

# Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.  
“Keeping the memories alive” Newsletter 217

In this issue:

Visiting with Friends - by JD Wetterling

Introducing Thomas G. Gates

- Highway Patrol of the Ho Chi Minh Trail

President Honors 14<sup>th</sup> SOW

35<sup>th</sup> TFW Tops RECON Goal - Det. 8, 14<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port Squadron makes the difference

Thompson Takes Command of 311<sup>th</sup> TAS

A Day in the Life of a C-123 Crew - Dean Delongchamp and Buddy Cox

Obituaries - Richard S. Brown - Michael Thomas Gresch

My Friend Joe, Doug's Comments and Important 2021 Reunion Information

This article is so poignant and haunting that I'm sure you won't have any trouble identifying with it.



## Visiting with Old Friends

I visited with three old friends recently at a park in my town. It seems like only yesterday that we were all together, but actually it had been 52 years.<sup>1</sup> There was a crowd at the park that day, and it took us awhile to connect, but with the aid of a computer we made it.




<sup>1</sup> When this article was written it was 28 years.

**“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. 216 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

I found **Lance** at Panel 54W, line 037, **Lynn** over at Panel 51W, line 032, and **Vince** down at line 103 on Panel 27W. We were gung-ho young fighter pilots in Vietnam, the cream of the crop of the US Air Force pilot training system, and now their names are on that 250-foot-long, half-size model of the Vietnam Memorial that moves around the country. I had intentionally avoided visiting the wall when it came to town in years past, because I did not trust myself to behave in a composed manner, but after nearly five decades it was time to try for some closure on this issue. I told my wife that I preferred to go alone, if that was all right, and, truth be known, I nearly backed out at that.

		
<b>1Lt. Lance La Grange</b>	<b>1Lt. Lynn Arthur Hoffman</b>	<b>1Lt. Robert Vincent Willett Jr.</b>
F-100D 56-3122	F-100D 56-3066	F-100 56-3403
F-100s were often used for landing zone preparation in advance of a helicopter assault. On such a mission near Thuan An, 40 miles north of Phu Cat, an F-100 was dropping napalm on its first pass when it was hit by ground fire and crashed near the target. The Pilot did not eject and was killed.	A Super Sabre was struck by lightning and damaged during a combat mission over South Vietnam. The pilot lost control of the aircraft during an emergency landing at Bien Hoa and the aircraft crashed. 1Lt Hoffman was killed in the accident.	A flight of F-100s from Tuy Hoa was making a night strike on a group of trucks near Tavouac in southern Laos. 1Lt Willett was seen to put his Super Sabre into a dive from 5,000 feet but his aircraft was then hit of 37 mm anti-aircraft fire and crashed near the truck convoy. Robert Willett, was not seen to eject and was presumed killed.

## **“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. 216 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

### *“...danced the wild blue with a supersonic angel.”*

Standing in front of that somber wall, I tried to keep it light, reminiscing about how things were back then. We used to joke about the psychiatric term for a passionate love affair with inanimate flying objects—we flew F-100’s—and we marveled at the thought that the taxpayers actually paid us to do this “work.” We were not draftees, but college graduates there by choice, opting for the cramped confines of a jet fighter cockpit over the comfort of corporate America. In all my life I’ve not been so passionate about any other work. If that sounds like an exaggeration, then you’ve never danced the wild blue with a supersonic angel.

I vividly remember the Sunday afternoon, in the summer of ‘68, when we flew out of Travis Air Force Base, California, on a troop transport headed for Vietnam. Lynn, Lance and I crowded around the same porthole and watched the Golden Gate Bridge disappear below broken clouds. We had gone through fighter pilot school together and had done some serious bonding. In an exceedingly rare moment of youthful fighter pilot humility, I wondered if I would live to see that bridge again. For reasons I still don’t understand, I was the only one of the three who did.

Once in Vietnam, we passed the long, lonely off-duty hours at Dusty’s Pub, a lounge that we lieutenants built on the beach of the South China Sea at Tuy Hoa Air Base. The roof at Dusty’s doubled as a sun deck and the walls were non-existent. The complaint heard most often around the bar, in the standard gallows humor of a combat squadron, was that it was “...a lousy war, but it’s the only one we have.” (I’ve cleaned up the language a bit.) We sang mostly raunchy songs that never seemed to end—someone was always writing new verses—and, as an antidote to loneliness, fear in the night, and the sadness over dead friends, we often drank too much.

Vince joined us at Dusty’s Pub halfway through my tour of duty, and since he was a like-minded country kid from Montana, we hit it off. He had a wide grin, slightly stooped shoulders, and his own way of walking—he just threw his feet out and stepped on them. But what he lacked in military bearing he made up for with the heart of a tiger. He often flew as my wingman, and we volunteered for the night missions on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. One starless night, the longest, saddest night of my life, we got into a really nasty gun duel with some anti-aircraft artillery batteries. I watched Vince die in a mushroom shaped fireball that for a moment turned night

## **“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. 216 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

into day.

Lance—a New York boy who took unmerciful grief from the rest of us because he talked like a New Yorker—crashed into the side of a mountain in the central highlands while attacking a target. Lynn, a happy-go-lucky jock from Pennsylvania’s Slippery Rock College with a hound named John the Basset, returned to his base on a stormy night in July after weather aborted his mission. Two miles of wet runway weren’t enough to stop an F-100 landing at 160 knots with all its bombs still on board. He ran off the end, flipped over, and slid through the minefield at the perimeter fence, setting off a gruesome sound and light show.

At the wall, I told the guys only about the good parts of the last 52 years. Lacy, one of our associates from Dusty’s Pub, became an astronaut, and a few summers ago I watched from my back yard, near Tampa, as he blasted off. His voice over the radio from space was at least an octave lower than it was the day I heard him radio for help while swinging from his parachute hung up in a tree in Laos. Another Dusty’s patron, Rick, is now a two-star general, and I reminded them of what we used to say about the military promotion system—it’s like a septic tank, only the really big chunks floated to the top.

I didn’t tell them about how ostracized Vietnam vets are, that during that same week, one of the nation’s leading newspapers has run an article that implied we Vietnam vets were, to quote one syndicated columnist, “either suckers or psychos, victims or monsters.” I didn’t tell them that the secretary of defense they fought for back then has now declared that he was not a believer in the cause for which he assigned them all to their destiny. I didn’t tell them that a draft age kid from Arkansas, who hid out in England to dodge his duty while they were fighting and dying, is now the commander-in-chief. And I did not tell them we lost that lousy war. I gave them the same story I’ve used since the Nixon administration: “We were winning when I left.”

I relived that final day as I stared at the black onyx wall. The dawn came up like thunder after a year and 268 combat missions in the valley of the shadow. The ground trembled as 33 F-100’s roared off the runway, across the beach, and out over the South China Sea, climbing into the rising sun. On the eastern horizon a line of towering deep purple clouds stood shoulder-to-shoulder before a brilliant orange sky that slowly turned powder blue from the top down. From somewhere on that stage, above the whine of spinning turbine blades, I could hear a choir singing Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus” in fortissimo: The “...Lord God Omnipotent reigneth...,”

## **“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. 216 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

and He was bringing me home, while Lance and Lynn and Vince will remain as part of the dust of Southeast Asia until the end of time.

I was not the only one talking to the wall through tears. A leather-vested, bare-chested biker two panels to my left was in even worse shape. I backed about twenty-five yards away from the wall and sat down on the grass under a clear blue sky and mid-day sun that perfectly matched the tropical weather of the war zone. The wall, with all 58,200 names, consumed my field of vision. I tried to wrap my mind around the mega-tonnage of violence, carnage and ruined lives that it represented. Then I thought of how Vietnam was only one small war in the history of the human race, and I was overwhelmed with a sense of mankind’s wickedness.

My heart felt like wax in the blazing sun, and I was on the verge of becoming a spectacle in the park. I arose and walked back up to the wall to say good-bye and ran my fingers over the engraved names—Lance and Lynn and Vince—as if I could communicate with them in some kind of spiritual Braille. I wanted them to know that God, duty, honor, and country will always remain the noblest calling. Revisionist history by the elite dodgers who are trying to justify their actions cannot change that.

I have been a productive member of society since the day I left Vietnam. I am proud of what I did there, and I am especially proud of my friends—heroes who voluntarily, enthusiastically gave their all. They demonstrated no greater love to a nation who’s highbrow opinion makers are still trying to disavow them. May their names, indelibly engraved on that memorial wall, likewise be found in the Book of Life.

### **THE STORY BEHIND THE COLUMN:**

This op-ed article appeared in the Wall Street Journal on the Friday before Memorial Day, 1996. Ronald Russell Deyhle had the clipping from the newspaper and recently shared it with me and just after reading the first two paragraphs I knew I wanted to share it with you, so I immediately wrote a plea to JD Wetterling, the author, for permission to use it and a few days later I received his blessings. I felt as close as I will ever get to the unbelievable experiences of a jet fighter pilot in a hellish environment. I was deeply moved by the sacrifice of all veterans everywhere, and I was mesmerized by JD's compelling and descriptive language.

## **“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. 216 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

I had a very hard time putting this down on paper, maybe doing just a paragraph at a time and then I would have to leave it for awhile and come back later to do another. *A disclaimer, the title graphic for this story is not meant to represent the exact location of the names on the wall, but only a representation.*



**Bill Lloyd, JD Wetterling, Lacy Veach, and Rick Goddard, post combat mission**

The picture of 4 USAF Lieutenants, above, appeared with the article, a nearly unheard of occurrence on the WSJ editorial page. JD Wetterling had submitted the story, unsolicited, to the WSJ, and by God’s grace it opened the door to his writing career.

JD Wetterling has written five books and had over 250 op-ed columns and essays published in The Wall Street Journal, the Los Angeles Times, the St. Petersburg Times, The Atlanta Journal Constitution, The Tampa Tribune, The Des Moines Register, Newsweek.com, World magazine, The American Legion Magazine, Mig Sweep and numerous other periodicals.

## **“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. 216 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---



**A long time ago in a life like no other.  
JD and bomb-laden F-100D, Tuy Hoa  
AB, Vietnam**

In 1968-69, he flew 268 combat missions in an F-100 in Vietnam and was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses, fourteen Air Medals, and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. He was Top Gun in every fighter squadron in which he served in the USAF.

His roots go back to a farm in western Illinois and a one-room country schoolhouse where he was the only student in his class all eight years of grade school. On that foundation he built a Bachelor’s Degree from the University of Illinois, an MBA from the University of Utah, summa cum laude, and a career as a fighter pilot, businessman, speaker, and writer. JD is a veteran

entrepreneur, CFO, CEO, financial consultant, director of profit and non-profit organizations and business columnist.

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## **Introducing Captain Thomas Gates - USAF Veteran**

Tom has been a supporter of this newsletter and my efforts to document the lives of those that



served at Phan Rang AB from the very early days of this endeavor. His contributions can be found in Phan Rang Newsletter 141 “Thomas G. Gates Inducted into the Florida Veterans’ Hall of Fame” and in Phan Rang Newsletter 175 “It could have been time for me to meet the Grim Reaper by Thomas Gates” and in countless personnel correspondence to me recognizing my efforts and encouraging me to continue and even promising to provide a permanent home for these stories of Phan Rang

heroes because their lives cannot be forgotten.

Tom has made a difference to so many veterans in Florida. He’s worked tirelessly on behalf of service men and women from throughout Florida making the transition from military life to civilian life. He was personally instrumental in establishing and funding the programs and facilities that have resulted in the University of South Florida being named by the Military Times

## **“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. 216 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

as the best school for Veterans. Seeing even greater need on a more personal level, he has expanded his involvement in work on behalf of Veterans in crisis, especially those affected by PTSD/TBI.



Tom believes that no man should be left behind when serving his country; he has shown by his actions that no veteran should ever be left behind in life. By his example, he has inspired others including his son, Colonel Bryan Gates, a Wing Commander in the USAF, to continue his tradition of service.

He continues to make significant contributions to the State of Florida in public service, business and civic endeavors. He has spent an exemplary life, most of it in service to his country. In his business dealings, he has conducted himself with honor and integrity bringing credit to the values he developed during his military and public service. He has given of his assets and time in pursuit of Veteran’s issues benefitting not just one group or agency in Florida but numerous such agencies. He has persuaded many others to do the same making tireless efforts to educate Florida citizens, businesses and institutions so that they are willing and enthusiastic supporters of Veteran’s causes. He has been instrumental in making the issues important to Veterans at USF also important to the faculty, administration and fellow students. He has asked nothing in return but that does not mean that his efforts should be unrecognized.

### **Education and Training Accomplishments:**

Tom graduated from Choctawhatchee High School in Shalimar, Florida. While in High School, he obtained the rank of Eagle Scout and was inducted into The Order of the Arrow, serving in a leadership role in the Boy Scouts for more than 14 years. He is a 1966 Graduate of the University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa, Florida. During his service in the Air Force, he completed the Undergraduate Navigator/Bombardier and Pilot Training Courses. Air Crew Familiarization Course, the USAF Operational Training Course, the USAFE Tactical Employment School, the Combat Operations Course and the Forward Air Controller (FAC) Course. He was dual rated as a Weapons System Officer-Navigator Pilot. He is a veteran of two combat tours during the Vietnam War. He holds a Private Airplane Pilot Certificate with an instrument certification. His occupation related training continued during his service in the FBI. Details 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. 216 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

that training are confidential.

### **Professional and Employment History:**

Following graduation from USF, Tom entered the United States Air Force. When he separated from active duty in 1975, he was a Regular Officer, Flight Commander of an F-4 Fighter Squadron, having achieved the rank of Permanent Captain. He received an Honorary Retirement from the USAF Reserves in 1986. Following his military service, he spent one year with Investors Diversified Services before joining the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). As a Special Agent, his accomplishments include: Project Manager in charge of the first Joint Drug Intelligence Group: service as a member of the development team for the establishment of the National Drug Intelligence Center: management of several major investigations involving organized crime, outlaw motorcycle gangs, narcotic cartels, and narco-terrorism groups. His work is referenced in 12 published books, four major magazine articles and numerous newspaper and national television reports. He participated in electronic surveillances and undercover operations involving organized crime, narcotic cartels and outlaw motorcycle gangs. He received numerous commendations for his actions and accomplishments. After retiring from the FBI, he spent 15 years with Orion Scientific Systems/SRA International, Inc. He was Director of Business Development for Public Safety at this firm working in the areas of national security, civil government and global health. Since 2011, his firm, Gates and Associates, LLC, has offered security consulting services to businesses, agencies and individuals.

### **Advocacy on Behalf of Veterans:**

In conjunction with the PGA tour, Tom was instrumental in founding the Foundation for Birdies for the Brave, Tampa Bay. He served as Chairman for several years, growing the event into one of the highest profile and most successful Veterans benefit events in Tampa Bay. During his tenure as Chairman, the Event made contributions totaling nearly \$3,000,000. of which a portion was dedicated to local veteran support groups in the Tampa Bay area including: The University of South Florida (USF) Foundation supporting veterans affairs; Quantum Leap Farm, Equine Therapies, a veterans support foundation and Operation Helping Hand (Haley VA Hospital). Included in the Birdies for the Brave Veterans Support Groups on a national level are: Homes for our Troops; Special Operations Warrior Foundation; Navy SEAL Foundation; Operation Homefront; Military Warriors Support Foundation; Green Beret Foundation; United Through Reading; K9's for Warriors: Feherty's Troops First Foundation; Operation Shower and Disabled Sports USA.

## **“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. 216 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

He is currently Chairman Emeritus of Birdies for the Brave, Tampa Bay; a former member of the Board of Directors of Combat Wounded Veteran Challenge (CWVC); former Executive Director of Reveille Summit a major fundraiser for CWVC; member and Secretary of the board of ART International (Accelerated Resolution Training and Research); Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Veterans Alternative Foundation: a member of the Board of Directors of Copperhead Charities and is a VFW and an American Legion Life Member.

Since 2015, Tom has organized annual retreats for veterans dealing with PTSD/TBI that include yoga and ART therapy coupled with horseback riding and golf. Attendees are special operators with severe PTSD. All participants have said the experience has been extremely "healing", The related fund raising golf event raised \$290,000 for PSTD/TBI research.

**The accolades are numerous for his Civic Activities and Contributions, Air Force Awards and Honors, Federal Bureau of Investigation Awards, Corporate and Civic awards.**

Tom was instrumental in the conception and promotion of the USF Center for Veteran and Military Transition which included a new \$30 million facility that will dramatically alter the way veterans transition from the military into meaningful civilian employment. Tom solicited the gift of architectural renderings to kick off the project and has become the principal volunteer fund raiser.

He also has been designated a permanent member of the Pat Tillman Scholarship Selection Committee at USF, a USF recipient of which was recently profiled in the national news media bringing considerable attention to this important program, Torn has also been featured twice in USF magazines for his philanthropic endeavors and work with veterans on the USF campus.

**Now that you have a better idea of who Thomas Gates is, the following is his latest contribution.**

## "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. 216 "...keeping the memories alive"

### Highway Patrol of the Ho Chi Minh Trail



The majority of the 8th TBS missions involved flying at night into the "Jaws of Death" (Doom Pussy) targeting some of the highest threat areas in the war zone.

We were proud to be the first bomber aircraft to fly into North Vietnam as well as being the "Highway Patrol" of the Ho Chi Min Trail.

A major challenge and a thrill was to go guns on guns at night.

*"A major challenge and a thrill was to go guns on guns at night."*

I find the Sabre Pilots were cocky (overly confident) and full of themselves but I have to admit when I transitioned to the F-4 Phantom I got a bit more of a strut in my step. The majority of the 8th TBS missions involved flying at night into the "Jaws of Death" (Doom Pussy<sup>2</sup>) targeting some of the highest threat areas in the war zone. We were proud to be the first bomber aircraft to fly into North Vietnam as well as being the "Highway Patrol" of the Ho Chi Min Trail. A major challenge and a thrill was to go guns on guns at night.

**This is a relatively short story about the hairiest night flying in combat I had in Laos in the B-57 Yellow Bird..**

We had a night mission over Chepon that turned into a nightmare. The flak was similar to Bagdad on the first night. It was obvious there was something important to protect. Following a target brief by our FAC. We rolled in with MK 82's. The anti-aircraft was extremely heavy, tracers everywhere. Even so, we were able to put our bombs on target. On the second pass we

<sup>2</sup> To read more "Doom Pussy" stories see Phan Rang Newsletter 115 Doom Pussy Gang Sets Reunion in Las Vegas, Phan Rang Newsletter 135 "Doom Pussy Facts, Legend & Myths" and Phan Rang Newsletter 183 "Doom Pussy".

## **"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. 216 **"...keeping the memories alive"**

---

saw numerous secondaries coming from the target area. At about 4K feet I noted twin 57MM rounds coming up at 9 O'clock that appeared to be on a collision course. (**Confucius say...he who see red beer cans not moving on canopy eventually going to hit you in the ass**).

At the very last minute we did a "hard over" standing the aircraft on the left wing tip while watching the upper string pass directly above the canopy and can only assume the lower string went under the belly and watched them explode above us.

We were definitely on a collision course. We had HEI 20MM left and decided to try and silence one of the 57MM AA sites.. (High Noon or should say High Moon) With the help of the FAC, we pinpointed a gun placement and took them on. The result was: Good Guys - 1; Bad Guys - 0.

They must have been sitting next to an ammo storage area as it looked like the 4th of July when the secondaries started. Our battle damage assessment was extensive that night and we were extremely fortunate to escape the jaws of the **Doom Pussy**.



We really enjoyed the camaraderie with our Aussie B-57 component. One of the most fun inter- service activities with the Aussies was the competition for the "Cinders"<sup>3</sup> which was a 55MM Canon shell filled with cinders as opposed to the "The Ashes" (The Ashes is a Test cricket series played between England and Australia) . We extended the competition to include a softball game. The competition consisted of a cricket match and a softball game followed by a lot of beer drinking.. They always had a surplus of beer which they were more than willing to share. UHRAAH! Obviously, they won the cricket match and we won the softball game. I **cannot say enough good things about the Aussies**.

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<sup>3</sup> Phan Rang Newsletter 177 has the article "Vying For the Cinders Trophy".

## **"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. 216 "...keeping the memories alive"

---



### **PRESIDENT HONORS 14<sup>TH</sup> SOW**



The President of the United States, Richard M. Nixon, has bestowed the highest unit award, the Presidential Unit Citation, upon a Phan Rang AB unit - - the 14<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Wing (SOW). The award was presented March 14 by Maj. Gen. Ernest C. Hardin Jr., 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force vice commander, during morning ceremonies at this coastal Vietnam Air Base.

The citation accompanying the honor read: "The 14<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Wing, Pacific Air Forces, distinguished itself by extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against opposing armed forces in Southeast Asia...crew members of the Wing flew one of the most versatile missions in Southeast Asia which included reconnaissance, escort for search and rescue, close air support, psychological warfare, illuminations, airlift and resupply. Despite intensive hostile air defenses, inclement weather and treacherous terrain, crews of the Wing, night and day, risked their lives to further Allied goals in Southeast Asia.

"As a consequence of the flight crews' courage, over 33,000 hostile troops defected to friendly forces, more than 3,600 Allied installations were successfully defended, and hundreds of friendly ground teams and patrols were saved from annihilation.

"The professionalism, dedication to duty, and extraordinary heroism demonstrate by the members of the 14<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Wing are in keeping with the finest traditions of the military service and reflect the highest credit upon themselves and the Armed Forces of the United States."

The 14<sup>th</sup> is unique because its fighting units are the only Air Force units of their kind in Vietnam.

## **"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. 216 **"...keeping the memories alive"**

---

Two of the tree fixed wing USAF gunship squadrons, the only USAF psychological warfare squadron, and the only USAF armed helicopter squadron are all part of the 14<sup>th</sup> SOW. With this special force operating seven different types of aircraft from nine major airfield locations throughout Southeast Asia, the 14<sup>th</sup> has placed a versatile role in the fight against Communist aggression in this part of the world. Flying an average of 137 missions every day, aircrews of the wing have participated in every major ground operation in the Republic of Vietnam since March 1966. The Wing's 17<sup>th</sup> SOS is now training Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) aircrews in the twin-engine AC-119 Shadow gunships at Phan Rang AB under the VNAF Improvement and Modernization Program.

### ***"March 14 was a big day for the 14th Special Operations Wing"***

All personnel of the 14<sup>th</sup> SOW including the 14<sup>th</sup> Field Maintenance Squadron, the 9<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 90<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadrons may wear the Presidential Unit Citation ribbon while serving in the Republic of Vietnam. However, only the individuals serving with Wing units during the period covered in the citation can wear the ribbon once leaving the Republic.

At the same time awards ceremony, command of the 14<sup>th</sup> SOW changed from Col Alfred F. Eaton of Holly Bluff, Miss., who has completed an 18-month combat tour in Vietnam, to Col Mark W. Magnan of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, the 14<sup>th</sup>'s vice commander General Hardin also pinned the coveted Legion of Merit and the first oak leaf cluster to the Distinguished Flying Cross on Colonel Eaton before the formation was dismissed.

March 14 was a big day for the 14<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Wing.

(Source: The Phan Fare, 21 March 1971)

***"We are not heroes: we were all just in the U.S. Air Force"***

## **35TH TFW Tops RECON Goal**

**Det. 8, 14th Aerial Port Squadron makes the difference**

**A** Resources Conservation (RECON) savings action submitted by Detachment 8, 14<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port Squadron here recently pushed the 35<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing \$4,000 over its fiscal year 1971 RECON goal of \$395,000.

## **“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. 216 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

Capt. **Earl D. Cauthen Jr.**, Det. 8 Commander, reported a \$63,399.92 RECON saving for the remainder of FY71 by initiating a supplemental program of using U.S. Army trucks to transport air eligible cargo to nearby Cam Ranh Bay AB instead of airlifting it.

Before the action all eligible cargo was airlifted to Cam Ranh Bay by C-123 Provider aircraft. The operating cost for a C-123 for the 64-mile round trip is \$354 compared to \$34.56 for an Army 10-ton tractor and trailer. Captain Cauthen stated that the service is just as fast using the service is just as fast using the available trucks on the established truck run. Approximately one quarter of the cargo passing through Phan Rang’s aerial port facility is trucked to Cam Ranh Bay.

During the month of February, 4 11 tons of air eligible cargo was trucked at a savings of \$11,914.08. The estimated savings for a full year is \$155,000. (Source: *The Phan Fare*, March 21, 1971)

**“Remember buying a case of cokes or beer at the BX and then finding out that half were empty or half full but never opened.”** *Terry D. Coffman*

## **Thompson Takes Command of 311th TAS**

Command of the 311<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Squadron (TAS) changed hands during May 12 ceremonies at this coastal Vietnam Air Base.

The new commander, Lt. Col. Earl D. Thompson of Honolulu, Hawaii, has been assigned to the 311<sup>th</sup> TAS since February as assistant to the commander. He thus assumes the commander’s job with experience in the squadron’s operation and in flying the C-123 Provider assault transport in Vietnam.

Colonel Thompson is a command pilot with over 8,000 flying hours, of which 440 are combat hours flown in Korea and Vietnam. Prior to his arrival in Vietnam he was the chief of Project PRESS, Electronics Systems Division, Air Force Systems Command with duty at Hickam AFB, Hawaii.

Thompson, who has been in the Air Force for 24 years, received his commission through the

## “Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

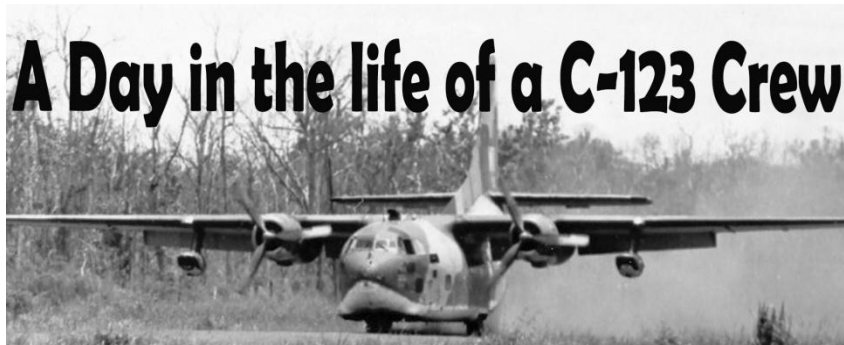
The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.

Phan Rang AB News No. 216 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

Aviation Cadet Program in 1944. He was released from active duty after WW II, to be recalled in 1951 during the Korean conflict.

Colonel Thompson succeeds Lt. Col Paul R. Zavitz who has commanded the 311<sup>th</sup> since October 1970. Colonel Zavitz has been appointed Assistant Deputy Commander for Operations for the 315<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Wing here. (Source: *The Phan Fare*, an unofficial bulletin published weekly on Sunday by the Office of Information, 35<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing, and is designed to keep Phan Rang AB Personnel informed of current events, May 23, 1971)



**Dean Delongchamp wrote on Facebook:** That looks like the Nav station where you see the guy



## “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. 216 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

on a “floating” chair where you enter the cockpit. The table and intercom were to the right. I flew missions that carried, pigs, prisoners and pallets (food, water, mortars, ammo, weapons, fuel bladders, and most sadly, bodies). Sometimes we airdropped the cargo, sometimes we off-loaded it. We airdropped when the destinations were hot and landed when the airfields were secure. Got to land at most of the airfields in Vietnam. Buddy Cox says he didn’t like going anywhere if it was going to be “exciting”. I know for a fact he landed at a very remote airfield once and NVA soldiers were shooting at him all the way down the runway. When he got to where the American soldiers were entrenched, a couple came running over to the plane and asked him what he was doing there. He said he was cleared to land.

They let him know the enemy controlled the airfield and the tower and they had cleared him to land. Our guys said they would lay a mortar barrage down the sides of the runway and he needed to get out of Dodge. He pressed the pedal to the metal and fired his jets to max and climbed his way out of another non-exciting landing.

I can say with every bit of conviction I can muster that if you flew on a regular basis, you would encounter “exciting” days on a regular basis. Enemy small arms fire, hard landings, equipment malfunctions, emergencies, bad weather and mortar attacks at remote landing zones. It happened enough to keep your excitement low level light from staying in the off position! Do you remember that day, Buddy? I was the ops officer of the day and remember you coming in about dusk, wide eyed and bushy tailed the completion of another non eventful day! We never had to look for excitement, it found us. We didn’t lose 53 C-123’s because things weren’t exciting on a regular basis! Buddy could handle that excitement with the best of them, and I’d fly with him anytime I got the chance.

**Buddy Cox responded to Dean’s comments on Facebook:** I do remember that day. We had a time to land, when FAC and fighters were there to cover us. We were late. No FAC and no fighters. Copilot got on Guard freq for any FAC in the area. A guy came on the radio and said he was a FAC orbiting north and we were cleared in. He sounded American.

We landed and taxied to the ramp. Nobody there, the base looked deserted. Finally a soldier came running towards us. His hand on his helmet, flack jacket and a big radio on his back. He was running bent over with one hand holding his helmet on. He ran into the plane. The engines were running so it was hard to hear him. He said ‘what are you doing here, we are under

## “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. 216 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

attack’?

I told him a FAC cleared us in. He said “‘y’all have to get out of here, you are attracting enemy mortars”.

I told him we needed to off load first. I told him we would do a speed offload right here. Taxi backwards then come hard out of reverse and the load would fly out. He said ‘OK. We’ll shoot mortars at the enemy, they are right off the end of the runway.

“I’ll give you a signal when to takeoff”. We lined up on the runway awaiting his signal. He started jumping up and down like starting a car race. I turned in a steep bank 1/2 way down the runway to avoid flying over the enemy. No hits, never heard any shots or mortars. We decided do not mention being late or the attack. Just wrote the after landing report ‘*Flown as Fragged*’.

**We could have gotten a medal or court martial. Played it safe and got neither.**



### Richard S. Brown

At 1:20, Monday afternoon, December 14th, Heaven welcomed an angel. Rich was taken from us very quickly by Covid 19, He was a wonderful Christian man, dedicated to his

precious family and the love of his life, wife of 46 years, Lois. He cherished his children and grandchildren. He was dedicated to his friends, career and hobbies; always there to help and understand friends, family and co-workers.

He was especially proud of his service to his country through the US Air Force, from 1969 to 1971, serving in Phan Rang AFB in Vietnam as a C-123 crew chief. When he ended his Vietnam tour, he was stationed at Griffiss AFB as a B-52 crew chief with Strategic Air Command. A true proud American Veteran.

Through the years, Rich served as Educator, Assistant Chapter Director and Director of the Gold Wing Road Riders Association Chapter F. And, he and Lois served as NYS Couple of the Year in 1997. He served as Boy Scout Troop leader, was an American Legion member, and served as Quartermaster with the Watkins Glen VFW. He also served as president of the Schuyler County

## “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. 216 “...keeping the memories alive”

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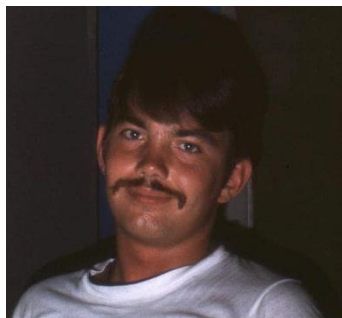
Seneca Chiefs Motorcycle Club and for 15 years, he and Lois served as tour leaders with the Americade Motorcycle Rally in Lake George, NY. Rich especially enjoyed his membership and participation with the Glen Regional Corvette Club and he treasured his Corvette friends.

Rich was a Xerox Customer Service Technician, mostly in the Ithaca area, for 41 years. He also served with the Town of Hector for the last five years. Needless to say, Rich’s smiling face always let you know that you were very special to him.

Rest in Peace wonderful loving and devoted gentleman. You are dearly missed.

### **Michael Thomas Gresch** (April 24, 1948 - November 7, 2019)

Michael passed away peacefully surrounded by his loving family on Thursday, November 7, 2019, at Froedtert Hospital. He was 71 years old.



**Michael Gresch, Phan Rang, circa 1970**

Michael was born in Milwaukee to parents Doris and Stanley Gresch on April 24, 1948. Michael attended St. Sebastian Catholic School and then Francis Jordan High School in Milwaukee. Michael was a proud Vietnam Veteran having served the Air Force in the K-9 Unit from October 10, 1969 until September 27, 1973. After his military service, Michael returned to Milwaukee and married

Cynthia Fenney on July 5, 1975. Michael was a loving father to son Chad (Tiffany) Gresch and daughter Kelly (Mike) Filo. Michael was also a very proud grandfather to McKenna. Also survived by his sister Kris (David) Reicher and countless other family members and friends.



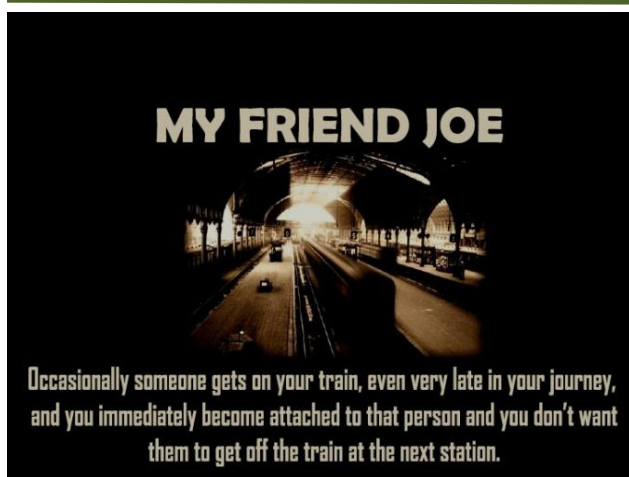
**Dean Delongchamp wrote:** When we weren’t flying, sometimes we partied. This was our New Year’s Eve party in our C-123K hootch 51 years ago (1969).

## “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. 216 “...keeping the memories alive”

---



Occasionally someone gets on your train, even very late in your journey, and you immediately become attached to that person and you don't want them to get off the train at the next station, because you're not ready for them to depart and you can't imagine completing the rest of your journey without them. Like so many in the Phan Rang community this guy performed his duties in Vietnam in an exemplary fashion,

protecting our base during some very dangerous times and for the rest of his life he served and protected his local community and Joe and his wife had so much love for people that every year they would travel to the Dominican Republic, carrying suit cases full of items of clothing that they bought and collected throughout the year to give to the needy. I probably don't know half of the goodwill these two wonderful people did through the years, but I know that Joe has contributed so much to the Phan Rang Veterans group with his handicrafts. He spends all year making works of art in his basement workshop to bring to the reunion for the silent auction. With all of that said, the most important contribution is his pleasing personality and that contagious laughter that hasn't been described because it's unique to Joe. Joe Kaupa along with his wife Nancy are truly loved by the Phan Rang community, but right now and in the coming months Joe is going to be facing the biggest challenge of his life and with our prayers and his positive attitude he will make it, not just to the next station, but to the end of the line.

**We love you Joe!**

### **Doug's Comments:**

As previously noted, a future issue is going to list all of the aircraft assigned to Phan Rang. Kirk Minert is working on this and it probably will continue to be a forever work in progress because as we find more information about an aircraft we will update the data. Like our Roll-Call that needs constant updating by the Keeper of the Rolls, Bob Tucker. There still is at least another edition that will be devoted to your stories in any format and length that you choose. Please send me your story. This newsletter was composed and all graphics by Douglas Severt unless otherwise stated. To see a list of all previous newsletters click [here](#). To unsubscribe to Phan Rang News, mailto: [dougsevert@cox.net](mailto:dougsevert@cox.net) and put 'unsubscribe' in subject line.

**“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. 216 “...keeping the memories alive”

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**PHAN RANG VIETNAM VETERANS  
2021 REUNION**



**14-17 OCTOBER**

**Here’s the latest on the 2021 Phan Rang Reunion, Branson, MO.**

**Date:** 14-17 October 2021

**Location:** Lodge of the Ozarks, Branson, Missouri

**Rates:** \$99.95 Double Queen - \$104.94 King (These rates are good three days before and three days after the scheduled event)

**Reservations:** Call 417-335-2555, Monday - Friday 8am to 5 pm, ask for Renee

**Reunion fee:** \$25 per person

**Banquet:**

**Menu Choice 1** - Menu choice Roast beef and Chicken with Garlic Mashed Potatoes, Fancy Green Beans, Dinner Rolls and Butter and Strawberry Salad, Coffee and dessert included.

**\$50.00**

**Menu Choice 2** - Vegetarian meal, Vegetable lasagna **\$50.00**

**Showboat Branson Belle:** 15 Oct. Lunch cruise **\$40** per person, Includes tax & gratuity

**REUNION MAIN EVENTS**

**(OTHER EVENTS AND SPECIFIC TIMES TO BE ANNOUNCED LATER)**

<b>14 Oct. (Thursday)</b>	Southern Style dinner (Time TBA), with fried chicken, mashed potatoes & gravy, sweet buttered corn, fancy green beans, garden salad, dinner rolls
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**“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. 216 “...keeping the memories alive”

	and strawberry cake.
<b>15 Oct. (Friday)</b>	<i>Showboat Branson Belle</i> , a noon departure with dinner (Mixed garden salad with roll, Honey Citrus Chicken, Slow cooked Pot Roast in gravy, steamed green beans, garlic mashed potatoes, butter cake and drinks) and entertainment. Specific times to be announced (TBA).
<b>16 Oct. (Saturday)</b>	Banquet with pay as you go bar.
<b>17 Oct. (Sunday)</b>	Goodbyes & checkout.

In summary here are your options **(all costs are per person)**.

Reunion w/reunion fee	Reunion w/reunion fee & banquet <sup>4</sup>	Reunion w/reunion fee & banquet & Branson Belle
\$25 <sup>5</sup>	\$75.00	\$115.00
<p>SEND CHECK TO:</p> <p><b>Elizandro De Los Santos</b>  <b>11705FM 775</b>  <b>Floresville, Tx., 78114</b></p> <p>(Pease make your check payable to “Phan Rang Vietnam Veterans” and indicate your banquet meal choice and email or telephone number with payment.)</p>		
<p><b>IMPORTANT: ALL MONIES/REGISTRATIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BY 14 SEPTEMBER 2021 AND REFUNDS ARE ONLY AVAILABLE UNTIL THAT DATE.</b></p>		

**LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING YOU AT THE REUNION!**

<sup>4</sup> All meals are included in the cost of the banquet.

<sup>5</sup> By sending in your money, you are then registered for the reunion.