

Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.
"Keeping the memories alive" Newsletter 238

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EDWARD L. DOWNEY

MEMOIRS OF EDWARD L. DOWNEY

SGT. E-4, USAF - 9 September 69 - 7 September 73

SLICK SLEEVE

I graduated from Southern Illinois University, Vocational Technical Institute majoring in automotive technology on June 11, 1969. I joined the United States Air Force on June 12, 1969 under the Delayed Enlistment Program (DEP) which gave me three months before going active, but gave credit to time in reserves.

Active duty started 9 September 1969. I was assigned to the 3727th Basic Military Training Squadron, Flight 1426. Sgt. Stemp was our Training Instructor (TI), a short man with a voice that could bellow out like an opera singer. The team chief was Technical Sgt. Stone, a square-

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jawed, steely-eyed man whose looks alone drew fear from a trainee. We arrived at Lackland AFB in San Antonio, TX about 0200 on 10 September 1969. They told us that day we were the lowest form of life on the planet except for civilians. Our first meal was at 0300 in **“HELL’S KITCHEN”**. Everyone in the place was yelling and screaming at us, speeding us through the chow line. We bolted down our breakfast and hurried back on the bus. We were then taken to our barracks, a two story wooden structure with open bays. They gave us some bedding and we flopped for about two hours of sleep. The lights came on at 0600 and Sgt. Stemp roared **“GET UP!! GET OUT OF THAT BED!!”** With that our 30 days of training had begun. We began processing, classroom training, drill, physical training, which included running 2 miles every day, taking care of our barracks and uniforms.

On the Physical Training (PT) field, we did pushups and sit-ups among other exercises. A crude parcel of ground was used for PT, and weed stubs poked holes in a trainee’s back causing him to bleed. A sting from a scorpion was also a hazard during PT.

Immunization also caused some problems. We were given shots with a special gun which injected the serum under pressure. We were pushed through the line so fast, sometimes the man giving the shot couldn’t plant his gun firmly on your arm and a slash of serum would cut you open like a knife.

About half way through basic, we were moved to a 1,000 man barracks made of concrete and steel. We also got new training instructors. Staff Sgt. Roden was a down-to-earth kind of guy who seemed human. Then there was our new team chief, Technical Sgt. Dudley from Alabama. He told us if he had been in the civil war, the south would have won!

One day while marching in formation coming back from a parade, our TI gave us **“FLIGHT HALT”**! AB Willy Highsmith was in the middle of the flight daydreaming and didn’t get the command. When everyone stopped, he kept going and everyone in front of him fell like dominos.

While we were getting pretty good at marching, Tech Sgt. Hatchet was brought in to put the finishing touches on us. With his clear voice and instructions in cadence, we beamed with pride in our marching. He would call: **“Lean-back-and march-from-the waist-down-strut-strut.”**

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We were allowed to go off base one Sunday afternoon. I went to see the Alamo and was shocked to find it in the middle of the city. Later I took in a John Wayne movie, The Undefeated. Every Sunday morning we looked forward to church services held at the movie theater. It was our only chance to sit in a comfortable chair and relax.

In order to graduate, we had to pass our PT test. A prescribed number of pushups, sit ups, etc., and run the mile in 8 minutes or less. One airman from our sister flight was rather large and having a hard time with this run. A couple of the better runners that had already finished their run went back out to encourage him. The TI was calling out the time and it was running out. Both of our flights were cheering him on. As he neared the finish line, we all went silent to hear the TI call the time. He cried out “**HE MADE IT!**” and we all roared with pride and joy. I think the TI fudged on the time call but it was a great moment.

I don’t recall any formal graduation ceremony; we simply got our orders and were shipped our different ways to the next station. For me it was Keesler AFB in Biloxi, Mississippi.

AIRMAN



On 22 October 1969 with one stripe freshly sewn onto my air force blues, I boarded a bus with Dominic Cortese who would be my friend throughout tech school. It was an all day trip across Texas, Louisiana and into Mississippi stopping only once for lunch at a cafeteria. We arrived late in the evening at Keesler AFB where I was assigned to the 3408th Student Squadron in the Air Training Command (ATC). We were billeted in the Personnel Awaiting Training Status (PATS) barracks. I would be there for the next seven weeks. Student leaders or “Ropes” took the place of TI’s and they were just as demanding as their superior counterparts. Now we really had to work on our spit shined boots, starched fatigues, haircuts and spotless barracks. During the day we would do details, i.e.,

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wax and buff floors, police squadron areas, clean the base gym, marina duty or KP. I did about four weeks of KP.

At night, the Ropes would make us do a fire drill. They would blow a whistle and yell “**FIRE DRILL!!!**”. Then we had to grab our shoes and a blanket to keep burning embers off us, lock our lockers so no one could rob us while we were out and evacuate the barracks, put on our shoes, and form up on the basketball court, all in about 30 seconds. If we were not fast enough or had a security breach, they would let us get back to sleep and do it again, maybe two or three times a night. I guess this was to get us prepared for Vietnam. To this day I still raise straight off the bunk when the phone rings.

A class opened up early in December and I moved to the ‘C’ shift barracks and started school, Basic Electronic Division (BED). School started at 1800 and ended at 2400. Each week was a different course and we were tested at the end of the week. Pass or fail we never knew our scores, only if we advanced to the next course.

I became a student leader, a Green Rope, which oversees details and was quickly promoted to Yellow Rope, one who marches the troops to school. I had a good command voice, which is why I got the job. Some of the guys started calling me “*The Barking Dog of 3408*”. I was a sharp troop at this point and enjoyed guiding a mass of troops through the streets of Keesler.

My parents brought my car to me in December and that gave me some mobility to see the South. Trips to Pensacola, FL, Mobile, AL to the new military park, Vicksburg, MS battlefield, Jackson, MS, and New Orleans, LA for Mardi Gras were good weekend jaunts. My aunt and uncle, Marian and Rock Rougeau, allowed me to stay with them several weekends, including Christmas at their home in Houma, LA.



Ed with guidon at Keesler AFB for technical training.

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DEUCE

On 1 April 1970, I was promoted to A1C, a two-striper or “deuce”. A ritual called “*tacking on the deuce*” requires a previously promoted A1C to strike your stripes with his fist at whatever level of pain he would like to inflict. We were all glad to get that second stripe. Many students with shorter courses had already left school, still with one stripe.

I finished BED and was given 13 days boot leave starting on 7 April 1970. I drove home and got my first speeding ticket in Blytheville, Arkansas. It was good to be home again, but the time really flew by and it was soon time to head south. I got my second speeding ticket at Cape Girardeau, Missouri. I told the judge I was heading back to base and he gave me a military discount on my fine. School started again and I was in Specialized Electronic Training School (SETS), studying NAV AIDS. Now we were working with systems, hooking them up to the mock-ups and following signals through the schematic drawings.

With just a few weeks left in school, we got our orders for our first duty assignment. My orders were for the 35th Combat Support Group (PACAF) APO San Francisco, 96321. Not knowing what that meant, I had to go to a special office where I was informed this was Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. I was given instructions to go to the firing range where I had to prequalify with the M-16 rifle. I watched a film about Vietnam and it briefly touched on Phan Rang. This was going to be quite an assignment that I would have to pass judgment on.

On 4 August 1970 I was awarded Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) 30131-Aircraft Electronic Navigation Equipment Repairman. No ceremony followed, only 38 days leave and an invitation to Vietnam.

HAPPY VALLEY

The morning of 13 September 1970, I got on a plane in St. Louis bound for Seattle, Washington. From there I caught a bus to McChord AFB, arriving at 1230 hours. It was a long day waiting for my flight twelve and a half hours later. I somberly watched all the troops getting off their “Freedom bird”, gazing at their dark tanned skin and the hue of red clay in their boots and faded uniforms. Finally, at 0100 14 September 1970, I boarded a Flying Tigers Airline Stretch 8

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with about 300 other soldiers and a few airmen. We refueled in Alaska and Japan and the 18-hour flight ended at Cam Ranh Bay AB 1100 hours on 15 September 1970.

As the plane stopped and the men rose to deplane, I remember looking out the window, looking at all the military vehicles, and activity, wondering what this year had in store for me while not wanting to get off the plane. As I got to the open door of the aircraft, the blast of heat hit me square in the face and almost took my breath away. **Welcome to Vietnam!**

I had to schedule a flight to Phan Rang. The earliest plane left at 1630 hours so I had all afternoon to wait. I could not get over how bad it smelled there. That was when I found out about “binjo ditches”. Vietnamese would throw their garbage in these ditches and wait for a rain to wash it away. At last it was time for my first military hop, a C-123 Provider cargo plane with two prop engines and two outboard jets. It had windows with no glass and the noise was deafening! The half hour flight put us down at 1700 hours and I got my first look at Phan Rang.

The F-100 Super Sabres sat menacingly in their revetments along Uniform and Victor rows. I was put up in the Transient Airmen Quarters (TAQ) for the night until I could go through processing and get my squadron assignment. The barracks looked as if they had never been cleaned as the dust that blew in from the open slats in the walls of the building was thick. To make things worse, the trim pad, a place used to check out jet engine operation, was probably 50 yards from the barracks. All night long the whine of the jet engines was interrupted only by the thunderous burst of the after-burners.

The next day I started in-processing. There was a sign in the room that read: *“Welcome to Happy Valley.”* Later I was taken to my barracks where I stowed my gear. Then we went to the 35th Avionics Maintenance Shop (AMS) and I was introduced and shown around. Everyone there, including the top sergeants, was real nice and I felt this might be okay after all.

That night was much quieter with the trim pad being a mile away. There were still new sounds to get used to. I was closer to the perimeter of this isolated and restricted base and the rattle of machine gun fire awakened me as the Security Police (SP) lay down some fire to keep any sneaky VC from getting too close to our wire.

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The next day I reported to work at 0600 hours for a 12-hour shift, six days a week. Sgt. Robert Lewis was my trainer and I was to learn the Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) System which includes the RT-279/APX25 transponder, the KY95A/APX25 decoder, an antenna and a control box. I also went on my first work order on the flight line. The Sergeant that took me on this job was a short timer and said I was his replacement. He told me to sit in the F-100 and he would show me our equipment and told me what not to touch, mainly things that actuate the ejection seat. I was as excited as a kid at the state fair.

As each day passed, I learned more and more. I would talk to the other guys in the shop about the systems they serviced on the bench. When I would show up for work, I would be grinning from ear to ear. The career airmen, or lifers as they were called, would jokingly say they needed to give me an attitude adjustment because I was having way too much fun there. They wanted me to be miserable like everyone else.

Time “in country” slowly changed that. Because we could not get off base, sometimes you felt boxed in. Mail was very important because a day with no mail was a bad day. I wrote to someone practically every day to be sure to get something in the mail daily.

We had four squadrons of F-100s. Most of the aircraft were F-100D models, single seaters, but a few were F-100F models - two-seaters, front and back. All were built in the mid-1950s. Some called them the “Lead Sled”. If the single jet engine ever quit, the plane was no glider.

In the Navigation (NAV) Shop we had four systems on the aircraft we had to take care of. The ARN-21 TACAN System (Tactical Air Navigation), which gave the pilot azimuth (bearing) to a station and distance to or from that station. The APX 25 IFF system used a transponder and a coder decoder that returned signals from an air traffic controllers system for aircraft identification. The ARN-6 Radio Compass was an AM-band radio receiver that gave the pilot a radio station to listen to and bearing to that station. A system we called the “Music Box” was for precision bombing. All sets for these systems were located in the nose of the aircraft under the hood, except the Music Box which was located in the vertical stabilizer of the tail section and hard to access. We had to remove an aluminum panel secured by many screws to get to this little transistorized box, but it seldom gave any problems. Also located in the nose of the aircraft were two or four 20-mm machine guns depending on the model of aircraft, which

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shook our “black boxes”, as we called them, to pieces.



Ed Downey sitting on an F-100 Super Sabre while the aircraft under goes maintenance at Phan Rang AB.

Here is an example of a typical day in the NAV Shop: There were between 40 to 60 Sorties flown daily. Broken aircraft had priority over any job of the day. Job control would call our shop with a work order. That would tell us the aircraft type, aircraft number, location and problem. A repairman would be dispatched to the flight line ASAP by a metro van that ran a continuous route by the maintenance shops to the flight line. Upon arrival at the designated revetment, the specialist would first check the aircraft forms to see if it was safe to apply power. For example, an open fuel cell could be ignited by a spark from power application and burn up an aircraft. That happened once to another shop during my tour. Once you had determined it was safe to apply power, you fired up the MD-3 power unit. Now the aircraft had 28 volts DC and 115 volts AC 400 cycles external power. You climbed up the ladder, stepped into the cockpit and turned on the proper system to check it out. If it was TACAN, you turned the channel selector to the base station and waited for the indicator to lock on the proper azimuth and distance. If it was IFF, you called the shop, using the aircraft radio and request an IFF check.

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The conversation would go as follows:

ME - “Checkmate control, this is Checkmate 21”

SHOP - “Roger Checkmate 21, this is control”.

ME - “Request IFF check for aircraft 570”

SHOP - “Roger - standby - squawk normal IP (pause) one second red (pause) return to standby, you have a good check”

ME - “Roger that”.

If you were pretty sure of what was going to fix it, there were good sets in the shop we could take with us. If you were not so sure, you could check it out, call the shop and have them send what you needed. To change a set, we simply cut the safety wire, disconnected the antenna cable and other “canon plugs” (wire bundle connectors), loosened the wing nuts and removed the set from the mount. You reversed that procedure for installation, checked it out, signed off the aircraft forms and turned in your paperwork. Then the dispatcher would call job control with a completion of the work order.

Now, if everything was under control on the flight line, you could work on some sets that were just brought in. All repairmen in the shop could do any job on the flight line. But in the shop, we specialized on one system. Each bench was a “mock up” of an electronic system fully functional with test equipment. We would open the sets, check power source voltages and follow the signal through the set, start to finish, using a probe and an oscilloscope, while following a schematic diagram. It took several weeks to figure out what you were initially doing. Eventually, you learned the diagnostic procedure. Once you found the problem, you could go to “bench stock”, a room in our building that kept common repair parts, get the tube you needed to fix the set, align it electrically, paint it, and put your name tag on it. Ready for the next job!

We had a nice movie hall called Viking Theater and a mosquito flick called Happy Valley Drive-

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in, where you could watch movies outdoors. We had an airman’s club and a 21-club, but I only went to those a couple of times. Our squadron had a little bar and I spent some time there drinking rotten beer from our own ration cards. We were allowed two cases per month, which cost \$2.40 a case.

My friend from college, Kelly Angel, was sent to Phan Rang in November. He was with the C-119 gunships, Shadows and Stingers. His shop was a block away from mine, but his barracks was by the trim pad. We would get together every few weeks or so. It was good to see someone from home.



Ed relaxes outside his barracks at Phan Rang AB.

In April and June, I was awarded the Certificate of Maintenance Achievement for Outstanding Job Performance. In July, I was nominated by our squadron for airman of the quarter, but I lost out to a Security Policeman with starched woodland camo fatigues.

One afternoon, I was on a work order at Uniform 1, a revetment near the runway when the base siren went off. Everyone stopped what they were doing to see what was going on and no one had a clue. Several men gather around my revetment when a most unusual thing happened, a half track was driving by our location heading for the runway. All of a

sudden **BOOM BOOM - BOOM!!** A staff Sergeant yells “**HIT THE DECK!**” and we all laid down while others scrambled for better cover. I wished for a hole to jump into instead of laying on the concrete. We soon realized the half track was purposely running over something causing small explosions. We would find out later an F-100 accidentally dropped an anti-personnel

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mine dispenser on take-off and the half track was running over the little "toe poppers".

There was one way to get off base, you could go to the beach. On your day off, you could catch a bus early morning at the Base Exchange (BX). We had an escort by a V-100, a fast moving vehicle that looked like a tank with tractor tires, only no big gun. We moved right along between 50 to 60 mph so we weren't too easy of a target. We drove by lots of rice paddies and what looked to be old monuments. After a 30 minute trip, we were at the beach. There wasn't much there except the beach, a lookout tower, and lots of barbed wire along the inland side of the beach. Dave Sparkman and I spent the day there and I remember getting in the water only for a short time. There were so many jellyfish all around me and I wasn't sure what they were capable of doing, so I got out. The bus was supposed to pick us up at 1600 hours, but it never showed. After a nervous hour and a half, an Army dump truck pulled up and asked if anyone wanted to go to Phan Rang. Five of us waiting there gladly jumped in the back of the truck. We hadn't gone too far when we heard a startling POP-POP-POP!! We dived to the bottom of the truck bed thinking we had come under fire. The army guy riding shotgun had pointed his M-16 out the window and was firing at some birds in the rice paddy. So much for being out of my element. We made it back to base and that was my last trip to the beach.

Attacks on the base usually occurred on a Sunday morning. Rockets were set up on Charlie's Hill using a crude bamboo launch apparatus with a thermal firing device. There were no Vietnamese civilians working on Sunday so about 1100 hours when the temperature got to 90 degrees, the rockets would launch and land haphazardly on the base. A sortie of F-100 or C-119 gunships would make a strike on the hill, but there was nobody there. This would happen every couple of weeks, one or two rockets being fired, but I never heard one go off.

I took R&R in Sidney, Australia from 1 June to 8 June 1971. We departed from Tan Son Nhut AB at night and I remember how eerie the base looked from above with the illumination flares going off and seeing all the bomb craters around the perimeter. Sidney was a very clean city and I felt very safe there even late at night.

The scariest night of the year occurred on 3 July 1971. I was working on a C-47 when I noticed along the perimeter more illumination flares than usual. The base siren came on and the giant voice informed us "**Security Condition was Red Option 1**". This meant the base was under

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attack and the enemy was on base. While we couldn't see or hear anything, the siren went off all night, creating a very uneasy feeling. The crew chief of the C-47 had some .45 hand guns on board if we needed them. About 0400, I decided to walk back to the shop. When the shift was over at 0600 I went back to the barracks and the guys that spent the night there sat up all night with helmet and flak jackets. At 0800 the base alert was called all clear and security police had killed two VC at the ammo dump.

That afternoon 4 July 1971, we had a base party on the flight line in between two rows of revetments. There were bands on a flat bed trailer and 500 gallon storage tanks cut in half to ice down beer. The party went on into the night.

Two pilots were killed that year. One flew into the side of a mountain and the other took ground fire in the napalm tanks. It was at Phan Rang that I saw my first “missing man formation”. On 31 July 1971, the F-100s were going back to the states to the Arkansas National Guard. That was a very big day for me. I was asked to be on the launch team to see the planes off for the last time. It was a sign things were winding down.

Now that the Super Sabres were gone, work eased up quite a bit. We still had a few planes to tend to, 02 and 0V10 Forward Air Controllers (FAC) and some C-123s from the 315th TAS. There was a silver C-123 that sprayed the base for mosquitoes every couple of weeks. Early one morning after I had just gone to bed from night shift, the C-123 called “Patches” flew right over my barracks at low level. What a sound that was! Sometime later I went on an IFF work order on “Patches”. I was told it was heading to the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio. The mosquito killing fluid was all over the cargo compartment and everything I touched was sticky.

My Date Estimated Return from OverSeas (DEROS) finally came up and it was off for my ride on the “Freedom Bird”. It was a very emotional time and I had trouble getting my breath. It was a long night at Cam Ranh Bay going through customs by the Security Police (SP). We were tested for drug use, dogs sniffed us for drug items and our duffle bags were thoroughly inspected. It was one long line after another. To make things worse, the base came under attack and the SP's had to stop inspecting and go to the perimeter. After a couple of hours, inspections resumed and as daylight broke we were standing on a painted line waiting to board the aircraft. A Sgt. walked up to me and told me to report to the front of the line. I couldn't imagine what he

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wanted. It turned out a stewardess thought I was cute or something and wanted me to sit by her station so we could talk. Well, I was too tired to talk and I wanted to sit by an emergency exit where there was more leg room. That’s what I did, and away we went. I flew back to McChord AFB, got on a bus for Seattle airport, and right away a plane was taking me back to St. Louis. I had 38 days leave until I had to report to my next duty station. Little Rock AFB, Arkansas (LRAFB), and C-130 cargo planes.

TAC MOBILE

I arrived at Little Rock AFB by Personal Motor Vehicle (PMV) and I was put up for the night in the TAQ. I could hear the turbo props of the C-130's down at the flight line all night. The next day after getting my assignment, I reported to the 61st Tactical Airlift Squadron (TAS) for duty. At this facility, we only did flight line maintenance. Bench work was done at the 314th AMS. There was a lot of sitting around at this place.

Early one Friday morning in November as I recall, a C-130 from the 62nd TAS lost power on the right wing after takeoff. As he circled the flight line to make an emergency landing, he flew right over our shop and our squadron of aircraft. Then his right wing tip touched the grass between the runway and the ramp. The aircraft crashed and exploded into flames. The black smoke poured off the burning wreckage and only a loadmaster was able to free himself from the doomed aircraft. He had serious burns and was sent to San Antonio Burn Center, but the rest of the crew, around seven in all, were killed.

The C-130E models of the 61st had a new radar system called All Weather Aerial Delivery System (AWADS) which was made up of an X-band and more powerful KA band radar systems, with computer assist. Station Keeping Equipment (SKE) allowed for formation flying in zero visibility. These were all new airplanes and a pleasure to work on. Other systems included TA CAN (2) and Radio Compass (2) just like the F-100 used. The IFF was a new transistorized system and very reliable. There was a Visual Omni Range Instrumental Landing System (VOR-ILS) that gave your bearing to a station, glide slope information, and an audio station identification using Morse code. A radar altimeter and a Loran system, used for over water navigation, completes our list of systems for what we now call the “Radar Shop”. Later on we would be responsible for the aircraft of the 62nd TAS which had the APN-59 Radar System that

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was used in WWII.

On 24 November 1971, I was sent to Keesler AFB for two weeks of High Reliability Soldering and Connections School and one week of AN/ARN-97 TALAR Systems school. Our planes didn't have this system, but they had to send somebody and I was the new guy. During this Temporary Duty (TDY) I was promoted to Sergeant E-4. The course was completed on 14 December 1971 and I went back to LRAFB.

I got to spend my first Christmas at home in two years. On 15 February 1972, I took part in my first rotation with the C-130's. This would be at Howard AB, Panama C.Z. It was a pretty base with lots of palm trees. I swam in the Pacific Ocean at Kobbe beach with a shark fence around us. I was sent back to Little Rock AFB, 15 March 1972 to get ready for another trip.

After twelve days at Little Rock, I was sent to Pope AFB, NC for 160 hours of AN-APN-69 Ground Equipment School. The instructor was surprised I was sent because I had never been to the airborne equipment school. It was like taking Algebra II without Algebra I. Again, they had to send somebody and I was the new guy. We were put up at the Prince Charles Hotel in Fayetteville, NC and an Air Force van commuted us to school daily. At night we would hit the bars on Hays Street and at Ft. Bragg. I was able to go to the Rebel 400 at Darlington, SC, my first NASCAR Winston Cup race. I returned to Little Rock AFB on 22 April 1972. In the coming weeks I would find out about the biggest trip of my AF career. A Joint Chief of Staff directed deployment for the Easter Offensive in South East Asia (SEA), Operation Constant Guard IV.

We left Little Rock AFB on 12 May 1972 for a 179 day Temporary Duty (TDY) with the 61st TAS and a squadron of AWADS C-130's from Pope AFB. I was assigned to the EST-B team where I would befriend Sgt. Jeff Villines, an instrument specialist. Our duty on the EST-B team was to Recover and Launch (R&L) aircraft on our way to SEA. Our first stop was at McClellan AFB, in California. We were to refuel and proceed to Hickam AFB, Hawaii where we would R&L. After being refueled, we taxied and ran up the engines. A problem was found. We taxied back and waited for the aircraft to be repaired. Although we had all specialists on board capable of repairing our own craft, we were not allowed to because of civilian contracts at McClellan to service transient aircraft. They worked on it, we tested it and there were more problems. This went on two or three more times until our flight crew ran out of flying time and we had to Rest

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Over Night (RON). We reported back to our aircraft and it still wasn't fixed. Our Aircraft Commander (AC) was concerned that everyone else had left and we wouldn't be able to perform our R&L duties. He superseded the civilian authority and put our team to the task of repairing the engines. In forty minutes time we were buttoned up and ready to go. We were supposed to do R&R at Hawaii, but because we were stragglers, EST-A team got that job. We would refuel at Hickam and proceed on with a tiring flight to Wake Island to get ahead of the rest of the force.

We landed on Wake at 0200 and we were bused to the barracks. We all got a good rest and when I woke up, I looked out the window and all I could see was water. I went to the hall and looked out the doors and I all could see was water. I thought “What in the world are we sitting on?” We were on the tip of a very narrow horseshoe-shaped island. We went to the chow hall and couldn't see the serving line. A Filipino waiter told us to sit at a table and order off the menu board. He took our order, not writing anything down, and brought us some of the best chow I ever had on a military installation.

In between recoveries and launches, we had some time to tour the island. There was a bowling alley, a bar, a mosquito flick, and at Special Services where you could check out bicycles and swim masks and snorkels. Around the island were concrete bunkers and big gun emplacements. We were told not to bother the unexploded ordinance out in the bay. There were also remnants of a Japanese aircraft engine by the flight line.

A few days later, we were on our way again and we stopped at Anderson AB in Guam to refuel. I recall rows and rows of black B-52 Stratofortress bombers and how ominous they looked. We finally made it to Ching Chuan Kang AB in Taichung, Taiwan. A total of 33 hours in flight. It took us three days before we felt like our feet were on the ground with all the airborne motion we had experienced.

A few of the AWADS specialists stayed at Ching Chuan Kang Air Base (CCK), Taiwan but most of us went on to Tan Son Nhut AB, Vietnam a few days later. On our approach to Tan Son Nhut in the C-130, I was about to experience my first “assault landing”. Instead of coming in on a gentle glide path, the pilot stays at high attitude until he crosses the base perimeter. Then he points the aircraft nose down and lets her drop. Then, just before you crash, he levels it out

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and lands it. It makes your stomach go up in your throat.

Once there, we set up in the avionics shop and all we had to service was AWADS, none of the navigation equipment. That was pretty easy duty. It was much warmer at Tan Son Nhut and mosquitoes required us to drape mosquito nets over our bunks. When working night shifts, it was hard to get good days sleep in the heat. We would frequent the NCO club while off duty, where they always had a good band. It was there I ran into Bob Rue from Jerseyville one night.

My new friend, Jeff Villines, wanted to go to Saigon, so one day we put on our 1505 tan uniforms, and took only the money we were prepared to lose, along with a “Class A” pass. We got off base, flagged down a cycalo, a three wheeled motorcycle with a bench seat in the front, and proceeded to Thu Deaux Street. A Vietnamese soldier started tagging along with us and I wondered what he was up to. We went in a bar, had a beer and I told him we would rather go out on our own. Little did I know, he already found out what he wanted to know. I was looking for an oil painting to take home. As we walked along, two Vietnamese women squatting by the sidewalk had plates of trinkets shouting “YOU BUY, YOU BUY”. I declined and one woman started yanking my leg while the other tugged on my arm. “YOU BUY, YOU BUY!” I grabbed the woman yanking my leg by the arm and with both hands started twisting the flesh. I didn’t want to smack her because I feared the whole neighborhood would be on us. I broke her hold and Jeff and I got out of there.

Although flustered a bit, I just wanted to get a painting and head back to base. I found one, argued about the price, as you’re supposed to, and reached for my money which was in my left breast pocket and it was gone!! That woman tugging on my arm picked my pocket and that an Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) soldier told her where it was. Another flush went through me. Jeff had to loan me the money to get the painting and luckily the woman left my Class A pass so I could return to base. That was our last trip to Saigon.

Working with these aircraft you get attached to them. One foggy night we passed one of our C-130's that was backlit by an NF-2 Lite All. It was a magical image of the silhouette in the bright fog. One day, I asked a C-130 crew chief what kind of mission his bird had been flying. He said they loaded up ARVN deserters that had been rounded up in Saigon and sent them back to combat. They would stretch straps across the floor so they could hang on to something and fill

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it full. After three months in country we were sent back to CCK, expecting to go home any time soon. We became familiar with Taichung, as it was a lot more fun to go there. A typhoon was coming to Taiwan and all our aircraft were sent to Japan, so for three days there was nothing for us to do. It rained a lot and the wind blew, but there was no damage I was aware of.

Another time, we had an AWADS system break on one of our birds at Clark AB in the Philippines. I was dispatched to fix it. As soon as I got there, I determined it needed a navigators indicator or scope. One would have to be flown in so I was stuck there for a day or two. They put me in a trailer on base with some crew chiefs from Pope AFB. These guys were a rough bunch and I didn't feel comfortable with them. One blond headed guy with a mustache threw a hunting knife into the walls all day long. We had an armed guard for every barracks there, most of them Filipinos with shotguns.

That night the guys wanted to go downtown to Angles City. I declined but they insisted. They said I would be safer with them than anyone because they knew what was going on. A jeep taxi picked us up off base and bar hopping we went. I was still a little nervous and we had a couple of San Miguel 3 Star beers in the lounge at the Hilton Hotel. These beers didn't set right and I threw up off the steps as we left the hotel. There were people dressed up to go to an affair as I stood there hurling. The crew chiefs said “Don't sweat the barf - let's go!!

We went to other bars and the Filipino jeep driver kept hitting me up for money. His mother was sick and his sister had no shoes. I told him I didn't have any to spare. As we headed back to base, the jeep driver picked up one of his friends. The jeep stopped 100 yards from the gate and we were told to walk from there. One of the CC's said we were not getting out till we get to the gate. He knew we might be mauled if we had to hoof it. The two Filipinos looked at each other and eventually took us to the gate. The next day, our trailer guard told us not to go back to town as there was a bounty on us. Thankfully, my scope came in that day and I got out of there. I was safer in Vietnam!

On our way to CCK, we stopped at Cubi Point Naval Station in Subic Bay, Philippines. I never saw so many aircraft jammed into such a small ramp as they had. They were parked wingtip to fuselage. We ended up staying at CCK another month before heading home. As we left, everything was going well and we were to Recover and Launch again at Wake Island. We had

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worked about a 32 hour shift and all of the aircraft were gone. Time for us to go and we had prop problems and no parts. A spare prop was on one of the planes that just left, so we had to wait for one to be sent from Hickam. A day later we got the prop but no tool to take the big nut off. The local machine shop was asked to cut us a tool and they began. Five p.m. came that Friday and the civilian workers had to quit. Our tool would not be finished and the doors were locked. We ended up waiting another day for a prop tool and we were finally on our way. As a result, we missed extra time in Hawaii spending only one night there, but we did get to go downtown. The next morning as we waited in the air terminal, we watched TV as Jim McKay of ABC Olympic coverage announced the death of the Israeli athletes in Munich.

Our TDY was over in August of 1972 and I would finally get to stay put for a while. Back at the Rock, one day I was told to report to the squadron commander in my dress blues. I did so, fretting “What kind of trouble have I got myself into now?” **Much to my surprise, I was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal for meritorious service during my tour of duty at Phan Rang with the F-100's.**

For many months it was work as usual at the 314th AMS. My friend, Jeff Villines was about to be wed at his home in Greenwood, Indiana and he asked me to be a groomsman. I was delighted and flew to Indianapolis the first weekend in June right after the Indy 500. To my delight A. J. Foyt was on the plane in first class talking to the captain. I went back and took my seat wanting the whole time to go up and talk to him, but I didn't have the nerve to bother him. When Jeff and his dad came to pick me up, they said “Do you know who was on your plane?” We were all excited. I had a great time at the Villines and it started a real friendship that has lasted to this day.

A few days later, 7 June 1973, I was off on my next rotation to Rhein Main AB, Germany. Germany was a lot of fun. We would go to Frankfurt on Saturdays, have a beer and a brat in the “Haupt Bahnhof” (train station) and walk around town. There was a flea market along the Mainz River, a very pretty setting. On Sundays, I would take a bus tour with special services. Trips to the Marksburg Castle, Rudeshiem and the German Grand Prix at Nurburgring were the highlights.

It was at Rhein Main AB where my personal favorite aircraft repair job took place. One of our

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C-130's was having a recurring problem with the AWADS system flashing an Electronic Control Amplifier (ECA) fail light. The system always checked good on the ground, but failed in the air. Several ECA had already been changed by other specialists and the navigator was put off that his radar was broken every time he flew. I was given the work order and reviewed the previous work orders. I concluded it must be vibrations causing the problem because a C-130 vibrates all over. I thought the radar antenna was most susceptible to vibration, hanging off the frame in the nose of the aircraft. I opened the radome and shook the antenna as an assistant watched the idiot lights. And there it was. ECA failure. After closer scrutiny, I found a wire with the insulation rubbed bare by the metal framework that only shorted out when the antenna was vibrating. We put on a new antenna and the problem was solved. For me, this was my finest hour. We returned to Little Rock AFB on 9 August 1973. I was told I would be receiving Superior Performance pay which amounted to \$30 per month. Perhaps a little bait to get me to re-enlist, but I was tired of living out of a duffle bag for four years. I took my release from active duty, giving the Air Force my best right up to 7 September 1973. I stopped by to say goodbye to Jeff and his new bride Jo Ellen and then I went home. Final military obligations terminated on 11 June 1975.

Very few people were interested in hearing your experiences in service. Everyone was tired of a war that had already lasted too long. The Vietnam Veteran simply answered his call to duty.

On August 25, 1990, twenty years after my first tour in Vietnam, I heard the two most comforting words ever at a Vietnam Veteran's reunion in Belleville, Illinois. An Army captain told the assembled crowd – **WELCOME HOME!**



Ed on his Harley after completing his 400th “Patriot Guard Ride”. He is passionate about honoring veterans during homecoming celebrations, funerals and other events to also honor first responders and the decedent’s family.

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Ed Downey lights a remembrance candle while John Ploof salutes and Barbara Brandt reads the remembrance script at the 2021 Phan Rang Veterans Reunion. Ed, John and Barbara have performed ‘Drill and Ceremonies’ duties at most the reunion.



Steven is like many Phan Rang veterans, I feel like I know him, but have never met him, because we both are charter members of the Phan Rang Facebook Group, and I’ve seen his pictures and his writings for many years. I’ve always admired him for his contribution to his fellow veterans and for preserving the art of early American Rock & Roll and Soul music, a

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genre that is favored by the West Coast East Los Angeles Chicano community. Also as a fellow ‘Aerial Porter’ I’m disappointed that we didn’t run into each other sometime during our military careers and maybe a little envious of those that did have the pleasure of working with him. Here are some interesting facts about Steven.

August 8, 1968 was the first day of my 20 year military career, but it took 37 years to complete. Basic training at Amarillo Air Force Base in Texas; Munitions Technical Training at Lowry AFB in Colorado; and off to Phan Rang Air Base in Vietnam.

I returned to March AFB in Riverside, California for 9 months and then to Utapao Air Base in Thailand. I was Honorable Discharge in June 1972 as an E-4 Buck Sergeant. In 1987 I reenlisted into the US Air Force Reserves at March Air Force Base in Riverside, CA. I was a member of the 37th Mobile Aerial Port Squadron and the 50/56th Aerial Port Squadron.

We worked in many Air Force Bases including Kadina AB (Okinawa); Yokota AB (Japan); Clark AB (Philippines); Osan AB (South Korea); Anderson AB (Guam); Hickam AB (Hawaii); and Aviano AB (Italy). We also traveled and worked at many military bases in the Continental USA.

I retired in 2003 as a Technical Sergeant E-6. It was an Honor and Privilege to serve.



After my 20 years with the US Air Force/USAF Reserves and 32 years for the US Postal Service finished, I continue, or shall I say **WE** (Janie and I) continue our 47th years of blissful marriage on November 9, 2021. All the congratulations and honor go to Juanita Palacios Chavez. Thank you for being patient, understanding, and loving.

And, Thank You for not taking a baseball bat to my head! Diane Estrada, Sandra Flores, and Phillip Chavez were there at the little White Chapel on the Las Vegas strip. **My biggest accomplishment in longevity, 47 years and counting!**

I started and continue with my internet radio station, I collect autographs of historic persons

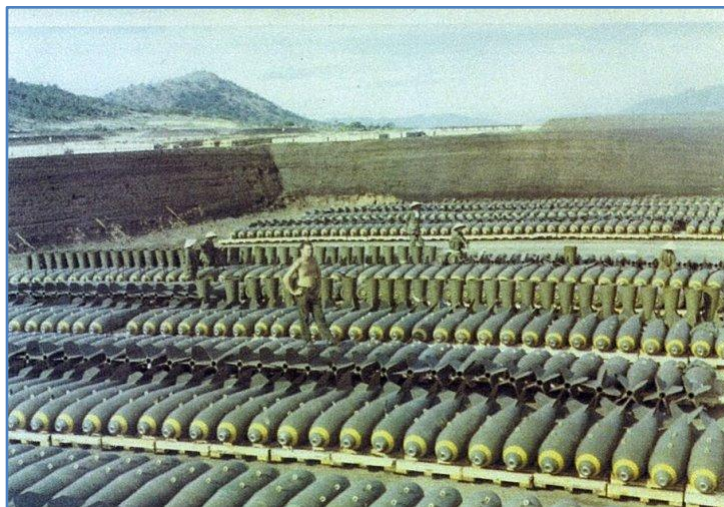
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(NO athletes or movie stars) my Great Great Grandfather was Medal of Honor recipient during Indian Wars in Arizona Territory. My Dad was in the Pacific during WW2 and I had Uncles in Europe at the Battle of Bulge, **I love my country and my fellow veterans.**

At Phan Rang AB, Steven, was assigned to the 435th Munitions Maintenance Squadron handling



all of the munitions that were loaded on the aircraft daily. The picture on the left was taken by Steven from the top of the revetment and are 750 pounders. These came from the contractor barges at the beach area. We went there and unloaded the barges with stationary Hansen's onto 40 footers and drove them back to the base. There was some really old ordnance there. I have pictures of 1954 munitions. Some old 1000lb

block-busters. This was in 1970, my last work day in Vietnam.

The **East LA Revue Internet-Radio station** was started by Steven to help him overcome the effects of PTSD. After years of suffering guilt and other effects of PTSD, he decided that operating a radio station might help him self-medicate those effects. After years of being a valuable contributor to his community and with listeners around the world, he feels much better now.



Click on the above picture to go directly to East L.A. Revue Website

As a fully independent and privately funded entity that has developed a world-wide cult

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audience over the past eleven years and, **East L.A. Revue Radio** enjoys the distinction of playing bi-lingual (English & Spanish) music in different genres spanning the 1940's era to today. It does this by playing music 24 hours a day by several experienced and talented DJ's and it all emanates from the home of Steven Chavez.

The following information comes from the East L.A. Revue Radio website and I thought it was noteworthy for it to be included here.

Music Culture; it is said that a culture is defined by its art and a culture's Art reflects its history for future generations to learn and evolve from. That being said, this site is dedicated to the Art of music that has evolved from a Latino and African American perspective in America. Without being racially hostile or challenging, welcoming all races of all colors to join us in the enjoyment of music from our past that brings us to our present, leading to our future. Since the end of World War II, Latinos have evolved into a musical legacy that has crossed racial, language, and genre barriers to the enjoyment of several generations. Starting with such musical pioneers as Lab Guerrero and Don Tosti of the 1940's, to Rock & Roll legends of the 1950's such as Richie Valens, Chris Montez, Sunny Osuna, Dimas Garza, and the Storytellers, to 1960's Latin Legends as Ralfi Pagan, The Midniters, Cannibal & The Headhunters, Joe Bataan, the Premiers, the Blendells, Max Uballez and the Romancers, to popular 1970's groups such as Santana, Malo, Tierra, Nuestro, Los Lobos, and El Chicano, to the several outstanding cover groups that keep the music alive today.

During the 1960's & 70's, the combination of all the afore mentioned talent has been become known as the Los Angeles "Eastside Sound" promoted by such legendary Los Angeles radio DJ's such as Art La bee, Hunter Hancock, Chico Sesma, Huggy Boy, Wolfman Jack, the Marvelous Montique, Lucky Pierre, and others during the Viet Nam war era, as 3 of the largest U.S. Army, Marine Corps, and Navy bases were located on the West Coast within driving range of Los Angeles, and East Los Angeles became the hub of lowriding, live music & dances, and a sense of "refined cool" for the millions of young men and women coming to the West Coast that chose the Rock & Roll, Soul, and romantic ballads over the frenetic hard rock "hippy" culture of San Francisco at the time.

Although it has grown in popularity across the Country and several other Countries around the

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World due to the advancement of the Internet, for several reasons, much of our music played here has become tagged as "rare" because of the limited production, distribution, and exposure to mainstream entertainment media at the time it was recorded, along with racial barriers that existed at the time. Many of the recording artists have sadly fallen into obscurity.

Therefore, the **East L.A. Revue Internet Radio** stands dedicated, committed, and true to the Eastside Sound for your continued enjoyment. We are keeping it alive, like nobody else can!

MORE OF STEVEN'S PHOTOS



Steven, second from left, on a C-141 with an ORI Team at Cherry Point, NC. This was his last assignment in 2001.



Steven, third from the left, on a C-141 with safety personnel.



Osan, Korea. 1980s (Steven has his hand up with five fingers and mustache) front left.



Steven, on right, with his friend Eddie who served with the US Army as a door gunner for 120 combat mission.

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**FAITH, FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND COUNTRY ARE CORE VALUES THAT
STEVEN LIVES BY EVERYDAY!**

Rode the mail plane all the way to Vietnam

by William Stranahan

In May of 1966 the commercial pilots were on strike and you couldn't get a seat on a plane anywhere. I lived in a small town called Cortland in Ohio near Youngstown and I found out the Air Force was moving Vietnam bound troops in the states because commercial flight were not available. The only way you could travel was if you had orders in hand to go to Vietnam.

I took a flight from Youngstown AFB, Ohio to McGuire AFB, New Jersey where I had a port call. On checking in for my flight to Vietnam I was told I was late (like most were) so my plane had left so I had to go on the space 'A' list and later they put some of us on a mail plane. Turned out to be a C-135 full of mail bags, one of which was to be my seat for the duration of the flight. Another passenger on the plane was a second lieutenant who was with the 101st Airborne Division.



Our first stop was Hawaii after leaving the mainland where you took turns getting off the plane to find food. The pilot let us in the cockpit to see Hawaii from high up. I took a picture from the cockpit as we were flying over the Hawaiian Islands and here is that photograph.

Next stop Okinawa and there was no food supplied on this plane and our next stop was Saigon. I don't know about the rest of you but when I stood in the door of our plane the heat and that smell (like puke) what a start for my Vietnam tour. I said good luck and good bye to the Lieutenant who had to find out where to catch a ride to Phan Rang. I was told when the next

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plane was going to Phan Rang, so I just hung around waiting for it, and thank goodness it wasn't a mail plane.

AUSSIE TRADITIONS CONTINUE

The Australian War Memorial, located in Australia's capital city, Canberra, is Australia's national memorial to the members of its armed forces who have died or participated in wars involving this nation. Every day, a Last Post Ceremony is held at the Memorial close to sunset, at a set time of 4.45pm local, during which the story of one deceased veteran (whose name is listed in a roll of honour along the walls of the Memorial) is read out, usually by a serving military person.

The ceremony begins with the Australian national anthem followed by the piper's lament. Visitors are invited to lay wreaths and floral tributes beside the Pool of Reflection in the Commemorative Courtyard. An individual's story is told, and the ode is recited by Australian Defence Force personnel. The ceremony ends with the sounding of the last post. The public are permitted to attend this event as well as relatives of the deceased person.

On Monday 21 November, **Bob Howe** laid a wreath at the Last Post Ceremony which was in honour of Warrant Officer **Lloyd George McKenzie** who was killed in 1944 while flying as a bomb-aimer in a Lancaster bomber from Number 456 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force. He was flying out of Waddington in Lincolnshire, UK. Coincidentally, Bob was a bomb-aimer also, flying in the Canberra jet bomber (named after Australia's capital city) that served with Number 2 Squadron in Vietnam.

Picture from the ceremony and the entire ceremony can be seen on the web via

www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/last-post-ceremony



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The Ode comes from For the Fallen, a poem by the English poet and writer Laurence Binyon and was published in London in the *Winnowing Fan; Poems of the Great War* in 1914. The verse, which became the League Ode, was already used in association with commemoration services in Australia in 1921. "They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;

They Shall Not Grow Old

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning

We will remember them.

For the Fallen By Laurence Binyon

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Bob Howe about to lay his wreath at the War Memorial in Canberra.

Doug's Comments:



I hope that you enjoyed this newsletter. If you have a story to tell, please write it down and send to me so that your unique experiences can be saved for posterity. I've heard some say “All of a sudden I feel a need to reconnect to a significant part of my life” and I hope that this newsletter helps fulfill that need. This newsletter was composed by Douglas Severt and all graphics by Douglas Severt. 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.