

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 81

“Stories worth telling”

In this issue:

612th Screaming Eagles Return To First ‘Home’ In Vietnam

612th TFS, 1966...a pictorial

Spooky Chases Enemy Forces Surrounding Friendly Troops

Spooky Saves Doomed Unit

Mighty Behemoth Feed War’s Appetite

Famous Actor (Pat O’Brien) Visits

War Zone Reports:

Russ Hold Jet Forced To Land With 214 GIS

PACAF Wins Daelalian Award

Phan Rang Memories by Larry Theurer: A Scarry Run Home

Grant’s Heroes

Air Rescue Behind Enemy Lines, Part 1

Parting Shots: SSgt. William Hamilton, C-123 Loadmaster

2015 Reunion Information

612th Screaming Eagles Return To First ‘Home’ In Vietnam (*Phan Fare, The Happy Valley Weekly, April 24, 1969*)

April means a 'homecoming' celebration for the 612th TFS “Screaming Eagles.”

After ten months at Phu Cat AB, the 612th returned to Phan Rang AB, also known as "Happy Valley," to again become part of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing. They were welcomed back to the base by the wing commander, Col. Frank L. Gailer Jr., the wing staff officers and commanders of the other fighter squadrons.

The 612th arrived from Japan to begin its tour at Phan Rang July 1, 1966 (see the following pictorial of that event). The Screaming Eagles launched its first strike on that Independence Day.

Eleven months later the 612th packed up its equipment and F-100 Supersabres to begin a ten-months tour at Phu Cat.

Phan Rang was only six months old when the 612th initially arrived to become the first F-100 unit on Base.

Living conditions on such a new installation are rarely ideal but the entire situation improved rapidly as base facilities were completed. In March 1967 the jets were moved to protective revetments, and by then showers and good living quarters and meals had been a long-standing way of life.

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 81

“Stories worth telling”

Moving back to a base considered 'tops' in Vietnam the Screaming Eagles now serve with three other F-100 squadrons, a B-57 Canberra squadron and an Australian bomber squadron in the wing. Also on base are FACs, AC-119 "Shadow" gunships, and a wing of C-123 Providers.

"I can say without reservation that every one of us is happy to be back to Lt. Col. Warren H. Rice, the squadron commander. "We think the base is great! And we immediately noticed the high spirit here."

"Also, we'll fly missions different than those from Phu Cat," Colonel Rice continued. "Many of us will have the opportunity to broaden our experience in tactical air combat, which is completely in our favor."

Within two days of the move, the squadron flew its first combat missions from the home they returned to.

Since its arrival in Vietnam, the 612th has been credited with 6,022 structures destroyed and 3,390 damaged, 2,744 fortifications destroyed and 794 damaged, 201 sampans destroyed and 96 damaged and 1,800 enemy soldiers confirmed killed and another 1,415 estimated killed.

612th TFS, 1966...a pictorial



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

Phan Rang AB News No. 81

“Stories worth telling”



Spooky Chases Enemy Forces Surrounding Friendly Troops *(Seventh Air Force News, February 5, 1969)*

DA NANG — Air Force AC-47 Dragonships from the 4th Special Operations Squadron, here recently routed enemy troops trying to overrun an ARVN position in Quang Nam Province.

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 81

“Stories worth telling”

According to Capt. Robert M. Jones, Valdosta, Ga., aircraft commander, "We were flying combat air patrol when we received a call to give support I to some friendlies surrounded by a large hostile force."

The action involved a small element of the 2nd Division of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam that had become separated from its main unit during a sweep operation about eight miles south of Da Nang.

They were cornered in a river bend by an estimated 100 enemy troops who were firing rockets, mortars, automatic weapons and small arms.

Knowing that the small group was in imminent danger of annihilation, an American advisor with the main element radioed for air support. Spooky responded.

"Our first burst hit a fortification that our ground observer told us housed a large portion of the enemy," stated Captain Jones, who was flying his first combat mission as an aircraft commander. That burst from the Spooky's minigun silenced the machine gun that had been raking the friendly positions.

"The second time we opened up we caught a large group out in the open trying to escape from the structure after our first burst had made it too hot for them," recounted Maj. Ervin P. Simon, Detroit, pilot.

"This second burst completely routed the enemy and stopped all hostile fire - at us and at the friendlies," Major Simon commented.

Spooky Saves Doomed Unit (*Seventh Air Force News, February 5, 1969*)

By SSgt. Jim White

NHA TRANG — "When the compound and the men in it seemed doomed," Army Capt. Stephen M. Brown said, "Spooky arrived overhead. All of us owe our lives to that Spooky crew. We had absolutely nothing else to help us."

Captain Brown, from Atlanta, who came to Nha Trang AB to thank the 4th Special Operations Squadron AC-47 Dragonship crew which saved him and his men, is an advisor on Advisory Team 25.

The team's compound, located 17 miles northeast of Ban Me Thuot in Vietnam's central highlands, came under intense mortar attack and heavy ground assault in the pre-dawn hours, Dec. 28.

"The enemy had been throwing mortars at us for about 45 minutes when we realized that a sapper unit had penetrated our southwestern perimeter," Captain Brown recalled. "By that time, we had been forced into our bunkers by the impacting mortar rounds and were

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 81
unable to counterattack.

“Stories worth telling”

"The sapper unit was moving about the compound at will," he continued, "setting satchel charges and hurling grenades into the bunkers. Just as it appeared that we had had it, Spooky arrived."

Captain Brown, in radio contact with the circling AC-47 overhead, informed the crew that all of the friendlies were in bunkers and needed help badly.

"I cleared them to fire into the compound," he said. "The resulting firepower riddled the entire compound, caught the enemy in the open, and forced them to turn and run."

"After the enemy forces began to retreat," commented Lt. Col. Beacher M. Tillman, Pekin, Ill., aircraft commander on the AC-47, "we stayed on target dropping flares to support a medical evacuation helicopter."

Mighty Behemoth Feed War's Appetite *(Seventh Air Force News, March 12, 1969)*



Mighty Behemoth Feed War's Appetite

The machinery of Seventh Air Force daily consumes astronomical amounts of equipment and supplies requiring unprecedented efficiency in the logistical support system. C-141 Starlifters, like the one being unloaded here, are the primary aircraft being used to ferry equipment and supplies to the war zone from aerial ports in the States.

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 81

“Stories worth telling”

Famous Actor (Pat O’Brien) Visits (Seventh Air Force News, March 12, 1969)



Famous Actor at Phan Rang AB, actor Pat O’Brien, famous for his portrayal of football’s immortal Knute Rockne, shakes hands with Sgt. Lawrence T. Phillips as he leaves an armored Security Police Vehicle. (Photo by A1C Donald B. Dirksing)

(Comments appreciated. Recently I have been putting articles or stories that aren’t directly related to Phan Rang in “War Zone Reports” and “Vietnam Communique” and I was just wondering what your opinion is on that. Would you like to see just Phan Rang articles and stories or a smattering of news from everywhere else in Vietnam like I’m doing now?)

War Zone Reports

Russ Hold Jet Forced To Land With 214 GIs

RUSS HOLD JET FORCED TO LAND WITH 214 GIS



U.S. Urges Quick Release Of Off-Course Transport

WASHINGTON (AP) — An airliner carrying 214 U.S. servicemen to Vietnam is being held today on a Soviet island in the Pacific Ocean after being forced to land by MIG fighters.

The chartered DC-8 was on its way to Vietnam from McChord Air Base in Seattle, Wash., Sunday when, the U.S. government said, it strayed off course and was forced to land on Iturup Island, a part of the Kuril chain in the northern Pacific.

The State Department immediately contacted the Soviet embassy in Washington and urged the quick release of the plane, its passengers and the 17 crewmen.

A Japanese air force radar station said it began tracking the plane at 7:30 p.m. EDT Sunday and warned the pilot he was on a course that would cross the Soviet-held island.

The pilot replied, "We cannot alter our course," Japanese sources said, indicating the plane



FORCED DOWN—This is the U.S. commercial plane which was carrying U.S. soldiers to

Japan last night when it strayed off course and was escorted by Soviet planes to a landing field

on Iturup Island in the Kuril Island chain, which is situated in northern Pacific.

AP Wirephoto

already was under MIG escort.

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 81

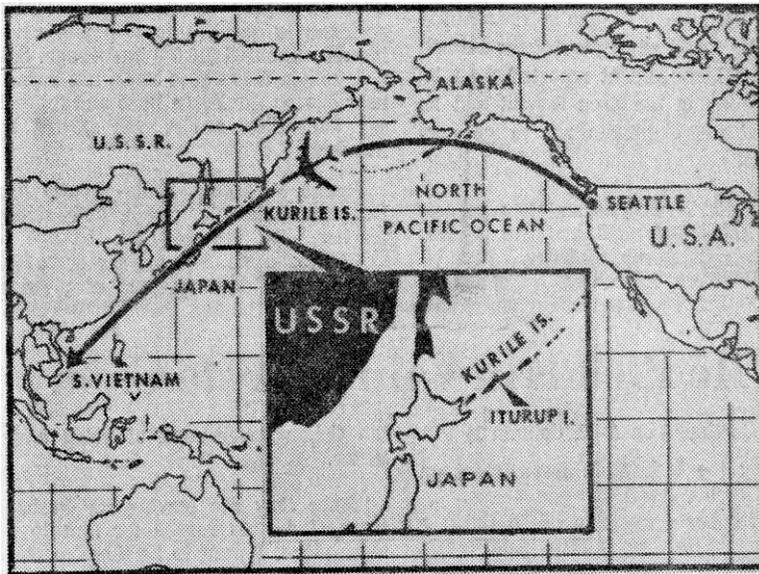
“Stories worth telling”

The sources said the plane was tracked another five minutes before it disappeared from radar screens at a position about 30 miles south of Iturup Island.

U.S. Ambassador Llewellyn E. Thompson said in Moscow he was told by Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin and First Deputy Foreign Minister Vasily V. Kuznetsov the incident is under investigation.

The Pentagon said the pilot of the chartered Seaboard-World Airlines jet, Joseph Tosolini, talked by radio with another American aircraft during the incident.

According to the Pentagon, the pilot of the Seaboard plane reported about 7:20 p.m. that MIG fighters had intercepted the airliner.



Plane's Route - Map shows route of a civilian plane carrying American servicemen to Vietnam which was intercepted by Soviet Fighter planes and escorted to a Russian island north of Japan. The Seaboard World Airways DC8 jet was en route from McChord AFB to Vietnam by way of Yokota, Japan, according to Pentagon announcement.

(Related article: Phan Rang News 12, “U.S. Urges Quick Release Of Off-Course Transport”)

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 81

“Stories worth telling”



Another headline of the same event.

PACAF Wins Daedalian Award...General Nazarro Lauds 7AF (*Seventh Air Force News, June 25, 1969*)

By Sgt. Bob Palmer

7AF HQ — Seventh Air Force personnel recently received praise from Gen. Joseph Nazarro, Pacific Air Forces PACAF) commander, for their efforts which helped the command win the 1968 Daedalian Flight Safety Award.

The Daedalian Trophy, initiated by the order of Daedalians, an organization established by World War I pilots, recognizes the major air Command having the most effective aircraft accident prevention program for the previous calendar year.

General Nazarro, in a letter to Gen. George S. Brown, 7th, Air Force commander said, "It is a pleasure to announce that PACAF has been selected as recipient of the Daedalian Flight Safety Award for calendar year 1968. Your personal interest in accident prevention has resulted in PACAF being recognized for its outstanding accident prevention program.

"I extend my personal congratulations and thanks to you and to all members of your command. Thus far in 1969 the major aircraft accident trend has shown a slight decline. I solicit your continued support in this area to insure invaluable USAF personnel and equipment are not lost in preventable accidents."

General Brown also praised 7th Air Force personnel. "This award," he said, "signifies sustained professionalism and superior performance by operations and maintenance personnel under

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 81

“Stories worth telling”

adverse conditions and a combat environment, backed by an active, aggressive flying safety program. You are to be commended for this notable achievement."

7th Air Force pilots and crews logged more than a million flying hours last year, according to Lt. Col. William W. Gray, Ishpeming, Mich., director of safety.

"This represents more than 3,000 hours flying time per day," said Colonel Gray, who recently took over the safety post. "It's quite an honor for the air command to win the Daedalian Trophy. Competition for the award is very keen.

"Of course, our job here is to monitor and direct all aspects of the flying safety program," he continued. "The people who maintain and fly the aircraft and do the 'nuts and bolts' work in the field are the ones who earned the award."

"The fact that our pilots and crewmembers operate under the hardships imposed by combat demands is significant," Colonel Gray stated. "7th Air Force flies the majority of the command's total hours," he explained. "Only through strict adherence to safety procedures, even under extreme conditions, have combat crews been able to keep aircraft accidents at a minimum."

A 16-year veteran of safety work, Colonel Gray was also assigned to Air Defense Command headquarters when ADC won the Daedalian Award several years ago.

Some of the points considered include weather conditions, geographic location, aircraft types, personnel manning problems, and participation in hazardous operations or missions. Final selection of the winner is made by the USAF chief of staff. The trophy accompanying the award remains in the custody of the winning command until the next year's winner is announced.

Vietnam Communique



Evening Telegram and the Evening Index, San Bernardino, Ca. Mon July 1, 1968

The unusually busy schedule for the B52s apparently put most of the big bombers in the Far East into the air. Japan's Kyodo News Service reported from Okinawa that all except one of the

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 81

“Stories worth telling”

B52s which usually are at Okinawa's Kadena air base took off today, accompanied by about 20 KC135 tankers.

Other B52s came from bases in Thailand and on Guam.

In the day of unusually heavy air attacks, U.S. Marine fighter-bombers strafed and bombed North Vietnamese troops threatening Marine infantrymen and engineers dismantling the Khe Sanh combat base in the northwest corner of South Vietnam. Forty enemy troops were reported killed three miles southeast of the base.

U.S. fighter-bombers also flew 139 missions against North Vietnam's southern panhandle Sunday. The heaviest strikes were against a construction material plant believed to be turning out material for coastal defense batteries and other fortifications. Pilots reported their bombs destroyed three furnaces and damaged a large building, an electrical substation and two other furnaces.

Ten of the eight-jet bombers attacked some of the enemy's largest base camps in Tay Ninh, a long-time Viet Cong stronghold along the Cambodian border 47 miles northwest of Saigon. Military strategists consider Tay Ninh a potential springboard for the third offensive against Saigon.

Fifteen B52s pounded other camps in Hau Nghia and Binh Duong provinces, which form a border triangle with Tay Ninh northwest of the city.

Another 15 bombers hammered enemy troop concentrations in Long Khanh Province, reportedly the headquarters of the North Vietnamese 5th Division 57 miles from Saigon.

Police sources also heard reports that the Viet Cong planned to intensify the shelling of Saigon to create confusion, undermine government prestige and incite the citizens to "struggle for peace" and demand that the South Vietnamese government negotiate with the National Liberation Front.

The sources could not vouch for the reliability of the reports, but all were being carefully checked. Allied officials responsible for the defense of Saigon said precautionary measures were being taken where necessary. Allied troops patrolling Saigon's outer defense ring today killed 18 Viet Cong in a day-long battle in Tay Ninh, where the heaviest troop concentrations have been reported. Two U.S. infantrymen of the 25th Division were killed and four were wounded.

In another engagement 29 miles northwest of Saigon, U.S. paratroopers intercepted 200 of the enemy moving under cover of darkness and killed 38 in a three hour battle. Twenty-two paratroopers were wounded.

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

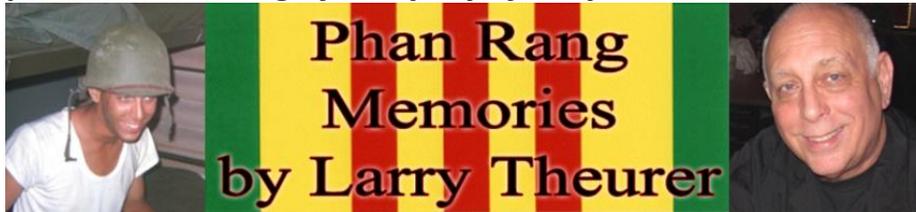
Phan Rang AB News No. 81

“Stories worth telling”

On Saturday U.S. Green Beret troopers and South Vietnamese irregulars dislodged a Viet Cong defense unit after two days of fighting and seized one of the biggest weapons caches of the war. The haul included hundreds of rifles and machine guns, some American-made; three tons of mines; 20 tons of TNT; more than 8,000 grenades; more than 300,000 rounds of ammunition, and 2,000 mortars, rockets and recoilless rifle shells.

Two terrorist incidents in the Saigon area were reported in the last 24 hours. Two Vietnamese were killed and 24 were wounded by a mine or satchel charge set off on a downtown sidewalk in front of a cafe, next to an American billet. Police said the charge was planted on a motorbike outside the bar.

“Thanks Larry, you’ve invented a literary time machine that takes us back to our time spent at Phan Rang of everyday life beyond the headlines.” ...Doug



A SCARY RUN HOME

One dark night I missed the usual ride back to the barracks with our crew from the flight line. I caught a ride with another truck. When it got to the barracks area it did not stop at my barracks but continued past it farther up to the base of that great big hill in back.

He let me off and drove away leaving me standing there in silence and almost total blackness, no moon. I see my barracks below in the dark and begin walking toward it slowly, carefully trying not to trip.

“three machine guns behind me somewhere on that hill opened up and began firing”

I don’t know what the heck was on the other side of that hill. I had only taken about 10 steps when three machine guns behind me somewhere on that hill opened up and began firing. I was down that hill and in the barracks in about 5 seconds flat with my heart pounding so hard I thought it would explode. They stopped firing after about a minute.

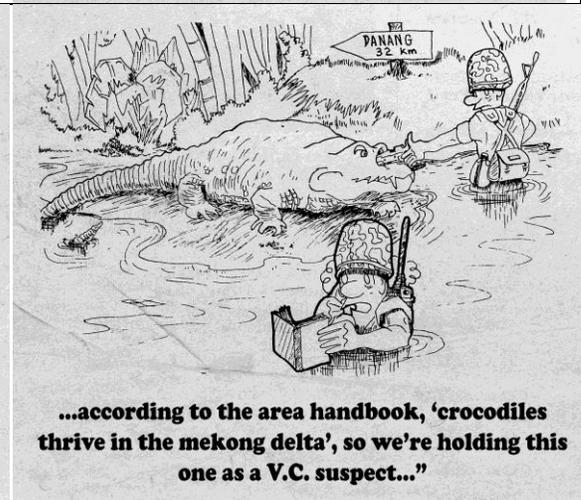
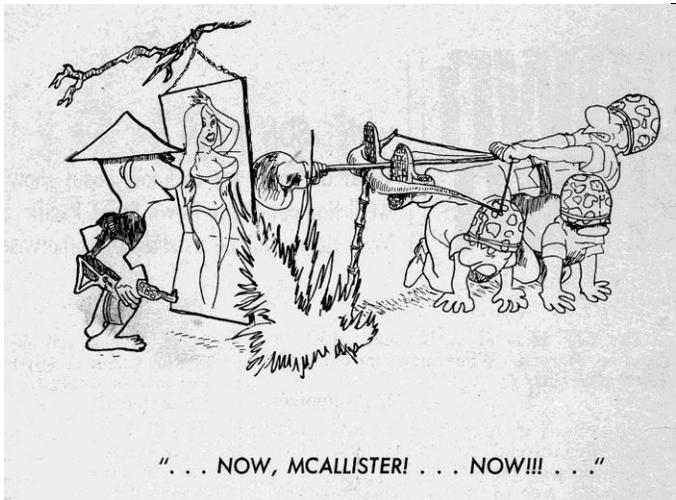
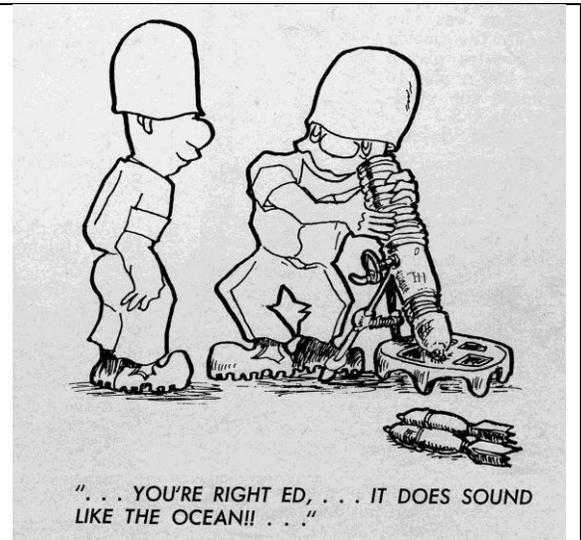
I was looking up the street waiting for alert sirens to go off and helicopter to come over, but nothing happened.

Have no idea what that was all about.

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

Grant’s Heroes

GRANT’S HEROES



Air Rescue Behind Enemy Lines, Part 1

(The story of these pararescue men’s heroic actions may be one of the greatest war stories ever told. Every mission they put their lives on the line to save a downed airman.)

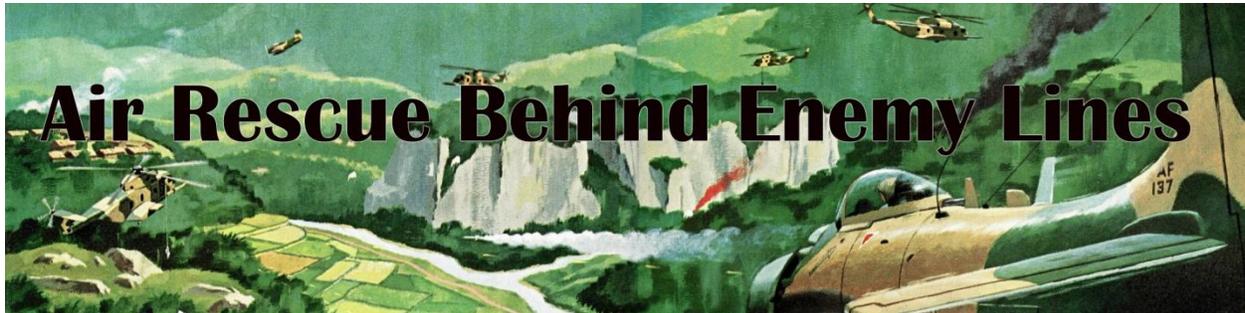
TWO AMERICAN PLANES were shot down, but their pilots were rescued." Such laconic reports are all too familiar, yet few of us have even an inkling of the deeds

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 81

“Stories worth telling”

of self-sacrifice and valor behind the terse words. Here now is the little-known story, told by intrepid writer-photographer Howard Sochurek.



THEY ARE CALLED Jolly Green Giants and Big Ugly Fat Fellows, and when they hover above North Viet Nam's perilous ocean of jungle, life hangs in the balance. They are watched over by Sandys and succored by Crowns. Inside them ride men called PJ's and others wearing King Arthurs—and they are among the bravest and most selfless men I have ever known.

These are the strange, casual terms in the vocabulary of the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service: 5,000 American airmen engaged in rescue work around the globe—most dramatically, in saving downed fliers from capture or death at the hands of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese.

Whatever the outcome of the war and the peace talks—both in progress as I write—this is a drama that should be recorded. One of the things that war leaves in its brutal wake is the memory of acts of courage undertaken to save human life in the midst of so much taking of life.

"Impossible to Describe the Sense of Joy"

Earlier this year I made my nineteenth trip to Viet Nam, this time to report the deeds of those detachments of the ARRS that fly to North Viet Nam. My notebooks have seldom recorded such moving experiences, related by the men who lived them.

Sgt. Jack Hoover of Salisbury, North Carolina, told me of his rescue of a pilot: "I was holding him cradled in my arms. He had been in the jungle for three days. There were tears in his eyes and he just kept patting me on the back endlessly...."

I listened to the men who were rescued, like Capt. John A. Corder of Fort Worth, Texas: "I had a death grip on that penetrator. I didn't let go, not even after they had pulled me into the helicopter. It is impossible to describe the sense of joy you feel when others have risked their lives to save yours, and all of you have made it."

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 81

“Stories worth telling”



"Rescue's my lifework," says Sgt. Kerry Kelley. He has trained intensively in medicine, survival, and even scuba diving to save fliers downed at sea. Scorning danger, he and his fellow pararescuemen eagerly toss coins to decide who will descend first into enemy territory to help disabled airmen.

Aerial rescues in a combat area have never before been tried on such a scale, or with such success. As of this writing, U. S. Air Force teams in Southeast Asia have brought back 1,300

American servicemen, many of them wounded, plucking them from dense jungle with steel cables, snatching them from blazing fields of battle, fishing them from enemy waters.

The Air Force, with its Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service under the Military Airlift Command, has the over-all responsibility. But in areas where the Navy operates, equally skilled naval crews carry out their own rescue operations. Aboard a carrier and at bases in Viet Nam and Thailand, I saw the men and machines in

action. The Air Force men fly Sikorsky HH-3E helicopters—Jolly Green Giants—and the larger Sikorsky HH-53B's, the Big Ugly Fat Fellows, or Buffs, which are also called Super Jollys. Navy rescue teams use Sikorsky SH-3A's—Big Mothers—and Kaman UH-2 Seasprites.

Big Mothers, guarded by carrier-based fighters, have often reached into North Viet Nam to pluck Air Force and Navy airmen from hills around Haiphong. Most Navy rescues are made at sea, however, where destroyers and helicopters keep an eye on returning aircrews.

Thirty Men Risk Lives to Save One

"When a man is downed," Col. Paul E. Leske observed at an ARRS station in Thailand, "he is far more than a statistic. He is a fellow American, with a family at home, with hopes and dreams and a potential that cannot be measured. He is a man in trouble, and he needs help fast."

On one occasion, Colonel Leske, commander of the 3rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group, which covers all Southeast Asia, committed 11 aircraft, crewed by 30 men, to 123 combat sorties during 101/2 hours of rescue efforts to bring one pilot back to safety.

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 81

“Stories worth telling”

The air-rescue teams assigned to missions in North Viet Nam are stationed at Da Nang in South Viet Nam, at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base in Thailand, and at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base, due west of Nakhon Phanom (map, above).

February 27, 1968, was an unusually chilly day at Udorn. It was just before the rainy season, and a gray sky stretched over the base. Far to the east, in the jungle mountains south of the Mu Gia Pass and north of Khe Sanh, the sun was beaming down on a disaster. An aircraft with nine men aboard had been shot down near the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The 37th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron had responded immediately. Maj. Frederic (Marty) Donohue, who usually has a pipe clamped in his mouth but is always losing it nonetheless, was piloting a Buff at "full blower," nearly 200 miles an hour, toward North Viet Nam as I arrived at the operations shack at Udorn.



Close to the action, rescue teams fly from forward bases at Udorn and Nakhon Phanom in Thailand, and Da Nang in South Viet Nam.

With Major Donohue was his copilot, 1st Lt. Leone Russo, a small and bald man called "Lennie the Gnome"—a name that had stuck to him from the days when he did the "Lennie and Liz" Saturday morning children's show on WKSU in Kent, Ohio (page 355). Both pilots were wearing armored vests called King Arthurs. Also in the crew were two parajumpers— still known as PJ's for their old name, parajumpers—and an engineer to operate the ingenious rescue device called the penetrator.

...to be continued in Phan Rang News 82.



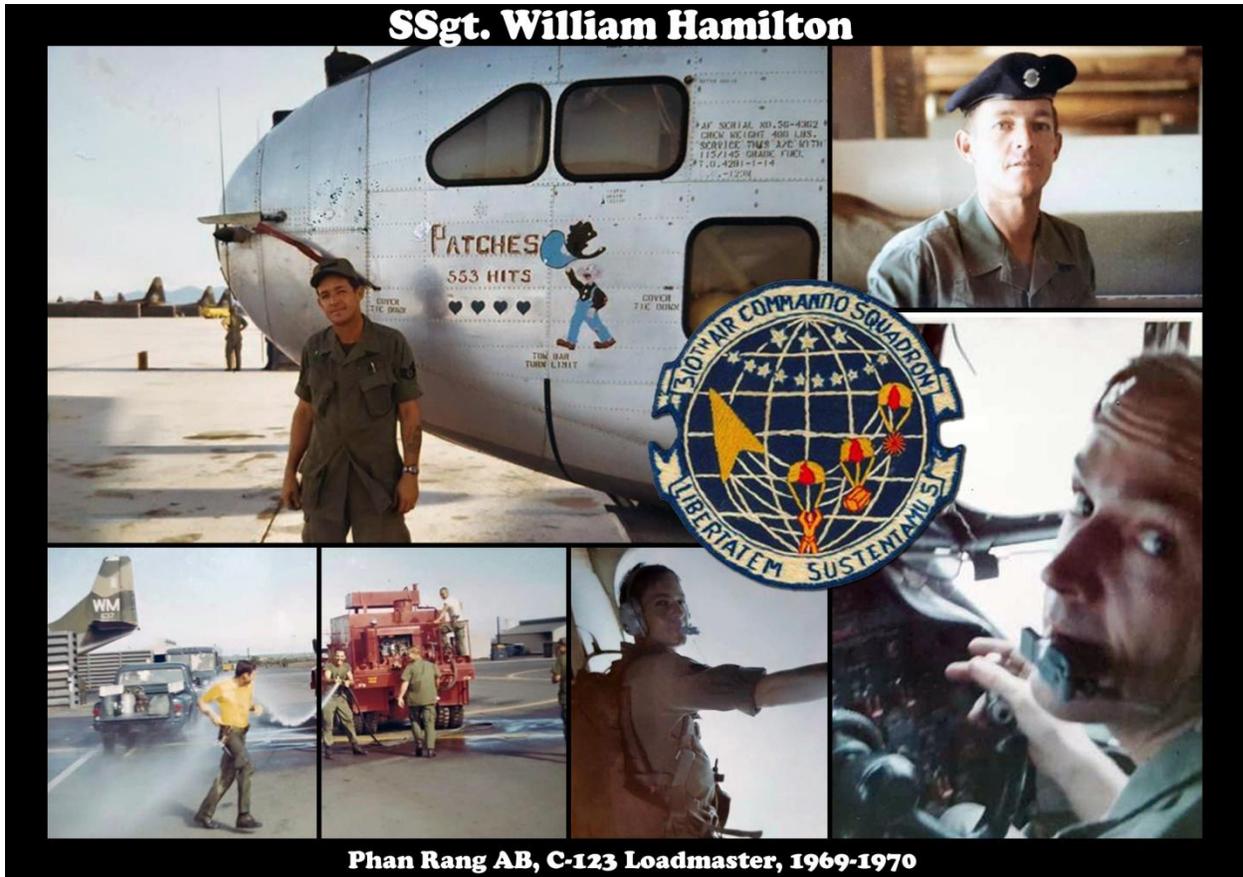
Click on the logo to make your hotel reservations.

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 81

“Stories worth telling”

Parting Shots: SSgt. William Hamilton, C-123 Loadmaster



(This newsletter was compiled by [Douglas Severt](#), unattributed graphics and photographs by Douglas Severt. I try very hard not to repeat a story and if I do it might be from a different perspective or news source I will always site where that story has previously appeared.)