Phan Rang AB Newsletter
The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.
"Keeping the memories alive" Newsletter 241

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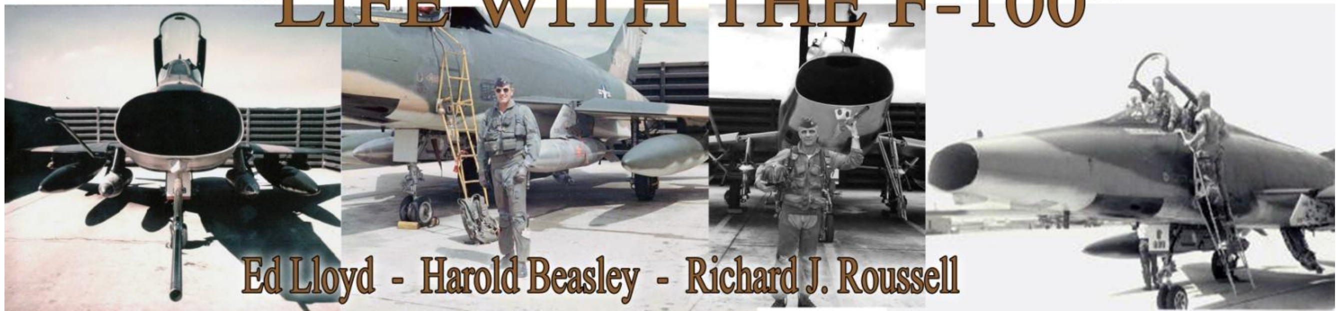


Ed Loyd

Attached is one of the best photos I took of the F100D I was flying in Vietnam. The tail # was

56-2989. In this photo, it has unfinned nape and 500# hi-drags loaded.

Sometime after this was taken the aircraft developed a wing crack in the lower surface wing skin. An engineer assessed the problem and we took the inboard pylons off and fabricated a 0.5-inch X 6-inch band of steel that was attached from one pylon fitting across under the fuselage to the other inboard pylon. This was to provide enough

residual strength to fly it that way. I ferried the airplane from Vietnam to the Philippines and on to Taiwan in that configuration. The IRAN (Inspect and Replace as Necessary) facility replaced the entire wing and 989 went back into combat with the 35th Wing, Phan Rang, RVN.

This A/C, 56-2989, was assigned to the 35th TFW, 614th TFS, (Lucky Devils) Phan Rang, RVN the whole year I was there from 3 May '67 to 3 May '68. I flew a total of 320 missions in the F100D that year and totaled 505 hours combat. All missions were air to ground and all were in country except one mission and that was in Laos during TET '68.

I don't know the prior history of the aircraft or where it went from Vietnam. I did not fly the F-100 after Vietnam. Here's a photo of me [Ed Lloyd] deplaning on mission #320 from ole '989 on 1 May, 1968. I departed Vietnam on 3 May, 1968.

Note: Additional reading material for Ed Lloyd can be found in Phan Rang Newsletter 334.

Harold Beasley

This photo of me in front of 56-3073 was taken sometime in 1967-68 at Phan Rang, South Vietnam. The cockpit frame has the name of Capt. Garrett on it -- we flew whatever plane was assigned to us, so the cockpit frame name and the pilot flying the airplane didn't necessarily

match.

Almost all my combat missions were flown in South Vietnam. But I do remember one mission somewhere into Laos -- I don't really know where, because we scrambled from an alert to hit a target marked by a FAC (Forward Air Controller). Our FAC was an O-2. When we got to the target area, we were holding at 10,000 feet, looking for the O-2, who was also holding at that altitude to keep away from intense ground fire. (We didn't know that at the time!) Anyway, we finally spotted the O-2 when we just about ran over him.

When the FAC marked the target, our flight of two rolled in to hit the target with hi-drags-- only to encounter the most intense ground fire you can imagine. I hadn't seen that much fire since Korea. But we dropped our load without getting hit -- I still don't see how that was possible.

Incidentally, each one of our four squadrons always had two aircraft on alert. Although an alert assignment wasn’t much fun, it did allow us to scramble quickly and fly missions that required our immediate presence.

(**Note**: Harold Beasley was the Squadron Commander, 352TFS/35TFW, Phan Rang, South

Vietnam, from 4 August, 1967 to sometime in April, 1968. Additional reading material about Harold Beasley can be found in Phan Rang Newsletter 174.)

Richard J. Roussel

Major Roussell’s story: During 1970 I flew with the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing, 416th Tactical Fighter Squadron, based at Tuy Hoa AB, Vietnam. (I was the operations officer of the 416th.) I was transferred to Phan Rang and became the Operations Officer of the 615th Squadron there. When the Commander finished his tour, I became the Commander. That was all done in 1970. I would have stayed at Tuy Hoa the entire time except that the powers that be decided to donate our nice clean little base (Tuy Hoa) to the VNAF (Viet Namese Air Force.)

This picture was taken at Phan Rang after one of the 309 total combat missions that I flew in 1970, combining the assignments at Tuy Hoa and Phan Rang. During those two assignments, I was awarded one Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) and the Air Medal with 12 Oak Leaf clusters. I earned the DFC after being declared “top gun” on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, where I attacked a road (actually, an elaborate trail system) that was being repaired by a large group of North Vietnamese road crewmembers. The road had been destroyed the night before by B-52s. (Note: This mission was flown out of Tuy Hoa. The picture was taken later, after Major Roussell’s assignment to Phan Rang. It was used in a story published by the Stars and Stripes

paper of the Far East.)

Note: Dick Roussell flew with the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing, 416th Tactical Fighter Squadron, based at Tuy Hoa AB, Vietnam during 1969-1970. (At Phan Rang, he flew with the 35th TFW, 615th TFS.)

Richard Roussell in the news:

Steven Point Daily Journal, 30 Jun, 1959, Stevens Point, Wisconsin

Capt. Richard Roussell of Lockport, La., was an eyewitness to a pilotless U.S. Air Force jet fighter that hurled into the corner of an Okinawa schoolhouse Jun 30, 1959 in Naha Okinawa, then sprayed fiery fragments over a residential area.

It was one of the worst military disasters since World War II on Okinawa, biggest U.S. base in the Far East.

An explosion occurred aboard the F100 Super Sabre jet soon after it took off from Kadena Air Base. The pilot Capt. John G. Schmitt Jr. of Chalmers, Ind. parachuted to safety.

Capt. Roussell said the empty plane headed for an uninhabited hill, veered sharply and finally crashed into a shower of flaming metal killing 21.

Jay Riedel - 615th TFS Super Sabre Pilot

Jay E. Riedel was born 19 November 1939 in Freeport, Long Island, New York and graduated from Ithaca High School, Ithaca, New York in June 1957. He received his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Mathematics from the University of Buffalo, Buffalo, New York, and his commission as a Second Lieutenant through AFROTC in July 1961. He also received a Masters Degree in Business Management from Auburn University,

Montgomery, Alabama, in July 1974.

Second Lieutenant Riedel entered the Air Force in March 1962 after spending eight months as a scientific computer programmer at Bell Aerosystems, Niagara Falls, New York, while waiting for his pilot training class to begin. He completed pilot training in March 1963 at Reese Air Force Base (AFB), Texas. He was assigned to KC-135 tankers in Strategic Air Command at Loring AFB, Maine, in August 1963 and served as co-pilot, Standardization/Evaluation Co-pilot, and aircraft commander until October 1968.

After volunteering for "F-anything" (any fighter) in 1966, Captain Riedel received an assignment to F-100 school at Luke AFB, Arizona in October 1968 and was assigned to the 510th Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS), Bien Hoa Air Base, Republic of Vietnam in August 1969. When the 510th TFS deactivated in October 1969, Capt Riedel was reassigned to the 615th TFS, Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam, and served as an F-100 instructor pilot until July 1970.

Capt Riedel returned from Vietnam in July 1970 and was assigned to the first United States Air Force A-7D squadron that was being activated at Myrtle Beach AFB, South Carolina-the 511th TFS that soon thereafter became the 353rd TFS. During this period, Capt Riedel was an assistant flight commander, flight commander, squadron scheduling officer, mobility officer, and instructor pilot. In October 1972, Capt Riedel deployed with the 354th Tactical Fighter Wing to Korat Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand, with the first Air Force A-7D's in Southeast Asia, and he took part in the "Eleven Day War" of Linebacker II (19-29 December 1972) for the final bombing of North Vietnam. During this period, Capt Riedel also participated in the new Search and Rescue mission of the A-7D and returned to Myrtle Beach in January 1973 to be Chief of Wing Training.

In July 1973, Maj Riedel was assigned to the Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, and graduated in July 1974. He was assigned as Chief, A-7D Operations Test and Evaluation in the 422nd Fighter Weapons Squadron, Nellis AFB, Nevada, until the A-7's were phased out of Nellis in August 1975.

Maj. Riedel was transferred to Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona, in August 1975 and served as a formal course A-7D instructor pilot, and Assistant Operations Officer of the 354th and 357th

TFS's; Operations Officer of the 358th TFS; and Chief of Safety, Tactical Training Davis-Monthan until October 1978.

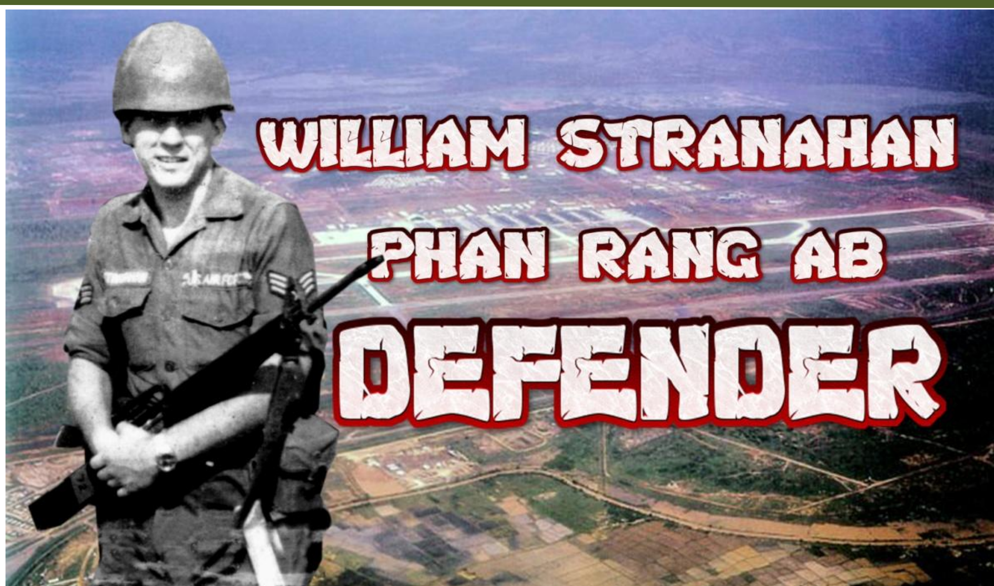
Lt Col Riedel received an F-4D checkout at McDill AFB, Florida, from October 1978 to January 1979, and then was assigned to the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing "Wolf Pack", Kunsan Air Base, Korea, in February 1979. He became the Operations Officer, then Commander, of the famed 80th TFS "Headhunters" until February 1980.

Upon leaving Korea, Lt Col Riedel was assigned as Chief, Operations Requirements Division at Headquarters Pacific Air Forces, Hawaii, in March 1980; and Deputy Director of Support Operations in March 1981.

In March 1983 he was assigned to the 474th Tactical Fighter Wing, Nellis AFB, Nevada, as Chief, Operations Plans Division and, upon promotion to colonel, Wing Chief of Staff. Col Riedel was assigned to Ft Benning, Georgia, as the Senior Air Force Representative to the US Army Infantry in August 1985.

Colonel Riedel retired 1 April 1992 after 30 years of active service to his Country.

His decorations include the Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross (V) with oak leaf cluster, Meritorious Service Medal with four oak leaf clusters, Air Medal with thirteen oak leaf clusters, Combat Readiness Medal with three oak leaf clusters, National Defense Service Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, and the Vietnam Service Medal with seven service stars. A command pilot, he has logged more than 4000 flying hours in the F-4D, A-7D, F-100, KC-135, AT-33, T-33, T-37 with "stick time" in the F-16. He has also logged more than 500 combat flying hours and 323 missions in three different aircraft in Southeast Asia between 1964 and 1973.



After the long flight on the mail plane I finally arrived on the base, I hitched a bus ride to the headquarters and was assigned to a hootch.

After getting settled in I made my way to the Airman's Club the selection of beer was terrible and it doesn't get better for a long time. In the morning I was taken to the mess hall were you're given a mess kit to eat your food from, The main selection was Powered eggs, with no condiments to add, this was just about what was on the menu for the year. For about 2-3 months you cleaned your mess kit in a barrel of hot dirty water, there was nothing else.

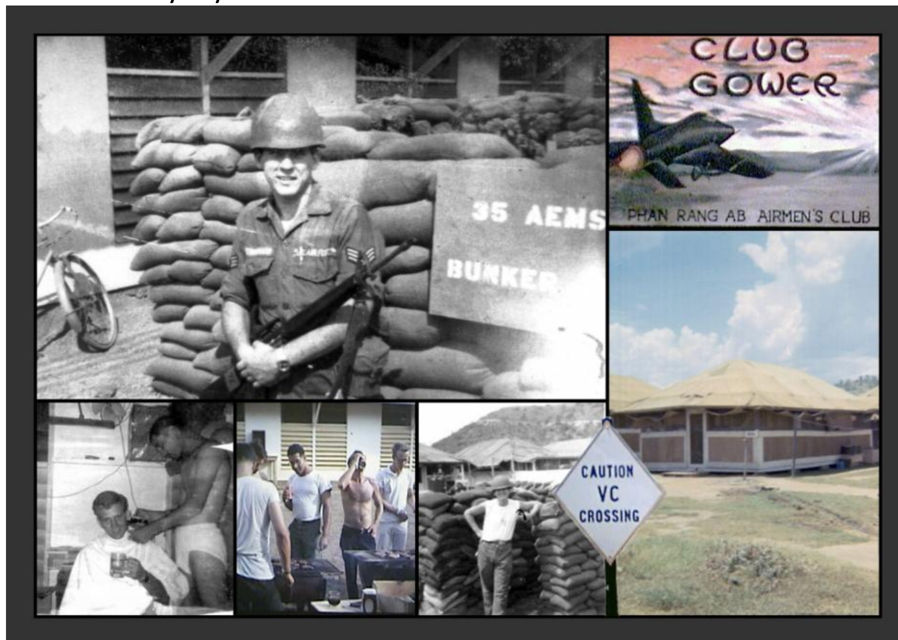
We did get locals to do these jobs and others after they were vetted. You would then take a bus to the maintenance shop for the day. It was about 8 months before we were moved to barracks. We got to fill sand bags for the tents; A lot of the AP'S rotated all at once so we had to take their place on guard duty and I was always stationed on the outer perimeter.

The locals used the river for swimming, washing clothes and everything you would use water for. After about 10 months our commander had a party for us of grilled steaks. What a treat! All of our pictures ended up being taken from Polaroid instant cameras because we didn't have any luck getting our 35mm pictures developed. They finally opened a Hamburger stand and on the weekends in our area but you could only get two at a time. Our club was placed on reduced operating hours so we sent for a fridge from Post Exchange in Japan for the barracks, so we

could go back to the barracks and still have cold refreshments.

When we first arrived we were responsible for cleaning our clothes and this was a very difficult task. The Base Exchange didn’t have much or any in the line of laundry detergents because we were a new base. If you found a bar of soap it was a good thing. We washed our clothes in the shower while showering because there was no other way to do it. In 1967 they finally opened the Beach which was nice. We also had one guy that could cut hair.

There was one night we had some Viet Cong sappers brake in, but they didn’t do any damage so the imaginative engineers installed a sign that said **“caution VC crossing**” the bosses didn’t care for it and it didn’t stay up very long. There were good days and bad days but you just did your job and marked another day off your calendar. Supplies didn’t come to Phan Rang directly so sometimes it took a while to get parts and other supplies for the planes. We had to cannibalize a lot, which means that you remove a part from a plane that just landed to replace a broken one that was awaiting parts to be flyable. My last station was McClellan AFB in Sacramento, California for one year then I was separated from the Air Force and left for Ohio I made a lot of friends in my 4 years.



Top row: Going on guard duty, “Club Gower” Airman’s Club Sign. Bottom row: William getting a haircut in the hooch, barracks party in 1967, William going to fill sand bags for the barracks bunkers, VC Sign and our hootch in 1967.

Forward Air Controller Took Death-Defying Risks To Aid Special Forces

The pilot in this O-2 has identified his target and fired a white phosphorus rocket to guide arriving gunships in 1969 near Phan Rang, South Vietnam.

Mark Carlson
June 2021

During the Vietnam War, the skies were filled with fast jet fighters, huge bombers, droning transports and thudding helicopters. They were hard to miss. Other aircraft, less noticed but no less important, provided neither guns, nor bombs or transportation but something that was just as crucial to men fighting the ground war—a pair of eyes in the sky. These planes, piloted by forward air controllers, flew above the battlefield looking for enemy forces and then directed bombers or fighters to strike them.

The Vietnam War’s FACs were the legacy of a concept that originated during the Civil War. In 1862, the Union Army used hydrogen-filled balloons to scout and report the positions of Confederate troops and artillery on the York-James Peninsula in Virginia. Aerial observers were also in the open cockpits of wood-and-fabric biplanes over the Western Front during World War I, taking note of enemy troop movements, artillery emplacements and other useful details.

Since then aerial observers have had a nearly unbroken history in warfare stretching through World War II, Korea and Vietnam—on into the 21st century. Tiny, slow and fragile airplanes

carrying a single aviator who could assess an evolving ground battle and decide what air action to take became essential elements in modern warfare, even in the age of the jet.

Hundreds of FACs in the Air Force, Navy, Army and Marines provided vital assistance in Vietnam. They were the link between friendly ground units and the "fast movers," the tactical air fighters. If a Marine, Special Forces or other Army unit needed help from the skies, the FAC climbed into his little Cessna O-2A Skymaster observation plane and flew into so-called "Indian Country." As he drew closer, the pilot established radio communication with the ground unit to learn where the enemy was and more important, where the friendlies were.

The FAC, on call at any time and place, had no real weapons, other than his sidearm. His most important tools were three radios and a load of 10 white phosphorus rockets used to mark enemy targets for American planes coming in with bombs. The radios—set to communicate with the air base, ground forces and strike aircraft— could only be used one at a time. Fast reactions were required to flip from one radio to another while calling in airstrikes and keeping both the air base and ground units informed. An FAC had authority to request airstrikes on the enemy. If ground units were in danger of being overrun, he could even divert aircraft involved in other operations.

The Cessna O-1 Bird Dog was the first plane flown by forward air controllers of the 20th TASS./U.S. Air Force

Keen eyes, a steady hand on the controls and a quick mind were essential to assessing an evolving situation. Those were the qualities that earned Air Force Capt. **John P. Calamos** a

reputation as one of the top forward air controllers of the war. Serving with the 20th Tactical Air Support Squadron at Da Nang Air Base, he flew some 400 flights as an FAC and logged more than 1,000 hours in the air. One harrowing night over Thuong Duc Special Forces base in September 1968 assured his place in the history of the Vietnam War.

Calamos, the son of Greek immigrants, was born in Chicago and had "only flown once or twice" growing up, he said. "The idea of someday flying jets in formation seemed like a pretty good accomplishment."

He enrolled in the Air Force ROTC at the Illinois Institute of Technology and earned his commission in 1963. Calamos went on active duty in 1965 and got his pilot training at Webb Air Force Base in Texas. "I had aimed to be a fighter pilot, but was assigned to fly B-52s," he said. His wing was stationed at Beale Air Force Base in California.

Calamos did not get to spend much time in the big B-52 Stratofortress. "I was ordered to go to Vietnam as a forward air controller," he said. After going through FAC training in Florida, he arrived at South Vietnam's Da Nang Air Base in May 1968. "It was quite a shock to go from the biggest bomber in the Air Force to the little Cessna 0-2A," Calamos said.

The Air Force set up operations at Da Nang Air Base in 1962 to support U.S. military forces and South Vietnam's army. Originally used for troop transport aircraft, the Da Nang facility had expanded by 1965 into one of the largest combined air bases in the Far East. Dozens of Air Force, Army and Marine transport, tactical bomber, reconnaissance, attack and tactical fighter units were stationed there.

On May 8, 1965, Da Nang became home to a new unit, the 20th Tactical Air Support Squadron. Originally slated to receive 30 aircraft, the 20th TAAS spent most of the summer of 1965 with fewer than 20 Cessna O-1 "Bird Dog" observation planes because of slow aircraft deliveries by the Army.

After the pilots assigned to the squadron completed a series of familiarization flights, they were given various duties in the region.

One of the assignments was to fly interdiction missions to spot enemy troop movements, call in airstrikes and support air rescue operations over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, an operation designated Tiger Hound. At least three forward operations bases—Khe Sanh, Kham Duc and Kontum—were established to support the FAC mission.

In July 1966 the 20th TASS was assigned to what were called Tally Ho interdiction missions in the Operation Steel Tiger area of Laos, extending 30 miles north of the Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Vietnam.

Calamos, who flew B-52s with the 23rd Bombardment Squadron in the U.S., receives an Air Medal. / U.S. Air Force

By the time Calamos arrived at Da Nang in May 1968, the 20th TASS had abandoned the O-1 Bird Dog, whose origins went back to 1947, and was flying the more capable Cessna 0-2A, a military variant of the civilian Model 337 Skymaster. In late 1966, the 20th TASS was the first squadron to receive these planes. The Air Force contracted for 350 0-2A Skymasters in all.

Nicknamed the “Oscar Deuce,” the O-2A had twin engines with a propeller on the nose and one at the rear, known as a tractor-pusher configuration, under a high wing between twin tail booms. With large, slanted windows providing excellent visibility, the 0-2A was perfect for the FAC role, yet provided nothing in the way of pilot protection.

The O-2A’s most valuable asset was its excellent range. At a cruising speed of about 140 to 160 mph, the Cessna could fly more than a thousand miles. It was retired when the more advanced North American-Rockwell OV-10 Bronco light attack and observation plane entered service in 1969.

The O-2A, with its low cruising speed, could “loiter” over and around a relatively small battle area, which helped the pilot stay abreast of the situation on the ground. McDonnell F-4 Phantom II fighter-bombers and North American F-100 Super Sabre fighters moved far too fast for accurate bombing when there was less than a few hundred yards between enemy and

friendly forces. Pinpoint precision was paramount in airstrikes when American and allied forces were close by.

“The FACs orbited the area, controlling the airstrikes by firing white phosphorus rockets to mark the target,” Calamos said. “We knew where the friendly and enemy ground units were. That’s what the rockets were for. The jet fighters could not drop unless we told them that they were ‘cleared in hot,’” meaning the target was clear of friendlies and could be hit. The FACs told the attack aircraft what the target was and which direction to approach from.

Downed airmen and friendly infantry carried various colors of smoke flares that enabled the FACs to locate them under dense forest canopy. However, the North Vietnamese Army used flares too, in an effort to confuse the American forces.

Calamos had once received a call from an infantry unit that was under attack by NVA troops deep within a forest. “I was on the radio with the jets and the guys on the ground,” he recalled. “I needed to pinpoint where they were, and the guy says, ‘I’ll send up some red smoke.’ Suddenly there were two red smokes coming up from the woods. That meant the enemy was listening in and using [red] flares to make it hard for any rescue attempt. So then the guy says, ‘I’ll send up green smoke!’ Then I saw two separate green smokes.”

Calamos knew the North Vietnamese soldiers were copying the flare color. On the ground, the American infantry figured that out too and tried something else. “While this was happening the jets orbited nearby, waiting for their cue,” Calamos continued. “Then the guy radios, ‘Sending up yellow smoke!’ And only one yellow smoke comes up. At that point the infantry guy said: ‘I don’t have yellow smoke! Get them!’ Then I radio ‘Cleared in hot! Target is the yellow smoke!’”

FACs orbited within sight of the target while the jets moved in and dropped their ordnance. One at a time the bombs went off, obliterating the FAC’s view of the impact zone, but when the smoke cleared, he had to decide whether to call in another bomb run. Often many bomb runs were required to finish the job against tenacious North Vietnamese troops.

The low altitudes and loitering that were necessary in their work put the FACs in almost constant danger of being shot down and captured. “We tried to stay clear of groundfire,” Calamos said, “remaining above fifteen hundred feet and not flying straight and level for too long. There was often a lot of groundfire, even small arms stuff. When we fired the rockets we had to descend to make sure we hit our target, but right after that it was back to fifteen hundred feet again.”

By 1968 the FACs were performing a variety of vital air support roles, almost always alone. They collected intelligence on NVA movements, weapons and strength, and acted as communications links between ground and air units.

When Calamos was flying FAC missions in the fall of 1968, the Special Forces camp at Thuong Duc, established in late 1965, was one of the many Green Beret fortifications the U.S. military had constructed in South Vietnam near the Laotian border to monitor NVA activity in the region. They were manned by A-Teams of the 5th Special Forces Group and paramilitary units from the region's Montagnard tribes, one of South Vietnam's ethnic minorities.

Camp A-109 at Thuong Duc was in a river valley about 25 miles southwest of Da Nang. The Special Forces team occupied the camp's center compound, connected by a complex network of communications and land routes to an outer ring of Montagnard camps and outposts. The camp was well-positioned along two ridges with a commanding view of the river valley below. The nearby Da Nang Air Base added to its tactical importance. The camp also was on one of the major routes used by the NVA for attacks on U.S. installations in the region. The North Vietnamese were determined to eliminate it at any cost.

Even though Special Forces camps had mortar and artillery crews, they relied heavily on what is now called "close air support" and during the war was dubbed "calling in the whole world." The FAC's job was to identify the enemy and bring whatever aircraft were needed to counter the threat. "There were about six of us at Da Nang," Calamos said. "We were assigned sectors around Quang Nam [province], which included the Thuong Duc camp."

In September 1968, NVA forces began preparing a major assault on Da Nang—and the first place on their hit list was the Thuong Duc camp. Two regiments of NVA infantry, about 3,000 troops in all, stealthily moved mortars and artillery to surround the camp and its outposts on three sides. The assault began 2 a.m. on Sept. 28 when elements of the NVA 21st and 141st regiments attacked and overran outposts Alpha and Bravo, around 600 yards from the camp perimeter. The Special Forces troops and Montagnards led successful but bloody counterattacks to retake vital outposts.

The NVA increased the pressure throughout the day with mortar and artillery attacks on local villages to establish more concentrated fire on the camp. This vicious tactic cleared an area so NVA could move its short-range mortars closer to the camp. The Special Forces and Montagnards continued to repel the attacks as night fell.

That was when Calamos, call sign "Lopez 58," was sent to relieve the FAC who had directed airstrikes during the day. By this time the enemy had lost the initiative but still pushed hard to break through the American perimeter.

In the darkness of night, Calamos, in his little "Oscar Deuce," watched the ground for flashes of gunfire, tracers and explosions. "I had tracers coming up at me," he said. "I could not see the enemy troops, but I knew where they were from the groundfire."

The opposing forces were just 200 feet apart, according to Calamos, who was getting his information from the Green Berets. “The bad guys were too close for the jets to hit with any precision,” he said. “The night made it even more risky.” More light was needed. He called in flare planes, which dropped a steady stream of parachute flares to illuminate the battlefield in an eerie stark white light.

Calamos asked the base at Da Nang, which had been launching airstrikes during the day, to send in more jets loaded with ordnance. Phantoms and Super Sabres streaked in low and disgorged cluster munitions and general-purpose bombs. Calamos assessed the damage and effectiveness of each strike. The bombs detonated in bright yellow and white flashes that left spots in his eyes.

Small fires flared, adding to the macabre night landscape and revealing an inferno of bodies and weapons. Yet the remnants of the two NVA regiments refused to give up. They continually probed to find a weak spot in the American and Montagnard perimeter.

Calamos spotted those attacks. More white rockets streaked down as his call of, “Cleared in hot!” came over radio frequencies. The FAC called for a second full strike on the determined enemy.

“The weather was poor, and it sometimes interfered with my being able to see what was happening,” he said. “The second strike came in and hit right where I had put my rockets.”

Calamos’ call brought in one of the truly remarkable aircraft of the Vietnam War.

A Spooky gunship of the 4th Air Commando Squadron deploys on another mission. A crewman stands at the rear cargo door of the aircraft, nicknamed “Puff the Magic Dragon.” U.S. Air Force

Nicknamed with typical American humor as “Spooky” and “Puff the Magic Dragon,” the Douglas AC-47 was the ultimate gunship at that time. This converted C-47 transport plane carried three 7.62 mm General Electric rotary miniguns mounted in the left side cargo door and two windows. Each gun had six rotating barrels, like a Gatling gun, and fired 2,000 to 6,000 rounds per minute from a 5,000-round belt. The AC-47 often hauled a combat load of 24,000 rounds.

Spooky’s pilot controlled the guns as he peered through crosshairs on his left-side window. The plane circled in what is known as a counterclockwise “pylon turn,” in which the pilot was able to keep the stream of hot lead aimed in a cone of fire at an area about the size of a football field. Groundfire and mortar explosions gave the pilot a clear aiming point. At night the tracers looked like orange laser beams, making aim easier. The steady stream of bullets literally tore through the foliage, leaving death and carnage wherever it touched. That concentrated firepower inflicted heavy casualties on the NVA troops the night of Sept. 28.

After four solid hours of orbiting over the battle at Thuong Duc and calling in every aircraft that could be of help, Calamos was relieved at 2 a.m. on Sept. 29 and flew back to Da Nang. The Special Forces camp was later secured and the NVA driven away. It had been a long and bloody fight. At least 68 NVA were killed in direct assaults on the camp, while hundreds more were killed in the airstrikes. U.S. and friendly casualties were light, although exact figures are unavailable.

The FACs working with Air Force and Marine aircraft played a major role in protecting the Thuong Duc camp and surrounding area from an NVA assault that threatened to overrun the American and Montagnard forces.

Calamos’ outstanding work over the battlefield earned him the Distinguished Flying Cross, awarded to personnel in all branches of the armed forces who display “heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight.”

“I flew over 1,000 hours during my tour in Vietnam,” Calamos said, and “833 of those hours were in combat.”

After rotating back to the States in May 1969, Calamos returned to B-52 bombers, based at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota. He spent five years on active duty and 12 more in the Reserves flying Cessna A-37 attack planes. One can’t help but wonder what the Air Force had in mind when it took Calamos from B-52s and made him an FAC in the O-2A Cessna, then put him back in the Stratofortress. Regardless, the Special Forces soldiers who served at the Thuong Duc camp are very glad the Air Force did that.

This article appeared in the June 2021 issue of Vietnam magazine.

The Australian Army's Experience in the Vietnam War

Beware the Sting in the Tail

by Roger Lambert

Platoon Commander, 9 Platoon, C Coy, 5 RAR, 1969/70

South-East Asia is renowned for having some of the most diverse varieties of wildlife and creepy-crawlies on the planet. During an operation in 1969, I had a very personal and unpleasant encounter with one of the local beasties.

Having received fresh orders from the OC, Major Claude Ducker MC, I called my Platoon Sergeant, Peter Knight, and Section Commanders in for an O Group to brief them on the changing plans. I lay out my map on the ground and placed my M16 rifle alongside it.

At the conclusion of my orders, the Section Commanders went off to brief their troops before we 'saddled up' to recommence our patrolling. I folded my map and placed it in my trouser side pocket. As I picked up my rifle, I felt a sharp sting on my index finger. Looking down, I was greeted by the sight of a scorpion near the trigger guard.

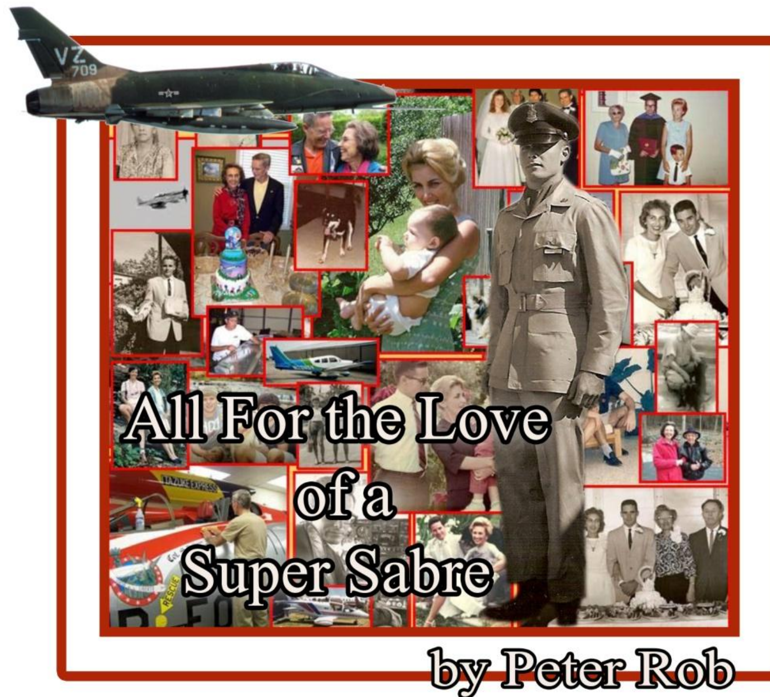
Now this thing was smaller than my little finger but boy, did he/she pack a wallop! Within seconds, my finger went numb followed by my hand. The pain was excruciating. The numbness soon extended up my forearm until my entire right arm was deadened.

Great! I’m right-handed, my trigger finger and right arm were useless and we’re in a combat zone! Thank goodness that we didn’t have any enemy contacts over the next few hours as that’s how long it took for the effects of the scorpion sting to wear off.

After this incident, I made doubly sure that there were no nasty critters within cooee of any of my kit.

All For the Love of a Super Sabre

by Peter Rob



Introduction: Peter Rob’s life story is unlike that of the average Air Force pilot, except he

never was an Air Force pilot. His early life saw more adversity and challenges than the average citizen but he overcame so many obstacles and achieved so much and by any measure he was very successful except he never got to fly the F-100. His dream was to be an Air Force Pilot, but he couldn't get a vision waiver. He completed four years of Air Force ROTC, but then the Air Force wouldn't commission him because he wasn't a U.S. citizen. He went on to earn his PhD. and because a college professor and also earned his Airline Transport Pilot License. He taught statistics, database systems design and wrote 28 books, many technical manuals and articles and did a lot of consulting work. He finally got to fly jets, just not his first aviation love, the F-100, when he became a charter pilot and relief business pilot during vacations, weekends and nights. This brief introduction only is the tip of the iceberg of Pete's amazing journey through life and I hope that you enjoy reading about his journey as much as I have.

"My affair with the F-100 began in Europe"

My affair with the F-100 began in Europe. I saw my first one, an F-100C, at Soesterberg AB, Netherlands, in 1956 and it just clicked. It's a gorgeous airplane and it projects power, as a great fighter/bomber should. In addition, the first of the Century Series set the stage for supersonic flight by breaking down a significant number of technological barriers. Therefore, the F-100 is an aircraft that deserves special attention.

Naturally, I believe that the people who flew and maintained her deserve much more credit than they have received thus far. But I have a more personal reason for my love affair with the F-100. I'll make the story short – no story can compete with the F-100 anyway. So here it goes.

"My road to the U.S. was long and winding"

My road to the U.S. was long and winding. I've had family members living in the Dutch East Indies as early as my grandfather. My father, who was a concert pianist in the Netherlands, moved there in 1937 to make a better living and later earning a degree in tropical agriculture. My mother was a surgical nurse who moved there to be with my father. We were in the Dutch East Indies -- now Indonesia -- when the Japanese invaded. We were in Japanese concentration camps from 1943-45, then to a refugee camp after liberation. Repatriated to the Netherlands in early 1946, the Red Cross helped us find my Dad late in 1946.

There are many gaps in my life’s story due to a lack of reliable documentation. For example, WW II and the post-war conflicts that yielded the transformation from “Dutch East Indies” to “Indonesia” destroyed much of whatever family memorabilia might have existed. Naturally, there are no photographs that record the 1942-45 Japanese concentration camp years and the post-war refugee camp period.

The “concentration camp” as it was used at the time of its existence and during most of the post-WWII decades. Horrendous as the Japanese concentration camps were, they did not come close to matching the horrors produced in the Nazi concentration camps, which are more accurately described as “death camps” or “extermination camps”.

Fortunately, there were a few magically-preserved bits of documentation, such as my mother’s letter to me, written in 1941, to be opened by me at age 18. That letter turned out to be one of my autobiographical goldmines. How that letter and other documentation such as a few family photos and my mother’s commendation letters survived the war years can only be described as the lowest of low-probability events. Such “finds” enabled me to reconstruct some of the early parts of my life’s story that otherwise would have been out of reach. A few photos taken during the 1948-1953 years also survived against all odds, so they served to anchor some of that period’s events.

We returned to Indonesia in early 1948, only to stumble right into the so-called war of liberation. Then the communists tried to take over -- and (thankfully) failed. What a mess. Combat at an early age, and then back to the Netherlands in 1954 to go to school.

My 1953-1954 “Dutch period” still triggers flashes of anger -- the events that took place during that time could easily have destroyed any hope for a successful future. (Perhaps that’s why my mind protected itself with a ration of memory lapses.) In any case, the lack of documentation available for that unpleasant 1953-1954 period made it impossible to reconstruct a coherent whole. Fortunately, my life recovered its balance after 1954 -- and the rest of my life followed a (much-appreciated!) path that yielded many gladly-recalled great memories.

I felt the need to limit the depth of coverage of some events in my autobiography that may be

(euphemistically) described as painful. For example, I decided to limit coverage of some of the most unpleasant details of life in the various Japanese concentration camps that we were placed in during 1942-45. Post-war refugee camp life and the 1946-1947 years in the Netherlands were also treated gingerly in. Similarly, the horrendous events that took place in our part of Indonesia during the early 1950s received less coverage than they surely warranted. Yet in spite of my attempt to tread lightly, reliving this part of my personal history brought sufficient detail to the surface to produce a more-than-adequate supply of sleepless nights.

"What a great way to discover the USAF."

Passing through the Suez Canal in '54, we were buzzed by British Vampire jets, thus triggering my instant love affair with jets. Better yet, while entering the harbor in Naples, Italy, the USAF gave us an impromptu air show with a series of high-speed F-84 passes. What a great way to discover the USAF.

After my arrival in the Netherlands, it took no time at all to discover that the USAF based various aircraft at Soesterberg AB. I saw my first F-100C there in 1956 and fell in love with it. (An F-100 with the burner on is a symphony and the F-100 is, to me at least, the most beautiful piece of sculpture to ever grace the sky.) Not surprisingly, the hours spent along the Soesterberg AB perimeter, as close as possible to the taxiways, were the highlights of my existence. (When I was particularly lucky, the F-100 pilots spotted me and waved or even saluted as they taxied by ... and I would be ten feet tall. **Those guys were my heroes**.)

Looking and waving were OK … but picture-taking was a no-no along the base perimeter during those Cold War days. One day, the U. S. MPs caught me with my little camera and I really thought my time was up. To my surprise, the MPs put me in their jeep -- they even found room for my bicycle -- and drove through the main entrance to the American side of the base. After I had explained in my best schoolboy English what I wanted, I was taken to a small metal building, where I was given a hamburger and a Coke -- the first I'd ever had. After that royal treatment, I was ready to join the USAF. (Side note: How I wish I could find those MPs now -- they never knew what a miracle they performed. Great people! Of course they were -- they were Americans.)

Becoming an American citizen became a major goal. My parents had already applied for immigration status in 1950. In 1959, my parents and I were given formal permission to enter the U. S. as immigrants. Anne –- my wife-to-be –- and her parents made it to the U. S. in 1960. Anne and I had known each other since 1948, I was in love with her by 1954, we became engaged in late 1960, and we were married on January 30, 1961. My parents and I earned the coveted title "U. S. Citizen" in 1964 and Anne and her parents earned that title in 1965. (Need I add that we discovered that the U. S. was every bit as good as we knew it would be?) Our son Pete, the first American-born member of the family, was born in Texas in 1966. He earned his college degree after serving in the first Iraq war and is a quality assurance engineer for Nissan. Pete married a smart, witty, and gorgeous woman named Sheena in 1991. (Our family decided that she was perfect after Pete’s second date with her …) Pete and Sheena have two sons, both of whom are academically and athletically gifted.

During 1959-1960, I enrolled in Air Force ROTC at the University of Florida -- but I was told that I couldn't get into the senior program because I wasn't a citizen yet. After earning my Citizenship papers, I kept trying to qualify for USAF pilot training. Unfortunately, my eyes kept me out of a fighter cockpit. However, as the Vietnam War heated up, I kept reading about the lack of pilots, so I hoped that they'd waive the 20/20 requirement. They never did. (Anne, my best friend and wife, occasionally reminds me that I just about camped on the recruiting office's doorstep during 1968-70 -- I sure was ready to forget about that Ph.D. degree I was working on in order to fly F-100s.) The miracle never happened, so no F-100 stick time. (OK, I would have settled for an F-105 or an F-4 – but the F-100 was and remains the aircraft on which I lavished most of my aviation affection.)

After earning my Ph.D. degree in early 1970, I became a college professor, teaching (mostly) a variety of statistics courses. Pete also managed to earn a Private Pilot’s license during the summer of 1970. During 1970-71, I earned his commercial pilot's license with instrument and multi-engine ratings and started flying charter part-time. (Academic years are relatively short, so that gave me ample opportunity to fly during the winter and summer breaks. I also flew charter trips during weekends, picking up a lot of night flying experience.)

Charter pilots tend to fly a wide variety of aircraft in all sorts of weather and route conditions. After six years of charter flying, I had the experience required to help me earn the coveted

Airline Transport Pilot's license … which opened up even more part-time flying opportunities. All in all, I flew charter for 16 years all over the U. S. and Canada, picking up a few thousand treasured hours of Pilot in Command time. (There were more than a few occasions when my co-pilot and I would look at each other and ask "can you believe that somebody is actually paying us to do this?" OK, there were some times when weather conditions, equipment glitches, and flight schedules made flying a real challenge -- but overcoming such challenges added to the spice of flying.)

By 1981, my academic horizons had widened considerably. I had learned various programming languages and had written several books and statistical application packages. Given the growing need to devise data storage and management strategies, I expanded my skill set to include database design and application development. During the next period of twenty-plus years, I wound up writing 28 books and manuals. The 7th edition of one of my books, Database Systems: Design, Implementation, and Management, co-authored with Carlos Coronel, a former graduate assistant and a valued friend, is available from Course Technology, a Thomson International company.

Pete bought an airplane in 1990 and sold it in 1996 when he simply didn't have enough time to stay current. (Too much database systems design consulting and book authoring in what laughingly was referred to as my "spare" time.)

"I wanted to pay homage to my favorite airplane"

In spite of all the other activities that occupied my time, I never forgot the Super Sabre, building many models and collecting a substantial library. After retiring from college teaching and research in 2002, I wanted to pay homage to my favorite airplane, to the pilots who were lucky enough – and good enough -- to fly her, and to all the great people who kept her flying.

I was so enthralled with every aspect of the Super Sabre program and those that flew and maintained the aircraft that I built my "museum' a 1,200 square foot building to house my F-100 section as well as the hundreds of F-100 models. My Super Sabre has a complete set of instrument panels. In fact, Pete Felts, who is quite possibly THE HUN Chief Pilot, sat in it and told me that everything absolutely felt right, which was nice to hear especially since I had

painted a lot of the instrument faces in vinyl.

Peter loved the F-100 so much he built a model, just 28 feet of one, which he did over a 9-year period.

(Click here to read more about Pete Rob's Super Sabre addiction)

Robert Browne wrote: I am seeking to find out about the whereabouts of a fellow that served at Phan Rang AB 1967/68. His name was **Ron DeCiccio** or perhaps **De Cecio**. I think his rank was A1C, he was probably an Armament Systems person as I know he loaded bombs. During his tour at PRAB he rotated to Clark AB for a time and then returned.

When at Phan Rang AB, I first met Ron when I was with the RAAF 5 Airfield Construction Squadron, Det. B (with Red Horse) and from May 1967 with RAAF No 2 Squadron. Ron later often visited the RAAF 2 Squadron Koala Bar Airman's Club and he reciprocated by inviting us to

BBQ’s at their barracks. I remember the ice cold beer in a half bomb canister and a second canister used as a BBQ pit with charcoal as fuel. I also remember he was always cheerful, loved telling jokes and we shared a passion for cars and motorbikes. I seem to remember his home town was Woodland Hills California. I visited the US in early 1980’s and tried unsuccessfully to find his contact number.

Regards **Bob Browne** (member of the No 2 Sqn RAAF Association Brisbane Branch)

I also posted this on Facebook and within a very short time and thanks to Tom Barker, John Decillo and Howard Taylor who found Ron in Lakeland, Florida. The following is Bob’s response:

Doug, I can’t thank you enough, this all happened so quickly. You’re a super sleuth of the first order. You can’t possibly know what this means to this aging Aussie and I will certainly let the others in our association know the effort you have put in to track down Tom and Ron. I’m not sure that I remember Tom but after contacting him I’m sure it will come back. I have an email from Ron and will answer it shortly. He gave me a brief rundown on his family and where he lives so I will send him an attached letter telling him something of my (adventurous) life and about my own close family.

Cheers and best regards until we correspond again,
Bob

C-123 crews members ringing in 1969. From the left, Unknown, **Buddy Cox**, **Dean Delongchamp**, unknown, **Bill Tafs**, **Pat Stajdel**, ? Photo by Dean Delongchamp.

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The 2022 Phan Rang AB Reunion is now scheduled for Mobile, Alabama. A great deal of time and effort was put into trying to find a suitable location in Pensacola, with delays because of personnel changes, COVID and the holidays it was decided by the board to move to Mobile after exhausting all options.

Additional reunion information is expected to be announced within the next couple of weeks.

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. Remember if your stories are not written down and published, they will disappear over time. Your stories would be the greatest gift you could give to your children and grandchildren. 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, dougsevert@cox.net and put ‘unsubscribe’ in subject line.