

**“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, Vietnam
...keeping the memories alive**

Phan Rang News No. 40

“Stories worth telling”

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Exchange**



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‘Spooky’ Produces 9 ‘Frag’s (*Seventh Air Force News, Dec., 18, 1968*)

PHAN RANG—The men of B Flight, 3rd Special Operations Squadron here who fly the AC-47 gunship, discovered during the early hours of a recent morning what developed to be nine new "frags."

The first arrived at 1:30 a.m. and the last came around 3 p.m. Runners delivered progress reports to the men of the 3rd SOS who were already celebrating the event at the base recreation area, "White Rock National Park."

The news was not a complete surprise as some results had been expected for several weeks. However, the fact that there were nine surprised many—especially TSgt. Bruce H. Maine, Buck Hannon, W. Va., in whose room "Spooky," the unit mascot, released the news . . . nine new pups.

Tapestry Token of Friendship (*Seventh Air Force News, Dec. 18, 1968*)



A hand-loomed tapestry, a gift from the Cham people to the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, Phan Rang AB, is presented by Mr. Qua Muong, a Cham leader, to Col. Frank L. Gailer Jr., Arlington, VA., 35th TFW commander. Interpreter for the two is Miss Nguyen Thi Duyen, base civilian personnel technician. The Cham, remnants of a once powerful nation that ruled central

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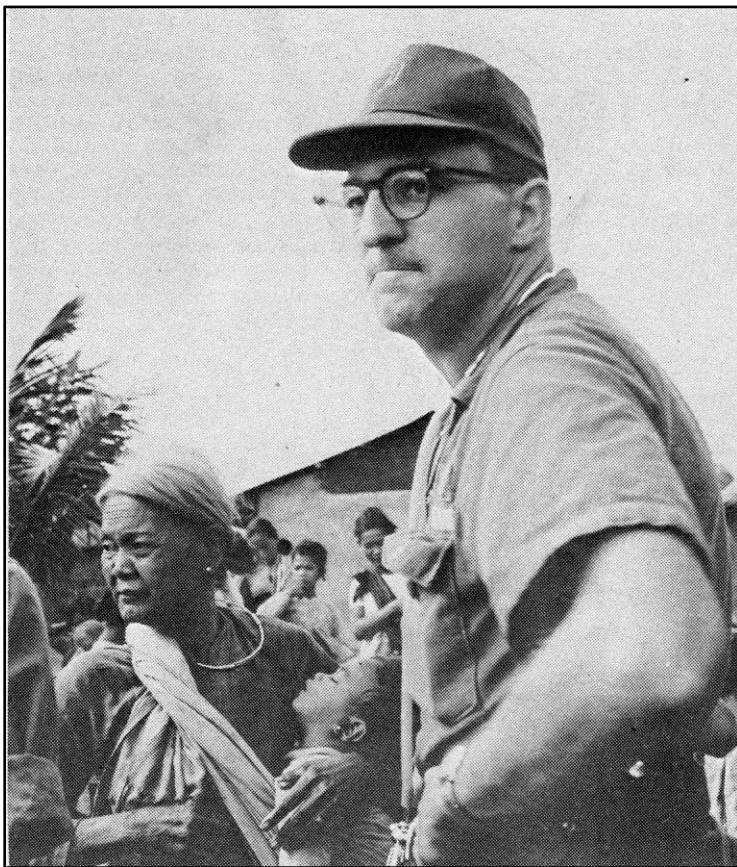
Vietnam, made the presentation at the time of their recent “Cham New Year” celebration to recognize the excellent relations between the Cham people and ember of Phan Rang AB.

‘Flying Doc’ Aids Villagers (*Seventh Air Force News, Dec., 18, 1968*)

PHAN RANG—Ma Trai, Karom, Suoi Vang, and Suoi Gieng are all Montagnard refugee villages in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. They are all near the coast of the South China Sea, and are visited every Tuesday by a man they call "the Flying Doc."

That man, Air Force doctor Capt. Donald J. Murdoch, Cambridge, N.Y., goes on the weekly trips to the villages and many others, as part of the Air Force Medical Civic Actions Program

(MEDCAP).



The Flying Doc - Doctor (Capt.) Donald J. Murdoch, 35th USAF Dispensary, Phan Rang AB, waits for his next patient as a Montagnard baby sleeps in her grandmother's arms.

Captain Murdoch flies to the villages via Army helicopter Gunships of the 192nd ATTC, headquartered at Phan Thiet. He says the most common diseases he finds are "malaria, dysentery, skin infections, TB, leprosy, pneumonia, anemia, and malnutrition."

According to studies made by him, more than 80 per cent of the people he has examined (about 150 each trip) have some sort of parasitical disease. One of the most common of these is filariasis, a blood disease.

"One of the hardest things," said Captain Murdoch, "in treating these people is overcoming the old superstitions they have about disease. They still believe in evil spirits and still use old methods like bloodletting. Once we get a patient though, and prove that our cures work, the rest of the people usually come for aid."

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They are still coming, every Tuesday, rain or shine, for the visit from the "Flying Doc."

Security Police Training Yields Confidence, Dividends (*Seventh Air Force News, Dec., 18, 1968*)

PHAN RANG — "Our pupils couldn't out-shoot Matt Dillon, but they have out-shot Charlie every time," says Sgt. Thomas J. Metzen, Anaheim, Cal. Sergeant Metzen, Non Commissioned Officer-in-charge of the 35th Security Police Squadron firing range, is charged with making certain that the sentries know the weapon they are handling like the back of their hand.

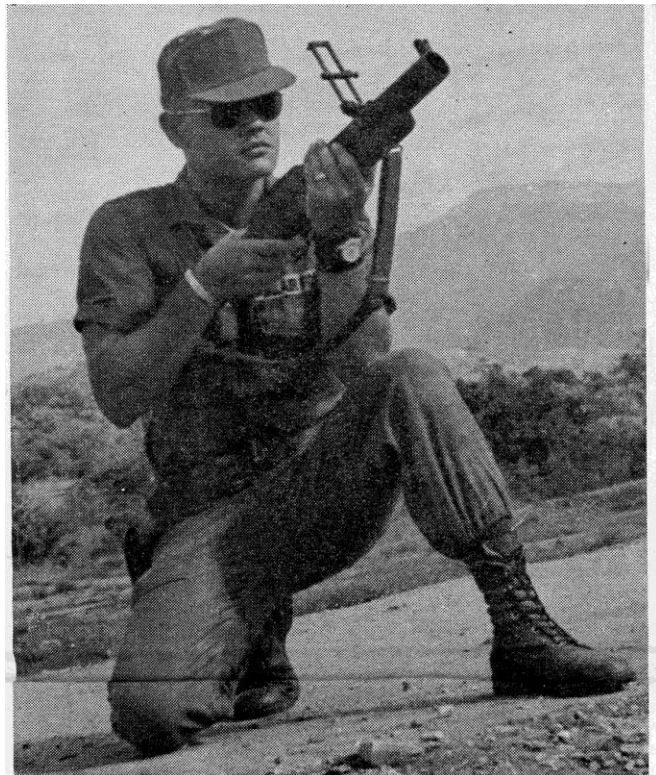
"When we get new men in the squadron," Sergeant Metzen continued, "they go through classroom and range familiarization. They may have handled the same weapons for two or three years—but not in a combat situation. That can make quite a difference."

After the initial familiarization with a multitude of weapons, the policemen are called back twice a month for re-fire. "Though these people carry the weapons daily, they may not fire them once between training sessions," commented Sgt. Roger T. Williams, Romney, W. Va.

Aside from the familiar M-16 rifle, the course also includes firing the M-148 and M-79 grenade launchers, the M-12 riot gun and the M-60 and .50 caliber machine guns, plus basic instruction on hand grenades and flares.

"Part of our initial training consists of instructions on how to spot explosive devises or "booby traps," said Sgt. Larry D. Paul, Decatur, Ill.

"There is no way," concluded Sergeant Williams, "to tell how much the people gain from our instruction, or how many lives it has saved, but we are confident that our work has paid big dividends."



Sighting In

Range NCOIC Sgt. Thomas J. Metzen, sights in an M-79 for student.

From ‘NGUYEN’ with love (PHANFARE, April 5, 1969)



Dear Nguyen,

I may not be hip on all the NCO club rules - but why is that every time there is an Aussie floor show at the NCO Club, you see all kinds of Aussies at the Club? I know they can't be members because about half of them are 'slick sleeves.' How do they get in? On top of that, they usually come late and end up standing in front of paying members! **Member**

Dear Member,

Without much research, I've found there are two legal ways the Aussies can come into the club - those who work there are members. And, they can come as guests of card-carrying members, just off-hand, I'd say that the management isn't checking as closely on the membership criteria of the Aussies as they are of the U.S. types on floor show nights. But anyway, give them a break, we are comrades-in-arms. **Nguyen**

Dear Nguyen,

Is it true that Charlie plans an Easter 'egg' roll from the top of Nui Dat to Happy Valley? **Huh**

Dear Huh,

Dear me, I guess your intelligence sources are better than mine. This is the first I've heard of it. Quite frankly, I hope not! **Nguyen**

Dear Nguyen,

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Are they ever going to complete the sidewalk in front of the chapel? It now ends at the ditch and goes nowhere. And secondly, when are they going to start turning on lights in front of the chapel for a night-lighting effect? **Curious**

Dear Curious,

How silly can you be! Of course the sidewalk leads somewhere, it leads into the chapel! Remember, Happy Valley is still in a state of development. And as for the lights, since Charlie can use lighted landmarks as aiming points, don't push your luck. **Nguyen**

Five Men Receive \$ Awards (*Seventh Air Force News, Dec., 18, 1968*)

PHAN RANG — Five men here were recently presented awards for suggestions submitted under the military suggestion program.

TSgt. Millard R. Vieno, Beaumont, Tex., 554th Civil Engineering Squadron (RED HORSE) received \$15 for his suggestion to pad the frame of the practice golf cages at Phan Rang.

SSgt. Raymond R. Sidhu, North Sacramento, Calif., 35th Security Police Squadron, received a letter of appreciation for his suggestion to consolidate two areas of defense at Phan Rang, resulting in savings of manpower and vehicle utilization.

SSgt. Carrel E. Owen, Mobile, Ala., 310th Special Operations Squadron, received \$15 for his idea of bolting two steel bars onto the arm of a towbar to avoid breakage at a potential weak point.

Sgt. Burl E. Spainhower, Aurora, Colo., 35th Armament and Electronics Maintenance Squadron, garnered \$25 for suggesting that the cannon plugs on two types of F-100s be marked to avoid mixing them up.

Second Lt. Chester S. Lubelczyk, Hardwick, Mass., 352nd Tactical Fighter Squadron, pocketed \$20 for the idea of installing a bracket on the tail of the F-100 Supersabre to lift the tail hook off the ground. This provides clearance so the aircraft can taxi to revetment areas of refueling pits.

Bladen Airman Helps Un-bog Mired Aircraft (*The Robesonian, Tuesday, October 29, 1968*)

(This story, almost verbatim appeared in Phan Rang News 39, but it was from a different publication and giving credit to a different individual. The previous article was published in The Victoria Advocate, Sunday, Oct. 27, 1968. There is also a story about this same event in Phan Rang New 3.)

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WITH U. S. COMBAT AIR FORCES, V i e t n a m—Mud, bursting air bags and enemy fire merged to badger Staff Sergeant Eugene Smith Jr., son of Mrs. Gathering L. Smith of Justin, Tex. but when he finished his job, a valuable transport was airborne over Katum, Vietnam.

The sergeant is a 1957 graduate of Bladenboro N. C. High School. His wife, Ella, is the daughter of Mrs. Gladys Edwards of Rt. 2. Bladenboro.

Sergeant Smith was a member of a 12-man U. S. Air Force maintenance team that recently recovered a C-1 23 Provider in an operation that was first thought to be impossible.

The Provider lay mired ,in mud with all three landing wheels off the runway at Katum. One propeller was bent; the left jet engine was an inch off the ground; the right wing extended 30 feet across the 60-foot-wide runway. The airstrip was blocked to other fixed-wing resupply aircraft and the Provider had to be quickly recovered or destroyed.

Sergeant Smith began the assignment that was plagued with difficulty but conquered by persistence when he boarded a helicopter at Phan Rang Air Base for the trip to the special forces encampment, northeast of Saigon near the Cambodian border.

He and his crew were initiated to the trials of the job when incoming mortar rounds forced their helicopter to take off from Katum before their equipment was completely unloaded. Using inflatable air bags, the team began the arduous task of lifting the transport during a lull in the attack but mortar fire took them off the job periodically and then three lifting bags ruptured from pressure.

The men took shelter as they awaited replacements from Phan Rang and then, even as enemy fire continued to pound the area, resumed work. They were again delayed, this time by darkness.

Sergeant Smith and the crew tackled the job, in the early daylight that also brought increased enemy activity. On their third attempt to get the ttransport on to the runway, the Provider yielded.

Supporting tactical fighter pilots blasted the surrounding area with bombs and, strafed as the maintenance men replaced the damaged propeller, started the engines and checked over the aircraft. A flight crew arrived and noon the once-doomed Provider took off for Phan Rang.

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Copter Battles High Winds to Rescue Seaman (*Pacific Stars & Stripes, Saturday, April 15, 1967*)

PHAN RANG, Vietnam (7AF)—Braving winds gusting to more than 40 miles an hour, an Air Force rescue helicopter crew assigned to Det. 1, 3rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group, hovered over a Republic of Korea Navy ship to evacuate a Korea seaman suffering from acute appendicitis.

The Huskie helicopter pilot, Capt. Lamonte Kahler of Idaho Falls, Idaho, described the mission as “not routine by any means, but not particularly hazardous as long as everyone worked together.”

The rescue mission with the Phan Rang AB helicopter flying cover for the primary rescue helicopter from Cam Ranh Bay AB.

Twenty miles out, in the South China Sea, Kahler made contact with the pilot of the Cam Ranh Bay helicopter who was returning to land because of fuel system difficulties. The mission was now the responsibility of Kahler and his crew.

Dangerously low on fuel, Kahler attempted to make radio contact with the Korean vessel located approximately 50 miles out to sea. When the vessel did not answer, he turned his helicopter toward Phan Rang, radioed his unit, and asked for additional supplies for his next attempt at the pickup.

The location of the ship made it almost beyond the range of the Huskie helicopter. Kahler refueled at Phan Rang and picked up a six-man life raft in case they had to ditch the chopper.

"We had just enough fuel for one attempt at the pick up," Kahler said. "A Navy aircraft, which flew cover for the first pickup attempt, flew toward Phan Rang to guide us back to the ship. The ship had veered toward land to speed the pickup and decrease the distance.

"The Navy aircraft helped us make radio contact with the ship and we spotted it from about 10 miles away. The turbulent sea caused the ship to rise and fall about 15 feet.

"We told the Koreans to turn the ship toward us and parallel to the waves to make the pickup easier.

"There was no place to land on the ship, so I brought the Huskie around to a hover about 50 feet above the vessel. This was like flying formation with another aircraft since I had to maintain the same forward speed, about five knots, and keep the helicopter about 50 feet above the ship," he said.

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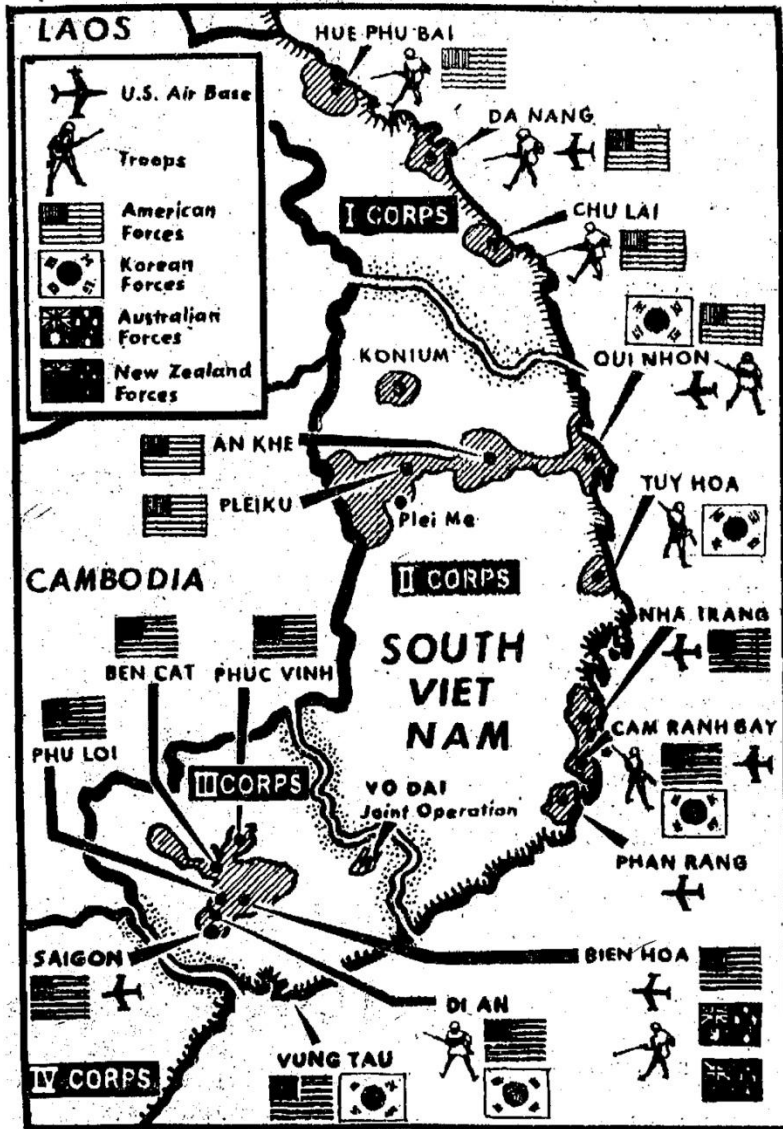
"To add to the difficulties, I had to watch out for the main mast in the forward section and several antennae in the aft part while the ship bobbed up and down." he added.

Because of low fuel, Phan Thiet was the only place the rescue helicopter could go. There, the stricken Korean was transferred to a Phan Rang C-47 and taken to the hospital at Cam Ranh for treatment.

Why More U.S. Troops Are Needed (*Stars & Stripes, Sunday, December 5, 1965*)

By PETER ARNETT (Arnett worked for National Geographic magazine, and later for various

television networks, most notably CNN. He is well known for his coverage of war, including the Vietnam War and the Gulf War. He was awarded the 1966 Pulitzer Prize in International Reporting for his work in Vietnam, where he was present from 1962 to 1975, most of the time reporting for the Associated Press news agency. In 1994, Arnett wrote *Live from the Battlefield: From Vietnam to Baghdad, 35 Years in the World's War Zones*. In March 1997, Arnett was able to interview Osama bin Laden. The Journalism School at the Southern Institute of Technology is named after him. Source: Wikipedia)



Map indicates where foreign troops are stationed in the Republic of Vietnam, with shaded areas indicating their zones of combat. (AP)

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effectively. An important reason: Most U.S. and Vietnamese troops are pinned down by security jobs—including keeping what 'they hold—so that surprisingly few battalions are available for searching out the Viet Cong.

An influx Of troops from north Vietnam has in effect returned the situation to where it was earlier this year, before a surge of new U. S. forces tipped the balance temporarily in the allies' favor.

The communist s in recent weeks have shown themselves willing to sacrifice hundreds of troops. Man for man, they are as well equipped as the U. S. infantryman and have as much, if not more, firepower. Seldom mentioned anymore in Saigon is the theory that a U. S. platoon, because of its firepower, could easily wipe out a Viet Cong company.

The war now probably will produce bigger and bloodier battles. It seems likely that only if U. S. troops can wipe out large ccommunist units will the enemy return to the harassing hit-and-run, guerrilla-type war.

685,000 in All

Allied forces in the Republic of Vietnam total about 685,000. Of these, 165,000 are American, 500,000 Vietnamese, 18,000 South Korean, 1,300 Australian and 300 New Zealand. In addition, the U. S. Navy has major forces Deployed off the coast. At least four aircraft carriers and numerous destroyers are in action in the South China Sea all the time. One carrier provides aircraft only for South Vietnam. Destroyers are used with greater frequency to bombard Viet Cong facilities and provide fire support for villages and outposts under attack.

U. S. strategy is to punch deep into enemy territory and hold as much of it as required to operate base installations. One U.S. aim is to keep its major base installations outside the range of communist weaponry.

But putting bases deep in communist territory, the U. S. command has found, requires plenty of men to defend them, and this defense job has eaten up battalions.

Jungled areas like Chu Lai, If An Khe and Ben Cat, where up six months ago the communists moved freely, have become American base locations. Now that the bases are set up, the question is "Where do we go from here?"

The allied buildup thus far seems at the most to have had the effect of containing the communists. Open invasion across the border by, north Vietnamese troops - has drastically changed the picture.

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New U.S. Forces

New U. S. forces had been brought in early this year forestall a dangerous Viet Cong buildup. Communist ranks were swollen by southerners who had gone north in 1954 when the country was partitioned, and who returned as indoctrinated "liberators."

Now, countering the U.S. buildup, north Vietnam-has sent in its 325th Div., mainly troops born and bred in north Vietnam, and set the situation back, from the allied viewpoint.

In view of this, there seems little doubt that U. S. Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara will recommend a large increase in American troops in his report to President Johnson following his visit to Vietnam early this week. Officials speak privately of having as many as 300,000 U. S. troops.

Both sides in this war are proving ready and willing to fight. The conflict has become something like a boxing match. Each side leaves its corner for a tussle, in the center of the ring, then retires to safe territory until the bell rings for another round.

The U. S. Army's 1st Cav. Div. (Airmobile) rang it at Ia Drang by helicopter men deep into communist territory. The communists hammered them, and themselves took heavy-losses. The cavalymen pulled out last weekend.

The communist side rings the bell by attacking government outposts and base installations.

The 81mm mortar, the popular Viet Cong weapon, has a range of four to five miles. U. S. commanders say that if they have security up to three miles from their main base installations, they are reasonably safe from accurate enemy mortar fire. But this will change if the Communists start using their bigger 75mm pack howitzers more frequently. These have an eight-mile range.

Debate at Hq.

As the Americans establish more base areas for heavy artillery, they will need more men to secure them. There is a debate going on between U.S. military headquarters in Saigon, wanting bigger artillery in more places, and the U.S. Army 1st Div., preferring fewer artillery bases and more freedom for troops to move.

The role of U.S. Marines differs greatly from what it was in other wars. Historically, Marines were beachhead forces. The Army would come in later and the Marines would move on. Now they stay put around three coastal enclaves, while the Army strikes out.

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Burdened with this semigarrison duty, the Marines make the most of it by attempting pacification of Vietnamese villages. The Marines figure they have pacified everything within 12 miles of the Da Nang AB, but concede that Viet Cong terrorists still can penetrate defenses, mine roads or launch assaults against the air base.

Pacification is a sideline—a by-product—so far as U.S. forces are concerned. Base areas have been chosen for military reasons. There is one pacification experiment in the, Vo Dat area northeast of Saigon, where U.S. infantrymen guard farmers harvesting rice. Once the rice is in, the area—like other "pacified" areas will be- turned over to the Vietnamese. U.S. officials insist it's an experiment.

Here is how allied forces are deployed in South Vietnam:

UNITED STATES

Marines, totaling 43,000, have been assigned to the northern coastal part of the country. In South Vietnam since February, they have established themselves in three main areas: The Da Nang AB, Chu Lai and the Mue Phu Bai sector.

Most of the U.S. Marine Corps 3rd Div. is at Da Nang, preoccupied with protecting the important airbase. Several Navy Seabee battalion work in the Da Nang area.

One Marine regiment guards the increasingly important Chu Lai AB, 65 miles south of Da Nang, where helicopter and Marine jets are based. Patrols from Chu Lai penetrate about 12 miles into countryside where the Viet Cong operate.

The Marine enclave in the Hu Phu Bai area devotes itself almost wholly to guarding the airstrip there.

Marine officers say they would like a more aggressive role, but the Marine high command says if its forces can hold the coast and increase control in the lowlands, the Viet Cong can have the mountains and highlands.

"We want the places where the people are," said a Marine officer. "The Viet Cong can have the rest."

Side by Side

Two Vietnamese Army divisions fight alongside the U.S. Marines in the 1st Corps area of Vietnam.

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A whole division of U.S. troops —the 1st Air Cav.—is based in the An Khe valley in the middle of Vietnam. This misty mountain area was envisioned as a jumping off point for airmobile operations using the division's numerous helicopters. The division was engaged in fierce fighting against north Vietnamese troops at Ia Drang.

One brigade from this division secures the An Khe base area. Another is free to operate against the enemy. A third is in reserve. The central highlands capital, Pleiku, has been a center for the cavalrymen. The highlands town of Kon tum, north Of Pleiku, may be another operating area.

1st Cav.'s Mission

The 1st Cav.'s mission is to engage the communists in a fight to the death. It may have severe actions in the future because the central highlands represent the main infiltration route for the north Vietnamese.

A U.S. Army paratroop regiment from the 101st Airborne Div. is based at Phan Rang, a fishing village on the coast, 160 miles northeast of Saigon. The 101st is primarily a reacting force for use in emergencies.

Other American installations in the II Corps area include the main U.S. field force headquarters at the coastal city of Nha Trang, and the major project port of Cam Ranh Bay, a few miles south of Nha Trang. A huge airfield for jet craft has been completed at Cam Ranh, and big port facilities are being installed there.

The U.S. Army 1st Div. the "Big Red 1"—is deployed in four areas north of Saigon. One brigade is at the Bien Hoa AB, another at Ben Cat, and the third at the lonely town of Phuoc Vinh, beside Zone D. The division headquarters is at Di An, about 17 miles northeast of Saigon.

Attached to the 1st Div. is the 173d Airborne Brigade at Bien Hoa. This brigade has made many probes into the southern fringes of Zone D. Other 1st Div. battalions have patrolled into Viet Cong areas. But the main work up to now has been to secure bases of operation. As more heavy artillery comes in, more men will be needed to protect it because the Viet Cong seeks to knock out these pieces.

As of now, the "Big Red 1" probably has five battalions available, for aggressive actions against the Viet Cong.

Part of the 1st Div. region Zone C, north of Tay Ninh, where no American troops have yet stepped. The U.S. Air Force, using jet bombers and B-52s, has done the job in Zone C up to now. Eventually the 1st Div. may have to go in.

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Seat of Command

U.S. helicopters have made a base of the old Japanese, airfield at Phu Loi, 20 miles northeast of Saigon. U.S. armored and artillery units are there.

Saigon remains the main headquarters for U.S. Forces, the seat for General William C. Westmoreland, U.S. Forces -commander.

SOUTH KOREAN

Aiding the Vietnamese Army's two divisions in the highlands is the Korean Capital Div. nick named Tiger. Two Korean regiments numbering 10,000 men are based in the coastal city of Qui Nhon, due east of An Khe, providing security for the U.S. logistic bases there. The Koreans sometimes move out on pacification operations 10-15 miles from Qui Nhon.

Korean Help

A Korean battalion recently moved down to Tuy Hoa, south Qui Nhon, to help secure the town after Viet Cong troops knocked out several Vietnamese platoons in the area. The Koreans have 6,000 marines at Cam Ranh Bayon security duty, and troops at Di An, north of Saigon, building roads and bridges.

Korea is the only foreign ally with a complete hospital which treats Vietnamese as well as Korean wounded and Americans.

AUSTRALIA-NEW ZEALAND

The 1,300 men of the Royal Australian Regt., based at Bien Hoa, are under the command of the U.S. 1st Div. They have been used mainly in search and clear operations around Bien Hoa. Occasionally they move into Zone D on search and destroy missions. They are supported by New Zealand artillerymen, using lightweight Italian artillery pieces that can be easily maneuvered.

SOUTH VIETNAMESE

South Vietnam's army has 11 divisions and numerous smaller groups, such as the Rangers, Marines and Airborne troops. Some joint operations have been, held with U.S. and other allied troops. A few operations have been directly under U.S. command.

Delta Problem

U.S. troops have scrupulously avoided the populated areas around Saigon and in the Mekong Delta, where more than a third of South Vietnam's population lives. The delta Vietnamese have

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been traditionally hostile to foreigners, and the U.S. command seems to have deemed it better to stay away from them for the time being. In line with this, all combat units based in Saigon, such as helicopter companies and fighter bombers, are being moved away from the capital city to provincial areas.

South Vietnamese forces handle the delta's problems, with three infantry divisions.

New air bases are springing up across Vietnam. There, once were three main bases-Bien Hoa, Saigon and Da Nang. Now there are seven. The new ones are at Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, Chu Lap and Cam Ranh Bay. A big one is being constructed at the coastal town of Phan Rang.

‘Happy Valley’ Phan Rang AB Reunion Information



**Where: DoubleTree by Hilton, Reid Park, 445
S. Alvernon Way, Tucson AZ**

When: October 9-11

Single/Double rate \$99

Banquet 11 October in the Bonsai Room



To make your hotel reservations for the reunion. Click on the Double Tree logo above and it will take you to the Phan Rang AB Reunion Web Site. Please make your reservations early which will help us greatly in the planning process and also to insure that everyone that wants to attend gets the reunion rate. Remember if circumstances prevent you from attending you can always cancel within 24 hours of your check-in date. If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact [me](#).

Please note that the bus for Tour 1 is full! There is still plenty of space on all of the other tours.

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TALES OF PHAN RANG



BY ROBERT CHAPPELEAR

Tales of Phan Rang (Part 15) by Robert Chappellear

Tales of Phan Rang

Published by Robert L. Chappellear at Smashwords

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An account of the author's one year tour of duty flying C-123 cargo aircraft in Viet Nam. Provides descriptions of life in country and the missions that were flown.

This book is a description of that year providing an insight into what it was like to live and fly in that conflict and during that time of the war.

About Robert Chappellear

Retired from two careers, the first was as a fighter pilot for the USAF; the second as a system engineer for a defense contractor. Accumulated 6000 hours of flying time in 7 different operational assignments including three tours to Asia and one to Europe. As an engineer I worked on the airborne command post, nuclear aircraft carriers, presidential helicopters, and various other communication systems.



Married with three sons and one step daughter and three grandchildren (1 grandson, and 2 granddaughters). Though I have made 36 moves during my lifetime I am now settled in Minnesota.

Chapter 15 - Snake School

I think that the second or at the latest, the third Air Force school that air crew members attend is survival school up in Spokane Washington. This school is worthy of its own story and I will not describe the school in its entirety here. For those of us that were destined for Southeast Asia (SEA) this course was cut to two weeks instead of three. This was because the third week of the course which was a survival “trek” through the eastern mountains of Washington was supposed

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to be replaced by the additional two weeks that SEA bound crewmembers would receive enroute to their operational bases. 99 percent of SEA bound aircrew attended the Pacific Air Force Jungle Survival School at Clark Air Base, Republic of the Philippines as they were deploying from the States to SEA. Those C-123 crewmembers that were in my class were the 1 percent that didn't.

At the time I had no idea how fortunate this was for me. It seems that some administrative clerk got checking our records and discovered we had been in-country for 6 months or so that we had not attended this “required” school. So what do you know but now all of a sudden there are 22 of us that need to be sent back to the Philippines to attend this school. It was not operationally desirable to lose all 22 of us at one time so we got scheduled to attend the school three at a time. My turn came after about 7 months in country. That was great for it was like a Rest & Recuperation leave half way thru the tour.

I remember that one of the two from the wing that I attended this school with was Captain George M. (“Monty”) Montgomery from Montgomery Alabama. Monty and I had been in the same pilot training class down at Laredo AFB, Texas. We also attended the same C-123 RTU and had deployed to Vietnam together. Monty was assigned to the 310th SOS and he spent most of his time flying in I and II Corps while I spent most of my time flying in II, III, and IV Corps. It was kind of nice to see Monty again and we both looked forward to the break away from Vietnam.

The squadron schedulers knew that we all looked forward to this break and I think that they purposefully scheduled us to travel to Clark on Fridays before the class started on Monday. That way we had a couple of days to raise hell before we had to get serious. We were also advised by all of the squadron mates that had already been at the school to wait at the back of the line when registering for quarters. That way we were more likely to have “Non-availability” which meant that we would be assigned a room at a motel downtown in Angeles City. There was more “action” downtown and this was considered more desirable. The three of us from incountry arrived at base billeting coincidentally with the passengers just arriving from the States. We didn't even have to play any games to get “non-availability”. Before you knew it we were on a bus to a motel downtown.

Downtown was actually on the outskirts of Angeles City and to tell you the truth I did not necessarily like it. It actually was not even as comfortable as my room back at Phan Rang. It was warmer even though it had an air conditioner; it was more humid, and dirtier. There were signs posted in English in the bathroom warning us that the water was not “potable” and that we should only use water from the marked containers that were found outside at the end of the hallways. There was even less of a feeling of safety than at Phan Rang. There were guards armed with chrome plated .45 caliber Thompson submachine guns stationed at all entrances and exits to the motel. I actually went back to the billeting office on Monday afternoon and asked if they could find me some sort of an on base accommodation. They found me an empty BOQ room and I moved back on base that evening.

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I think that I had the better deal. My quarters were in what was called MacArthur Hall and it was in short walking distance from the O’Club. However, I didn’t even have to go to the club unless I wanted for there was a dining hall in the Q and there was also an O’Club extension where one could get a beer in the evening if so desired. I found the base quarters to be more comfortable, and certainly with a greater feeling of safety than off base.

The school lasted two weeks. The first week was academic classes covering such areas as how to find water in the jungle, how to find something to eat, what plants could be used for medicinal purposes. Other topics included escape and evasion, and what we knew could be expected if shot down and captured. The second week started out with three days in the jungle. These days were spent in the company of a Negrito native of the Philippines who acted as a guide and teacher. These guys were truly amazing in their knowledge of the jungle. They showed us how to find those sources of safe drinking water, what plants could be eaten and what ones should not be eaten. Furthermore, they prepared an absolutely marvelous feast for us that first evening in the jungle. We had baked sweet potatoes, other tubers, rice, baked bananas, tapioca, and monkey meat. All of which had been harvested from the jungle by the Negrito guide. After the demonstration in the jungle that day, the guide had demonstrated to us how to construct individual covered hammocks in the trees and while we built our individual abodes he returned to the jungle to gather these foodstuffs.

The next morning we finished all of the leftovers and took another walk through the jungle. In the early afternoon we gathered together in some bleachers where we received a briefing on the afternoons, evening, nights, and morning forthcoming activities. We were about to enter the “Escape and Evasion” exercise. We were briefed that we were about to simulate ejection from our aircraft and being lost and alone in the jungles of Vietnam. This exercise was modeled after successful evasions from the war. We were briefed that if forced down in bad guy territory we would have a short time to find a place to hide and then we would have to remain hidden until recovery helicopters arrived on the scene. We were then expected to carefully evade to a location where we could signal the helicopters and effect a recovery. In these “exercise” scenarios instead of armed enemy soldiers hunting us, we would be pursued by negritos who would receive 5 pounds of rice for every white painted dog tag that collected and 50 pounds of rice for ever red dog tag that was collected. Each of us “evaders” were issued three white painted dog tags and one red painted dog tag. We were honor bound to surrender one white dog tag if “captured” by one of these searching negritos and to surrender the red one only if injured or otherwise in need of medical assistance. The Negrito searchers would continue looking during the entire exercise period and they could collect as many dog tags as possible during that period. Many of these searchers made relatively good “wages” in this job by collecting only white dog tags. The reason for the much larger pay off for the red tag was because the collecting Negrito was expected to immediately return to the base camp and

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escort medical personnel and transportation to the injured survivor. By the way it was not common for one of us “evaders” to successfully go an entire night without being “captured” by one of the Negritos.

The school did not have a huge fleet of helicopters to transport us out into the jungle and then to drop us off to start the exercise. Therefore, we were loaded onto army style two and a half ton trucks and taken out into the jungle on dirt roads where we were dropped off basically at irregular spacing and told that we would be pursued shortly. Monty and I we were dropped from the truck together and we split up immediately. He went one way downhill, and I went the other way uphill. I later found out that he went the prescribed period of time and then found a fallen stand of bamboo. He told me later that he shoved a stick under the fall first and shook it around. He said that after nothing slithered out, he lifted the fallen bamboo shoots and crawled under. I on the other hand went up the hill and actually stayed on a trail under my watch told me that I had traveled the prescribed time. At that moment, I looked both left and right and selected right. I carefully separated the bushes being careful not to break any, stepped through for two steps, and closed them carefully behind me. I then prepared a space to lie down and noticing that I could see through the lower branches of the bushes back to the trail I took my poncho liner and arranged it in a seemingly haphazard shape to block that view. It was quickly approaching sunset and I felt sleepy. I lay back and tried to sleep. I had spread a good bit of mosquito repellent along seams of my clothing and about my neck, ears and face. I actually

found that this was effective in keeping mosquitos away however, small buggies were flitting about my ears and keeping me awake. I took my handkerchief and fashioned a head covering that looked much like that thing that used to be worn by the “Aunt Jemima” of pancake mix fame. I made sure that this head set covered my ears and it worked great! I slept pretty soundly that night and was awakened only four times by someone walking by on the trail. In every case I expected to be shortly tapped on the shoulder and asked for a white dog tag. I was surprised on every occasion to hear the searchers pass me by.

I awoke with the sun the next morning and knew from the earlier briefing that the recovery helicopters would be arriving soon. Another piece of information that had been given to us at the briefing was that best recovery signals would be the first “survivors” to be picked up by the helicopters. I guess that I have always tried to give myself an advantage. Like fighter pilots say, “If ya’ ain’t cheatin’ ya’ ain’t tryin’!” So when I had chosen to go uphill the day before I knew that I was moving towards the “military crest” of the hill. The “military crest” is considered to be a point approximately two thirds of the way up. If you are traveling in hilly country and you walk the very top of the ridgeline you are silhouetting yourself against the skyline, but if you walk approximately two thirds of the way up you avoid this and if some one above sees you then you can get to the bottom before they can and vice versa, if seen from below you can get

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over the top before they can get up to you. My “trail” was at the “military crest” of the ridgeline and with the rising sun I could see that there was a small flat cleared plateau at the top. I carefully and quietly gathered up my poncho and as stealthily as possible made my way toward that plateau. I crawled out into the center of the tall grass and laid on my back. I took my signaling mirror from my survival vest and waited for a helicopter to appear. Within 5 minutes I heard a helicopter approach. Fortunately it was approaching from the east so I had the rising sun behind him to reflect back to him as a signal. That helicopter came directly toward me and hovered overhead. He lowered a jungle penetrator device and I strapped myself in. I was shortly hoisted aboard and passed a canteen of water. We picked up 5 more “survivors” and then returned to the “base camp”. The helicopter made several more trips out into the jungle that morning and returned 5 or 6 others with each landing back at the camp. We were all asked to turn in our remaining dog tags and only Monty and I returned all three white and the one red dog tag. Most others had lost at least one of the white tags and several had lost all three. After all class members had been returned to the base camp Monty and I were asked to tell the rest of the class members how we had successfully evaded. Monty told of how he had crawled under the bamboo cane break and laid their quietly all night. He spoke of “creepy crawly critters” and other slithery things passing by him in the dark. I spoke of how I had simply hidden behind the bushes, how I had made sure that I was not visible and then how I slept and remained quiet. The instructors then told the rest of the class that this was the first time that there had been two persons from the same class successfully evade.

As a class we returned to Clark AB and to the classroom for two more days of classified instruction. We got to spend another Friday and Saturday night there at Clark AB before returning to Vietnam on Sunday.

Like I said, this all happened during my seventh month of the tour so it was a welcome break from Vietnam.



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