Phan Rang AB Newsletter
The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.
"Keeping the memories alive" Newsletter 262

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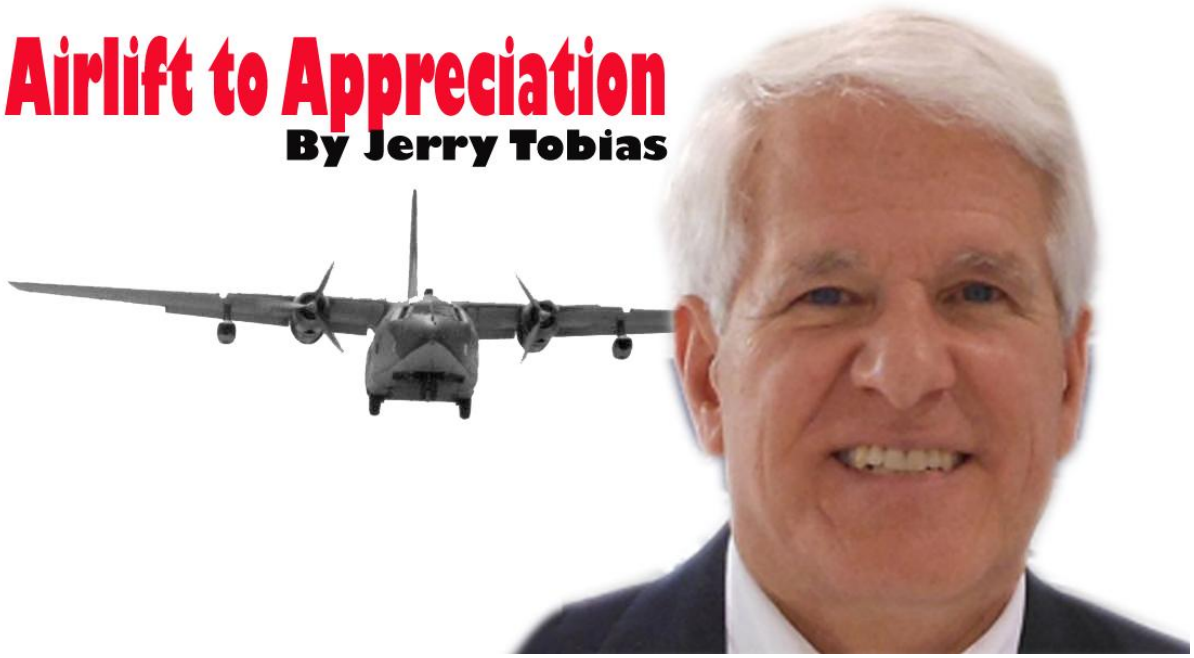


Spreading a little Christmas cheer in Vietnam

The U. S. Air Force Fairchild C-123K Provider was a tactical airlift workhorse during the Vietnam War. This 60,000 lb. airplane, with its two Pratt & Whitney R2800 18-cylinder radial engines and two General Electric J-85 wing-mounted jet engines, was well suited for both the tactical airlift mission and the combat environment.

I flew the C-123 out of **Phan Rang** Air Base in Vietnam, and soon learned to appreciate this rugged and dependable airplane. All of the hundreds of sorties I flew in the combat theatre were interesting, and most were also challenging in one way or another. This gave me the opportunity to observe the realities of war and the impact of combat on the people involved. Many of the forward bases we frequented, for example, had no instrument approach, the

runways were sometimes surrounded by rugged terrain or shrouded in layers of low scud clouds (or both), and the landing surfaces were often unimproved, meaning that they were "paved" in pierced steel planking (PSP) or even dirt. The PSP runways actually weren't bad when they were dry, but they could be like landing on butter when they were wet. More challenging than the flights, however, were the horrors of the war itself.

The C-123 was a workhorse in Vietnam.

In my job as a tactical airlift pilot, I crisscrossed the length and breadth of the war zone on a regular basis. Therefore, I constantly observed the realities of war and the impact of combat on the people involved. Occasionally, this meant seeing up close the terrible physical toll of the Vietnam conflict: the dead, the injured, or the tragic collections of GIs chained together en route to an in-country detox center. It also meant seeing the war's appalling emotional toll.

Frequently, for example, I observed the fear and uncertainty in the eyes of the newly arriving troops travelling from Saigon or Cam Ranh Bay to their forward bases. I couldn't help but wonder how many of them would survive their tours of duty. I also learned to recognize the resignation and despair on the faces of the battle- and boredom-weary soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen who shuffled on and off of my C-123 each day. The war and its painful by-products seemed to eventually erase all other expressions from the faces of most of them.

It's not hard to understand why. Few of these men were volunteers; they were not there because they wanted to be, but because they had to be. And, many had already known a buddy or – at least – had heard of someone who had been killed in an ambush, maimed by a booby trap, or caught in the web of cheap and easily accessible drugs. Unfortunately, all of them were also aware of the loud and negative segment of the population back home that seemed to neither care about them nor about what they were going through day after day. Those facts all helped to make my flights on December 24th and 25th of 1971 even more significant.

My C-123 unit had asked for volunteers to fly troops to and from the Bob Hope USO Christmas shows in Bien Hoa those two days. Flying certainly seemed to be a better alternative than spending a lonely Christmas in my room, I reasoned, so I gladly signed up to be scheduled as needed.

I flew 13 sorties back and forth to Bien Hoa before Christmas Day ended. Every flight was as packed with as many troops as we could legally carry aboard the C-123. The field commanders, it seems, did a good job of getting as many troops to the Bob Hope shows as possible.

The flights to the shows were pretty much normal troop transport flights. The troops were still mostly expressionless; they were just glad to be getting a break from the war.

Each return flight, however, was the absolute opposite. The physical gross weight of the airplane, of course, was always about the same as it had been en route to the show. But, the emotional weight of the airplane seemed to be thousands of pounds lighter. Most noticeable were the restored expressions of life and laughter on the men's faces. It was as though Bob Hope had turned the light back on in their souls. That, I believe, was not the result of the men having been entertained, but of their having been appreciated.

One flight also stands out for another reason. It was my last return flight late Christmas Eve night. We rarely flew our C-123s at night, but everything about this particular cloudless, full moon-illuminated night was even more unique. It was a strangely silent night, an almost holy night. All was uncharacteristically calm. All was spectacularly bright. And the cognitive camera snapshot I took that night of this beautiful and surreal-yet-peaceful view of a tragically war-torn land will forever be etched on my mind.

Bob Hope "turned the light back on in their souls."

I am very grateful for the support that our men and women in uniform currently receive from most sectors of America. All of the various "support our troops" programs, the very meaningful and practical assistance provided to our active duty, reserve and guard troops, and the encouragement expressed to both our deployed troops and their families at home all needs to continue and even be expanded however and wherever possible.

Such support, however, was just not the case during the Vietnam War. The very genuine care and appreciation that Bob Hope and his companions expressed to the troops in just a couple of hours during each Christmas show, therefore, was probably quite literally more encouragement and support than many of these young men experienced before, during or – sadly – after their tours of duty.

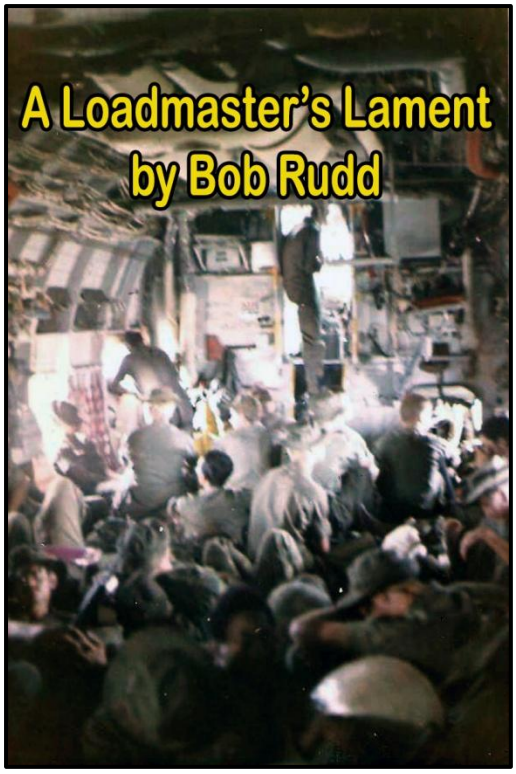
Bob Hope made nine consecutive USO Christmas tours to Vietnam between 1964 and 1972. He entertained, yes, but – more importantly – he also imparted sincere value and respect to thousands who had not received much of either for a long, long time. We, as a nation, owe him and those who have followed after him more thanks and gratitude than we could ever repay.

Although my flight schedule kept me from attending a Bob Hope USO Christmas show myself, I was able to personally witness – and will never forget – the incredible impact that he and those with him had on the morale of our troops. And, I count it a tremendous privilege to have had a part in providing several hundred of America's finest with airlift to the appreciation that they so desperately needed and so richly deserved.

Jerry Tobias

Jerry Tobias

Jerry grew up in central Kansas where his father farmed after flying Navy Hellcats during WWII. Although his father never flew again, Jerry was awed by the way he lived his life and riveted by his reluctantly shared flying stories, and it was his love and respect for this special man that ignited his passion for aviation. Jerry flew 747s (E-4Bs) and other types for the Air Force, MD-80s for Jet America and Alaska Airlines, and numerous corporate aircraft for Mutual of Omaha. However, he now really enjoys flying a pristine 1946 vintage Ercoupe.



Sometime in 1969 we had picked up a load of grunts after they had spent 6 Weeks in the field. They were just Walking Zombies, exhausted and filthy.

I offered the one that sat beside me, water in an igloo we carried next to the cockpit. Uck! Meds! (Malaria meds).

I smiled, told him there were no meds. He wasn’t interested until I told him there was ice in it. He looked at me like a child on Christmas Morning and headed for the Igloo. Within seconds all of them were crowded around the igloo.

I had to push my way through them and carry the igloo back under the wing to restore balance to the plane. They emptied the igloo in minutes, including the ice an all. There were gins all round.

What Can She Say? SLC Grad's Plight with Wounded GIs

HAMMOND — "I'm part way through my ninth month, over here, and I've had experiences (good and bad) which I'll never forget, writes Gay Nail from Vietnam.

She's a Southeastern Louisiana College graduate, from Metairie, working with an American Red Cross clubmobile in that war-torn land.

She write back to the college that "seeing our young men going through untold hell and coming out of it without bitterness — still with a smile — is worth any sacrifice I have to make.

"I can't tell you how many times I've walked into a hospital and talked to someone 20 years old — with both legs gone. What can I say? They are so great; they, usually end up boosting my morale.

"My first four months were spent at Di An. with the 1st Infantry Division. Di An is down south near the "Iron Triangle." There, I experienced my first monsoon and first mortar attack. I hope

to go through neither again.

While I was with the 1st Division, I took nine days leave and went to Penang, Malaysia and Bangkok, Thailand. Really enjoyed both places. Saw classical Thai dancing in Bangkok, a great place to buy silk and jewelry.

"After four months, I was transferred to Phan Rang Air Force Base, on the coast of the South China Sea, about 50 miles below Cam Ranh Bay. "Phan Rang was a real change from Army life. We had good living conditions and a fairly secure area. Bob Hope and his Christmas troupe performed there, and I worked backstage. Got to party with the cast and had loads of fun.

"I'll never forget Christmas in Vietnam — never worked so hard in my life. This is the hardest time for the fellows to be away from home, so we try to make everything as nice as possible. At present, I'm stationed with the 4th Infantry Division at Pleiku, about 50 miles from the site of the battle of Dak To. Pleiku will be my last assignment — I have 3 1/2 month to go.

"I've been out twice in the past week to visit troops. Last Friday, I spent the morning on Hill 1338, where one of the major battles took place a few weeks ago. Our guys are still digging in up there. The place is a fantastic sight. Artillery and air strikes have completely decimated the area.

"Pleiku ia in the Central Highlands, surrounded by Montagnard villages. These people seem like they're 5,000 years behind the times. It Is really interesting to visit their villages — but there's one catch, you have to drink their rice wine. Ugh!

"Living conditions for us here are the worst I've had so far, impossible to keep anything clean, least of all yourself. We have outdoor showers and latrines. Not really too bad — but I'll certainly appreciate a bathroom when I get home."
(**Source:** The Hammond Daily Star, February 2, 1968)

Many stories have been written about the patriotic women that volunteered to be Red Cross "Clubmobile" or "Donut Dollies" in the pages of the Phan Rang Newsletters. Here are just a few of them, 127, 136, 138, 216, 236, 254, 255.

Chronicle’s of a Loadmaster

As we taxied for takeoff, I looked out the back of the C-119 cargo area and could see the Army sergeant running behind the plane trying to catch up. The afternoon jungle rain, which only an hour ago sent torrents of water cascading over the perforated steel plate that covered the runway, was now escaping through the holes as streams of vapor carrying the smell of rotting vegetation toward the sky, and leaving the PSP wet and slippery. Using the web straps attached to the side of the plane for handholds I struggled toward the ten-foot opening in the rear of the plane, where the clam shell doors used to be, and stepped over the rollers that we nailed to the floor.

The cargo area, partially loaded with boxes and pallets containing military hardware, was ready for para-drop to the troops. As the plane slowed to turn onto the runway, I extended my left arm, holding onto the last strap with my right, and reached out yelling to the sergeant, “Throw the rifle on board and grab my arm.” Arms locked, I pulled as hard as I could as he jumped, dragging him into the cargo area on top of the rollers, and slinging him to the side where he could grab the webbing and his M16, as it vibrated toward the opening.

The plane finished its turn, the brakes locked, and the engines started revving up. The engines

were cycling up and down as the pilot ran through his last-minute checks of magnetos and props prior to takeoff. Amid the noise and vibration, the sergeant looked up at me and yelled, "We need you at the other end of the runway for an emergency pickup."

"Hang on tight," I yelled and stood up, starting for the front of the plane. I could hear the hydraulic and electric motors driving the flaps to the takeoff position, knowing that in moments the engines would be revving up for takeoff. I had to make it to the cockpit entrance before that takeoff run started, and the acceleration kept me from moving forward, or even worse falling onto the rollers and out the back of the plane onto the runway.

"Abort! Abort!" and crashed head first into the stairs as the engine noise subsided and the plane slid to a stop on the wet PSP."

The thin aluminum sides of the airplane amplified the sound of the 3000 hp engines as they revved up, vibrating like tympanic instruments to the sound of the exhausts. As I stood up, quickly stepping over the rollers, and around the tie-downs of the cargo, I felt the brakes release and the plane lurched forward. Diving forward against the forces of acceleration and gravity, I reached for the handle at the cockpit stairway entrance and yelled, "Abort! Abort!" and crashed head first into the stairs as the engine noise subsided and the plane slid to a stop on the wet PSP.

"You OK, Sergeant?" the co-pilot said, looking down at me from the cockpit.

"Yes, sir," I replied, sitting up and rubbing my shoulder. "The Army sergeant…" turning my head and nodding toward the back "…has an emergency requirement."

"Army sergeant?" the co-pilot said incredulously. "How did he get on board? Forget that, what's the problem?"

The Army sergeant yelled from the back of the plane, "Sir, we've got a platoon taking fire. They need that fucking equipment that's at the other end of the runway. Now!"

The co-pilot turned and leaned forward talking to the pilot, and then leaned back into the

stairway and said "Got it. Hang on." The brakes released and the plane accelerated forward again. Almost as quickly as we accelerated, the brakes were applied, and we slid to a turning stop at the end of the 3,800-foot runway. Leaning back into the stairway the co-pilot said, "O.K. sergeant, get that shit loaded."

Before I could get to the back of the plane, a forklift with a jeep on a pallet was lining up and moving onto the back-end rollers. "Easy now," I yelled over the noise, not wanting the pallet to hit the side of the plane. "OK, lower," I yelled, pointing my right thumb down while holding my left hand up indicating a cautious movement to the driver. The plane rocked as the jeep in its wooden cradle settled onto the rollers and the forklift backed out.

"I could hear the swearing and commotion of the Army troops chasing their gear blown around by the prop wash"

Yelling at the Army sergeant, "Hey, give me a hand," we slid the jeep toward the front of the plane against the pallet of jerry cans and strapped it down. Before we finished, I could see the forklift approaching the rear with another jeep.

"Hurry up, sergeant," these engines are loading up and starting to miss," yelled the co-pilot as he advanced the throttles briefly, to clear the fuel out of the thirty-six cylinders of the engines. Turning to the back of the plane as the engine noise subsided, I could hear the swearing and commotion of the Army troops chasing their gear blown around by the prop wash.

"Holy shit! What does that thing weigh?" I yelled at the sight of the second jeep. It appeared bigger than the first, and had an anti-tank weapon mounted on it, but in addition to the cannon that just cleared the top of the plane, it was heavily armored.

"Don't know," yelled a voice from the back ranks. "Don't matter no how. You Air Force pukes gotta take it anyway."

I looked at the armored jeep and thought: Christ, this thing probably weighs half again what the standard jeep weighs and it's on the back of the plane. We need to unload and put this one on first to get the center of gravity within flight limits.

As I turned toward the cockpit, the pilot yelled down the stairway, "Get that stuff tied down now. We've got to go."

"Yes, sir," I yelled as a refrigerator-sized man pivoted onto the back of the plane and started barking orders.

From the back I could see the second lieutenant bars on his shoulders and the dark area on his sleeves where stripes used to be. As he turned toward me, glancing around the cargo area, sizing it up, I could see the chin strap on his helmet drawn tight against his pockmarked, dark face pulling it down near his eyes. Without any acknowledgment, he turned and shouted, "Get your sorry asses up here. Now!"

"Sir, I think we have an excess load and an aft CG."

Twenty paratroopers in full gear lined up behind the plane in two lines of ten and began climbing into the plane while I was strapping down the load. Bumping into me with their packs, parachutes and rifles they filed to each side of the strapped cargo and connected the static lines of their chutes to an overhead cable following rigorous commands barked by their officer. Christ! Twenty troops in battle gear must be another four or five thousand pounds.

Struggling past the line of troops, I entered the cockpit stairway and yelled, "Sir, I think we have an excess load and an aft CG."

"What do you mean excess load? How much and how far back?" the pilot said in a pissed off tone. "You're the load master. What the fuck are you doing back there?"

"Sir," I replied, quickly calculating, "That armored jeep is half again the weight of a standard jeep. That's 6,000 pounds, plus twenty troops at 250 pounds is another 5,000 pounds, plus our original load of 2,000 puts us at 13,750, and the armored jeep is twenty feet aft. That's 3,750 pounds over with an aft CG."

My load analysis was interrupted by the static of a radio call as the co-pilot said, "I just heard an

emergency fire support call on 121.5."

The pilot did some mental calculations and turned to the co-pilot and said, "Lieutenant, how much fuel have we burned?"

"Roughly 500 pounds, Sir."

"Less 500 pounds of fuel, puts us twenty percent over our single engine emergency limit and an unknown aft CG. What do you say?"

"Let's go, Captain," said the co-pilot.

Turning to me he said, "OK, Sergeant, strap 'em in and move 'em forward. Lieutenant, short field take off procedure. Set full down elevator trim and dump full flaps when we pass the 3,000-foot runway marker. Engineer, I want full METO power."

The engines in the C-119 were special: Unlike previous aircraft, there were no throttle stops, meaning the output power could be increased until the engines literally exploded, but under extreme conditions, that additional power could be available. Maximum extended takeoff power was the limit, and controlling that power without engine damage was the job of the flight engineer.

Stepping out of the cockpit stairwell and back into the cargo area, I yelled over the engines, "Lieutenant, we need everyone forward for takeoff. Just slide your static lines forward as you move."

"Ten' hut," yelled the Army lieutenant, and the two rows of paratroops stood to attention. "You heard the sergeant. Move 'em forward. Bunch 'em up. The Air Force wants you standing forward and we don't want to disappoint those pukes."

Shuffling, bumping, and moving in baby-step confusion with one hand above their heads, sliding their static line clasp, they moved forward as the plane turned sharply on the PSP runway and then abruptly stopped as the engines roared to maximum extended takeoff power.

"The facade of bravado left the faces of the paratroops as the brakes were released.."

The facade of bravado left the faces of the paratroops as the brakes were released, and the plane accelerated with an ear-deafening engine roar down the runway, leaving behind a spray of mist from the tires and props, swirling into the open back of the plane. Still standing forward, along the sides of the plane, the troops lost their balance, tumbling like rows of dominoes, as the flaps deployed and the plane pitched up leaving the runway. The weight of the rear jeep caused the nose to rise so violently that PSP filled the view out the back as the plane appeared to go straight up. Then just as quickly, the plane leveled out, the negative g's causing a sick sensation in our stomachs, now throwing the troops forward. Their faces were now white with fear, a fear that was compounded with a crashing sound on the bottom of the fuselage as jungle foliage flew behind us.

"Flying over enemy territory at less than two thousand feet was well within the range of small arms fire."

For another minute the engines fought the struggling airplane into the air, and then I heard the engine sound subside to gentler roar as the throttles were retarded to maximum climb. But the climb wasn't normal, maybe a hundred feet per minute at best, and we were rapidly approaching enemy territory.

Flying over enemy territory at less than two thousand feet was well within the range of small arms fire.

Furthermore, we were only twenty minutes from the drop zone, and at this rate-of-climb they will have to do a low jump with little time to get ready.

Ten minutes out we only had a thousand feet, and with only ten minutes to go, the yellow light came on. The paratroops were already going through their routine of checking their static lines and equipment, and then their buddies, giving each other a helmet slap to confirm their jump status.

Moving to the rear of the plane, I unbuckled all but two web straps on the armored jeep and

extended the ripcord handle from the jeep's parachute pack to the front. When the yellow light flashed, I would release the last two straps, and when it turned green, pull the ripcord handle. There, yellow flash! I leaned over and unbuckled the last straps. Green! I pulled the ripcord.

A small pilot chute fluttered into the slipstream, flying below the horizontal stabilizer that spanned the twin booms of the cargo plane, pulling out three large chutes that opened together. The connecting shroud line instantly tightened and jerked the jeep out of the plane with a sharp bang. I grabbed a web strap as the plane violently bucked with the change in weight, rising, diving, the engines surging and then everything stabilizing as the pilots regained control, and turned for another pass.

The yellow light was on again. Unbuckling the straps on the second jeep, I pushed it toward the rear with the help of the paratroops who kept it centered on the opening. Sweat formed on my forehead as I realized the futility of holding onto two thousand pounds of loose cargo, waiting to careen into us or the sides of the plane with the next turbulence. The flashing yellow turned green and I pulled the ripcord. Again the pilot chute pulled the main chutes to full bloom jerking the jeep out of the plane with the same violence, and then the plane was turning again with the yellow light flashing.

As the plane leveled out, the yellow light turned green. The lieutenant yelled, "Go. Go! Go!" and they marched out the back of the plane eager to go to battle. As the last man jumped, the lieutenant turned to me, smiled, gave a thumbs up, and was gone. I looked out the back of the plane as we started a normal climb, and saw the last of the silk chutes bloom and then collapse as they quickly reached the ground.

Now out of small arms range, the rest of the flight would be a routine drop, and return to our forward base. Holding on to the edge of the opening, I leaned out into the slipstream and hooked my arm around the ten static lines dangling behind the plane, and pulled them inside, doing the same on the other side, and thinking while looking at the empty ends of the static lines: Their faces were white with fear from the unknowns of a plane ride, but those same faces exuded confidence, as they bravely jumped into the unknowns of a war.

About the author: Fred Fredine is an Air Force veteran (Staff Sergeant, 1954-58), graduate of Ball State University (BS A&S Physics & Math), Engineer (Navy civilian, 28 years), and pilot (CFI) . Now retired, he lives with wife of fifty-three years in Indiana. He enjoys competitive shooting, flying RC model airplanes, and writing military fiction.

"What was the Vietnam War?"

A Facebook conversation initiated by Frank Pennington on "Happy Valley" - Phan Rang AB, Vietnam Facebook group

Frank Pennington wrote: My ten year old grandson asked me "**What was the Vietnam war**?" and I did not know what to say. My first response was "It was a useless war where Americans were killed for nothing."

Michael Morgan commented: It wasn't just Americans. It was really tragic for the Vietnamese people. At the time we were battling Communism. In any armed conflict the civilian population suffers the most. Was it useless, I don't know? The same thing may happen again, only on a larger scale. It's the ideologies that are at fault and have been since Cain killed his brother Abel. For what? Because Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God and Cain's was not.

Frank Pennington responded: You are correct everyone suffers. My mother survived the German booming of Scotland during WWII and was anti Vietnam.

Paul K. Glasser commented: I think it is a lot more complicated than just a "useless war". Jan Scruggs once commented that Vietnam was a traumatic experience for America, not just those that served, but for our parents, friends and most all of the American society. I for one can say I learned poignant lessons through the adversity and tragedy. My experience shaped my behaviors and professional career that followed. If nothing else we learned the meaning of service and sacrifice for our country and also for each other.

Donald Nixon responds to Paul's comments: I learned not to trust ANY government no matter how many feel good promises they feed you!

Dean Ford commented: In most parts of Asia it's called the American War. It was a civil war that we couldn't win and shouldn't have tried. 60,000 Americans died along with millions of Vietnamese (+women/children). Vietnam's infrastructure was destroyed. Today Americans enjoy inexpensive clothing, foods, electronics, medicines and many other useful items - made in

Vietnam. The beaches along the South China Sea are lined with some of the best vacations resorts in the world. A very popular vacation destination for Americans, French, Brits and others. I'd love to go back!

Danny-Linda English commented: We did our job. The politicians betrayed us and the Vietnamese people, and they lost the war at our expense. Benghazi, Iraq, Afghanistan; when will it stop?

Ward Shute replied: Damn good question maybe when we send them to the next one.

Doug Severt replied: Danny-Linda English we are getting close to doing just that in Ukraine. So far no troops, but they are certainly draining our treasury and our war stockpiles.

C Dan Brownell replied: Doug Severt, once again we gave the Ukrainian people hope only to drop them flat on their face thanks due to Political Party shifts. The USA will not be trusted to finish anything. We will back out of S. Korea and Japan before long. Who knows when we will do the same with Germany, Guam, Philippines, Taiwan, etc., etc. Without buying friends all there is left are enemies. Sad we have got ourselves into this position.

Donald Nixon commented: Yeah, that about sums it up! It made LBJ and his old lady rich though! That's why our country is at war all the time! War means jobs building the tools of war, new stuff the generals just gotta try out!

Michael Morgan posted: The GI movement was an organized expression of a much larger reservoir of troop discontent. By the early 1970s, the military in Vietnam was ridden with decentralized rebellion. Many combat troops felt that the unpopular war "wasn't worth it." The Vietnamization program was announced by Nixon "peace with honor" and they saw themselves being used as "pawns" and "bait" in a "lifer's game" of career advancement. To stay safe and sane, troops developed what Fred Gardner called a "vague survival politics" that responded to the immediate dangers they faced in Vietnam. These tactics became weapons that grunts used to exert bottom-up power to protect their bodies and minds as they waited out the war.

The starkest form of survival politics was outright refusal of combat orders, but such mutiny was rare. More common were maneuvers to avoid combat without openly risking punishment. Soldiers used the "search-and-evade" tactic, in which they pretended to obey fighting orders while secretly avoiding armed contact. One veteran explained that his unit would "go a hundred yards, find us some heavy foliage, smoke, rap and sack out." Combat avoidance was "virtually a principle of war" by late 1971. Troops also sabotaged military equipment: gears were jammed on ships and fires mysteriously broke out on deck, which prevented embarking to Vietnam.

The most violent form of revolt was "fragging," or the attempted murder of higher-ups. Nearly 600 instances were reported between 1969 and 1971, though more likely went unreported. Some fragging attempts happened in the field but many occurred in the rear, often because of anger over punishment for drugs or racial tensions. One GI called fragging "the standard response of the Army's little people" to "any action directed by their superiors that they consider unnecessary harassment." Actual fraggings could take the form of a grenade explosion or feigned friendly fire, but more important was the widespread knowledge that they could happen. The practice of fragging, said one officer, was "troops' way of controlling officers," and it was "deadly effective." While brutal, fraggings grew out of the surreal atmosphere of the war and its normalized violence. They reflected the disintegration of the late Vietnam-era army and the fact that some GIs saw their main conflict with the military rather than the Vietnamese. Soldiers in Vietnam also waged a cultural rebellion that drew on the symbols and language of the 1960s counterculture. They grew their hair out and wore protest decorations. They etched peace signs and psychedelic art on their Zippo lighters, along with slogans like "Pray for peace and put a Lifer out of a job," and "We are the unwilling led by the unqualified doing the unfortunate for the ungrateful." They used drugs to relax and escape the stress of war, and GI "heads" celebrated getting high as a rejection of the war and the army's authoritarianism. This GI counterculture was also a rank-and-file class culture. The rebellious identities that soldiers asserted were distinctly those of the lower ranks, of the grunts who performed the thankless labor of the war while, as they saw it, uptight lifers sat in air-conditioned buildings barking out orders.

One measure of the depths of GI rebellion is the deep sense of alarm that it generated among military and political elites. Congress devoted hours of hearings in the early 1970s to the investigation of radical subversion in the armed forces. Military intelligence closely monitored the activities of the GI movement, and even General Westmoreland worried about the GI coffeehouses. Army leaders openly lamented the scope of the crisis. Most famously, the celebrated military historian Colonel Robert D. Heinl published an article in the June 1971 edition of the Armed Forces Journal titled "The Collapse of the Armed Forces." It began with the stunning words: "The morale, discipline and battle worthiness of the U.S. Armed Forces are, with a few salient exceptions, lower and worse than at any time in this century and possibly in the history of the United States."

According to Tom Hanks, this was Forrest's speech: "*Sometimes when people go to Vietnam, they go home to their mommas without any legs. Sometimes they don't go home at all. That's a bad thing. That's all I have to say about that.*"

Michael Mulcahey commented: I do not think there is a good answer for this question. I think the only true answer could be made at the time of the war, with the knowledge of the time and the way we had to perceive it. A similar question would be is there evil in the world or is it just lack of good. The only way I could come up with an answer is what I felt, what I believed to be "right" at that time.

Lynn Davis questions: Doug Severt, this is a pretty political conversation. I thought that was not allowed. Has that policy changed?

Doug Severt answers: Lynn Davis, in my opinion it would be impossible to have an intelligent conversation about the Vietnam War without discussing politics. I know the originator of this thread was talking about telling his 10 year old grandson what the war was about and in my opinion the political motives of the day would just be over his head and he should just be given just the basic facts.

EL Hoard posted: I volunteered because of loyalty to America and its values for freedom for all inhabitants of this planet. I was young and naïve to believe that our leaders felt the same, thus the reason for our involvement in this foreign land. We and America were betrayed by ruthless and greedy people elected by freedom loving and misled Americans. Vietnam Veterans took the brunt of the anger from our own people rather than those that involved us in that war and who never were held accountable for their actions. Oh and it wasn't just politicians. The number of greedy civilians and businesses that became forever wealthy is immeasurable. I personally will never forgive them for what they did and all the lives lost as a result of their actions. I don't, however; feel guilty for doing my duty for our country and for the most honorable of reasons. I have never discussed this war with any of my family and probably, never will.

Doug Severt responded: El Hoard, your first two sentences mirror my sentiments exactly. I'll bet I was probably more naive then you, but I guess I was an idealist, probably like most of us from that generation. In our squadron orderly room at Clark AB, there was this quote, on a large poster, from JFK "*Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.*" That really was my mantra throughout my military career, but I wasn't always naive, but I truly believed in and respected our military leaders probably all the time I served. When asked if I would do it again or do I have any regrets, I would have to say absolutely not, because

I feel like I'm now a member of a very exclusive club populated by some of the most noble and patriotic men and women on the face of this earth...Vietnam Veterans. In my mind if I felt any other way, I would be discrediting all those hero's that didn't make it home, with their names spread all over the Vietnam Wall Memorial. I wouldn't want any of them to think they died in vain.

EL Hoard replied: Well said Doug. I agree 100% with your comments, especially the JFK inauguration statement. He had his faults but being un-American wasn't one of them IMHO. My son wanted to join the military after High School but I refused to sign for him and eventually talk him out of it. I'm glad I did.

Sam Lewis posted: LBJ was a Coward. Built the troops up in Nam to over half a million then he decided he didn't want to finish the job and went on National TV crying Crocodile tears saying he wouldn't accept the nomination for office of the president another term. All along while he and his family were making millions off that war. Over 58,000 Heroes who sacrificed All. Blood is on his hands.

Doug Severt posted: As with many long conversations, sometimes we get off track and as actual participants in the Vietnam War, politics will enter into it. Basically this thread started because Frank Pennington was looking for a way to describe the Vietnam War to his 10 year old grandson. **Very simply the conflict started because the communist government of North Vietnam was pitted (trying to conquer and occupy) South Vietnam and its principal ally, the United States stepped in to try to stop the communist aggression.** Maybe that's all you would have to say to a 10 year old because everything else is politics.

El Hoard replied: Doug Severt, I agree.

Patricia Cantrell Mason wrote on Facebook: My husband. **Larry Mason** was a cook on the base at Phan Rang. He was stationed there from June 71-Feb 72. He wants to know if anyone remembers him. His roommate was Gordon? He was in the medical squadron. If anyone has any information they can respond to Doug Severt here.

Perhaps you do not see yourself in this photo but you are there...

Christmas 1969, as it was for you, Christmas in Nam was not what you may call the best Christmas of your life but it was the best you could make it.

You see, I spent Christmas with you, perhaps you do not see yourself in this photo but you are there. The feelings I shared with these men is the same I feel with YOU whether we are together or apart. *Michael Mulcahey*

Back from left to right: Klein, Stevens, Dlugulz. Front: Spahr, unk, Stoltenow and Jacobs.

Many people inquire about how to find the Phan Rang Roll Call?

Here's how to do it...Click here to access the roll-call and other documents and information about Phan Rang AB.

I frequently scroll through the Phan Rang AB causality list and make a selection of an individual and try to gather some additional research on them so that I could single them out and honor them individually in these pages. After many countless hours of scanning old newspapers I finally came to the realization that a twenty year old hasn't had the opportunity to make a newsworthy impact. **If you have any first hand information on any of the casualties attributed to Phan Rang, please let me know so they can be honored and remembered here.**

Just one of the passengers

James Andrew Grzegorek

Buffalo, New York

Birth Date: March 19, 1947

Death Date: March 6, 1968

Age at Death: 20

PFC, Marine, Rifleman

H7S Co., 1st Bn, 26th Marines, 3rd MARDIV

LTC Frederick J Hampton
Aircraft Commander

1LT Ellis E Helgeson
Co-Pilot

SGT Jeffrey F Conlin
Loadmaster

On 6 March 1968 a U.S. Air Force C-123K was scheduled to fly to Phu Bai Airfield, South Vietnam, some thirty-nine miles northwest of Da Nang, then on to Khe Sanh, Quang Tri Province. Aircraft commander LTC **Frederick J Hampton**, co-pilot 1LT **Ellis E Helgeson**, and Loadmaster SGT **Jeffrey F Conlin** comprised the crew of the C-123K (serial # 54-0590), Mission # 702. All members of this aircrew were assigned to the 311th Air Commando Squadron, 315th Air Commando Wing, Phan Rang Air Base, South Vietnam and were detached to Da Nang Airbase. Mission # 702 departed Da Nang with its cargo for Phu Bai. After off-loading its cargo was accomplished, the aircraft was subsequently loaded with 43 U.S. Marines bound for Khe Sanh. Phu Bai's passenger representative assisted the aircraft's loadmaster in organizing various pallets loaded with the passengers' gear, another set of pallets stacked with M-60 machine guns and other weapons, and more loaded with beer and soft drinks that were all to be delivered to Khe Sanh. When Mission # 702 departed Phu Bai Airfield, it carried a total

of 51 passengers and crew--43 Marines, 1 Navy corpsman, 1 civilian photographer, 3 U.S. Air Force passengers and the 3-man Air Force aircrew. Once in the vicinity of their destination, LTC Hampton established radio contact with ground control and was cleared to land. He initiated his final approach to Khe Sanh's airfield, but was forced to abort the landing because of a South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) light aircraft that obstructed the runway. The Provider circled around at low altitude to set up for a second approach. However, as it did so, it was hit by enemy ground fire in the port jet engine. LTC Hampton climbed for altitude as he transmitted their situation and reported that he was returning back to Da Nang with battle damage. Shortly thereafter, the Provider spiraled into the ground exploding on impact.

The crash site was located in extremely rugged jungle-covered mountains that was dotted with small clearings covered with elephant grass and bamboo just a mile southeast of the base's runway, less than a mile east of the closest point along Route 9, and just north of the closest location on the Song Quang Tri River that nearly encircled the loss location. The crash site was also located approximately 14 miles east of the South Vietnamese/Lao border, 58 miles west-northwest of the Phu Bai Airfield and 100 miles northwest of Da Nang Airbase. Due to the tactical situation in and around Khe Sanh, ground search parties first reached the aircraft's wreckage on April 26, 1968 to begin the grizzly task of recovering remains. Other search teams returned to the crash site on June 24 and July 3, 1968 respectively. On each occasion, human remains, dog tags, other identification media and personal effects were recovered. All possible human remains and personal affects that were recovered were transported to the U.S. Army mortuary facility at Da Nang for the arduous task of identification. Military morticians were able to positively identify less than half of the men aboard the Provider.

Those remains were embalmed and returned to each man's family for burial. They included PFC George E. Beale, PFC Willis Beauford Jr., LCPL John H. Clark, 1LT Ellis E. Helgeson Jr., PFC Ralph E. Higgs, PFC Robert J. Horvath, PFC Harry K. Latshaw, CPL Dennis J. Medeiros, PFC Ronnie C. Presley, PVT Domingo Rodriguez Jr., CPL Ronald R. Ryan, CPL James H. Smith Jr., PFC James O. Taylor, LCPL Louis G. Taylor, LCPL Robert L. Vickers, PFC Stephen A. West, PFC David R. Wienckoski, LCPL Hollis Williams Jr., and PFC Thomas H. Williams.

Remains of the other personnel on board could not be positively identified, therefore they were returned to Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery for group interment on November 23, 1968.

The names include PFC Herbert R. Aldridge, PFC David G. Anderson, SSGT William F. Anselmo, PFC Charles G. Boyer, CPL Joseph P. Brignac, PFC Donald R. Bumstead, PFC George L. Elliott III, PFC Michael D. Gray, PFC **James A. Grzegorek**, PFC Blucher R. Hall, PFC Paul E. Hicks, PFC Howard E. Hollar, LCPL Andrew Jackson, CPL Larry S. Kennedy, LCPL Thomas MacMillan, PFC Joseph A. Marturano, LCPL Winford McCosar, PFC Dennis M. Mead, PFC James E. Miles, PFC Roger C. Minch, PFC James E. Moore, PFC Thomas J. Moss Jr., PFC Richard J. O'Hare, CPL Vic M. Pizarro, SSGT Noel L. Rios, CPL Samuel P. Robinson, CPL Michael Sears, LCPL Kenneth A. Stanciu, CPL Stanley G. Strong, PFC Daryl B. Terhune, CPL William L. Terrell, HM3 Louis J. Toner, MSGT Howard B. Waldron, and Robert Ellison, a civilian photographer for Newsweek magazine.

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. With this issue, I've added a C-123 and F-100 to the masthead. To see a list of all previous newsletters click here. To unsubscribe to Phan Rang News, dougsevert@cox.net and put 'unsubscribe' in subject line.