

# Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.  
“Keeping the memories alive” Newsletter 275

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In this issue:

**2023 Phan Rang Vietnam Veterans Reunion (recap)**



**“Autumn leaves, rustling together to the appointed place, the old warriors come.”**

The 2023 Phan Rang Vietnam Veterans Reunion began early during Wednesday afternoon congregation of veterans in the hotel lobby. The early arrivals gathered together renewing old friendships and making new ones. One after another they arrive and they quickly get caught up in conversation after greeting each other with heartfelt hugs. There was magnetism in the air because they were drawn to each other and didn't want those moments to end.

**“Pilgrims, drifting across the land they fought to preserve.  
Where they meet is not so important anymore...They meet  
and that's enough for now”**

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Stories were told of their journey to the meeting place, some uneventful, some not so. Some traveled for days to reach this special place where they were to meet their comrades and would have to travel for days again after the reunion. All made a sacrifice to make this connection to their past.

**“Greetings echo across a lobby. Hands reach out and arms draw buddies close.**

**Embraces, that as young men they were too uncomfortable to give, too shy to accept so lovingly.”**

As dinner time approached it was suggested that we all go over to the Perkin’s restaurant in the hotel complex, so reservations were made and soon all followed the lead of Peggy and Carrie Cox, who guided the entourage through a pedestrian tunnel directly to the restaurant. We were ushered into a private room and told that they were short staffed, with only two young men for cooks, but they would do their best...and they did. With approximately 40 people ordering a different meal it didn’t matter to us that we had to wait because we were in the company of our best friends. In the end we all had an excellent meal that was up to Perkin’s standards and we gave the server and the cooks a hardy round of applause.

**“But deep, within these Indian Summer days they have reached a greater understanding of life and love.”**

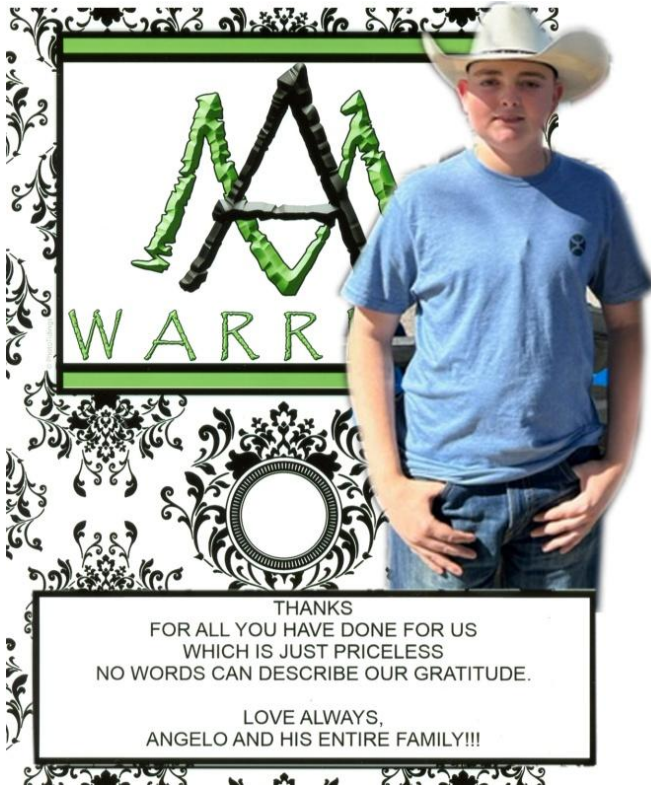
The first day of the reunion started with trying to get everything organized. Bob Tucker and Cindy Weber manned the registration desk and Jeanie Holz and Carla Reed started the gargantuan task of getting the raffle items set up, and Bob Holz and Mike Reed were standing by to offer advice and provided moral support. The generosity of the Phan Rang group is beyond compare. The contributors were many and if I knew all of them I would single them out, but practically everyone contributes something and these something’s often are hand made, with love, items that are so much in demand and usually fetch a pretty good price. I do know that Jeannie had almost two tables of handmade items. We were even fortunate to still have a few items that Joe Kaupa created or if he didn’t create them, they were items that were inspired by him. **Joe just keeps on giving!**

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There is another person that is in the hearts of every Phan Ranger that I would like to acknowledge. Angelo is his name, the grandson of Larry & Louise Martino, who has been fighting cancer for many years. Because of health issues, he isn't able to participate in many physical activities that normal teenagers are capable of, so he has been directing his talents to making 'key chains' among other things. He donated many of these for our raffle. Many of them looked like colorful fishing lures, only without the hook, but instead of a chain to attach keys. Another bunch was small miniature deer horns and these also had chains on them also for use as a key chain. Thank you Angelo and I'm

sure that everyone that won one of your key chains will treasure them. Angelo, your fight is our fight and we are praying for your recovery.

**“The shells holding their souls are weaker now, but hearts and minds grow vigorous remembering.”**

Others spent the morning and afternoon reminiscing about previous reunions and remembering and comparing stories from their Vietnam experience. We thoroughly enjoyed Mike McCahey's presentation and then enjoyed more conversation for the rest of the evening. We had two buffet dinners on Thursday and all anxiously looked forward to our tour on Friday.

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# The Tour



The sightseeing tour carved its way through the Black Hills beginning at Fort Hays on the Dances with Wolves film set for a cowboy breakfast. Departing mid-morning, the tour winds its way along scenic highways visiting attractions like Mount Rushmore National Monument, Custer State Park, the Needles Highway, and Crazy Horse Memorial. The informative tour guide/bus drivers, drives you through 100 miles of the Black Hills National Forest stopping along the way for pictures of wildlife and picturesque sights. The tour then returns to Fort Hays, but the night continues as we enjoyed the famous Chuckwagon Supper and Live Branson-style Music Show.





## our presenters

**“On a table someone spreads old photographs; a test of recollection. And friendly laughter echoes at shocks of hair gone gray or white, or merely gone.”**

We were very fortunate this year to have so many come forward to tell their stories. **Peggy**



**Peggy Cox**

**Cox**, the widow of veteran David Cox, gave us a quick overview of her family’s military service. Peggy and her children are keeping her husband’s memories alive by attending the reunions every year.

**Sue Greenleaf** gave a back story on comments from Mike Mulcahey’s presentation when he mentioned Kent State shootings which resulted in the killing of four and wounding of nine unarmed college students by the Ohio



**Sue Greenleaf**

National Guard. Sue, was a 19 year old college student attending Kent State at the time and she told of her memories of that event and how it affected her.



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**“Talk turns to war and planes and foreign lands. Stories are told and told again, reweaving the threadbare fabric of the past. Mending one more time the banner of their youth. They hear the vibrations, feel the shudder of metal as propellers whine and whirl, and planes come to life.”**

### The incomparable Mike Mulcahey



Mike delivered his message directly from his heart, casting a spell over the assembly, and he had the audience hanging on every word. He didn't have a script, but he did have a few pictures to highlight his story. He told his story with down-home grit, which was punctuated



with humor. When he first offered to tell his story, he thought some of what he would say would upset some people, but on the contrary they all identified with him. Mike's story is one of those that will resonate long after the reunion; in fact, is right up there with the memorable impromptu, first-hand talks from any of our reunions.

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### “Then Came Wes”



We were fortunate to have **Wes Vettel** as our keynote speaker this year. Wes had a very interesting career and he and his wife Linda, are still involved in veteran affairs in Bismarck, but you can read all about that in his brief bio below. His sense of humor came through in some of the situations he created, like feathering the front engine of the O-2B, scaring the, you know what, out of his passenger. He also had a brief stint of flying the skymaster for Air America and one mission took him over Laos to assess

activities at a certain village. There were more, but with any luck we will have him back for round 2 because I would like to hear more about what it was like on all those B-52 bombing missions for Cambodia and Laos.

#### Wes Vettel’s Bio

Born in Bozeman MT and moved to Bismarck ND, Wes graduated from Bismarck High in 1965. He went to NDSU (North Dakota State University), graduating in Business Economics with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1969. He took Air Force ROTC while at NDSU and received his Second Lieutenant commission.

Wes proposed to Linda on a roof top while studying for finals in April 1969, and later married in August. Wes entered the Air Force active duty in September 1969 and received his pilot wings at Enid OK in 1970. He took 2 months of training in an O2-B at Hurlburt Field FL (a special ops base) for the plane he would fly in Vietnam.

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**Wes during survival school in the Philippines.**



**Wes getting ready to fly. He would like to locate D. Colter, the aircraft crew chief.**



**Wes in the cockpit of his Cessna 0-2B Skymaster.**

Wes attended survival training and mock POW training at Fairchild AFB in December 1970. He traveled to Clark Air Base in the Philippines in December and attended Jungle Survival School. He avoided the Negrito searchers by climbing a tree. Vietnam was his next trip to Phan Rang AB where he was attached to the 9th SOS (Special Operations Squadron – Snoopy call sign) and flew approximately 200+ missions over South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. He flew on some SAR (Search and Rescue) missions, one of which he received a Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for extracting 9 people (the citation stated only 2) and a Huey chopper from Cambodia. He flew a SAR for a downed F-100 pilot. The DFC is awarded to an officer or enlisted military person for “exceptional heroism when engaging in aerial flight involving operations that are not routine”.

In 1972 Wes trained in a B-52G and flew out of Guam AFB on an all - instructor crew. He arrived at Guam 1 or 2 days after Linebacker 2 ended the bombings of Hanoi and Haiphong North Vietnam. He flew another 23 bombing missions over Laos and Cambodia and flew back to Barksdale AFB during the Yom Kippur Arab – Israel War October 1973. Since the military, Wes was a Purchasing Agent and Contracts Administrator for 38 years and retired in 2012 in Bismarck ND. Wes and Linda have been married now for 54 years as of 2023.

**“Dead comrades, hearing their names spoken, wanting to share in this time, if only in spirit, move silently among them. Their presence is felt and smiles appear beneath misty eyes.”**

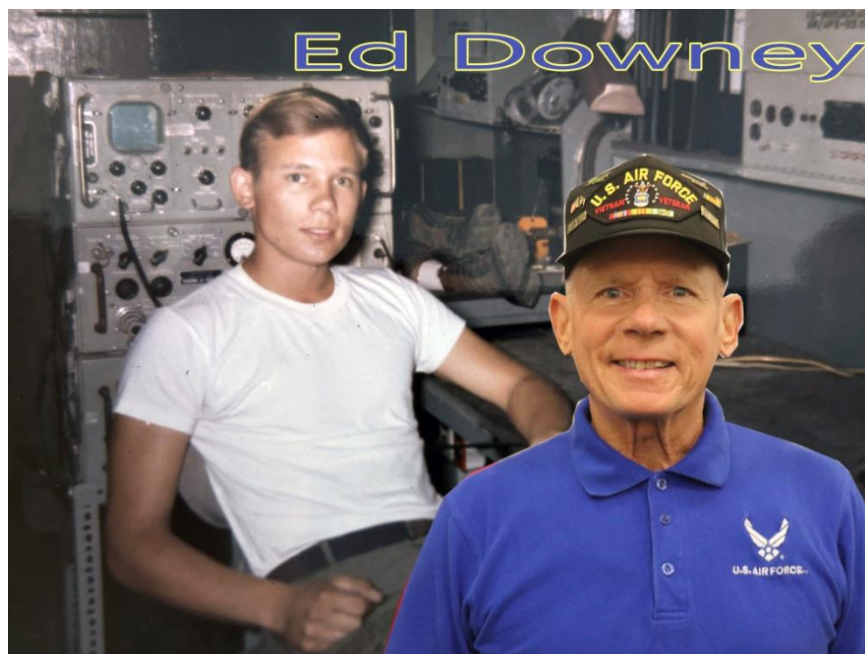


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Since Ed’s first time attending a reunion he has taken command of the drill and ceremony portion and even sometimes the chaplain’s duty. Every performance has been a moving celebration of our Vietnam duties and love and patriotism for our country. Every reunion we look forward to seeing what he has in store for us. A YouTube video of the flag folding and memorial ceremony to our fallen veterans is at the end of the following article that Ed presented at the reunion.

### **ALPHA TO OMEGA**

By Ed Downey

#### **The First and Last Days of my Asian Vacation**

While I was nearing the end of my tech school, I received orders for my first duty station. 35th Combat Support Group – PACAF – APO San Francisco 96321. I was instructed to report to an office for orientation and indoctrination to my assignment. That’s when I learned I was going to Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. This base was isolated and restricted due to previous attacks and the only place one could go was to the beach in a military supplied vehicle. And during this orientation, I was informed about the rat population. I was shown a film on Asian customs and some footage of the base.

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I remember seeing an airman, drenched in sweat and using a metal cup to get a drink from a bucket of water. OH BOY!!

Tech school was now complete and I got my 30 day leave and instructions for my transfer. I was to report to McChord AFB, Washington no later than 2300 hours 13 Sept. 1970. I inquired about a flight from St. Louis. One left mid-morning and another left mid-afternoon. I chose the earlier flight in case there was some delay. The flight went well and a bus took me and other GIs from Tacoma/Seattle airport to McChord AFB. We passed through Ft. Lewis on the way.

I got to the terminal around 11 a.m. and the flight to Vietnam didn't leave until 1 a.m. the next day. I had a 14-hour wait in store for me. All day long, I watched GIs walking down the stairs from their Freedom Bird. Their skin a dark tan from the tropical sun that beat down on them. Their faded jungle uniforms and jungle boots had a red hue about them from the red clay they walked on.

Around 10 p.m. that night, several bus loads of soldiers came into the terminal to join me on our flight. And it wasn't long until – just like in the movies – a crap game broke out on the floor of the latrine.

Our plane took off and we stopped in Alaska for fuel and then Yokota AB, Japan, where we were allowed to deplane and walk about. Back in the air, our final stop would be Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. The blast of heat hit me as I stepped out of the Flying Tiger Airline stretch 8, and made my way to the terminal and the smells of Vietnam permeated my nose. I watched curiously as so many soldiers boarded trucks and other vehicles heading for unfamiliar outposts. I wondered what was in store for them, and for me!

I waited 3 hours for a flight to Phan Rang, aboard a C-123 cargo plane. One of the windows was missing its glass and when takeoff began, the roar from the two radial engines and the outboard jet engines was deafening.

We landed at Phan Rang in the evening and as we taxied back to deplane, I got my first glimpse of the F-100 Super Sabre. As we passed by plane after plane on Victor and Uniform row, the red intake cover for each jet stood out among the woodland green camouflage paint scheme. After

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I deplaned, I was sent to the transient barracks, which were full of dust, to bunk for the night.



Ed sitting on the tail of an F-100 Super Sabre in the Phase Dock.

This barracks was just off the flight line and all night the roar of an F-100 engine on the trim pad would sound like an explosion when it hit after burner.

The next day, I was given my squadron assignment; I went through in-processing, listened to another orientation briefing and was then billeted in the barracks of the 35th Avionics Squadron.

That night, I could hear the rattle of machine gun fire and I wondered what was going on. I was apprehensive, not knowing what might happen. My first day in the Avionics Shop, I was introduced to those present, and was informed about what we do and how we do it. 364 days to go!!!

As the days clicked by, I saw the F-100s leave the base heading for the states at the end of July, 1971. The Australian B-57 Canberra left as well and the AC-119 gunships were turned over to the Vietnamese Air Force. That left the C-123s, the O2A's and on occasion an OV-10 Bronco as the only aircraft on base.

By now, I've become a short-timer and a crew comes to my barracks to build a crate to pack my stereo equipment and send it back home. Out processing begins as my DEROS or "Date Estimated Return from Overseas" nears. And then the day comes. The much anticipated journey back to the world.

I board a C-130 heading to Cam Rahn Bay the date before I'm to depart Vietnam. I get a few hours rest before heading to the terminal for final out processing late at night. I stand in one endless line after another. I'm frisked; have to pee in a bottle and all contents in my duffle bag are thoroughly searched. I'm feeling more like a convict at this time. Then in the early morning hours, the base comes under attack and the MPs and SPs who were searching our bags have to leave for base defense. I am getting emotional about leaving and have to take deep breaths to keep my composure. Finally, the all clear is sounded and the bag

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searches continue. At last, we are ready to board the aircraft and the long trip begins.

Landing back at McChord AFB mid-morning, I board a bus for Seattle/Tacoma airport and I’m on a plane for St. Louis in no time. I did not experience any protesters as many did who arrived in California, which brings me to the next story.

A high school classmate of mine named Joe joined the Navy and was assigned to an aircraft carrier. On his first cruise his port was in San Francisco. As the carrier approached the Golden Gate Bridge, Joe notices the ship was listing to one side. His first thought of the listing was for the antennas to clear the bridge – NOT So. The crew flooded one side of the ship to make it list and as they sailed under the bridge, protesters dumped garbage on the flight deck. As the ship passed under the bridge, hoses were brought out to wash the garbage off the flight deck.

These actions were typical of the times and we can all be thankful those days are far behind us. I am thankful for your time and I’m proud to be in this room with the Airmen of Phan Rang and the ladies that support them.



[Click picture to view video.](#)

**“In their ceremonies, the allegiances, the speeches, and the prayers, one cannot help but hear the deep eternal love of country they will forever share.”**

### Guest List

*Donald Baker, Tom and Sandy Barden, Marwin, Carolyn and Joy Bennett, Ray and Mary Benson, David and Ann Boerman, John and Alison Bruss, Carol Clarke, Mike and Donna Conklin, Israel Cortez, Peggy and daughter Carrie Cox, Richard (Rick) Dixon, Sarah Cormier, Ed Downey, Jess Echavarria, Tom and Nancy Gates, Mike Granese, Dean Harrison, Jim and Judy Hemphill, Robert and Jeannie Holz, Dave Hooton, Richard and Ruth Learst, William and Nancy Lindsay, Richard and Carol Long, Craig and Patty Lord, Larry and Louise Martino, Louis and Sue Matherne, Alison Robertson, Andy and Betty McClendon, Hank and Sue Milnark, Lee Moore, Mike Mulcahey, Bruce and Mary Muller, Jim and Joyce Obland, Harold and Christina Owens, Thomas and Marcia Parsons, Eugene Pellon, Diane Drew (AKA Jane Ring), Donald Poirier and Deborah Barrett, Michael and Carla Reed, Michael and Michelle Rowan, Lou and Annette Ruggiero, John Ryan, Greg Schmidt, Joseph Schwarzer, Chris Eyler, Douglas and Joyce Severt, Daniel and Linda Smith, Carl Stehle, Robert and Sally Theriault, Bob and Marcia Tucker, George and Patricia Varney, Edward Velarde (Chief of the Jicarilla Apache Nation, Dulce, New Mexico), Wes and Linda Vettel, Richard and Judith Ward, Randal and Cindy Weber, Carl Weese, Sue Greenleaf, Wayne and Carmen Yuris and Laury Schwartzkopf.*

**Finally, it is time to leave. Much too soon to set aside this little piece of yesterday, but the past cannot be held too long for it is fragile.**

**They say, "Farewell...See you next year, God willing,"  
breathing silent prayers for one another.  
Each keeping a little of the others with him forever."**

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### **Comments**

**“Our hearts are full with love. We’re already looking forward to our next adventure with our Phan Rang family. Love and hugs.” - Marcia Parsons**

**“We loved our time with all the participants. What a loving group that keeps on caring for one another. Thanks to everyone that made it possible and to all the Phan Rang folks.” - Jane Ring**

**“We attended the Phan Rang Vietnam Veteran's Reunion with the finest people in the world and they are all so dear to me/us. They are more like family....actually, they ARE family and we love them all dearly.” - Joyce Severt**

**” Another wonderful reunion to put in our memories!! Love this group so much.” - Jeanie Holz**

**“This was the FIRST Reunion I attended, I had a really great time and was totally surprised. I have attended other reunions, (high school, etc.). And there were always a few cliques and then everyone else was wandering around aimlessly. This is what I anticipated the Phan Rang reunion would be like, BUT BOY WAS I WRONG!!!**

**Everyone was so friendly and welcoming! I felt like I belonged, saw a lot of people I knew, and met many more for the first time. It was truly like a FAMILY GATHERING. Thank you all! I hope maybe some more First Timers will attend in the future. If you can I strongly recommend it!!!**

**A SPECIAL THANKS to Doug and Bob for all the work you guys have done, it really showed! And the ladies for the Auction and Raffle work!**

**I could go on and on, but suffice it to say, this has been the highlight of the year! I am looking forward to next year!**

**THANKS AGAIN TO ALL OF YOU!” ---- Don Baker**

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**Doug’s Comments:** In this issue I tried to report as accurately as I know how in order to help preserve the memory of this very special event. It isn’t me, or the board that makes this special it’s the people. As I indicated previously we just had an overwhelming support for the raffle and silent auction and in such a short time that the items were on display and how fast any furious everything was coming together, it’s hard to remember everyone that so generously contributed. The proceeds will help us fund things for the next reunion to make it easier on everyone’s pocket book. Can’t wait to see everyone again next year and it’s always great to meet new members. 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.