

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

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Phan Rang AB News No. 59

**"Stories worth telling"**

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**Christmas just another day for men in Vietnam** (*Redlands Daily Facts, Redlands, California, Friday, December 24, 1971*)

**By STEWART KELLERMAN**

**XOM ONG, Vietnam (UPI)** — Christmas, 1971, Vietnam.

It's a time for dreaming. Thoughts of home. Logs crackling in the fireplace. The big tree, the gaily wrapped gifts. The tinsel and glittering stars and colored lights.

Then, back to reality. A tank caked with mud. A can of C ration boned turkey. The sun and the jungle. The danger once in a while and the boredom the rest of the time.

“It's not Christmas at all when you're over here,” Spec. 4 Larry Morse, 19, of Salina, Okla., said. “It's just another day. Like any other. That's why it's so bad. You just sit around and do nothing, like always.”

Morse sat on top of a Sheridan tank, his boots splattered with yellow mud and his brown hair blowing in the morning wind. He and the other GI's in F troop of the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment were setting up camp in chest-high elephant grass 25 miles northeast of Saigon.

It's no fun on Christmas for the 159,000 American soldiers in Vietnam. It's especially tough for an estimated 15,000 “grunts” still out in the field in combat.

U.S. commanders arranged hot turkey dinners Saturday for GI's in Vietnam, but some troops out in the “boondocks” expected to get their Christmas meals a couple of days late.

Morse, a tank gunner, said he had only one Christmas wish and he didn't expect Santa Claus to grant it — “I'd like to get out of here, right, now, right this minute.”

“I'm sick and tired of this place,” he said, his shirt open and a copper cross dangling from a black bootlace around his neck. “What I'd like is some snow. Christmas doesn't mean anything to me without snow.”

Spec. 4 William Harper, 20, of Cookeville, Tenn., stood on top of APC and decorated a wilting Christmas tree the chaplain sent to F troop. His unbuttoned fatigue shirt flapped in the breeze outside his trousers.

“I guess we just got to be here,” he said. “But it won't be nothing like home. That's where I'd like to be now. Back home. There it is.”

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**834<sup>th</sup> Wins 2<sup>nd</sup> PUC** (*Pacific Stars & Stripes, Friday, Oct. 1, 1971*)

TAN SON NHUT AB, Vietnam

(Special)—The 834<sup>th</sup> Air Div.. responsible for all U.S. Air Force cargo and troop transport in the Republic of Vietnam, has received its second U.S. Presidential Unit Citation.

The division, headquartered at Tan Son Nhut AB, was cited for its outstanding airlift support for the Free World Forces in the Republic for the period April 1 to June 30, 1970. The earlier award covered the period Jan. 21 to May 12, 1968.

Under the division are Detachments 1 and 2 at Tan Son Nhut and (Cam Ranh Bay AB, respectively, both flying C130 Hercules aircraft; the 315<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Wing at Phan Rang AB, flying C123 Providers; the 483d Tactical Airlift Wing at Cam Ranh Bay, the only C7 Caribou wing in the U.S. Air Force; and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Aerial Port Group, headquartered at Tan Son Nhut.

In its five years in Vietnam, the 834<sup>th</sup> has been responsible for carrying out the largest sustained airlift in history, dwarfing the combined totals of the Berlin Airlift of 1949, the “Hump” airlift over the Himalayas during World War II and the tactical airlift of the Korean War.

More than two billion tons of cargo and 3.5 million passengers were carried aboard the unit’s aircraft in the last year alone.

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**‘My Life Depends on Them,’ Says Pilot of Munitions Men** (*Seventh Air Force News, Nov. 6, 1968*)

**PHAN RANG** — “Every time I step into that cockpit, my life depends on those people. Without them, our job couldn’t be done,” exclaimed Maj. Donald O. Neary, Aurora, Colo., a pilot with the 120<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron.

He is speaking of the 435<sup>th</sup> Munitions Maintenance Squadron. The men of this squadron are the vital link between the crated ordnance that arrive at Phan Rang AB and the bombs on the wings of Phan Rang’s F-100 Supersabres and B-57 Canberras.

From crate to wing, the operation has three phases, the ammunition storage operation of uncrating and handling, the transport to an isolated staging area where bombs and ammunition await the final process, and then the delivery.

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Weapons crews preping bombs  
Phan Rang 1970.  
Added by David McGaughey

In the first operation, bombs and fuses are uncrated, 20mm, 7.62mm, and .50 caliber cannon shells are “broken down” into ammo cans, and all are inspected.

In the second operation, the bombs are trucked to a staging point. At this isolated spot about two miles from the flight line, the ordnance is held awaiting use. In this reveted area, the cargo is safe from attack and far enough from vital areas to create no hazard.

When the ammo is needed for the daily missions of 35<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing aircraft, the trucks move to the flight line. There the final step of unloading takes place. The bombs, 250 to 750 pounds in weight, are picked off the truck bed by heavy cranes and placed on wooden platforms, awaiting up-loading by the fighter squadron load crews.

The 20mm, .50 caliber and 7.62mm cannon shells are taken from their crates and all cardboard required for safety in shipping is pulled out, then the huge belts or “chains” of ammo are linked and fed into magazines, waiting to be uploaded onto the F-100s and B57s of the sprawling 35<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing.

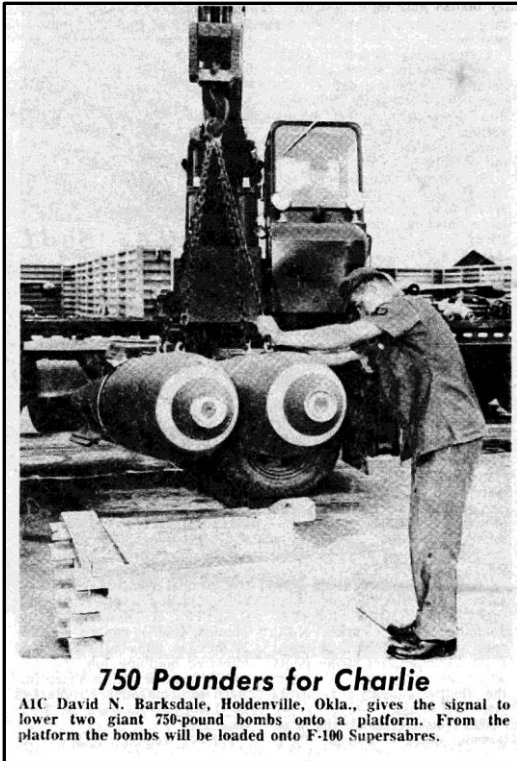


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A simple process? Hardly! It is a vital, precision job. The way in which it is performed stands as a tribute to the officers and men of the 435<sup>th</sup> Munitions Maintenance, Squadron.



**ONE HELL OF AN ALARM CLOCK**

I’m on the old linked PSP steel ramp on the East side of the runway. Revetment side not built yet. First time in Vietnam, very nervous.

It’s night. I and another guy are repairing a gun. It’s cold and a wind is blowing. Vietnam can get cold at times. I have a USAF jacket on but I’m still chilled. The B-57 we are on top of had just landed and parked. The long engine cowling sticking up out of the wing next to the gun bay door was too hot to touch when we first began working but now it’s nice and toasty warm. I’m sitting on it.

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We needed a part from the shop to complete our repair. The guy with me leaves to get it. I’m sitting there waiting for him, shivering. I decide to lay down with my back and legs pressed along the warm engine and the gun bay door blocking the wind. The feeling was heavenly. I was soon asleep.

Now for those unfamiliar with the B-57, let me explain how the engine starts up. Basically they stick a giant shotgun shell in the nose of the engine, fire it, loud boom, a huge cloud of black smoke comes out the side of the engine and the turbine blades begin spinning. Spectacular. See it yourself on You-Tube, search “B-57 Startup”.

So I’m snoozing on the nice warm engine out of sight of anyone and I hear a truck pull up. I figure it is a fuel truck. Then I hear someone in the cockpit, switches thrown and little electric motors whining. I figure it’s just the bomb loading crew checking armament circuits.

Then “BOOM” from the engine nose 5 feet from my sleepy head behind the gun bay door and the jet engine pressed against my body begins winding up. I instantly sit up to be enveloped in black smoke.

In absolute terror I sprang up and ran straight off the 9 foot high wing tip, my feet spinning mid-air as I descend to ground. I did not stop running until 200 feet away. Stood there trembling in fear. I scared the hell out of the two crew chiefs that had come to test a reported problem with the engine.

The real stupid part was that I had been in no danger where I was. I just could have just stuck my fingers in my ears and sat right there on top of the wing by the gun bay and been perfectly safe. I damn near killed myself flying off that wing tip. For months afterward my body would start shaking whenever a B-57 engine started up.

*(A2C Lawrence (Larry) Theurer was with the 8<sup>th</sup> Tactical Bomb Squadron, loading munitions aboard the B-57 Canberras. I was fortunate to have meet Larry at the B-57 Bummers reunion in Branson, Missouri and after I had seen what he had written I asked if I could share his stories with the Phan Rang community. Of course he agreed and this is just another one of the many stories to come.)*

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**Red Horsemen Build Vital War Structure** (*Seventh Air Force News, November 6, 1968*)

**SAIGON** — Project RED HORSE, Air Force's own combat engineering unit, has completed more than 11-million dollars worth of construction projects at air bases throughout the Republic of Vietnam since Jan. 1, 1968.



RED HORSE, which stands for Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operations Repair Squadrons, Engineer, is the Air Force's combat engineering unit assigned in Vietnam for construction and repair of operational requirements.

The 1st Civil Engineering Group is composed of five self-operating squadrons located at Air Force bases throughout the country.

Projects for 1968 included a 23,610 square-foot aircraft maintenance hangar at Phu Cat AB and a 33,000 square-yard aircraft parking apron built at Phan Rang AB. Other constructions were troop billets, dining halls, maintenance shops, medical facilities and storage areas.

The two most significant work programs pursued in 1968 were building aircraft revetments and hardened shelters. Since the first RED HORSE unit arrived Jan. 31, 1966, some 150,000 feet of the 12-foot high aircraft revetments were constructed.

The revetments are highly-effective in containing aircraft fires and explosions caused by impacting enemy mortar and rocket rounds. The hardened shelters consist of metal arch-type buildings over aircraft parking areas, covered by 12 inches of concrete to provide greater protection for tactical fighter-bombers.

The RED HORSE mission is to provide rapid response capability within the combat zone to augment air base civil engineer forces making major repairs as a result of enemy attack, and to build new air fields as needed.



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Since the first deployment of RED HORSE to Southeast Asia, approximately 43-million dollars worth of construction work has been done on 780 different projects.

Breaking the total down, 38 per cent of the jobs were considered direct operational support and involved building runways, taxi-ways, revetments, control towers, aircraft maintenance facilities and POL (petroleum, oil and lubricants) storage areas.

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**Bob Hope doubts he'll get to go to Hanoi** (*Redlands Daily Facts, Redlands, California, Friday, December 24, 1971*)

BANGKOK (UPI)—Comedian Bob Hope said tonight he has received support for his plan to visit Hanoi to try to negotiate the release of American prisoners of war.

But Hope told UPI he had received no indication so far that North Vietnam would be willing to give him the visa he needs to carry out his plan.

"No, I have heard nothing," Hope said his hotel room shortly after returning from South Vietnam where he staged a Christmas show for American GI's. 'I am still waiting. I am hopeful something can be worked out."

Hope said he had received indications that leaders in the American automobile industry in the United States would be willing to support his project by helping raise money for it.

He said he had received no word from President Nixon or any other U.S. government official since he disclosed his plan to try to get to Hanoi.

"No, I have not heard from any officials," Hope said. "It was a big surprise (presidential advisor Henry) Kissinger."

Asked if he thought there was a chance the North Vietnamese would agree to his proposed trip, Hope said, "I am going to church to pray. Please keep your fingers crossed."

Hope said he and his troupe are scheduled to leave Bangkok Sunday but he would alter his schedule if he receives permission to go to Hanoi."

At Camp Eagle in South Vietnam, Hope said he wanted to take his entire show to North Vietnam, but estimated the odds on getting a visa were "very long."

"I'd like to take as many people as I could," Hope told newsmen after his second Vietnam show of the current tour. "I'd like to entertain the prisoners, and meet a couple of people and negotiate a deal for their release."



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The ski-nosed entertainer requested the visa at an 85-minute meeting with a North Vietnamese diplomat in Vientiane, Laos, Thursday afternoon.

"If we get lucky enough, we'll get a visa to Hanoi," Hope said. "There was no decision made. In fact, I would say the odds are very long."

Hope said he had discussed an "exchange" to win the release of the prisoners from North Vietnam.

"We talked about an exchange, with the children of America working up a fund to give to the children of North Vietnam. We talked about a people to people fund also."

He refused to discuss many of the details of the discussion "because it might hurt the chance of getting a visa."

He said Thursday, however, that he had discussed the figure of \$10 million to win the prisoners' release in his dealings with the North Vietnamese diplomat.

Hope said jokingly that he did not think the 75 members of his Christmas show would want to go with him to Hanoi, should the North Vietnamese grant visas. They put up an immediate protest.

"No," he said, "they would love to go. It would be the greatest thing in the world if it happened."

Hope, currently on his 8th tour of Vietnam and in his 30th year of entertaining GIs for Christmas, performed for 8,500 members of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division at Camp Eagle today, and for the first time in Vietnam there were empty seats in the amphitheater.

"I was thrilled to see some empty seats," said Hope, referring to the fact it meant that American withdrawals from the war zone had cut down his audience.

"It would be nice to come back here to play to an empty house some time."

At today's performance, second of three shows in Vietnam, a GI held up a sign that read, "Bob Hope for Vice President." Hope cracked that he could never be vice president. "I've never hit anyone with a golf ball in my life."

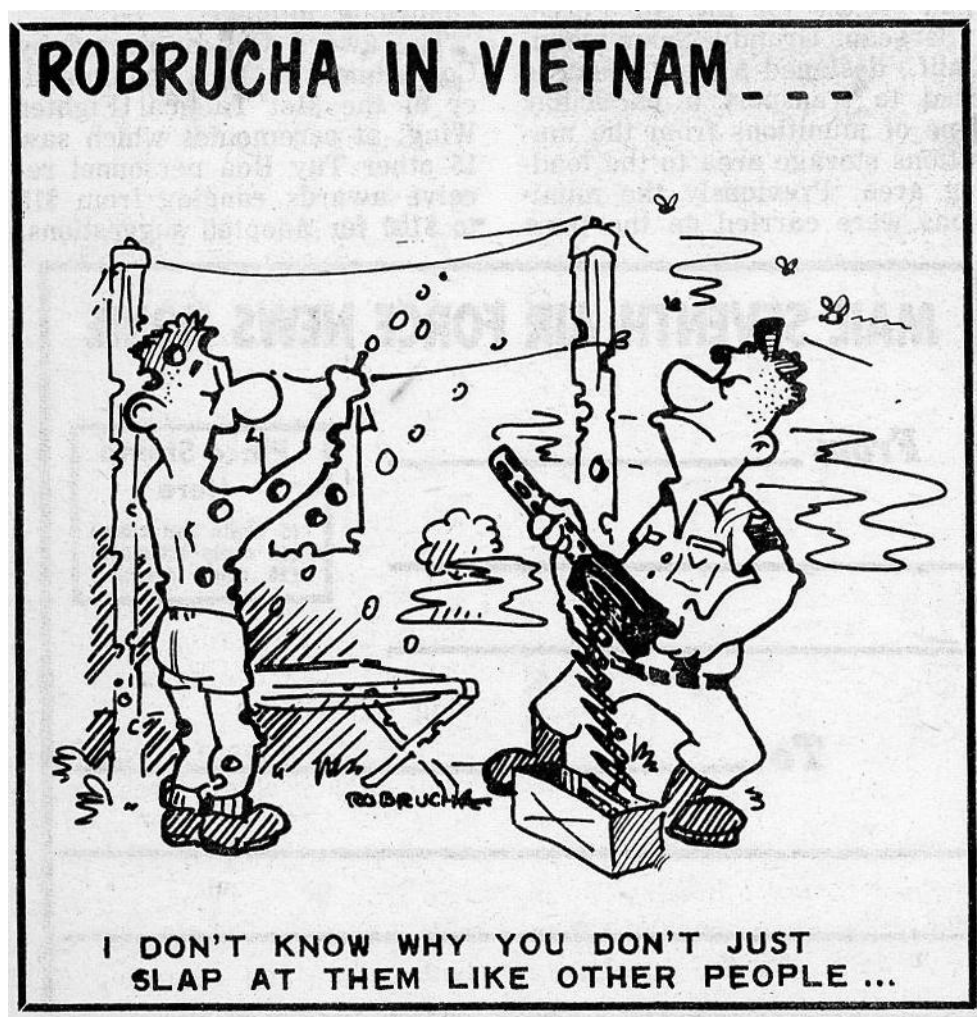
For the first time in weeks, Camp Eagle was bathed by brilliant sunshine for the Hope show. "Cardinal Terence Cooke must have been here ahead of me," he told the GIs.

The show was attended by U.S. Pacific commander Adm. John S. McCain, whose son is among the 343 prisoners the Communists admit to holding in North Vietnam, and other generals.

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Source: Seventh Air Force News, November 6, 1968

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**"Yellow Jackets" Retention Rate High**

**Press Release**

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
HEADQUARTERS SEVENTH AIR FORCE (PACAF)  
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96307

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 2721



**PHAN RANG AB,**

Republic of Vietnam  
(7AF)

Major Donald E. Grostic (left), 37, Howell, Mich., an F-100 Super sabre pilot in the 352<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron here, administers the oath of reenlistment to Staff Sergeant Jerry C. McDaniel, 25, Fort Worth Texas. The 352<sup>nd</sup> TFS boasts the highest first term reenlistment rate on the base. Since January 1, the "Yellow Jacket" squadron has reenlisted 8 of its 15 eligible first-term airmen. The unit's 55 per cent first-term reenlistment rate is one of the highest in Pacific Air Forces. (U.S. Air Force Photo by A1C Christopher P. Boles)

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**Doug’s Note:** Next week I’ll make the Phan Rang Newsletter a reunion special. Telling you all about the amenities of the hotel and what the cost will be. My hat is off to Lou Ruggiero for his negotiating skills. I don’t know if it’s really a skill or it’s his Italian/Brooklyn/New Jersey accent that they think they might be dealing with the mafia so they do whatever he wants. No matter what it is, he has done a fantastic job for us and I certainly appreciate it as I know you all do as well.

Anyone willing to help highlight your organization? I thought it would be nice to do a special in the Phan Rang News highlighting a specific organization with a write-up of the organizational mission and with pictures and maybe even the names of those individuals that we know were assigned. If you would be willing to do that, please contact [me](#). The main thing you would have to do is the write up and work with me to pick out appropriate pictures from the archives.

Once again I’m including links to all the previous newsletters and other Phan Rang documents and I just called it the *Phan Rang AB Library*. I’m constantly getting request for previous issues and I thought this would be helpful for those that have difficulty navigating the web. The links all take you to the documents that are posted to Facebook, however that isn’t the only place they are located. As you’ve probably noticed if you Google ‘Phan Rang’ you will probably see multiple links to those very same documents, but they are located on my Phan Rang web page. By having them up there in searchable documents by Google I hope to use that as a magnet to attract other Phan Rangers to our group. The only problem is I have to FTP the documents and I haven’t been very consistent lately about doing so. I’ll have to take some time to get that updated.

**Who’s Who at Phan Rang**

**PHAN RANG STAFF MEMBERS**

**Joseph Burkhardt:** Master of Ceremonies

**Robert Kellington:** Tour Coordinator

**Jack Anderson:** Treasure

**Lou Ruggiero:** Site coordinator/Contract negotiator

**Douglas Severt:** Reunion Coordinator

**Ed Downey/Barbara Brandt:** Ceremonies

**Mike Maleski:** Chaplain

**FACEBOOK GROUP ADMINISTRATORS**

**Douglas Severt, Kenneth Rowsey, David McGaughey, Vincent Joseph Miller (Susan Anderson-Miller) and Kirk Minert**

**...and the 756 members (and counting) of the “Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB Facebook group.**

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**PHAN RANG AB LIBRARY**

**PREVIOUS ISSUES OF THE PHAN RANG AB NEWS**

*(The Phan Rang AB News is a newsletter compiled from various sources by Douglas Severt to heighten the awareness of Phan Rang AB and to keep interested personnel informed about the annual Happy Valley, Phan Rang AB reunion.)*

To download any of the previous issues of the Phan Rang AB News, just click the hyperlink of the desired issue.

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