

# Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.  
"Keeping the memories alive" Newsletter 251

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Serving Our Country

Doug's Comments



*"I explained my fake birth date to the recruiter...in short order, it was a done deal and later that day I left for basic training."*

## *Scenes from the Music Video*



On 3 January 1949, we drove to the Army recruiting office where I informed the recruiter that I was indeed 18 years old and I wanted to join the Army. He asked for my birth date and I knew he would want to see my draft papers, which would list my real date of birth, so I told him my birthday was on January 1st 1949, the previous Saturday, which meant that since the draft office was closed over the weekend so I

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**His mother knew he had to leave this mess  
before it trapped him like the rest...**

couldn't have any papers to show.



**Charles explaining to his children that he was  
going to leave them to serve his country.**

**Kristofer Simmons, Charles' grandson, singing  
"Extraordinary Man" on stage.**



**Charles' talented Grandson performing on  
stage the "Extraordinary Man" a song he co-  
wrote with his father.**

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**“There's a hero in my house you might not know it just from lookin'...His back is bent, his hands are tired, and his eyes are growin' old.”**



**Charles explains his military awards to his grandson, Kristofer Simmons.**

**Kristofer Simmons singing “Extraordinary Man”.**



**Kristofer Simmons, looks on attentively as his grandfather shows him pictures from his military service.**

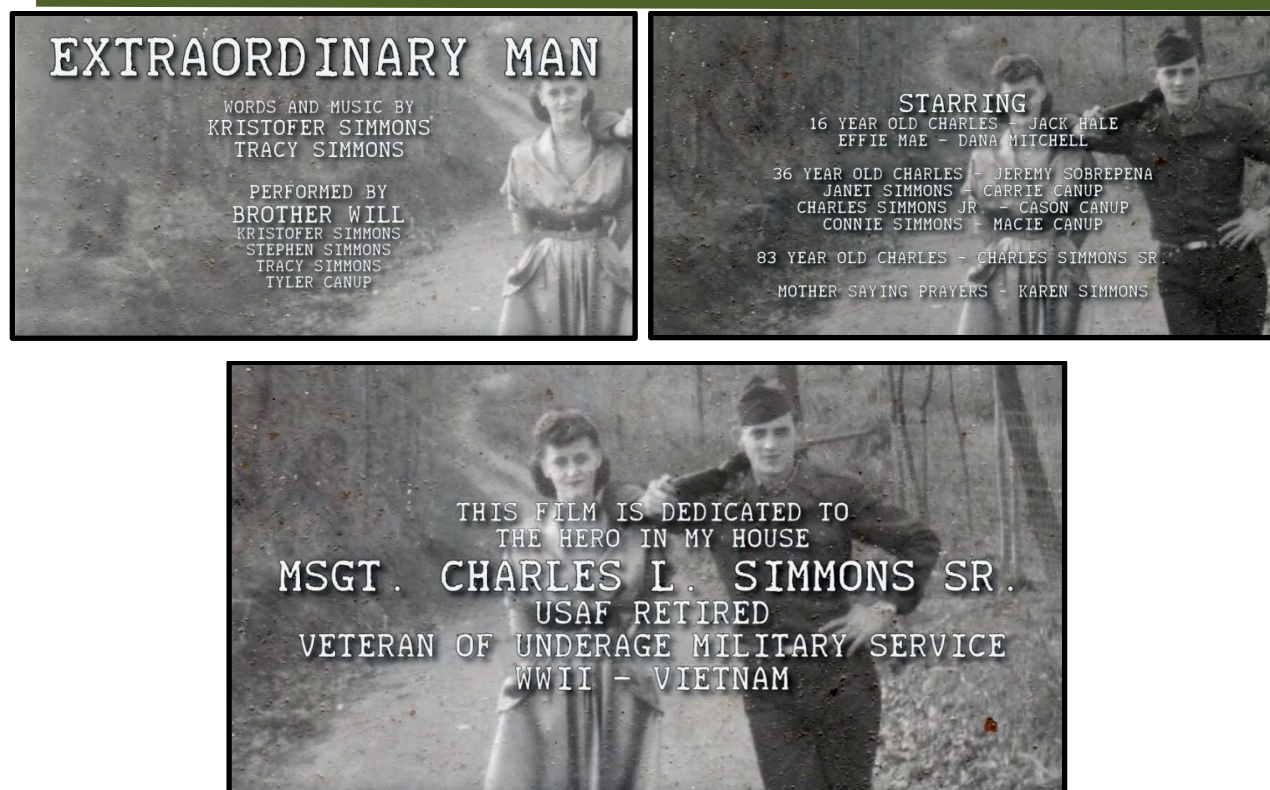


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### **Extraordinary Man Lyrics**

Brother Will and Kristofer Simmons

**He lied about his age and joined the Army to get away**

**Just sixteen all dressed in green left his momma wavin'**

**She knew he had to leave this mess before it trapped him like the rest**

**Found his boot print in the dirt, just outside the gate**

**Covered it up with a piece of old wood and cried there every day**

**Now he's thirty-six with four kids at home there's a war across the world**

**His woman can't believe, but he's gonna leave three sons and his little girl**

**He volunteered to join some boys in the fields of Vietnam**

**She left his boots out in the hall, a reminder so she'd pray**

**Everyday those kids would wear them boots around the house to play**

**There's a hero in my house you might not know it just from lookin'**

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**His back is bent, his hands are tired, and his eyes are growin' old**

**What you see won't tell the tale of a very simple plan**

**To give his life for those he loved as an extraordinary man**

**Eighty-three, his children grown so much time has passed him by**

**Memories and used to be's, some dreams are fading**

**Help the sick, feed the poor, point the way to God**

**When tomorrow comes he'll wing his way to his home up above**

**His yesterdays are safe inside the lives of those he loved**

**There's a hero in my house you might not know it just from lookin'**

**His back is bent, his hands are tired, and his eyes are growin' old**

**What you see won't tell the tale of a very simple plan**

**To give his life for those he loved as an extraordinary man**

**Take a look around your world, there's heroes all around**

**Dawn patrols, deserts wild, the lost who can't be found**

**Down the sidewalk corner store, the mother sayin' prayers**

**Take a look inside yourself, is there a hero in there?**

**There's a hero, in my house, you might not know it just from looking, this man is growin' old**

**What you see won't tell the tale of a very simple plan**

**To give his life for those he loved as an extraordinary man**

**He lied about his age and joined the Army to get away....**

**Doug's notes:** Charles was an American Patriot. When he started his military experience it probably wasn't born of patriotism, but the military was a means for him to escape the abject poverty and troubled family life. He was just 16 years of age when he served with the World War II, 8<sup>th</sup> Army Occupation Forces in Japan in 1949, consequently he was a member of the "Under Age Warriors".

This one paragraph from his biography tells it all. *"At the age of 31 Charles was saved and*

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

He was a huge supporter of the Phan Rang Vietnam Veterans group and even though he probably had the farthest to travel from Anchorage to several points in the lower 48, he always seemed to have some family at those reunion destinations, leading me to believe that he had a large loving family, just as he had a large group of adoring veterans. He was a Chaplain for the group and for our Nashville reunion he prepared a video to honor and commemorate those lost in Vietnam, when shown, it brought tears to the eyes of all present. I suspect that he had a lot of help from his son, Tracy to prepare it, but they were all his ideas. He also was a guiding force on the Phan Rang Facebook group injecting his religious teachings where he thought necessary and also originating religious view points.

It seems like only yesterday that he was planning on attending the 2021 reunion in Branson, but leading up to that event his health was deteriorating, but during our frequent phone calls he still remained confident that he was still going to make it, but even being an optimist and full of hope it wasn't to be so.



Lastly "Extraordinary Man" is a testament to how much he was loved, respected and admired by his family. That admiration also has to be extended to his son and grandson, who are also "Extraordinary Men".

The biography of Charles Simmons can be found in Phan Rang Newsletters [223](#) and additional stories and articles can be found in Phan Rang Newsletters 49, 83,

99, 136, 144-146, 184, 157, 165, 168 174, 213, 216, and 239. Click [here](#) to see the

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“Extraordinary Man” on YouTube. The name of the band performing the song is “Brother Will”, comprised of Kristofer, his dad, Tracy Simmons playing the acoustic guitar and singing backup, and his other son Stephen on the base guitar, and their friend Tyler Canup playing acoustic guitar and singing backup.

**The following is another testament to the love a daughter had for her father, Gerald E. Moore, who wrote the “The Rank of Life” during a period of time when her father was ill and wasn’t expected to live.**



*I watched from a distance as several men  
Awaited a summons from God  
As each one walked to the throne  
I heard others in deference applaud*

*Such important men, I reasoned  
God would surely grant their requests  
They had rank and power of men  
And pridefully towered above the rest*

*Each one wanted something  
That he could not himself attain  
No chance of denied requests, each thought  
Secure in his rank, so pompous and vain*

*The first man approached with dignity  
The stars on his shoulders gleamed  
Whatever he wanted would be granted*

*At least that's how it seemed*

*The second strode forth so boldly  
Eagles perched proudly; for all to see  
This one too - he had no doubt  
Of being answered affirmatively*

*The oakleaves on the third one  
Shone golden bright in the sun  
going forth in his presumption  
He believed his prize he'd won*

*The fourth and fifth marched up, determined  
Bars, both double and single of silver and gold  
Ambition and youth had presumed their rights  
Fictitious delusions had made them bold*

*Then there were some, who cm up last  
Many stripes adorned their sleeve  
But self sufficient, domineering ways  
had caused them also, to be deceived*

*I watched so my smug emotions  
On smiling faces feigned  
They hid conceit and haughtiness  
Condescension and disdain*

*As God looked them over intently  
His words were sharp as He spoke  
You put much store in symbolic adornment  
But My wrath is does provoke*

*You all expect an answer of favor*



*But with emblems I'm not impressed  
I only answer by grace through faith  
In the life of My son...that you protest*

*While your peers look on your stature  
and watch for successes won  
I search within your heart  
For the mark and the blood of My Son*

*So he who would rank high in heaven  
Will have a servant's heart on earth  
For eagles and stars and oakleaves and bars  
In My eyes are of little worth*

*For I made majestic eagles to soar  
The stars of heaven I hold in My hand  
I color the leaves on the mighty oak  
And only see stripes on the back of one Man*

*So the only rank that has privilege  
Or in My kingdom that has any part  
Is the work of grace that's done  
Through Jesus changing your heart*

*So requests denied on the basis of pride  
The only insignia you need  
Is the Life of Christ living in you  
In thought - word- and in deed*

*Because oakleaves will rot and bars will break  
Position counts nothing at all  
Humbly earn your rank in heaven  
Because eagles will die and stars will fall*

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*Penned by: Debbie Moore Ridenour 9/19/92*

*Dictated by: God*



### **Viet Activities of Sergeant From Kern Told**

*(Bakersfield Californian, October 31, 1967, Bakersfield, California)*

Activities of five Kern County men on duty with the U.S. Air Force in Vietnam were reported by the Air Force Home Town News Center at Tinker AFB, Okla.

Ten minutes after Staff Sgt. **Vincent L. Davis** of Bakersfield, took off in the midst of enemy-held territory, his critically wounded Vietnamese patient arrived at Phan Rang City Hospital for treatment.

Davis, son of Mrs. May K. Davis of 2606 San Emidio Street, was an aeromedical technician on an H-43 Huskie helicopter crew that recently rescued a Vietnamese soldier who had been shot in the back twice by the Viet Cong 10 miles south of Phan Rang.

When his helicopter was unable to land in the immediate area because of the terrain, the sergeant volunteered to climb down a cable to reach the injured man. Then, with assistance of Vietnamese troops, Davis carried the victim to a clearing where the chopper had landed.

Davis is assigned at Phan Rang as a member of the highly-specialized and global Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service that has logged more than 1,000 combat "saves" in Vietnam since December 1964.

The sergeant, a 1951 graduate of Bakersfield High School, has 15 years Air Force service.



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### **Air Force Man Trains Children to Farm Land**

*(Van Nuys Valley news, June 17, 1971, Van Nuys, California)*

Vietnamese youngsters, ages 6 to 18, are being taught improved agricultural methods on their own two and one-half acre plot near Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam, by U.S. Air Force Capt.

**Michael J. Selby.**

Capt. Selby, son of Mr. and Mrs. E. George Selby, 400-B W. Alameda, Burbank, and a fellow member of the Phan Rang civic action team have delivered to the young farmers water pump, a sprayer, insecticides, seeds, clothes and barbed wire for a fence — all donated by the Phan Rang civic action program.

The youth contributed the fence posts and will share in the labor in forthcoming months. As planned, the youngsters will level and prepare the land before planting corn, watermelon, sugar cane and banana trees.

The participants in the multi-sponsored program were selected from among the membership of Kien Kien hamlet's Rural Development Youth Club.

The captain, a special operations officer, was commissioned in 1967 upon completion of Officer Training School. Lackland AFB. Tex. He graduated from John Burroughs High School in 1960 and received his B.A. degree in English in 1964 from the University of California at Los Angeles. He is a member of Phi Delta Theta.

### **Base in Vietnam Taking on Stateside Look**



**PHAN RANG, Vietnam** (Special) — The opening of five new base facilities at Phan Rang Air Base is just another step designed to give the installation a "Stateside appearance" according to the base commander.

The overall project is only 70 per cent finished but already in use are a new base exchange, enlisted dining hall, enlisted open mess and base chapel. Soon to be in use is a new headquarters building.

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"The gain in morale and working conditions certainly offsets any additional costs we might have had," said Col. Lewis R. Riley, base commander "In another year, we'll have the construction complete."

Riley pointed out that almost 5,000 people used the new BX the first day. The enlisted men's mess drew an opening-night crowd estimated at 2,500.

Much of the construction was handled by Air Force personnel and civilian Vietnamese workers of the 35th Civil Engineering Sq. and the 554th CES.

"We make it as Stateside as we can," Riley said in reviewing what has been accomplished at Phan Rang, and the reason is "primarily for the morale of the troops." (*European Stars & Stripes*, September 25, 1967, Darmstadt, Hesse, DE)



In the late 1960s, the main function of No. 1 (Bomber) Operational Conversion Unit (1BOCU), based at Amberley air base not far from Brisbane, Queensland, was to prepare Aussie Canberra bomber air and ground crews for service at Phan Rang air base, South Vietnam. But 1BOCU also undertook other duties as required by Headquarters Operational Command of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).

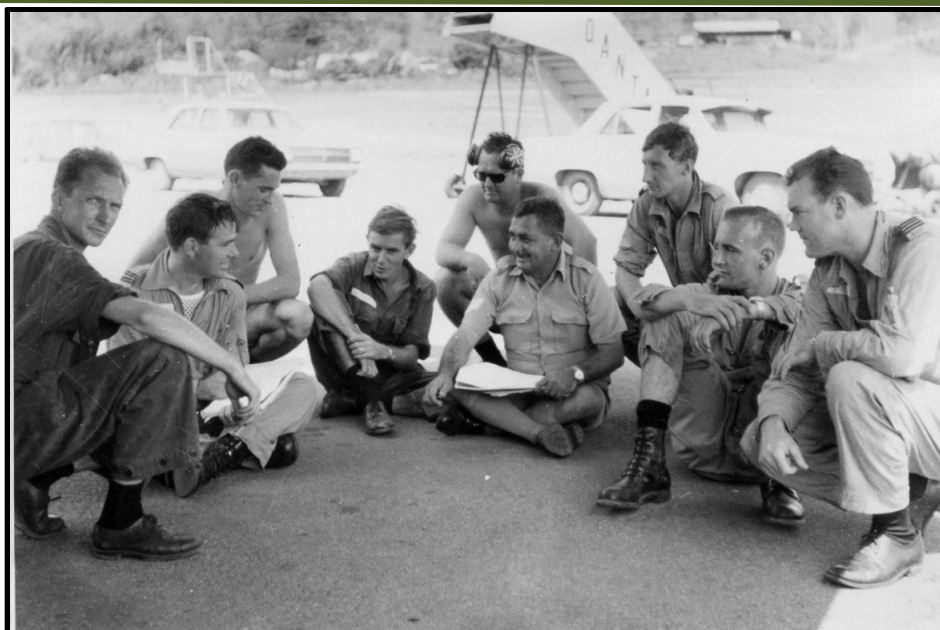


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**The Detachment Commander, Bob Howe (2nd from left), briefing the troops at Jackson Field, Port Moresby on the day's planned operations.**

One such duty in May 1968 saw a 1BOCU team of airmen, accompanying two Canberras – A84-222 and A84-223 – deploy to Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea under “*Exercise Boy Scout*”. Their task was to fly over and photograph PNG airfields so that the RAAF could update its intelligence database. The importance of knowing as much as possible about PNG was reflected in Australia’s history, remembering that it was occupied by the Japanese during World War II, en route to invading Australia. The reconnaissance task was not easy in this remote region where there were deep valleys and high mountains up to 14,000’.

The detachment of two crews comprised two newly graduated pilots: Pilot Officers Dick Allchin and Al Blyth, and two experienced navigators: Flight Lieutenants Bob Howe and Clarrie Stjernqvist. Both Bob and Clarrie had previously flown in maritime/anti-submarine aircraft, Clarrie in SP-2E Neptunes with No. 11 Squadron from Richmond, NSW and Bob in SP-2H Neptunes with No. 10 Squadron at Townsville, North Queensland.

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**It was a strange sight for civilian passengers disembarking from their commercial airline flights to see two camouflaged RAAF Canberra bombers at the airfield, however there were no operational RAAF air bases in Papua New Guinea where they could fly from.**



**Remote Tapini airfield.**

The Canberras were equipped with World War II vintage Williamson F-52 cameras, typically with a 10-inch lens, which were fitted into a hatch behind the aircraft's closed bomb-bay doors. The camera looked through a window at the ground below and was operated by the crew up front. It produced 8.5 inch x 7 inch over-lapping black and white prints of good quality, providing that the airfield target could be readily seen. This was not always the case as the weather in this tropical region was very volatile. When the humidity increased rapidly after sunrise, significant cloud build-ups could, and did, occur over many of the airfields to be photographed.

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### **Tucked in over Papua New Guinea**

Indeed, Plt Off Allchin and Flt Lt Howe had a challenging experience when, flying at 25,000' altitude, they flew into a developing cumulo-nimbus thunderstorm cloud. Before they knew it, the hapless Canberra crew were hoisted up to 40,000' by the tremendous updraft currents that occur in these storm clouds. No matter what Dick did to make the aircraft respond to his controls (the 1950s-vintage Canberra was manually controlled only) they continued to climb and suffered severe buffeting, while lightning flashed around them. To make matters worse, the Canberra wasn't fitted with any sort of radar that could tell the crew where the boundaries of the cloud cell were, so Dick couldn't knowingly head in any specific direction to escape its clutches. Finally, they were spat out of the cloud at around 45,000', and blessing their fortune that the Canberra had such a sturdy airframe, they decided to call it a day and head back to their temporary Port Moresby home.

## **Pantle Takes Part in Mission To Aid Vietnamese Red Cross**

*(Fairborn Daily Herald, December 23, 1970, Fairborn, Ohio)*

Maj. William S. Pantle, 1427 Glendale dr., was recently part of a six-man crew of the 311th

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Tactical Airlift Squadron who flew a humanitarian mission in support of the Vietnamese Red Cross of Ninh Thuan province, South Vietnam.

A native of Penndel, Pa., Pantle is married to the former Judith Baker, daughter of Mrs. Gladys A. Baker, 377 Fairway dr. Pantle has been in the service 12 years and has been in Vietnam since July.

Following the early November flooding in the northern part of the Republic of Vietnam, the Red Cross headquarters in Phan Rang City gathered more than 3,300 pounds of rice and 1,100 pounds of blankets and clothing for the flood victims, but had no means to transport the vitally-needed supplies 275 miles up- country. The Red Cross director appealed to Col. Tran Can Tu, Ninh Thuan province chief, who in turn passed the request on to the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam team 45 in Phan Rang city. The request was forwarded to the 315th TAW which readily agreed to make the trip.

About 30 Vietnamese Red Cross volunteers, many in their early teens, delivered the cargo to the rain-soaked Phan Rang AB flight line.

Loaded with a precious cargo of foodstuff, clothing and Red Cross workers, the C-123 Provider lifted off the Phan Rang air base runway last month, destined for the flood-ravaged area around Da Nang airfield.

Fifteen of the Red Cross workers also accompanied the goods to help distribute them to the hamlets of the inundated Quang Nam province lowlands and to bolster other Red Cross relief efforts in the area.

Upon arrival at Da Nang airfield after the two-hour flight, the cargo plane was met by Red Cross workers from Da Nang city. The relief supplies were quickly off-loaded and put into waiting trucks for delivery to the flood victims.

The 315th TAW C-123 then was refueled, took off into the ominous gray sky, and headed back down the coast for home with its mission accomplished.



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**JOE A. JORDAN** son of Mrs. Ruby Jordan of 1217-A Jeanette, has received the Air Force Commendation Medal at Phan Rang, AB, Vietnam, from Col. Walter C. Turnier, 35<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing commander. Sgt. Jordan distinguished himself by meritorious service as an electrical power production technician at Phan Rang. (*Abilene Reporter News, December 21, 1970, Abilene, Texas*)

Sgt. **Franklin L. Suffecool** EDWARDS. Calif. — Sgt. Franklin L. Suffecool, son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter D. Suffecool New Paris, has received the Air Force Commendation Medal at Edwards, AFB, Calif. Sgt. Suffecool, a construction equipment repairman, was decorated for meritorious service at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. He was cited for professional skill, knowledge and initiative. He is now at Edwards in a unit of the Air Force Systems Command. The sergeant is a graduate of Mesa High School. His wife, Mary, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. O. S. Humble of Tucson, Ariz. (*Altoona Mirror, October 8, 1968, Altoona, Pennsylvania*)

Airman 1.C. R. J. Vassas VIETNAM — Air Force Airman A1C **Richard J. Vassas**, son of Mrs. Marie A. Vassas of 314 Craig St., Gallitzin, has arrived in Vietnam for duty and will be stationed at Phan Rang Air Base. Airman Vassas is a member of the 821<sup>st</sup> Combat Security Police Squadron, an elite unit that has been specially trained to repel enemy aggression and provide air base security. The Phan Rang unit will be held in constant readiness to supplement the defense forces of any U.S. air base in the combat zone which might come under an enemy attack. The airman is a graduate of Greater Gallitzin Joint High School. (*Altoona Mirror, October 8, 1968, Altoona, Pennsylvania*)

COL . NELSON IS DECORATED With U. S. Combat Air Forces, Vietnam U.S. Air force Colonel **Allen S. Nelson** of Mc Allen, Tex., has been decorated with the Meritorious Service Medal at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. Colonel Nelson distinguished himself by his outstanding duty

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performance while assigned to the Global Plans and Policy Division. Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans, Headquarters, USAF. He is now at Phan Rang where he serves as deputy commander for operations for the 35<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing a unit of the Pacific Air Forces, headquarters for air operations in Southeast Asia, the Far East and the Pacific area. The colonel, a veteran of World War II, was commissioned in 1944 through the aviation cadet program and holds the aeronautical rating of command pilot. He has also served in the Republic of Korea. A 1941 graduate of Mc Allen High School, he attended the University of Texas. He is a graduate of the Air Force Air Command and Staff College and the Air War College, both located at Maxwell AFB Ala. Colonel Nelson's wife, Margie is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. T. E. Matlock of 1211 Willow St., Austin, Texas. The colonel is the brother of Mrs. L. C. Brown, P. L. Nelson, Jr., and Harry I. Nelson, all of Mc Allen. He also has two sisters, Mrs. Melvin King and Mrs. G. T. Sandidge of Bandera Texas, and a sister, Mrs. Leon Ray, who resides in Ft. Smith, Arkansas. (*Bandera Bulletin, October 16, 1970, Bandera, Texas*)

AIRMAN IN VIETNAM GOODING — Airman 1.C. **Tommy R. Thompson**, son of Mr. and Mrs. M. E. Thompson of Route 2, Gooding, is on duty at Phan Rang Air Force Base, Vietnam. Airman Thompson, an electrical power specialist, is a 1961 graduate of Twin Falls High School. (*Twin Falls Times News, December 27, 1966, Twin Falls, Idaho*)

Air Force Maj. **Raymond A. Malacarne**, son of Victor Malacame, 1625 Eighth St., has been decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross for aerial achievement in Vietnam. Malacarne, an F-100 Super Sabre fighter bomber pilot at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam, provided close air support for friendly forces at Dak Seang, Vietnam, which were being attacked. (*Sarasota Herald Tribune, December 20, 1970, Sarasota, Florida*)

Staff Sgt. **Walter A. Roche**, son of Mrs. Rose Roche, 3113 Cortez Road, W, Bradenton, has received the Air Force Commendation Medal at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. Roche was decorated for meritorious service as a fire protection supervisor with the 35th Civil Engineering Squadron at Phan Rang Air Base. (*Sarasota Herald Tribune, December 20, 1970, Sarasota, Florida*)

TSgt. **Samuel Otipton**, 692 E. William St., Crestview, is on duty at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. Sgt. Otipton, an aircraft maintenance technician, is assigned to a unit of the Pacific Air Forces. Before his arrival in Vietnam, he served at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. The sergeant is a 1942

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graduate of W.B. Townsend (Tenn.) High School. (*Playground Daily News, April 8, 1971, Fort Walton Beach, Florida*)

Col. **John T. Parish Jr.**, son of Mrs. John T. Parish, 143 Sunset Drive, Marlanna, has assumed the position of director of training for the Twenty-First Air Force headquartered at McGuire AFB, N.J. Col. Parish served at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam, prior to his appointment at McGuire. Twenty-First Air Force is a major component of the Military Airlift Command. (*Playground Daily News, April 8, 1971, Fort Walton Beach, Florida*)



A1C **David Woodman**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence B. Woodman, Rt. 2, is serving with the 315th Combat Support Group at Phan Rang AFB, Vietnam. Woodman left from McChord AFB, Wash., Nov. 21, and stopped at Anchorage, Alaska; Tokyo, Japan; and Cam Ranh Bay, scheduled to go to Phu Cat AFB. Arriving at Cam Ranh Bay, he learned that Phu Cat AFB had been turned over to the South Vietnamese Forces, so his orders were changed to Phan Rang. Woodman, who served at K. I. Sawyer AFB, Mich., the past year, was graduated from AF Technical School, Chanute AFB, Ill., in September, 1970. A Craig High School graduate in 1968, he attended

Platteville State University before entering the Air Force. His address is: 394563960, Box 5828, 315<sup>th</sup> CSGP (PACAF), APO San Francisco, Calif. 96321, Pas: PRRHYK Phan Rang AFB, Vietnam. (*Janesville Gazette, December 15, 1971, Janesville, Wisconsin*)

In Vietnam SUSSEX. N.J. Airman/1C **Gene R. Elliott**, son of Mr. and Mrs. Harvey A. Elliott of R. D. 3, Sussex, is on duty at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. Elliott, an aircraft mechanic, is a member of the Pacific Air Forces. Before his arrival in Southeast Asia, he was assigned to Williams AFB, Ariz. The airman is a graduate of Sussex High School. (*Middletown Times Herald Record, November 10, 1967, Middletown, New York*)

**At Phan Rang** MIDDLETOWN Airman/1C **Arthur C. Nielson**, whose mother is Mrs. Rita Benforte of Middletown, is on duty at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. Nielson, an aircraft loadmaster, is a member of the Pacific Air Forces. Before his arrival in Southeast Asia, he was assigned to Travis AFB, Calif. The airman attended Middletown High School and completed requirements for his diploma after entering the service. (*Middletown Times Herald Record, November 10, 1967,*

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*Middletown, New York)*

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



I hope that you enjoyed this newsletter. I was so taken by the video and of course the song that the Simmons did for their dad and grandfather that I just wanted to capture the sense of the video for print. After I listened to it the first time the words from Charles' biography kept going through my head and it's almost like I could hear his voice reading it to me so I knew I had to do something and not only that, but it isn't very often that children go to such efforts to commemorate their dad. When I showed this video to a neighbor she then shared with me what she wrote for her dad, and I thought it went along with the previous story very well. Her dad wasn't a Phan Rang veteran, but he was a C-130 loadmaster that transited Vietnam many times. This newsletter was composed by Douglas Severt and all graphics by Douglas Severt unless otherwise noted. 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.