

# Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.  
“Keeping the memories alive” Newsletter 226

**Back In The Day**



## A SNAPSHOT IN TIME - JULY 1967<sup>1</sup>

- 5 July - COOKS STICK TOGETHER
- 5 July - SECURITY POLICE HAILED BY ORPHANAGE
- 5 July - HOW TO SURVIVE AT PHAN RANG
- 5 July - 35<sup>th</sup> FMS PRAISED
- 12 July - PIZZA, ENTERTAINMENT TO MARK GRAND OPENING
- 12 July - GENERALS CITE WING FOR AID TO 8<sup>TH</sup> TBS
- 12 July - SEND FOR GRASS
- 12 July - F-100 PILOT SURVIVES 45-MINUTE NIGHTMARE
- 12 July - RED HORSE BUILDERS WIN 'APPRECIATION DAY'
- 12 July - SWAMP-CAT ROARS AT SNAKE HUNTERS
- 12 July - SOFTBALL TEAM SPLITS WITH PLEIKU
- 12 July - FIVE PILOTS IN 615<sup>th</sup> HIT THE '300' MARK
- 12 July - AUSSIE BOMBERS AID GROUND OPERATIONS
- 12 July - V.C. VOLLEYBALL BOUNCES BACK
- 12 July - MACHINE ROOM EXTENSION-HAPPY
- 12 July - NO SAFE IS SAFE WHEN HE'S AROUND

---

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately there is one week missing for July, 19 July issue cannot be found so many of the stories in the 12<sup>th</sup> of July issue were continued in next week's edition (19 July) are not available. If that issue ever surfaces I will do an update to include it with the other three issues.

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

---

12 July - MODERNIZATION GOES TO THE DOGS

26 July - AT LAST!...NEW DINING HALL TO OPEN

26 July - GENERAL GRAHAM GIVES AWARD FOR FLIGHT SAFETY TO 352<sup>ND</sup> T.F.S.

26 July - ‘BLACK PANTHER’ PILOT CLAIMS COMBAT RECORD

26 July - HOW 800 VEHICLES ARE FED AND CARED FOR

26 July - 615<sup>TH</sup> T.F.S. HAS ANNIVERSARY

26 July - SENTRY DOGS ARE FULL OF TRICKS

26 July - AIR COMMANDOS SWARM ON BASE



5 July - COOKS STICK TOGETHER

“It’s just coincidence....That’s all it is” Said SSgt. **Bernard B. Brent**, 36, from Washington D.C., who is a cook in the RMK airmen’s and NCO dining hall.

He was trying to explain why he and another cook over there, SSgt. **Ralph E. Perkins**, 32, from Brattleboro, Vermont, have been assigned to the same bases at the same time on two continents ever since February, 1963.

The two 35<sup>th</sup> Services Squadron NCO’s found themselves cooking on the same shift in the dining hall of Truax Field, Wisconsin (ADC) in February of 1963 and became friends. Then, on December 3, 1964, they both arrived at Osan Air Base, Korea (PACAF). On New Year’s Day, 1966, Sergeant Perkins left for Charleston AFB, S.C., and Sergeant Brent was right beside him as they prepared for the new MAC assignment.

On February 8, 1967, the pair arrived at Phan Rang AB, and they not only cook in the same dining hall but live in the same hooch, alongside one another.

“In Korea we spent a lot of off-duty time together,” Sergeant Perkins recalled. Right now, however, the two cooks are working different shifts so there’s less time for mutual socializing.

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

---

The same fate which brought the two men together will now separate them. Sergeant Brent will leave for Little Rock AFB, Ark. in September, and Sergeant Perkins is hoping to get an assignment in Alabama next January.

This is Sergeant Brent’s second trip to Vietnam. He served at Bien Hoa for four months back in 1962, when “you had to have a passport to get into the country.”

### **5 July - SECURITY POLICE HAILED BY ORPHANAGE**

For their all-out assistance to the ‘Orphanage at Tan Tai’ in the town of Phan Rang, the men of the 35<sup>th</sup> Security Police Squadron were recently hailed by the Mother Superior behind the orphanage and Dr. (Capt.) **William N. Palma**, (35<sup>th</sup> Tac. Disp.) who provides the orphans with medical care.

“I do not know how to express my gratitude,” wrote Sister Mary Angeline in a letter which began ‘Dear Benefactors’ .....”Believe me, you are our greatest benefactors and our best friends in Vietnam....We are very fortunate to have you as our benefactors....Every day in our prayers, I and the Sisters in the Convent, we will remember you and yours.” Help give to the Convent of Binh-Cang was also cited.

Doctor Palma noted that the security policemen “didn’t stop with just building a nursery and reservoir, “but added a dining room, woodshed, toilet facilities, sewer pipes, and screens, and are planning a play-yard at Tan Tai Orphanage.

Boxes of clothing and medicine for the orphanage have come in from all over the States, the doctor observed, and the security policemen have adopted twin girls, seven months old, and a six-month-old boy.

### **5 July - HOW TO SURVIVE AT PHAN RANG**

Ground accidents have decreased by 70 per cent at Phan Rang Air Base since last year, according to SSgt. **William A. Riggs**, NCOIC of Ground Safety for the 35<sup>th</sup> TFW.

He cautioned however that “it’s a new base.....Most of us have never been stationed under these conditions before.....We have to alert ourselves, and I think a lot of us are.

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

---

During a lengthy interview, Sergeant Riggs took a careful look at potential hazards to life and limb at this air base. His recommendations for survival look like this:



**Passengers** getting out of a bus should wait for the bus to leave, and then should look both ways before attempting to cross the road.

Vehicles behind busses do **not** have to stop when the bus stops, he pointed out.

Drivers of such vehicles should **slow down** and be on the alert for any pedestrians attempting to cross the road behind or in front of the bus.

Because of the ditches and excavations and other road obstacles which appear **from one day to the next** as a result of the continuing construction program on

base, pedestrians **should use flashlights** everywhere at night.

“You never know where they’re going to dig around here,” said Sergeant Riggs.

To avoid the possibility of being hit by construction vehicles such as tractors and pay-loaders moving through fields at night, pedestrians are urged to **stick to established roads** and paths instead of making their own short-cuts.

Vehicle drivers are cautioned that although the **maximum speed limit** at Phan Rang is 35 mph, out on the perimeter road, the prescribed speed for the barracks area is only 20 mph or less and the maximum flightline speed is pegged at 15 mph.

Vehicle drivers in the revetment area are advised to drive along the blacktop macadam apron on the East side of the taxiway. In other taxiway areas, drivers are advised to stay on the



## “Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 226 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

macadam strips on either side of the taxiway.

Bicycle and motorcycle operators are asked to keep their lights on even in the daytime “because personnel (on base) don’t seem to be aware of or reacting to two-wheeled traffic.”

Sergeant Riggs commented that “a lot of the vehicle drivers we’re getting in now are under 25, with very little experience.” Therefore, he suggested, both pedestrians and vehicle drivers should be more alert to all Phan Rang traffic, including bicycles and motorcycles, which are subject to the same traffic regulations as four-wheel vehicles.

Pedestrians should walk facing traffic, on road shoulders. Vehicles picking up or discharging hitch-hikers should do so on road shoulders only. Drivers are urged to avoid tail-gating, and to make every effort to get their vehicles off the road onto a shoulder in case of a breakdown

Vehicles should not park along corners.

### 5 July - 35th FMS PRAISED

“FMS is about the best squadron we have”, said SSgt. **William A. Riggs**, NCOIC of ground safety, as he reviewed the Phan Rang safety scene.

In the annual safety survey conducted recently, the 35<sup>th</sup> FMS didn’t have a single discrepancy, he pointed out.

There has been a marked improvement in the squadron’s safety record since last year, said Sergeant Riggs, and he paid high tribute to MSgt. **Charles G. Pike**, the squadron’s safety NCO for the past four months, for “doing a marvelous job....Personnel in the FMS seem to be getting the word on safety,” Sergeant Pike was praised for taking the “bull by the horns”.



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

---

### **12 July - PIZZA, ENTERTAINMENT TO MARK GRAND OPENING**

The long awaited opening of the new Red Cross Recreation center is scheduled for 2:00 PM Sunday July 16.

Pizza, that often thought of Italian American favorite will be served as refreshment, plus musical entertainments.

Sue Behrens, assistant director for Red Cross services, will be here from Saigon for the opening.

Those who helped move the center and the Tape Center were Capt. **Duane Sand**, MSgt. **Robert Birchfield**, MSgt. **W. H. Cover**, A1C **John Mitchell**, A1C **Laszio Agoston**, A1C **John Agnew**, A2C **Edward Thompson**, A2C **Thomas Canzano** and A2C **Ronald Johnson**.

A cordial invitation to all is extended to come and see this beautiful new addition to the facilities at Phan Rang.

There is a large game room in the west end of the center. A long hall with a full kitchen off to one side connected all other rooms together.

### **12 July - GENERALS CITE WING FOR AID TO 8TH TBS**

A pair of three-star generals and the first man to break the sound barrier have joined in the congratulations extended to the 35<sup>th</sup> TFW for its “outstanding assistance” the 8<sup>th</sup> Tactical Bombardment Squadron.

When Lt. Col. **Nathaniel A. Gallagher**, former commander of the ‘Liberty Squadron’, sent a warm letter of appreciation to the commander of the wing citing the wing’s top-notch support during a two-month tour of the squadron at Phan Rang AB earlier this year, it started a chain reaction of endorsements.

“Include my appreciation and gratitude,” wrote Lt. Gen. **William W. Momyer**, commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force in Vietnam. “Acknowledgement of outstanding services performed is always gratifying to receive....”

(Continued next week)

## “Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

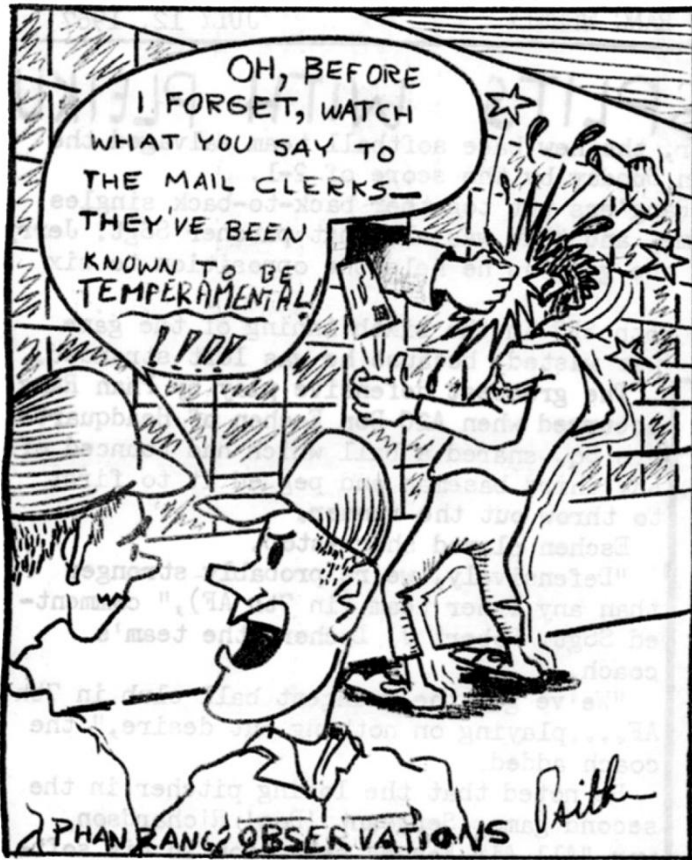
The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.

Phan Rang AB News No. 226 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

### 12 July - SEND FOR GRASS

Tired of dust and barren land? Write home to your folks, wife, or sweetheart and ask them to send you one pound of Bermuda grass seed. This is a base-wide appeal designed to beautify Phan Rang. Let’s all pitch in and make Phan Rang green.



### 12 July - F-100 PILOT SURVIVES 45-MINUTE NIGHTMARE

Perhaps only an Edgar Allen Poe could portray the horror which confronted an F-100 Super Sabre pilot of the 615<sup>th</sup> TFS recently when his aircraft plunged upside down into a drainage ditch at Bien Hoa AB.

For 45 minutes, Capt. **Thomas R. Olsen**, 33, from Houston, Tex., formerly assigned to Phan Rang’s ‘Black Panther’ Squadron, was trapped in the inky blackness of “five or six feet” of muddy water, with only a leaking oxygen mask between him and death.

The icy-nerved flier had only “three to five minutes” of oxygen left when the aircraft was finally dragged to shallower water, enabling him to float out the cockpit to safety.

The aircraft was on fire for 15 minutes, and the captain later agreed that the ditch water saved him from the flames. (Continued next week)

### 12 July - RED HORSE BUILDERS WIN ‘APPRECIATION DAY’

In case you didn’t know it, Saturday was “Red Horse Appreciation Day” on base.

Col. **James Dusenberry**, scheduled to become the new 7th AF Engineer, toured the base and was taken to project after project imitated and completed by personnel of the 554<sup>th</sup> (Red

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

---

Horse) Civil Engineering Squadron within the last “nine to twelve months”, according to the squadron project officer for the appreciation day, Maj. **Dee Worrall**.

Special signs were erected. (Continued next week)

### **12 July - SWAMP-CAT ROARS AT SNAKE HUNTERS**

The roar of a “swamp cat” interrupted a night hunt for a king cobra last week on Nui Dat Mountain.

Armed with flashlights, snake-hook sticks, and a noose, Phan Rang’s three-man team of serpent catchers had been in brush terrain for about 30 minutes when all of a sudden “a real throaty roar” erupted from a dense growth about 40 feet in front of the hunters.

Somewhat startled were 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. **Jack Wittman** (base fuel system officer); A1C **Bill Gaither** (1882<sup>nd</sup> Comm. Sq.); and A2C **‘Egg’ Eggleston** of the 35<sup>th</sup> SPS.

The lieutenant said the swamp-cat, sometimes mistaken for a panther, seemed to be telling the hunters they could proceed only over his (the cat’s) dead body.

The hunters promptly moved elsewhere, but Airman Gaither is out to get ‘Kittie’.

### **12 July - SOFTBALL TEAM SPLITS WITH PLEIKU**

Bouncing back from the shock of a no-hitter, the new base softball team salvaged the second half of a double-header with Pleiku on Sunday by the score of 2-1.

After Pleiku won the opener 5-0, the Phan Rang’ers put together back-to-back singles and a long fly for two runs in the second came, and that was all that pitcher SSgt. **Jerry Gramke** of the 1882<sup>nd</sup> Comm. Sq. needed to win the game as he held opposition to six hits.

A triple by SSgt. **‘Slugger’ Gillock** of the 35<sup>th</sup> SPS in the sixth inning of the game was wasted, because he was left stranded.

The greatest defensive play by Phan Rang occurred when A2C **Don Eschen** of Headquarters Sq. snared a ball which had bounced off the third baseman and pegged it to first to throw out the runner.



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

---

Eschen played short-stop.

“Defensively, we’re probably stronger than any other team (in 7<sup>th</sup> AF),” commented SSgt.

**Robert J. Docher**, the team’s coach.

“We’ve got the youngest ball club in 7<sup>th</sup> AF....Playing on nothing but desire,” the coach added.

He noted that the losing pitcher in the second game, sergeant **‘Doc’ Richardson**, won “All Air Force” selection in his softball career.

Sergeant Docher quoted ‘Doc’ as saying: “You’ve got an awful hard team to beat.”

Sunday’s double-header took place at Diamond One, and the Phan Rang’ers were resplendent in their new two-done uniforms. The team’s record is now two wins and four losses.

Everyone’s support is needed!

### **12 July - FIVE PILOTS IN 615th HIT THE ‘300’ MARK**

Five pilots from the 615<sup>th</sup> TFS have completed a grand total of over 1,500 combat missions in F-100 Super Sabre Jet fighters.

Since their arrival at Phan Rang in July, 1966, the following five officers have notched a total of 1,577 missions:

Capt. **John D. Eckhart**, 31, from Carlisle, Ohio; Capt. **Thomas R. Olsen**, 33, from Houston, Tex.; Capt. **Richard A. Mason**, 32, from Titusville, Fla.; Capt. **Roger E. Wichman**, 30, from Pender, Neb.; and Capt. **Ronald R. Zodin**, 25, from Forth Worth, Tex.

The quintet of combat fliers have dropped a whopping three million pounds of ordnance in the course of these missions.

All five officers are in the process of returning to the U.S. for new assignments. Captains Wichman and Zodin are headed for Cannon AFB, N.M., Captain Eckhart to Dover AFB, and Captain Mason to Fort Bragg.

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

---

### **12 July - AUSSIE BOMBERS AID GROUND OPERATIONS**

Wing Commander **Rolf Aronsen’s** No. 2 Squadron of the Royal Australian Air Force has been credited with supporting many of the Allies’ major ground operations in Vietnam.

The Phan Rang - based squadron of twin-jet Canberra bombers dropped nearly 1,200 tons of bombs on more than 900 targets in Vietnam during its first ten weeks of combat operations.

The Canberras have pounded enemy concentrations in such operations as Junction City, Pershing, Francis Marion, Diamond Head, and Malheur.

The Aussies have struck in the Mekong Delta (IV Corps) and supported Task Force Oregon in I Corps.

Missions have also been flown in the Phuoc Tuy Province of III Corps in support of the First Australian Task Force and the Second and Seventh Battalions of the Royal Australian Regiment. ***(To read about a heart-warming story of a reunion of ground and air forces see Phan Rang Newsletter 186 “Blondes, Bombs and Bunkers Part 1”, Newsletter 187 “Magpie 31 part 1” and Newsletter 188 “Magpie 31 part 2”.)***

Most of the strikes have been at night under radar direction. The air crews fly about 45 hours per month, with sorties lasting up to three hours.

Occasionally there are daytime strikes. In a recent two-aircraft attack on a Viet Cong concentration, the Canberras were directed by Wing Commander **Tony Powell**, from Melbourne.

He is a RAAF forward air controller who flies a Cessna ‘Bird Dog’, on exchange duty with the U.S. Air Force at Nha Trang.

The strike was led by Wing Commander **Vin Hill**, from Brisbane, who won the Distinguished Flying Cross in Korea.

Intelligence officers of the U.S. Army’s 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division are reported pleased by the

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 226 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

support of the Aussie fliers.

### **12 July - V.C. VOLLEYBALL BOUNCES BACK**

Oh well, that’s the way the ball bounces.

TSgt. **Frank Davis**, personnel services man out at the beach, claims a volleyball which was missing from the beach supply office recently made a trip to a nearby Viet Cong base camp!

The well-traveled ball was found by the U.S. Navy after captured Viet Cong let them to the base camp.

Now the ball is back at the beach, showing no evidence of ill treatment by its playful abductors.

### **12 July - MACHINE ROOM EXTENSION-HAPPY**

A 50 per cent extension rate,” commented SSgt. **Robert J. Locher**, an official of the machine accounting section of the office of the base director of personnel....”That’s pretty good!”

Five of the ten men assigned to the section, known simply as the machine room, have extended their tours in Vietnam.

Two of these men, A3C **William Westerberg** and A1C **Vincent Moreszes**, have added a full year to their tours, and the other three airmen have added six months.

“You’ve got to help the Vietnamese at a time when they need it,” said Airman Moreszes when asked why he extended.

He came to Vietnam in September, 1965. This is his third extension. He is 23, and is from Los Angeles, Calif.

Airman Westerberg, 23, from Glenolden, Pa., came to Phan Rang in February, 1966 and thanks to his latest extension will remain until August, 1968.

“I like it here,” he commented. “We’re all needed.”

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

---

Also extending were: A1C **Gillman Bouley**, 20, from Fort Kent, Maine; A1C **Ralph Jacob**, 21, from Sunnyvale, Calif.; and A1C **Joe Wallace**, 27, from North Little Rock, Ark.

Under the direction of their NCOIC, MSgt. **Raymond A. Bell**, the men of the machine room “submit all data on enlisted men and officers on punch-cards to Pacific Air Force Headquarters to be recorded on historical documents.”

Cranking out some 7,000 punch-cards per week, the section makes use of five units of IBM equipment to store up date vital to personnel.

### **12 July - NO SAFE IS SAFE WHEN HE’S AROUND**

In his four months at Phan Rang Air Base, TSgt. **Ben Marshall** of the Accounting and Finance Office has saved the Air Force approximately \$6,000 by repairing inoperative safes.

Bonded, certified, licensed, and registered as a locksmith, the nimble-fingered NCO is a graduate of the Locksmithing Institute in Little Falls, N.J.

Gaining an education in the art of locksmithing in his off-duty time, the versatile sergeant has managed to become a member of the Associated Locksmiths of America, and the Dixie Locksmithing Association.

Recent honors came to Sergeant Marshall in the form of membership in the Locksmiths’ Honor Society for the years of ’66, ’67, and ’68.

Such membership is bestowed on locksmiths experts who contribute to the advancement of the craft by inventing tools that will do the job better or faster, and coming up with ideas for improving the profession.

Sergeant Marshall owns a locksmithing business in Fort Walton Beach, Fla., and plans to operate it full-time upon his retirement in 1969.

He once made a special trip to the military site at Dalat to open and repair a locked-out safe.

The safe-minded sergeant suggests that Air Force personnel approaching retirement look into

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

---

the locksmithing profession.

“It is an honorable profession, and the services are badly needed in most communities in the United States,” he noted.

### 12 July - MODERNIZATION GOES TO THE DOGS

The widespread improvements of Phan Rang facilities haven’t been confined to humans alone.

A vital part of American fighting forces, the sentry dog section of the 35<sup>th</sup> Security Police Squadron, have moved from primitive lodgings into modern quarters.

Using the self-help approach, security policemen of the section have built two new spacious kennels, a new training area, and a new training area, and a veterinarian’s center.

Advised by supervisors of the 35<sup>th</sup> Civil Engineering Sq., and 554<sup>th</sup> (Red Horse) CES, the men have spent several months building and improving the area form out “Eyes and Ears in the Night.”

On his own initiative, A1C **George Fitts** learned welding so he could weld steel fences and build steel cages. (Cont. next Week)



### 26 July - AT LAST!...NEW DINING HALL TO OPEN

According to CMSgt. **Benjamin F. Jennings**, food service superintendent in the 35<sup>th</sup> Services Squadron, the long-awaited opening of the new Batson Hall Dining Hall in the airmen’s barracks area will take place on Tuesday...at the noon meal.

The new dining hall, built by RMK workers, as a capacity of 1,500 persons per meal, according to Sergeant Jennings. Personnel holding the rank of staff sergeant or below...that is, all airmen,



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

---

can eat in the new facility at this time, Sergeant Jennings pointed out.

One wing of the RMK Dining Hall, he stated, will be closed down for renovations such as the tiling of the floor.

The supper meal at Batson Hall will be offered from 4 to 6:30 p.m., and no midnight chow will be served there. The breakfast and dinner meal hours will be the same as those of the other two dining halls on base. In command will be TSgt. **H. Rice** and TSgt. **Charles Lee**.

### **26 July - GENERAL GRAHAM GIVES AWARD FOR FLIGHT SAFETY TO 352ND T.F.S.**

Maj. Gen. **Gordon Graham**, vice-commander of 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force, flew to this base recently to present the U.S. Air Force Flight Safety Award, one of the top honors that can come to any unit, to the 352<sup>nd</sup> ('Yellow Jacket') Squadron.

The award was accepted by Lt. Col. **Rocco Palumbo**, 44, from Durham, N.H. commander of the F-100 Super Sabre squadron. The citation accompanying the handsome plaque award was read by the 35<sup>th</sup> TFW commander, Col. **James A. Wilson**.

After a dramatic deployment from its home base, Myrtle Beach AFB, S.C., last August, the Yellow Jackets embarked on the first of over 6,500 combat missions which have resulted in the death of over 540 enemy personnel, the sinking of 146 sampans, and the destruction of over 2,000 military structures and over 1,000 fortified positions.

The squadron's jet fighters have touched off 805 secondary explosions in relentless bombing and strafing attacks on enemy positions in support of friendly ground forces in Vietnam.

In their almost 10,000 flying hours in Vietnam, the Yellow Jackets have not lost a single aircraft through maintenance failure.

The squadron was cited for achieving over 15,000 accident-free flying hours over a 30-month period which ended December 31, 1966.

Colonel Palumbo, who led the deployment to Vietnam, labeled his assignment as Yellow Jacket

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 226 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

commander as the best of his 21-year Air Force career.

He said it’s the kind of assignment that comes once in a lifetime, and added that the dedication of the air crews and maintenance personnel of the 352<sup>nd</sup> TFS has made his job as commander an easy one.

The plaque accepted by Colonel Palumbo consisted of a bronze eagle on a field of blue with a silver border.

The Yellow Jackets were cited for such achievements as the training and upgrading of 60 newly-assigned pilots, four successful ocean-spanning deployments, and participation in fire-power demonstrations and joint training exercises in the U.S.

Colonel Palumbo said that the 352<sup>nd</sup> TFS deployment to Phan Rang was praised as the most successful operation of its kind in the history of the Tactical Air Command.

“Excellent supervisory planning, coordination, and maintenance support” were evident in the squadron’s outstanding safety record, according to the citation.

The Yellow Jacket commander noted that General Graham likened the award to an outstanding unit citation.

Colonel Palumbo singled out line-chief MSgt. **Floyd Noble** for special praise for his “fantastic” dedication.

Maj. **Charles Zeitner**, ops officer, and Capt. **Robert Edney** and Capt. **James Lehtonen** are the only pilots still here among the ones who participated in the deployment last year.

### **26 July - ‘BLACK PANTHER’ PILOT CLAIMS COMBAT RECORD**

Capt. **Roger E. Wichman**, 30, from Pender, Neb., recently completed his one-year tour with the ‘Black Panthers’ of the 615<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron with a special reason for celebrating.

The modest soft-spoken F-100 Super Sabre flier left for his new assignment at Cannon AFB with the firm conviction that he had set a new record for the most combat fighter missions flown by

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

---

any tactical fighter pilot during a 12-month stint in Vietnam.

He flew 345 combat missions, but enemy ground fire almost brought his career to a premature close just a week before his scheduled departure for the ZI.

His fuel tank was struck by enemy fire, and he made a finger-crossed landing at Bien Hoa AB in a rain storm with less than four minutes of fuel remaining in the stricken aircraft.

“Certainly, without question, this has been the most interesting and educational tour I’ve ever spent in the Air Force”, said the combat veteran just before his departure.

He has been decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with nine Oak Leaf Clusters.

Captain Wichman was the ‘last of the Mohicans,’ the last remaining pilot among those who participated in the deployment of the ‘Black Panthers’ from England AFB, La. to Phan Rang last summer.

A veteran of more than seven years Air Force service, he noted that “there’s been a fantastic improvement in the facilities of Phan Rang since July of 1966.” He singled out the switch from aluminum runways to the new 10,000-foot concrete runway as an example.

Before Captain Wichman left the base, he exchanged reminiscences with an old friend, A1V **William E. Kerchenfaut**, 24, from Elgin, Ill.

An aircraft mechanic, the airman is the last enlisted man left in the squadron among those who took part in the deployment last year.

He assisted in launching Captain Wichman on night missions at Phan Rang. Air Kerchenfaut recently extended his tour six months.

### **26 July - HOW 800 VEHICLES ARE FED AND CARED FOR**

By A1C **John Engle**

The local ‘service station’ is a complex of buildings spread all over the base and manned by

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

---

members of the 35<sup>th</sup> Transportation Squadron.

MSgt. **Williard O. Middleton**, 50, from universal City, Tex., is the NCOIC. He and his assistant, SSgt. **Theodore W. Hansen**, 38, from Laredo, Tex., keep their fingers on the pulse of this organization, which handles the ‘care and feeding’ (repair and refueling) of approximately 800 vehicles used all over the base.

Using two radio-equipped vehicles, A1C **Oberon D. Rush**, 22, from Denham Springs, La., and A1C **Francis F. O’Keefe**, 24, from Penacock, N.H., are on 24-hour call to service a vehicle that may be stranded anywhere on base.

Sergeant Middleton stated that an average day’s service schedule covers 30 to 40 vehicles, including road calls.

At another site on base, hundreds of gallons of fuel are pumped into the gas tanks of Phan Rang’s ever-moving vehicles by: A1C **Richard C. Killingsworth**, 21, from Brooksville, Fla., and A1C **Donald W. Johnson**, 32, from Jacksonville, Fla.

Lubrication for the fleet of rolling stock is provided by A1C **Jeffrey A. Jackson**, 23, from Searcy, Ark.

Meanwhile, over at the tire shot, A2C **James A. Avila**, 23, from Aquilar, Col., patches and replaces 40 to 50 tires every day.

“All vehicles should be washed at least twice weekly,” said Sergeant Middleton, “and with the equipment and help of 12 Vietnamese civilian workers at the wash rack it takes only minutes to have a clean, shiny vehicle.

Nine of her Vietnamese civilians assist in other departments of the vehicle service complex.

Col. **James A. Wilson**, commander of the 35<sup>th</sup> TFW, praised the repairmen and other members of the vehicle service complex for doing “an outstanding job” with the equipment available to them.

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

---

### **26 July - 615TH T.F.S. HAS ANNIVERSARY**

The ‘Black Panthers’, alias the 615<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron, recently celebrated their first-year anniversary of combat operations in Vietnam.

Commanded by Lt. Col. **Julian D. Sawyer**, 38, from Mobile, Ala., the F-100 Super Sabre squadron has plenty to show for its 12-month stretch of front-line action.

The rampaging Panthers have destroyed 1,290 enemy fortifications and wiped out 573 enemy personnel. They have demolished 2,730 military structures, set off 144 secondary explosions, and knocked out 26 enemy weapons positions.

That’s not all. The F-100 thrusts of the Panthers have sunk 196 enemy sampans, set off 101 secondary fires, and ripped up 3,187 meters of enemy trenches. The air crews of the squadron have also been credited with uncovering and destroying 269 enemy foxholes and blowing up five bridges.

Squadron awards over the past 12 months include two Silver Stars, eight Bronze stars, 16 Distinguished Flying Crosses, a Purple Heart, and 248 Air Medals.

Based at Phan Rang since its deployment last July from England AFB, La., the squadron was among the first combat units to arrive at this mountain-cradled installation.

The Panthers flew over 8,100 combat sorties in their first year of operations in Vietnam, and unleashed over 12 million pounds of munitions against the enemy. They fired 1.5 million rounds of 20 millimeter cannon shells at enemy targets. The anniversary was celebrated last week with an air crew group photo...and more combat missions!

### **26 July - SENTRY DOGS ARE FULL OF TRICKS**

Three sentry-dog handlers of the 35<sup>th</sup> Security Police Sq. have dogs that are full of tricks.

The men are A2C **George Fournier**, 19, from Centereach, Long Island, N.Y.; A2C **Donald V. Houck**, 20, from Six Mile Run, Pa., and A2C **Donald A. DeMeurers**, 23, from Mountain Falls, N.Y.

Airman Fournier’s dog ‘Jack’ is nine years old. His specialty is running the kennels’ obstacle



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

---

course without a least. His handler simply runs alongside and signals Jack over the hurdles, etc.

Airman Houck’s dog ‘Dutch’ is almost eight years old. ‘Dutch’ retrieves items for his handler on command. When such items as a pack, a muzzle, and a collar are placed 15 feet in front of him, he goes out to get the one his master asks for. ‘Duke’, a cleaver dog assigned to Airman DeMeurers, obeys commands spelled out by the airman. Such command might be S-I-T D-O-W-N or S-T-A-N-D.

### **26 July - AIR COMMANDOS SWARM ON BASE**

Make way for the air commandos! The 315<sup>th</sup> Air Commando Wing (Troop Carrier) has officially arrived at Phan Rang Air Base.

Made up of four squadrons of airlift personnel and one squadron of defoliation personnel, as well as a consolidated maintenance squadron, the wing is commanded by Col. **V. W. Frolich**, The vice-commander is Lt. Col. **Bill M. Richardson**.

The 315<sup>th</sup> was one of the first Air Force units to arrive in Vietnam. It airlifts cargo and passengers in support of Army units, including Special Forces.

One unit of the wing carries out defoliation missions.

The wing participates in assault landings and has occasionally carried out flare-drop missions.

“This is a consolidation of the wing, here at Phan Rang,” stated Lt. **Charles A. Wilson**, 25, from Chicago, Ill., director of personnel for the air commando unit.

“Before coming here,” he continued, “the wing was spread over several bases in Vietnam.”

One squadron, the 311<sup>th</sup>, came in from Da Nang, and another, the 310<sup>th</sup>, moved in from Nha Trang, and with it came the Headquarters and Consolidated Maintenance (CAMRON) Squadrons.

Two other squadrons of the wing are still deployed at other bases.

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

---

Next month the ‘troop carrier’ part of the wing’s name will be dropped.



**Doug’s Comments:** The Phan Fare ‘mastheads’ and all of the cartoons or ‘Phan Rang Observations’ were drawn by William Gaither for the month of July. To read more about the art of William Gaither, see Phan Rang Newsletter 221.

This newsletter was composed and all graphics by Douglas Severt unless otherwise stated. To see a list of all previous newsletters click [here](#). To unsubscribe to Phan Rang News, mailto:

[dougsevert@cox.net](mailto:dougsevert@cox.net) and put ‘unsubscribe’ in subject line. Also if you are not on the Phan Rang mailing list and you would like to receive each issue of the Phan Rang Newsletter, just send a request by email to the same address.