

# Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.  
“Keeping the memories alive” Newsletter 249

---

In this issue:

**Those Magnificent Flying Machines**

**Col. Weart Assigned To New Position In Germany**

**Clearfield Pilot Awarded Medals**

**Close Encounters With a Provider - by Roger Lambert**

**Capt. McGovern Awarded Air Medal At Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam**

**Academy Grads Donate To Vietnam Orphanage**

**366<sup>th</sup> Love Angels**

**Huge Cargo Planes Bring Supplies To Air Guard for New F-100 Jets**

**Men of 389<sup>th</sup> Operate From ‘Bare’ Viet Camp**

**Capt. Kraybill of Pittsfield Heads Medical Team**

**Flight from Hell**

**Serving Our Country**

**Doug’s Comments**

## Those Magnificent Flying Machines



*(Sandusky Sunday Register, June 23, 1991, Sandusky, Ohio)*

**Local builder’s hobby a flying war memorial**

**By KAREN MORK**

**Staff Writer**

**Look — up in the sky! It’s a bird ... it’s a plane .... It’s Ron Stone again.**

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

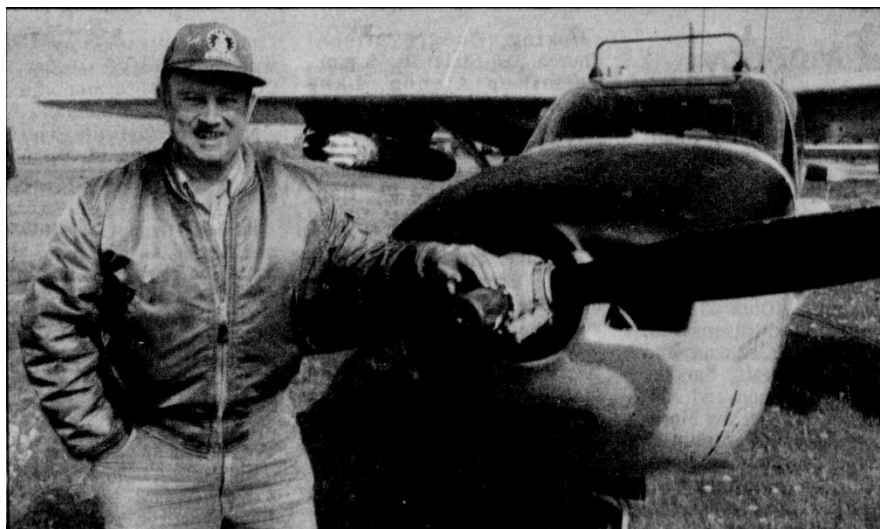
Stone’s military planes, which have included a North American T-28 fighter/trainer, a Japanese VAL dive bomber, a Cessna L-19 Bird Dog, a T-6 trainer, and a Cessna AT-50 Bamboo Bomber, have been a familiar sight overhead for the last 12 years or so.

On February 13 his newest warbird, a Cessna 02-A, was licensed by the Federal Aviation Administration and took to the sky for the first time since the Vietnam War.

Stone, a home builder and developer, purchased the carcass of the disassembled plane in 1984, and spent the next 6-1/2 years restoring it with the aid of Earl Smith, Ron Zoellner, Kip Stevens, and others.

It wasn’t an easy job, Stone said. He had to chase all over the country searching for missing parts. Some of the parts had to be manufactured.

Taxpayers pay to have the planes made, and they pay to have them destroyed, and the government doesn’t give anyone the opportunity to buy the parts in between, he said. Stone restored the aircraft as a flying memorial to the men and women who served and died in Vietnam.



**Man and Machine, Ron Stone proudly displays his Cessna 02-A.**

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

The O2-A's log shows that it was first put into service with the 21<sup>ST</sup> Tactical Air Support Squadron in June 1969. It subsequently flew with the 19<sup>TH</sup> TASS at Phan Rang Air Force Base, Vietnam, the 504<sup>th</sup> tactical Air Support Group and the 377<sup>TH</sup> Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron in Tan Son Nhut, Vietnam. After amassing 3,300 hours of combat flight, the O2-A went to U-Tapao, Thailand. It was disassembled and shipped to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base for storage in June 1974.

The O2-A's design earned it a number of nicknames, including: The Duck, due to the way the rear landing gear retracts; the Mixmaster; and the Push and Pull or Suck and Blow, due to the two engines installed in line —one pulling on the front of the aircraft, and one pushing on the rear.

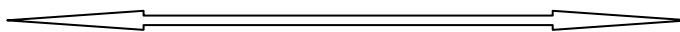
The aircraft's primary mission in combat was to locate and mark targets for the jets. It was ideal for the job, because it could stay on sortie for six to seven hours. It could be equipped with machine guns, rocket launchers, or 250-pound bombs. An armored seat bottom and a flak jacket were the pilot's only protection against ground fire.

During the restoration of his O2-A, Stone found three bullet holes, one with the slug intact. “So the aircraft qualifies for a purple heart,” he said.

He has outfitted his plane with two 100-pound bombs and two seven-tube 2.75-inch rocket launchers (but don't worry - they're dummies).

The plane has the same flying colors and numbers as it had when it flew in Vietnam. Its restored value is between \$100,000 and \$150,000.

“You put your money and time into it, and you're lucky if you break even,” Stone said.



## **Col. Weart Assigned To New Position In Germany**

*(Alamogordo Daily News, March 17, 1967, Alamogordo, New Mexico)*

Air Force Col. **George S. Weart**, deputy commander of the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing when it was based at Holloman, and more recently, commander of the 35th TFW in Vietnam

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

when come through Alamogordo sometime this month on his way to a new assignment as deputy chief of staff for operations, Seventeenth Air Force, Ramstein Air Base, Germany.

He will have with him a complete slide briefing on the development of Phan Rang (air base) and the 366th - 35th TFW combat operations in Vietnam to show to interested local, groups.

Weart left Phan Rang Air Base March 1 and will return by way of Saigon, Honolulu, Washington, California, La Cruces (where his son is attending New Mexico State University) and Alamogordo.

Col. Weart opened Phan Rang one year ago, piloting the first F-4 Phantom to land on the new aluminum runway.

‘ll never forget the hot blowing dust which greeted us,” he said recently. “When I saw the rows of tents in which we would have to operate, I didn't know, how we would make it.” The base is now one of the largest in Vietnam, some 10 square miles in area, and boasts, among other permanent facilities, a concrete runway. Bombers stationed there have flown more than 20,000 sorties.

A command pilot and veteran of more than 100 combat missions in the Pacific Theatre during World War II, Weart flew 91 combat missions in Vietnam, among them Phan Rang's 5,000<sup>th</sup> and 15,000<sup>th</sup> strikes.

He has earned the Legion of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross with on Oak Leaf Cluster, the Bornze Star, the Air Medal with six Oak Leaf Clusters and the Air Force Commendation Medal.



**COMING HOME— Col. George S. Weart, commander of the 35th TFW, Phan Rang, Vietnam, flew his 91<sup>st</sup> and last mission in the combat area in late February. He will come through Alamogordo, where he was deputy commander of the 366th TFW in 1966, on his way to reassignment in Germany.**

## "Happy Valley" Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 "...keeping the memories alive"

---

### Clearfield Pilot Awarded Medals

*(Clearfield Progress, March 19, 1969, Clearfield, Pennsylvania)*

**VIETNAM** — U S Air force Lt. Col. **Joseph R Henry** was presented the Distinguished Flying Cross at Phan Rang Air Force Base, Vietnam by Col. **Bruno M. Larsen** vice commander of the 315th Special Operations Wing.

Lt Col Henry, son of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene M. Henry of 405 S. Third St. Clearfield, was also decorated with the Air Medal.

Col. Henry received the medal for heroism as a C-123 Provider pilot in the evacuation of personnel from Kham Duc, winch was completely surrounded by automatic weapons positions and was under rocket, mortar and ground attack and for his outstanding airmanship and courage on successful and important missions under hazardous condition.

Col Henry, who has logged 700 flying hours. He is a graduate of Clearfield High School, was awarded his bachelor of science degree and commission upon graduation from the U S Military Academy and holds an MBA degree from the University of Chicago.

Col Henry is married to the former Sue Hamberger of Du-Bois.



*With introduction by Doug Severt*

**Like many of us we never had any experience with the C-123 Provider as in my case and I**

## "Happy Valley" Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 "...keeping the memories alive"

---

would imagine many others as well, hadn't even seen one before arriving in Vietnam. His experience almost mirrors that of my own and reading his description brought me back to my first encounter with a Provider on the short trip from VCR to PHA. One thing that I remember that Roger hasn't mentioned, but maybe they didn't do it on his flights, but on several flights that I made on the Provider they had a window open in the cargo compartment and I thought that was very usual. Any encounter with a Provider before Vietnam would have been unusual for Roger, being an Aussie. What follows is his 'Close Encounter With a Provider'.

"Tan Son Nhut

**Touch down** Tan Son Nhut. We are in Vietnam at long last. It's very hot - and smelly.

What sort of place is this? There's civil and military aircraft coming and going, GIs all over the place and Vietnamese all over the place as well. Hang on, isn't this supposed to be a war zone? And I don't even have a weapon...

With the usual administration tasks out of the way with Air Movements, we're marshalled towards a weird looking aircraft in camouflage, two greens and brown and US markings. It's not a Hercules as it's only got two of what appear to be radial engines and a jet pod under each wing. This 'baby Hercules' is actually a Fairchild C123 Provider.

Fairchild C123 Provider. Tramp up the ramp and - wait a minute - where's the seats? There aren't any! Our trusty green carryall bags were placed in rows across the floor, we were told to sit down on them facing aft and tie-down straps placed over the thighs from one side of the row to the other. **Welcome to Vietnam! And people complain about cattle-class these days.**

It's funny how some things remain vividly etched in the memory after so many years. The prop on one engine began to turn slowly before the engine fired up and then the second engine. **Noisy beast.** Taxiing out, the thing rattled and shook, and the brakes squealed alarmingly (at least I assumed it was the brakes) as we trundled out to the active runway. The whine of the under-wing jet engines turned into a deafening roar, and though this didn't actually seem to

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

give us enough forward momentum, the 'baby Hercules' was airborne in what seemed to be a relatively short take-off.

A few minutes later, the high-pitched whine of the jets ceased and the aircraft settled into what's best described as a wallowing cruise under the power of the two piston engines. **The thing rattled, shook and creaked to the extent that I thought it would start popping rivets!** The noise in that stripped out cargo hold bore no resemblance to anything I'd experienced before. This thing flew far worse than a Caribou and that was bad enough travelling sideways up to Gaspers from Bankstown on exercise with birds (feathered variety) overtaking us in the air (well, not quite).

### **Luscombe Field, Nui Dat**

Approaching our destination, Nui Dat, the pilot pulled back the throttles and the aircraft adopted a nose down attitude. This guy was doing a combat approach to the runway as the angle of descent rapidly increased.

The thing began to rattle and shake more so than ever, dust and dirt began to fly up off the cargo bay floor as the entire airframe seemed to resonate in synchronization with the revolutions of the engines. You could hear the rush of the slipstream above the noise of the engines as the flaps and undercarriage were lowered (at least I hoped that's what it was).

Luscombe Field. Our makeshift seating made it difficult to stop sliding towards the nose of the aircraft as we began our descent into Luscombe Field. As the descent became steeper, the tie-down strap was the only thing preventing all of the human cargo from joining the aircrew in the cockpit!

**The arrival at Luscombe Field was just that - an arrival. This 'baby Hercules' slammed onto the deck. I can only assume that the pilot had done this many times before but to my mind, he had just managed to flare the aircraft before we met terra firma. Moments before I was thinking that we're all going to become casualties before we've even seen combat!"**

**Cheers, Roger**

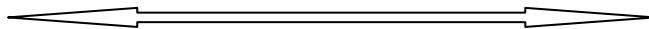
## **“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN**

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

**Note:** We first met Roger Lambert, Platoon Commander, 9 Platoon, C Company (RAR) in Phan Rang Newsletter 186 and 187 in “Blondes, Bombs and Bunkers” and the search for the crew of Magpie 31. Roger continued to provide us with his exciting Vietnam adventures which are chronicled in Phan Rang Newsletters 188, 193, 195, 200, 205, 206, 207, 211, 214, 216, 219, 221, 240 and 241. Pretty good for someone that never stepped foot on Phan Rang AB.



## **Capt. McGovern Awarded Air Medal At Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam**

*(Haverstraw Rockland county Times, January 21, 1971, Haverstraw, New York)*

**WITH U.S. COMBAT AIR FORCES, Vietnam** — U. S. Air Force Capt. Michael D. McGovern, whose



**PRESENTATION:** U. S. Air Force Capt. Michael D. McGovern, at right, receives the Air Medal at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam, from Col. Walter C. Turnier, commander, 35th Tactical Fighter Wing. U. S. Air Force Photo

wife, Ann, is the daughter of Mrs. Anna Hessian, 27 Broadway, has received the Air Medal at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam.

Capt. McGovern, an F-100 Super Sabre fighter bomber pilot at Phan Rang, was decorated for his outstanding airmanship and courage on important and successful missions completed under hazardous conditions. He is assigned to a unit of the Pacific Air Forces.

Captain McGovern, son of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin McGovern of Stony Point, is a 1959 graduate of Haverstraw High School. He received his Bachelor of Business Administration degree in 1963 from Manhattan College, Riverdale, N. Y., where he was commissioned through the Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps program.

## **Academy Grads Donate To Vietnam Orphanage**

*(Colorado Springs Gazette, January 19, 1971, Colorado Springs, Colorado)*

The Air Force Academy's Association of Graduates donated \$100 to the Tan Tai Catholic Orphanage near Phan Rang City, Vietnam, recently on behalf of the late Maj. R. Weaver, 1959



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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

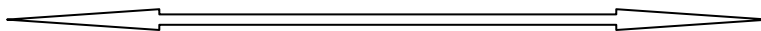
USAF Academy graduate. The money was presented to the orphanage by three Academy graduates stationed at Phan Rang Air Base.

The donation came from the Major **James R. Weaver** Memorial Fund, administered by the Association of Graduates, and in memory of Maj. Weaver, who was killed in an aircraft crash off the coast of England in May 1970.

In a letter accompanying the donation, Capt. **Frederick L. Metcalf**, executive secretary of the Association, said that Maj. Weaver actively supported the Tan Tai Orphanage through the base’s civic action program while he was stationed at Phan Rang Air Base.

The orphanage cares for 68 Vietnamese children and is run by four Roman Catholic nuns.

The gifts were presented to Sister Marie Aimee De Jesus at the orphanage by Capt. **Gilbert D. Mook**, Charleston, R. I., and **Craig L. McKinney**, Falls Church, Va., and 1st Lt. **William W. Taylor**, Glastonbury, Conn. All three are flying F-100s with the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing Phan Rang Air Base.



## **366th Love Angels**

*(Alamogordo Daily News, June 12, 1966, Alamogordo, New Mexico)*

**By LT. BILL SPENCER**

**PHAN RANG AB, Viet Nam**— Air Force men of the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing at the Phan Rang air base in Viet Nam are in love with a special band of Angels.

Living up to promises to provide “the ‘necessities’ of a combat tour such as fruit cake and home-baked cookies,” the Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps Angel Flight at New Mexico State University sent a seven-cubic foot box of home-baked cookies. The men are “eating it up” quite literally.

## “Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

---



**COOKIE BREAK**— Air Force Col. George S. Weart, 366th Tactical Fighter Wing commander, passes out bags of cookies and cokes to 389th Tactical Fighter Squadron pilots and maintenance and support men at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam. The cookies came from Angel Flight members of New Mexico State University. Shown receiving goodies are Capt. **Jimmie A. McKensie**, 33, of Holloman, at center, and Capt. **Jimmy G. Martin**, 31, of Commerce, Tex., at right, while two unidentified non-coms who already have received gifts watch the distribution.

The cookies, baked in all sizes, shapes and flavors, made the long journey intact from campus ovens in Las Cruces, N.M., to the sun-baked tents at Phan Rang. In less than an hour after the cookies arrived, Col. George S. Weart, wing vice-commander, distributed them on the flight-line to pilots, maintenance men and support personnel.

The promise, which the Angels made as their primary service project for 1966, began with formal adoption of the 366th Wing at Holloman before it was deployed to Viet Nam.

While at Holloman, Jeanie Sturtz, Angel Flight commander, proclaimed that since the Angels at NMSU “feel a particular closeness to the fighting men of the 366th, as adopted sons of our state . . . we do resolve to support the men of the fighting squadrons of the 366th TFW and to create a special place in our hearts and minds for these defenders of our opportunity to receive an education in the state of New Mexico.”

Terms of the “adoption” also includes sending warm letters of encouragement and aid and assistance in civic action projects undertaken by the wing.

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

# **Huge Cargo Planes Bring Supplies To Air Guard for New F-100 Jets**

*(Terre Haute Tribune, August 11, 1971, Terre Haute, Indiana)*

Five happy Air Guardsmen and 80,000 pounds of ground support equipment and supplies were airlifted into Terre Haute yesterday by two huge C141 cargo airplanes.

The men and equipment arrived direct from Phan Rang, Vietnam, and were processed through customs upon arrival at Hulman Field.

The 181st Tactical Fighter Group, Indiana Air National Guard, based at Terre Haute’s Hulman Field, will utilize the equipment and supplies to maintain the unit’s newly acquired F-100 Super Sabre fighter bombers.

Both the new airplanes and the equipment received yesterday are from the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing at Phan Rang. The regular Air Force recently deactivated the wing.

The five local Guardsmen who arrived home yesterday were part of a seven-man 181<sup>st</sup> TFG team that has been in Vietnam the past month preparing the equipment for the flight to Terre Haute.

The five who returned were: Capt. James Bowman, Dugger; CMSgt Emory Morgan, Brazil; TSgt Donald Amerman, Clay City; TSgt. Henry Mauldin, Clinton, and SSgt Steve Keller, Worthington. Upon arrival, men were greeted by their families.

The huge Lockheed C 141 a cargo and troop carrier type aircraft and is one of the largest aircraft to land at Hulman Field. Each of the planes was loaded with 20 tons of equipment.

After leaving Phan Rang, planes flew to Yokota, Japan, then on to Elmendorf Air Force Base in Alaska, and then directly to Hulman Field.

## “Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

---



**LOCAL GUARD GETS EQUIPMENT**—The 181st Tactical Fighter Group, Indiana Air National Guard Tuesday received about 40 tons of equipment and supplies from South Vietnam for use in maintaining the unit’s newly acquired F-100 Super Sabres. Two C-141 cargo planes delivered the material.



**BACK FROM VIETNAM**—These members of the 181st Tactical Fighter Group, Indiana Air National Guard, returned from Vietnam Tuesday after spending a month there preparing equipment to be brought to Terre Haute. Shown are, from left, S./Sgt. Steve Keller, T./Sgt. Henry Maudlin, Capt. James Bowman and T./Sgt. Donald Amerman. The equipment from Vietnam will be used to maintain the units recently acquired F-100 fighter aircraft.

About 450 members of 181st currently are undergoing their only 15 days of active duty at Hulman Field. Due to the conversion to the F-100s the annual training is being accomplished at the home base.

Aircraft and engine mechanics are undergoing specialized training to become qualified in the maintenance of the new fighters. The training, conducted regular Air Force instructors, being

## “Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

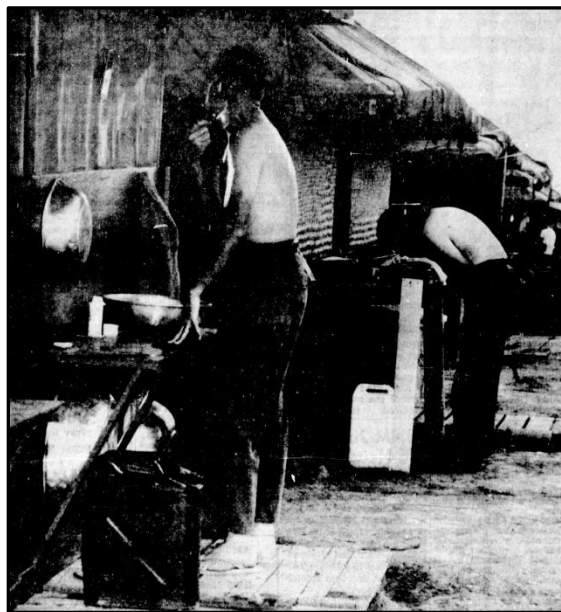
given at the local base for the entire Indiana Air National Guard, which includes personnel from the 122<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Fighter Group at Baer Field, Fort Wayne.

Pilots have been enrolled special training for the F-100 at Tucson, Ariz., plus additional training is being received by assigned pilots during the current field training period.

### Men of 389th Operate From ‘Bare’ Viet Camp

*(Alamogordo Daily News, June 19, 1966, Alamogordo, New Mexico)*

**PHAN RANG, Viet Nam** — Operating from a “bare” base, Air Force F-4C Phantom crews flew strikes from the Phan Rang air base against Viet Cong targets only two days after completion of a new, aluminum runway here.



**BARE NECESSITIES** — Using outdoor facilities at the Phan Rang air base, Air Force Maj. **James R. Kirkpatrick** (left) of San Antonio, Tex., and Lt. Col. **Wilbur O. Pensinger** of Fairborn, Ohio, prepare for the day's activities. Until permanent buildings are constructed at the base about 65 miles northeast of Saigon, Air Force men live, eat, sleep and work in tents or hastily constructed wood buildings.

The base which consists of the new runway, an older runway nearby and temporary buildings for living and office space is located about 65 miles northeast of Saigon. Although permanent buildings are being built, most men at the base still live, eat, sleep and work in tents or hastily-constructed wood buildings.

Since arriving here May 14, F-4C crews from the 389th Tactical Fighter Squadron—a 366th Tactical Fighter Wing unit— have flown more than 1,000 close air support and other combat sorties against the Viet Cong.

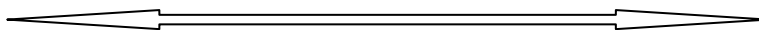
## **“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN**

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

Phantom crews from Phan Rang have been credited with destroying or damaging more than 1,200 buildings, possibly killing more than 115 VC and destroying or damaging about 50 fortifications.



### **Capt. Kraybill of Pittsfield Heads Medical Team**

*(Jacksonville Journal Courier, May 2, 1971, Jacksonville, Illinois)*

**WITH U.S. COMBAT AIR FORCES, VIETNAM** - A “model hamlet” is one training tool Captain **William G. Kraybill** of Pittsfield uses on his special assignment at Phan Rang, Vietnam.

Captain Kraybill heads a four-man U.S. Air Force medical team that is helping conduct the U.S. Military Public Health Assistance Program at Phan Rang and the surrounding area.

The team has had the triple mission of primarily instructing their Vietnamese counterparts as they help implement public health programs in nearby hamlets and provide patient care at the Ninh Thuan Provincial Hospital in downtown Phan Rang.

A model hamlet established by the Vietnamese under the guidance of earlier U.S. medical personnel, has provided the Air Force team a vital example of what improved facilities can do for a community. Confronted with the visual results and guidance by Captain Kraybill’s villagers have undertaken variety of similar projects that range from improved sanitation to immunization programs.

In the area of medical care, Captain Kraybill and his team mates have encountered diseases practically unknown in the United States, including leprosy, plague and spinal tuberculosis. Tuberculosis is their main concern, with some 30 to 40 patients treated each of the two days the clinic is in operation.

Commenting upon discovering in its early stages, Dr. Kraybill said, “It is significant that the people are coming in more freely. They are aware now of the dangers of not taking steps to protect their health. Once something like this starts snowballing, effective public health becomes a reality.”

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

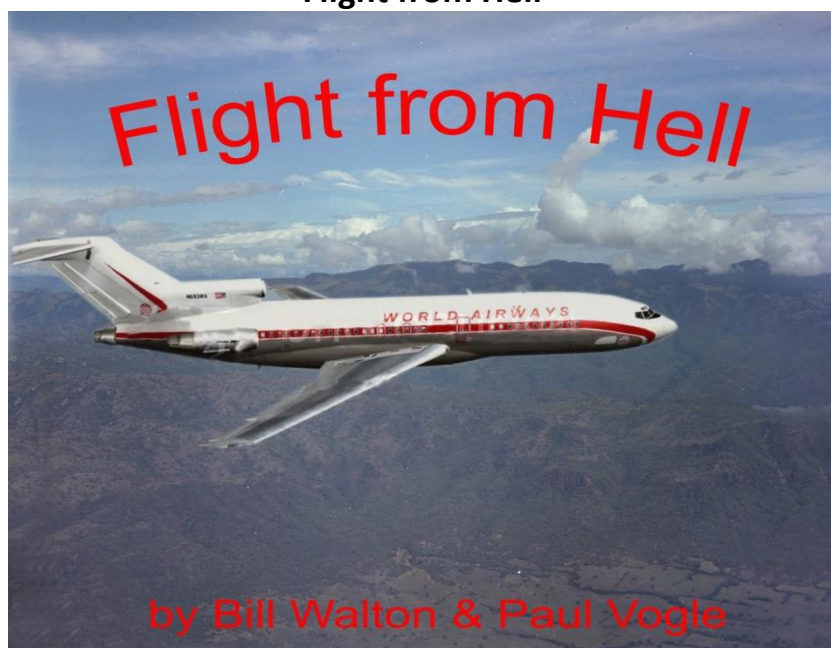
---

Services of the team are also supplemented by three professional specialists who travel from the big Air Force hospital at Cam Ranh Bay to Phan Rang for regularly scheduled visits.

In conducting the three fold program, Captain Kraybill and his team mates agree that the language barrier has been their greatest handicap because in the case of some English words, there is no Vietnamese equivalent.

The 28-year-old physician, son of Mrs. W. G. Kraybill, Sr., of Pittsfield, is a 1961 graduate of Pittsfield High School. He received his A.B. degree in biology in 1965 from Earlham Colledge. Richmond, Ind. and his M.D. degree in 1964 from the University of Cincinnati.

### **Flight from Hell**



*(Marshall Chronicle, Marshall, Michigan, April 25, 1985)*

( Editor’s note: The following article is an eyewitness account of the last refugee plane to leave Da Nang, filed March 29, 1975, as one of the most dramatic stories to come out of the Vietnam war. Paul Vogle began reporting for UPI in South Vietnam in 1967. He now works for the UPI bureau in Detroit, where he grew up. The story has again been released as p art of “Vietnam: The Legacy” series by U PI.)

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

By PAUL VOGLE

**DA NANG, South Vietnam** (UPI) — Only the fastest, the strongest and the meanest got out on what may have been the last refugee plane from Communist-threatened Da Nang Saturday.

I saw a South Vietnamese soldier kick an old woman in the face to get aboard.

In the movies somebody would have shot the soldier and helped the old lady on the plane, but this was no movie — he flew and the old lady tumbled down the tarmac, her fingers clawing toward the plane that was already rolling.

People fought one another and died trying to get aboard. Others fell thousands of feet to their deaths in the sea because even desperation could no longer keep their fingers welded to the undercarriage.

It was a flight out of hell and only a good tough American pilot and a lot of prayers got us back to Saigon’s Tan Son Nhut airbase alive with the Boeing 727’s flaps jammed and the wheels fully extended.

It all started simply enough. I asked World Airways Vice President Charles Patterson if he had anything going to Da Nang. He said, “Get on that truck and you’ve got yourself a ride.” -----

It was a ride I’ll never forget. World Airways President Ed Daley was aboard. He was angry and tired. Daley said he had been up all night arguing with American and Vietnamese officials for permission to fly into besieged Da Nang to get more refugees out.

Daley finally said to hell with paperwork, clearance and caution and we were on our way.

It seemed peaceful enough as we touched down at the airport, 370 miles northeast of Saigon.

More than a thousand people had been waiting around a Quonset hut several hundred yards away from where we touched down.



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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

Suddenly it was a mob in motion — they roared across the tarmac on motorbike, jeeps, scooters and on legs speeded by sheer panic.

Daley and I stood near the bottom of the 727’s tailramp. Daley held out his arms while I shouted in Vietnamese, “One at a time, one at a time. There’s room for everybody.”

There wasn’t room for everybody and everybody knew damn well there wasn’t.

Daley and I were knocked aside and backward.

If Daley thought he’d get some women and children out of Da Nang he was wrong. The plane was jammed in an instant with troops of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division’s meanest unit, the Hac Bao (Black Panthers).

They literally ripped the clothes right off Daley along with some of his skin. A British television cameraman who flew up with us made the mistake of getting off the plane when we landed to shoot the loading. He could not get back aboard in the pandemonium so he threw his camera with its precious film into the closing door and stood there and watched us take off.-----

We heard later that an Air America helicopter picked him up and carried him to safety.

As we started rolling, insanity gripped those who had missed their chance. Government troops opened fire on us. Somebody lobbed a hand grenade toward the wing. The explosion jammed the flaps full open and the undercarriage in full-extension.

Communist rockets began exploding at a distance.

Our pilot, Ken Healy, 52, of Oakland, Calif., slammed the throttles wide open and lurched into the air from the taxiway. There was no way we could have survived the gunfire and got onto the main runway.

A backup 727 had flown behind us but had been ordered not to land when the panic broke out. The pilot radioed he could see the legs of people hanging down from the undercarriage of our plane.

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

UPI photographer Lien Huong, who was in the cockpit of that backup plane, saw at least one person lose his grip on life and plummet into the South China Sea below- .....

There Were 268 or more people jammed into the cabin of the little 727 limping down the coast.

Only two women and one baby among them. The rest were soldiers, toughest of the tough, meanest of the mean. They didn't talk to each other or us. They looked at the floor.

I saw one of them had a clip of ammunition and asked him to give it to me. He handed it over. As I walked up the aisle other soldiers started loading my arms with clips of ammunition, pistols, hand grenades. They didn't need them anymore.

There was no more fight left in the Black Panthers this day. They had gone from humans to animals and now they were vegetables.

In the cockpit we wrapped the weapons and ammo in electric tape.

We flew down the coast, the backup plane behind us all the way. Healy circled Phan Rang airbase 165 miles north east of Saigon, hoping to put down for an emergency landing.

Lien Huong served as interpreter on the backup plane, radioing Phan Rang control tower that our 727 had to land there in an emergency. The reply came back that there was no fire fighting equipment at Phan Rang so Healy aimed the plane for Tan Son Nhut.

I heard Healy on the radio telling Tan Son Nhut, “I've got control problems.”

The backup plane was shepherding us in. Huong told me later when we touched down safe the pilot and cabin crew on his plane pulled off their headphones, some of them crossed themselves, and all thanked God for a small miracle delivered this Easter weekend.

When we touched down the troops who had stormed us were put under arrest. They deserved it.

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

The mangled body of one soldier, M 16 rifle still strapped to his shoulder, was retrieved from the undercarriage. He got his ride to Saigon but being dead in Saigon is just the same as being dead in Da Nang.

Over a score of others came out of the baggage compartment, cold but alive. Somebody told me that four others crawled out of the wheel wells alive. One died.

The last plane from Da Nang was one hell of a ride. For me. For Ed Daley. For Ken Healy. For the Black Panthers. And for two women and a baby.

But the face that remains is that of the old woman lying flat on the tarmac seeing hope, seeing life itself, just at the end of her fingertips and rolling the other way.

## **Heroic World Airlines Pilots Flew Overloaded 727 on the Last Flight Out of Da Nang**

**They Landed Without Clearance, Then Took Off From a Taxiway While Under Fire- But They Evacuated Hundreds** - World Airways became a key military contractor during the Vietnam War. For the majority of America’s involvement in Vietnam they flew troops and equipment back and forth between World’s base at Oakland International Airport and Southeast Asia. Flying a mix of Boeing 707, 727, and Douglas DC-8 aircraft, World would be thrust into a maelstrom of humanity and nearly lose several hundred lives while attempting to help refugee women and children get out of Da Nang.

**Against All the Rules and Most Odds** - World and Daly were chartered by the United States Government to make 20 evacuation flights out of Da Nang. When the United States Embassy cancelled contract after only three flights, Daly took matters into his own hands. On March 29th 1975 Daly took two World Airways 727-100s into Da Nang without clearance or permission. One of the 727s was unable to land. The other 727 was carrying Daly. Forced to lift off from a taxiway when the runways were blocked by abandoned vehicles and humanity, the airliner was fired upon and sustained severe damage to the fuel tanks and flaps. The 727 had used its under-tail air stair to load the passengers. Daly was forced to stand his ground at the air stair so

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

the aircraft would not be too overloaded to take off at all. As it was, 268 people were crammed into the cabin and another 60 or so jammed themselves into the cargo holds which had been left open on the ground.

In a masterful piece of flying, the World Airways pilots landed the overloaded aircraft, nearly out of fuel, with the damage to the wings and flaps causing controllability problems, main landing gear unable to retract due to human beings in the gear wells, and the aft air stair stuck in the open position, some 90 minutes after leaving Da Nang. The human side of this tragedy is that World and Daly had flown into Da Nang to rescue refugee women and children. Instead, aside from the five women and two or three children aboard, the flight carried nearly all South Vietnamese military personnel- about 300 of them.

**Continued Support for the South Vietnamese** - World Airways and Daly flew a DC-8 freighter into Saigon a few days later and rescued 58 Vietnamese orphans. Dubbed “Operation Baby Lift” by President Ford, this flight was the impetus for the continuing effort to bring nearly 3,000 orphans to the United States. Footage of the aftermath of this flight (a much more joyous occasion) is included in the video as well.

(Situations like this we would never have believed that would be repeated, but reading this story it is impossible not to compare it with the August 1921 withdrawal from Kabul of thousands of Afghans, when they rushed into Kabul’s main airport, some so desperate to escape the Taliban that they held onto a military jet as it took off and plunged to their deaths.)



**OWEN** - Technical Sargeant **William R. Krach**, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Krach, is a member Of the 35th Tactical Fighter wing at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam that has been honored by the Vietnamese Armed Forces. Sergeant Krach is an aircraft maintenance technician. (*Eau Claire Leader Telegram, June 1, 1971, Eau Claire, Wisconsin*)

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

**BARRONET** - Major **Jack W. Graf**, son of Mr. and Mrs. George R. Graf, Rt. I, is a member of the 35<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam, that has been honored by the Vietnamese Armed Forces. He is a maintenance staff officer. (*Eau Claire Leader Telegram, June 1, 1971, Eau Claire, Wisconsin*)

**NEILLSVILLE** - Staff Sergeant **William Perrine**, son of Mr. and Mrs. William H. Perrine, 2204 Black River Road, is a member the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam that has been honored by the Vietnamese Armed Forces. Sergeant Perrine is an aircraft maintenance technician. (*Eau Claire Leader Telegram, June 1, 1971, Eau Claire, Wisconsin*)

Airman First Class **William A. Lowrey** has received the Comptrollerite Award at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. His parents, retired Air Force T. Sgt. Robert L. Lowery and Mrs. Lowery, reside at 207 Happy Lane in Del Rio. Airman Lowery was recognized for his outstanding professional skill, initiative and dedication to duty. He is a finance specialist with the 35<sup>th</sup> Combat Support Group, a unit of the Pacific Air Forces, headquarters for air operations in Southeast Asia, the Far East and Pacific area. The airman is a 1966 graduate of Del Rio High School. He and his wife, the former Linda A. Seffens, have a son, William Jr., four months old. (*Del Rio News Herald, November 23, 1969, Del Rio, Texas*)

Sgt. **Jerry L. Howell**, husband of Gerry Lynn Howell of 1014 Avondale St., was promoted to his present rating while serving with the 35th Combat Group at Phan Rang Air Force base in Vietnam. Sgt. Howell is due back in the states in February. His wife and 4 - month - old son, Christopher Thomas, reside with her parents. He is the son of Mrs. Isabel Watson of 1037 Ephriam St. (*East Liverpool Review, August 21, 1970, East Liverpool, Ohio*)

**On Duty at Phan Rang** WITH, U.S. COMBAT AIR FORCES, Vietnam— U.S. Air Force Captain **Cecil G. Moyer Jr.**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Cecil C. Moyer Sr., 18 Chambers Ave, is on duty at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. Capt. Moyer, a US Provider cargo-troop carrier pilot is assigned to a unit of the Pacific Air Forces. He previously served at Eglin AFB, Fla. The captain was commissioned in 1967 upon graduation from Officer Training School at Lackland AFB, Tex. A 1963 graduate of Greenville Senior High School, the Alpha Chi Rho member received his B.A. degree in history in 1957 from Thiel College. His wife, Sally, is a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. G.A.

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

Rhimer, 1239 Hagysford Rd., Narberth, Pa. (*Greenville Record Argus, October 27, 1970, Greenville, Pennsylvania*)

**Capt. Donald Neff Flies Super Sabre At Phan Rang AB** - US Air Force Capt **Donald W. Neff**, whose wife. Margaret is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Theo Halbardier, 1412 Cross St., is on duty at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. Capt Neff, assigned as an F-100 Super Sabre pilot with a unit of the Pacific Air Forces, previously served at Luke AFB, Ariz. A 1959 graduate of Cleveland Hill High School in Buffalo, N. Y. the captain earned his MS degree in 1963 from the US Air Force Academy. (*New Braunfels Herald Zeitung, June 26, 1969, New Braunfels, Texas*)

**T-Sgt. A.A. Curtis At Phan Rang A.B.** - US Air Force Sgt Andrew A. Curtis, son of Mrs. Julia Wilkerson of 33 River St, Rockville, Conn., is on duty at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. Sergeant Curtis, an aircraft maintenance technician, is assigned to a unit of the Pacific Air Forces. The sergeant is a 1951 graduate of Rockville High School. His wife, Leslie, is the daughter of Mrs. Austin Griffin of 350 Pinney St., Ellington. (*Southington News, August 20, 1969, Southington, Connecticut*)

Airman First Class **Ned M. Musselman**, stationed at Phan Rang Air Force Base in Vietnam has been officially made an educational training specialist. He is teaching class of high school English and remedial reading to GIs twice a week in addition to his regular job of setting up schedules and issuing tests for air force men in his squadron. His wife, Judy, is a teacher at Fairborn. The son of Mr. and Mrs. John M. Musselman, Route I, has new service address. It is: A1C Ned M. Musselman. F-276-40-1845, Box 8569—B, 25th Combat Spt. Gp., APO San Francisco, Calif. 96321. Note: I think it should have been 35<sup>th</sup> Combat Spt.Gp. (**Circleville Herald, November 4, 1969, Circleville, Ohio**)

**RICHARD W. GARBETT GETS PROMOTION** **Richard W Garbett**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Richard E. Garbett of Thatcher, has just been promoted to the rank of Master Sergeant in-the United States Air Force. Since entering the service in July of 1960, Sergeant Garbett has been an instructor in the aircraft maintenance field. For the past six years, he and his family have been stationed at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, North Carolina. At the present time he is being assigned to Phan Rang Air Force Base, Vietnam, where he will serve with a special operations squadron. (*Caribou County Sun, February 11, 1971, Soda Springs, Idaho*)

## **"Happy Valley" Phan Rang AB, RVN**

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 **"...keeping the memories alive"**

---

**AT PHAN RANG AB** Air Force TSgt. **William M. Demers**, son Leo R. Demers, 59 Riverside Drive, Saranac Lake, is on duty at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. His wife Beverly, is the daughter of Mrs. Florence K. Soper, 60 Lake Flower Ave., Saranac Lake. (*Syracuse Post Standard, October 26, 1970, Syracuse, New York*)

**Lt. Mark C. Chenis** Services will take place in Fairfield for Air Force Lieut. **Mark Chenis**, 23, son of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony J. Chenis of 309 Meadowbrook Road, who was killed Oct. 17 when his fighter plane crashed while taking off on a mission in Vietnam. The services are being arranged by the Wilraot, West and Goulding funeral home, 1209 Post road. Lieut. Chenis was stationed at Phan Rang Air Force base where he flew F-100's. **Note:** Additional information on Mark Constant Chenis can be found in Phan Rang Newsletters 122, 155, 197 and 247. (*Bridgeport Post, October 22, 1968, Bridgeport, Connecticut*)

Air force technical Sergeant — **James B. Bierce**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Burton B. Bierce. 1934 S. Grand av., W16024 Menomonee av., Menomonee Falls, at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. (*Waukesha Freeman, May 20, 1967, Waukesha, Wisconsin*)

**ARRIVES IN VIETNAM** - Mr. and Mrs. Robert Conover have received word that their son, Airman 1-C **William E. Conover**, arrived in Vietnam December 22. He is stationed at Phan Rang Air Force Base near Cam Ranh Bay. His address is A1C William Conover, AF 16886644, Box 7924, 35 Combat, Spt. G.P., A. P. O. San Francisco 96321. (*Wyoming Post Herald, January 3, 1969, Wyoming, Illinois*)

Sgt. **Jerry L. Howell**, husband of Gerry Lynn Howell of 1014 Avondale St., was promoted to his present rating while serving with the 35th Combat Group at Phan Rang Air Force base in Vietnam. Sgt. Howell is due back in the states in February. His wife and 4 - month - old son. Christopher Thomas, reside with her parents. He is the son of Mrs. Isabel Watson of 1037 Ephriam St. (*East Liverpool Evening Review, August 21, 1970, East Liverpool, Ohio*)

**Airman Honored** Airman 1st. C. **James T. Devendorf**, is a member of the 35<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing at Phan Rang Air Force Base in Vietnam. The wing has been honored by the Vietnamese Armed Forces, receiving the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm for its contribution to the

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

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 249 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

military forces and citizenry that country. Airman Devendorf is the son of Mr. and Mrs. James Devendorf 49 Wooster street, Bethel. A fuel specialist, he is a 1969 graduate of Bethel high school. His wife is the former Susan Schofield of Bethel. (*Bridgeport Post, June 10, 1971, Bridgeport, Connecticut.*)

**Bellwood Airman Takes A Bride In Hawaii** - Airman First Class **Ronald Kowalczyk**, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Kowalczyk, 332Frederick Ave., Bellwood, recently spent an R&R in Honolulu Hawaii. Ron, an aircraft maintenance specialist, has been in Vietnam for the past seven months and is stationed at Phan Rang Air Force base. (*Bellwood Star Sentinel, March 4, 1971, Bellwood, Illinois*)

After eight and a half month at Phan Rang Air Force Base in Vietnam, Sgt. **Ervin Ray Sellers** was reunited with his family, Staff Sgt. and Mrs. Harvey Glenn Sellers in their home Friday evening. (*Blytheville Courier News, October 17, 1969, Blytheville, Arkansas*)

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



I hope that you enjoyed this newsletter. This newsletter was composed by Douglas Severt and all graphics by Douglas Severt. As with all good things, the end may be in sight for the Phan Rang Newsletter. It's amazing for the very short time that Phan Rang AB existed that there were so many stories to come out of there and I'm forever grateful that so many shared their stories. I still have hundreds of short hometown news releases to publish and I certainly will make sure that all of them gets published because that also helps build the Roll-Call and also provides evidence that someone served in Vietnam or more specifically Phan Rang AB, so when someone searches on Ancestry or Fold3.com it would provide a starting point for researchers. Speaking of Roll-Call, we are nearing six thousand names and in my Index to the Phan Rang Newsletter I also have six thousand names, and we are constantly building on those lists. I know that isn't much compared to the number that would have been assigned to the base, but I doubt if any other organization has been able to compile similar data. To see a list of all previous newsletters click [here](#). To unsubscribe to Phan Rang News, [dougsevert@cox.net](mailto:dougsevert@cox.net) and put 'unsubscribe' in subject line.