

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 98

“Stories worth telling”

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Capt. R. S. Pahl Cited For Vietnam Bombing (*The Post-Standard, February 7, 1972*)

GRIFFISS AFB - Gallantry and achievement may seem to have been relegated to the distant past, but a 29-year-old Rome Air Development Center pilot has proved that they are still current.

Capt. Robert S. Pahl of the Center's Flight Test Division was recently decorated with one of the nation's highest honors: the Silver Star for gallantry in Vietnam. In addition, the B-57 Reconnaissance pilot added two oak leaf clusters to the Distinguished Flying Cross for extraordinary achievement in battle on two other occasions.

The Rossville, Ga., native, while stationed at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam, with the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, carried out three highly successful missions against enemy forces.

On Feb. 5, 1971, Capt. Pahl flew his F-100 fighter-bomber to a location where friendly forces were pinned down by intense ground fire. Heavy antiaircraft fire, poor visibility and darkness notwithstanding, Pahl delivered devastation with unerring accuracy against the hostile forces. He destroyed their effectiveness, thereby enabling the allies to regroup and prepare for an offensive thrust the following month.

Three days later, shortly after midnight, he scrambled from the alert pad at Phan Rang to aid friendly forces immobilized by intense mortar, rocket and automatic weapons fire. Despite a low, 5,000-foot ceiling, heavy ground fire and minimal visibility, the Air Force officer again completed his mission with pinpoint accuracy. This was accomplished at the risk that an error in judgment would have resulted in destruction of friendly forces.

(This story originally appeared in Phan Rang News 26.

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A month later, on March 6, Capt. Pahl went to the aid of U.S. Army personnel who were under heavy rocket attack at Fire Base Alpha Four, deep within the demilitarized zone. His flight was the only available one to destroy the rocket sites with precision. The citation for his Distinguished Flying Cross states, "If Captain Pahl had not displayed such great courage, professionalism and aerial skill, it is likely a disaster would have befallen the American Unit."

Pahl earned a B.S. degree in industrial management from Georgia Institute of Technology, in 1965, and he entered the Air Force in 1966. He attended Officers' Training School and was commissioned that same year.

(This same article appeared in Phan Rang News 26 which was from the Syracuse Post Standard and is slightly different than this one from The Post-Standard. There also is an interesting story about Bob Pahl swapping roles with the navy in Phan Rang News 30. We were fortunate to have Col. Bob Pahl with us at the 2nd reunion in San Antonio, Texas where he presented BGen Frank L. Gailer Jr. with a plaque.)



U. S. Air Force Photo by Sgt. Oswald Gooden

From left, Sgt. Roger L. Turner, Army Sgt. Francis Poledink, Sgt. Ronald D. Childs, Instructor, Students set up 81mm Mortar for firing.

Airmen, Soldiers Finish 7th AF Combat Course

Phan Rang - At the only school of its kind in the Republic of Vietnam, 22 airmen and nine soldiers were recently presented completion certificates at Seventh Air Force's Weapons, Small Units Tactics and Mortar School here.

Operated by the 821st Combat Security Police Squadron, the 10-day course centered around fire direction control and the firing and maintenance of the 81mm mortar.

"This is the first time we had the Army with us, and they certainly did well,": said the commandant of the school, 1st Lt. John K. Morris.

THE BRAINERD DAILY DISPATCH

"CENTRAL MINNESOTA'S DAILY NEWSPAPER"

National Guard Unit Welcomed in Vietnam (*The Brainerd Daily Dispatch, Central Minnesota's Daily Newspaper, September 14, 1968*)

By HENRI HUET

PHAN RANG, Vietnam (AP) — The 116th Combat Engineer Battalion—the first battalion-size national Guard outfit to reach Vietnam —was welcomed today and told "You are needed here."

The U.S. Military Command in Saigon announced the arrival of the Idaho Falls, Idaho unit simultaneously with a parade ground welcome formation held at the Phan Rang Air Base.

Most of the battalion had arrived by plane Friday, preceded by their heavy equipment which came by sea. The last planeload of engineers missed the ceremony, however. Their plane was diverted at the last minute Cam Ranh Bay.

On hand to greet the engineers were Lt. Gen. William Peers, commander of the 1st Field Force command under which they will work, and Gen. David S. Parker, commander of all engineer troops in Vietnam.

The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Donald Ghormley, a veteran of World War II and Korea, responded: "We have a job do and we'll do it well."

The battalion of some 750 men has seen active service in every conflict involving the United States since the Spanish-American war. It was recalled to active duty April 14, 1968.



Communists bomb Airport, take Phan Rang (*Bennington Banner, Bennington, Vermont, Wednesday, April 16, 1975*)

SAIGON (UPI) — Tank-led Communist forces captured another provincial capital today, shut down Bien Hoa air base for nearly six hours with an artillery barrage and routed a South Vietnamese regimental base outside the province capital of Xuan Loc.

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The series of military setbacks shook the morale of warweary government troops fighting to keep the remnants of a dwindling South Vietnam from falling into Communist hands. They coincided with reports the Communists had established an air base at Pleiku in the Central

Highlands.

The Communists, moving under a barrage of more than 1,000 shells, overran the 2,000-man regiment of the 18th Division at Gia Kiem, eight miles northwest of Xuan Loc, which is 38 miles northeast of Saigon. By nightfall, field reporters said, the battered outfit had retreated to Trang Bom, only 23 miles from the capital.

The regiment, which some field reports said appeared to be 80 per cent destroyed, blew up eight American-supplied 105mm and 155mm howitzer artillery pieces before fleeing, military sources said.

Sources said other government troops today abandoned the province capital of Phan Rang, on the south China Sea coast 165 miles northeast of Saigon, when it was attacked by a 5,000-man Communist force moving with tank support.

It was the 18th provincial capital lost to the Communists in the current offensive and left the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong in full control of Ninh Thuan Province. The Communists now control 18 of South Vietnam’s 44 provinces and two-thirds of the nation’s territory.

Military sources said government warplanes bombed the Phan Rang air base after the city’s 2,500 defenders fled to ships waiting offshore. Two South Vietnamese generals were feared trapped in the city, and Communist tanks were reported cruising the streets.

Intelligence sources said the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had established what they considered their main air base in the fallen Central Highlands province capital of Pleiku, 230 miles north of Saigon.

The sources said at least one Korean War-vintage MIG19 jet and some Soviet-built helicopters were on the ground at the Pleiku airfield.

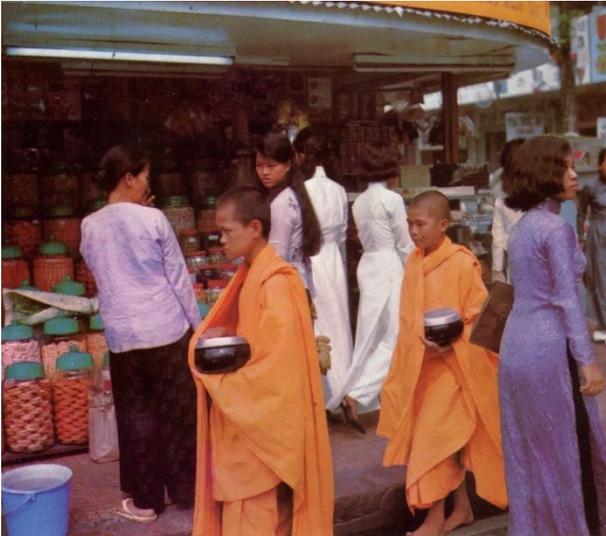
Communist troops meanwhile today fired more than 30 rounds of 130mm artillery into the government’s major airbase at Bien Hoa, 14 miles northeast of Saigon and headquarters for South Vietnam’s Military Region III.

The Face of Viet-Nam - The Land & the People (Part 3)

SOUTH VIET-NAM

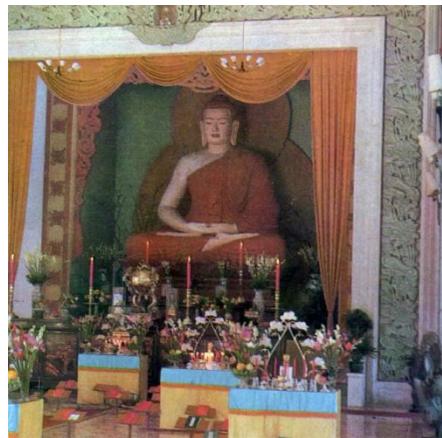
Land of Contracts

RELIGIONS OF VIET-NAM



Buddhist monks, with their begging-bowls in hand, walk through Saigon streets. South Viet-Nam is a religious country, with free choice of worship and (which may seem strange to Westerners) plural religions. One may make offerings in a Buddhist temple, but also pay reverence to his ancestors according to the teachers of Confucius; and it is possible to find Christ, Confucius, Mohammed, and Buddha all honored in the same temple.

This is the interior of a Cao Dai Temple near Tay Ngh. Cao Dai is a new religion blending Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.



A Buddhist Temple — the Xa Loi Pagoda in Saigon.

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TEMPLES AND TOMBS



Elaborate architecture, varying widely among the different religions responsible for their erection, makes Vietnamese temples and tombs fascinating to the Westerner. In some, Chinese influence dominates; but most are in an Indonesian style.

Notice the wide difference between the ornate sculptures of the temple in the upper picture and the restrained architecture of the Cao Dai temple in the lower left-hand corner.



The center picture shows statues in the courtyard of the Tomb of Emperor Minh Mang, built in the 1840's in the city of Hue.



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WATER TRANSPORT IS EVERYWHERE



Rivers, canals, irrigation ditches and the South China Sea are all invaluable means of transport for South Viet-Nam. With railroads knocked out by Viet Cong guerrillas and rusting away, and roads impassable except by the use of armed convoys, the people must depend upon small boats to carry much of their commerce.

Above, a farm girl transports sugar-cane in her narrow, canoe-like boat along an irrigation canal. In the background is her home.



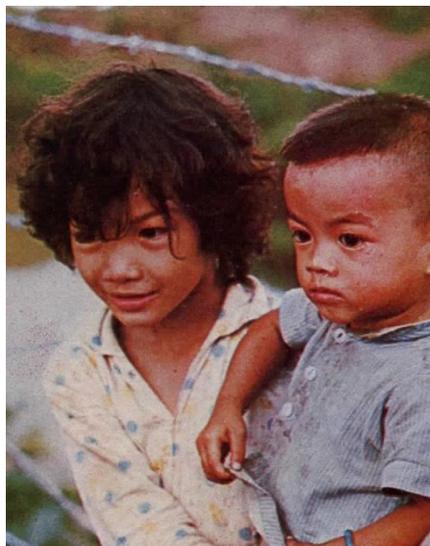
The River of Saigon with a small part of its fleet of cargo-carrying and fishermen's sampans, and houseboats on which families spend their lives. The sampans are sturdy craft despite their low free-boards, capable of carrying considerable loads.

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PEOPLE OF THE FIELDS AND RICE PADDIES





Protect & Serve: One Man’s Journey From Vietnam to Law Enforcement

A True Life Story by Joe Kaupa

Vietnam

Part 2

For the next month I was posted alone on the towers in different areas. I have to admit it was a very scary and a lonely time, and I had a lot of time to think about my wife and kids, wondering what they were doing at home hoping they were getting along well. I remember so well while I was posted alone on the towers how my mind worked in so many different ways, wondering if the VC tried coming through the wire, just where would it be at. I would look out into the darkness, thinking, this is where they will try to come through. It would be so quiet on the perimeter, and then all of a sudden I would see red tracer rounds out in the distance and hear gun fire. You would hear and see the tracers and would say to yourself, "Here they come, be ready!" I grabbed my weapon and strained my eyes looking out over the wire to try to detect any movement. It was so scary out there all alone, the darkness and no sound, then all the sudden you would hear something. It is funny how the mind works. Your watching the fence, wondering when Charlie was going to come through the wire charging your location firing and it was just you and no help. How can I stop thirty enemy all firing at your tower and B-40 Rockets coming at you. Pretty crazy how the mind works.

“Holy Shit! There was an eight foot cobra on top of the sandbags.”

I remember how hard it was to sleep during the day after working all night because it was so damn hot. One night I was posted on a tower in the Golf area, I think, and I had just climbed up in the tower and was going to put my things down, when I heard something, I shined my small flashlight over to the corner. Inside Holy Shit! There was an eight foot cobra on top of the sandbags. I about shit my pants! I called CSC on the radio and got permission to shoot it.

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Working on man towers at night was scary and nerve racking as hell as it was so dark and you were the only one there wondering if the VC would make a charge through your wire and you would be over run. During my month of working in the towers we had some probes at the wire by VC, as you could see movement outside the wire but it would only be there a couple seconds and the VC would be gone. The K-9's would alert and then nothing. We all knew what the VC were up too. We would receive incoming Mortars and 122 Rockets when there was no moon. To this day, I can still hear those Mortars and Rockets wising over my head, then all the sudden you hear an explosion upon impact, and it would light up the ground.

I remember thinking so much about the VC and about how World War II, Korea, and the war with Japan was fought and how here in Vietnam it was so different. Each one of those enemies wore uniforms and had a line of fighting and you knew who your enemy was. But here in Vietnam you just didn't know. Everyone wore Black PJ's and a straw hat. The enemy could be an old man, a oman, even small kids. There were no uniforms. The VC wore only Black PJ's and a straw hat just like all the peasants in the rice paddies. The NVA wore uniforms but not their Sapper Teams. They only wore a groin cloth. During the day they would come on base and work, and at night they would be shooting at us. I was only aware of two occasions when some of the Vietnamese workers were caught making diagrams and marking off certain distances for their future targets in an area by the flight line or in the barracks area. They were making coordinate grids to set up for mortar and 122 rocket attacks would be Vietnamese that were suppose to be peasants and worked on base. **YOU NEVER KNEW WHO THE ENEMY WAS.** It may be a small child, mamason or papa-son.

Well, July 1, 1968 came around, and I received my promotion to SSGT and had to move out of the airmen's barracks and into the NCO barracks. (It is a terrible thing to say, but I cannot remember the name of my bunkmate for the life of me.) Upon going to work that night I was assigned as a SAT Team leader and for the next five months or so, that was my job. On the SAT Team we patrolled the perimeter in a sector and gave breaks to men in the towers, unless we got called to respond to a probe. We had a lot of probes which the K-9 dogs would alert. The VC would probe the perimeter to see if they could get information to plan a large attack.

“If there was no moon we always had probes.”

I remember one night in particular when we responded to a probe at the wire where a K-9 alerted, there were four to five VC by the wire. We did not know for sure if there was going to be a sapper attack on the base or not. We called in Spooky, a C-47 aircraft that had two or three mini guns, and he came in with guns a blazing. Each gun fired 10,000 rounds a minute. When he opened up on the wire, it looked like a water hose of green tracers being sprayed to the ground. It was just constant. I think every fifth round was a tracer. He also would drop

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illumination. It was quite a fireworks display! Those of us on the ground were firing M-60 rounds from our jeep, M-16 and M79 grenade launcher, (was fired from a tube.) There were at least four to five VC at the fence, and I know we hit at least three of them, because we saw them go down before Spooky arrived. We were also using slap flares to light up the area. At daylight, a sweep of the area revealed a lot of blood, but no bodies. The VC were good about not leaving their dead or wounded behind, as were the Americans. Once I was put on permanent SAT, I carried an AR 15, an M79 grenade launcher, .38 revolver and grenades.

For the next few months this was a normal thing, depending upon if the moon was full or not. If there was no moon we always had probes. During the night, though, I would always make sure the guys in the towers got plenty of breaks, and I would have one of the airman that was on the SAT team go up and relieve the guy in the tower so he could come down and just relax or have a bite to eat out of his C-Rations. We would take our peanut butter out of our C-Rations and mosquito repellent and light it to heat up our beans and wieners, ham and lima beans or whatever else we had. Nancy would send me Jiffy Pop popcorn and we would mix up bug spray and peanut butter for a fire and pop the corn over it. It was really great.

After about two to three months we were able to call home through a ham operator in the states. I never really knew how that worked. We would get a ten minute call. We'd go up to the hill. I think it was call Nui Dat and a communication guy would call to Seattle, Washington, or somewhere and ham a radio operators would contact your home and get your wife on the line. All I remember was you could not have a direct conversation but you would talk and have to say "Over"; then the person on the other end would talk and they would have to say "Over." It was always so great to hear Nancy's voice but afterwards it was very, very hard on me emotionally, as I am sure it was for her. I never talked to my kids; I don't think I could have handled it.

I'm skipping around here a bit, but as I think about all this over the past forty-five years things just keep popping into my head. There were a lot of mornings when we got off post that we would go to the back of the orderly room; outside there was a small area where we could drink a few beers or just BS, before we tried to sleep. I can also remember when it came time, we would have to go to the dispensary to have our shots updated. There would be two lines. The first line was for your shot updates, and the second line was the penicillin line. Glad I never got to that line. Some of the guys would go off base during the day and hook up with the local girls. Not a good scene. Damm! I would laugh because the medics were not very nice to them. They would tell them to hang onto the wall, then the medic would ram that needle in their butt, and they would let out a blood curdling scream. I had pretty much adjusted to the heat and the smell during the past two to three months, except when Momma-son would wash our clothes and use rice starch on our fatigues. Wow! That smelled also, but it did not bother me too much. Things went pretty good at night. We'd get mortar rounds and 122 rocket rounds fired into the base and, of course a few probes on the wire. I did have an incident with one of

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the airmen one night. It was about 0200 hrs., and when we drove up to his tower, and I did not see him or hear him. I yelled out to him. No response. I told the other two guys to stay put and keep their eyes open. I didn't know if the VC got thru the wire and slit his throat or what. It was not normal. I climbed the steps to the tower and, once inside I looked in the corner. He was sleeping. He had his M-16 next to him, and when I went to wake him up, he grabbed his M-16 and pointed it at me and said if I report him he would shoot me. I told him to settle down and said that everyone makes a mistake and this would be between the two of us. But I also told him if this ever happened again, I would see that he was court marshaled. I have always felt that everyone is human and can make a mistake. I don't know if this was the right thing to do or not, but to this day, only two people knew about this, him and I.

The nights were so long out on the perimeter and when you are alone with no one to talk to and nothing to do but look out on the wire trying to see movement, it can really work on your mind. Try standing in a square about 6'x 6' for twelve hours in the middle of the night, alone, trying to see a person coming to the wire about thirty yards away from your tower. Do this six days a week for fifty-two weeks. Wow! I have nothing but respect for these men. Speaking of respect, think about being on the wire alone, with just your dog, and the enemy, is trying at any time to come through your wire. Wow! One cannot say enough about the K-9 handlers and their dogs.

Things were going pretty good for me except I really missed my wife and kids. I think it was one night in September when I was standing in guard mount, my Flight Sgt. told me that he needed me to post at the Well, (water point) along with an E-4. I am saying to myself, well, this will be the end of us. The water point, which supplies all the water for the base, was located about one to two miles from the base perimeter in a hamlet called Tap Chan. The water point was guarded 24/7 and there was only two men at the post. When the Army posted it they had fourteen men posted. Wow! I checked out a jeep, and the airman and I grabbed a case of C-Rations and water, loaded our gear, a M-60 machine gun and extra belts of ammo and headed out to the Well. This was the first time that I was posted at the water point. We arrived and relieved the other men. The Well had a large bunker and short tower, all attached. There was a 50 caliber machine gun mounted in the tower. On each side of the bunker and tower were small hootches, which were about five to six feet from strands of rolled concertina wire. I remember, before dark two little Vietnamese boys came up to the wire wanting food. I gave them some C-Rations, but I opened them first so they had to eat it and could not sell it on the Black Market. As darkness approached we got settled in and got our gun positions set up to where we thought trouble might come from. That night there was no moon and it was really dark. We both looked at each other, thinking this is not good. At about 0100 hrs., we heard automatic weapons fire across the river and red tracers. (Note: Red tracers met VC). We knew it was the VC in a hamlet across the river. We could hear yelling, and we thought this was going to be a very long night because we believed that they would be coming to the water point next. The night went on, and nothing happened. Finally daylight. Our relief showed up, and we briefed them on the happenings during the night and headed back to base. This was really a long night. I was lucky enough that I only had to post at the water point two times and both

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were uneventful. Thank God, as you were out in no man's land, with back up being one to two miles away. When it was damn worrisome though. I don't remember anymore for sure the date, but sometime after the TET ground attack the water point was hit bad and the two security policemen were critically injured. Thank God they lived. It had to be just a terrible night.

As time went on, the monsoon season came. What a hell of a time! The rains came and came. At night while on the perimeter the water got so high at times that it just about filled the bottom of the jeep's floor. Getting around was just about impossible. We would have our ponchos on and in five minutes we would be soaked from head to toe. Getting the jeep stuck was automatic. I thought about the men in the field, the Army grunts and the Marines during the rains, and the hell they must have been going through for days. If you weren't there, you have no idea what it was like. Damn, I felt sorry for those Army and Marine soldiers in the field.

“I just knew the water point was going to get it and it was just a matter of when.”

In September the Water point was hit by 122 Rockets and Mortars. Both Security Policemen posted there were severely injured. One troop took over 100 pieces of shrapnel in his body and the other had a severe chest wound. They were medivac out. I just knew the water point was going to get it and it was just a matter of when. I was working SAT Team that night but don't remember the area I was in.

I can't remember for sure, but I think it was sometime in October or November of 1968 that the Lieutenant told me that I was going to be moved into CSC (Central Security Control) effective immediately. CSC is the operation center for all Security Police operations. They called them comptrollers. I thought to myself, well Joe, someone must have a lot of confidence in you to want you to go into CSC and be responsible for the entire base security. CSC was located in a small room just adjacent to the armory, across the road from the flight line where all the aircraft were parked and ready for their missions. We had F-100 fighter jets there as well as Australian Cambria bombers there. The building where CSC was housed, also had offices and a sleeping area for men that worked days and were on stand-by for back up SAT Teams during the night. The operation center had a board on the wall showing the layout of the entire base and the perimeter including the Well. Each post was on this big board and the name of the person that was on it. Also we had radio contact with every tower, K-9, SAT Team, Heavy Weapons Unit, the Well, Korean Ambush teams and Aussie Ambush teams. We also kept a typed blotter of every radio call no matter what the call was. If a radio call came in on a probe at the wire, we would dispatch a SAT Team and, if necessary more backup. As I said earlier, we had backup SAT Teams, located in the CSC building. Usually the Flight Sgt, (which was an E-6 or above), and the Lieutenant or Major stayed in CSC unless they went out checking posts. Things went well for me in CSC because I did have experience as a Dispatch from my previous base in the States. From October to the first part of December things were fairly quiet, as I remember.

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The NVA and VC didn't like the monsoon season and all the rain. We would continue to have our probes on the wire when it wasn't raining and a few short 122 rocket and mortar attacks.

“God! I missed my wife and kids!”

God! I missed my wife and kids! I used to lay in my bunk thinking about them, wondering what they were doing and how big Scott and Debra were getting. Some days, while lying there, tears would just start going down my cheeks and I had a hell of a time shutting them off. I did have something to look forward to, though. I had been approved for an R&R (Rest and Recovery), to meet my wife in Hawaii around the middle of December.

You can get an autographed copy directly from the author. Call Joe at 507-534-3303 and arrange to have one shipped directly to you. He sells them for his cost, but they are also available on Amazon by clicking [here](#).

Phan Rang AB Challenge Coins

Side one depicts the country, Phan Rang, Happy Valley, the dates of the base and most importantly all the nations that served there. Side two remembers all who served there, and stresses the fact we did indeed return with honor. the dragon and the palm trees signify the country of Vietnam. And finally the ribbons demonstrate that were earned with honor! The above rendering is just that

and the process has begun to have them manufactured.



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Order your challenge coin now. Price includes postage.

MAIL ORDER PRICE* LIST		Total Amount to remit
Each	Price	
1	\$6.56	\$6.56
2	\$7.00	\$14.00
3	\$7.22	\$21.66
4	\$7.44	\$29.76
5	\$7.66	\$38.30
6	\$7.88	\$47.28
7 or more call for cost.		

Send Check or money order for the exact amount to **Jack Anderson, 826 72nd St. SE, Auburn, WA 98092**. Please make check payable to **Happy Valley Reunion**. Because of the high cost of manufacturing these coins we are going to need your money up front and will have to amass sufficient funds to have coins made. Your understanding is appreciated and we will do everything to insure prompt delivery after the coins are manufactured.

** Price includes a \$.50 profit for the Phan Rang AB Reunion fund.*

Buy 10 or more coins for only \$4.44 Ea.

Coins must be paid for now with pickup at the Phan Rang AB Reunion in Oklahoma City in October or at point of origin after manufacturing in Oklahoma City.

Please send check or money order payable to **Phan Rang Reunion** to Jack Anderson, 826 72nd St. SE, Auburn, WA 98092.

Order quantities must be 10 or more coins.

PHAN RANG STAFF MEMBERS

Joseph Burkhart: Master of Ceremonies

Robert Kellington: Tour Coordinator

Jack Anderson: Treasure

Lou Ruggerio: Site coordinator/Contract negotiator

Douglas Severt: Reunion Coordinator

Ed Downey/Barbara Brandt: Ceremonies

Christopher Boles: Photographer

Kirk Minert: Aircraft Historian

Bob Tucker: Keeper of the Rolls

Mike Maleski: Chaplain

Jim Erixson: Associate Chaplain

Bob Howe: Australian Ambassador (new)

FACEBOOK GROUP ADMINISTRATORS

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

...and the 812 members (and counting) of the “Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB Facebook group.

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Here's more information about the Sheraton Oklahoma Downtown Hotel

- Guestroom rates do not include the current city/state occupancy tax
- Room rates are \$129 single and double, triple rate \$159 and quad rate \$189
- Included are two full breakfast buffets, a \$32 value
- Check in time: 3:00 pm; Checkout time: 12:00 pm
- Individual cancellations without liability: 5 days prior to arrival
- 24-hour Sheraton Fitness by Core Performance (NBA certified)
- Free WiFi in all guest rooms and lobby

[Click here to make your hotel reservation.](#)

Please make your hotel reservations now!

This newsletter was compiled and published by **[Douglas Severt.](#)**