

# Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.  
"Keeping the memories alive" Newsletter 269

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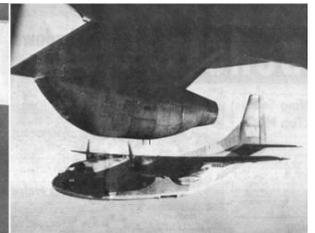
**Unloading Livestock**



**Full house Aboard**



**Just another mission**



**Heading for home**

## JUST ANOTHER MISSION

*By Christopher Boles*

As a photographer with the 600<sup>th</sup> Photo squadron Detachment 5, I had heard that if you were on flying status (which I was qualified for) you could get on a plane as part of the crew. I thought that would be a fun thing to do and not just hang around the base looking for something to do. It would be more like, since you are here we have a job for you to do. I called the 315<sup>th</sup> Op's and they said they could get me on a plane, all I had to do was show up and I would be directed which plane I was assigned to for that day.

I usually had in tow my Singer Graflex SL 120 roll film camera, and a 35mm camera (either a Nikon FT or a Leica 3F) with color film. My pockets bulging with film. I was set for whatever came that day. I just told the NCOIC in charge where I was going and that I would most likely be back by dark.

So, off we go to where ever. I never tired of looking at the scenery as we flew over the brown

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rivers cutting through the verdant green rice paddies and the lush mountains of forest. We landed and taxied up and opened the ramp. As I look out there is a line of adults and kids waiting for us. There were also another couple of planes to ferry the villagers as well. It was then that the crew chief said that we were going to move a village of Montagnards to another location so they would not be bothered by the Viet Cong (VC). I thought to myself, “Oh, this should be interesting for photographs.”

Mind you now, these people only brought what they could carry or put on a pole between two people. If you were to be moved like that today, what would you take with you? They didn't have a whole lot. They all stood around talking and waiting. Here were older sisters carrying their brother or sister on their arms, some with suitcases, or a tie wrapped bag. In amongst the mix was their dogs, and chickens making noise of not wanting to be cooped up. Everyone was clean, decently dressed for the occasion and ready to start a new life somewhere else.

Soon the crew chief with the help of an interpreter started to load people on to the plane. They moved them in as far up to the fire wall as they could, people in the fold down seats and their stuff piled in around them. Then the people just piled in to the cargo hold as many as we could cram in there. I was the last one on, and I had to stand it was that crowded. I honestly to this day remember that there could not have been a square inch of free space. The ramp closed, the engines fired up and we taxied out. The jet engines fired up and the plane went full throttle. Some of the babies cried, and the kids were wide eyed at the experience as the plane lifted up. I would say that this was their first time in a plane and most likely their last time they ever flew.

I don't remember how long of a flight it was, but the drone of the engines put some of the adults to sleep as I am sure it was up at the crack of dawn to get down to the airport. Soon we let down, taxied to the parking and everyone got off. We did this rotation I think 3 more times. One of the flights was a load of soldiers. At the end of the day we moved the village. As we flew home I reflected on what I had seen, and was seeing as I looked out the open window. The sun was setting on the day after a mission well done by the crew of the 315<sup>th</sup> SOW at Phan Rang Air Base.

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### Phan Rang Facility Expands As Photo Hobby Shop Opens

*By TSgt. John B. Mahoney*

*(7th Air Force News, March 5, 1969)*

**PHAN RANG** - A photo hobby shop furnished with more than \$6,000 of new darkroom equipment recently opened at Phan Rang AB.

"The new shop is open to all airmen regardless of their prior darkroom experience," explained SSgt. **David L. Short**, Houston, part-time manager of the shop. "All he needs is an interest. There will be a darkroom instructor on duty from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

"The shop has the equipment capability to process both color and black and white," he continued. "We will not do color printing since that would tie up the facilities too long. Even as it is, we expect to operate on an appointment basis. We can handle ten photographers during each three-hour session. And, depending upon the call for it, we will let the men do color transparencies except for Kodachrome."

In the printing room, there are two D3V Omega enlargers featuring automatic focusing and electronic timing. The Omegas can handle up to four inch by five inch negatives. Five smaller enlargers can handle up to two and one-fourth inch by three and one-fourth inch negatives. Beside each enlarger is a cutting board and timer. A contact printer is also available.

The printing room is equipped with safe lights and full air conditioning keeps the chemicals at 68 degrees as well as making working conditions ideal.

"There is a 50 cent charge for each three-hour session to help cover operating expenses," Sergeant Short said. "Chemicals are furnished at no charge. Printing paper can be bought at the hobby sales store for 50 cents for six sheets or \$7.60 for a box of 100 sheets. Free lockers are available for storage of personal equipment.

"Each three-hour session will include only darkroom time," Sergeant Short explained. "An additional hour will be allowed for washing and drying prints."

Six tripods are available for 24-hour loan service.

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The shop has two print dryers, a washer and a dry mounting press.

"Opening this photo shop completes the hobby center," said SMSgt. **Michael Skovran**, Ft. Walton Beach, Fla., arts and crafts director of the hobby center. "When we moved into this building in June, there wasn't even tile on the floor. Now, in addition to the photo shop, the building houses a 33-station tape center, a hobby resale store, model slot car track, an electronic hobby shop and a leather craft shop."



### This Is the Way It's Done

At the opening of the new Phan Rang AB photo hobby shop, Col. **Frank L. Gailer Jr.** (center), Arlington, Va., listens intently while the shop manager, SSgt. David L. Short, explains the operation of a print enlarger. Colonel Gailer, 35th Tactical Fighter Wing commander, then made a print, starting with the enlarger and working through to the print dryer. SMSgt. **Michael Skovran**, arts and crafts director of the hobby center, looks on.

## Devils' Luck Outlasts Persistent Enemy



*By TSgt. John B. Mahoney*

*(7<sup>th</sup> Air Force News, March 5, 1969)*

**PHAN RANG** -They call themselves "**Lucky Devils**," these fighter pilots of the 614<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron, here. Luck was surely with three of the "Devils" recently when they flew a routine mission against the Viet Cong.

"Our target for the day was enemy bunkers in the Mekong Delta 60 miles west of Bien Hoa,"

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recalled Maj. **Norman H. Rushton**, Clovis; N.M., flight leader.

Seated beside him at squadron operations were the two men who had flown with him on the mission two days earlier. Capt. **Gerald G. Potter**, Vida, Ore., was breaking in 1st Lt. **Donald Muller**, Northfield, Ill., who had just arrived from the states.

"I flew the first attack pass," the major related. "Lieutenant Muller followed him as they swooped down and released their ordnances.

"Then it happened," Lieutenant Muller added. "The 'plane was ripped by a violent explosion just as we were pulling out of the dive over the target.

"Controls were shaky as the plane just about flipped over, heading for the ground. Fire warning lights lit up the cockpit, and the engines started to become unglued."

Lieutenant Muller, in his fifth day in country, struggled at the controls to get his plane over the nearby Song Co Chien River.

"As soon as we got there, said, 'O.K., it's time to go! ' he continued. Captain Potter ejected first blowing the cockpit canopy. With the right side of the fuselage burning, I took my foot of the rudder and punched out."

As Major Rushton circled above radioing for help, 'both pilots were floating to earth about one mile apart, one over land and the other over the river.

"I got my bearings and looked up at my canopy," said the 'captain. "It had big holes in it which increased my fall rate. That was all right with me as I wanted to get into the safety of the river - but fast!"

I could see people on the shore," he continued, "People were yelling and I could hear gunshots. I got rid of my mask and popped my water wings. As I splashed down, I pulled the quick release of my harness, and the chute collapsed."

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Meanwhile, Lieutenant Muller was pulling on his parachute risers in an attempt to steer his landing toward the river, but "Floating down, I could see four men shooting at me with rifles," he continued."

"I landed face down in the mud of a rice paddy," he added. "When I looked up and saw the men running down the path at me. I radioed Major Rushton where to strafe and within seconds, just as they were about to run over me, vroom! Here comes Major Rushton like gangbusters."

Seeing the lieutenant in greater immediate danger than Captain Potter, Major Rushton concentrated his support to him."

"With bullets flying all around," Lieutenant Muller continued, "I dug in that mud like an eager beaver. I was in contact with the major on my radio all the time.

"Then I heard automatic weapons fire coming from the same area the enemy riflemen had come from."

The jet was making tight turns, diving to tree-top level and making strafing passes at the direction of Lieutenant Muller and a forward air controller. By the third pass, the automatic weapons fire ended.

"Then firing came from another direction," continued lieutenant Muller. "I directed Major Rushton to it. He strafed it once, then again."

"I put my bursts where he and the FAC asked," Major Rushton said. "I ran out of ammunition on the fifth pass, but I knew he still needed me. On my next pass I dropped my wing fuel tanks just to make Charlie keep his head down. All I had left were my pylons to drop if necessary." Then the lieutenant heard the radio message that gave him hope: "We're on our way," said the voice of the rescue helicopter flight leader. "**Hold on! Stay where you are.**"

The Army chopper pilot was getting ground fire as it hovered in for the pickup. "Can't see him," the chopper pilot radioed Major Rushton.

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Making another pass, the major radioed the chopper to "land on the chute. That's where he is."

"Choppers were swarming about when I jumped up and ran for one that landed," Lieutenant Muller said. "Two Army troops with heavy weapons jumped out to cover me as I jumped aboard."

Meanwhile, Captain Potter was bobbing in the river attempting to paddle away from shore.

"I didn't know if the people on the beach were friendlies or not," he explained. "Soon an Army chopper which happened to be in the area attempted to pick me up. It had no way to, so it left.

"Then another Army chopper pilot brought his bird in. Keep in mind that his craft is designed for land operations. He had such fine control that he brought it right down to river level. The next thing I knew, I could feel myself being pulled aboard.

The pilots were reunited at Can Tho. There, they boarded a C-123 transport and flew back to their home base at Phan Rang.

**Three lucky devils - for sure!**

## **FAC Lauds Sabermen**

*(7<sup>th</sup> Air Force News, March 5, 1969)*

**PRAN RANG** - Two 120<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron F-100 Supersabre pilots were recently complimented by a forward air controller (FAC) for providing "the finest example of air support he had ever seen in his 16 months of combat in Vietnam."

Capt. **Daniel S. Trail**, a FAC with the First Air Cavalry Division, described the action in a letter to Captains **Craig R. Iverson** and **Galen J. Smith**, both of Littleton, Colo.

The letter to the Phan Rang AB pilots described the event: "The unit was engaged with the

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enemy in a rubber tree forest and was receiving heavy automatic weapons fire on its front and flanks."

The air strike by the former Colorado Air National Guardsmen with bombs and cannon fire enabled the ground troops to recover their casualties but after moving forward another 200 yards, they again encountered heavy enemy fire.

A second air strike was brought in against the new enemy positions, completely silencing the hostile guns and enabling the friendly troops to receive badly needed supplies.

The ground troops also reported finding seven enemy killed by the air strikes and the FAC added that the pilots now "stand a little taller these days in the eyes of the 'Gary Owen' Brigade."



**Eugene Phillip McKinney**

### ‘Missing Wingman’ Flight Pays Tribute to Aviator

*(7<sup>th</sup> Air Force News, March 5, 1969)*

**PHAN RANG** - The seldom seen but traditional Air Force salute to a fallen comrade, the "missing wingman" formation, recently flew over Phan Rang AB as three F-100 Supersabre pilots of the 35<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing paid a just tribute to a friend.

About a year ago, four Supersabre pilots arrived at Phan Rang together: Captains **Roger W. Carroll**, Kansas City, Mo. **Robert C. Konopka**, Royal Oak, Mich., **Robert N. Staples**, Big Springs, Tex., and **Eugene Phillip McKinney**.

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The first three of these pilots requested and received permission to fly their last combat sortie in Vietnam together as a requiem to the fourth, **Captain McKinney**, who was killed in action.

Their flight included the "missing wingman" formation in two passes over the airfield.

## **ON THE ROAD TO DALAT**

*Story and photos by A1C Christopher Boles*

In 1969 I was on a year tour of Vietnam assigned to the 600th Photo Squadron Detachment 5 (600 P.S. Det. 5) as a still photographer (AFSC 23651).

Every day I would notice a long line of dump trucks lining up on the road around the base just outside of the asphalt plant. Then they would all head out to who knows where to dump their loads. This went on for some time and I started to get curious. I asked my NCOIC MSgt Charles R. Dees, if I could have permission to go off base and pursue a story of where these trucks were headed. I got the permission to do this on my own time. What I was after was a major two page spread in the 7th Air Force News of how we (the U.S.) were building roads in Vietnam for the people and to support our mission there.



**Phan Rang AB Asphalt Plant looking south.**

The first place I headed was to the gravel pit and to shoot some overall photos so you could get a sense of perspective of the base and the relationship to the layout. From what I could gather

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that mountain of rock had been whittled down over time to make rock for the concrete plant, road base and asphalt.

There was the rock crusher where they dumped the coarse material in one end and out the other end came the graded sand and rock in a huge pile. It seemed like the place ran every day and the pile kept about the same height.

To build the base must have required a lot of tonnage of material for concrete and road base. There wasn't any sand in any direction to be had from a river bottom so it was all made at the base rock crusher.



There was the crane operator who scooped up the crushed material and dumped it into the hopper to take it up to the top of the plant to a storage tank. Also the crane operator loaded road base into the dump trucks for deliver on site.

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**Crane loading road base onto a dump truck.**

At another location was the machine that melted the solid tar blocks that were stacked off to one side of the facility.



**Tar and sand kiln in action (notice the flame).**

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A operator sat at a control board watching a scale of mix being made, making sure that it was the right consistency.



**Asphalt plant operator in action.**

The trucks were part of the 18th Brigade 35th Group 513th Engineers, which over all was part of the 589th Engineers Battalion. The 589th built roads all over Vietnam and Phan Rang was just one of the many support locations for building roads in the province.

When the batch was ready for a run, the trucks would line up and go through the batch plant getting a full load of hot asphalt.



**Trucks loading up with fresh asphalt.**

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Then they would proceed out to the road and lineup. When the convoy was ready they would drive out the gate and head in this case towards the mountain community of Dalat.

I managed to hop a ride with one of the drivers out to the end of the road where there was a road crew waiting for the convoy to show up. While driving out there, it was a nice ride considering it was a dump truck. One of the questions I had was “why are there sandbags on the floor?” Those were put there in case you run over a road mine as it was put there to absorb shrapnel. I also asked what do you do if “Charlie” starts shooting at you. Where upon he grabs his rifle and points it out the window, “We start shooting and we floor the truck to get out as quickly as possible.”



**Trucks on the road to Dalat.**

Then each of the trucks would wait their turn to dump their load in the hopper of the paving machine.



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Then the paving machine would lay down the hot material and then rolled by the compactor until it was solid.



Army road crew laying down asphalt while the compactor waits.

After each truck was dumped, then the convoy would head back to the base to repeat the process all over again.



**DON'T GO TO VIETNAM!**

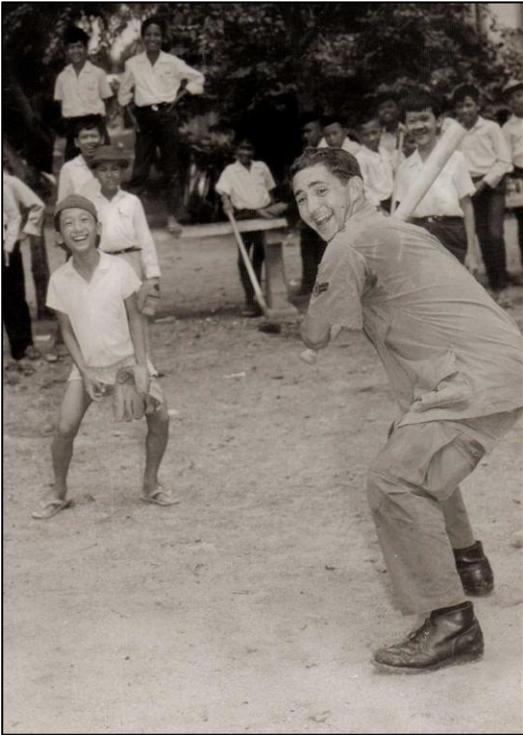
Come and join the old warriors at the  
Phan Rang Vietnam Veterans Reunion  
Rapid City, SD  
21-23 September 2023

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## Three and Two

Release # PR-10-69-12

By Capt. Roland D. Stanley

### BOMBING PAUSE STIRS NEW CIVIC ACTION ACTIVITY

PHAN RANG AB, Republic of Vietnam (7AF)

Airman First Class **Thomas J. Norbeck**, 23, Folcroft, PA., of the 352nd Tactical Fighter Squadron “Yellowjackets” here, readies to swing at the next pitch. He helped conduct a baseball clinic for aspiring ball players at Truong Vinh Ky High School near the base. The squadron busied itself with many civic actions projects at the school during a recent lull in combat activity. (U.S. Air Force Photo by A1C Christopher P. Boles, Det 5 600 Photo)



**Mike Moore commenting on Ron Deyhle’s “The Great Hurrah, or, How a Fighter Pilot Can Make It Better”:** I love stuff like this. If I was I younger and wanted to write a book that would be a best seller, I would interview fighter pilots, and pilots in general, to get their all-time hairiest stories, and maybe their all-time most fun stories, and publish them. Although not active now, at one time I was a QB taking their monthly publication that had some really good stuff. One story was about a T-38 instructor at Laughlin. His student was one of those who had finished everything except the hours to be flown requirement, which meant the IP could get stick time. The hot subject in the O Club at the time was power off loops in the Talon. IP Big Rog took off with his student watching. Big Rog thought he knew how to loop the bird with power off. He forgot the most important thing, a dive to gain max airspeed before entering the maneuver. He fell into an inverted flat spin at the top and fought it all he could to no avail; he

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lost both engines and went through the lowest altitude he could before ejection. Finally, he gave the order to eject to his student and then punched out. Just as he left the bird, the student saw an engine increasing in RPM. He righted the airplane, stayed with it through spool up and scorched some cactus before he got a positive climb rate again. Without a rear canopy, he circled back, saw his IP safely on the ground then headed back to base using his solo call sign in his call up. They were confused. They could tell on their chart that the flight did not start as a solo. In crisply spoken words the student added that he was formerly flight such and such, indicating a dual flight. Huh, what the hell?” When he rolled out in front of the tower with no rear canopy the controllers nearly soiled their pants. The IP was forced to leave the service and the student was punished for disobeying an order. He was allowed to graduate but he got a crummy assignment, served his time and got out because he was basically ruined. Me? I thought he deserved a medal for having more brains than his IP, plus he saved a very valuable airplane. They punished a hero, IMO. He proved he had the most valuable thing of all for a pilot: he could remain calm under the worst of circumstances. That is rare. Even Chuck Yeager choked up once when he got into a flat spin in the X-1. This guy was as cool as a winter cucumber all the way. (Note: Mike Moore is the author of “A story worth telling - James Vance Phillips” in Phan Rang Newsletter 208)

**Tony Salazar wrote:** The reason for this email is to tell you of my encounter with Pat O’Brien the actor. Late in ‘68 while at Phan Rang and while I was under a J-57 jet engine that was on a rail maintenance bed, those were used to place the engine while we worked on them for whatever maintenance was needed and they were secured and wouldn’t move.

I’m under the under this engine working on a pump located on the OPAH, those that don’t know what an OPAH is I’ll try to explain. Oil Pump and Housing, a very large gear box or transmission if you will that runs different type of units that run the engine itself.

So, I’m on a creeper looking at the pump and off to my left I could see personnel dressed in 1505’s and a couple in dark slacks. There at the rear entrance to the shop standing and I say to myself, “here comes the brass again looking to what is wrong with our shop”. Maintenance is slowed or stop when these guys showed up.

I continue working and getting frustrated with fluid running down my arm and my surrounding

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area. I notice the person in black slacks is stopping at other work stations and then moving on to the next. Oh hell, fluid running towards my armpits and this guy is walking towards my station. Focused on my pump I hear a smooth.... Hello son, how you doing? I look to see whose talking and it was Pat O’Brien.

After securing the pump and realizing who it was he spoke to me and asked where was I from, I replied Pacoima California. He replied with that he owned a small ranch in Chatsworth and he said he knew the Valley well. He must have, because Pacoima, some people can’t even pronounce it but he knew it well.

Our discussion last a few minutes, we chatted about the Valley and it was nice talking to someone from the San Fernando Valley. A little bit of home came to visit. I got back to task and moved on with business. That was my encounter with one Pat O’Brien, actor. Strange, thousands of miles from home and then you bump into a celebrity from the past but he made me feel good. As I said, I think this encounter happened in late 1968.

He said he would give the Valley my regards once he got back to The World but he was probably too busy to do that but that’s okay too. Life has its ups and downs, dark and bright sides and that’s part of life. We live in a Country worth fighting for and if one can’t see that I feel sorry for you, of course there’s a price and we will keep meeting that price. I felt I had to share this episode while I was at Phan Rang Air Base. I once shared my encounter with that tiger. I really believe that I would do it again if I had to. (**Note**, Tony and his wife Mary are special to many Phan Rangers as they attended the first Phan Rang reunion in Dayton, Ohio in 2012. At the Saturday night banquet we didn’t have a formal program planned, but instead each guy that had a story to tell stood up and told theirs. Tony, recounted an event that happened, at night, while he was on augmentee duty on the perimeter. He had an encounter with a tiger, and I believe the worst thing that happened is that he soiled his pants, but ever since then he’s been known as “Tony the Tiger”. I sure hope that someday I have an opportunity to have another encounter with Tony.)

**Dennis Hawkins wrote:** Thank you for all your continuing efforts.

During my tour, our band played for Colonel Tu, the Province Chief of Ninh Thuan Province, for Vietnamese Armed Forces Day, as well as on, at least, one other occasion.

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Some time back, I noted a piece of correspondence in the MACV Team 45 emails that indicated Colonel Tu was held in a re-education camp for 13 years and had resettled in California. If memory serves, the writer stated that the former Colonel had become a Buddhist Monk. Do you, or any of your contacts have any further information on our friend, Colonel Tu?

(At the time of my assignment to Phan Rang, I was a USAF Sgt., assigned to the 35th FMS Jet Shop) Thanks, Dennis W. Hawkins, SFC, Ret. US Army

**Doug’s Comments:** This issue exclusively contains articles that I’ve put aside over the



years and just now taking a fresh look at them and realizing that they are just too valuable to overlook. Christopher Boles supplied every story in this newsletter, many of them sent to me prior to 2014, so thank you Christopher for saving all of these valuable stories and then sharing with the Phan Rang community. I hope that you have enjoyed this newsletter. 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.