

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 85

“Stories worth telling”

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Vietnam Shuns the Men Who Died for the South (*Star Tribune, Sunday, August 16, 1998*)

The military cemetery where most of the dead are buried is considered a monument of shame.



By David Lamb

Los Angeles Times

Bien Hoa, Vietnam - All but the ghosts have abandoned the wartime cemetery in Bien Hoa. No relatives visit. The monument to honor the sacrifice of the dead stands unfinished. The pagoda for family prayer is empty. Weeds run wild among the graves and headstones lie toppled.

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A generation ago, when these boy soldiers died, bereaved mothers encased their photographs in the stone markers. Surprisingly, many of the pictures have not faded. The faces - clear eyed, clean shaven, proud - look much like those of the young men one sees today on the streets of Hanoi.

Even the names chiseled in granite at Bien Hoa in southern Vietnam are no different from those one might find in the manicured military cemeteries of the north and the central highlands that are tended by schools children and veterans organizations: Nguyen Van Them, Do Van San, Pham Hiem, all buried as teenagers.

But there is one big difference. The northern cemeteries are for the fallen soldiers of the victorious North Vietnamese Army or NVA.

And these vast, desolate grounds at Bien Hoa, a 45-minute drive north of Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), are where the vanquished lie - the men who fought for the Republic of Vietnam as the South was known until its collapse in 1975.



National Military Cemetery of Bien Hoa seen from the air in early days. The cemetery's layout has been designed in the shape of the bee for the insect represents the characteristics of dedication, stoicism, and loyalty that mirror the ARVN fallen soldiers' virtues.

The contrast between the cemeteries in what was once two countries underscores the unspoken conflict in Vietnam's heart over how - or whether - to forget the past. In many ways, Hanoi has had an easier time reaching out to the United States than its brothers who fought for the South.

Eerily Still

From a nearby village, Nguyen Tan Trung, 25 approached the cemetery the other day on his bicycle, pedaling along the dirt road once lined with handsome willows but now treeless and barren.

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The way, he passed a sprawling water-bottling plant recently built on the edge of the hallowed grounds.

The cemetery was eerily still.

Once a year, to mark the lunar New Year, Trung and a handful of volunteers from the village cut the knee-high grass covering the graves. Once in a while, they get letters from Vietnamese families in North America or Australia asking them to search for the grave of a loved one. If they find it, they honor the dead with a cluster of incense.

Asked why the cemetery had been forsaken, Trung replied: “Who cares about this place? This belongs to the time before 1975.”

The people of the South who are not staunch Communists - and most are not - speak of everything in modern history as belonging to one of two epochs: “Before 1975,” when war raged between North and South or “after 1975.” When the Americans were gone and Saigon had fallen to the Communist forces of the North.

Hanoi never has acknowledged that its North-South conflict had an elements of a civil war. The conflict was, Hanoi contends, a war of liberation to free South Vietnam’s people from the grip of a corrupt, dictatorial Saigon regime and foreign invaders.

North Vietnam’s army, sweeping south in the spring of 1975 in the final days of what is known in Vietnam as “the American war,” desecrated the military cemetery at Bien Hoa. It lingers as a monument of national shame.

The families of those buried there do not want to admit their former association with the South, and those always loyal to Ho Chi Minh divide the war dead into two clearly defined groups: “Liet sy” (martyrs” from the North and “nguy” (puppets) from the South.

Loss not acknowledged

The government denies any official bias. “Our policy has always been to treat all Vietnamese who suffered equally,” said Trung Minh Nhai, the Communist Party’s vice director for ideology in Ho Chi Minh City. “But it is natural to pay more attention to those who died for their country.”

The mothers of northern soldiers killed in battle received a onetime payment from Hanoi of \$272 and still get pensions of \$21 a month and free medical care. The mothers of southern soldiers receive nothing. The former are honored as “Heroic Mothers” while the latter’s loss is not acknowledged.

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“The only time we talk about the war is when we are alone behind closed doors,” said a former soldier with the South’s Army of the Republic of Vietnam, or ARVN.

It is not that anyone today would be bundled off to jail for having supported the South - Vietnam is a much more open, relaxed place than it was a decade ago - but an association with the Saigon regime is still not something that a Vietnamese casually drops into conversation or puts on a resume.

U.S. diplomats have not been successful in suggesting that the search for Vietnam’s 300,000 soldiers still listed as missing in action be expanded to include southerners as well as northerners.

Vietnam’s government run newspapers and television regularly run pictures of missing soldiers whose families are looking for closure. The army leads families through old battlefields and helps them search for remains. But the campaign focuses exclusively on the North’s missing sons.

Vice President Ky Visits Phan Rang: Attends ‘Shadow’ Crew Graduation *(Phan Fare, The Happy Valley weekly, March 21, 1971)*

The Vice President of the Republic of Vietnam, Nguyen Cao Ky, was the honored guest at Phan Rang AB Mar. 12. He journeyed from Saigon, 165 miles southwest of this coastal base, to attend the 14th Special Operations Wing (SOW) graduation of the first Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) AC-119 Shadow gunship class.

Vice President Ky was welcomed to Happy Valley by an old classmate, Col. Cregg P. Nolen Jr., commander of the base's host 35th Tactical Fighter Wing. Both men were students together at the U.S. Air Force Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, Ala., as majors in their respective Air Forces in 1959. Since then, Ky rose to the grade of major general, commanded the VNAF, became his country's premier in June 1965, and was elected vice president in 1967.

Also on hand to welcome the South Vietnam statesman were Cols. Alfred F. Eaton, departing 14th SOW commander; Kenneth T. Blood Jr., 315th Tactical Airlift Wing commander; and Donald E. Libby, base commander.

The primary purpose of General Ky's visit was to attend the graduation ceremony and reception for the 18 VNAF officers and enlisted men who are completing combat training as aircrews in

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the twin-engine AC-119 Shadow gunship with the USAF's 17th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) here. This is the first class to complete the rigorous course which began at Phan Rang AB on Feb. 1 as part of the VNAF Modernization and Improvement Program.

General Ky spoke to the more than 600 American, Australian and Vietnamese guests about his memorable days as the VNAF commander, stating, "It is my happiest moment when I am again with airmen." The Vietnamese Vice President went on, "Our two countries stay together, fight together, and die together against a common cause . . . We will never give up the fight as long as there is Communist aggression in our land, and I'm certain all airmen, will follow me to this end."

Turning to the Americans and Australians in the audience, he concluded, "For generations to come, we will remember your names, your faces, and your sacrifices for us."

The first three graduating classes of pilots, navigators, flight engineers, weapons system and illuminator specialists will form the nucleus for the first all-VNAF AC-119 Shadow unit, the 819th Combat Squadron, which will be activated in the near future. The senior VNAF officer in this first class, Maj. Dang Van Duc having logged more than 11,000 flying hours in his 16 year VNAF career, will command the new gunship squadron.

The AC-119 flying battleship provides devastating firepower for close air support of ground forces from its four side-firing 7.62mm miniguns, each capable of spewing out 6,000 rounds per minute. It is also equipped with a computerized fire control system, flare launchers, a two-million candlepower white light and infrared illuminator, plus various other sensor and electronic gear.

The evening affair also honored departing Colonel Eaton, who has served with the 14th SOW for the past 18 months, six of which as its commander. The 14th SOW developed the entire curriculum for this first VNAF gunship aircrew training course, under the watchful eye of Colonel Eaton, Lt. Cols. Wendell E. Cosner, the 14th's VNAF training officer; and Canard A. Elbert, 17th SOS commander.

According to Colonel Eaton, the professionalism, enthusiasm and outstanding airmanship of this first class has kept them ahead of their training phase points throughout the three-phase program.

During the course of the reception, Colonels Eaton and Blood presented 14th SOW and 315th TAW scarves to General Ky, who is famous among aviators the world over for his own violet scarf and black flight suit, and to Maj. Gen. Fran Van Minh, present VNAF commander. Mementos were also exchanged among the VNAF class the 17th SOS and the 14th SOW.

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Col Blood Assumes Command Tactical Airlift Wing (*Assabet Valley Beacon, Thursday, March 18, 1971*)

WITH U.S. COMBAT AIR FORCES, Vietnam — Colonel Kenneth T. Blood Jr., has assumed command of the U.S. Air Force’s 315th Tactical Airlift Wing at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam.

Colonel Blood, son of retired Major General K. T. Blood Sr., 55 Great Road, Acton, Mass., will command the unit through August, when he is scheduled to complete an 18-month tour of duty at Phan Rang. Since March 1970, he has been vice commander of the wing.

The colonel helped establish the C-123 Provider aircraft training program for Republic of Vietnam Air Force (VNAF) aircrews initiated in January at Phan Rang. The VNAF crew members are being prepared to assume responsibility for flying C-123 cargo - troop transport missions.

Colonel Blood, who holds the aeronautical rating of command pilot, served in the Pentagon before he began his Southeast Asia assignment. He was nuclear weapons chief in the strategic operations division, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

A 1940 graduate of Fishburne Military Academy in Waynesboro, Va., he was commissioned in 1945 upon graduation from the U.S. Military Academy where he earned a B.S. degree in engineering.

His wife, the former Susan Hashagen, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. F. E. Hashagen, 1532 Queens Road, Charlotte, N C.



Col. Kenneth T. Blood, Jr.

Colonel and Mrs. Blood have one child, Kenneth T. III, 16 years old.

35th TFW Awarded Vietnamese Cross Of Gallantry (*Phan Fare, The Happy Valley weekly, March 21, 1971*)

The Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with palm was presented to the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW) Mar. 18, in a morning ceremony at the bases’s four nations flagpoles.

Col. Cregg P. Nolen, Jr., 35th TFW Commander, accepted the award in behalf of the 35th TFW Wing and its subordinated units from Brig. Gen. Vo Van Canh, commanding general of the 23rd Infantry Division, Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). General Canh represented Maj. Gen. Ngo Dzu ARVN commander of Military Region 2, who was unable to attend the formal presentation.

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During the same ceremony Colonel Nolen received the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with gold star from General Canh, and a Certificate of appreciation and plaque from Col. Tran Van Tu, Ninh Thuan Province chief.

The citation accompanying the award of the Cross of Gallantry streamer stated, in part, that the Wing, from Sept 1968 to Oct. 9, 1970, had performed in a fantastic manner because of its dedicated support personnel and heroic pilots who, under extremely difficult mission situations and with personal disregard for the dangers involved, have conducted air strike missions against Communist strongholds and provided air support to operations organized by both the Armies of the Republic of Vietnam and the United States of America in Military Regions 2, 3 and 4.

"Heavy losses to the enemy were inflicted by more than 53,000 air strikes and air support missions flown by the F-100 Super Sabre and Canberra bomber units of the 35th TFW. Their extremely hazardous missions account for over 2,800 enemy killed in action, thousands of enemy installations, artillery towers, boats, crew served weapons locations destroyed and many miles of communications and fighting trench completely disrupted.

"Moreover, in another area of achievement, the 35th USAF Dispensary has assisted the medical civic action program at Thap Cham, Hai Chu, Dong Giang, and An Xuan villages, as well as the Phan Rang village orphanage, so that thousands of people have been provided life-saving medical treatment.

"The Cross of Gallantry ribbon with palm is also presented to all personnel of subordinate units of the 35th TFW." Colonel Nolen was personally cited at the ARVN Corps level and was presented the Cross of Gallantry with gold star. The citation read in part, "This, remarkable field grade officer, air commander, and seasoned fighter pilot with meritorious combat experience, who, during his tour of duty in the Republic of Vietnam as 35th TFW commanding officer, has devoted his full energy, without ceasing, to the highly effective management of the 35th TFW units in successfully supporting ARVN units operating against the enemy.

"During operations conducted in the Vietnam-Cambodia-Laos tri-border area, Colonel Nolen is especially cited for providing maximum fire support from the F-100 units, which have resulted in many enemy killed by air strikes, over 3,700 connecting trenches disrupted, 800 enemy fortifications destroyed and over 1,000 secondary explosions.

"Colonel Nolen's devotion to the ground support mission, enthusiasm, and inspirational leadership have contributed greatly toward the destruction of Communist forces in the Republic of Vietnam."

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In accepting the awards, Colonel Nolen stated, "It is with deep humility and pride that I accept these honors in behalf of the entire 35th TFW contingent, both the people that are here now and those who have served in the past.

"This award does far more than recognize the efforts of thousands of American airmen. It is symbolic of the fact that we have been close Allies --fighting and dying together with singleness of purpose-- to defeat Communist aggression and terrorism in this great nation, the Republic of Vietnam.

"The battle will be won, and the victory will be yours. Of this I am certain. "General Canh, Colonel Tu, I accept this honor and award in behalf of all the men of the 35th TFW who have served here with pride and honor, and in memory of our comrades in arms who have died here for our common cause."

Also attending the formal ceremony were other province and base officials including Mr. Richard Owen, senior U.S. advisor to the Ninh Thuan Province chief; Col. Kenneth T. Blood Jr., 315th Tactical Airlift Wing commander; Col. Mark W. Magnam, 14th Special Operations Wing commander; Lt. Col. Nau Suk Lee, the Phan Rang AB Republic of Korea battalion commander; and Squadron Leader Arthur Barnes, acting Royal Australian Air Force Number 2 Squadron commander.

35th TFW Tops RECON Goal *(Phan Fare, The Happy Valley weekly, March 21, 1971)*

A Resources Conservation (RECON) savings action submitted by Detachment 8, 14th Aerial Port Squadron here recently pushed the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing \$4,000 over its fiscal year 1971 RECON goal of \$395,000.

Capt. Earl D. Cauthen Jr., Det. 8 commander, reported a \$63,399.92 RECON saving for the remainder of FY 71 by initiating a supplemental program of using U.S. Army trucks to transport air eligible cargo to nearby Cam Ranh Bay AB instead of airlifting it.

Before the action all eligible cargo was airlifted to Cam Ranh Bay by C-123 Provider aircraft. The operating cost for a C-123 for the 64-mile round trip is \$354 compared to \$34.56 for an Army 10-ton tractor and trailer. Captain Cauthen stated that the service is just as fast using the available trucks on the established truck run. Approximately one quarter of the cargo passing through Phan Rang's aerial port facility is trucked to Cam Ranh Bay.

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During the month of February, 411 tons of air eligible cargo was trucked at a savings of \$11,914.08. The estimated savings for a full year is \$155,000.

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The Big Lift

***They braved rain, fog, and bullets
to drop supplies to a garrison
under siege by 20,000 reds***

HISTORY WAS ON THE side of the enemy, or so he thought.

Twice before attempts to resupply surrounded garrisons by air had turned into military disasters that led to eventual total defeat in two wars.

The first effort to resupply a major beleaguered military force by air came in World War II. The posturing chief of the Luftwaffe, Hermann Goering, promised Adolph Hitler air resupply of the surrounded German 9th Army at Stalingrad.

The overextended Luftwaffe failed completely. The Soviet steamroller crushed the besieged garrison. The German Army never recovered from the blow.

More than a decade later, in rolling hill country deep in North Vietnam, another grim specter of defeat arose — Dien Bien Phu.

And here, once again, the fulcrum on which the battle turned was the inability to resupply by air a surrounded garrison.

Then, in 1968, there was Khe Sanh.

Even before the battle for Khe Sanh began it was being compared to Dien Bien Phu. The comparison was never a fair one, for the differences between Dien Bien Phu and Khe Sanh far outweighed the similarities.

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But the similarities that did exist were chillingly real enough to raise anxiety.

American commanders, like the French before them, chose to make their stand deep in territory the Communists had long considered their own — giving the enemy the advantage of shortened supply lines.

The enemy's top commander was again the wily Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap whose greatest triumph was victory at Dien Bien Phu.



And once again the defenders were to be far outnumbered by Communist forces.

But looming far larger than any other factor was the question of air support. Could the U.S. Air Force provide continuing replenishment of the supplies needed to keep the 6,000 defenders of Khe Sanh a powerful fighting force?

In the hills overlooking the combat base Giap began massing his forces — that were to reach some 20,000 men.



He deployed powerful mortars and artillery as he had at Dien Bien Phu where their bombardments broke the back of French resistance.

American commanders never doubted the ability to relieve Khe Sanh with a strong overland thrust.

Unlike the French, the allies had forces that were both plentiful and powerful to do the job.

But Khe Sanh had been designed to tie up enemy troops, not allied forces, and to do that



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job the combat base had to hold out until the time for a relief force was ripe.

No one knew what the enemy commanders thought but by Jan. 21 they were ready and the 78-day siege of Khe Sanh began — and it began with the Communists striking a heavy blow at the defenders.

A rocket and mortar barrage destroyed the Khe Sanh ammunition storage area. More than half of the base's line airstrip was covered with twisted and smoking rubble making it temporarily impossible for big C130 Hercules transports to land.

Far to the south, at Tan Son Nhut AB on the outskirts of Saigon, Maj. Gen. Burl W. McLaughlin, commander of the 834th Air Div., and his staff began putting into motion the massive airlift that would spell life or death for Khe Sanh.

A "tactical emergency," the highest priority in airlift, was declared and six C123 Provider transports were diverted from their regular missions to fly critically needed ammunition to the base.

That night, by the light of artillery flares and while under heavy enemy automatic weapons fire, the C123s landed 26 tons of ammunition on the shell-holed Khe Sanh runway.

The first crisis had been met. But there would be many more.

From the very beginning airlift commanders had to cope with a series of problems. One was that every plane that landed at Khe Sanh came within range of enemy small arms fire.

Then, too, there were the daily enemy rocket and mortar attacks that seared the base's runway, that made landing hazardous and put planes in dire jeopardy in the critical moments just before landing and just after takeoff.

Another problem was the weather, the "Khe Sanh fog factory," mountains of swirling mist along with driving rain that drastically cut the time the airfield could be used. Ironically, the Air Force was later to use the "fog factory" to its advantage.

By mid-February the enemy had forced a new crisis. Landings, particularly for the big, four-engine C130s, were becoming increasingly risky. A Marine Corps C130 was destroyed on the ground by enemy fire while an Air Force version of the transport was severely damaged.

The message was clear. C130 landings at the besieged base would have to be stopped. But without the tons of cargo carried by the C130s, the biggest transports used in the airlift, the backbone of the supply line to Khe Sanh would be snapped.

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The men running the airlift were ready with an answer. For years, during peacetime maneuvers, the Air Force had been perfecting techniques of precision, lowlevel aerial resupply systems for just such a battlefield emergency.

There was only one hitch. Conditions at Khe Sanh made it absolutely essential that many of the airdrops be made by planes guided over the drop zone by instrument — and no such system had been developed, let alone tested.

The kind of intricate system needed at Khe Sanh is usually years in the development and testing stage.

But during the siege of Khe Sanh it was developed, tested and put into action in a matter of days.

To do it Air Force men in Vietnam pooled all their years of experience to piece together navigational and directional equipment often originally made for a far different purpose.

It was a tactical air delivery system literally built overnight — and it worked.

Past performances of aerial resupply, under conditions less difficult than at Khe Sanh, had proved both tricky and disappointing. At Dien Bien Phu, as many of the air-dropped supplies wound up with the enemy as they did with the French.

But the story was different now. Using varied airdrop techniques, many of them calling for tree-top flying, the C130s, plopped tons of supplies into the base with uncanny accuracy. There was not a single instance of supplies winding up in enemy hands.

Meanwhile, landings continued on Khe Sanh's battered airstrip, carried out by the smaller C123s with their shorter landing and takeoff ability.

For the crews of these aging planes, once relegated to National Guard duty, heroism was a daily affair.

At night, the first 1,000 feet of the runway they landed on was often in enemy hands. Pilots of the bulky transports flew them as if they were fighters, diving in for landings so their ships would be exposed to ground fire for only a few seconds.

As the siege of Khe Sanh continued, the enemy followed the textbook tactics he had perfected at Dien Bien Phu. At the expense of punishing casualties he pushed forward his trench lines and tunnels until they reached the base's perimeter.

But the Communist grand strategy wasn't working. Instead of the defenses becoming weaker, as they had at Dien Bien Phu, Khe Sanh's defenses became stronger.

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On April 7, troops of the 1st Air Cav. Div., taking part in an operation code-named Pegasus, shook hands with the defenders of Khe Sanh.

The siege was over, the garrison was relieved — and it was almost an anti-climax.

Allied commanders had picked the time to relieve the base. Time had not worked for Giap.

Just what was Giap's intention at Khe Sanh?

Did he really think he could repeat a Dien Bien Phu victory against the massive firepower of the Khe Sanh defenders and under the threat of massive allied forces within striking distance?

Or was it simply a ploy to draw into the hills and away from population centers the American forces that would play such a vital role in the Tet offensive campaign that was on Giap's drawing board when the Khe Sanh siege began?

Whatever Giap's intention, it failed and the price of failure was tremendous.

When Army troops pushed through to Khe Sanh, Communist troops offered little resistance as they gave up the positions they had held so tenaciously and fled to the across-the-border sanctuaries they had come from.

Behind them, on the scarred battlefield around Khe Sanh, untold thousands of other enemy soldiers had died — most of them victims of the fearful, round the-clock bombardment laid down by fighter-bombers and huge B52 bombers.

The siege of Khe Sanh was over and so was the airlift — but the impressive record it set remains.

During the 78 days the siege lasted transports had delivered 12,340 tons of supplies, flown in 2,676 passengers and taken out 1,574 - including 306 wounded.

Khe Sanh was the greatest test of U.S. airlift power in Vietnam - and it had been its greatest triumph.

PACIFICATION: Killing Viet Cong is not enough

THIS IS THE FIRST time in recorded history," a senior American official in Vietnam recently said, "that an effort is being made to rebuild a country while a war is still going on."

Strange? The savage, no-quarter struggle in Vietnam is a strange war — a war that often takes unpredictable turns and rewrites the rules as it goes along. It is a war in which a worn and tired

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phrase — "the hearts and minds of the people" — still defines an objective as critically important as the strong points and supply routes of the enemy.

Thus there is pacification — the building of a school, the construction of a reservoir, the opening of a hospital, the slow and patient teaching' of modern agricultural methods to tall, mahogany-hard mountaineers who can barely scratch a furrow with a stone plow.

Electric light might suddenly flood a small village once illuminated only by the flaring light of candles. Clean water, flowing through concrete pipes, will do away with the necessity of walking long miles to a contaminated well or a slime-filled pond — to carry back polluted water that can kill a sick child or a newborn infant.

All of these things can equal a more rewarding existence and a longer life. Most of all, it can give a villager faith and confidence in his government — demonstrate that it is a compassionate and helpful presence, not a remote and indifferent shadow that lives in faraway Saigon and thrusts out a hand to collect taxes.

The villager himself might be a lone being with a loyalty in limbo — a man who can be swayed by armed strangers who come to his village with blandishments or threats. If pacification works the way American and Vietnamese government officials hope it will, the villager will be given something of value — something he will grasp tightly and fight for. . . .

It was a day of celebration in Cheo Reo, the rustic little capital of Phu Bon Province in the Central Vietnam Highlands. A parade of teen-aged schoolgirls, dressed in spotless, flowing blue-and-white ao dai, walked onto the spacious grounds of an \$80,000 hospital — built with American money and Vietnamese hands. Light and power would come from two 150 kilowatt generators run on fuel from the Vietnamese government, which would also pay the salaries of a well-trained hospital staff.

The hospital had 60 beds in large, clean wards. One had only to look at the town's old hospital, a dingy little flytrap with stained walls and cots made of hard, dirty planks, to see a giant-step difference.

Now there was a hospital worthy of the name and definition — a foundation for a solid and progressive public health program.

One American spoke eloquently before the townspeople and a gathering of U.S. and Vietnamese officials; Willard E. Chambers, deputy assistant director for CORDS (Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support), told of how crippling diseases would be conquered in the hospital, and of the generations of children who would be born there.

The ceremony was over quickly. The hospital opened. The staff, headed by a seven-member Korean medical team that would stay in Cheo Reo for a year, met an onrush of lame, halt and

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blind. There were infants and children malformed by malnutrition. The first baby was delivered. The first patient was rushed into the surgical ward — a Vietnamese woman, wounded during a Viet Cong attack on her village, had limped three days on a leg stained with the flush of infection. Surgeons gingerly plucked out a bullet.

The opening of the hospital, the first baby born, the first injury treated — all of these, to Chambers, were the first shots fired in another war.

"There are those who wonder, 'why do you build schools and hospitals, why don't you just get on with the war,' " Chambers told a newsman at the dedication ceremony. "That's very inadequate thinking. You must remember that insurgency results from real or imagined grievances of the people. There are three things you must understand and do.

"First, you must develop a government that deserves the support of the people — and demonstrate the capability of that government (to function) with reasonable honesty and efficiency.

"If you can't do that, you won't be able to do the number two thing — assure the support of the people to that government. The government must have a dialog with the people.

"If you can't do either of those things, there's no point in trying the third thing — to enhance the enforcement of the government to where it can deal with insurgents. Those who would suggest 'get on with the fighting' don't understand the nature of the insurgency problem."

Chambers said that the "deadwood" that plagued previous Vietnamese governments has been weeded out and that this has helped push the "slow process" of pacification into slightly higher gear. One other hospital had been opened a week before in an area where the VC grasp had been broken — where a hospital or any other solidly-rooted government presence would have been impossible two years before.

"Life expectancy here is some 40 years," Chambers said, "which means you have to replace every generation with new leaders — plus the fact that tens of thousands have been assassinated by the VC. That's why hospitals and public health programs are so necessary — to save what you have created so they can train a second generation of leaders."

Phu Bon, a keystone in the critically-contested highlands, is under the control of a military province chief — Lt. Col. Kha Van Huy. Chambers said that Huy and his senior American adviser, 41-year-old Lt. Col. George E. Palmer, are among "the two or three best" he has worked with during his three years in Vietnam.

An hour after a fire swept the isolated mountain village of Bon Broai, Huy and Palmer alighted from a helicopter to assure the villagers that they would get relief supplies and help in

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rebuilding their village — and backed it up by sending in a small fleet of supply-laden helicopters a few hours later.

The presence of both men, particularly the Vietnamese officer, was significant. Like most of the inhabitants of Phu Bon, the villagers were Montagnards — dark, wiry mountaineers who for years have been despised and neglected by the Vietnamese. Of the 66,000 people who live along Highway 7B, which runs through the province's three main districts and is an artery to vital Highway 14 to Pleiku, some 90 per cent are Montagnard. Both their welfare and their loyalty are important.

More can be done for them, Palmer emphasizes — more can be done to help them help themselves. He takes a visitor to a 44,000-gallon reservoir — the source of Cheo Reo's first municipal water system. It came about through a "felt need" of the citizens. The townspeople were either walking long miles to the Song Ba River to draw their unclean water, or were buying it at inflated rates from local merchants who came in every day in ungainly tank trucks — one of which was dubbed the "yellow whale" by an American onlooker. Prices shot up during a long dry season; there were flareups between the merchants and the townspeople.

"We decided, with Col. Huy, that a water system was needed," relates Russell L. Meerdink, a CORDS employee who is Palmer's deputy. "First, U.S. Army engineers drilled two wells . . . We took materials and cement from Revolutionary Development and went out with Vietnamese troops. Montagnard labor mixed the cement and put in a reservoir of American design."

The Ministry of Public Works in Saigon became interested in the project and promised to supply pipe for a distribution system. Hamlet chiefs were called in and told of the benefits of the system — pure water, healthy children. Any townsman who wanted it would dig his own portion of a long ditch that ran through the town and outlying hamlets. No money; strictly self-help and better living.

"They had heard this song and dance before and weren't sure," recalls Meerdink, who is 28 and comes from Sheboygan, Wisc. The townspeople stood a doubtful distance until an American plane came in with the pipe. Within a week's time, 90 per cent of the water system was laid in.

"They had old men, women, everyone out working all hours of the night," Meerdink said. At the reservoir, Palmer pride fully shows off a successful project in which the Americans had only an advisory hand.

"They came out for this one, too," Palmer says. "It was handmade by 700 workers — at least 150 people a day for three months. It's all theirs — they did it themselves." The reservoir sits on a knoll, bare and prominent, and looks like an inviting target for a Viet Cong attack.

"I doubt if they could or would," Palmer says. He says the huge concrete tank has walls eight feet thick, four supporting pillars inside and a steel hatch secured by a strong lock. It would take

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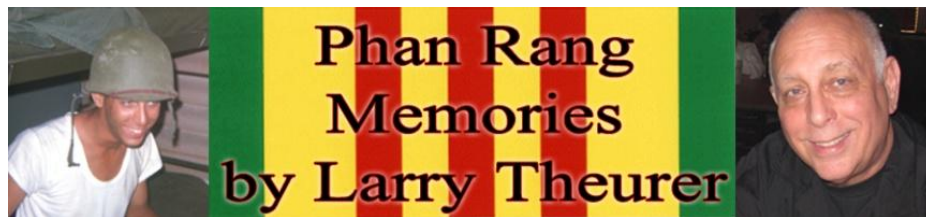
“Stories worth telling”

a truckload of explosive to destroy it — and this would be effectively discouraged by a 100-man Regional Force company that sits just beside the reservoir, which itself resembles a sturdy blockhouse. The well-armed garrison could drop a thunderstorm of firepower on any attacker.

"They have something good," Palmer said. "And if a man has something good, he'll fight for it. That's the whole idea. . . ."

Huy, pushing durable, permanent-type homes in the community, has promised both electricity and water to townspeople who have concrete block structures — with blocks cheaply provided, through a contractor, from an outdoor factory run by CORDS.

"Our role is not to do, but to advise," Meerdink emphasizes. "To make the Vietnamese government function and work - to make the Vietnamese government respond to the felt needs of the people and convert those needs to action."



PROUD TO SEE THE RESULTS OF MY WORK

One sunny day we had just finished loading bombs on a B-57 in the revetments. Off in the distance to the West the big very beautiful mountain overlooking the base is shining its usual spectacular beautiful greenest green I've ever seen

A short while later I see the aircraft we loaded taxiing out to the runway and watch it take off. I'm standing in the dirt out back of the line shack so I have a nice unobstructed view of the sky. Usually the B-57s take off and disappear straight out over the horizon.

I'm watching this B-57 and as it lifts off the runway instead of going straight out and disappearing; it banks toward the left toward the mountain. The air was crystal clear and I watched it fly for five minutes all the way to the mountain. At that distance it looked as small as a bird but I could still distinctly see its shape.

I thought it would disappear over the mountain but it circled a couple times and then dived rapidly toward the mountainside facing me and then pulled up. I see a big flash and then see the shock wave radiate up knocking waves into the moist air. I could not hear any noise from that distance but I could see everything perfectly.

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It was so great to see. I was so proud we loaded those bombs. Then I was thinking, gee, if I can see that mountain so well from here with my naked eyes, the people up there he is bombing could easily with binoculars have been watching me all day and I’m wondering how far can they fire those 120mm rockets they have.

The B-57 dove on the mountain side numerous times and then returned. It was rapidly reloaded again by another crew went back out a short while later.

I would have loved to watch that every day.



Airman Charlie Hudgens standing on the back of the truck used to haul napalm to the flight line. Right over Charlie’s left shoulder on ‘Charlie Mountain’ is where Larry saw the B-57 drop its ordinance.

Facebook conversation

Woody Woods: I remember watching Capt. Hamilton and another Pilot working Charlie Mountain early one morning, I surly don't remember the date, but we had loaded the birds and it was a blast to see them doing their thing!

David Knighton: If I remember correctly the range of a 107mm Rocket and there have been some reports that there were some 122mm rockets used but I have never found any record of that happening during the time I was there, was 7 miles.

Sam Lewis: I sat in those towers out on the NW Perimeter facing Charlie's mountain with

Steve Russ: According to Google Earth's distance tool, Charlie’s Mountain was in fact 6

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<p>the ROKs firing the big guns from the hill behind me many times with the rounds traveling right over my head. It Shook me up to start with but as time went on I got used to it except for the loud BOOM which I think is the primary cause of the constant Crickets in my ears today. To occupy myself I counted the seconds from the time the round left the gun until the flash from the impact then until I heard the distant boom from where it hit the mountain. I had it figured to a ‘T’ at that time. I can’t remember the seconds for sure after all these years but 4 and a half miles sticks out in my memory.</p>	<p>miles from the flightline, and the nearest peak of Charlie’s Mountain shows as about 9.3 miles. I had always heard it was about halfway between us and Cam Rahn Bay, which, if you go by the town of Cam Ranh, it is. If you go by the air base at Cam Rahn Bay, it’s more like about a third of the way (around 32 miles from Phan Rang AB to Cam Rahn Bay Air Base.</p>
<p>Sam Lewis: During my entire time at Phan Rang something was being fired at that mountain. At times the ROKs, our F100s, Spookey with the tracers, and the big gun from the ships all at the same time. Quite a show Indeed!</p>	<p>Sam Lewis: I was always fascinated when the F100s which looked like small insects from that distance dived bombed that mountain dropping their ordinance on it.</p>
<p>John Hennigar: I know Charlie Mountain was within range of the ROK’s howitzer.</p> <p>Tom Ledbetter: Exactly one 107 rocket away...unless they got backed up then it was exactly one 122 rocket away. Mortars were close in for the kids that got killed as cannon fodder!</p>	<p>Lupe Saenz: I used to count when the shots went off to the time it would hit the mountain. Up to 8 to 10 seconds sometimes. I remember ROK artillery would fire all night sometimes. The first time I heard the ROK artillery I mistook it for incoming and all my buddies would make fun of me.</p>
<p>Donnie Powell: I watched rounds from the battleship New Jersey hit the top of the Mountain with the shells going right over our heads. That’s a long shot from out in the ocean.</p>	<p>Sam Lewis: I think I have to go with my estimate of 6 Klicks or 4 or at the most 5 miles from the NW Perimeter. I could be wrong but I don’t think I could have had the eyesight to watch the F100s as small as they looked nose dive the side of that mountain from 9 miles away sitting in a tower on the perimeter of the base even as a 22 year old with 20-20 vision .</p>
<p>Steve Russ: Sam, you might notice I said the 9.3 miles was to the peak of the mtn. That particular mountain range was surprisingly long and wide in miles. I measured from both the control tower and the army compound (the Korean guns were probably a mile closer due to where they were near the bomb dump,</p>	<p>Sam Lewis: Could be! The Korean Guns were closer to the NW Perimeter and the NW Perimeter corner was a mile possibly closer to 2 from the control tower. That would put the mountain inside the 5 mile range from the guard towers on the NW Perimeter Id think. I was relying on my almost 50 year memory and</p>

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which was closer to Charlie Mountain. Using those areas for measurement, the closest reading I got was a little over 5 miles to the foot of the mountain. It appears to be around 6-7 to anywhere on the side, depending on where Charlie had tunnels. Assuming the measuring tool on Google Earth is reasonably accurate, which I'm betting its close enough.

the seconds it took me to count from the time I saw the flash from the shell hitting the mountain until I heard the distant Boom. As I remember as Lupe said it was indeed around 8 to 10 seconds. I never actually drove to the foot of that mountain although I was outside the base a couple of miles in the foothills about halfway toward that mountain during TET 68. It was NOT one of my favorite places to be out there. From the NW Perimeter it seemed like one was looking at the entire mountain but like you said in actuality as I remember from the Cam Rahn Escorts it was indeed a Mountain Range that stretched for a few miles and what I saw as the top from the perimeter very well could have not been the actual top.



**The freedom bird, the freedom bird,
The greatest sound you ever heard.
Wind over wings, an upward climb,
You serve your year, you serve your time.
A ground shaking noise, an ear splitting sound.
The freedom bird lifts off the ground.
To carry you to the land of your dreams,
A land where green meadows and twinkling streams.
A land where freedom is an inherent thing,
A land where people can freely sing.
A land you were away from for maybe a year,
A land your buddies died for without any fear.
The freedom bird, the freedom bird
The mightiest sound you ever heard.
In just a few days, a month, maybe more,
Up the ramp you'll go right thru her door.
When that bird has lifted with that beautiful sound,
Look out the window at the far below ground.
Good by Vietnam! No more will I roam!
Come on freedom bird, take me home.**

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

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"Stories worth telling"



Click on the logo to make your hotel reservations.

(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.)

THE NEXT THREE PAGES ARE COPIES OF THE SCHEDULE FOR THE 2015 PHAN RANG AB REUNION. THE INFORMATION IS AS ACCURATE AS CAN BE FOR EARLY SEPTEMBER 2015 SO IT COULD CHANGE AS TIME PROGRESSES. THE MOST LIKELY CHANGE WOULD BE THE DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL TIME FOR THE BUS FOR THE BASE TOUR.



Crowne Plaza Charleston Airport
4831 Tanger Outlet Boulevard
North Charleston, South Carolina 29418

**No event in American history is more
misunderstood than the Vietnam War. It
was misreported then, and it is
misremembered now.**

- Richard M. Nixon, 1985

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<div></div> <p><u>THURSDAY 8 OCTOBER</u></p> <p>12:00 NOON—8:00 PM: Registration in the Drayton Hospitality suite.</p> <p>4:00 PM—11:00 PM Drayton Hospitality Suite (Complimentary snacks and beverages (including beer and wine) provided every day.</p> <p><u>FRIDAY 9 OCTOBER</u></p> <p>6:00 AM—10:00 AM: Full breakfast buffet in the Sweetgrass restaurant.</p> <p>8:00 AM: Tour busses depart Hotel to JB Charleston. Hospitality Suite closed during the tour.</p> <p>2:00 PM: Tour busses return to hotel (approximate time)</p> <p>4:00 PM - 10:00 PM: Drayton Hospitality Suite open.</p>	<div></div> <p><u>SATURDAY 10 OCTOBER</u></p> <p>6:00 AM—11:00 AM: Full breakfast buffet in the Sweetgrass restaurant.</p> <p>TBA Group Meeting</p> <p>SATURDAY —5:30 pm assemble in lobby for Group Picture Lobby Bar 6:00 pm—7:00 pm Cocktail Reception</p> <p>7:00 —10:00 pm Banquet in the Drayton/Middleton Room.</p> <p><u>SUNDAY, 11 OCTOBER</u></p> <p>Have a safe trip home</p>
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Airport Shuttle is available.

Call the hotel direct when you land. 843-744-4422. The hotel shuttle is at the airport quite often during the day so you may not have to call.

Drayton Hospitality Suite: The hospitality suite is available to us 24 hours as long as we have a person willing to take responsibility to lock it up after everyone leaves.

Breakfast Buffet in the Sweetgrass Restaurant: Mon. through Fri. 6-10 a.m. weekends 6-11 a.m.

Internet: Complimentary Internet/WIFI throughout the entire hotel in include guestrooms, meeting space and public areas.

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB Facebook group: If you are on Facebook come and join your friends in Happy Valley at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/phanrangairbase/>

BANQUET HIGHLIGHTS

- Invocation and closing prayers - Chaplain Mike Maleski
- Ed Downey & Barbara Brandt—Ceremonies
- Michelangelo Rodriguez displays his sense of humor in a Phan Rang Slideshow

