

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 90

“Stories worth telling”

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Dragonship Ramp Built by Red Horse Men (*Phan Fare, The Phan Rang Weekly, March 27, 1968*)

A construction team of the 554th ‘Red Horse’ Civil Engineering Squadron recently completed a 30-day project to provide Flight B of the 14th Air Commando Sq. , with a 600 by 375 foot parking ramp for their AC-47 Dragonships.

The Air Force engineers removed 13,000 cubic yards of earth and laid down 25,000 square yards of “hot plant mix; asphalt, five inches deep on the north ramp of the flightline.

Scrapers, graders, compacters and asphalt-rollers were employed by the engineers. A total of 4, 743 tons of hot asphalt, fresh from the squadron’s own asphalt plant, went into the new ramp.

MSgt. Charles S. Hall, superintendent of the airfields division of the squadron, said the project was on schedule.

Among the key personnel in the project were: TSgt. Otto O. Mayo, SSgt. Robert W. Miller, Sgt. Carlan K. Mayle, Sgt. Ruben Garcia, A1C Bernard A. Hillesland.

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Hall noted that asphalt was delivered to the ramp area in seven trucks. Its temperature was 350 degrees Fahrenheit when poured into the trucks.

The Dragonships of the 14th Air Commando Sq., come to the aid of Free World forces under enemy attack. They are very active in the Vietnam War, and this is the first time this type aircraft have been armed for battle.

TSgt. George W. McKay was in-charge of earth work on the ramp project, and MSgt. John J. Latham headed the asphalt operations.

Sgt. Rufus Hunt controlled the depth of the asphalts as it was being laid down.

This is another project being done by the 554th in a great effort, making us the best.

American Airman (*Press Release 3701, 29 September 1969*)



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

U.S. Air Force Airman First Class Richard M. Monahan, Framingham, Mass., center, chats with a Republic of Korea Army officer. A1C Monahan is a liaison agent between local elements of the Korean “White Horse Division” and the 35th Security Police Squadron here, to which he is assigned. (USAF PHOTO)

Phan Rang AB Scuba Diving Club, Part 2 *by Jimmie L. Jenkins*



I was stationed at Eglin AFB when I received my orders for Phan Rang Air Base in late 1968.

I had been heavily involved in scuba diving while stationed at Eglin AFB, Florida and was told that Phan Rang had a scuba club and some awesome diving. I took some diving gear with me when I deployed and after arrival and getting settled in, I checked out the scuba club at first opportunity. The club, known as the Phan Rang Sea Serpents was headed up by TSgt Toomey, who was a National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI) certified scuba instructor.

The club was pretty small with only a few sets of diving equipment, but as advertised, the coral reefs were outstanding. We would get out to the reef on either a South Vietnamese river boat or a Army LARC amphibious vehicle whose operator would take us out for a case of beer!

To be eligible to dive you had to either be certified or go through a training class. This was obviously for safety reasons. You also received a briefing on the dangers in the area (besides NVA/VC) such as the nasty and extremely poisonous pink sea snakes!

When TSgt. Toomey rotated stateside, I took over the club (most experienced). We were able to get some funding from the base to purchase more equipment so the club grew substantially. Until early January, Phan Rang had been a relatively peaceful location, but that ended early in January 1969. We started taking frequent incoming rounds, and the rule was that you could not go of base the day after an attack.

This restriction to base put a real crimp in the scuba diving trips. We came up with the idea of forming a "search and rescue" team in hopes that we would be allowed off base to practice. We had to provide our own transportation and security for our journeys to the beach. Picture a 1-1/2 ton flatbed truck with scuba gear and a bunch of guys with bathing suits and M16's!!!

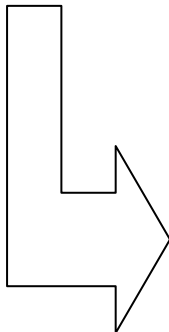
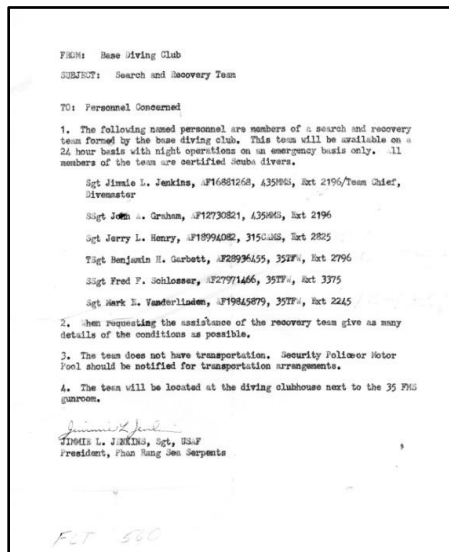
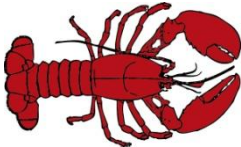
Someone was definitely watching over us! We did practice search safety and search methods/patterns, never thinking we would actually be called upon to really search or rescue, but we were!

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First the harbor master asked us to find and remove some debris that had damage the hull of some supply barges. We found and removed the debris like we knew what we were doing! Next we got a call from the harbor master requesting an inspection on the propellers of a gigantic cargo ship which had possibly become entangled in some steel cable. The props were cleared and we got to go on board the ship for a meeting with the Captain and the Chief engineer. Way over our pay grade!!!



FROM: Base Diving Club

SUBJECT: Search and Recovery Team

To: Personnel Concerned

1. The following named personnel are members of a search and recovery team formed by the base diving club. This team will be available on a 24 hour basis with night operations on an emergency basis only. All members of the team are certified Scuba divers.

Sgt. Jimmie L. Jenkins, 435th MMS, Ext 2196/Team Chief

SSgt John A. Graham, 435MMS, Ext 2196

Sgt Jerry L. Henry, 315CAMS, Ext 2825

TSgt Benjamin H. Garbett, 35TFW, Ext 2796

SSgt Fred F. Schlosser, 35TFW, Ext 3375

Sgt Mark E. Vanderlinden, 35TFW, Ext 2245

2. When requesting the assistance of the recovery team give as many details of the conditions as possible.

3. The team does not have transportation. Security Police or Motor Pool should be notified for transportation arrangements.

4. The team will be located at the diving clubhouse next to the 35 FMS gunroom.

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The final call we got was from the Army who requested our assistance in recovering a helicopter and the pilot that was down in the Kinh Dinh river. At first it was thought that the pilot might have been trapped in an air pocket in the helicopter, but he was not.

We recovered his body and the wrecked chopper from the river. I was really proud of the team and what we had accomplished as amateur divers!

As I stated earlier, the diving was fantastic and one of the best things were the lobster! We would catch a bunch of them, trade some to the officers club for steaks, and have surf and turf barbecues at the clubhouse! Not bad chow for the Nam!

MACCORDS ADVISORY TEAM

NINH THUAN PROVINCE

APO 96321

SUBJECT: Letter of Appreciation

THRU: Commanding Officer

35th Tactical Fighter Wing

APO 96321

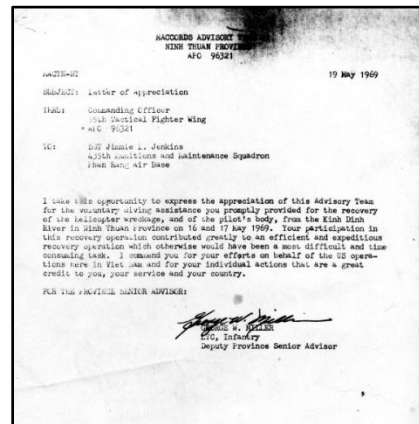
TO: Sgt. Jimmie L. Jenkins

435th Munitions and Maintenance Squadron

Phan Rang Air Base

I take this opportunity to express the appreciation of this Advisory Team for the voluntary diving assistance you promptly provided for the recovery of the helicopter wreckage, and of the pilot's body, from the Kinh Dinh River in Ninh Thuan Province on 16 and 17 May 1969. Your participation in this recovery operation contributed greatly to an efficient and expeditious recovery operation which otherwise would have been a most difficult and time consuming task. I commend you for your efforts on behalf of the US operations her in Vietnam and for your individual actions that are a great credit to you, your service and your country.

FOR THE PROVINCE SENIOR ADVISOR:



Archie T Pinkley

"I loves to go Swimmin with bowlegged Wimmin and dive between their Legs"....Scuba Club Motto....!!!!



What Is A Crew Chief?

By **Capt. Don L. F. Bice**, 614th TFS Maintenance Supervisor

A pair of combat boots are firmly planted on the concrete ramp in front of an F-100 aircraft. The 'Red Devil' on the nose-gear door denotes the 14th TFS 'Lucky Devils'.

Who is filling the boots? Probably a young sergeant with a man-sized job. He is a crew chief. Heretofore the job has been done by a technical sergeant or at least by a staff sergeant with considerable F-100 experience.

Things have changed. Now it is a sergeant with little experience on any aircraft, let alone the F-100.

The aircraft is staring back at him, seemingly in defiance of his efforts to keep it clean, in proper operational order, and safe to perform its mission.

His job is to bring together all of the resources provided...sometimes less than he would like to have...and produce an effective weapons system, capable of making a combat strike, all systems 'go'.

To him the aircraft is a big, complicated piece of machinery that thrives on manhours, parts, ordnance, a lot of sweat, and, at times, a few tears.

He wonders, "How did I get in this position?"

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Just a few years ago he was in high school, worrying about the angles, literature, and girl friends.

The war seems a little unreal to him. True enough he hears the gunfire and mortars at night in the surrounding hills, but where is the war? Where is the action? What is all of the commotion about? It isn't to be seen.

There are no Viet Cong hiding behind the revetments and taking sneaky shots at him or his buddies. Sometimes it's hard to believe that his aircraft is taxing out, loaded with virtually everything that the conventional weapons inventory has to offer.



As the bird leaps into the air, he observes orange flames trailing. The jet is in a hell of a hurry to get somewhere to do something to contribute to the war effort.

Full realization of what is on the receiving end is hard to grasp. Even so, there is a feeling of pride as his aircraft disappears into the distance.

It takes a lot of people behind the crew chief to produce a combat sortie. There isn't anyone on base who doesn't contribute his bit part..from those who supply the food, supplies, and stores, to the technicians who rally to the crew chief's aid when expert, specialized assistance is needed.

The crew chief's job is very demanding. Jets develop many problems. Work must be done immediately. The jets must be operational at all times.

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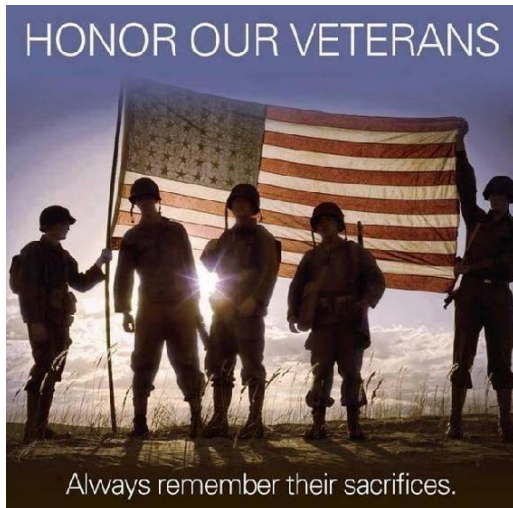
A good share of the crew chief’s work is manual labor. These are men, not lads, and their boots are sometimes filled with sweat. **Their boots are made for working!**

One of the many crew chiefs is **Sgt. Peter (Buddy) Bommarite**, 23, from St. Louis, Mo. I’ve been in the maintenance field for 19 years, and I take my hat off to this sergeant and all the others like him.

They come from different worlds, but they all have a lot of guts. These young men are fresh from school. They never give ‘No’ for an answer. These young men are doing a fine job. The American military is pleased and the public can be justly proud of them.

(Editor’s note: So should we all!)

Veterans Day message from Jim Kucipeck



Another year and another Veterans Day have arrived. This day is always sad for me and probably always will be. I am a veteran of the Vietnam War as all of you are but there are moments when I break down and want to cry, and sometimes do, for all those young men and women who never came home to their families. There is a topic in the latest Phan Rang News entitled “Did We Make a Difference?” And I would like to speak to that.

Let me recount a couple of incidents of my family’s experiences in WWII. Uncle Andy, a

Marine veteran of Iwo Jima, one night we were talking about his time there. I innocently asked if he ever had heard from any of his ‘buddies’. He looked my straight in the eye and said “Jim, I am the only one who survived out of my company (100+ men)!” Uncle Nick, another Marine vet, who fought on the South Pacific island of Bougainville, was a lone scout walking and laying in the swamps hunting for the Japanese. So close to them that he could have reached out and grabbed them by the ankles as they marched passed. And finally, Uncle Harry, an 18 year old kid, landed on Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944. He was wounded by a German hand grenade in the battle for St. Lo. All three suffered from “Battle Fatigue” now we call it PTSD. I think that they made a difference and I salute them.

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There was a post on this Facebook page which asked “Did We Make a Difference?” There were different responses and the one that really struck home for me was the comment on the political interference from Washington. We won every major battle and had the VC and NVA on the ropes, but we just up and left the war to the South Vietnamese people! From my perspective we didn’t make a difference!

My time in Phan Rang is much different from all of you in that I worked for a whole year with the Vietnamese people and spent little time working with GI’s. I got to work and know them on a personal level. They told me of their life experiences with the French, the Japanese, and at that time, the Americans. My crew chief counterpart prophetically told me that the Americans too would leave one day and then someone else would come and take over! Did I grow personally from my experience in Phan Rang, yes I did. But the question remains, did we make a difference in Vietnam? The answer is only up to you!

I could go on here but I have probably bored you by now with my thoughts. There is one thing that I want to leave you with. From the past two reunions and the Happy Valley FB page I have come to know and love all of you for your service in Vietnam and proud to call you brothers and sisters! Celebrate our day Veterans Day, salute!

Newman Earns Heroic Cheney Honor *(Seventh Air Force News, April 9, 1969)*

by Maj. Carroll Shershun

TAN SON NHUT—For the third time in the past four years a member of the 3d Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group (MAC) has won the coveted Cheney Award for heroism. For the second successive year the highest annual award for heroism has gone to a "Jolly Green Giant" pararescueman (PJ).

Sgt. Thomas A. Newman of Milwaukee, Wise., assigned until recently as a PJ with Det. 1, 40th ARRS, at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, was selected for the 1968 award for his "extraordinary heroism and valor" in the rescue of a

downed Air Force 0-2 pilot, May 30, 1968.



Sgt. Newman

Despite the known presence of enemy forces, Sergeant Newman voluntarily descended through the double-canopied dense jungle to complete the rescue under

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storybook conditions.

After being lowered on the forest penetrator Sergeant Newman was forced to search for the pilot in expanding circles since it was too dark to see more than a few feet. He knew that the pilot, Col. Norman P. Phillips, had broken his arm when he bailed out and needed assistance.

As the enemy forces approached, he told the hovering helicopter crew above to "move out" in order to improve his chances of locating the downed pilot without letting the enemy know their exact whereabouts.

Suddenly he saw a muzzle flash. He began to crawl toward the source, thinking that it came from, the downed pilot. He was right. Calling to the injured colonel for identification, he then inched his way toward him.

Reaching Colonel Phillips, he cut him free of his flight and survival gear. As he worked, he could see and hear enemy weapons being fired.

After 20 minutes, but what must have seemed like an eternity, the noise settled down. Sergeant Newman called in the rescue helicopter, which quickly returned to its hover point. Almost immediately enemy ground fire was received as the HH-3E's flight engineer quickly lowered the hoist.

As he turned to assist the injured pilot, Sergeant Newman lost sight of the forest penetrator in the darkness. Searching for the device he found the slackened cable. He radioed for the slack to be taken up. But the cable went up rapidly and snared his foot, which had become entangled.

Suddenly he was off his feet, suspended by his ankle and being jerked, rapidly, through the trees. His leg and ankle were violently wrenched as his body was lifted through the branches.

As he rose through the trees feet first he could see enemy weapons being fired at him from only 50 to 75 yards away.

Slowed by branches which loosened the cable around his ankle he fell 20 feet to the ground, spraining his left wrist.

Quickly recovering from the flying-trapeze-like experience, Sergeant Newman quickly secured the injured pilot and himself to the penetrator and shielded the pilot with his own body to protect him from the increasingly accurate enemy ground

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fire.

In November 1968 Sergeant Newman was presented the Air Force Cross, the Nation's second highest award for valor. He became only the sixth enlisted man in the history of the Air Force to receive the award.

The annual award consists of a certificate, a bronze medal and a \$500 honorarium.

(Doug's note: Sgt. Newman's story of heroism is very similar to "Rescue Behind Enemy Lines" presented in Phan Rang News 81 and 82. This story isn't Phan Rang related, but I will always be awed by the courage of these individuals no matter where they were assigned.)

Gleanings from Food Service: Ninety-eight pairs of sneakers were issued to the civilian attendants in the mess halls this past week.

Phan Fare, November 1, 1967

The next article is important information for those that worked on the C-123 and were associated with Operation Ranch Hand.

New Agent Orange Benefits Thousands of Air Force veterans are affected.
(Source: Military Officer, September 2015)

Earlier this year, a report by the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine concluded crews operating on C-123 aircraft during the Vietnam War were exposed to Agent Orange.

In congressional testimony provided in May, MOAA recommended that Congress and the VA act on the report.

The report found evidence that those who served aboard or worked on the C-123 aircraft associated with Operation Ranch Hand (ORH) were exposed to the herbicide both during and after the Vietnam War, when many of the aircraft remained in service for aeromedical transportation and other missions.

The VA published an interim final rule June 18 to allow veterans to apply for disability compensation and VA care for any of 14 presumptive medical conditions due to exposure

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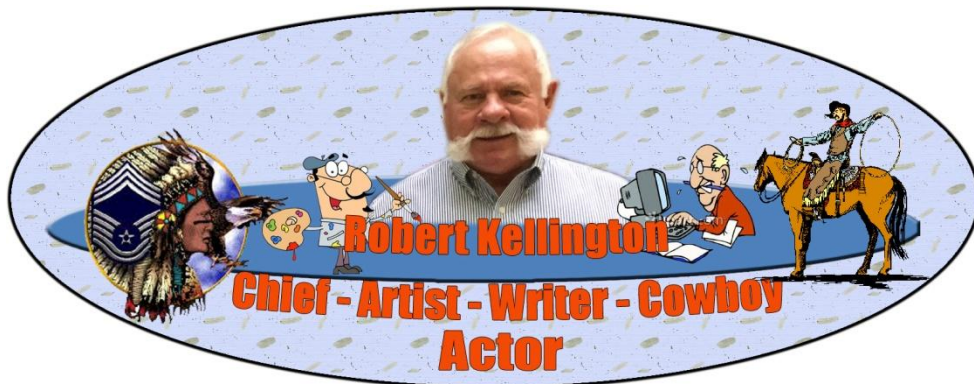
to Agent Orange. The ruling applies to active Air Force and Air Force Reserve veterans assigned to specific C-123 units from 1969-86 who have developed an Agent Orange condition.

In a press release, the VA said, "Air Force and Air Force Reserve flight, medical, and ground maintenance crew members who served on the contaminated ORH C-123s are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides during their service, thus making it easier for them to establish entitlement for some VA benefits if they develop an Agent Orange related presumptive condition. In addition, for affected Air Force Reserve crew members, VA will presume that their Agent Orange-related condition had its onset during their Reserve training. This change ensures that these reservists are eligible for VA disability compensation and medical care for any Agent Orange related presumptive condition and that their surviving dependents are eligible for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation and burial benefits."

MOAA recommends any Air Force veteran who served in a C-123 squadron during or after the Vietnam War contact a veterans service organization that represents and assists veterans in the VA claims process.

Update on last weeks story, **“Plane Lost Over Nui Dat”**. **Sam Lewis** wrote: ...I’ve told that story several times over the years. I was on SAT Patrol that day and I was sitting and watching as that poor guy tried to retrieve his model plane as it flew further and further away. I felt so sorry for that guy.

Robert Kellington’s Auctorial Reflections



BORN TO THE COLOR PURPLE

By

R.W. Kellington 11 Sep 2005

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Sobering thoughts of helplessness
Unable to participate or show that I care
This is what I call despair
Can think of nothing but our troops over there
Mother's Son's, Father's, Daughter's – Oh so brave
How many lost as they search the caves
How many fallen from the air
Along roadsides where none dare
Airman, Marines, Soldiers, Navy
Heroes all and Born to the color purple be
Their lives on the line – That we be free
Terrorism, brutality, horror and death – Daily companions –Yes

No news is good news- Dread the day when an unknown soldier approaches our door –
with the news that our loved one is no more
No tear, no cry, no prayer, no sigh
Can't fathom how the enemy prays to die
While we pray to live and continue to give
Who is right and who is wrong – Makes no difference when we hear deaths song

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RED CROSS GIRLS

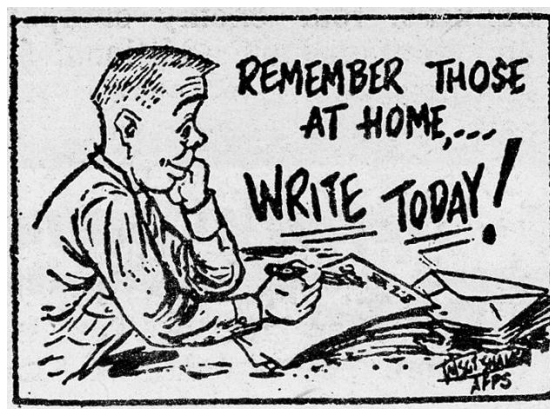
A few times while I was at Phan Rang, the Red Cross girls would come to the flight line. I think they had a little lemonade cart and they would go around greeting each of us and handing out cups of lemonade. They were doing a morale boosting mission.

One day I and some other guys were walking by the section of the revetments where the F-100s were parked. The girls had already handed us some lemonade and were scouring the ramp looking for other people. The girls had on their Red Cross outfits, flowing Sun dresses with their Red Cross symbol.

In one revetment was an F-100 with a pilot seated inside and a steel ladder hanging from the cockpit. Standing at the bottom of the ladder was the aircraft's maintenance crew chief looking up talking to the pilot.

One very pretty Red Cross girl spies them and races over to them with two cups of lemonade. She hands one to the crew chief and then scrambles up the ladder and bends over into the cockpit to give one to the pilot. The wind is blowing. The crew chief is looking up.

The pilot is all smiles and blushing while the girl chats with him for a few minutes. We are all watching this in envy. The expression on the crew chiefs face was "priceless". I believe he sprained his neck. We were all so jealous of that crew chief that day. Guys were saying "damn, wish I was a tire kicker".



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Authors in Our Midst *(If anyone knows of any other authors from our group please let me know and I will add them.)*

Jack Anderson: [Vietnam Remembrances](#)

Joe Kaupa: [Protect and Serve: One Man’s Journey from Vietnam to Law Enforcement](#)

Robert Chappelle: [Tales of Bien Hoa](#) and [Tales of Phan Rang](#)

Margorie Hanson: [Brave Warriors, Humble Heroes: A Vietnam War Story](#)

Vic Markle: [Forgotten Moments Forgotten People](#)

Mike Trahan: [The Gift: The Air Force Years](#); [The Gift Part Two - The Air Force Years](#); and [Home Again: Short Story](#)

Rob Morris: [Untold Valor](#); [Marinell](#); [The Wild Blue Yonder and Beyond: The 95th Bomb Group in War and Peace](#); [Prisoner of the Swiss](#); [I’ll Be Seeing You](#) and [Combat Bombardier: Memoirs of Two Combat Tour in the Skies Over Europe in World War Two](#)

Carl Adams: [Remember the Alamo: A Sentry Dog Handler’s View of Vietnam from the Perimeter of Phan Rang Air Base](#)

Gary K. Thrasher: [Phantom Letters](#)

**“We expected nuthin’ in Vietnam when we got home-nuthin’s what
we got”**

Now we have each other!

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This newsletter was compiled and published by [Douglas Severt](#). I want to thank all of those that have shared with me so many of their stories and pictures so that I could share them with you to keep the memories alive.

