

Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan

Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.
"Keeping the memories alive" Newsletter 223

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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

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armed servicement, thie dedication to country and the close comradely with our Australian allies.



**Charles Lee Simmons
35th Supply Squadron**

Charles Lee Simmons, 35th Supply Squadron

Charles lee Simmons, Sr. was born in Winchester, Virginia on November 5, 1932 to Clyde Simmons and Effie Mae Rotruck, who grew up in the mountains of West Virginia. Clyde was employed in the timber business, both cutting the timber and delivering it to the sawmill, with horses. During the Great Depression, Clyde began making moonshine and Effie selling it. During this same time, it was decided to move to Winchester, Virginia. Soon after arriving, Clyde and Effie separated. The reasons for separating were never explained to me but I suspected it to be a combination of stress from the Great Depression and an unfaithful marriage. But Mrs. Simmons didn't believe in divorce and did stay married to Clyde until she passed.

Once we arrived in Winchester, two brothers, George and Oliver hired my mother to take care of their invalid mother, which gave us a place to live. Prior to that we lived in numerous houses (dumps) because mom was only making a mere \$33.00 a month working for the Works Progress Administration. During our stay with George and Oliver, their mother passed. Even so, they let us stay in the house, since they had never paid my mother, Effie, for taking care of their mother.

There were many advantages to living with George and Oliver but there were many other times we had a lot of trouble. Although George was an adult, he was very abusive towards me physically despite me being a kid and in no way related to him. But, the tides turned in my favor for a moment when I was about twelve or thirteen years old. One cool fall day, George and I were groundhog hunting in the backwoods of Virginia. It was not an eventful day of hunting but we did manage to get one groundhog that was in a hole. My dog dug into the ground, ravenous for the kill, and did grab it first, but then George and I got into an argument because he was so certain his dog grabbed it and not mine. We bickered at each other for a moment and I got a fist in the face. Being rather surprised from George's assault on my face, I fell to the ground. I laid on my back staring at the blue sky feeling my temper rise. But that became a nearly fatal mistake for George as I saw his single shot .22 rifle was leaning up against a tree right next to my head. George's back was toward me and I seized the opportunity to grab his rifle. I pointed the

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gun at his back and pulled back the hammer. George heard the click of the hammer and spun around to see the gun pointed at his belly. He slapped the rifle barrel down as I pulled the trigger and shot himself in the foot. After that, George kept his distance from me for some time. A couple years later George and I got into another argument in the kitchen. I saw him motion to strike me with his hand and struck first. I knocked George into a window hard enough that it broke the window and cut his backside pretty badly. Until I joined the Army, George again kept his distance from me.

Things at home, as much as I wanted did not go well, and worsened as time went on. In 1948 I was hit by a car leaving me with a \$65 hospital bill that Oliver was not too happy about. I gave him my horse just so I could shut his mouth and it did for awhile. Then, one morning I called him a damn liar while we were arguing and just like his brother before him, I saw his hand rising to strike me and I struck first. He hit the floor and slid partway under the table. When he'd gathered himself, he stood and stared at me. My temper was through the roof and I didn't care what would happen. I knew for a fact his mother had fed him lies that led to me getting several whippings from him and George. And now it was my time to get even. So I came up with a master plan and told Oliver and my mother that I wanted to join the Army. Mom said “no”, but Oliver agreed and said it was a good idea.

On January 3rd 1949, a Monday morning, we loaded up in Oliver's car and drove to the Army recruiting office in Winchester. When we arrived I informed the Army recruiter that I was indeed 18 years of age and wanting to join the Army. He asked my birth date and I knew he would want to see my draft papers, which would list my real date of birth. I told him my birthday was on January 1st 1949, the previous Saturday, which meant that since the draft office was closed over the weekend I couldn't have any papers to show. Furthermore, since I was enlisting on Monday, they had no way to confirm if I was 18 or not, since my fake birthday was on a weekend. Part of this plan hinged on Oliver helping me to lie to the recruiter, which he was eager to do. I could tell, when I explained my fake birth date to the recruiter, he wasn't buying it. But, here was the man that raised me for nine years so, surely he knew how old I was. In short order, it was a done deal and later that day I left for basic training. After basic training my whole outfit left for Japan and became the 507 AAA AW BN, 8th Army. I was a gunner on a multi-mount .50 cal machine gun for the eight and a half months I was stationed in Japan. I was found out to not be of age after my mother sent my birth certificate to my commanding officer. I was sent back to Seattle for discharge on account of not being old enough for enlistment. The total time I spent serving the Army was one year and twenty days of honorable service. I had served with the occupation forces of Japan and was awarded the Army Good Conduct medal, Occupation Medal Japan, and the Ruptured Duck (WWII discharge emblem sewn on uniform).

Taking up Civilian Life after the Army

After being shipped back home and arriving in Seattle, I rode a Greyhound bus all the way back

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to Winchester. When I got there, I dragged my duffle bag out of the belly of the bus and started the mile walk to the house Oliver had built while I was away. Everything was going well for awhile, but it was clear settling down was not part of my agenda.

The first year I was home and went to file my taxes and I had seven W-2 forms! The agent who was filing for me looked at me and said “you know that old saying, a rolling stone gathers no moss?” I replied, “it aint supposed to, is it?” He just stared at me and didn't say anything more. Being home made certain habits unnecessary, like writing home. While I was overseas, I wrote to many people back home. One of them was my childhood friend Raymond, although Raymond was far too lazy to write me back. But, I kept writing to Raymond and after many letters, I finally got a response. The response was not from Raymond but from his sister Janet. Come to find out, she had been reading the letters all along. At the time of writing the letters, I was sixteen and she was twelve. I did not know it at the time, but this was the love of my life who I would later marry and be with for forty eight years, until her passing. By the time I got out of the Army, I was seventeen and she was thirteen.

My younger sister Nina had married Ray Newlin while I was in Japan. She was thirteen and had turned fourteen by the time their first son was born. I also acquired myself a 1937 Ford sedan. Ray Newlin and I ran around together even though he was newly married to my sister. He was old enough to buy booze, so drinking wine and racing my Ford was a regular occurrence. We loved seeing how fast it would go. It was only a 60 horsepower engine and I used to say “*it wouldn't pull a sick whore off a piss pot*”. The hot rod Fords had an 85 horsepower engine and were a lot faster than my car. I worked several different jobs for a time but none of them had the appeal I was looking for. Probably, career wise, the Winchester Western Railroad would have been an excellent choice. My friend, Kenny Jenkins and I started to work there together and did so for a few months. We were both so skinny we had to drink coffee to make a shadow. I weighed a whopping one hundred twenty eight pounds when I got out of the Army, and Kenny weighed about the same. But, we were both muscle and bone having worked manual labor related jobs most of our life.

“...we worked thirteen hours a day I made thirty five cents an hour.”

I was nine years old when I had my first job. I found a job picking apples for ten cents a bushel. I went up and down a ladder all day with an apple bag hanging from my neck, holding one bushel at a time. Later, I worked in E.W. Barr's Packing Shed where the apples were brought from the orchard to be processed. Mom and Oliver both worked on the conveyor belt line where the apples were inspected. The belt had different sized holes in it to allow the apples to fall onto other belts. Mom and Oliver would inspect the sorted apples. If the apples had a defect they sent them to me. I worked at the cull tables where my job was to load the rejected apples into crates that we then sent to H.J. Heinz Co. who would press the apples into cider. During the busy season, we worked thirteen hours a day I made thirty five cents an hour. After the apple

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plant, my brother-in-law Ray Newlin and I cut pulp wood and timber for his father. I would also work on his father's saw mill, stacking the boards as they came off the rip saw. I remember the wood being very green and heavy. There was one day where I got so hot I passed out from the heat. Eventually I left that job and began plastering houses for a man named Donald Printz.

It was during this time Janet and I were married. The day was March 7th, 1953. Shortly after marrying Janet, I decided to start my own plastering business. Janet's brother, Raymond, worked for me as a plaster hand and Ted Cox as a mud mixer. We plastered the insides of houses, the outside of cinder block houses, and the occasional motel job. We also could seal the insides of cisterns for homes that depended upon rain water for their water supply. Once the summer was over, work became very scarce and all I was able to find was repair jobs for damaged plaster. Money became tight, but I had a good rabbit dog and a double barrel 16 gauge shotgun. We ate a lot of rabbit the winter of 1953 and into 1954. I submitted my resume all over Winchester, but I was not getting any calls back for work. All I would get from the employers was “check back next month”. This went on until May of 1954 I was looking in the same old Winchester and getting the same old answers. I found myself walking by the Army recruiting office and decided to check it out.



Since I was married, the Army wouldn't take me because I had a dependent. But, the Army recruiter told me the Air Force would take me as long as I only had only one dependent. So, I went to talk with the Air Force recruiter and took their entrance exam. I passed and shortly thereafter was a proud member of the United States Air Force. My report for duty date was May 18th, 1954. I went home and told Janet about my enlistment and that's when the tears started. The next few days were tough on both of us. Being newly-weds it's expected to have some rough

times. The finances and debt were our biggest worries. Divorce was talked about but neither of us wanted to take that first step. We had only been married fourteen months and were still madly in love. When my day came to leave I didn't dare look back at Janet. I knew the tears were running and if I looked there was no way I could leave. This was the girl I loved who defied her parents and ran off to marry me. Yet here we were fourteen months in on the verge of being splitsville.

Being twenty one and seventeen does not equal maturity. Looking back now, the Air Force saved my marriage. Divorcing Janet would have been the biggest mistake of my life and the dumbest divorce in history. The next forty seven plus years proves that statement to be true. She went with me every place the Air Force would permit her to go. While I was away she took

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care of the kids and kept the family together. Not long before she passed, she told me I was a good husband and father. I think we were meant for each other and love like ours comes along once in a lifetime. That doesn't mean you can't love again or love someone else.

Charles L. Simmons Sr., originally from Winchester Virginia, now lives in Anchorage, Alaska thanks to the Air Force. His first Alaska assignment took him to Shemya Air Base (now Eareckson Air Station) in the early '60's. Charles served in both the Army and the Air Force for more than twenty two years and retired as a MSG,(E7). He is a Vietnam veteran with many military awards and decorations including the Bronze Star (our nation's tenth highest military award) and the Air Force Outstanding Unit award for valor. In addition to those awards, he was also given the Vietnamese Gallantry Cross with gold palm, four campaign stars, the Occupation Medal Japan, and the sewn on Yellow Duck patch of an honorably discharged WWII era veteran.

In the Army, he served as a multi-mount gunner in the 507th AAA AW Battalion, 8th Army in occupational forces in 1949. In the Air Force he served in the supply field at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam where he was NCOIC of Maintenance Supply Liaison in the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing's Material Control. Charles is a life member of the VFW, DAV and Americans Underage Warriors. He is also a member of the American Legion. Charles is a member of numerous “Who's Who Publications”. During much of his working years in Alaska, Charles owned and operated “Alaska Mud Puddle”, supplying all the needs for a potter and he still counts being a ceramist as one of his hobbies as well as being an airbrush artist.

At the age of 31 Charles was saved and surrendered to Christian ministry at 32. Being a 7th grade dropout, with a family of five at the time, presented a number of challenges in preparing for ministry. After retiring from the Air Force in 1975, he later finished college, earning a Master of Religious Education degree. Three months prior to his 70th birthday, Charles graduated with a Doctorate of Ministry in Biblical Counseling and Theology.

He has served numerous churches in the state of Alaska as a pastor, interim pastor, and associate pastor. He also served in RV Parks as pastor in Arizona. He is one of the chaplains serving with the Phan Rang Vietnam Veterans group. Charles, and his wife Bonnie, were both widowed. Together, they have a combined 93 years of marriage and jointly have 7 children and 17 grandchildren. They met at church, where Charles was part of the pastoral staff. Charles describes himself as being semi-retired from the ministry. He no longer pastors full-time, but continues to preach and serve in temporary positions as opportunity allows.

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Daniel Chaffin Biggs III
17th Special Operations Sq.

Daniel Chaffin Biggs III, Pilot, 17th Special Operations Squadron

My home town is Odessa, Texas even though I was born in Ottumwa, Iowa in 1943. After graduating from Permian High School in 1961, I attended and graduated from Texas Tech University in 1966. Soon after graduation I joined the Air Force to fly upside down and cheat death.

From January to December 1970 I was assigned at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam as a pilot with the 17th SOS. The most exciting missions I flew were double shifts over Dak Seang and Dak Pek, RVN. I will always remember the great people I got to fly with. I will never forget having to trim each bird of the fleet in a different configuration just to get it off the ground, then having to use the entire runway attempting to take off. Often takeoffs had to be aborted. Then we had to run the engines up to burn off the plugs and make another go of it. There was also the mission where I fired the guns for so long that they melted, resulting in shooting my own wing.

I separated from the Air Force at Dyess AFB, Texas in 1973 and I currently live in Irving, Texas.



Claude Mark Blum
18th Special Operations Sq.

Claude Mark Blum, Maintenance, 18th Special Operations Sq.

My birthplace is Vernon, Texas and I was born in 1948. I graduated from El Dorado High School, Kansas in 1967 and joined the Air Force in March 1968 at Wichita, Kansas to keep from getting drafted into the Army. My basic training was completed at Amarillo AFB, Texas in 1968.

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I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at Lockbourne AFB in April 1968 and then was sent to Phan Rang AB, Vietnam in October 1969. From the end of December 1969 to March 1970, I was assigned to Phu Cat AB, Vietnam and then reassigned to Udorn AB, Thailand from March to October 1970. In November, 1970, I PCS'ed to Travis AFB, California, then returned TDY to the 18th SOS in February 1971 as a Crew Chief at NKP, Thailand.

In all of my 27 years in the Air Force, I was never assigned to another unit that was as closely knit as the 18th SOS. The AC-119 Gunship units were like a family. I retired from the Air Force at McConnell AFB, Kansas in December 1995 as a Master Sergeant.

My most exciting events in Southeast Asia started after I left Phan Rang. On or about 29 December 1969, FOL B was formed and moved to Phu Cat. Our AC-119K's started flying missions from Phu Cat soon after New Years 1970. In mid January 1970, the night shift supervisor along with two other crew chiefs and I were in the flight line van, parked at the end of the Perforated Steel Planking (PSP) in front of the revetments. We were watching and waiting for the first aircraft to land. Sitting and looking out the van windshield, TSgt Cole suddenly yelled, “In coming!” A 122mm rocket hit a foot or two off the side of the PSP and 30 yards from the front of our van. Cole saw the rocket launch off the side of one of the mountains that overlooked Phu Cat.

Two weeks after the rocket hit the flight line, A1C Israel Bobe and I were working on a small oil leak on the outboard side of the #2 recip engine. After our first mission aircraft returned to base, at about 2300 hours, Bobe and I heard a loud crack pass over our heads. We jumped off the top of the B-5 maintenance stand and TSgt Cole drove up and told us to get under cover because Viet Cong snipers were near the F-4 trim pad, which was 400 yards straight to our revetments. Bobe and I headed for cover.

In mid-March at Phu Cat, five night shift crew chiefs and I were standing in front of the revetments. The first of three mission aircraft had returned to base and was being readied for the next day. At about 0300 hours, we were talking and smoking with the security cops that walked our revetments when one of them got a radio call about movement along the base outer fence. As the security cop moved off the PSP toward the taxiway, he told us to get out of the light because some nasty “stuff” was coming down. A short time later, the VC started a fire fight on the north end of the runway. My fellow crew chiefs and I were still standing in front of the aircraft watching tracers fly back and forth across the runway. Then a trip-flare went off along the outer fence about 100 yards up and across from our revetments. The guard tower, located straight across from where we were standing, opened fire with a M60 on the fence line. The tracers from the guard tower gun started swinging around toward our position. That's when we all determined it was time to find cover because we couldn't defend ourselves, since we crew chiefs were not allowed to have weapons. The next morning, we found out that twenty-two VC sappers with explosive charges came through the wire where the trip flare went

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off. All but one of the sappers was killed. The captured VC told security that the sappers were to hit the gunships, our ops building, and our air and ground crew barracks.

I'll never forget when FOL B at Phu Cat was changed to FOL D and moved to Udorn, Thailand. Instead of going to Udorn with everyone else, crew chief Jim “Pick” Pickalshimer (Sp?) and I were sent to Da Nang. When Pick and I arrived at Da Nang, we found out that the FOL at Da Nang not only didn't need us, but did not have a room for us in the barracks. We would have to “Hot Bunk” with two of the Da Nang crew chiefs. So, CMSgt Texara called headquarters at Phan Rang to straighten-out the situation. The next morning, Pick and I hitched a ride on an AC-119K Stinger that was passing through Da Nang on its way to Udorn. What Pick and I didn't know at the time was that one of the Da Nang Stingers had experienced a runaway prop on a mission the night before and had landed at a remote U.S. Marine air strip, somewhere in South Vietnam not far from the Laos border. We were to land at the air strip and off load a prop sling and prop tools.

During landing and roll out on the PSP runway, the aircrew and we passengers immediately noticed the burned-up carcasses of an F-100 and an F-4 Phantom, both lying on their sides along the runway. We also took notice of the fact that all the buildings were underground except for a foot or so at top which had firing ports. Our aircraft commander told the IO and us over the intercom to get ready to ‘kick-off’ the prop sling and tools when he stopped the aircraft. He was not going to shut down engines because he didn't want to get caught on the ground in case the air strip started taking enemy fire, mortars, or rockets. It was not a friendly place. With the prop sling and tools off-loaded in minimum time, we safely took off and flew to Udorn.



David Wisser
310th Tactical Airlift Sq.

David Wisser, 310th Tactical Airlift Squadron

I was born November 23, 1948 in Louisville Kentucky, and graduated in 1967. I was on the track and cross country teams and worked on the school newspaper. I worked various minimum wage jobs while in high school and after graduation. I wasn't in college, and I knew I was cannon fodder for the draft, so I took all of the tests for the USAF in September 1967, and was inducted on February 22, 1968.

I was sent to Amarillo AFB for basic training, and from there I went to Sheppard AFB Texas for

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training in aircraft maintenance. My first permanent duty station was at the long ago closed England AFB Louisiana. I had two life altering experiences occur while stationed there, one great (meeting my wife of 50 years) and one that nearly resulted in my death as the result of an automobile accident that landed me in the hospital for 6 weeks, and 5 months of rehabilitation and recovery. I had just met my now wife when the wreck occurred and already had orders for Vietnam. Because of the accident my orders to Vietnam were cancelled and I didn't wind up leaving for Vietnam until the end of December 1969.

I arrived in Vietnam at Cam Rahn Bay on New Years Day 1970. Happy New Year! I was stationed at Phan Rang Air Base for all of 1970. I worked as a crew chief on C-123K's. Most of the year I was a crew chief working from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. six days a week. I had the experience of going on a few maintenance recovery missions to forward bases to recover our aircraft which was quite an experience. It gave me an enhanced appreciation for our brave aircrews!

Upon my return to “the world” we got married and I was to Barksdale AFB Louisiana where I finished out my four year hitch. I was discharged on February 22, 1972.



David Wisser and family

After being discharged, I took a job with a division of GE In 1972 and worked in sales until my retirement in 2009.

We have spent our retirement years volunteering (including at the local VA hospital), spending time with our children, grandchildren, family and friends, and traveling both nationally and internationally. I also enjoyed motorcycling for over 20 years and visited over 25 states on our motorcycling adventures.

We are blessed with our two children, and five grandchildren ranging in age from 7 to 21. We celebrated our fiftieth anniversary earlier this year and as long as our health is good we plan to live life to the fullest.

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Donald E. Brogan 71st Special Operations Sq.

Donald E. Brogan, IO,71st Special Operations Squadron

I was born in Evansville, Indiana in 1940. After graduating from Bosse High School in 1958, I soon found out that good jobs were far and few between in the Evansville area, so I joined the United States Air Force in February 1960.

I served in the 71st SOS from April 1968 to July 1969 as a loadmaster/illuminator operator at Bakalar AFB, Indiana; Lockbourne AFB, Ohio; and Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam. We had many exciting and memorable missions in Vietnam. One evening mission turned into a true dusk to dawn marathon, as we fired 68,000 rounds and launched 12 flares in three sorties. Another mission, among many, that left our aircrew frustrated was flying for hours tracking lights on the ground, but we could not get clearance to fire. With no clearance, we broke off at dawn to RTB.

In Tay Ninh Province at Black Mountain (Nui Ba Dinh Mountain), we arrived to find Huey gunships flying low attacking enemy positions on the mountain. When they had to leave for fuel and ammo, we were tasked with attacking the mountain gun sites of 51mm AAA. During this attack, while working between guns 2 and 3, one of our gunners, Sgt Greg Terrell, was blown across the cargo bay to the right side of the aircraft. I reached him and determined that he had been hit, but not too severely. The pilot was told what had happened, and being close to Winchester (out of ammo), we broke off our attack and flew to Tan Son Nhut for medical assistance. After landing and parking, an inspection of the aircraft showed 20 hits.

I will always remember the time I spent in gunships as most enjoyable. My training into a new aircraft system was a great experience. The times at Phan Rang when we got together with our Aussie friends will always be remembered. A fellow crewman getting hit will always be a memory both good and bad, good in that the injury was not severe. My time with the 71st Gunship Squadron was a part of a long association with this unit, both on C-119s and AC-119s.

After Vietnam, I flew on C-130s as a loadmaster, spent 3 years in the Army with an artillery battery, and after retraining for the 4th time, served as munitions maintenance supervisor with the 434th TFW, 930th Maintenance Squadron. After 26 years of service, I retired from the Air Force as a Master Sergeant at my last duty station, Grissom AFB, Indiana in December of 1986.

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Jay L. Chase
18th Special Operations Sq.

Junior "Jay" L. Chase, Maintenance, 18th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in December 1918 in Chappell, Nebraska. I grew up in Lakeland, Florida and graduated from Lakeland High School in May 1937. I joined the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1942 to avoid the draft. I was discharged after WWII and was recalled to active duty in May 1951.

I served with the 18th SOS at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio as a maintenance line chief starting in May 1969. In October 1969, I was serving at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam. I don't recall much excitement; however, I do have a couple of incidents to comment on shortly after my arrival at Phan Pang (along with other personnel), we experienced our first mortar attack. The explosion was about fifteen feet from the Airman Quonset hut with shrapnel passing through the window. As I recall, it was a Sunday morning and guys were lounging and moving about. It was a miracle that no one was hit, except one man on a bunk. The shrapnel had hit a wood window and fell on the poor guy, breaking his skin just enough for a Purple Heart.

Later, as one of our first aircraft was arriving from the U.S., we had selected a revetment for it to park. As it was taxiing in, the Colonel interceded and led it to a different spot. Just moments after the crew had off-loaded, a mortar landed right where we had first planned to park the aircraft. Had the Colonel not made the change, we would have lost the aircraft. The Lord works in mysterious ways.

I remember while we were in Ohio, we were having trouble keeping a supply of tiny red bulbs that acted like a fuse in some of the systems. Base supply couldn't seem to get them and it was slowing our training. We learned that the bulbs were manufactured locally and we checked out our staff car, drove to the factory, and "scrounged" enough bulbs to get things going again.

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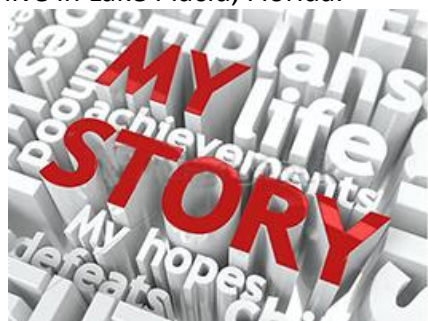
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Another thing that sticks in my mind was our maintenance office, a screened-in tea house near the runway at Phan Rang. Needless to say, it was dusty and noisy. When our first aircraft arrived, our maintenance officer had a window air conditioner onboard. My next task was to board up and install the air conditioner (with the aid of our clerk). It was nice to have the cool air and less noise and dust.

I managed to find most of my work in the tea house. I spent most of my 51st year there. My other claim to fame was I was assigned to make the “Stinger” signs at the revetment entrance. Now at ninety years of age, I don't remember names very well, however, one always comes to my mind, Metcalf. Second Lieutenant Douglas Metcalf came right out of ROTC to the 18th SOS at Phan Rang as our Assistant Maintenance Officer. He was sharp and eager to learn, just a regular guy. He deployed to Da Nang as Maintenance Officer and I didn't see him much after that. I always wondered what happened to that “shaved tail.” Well, a few years back I got his e-mail address from a newsletter and contacted him. I learned he was a Brigadier General in the reserves and lived in Winter Park, Florida. Sometime later, I attended the pinning of his second star and we have enjoyed lunch on occasion. He is now retired.

I retired at McCoy AFB, Orlando, Florida in 1974 with twenty-seven years active service. The base was closing at the time and there were not enough people left for a ceremony. I currently live in Lake Placid, Florida.



Jay Collars
17th Special Operations Sq.

Jay Collars, Flight Engineer, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I served as an AC-119G Gunship Flight Engineer with the 17th Special Operations Squadron, A Flight, Phu Cat AB from April 1970 to April 1971. Upon arriving at Phu Cat, I was assigned to Major Richard Rabinski's crew (Shadow 7). During my 12-month tour, I flew 125 combat missions, totaling over 500 combat hours. I also served as First Sergeant for A Flight. Although the position required extra administrative duties, it was probably the easiest First Sergeant

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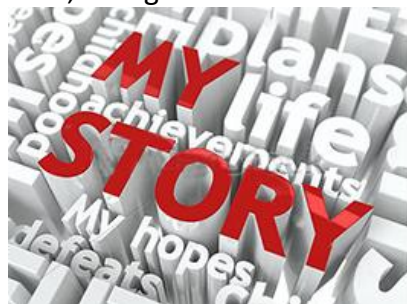
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position I ever held. As First Sergeant, I was responsible for hiring the Mama Sons for the enlisted barracks.

My awards and decorations include the Bronze Star w/V device (1st Vietnam tour), Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal w/7 oak leaf clusters (2nd Vietnam tour), and the Meritorious Service Medal. I retired as a Chief Master Sergeant.

Recovering With a Runaway Prop

While on a mission over Pleiku Province, our Shadow 7 crew received a call about a large group of North Vietnam troops moving through an area. As we approached the area, we could see ARVN troops moving among the trees. The forward controller gave us clearance to fire. After approximately one hour of firing on targets, ground actions slowed. As we pulled off target, we took a .50 caliber hit through the right propeller oil line, severing the line and causing a runaway propeller. The aircraft immediately rolled and yawed left and began losing altitude. As every Shadow crewmember knows, the AC-119 isn't supposed to be flyable with a runaway prop. While the pilots struggled to gain control, I (as flight engineer) began running the emergency checklist. Needless to say, for a few minutes there was a lot of scrambling on the flight deck. After several long minutes, Major Rabinski gained directional control of the aircraft and arrested our descent. It was through skill, professionalism, and teamwork that we beat the odds, brought the aircraft back to a successful landing, and lived to fly another day.



Norman J. Evans
17th Special Operations Sq.

Norman J. Evans, Gunner, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I joined the Air Force in Monroe, Michigan on 29 December 1955. After various assignments and training schools, I volunteered and was assigned to the 4th Air Commando Squadron, flying AC-47 Spooky gunships in Vietnam. After flying combat in “Puff”, I was assigned to the 20th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) at Hurlburt Field, flying UH-1N helicopter gunships. At

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Hurlburt, I volunteered for AC-119 gunships.

Reporting in June 1970 to the 17th SOS at Phan Rang AB, I was assigned to Fighting C Flight at Tan Son Nhut (TSN) AB at Saigon. While stationed at TSN, I lived at the Merlin Hotel in Saigon along with other enlisted Shadow aircrew members. The hotel was located not far from the American Gate at Tan Son Nhut. A shuttle bus transported us back and forth to the base and flight line. My buddies were my fellow gunners and other Shadow crewmembers. I always remember the outstanding people we had in our flight and squadron. All combat missions were serious business but there were times for a little humor.

While watching F-4 Phantoms deploy drag chutes after landing at TSN to slow them down during roll-out, it occurred to me that the Shadow gunship should also have a drag chute. Wheels started turning and next thing I knew, my gun compartment comrades (NOS excluded) and I had devised a drag chute from a flare parachute. Upon landing touchdown at TSN after our next mission, I threw the Shadow drag chute out the flare launcher door for deployment. To everyone's disappointment, it was a dud! The chute collapsed and dragged along behind the speeding gunship like a rag on a string. I pulled 'the dud' into the aircraft as we taxied off the runway. Even the pilot had no idea that we were trying to help him slow down the hot boxcar.

Once when I was flying on a normal combat mission, firing at a target when a 7.62mm high explosive incendiary shell exploded in a minigun chamber. Shrapnel shot everywhere. I was working close to the gun and caught a small sliver in my eye. We continued the mission until Bingo Fuel and returned to base at Saigon. After landing and upon engine shutdown, I departed the aircraft and immediately headed for the base infirmary. The flight surgeon extracted the sliver of metal from my eye and applied a bandage over the eye. I returned to Shadow Ops to inform the Ops Officer that I was DNIF. WELL, the Ops Officer was not at all sympathetic nor did he honor my DNIF status. I was already scheduled for the next mission because our Flight was short on gunners at the time. Injured or not I was going on the next mission which I flew as a one-eyed gunner.

Another time we were flying a daytime armed recon mission over Cambodia when all of a sudden a jet came out of nowhere and buzzes our Shadow. From our six o'clock position, the jet shot very close to the top of our gunship. The sound and vibrations caused by the jet startled our crew. What in the hell was that?? Then the warplane was identified by a knowing pilot. It

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was a MiG 15, a bandit! We wondered if the MiG was only warning us that we were doomed and that he would soon turn to make his kill? Everyone scanned the skies for imminent aerial attack as time slowly passed. Thankfully, the MiG did not return. We gladly headed back to Saigon and landed. A few of us changed our flight suit before going to debrief. During debriefing, we learned that the Cambodian Air Force had MiG 15 fighter aircraft. The bandit was a friendly MIG!

In January 1971, I was transferred from TSN to Phan Rang as SEFE gunner to train the Vietnamese in the AC-119G. I departed Vietnam in June 1971, having completed my one year tour of duty. Stateside, I was assigned to the 415th SOTS, flying the AC-119G and AC-119K. In 1972, I, along with many other gunners from the 17th SOS, was selected for “Project Credible Chase” in which one pilot and one gunner flew single-engine Helio Stallion AU-24 and Pilatus Porter AU-23 gunship aircraft. Both gunships were equipped with one three-barrel 20mm Gatling cannon. From there, I went back to AC-130s and became the first enlisted sensor operator, position normally held by a navigator. In 1975, I transferred to Korat, Thailand as an AC-130 sensor operator.

In my five tours in Southeast Asia (4 in Vietnam, 1 in Thailand), I was awarded the Command Crew Wing, the Senior Jump Wing, one Bronze Star, the DFC with four Oak Leaf Clusters, 21 Air Medals, and a Purple Heart. I retired from the United State Air Force as a Chief Master Sergeant in December 1985.



Robert Dean Ford
435th MMS

Robert Dean Ford, 435th Munitions Maintenance Squadron

I was born June 6, 1947 and raised in Kentland, Indiana, a small rural community of 1,500 people (the largest town in the county). Growing up in such a small town was reminiscent of the film "To Kill A Mockingbird". Everyone knew each other. Doors were never locked and we

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often played outside until well after dark. My father was a former Indiana State Trooper and later the County Sheriff. In those days the sheriff's family lived in one half of the sheriff's two story building

My mother cooked all the meals for the prisoners and took care of their laundry. Being the sheriff's kids my older brother and I got a lot of attention in town (good & bad). Imagine Opie Taylor in Mayberry - that was me. My big brother and I attended elementary school on one side of town and high school on the opposite side. My senior class (of 1965) was the largest to ever graduate in the school's history, just 49 students. My father also graduated from the same school, AJ Kent High School in 1925.

I spent my summers playing on my Uncle's farm to 'keep me out of trouble'. When I turned 12, I started working on the farm for 25 cents an hour. I worked there every summer until I graduated high school. The following fall I went to Chicago on a scholarship to the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. Living in a small boarding house in Chicago was a real culture shock for kid growing up in a small town. My scholarship was just for one year so I worked part time in a restaurant to stay in school. In the summer of 1967 I had to drop out of the Art school and work full time in order to save money. Growing up in a small town, all of my friends knew the nice 'lady' who was head of our local draft board, Lucille B. Donahue. So I decided to write her a letter just to let her know I had left school to earn enough to return the following semester.

Two weeks later I got a notice to report to the Chicago induction center for a physical. I freaked out. True story: One late afternoon while walking home from my job, I spotted an USAF recruiter locking his door for the day. Without thinking it thru, I approached him. I've never been a very good bullshitter but that afternoon I surprised myself. I told him my father was in the Army Air Corp during WW2 (in truth, he served as a regular troop in the Pacific during the war) and that my older brother was an officer in the USAF (he was serving as an officer the the Navy) - and it was 'expected' that I would enlist in the United States Air Force! I've never lied so well in my life. He bought my BS and unlocked the door. I took the written test and passed. (duh)

Since I was scheduled for induction in a few weeks he promised he would be there to "claim" me. I'm not sure anyone else joined the USAF this way but here is what happened. I spent the entire morning at the induction center, hundreds of us in our under underwear, clutching

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papers. I reported there at 7:00 a.m. but it wasn't until that afternoon that we were herded into a packed room to be sorted: Army < - > Marines. But before they started there was a shout from the back of the room: "One f ours is in here by mistake! I need Robert Ford to come with me!" And that's how I joined the United States Air Force on November 20, 1967.

After basic training I was sent to Keesler AFB in Biloxi, Mississippi to be trained as a Computer Maintenance Specialist - a 72 week course! I never did understand why they picked me. I was terrible at math and computers in 1967 were a complete mystery to everyone. My first class was students ranging from 'fresh-out-of-basic' to 2nd Lieutenants. The instructor started by announcing: 'I'm sure everyone here is familiar with Boolean Algebra' (?). I held my hand up: "What's Bullween algebra?" It was downhill from there. Three weeks later the brass decided I wasn't computer material and sent me to Lowry AFB, Denver, CO to become a "BB stacker". From there I went to Davis Monthan AFB in Tucson, AZ.

In May 1969 I was sent to Happy Valley to work in the Bomb Dump. And a year later I arrived at Grissom AFB, Peru, Indiana to be trained as a Fireman. There was an asshole Sergeant there who always give me a hard time and after a loud shouting match, I stormed out in a huff. I went straight to the Chief Master Sergeant's office. I was so pissed off I didn't bother to knock. I walked up to his desk and exclaimed that I didn't give a damn if he threw me in the brig, I wasn't going to take anymore BS from Sgt. So & So!! It was at that moment when a white haired Bird Colonel sitting behind me quietly rose and left the room. I didn't know it then, but he was the Squadron Commander. The Chief Master Sgt listened to my complaint and ordered me to return to the barracks. The next morning I was told to report the Base Commander's office. I was expecting to be busted to an Airman and/or sent to jail. Instead he smiled and asked me if I could type? I said yes. (I lied). Then I was introduced to four civilian women who ran the Colonel's office. I was assigned to a desk and an electric typewriter, and for the next 6 months I seldom typed anything. But I had a great time and became a close friend to Captain Mike White, right-had man to the Commander. Before the month was out I was babysitting with his 2 kids from time to time. My last 6 months in the USAF was wonderful!

I bummed around after my discharge in November 1970 and moved to Bloomington, IN (IU) and for the next three years I partied! In 1975 I took a job with the Indiana Highway Dept. of Transportation, rented a small house in the woods and convened with nature. I got married in 1983 to a part-time actress and became a father to a beautiful boy 12 months later. The

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marriage was doomed from the start so in 1986 we calmly divorced using the same attorney. Afterward we had lunch together.

In 1987 I became an environmental activist and by myself, formed a river protection group called 'The Friends of Sugar Creek'. Over the years I received numerous awards from the Governor, community organizations, other environmental groups & local newspapers. I was a frequent speaker around the state. The organization grew into the largest watershed organization in Indiana - over 3,000 members. I retired after serving 18 years as president.

Today I'm retired from my State employment, married to a beautiful, intelligent woman 8 years my junior. My 37 year old son is an Army vet, college graduate and married to a wonderful woman. My wife and I live in a two story cabin deep inside the Hoosier National Forest, along with two cats & two dogs. Life is good!



Robert W. Mundle
17th Special Operations Sq.

Robert W. Mundle, Pilot, 17th Special Operations Squadron

Robert “Bob” William Mundle was born 12 December 1945 in Red Wing, Minnesota to the proud parents of Ernest (1906-1973) and Helen (1919-) Mundle. Bob graduated from Red Wing Central High School in 1963. Subsequently, he graduated from Rochester Junior College in 1965 and Mankato State College in 1967 with a B.S. in Business Administration.

Bob entered military service in February 1968 at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas and became a commissioned officer in the United States Air Force upon graduation from Officer Training School on 27 June 1968. Second Lieutenant Mundle graduated from Undergraduate Pilot Training at Laredo AFB, Texas on 27 June 1969 and was selected to fly AC-119G gunships.

Completing C-119 training at Clinton County and AC-119 combat training at Lockbourne AFB in Ohio, Bob departed the states for duty in Vietnam. He arrived at Phan Rang Air Base in the

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Republic of Vietnam on 2 January 1970 and was assigned to C Flight at Tan Son Nhut, Saigon.

After flying 197 combat missions in Vietnam and Cambodia, First Lieutenant Mundle was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses and nine Air Medals. Upon receiving a 30-day “rollback”, Bob departed Vietnam on 2 December 1970.

Upon return stateside, Bob reported for duty at Vance AFB; Enid, Oklahoma as a Flight Instructor in T-37 aircraft from 1971 to 1979. While stationed in Oklahoma, he attended night school and received an MBA with honors from Oklahoma City University. He then was assigned to fly C-5s based at Travis AFB, California from 1979 to 1981.

In May 1981, Bob left active duty and transferred to the United States Air Force Reserves (USAFR) 326th MAS based at Dover AFB, serving as aircraft commander on C-5s until June 1989. He retired from the USAFR in 1989 at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

In February 1981, New York Air employed Bob as a pilot to fly DC-9s from LaGuardia Airport; New York, New York. Upon New York Air merger with Continental Airlines in 1987, Bob became a Continental Airlines pilot. He retired from Continental Airlines in December 2005.

Bob married his pretty and charming wife, Cheryl in October 1992. He has two daughters, Eliz (1971) and Emily (1976) from a previous marriage and a step-son, William (1969) and step-daughter, Tara (1974).

Bob and Cheryl reside in Vonore, Tennessee with a summer cottage in Amery, Wisconsin. Bob loves to play golf when not flying his Beechcraft N35 Bonanza.

War Stories

My first night in-country was spent at Phan Rang Air Base, where I reported for duty with the 17th SOS. There, we were in-processed and assigned to a flight. I remember being in the BOQ (I think I was doing my laundry) and we came under mortar attack. The sirens went off and there I was crouching behind a concrete wall thinking, “This is going to be a long year!” As I remember, that was the one and only mortar attack that I experienced during my tour of duty in Vietnam.

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I was assigned to C Flight at Tan Son Nhut shortly thereafter and the only thing scary there were the C-123 spray birds. I remember they would very loudly zoom at extremely low altitudes directly over our barracks compound about mid-morning, not long after I had finally fallen sound asleep (I flew only night missions at that time in my tour). Initially, I would roll out of bed sure of an impending heart attack, but after living at TSN for a month or so, I slept right through the C-123 bombing raids. I think they were spraying mosquito insecticide, not Agent Orange.

On one daylight mission during late summer 1970, we (Shadow 81 – my radio call sign) were providing direct air support for the Cambodian Army Garrison at the Province Capital City of Kampong Cham located on the Mekong River. All at once, our gunship started picking up .51 Caliber fire. We pinpointed the enemy gun site and attacked. I started “dueling” with the enemy gunner. I remember the concussion of the .51 caliber bullets sounding just like popcorn popping as the bullets flew by my windows. I must admit that my youth and adrenalin had some effect on my actions that day. I couldn’t believe the nerve-- that SOB was actually shooting at me!! We stayed on target and expended 36,000 rounds at the site and he kept shooting at us periodically throughout the mission. Finally, I decided that it wasn’t worth the risk - - no TIC, and I wasn’t making any headway shutting him down so we departed for TSN. We were not hit and apparently that guy went home to tell his story too.

I remember when we (Shadow 81) launched for a night mission and had to shut an engine down very shortly after takeoff at Tan Son Nhut (Saigon). On normal missions, it was standard routine to depart on runway 25L and recover on 25R. Until that emergency, it never dawned on me that the emergency runway would be 25L because the fire department was located closer to 25L. Anyway, I robotically rattled-off the bold faced items and we got the engine shutdown, prop feathered, and ran all checklists in preparation for a closed pattern emergency landing. It just so happened that our Flight Commander, Lt. Col. Teal was strapped in the jump seat as a mission observer.

My copilot, 1/Lt. Larry Fletcher and my flight engineer, Tech Sergeant Ed “Mac” McCormick quickly completed all checklists as I called for them. Fletcher contacted Saigon Tower and received landing clearance on downwind leg of our closed pattern. While cleared by tower to land on run- way 25L, I was concentrating on flying and trimming the gunship for single-engine flight and landing on 25R. With tunnel vision for landing on runway 25R, I eased the aircraft into a wide base turn to lineup on runway 25R and set up what felt like a perfect glide slope for that

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runway. Upon rolling out for final approach, Fletcher pointed out that tower had cleared us to land on the Left Runway (25L). I immediately adjusted the rollout and lined up on the much closer and fast approaching runway 25L. There would be no single engine go-around with the fully-loaded gunship. I was bound and determined to get the plane on the ground. The only thing I could say was, “OH, F—K. FULL FLAPS NOW!” At idle power, the plane came down nicely and we landed just fine but my pride was hurt a little. Colonel

Teal was nice enough to not mention that little detail in the debriefing.



William L. Jowers
14th Special Operations Sq.

William L. Jowers, Pilot, 14th Special Operations Wing

William “Bill” Jowers was born at Middlesex, North Carolina in 1935. Pocomoke City, Maryland is where Bill lived and attended school, graduating from Pocomoke High School in 1953. Four years later in 1957, Bill graduated from the University of Maryland and was commissioned an officer in the USAF through the ROTC program. Bill wanted to fly and that is the reason he selected the Air Force. He was in the first class of ROTC students who earned a Pilot’s license through the Flight Instruction Program at Maryland. After college, he entered active duty at Lackland AFB, Texas.

First assigned to Spence Air Base, Georgia for Primary Flight Training in the T-34 and the T-28, Bill then received Advanced Flight Training (AFT) in the T-33 at Webb AFB, Texas. Following AFT, he was sent to Randolph AFB, Texas for KC-97 Orientation Training and was assigned to Malmstrom AFB. From Malmstrom, Bill was sent to Castle AFB, California for KC-135 training. He attended AF Survival School at Stead AFB, Nevada.

From 1959 to 1964 Bill was assigned to the 97th Air Refueling Squadron (ARS) at Malmstrom AFB as a KC-97 pilot. From 1964 to 1966, he flew KC-135 tankers with the 7th ARS at Carswell AFB. Bill was then assigned as a KC-135 pilot to Clinton-Sherman AFB, Oklahoma from 1966

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through 1968.

Bill was then assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio for training in the AC-119K gunship. After completion of training, he was selected to ferry a gunship from Lockbourne to Vietnam. Shortly after arriving in Vietnam, he was sent to Clark AFB in the Philippines for Jungle Survival Training. Bill served in Southeast Asia from November 1969 to November 1970. He was an AC-119K Stinger aircraft commander and instructor pilot at Phu Cat Air Base, RVN from 1969 to early 1970 when he was assigned to Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base (NKP), Thailand.

On February 5, 1970, Major Bill Jowers didn't duck soon enough and caught a 37 millimeter AAA shell in his Stinger gunship just below the co-pilot's seat. All communications and most of the engine and flight instruments were lost. Three crewmembers were wounded, the IP (Bill), the AC and the FE. Read details in the following War Story. Sometime thereafter, Bill was assigned as Gunship Liaison Officer with the 14th Special Operations Wing at Phan Rang AB, RVN where he completed his Vietnam tour of duty.

Returning to the states, Bill was assigned to Griffiss AFB, New York, initially in the Flight Test Division of Rome Air Development Center (RADC), USAF Systems Command. He then became Flight Commander of Flight Test Division Jet Section, Chief of Plans, and finally Executive Officer to the Commander of RADC. During this time, Bill flew the NKC-135 as an IP and a Standardization Check Pilot. With twenty years military service to his country, Bill Jowers retired from the USAF at Griffiss in September 1977.

After retirement from the USAF, Bill worked for Midlands Technical College (MTC) in Columbia, South Carolina, becoming the Assistant Dean of Continuing Education. After 21 years with MTC, he retired again. He now enjoys playing golf, five wonderful grandchildren and most of all his lovely wife, Fran of nearly 50 years of marriage.

Bill's memories of his AC-119 Stinger gunship experience center on the super group of professionals that he encountered in the U.S.A. and in S.E.A. Bill was in the initial group to train in the AC-119K gunship that required much teamwork and patience from instructors and students alike. His experience in ferrying a “K” from Lockbourne to Vietnam was an unforgettable flying adventure.

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His gunship crews in S.E.A. were the best he could ever hope for. They were dedicated to the mission and brave in combat. This was proven on the night when his Stinger was hit by enemy triple-A. Every crewmember performed exactly as trained to do with little or no direction.

Bill Jowers was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star, Air Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters and the Purple Heart for combat action in the Vietnam War.

Stinger Hit

On February 5, 1970 while flying a truck kill mission over the Ho Chi Min Trail, AC-119K #53-7826 with the call sign “Rose” took a 37mm shell just below the co-pilot’s position which exploded inside the aircraft. The damage included, but was not limited to, loss of electrical control of both jet engines (both went to idle), loss of all radios and outside contact with anyone, and loss of almost all electrical instruments (both flight and engine indicators). Three of the crew members were wounded which included a foot wound to the pilot, glass in the eyes of the flight engineer, and numerous pieces of shrapnel, glass and plastic in the face and legs of the instructor pilot in the right seat. Using the only heading information available, the magnetic compass, a heading was determined for Da Nang AB and a turn was made to this heading to try a landing at that location if possible. After the turn was made we received the only radio message of the return trip when our escort advised us that if our intention was to land at DaNang, we needed to turn almost 30 degrees south of our present heading. We made this correction and fortunately one of the persons in the aircraft with us that night was an F-4 pilot who had been stationed at Da Nang before he began flying cover for us out of Phu Cat. His knowledge of the area around Da Nang was instrumental in establishing our exact position and the location of terrain and other important landmarks near the base.

After flying out over the South China Sea east of Da Nang, we jettisoned all items that we could throw out the door which might cause fire dangers on landing. This included all flares, ammunition and such. Fortunately, we didn’t sink any Navy ships that we know of, as we were in and out of rainstorms in the local area. After the jettison operation was completed, we turned back to Da Nang and with the assistance and guidance of the on-board F-4 jock, we lined up with the runway at Da Nang. As we had no radio contact with the base, we had to rely on the fact that someone had advised them we were in the area and intended to land. Since we

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had to lower the gear manually, it was lowered as we began our approach and visually checked. Using the minimal instruments and indicators we had available, Captain Boozer made an outstanding approach and landing.

After touchdown, we turned off the runway and shut down the aircraft and exited ASAP!!! I think that most of us were surprised at the size of the hole in the fuselage and the amount of internal damage that had been done behind the instrument panel and below the crew compartment. We were greeted on the taxiway by almost everyone in the 18th SOS detachment led by Major Fred Sternberg, the detachment commander, as we stopped on the taxiway. This was probably due to the fact that we were the first aircraft to receive significant AAA damage in the squadron. After a brief visit to the Flight Surgeon’s office, a SMALL celebration was had by all before retiring for the evening. The next morning the crew went out and looked over the aircraft and it was then that the extent of the damage and the realization of how lucky we all were became evident to all concerned. I later learned a few interesting facts that are almost uncanny. The crew number for this crew was 13. The Aircraft number was 826. I have been advised that the crew lost later in the tour was crew number 13 and was flying aircraft 826.

This Stinger War Story is submitted by the following members of Crew number 13 that were onboard aircraft number 826 on 5 Feb 1970:

William L. Jowers (IP)

Gordon Boozer (P)

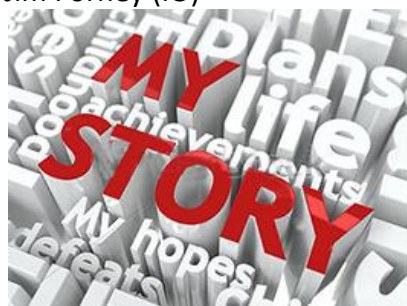
Joe Taub (Nav)

Bill Biden (FLIR)

Jim Brickle (NOS)

Don Ebbeson (FE)

Jim Forney (IO)



Rod Friese
17th Special Operations Sq.

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Rod Friese, 17th Special Operations Squadron

Murphysboro, Illinois was my birthplace in 1949. I graduated in 1967 from Unity High School near my home town of Sidney, Illinois. I joined the Air Force at Indianapolis, Indiana on 25 July 1968. The Draft was sneaking up on me and higher education at the time was not my ‘bag’. So, I went to the Air Force recruiter, thinking somehow I could get a flying job in Vietnam even though I had already lost two classmates to the war. One classmate was in the Army and the other in the Marine Corps.

Flying in Vietnam, one of the most memorable missions was a routine “Shadow Box” target, nothing specific even though Intel had numerous reports of enemy activity within the map coordinates. Box missions were usually boring, orbiting in the sky, looking for anything that moved. After an hour or so of boring holes in the sky, we came across a compound that our navigator had seen before on a previous search, but now they had what appeared to be a makeshift Red Cross on the roof of the building. We checked with Saigon control and they radioed back within minutes, saying the building had been reported as an enemy ammo storage building, not a medical facility by reconnaissance that day. They gave us permission to fire and we let them have it, first with one mini-gun which caused secondary explosions. Then we fired with all four mini-guns at the same time and the ensuing explosions lit up the countryside for miles around. In thirty minutes time, we had wiped out a large stockpile of enemy munitions.

Soon after I had arrived in country, I experienced a highly intense mission at Dak Seang, South Vietnam where enemy forces were about to overrun American troops. Besides the Shadow gunship, there were many types of U.S. aircraft flying in support of our ground troops. C-123 and C-130 aircraft made supply drops while U.S. Army helicopters attacked enemy troops and Air Force fighter jets dropped bombs and napalm on enemy locations before strafing. It was a very, very congested airspace and we had to keep a sharp eye out for the other aircraft as well as enemy ground fire. It was hard work, keeping the flares going, helping gunners drag cans of brass, and watching for anti-aircraft fire. Amid the sounds of our guns firing and the rushing wind outside the gunship while scanning below for enemy fire, I had to listen very closely on the intercom headset for commands from the pilot to launch flares. It took about five days and nights to drive off the enemy but we did it.

Flying missions over the Bolovens Plateau in Southern Laos, out of Phu Cat Air Base, Vietnam for three weeks in December 1970 was really exciting. There were lots of fireworks there. During those missions I experienced the most intense heat that I have ever felt from bomb explosions and napalm. We would hit the target areas in the Plateau, go Bingo Fuel and Winchester and have to land at Ubon, Thailand to regenerate. A couple of times we ended up staying overnight at Ubon. That was a nice break!

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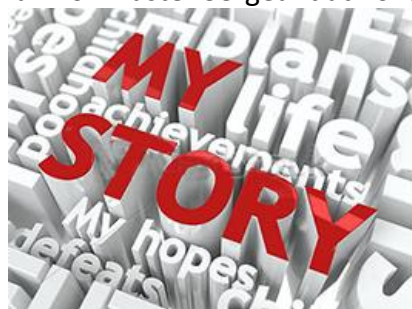
I remember the feelings I had and still have for every time we returned from a “Hot” mission. We accomplished exactly what we were tasked in a short amount of time; it always resulted in defeating “Charlie”. We whooped their ass! And they knew it!

One of my most unpleasant memories of the AC-119 concerns the choice of Ohio for combat crew training. It still seems ludicrous that we were expected to train for Southeast Asia by flying in the frigid Ohio winter in an aircraft with all the cargo compartment doors removed. Consequently, we got about one- half of our required training accomplished before they sent us to Vietnam.

I’ll always remember my 20th birthday at Phan Rang, getting rolled out of bed and trucked to the flight line Fire Department water tank for a dunk. Who at Phan Rang can forget nights at the outdoor theater? When someone had a ‘fini’ flight, we’d uncork the champagne, skip the chow hall, and go from there. On crew stand-by status or even a day off from flying, I’ll always remember the card games, the pranks, taking the officers to the NCO Club, and going with the officers to the O’ Club to see how long it took before we got kicked out of either.

The best friends I made while in Vietnam were gunners. I’ve kept up with these guys through our AC-119 Gunship website and finally made a reunion in Branson. Great friendships were bonded during my year in Vietnam and I’ll never forget that!

After twenty-two years service, I retired from the United States Air Force in May 1990 with the rank of Master Sergeant at Yokota Air Base, Japan.



Clayton L. Green
17th Special Operations Sq.

Clayton L. Green, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I was assigned to the 4th SOS at Nha Trang and performed engine maintenance on Spooky, AC 47s and Shadow, AC- 119s and was then transferred to 71st SOS, later becoming the 17th SOS. I moved to Phan Rang as an R-3350 engine mechanic on Shadows because of my prior experience on R-3350 engines and was run-up and taxi qualified. I was then designated as Taxi and Run-Up instructor for the 17th SOS and was placed on flying status as a flight mechanic.

I spent the majority of the tour TDY recovering battle damaged aircraft or making mechanical repairs all over Vietnam and Thailand, often times under hostile ground fire. On one occasion I

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was deployed to Bam Me Thout East TDY to recover a Shadow that had made an emergency landing on a PSP runway due to #2 engine failure. A short time after I arrived, the base was under attack by “Charlie”. Charlie was trying to destroy Shadow and mortars were being launched at the airplane and small arms fire continued thru the night until the next morning. Fortunately, the Army was there to handle the ground assault. I proceeded to change the engine in record-setting time, flew the test flight with the crew, landed, performed the dash-6 inspection and flew home to Phan Rang with the crew. Upon returning to Phan Rang, the Squadron Commander awarded me a commendation. I was also nominated for the Bronze Star for changing the engine in record time under hostile ground fire. In addition to Phan Rang and Nha Trang, I spent TDY time in Ben Hoa, Chu Lai, Tuy Hoa, Pleiku, Phu Cat, Da Nang, Ban Me Thout, Cam Ranh Bay, Tan Son Nhut, Udorn, U Tapao, and NKP. I had opportunities to fly several missions and witness the magnificent firepower and devastation of Shadow and the intense but exemplary performance of the flight crews and maintenance crews. "Deny him the Dark" was a very appropriate slogan for the mission objective.

I was discharged from the Air Force at Mather AFB, CA in 1972.



Bryan Douglas Maynard
18th Special Operations Sq.

Bryan Douglas Maynard, Navigator, 18th Special Operations Squadron

San Jose, California was my birthplace in 1933. I graduated from Lincoln & James Lick High School at San Jose in 1951 and then graduated from San Jose State University in 1955. In 1956, I entered the U.S. Air Force at Lackland AFB.

I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron as a navigator/ sensor operator on AC-119K Stinger gunships. I flew out of Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam (RVN) during January 1971 and then out of Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand from February to July 1971. From July 7, 1971 to January 1972, I flew out of Da Nang Air Base, RVN.

My most exciting combat mission was my first Stinger mission, flying out of NKP hunting trucks on the Ho Chi Minh Trails in Laos. We had a big ‘AAA’ time and were lucky to get back to NKP without taking any hits. The next night, my longtime friend, Bob Bloomfield, went up with my crew and sustained a six-inch hole in one of the vertical tails for their effort, as well as many other close 23mm rounds. My first mission was the worst. Gladly, the rest were less stressful.

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The things that I will always remember about flying Stinger gunships are: Bingo Points, which we learned had to be reconsidered for one engine returns! That we must not toss out miniguns to reduce weight!

I retired as a Lieutenant Colonel from the Air Force in February 1977 at Beale AFB, California. I currently live in Penn Valley, California.



Donald Paul Stevens
17th Special Operations Sq.

Donald Paul Stevens, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in Houston, Texas in 1949. I graduated from Richfield High School at Waco, Texas in 1967. I joined the Air Force in 1969 because I was young and not ready for college and because of the Vietnam War. After I separated from the Air Force in July 1973 at Carswell AFB, Texas in Fort Worth. I entered college and graduated from Tyler Jr. College at Tyler, Texas in 1975 and McLennan College in Waco, Texas in 1978. My wife, Chris, and I currently live in Waco.

My most memorable event while I was with AC-119 gunships was when I got a chance to fly on an AC-119G Shadow gunship with the crew. Although it was not a combat mission, it gave me some insight of what it was like to be aboard one of the planes with the crew. I am pretty sure it was a hop from Phan Rang to Tan Son Nhut at Saigon. The trip gave me an above the ground perspective of Vietnam and its natural beauty. It also reminded me of how serious our mission in Vietnam was and how dangerous it was for our AC-119 crews. I had so much respect for them.

I will always remember the closeness of our 17th SOS unit (C Flight) at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. I had many really close pals among the young and older enlisted men as well as officers. I loved the time I was there, yet hated it! I missed my wife, Chris (we are still married now for forty years). I was proud to serve with the 17th SOS in Vietnam for 364 days. I am still proud of our group of guys.

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Kenneth Paul Stearn
17th Special Operations Sq.

Kenneth Paul Stearn, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in 1943 at Fort Smith, Arkansas, but grew up in Red Lion, Pennsylvania where I graduated from Red Lion Senior High School in 1962. To stay out of the Army and to sleep on white sheets, I joined the Air Force on 13 July 1967 at York, Pennsylvania.

In Vietnam, I was assigned as an Illuminator Operator (IO) to the 17th SOS, C Flight at Tan Son Nhut, Saigon from August to November 1970. Then I was temporarily assigned to the 18th SOS Flight at Da Nang. In December, I returned to the 17th SOS C Flight at Tan Son Nhut to fly missions until April 1971. I was transferred to the 17th SOS at Phan Rang to train Vietnamese Illuminator Operators until my return to the states on 10 August 1971.

“...I realized that the guys on the ground were trying to kill us.”

There were so many exciting and dangerous combat missions that I flew in Southeast Asia, it is hard to pick out just one. The first time we were fired on by enemy 50 caliber guns still sticks out in my mind as a bonafide reality check. I mean we were flying in Cambodia and there were not supposed to be any 50 cal gun sites there. Then it happened, I really did not know what was going on. All of a sudden all I could see were white streaks coming up between the booms and a noise that I thought sounded like popcorn popping. It did not take me long to realize what was going on when I heard someone yell, “Break Right!” That was the first time I realized that the guys on the ground were trying to kill us. After that I became more aware of my surroundings in the air and on the ground. You really start paying attention when you realize that you could be killed at any time. I think I will always remember the people, Vietnamese and Americans. There were good times and bad times but we managed to make it through.

My awards and decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross with an Oak Leaf Cluster, Meritorious Service Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters, and the Air Medal with a Silver Oak Leaf and three Oak Leaves.

I retired from the USAF at Langley AFB, Virginia on 1 Aug 1993 with 26 years and 19 days of service.

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After retirement, I went to worked for a copier company where I was in charge of the parts room. The organizational and management skills that I had learned in the Air Force started paying off. I worked there for eight years before they promoted me to warehouse manager and moved me to Richmond. It was a round trip commute of 156 miles. I stayed about four months and decided that was enough. For the next four years, I began working with substance abusers in Newport News. This was a real eye opener for me, seeing talented individuals throwing their lives away for drugs and alcohol. It was the greatest learning experience since Vietnam. I retired again in June 2005 and found retired life boring. I now work part-time as a Park Aide at one of our county parks while serving as administrator for our Moose Lodge.



James M. Roach
71st Special Operations Sq.

James M. Roach, Pilot, 71st Special Operations Squadron

He was born in Utah on October 1, 1924. He enlisted in the aviation cadet program upon reaching 18. James graduated from pilot training in April 1944 at 19. He then graduated from B-24 transition and proceeded to form a crew at Tonopah AAF, NV. He was a B-24 aircraft commander at age 19, flying combat missions with the 830th Bomb Squadron, 485th Bomb Group, 15th Air Force in Italy beginning in the fall of 1944. Jim flew a war-weary B-24 back to the States after the war.

James was discharged in November 1945 as a First Lieutenant. He entered college and graduated in 1950. He was recalled to active duty in March 1951 and served as a Finance Officer and pilot for 7 years in Germany, France, England, Wisconsin and California. He flew C-47s, C-119s, C-45s and T-33s during this period. In 1959, he was assigned to SAC as a KC-97 aircraft commander at Dow AFB ME. In 1963, he was transferred to SAC Headquarters to fly VC-97s around the country and many overseas destinations. In 1965, James was transferred to Wiesbaden, Germany to fly “Spooky” C-97s (Spy Missions) for 3 years.

Receiving orders for AC-119 gunship training, James attended C-119 transition at Clinton County and then gunnery school at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. He trained in the AC-119K model, but was sent to the 17th SOS as a G-pilot replacement, when the Reserve pilots were rotated back to the States. He served at Nha Trang and Phan Rang as an Aircraft Commander and Instructor Pilot in addition to serving as Operation Location and Squadron operations officer.

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James rotated back to the states in April 1970 and reported to his next assignment as a C-141 pilot and instructor pilot and operations officer at McChord AFB.

James Roach retired from the Air Force in September 1975, having accumulated 10,000 flying hours in a variety of aircraft, and returned to college, earning a master’s degree. He worked for the State of Washington for 6 years and then retired from all work. In 1987, he moved to Las Vegas where he and his wife of 47 years have since lived. James has one daughter.



Earl W. Wall
71st Special Operations Sq.

Earl W. Wall, Crew Chief, 71st Special Operations Squadron

I was born on April 26, 1942 in Indianapolis, IN where I was raised and educated. While working at U.S. Naval Avionics Facility in Indianapolis, I joined the Air Force Reserve at Bakalar AFB, Columbus, IN in 1963.

On April 11, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced the activation of our C-119G Reserve unit at Bakalar AFB, where I reported for active duty on May 13, 1968. The unit was redesignated from 930th to 71st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) on July 8, 1968 and tasked to fly the AC-119G Gunship III. On November 27, 1968, the Deputy Defense Secretary approved our deployment to Southeast Asia as an active duty AC-119G Gunship unit.

I was assigned as crew chief to Ferry Crew #3. Our task was to deliver Aircraft #52-5892 to Nha Trang AB, Vietnam. The crew included two pilots, Lt. Col. Lawrence Shinnick and Lt. Col. Loman Miller, a navigator, Maj. Spencer Nichols, and a flight engineer, SSgt John Strubbe. On January 29, 1969, we departed Lockbourne AFB, Ohio for Vietnam. Our flight route included stops in Florida, Arizona, California, Washington, Alaska, Adak Island, Midway Island, Wake Island, Guam, and the Philippines. We arrived at Nha Trang AB on March 2, 1969.

Pucker Flight to Adak

“We slid off the end of the runway into a snow bank and had to be pulled out by a tug.”

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The most frustrating and troubling segments of our delivering the AC-119G to Nha Trang AB, Vietnam occurred between Anchorage and Adak Island, Alaska. We had spent seven days snow bound at Anchorage. On the day we finally left, the air temperature was 34 degrees below zero. We had to preheat engine nacelles for four hours just to get the engines to crank over. The aircraft had low power during takeoff and we had to abort. We slid off the end of the runway into a snow bank and had to be pulled out by a tug. Our second takeoff was good; we were on our way to Adak.

Just after passing the point-of-no-return to Anchorage, we ran into an ice/sleet storm. Ice started accumulating on the aircraft and our airspeed started dropping off. We put all available heat into the propellers and leading edge of the wings, but ice continued building. The accumulation on the propeller dome would build straight forward to approximately two or three feet, then break off and slam into the side of the cockpit fuselage with the sound of a 12-gauge shotgun! The ice dented the sides of the aircraft.

The airspeed continued dropping. We began descending and the pilot instructed me to get the survival gear ready for ditching. On the pilot's command, it was my task to kick survival rafts/gear out of the aircraft. The pilot would then circle back around and we would all bail-out over the survival gear. We had only 2 minutes to get into the rafts and zip inside before being overcome by hypothermia. Less than a minute before the planned ditching, we flew out of the storm and were able to maintain enough air speed to continue the flight to Adak. We had lost a lot of altitude, though, and as we passed close to some Russian Naval ships we could clearly see soldiers on the deck.

When we landed at Adak Island, the wind was blowing so hard that the aircraft had to be immediately anchored to the tarmac to keep the aircraft from being damaged or flipped over. This was when I acknowledged that Adak Island was truly the “Birthplace of Wind on Earth”.

As we entered the transient barracks we saw a soldier sitting on the floor with ankles shackled to the wall. I knew then that Adak was an interesting place to be. Indeed, the next morning I got a view of the Adak National Forest. The “forest” consisted of an area approximately 12 feet square lined with railroad ties stacked four high and filled with dirt. There was one lonely pine tree in the center and a sign that read Adak National Forest. Adak Island is a volcanic rock!

After arriving at Nha Trang, I was assigned to the Flight Line Maintenance Crew. On February 13, 1969, I was reassigned to FOL Phan Rang where I spent the remainder of my tour of duty. I will always remember the very close friendships developed during my tour. One in particular was with SSgt Jim Alvis. We are still best friends to this day. Following our return home to Indiana on June 6, 1969, I returned to the civilian workforce at Allison Engine Company/GM. My wife, Dixie, and I started our family and the rest is history.

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Don Main

18th Special Operations Sq.

Don Main, Pilot, 18th Special Operations Squadron

I was flying C-119s with the 914th Tactical Airlift Squadron out of Niagara Falls, NY as a Reserve pilot. I decided to come back on active duty in November 1969 when the call came down that they were looking for C-119 pilots to fly the Stinger gunship in Vietnam. So in December 1969, orders were cut sending me to Lockbourne AFB to check out in the AC-119K gunship. In April 1970, I departed Lockbourne for Vietnam after completing my AC checkout. At that time I was a Captain and Senior Pilot and my orders were cut for Nha Trang AB. When I arrived at Nha Trang, I was told that the 18th SOS had moved to Phan Rang AB. Off I went to Phan Rang and although I can't recall how long I stayed there, it was long enough to get an in-country checkout and a couple of flights and then I was sent to Da Nang AB where I spent the remainder of my tour in SEA. One of the things I remember while I was at Phan Rang was that the Operations Officer had to visit a Marine outfit that had one of their men killed by friendly fire from a Shadow which had fired on their location. Somehow the Shadow had acquired the target about 10 clicks from where they should have been. I remember he told me it was one of the toughest things he had to do, as those Marines had blood in their eyes, and although he felt really bad, he was glad to depart!

Upon arrival at Da Nang, I went through the normal in- processing and checkout and flew as a copilot on Dave Kuhn's crew. I do remember that upon my arrival, one of the crews had a runaway prop and the AC bailed the crew out over the South China Sea just off the China Beach R&R Center. My good friend, that I went through training with, Pete Chamberlain, who was a navigator on the crew, told me what it was like for him. I believe the IO died but the other crew members all survived. When Dave Kuhn departed for the States in June, I got my AC checkout and took over the same crew. Although I had various crew members, I do remember well Bill Feezor who was my FE and Bill Thurston who was my copilot and had also been my copilot through training at Lockbourne.

In September 1970, my crew was sent TDY for the month to Tan Son Nhut to fly missions into Cambodia. These were very interesting as they were the only daylight combat missions that I ever flew. The missions covered all types of targets including sampans, trucks, buildings, etc.

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One of the missions that will always stick in my memory is when we spotted a number of single-axle wooden carts being pulled by water buffalo. The number I don't recall, probably around ten or twelve. It seemed strange that where there was supposed to be “no movement,” there would be so many carts. Anyway, I called control and requested instructions as to a possible target. They came back and said to fire on the target. This convoy was just crossing a small stream and as I fired, the stream soon became red with the blood of dead water buffalos. I was hoping to see some kind of secondary explosion but it never happened. The table Nav didn't want me to fire, and at the conclusion of the mission told me he would never fly with me again. I was upset with myself and I still live with that one. War is Hell!

On another mission over Cambodia, we were requested to fire on a small village. There was absolutely no activity or movement in the area that I could see. Once in the firing pattern, with a little top rudder, you can walk the firing pattern in a straight line. This is what I did and I learned the ferocity of the 20mm cannon fire. I could see windows and doors and I mean the whole frame just blew outward. If there was anyone in those buildings, they were not in great shape by the time we departed.

“...we had destroyed or damaged some 20 plus trucks without any AAA - a very good night's work.”

In October, after returning to Da Nang, we had one very eventful mission when we caught a convoy of trucks on the Trail. Our initial lock-on happened to be on the lead vehicle which just happened to be a gasoline tanker. I hit it directly and it exploded and literally lit up the night sky. It blocked the 20 or so trucks behind it. I was afraid the light would illuminate my gunship and enemy guns would start firing at us, but I believe we caught the convoy in the open and there was no AAA in the vicinity. In the open and with all the light, I could just pick-off each truck visually. By the time we had completed, we had destroyed or damaged some 20 plus trucks without any AAA - a very good night's work.

On another mission that I remember well, we locked onto a truck and fired. The AAA came up so we pulled off target. The back end observers said they did see a secondary explosion so we called it a damaged truck. We were about 5 clicks away from the target when all of a sudden, the whole thing just blew and the sky lit up like the 4th of July - we had hit a truck carrying ammunition. We changed the results from damaged to destroyed. That one destroyed truck made us all feel very good because we had stopped ammo from getting to the Viet Cong. By the end of September, I started my IP checkout and in November was flying several missions as an IP. My crew was an instructor crew as the FLIR operator and the lead gunner were also instructors. Our crews normally flew three nights in a row and then had a night down, but they could fly us five nights in a row and then give us a night down. And as an instructor, that is normally what I flew. So after November, I really started logging the combat missions which got me to over 170 before the end of my tour. I was really glad to go on R&R at the end of

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November, as I looked forward to the rest and seeing my wife for her 30th birthday in Hawaii. I had bought her three rings in Thailand for her birthday and, unfortunately, I guess they thought I was smuggling in something and detained me for over an hour at the arrival facility. Everyone else had left and they finally released me and I had to ride in the baggage truck. All the other passengers had arrived at the meeting area but no one had told my wife what happened and she was worried to death. Another great way our government takes care of its service personnel. Anyway, I was there and we had a great R&R.

When I returned to Da Nang, things got busy. I was a training officer working with Frank LeGrand to set up a training program for the new arrivals. This was never done in the past and it helped to establish some sort of structured program for in-country training. At the end of December, I was fortunate to get on a freedom bird for Christmas leave. This was my third trip and after that they started the lottery. I thought that was one of the toughest times-to go back home to the USA and then have to return to Vietnam. I was feeling dejected, so I really got immersed in my work.

After the beginning of 1971, I was flying IP with a recent arrival and we had one of our best nights when we got 39 trucks either destroyed or damaged. Things were fairly normal, as they can be in a combat zone, until the end of my tour. I never really got scared with incoming at Da Nang because I felt if I was going to get it would be on a mission. However, as the last two weeks approached before I was to depart, and the alert signal sounded for incoming, I put on my flack vest and got under my bed just to make sure! The Marines, who had been guarding the western perimeter of the base, had departed and turned the security over to the Vietnamese which was not a warm fuzzy feeling. During my tour, the Viet Cong had constantly lobbed mortar rounds into the base, but did not do much damage. They once hit a corner of a BOQ but no one was in it and another time they hit a runway and closed it but there was no major damage. At the end of March they made a direct hit on a POL storage tank which burned for at least two weeks.

One of the highlights of my tour was a trip to Yokota AB in Japan (I believe it took place in August) for a selective manning interview for my next assignment to the RB-57F which was a high altitude research and reconnaissance aircraft located only at Yokota and Kirtland AFB in New Mexico. I spent three days in Tokyo and spent one full day buying Honda motorcycles. I was going to buy one while I was there and four other crew personnel asked me to get them one also. So I ended up buying five motorcycles, which took all day to disassemble, pack (which the dealer gladly did) and then mail at the Yokota Post Office. Luckily, the Honda dealer was across the street from the main gate of Yokota, so that saved a little time. But each motorcycle took about six or seven boxes to ship. With some stroke of luck, all the boxes found their way to Da Nang. Jeff Baker, who had put three other cycles together, helped me with mine. Thank God for Jeff as the assembly instructions were all in Japanese! We started at six o'clock one evening

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and nine hours later finished and it started on the first try. I now had transportation for the remainder of my tour.

When April 1971 came, I was glad to be going home but it was a tour that I shall always remember, especially the good friendships that I still cherish. I had flown over 170 combat missions and was probably scheduled for close to 300, but the old bird took time to turn and so a lot of missions were cancelled or scrubbed. But she was a bird that I will always remember. Though I never took a hit, I was Duty Officer on two occasions when she returned from missions - once with a jet engine shot off and fuel pouring out of the right wing and the other with the whole radome shot off. The Stinger gunship was a hard bird to bring down. She left me with many fond memories of her and the men who flew her.

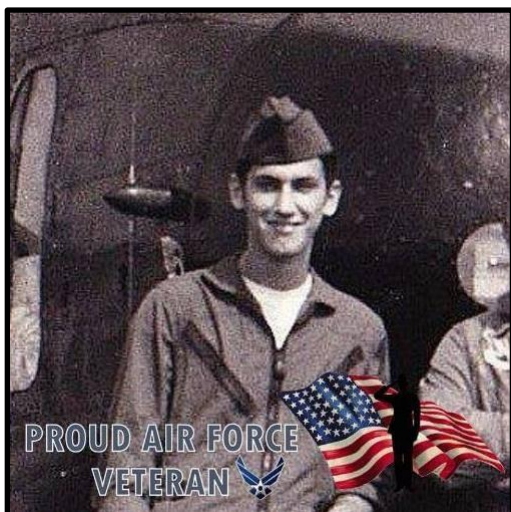


James Edward Mattison
17th Special Operations Sq.

James Edward Mattison, Gunner, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I was born on November 8, 1947 in Glens Falls, New York. I enlisted in the United States Air Force in January 1967 and reported for basic training at Lackland AFB, Texas. My first assignment was to the USAF Technical School at Lowry AFB, Colorado as an AF Specialty 462X0-04 Interceptor Weapons

In September 1967, I was stationed at Logan Field in Billings, Montana with the 29th Fighter Interceptor Squadron (FIS). I served there until January 1968 when I was sent to Minot AFB, North Dakota for duty as a weapons mechanic with the 5th Fighter Interceptor Squadron.



I received orders in September 1968 for AC-119 gunship training with the 4413th Combat Crew Training Squadron at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio as an aerial gunner. Upon completion of gunship training in December, I departed CONUS for Southeast Asia and a one year Tour of Duty in Vietnam with the 71st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) at Nha Trang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam (RVN). When the 17th SOS assumed operational responsibilities for AC-119Gs from the 71st SOS in June 1969, I was officially

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transferred to the 17th SOS headquartered at Phan Rang AB.

While assigned to the 71st and 17th Special Operations Squadrons, I flew as an Aerial Gunner (AG). I was part of the initial deployment of the AC-119G Shadow gunship. I was a member of Major Richard Morgan’s crew until the 71st rotated back to the USA. The remainder of my tour was spent as part of the gunner pool, assigned to crews as needed. I trained with Sergeant Gregory Terral and we usually flew together until the latter part of my tour. At that time, we were split up and each of us had a “green-guy” to train.

I only performed aircrew duties in the AC-119G; however, while assigned to the 129th ARRS I was a certified as a search and rescue scanner. As an Aerial Gunner, I flew approximately 140 missions and 700+ combat hours. I was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses and eight Air Medals.

One of the more memorable missions with Major Morgan was flying three sorties in one night. We expended 88,000 rounds of 7.62mm and 72 flares. We did turnarounds at Da Nang and Chu Lai. The results of our efforts were 80 secondary explosions and numerous sustained fires. It was truly a “dusk to dawn” mission.

A regularly scheduled mission out of Nha Trang was known as the ‘UFO Box’; patrolling for suspected enemy aerial operations. One night, we were patrolling a UFO Box when our NOS detected four individual beacons. For hours the NOS tracked the beacons moving in distinct patterns up and down a ridgeline. We awaited clearance to fire on the targets but clearance was never given. The sun was starting to come up and we were directed to break engagement and RTB.

The most memorable mission that I flew was the night Major Morgan’s crew supported a major engagement at the Black Virgin Mountain, Tay Ninh Province. The enemy surrounded the mountain. Huey gunships were attacking at low level. Artillery was firing all around the mountain. We were tasked with destroying the .51 cal AAA in the area. We had engaged and silenced a couple of the AAA sites and were rolling in on another target when we were hit by a burst of very accurate enemy fire. Just prior to being hit, I had put #1 gun online. The Aircraft Commander (AC) called back that he needed a gun. I leaned forward to check the gun’s status, when at that moment I saw Terry (Sgt. Terral) fly backwards from the #3 gun. He struck the right (starboard) side of the cargo compartment and slumped to the floor. I came up on intercom and notified the AC that we must have had a gun blow up and Terry was down; condition unknown. Don (SSgt. Donald Brogan), our IO, rushed to Terry’s aid and determined that he had been wounded, but not severely. Our AC elected to break engagement and recover at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon to seek medical attention for Terry.

“At least one round had exited the aircraft through the top of the right wing.”

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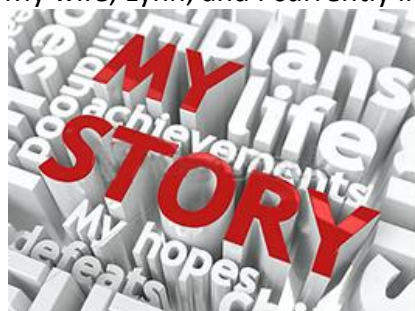
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While Terry was taken to the Medical Center at Tan Son Nhut, the remainder of the crew stayed with the aircraft and inspected her for damage. We counted at least 20 hits in the aircraft, starting just aft of the NOS position and ending at the vertical fin. SSGT. Squire Riley, our Flight Engineer, also inspected the wings and fuel tanks. At least one round had exited the aircraft through the top of the right wing. We also discovered that, had I not leaned forward to check the #1 gun, I would have been another casualty. One of the rounds had gone through my half of the gunner's station, exiting an inch above the gun control panel. Moments before, I had been standing upright at the gun control panel, switching #1 gun online. Sergeant Terral eventually recovered from his wounds. He was awarded the Purple Heart.

On the lighter side of things, during my stay at Phan Rang, enlisted aircrew quarters were Quonset huts out in no man's land. We had struck a close friendship with the Aussies who were part of an RAAF Canberra squadron. Whenever there was an Australian USO band playing the clubs, they always came to our Quonset hut after performances for a jam session. Our Quonset hut was so far from the rest of 'civilization' that the Aussies could party till the wee hours. I am still in contact with Jim Drever, one of our “Australian Brothers.”

In December 1969, I was assigned to the 475th MMS at Misawa Air Base, Japan where I served until June 1971.

My wife, Lynn, and I currently live in Rohnert Park, California.



Liegh Robert Norstrum
17th Special Operations Sq.

Liegh Robert Norstrum, Maintenance, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I joined the Air Force on July 5, 1956 at Fargo, North Dakota to keep from getting drafted into the U.S. Army. I had already tasted Army life in the North Dakota National Guard for one year, three months, and 26 days. Born at my hometown Grand Forks, North Dakota in 1938, I graduated from Central High School on May 29, 1956.

I reported for duty with the 17th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam on 13 July 1970. On 2 August 1970, I was sent PCS to Phu Cat and served for a short time as Line Chief and then returned to Phan Rang PCS where I served until my DEROS date of 13 July 1971.

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“We then flew back to Phan Rang that night and were greeted by Santa Claus with a bottle of whiskey for all to join in a short snort.”

I was sent TDY along with AC-119G gunships and maintenance people to Phu Cat on 24 December 1970 where our Shadow gunships launched to interdict enemy supply convoys headed down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the South Vietnam border. On 24 December 1970, we launched a combat mission from Phu Cat to hunt targets on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. After strafing a target, the aircraft commander turned the aircraft 180 degrees back toward the target to witness what seemed to him like the whole earth was on fire. I said to the AC, “You must have hit an underground ammo dump.” We then flew back to Phan Rang that night and were greeted by Santa Claus with a bottle of whiskey for all to join in a short snort.

After twenty years, one month, and 26 days of military service, I retired an E-6 from the U. S. Air Force at Travis AFB, CA on 1 August 1976. I graduated with a B.S. in Business Administration from Northwood University in Texas on 6 June 1995. My wife Shirley and I live in Abilene, Tx.



Brent C. O'Brien
18th Special Operations Sq.

Brent C. O'Brien, Pilot, 18th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in Melrose, Massachusetts on February 23, 1943. I attended grade school and junior high school at Shoemaker Elementary and Pickering Jr. High in Lynn, Massachusetts and then attended E.C. Glass High School in Lynchburg, Virginia before graduating from Conestoga High School in Berwyn, Pennsylvania. I majored in sociology at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, PA and graduated with a BA degree in 1964. During my senior year, I was commander of the Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps through which I was commissioned upon graduation. I completed Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT) at Laredo AFB, Texas in October 1965 and, after Winter Survival Training, reported for training in the C-124. I flew all over Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East at 10,000 feet with an air speed of 180 knots (Okay, that was with a tail wind.)

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“What a fun aircraft (C-141A) to fly for a large machine!”

In 1967, I trained as a C-141A pilot at McGuire AFB, New Jersey. What a fun aircraft to fly for a large machine! We provided Med-Evac from Germany to Jordan, staging to Nam-North Pacific and Mid-Pacific, low level drops at Lakehurst, New Jersey and All Weather Landing System work.

After all the fun, Vietnam duty called in 1969 and I reported for C-119 and AC-119K gunship training. My gunship transition memories include: gunnery practice missions to Indiana during winter – great training environment for SEA; delay after delay in deploying to Vietnam; and PACAF Survival Training - HELLO0000 Jolly Green!

We arrived at Phan Rang AB, RVN in November 1969, but relocated to Phu Cat AB in January 1970. Then in March we moved again; this time to Udorn AB in Thailand. Memories include: INCOMING!, Monsoon floods, Thai kick boxing at the ring behind the hotel where we lived for a time in downtown, F-4s flying cap, and “Triple A.... BREAK RIGHT!” and “Triple A ...BREAK LEFT!”

My most memorable combat mission in SEA was the May 8, 1970 mission that resulted in our Stinger crew being awarded the MacKay Trophy. Our gunship was struck by AAA over northeastern Laos; we lost 14-feet of the right wing, including the aileron. The old bird hung together and the splendid teamwork of the crew bought us safely home. What a fabulous Stinger gunship crew and what a great job done by each crewmember that included: Alan D. Milacek, pilot; Brent C. O’Brien, copilot; Roger E. Clancy, navigator; James A. Russell and Ronald C. Jones, sensor operators; flight engineer Albert A. Nash; illuminator operator Adolpho Lopez, Jr.; aerial gunner Donnell H. Cofer, and crewmembers Ronald R. Wilson and Kenneth E. Firestone. I returned to the “real world” in September 1970 and separated from the Air Force at Travis AFB, CA. In the fall of 1971, I flew to Washington D.C. for the presentation of the MacKay Trophy. Because I had separated from the service, I was the only one from our Stinger crew dressed in civilian attire. The MacKay Trophy is displayed at the Smithsonian Air/Space Museum in Washington D.C.

During my service in the Air Force, I was awarded, among other decorations, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with six Oak Leaf Clusters. I currently live in Williamsburg, Virginia with my wife, Joan and son Greg and daughter Kendall. I also have a daughter from my previous marriage and two grandchildren that live in Dallas, Texas.

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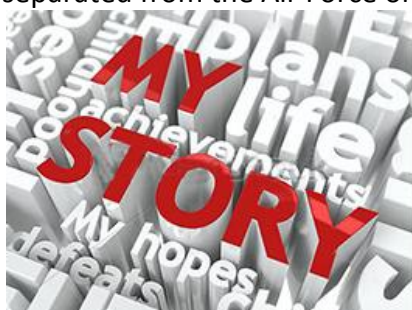


John B. Martin
17th Special Operations Sq.

John B. Martin, Maintenance, 17th Special Operations Squadron

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was my birthplace in 1949. I graduated from high school in Coral Gables, Florida in 1968. I joined the U. S. Air Force in 1968 at Miami, Florida.

I served with the 17th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang, Phu Cat, and Tuy Hoa. I was sent via helicopter to Phnom Penh, Cambodia for a week to change an engine on a Shadow gunship. After run-up tests were satisfactory, the aircraft was ready for the crew to fly. I separated from the Air Force on 19 August 1974. I currently live in Rydal, Georgia.



Roger Carl Nyberg
17th Special Operations Sq.

Roger Carl Nyberg, Flight Engineer, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in Chicago, IL in 1941 and graduated from Manatee High School in Bradenton, FL in 1960. While in high school, I was a cadet in the Civil Air Patrol. I enjoyed it very much and my first airplane ride was in a Grumman U-16 Albatross. I had no plans for college, so I enlisted in the Air Force in 1960.

During 1960-1964, I served as a Crew Chief on C-124s. I served as a Flight Mechanic on VC-131s from 1964 to 1965, on C-47s from 1965 to 1967, and C-131s from 1967 to 1968. During 1968-69, I made the mistake of separating from the Air Force. I soon got homesick for the Air Force and reenlisted. I went to Homestead AFB to process in and found out I was going to Vietnam. They said I would be flying as a Flight Mechanic/Flight Engineer on C-47s, maybe AC-47s.

I was sent to Nha Trang and, because my AFSC was for a Flight Engineer on recip, they assigned me to the 71st SOS. (AC-47s were being assigned to the South Vietnamese Air Force.) Since I had not attended jungle school, I was sent to Clark AB for jungle survival training. I started basic AC-119G training on local flights with MSgt. Scott and TSgt. Thomas during daytime.

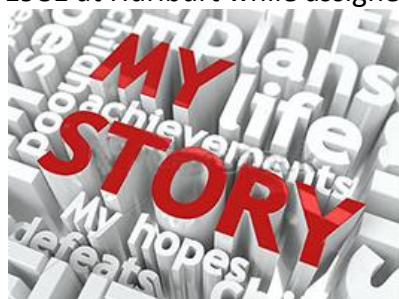
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On April 6-7, 1970, we supported Dak Seang in the A Shau valley for night drops with our spot light to light up the drop point. One other night, we were called to defend a Special Forces camp west of DaNang AB that was being overrun. We got over the base and they were taking incoming fire and we could see the NVA troops breaking over the outer fence, so we were cleared to work the area. We had a C-130 flare ship at 10,000 feet dropping flares, and by the time they reached our altitude, they were burned out. Along with enemy gunfire to dodge, we had to watch out for the flares with their nice cable hanging down to crash into one of our props or windshield. Our relief aircraft was delayed due to maintenance and we were close to bingo fuel, so I leaned the fuel mixture more. If we departed the TIC, we knew the camp would be lost. Finally we heard the relief aircraft coming in. We briefed them and just made it back to DaNang.

From 1970-1974, I was assigned to C-130Es at Forbes AFB, Kansas, then Kadena AB, Okinawa on C-130Es, and from 1975 to 1978 to Hurlburt AFB on MC-130E/H. I retired from the Air Force in 1981 at Hurlburt while assigned to the 8th SOS on MC-130s. I live in Bradenton, Florida.



Vernon Richard Raveling
17th Special Operations Sq.

Vernon Richard Raveling, Flight Engineer, Illuminator Operator, 17th Special Operations Squadron

Remsen, Iowa was my birthplace in 1930. I graduated from Central High School in my hometown of Le Mars, Iowa in 1948. I entered the Air Force in Sioux City, Iowa on October 2, 1950 because the Iowa National Guard (Infantry), of which I was a member, was due to be called to active duty for the Korean War.

During my first 18 years of active duty I served as a Crew Chief and Flight Engineer with the 1141st Special Activities Squadron, a little known organization that provided VIP services for General Officers throughout the World. My duty was to fly on and maintain aircraft for general officers assigned to American Embassies, NATO and United Nations locations.

In late 1968, I was reassigned to the 4413 CCTS at Lockbourne AFB as an instructor Illuminator Operator for the AC-119G and AC-119K programs. I also completed the AC-119 Instructor Flight Engineer course, making me dual qualified as instructor IO and FE. I eventually received orders for the 17th SOS at Phan Rang. I flew a few combat missions as an IO before being reassigned to 14th SOW as the stan/eval. As stan/eval IO, I flew missions with 17th and 18th Special

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Operations Squadrons. I will always remember the brand new IO who, for some reason, ejected the flare launcher instead of launching a flare as ordered.

The wing commander was demanding. He said he only wanted to see the stan/eval people on Sunday mornings. That meant flying back to Phan Rang on Saturday, meeting on Sunday and flying out again Monday to the FOLs. The Sunday morning meetings with the wing commander were some of the most exciting events of my tour. The most I typically said was, “Yes sir” and “No sir.” I found out very soon to never offer additional information that was not in the report, to keep it short, and to remember to say how well the crew coordination was, as a whole, and to comment on the good work the crews were doing.

I flew at least three or four missions a week. There were many hair-raising missions (too many to list). I kept out of everyone’s way, kept a low profile, and submitted the reports the wing commander required. Even as a stan/eval member, there were times on some missions that I took the place of the assigned FE or IO because of crewmember grounding.

In November 1970, I returned to the U.S. on leave. While on leave I was reassigned to the 4413 CCTS as Instructor IO for the AC-119 and the AC-130. The following month (December 1970) I received orders to return to SEA as an AC-130 IO. It was time to retire.

I officially retired from the USAF on June 30, 1971 at Lockbourne AFB. I took a job with the Post Office where I worked for the next 20 years. I’ll always remember the many friends made while assigned to the gunship program.



Michael Patrick Smith
17th Special Operations Sq.

Michael Patrick Smith, Gunner, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in Groton, New York in 1948. I graduated from Goose Bay Dependent High School at Goose Bay AFB, Labrador in 1966. Being an Air Force Brat, I attended three different colleges earning an Associate Degree. I joined the Air Force to continue a family tradition. From my father on down, my family has over 200 years total in military service to our country.

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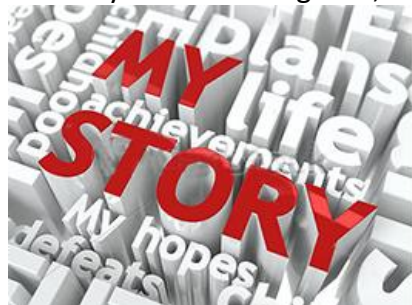
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I entered the Air Force in 1967 in upstate New York and received basic training at Amarillo, TX. After crew combat training at Lockbourne AFB, OH, I served with the 17th SOS at Phan Rang AB, RVN from Dec. 1969 to Dec. 1970. Upon my return to the States, I served at Lockbourne AFB as an instructor gunner for AC-119G crew combat training from Jan. to Aug. 1971. Then I was assigned to Hurlburt Field 9 at Eglin AFB, FL as an instructor gunner on AC-119G/K gunships and eventually as an instructor on AC- 130A, E, and H model gunships between Aug. 1971 and Aug. 1975. From 1975 to 1983, I was a USAF para-rescue man.

My most memorable missions were those flown in Cambodia. I will never forget missions flown in providing fire support for the Siege of Duc Lap, Dak Seang and Dak Pek in South Vietnam. The TIC missions in the Bolovens Plateau in southern Laos were unforgettable.

Receiving a medical retirement from the USAF, I retired as a Senior Master Sergeant in 1987. I currently live in Alamogordo, NM.



Charles H. Vellines
17th Special Operations Sq.

Charles H. Vellines, Navigator, 17th Special Operations Squadron

My name is Charles H. Vellines. I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1929. I joined the Air Force in 1951. At that time I was living in Baltimore. I was about to get drafted so I joined the Air Force because I had a couple of buddies in the Air Force who thought it was great. I took my basic training at Samson Air Force Base up in Geneva, New York. That was a Navy base at one time and they converted it to an Air Force Base. I was an Airman Basic when I got an opportunity to go to Cadets. I got my first stripe at Sampson Air Force Base. After Basic Training, I got assigned to B-26s at Langley Air Force Base. The Korean War was still on, but they called a truce there. From there we stopped the combat crew training and I was sent to Ardmore Air Force Base in C-119s. I spent four years in troop carrier at Ardmore dropping paratroopers and heavy equipment into all the major paratrooper bases, Benning, Fort Bragg and Campbell, Kentucky.

After that, I was reassigned to the KB-50 tanker outfit in Albany, Georgia and I flew KB-50 tankers for years as a navigator.

After that assignment, when the tankers closed down, I went into the 4440th aircraft delivery group at Langley and we moved aircraft over to Vietnam and everywhere. From that position, I

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was called up to go to Vietnam. I did my training at Lockbourne Air Force Base and Wilmington, Ohio. Then we went over to Phan Rang where I started my Vietnam tour the latter part of 1969 and stayed there until 1970 when I was returned home.

I flew as a table navigator and as a nos operator and interchanged doing that. We flew mostly over South Vietnam. We got a couple of missions over the border in Laos, and I flew way down mostly in II Corps and we got to I Corps a couple times, and down in the Delta. Most of the missions were at night. I flew a couple missions in the daytime.

One mission was pretty interesting. I was flying somewhere around Delat. An OV-10 started marking targets and he fired a rocket into a tree line where they thought the VC were and there was a monstrous explosion. He had hit an ammo dump and that was pretty interesting to see that thing. We had a good shot there.

We had a lot of missions up in BooPrang which is up in the northeast corner of II Corps. Most of those were TICs. We were usually assigned a box to fly in initially in the night and from there we were usually assigned a TIC somewhere.

“...picked up a couple of wounded people and it was pretty rewarding.”

I had a couple of interesting TICs. One was around Delot again. There was a bunch of Arvin and US forces were stationed at a bridge and the VC attacked them at night. They had a lot of wounded and there was a Dustoff Chopper that was going to pick up the wounded, but it was afraid to go in because of all the ground fire. We got him in by coordinating with him. The infrared light we had on board. At his call, we turned the light on the area where the pick up was to be made. As he hit the ground, he hollered, “Turn it off,” which we did. He picked up a couple of wounded people and it was pretty rewarding.



Ronald Gary Julian
18th Special Operations Sq.

Ronald Gary Julian, Gunner, 18th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in 1947, the oldest of six children. I enlisted in the Air Force on December 16, 1966 at Indianapolis, IN. After basic training at Lackland, I was assigned to Lowry for formal training as an aircraft weapons mechanic. My first operational assignment was to MacDill as a weapons

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release specialist on the F-4 “Phantom” and the T-33 “Shooting Star.” In 1969, I entered the Air Force’s gunship program where I logged over 500 hours as an aerial gunner on the AC-119K “Stinger” gunship with the 18th Special Operations Squadron. This association included assignments to Lockbourne AFB OH, Phan Rang, Phu Cat, Udorn Thailand, and Da Nang.

In early 1971, I returned from Vietnam to Hurlburt Field, Eglin AFB FL, and worked as a weapons release mechanic on the A-1E “Sky Raider,” OV-10 “Bronco,” O-1E “Birddog,” and A-37 “Dragonfly” with the 311th Munitions Maintenance Squadron. While at Eglin, I was selected to cross-train into the instrumentation career field. I moved back to Lowry AFB for additional training before being assigned as a nuclear instrumentation technician to the Air Force Weapons Laboratory at Kirtland AFB NM in 1972. In October 1973, I returned to Southeast Asia, where I was weapons loading standardization crew chief on the A-7 “Corsair,” the F-111 “Aardvark,” and the F-105 “Thunderchief” with the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing at Korat, AB Thailand. My 1974 return assignment was to Wilford Hall Medical Center, where I was a biomedical instrumentation technician in one of the Air Force’s first hospital-based biomedical engineering departments. I was awarded the Academic Award and the Distinguished Graduate Award from the Air Force Systems Command’s Non-Commissioned Officer Academy in 1976. I returned to the operational Air Force with my PCS to the 390th Strategic Missile Wing at Davis Monthan AFB AZ in 1978. I was assigned as the Field Maintenance Branch Superintendent overseeing a three-shop complex that maintained 18 Titan II strategic missiles.

My application to the Airman Education and Commissioning Program was accepted in 1979 and I began my electrical engineering program at the University of Arizona. I graduated in 1981, attended Officer Training School at Lackland AFB, and was reassigned to the Air Force Weapons’ Laboratory at Kirtland AFB as a nuclear instrumentation engineer. At Kirtland, I was involved in several projects directed toward the protection of aircraft and missile systems from the electromagnetic effects of a nuclear attack. In 1985, I was assigned to the Armstrong Laboratory at Wright-Patterson AFB, where I led the Human Sensory Feedback for Telepresence program. I was the 1987 Company Grade Officer of the Year for the Armstrong Laboratory and for the Human Systems Division in the Air Force Systems Command. I was also the 1987 Program Manager of the Year for the Armstrong Laboratory. In 1992, I was presented the Director’s Award for the Crew Systems Directorate of the Armstrong Laboratory. I became the Chief of Operations for the Biodynamics and Biocommunication Division in 1992 and served in that capacity until my retirement on March 1, 1996. I essentially had two careers in the Air Force. My enlisted career (Dec 66 – Dec 81) and my officer career (Dec 81 – Feb 96).

“...(every) assignment ... held new, exciting opportunities.”

Seems like I couldn’t hold a job! I had 17 permanent change of station assignments and each one held new, exciting opportunities. I had radically different jobs in most of my new assignments. My duties included fixing knuckle busting bomb racks and weapons loading on the

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flight line, aerial gunner in combat, patient research in the hospital environment, missile maintenance supervision, nuclear protection R&D, and R&D management in human factors and telerobotics. What would you like your family members and future generations to know about your military service? Service to one’s country and its citizens is the highest calling. I am privileged and honored to have had the opportunity.

My most meaningful assignment was supporting medical and clinical research at Wilford Hall Medical Center where I worked with a broad range of physicians (thoracic surgeons, orthopedic surgeons, neonatal physicians, biomedical engineers, cardiac physicians) and had direct interaction with patients while helping them get well and stay well.

My scariest moment was a mission where our flight path intersected with an Arc Light drop. I don’t know if those two B-52s were lost or if we (Stinger) were out of position. One thing for sure – one of us shouldn’t have been there!! However, it was quite exciting to see the bombs going off below us in the jungle as the tree trunks went flying. The inside of our cargo compartment looked like someone was setting off flashbulbs – lots of flashbulbs.

Awards, Decorations, and Badges:

Distinguished Flying Cross, Meritorious Service Medal (2 OLC), Air Medal (8 OLC), Air Force Commendation Medal (1 OLC).

My wife, Kathy, and I have two sons, Travis and Troy.



Larry D. Middleton
17th Special Operations Sq.

Larry D. Middleton, Weapons Maintenance, 17th Special Operations Squadron

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

From January thru October 1969, I was assigned to support the 71st and the 17th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang Air Base, RVN as a weapons specialist. One night in the spring or summer of 1969 at Phan Rang, we started receiving heavy rocket and mortar fire. This was not uncommon, except in this instance, the base siren blew in a series of blasts that

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

“Everybody knew how important our aircraft were and it was up to us to keep each plane working to its fullest potential.”

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

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

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

I separated from the USAF on 15 December 1970 at Travis AFB, California. It was a privilege and honor to serve our great nation in the U.S. Air Force. My wife, Bonnie, and I currently live in Lincoln, Washington.

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Gary Eugene Rubingh 18th Special Operations Sq.

Gary Eugene Rubingh, Gunner, 18th Special Operations Squadron

Charlevoix, Michigan was my birthplace in 1948. In 1966, I graduated from Ellsworth High School in my hometown of Ellsworth, Michigan. I joined the Air Force at the recruiting office at Traverse City, Michigan in February 1968. I joined because of my interest in airplanes. I graduated with an Associate Degree in avionics from Ferris State University at Big Rapids, Michigan in April 1974.

My most exciting mission while flying on a Stinger gunship as an aerial gunner was the time we flew into a flak trap. The North Vietnamese turned a vehicle's lights on and surrounded it with anti-aircraft guns. The NOS and FLIR operators said we had found the world's dumbest truck driver; however, when we fired our guns, twenty-five to thirty anti-aircraft guns shot at us. The IO was shouting "Break left." The gunner scanner was shouting "Break right." The pilot was ignoring both while trying to avoid the tracers in front of the aircraft. The FLIR operator, who could not see the tracers, was saying, "Fly straight up!" When filling out the after-action report, anti-aircraft rounds fired at us simply said 'several thousand'. We never called a NVA truck driver dumb after that!

I remember flying combat missions out of three different air bases (Phan Rang, Phu Cat, Nha Trang) located in Vietnam and two different air bases (Udorn and Nakhon Phanom) located in Thailand. The thing I remember most about my time with AC-119K Stinger gunships was the world class men I served with. I served with the best of the best in fixed wing gunships.

I separated from the Air Force in 1972 at McConnell Air Force Base at Wichita, Kansas. I currently live at Ellsworth, Michigan.



Johnny Mack Higgins 14th Field Maintenance Sq.

Johnny Mack Higgins, 14th Field Maintenance Squadron

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I was born in 1946 at Searcy, Arkansas. I graduated from Mabelvale High School in 1964 and joined the Air Force at Little Rock, Arkansas on 29 March 1965 to serve my country, get an education, and see the world.

After completing Basic Training at Lackland AFB, Texas and Tech School (ANSQ25-MA-1 Systems) at Lowry AFB, Colorado, I was assigned Permanent Change of Station (PCS) in April 1965 to the 343rd Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron (ADC) at Duluth, Minnesota. At Duluth, I worked as an F-106 MA-1 Fire Control System Mechanic, System Mock-Up, Flight Line Maintenance, and Debriefing.

In June 1969, I was assigned PCS to the 18th Special Operations Squadron (TAC) at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio for AC-119 Fire Control System Training. In October 1969, I was assigned PCS to the (PACAF) 14th Field Maintenance Squadron at Phan Rang AFB, RVN. In April 1970, I was assigned Temporary Duty (TDY) for 30 days with the 18th SOS Forward Operation Location (FOL) at Udorn AB, Thailand. I was assigned another 30-day TDY with the 18th SOS FOL at Da Nang AB, RVN in September 1970. In October, I returned to Phan Rang Air Base and departed from Vietnam in November 1970.

Stateside, I was assigned to the 49th Fighter Interceptor Squadron (FIS) at Griffiss AFB, New York until receiving PCS orders in December 1971 with an assignment to KI Sawyer AFB, Michigan where I served with the 87th FIS (90-day TDY to Tyndall AFB, Florida) until my discharge from the USAF at K I Sawyer on 2 August 1972.

My most exciting event in SEA would probably be the trip over. We were interrupted at the Ernest Tubb Show at the NCO Club at Lockbourne and told to get our equipment and head for the World Airways Jet on the flightline. When we left Ohio, it was dark, when we got to Alaska for a stop, it was still dark, and when we got to Guam, it was still early morning. I noticed the Marines that we picked up there had uniforms that smelled awful (now I know it was the rice starch from Nam). We continued our flight to Happy Valley and after landing, the crew left the engines running. As soon as the passengers got off the aircraft, they were off and gone!! But, that is when I noticed the workers were lying on the ground and sirens were going off. This was to be the first of many rocket and/or mortar attacks while I was in-country. I remember saying to myself, “This is going to be a long year!!”

The things I will always remember about my tour of duty in Vietnam are:

- Playing my guitar in the band at the NCO Club and trying to get back down the hill with a Sanyo flashlight.
- Working in the Photo Hobby Shop and helping to get everyone’s photo memories on paper.
- Visiting the ROK Compound and seeing their version of a USO Show.

“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. 223 “...keeping the memories alive”

- Playing cricket and singing “Waltzing Matilda” at the Aussie area. I had my first oilcan (Fosters) there.

- Card games in the Hut.

- Feeling good when the aircraft came back with no big write-ups.

It seemed funny that TSN got Bob Hope, but Phan Rang could only get a Korean Floor Show.

After leaving my duty station in Michigan in August 1972, I returned to Little Rock and started over. I stopped by the VA to register and was basically laughed at for calling myself a war vet. I have never stepped foot in the VA since. By September, I found a job at the local Cessna dealer as an Avionics Technician. (I even turned down a job playing music with Charley Rich.) I joined the American Legion Post 344 in Little Rock and went thru the chairs to become Commander. I am still playing music part-time.

I live in Mabelvale, Arkansas and I am still married to my wonderful wife Anita (42 years). We have two grown sons. I am a 32nd Degree Mason, a Shriner and a Jester. I belong to the Scimitar Shrine Motor Patrol, riding a 2005 Harley Davidson Ultra Classic. I still work with corporate aircraft electronics.



Doug’s Comments: This biography/autobiography issue was one in a series of other Phan Rang Newsletters that were devoted exclusively to telling the stories of Phan Rang AB veterans. Phan Rang Newsletters 210, 212, and 215 were exclusively autobiographies/biographies and Phan Rang Newsletter 140 and 151 both were “Phan Rang Member Profiles” and Phan Rang Newsletter 139 was a consolidated issue of commanders profiles that were mostly published in the Phan Fare under the title “Know Your Commander”. Individuals stories are not just confined to the above issues, but are

contained in almost every issue of the newsletter. Soon there will be an “**Index of Personnel**” available that will list names and the issue that those names appear in.

This newsletter was composed and all graphics by Douglas Severt unless otherwise stated. To see a list of all previous newsletters click [here](#). To unsubscribe to Phan Rang News, mailto: dougsevert@cox.net and put ‘unsubscribe’ in subject line.