

# Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.  
“Keeping the memories alive” Newsletter 261

---

In this issue:

**Mission: Build Facilities to Support Canberra Bombers**

**Capt. Brown Receives Two Flying Crosses**

**What Phan Rang Taught Us about Breaking Bad Habits**

**Truck Killers Enter Centurion Club - Seventh Air Force News Makers**

**Captain Richard W. Dabney, Jr.**

**Top 10 Hit Parade**

**Letters**

**Doug's Comments**



The Airfield Construction Squadrons were born of necessity, always under strength in men and materiel, and the recipients of plaudits and criticism. During the Second World War the attitude of the US Army was at times a threat to the future of the force. In post war years the organisation was based on shaky foundations and it may be argued that it was national commitments which reinstated the construction units in the RAAF order of battle in the early 1950s, and not the foresight of RAAF planners.

**Robert Browne** said, “The RAAF Airfield Construction Squadrons always had a core group of regulars, but when they required extra manning for a large project, they ‘seconded’ personnel

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

---

from other RAAF units and that is how I got the opportunity to join 5 ACS-Det. B.”

Browne went on to say “In late 1966 the RAAF sent out an ‘expression of interest’ notice seeking personnel that were prepared to go to Vietnam. While no specific unit/squadron was mentioned the former ACS members on the Base I was at were sure it was for 5 ACS, but they had no idea exactly where in Vietnam it was for. Try as they might no one was talking. To cut a long story short, I applied (my unit Commander and WO tried to talk me out of it) and along with about 20 others I was accepted.” He saw the deployment as being a positive career move and an opportunity for an overseas posting. In many respects this decision proved to be correct, but it also had some detrimental consequences.

Bob Browne said his father who was a WWII veteran was initially critical of his decision, but it was him that gave him the most information about Vietnam. He was now most supportive but had reservations about Australia being involved. He had several Newspaper cuttings and one article was about the possibility that the Australian effort in Vietnam would be increased and the domestic political ramifications of this. (The conscription “Draft” matter was not popular).

The group was comprised of Carpenters, Plumbers, Electricians, Mechanics, Suppliers and Clerks. Most of the tradesmen had previously been with ACS and were keen to have another stint. Those chosen were still not told which unit or exactly where the job would be.

“Then in mid-December 1966, we began our pre-embarkation stuff and were called to a meeting where we were told that the Unit was designated 5ACS-Det B.” Browne said. “We were still in the dark about where the job was to be located, but we were told we would be departing on 14 February 1967 and we are also warned, in no uncertain terms, not to discuss any details with anyone however we were allowed to tell our immediate family. Word had already got out to the media but with sketchy details.” Browne went on to explain.

“Many of us were going on leave for Christmas. Over the next several weeks we had to attend medical and dental ‘parades’ and were issued with Australian Passports (appropriately stamped not valid for North Vietnam). Interestingly we received no briefings about what to expect in Vietnam or anything about the conflict. Just before departure we were given an Australian Military ‘Booklet’ about Vietnam.” Browne said and he still has 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. 261 “...keeping the memories alive”

---

On the day before their departure his Father drove him to the base. They stopped and had a few beers at a Pub on the way and had a long amicable chat. The sad part is that it was the last time he got to talk directly with him again, because he had been ill for some time, and he died while he was at Phan Rang.

### **Vietnam Arrival**

5ACS Detachment 'B' deployed to South Vietnam in January 1967. Squadron Leader **G.P. Anderson** officially assumed command of the detachment on 31 January with the task of constructing domestic, and technical facilities to enable eight 2 Squadron Canberra bombers to operate from the American base at Phan Rang, 257 kilometers north-east of Saigon. The plan called for domestic facilities (accommodation, messing, generating and reticulation of 415 volt electrical power, purified water reticulation and the construction of a septic tank system) to be built. A Bellman hangar with double story annexes and a Headquarters/Operations and Communications building were also to be erected. In addition, there was a requirement for a bomb fusing area close to the aircraft hardstanding. Squadron Leader **Richard Gurevitch** had been on site, discussing the works arrangements with the 554th Civil Engineering Squadron (USAF) prior to the arrival of the advance party of the detachment on 28 January.

The arrival was not auspicious. The advance party, dressed in civilian clothes, had flown from Singapore to Saigon, then by Caribou transport to Vung Tau, where they were given a meal and issued with weapons. After being ushered back into the Caribou, the group was flown to Phan Rang where they were met by the Americans, expecting to 'welcome the Aussies in their slouch hats'; instead they were confronted with a group 'dressed in new suits (purchased in Singapore) with rifles on their shoulders'. The bad first impression was negated by the subsequent performance of the detachment.

On 5 February Flying Officer **H.S. Gordon** and six airmen travelled to Cam Ranh Bay to supervise the unloading of unit store from HMAS Jeparif. Two days later, the first convoy of 28 vehicles arrived at Phan Rang, followed on the 8<sup>th</sup> by another convoy of 25 vehicles. When the main body of 43 airmen arrived on 17 February they were housed in recently completed two story sleeping quarters.

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

---

Travel to Vietnam by squadron personnel went as planned, they traveled to Sydney and joined up with many others where they then boarded a Qantas 707 and flew on to Perth where a few more joined the group. It was a happy reunion of sorts for many of the former ACS personnel that had gathered together for the long journey. They then flew on to Singapore, stayed overnight and then flew to Saigon on a Pan Am DC6-B. That was the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1967.



**Bob Browne moving supplies at Phan Rang.**

Now at its full strength of 70 personnel, the detachment commenced work early in the morning and, as the 2 Squadron communications officer, Flight Lieutenant **John Coomer** recalls, 'would knock off at dusk, the colour of their faces and their clothes the same as the ground; only eyes showed through, the whole streaked with sweat ... teams of men worked

everywhere erecting buildings, working on roads, sealing some, finishing a power house'. Much of the construction was after discussion with 2 Squadron staff on the requirements of the squadron, and close liaison between the two units was maintained before (and after) the Canberras arrived in April.

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

---



These vessels had been chartered by the Department of Shipping and Transport to carry supplies for the Australian forces engaged in the Vietnam War.



The highlight of the work undertaken by the detachment was the provision of a unique facility at Phan Rang - flushing toilets. The septic system installed in the domestic area was a wondrous thing. Some American servicemen were known to seek invitations to visit the Australians to enable them to use these examples of the plumber's art. Coomer recalls that it was common while following the call of nature to be requested by a 'USAF chicken colonel on the next seat, "Say Aussie, when can I come up and use your fancy crappers?"

The assistance of the 554th Civil Engineering Squadron, the famous 'Red Horse' unit of the USAF, was invaluable. This unit supplied initial messing facilities for 5ACS until the arrival of a brand new stainless steel and aluminum kitchen on HMAS Boonaroo during March. The men had access to USAF sporting and entertainment facilities thus giving them the opportunity to be entertained by well known American artistes; on 10 February one lucky member of 5ACS was appropriately recompensed by the singer, Nancy Sinatra, for donating a slouch hat to her as a souvenir. The beach at Phan Rang, where men could relax in the surf, fish or water ski, was accessible on Sundays. 5ACS personnel participated in the base sporting competition without, it must be admitted, great success. The softball team was, at least, enthusiastic. During March Anderson was to comment that 'with further tuition from an American expert [they] should win their first game in the near future'. However, he was still waiting for this magic result at the end

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

---

of June.

On 19 April 1967 a ceremonial parade was held on the north ramp of the 2 Squadron area to mark the arrival of the unit at Phan Rang. It was a proud moment for Anderson and his men, who began preparations to close the detachment. At the end of April the officers and men, with expectations that they would be soon be returning to Australia, arranged a series of social functions to say farewell to friends and colleagues from the 'Red Horse'. But the departure from South Vietnam was to be delayed. On 13 May Squadron Leader Anderson flew to Saigon for discussions at Headquarters Australian Force Vietnam with the Commander RAAF Vietnam and the Officer Commanding the Task Force at Vung Tau. As a result of this discussion, it was decided to postpone the disbandment of the detachment and move it to Vung Tau to complete the construction of domestic and technical facilities at the aerodrome. After transferring stores and equipment from Phan Rang, Detachment 'B' moved to Vung Tau by Caribou aircraft on 21 June 1967. There were many stayed on at Phan Rang because they moved over to No 2 Squadron and after most of the works was completed flew home together 12 months later on their normal rotation.

**Credits:** The main source for this article was *“The RAAF Airfield Construction Squadrons 1942-1974”* by David Wilson and the personal first-hand accounts were provided by Robert ‘Bob’ Browne whose trade in the RAAF was titled ‘Equipment Assistant’. He was promoted to Corporal late in 1967. The Equipment Assistant title was later changed to ‘Supplier’. The duty of ‘Supplier’ was to manage stores work and satisfying demand for stores, receiving goods and warehousing. At No. 2 Squadron he also did air-movements stuff like preparing loads, manifesting, the unloading and loading of C130’s and Caribou. After leaving Vietnam his career changed somewhat as he was posted to Headquarters where he was trained in Defence Cataloguing. He worked in



**Bob Browne in Hong Kong on a respite from the war.**

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

---

Codification & Cataloguing converting the outdated RAAF Stores system to the NATO system.

For additional reading on the building of an Aussie presence at Phan Rang see Phan Rang Newsletter 109 and the article “*Establishing an Aussie presence at Phan Rang*”.

### **Capt. Brown Receives Two Flying Crosses**

Captain **Robert M. Brown**, son of Mr. and Mrs. James F. Brown who live on Rt. 2, Smithfield, was recently presented two Distinguished Flying Crosses by Colonel Robert F. Long, Commander of the Air Force Cambridge Research Laboratories, in Bedford, Mass. Captain Brown is a project officer in the Aerospace Instrumentation Laboratory at AFCRL.

The decorations were awarded Captain Brown for extraordinary achievement on December 17, 1966 and April 19, 1967.

Captain Brown received his first Distinguished Flying Cross for action performed near Bong Son, Republic of Vietnam, where he gave close air support in an F-100 to a hard pressed friendly unit. Although weather conditions were extremely hazardous and automatic weapons fire from the ground was intense, he pressed his attack to deliver his ordnance directly into the hostile position.

Another action near Bong Son won for Captain Brown the First Oak Leaf Cluster to his Distinguished Flying Cross. On alert at Phan Rang Air Base, Captain Brown was scrambled to provide urgently needed tactical air support to an element of the 1st Cavalry Division pinned down by two battalions of North Vietnamese regulars. Initiating difficult and hazardous weapon deliveries, Captain Brown struck telling blows to the entrenched hostile force. The citation accompanying his decoration lauds his aggressive execution of weapon deliveries, courage, outstanding professionalism and driving will to provide needed support.

Captain Brown joined the Aerospace Instrumentation Laboratory in October of this year following his return from Vietnam. A 1957 graduate of the United States Naval Academy, his assignments since coming on active duty have alternated between tactical flying and

## "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. 261 "...keeping the memories alive"

---

engineering duties. After going through pilot training at Webb AFB, Texas, Captain Brown was assigned as an in interceptor pilot at Maelstrom AFB, Montana.

Receiving a second B.S. degree, this one in Electrical Engineering from the University of Michigan he then worked in the Gemini Support Office at Patrick AFB, Florida. His Vietnam assignment followed.

While assigned to the 614th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Phan Rang Air Base in Vietnam, Captain Brown, a recent selectee for promotion to major, flew 299 combat missions winning the air medal with 11 Oak Leaf Clusters. He also wears the Joint Service Commendation Medal.

Captain Brown and his wife, Eva May, have one son, Bruce, age 9. He and his family reside in base housing, in Bedford.

*(Smithfield Times, December 13, 1967, Smithfield, Virginia)*

## What Phan Rang Taught Us about Breaking Bad Habits

*a Facebook conversation initiated by Mark Ward*

**Mark Ward wrote:** Am I the only one that got caught in the heroin trap at PhanRang? Their answer to that issue was to begin, "the golden flow program".

Those of us who fell prey to that weapon were put in an open bay area and detoxed. Then we were sent home without any recovery counseling. My and other lives were severely damaged and continued to pursue drugs for years after coming home. Some died from that addictive disease. I and others were hidden and pushed to the side. By the grace of God at 72 years old I have been clean for 28 years. My heart goes out to the walking wounded.

**Sam Lewis commented:** Thank God when I was there in Mar 67-68 the majority of us who "indulged" in anything were Beer Drinkers. There were a couple in the barracks who sat up smoking Pot and giggling all night but they were very few. We were told the stuff the locals chewed was laced with Heroin and Opium but we never touched it. I was told drugs became a problem there in the years after I left.



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

---

**Mark Ward replied:** Yes sir, it did become a life changing issue for many of us.

**El Hoard commented:** I congratulate you for beating the odds Mark.

**Mark Ward replied to El Hoard’s comments:** AA and God brother.

**El Hoard commented:** I never participated in drugs or beer. Want to have my wits about me when TSHF.

**Mark Ward replied:** Your wisdom or your faith protected you.

**Robert Spence wrote:** Congratulations on a long successful recovery from addictive illness. This is from a retired Licensed Clinical Addiction Specialist and a former 35th SPS Panther, 67-68.

**Mark Ward replied:** Thank you Robert.

**Luis Coca Jr. wrote:** I think I was at a different Phan Rang. We couldn't leave base, except by convoy to beach area. We smelled marijuana at some towers and bunkers. . Drank a lot of beer from rusty old cans and ate a ton of C-rats. Work and drink...Security Police 69-70, 35th Heavy Weapons.

**Rick Davidson wrote:** Thanks for bringing up this subject. I know of 1 drug induced death at Phan Rang in '70. I myself smoked a lot of pot and opium laced joints. My friend started smoking heroin and it really changed him. I never tried it until I transferred to Phu Cat. Heroin prevented me from taking R&R because of drug testing. I got clean before coming back stateside. I don't think many people know the extent of the drug problem in Vietnam.

**John Graham wrote:** Early 1969 we were able to go down to Phan Rang city and we had the strip outside the main gate what a time that was.

**Franz Juran wrote:** Used to see the HEADS doing their thing under the empty barracks on the way from the post office to my building next to the laundry. No one ever acknowledged the drug problem and just seemed to push it under the rug. One day I found a sergeant laying on my hooch floor apparently from a overdose and did what I could to resuscitate but found out only recently that he had passed away. Medics were very slow to get to us and no one ever talked about it until someone from the jet engine shop let me know about the guy 50 years later on this site.

**Tom Barden commented on Franz Juran post:** I think he died from an overdose in early 71. That's when I quit smoking laced heroin pot. He was in the barracks next to mine.

**Fran Juran responded:** Sounds like that was the Airman. He worked in the jet shop.

**Mark Ward wrote:** The girls who cleaned and did laundry would bring it on base. I think that we would trade a carton of cigarettes for a few vials. The flight line upper echelon certainly didn't acknowledge the problem. O well life is good, we aren't in Vietnam and many of us are blessed

## "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. 261 "...keeping the memories alive"

---

to be alive.

**Doug Reiter wrote:** Toward the end, the powers that be, did realize that there was a problem. I worked in a drug rehab program ran by Liz Young (base librarian) and Lt. Kelly O'Rourke (C-123 pilot). Had a barracks for guys that tested positive for opiates and did our best to get them straight. Mostly we cleaned them up and sent them home, where they got absolutely zero help with the long-term effects of their problem. That would have been 1971 I think.

**Mark Ward commented:** I was in your, "treatment barracks", in early 71 and left country after my stay. Thanks for trying.

**Doug Reiter responded:** I'm sorry we weren't able to do more for you Mark. Drug rehab was not a priority during that period.

**Mark Ward Responded:** I am responsible for the behaviors in my life. I recovered long ago my life is good and know that all of us serving in country at that time were at risk of many things. The VA has taken great care of me for years. I am grateful for all they do.

**Wayne Marsh replied:** Glad you got clean and have been for a while now. God bless you.

**Edward Cartwright wrote:** Drugs were rampant in Nan. I did two tours, one at Phan Rang and one at Binh Thuy. They were pushed to me but I passed. However, one night in the hooch an airman had a bag of pot. I smoked a few joints with some beer. I quickly figured out, why do people do this stuff. I stuck with my beer. Been clean of beer for 25 years now.

**Dick Oelkers wrote:** I was there 68-69, but never knew anyone who used drugs, including Marijuana. However, I was once on a work detail deconstructing a barracks bunker, and we found a bag of Marijuana. We turned it in to the 1st shirt.

**Bob Browne wrote:** I was there Feb 67 to Feb 68 and don't remember heavy drugs or hash being trafficked or used. I'm sure it probably was. But I do remember drinks being spiked with something at the Strip. I was told it was either 'speed' or some local 'weed'.

**Mike Kuhr wrote:** When I was at Phan Rang Jun 71-Feb 72 drugs were rampant. I was never approached to use maybe because I re-upped in Aug and was considered a lifer and the fact I worked nights 12hr shift 6 on 1 off. The remainder of my 16 years was spent doing random "golden flow" because of the drug issue.

**Sam Herold wrote:** I've always been reluctant to say anything about my drug use on this page. I had first been introduced to Marijuana and hallucinogens a few times at my first base. But once in Vietnam (March 71-72) I spent the whole year at Phan Rang smoking heavily. In fact I gave up alcohol completely. (from my teen years I was a drinker and even then was only 20) during that year. It wasn't just the mama sans who brought drugs on to base. Anytime we in SPS worked

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

---

the “Wells” we would bring it back to base, sometimes 20/25+ ounces at a time, occasionally joints would be coated with that black tar heroin but I avoided the addictive trap. I never tested positive for use even when tested, it was either luck or they just didn’t want low level marijuana users to deal with. (there’s more about this I could share). After returning to the states no drug was out of bounds and alcohol became the go too drug to supplement. I worked missile security with 3 on 3 off shifts and lived off base. Anything was possible. I completed my 4 years in 74 and was out honorably. By 79 I put myself in a alcohol treatment program (stayed sober for a bit then back to drank only for 20 years. This month I’m 24 years sober. I don’t hold my service time there responsible for any of that. It was just part of my story.

**Mark Ward commented:** Sam I’m glad you found freedom from your addiction. I don’t blame anyone for my addictions. Glad you are free now.

**Tom Barden responded:** Never used drugs till I went to Nam. Started smoking pot, then laced with opium, then did heroin laced pot but when a friend O.D'd I only smoked only regular pot. Spent 21 yrs in and NEVER got selected for random urine test. Of course I had to clean up my act after Nam as I progressed up the ranks.

**Scott Manes commented:** Isn't it interesting how things change. In 66 we would drink a good part of the day away in town or on the strip then be outside the perimeter all night with our dogs. I never even heard of anyone doing drugs. You probably received what was considered normal treatment for the times sadly. Glad you were able to get your life together despite it all.

**Doug Severt questions:** Actually I did hear whispers but nothing like this. Since, everyone express themselves so eloquently and honestly here on Facebook I would like to do a story for the Phan Rang Newsletter. Do any of the posters have any objections to this and using your name?

**Mark Ward responded:** I posted because I didn't see anything brought to light concerning the topic of drug use in country. If your use of this posting can help others who fell prey to drugs while serving our country and the people of Vietnam. Go for it.

**Donald Poirier commented:** I was with the Security Police 1971. About 3 months before I left Phan Rang I was posted on numerous times being on the 'Operation Golden Flow' team. When on duty, I sat behind a mirror, the Airman couldn't see me, but I had to ensure that the individual peed in a sample bottle. They were then tested for drug use before they could leave Nam.

**David Wisser adds to the conversation:** I was not aware of any heroin use during my time at PRAB in 1970, but do remember allot of weed being smoked. I did see some cocaine use

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

---

including a guy who was assigned to me as an assistant crew chief. Needless to say the NCO's were aware of his drug proclivities and he was subsequently assigned to the Phase Docks on the wash rack and spent the rest of his tour washing airplanes using alkaline soap which required him wearing a rain slicker suit in the oppressive heat! Probably a more fitting punishment than being court marshaled and sent back to the world.

**Rodney Eagan commented:** As a photographer at Phan Rang during 1971, I had to photograph a number of deceased personnel in the barracks that apparently were engaged in drug use. I don't have a count but there were many.

**Mark Ward responded:** We were so susceptible to ways to cope. I am grateful to have overcome. The streets are full of veterans still. Thank you for your service.

**Doug Severt questions:** Rodney Eagan if there were many, I can't find them on the wall or any other database. The Coffelt database of Vietnam casualties has categories like Misadventure, Accidental Homicide, Self Destruction and Suicide. Do you think a person that died from a drug overdose would have been classified as one of those that I've listed? I say that was the Coffeldt, but it's really the way the government classified them.

**Doug Severt questions:** I have so many questions and I guess I would have to preface it by saying that I was raised in a very small town in the very Northern part of Wisconsin which probably contributed to my naivety about a lot of things and that included drugs. Even though I was on my second enlistment by the time I got to Vietnam I never was exposed to any kind of drugs either during my tour of duty at Clark or Travis. In the Philippines I was really disappointed in most of the NCOs that I knew because they really were all functioning alcoholics. I'll never forget this one older guy that bunked not far from me and he usually was so drunk that he barely made it into his bunk...usually sleeping half on and half off the bed and the most notable thing is when he was passed out or sleeping he had his eyes open. What a sight! Now for the most pressing question that I have is where the drugs were coming from. Something must have happened after mid-1969 when I left Phan Rang that allowed the drugs on base. Did they come from the local area or were they brought in from somewhere else?

**James McDonough responds:** Must of had a demand for them, I frequented the bars on the strip and was never offered any drugs, I wonder if some GIs had a business on the side to make a few bucks, I do know of a A1C who had 1/2 ownership of a bar on the strip. Heroin is a giant step up the drug ladder from weed.

**Dan Henry comments:** In Pedro Rescue, thankfully we never experienced drugs. On occasion, we'd have a beer or two more than we should but I never saw any hard drugs. Thank the Lord!

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

---

**Jack Nottingham adds to the conversation:** I came back in May '67 and didn't hear anything about drug use/abuse until about 1970. Then it was reported as 'rampant'. It surprised me. I was with a pretty rowdy bunch of AP/SP beer/whiskey drinkers and NEVER heard of any drug use. I attributed my naïveté to being a Cop. I also felt a difference in younger recruits/Airmen around 1968 and chalked the drug thing up to a generational thing. Nobody EVER approached me with an offer of weed, pills or harder drugs.

**Doug Severt poses a question:** I haven't had any comments as to the origin of the drugs, but I was wondering if it could have been made readily accessible somehow by the Viet Cong as a means of crippling US Forces because prior to this, the locals never had an interest in drugs?

**Mark Ward responded:** I'd say that was a good possibility Doug, especially heroin. It put you on a dream state and incapacitated you.

**Gary D. Neitzke add to the conversation:** A couple buddies and myself smoked pot every evening in the old radio studio on the second floor of Wing HQ building (71-72).

**Jerry Harley commented:** Was there in 67-68 and never did a piss test. Never used anything not prescribed. Beer and massages don't count. 12 hours on 12 off. One day a week off.

**John Renninger commented:** 70-71 drugs were readily available. Best friend went from crewing an F-100 to cutting the grass at the squadron orderly room. Barracks had the “Alchys” and the Druggys”. When people ask me how much did you drink? I always say, “Just enough”

**Mike Crowder responded to John:** I think I remember him, but not his name, remember when we put up the plywood walls to replace the office potions and he took colored pencils and colored the different grains in the plywood.

**James Mcdonough commented:** I knew that many of the Vietnamese workers that were building bunkers were smoking weed, and on 1 occasion I walked into my hooch and about 7 Black airmen were smoking something and got startled when they saw me. I worked a few shifts at the base jail that had 1 occupant, a guy from LA who was being reassigned for drug rehab at a base in Oklahoma he told me he was only smoking marijuana, because his job was one that involved a long tech school he was very valuable to the USAF and instead of getting a bad conduct or general discharge he got rehab. I was totally naive about marijuana but often heard stories about guys buying cartons of American cigarettes but instead of tobacco they had weed and resealed, they supposedly were getting rich sending them home. It may have been total BS.

**Bob Follmer stated:** an opium-laced joint could be purchased for one dong at the strip. one Dong was equivalent to about 9 cents. Just tell one of the girls that you wanted a dinky-dau

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

---

(dow) cigarette and you'd be hooked up. You could buy as much as you could carry but one joint smoked on site reduced the jail time risk and was the normal purchase quantity for me. For most of the year I didn't know opium was part of the deal.

**George Varney wrote:** I flew back to the States on a medivac flight in September 71 to have a hernia surgery; there were 10 to 12 service members on board who had took the amnesty program. They were treated like prisoners. They were separated from other service members with medical care. The only time I was with them was at a stop at Phillippins. We were put in A locked room that had phone service, these guys did not have any money, that was taken away, but I had three quarters and handed them out to them. It was sad to hear them tell their Story to their families. I even got my quarter s back. Oh, all families were relieved there child was not in Country.

**Mark Ward replied:** Thank you George, the experience was as different as those of us who served.

**Doug Severt throws out this question to the group:** I've asked this question of Rodney Eagan, but I thought it would be a good idea to throw it out to the group. Here's the question. If there were many casualties, I can't find them on the wall or any other database. The Coffelt database of Vietnam casualties has categories like **Misadventure, Accidental Homicide, Self Destruction** and **Suicide**. Do you think a person that died from a drug overdose would have been classified as one of those that I've listed? My second question is, has anyone tried to match up the deaths to those listed in the Phan Rang Timeline that was just published in the Phan Rang Newsletter 259 or the Casualty list for Ninh Thuan Province in Phan Rang Newsletter 155 or the Chronological Order of Phan Rang AB Losses in Phan Rang Newsletter 197?

**Doug Severt responds to his own post:** I don't suspect anyone is going to answer my questions and since I hate to be talking to myself, here is what I found on Google. "Drug overdose deaths are identified using underlying cause-of-death codes from the Tenth Revision of ICD (ICD-10): X40-X44 (unintentional), X60-X64 (suicide), X85 (homicide), and Y10-Y14 (undetermined). Drug overdose deaths involving selected drug categories are identified by specific multiple cause-of-death codes." So all of those deaths that are coded that way are probably from a drug overdose are what I'm guessing.

**Doug Severt concluded the conversation.**

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

---

**These are the statistics for all of Phan Rang AB existence.**

### **1967**

**Misadventure<sup>1</sup> 1**

**Accidental Homicide<sup>2</sup> 1**

### **1968**

**Accidental Homicide 2**

**Self-Destruction<sup>3</sup> 1**

**Suicide 2**

### **1969**

**Accidental Homicide 4**

### **1970**

**Accidental Homicide 1**

**Intentional Homicide<sup>4</sup> 1**

**Accidental Self-Destruction<sup>5</sup> 4**

### **1971**

**Intentional Homicide 2**

**Accidental Self-Destruction 3**

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a coroner's term that originated in the UK to describe a death due to risk willingly incurred — a preventable death.

<sup>2</sup> Accidental homicide is where you kill someone in the course of a lawful act that is done with a reasonable belief that no harm will take place.

<sup>3</sup> Behavior that causes serious harm to oneself.

<sup>4</sup> Unlawful death purposefully inflicted on a person by another person.

<sup>5</sup> When you kill yourself by accident.

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

---

### **Seventh Air Force News makers**



Major Davidson



Major Hammett



Major Hughes



Colonel Klein

### **Truck Killers Enter Centurion Club**

Four B-57 Canberra pilots from Phan Rang AB have been named to the base’s famed Centurion Club’s honoring those pilots who have destroyed more than 100 enemy trucks. New Entries are, from left, and the number of trucks they have destroyed: Maj. George B. Davidson, Princeton N.J., 111; Maj David M. Hammett, San Diego, Calif., 107; Maj. Frank A. Hughes, Edenton N.C., 106; and Lt. Col. Donald D. Klein, Shreveport, La., 105, enemy trucks. (Seventh Air Force News, October 25, 1968)

### **Captain Richard W. Dabney, Jr.**

352 Tactical Fighter Squadron, APO San Francisco 96321



On 21 May 1968, Captain Dabney was number two in a flight of two F-100s scrambled off alert status from Phan Rang AB, RVN, to provide close air support. Captain Dabney delivered his ordnance with pinpoint accuracy, then was forced to leave the target area because of low fuel status. Soon after departure, and prior to rejoin, the fire warning light in Captain Dabney’s cockpit illuminated. He immediately declared an emergency and began to turn directly toward the nearest divert air base. Shortly thereafter, the aft section overhead light also illuminated so tanks and pylons were jettisoned in a clear area. The lead

aircraft closed, and the pilot advised Captain Dabney that he was trailing smoke, but that no fire was apparent.



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

---

The landing gear was lowered about one-half miles on final. As air speed decreased, a marked decrease in flight control response was noted, and the RAT was engaged. Captain Dabney decided that enough control response was available to land the aircraft. The flaps were lowered at one quarter mile, and 20 knots extra airspeed was maintained on final approach to provide zoom capability. Touch-down was about 500 feet down the runway with a 10 knot quartering tailwind. Captain Dabney then found that the drag chute would not deploy. Maximum braking was applied, but with stopping distance becoming critical and no barrier available, Captain Dabney intentionally blew both tires, providing marked deceleration. Partial directional control was maintained with nose wheel steering even though the left wheel was on fire.

As a direct result of exceptional skill and judgment, Captain Dabney was able to stop the aircraft on the runway. Postflight inspection revealed that the aircraft had received four .30 caliber machine gun hits, one of which penetrated the left intermediate fuel cell. Leaking fuel had caused fire damage throughout the aft section and the fire had burned through the drag chute assembly. **The courage and superior airmanship displayed by Captain Dabney saved a valuable combat aircraft. WELL DONE!**

### **Top 10 Hit Parade**

**Saigon (Special)** - The newest listing of the “Top Ten” record hits have just been listed by an unknown poll taker stationed here. The follow are those selected:

1. **“We Gotta Get Out of This Place”** performed by the 41<sup>st</sup> Signal Bn. choir.
2. **“Catch Us If You Can”** sung by the Viet Cong to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav. Div.
3. **“Run Baby Run”** sung by the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne escaping a Viet Cong ambush.
4. **“Singing in the Rain”** by a long range recon squad on night patrol.
5. **“Strangers in the Night”** by the combined Viet Cong-U.S. Army choirs.
6. **“Listen to the Rhythm of the Falling Rain”** performed by the U.S. Army during the monsoon season.
7. **“Wipe Out”** by the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav. to a trapped Viet Cong battalion.
8. **“No Milk Today”** sung by the cooks at the 41sgt Signal Bn. mess hall.
9. **“Dear John”** by the unfaithful sweethearts.
10. **“Ring of Fire”** by the ROKs to Charlie during Ted in Qui Nhon.

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

---



### Comments on Phan Rang Newsletter 255

**Carol Clarke:** Hard to believe that it has been 5 years since the reunion in Seattle. You do an absolutely awesome job of making these reunions happen and documenting them, too. Thanks for all you do to keep Phan Rang folks in touch -- and for doing it so well.

**Mike Mulcahey:** Thank you for all that you, Joyce and all that organize our reunions. Somehow just saying "Thank you" isn't nearly enough.

### Comments on Phan Rang Newsletter 256

**Carol Clarke:** Thanks for the article about Donut Dollies. Although it's been a long time ago, I still remember going from mess hall to mess hall on Thanksgiving to serve on the line for a while and talk to the guys -- and congratulate the kitchen crews who worked so hard on these meals.

### Comments on Phan Rang Newsletter 257

**Roger Lambert:** Many thanks for another top read, Doug. Mind you, I was not expecting your thoughtful foreword to my article on the loss of Albatross 03. That was very kind of you. BTW, you have promoted me from Platoon Commander to Battalion Commander in the foreword... ..Mind you, I did get a kick out of the unexpected promotion...

**Rich Buickerood:** It was fun to read about Cassidy and Stymiest...two more senior pilots who I knew well!

### Comments on Phan Rang Newsletter 258

**El Hoard:** EXCELLENT DOUG. Great read Sir. I think I can speak on everyone in the “Happy Valley” group when I say we appreciate all you do.

**Ray Munn:** This was awesome!

**Thomas Gates:** Thanks again for being the Phan Rang Historian.

**Rich Buickerood:** ...another great newsletter. Thanks again for all you do!

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

---

**Rob Lanier:** I just wanted to thank you for continuing to send me the newsletter. Although we could not continue to be Facebook Friends because of my political views, I do appreciate you and all you have and continue to do for us all.

**John Claybaugh:** Thank you for all you do. I like reading the letters.

**Roger Lambert:** The "Spooky" article reminded me of a contact in 1969 in which my colleague, Lieutenant Ian Hosie, Platoon Commander 7 Platoon, C Company, 5 RAR, and his platoon were saved by a "Spooky" gunship when an unknown sized enemy force attempted to overrun his night position. It was the first occasion within the Company that strobe lights were used at night. Ian had the strobes placed strategically around his position and "Spooky" did the rest.

My 9 Platoon was some kilometres away from Ian's position, but we could still see the tracers and hear the roar of the miniguns. One of my diggers likened the noise to "one, long extraneous fart" ... Needless to say that the enemy force was dispersed by the intense minigun fire and Ian's platoon was relieved of the onslaught.

Thanks again for your ongoing efforts with "Phan Rang News"; even as a somewhat interloper, your efforts are greatly appreciated by me.

### **Comments on Phan Rang Newsletter 259**

**Ken Ostrander:** I enjoyed reading your last newsletter that included the history timeline of Phan Rang Airbase. It was very thorough and I appreciate your time and effort in putting that together. Thank You! In addition, I was going to mention a possible addition to the timeline. It would be in December 1967 and the USO Bob Hope Christmas show. I'm sure everyone who was there for that show has not forgotten how good and important it made everyone feel. I have not found the exact date in December it was. Maybe some of your Phan Rang contacts would have the exact date and it could possibly be added. Thank you again for your time and effort with the newsletter. *(Note: I've added it as the evening of Christmas Day, 1967, but have not been able to positively prove it.)*

**Dan Henry:** Another fine job, Doug. But I have a question regarding the Bledsoe-Orr dining hall at the Fire station. This list reflects the dining hall opening in Jun 1968, named Bledsoe-Orr Dining Hall. The crash of Pedro was on October 8, 1968. Was the hall opened in June, then renamed after the crash in October? *(Note, I do not know the answer to this...does anyone else?)*

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

---

**Rhett O. Webber:** Excellent account of Phan Rang AB, RVN. USAF CMSgt (Ret) Phan Rang 1832nd Comm Sqdn-Air Traffic Control Mobile Tower. Volunteered Working Night Shirts at the MARS Radio 808809 helping both USAF and Army troops contact their families back Stateside, 1966-67.

**Roger Lambert:** A very somber and sobering read, Doug. For all the Phan Rang veterans who paid the supreme sacrifice.

**Gary Pugh:** Thank you so much.

**Bruce Gordon:** Great work on the timeline, Doug! Some details -- It shows the 612th TFS in June 1966 and again on October 10, 1966. I expect it was an advance party in June and the first aircraft in October?

**Donald Luke:** Thank you for continuing to publish the Phan Rang News. I was looking at the timeline and came upon an entry that I became aware of shortly before I headed for Vietnam. After moving from Massachusetts in 1961 to Southern California, I started my second year of high school. I was shy and socially awkward and was teased (a lot) because of my Yankee accent. I eventually ended up with a small circle of friends, mostly male, who all met for lunch each day. One of those was Stanley Strong. I lost track of everyone when high school ended. On my leave prior to leaving for Vietnam, I ran into a couple of high school friends. They told me that two of our group had joined the U. S. Marines and both had been killed in Vietnam. One of those was Stan. The story I got was Stan had been wounded and after spending time on a hospital ship, was on his way back to his unit at Khe Sahn on 3/6/68. The C-123K they were on was on approach when a Vietnamese aircraft got in their way so the C-123K had to pull up and circle around to try landing again. Supposedly, that is when the aircraft was shot down.

**Hank Milnark:** Fantastic job! It brought back many memories of 1966! Thanks so much to you and the brothers that put this together!

**Bob Smith:** Don't know if this is something you want to include in the timeline but the 504th Tactical Air Support Group (TASG) was transferred from Cam Ranh Bay AB to Phan Rang AB as of 1 Oct 1971. That is when I made my move to Phan Rang. The 504 TASG was the Headquarters for all of the Tactical Air Support Squadrons in Vietnam and Thailand. (This has been added to the timeline.

**Jim Lombard:** Although I have seen the lists of those from Phan Rang who were killed in one way or another, I'm always saddened and surprised each time I see a listing such as was contained in News 259. I ALWAYS learn SOMETHING, unfortunately, not all of it easy to accept. I also always come up with a question or three.

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

---

In the case of 259, one was of a surprising nature is that there were two who died at Phan Rang as the result of being struck by lightning. If you stop and think about it for a minute that is really pretty extraordinary given the size of the base and surrounding area. Look at a five mile radius of your home in OK - then think of the number of years you have lived there - how many lightning strike death have there been?

I have a sad personal connection to one of the events - what makes it horrific for me is that for 56 years I had thought the story had a happy ending and it wasn't until I read 259 that I learned it did not. Sept 1966 is the event in question. I have told the story over the years as a humorous aside to my work as an air traffic controller. Let me explain - many times when multiple ship flights took off and for one reason or another the weather (wx) was a little wonky, we (GCA) would provide departure vectors to join up the flight so that they could proceed on course. We would assign departure headings 15 degrees apart to the ships and would vector them until they had a flight member in sight and could join visually. On this particular day I was working departure and the flight coming off was a flight of 4 F4s. I had just made contact with the #4 ship and had given them a new heading to join when #2 (who had reported lead in sight) radioed "Departure, I think my flight leader just ejected", I asked why he thought that and he said he could see a parachute near where lead had been. That was pretty much the "end" of the story as far as I was concerned. 2 broke off to stay with the parachute and 3 and 4 were joined and vectored out to drop their stores; and dump fuel over the South China Sea and were vectored back so they could be recovered for a 360 overhead and landing. I changed 2 to a rescue frequency and didn't talk to him again. All these years I had been under the impression both crewmen survived, and I believe I am correct in believing both ejected. Over the years it had made a good "war story" and I had no clue anyone died in the incident. Ironically, I was aware Harold Knudsen had perished but thought it was in another accident, not the one I was involved in. Frankly, the other surprise is that I was never interviewed by the accident board since the procedure in accidents, especially fatal accidents is to talk to everyone involved and that includes air traffic control. While it IS possible that "my" incident and the one involving the death of Knudsen were different events, I sorta doubt it, but I'll probably never know for sure. The date corresponds generally with my recollection since the F-4s didn't leave PRG until Oct of 1966.

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

---

What prompted this email however was a question of curiosity. Before I get into that, let me express my gratitude to those of you who were there after the attacks began on Phan Rang in earnest. I have always been grateful that during '66 there was very little hostile activity - a few probes here and there, but not really anything to write home about. Many nights the trip flares would go off and some nites we would muster out and into our bunkers, complete with our AR-15s (the military had NOT “accepted” the rifles officially, so they were marked as AR-15s, not M-16s when they were issued - mine was still in the box complete with cosmoline wrapping when I received it at Tan Son Nhut before heading to Phan Rang AB), one or two magazines of ammo and our helmet. The HARD and fast rule was DO NOT LOAD YOUR WEAPON UNTIL EITHER FIRED UPON OR TOD TO DO SO. However, as we sat in our bunkers you could hear rounds being chambered up and down the line. There is nothing quite as chilling as sitting in a bunker with a bunch of drunks with automatic weapons looking for something to shoot at! This got to be such a problem that our AR-15s were taken away from us and stored in a Conex box at the end of the squadron area!! Rockets had yet to be introduced into the PRG area and there where were so many “armed forces” in the area, that we felt pretty much impregnable. You guys in 68-71 caught shit, and I certainly feel for ya!

But, back to my question(s). I ASSUME the answer to part of this is simply “suicide”, but I’ll have to admit I’m baffled by the different descriptors used. I know you did not devise the terminology, but do you have any idea WHY some are identified as suicide and other have such weird terms as: self-destruction, and non-hostile homicide, or even better, non-hostile accidental homicide - that one is especially strange as it says someone other than an enemy killed the individual intentionally, but accidentally? Over the document there are a number of these strange teams used that really leave the reader wondering. I was also unaware that it appears someone either lobbed grenades into a party at the air police club or someone inside was playing with them and something went very wrong injuring 15 and killing ??? Any clue what the hell happened.

There is an entry on 8/29/68 indicating the death was a “huicide” is that simply a typo of suicide or is this some sort of different type of death? (Yes, that was a typo)

As always, enjoyed the newsletter. Thanks for all your hard work. Take care and stay well. Jim  
**Walter Brooks:** Hi Doug I was a flight engineer on C-47 at Phan Rang assigned to 14<sup>th</sup> SOW. My

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

---

boss was MSgt Edward Johnson who died after a C-47 crash at I believe it was Phu Cat Air Base. We were both assigned to the aircraft as flight engineers. I don't believe his name is on the fallen members list of Phan Rang could you help get his name listed. thanx Walt (*thank you Walt for this information. All relevant data bases (Newsletters) have been updated to include MSgt Edward Johnson.*)

### **Comments on Phan Rang Newsletter 260**

**Michael Drzyzga:** Another good one - thank you for put forth the time and effort.

**Michael Dean:** Lots of action in Newsletter 260. Glad I was out of there by 9/68. The F-100 in the picture was tail # 724 that took a direct mortar round hit during the 69 Tet attack. It was assigned to the 614th TFS which I was a crew chief on #924.

**Thomas Gates:** A great write up. Thanks for publishing it.

**El Hoard:** Doug, out of all your newsletters that you've posted, this is one of my favorites. I was there the night of the TET invasion on January 26, 1969 and was one the Super Cops that this guy refers to. Actually I was unaware of that reference until after I had been out of the service for years. Thanks for sharing this peace.

**Bruce Gordon:** Wow! Excellent stories, Doug! The story of Sgt Jerry Berry was amazing!

**Herbert Heinen:** Thanks for sharing!

Brought back a lot of memories.

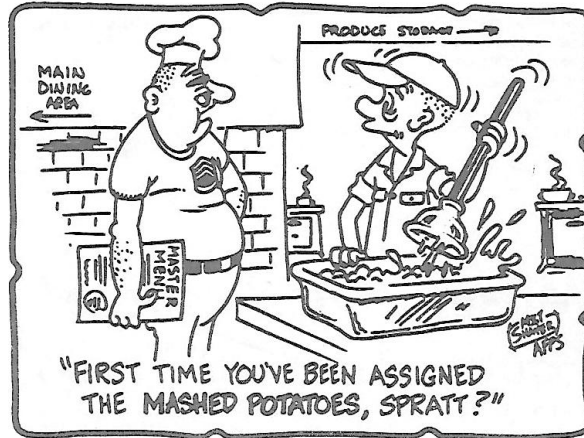
**Robert Browne:** Hi Doug, I must say that I'm so pleased to have joined the Happy Valley Phan Rang Facebook group. I get so much out of reading it. I also thoroughly enjoy receiving and reading Phan Rang News. I have noticed many more Aussies are joining. I will be attending the RAAF No 2 Squadron (Queensland) annual meeting in a few weeks. It's always an enjoyable reunion of sorts but each year we seem to have less attendees. I'm hoping that we can continue for a few more years but none of us are getting any younger. Still membership is open to all current and ex-members of the Squadron so the younger ones may join as time goes on. (*Note: This note along with a brief history of the RAAF No 5 Airfield Construction Squadron -Det B served as the seed for the lead story in Phan Rang Newsletter 261. Thanks, Bob.*)

## "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. 261 "...keeping the memories alive"

---



### Doug's Comments:



I hope that you enjoyed this newsletter. This newsletter was composed by Douglas Severt and all graphics by Douglas Severt unless otherwise noted, however, without your stories, this newsletter would not be possible. If you are reading this and haven't seen the previous issues, click [here](#) to download all the previous newsletters. To unsubscribe to Phan Rang News, [dougsevert@cox.net](mailto:dougsevert@cox.net) and put 'unsubscribe' in subject

line.