

# Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.  
"Keeping the memories alive" Newsletter 266

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These men were among the very first to see action in Vietnam

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Doug's Comments

These men were among the very first to see action in Vietnam



These men were among the very first to see action in Vietnam in the Doom  
Pussy Squadron.

Back Row

"Smash" Chandler; (Bear?) "Nails" Nelson; Ed Cook; Jerry Russell; Ken Blackwell; and Bill Breedlove. The others are unidentified and believed to be photographers who wanted to go on a combat mission.

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### **NAMES UNKNOWN**

*John M. DeCillo*

I saw them every day and night. I see them now. They were inside those helmets, behind those crash visors. They bore Grim Reaper and Soaring eagle patches on their shoulders. I never knew their names.

They flew bombers, sleek machines, bellies loaded with seven hundred and fifty pound messages of death for the enemy. Straining wings, loaded with shining cylinders of napalm infernos. Twin jet engined B-57.

These Knights of the air sat calmly in the cockpits as we charged the cannons and armed the bombs. We were the ones who shouldered the responsibility. Their lives depended on our work. They counted on us. I never knew their names.

How crushing were the fears that they faced on every mission? They were going out to kill, or be killed. When the wheels went up, they knew this flight could take them directly to God, or into the hands of the enemy. What did they think of us? Did they take pride in our awe and respect of them? Did they draw strength from our simple chalkboard messages? "God speed"--- " Kill the Cong". A snappy salute, thumbs up, throttles wide open. Destiny awaited them. We, were left standing on the ground. I never knew their names.

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We sit in the dark waiting their return. "Spooky" is working over some poor bastards in the nearby hills. We can see his flares and tracer streams. All ears are strained. We listen for that telltale engine whine. Did they all make it back? Are there any wounded? No crash trucks tonight. We breathe a sigh of relief.

Touch down, taxi in, ground lights on. Frantic moments that must have seemed like years.

George "The Weed", Donnie, Kulpie, and the rest, we all took our turns. Just us, and the light cart. Search lights that pointed out to the enemy exactly where you stood, for miles around. All the pilots could do was sit there helplessly and wait for us to do our jobs. They were home from the fight and yet they were still potential targets. The speed with which we dispatched the disarming kept us from seeing their faces or noticing their fear or fatigue.

What were they feeling? Were they grieving the loss of comrades? Were they sharing the thrill of a victory? Were they elated at just making it back alive? I never got to share those feelings. I never knew their names.

Those troubled times are long since passed, yet in my memory, they will always remain. Those brave men who fought the fight will forever abide in my minds own "Twilight Zone". Some lived, some died, some, may even yet be prisoners. I felt ten feet tall when I helped send them on their way. I had no

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thoughts that some of them might never return.

**I know some of their names now. I've seen them,  
etched into a black granite wall.**

**This was originally published in the second edition of this newsletter. Recently I received this from a B57 pilot, who didn't know it was previously published, along with some other information. Because the message that this conveys is so poignant that I thought it was appropriate to run it again. John DeCillo, Air Weapons, has dedicated this to “The Air Crews of the 8th and 13th Tactical Bomb Squadrons / Vietnam.”**

### **The Mission**

During the Vietnam War, the B-57 was chosen as the first jet aircraft to strike North Vietnam. Its long range and loiter capability with a large payload made it the logical choice as the "Night Intruder" for interdiction on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The use of fire bombs, hard bombs up to 1000 pounds, 20 millimeter and 50 caliber guns made the B-57 a formidable weapons delivery system against the transfer of supplies through Laos and Cambodia into South Vietnam. With the aid of C-130's, OV-10's and Ov-2 aircraft as Forward Air Controllers (FAC), the B-57 was the most effective system used against transporting war goods into South Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia.

The Eighth and Thirteenth Tactical Bomb Squadrons (8TBS, 13TBS) stationed at Clark Air Base, Philippines initially launched sorties from Bien Hoa. Later, Da nang Air Base near the DMZ became the base of operations. The final station was Phan Rang (Happy Valley) where the 8<sup>th</sup> TBS, as the oldest continuously operating bomb squadron in the Air Force (World War I), continued the mission until 1969.

The pilot was responsible for the 250 knot dive run and bomb release, but the back seat navigator was a second pair of eyes, spotter, observer, navigator and radio operator. On the pullout, the aircraft and crew were under a four "g" stress without the use of special equipment. Several crews were lost in midair collisions, target fixation and ground fire during the night missions. The most sophisticated piece of equipment in the aircraft was the rheostat which lighted the manually operated bomb sight.

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(Aircrews who flew early missions into North Vietnam wore the DOOM PUSSY (Danang Officers' Open Mess) patch. The DOOM PUSSY was turned to the wall each night until the crews returned. The words in Vietnamese mean, "I have flown into the jaws of the Cat of Death". Later all crews who participated in the night missions wore the insignia.)

### Roger's vow to his troops

Roger Lambert  
Platoon Commander  
9 Platoon, C Company,  
2nd Tour



*(Roger Lambert, Lieutenant Colonel (retired) Platoon Commander, 9 Platoon, C Company, 5th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment 1969-70 with the 5th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment who was originally introduced in Phan Rang Newsletter 186 and continued with more stories with 191, 192, 195, 200, 206, 207, 211, 214, 216, 219,221, 240, 249, 250, and 257.)*

I consider myself more fortunate than many as my casualties were relatively light compared with others. Unbeknown to 'my boys', **I made a vow to take them to Vietnam and to bring them home again; I almost achieved that aim.**

My first 'loss' was Lance Corporal **Mick Appleby**. Mick was a non-battle casualty in April 1969 when he was struck in the eye by a bamboo spike while riding on top of a M113 during a Tactical Area Of Responsibility (TAOR) patrol. He was medically evacuated back to Australia for treatment. To his credit, Mick returned to Vietnam as a CPL as a member of the Civil Affairs Unit.

PTE **David Stone** was wounded in action on 19 May 1969 during a fire fight. Ironically, 'Stoney' returned to the Platoon to become my Platoon Medic.

16 November 1969 was the blackest day for my platoon. The following casualties occurred during a heavy bunker contact on the morning of that day:

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**KIA**- Temporary Corporal **Ted Suttor** - Section Commander, killed in action when shot by an enemy sniper.

**WIA** - Sergeant **Peter Knight** - Platoon Sergeant, wounded in action when shot through the leg; medivac to Australia.

**WIA** - Private **John Hunter** - Platoon Medic, wounded in action when shot while tending Peter Knight; medivac to Australia.

During our 13-month tour of duty, approximately one third of the platoon who were National Servicemen were returned home to Australia as their two-year National Service commitment had come to an end. Replacements came from the 1st Australian Reinforcement Unit based in Nui Dat.

The ranks are slowly thinning though as the years begin to take their toll. Since our return to Australia in March 1970, the following Platoon members have attended their last parade:

### **Lest they forget**

- 1988 - Corporal **Mick Appleby** - Rifleman then Civil Affairs Unit post 5RAR
- 1991 - Private **Harry Kallergis** - Rifleman
- 2010 - Lance Corporal **Reg Smith** - Rifleman and Forward Scout
- 2012 - Sergeant **Stan Arnold** - my first Platoon Sergeant
- 2012 - Private **Eustice Swann** - Machine Gunner
- 2013 - Private **Eddie Moon** - Machine Gunner
- 2017 - Private **Don Tiechelman** - Rifleman
- 2017 - Private **John Winter** - Rifleman
- 2017 - LCPL **David Stone** - Rifleman and Medic
- 2020 - Private **Colin Summerfield** - Rifleman



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### **Super Sabre Henry John Pirkkala, Jr.**



**John “Perk” Pirkkala flew the F-100 with the 429th Tactical Fighter Squadron, “Black Falcons”, out of Cannon AFB, NM from August 1967 to March of 1968 and then with the 352nd Tactical Fighter Squadron “Yellow Jackets” out of Phan Rang AB, Vietnam from April 1968 to April of 1969. In March of 1969 Perk was a “Top Gun” in the F-100.**

John was a proud member of the Cadet Class of 1960. He was a Vietnam War Veteran and served active duty for over 20 years. Perk flew 257 combat missions in the F-100D and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, 12 Air Medals, and the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm device for his actions during the Vietnam War.

#### **“Perk” Pirkkala, 82 Headed West after a protracted illness.**



Major Henry J. Pirkkala Jr., USAF (Retired). He was a Vietnam War Veteran and served over 20 years active duty during his Air Force career. John flew 257 combat missions in the F-100D and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, 12 Air Medals and the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm device for his actions during the Vietnam War. He was with the 352<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron “Yellow Jackets”, Phan Rang Air Base Vietnam from April 1968 to April of 1969.

#### **Units Assigned**

- 12/1959-3/1960 Aviation Cadet, Lackland AFB, TX
- 3/1960-11/1960 Navigation School, Harlington, TX
- 11/1960-6/1961 RO School, James Connely, Waco, TX, (F-89J-backseat)
- 6/1961-5/1966 Kingsley Field, Klamath Falls, OR, got my private and commercial pilot’s license while there (F-101B, T-34)
- 1964 Pilot Training, Laredo, TX
- 6/1966-6/1967 Pilot training, Laredo, TX, won the flying training trophy and was Distinguished Graduate (T-37)
- 8/1967-3/1968 Training, 429th Tactical Fighter Squadron, “Black Falcons”, Cannon AFB,

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NM (F-100)

- 4/1968-4/1969 352nd Tactical Fighter Squadron "Yellow Jackets", "Top Gun" (March 1969), Phan Rang, Vietnam (F-100)
- 7/1969-8/1969 IP Training, Tyndal AFB, FL (T-38)
- 9/1969-10/1972 IP, Webb AFB, TX, T38 Note: While at Webb, Buck IP, D/C Flight Commander, Section One chief, Stand Eval. (T-38)
- 10/1972-10//1976 Survival School, Staff, Fairchild AFB, WA, SAC-Puke (T-29, T-41)
- 10/1976-4/1977 Forward Air Controller Training, Patrick AFB, FL (OV-10)
- 5/1977-7/1978 Advisor to Rep. of Korea 6th Corps., Camp Red Cloud, 19th TASS, Osan AB, Korea (OV-10)
- 1978-1980 Det 6 Advisor (Army 3rd/5th Calvary), Ft Lewis, WA (OH-58 Kiowa, Huey, AH-1 Cobra helicopters)
- 6/1980 Retired

### Awards & Decorations



Army Commendation Medal



Distinguished Flying Cross



Air Medal (12)



Meritorious Service Medal (2)



Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm



Korean Service Medal

### Flight Info

F-89J (Navigator)

F-101 B (Navigator)

T-33 (Navigator)

T-34

T-37

F-100D -257 combat missions

T-38

T-29

T-41

OV-10

OH-58 Kiowa

UH-1 Huey

AH-1 Cobra



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## Henry John Pirkkala, Jr.

### REMEMBERING JOSEPH STANLEY SMITH

(Joe was a farm boy from Assumption, Ill. He graduated from Notre Dame and received a Masters Degree from Washington University. He graduated from UPT in Reese AFB class 70-03 ranked #4 of 60 (Notables like **Phil Nolden** and **Lee Howard** were his classmates). He trained in the F-100 at Luke AFB, married Elaine Unser in May of 1970 and departed to fly combat in SEA in the Hun in August of the same year. He was a member of the 309th TFS at Tuy Hoa and was later assigned to the 612 TFS at Phan Rang, home of the 35TFW. Joe died 4 April, 1971 while flying a strike mission off the alert pad in Cambodia. May he rest in peace!)



**Joseph Stanley Smith**

**Captain (Promoted while in MIA status)**

**612TH TAC FTR SQDN, 35TH TAC FTR WING, 7<sup>TH</sup> AF**

**United States Air Force**

**May 07, 1945 to April 04, 1971**

**JOSEPH S SMITH is on the Wall at Panel W4, Line 106**

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The follow are notes from his entry in the list of casualties in **Phan Rang Newsletter 155**: F-100D 56-3120 DOWN DURING STRAFING RUN 56 KM NORTH-NORTHWEST OF KAMPONG CHAM AIR FIELD, CB, 1971. MSgt **Jon Alexander**, Tower Chief, a personal friend of Joseph Stanley Smith wrote the follow: Joe and I both are from Illinois and we have had a few beers swapping flying stories. Before Vietnam, I worked part time as a Regional Airline Captain. I told Joe that I would be in the Tower the next day. The only transmission received by the Control Tower was "**Jon, I am not going to make it.**" A few days later, I was honored

to be the Air Traffic Controller handling the final missing man formation for Joseph Stanley Smith.



## ANZAC Day Celebration Around the World

### Scotland 2023

**ANZAC DAY** Arbroath (Arbroath or Aberbrothock is a former royal burgh and the largest town in the council area of Angus, Scotland.)

Photos courtesy of **Frank Proctor** and **James Potter**

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We stood so tall in our uniforms, to make our country proud.  
To fight for everyone's freedom, not really knowing how.  
Our lives flashed before us, as the guns sounded out that day.  
On that beach where we had landed, in a land so far away.  
Grab your gear get of the beach, the sergeant shouted out.  
Grab that bloke, that way, go for cover,



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hey medic help us out he’s in a really bad way.

The guns are silent now, and on the sand dunes the flowers grow.

On that celestial parade ground the diggers stand, humble,  
yet proud, watching us down below.

To see how many of you have come together, from near and far,  
to be here on this day of remembrance, in another country, so far away.

You see, it’s ANZAC Day, a special day, full of feelings deep and strong.

To remember those who stood tall, who gave their all,  
To ensure, freedom for us all.

SCOTLANDS LINKS WITH AUSTRALIA, AND ITS INFLUENCE ON  
NATIONAL IDENTITY OR IN SIMPLE TERMS WHATS THE SWAGMANS  
NAME?

ONCE A JOLLY SWAGMAN CAMPED BY A BILLABONG,  
UNDER THE SHADE OF A COOLIBAH TREE.  
SANG AS HE WATCHED AND WAITED TILL, HIS BILLY BOILED.  
YOU’LL COME A WALTZING MATILDA WITH ME.

## **Australia 2023**

**ANZAC DAY Cessnock (Cessnock is a city in the Hunter Region of New South  
Wales, Australia)**



**Ian Weat (No. 2 Sq.) with his sidekick Indy in the ANZAC  
Day parade.**

**NO 2 Squadron team line up on Anzac Parade**

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Left to right, Peter Ekins, Bob Howe (sunglasses) on the left of the pennant Lance Halvorson and Alan Pearson on the right.

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Retired RAAF veterans Peter Ekins on the left, Alan Pearson (sunglasses) next to him, then the pennant holders are serving RAAF member, Leading Aircraftman Tyler Cooper (in uniform) and retired RAAF veteran Lance Halvorson.



Speaking at the event was this young lady who was an orphan bought to Australia in 1975 as part of Operation 'BabyLift'.

It was interesting to hear her story of how she was adopted and fitted in to life in Australia.



## THIS AND THAT

### LETTERS



### Looking to track down a Pilot/s who flew on April 25, 1971

**William Dierijck wrote:** I have a Vietnam veteran friend who is looking to track down the identity (serial number, unit, airbase and name of the pilot(s) of the jet that flew in to Happy Valley on April 25th of 1971 to provide air support. He earned a Silver Star for his actions on this date and says a jet came in to provide air cover while he was using a mirror to bring it in. The unit my friend was in at the time was the following: Company A, 1st Battalion, 52nd infantry, 23rd Infantry Division, the place they were fighting was the mountainous jungle terrain south of Tra Bong that he says was named Happy Valley.

(Note: This request isn't as farfetched as you might think. Phan Rang Newsletters 186 through 188 "Blondes, Bombs and Bunkers" chronicles the amazing story and reunion of No. 2 Squadron aircrew members (Magpie 31) and an Aussie platoon that received close air support for the platoon and that platoon leader was Roger Lambert who has contributed many articles for this newsletter including "Roger's Vow to his troops" in this issue. This wasn't the easiest match, but through the persistent research of Bob Howe this amazing story and reunion was possible.)

Williams contact information is: **William Dierijck** ([willemdierijck@gmail.com](mailto:willemdierijck@gmail.com))

## IT WAS 57 YEARS AGO

*BY Terry Brodt*

It was 57 years ago, 17 September 1966, I landed in Vietnam and stayed for 18 months, starting my small contribution to the Vietnam war effort.

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Taking off from England Air Force Base in Alexandria, LA, we flew in a C-130 aircraft to Travis Air Force Base, east of San Francisco. We carried a F-100 jet engine and lots of supplies. Seating on the aircraft was on the side of the plane in web seats, not the most comfortable seating arrangement. It was loud, cold and not much room to move around, but hey I was only 20 and ready for an adventure....

After a brief stop at Travis, we were on to Hickman Air Force Base in Hawaii. After getting supplies and a good meal, the 6 of us and the crew were off to Wake Island, located in the middle of the Pacific ocean, some 2300 miles from Hawaii. (Wake Island was famous for a major WWII battle, 23 Dec 1941, when the Japanese army took over the island. Later a major motion picture came out as to the battle, see below) As you can see the Island is about as big as the runway, some 9800 feet long. Pan Am built a small village to service flights going to China in 1935.

From Wake Island, we were off to Okinawa, Japan. After a short refueling stop, we flew south to Vietnam, landing at Phan Rang Air Base, located some 240 miles north of Saigon, and 25 miles South of Cam Ranh Bay. Total time for the trip was 42 hours!!!!

Upon landing, the fear of the 6 soldiers on the board was that the Viet Cong would shoot at the plane on approach and we could be killed. We braced ourselves for the landing, said a little prayer and thank God all went well.....

Phan Rang Air Base was home to three F-100 Fighter jet squadrons, along with an Australian Canberra Jet Bomber Squadron. (the Aussie's liked to drink and party hard) We also had the Army's 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division, who always had great food and steaks and we traded our clean sheets and other items for steaks. There was a great deal of bartering going on!!!

I was in the 614th Tactical Fighter Squadron (Lucky Devils) and was the Office Mgr/Admin for the squadron commander and pilots.

### **Sgt Terry Brodt**

(Read more about Terry Brodt in Phan Rang Newsletters 28, 44, 159, 175, 200, 204, 208, 229, 234 and 265.)

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### **Aerial Port Personnel working in ALCE**



**Sgt Jim Erixson and A1C Chuck Olsen, Det. 8 14<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port Sq., working in the 435<sup>th</sup> ALCE (Airlift Control Element) on the Buuson side of the base, circa early 1968. Photo was found by Jim’s sister when she was cleaning out her mother’s apartment.**

**Comments from Pat O’Connor:** Thanks for the memories. Reading this latest Happy Valley report brought back more memories from Phan Rang. Nui Dot especially came back to mind, I walked up that very steep hill to the observation deck. That’s where you got the pictures of the base I sent you. One of the photos was taken with a Kodak Instamatic camera through a pair of binoculars of a recon ROK patrol. I was surprised when the pic came out. The B-52’s reminded me of my TDY to Guam in 1967, pulled many an hour walking a figure 8 around the big birds on guard duty. also walking on the side of the flight line while the 52’s were screaming down the

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runway on take off. I was put on a guard post at the end of the runway near a cliff and got knocked on my ass when one of the B-52's took off over my head. One of the guards, John Mills was too close to the taxi way when a B-52 made its turn onto the runway. The aircraft blasted its engines the thrust took him off his feet, through him back against a bunker and knocked him out.

While in Phan Rang I was given my choice of places for R&R. Wanted to go to Australia but had my older brother stationed in Udorn Thailand. He was an air traffic controller. So I went to Bangkok planning to meet up with him. Never met him, the Air Force had the Air Traffic Controllers on duty 12 to 16 hours a day and would not let him off. Thousands of sorties were launched every month from Thailand. Still had a great time though. Love those Thai Girls.

Wishing you guys fun for the reunion. thanks Doug, for keeping me informed.

**Comments from Sgt. Jeffrey J. Samoska, Waterbury, Conn. Age: 73:** Stationed the year of 1970. 35th Security Police; Panther Flight. 35th TFW, 35th Combat Support Group, 7th Air Force, PACAF.

No injuries sustained, directly. Eventually, from Agent Orange, I got bladder cancer (remedied quickly) and prostate cancer (also gotten quickly). Have PTSD, hearing loss (wear aids). Currently 70% disability rated. Just filed for "Individual Unemployment" through my VSO. This will give me 100% disability money, not necessarily 100% disability rating.

I could go back to the base today, not feel lost. Remember practically everything I saw. Snack bar, mail room, base theater, BX. Loved the haircuts and massages for \$1. Beer was always too warm. Remember papa-san doing the garbage. Mama-san did my laundry.

Had to get used to sleeping in the heat, noise during the day. I was in a barracks, top floor, second cube on the right.

"Best" experience? Haircuts. "Worst" experience: Mild food poisoning for @ 6 hours. Should have gone to the dispensary. Rather, I drank my (warm) ice tea-lemon mix. When that ran out, lots of water. (Kinda felt like I was gut-shot).

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Got sprayed by the Agent Orange when a C-119 did a low overflight (with sprayers off) around dawn, west-to-east right near our barracks, low altitude/speed). I got the remnant stuff on my arms, face, swallowed some. Didn't see the effects until around 2004.

Crazy memories.

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



I hope that you enjoyed this newsletter. Currently I'm going through Phan Rang material with a fine tooth comb to make sure that I haven't missed any of the precious article and stories that have been sent to me through the years. I hope I can still put together a few more issues before the well runs dry. 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. To see a list of all previous newsletters click [here](#). To unsubscribe to Phan Rang News, [dougsevert@cox.net](mailto:dougsevert@cox.net) and put 'unsubscribe' in subject line.