

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 74

"Stories worth telling"

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'8' Things Vietnam War Movies Leave Out

By Evan V. Symon and Nguyen Hoa Giai, March 27, 2015

Even if your knowledge of the Vietnam War comes exclusively from Hollywood films and Texan textbooks that only refer to it as "that one the good guys lost," you've probably heard about the Viet Cong. They were a bunch of jungle-fighting guerrilla warriors who killed American boys via night-time ambushes and terrifying traps. Well, that's one side of the story. Here's another: They were a bunch of scared (mostly) young kids fighting in a massive conflict for very personal

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reasons. We sent a writer out to Vietnam to speak with Nguyen Hoa Giai. He fought as a Viet Cong from the late 1950s to the end of the war in the mid-'70s. Here's what he told us.

#8. We Weren't All Communists; We Just Wanted Independence, or Revenge

I became a Viet Cong guerrilla in the late 1950s, when I was 15. It wasn't because I was a Communist, or because I ran away to join the circus and just got wildly sidetracked. My uncle actually fought on Ho Chi Minh's side of things during WWII when the resistance against Japanese occupation was actually funded by the Americans and Brits.

I was just mad at how the South was pushing all of its excess money into the major cities like Saigon. The South Vietnamese government seemed to ignore small towns and villages, like mine. Ngo Dinh Diem (the leader of South Vietnam at the time) even took away our farms and put them under the control of a single rich guy who'd supported the French in World War II. This happened all over South Vietnam and was called "land reform," rather than the far more accurate "serious, deep, and exploratory boning."

The French, who had controlled Vietnam since the 1800s, always saw the locals as "lower," and we never forgave them for refusing to give us independence. Ho Chi Minh was snubbed twice, and after the second time he reacted. My uncle also wanted independence and would do anything, including support Communism, to get it.

Once the fighting started, a lot of people died, well over a million on our side alone. For the war to continue, a constant stream of new fighters had to join up, and they didn't have the benefit of such luxuries as "functional equipment" or "the slightest idea what to do." Over 90 percent of these new recruits were teenagers or younger. Many of them weren't even particularly invested in the "cause" itself. Supporting Communism or the dream of a united Vietnam was less a motivator than wanting revenge for the death of a parent, loved one, or child. The Viet Cong (literally: the National Liberation Front or just "the front") were just a means for securing that revenge.

Most of them were aware that Stalin and Mao each had movements named after them (Stalinism and Maoism), so they just assumed Socialism was named after a guy named Social and Communism was named after a guy named Commun. A distressing number of my co-soldiers still thought we were fighting France. They knew of Ho Chi Minh, but only in vague propagandistic terms, not the man's actual history. When we told them we wanted a Socialist society, they just said yes because they were mostly poor, grieving peasants living through a shortage of dams, and thus had none to spare for politics.

#7. We Were Just as Scared of the Jungle as the Americans Were

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Your movies tend to portray the Viet Cong as deadly jungle warriors, blending into the foliage and melting out of the wild to launch continuous surprise assaults on various Rambos. That's all a big load of crap: Many of us (including me) came from border towns and grew up in the hills or the mountains. We had no more mastery over the jungle than a kid from Oregon has over Death Valley.

So the jungle was alien to many of us, and unlike most of the American soldiers, we were stuck spending our entire war there. My uncle and I didn't trust the tunnel systems many of the other VC used. They were prone to collapse, and if that happened over a barracks or a mess hall it was likely to kill more people than an air raid. So we did most of our moving around outside, under the questionable cover of grass mats. This meant we were not only completely open to rain storms ... but also to murderous animals. It's easy to forget, amid all the drama of war, that there were tigers in that jungle. Easy to forget until you met a goddamn tiger, that is.

Despite what The Jungle Book may lead you to believe, alpha predators are very rarely interested in singalongs.

Tigers may be shy, but every once in a while one of us would disappear in the middle of the night, and we'd all just sort of understand why. Tigers don't exactly do end-zone dances after every kill, after all.

And so many people were killed by snakes. There were also rats as large as cats, mosquitoes, spiders, and centipedes to contend with. While you won't usually die from a centipede bite, one of my co-guerrillas committed suicide after being bitten because the pain was so intense.

Armed adversaries give you comparatively good odds of survival. Mother Nature has things uglier than bullets in her arsenal.

#6. The Fighting Looked Nothing Like the Movies

They always make the fighting between Viet Cong and American soldiers look like gruesome, close-up gunfighting. That kind of stuff happened, sure, but only when absolutely everyone fucked up. In reality, even when we were shooting at the enemy, we usually couldn't see them. There'd be muzzle flashes or tracers in the distance, and we'd just fire at those. During more than a decade of fighting, I saw living enemy soldiers up close only three times.

The first time was right after a firefight, and we were shocked to see how blackened the bodies were. We thought they must have been charred by an explosion until we realized their skin was naturally black. None of us had seen a black person before. Some people thought they were myths. All of them were either dead or near-death. We shot the wounded survivors with a pistol. We were in no condition to provide them with medical care. It seemed kinder than

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letting them bleed out. We didn't torture them or take any pleasure in the deaths. The younger guerrillas, who were less attuned to death, even cried.

Thanks to Hollywood, you probably picture the VC as constantly popping out of holes in the ground like deadly gophers. But like I said before, my group avoided those cramped, rickety tunnels full of death traps like, well ... like cramped, rickety tunnels full of death traps. You don't need an analogy to understand why that sounds like a bad idea. But sometimes we'd have to go really far south, or there'd be exceptionally clear skies and we'd decide that the tunnel sounded like marginally more fun than a bomb. The tunnels were essential for a lot of the VC, though, especially around Saigon.

Unlike living under the mats, tunnel living was a whole different world. The big ones had a kitchen area, with a smokestack jutting out sideways so the smoke would billow out far away. There was always rice, usually along with a vegetable or meat (rat or monkey).

But, as always, the great outdoors was the best bathroom. We generally had to wait for nightfall to relieve ourselves, but if it was an emergency, well ... you just kind of hope the bomb hits you direct, so nobody sees that you died squatting with your pants around your ankles. Once, in a tunnel near the Laotian border, we even made a fun game: The goal was to be the person who could finish their business outside first. We all got pretty good at this, but once a guy panicked when he heard the distant drone of a plane's engine. He leapt back in, spraying piss everywhere.

It turned out the plane was North Vietnamese. Everyone laughed, except the guy who'd sprayed us with his pee: He'd been the record-holder prior to that point, and now his record was irrevocably tarnished. With pee.

#5. We Were the Biggest Threat to Our Own Safety

On a day-to-day basis, enemy soldiers weren't our biggest threat. We saw more American leaflets and trash piles than actual combatants.

My group's job was mainly to observe troops near the Ho Chi Minh trail. Again, we only got into fights when someone screwed up. But we didn't need any help, American or otherwise, to get ourselves killed and mangled: Recruiting undisciplined kids and giving them more responsibility than a Tamagotchi will see to that.

Sure, there were VC training centers, but local recruits rarely attended. For every trained person we got through a camp, three more came from the surrounding area with only the vaguest idea of what a gun was. We provided on-the-job training to our guerrillas, and that led to disaster. I remember teaching one recruit, about 17 years old, how to throw a grenade. He

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pulled the pin then asked us what to do next. We were shouting at him to toss it, but he just waved at us, and watched the fuse burn up to the shell. It exploded. So did he.

Another recruit was given a Chinese AK to stand guard with, and then later that day he was asked to cut down a tree branch to give us better visibility for the night. Instead of asking for a saw, he flipped the AK on automatic and proceeded to shoot the branch down. The branch came down, but a bullet ricocheted off and killed him. So we had to bury him, as well as find a new position. His shooting had given us away.

#4. Our Best Gear Was Old Junk, and It Usually Came From America

Because we were on the front lines of South Vietnam, we were pretty far down the food chain when it came to getting weapons. Some came in through the Ho Chi Minh trail, but most of those went to the VC outside of Saigon. With the NVA above us and more critical Viet Cong below us, the guerrillas in the middle got the "short bus" weapons.

It worked like this: The Soviets would make a bunch of AK-47s and send them to China. The Chinese would keep the Russian AKs and replace them with inferior knockoffs that they'd produced. The North Vietnamese Army got the Chinese weapons, along with whatever WWII-era crap they had left over. Since all of the "good" weapons from this already-bad lot went to the NVA and VC near major cities, we mostly wound up with antiques -- and not even the nice, collectible antiques that old ladies build nests out of. Just old junk.

Which may explain why some of the most feared weapons of the war look like they came from a scrapyard.

Ironically enough, most of them were originally American made. M1s (I remember the iconic "ping" sound) and Thompsons were the norm in the early years. After fights, there were always enemy M16s scattered about, but we didn't touch those -- they never worked right. In one of the few true close-in fights we had with the Americans, they were actually using AK-47s against us. The American rifles were that bad.

Your tax dollars at work.

Toward the end of American involvement, we were just getting mortars and mortar shells. The North Vietnamese army was stockpiling everything else for an invasion of the South. In the jungle where we were, fired mortar shells could hit a tree branch and go off prematurely, killing us. So we had to find a way to use them, which required a lot of trial and error. I was in my late 20s by this time and by far the oldest living guy in my squad, so everyone else (all but one a teenager or younger) asked me to figure out something that worked.

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What followed was a disastrous slapstick montage -- people were physically holding the mortar at chest level and firing horizontally (and then flying backwards from the force of the weapon). We eventually got the idea to tie them onto trees, with the backs of the mortars against the trunk. It made one giant 360-degree cannon. As long as it wasn't fired with another tree right in front of it, it seemed to work pretty well.

"Could we just eliminate the tube altogether and launch the shells out of a big slingshot?"

And yes, we made traps, including those iconic tiger traps with spikes on the bottom. Those actually were made more with tigers in mind than any hope of spearing American GIs. It's, uh ... it's right there in the name, really. Seriously, tigers are fucking terrifying.

#3. Our Side's War Crimes Were Often Glossed Over

Whenever "Vietnam War crimes" are mentioned in the West, people think of My Lai or Agent Orange being dumped over large swaths of forests. Those are both awful things. But, for whatever reason, my own side gets to walk away whistling suspiciously.

"Hue? Hue who?"

That shouldn't be the case: We committed war crimes on a regular basis. How do I know? I saw them. The North Vietnamese Army would purposely target hospitals and medical areas, because that was where they could do the most damage. I wouldn't have believed it if somebody had just told me back during the war -- but I saw it happen at a base in the Quang Tri area and heard the order given when we briefly came to an NVA area to get new orders. We were also occasionally called away from the trail to watch over a VC or NVA firefight -- having long-range rifles as support was effective. But many of us would stop firing when we saw villages going up in smoke or villagers being shot. The VC and NVA weren't always sure if people near the border were pro- or anti-American, so rather than take chances, they went by the "atrocities to them all and let God cry it out" philosophy.

#2. No One Really "Survives" a War Intact

In 1974, with the U.S. out and South Vietnam operations winding down, my VC group was allowed to go home. I took the trails up to my village. As I approached, I started noticing odd things. Signs were gone, no kids came begging, no travelers walked the paths to and from the town. It all seemed too quiet. I remember running up to my village to find nothing. It was literally all gone.

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I found only traces of burned buildings under the dirt. When I went to the hill outside my village I saw a new indentation in the land. It wasn't a crater from a bomb; it was a mass grave. And despite knowing what I was going to find, I dug it up.

To this day I have no idea if the North Vietnamese, the Americans, or someone else was responsible. But the way everything was just covered by a bulldozer indicated the North Vietnamese. Everyone but my youngest brother was gone (and he would die during the Chinese War five years later). I'm not special. Ask any older Vietnamese person: They've all lost many, many loved ones. And not always due to America or its allies. I never expected to survive 10 years at the front. And, to be honest, I still don't really feel like I survived.

#1. Only Time and Support Can Heal Wounds

After the war, I moved to Saigon. At that point I'd never lived in a city and had spent half my life utterly detached from society. All I knew was how to hide, kill, and drill. It came out everywhere I went. I fought people because of the way they were carrying a loaf of bread, because it looked like they were smuggling a radio. I had the bathtub taken out of my apartment and built a custom one out of metal, tarps, and dirt -- to simulate bathing in a river. In hip U.S. neighborhoods, they'd call that something like "paleo bathing" and charge you a fortune for it, but I just knew no other way to be. I had to be reminded constantly to pay for things, because I was just so used to taking them. I struggled with PTSD and depression. I thought a lot about suicide.

In a weird way, Communism actually helped keep me alive. Workers in unified Vietnam were forced to socialize with each other during breaks and lunch. That's down to the whole "commune" part of "Communism." Lone wolves might have strange ideas; they might not be committed to the party. I started talking with others around me to avoid suspicion and found that, to my surprise, human interaction has some kind of value.

Go figure.

Many of them had similar experiences: They'd lived, but they had lost their family and friends in horrific ways. Over months and years of breaks, lunches, and trade meetings, my group of co-workers turned into a "Depression Anonymous" support group.

Life is much better now. By the 1990s, the U.S., Australia, and South Korea all more or less apologized for their role in the war. Today, the U.S. is actually viewed favorably by over three-quarters of the population. The general negative feelings are actually aimed more at France and China than the U.S., since you guys at least apologized. I've personally forgiven the U.S. and everyone else for their involvement in the war. I lost my entire family, but I managed to start a new one with a wife who also lost nearly everyone, including her husband, in the war.

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I went back to the site of my village a few years ago and found it to be a forest. The sunken area with the grave is still there, but there is a small memorial with trees growing over it. It made me feel oddly at peace: Death had been covered by new life.

35th FMS Wing Wins Softball Championship (Phan Rang AB Press Release 8-6Y-31 TSgt John B. Mahony)



PHAN RANG AB, Republic of Vietnam, (7AF)

WINNING PITCHER

Duane Bell, 24, Rigs, Mich., is carried off the softball field by teammates and fans after he pitched his second straight victory over the 315th Special Operations Wing at Phan Rang AB, RVN. His 10-0 shutout brought the Field Maintenance Squadron of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing the 1969 Softball Championship.

(Photo by A1C Christopher P Boles, Det. 5, 600th Photo Squadron)

Self-Help Construction Provides ‘Hurley’s Kitchen’ at Phan Rang (*Seventh Air Force News*, June 11, 1969) Story By Sgt. Douglas L. Christy

PHAN RANG-A new in-flight kitchen here, constructed through a self-help project, now prepares more than 80 boxed lunches each day.

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"Hurley's Kitchen," named for TSgt. Thomas P. Hurley, Cleveland, noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the facility, is located in the 315th Special Operations Wing area.

"Appliances were supplied by 35th Services Squadron," said Sergeant Hurley. "We salvaged everything else and did the carpentry, plumbing, painting and flooring.

The kitchen provides cold meals for aircrew members and ground personnel who cannot leave their duty stations at normal meal hours.

"C-123 crew members on long flights buy most of our prepared meals," Sergeant Hurley explained. "For ground feeding, probably the fire department and communications personnel are our best customers."

"Hurley's Kitchen" provides six menus for In-flight meals and two menus for ground personnel. Cost of the lunches is the same as meals in the dining halls for enlisted men and rated according to per diem for officers.

Two airmen assist Sergeant Hurley in preparing the chicken, a variety of sandwiches and accessories for the meals. Since box lunches must be consumed within five hours of purchase, second meals of canned or nonperishable food are sold to crew members on extended missions.

Spooky Switch a Mortar-Thumping Affair *(Seventh Air Force News, January 1, 1969)*

NHA TRANG — At a remote clearing 12 miles west of Phan Thiet, an Army "slick" transport helicopter planted two men for an all-night lesson in ground warfare.

With the smell of burning brush still heavy in the air, 32 men of the 101st Airborne Division welcomed a pair of Air Force officers into what would be their mortar-thumping, Spooky-growling classroom.

Lt. Col. Edwin A. Nelson, a West Point graduate from Farmington, Conn., and Capt. Ernest L. Moore, from Cisco, Tex., himself a former Army Airborne team member, were half of an inter-service exchange.

* * *

BOTH AIRMAN fly the AC-47 "Spooky" for "B" Flight, 3rd Special Operations Squadron, Phan Rang AB. It was their task to take over the hard ground left by two 101st officers who were flying the Dragonship that same night, providing a new perspective for each unit.

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The exchange of personnel by Army and Air Force was designed for a mutual understanding of problems the other faces when using the Dragonship. Since Spooky has direct contact with the units it supports, there are normally no full-time liaison representatives.

The company of men, under the direction of Army Capt. Gerald Wrazen, Buffalo, N.Y., had moved into the clearing only three hours before Colonel Nelson and Captain Moore arrived. They burned off enough brush to provide a base for their two 81mm mortars and a clear line of fire.

* * *

ALTHOUGH BOTH airmen had once been in ground forces, they admitted that many things had changed. As a matter of fact — everything — except the basic need for hard work and steel nerves.

One of the major changes, however, was the very reason the Air Force pair was welcomed so heartily — Spooky.

The visit not only showed them how Spook looked from the ground, but how the weapon was received by those who use it.

* * *

IN THIS tiny open space, a night means a complete change of action. There are no lights and no barbed wire perimeters. In order to have that relaxing cigarette, you must either cup it in your hands or smoke it under a blanket to hide the light. With this background, this is how one trooper whispered his description of the Dragonship:

"No matter how thick the lead may be around us, we always take time to give Spooky a cheer when he comes on station. As soon as we hear him up there we settle back and get our smokes out. In a couple of minutes, he'll pop a flare and we light up."

In a fire support base where the enemy is respectfully called "Mr. Charles" and a man needs to clear rocks and twigs from his plot of ground to sleep, the Air Force was treated to a show by the 101st mortarmen. They loosed a massive interdiction barrage into the same area Spooky had just saturated. The airmen also had a chance to wield the Army's M-79 grenade launcher.

Colonel Nelson and Captain Moore alike agreed that their appreciation of "how the other half lives" was heightened by the night.

According to Colonel Nelson. "I know now that when I'm placing my fire, the people directing us from the ground don't necessarily have the same vantage point that we do. A lot has been resolved by our discussions, but I naturally, still prefer my own position."

"These chaps really have it rough down there. I have the greatest respect for them, but I'll still take my position up there in that airplane as long as we get the job done," added Captain Moore.

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35th TFW Change of Command (Press Release 2658B)

PHAN RANG AB,

Republic of
Vietnam (7AF)
CHANGE OF
COMMAND
In front of the 35th
Tactical Fighter
Wings
headquarters
building, Colonel
Frank L. Gailer Jr.
(left), 45, Great
Neck, NY, and
Colonel Walter T.
Galligan, 44 Bronx,
NY, stand at
attention
moments before
Colonel Gailer
turned the
command of the
35th TFW to
Colonel Galligan.
Colonel Gailer,
who commanded
the 35th TFW for
the past year, has
been reassigned to
the 48th TFW in
England. (U.S. Air
Force Photo)



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A-37s Surprise Enemy at Meal Time...Guests Drop in for Dinner (*Seventh Air Force News, January 1, 1969*)

BIEN HOA—Five enemy soldiers preparing food 90 miles southwest of Can Tho recently had some unexpected, and unwelcome, guests drop in on them.

"The enemy wasn't expecting us," said Capt. John P. Sanchez, Merced, Calif., one of the A-37 pilots, "because it was really raining when we struck. The FAC had to guide us all the way as we couldn't see the strike zone."

* * *

Captain Sanchez and the other pilots, Lt. Col. David H. Auld, Webb City, Mo., and Maj. John C. Whistler, Raton, N.M., related that as they descended to lower altitude the rain became worse.

Describing the target, Major Whistler said it was an enemy food processing center at the junction of two canals. "They had a large rice mill in addition to numerous fortifications and bunkers in the strike zone," he added. "A dam backed up one of the canals."

Relying on the FAC for directions, the pilots hammered away at the fortifications.

* * *

"**THE RAIN** really made our deliveries difficult," recalled the captain, that is until one of the major's bombs started the fortifications burning. The fiery structures made a real good marker."

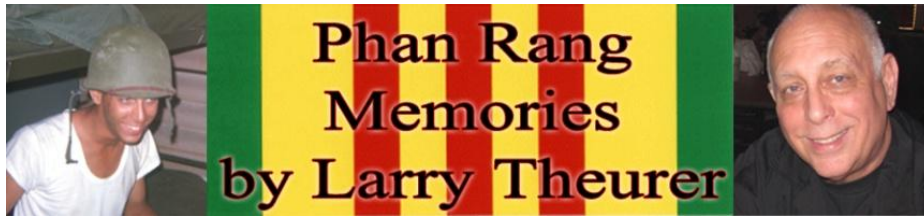
Pressing their attack, the pilots demolished the rice mill and then moved up and down the canal bombing various targets selected by the FAC.

"Then we made two strafe passes apiece for suppression purposes while he descended to give us the damage assessment," Captain Sanchez remarked. "In addition to the 5 enemy soldiers we killed and the rice mill we destroyed, the FAC reported we wiped out three fortifications, four bunkers and four sampans that were tied up to the canal bank. We also damaged seven of the fortifications, two bunkers and one sampan and started a fire in the rice storage area which sent white smoke rising to 350 feet."

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THE VIEW FROM (ALMOST) THE TOP OF THE HILL

One day I decided I wanted to explore that big hill that was behind the barracks and take pictures. I took my little Kodak instamatic camera and began hiking up the road that went crossways up the front of the hill.

As I reached the top my eyes cleared the bank and I see a big German shepherd guard dog standing there. Fortunately he did not see me.

I quickly ducked after almost craping my pants and silently slid back down the road a bit. The view was spectacular, a beautiful day and clear blue sky. I was enjoying watching the planes taking off from the runway.

*“Suddenly out of the trees down below over in the 101st Airborne area,
four helicopters rose up.”*

I still wanted to take pictures so I sat there for a while. Suddenly out of the trees down below over in the 101st Airborne area, four helicopters rose up. I could not hear them from that distance. They climbed and took off heading to the South away from me.

Then about two minutes later, out of the trees in a different location I would see a puff of dust and four more would appear and do the same thing. Again and again this went on until a long line of them were strung across the sky heading away somewhere. It was beautiful.

I was surprised how many helicopters there were. I thought I counted ten groups of four when I looked at my watch and saw it was time for me to go. There were still more rising up as I walked back down the hill.

Unfortunately the photos I took of everything with my little camera at that range were useless. The helicopters just looked like fly specs off in the distance.

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Sprucing up 'Spooky Claus' (*Seventh Air Force News, January 1, 1969*)



Sprucing up 'Spooky Claus'

AC-47 Dragonship mechanics of the 4th Special Operations Squadron, Nha Trang AB, had a full time job keeping this "Spooky Santa Claus" flying throughout his Christmas mission. Sprucing up this "Spooky Claus" is, from left, Sgt. Dale R. Christensen, Pekin, Ill.; A1C Joseph B. Bardelon, Baton Rouge, La.; and Sgt. Gary V. Kale, Charleston Heights, S.C. (Photo by Sgt. H. P. Mall)

Spookies Fly 12 Times in One Night (*Seventh Air Force News, January 1, 1969*)

By MSgt. Roy E. Dodson

DA NANG — The "Spooky" crews of "A" Flight, 4th Special Operations Squadron here recently set what must stand as Da Nang record for one night AC-47 gunship assaults against the enemy.

From the time the first scramble was sounded, and the first Spooky was launched at dusk, until the last aircraft returned base well after dawn, the tiny unit sent 12 sorties against enemy troops in contact with friendly forces, three of them against one large enemy element.

*

"IT SOUNDS fantastic," began Lt. Col. Wallace J. McKenzie, commander of "A" Flight, "but we were launching like mad all night long."

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One crew, lead by Maj. James G. Harrod, Highland Home, Ala., was launched four times during the night, the first time in support of Marine forces pinned down by an unknown size enemy force. "The Marines asked us to put suppressing fire on the 'bad guys' while they evacuated some wounded. After we made our passes, the ground controller told us we were right on target each time."

Another Spooky gunship, commanded by Capt. Merle F. Andrews, 29 Muscle Shoals, Ala., launched three times, twice in support of friendly forces in contact with the enemy just east of the Thuong Due Civilian Irregular Defense Group Camp, scene of recent heavy fighting.

"THE MARINES had reported 800 enemy troops in the open," Captain Andrews related. "They had already called in air strikes but night had fallen when we arrived, and the Marines told us to hit a sand bar by a river, where the enemy was trying to cross. We made several passes at the sand bar. We saw muzzle flashes from the ground, but no heavy stuff."

The Spooky crew returned to the sand bar on their next launch, "sanitizing" the area for three hours to prevent the enemy from crossing or retrieving their dead.

Both Major Harrod and Captain Andrews had high praise for their flight engineers, loadmasters and gunners. "We always had a gun ready to fire when the time came," said the Captain, "and during the entire night, I never had a target go dark for lack of flares at the right time."

"The crew was simply great," added the major. "From their standpoint, we had four perfect missions . . . and four Spooky missions in one night is a lot of work!"

During the course of the night, the Spooky crews raked nine enemy positions, ranging from Dong Ha south to the Thuong Due area, and as each aircraft returned to base, a busy ground crew, led by SSgt. Riley A. Besaw, Pocasset, Mass., worked constantly to reload and refuel the aircraft for more launches.

"This was the busiest night I've had in my 11 months in Vietnam," said Sergeant Besaw. "Two of our five-men crew are new, and had never seen anything like this, but they fell right into the pattern and we worked from dusk until after daylight.

WE HAD two men here on TDY but they joined in with the turn-arounds, and worked like Trojans."

Colonel McKenzie was tremendously pleased with the job turned in by his small ground unit, as well as his air crews. "Our maintenance people worked like demons to load and turn our aircraft around," he concluded. "Sergeant Besaw and his crew rate an A-plus for one of the most amazing jobs I've ever seen."

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Going to Meet Charlie (*Seventh Air Force News, January 1, 1969*)

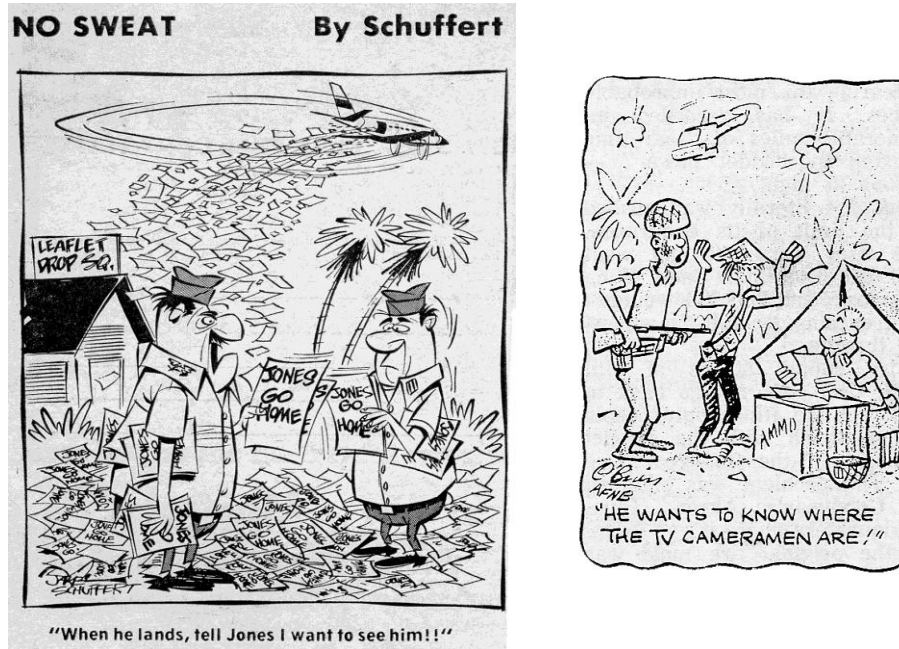


First Lt. Roger L. Riot , El Cajon; Calif., checks to see that everything is in order before his first combat mission over South Vietnam. He was recently assigned to Phu Cat AB with C-Flight; 4thSpecial Operations Squadron. He will be flying combat missions in an AC-47 Dragonship supporting free world forces. (Photo by Sgt. Walter C. Osten)

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Viet Boy’s TB Cured in Florida (*Pacific Stars & Stripes*, Monday, May 29, 1967)

PHAN RANG, Vietnam (OI)-Little Huynh Tai was a pitiful sight, that day more than a year ago when his father, Huynh Tho, carried him into the Phan Rang province hospital after walking more than three days to make the 50-mile journey through Viet Cong-controlled territory.

Barely 8 years old, tiny Huynh was ravaged by a silent killer — tuberculosis. Already paralyzed, his life expectancy could be counted in days. This hospital in Phan Rang city was his last hope.

While donating his spare time and medical knowledge to help the understaffed Vietnamese doctors at the hospital, Air Force Capt. (Dr.) Harry Tucker of Winter Park, Fla., a physician at the Phan Rang air hospital, examined the new patient.

He found pulmonary and probable abdominal tuberculosis. The disease had attacked the spinal column, destroying several vertebrae which collapsed the spine into a bent-over position.

Too weak to survive a necessary operation to relieve the paralyzing pressure, Huynh was given anti-tuberculosis treatment. Strength gradually returned to his disease wracked body.

Within two weeks Huynh was airlifted to the modern medical facilities at Cam Ranh Bay. A three-man team, including Tucker, performed an operation to drain an abcess and relieve the paralyzing pressure. Encased in a cast from hips to chin, Huynh was returned to the province hospital in Phan Rang.

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Two months later and continuing to gain strength, Huynh hesitantly placed one foot in front of the other to take his first trembling step since the disease began its attack.

Vietnamese doctors, nurses, ward attendants and other patients watched those first steps.

It seemed the Air Force doctor had done enough. But Tucker turned his efforts to a permanent cure for Huynh — an operation to fuse his spinal column.

The complex operation demanded a modern, well-equipped hospital and a specialist in this field. Tucker contacted Dr. Royston Miller, chief of orthopedics at Orange County Memorial hospital in Florida.

Miller volunteered to operate.

Nearly everyone in the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing — pilots, aircraft mechanics and support personnel — donated more than \$1,900 to allow the son and his father to be together in the U.S.

Nearly seven months after Huynh's condition became known to Tucker, the Vietnamese boy and his father boarded a jet-transport aircraft that took them to the United States.

After the operation to fuse his spine, the heavy body cast was replaced with a lighter and more comfortable brace. Months of recuperative care and additional medical treatment brought a stocky Huynh back to Vietnam recently.

Crash Victims Paid Homage (*Air Force Times, January 27, 1971*)

PHAN RANG AB, Vietnam — This base paid a final tribute to 30 fallen comrades here recently when it held memorial services for the Air Force and Army personnel killed in the November 29 crash of a C-123 near here.

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Clinton E. Wendland officiated at the memorial services at the base chapel. - The service included an organ prelude by A1C Eugene Ernst, 35th Security Police Sq.; a vocal solo by Army Sp5 Roy Cram; and a memorial flyover by aircraft of the 315th Tactical Airlift Wg. and the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing.

Aircrews of "A" Flight, 310th Tactical Airlift Sq. flew a three plane tribute with C-123s and the 352d and 615th Tactical Fighter Sqs. paid their final respect in a "missing man" formation of four F-100s.

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Joe Schwarzer getting a hug from his mother at the airport after returning from Phan Rang in 1968.

Skymaster, Bird Dog and Bronco Line Up for the Photographer

0-2A Skymaster, OV-10 Bronco and the O-1A Bird Dog photographed by Christopher Boles.



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Tales of Phan Rang

Series: Tales of Viet Nam, Book 1

By Robert Chappelle

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. Presented not as a political view but rather simply as an account of that year and what it was like to be there. The author was assigned to Viet Nam on 4 October 1968 as a C-123 co-pilot. He was a 24 year old 2nd Lieutenant recent graduate of USAF pilot training and on his first duty assignment. While there he participated in passenger flights, cargo delivery missions, air drops, and emergency resupply missions. He upgraded to aircraft commander and experienced many unique adventures in special forces camps, Philippine Islands, and Australia.

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.

Tales of Bien Hoa

Series: Tales of Viet Nam, Book 2

By Robert Chappelle

Always wanting to be a fighter pilot, Bob Chappelle volunteered for a second tour of duty in Viet Nam. This is the story of that second tour. It is a telling of what it was like to fly the A-37 Close Air Support Fighter. This airplane was "the worlds smallest fighter, the fastest gun!" The airplane only weighted roughly 6000 pounds but the gun shot 6000 rounds a minute. Always wanting to be a fighter pilot, Bob Chappelle volunteered for a second tour of duty in Viet Nam. This is the story of that second tour. It is a telling of what it was like to fly the A-37 Close Air Support Fighter. This airplane was "the worlds smallest fighter, the fastest gun!" The airplane only weighted roughly 6000 pounds but the gun shot 6000 rounds a minute. The airplane quickly gained a reputation for superior accuracy and so it quickly became a favorite of both the Forward Air Controllers and the ground troops that it supported. This story of that year flying the airplane out of Bien Hoa Air Base Republic of Viet Nam relates what it was like to fly these missions. It describes in detail, daytime/night "fragged" missions, "Sky Spots", daytime/night time "scrambles". The book includes descriptions of transitioning from flying cargo airplanes to flying this air to ground fighter. There are mission descriptions of missions flown in close support of friendly troops, missions flown in mountains, and exciting missions like what it is like to hit a tree with the airplane going about 300 MPH.

These books can be downloaded for reading on your Kindle, Ipad, tablet or computer. I previously just downloaded and read Tales of Phan Rang but then when I was talking to a friend the other day he told me that he was reading Tales of Bien Hoa and it is just as exciting and written with as much detail to make you think you are there as Tales of Phan Rang. I've downloaded it for my Ipad and will be reading it during my upcoming vacation. To buy either [Tales of Phan Rang](#) or [Tales of Bien Hoa](#), just click on the link and it will take you directly to the Smashwords site.

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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...‘keeping the memories alive’)

To download any of the previous issues of the Phan Rang AB News, just click the hyperlink of the desired issue. I’ve redone all the links and now anyone can access them. These documents are viewable on your Kindle, Ipad in IBooks or on your tablet. Download them and read them at your leisure on your mobile device.

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Click on the logo to make your hotel reservations.

Note: I’ve created a reunion slideshow from pictures from all of the previous reunions. The show will be shown in Charleston and will also be available on DVD. It’s really a trip down memory lane!

This 4th Annual Reunion is shaping up to be the best ever and one of the largest. I have to add a caveat because nothing can beat the very first reunion when many of us met for the very first time and some had not seen each other since leaving Vietnam. We are also going to have some very interesting speakers. You will not be disappointed...make your reservations now!

This newsletter was compiled by Douglas Severt.