

# Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.  
"Keeping the memories alive" Newsletter 254

In this issue:

**The Women of Vietnam**

**Water Treatment Plant by Jimmy Smith**

**What Did You Do in the War Daddy - a conversation**

**My Yank Mate by Tom Grieves, 2SQN RAAF**

**Follow up on "The Traveling Tea Cup or the Great Tea Cup Heist"**

**Doug's Comments**

## The Women of Vietnam



**1st. Lt. Hedwig Orlowski (top left)** U.S. Army was onboard with Capt. Alexander when their plane crashed on its return trip to Qui Nhon. She was assigned to the 67th Evacuation Hospital, 1LT Orlowski was from Michigan. She is remembered on Panel 31E, Line 15. (See her obituary and details of aircraft crash in Phan Rang Newsletter 254).

**2nd Lt. Carol Drazba (Second from the left)**, U.S. Army was killed in a helicopter crash near Saigon on February 18, 1966. Born and raised in Pennsylvania, she is remembered on Panel 5E,

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

---

Line 46.

**1st. Lt. Sharon Lane (third from the left)**, U.S. Army was killed by a rocket explosion on June 8, 1969, less than 10 weeks after she arrived in Vietnam. Assigned to the 312th Evacuation Hospital, 1LT Lane was working in the Vietnamese ward of the hospital when the rocket exploded, killing her and her patients. She was from Ohio and her name can be found on Panel 23W, Line 112.

**Capt. Mary Klinker (fourth from the left)**, U.S. Air Force was part of an on-board medical team during Operation Babylift. Her flight was carrying 243 infants and children when it developed pressure problems and crashed while attempting to return to the airport. Captain Klinker was killed on April 4, 1975, just three weeks before the Fall of Saigon. A native of Indiana, she is remembered on Panel 1W, Line 122.

**Capt. Eleanor Alexander (left bottom row)**, Captain Eleanor Grace Alexander, U.S. Army had been working in a hospital in Pleiku to help out during mass casualties from Dak To when her plane crashed on the return trip to Qui Nhon on November 30, 1967. She was with the 85th Evacuation Hospital. She was from New Jersey and is remembered on Panel 31E Line 8. See details of aircraft crash in Phan Rang Newsletter 254.

**2nd Lt. Elizabeth Jones (Bottom row, second from left)**, U.S. Army was flying with 2LT Drazba and was killed in the same helicopter crash near Saigon. She was assigned to the 3rd Field Hospital. 2LT Jones was from South Carolina and is remembered on Panel 5E Line 47.

**LTC Annie Graham (Bottom row right)** U.S. Army suffered a stroke on August 14, 1968. She was from North Carolina and was the Chief Nurse with the 91st Evacuation Hospital in Tuy Hoa. Her name can be found on Panel 48W, Line 12.

## **The Women of Vietnam**

(Source: Chicago Tribune Co. Jan 11, 1987)

Somewhere between 33,000 and 55,000 American women, both military and civilian, worked in Vietnam during the war years. They served as clerks, air traffic controllers, cartographers, photographers, intelligence workers, school and hospital workers for religious groups,

## **"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. 254 **"...keeping the memories alive"**

---

entertainers, Red Cross workers. Most of the women who were there with the military were nurses, many of them inadequately prepared for the carnage they would face. The fact that there is no accurate count of these women is a reminder of the lack of official and public interest in them at the time, a lack of interest that followed them after the war ended, even after concerns over the male Vietnam vets revived. "By and large," Kathryn Marshall writes, "women in Vietnam were caretakers and helpmates. They had been trained to take care of people --wounded people, sick people, children. And they 'did' for men because, in the military and elsewhere, that's what women did. By training and by habit they downplayed their own feelings and denied their own needs. The men's experiences, or the patient's or the child's feelings, came first. They were used to being minor characters, even in their own lives." In May of 1985 Marshall began interviewing these "minor characters" and found that some of them "talked with such power I couldn't let go of them." What follows is excerpts from 3 of the 20 monologues that make up Marshall's book, "In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam, 1966--1975" (Little, Brown & Co., \$17.95). The book, to be published in February, is the first to examine what women did in the war and what the war did to them.

Lily Adams was born and raised in New York City. Her mother, who died when Lily was 8 months old, was Italian. Her father is Chinese.

In 1966 she enrolled in a three-year nursing program at Mount Vernon Hospital. "One day--this was 1967--an Army Nurse Corps recruiter came and showed us this wonderful new movie about being an Army nurse. Well, that was the answer to a lot of my needs. Financial, for one. And for another, I could fill the needs that I wanted to fill for John F. Kennedy. He really inspired me at an early age--I remember staying home on that snowy day when he was inaugurated, remember hearing him say, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." And I thought, "My God, who is this man?"

In 1969 she received orders for Vietnam. From October of 1969 to October of 1970 she was stationed at the 12th Evacuation Hospital at Cu Chi.

My first day a group of wounded comes in, and I just stand there, frozen. What I see is a typical patient: a double amp (amputee). No legs, the bones and muscles and everything showing, like a piece of meat in a butcher shop. So I watch. Ten people are doing 10,000 things I can't keep

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

---

up with--really, they were doing too many things too fast for me to understand.

Basically, they were cutting the uniform off, looking to see where the wounds were, making the assessment, getting the IV in, trying to find out if the guy is allergic to tetanus so they can give him a shot right away and also asking him to give his name, rank and serial number in case he goes unconscious. The majority of men did not wear dog tags because they made noise. Sometimes they'd wear them in their boots--only if you get your leg blown off, you ain't going to have a boot. And most of the time they didn't come in with the parts. They just came in with what was left over.

So I'm on the other side of the triage room, trying to compose myself so I don't have a shocked look on my face. And I'm thinking, "This is crazy. They didn't tell me it would be like this." Then I start thinking, "I want my mother." So the second batch comes in and I'm feeling awful because I'm not doing anything. I'm frozen. Paralyzed.

So the third group comes in. Now as each group comes in you lose more and more staff, because more doctors and nurses are going to the OR (operating room), to pre-op, to X-ray and so on. When we're down to about a skeleton staff, one doctor yells, "I need someone to hold this guy's head!" I think, "Hold head. . . Hold head. . . I can do that; I can hold a head." So I run over and hold the guy's head while they stick a tube down his throat. Finally the doctor says, "Good," and after that I'm able to get the idea of what needed to be done.

It was overwhelming--the sights, smells, yelling, moaning. . . It was like a zoo. After I realized I could function, though, I was better.

In the recovery room my first assignment was a POW. When this male nurse told me, I told him to shove it--I was not going to take care of any North Vietnamese. But this nurse said, "Let me tell you some things. First, I know how you feel--none of us wants to take care of the enemy. Second, these people have a lot of information. We know they're upper rank. You may end up saving 100 GIs--so just think of it that way." And I said, "Okay, you're on."

So I take care of this guy and I find myself wanting to treat him like a regular patient. A few times I caught myself holding his hand and squeezing it, trying to get him to concentrate--you

## **"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. 254 **"...keeping the memories alive"**

---

know, when you work with badly injured people you try eye contact, you verbalize stuff that they're okay because that's what keeps them going. You've got to push them on so they don't give up and die. And doing this involves a lot of touch and a lot of energy.

I was thinking, "Do I want to keep this guy alive to save 100 GIs? Or do I want him to die because he's a damned gook and he's killed 100 GIs?" Then I find myself giving my regular good nursing care. And eventually I come to feel like this guy is really a human being and my patient-- I'm happy when his blood pressure is good, worried when it starts going down.

Well, when MI (Military Intelligence) comes to interrogate him, I get very protective. I stand in front of my patient and say, "What are you going to do?" I had thoughts of them slapping him around and doing all kinds of things.

The guy laughs and says, "We're just going to ask him a few questions." I go, "Okay--but I'm staying here."

So I stay, and they ask him questions and he readily gives answers. When it's over, I ask the guy, "Can I ask him some questions?" And MI says, "Sure. What do you want to know?"

"Well, how old is he?"

"He's 19."

"Well, what does he think about the war, I want to know that. Only tell him he doesn't have to answer me if he doesn't want to." I was afraid the POW would think that if he said anything negative, I may not treat him well. But he says something to the interpreter and the interpreter comes back to me:

"The patient said that if he could demonstrate in Hanoi like you're demonstrating in Washington, he would be doing it." And I thought, "This really is a human being. He's no different than my guys."

From the recovery room I went to the regular intensive care unit, where there were a lot of

## **"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. 254 **"...keeping the memories alive"**

---

belly wounds, and it smelled awful. There were maggots all over the place--to this day I have a passion against flies, I really do. In Vietnam I had my own body counts. During quiet times, I'd go for flies. Once I got 23, one right after another. The corpsmen used to tease me about my body counts, but I thought of it as saving lives. Also, it was an enemy that I could kill. I didn't have an M16 out in the jungle, but I could kill flies. I still hate them.

The ICU I ended up in had just been opened. It was half amputations with complications and half severe burns. We had a lot of Vietnamese. I remember one Vietnamese woman who had 90 percent of her body burned. She had set herself on fire because her GI boyfriend had decided he was going home without her. And this was not an unusual story, either.

I saw things in that unit that you will never see in the United States. Like phosphorous burns that continue to burn through the body if you don't put neutralizing solvents on them. The smell of flesh burning--it's an awful smell. I remember two Vietnamese children who were so badly burned their kidneys shut down and their urine turned to wine-color. Yeah, a lot of things that here in the States you will never see.

After a while, I wanted to go someplace where I didn't have to know all the stories. I just could not take one more story about a guy who was supposed to get married when he got home in May, only he had no legs and he couldn't tell his girlfriend. No, I could not deal with any more of that. So I put in for a transfer. I told them, "Get me out of here--get me to triage." (Triage is the initial sorting and allocation of treatment to the wounded.) And they said, "Great. Get her to triage--she's stupid enough to volunteer." What I didn't know till I got to triage was that you could nurse somebody for five minutes and still get very attached.

I liked triage. We got all kinds of stuff--Lambretta accidents, babies from the orphanages, GIs coming in drunk--the light stuff as well as the heavy. Setting aside the guys that weren't going to make it to the OR--well, I had some very heavy experiences. I remember one guy who knew he was dying and kept thinking I was his wife. He was saying, "Mary, Mary--hold my hand!"

So I held his hand. "Mary, Mary--I just want to let you know I love you!" My instincts told me it would not be right to say. "Hey, you're dying in muddy fatigues and this is the war zone and I am not your wife." I mean, it was his last time on Earth, and I did not want to screw up his

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

---

fantasy, even though I felt guilty that, in a way, I was lying to him. Well, my response was, "You're going to be okay," meaning either way--you're going to live or you're going to die, but you're going to be okay."

Another guy, I remember, lay there and told me he was dying for nothing. I was just about to talk about the domino theory and try to make him feel better, but something told me, "He doesn't want to listen to that." So I said, "Yeah, you're right." And he died peacefully. They all died peacefully.

Lily Adams is now a psychotherapist specializing in post-trauma stress disorder. She is on the national board of directors of the Vietnam Veterans of America and is chairperson for the Vietnam Veterans of America's special committee on women veterans. She lives with her family in Roswell, Ga. Cherie Rankin

Cherie Rankin grew up in West Palm Beach, Fla., graduated from high school in 1964, worked for two years, then went straight through college, graduating with a degree in social work and psychology. In her senior year she got involved with antiwar demonstrations.

Rankin was in Vietnam with the Red Cross's Supplemental Recreational Activities Overseas (SRAO) program from September of 1970 to September of 1971. She was based in Da Nang, Cam Ranh and Phan Rang. Here she talks about coming home:

There are the bad memories and there are the good ones. There are also the ones that are some of each: Like once, at Cam Ranh, the perimeter got overrun with Viet Cong. This other girl and I were coming home in our jeep, and all of a sudden the place was crawling with Military Police and military guys. They pulled our jeep off the road, and this GI pulled me out, threw me down into the sand and jumped on top of me. A firefight was going on--I don't know how long it lasted, but this GI was laying on top of my person the whole time, protecting me. Then, when the firefight was over, he picked me up, brushed me off and put me back in the jeep. I never knew who he was.

I was luckier than some of the women I worked with. Nobody that I was buddy-buddy with got killed--that I know of. I did have a guy who used to write me with such regularity that when 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. 254 **“...keeping the memories alive”**

---

didn't hear from him, I went looking through all the hospitals till I found him. He had a severe case of malaria. That was scary. And my brother disappeared for a while, and that was very scary. But I didn't lose anybody. My friend Joyce had lost her fiance before she'd come to Vietnam--he'd gotten killed, and she decided to come. And another women in the unit got engaged to a pilot while we were there. He got shot down and killed.

The hard part for me is that I met so many men and just don't know what happened to them. Some would hang around the center regularly, month after month--but I can't remember names, I can't put names to the faces. The ones I was closest to I know came back okay, but there are all the others. . . .

Eight years after I got back I went to see the movie "Coming Home." I am not a hysterical person, but I became absolutely hysterical. I started to sob uncontrollably. I felt this incredible, intense pain, emotional pain, and I couldn't handle it. That episode scared me so badly I decided I was never going to read about Vietnam or talk about Vietnam, ever. But whenever the subject of Vietnam would come up, in any situation, tears would come to my eyes--I knew I had a lot of stuff there.

Well, about two years ago, when thay started networking for the women who had been civilians in 'Nam, I started reconnecting with other women. I started sharing some experiences. I started to get in touch with my feelings--with a lot of the fear, for one thing. I realize now that I must have been afraid many times over there. Also, in the last year or two my brother and I have started talking. I really think I've worked through a lot. Now I can read about Vietnam. I have gobs and gobs of Vietnam books on the shelf over there. And I'm able to talk pretty freely now, without a lot of crying or pain.

Now what I feel I need is recognition. There is a sense of wanting to be identified as having been in Vietnam. Not because I supported the war. No, I want to be identified because I feel that what I did over there was valuable. I want to be proud of that because for so long I was ashamed. For so long I was afraid people would think I supported the war.

Let me end by telling you what happened to me last May, at the reunion in New York (the dedication of the New York Vietnam veterans' memorial). I'd only been there a few hours when



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

---

I started getting sick. It was horrendous: I couldn't cry, but I had this terrible headache, and then I started throwing up. I threw up and threw up, and when that was over, I was okay. The headache went. The depression went. I just threw it all up out of me. Later I told my therapist what happened, and she said, "That's a normal response. Because your experience in Vietnam made you sick."

Cherie Rankin now lives in Norwood, Mass. She is a clinical social worker specializing in the treatment of alcoholism. Ruth Sidisin

Ruth Sidisin grew up in Roselle, N.J. Her father was director of traffic at the Jersey City railroad yard, "where he could see Lady Liberty from his tower window." His family had come over from Czechoslovakia.

Ruth's mother, whose family came from Minsk, Russia, had been in the Red Cross during World War I. "She had helped out in the hospitals and did private duty after the war. And I wanted to be a nurse from the time I was 3 or 4, when my brother cut his finger and I put a Band-Aid on it."

In 1949, after completing two years at what was then New Jersey College for Women, Ruth entered the Johns Hopkins Hospital School of Nursing. In 1955, three years after graduating, she joined the Air Force Nurse Corps and stayed for 25 years.

A Vietnam volunteer, Ruth was stationed at Tan Son Nhut, at the 21st Casualty Staging Flight, from December of 1968 to December of 1969. She worked as a staff nurse and as charge nurse of the dispensary ward.

I was not a youngster when I went to Vietnam. I was 39 when I went over. I turned 40 while I was there. And when you're 40, you feel a long way from being 19, which was the average age of the people who were over there.

Being older than them was some help. At least I'd been around. At least I'd seen a bit of life and so forth, unlike most of the nurses in the Army and the young ones in the Air Force. They were just kids of 21 or 22. Still, there was no way to prepare yourself for what went on 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. 254 **"...keeping the memories alive"**

---

Lord knows, I wasn't out in the boonies, but that didn't stop me from seeing what happened. Because in Vietnam every day was disaster day.

So age was some help, but not much. Neither was experience. Not even working with earthquake victims or in the emergency room of a big hospital could equal what I saw in a single day in Vietnam.

There was a whole variety of just plain trauma. There were belly wounds, amputations, head injuries, burns. On top of that they all had infections and complications. They had things we'd never heard about in school--things some of the physicians had never even heard about--and diseases they told us people hardly ever got anymore: dengue fever, malaria, hepatitis, bubonic plague.

Bubonic plague they got from rats. Those rats were really something. I don't want to gross you out, but I have to tell you about this one guy who forgot to wash his hands before he went to sleep. It was in an area where there were lots of rats. Anyhow, this guy had just had a peanut butter sandwich, and when he went to sleep and dangled his arm over the edge of his cot, a rat went for that peanut butter--and ate most of his finger.

Some days you felt you'd lived a lifetime in just a week. Because Vietnam was not John Wayne on the beach at Iwo Jima. It was not ketchup on make-believe wounds. It was more like a grotesque form of "can you top this," because each time you thought you'd seen the ultimate, something else would come along.

I remember one young man with beautiful blond hair who came in blinded and missing one of his arms and both of his legs. He also had a belly wound. Well, thank God he couldn't see my face when he said, "Nurse, today's my 21st birthday." Because that was one of those times when you just couldn't have let them see it. You smiled and smiled while you were there taking care of them so that afterward you could go home to your hootch and cry.

Most of us just sort of got by by sharing with one another. Friendships, talking--I met the most beautiful people of my life in Vietnam. Plus some of us either adopted people or were adopted. Like I became a mom to the Security Police.

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

---

It started when I first got there. When I was sick and in a fog--you know, when I thought the mold on the walls was green paint. Well, every evening I'd hear the rumbling of heavy artillery going by. I'd drag myself over to the door and wave at the guys. And every night they'd wave and yell and whistle at me, until one night when these sergeants came by in their jeep and stopped. "Ma'am, we're afraid the Security Police have sort of offended you." I said, "Oh, no, nothing like that."

Then one of the sergeants said, "They've sort of taken to calling you Mom." And I thought, "Good grief, if I'd gotten married right out of high school like all my girlfriends did, I'd have kids the age of those guys." So I said, "Well, look, I'm flattered. They can call me Mom if they want." And every night after that, unless I was on R and R or something, they'd wave and shout and yell, "Mom!" Sometimes in the mornings they'd invite me over for breakfast. And once a month, when they had their hail-and-farewell barbecues, they'd come get me in Ruthie the Screaming Mini--the mini-gun tank they'd named after me. They'd come get me, too, on my days off. I'd have my steel pot on my head, my flak jacket and cammies on, and we'd ride out to the perimeter and visit. After a while I really thought of them as my sons. They were beautiful boys.

The day I was due to leave, some of my Security Police boys picked up this other gal and I in Ruthie the Screaming Mini and drove us down to the plane. They kept apologizing, saying, "Too bad the rest of the guys can't make it--too bad they're all asleep." Well, I'd been sitting on the plane maybe five minutes when I heard this announcement: "Major Sidisin, will you come to the front of the plane." So I went and looked out and--what do you think I saw? Trucks. Jeeps. Mini-guns. Big guns. All kinds of vehicles filled with my sons--maybe 400--who had come to see me off. Well, I tell you, I dissolved. I got off the plane and cried and kissed and hugged every one of them.

For a long time I thought I'd put Vietnam behind me. But in the last two years I've cried more tears than I have in the previous quite a few. I think what it is, a lot of the stuff that I had bottled up because I was busy--I think it finally hit.

I'm so glad they're finally recognizing that there were women over there and that the women

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

---

saw as much as the guys did, but in a different way. This should finally end the idea that a woman is supposed to give and give and give and make everything nice-nice, and be an Earth Mother and console everyone all the time without receiving emotional support themselves. Because if you believe women don't need to be replenished, you're a fool. Yeah, staying in the military made a whole lot of difference as far as attitude and adjustment. Because in the military there were other gals and guys to replenish and affirm you. The young ones that got out at old Travis (Air Force Base), spent maybe a year Stateside, were processed out and sent home--they found that nobody gave a darn, they had no one to talk to. It was almost as if they had been on Mars and come back to reality. Or as if they'd been in reality and come back to Mars.

Retired as a lieutenant colonel, Ruth Sidisin now lives in Sumter, S.C., where she is active in church and civic affairs and as an organizer for Vietnam veterans. She frequently speaks to veterans' groups on the role of women in Vietnam.



**Carol Clarke**

The Red Cross donut dollies who provided recreation, visited hospitals and infirmaries and worked tirelessly to improve the GI's morale were an important part of the Women in Vietnam story. The dollies served at recreation centers which the donut dollies staffed and managed, but the dollies also traveled off-site to firebases, landing zones, maintenance or supply facilities away from their base camp. Carol Clarke was one of those amazing women that served at Phan Rang and Bien Hoa/Long Binh as well as other locations that were all

mobile units. Carol made an important contribution to troop morale wherever she served and she has made many important contributions to the Phan Rang legacy by providing her stories to be included in the Phan Rang Newsletter. In issue 138, she explains what it was like to be a donut dolly, in issue 216 “A Vietnam Donut Dolly’s Recollections and Reflections” which is a chapter from her new book of the same title and issue 236 “Christmas and Hanukkah Away from Home”.

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

---



### **Water Treatment Plant**

by Jimmy Smith



I served with the 35th Civil Engineering Squadron at Phan Rang AB from March 1968 to March '69. My job was crew chief overseeing the water plant supplying water for the base and several outposts. I knew my job at Phan Rang was important because without potable water no one can survive. While the job of treating water pumped in from the river had its place at Phan Rang, it was nonetheless a “non-valiant” job as it seemed to me. By this I mean, that no one thinks of producing clean water as a major accomplishment compared to other jobs and positions during the Vietnam experience.

I regularly meet other Viet Vets and we greet each as brothers because I feel that no matter what our job or position was in Vietnam, we maintain a brotherhood that is endless. But my own personal experience comes to the front when I hear of others who were “Airborne” or “Air Calvary” or “Pilots” or “Infantry” etc. All of these jobs seem more important to the mission in Vietnam than a “waterman.”

I sometimes feel embarrassed to admit what I did “during the war” because I feel my job was insignificant when viewed beside those who dealt face-to-face with the enemy or those who carried out air raids, etc. Again, I know my job was important, but it just doesn’t make me feel I contributed to the real mission, even though I know it did. I usually answer the question, “What did you do in Vietnam?” with, “I worked as a support personnel at the Phan Rang AB.”

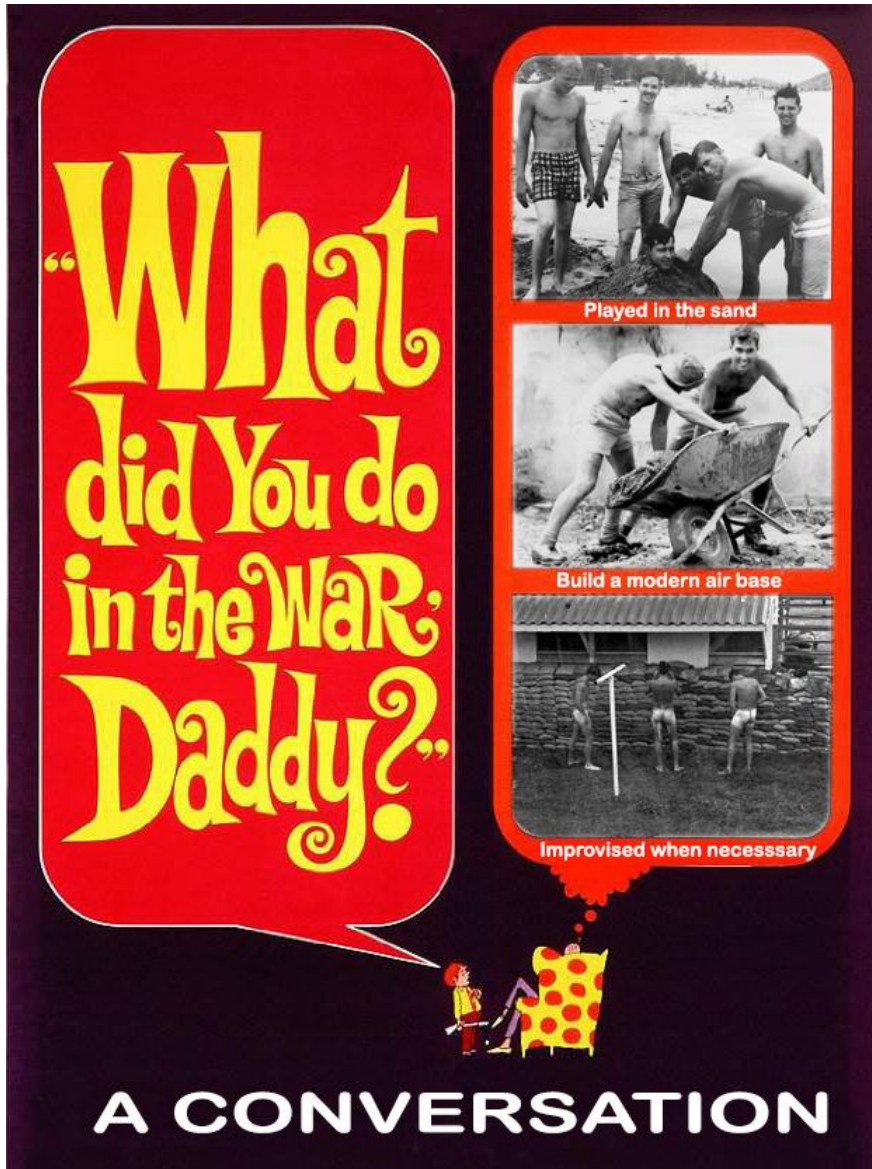


## “Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 254 “...keeping the memories alive”

Jimmy’s post generated this conversation on Facebook.



**Bill Craig wrote:** Thank you for your service...I can tell you that your job was just as important if not more important than others. Water is the life blood of everything.

**Prab Vet wrote:** Every job in Vietnam contributed to the overall mission. I would say clean drinking water is very important to the mission.

**Ron Ames wrote:** I drank and showered in your water.

**Doug Severt wrote:** Jimmy Smith your story certainly hit a nerve. For years we've discussed here and at our gatherings (reunions) and many times lamenting about one person’s contribution more important than others, but in the end we have to realize that we were a

cohesive team working together to accomplish the mission of the base. All of us performed our Air Force specialty at Phan Rang almost the same as a stateside base, albeit with some improvising in some case, but we were doing it in a war zone. Over the years I've always thought that those brave security people...even the augmentees were really my hero's because they kept us safe so we could all do our job, but I've since grown to appreciate the contributions of EVERYONE and that's why they are all hero's in my book...including you.

**Robert Earl wrote:** I was at Phan Rang in 69 as a Jet engine mechanic. I also worked B52s

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

---

supporting Arc Light in 66, 67 and 68. I have met many front line troops that give full credit to all support troops. They realize that they were dead in the water without support at all levels. You did your job. You were and are important!!

**Richard Hargrove wrote:** Good job you done your part, Appreciate what you and each person did at Phan Rang we were just as parts on the body all is needed to complete the body.

**EL Hoard wrote:** Thanks for your post...yeah, sometimes I feel that way as I returned home "intact, physically and mentally for the most part" even though I have my times as others, I guess. I don't think any of us had any different experiences than those who "went to war" before us...my dad was a WWII Navy vet and I had uncles that fought in Korea and WWII. I guess our struggles seem more inclusive because of the anti-war mentality that was prevalent across our nation during the 60s. And as I age, I guess I look for a purpose more and more and sometimes it feels like I'm heading down a dead-end street...I am dealing with depression since my wife died and perhaps that has taken over other areas of my emotional wellbeing.

**Jim Gorman wrote:** Welcome home Jimmy and thank you for your Service. I was in 35th CES most of the same period you were. I was at the Entomology Shop ( Bug Sprayers) from December 29, 67 to October 68. What you did was keep us disease free from contaminated water and sabotage from Charlie. I sometimes had the same feelings about “not really fighting the war!” I get snickers every once in awhile when I say, I was a glorified Orkin Man. We sprayed for mosquitos, inspected mess halls for cockroaches, rats, and all the other critters that made their way on base. All of these carried diseases, that we tried to keep from infecting the troops. You and I and all of our brothers did what the Air Force thought we should be doing for that particular time period. Yes, we were never destined to win the Medal of Honor, but our contributions helped our fellow brothers thru the tours as healthy as we could. What we are all facing some 50 years later is a different story. I am 70% Service Connected because of all the chemicals I handled in Nam and being around the big AO at PR. But in the end we were called, we served proudly, and we are Viet Nam Veterans.

**Dave Miller wrote:** Jimmy Smith ... I have often felt/experienced similar feelings. I was with the 554th Red Horse Squadron from Nov '68-Nov '69, We constructed many buildings and most of the "Concrete Sky" aircraft shelters that still stand today. Without you guys none of us could have done our jobs. Without water, mixing and pouring concrete would have been impossible. YOU WERE CRITICAL TO THE ENTIRE MISSION OF PRAB! Thank You ... Thank You ... Thank You!!!

**Dave Hooton wrote:** Jimmy, I've had many of the same feelings about my contributions at Phan Rang as you have. I was a welder and made the mounts for installing a minigun on a jeep



## "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. 254 "...keeping the memories alive"

---

for some of our SP's. I always hoped that it might have saved a life somewhere along the way. My best buddy growing up was a Marine in country at the same time I was. He had nothing but praise and gratitude for all his "Brothers" in the Air Force and other branches. Your last paragraph also struck a nerve with me. I too lost my wife last year and have had similar feelings of being lost. If you ever need to talk to someone, feel free to shoot me a message. You are never alone when you belong to this group of "Brothers", and you definitely belong here.

**Gary Phillips wrote:** For me, with the 35th SPS, I worked from November 1968 to March 1969 at the water wells along with several other security police troops, also with a guy from your squadron. We risked our lives for one reason and that's so everyone at Phan Rang would have safe water to use. Without it, nobody can survive! Thanks brother!

**Kurt Kraft wrote:** Jimmy I believe you served a most important role and we are all indebted for the work you did.

**John Myers wrote:** In '69 when the wells were hit and we went without running water for almost 2 weeks we all knew how important your job was thank you for your service.

**John Reeves wrote:** Jimmy everyone's job was a piece of the puzzle. We were a cohesive group that was very efficient and effective. The water plant, like the fuel storage area, bomb dump were the heart beat of the base. Charlie was always trying to interrupt your operations. Thank you for all you did. All of you were combat veterans.

**Michael Heffron wrote:** I worked security at the wells in 68, Panther Flight. When the rockets came in it didn't matter what your job was, we were all in the shit! Welcome home brother!

**Tom Barden wrote:** Without water there is no base with personnel. Great job and "rant"

**Joseph Dias wrote:** All lives are important. I remember getting water from the portable water tanks in the tent area in '66. It was warm, wet and because of it I survived so far to age 80. Thank you for your service. I owe you.

**Jerry Hughes wrote:** In 68 I was on my second tour to Happy Valley in the 310 ACS as a loadmaster on the 123's. My first tour was in '65 and guess what, I was in CES and I put together the water processing plant. I went to school on them at Ft. Leonard wood, Mo. That was my tech school. Don't feel bad about what you did; water is the most important thing about survival.

**Steve Russ wrote:** I, too, know the feeling. Coming home pretty much unscathed physically and mentally, and seeing what friends who were in combat roles were experiencing both in mind and body, I felt guilty for having a pretty easy 10 month tour. By the time I arrived in Jan '70, we were only dealing with the occasional rocket and mortar rounds that were generally single

## **"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. 254 **"...keeping the memories alive"**

---

rounds, often landing without human casualty. Only one alert of possible ground attack that never happened, that I remember. While I still have a bit of those feelings of guilt (I suppose maybe a minor form of survivors guilt) from time to time, I've become more secure in the knowledge that we all had a part to play, and what is important is that we did our jobs we were asked to do, and did them to the best of our ability. As an AMMO troop, we like to quote that saying, "Without ammo, the Air Force is just another unscheduled airline." Well, without someone to maintain and fly those aircraft, fuel them up, launch and recover them safely, etc, etc, we ammo guys and gals are nothing more than babysitters, wiping the dust off a bunch of explosives every so often, proving it's a team effort. You can, and should be proud of the part you played, as I know I am, secure in the knowledge that what you did mattered to the mission in a most important way. I know I am, and can go to my grave in that knowledge.

**Peter Marcuzzi wrote:** Climbed those tanks and worked those "Met Pro" erdelators for a year. Went down to the new water plant later in 69. Worked at the wells and inspected the pumps at the canal at night. 6/69-6/70. Was a hell of a year! I mean that positively!

**Jimmy Smith wrote:** Peter Marcuzzi, I would like to think I had a hand in getting the new water plant. The old erdelators were a pain and inefficient when needing water, especially to fight fires or other times. I wrote a letter to my congressman back in Michigan at the time and told him of the conditions. I also got an "invitation" to the base commander's office afterward wanting to know why I wrote the letter rather than discussing it with him first...the new plant was in the beginning stages when I left in March 69.

**Richard Gentry wrote:** I was Dog Handler and never visited the Wells. However, I thought it was a very dangerous place to have to work. Thank you for everything you did.

**Kathy Goodall wrote:** Every job there was of importance Jimmy. My Father 69-71 never spoke much about his time there. Just 'I was there to pay the mens wages'. (Amex Bank on PhanRang). Just like you guys, he suffered exposure to Agent Orange, that within a few years of his leaving, the first of 3 cancers that plagued his life, and ended it. So no job, however big or small, should go unrecognized. Stand up and be proud.

**C. Dan Brownell wrote:** Very simple my friend, no water- no base. No base - no protection for our grunts on the ground. You were part of the team. I appreciated the running water you helped to provide. I know how you felt as I was an Admin Clerk with an F-100 Squadron and at times I have felt the same but then realized that running and hiding from rocket and mortar attacks was no piece of cake either; especially after the Jan 26, 1969 attack. Thank you for your service.

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

---

**David Anderson wrote:** I was there assigned to the 554th Red Horse on loan from the 819th RHS. Doesn't matter what your job was, what matters is that you were there supporting those who may have been more in harms way. During my time there 69 to 70 we were hit all the time yet the supporters supported and the defenders defended. Everyone was critical otherwise it could not/would not work.

**William Arvo wrote:** Your job was every bit as important as any other! You served this country and were willing to put your life on the line for this country. Should have no regrets or feel like you contributed less than any other.. You should be proud! Welcome Home Brother!

**Joe Markus wrote:** 35<sup>th</sup> CES from Jan 68 until rotation Jan 69, working mostly with Ray Cruz on his survey crew. The water pumping station at the edge of the Phan Rang river, away from the perimeter, was attacked and put out of commission by the VC during the Tet offensive of Jan 68. After spending the next day there assessing damages with Sergeant Pouliot, (without military escort!! Scary!!) we spent all night laying ductile iron pipe on top of the ground from a new well point.

**Ray Munn wrote:** I was there 69-70 and was in supply. The water plant was next door. We took a large number of rocket attacks because we were located beside the water plant. They knew if they could hit the water plant it would be a major problem. As a result we put conexs all around our computer operations because of the rockets. The week before I went on R&R I was sent to find diclamious earth for the water plant to a closing base. I found it and made arrangements to ship it to PR but had to call an Army unit we supported for a ride back to Phan Rang. Finally arrived at Phan Rang in the dark thanks to the Army. I went immediately to the hospital to get cleared. I got the shot but had to return the next day. But the guy in the hospital signed it off and I got to go on R&R.

**Peter W. Taylor wrote:** Be proud of your Service mate; we wouldn't have survived without you Brother. Stay safe. RAAF ADG Feb 68-69.

**Brice Harris wrote:** I too was a "Water Dog" in the South Carolina Army National Guard. I went into that career field because there was an "all call" for individuals wishing to advance in rank. Well, having already been at the top of my pay scale for E-5 and E-6, I didn't hesitate one bit because I would be at E-7 with 26 yrs, and it topped out at 28 yrs, and Mortuary Affairs in the Guard topped out at E-6 .

U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps, Reserve Training Site, Fort Pickett , Virginia 2009.

The world of the Reverse Osmosis Water Purification System (ROWPU), Water Buffalos, Tactical Water Purification System (TWPS), etc. Loved 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. 254 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

**Gary Walters wrote:** We all had a job to do to support our mission.

**Grady Talbot wrote:** I was a pilot in the 615th in 1966. I remember all the hard work and long hours pretty much everyone worked. Like you-all, I did my job and appreciated what everyone else did in support. Thanks guys!!

**Paul Koenig wrote:** I arrived on base in August 68 with HHC 589TH ENGINEER BATTALION. Most of my time was field based with C&D companies as a surveyor. These companies each had a mobile water treatment plant so I also understand the importance of the water treatment personnel. Though CES and Army Construction Engineers are technically non combatant we know different. The 589th took casualties just as Air Force on Base did.

**Earlis Bernard wrote:** Hey Jimmy, you had one of those jobs that don't seem important until you turn on the shower head or water fountain and nothing happens. I departed Phan Rang in April 1968, so I had an opportunity to drink some of your clean water. So, be proud of the contribution you and the Civil Engineering group. Sorry about your loss. Much love my brother.

**Donnie Powell wrote:** I was a refrigeration repairman with the Army Engineers most days I just did whatever I was told to do. Remember you guys cut our water off because of Leaking pipes for a time. All we had was drinking water for a while. When it rained the guys ran outside with a bar of soap. I thank you for when our water was turned back on. Thanks' for your service.

**Will Rudd wrote:** I was there in 389 TFS from March to October 1966 and the only water we had came from you guys by way of those blue water buffalo's towed behind a jeep and left between our hooch rows. We bathed, brushed our teeth and shaved in a 12" aluminum basin at hooch-side. We would not have survived a week without you and your units support and WATER. Thanks for your service. You did make a difference. You allowed us to function and do our mission. It's all a team effort.

**Robbie Peavy wrote:** Every job supporting the troops is important. Without water everything else would stop. In my early days in the Air Force I worked part time as a janitor so my wife and young baby would have a decent place to live. I took great pride in how well I did my job. I've always believed it not what you are but who you are that counts. I had more respect for a person who what at the bottom of the chain and doing a great job than someone at the top who was just along for the ride.

**Tom Williams wrote:** Jimmy, the fact that you took responsibility as a military person, and more importantly, as a human, is what is important and what should be understood. Not all of us had glamour or exciting occupations, but I'm pretty sure that all of our occupations were required to make everything work as designed.

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

---

**Joe C. Williams Sr. wrote:** Thank you for your service it was very very important to all that we do. Without potable water, the pilots could not fly, soldiers could perform their duties and none of us would be viable very long. Each person had to perform their duties in order for the mission to be accomplished.

**Ralph Stabile wrote:** 69/70 Phan Rang bullet hole patcher...ALL jobs were important..We All had a purpose..Welcome Home Brother...

**Louis Scarpitti wrote:** I was at Phan Rang when our water supply stopped for a little while. Working on flight line can be a very dirty job. I’m glad you guys were on the Ball, 24/7.

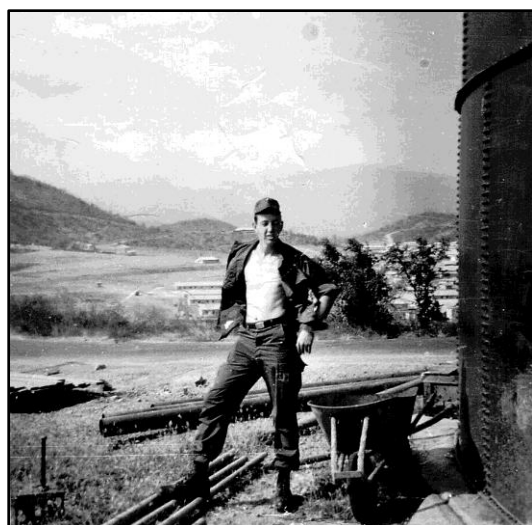
**Christopher Boles wrote:** Never say that your job wasn't important. We all gave some and some gave their all. I could not have done my job as a photographer without water. Whether it was processing film to having a sharp uniform for when the dignitaries came to town, water was an important part of what I did. I cannot thank you enough for your dedication to your

work to ensure we had adequate clean water.

**Logan Henderson wrote:** No job was more important than yours!!

**Russell Brown wrote:** It takes the whole TEAM!  
Thank you for your service

**Jim Hemphill wrote:** Jimmy, thank you for keeping us supplied with water. I was there in 69 when we had no water except at the flight line for almost a month when the pump broke down and took a few weeks to get to new one shipped to you. As everyone else said, every job was valuable to the whole. I am ever thankful that you and your civil engineers did your very best to keep the rest of us in water.



**Jimmy Smith at the Phan Rang AB Water Plant.**

**Bill Rimes wrote:** I was the Aerial Port Commander. Just a Captain at that time at Phan Rang and you were as important as the Wing Commander and I consider you a Band of Brothers in Viet Nam. No title or rank— just a military brother that served his country. Sorry for the family loss, We are all getting old, have lost more friends than I can count. Don’t really know you but I feel you would be a great friend!

**Jim Mattison wrote:** “For the want of a nail the shoe was lost, For the want of a shoe the horse was lost, For the want of a horse the rider was lost, For the want of a rider the battle was lost,

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

---

For the want of a battle the kingdom was lost, And all for the want of a horseshoe-nail.”

**Dan Henry wrote:** You feel bad? Come on, man...I was a clerk!!! But, you know what? I went into the bunker during the alerts, I typed the orders for awards for the men who deserved them, I typed orders for promotions, I filed tech orders and got them to the appropriate Sgt to review in order to keep Pedro flying safely, I did my job and volunteered for anything else that came up and I was just proud to be there doing what I could do. Hold your head up, my brother! Hold your head up and be proud!

**Robert Rusher wrote:** It was a team effort, not everyone can be a quarterback, running back, or wide receiver, all glorious positions admittedly, but not in the least possible without the linemen who provide them with the ability to do their jobs efficiently. So everyone is important, their jobs are important, and you should not be ashamed of what you did. I was a "lowly perimeter guard" but without my services, Charlie would have had free reign on base, so NEVER feel ashamed.

**James Mcdonough wrote:** Of course most of the jobs were not as important as others after all we were support troops most of us never came close to the experiences that the grunts put up with in the field, I enlisted in 1963 before Vietnam and I chose the Air Force because I didn't care to be a infantry grunt or Marine, I needed to fill a space in my life as I was not college material and not mature enough to go out in the world with zero skills (I was a 17 yr old dropout) the military filled that gap I did my time and am happy I did, I didn't get the career field I wanted ( AP) but it was my own fault because I didn't finish high school.

**Jim Kucipeck wrote:** Jimmy Smith it took the whole team to fulfill our mission. Everyone's job was critical! You did a great job, thank you brother!

**Kenneth Simons wrote:** I've been torn whether or not to add this, but I decided to. In 1971, we were hit at the wells. It didn't last very long but we lost two Civil Engineering guys that ran the generators for the pumps and one cop. That was a devastating night.

**Peter W. Taylor wrote:** We're all Brothers regardless of what we did and who we served with. Keep safe from Down Under. 2SQN RAAF

**Mike Steele wrote:** If you were there you were in harms way, it was just a matter of time and location, just some of us spent more than a little time in some very bad locations, 309th ACS PRAB 67-68 and 22nd TASS with various MACV Advisory Teams, Mekong Delta 69-70. Welcome home brother you did your job, all anyone can ask!



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

---

### My Yank Mate

by Tom Grieves, 2SQN RAAF 1968-69

I like many Aussies met and became mates with some Yanks (Yanks is our term for all Americans) while serving at Phan Rang Vietnam during the war, 1968-69. I don't recall how we initially met, but I do remember two blokes in particular who visited our Boozer (The Koala Bar)



PRAB '68 -Tom Grieves Rags Weaskus Paul Guay? Peter Robinson

they were Rags and Paul, two great blokes who worked at the 554th Civil Engineer Squadron - Red Horse. My mate Peter Robinson and I enjoyed their company on several occasions.



I recall being invited to their lines for a BBQ on one occasion, when we brought the Aussie beer (XXXX or VB I think) and superb thick juicy steaks were provided by our Red Horse hosts. I believe the steaks were from Hawaii and came in rectangular “armour plated” cardboard boxes, the likes of which I had never seen before.



white sauce on toast.

On another occasion when I visited the Red Horse area, I was treated to the Yank culinary specialty of “Shit on a Shingle”. My research of later years revealed that it was ground beef in 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. 254 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

I must have kept in touch with Rags after I went home to Australia in 1969, because later that year I received a parcel from Rags, and it contained a ceramic tankard that he had handmade and sent to me as a gift. I have treasured it ever since. Rags lost his ID Card in my area and had it replaced, I later found it and kept it.

**The ceramic tankard that he had handmade and sent to me as a gift. I have treasured it ever since.**



I lost touch with Rags, but about fifteen years ago I managed to find him through a Nez Perce Indian contact who located him in Hawaii, but I think he was doing it tough there. I sent him a letter via the Nez Perce contact, and Rags replied and sent me a personalized Vietnam Vets Cap. Sadly, I am no longer in contact with Rags, and I can't recall Paul's proper surname, I think it was Guay. After 50+ years recollections become vague, **but I fondly recall the times with my Yank mates at Phan Rang.**



**Note:** *I believe it was Tom, when several years ago that he ribbed me for taking three years to reply to one of his email message. I don't remember the exact details, but I do recall he must have told everyone in Australia about it, so if any one sees any despairing comments about how slow Yanks are, they probably are talking about me. There are more posts and pictures of Tom in Phan Rang*

*Newsletter 100, 167 and 213.*

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

---



by Douglas Severt

**Follow up on -**

### **“The Traveling Tea Cup or the Great Tea Cup Heist”**

*(The original Tea Cup saga was published in Phan Rang Newsletter 248, detailing the origin and the eventual return to its country of creation...Australia. The following details new information of the rescue and cudding of the cup for some 46 years before transferring guardianship to Douglas Severt some years ago and then then...well, here’s the rest of the story)*

One of the RAAF's most famous squadrons, No. 2, commanded by Wing Cmdr. Rolf Aronsen, which has a proud history dating back more than 50 years came to Phan Rang and renewed a link between the RAAF and the USAF's 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, parent unit at Phan Rang. Men of the 35th flew with the RAAF from bases in Australia during WW II, helping to halt the Japanese advance to Papua, and also took part in the Allied offensive which recovered the rest of New Guinea Back in 1967.

The Australian squadron furnished almost all its own support, equipment and supplies, which included mess supplies. They even brought an aircraft hanger that was erected on the airfield.

The Aussies besides being excellent war fighters, are also a fun loving, trustworthy and sharing group of people who never would have suspected that they would have been infiltrated by souvenir hunters. While they had troops protecting the outer perimeters of the base, they

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

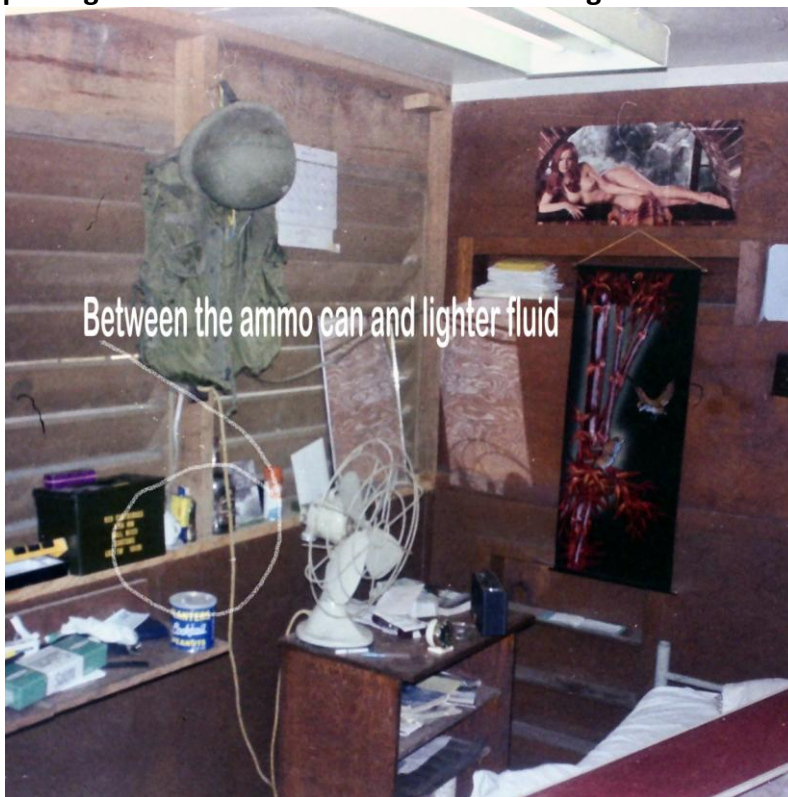
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never suspected that the china in their own club would have been vulnerable to some shifty Americans who just wanted to take home a war souvenir.

After a thorough investigation 54 years after the great heist, the perpetrators have been tentatively identified. But since they still haven't been brought to justice, it's important to note that David Landis, the protector (savior) and contributor of the tea cup absolves all responsibility for the cup ending up in his hootch. He even presented photograph proof of its existence in his hooch, but we have to ask ourselves; is this just a typical childhood response of blaming something on a younger sibling?

Now I digress and I'm going to have to accept Dave's explanation, because he has offered some pretty conclusive proof that the cup was indeed in his hootch when he moved into Red Horse (F row, hootch 4) the first week of February 1971. The following picture is submitted as evidence.

**Notice the tea cup wedged between the ammo can and the lighter fluid.**



Dave's story is that two of the guys in the hootch were heading home when he was moving in,

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

---

so he took one of their rooms and I'm sure that he also credits the wall art to the previous occupants as well. He provided as much detail as he could remember and his final words were *“...that's all I have and I'm stinking to it.”*

The best that he can remember is one of the previous owners was a Jerry Steffens and for the other guy all he could remember was that he was from Louisville, Kentucky who went by the name of Phil. Interpol has been notified, but they claim that the case is so cold that they refuse to accept it, plus the statute of limitations has long expired for obtaining war souvenirs.

I believe if this would have been a tea pot, this would have been a completely different story.

**Thus the story ends, and all is well because the tea cup is now home where it belongs and how it got there is not important anymore.**

**Note:** *Sgt David Landis was with the 35<sup>th</sup> CSG, later to become the 315<sup>th</sup> CSG. He worked mostly running the food storeroom at Batson, so re-ordering rations, receiving (twice weekly 40' containers of rations) and some trips up to Cam Ranh Bay and back delivering food items.*

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



The 2022 Annual Phan Rang AB Veterans Reunion is scheduled for 13-15 October in Mobile, Alabama. We have many exciting things planned just for the reunion. The annual reunion is a time to rekindle old friendships and make new ones, but the main thing to know is you will not be a stranger, in fact, you'll believe you knew these comrades all of your life.

To make a hotel reservation at the Mobile Marriott copy and paste the link that is displayed below into your browser. The reunion rate is effective three days before and three days after the event and to register for the reunion, click [here](#). I hope that you enjoyed this newsletter. 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.

<https://www.marriott.com/event-reservations/reservation-link.mi?id=1647882756323&key=GRP&app=resvlink>