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**Capt. R. S. Pahl Cited For Vietnam Bombing** (*Syracuse Post Standard, Monday, February 7, 1972, Syracuse New York*)

GRIFFISS AFB - Gallantry and achievement may seem to have been relegated to the distant past, but a 29-year-old Rome Air Development Center pilot has proved that they are still current.

Capt. Robert S. Pahl of the Center's Flight Test Division was recently decorated with one of the nation's highest honors: the Silver Star for gallantry in Vietnam. In addition, the B-57 Reconnaissance pilot added two oak leaf clusters to the Distinguished Flying Cross for extraordinary achievement in battle on two other occasions.

The Rossville, Ga., native, while stationed at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam, with the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, carried out three highly successful missions against enemy forces.

On Feb. 5, 1971, Capt. Pahl flew his F-100 fighter-bomber to a location where friendly forces were pinned down by intense ground fire. Heavy antiaircraft fire, poor visibility and darkness notwithstanding, Pahl delivered devastation with unerring accuracy against the hostile forces. He destroyed their effectiveness, thereby enabling the allies to regroup and prepare for an offensive thrust the following month.

Three days later, shortly after midnight, he scrambled from the alert pad at Phan Rang to aid friendly forces immobilized by intense mortar, rocket and automatic weapons fire. Despite a low, 5,000-foot ceiling, heavy ground fire and minimal visibility, the Air Force officer again completed his mission with pinpoint accuracy. This was accomplished at the risk that an error in judgment would have resulted in destruction of friendly forces.

A month later, on March 6 Capt. Pahl went to the aid of U.S. Army personnel who were under heavy rocket attack at Fire Base Alpha Four, deep within the demilitarized zone. His flight was the only available one to destroy the rocket sites with precision. The citation for his Distinguished Flying Cross states, "If Captain Pahl had not displayed such great courage,

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professionalism and aerial skill, it is likely a disaster would have befallen the American Unit."

Pahl earned a B.S. degree in industrial management from Georgia Institute of Technology, in 1965, and he entered the Air Force in 1966. He attended Officers' Training School and was commissioned that same year.

(We were fortunate to have Col. Bob Pahl with us at the 2<sup>nd</sup> reunion in San Antonio, Texas where he presented BG Frank L. Gailer Jr. with a plaque.)



**Vietnam Through the Eyes of Col. Pat Curoe** *(Not a Phan Rang story, but I think you will find it interesting and an enjoyable read, I did.)*

There are many things that occur in our long careers that we often reflect on. Important to me and many of us are events we would have liked to have done but did not get to. I have often stated that one of my deepest regrets is never having been given the chance to serve in Vietnam. When I was at Andrews AFB, I volunteered for Vietnam, Korea and Thailand. I was almost certain that I would get an assignment to Vietnam; I was sent to Korea. Over the years I have listened to countless stories of Veterans of the Vietnam War. I always listened and still do to their stories of what took place there during their assignment(s). Very many of our readers spent assignments to that country. In my mind each and everyone is a hero; doing a job under impossible and dangerous conditions. What I find amazing is that without exception they did so in wondrous ways. One thing I very much admire about American military members is that they can perform under threat of life and still find a way to find humor in the process.

Let me digress. I have worked for many people. One of those persons whom I very much admire was and still do is Col Patrick J. Curoe. He was my director of transportation at USAFE for many years. I found this man to be professional in all respects and if I may say so, he was extremely supportive all assigned personnel but especially the NCO. We NCO's loved his style of leadership. One of my most vivid memories is when things were a little tough he would look at me and say Sanders where would you rather be? When I first heard that statement I thought to myself, Colonel there is about 100 places I could name immediately that I had rather be at this moment. However upon reflection, I began to slowly understand the true meaning of what he was saying. Each of us in the military serve at a place that someone deemed was the right place for us. If you can follow my train of thought, you soon realize and understand that all of us are performing a task and at a place someone decided it was your place to be; therefore where would you rather be begins to make perfect sense. Col Pat, it took a while but I finally realized the beauty and honesty of your words. I thank you.

Col Curoe and I were having lunch with Col Dean Smith the other day at the Deutscher Haus, a German restaurant on Ramstein AB. It is a nice place and we had a good table in which we could talk and recount old times. I for the most part, remained silent and listened as Col Curoe and Col

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Smith recounted old times. I found it amazing at how they can still today remember names and places some 45 years later. Much of their conversation was about their time in Vietnam.

Col Curoe told me about a piece of paper he had written that recounts some of his time spent in Vietnam and how he had written them down in remembrance of one of his friends (Ed Langley) that he shared life with during his tour. He sent me a copy of those memos and we agreed that it should be shared. I am doing that. I hope his words mean as much to you as they do to me.

Col Curoe, here is your story: You asked me to edit; sir I would not dare change a word. Well done and it was written with much humility and professionalism. Thank you.

#### **Memo for Record 20 Apr 2014**

RE: Vietnam Recollections for Claire Roth (Linda Langley's niece) - per request

This memo is prepared pursuant to a recent request from Linda Langley to provide some of my Vietnam recollections for a paper that Ms. Claire Roth is preparing for a class project. As noted in the related email traffic, Ed Langley and I were friends, and worked closely together in Military Assistance Command- Vietnam (MACV)- Studies and Observations Group (SOG) headquarters in Saigon during '68-'69 time frame. The SOG was a highly classified unit and all departees had to sign non-disclosure statements. This secrecy aspect was overcome by events because a few years after our Chief SOG, MG John Singlaub, retired in the mid-70s he wrote a book on his career that included a chapter on MACV-SOG. It is very illuminating. As an aside, Gen Singlaub was a Jedi (super-secret operative) in WWII, so knew his way around secret operations.

For Claire's sake, I will try to capture some vignettes of Ed and my time together during our SOG tour. If seeking heroism, one needs to go elsewhere. Neither Ed to my knowledge nor I did anything heroic... we were just GIs that did our job. We were part of the Headquarters element for some units that did some truly amazing and heroic actions (see Singlaub's book or a few of those by John Piaster), but other than being in Vietnam and living in Saigon, we were in no particular danger. That comment does not apply to the warriors in the field. I have often mused that the closest time I can remember being near real danger was the time I almost got hit by a bicyclist on the streets of Saigon.

With that as background, here are some events/stories/war tales that might be interesting to a casual observer- or might not. They are not grouped in any particular order or importance... reflected here just as I recall them. Keep in mind, our tour together was: Ed from Jan 68- Jan 69 and mine was Apr 68- Apr 69. That was a long time ago. And, as an aside, Ed and I stayed in touch ever since.

1. At Ed's memorial ceremony in Sep/ Oct 2012, I gave what turned out to be an entirely inappropriate speech. I was one of the first speakers, and thought folks might be interested in Saigon and our daily activities, because that is where Ed's and my friendship started. I told the story of the Navy Lt. Commander who threatened my life because I had taken a vehicle away from one of his office mates (which was my job); I went to him with Ed at my side and said if anything "accidental" happened to me,

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Ed would kill him. It was absolutely true, but unfortunately, Ed's ceremony was not the place to tell it. All the following speakers extolled Ed's virtues, and there were many, but upon review, my comments were a bit harsh in that genteel setting.

2. Anytime one is in a war zone for the first time, and during the first few weeks/ months, individuals are super sensitive to all the announcements of a threat here and a threat there. After some time, it all sounds the same. Ed and I shared a jeep to get from our hotel/ living quarters... for the first while, we would check it in detail every morning for any booby trap bombs that might have been emplaced during the night. After a while, we would just look at one another and say "is this a bomb day?"... then get in, start the vehicle, and go to work.

3. We were worried about the occasional terrorist bombings, and did not ignore the threat, just chose to be aware and live our life as best we could. For example, I used to go to Catholic Mass at the cathedral in Saigon, but would always stand behind a huge pillar inside for about 10 minutes after the Service ended. You see, the bad guys liked to bomb crowds. Nothing ever happened, but I practiced that option for my whole tour.

4. I worked in the Command Post (CP) during several overnight shifts. The CP had to be manned 24/7 and the task rotated among the assigned officers. There was not much instruction regarding the job ("just be there just in case... then call a superior if needed") and usually not much action. One night at about 4 am Saigon time the Secure Phone rang. I answered it, and the voice on the other end said "make a record of this... your SOG units are not to hit targets at coordinates XX and YY (whatever the actual details were are lost)". I always make a note of who called, and asked the person who he was. He said, "Son, if I am on this phone, you don't need to know my name". I made the appropriate entries in the log, spent the rest of the night, and went to my billet at about 8am. About 9am, a fellow staffer was banging on my door, told me to get dressed, and come back to work. It seems that my log entry had made an impact, and the Chief SOG was involved. Instead of the terse note I had made in the log, I had to make a long detailed explanation of exactly what was said in the phone call-which I did. That was the last I heard of it, but the reality is that it could have been President Johnson, Sec Def McNamara, or any of the other warlords at the Pentagon giving those instructions-or a bored clerk...you see, it was about 3 pm , coffee-break time, in Washington DC when the call was made. Anyway...a good story.

5. Since we lived in Saigon and our billets were in contracted hotel rooms, we always ate at a contracted mess hall, which was the top floor of the Rex Hotel. It usually served good meals, and was a relaxing time. Separately, the bad guys (i.e. Viet Cong- affectionally called "Charlie") loved to set up rocket launchers outside of Saigon, fire them off, and run like heck. One night while I was TDY to DaNang, Charlie shot one at the Rex, and we were told it went over the rooftop by about 100 feet, which is not much. It scared the crap out of everyone there, and everyone exercised a great deal of caution for the next few days... then, what the heck?

6. Regarding the rocket launchers set up outside of Saigon, the reason Charlie had to fire and run

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like mad is that we had spotters on the roofs of many of the tall buildings in Saigon. When they noted a rocket launch, they would triangulate, i.e. by using their sightings to determine exact origin location we would be able to launch retaliatory rockets within minutes, or sooner, of their launch. It was a deadly game of "catch me if you can".

7. The Navy Doc and I went TDY to Dalat, the vegetable capital of Vietnam and a beautiful city. We decided to drive out of town a ways, and did so for about 10 miles. At that point, we looked at each other and said, "What the heck are we doing here?" You see, Dalat was the R&R site for Charlie, and he could have been waiting around the next corner. Needless to say, we "beat feet" back to the city. No harm, no foul.

8. Ed and I went TDY to Hue/ Phu Bai, way in the north of South Vietnam. We had to hitch a ride to the SOG compound, and ended up in a campsite across the way manned by some other US GIs. We could see our SOG encampment across the field, about 300 meters or so, and said we could just walk there. One of the assigned GIs recommended that we not do that, as the entire area was mined. We waited for a ride.

9. An important action item for assigned personnel is to be at the airport and meet your successor, in order to make him/ her feel comfortable after a long airplane ride. My predecessor was a numbskull- won't mention his name but still remember him. He did not track me down until I had been in-country for 5 days, an unforgivable error. Anyway, I made up my mind to exercise great hospitality to my successor, which I did. I met him at the airfield, took him to quarters, and spent a week or so orienting him to Saigon. He must have appreciated it... shortly before I departed, he took off his cap and playfully began hitting me with it and saying "go home, please go home". So, in my mind, I was successful.

10. Obviously, we were all armed if we wished. That almost became like "bomb day", in that we often opted not to be armed as we went about our business. One of my associates carried a .45 caliber handgun... a powerful weapon. One night, as he was sitting in his room, he shot his refrigerator! It was an accident, but we teased him for weeks about the invasion of Charlie Refrigerator.

11. My favorite watering hole was in the basement of the US Embassy. It was behind a red door seen from the street that if you did not know what was behind there, one would presume it was just a red door. My successor, mentioned earlier, was most grateful for that insight, as I told him that many important decisions had been made there.

12. My counterpart on the Vietnamese side was a gentleman named "Major Nick". He and I would discuss how to best help each other while consuming some local beer, called "33". I must have made some excellent decisions over those times, as he was instrumental in my receipt of a Vietnamese decoration- "Staff Service Award- First Class". By the way, I did give him 2 jeeps among other items that were excess to our requirements, and that may have made him a hero to his staff- and me to him.

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13. One of my additional duties was the SOG leasing officer. No big deal, although it did take a bit of time. I once flew to Danang with about \$5,000 worth of Vietnam piasters to close a deal. That money was stuffed in the pockets of my jungle fatigues, as we did not want to look like we were carrying a lot of money (right?).

14. Somewhere in the record of Vietnam should be the statement that the Vietnamese people were wonderful human beings. As they went about their daily lives, interrupted greatly by the War, all they were trying to do was love their families, make a living, be good citizens, practice their Faith, and live a peaceful life. Any portrayal that they were war mongers or evildoers is incorrect. What the Viet Cong (VC or "Charlie") were trying to do was follow the guidance of those whom they believed were their leaders, especially Ho Chi Minh. In my world view, they were wrong... but in theirs, all OK. My friend, Major Nick, exemplified those characteristics... he was a good guy. I often wondered what happened to him after the fall of Saigon.

15. Saigon was a pretty city. Before the war, it was called the "Pearl of the Orient", compared to Paris, France for beauty and cosmopolitan living. While we were there, it was still actually pretty nice... except for the occasional rocket attack. It has probably changed by now.

16. From an operational standpoint, we had many occasions of great sadness, as many SOG operatives lost their lives for America. In Dec 1967, SOG lost a C-130 which was shot down north of Hanoi, North Vietnam! Think of that, a C-130 is a cargo plane... what in the world was it doing to the north of Hanoi, where only fighters and bombers went? What it was doing was trying to drop supplies to one of the dozens of indigenous teams that we had earlier dropped or otherwise inserted into the area to gain intelligence. Think of the courage it took for those guys to make that run over hostile territory, in a cargo plane (!!)... and that is only one of hundreds of such stories. A separate event is that an Army Captain that came into our office in Saigon for some information... just a week or so later he was killed by Charlie... he had surprised two bad guys and gave them warning... they reacted faster than he did and he was killed in the shootout. Good guys... all. The saying "All gave some; some gave all" applies.

17. You may have seen the movie "Good Morning, Vietnam" with Robin Williams playing a troop named Adrian Kronauer. Except for the sequences where Williams/ Kronauer spoke "Gooooooooooooooooooooo Mooooooooooooooooorning Vietnam" into the microphone, the whole movie is crap. We used to hear that opening chant every morning on our way to work, and thought it was bunk then... but guess it did have some meaning for the troops. As an afterthought, when the movie came out, some reporters located Kronauer, and he turned out to be a regular guy, just trying to do his job as best he saw it. All in all, it was a comma in the long book of Vietnam.

18. The main mode of transportation for the Vietnamese was a motor scooter or motorcycle. There were thousands of them on the streets, and they all seemed to be on the streets when we were going to/ from work. I am not sure they have graduated to automobiles yet, but am sure that there are still a lot of two-wheelers.

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19. You may have read about Agent Orange, a herbicide derived from the powerful 2-4d chemical manufactured by Monsanto. Its purpose was to be spread by aircraft along the heavily forested trails and areas used by Charlie and to kill that forage to make the trail visible and enable air interdiction. It was effective. However, Orange was a nasty, nasty aspect of that particular war. The problem was that it not only affected the foliage, but it had some bad effects on human beings. Our US Veterans Administration is still grappling with the aftereffects of that chemical today. In my heart, I believe that Agent Orange factored into the deaths of several of my dear friends... and there is nothing I can do about it.

20. In August of 1968, SOG was building a heavily reinforced concrete bunker for the CP at Danang. It was 95% finished and appeared a fortress, so much so that it was put into use before final completion. The one detail lacking was that there were openings in the walls awaiting installation of wall unit air conditioners. Charlie knew that, and on an early morning foray into the camp, threw satchel charges into those openings, creating a compression blast site. We lost 16 men KIA and dozens of WIA. That was a hard lesson for all of us.

21. John Wayne was, and still is for many of us, a great man. In our view, he meant what he said, and backed the GIs in Vietnam in the face of unwavering criticism of his Hollywood associates. He once is quoted as saying, "Courage is being scared out of your mind, and saddling up anyway". In the '68 time frame, he starred in a movie called "The Green Berets"; which coincidentally was about the Vietnam War. Anyway, Ed and I went to see the movie one afternoon, and it was an emotional event. Our only recovery notion was to go by the Embassy Red Door... and all was well.

22. I was the vehicle officer, and was assigned a vehicle (of course). I still remember the Vietnamese license plate number- T-07535. I can't remember the plate on my current vehicle, but can remember that.

23. I mentioned "Bomb Day"; and that it did have a small effect on our activity. One day, two Lt. Colonels were driving down the street in their open Jeep and two little Vietnamese boys threw an orange into it. Supposedly, the two officers almost had a heart attack exiting the vehicle. At the time, it made us laugh... because we weren't the targets.

24. On one of our trips to Dalat, we wandered thru the market place. One morning, outside our hotel was a little 4-year old boy dressed for the cold in his presentable rags, but with the red nose and cold fingers associated with mountain cold. And, he was smoking a cigarette! I have his picture to this day... although it may be hard to find. I have always had two thoughts regarding that little fella: what caused him to smoke at that young age, and where is he now 45 years later? Oh, well, some things are better off in the unknown.

That summary kind of does it. If I were sitting in a VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) hall somewhere, chatting with some other old-timers (geezers?), we could probably come up with some more tales

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(interesting to us) and regale each other with "do you remember the time...?" What this summary does for me is to honor Ed Langley's memory by providing snippets for Ms. Claire to finish her paper on the subject. As an aside to that, I intend to provide a copy to my family, as there are things noted above that I may not have shared, unintentionally, with them. So be it.

PJ Curoe, Colonel, USAF (ret) *(Story received from Donald Sanders)*



### **Tales of Phan Rang (Part 1) by Robert Chappellear**

Tales of Phan Rang  
Published by Robert L. Chappellear at Smashwords  
Copyright 2010 Robert L Chappellear  
(used by permission of the author)

An account of the author's one year tour of duty flying C-123 cargo aircraft in Viet Nam. Provides descriptions of life in country and the missions that were flown. Presented not as a political view but rather simply as an account of that year and what it was like to be there. The author was assigned to Viet Nam on 4 October 1968 as a C-123 co-pilot. He was a 24 year old 2nd Lieutenant recent graduate of USAF pilot training and on his first duty assignment. While there he participated in passenger flights, cargo delivery missions, air drops, and emergency resupply missions. He upgraded to aircraft commander and experienced many unique adventures in Special Forces camps, Philippine Islands, and Australia.

This book is a description of that year providing an insight into what it was like to live and fly in that conflict and during that time of the war.

#### **About Robert Chappellear**

Retired from two careers, the first was as a fighter pilot for the USAF; the second as a system engineer for a defense contractor. Accumulated 6000 hours of flying time in 7 different operational assignments including three tours to Asia and one to Europe. As an engineer I worked on the airborne command post, nuclear aircraft carriers, presidential helicopters, and various other communication systems.

Married with three sons and one step daughter and three grandchildren (1 grandson, and 2 granddaughters). Though I have made 36 moves during my lifetime I am now settled in Minnesota. Looking forward to additional traveling throughout the United States after my wife's retirement in two years.



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## Chapter 1 - Phan Rang

This is the story of my first tour in Viet Nam. It is not meant to justify the war, or to condemn it. It simply describes my first year in-country. It speaks of the bad times, the troubling times, the peaceful times, the happy times and the comic times. It is true that I am only one of one and a half million Americans that served in-country during that war - so what makes my story more important than any other? The simple answer is - nothing, except that I have written it and here it is for you to read. It describes my experiences between 4 October 1968 and 4 Oct 1969. On this tour I served with what was originally called an Air Commando Wing but when I arrived it was renamed the 315th Special Operations Wing, 309th Special Operations Squadron. I have been told that someone in the command structure thought that "Air Commando" sounded too much like a "Steve Canyon" or "Terry and the Pirates" organization so the name was changed from "Air Commando" to "Special Operations". I don't know but I always thought "Air Commando" sounded cool and Air Commandos also had a reputation for being kinda crazy.



**Robert Chappelle's C-123 RTU Class (Robert is 7th person from the left kneeling)**

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The 315th SOW, 309th SOS flew C-123 B and C-123 K tactical airlift aircraft. The C-123 was officially named "The Provider". The B models had two big Pratt and Whitney R2800 radial engines, (propellers) while K models had the same two reciprocating engines plus two General Electric J-85s (jets). One of the guys in my squadron coined the phrase, "C-123 K 2+2 super sport; two of 'em turnin' and two of 'em burnin'!" The jets were seldom used for cruise, but they were always used for take offs and landings. The jets would be advanced to military power (100%) for take offs, go arounds, steep climb outs from short high threat airfields and for pulling up away from low altitude drop zones. The "Ranch Hand" airplanes, assigned to the 12th SOS based at Bien Hoa AB would have the jets running at idle when making their defoliation sprays in case they needed emergency power after taking hits from ground fire. With the jets we could take off and fly with a maximum weight of 112,000 pounds or so, but the actual load carrying capacity of each flight varied according to the fuel load needed to complete the next leg of each mission. We flew the airplane with a crew of four and sometimes five. The crew consisted of an Aircraft Commander (AC), a Co-Pilot (CP), a Flight Engineer (FE), and a Load Master (LM). When we flew airdrop missions, we also had a Navigator (NAV) on board. My first tour was at Phan Rang Air Base (AB), Republic of Viet Nam (RVN).

**To be continued.**

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**Men in Service** (*The Lowell Sun, Wednesday, September 18, 1968*)

**Major Richard H. Dewing**, son of Mrs. Loella F. Dewing of 21 James St., Tewksbury, received the Air Medal at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. Major Dewing was decorated for his outstanding airmanship and courage on successful and important missions under hazardous conditions. The major, a C-123 Provider pilot, has flown more than 700 combat sorties. A 1946 graduate of Tweskbury High School, Major Dewing earned his B.A. degree in 1953 from the University of New Hampshire where he was commissioned through the Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps program.

**Swett Given Civic Award** (*Pacific Stars & Stripes, Friday, August 21, 1970*)

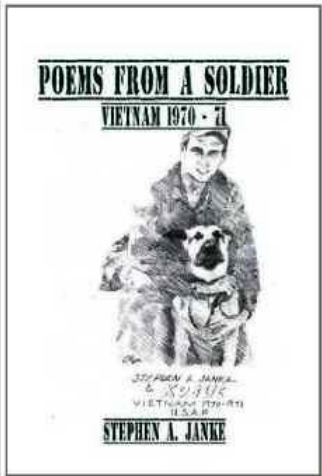
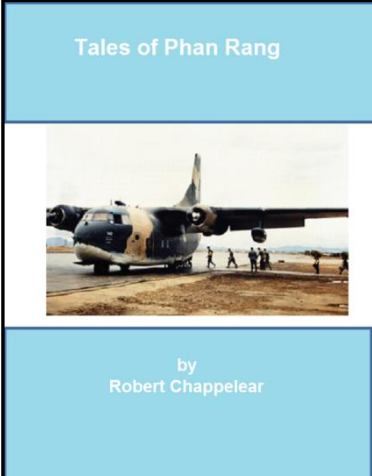
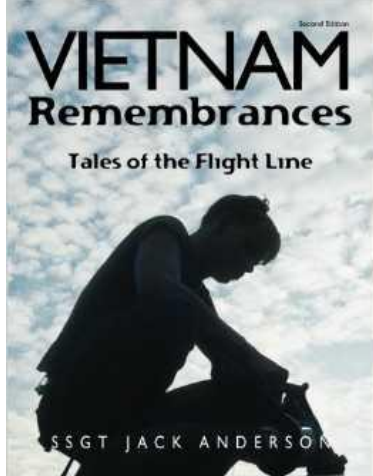
PHAN RANG AB, Vietnam (Special) — Maj., Ben H. Swett was recently selected to receive the Phan Rang AB Civic Action Quarterly Award for April through June.

Swett, a navigator with the 311th Tactical Airlift Sq, and civic action coordinator for the 315th Tactical Airlift Wing, was chosen for the award by the base civic action office.

Cited for his active support of local civic action programs, Swett received particular praise for the 315th TAW's participation in the "Dollars for Scholars" program, the collection of school supplies for the surrounding communities, and the construction of a hamlet road.

In addition, the 14-year Air Force veteran coordinated several other civic action projects, including construction of desks and furniture for the Thap Ban Tu School.

**Authors in our Midst**

		
<p>Steve Janke...<a href="#">click to buy book</a></p>	<p>Robert Chappellear...<a href="#">click to buy</a></p>	<p>Jack Anderson...<a href="#">click to buy book</a></p>

**The 2014 "Happy Valley" Phan Rang AB Reunion**

**The 2014 "Happy Valley" Phan Rang AB Reunion**

**Where: DoubleTree by Hilton, Reid Park, 445 S. Alvernon Way, Tucson AZ**

**When: October 9-11**

**Single/Double rate \$99**

**Banquet 11 October in the Bonsai Room**



**You may now make your hotel reservations for the reunion. Click on the Double Tree logo above and it will take you to the Phan Rang AB Reunion Web Site. Please make your reservations early which will help us greatly in the planning process and also to insure that everyone that wants to attend gets the reunion rate. This is a smaller hotel than the previous year, so we have to watch it very carefully. Remember if circumstances prevent you from attending you can always cancel within 24 hours of your check-in date. If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact [me](#).**

Got Photos or Stories that you would like to share with Phan Rangers and other interested Vietnam veterans? If you do, send those treasured pictures and stories to me and I'll include in this newsletter, that reaches out to over 200, or post on Facebook where we have over 550 former Phan Rangers, their families and friends. You can contact [me](#) and I will provide further instructions. Share the Phan Rang story and keep the memories alive.

**Doug's note:** I know not all of these stores have a dateline of Phan Rang, but we have a lot of members and readers that have an interest in stores dealing with the B-57, F-100, C-119, C-47 and C-123 aircrafts. Some may have friends or may have even been stationed at one time at these other bases.

Also if you are new to the Phan Ranger mailing list and you would like copies of previous issues of the Phan Rang News, they are all available [here](#) for downloading. If you have any difficulties, just send [me](#) a note and I'll will send one your way. If you know of a Phan Rangers that would be interested in receiving news about Phan Rang AB, please let [me](#) know and I will add them to the mailing list.

