

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

Phan Rang AB News No. 99

“Stories worth telling”

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Remembering 26 January 1969

(The following is from a post by Joe Kaupa on Facebook and the ensuing comments to that post.)

HOW MANY REMEMBER? On Jan 26, 1969, a night to remember for those of us that were stationed at Phan Rang AB on that date. I will never forget it! 47 years ago on this date, Jan 26, 1969 at 0015 hrs. all hell broke loose as the base came under attack by a large group of VC and NVA Sapper Teams.

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This attack was the largest combined Rocket, Mortar and ground attack in the history of Phan Rang AB. The attack lasted a number of hours and the base was finally declared secure after 12 hrs. from the initial assault. We received 76 incoming Rocket and Mortar rounds that night along with the perimeter being penetrated in a number of areas. This was the 2nd most incoming rounds the base ever received at one time. (Note: On 09-22-69 the base received a total of 86 incoming in one night.)

On the night of the 26th NVA Sapper teams penetrated the perimeters and 15 US troops were wounded with 0 KIA. The NVA weren't so lucky, they had 17 KIA and 1 Prisoner of War, that was accounted for. It is unknown just how many more KIA or WIA as they were very good at retrieving there WIA and KIA outside the perimeter. "Hand Salute" to all my brothers in the 35th Security Police Squadron and fellow Augmentee's that repelled the enemy in that nights ground attack. You know who you are and should be proud of your actions to defend the base and all the lives you may have saved.

NOT MANY PEOPLE REALIZE that the 35th SPS and Augmentee's were the ONLY ground defense for the entire Base.

From ALL the men that worked that night on the flight line, Crew Chief's, Maintenance men ETC and my SP Brothers, Augmentee's working the perimeter towers, SAT Teams, Heavy Weapons crews and K-9 troops, you all need to know you are HERO'S and Kudos's for a job well done. **I am honored and proud to say I served with you that night.**

I wonder how many of you remember that night in history? I also wonder how many of you realize that history has shown that Phan Rang AB received a total of 525 incoming Rocket and Mortar round alone in 1969. Bien Hoa AB received the second most at 228 round in 1969. Phan Rang AB received a total of 693 incoming rounds from July 1968 to 1972. This was the MOST incoming rounds for any AB in Vietnam. Apparently no records were kept prior to July 1968.

In closing I would like to hear from you if you remember this. I often wonder just how many men remembered that night, Jan 26, 1969. Joe Kaupa, SSGT, 35th Security Police Squadron, "Panther Flight", 1968-1969.

Dave Miller: ... remember Men of the 554th REDHORSE defended the 2 mile BRAVO Sector. JULIETTE Sector took the brunt of the attack ... I'm told BRAVO was second.
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Mike Whyte: I was one of the augmentees that night. Not fun but crazy.

Ken Daggett: I had been there 6 months. Sure am glad you SPs stopped the cong as our "higher

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ups" almost issued weapons. What a goat rope that would have been!
Vincent Donadio: Thanks many times over for keeping bad guys away so we could work to get the birds back in the air.
Nat Nastasi: That was my first night of duty (I was with a short timer , he only had 3 weeks togo) being my first night they teamed you up with someone! We were lucky that night, 1969 was a long year!
Jack Anderson: Who could forget?!!! Charlie had a good night that night.
Gary Reynolds: I remember well!!! We actually got our rifles!!! Spent time in bunkers and we're reday to be deployed to our assigned positions!!! Left phan rang in Feb 69. So this was a good send off for me 352nd weapons.
Floyd Brown: I remember it very well... A very long night...
John Schrank: I remember that night quite well I was lucky had my camera Got some nice pictures of gunships flight line cooking off . 435 MMS. Weapons release.
Doyce Bailey: Sure do remember that night. I was one of those augmentees. I was at the armory when the plane went up across the street. It was a long night.
Michael Gilchrist: I also was an augmentee and was there at the armory.
Tom Strait: Doyce Bailey, I also was there at the same time. Had just moved outside to the back of the building because inside it was getting very congested and was very busy. Got a whole new perspective to the term "In Coming". WETSU Airlines '68- '69
C Dan Brownell: Can never forget!
Rich Hennessey: Got to Phan Rang January 3rd, Jan 26th was my first 1882nd Commanders Call. Got to meet a lot of the guys in the Comm .Sq. Wasn't back at barracks long when the attack started. After a bit we were assigned guns and bullets were not issued. It was mentioned that one of the killed sappers worked in the tailor shop behind the barracks. Don't know how true it was.
Douglas Farmer: I think he was a 16 yr. old that worked at the laundry. Supposedly he was trying to climb the perimeter fence.
John Graham: There was also a barber killed in the same attack.
Steve Hughes: Hell yes I remember that night.
Dennis Blackford: I Remember that night
Larry Pace: I had been at Phan Rang about 2 weeks when this happened. Scared me to death. I remember a lot of our FAC planes had a lot of holes in them after this night.
Brice Harris: Dad said that the dead VC bodies were collected and he saw them covered in poncho type material that next morning. Where exactly they would be layed out like that has always puzzled me.
C Dan Brownell: Some pics were posted within the past year
Floyd Brown: They were layed out on the lawn of the Security Police HQ.
James Kestner: Because I was on starlight scope team, I moved from India Juliet and Kilo areas scoping for the guys in towers.. next morning we did the perimeter sweep and picked up bodies and recovered weapons/equipment.. got about 3 hours sleep that day and went back out that night..some things can never be forgotten even if you try.. Panther Flight ruled..
Gene Eddy: I was a crew chief in the 120th but luckily had that night off and was up at the

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barracks!!!! One of our planes was blown up!!!!

Jack Cooper: I remember it well. AS I recall, most of those killed by our security forces were from the base barber shop.

Mike Whyte: I got a haircut from one of those that got killed a week or so before the attack. he shaved me also.

Jimmie L Jenkins: I remember it well! In a bunker (435 mms) with helmet, vest, weapon (with ammo)! Don't remember if we were locked and loaded. Rumors were flying around enemy inside the wire, they were NVA, and they were naked!!! With flares it make everything look like it was moving! Freaky night! You SP guys did a great job!

Ernest Peters: While I didn't arrive at PRAB until Feb 1, 69 I did see the damaged aircraft that were still sitting where they were hit. I left on Oct 26, 69 so was there on 9-22-69. A BIG Thank You to those of you that protected us..

Mark Taylor: My father mentioned that attack, he was with pedro 69-70.

Don Baker: I wasn't there for the January attack, but was for the September attack. I was on Augmentee Duty in a tower at the bomb dump. Long days and longer nights. Remember the armory well. Interesting occurrence happened one night in the tower. As I'm sure you remember when it was dark, it was DARK. Sitting in the tower one evening another guy came up and of course could not see his face or anything. So we started the normal conversation..... Where you from? California. (Really so am I, Where at?) Southern California. (Your kidding, what city?) Wilmington. (You gotta be ^%\$#^ me!) When did you graduate? '66, How about you? (Same year, WHAT THE HELL IS YOUR NAME?) Adolph Castro. I told him my name, and we spent the rest of the time reminiscing. He had dated my cousin. Never saw him after that night in the tower, and obviously, with a name as his, you certainly would not forget it.

Dennis W. Craig: Was always flying B-57 missions in Laos, only was there for 1 rocket attack.

Meredith Lewis: Yes, I remember but details have been a bit cloudy tell now, thanks for the memories.

Tom Strait: I was there that night and remember it. I was an augmentee and was pulled from my plane to report for duty. Will never forget it!

Ted Trojanowski: I was there and I remember it well. Of course being up on the MARS hill we did not see much of the action but as usual whenever the base got hit, we had to pull radios out of the station and into the bunkered CONEX next to the building. And since there was not much between our hill and the perimeter except those water tanks, I recall being on top of the sandbagged CONEX with an M-16 and several clips. Nothing ever moved out there though. By the way, because we were sort of separated from the main part of the base, we had our own weapons up at the MARS station plus through some Army contacts we were able to get sidearm's as well

Robert L. Miller: Glad that I missed that night. I arrived at Phan Rang in November 69 and stayed a year in Heavy Weapons. We had one Sapper attack that resulted in 2 VC KIA and 1 wounded I believe that was outside the wire. They put the two bodies on ponchos and displayed them outside the 35th SPS Headquarters for everyone working that night to see.

Jim Greenleaf: Will never forget that night and the morning after when we surveyed all the damage.

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John Hennigar: MSgt David A. Surette of the 614th was awarded a Bronze Star for his actions during the attack

Jim Rabourn: I was there and have always told people that without the SPs the enemy would have taken the base. God bless all those who died defending the base and those who survived.

C.v. Skirvin: I remember very well. K9 working post at the strip gate 68/69.

Ted Trojanowski: Holy crap, "the strip"... I completely forgot about the strip. Brings back a whole new bunch of memories.

Brice Harris: I never realized just how much you guys got hit over there. !... Dad in heaven: that expended shell casing that held the Vietnamese-style brooms (that shedded loose straw all the time) located aside the living room fireplace, never had more meaning to me than now.

Frederick J Ciesla: I remember it well. After passing out weapons to the 315 maint. crews than watching spooky end the conflict with bursts of fire.

Bob Rudasill: My first attack and a night I'll never forget! Hard to believe it's been that long...

Craig Lord: Seems like yesterday, crazy night for us in K9 on the fence in Juliet. Augmantess did a great job along with Security and everyone else on the base. I would rather have been on the fence line with my dog than be on the flight line and have rockets and mortars fall on me. That had to really suck.

John Schrank: I never knew either or I really would have been a basketcase.

Vic Markle: Yes I remember that night. It is a night I try to forget. I was on Hotel 8 with my M-60. You K-9 guys out there, you are my hero's. One more thing Joe Kaupa you did a he'll of a great job that night. Thank you my brother.

Joe Schwarzer: I left in November '68 but read about the attack in the Baltimore Sun. You men guarding the perimeter did a great job.

Doyce Bailey: Thank God they hit the plane because the next rocket would have been in our laps at the armory. I was on my way in to pickup ammo at that point. It is in my nightmares often.

Joe Kaupa: My Brother Vic, Thank you for the compliment. I truly appreciate it coming from my SP Brother.

Charles Lee Simmons: Joe I remember that night quite well. I don't see how anyone who was there could forget it. Unless my math is really bad, this January 26th will be 47 years, and yet, at times it seems like only yesterday.

Pete Sternloff: Thanks to all the folks that helped with detailed comments about that night as well as the original poster. I left PR in November of 1967 and am thankful we didn't face what was coming down the pike. Hell of a job done well by all concerned. Thanks for a great post,

David Gile: I used to have a copy of the Security Police Blotter from this night. I was assigned with the guy who was in CSC dispatching the responders and typing the blotter. I gave it to another friend who collects military memorabilia. A very interesting read.

Bob Mays: it was a night!

Bob Watts: Etched in the mind

Randy Weber: I remember that night just as if it would have happened last night. I also remember staying on the perimeter all the next day and night.

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This posting along with graphic pictures detailing the events of 26 January 1968 is available in the archive (file) section of the Happy Valley Phan Rang AB Facebook group.

U.S. Army's 589th Engineer Battalion of the 18th Engineer Brigade

Donnie Powell: The U.S. Army's 589th Engineer Battalion of the 18th Engineer Brigade was stationed on Phan Rang Air Force Base for approximately four years. Below is their shoulder patch and Battalion Crest.



Christopher Boles: Were you the guys that paved the road to Dalat?

Paul Koenig: Christopher Boles, good morning. The answer to your question is yes. I was with the 589th when it arrived in Phan Rang and left country in April 70. When I went home we were working on the road near Song Pha. There is a 589th website that will provide more details on what happened after I left. The Battalion also worked on QL 1 south of Phan Rang.

Donnie Powell: The 589th moved in to Phan Rang in 1968.

Kirk Minert: Donny do you have any more information on other army units that were at Phan Rang?

Donnie Powell: The 589th had a rock crushing area on base. A-Co lost a man there in 1969 because a charge exploded as he was setting it. I attended a service for him. The road work crews would go out the base gates at first light and come in just before dark. They worked on the roads ql-11 to Song Pha and up to Dalat. I think C-Company at Song pha and D-Co worked on the mountain passes to Dalat. If you drove over the side it you were gone. They built bridges as needed. The only security they had was homemade gun trucks that had 50 cals, M-60 and the M79. Every man had his M -16. I thank they lost about 21 men from

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accidents and VC over the time at Phan Rang. C-Company at Song Pha got hit a lot I was there for two of them we lost a man in one in January 1969. The 589th was working on ql-1 south of Phan Rang to Song Moa we lost people on that road as well. We pulled guard duty in the 589th area at night on the Base. After the Base was attacked in January 69 we did a roving guard at night in Jeeps. That all for now I thank Paul Koenig could tell more. I think the 589th is a part of Phan Rang history. Thanks Kirk.

Paul Koenig: Donnie Powell, D company went to Phu Qui spring or early summer 69. I came back from leave and got sent to D company. They worked on QL 1 from just south of the city where the garbage dump was south towards Song Mao. During my time there Myself Lt. Minor (I remember correctly) and others went to Song Mao to build a fire base for the 5/27th Artillery.

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Ricky Pacenza: I was with the 513th Engr Co (DT) attached to the 589th from Feb 1970 until Mar 1971. I don't get on the computer much anymore so this is the first time I've seen the Army side of Phan Rang posted. I really appreciate it and would love to see more, especially pictures if anyone has any!! Thanks Donnie!!

AC-119G Gunships

(From a post on Facebook by Everett Sprous)

Everett Sprous: My friend, Bruce Muller, ask me to post this for him. He would input from anyone who was there. Please make any corrections you can remember.

In November of 1968, the 71st ANG out of Lockbourne AFB, Ohio, started their hop-scotching journey across the Pacific with 16 AC-119G Gunships. They landed at Nha Trang AB, Viet Nam, in early December of 1968, where they were retrofitted with all their equipment and assigned to the 14th Special Operations Wing. In January 1969, the 71st SOS brought the first 3 AC 119G gunships (known as “SHADOW”) to Phan Rang AB.

The 17th SOS “B” Flight was created under the command of COL. Robert Long for combat testing and evaluation of the AC 119G aircraft. In early June of 1969, the 71st SOS {ANG} stood down and was replaced by USAF regulars. By then, there were 6 AC 119G models on the flight line at Phan Rang AB next to Pedro Alert. We were flying 4 missions each night launching at: 61- 6:45 PM, 62 - 8:00 PM, 63 - 10:00 PM, 64 - Midnight, plus an Alert bird. In December of 1969,

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Col Long rotated to the Pentagon in DC to be replaced by LTC Richard Knie as Commanding Officer. In late 1971 Shadow was turned over to NVAF and left PRAB.

Our barracks were down near the “old mess hall” by the motor pool. We always felt SAFE knowing the “ROCKS” (Korean Army Unit Base Camp) were between us and the Air Police and the wire. It wasn’t bad living in the old Quonset huts away from everyone else. For the people who remember “Water Rationing” at PRAFB, we always had water for 3 or 4 hours after everyone else’s taps went dry. It was OUR little secret. On the first rotation of the regular maintenance and flight crew {enlisted}, the new replacements were all moved up on the hill in the new barracks. We always said: “with the rich people”.

In December of 1969, the 1st of 16 AC-119K models arrived at Phan Rang under the 18th SOS STINGER and the left PRAFB in late 1971 and went to Da Nang AFB and NKP

OK, Gunship people help me tell the history of the 71st, 17th, 18th SOS at Phan Rang AFB it was a long time ago, and things are a little fuzzy. Thanks 17th SOS Crew Chief 69-70. Email: 1fixedincome@gmail.com or on Facebook.



Along the South Vietnam Coastline

By Horst FAAS

(The Republican-Courier, Findlay, Ohio, Friday, September 30, 1966)

Phan Rang, Viet Nam (AP) - At the foot of an ancient crumbling temple on the central Vietnamese coast six giant airstrips stretch into one of the most powerful jet fighter bomber bases of the U. S. Air Force in Southeast Asia.

It is operated solely by the United States and is strictly for fighting. No Supply missions are flown from Phan Rang.

More than 6,000 combat sorties have been launched from Phan Rang since March. The number of bombs dropped on the enemy is classified - but fuel consumption averages 300,000 gallons a day.

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The six landing strips are 200 feet wide and 10,000 feet long. They are cut into reddish rocks and sand 10 miles inland from the South China Seas. The base is 160 miles northwest of Saigon in the almost exact center of the South Vietnamese coastline.

About 100 U. S. Air Force jets - a squadron of F4C phantoms and four squadrons of F100 supersabres - are stationed here. They strike anywhere in Viet Nam.

The Air Force calls it a ‘bare base’. There are no permanent buildings, no warehouses and no harbor. Tanks receive fuel pipelines from tankers in the South China Sea. Bombs are delivered by landing craft, truck convoys and cargo planes.

Security is provided by about 1,000 soldiers of the Korean Tiger Division and a battalion of Vietnamese Army troops. They are supported by the largest team of scout dogs in Viet Nam - 100 dogs with American handles.

The headquarters of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division is only one mile away. But the paratroopers cannot do much for the air force. Except for a small base guard they have been away on operations most of the time since they arrived.

Viet Cong activity as virtually nonexistent in the Phan Rang area until the Americans arrived in early 1965 and started building air strips. It has steadily increased since then. Recently the guerrillas attacked the fuel pipeline several times. In the worst attack 10,000 gallons were destroyed.

The predominant natives in the immediate vicinity are peaceful. They are the Chams, a steadily diminishing people that 2,000 years ago ruled Viet Nam. The Chams; reddish temple stands above the airstrips on a rocky hillside where it was built 1,200 years ago.

Most of the Viet Cong operate from a coastal salt flat some five miles south of the U.S. base. U. S. officers also say the VC maintains a training camp for about 500 guerrillas in the Je Mountains 12 miles to the northwest. The bombers of Phan Rang Base have not struck these nearby targets since the province chief has not asked for bombings. He is the only authority that can approve them in Ninh Thuan Province.

Phan Rang is a link in a complex of U. S. bases along the coast. Thirty miles north is the vast logistic center at Cam Ranh Bay. This supply harbor and depot is also under sole control of the U.S. Armed Forces. Cam Ranh still serves partly as a fighter air base but Phan Rang is expected to take over all this activity soon.

Thirty miles farther north is Nha Trang, headquarters of the U.S. 2nd Field Force, which is similar to an army command.

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National Highway 1 and a railway connect Phan Rang, Cam Ranh and Nha Trang. The road is traveled by well protected American convoys. The train does not carry U. S. military supplies because there are still too many Viet Cong incidents - but it is hoped that the track can soon be secured. Armored boxcars roll in front, and U. S. Air Force spotter planes fly overhead when the daily train trundles up past the six big airstrips, stops at the giant harbor supply base and rolls into Nha Trang in the late afternoon.

3-Month Course Completed By Pat Nugent

(Raleigh Register, Beckley, W. VA., Monday Afternoon, September 30, 1968)

SAIGON (AP) — President Johnson’s son-in-law, Airman I.C. Patrick J. Nugent, has finished training to be a loadmaster aboard the Air Force s C123 cargo-passenger planes and is now part of a crew flying missions throughout South Vietnam.

Nugent completed his three month training period Sept. 20 and is flying with the 309th Special Operations Squadron out of Phan Rang air base on Viet-nam’s central coast, 175 miles north east of Saigon.

Nugent, 24-year-old husband President Johnson’s daughter Luci, is almost at the halfway point in his one-year tour of duty in Vietnam, and is due for a week’s rest and recreation in mid-October. He may choose to meet Luci while on R&R.

As a loadmaster, Nugent is responsible for properly loading and unloading the C123s with passengers, food, ammunition and other supplies.

Nugent arrived in Vietnam April 13 after his reserve unit, the 113th Tactical Fighter Wing, was called to active duty during the Pueblo crisis. He served briefly as a bomb loader at Cam Ranh air base but transferred to June to Phan Rang for loadmaster training.

President Johnson’s other son-in-law, Marine Capt. Charles S. Robb, served for nearly six months as commander of a line company with the 1st Marine Division south of Da Nang and is now working at Division headquarters.

(Other articles about Patrick Nugent in Phan Rang News: **Pat Nugent training**, Phan Rang News 14 and **Patrick Nugent Receives the Distinguished Flying Cross**, Phan Rang News 75)



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

A True Life Story by Joe Kaupa

Vietnam

Part 3

*"Can you imagine how gassy all of us were after eating
smoke sausage and drinking beer?"*

Early in December I received a care package from my dad, homemade sausage from my family's butcher shop back home. It was the best in the world! It took a month to get the package to me in Vietnam. I couldn't wait to open the box. Damn, I was excited and so were the rest of the guys in the barracks; as they could smell the smoked sausage. I opened the box. There had to be twelve sticks of summer sausage each being about 12"-16" long. Every one of them was moldy! But it didn't make any difference because Dad had used a plastic casing. I took them outside, I took my bayonet out and scraped each stick until I got the mold off. Then I took them into the latrine and washed each stick. We had no windows in the barracks, only louvers for fresh air, so I tied all the sticks to the louvers to dry out. I knew they would not spoil, as the meat had been smoked and cooked already. I went to work that night; the plan was to party hearty when we got off in the morning with beer and sausage. That is exactly what we did. I think everyone in the barracks was smashed before we finished. Can you imagine how gassy all of us were after eating smoke sausage and drinking beer?

The middle of December finally came, and I was getting ready to meet Nancy in Hawaii. Wow, was I excited! I just couldn't wait to get on the Freedom Bird and see her. I packed a few things and went to the flight line to hitch a ride on a chopper going to Cam Ranh Bay, the departure point for me. I arrived in the afternoon and was taken to an Army barracks where other grunts were also leaving for R and R in the morning. I didn't sleep at all that night; I kept thinking about seeing Nancy and wondering how the kids and other family members were. Then I thought about the steak they were going to serve us on the Freedom Bird. I hadn't had one of them for seven months, and being a butcher's son, we ate a lot of steak. The next morning we were taken to the terminal and out to the flight line to get on that beautiful plane. I remember the

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plane leaving the ground, and I looked out the window saying to myself, "Good-by Vietnam" even if it was only for four to five days.

“...she was...the most beautiful sight in the world”

I don't remember how long it took to fly to Hawaii. I think we stopped in Guam for fuel. Once we arrived in Hawaii we were bused to Fort Deressey. The military had given information on where and when we would be coming in to meet our wives or girlfriends. When I got off the bus, there she was. The most beautiful sight in the world. Nancy had made reservations at the Ala Monana hotel. Once checked in, we went to our room. When we opened the door, we both laughed: we had twin beds in our room. I said, what is this all about? We decided we didn't care. Nancy turned to me and said, All your clothes smell really bad." I told her that it was the rice starch that momma-son used to wash and press the uniforms. Nancy's mother, who makes the best homemade bread sent a loaf with her for me, and mom and dad sent some more sausage. Nancy had packed a butcher knife in her suitcase. We were set. As the night went on, we had a great time with only one problem: we had pushed the twin beds together but, lo and behold the beds slid apart with both of us landing on the floor wrapped up in the sheets. Obviously, we were getting reacquainted again. God, we laughed so hard.

We had just a great fun-filled four days. We ate, toured, drank, had breakfast under the Banyan tree, and swam in the ocean on Waikiki Beach. We went to the Don Ho Show at the International Market Place and checked out the second largest shopping mall in the world. We rented a Ford Mustang convertible and toured the island, seeing Diamond Head, the Volcano, and the back side of the island. The back side of the island was not as touristy, and in some of the road ditches were smashed up vehicles that were burned out, even a couple of Army vehicles. They had been there a long time, and we wondered if that wasn't from back when Pearl Harbor was bombed. Looking at the vehicles, especially the military ones, it sure looked like it. We stopped at the Dole Pineapple Plantation and ate fresh pineapple. We also stopped at a roadside stand to buy some things and asked about the vehicles in the ditch. We were right; they had been left after the Pearl Harbor bombing and had never been moved.

We decided a tour of Pearl Harbor would be interesting. We toured Pearl Harbor on a cruise boat named the Aly Aly Key. As we entered Pearl Harbor, they put on a soundtrack of the actual bombing. We looked up to see four Japanese Fighter planes coming at us. We found out later that they were filming "Tora, Tora, Tora," the movie. Wow, if that wasn't freaky!

Well, the time had come where I had to return to Vietnam. I left Nancy at the room, We both shed a few tears before I went back to Fort Deressey to meet the bus to the airport. Once the Freedom Bird took off, the plane was very quiet. Everyone was very sad that they had to leave their loved ones. To this day I still can't believe how quiet the long-plane ride was.

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Once back at Phan Rang it was work as usual. It took me about two weeks to get back to normal because I was very sad and missed Nancy and my kids. It was great seeing her again, but terrible having to leave her again. I'm sure she felt the same.

Christmas was coming. Supposedly there was going to be a cease fire, but that was bull shit. It didn't happen. I think everyone had a hard time there not being with family and friends. We wished everyone a Merry Christmas over the radio, and that was about it, though they did have a Christmas dinner at the chow hall. Sure wasn't my mother's cooking.

I had about five months left in country before I could leave this god forsaken country, get on that Freedom Bird and head home. Over there we never got any news about back home or very little anyway, other than what we got from Armed Forces Radio.

We continued to get probes on the wire, but it seemed to be more often through the first part of January. I could just feel that something was going to happen, but when was the question.

On January 26, 1969, at 0029 hrs., all Hell broke loose! I received a radio call from J-4 tower saying there were possibly three individuals inside the wire. Two K-9's were dispatched to the area, and at 0032 hrs., four minutes later K-57 (K-9 handler) reported his dog had alerted. At the time K-58 was backing up K-57 and both men reported that they were opening fire at the individuals inside the wire. K-57 reported more individuals coming through the wire. At 0042 hrs., K-57 reported that K-58 had been wounded. At 0056 hrs. Bravo 6, tower guard reported five or six individuals outside the fence. At this time it appeared that NVA Sapper Teams were trying to come through the wire in many different sectors as more K-9 alerts were happening and different sectors were taking incoming small arms fire, and they were returning same. A call was made for a "Spooky Gunship" as there was no question that we were under a ground attack. Spooky arrived in a short period of time and set out illumination and started hosing down the area with his mini guns. All SAT Teams were dispatched to hot areas along with the Heavy Weapons Unit. More Sappers were coming through the wire in Coco Section, and K-9's were alerting. Golf sector was reporting Sapper Teams coming through the wire there. The radio traffic was just crazy: a number of sectors around the entire perimeter were reporting individuals attempting to come through the wire. At some point in this time frame we started taking incoming mortars rounds, 122 Rockets rounds and 107 Rockets. It was very clear to us in CSC that this was an all out Ground, Mortar, and Rocket attack on the base. The men on the perimeter were in the middle of a fierce ground attack by a number of NVA Sapper Teams and the balance of the base was getting hit with mortars, & rockets. Sirens had been activated and Augmentee personel were notified to report to the armory to get their weapons and get posted. Radio traffic was coming in from all over the perimeter and posts were stepping on each other calling in to report what was happening. It was total chaos.

A rocket hit the CSC building and the sound of the explosion was deafening as shrapnel was coming through the walls of CSC. We all hit the floor. I had the radio mike in my hand, still

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communicating with the guys in the field, attempting to deploy more units in the area that were calling for help. A second round hit CSC again and I could feel and see the shrapnel coming through the walls and lodging into the back wall. Reports were coming in of K-9 handlers being down, K-9's, killed and Tower guards being wounded. Col. Donald Reeves, our Squadron Commander was in CSC at the time, advised us to initiated RED OPS II and all base backup personnel were called in. (Note: Col. Reeves, was a excellent leader and was always looking out for his men. He was well liked by all the enlisted men. He was fair, honest, never got excited and always treated his men with respect and turn they treated him with respect. He was the best Commander I ever served under. He would be in front of the charge when all hell broke loose. He didn't sit behind a desk and was always concerned about his men. We told him Red Ops II, had already been activated. Calls came in that the heavy weapons unit APC had taken a direct hit by a B-40 rocket, and there were wounded. J-4 post radioed that K-57 was down and hit by shrapnel from a grenade. Up to this point the radio net was jammed a number of times because posts were calling in at the same time needing backup and ambulances. I remember mortars and rockets still incoming, and the flight line was being hit. I could feel the walls in the control room shaking from the explosions. At 0354 hrs. Hotel 10 radioed he was receiving small arms fire, and we lost radio contact. I asked for any available SAT team in the area to respond. Because the Sapper attack was coming from all sides of the base, it was very hard to keep track of personnel. It was very difficult not being able to see what was going on out there, and only relying on radio traffic to let you know.

Meanwhile the Aussie and Korean ambush teams that were outside the fence called in to advise that they were making sweeps outside the wire for VC and NVA. After several hours, the incoming mortar and rocket onslaught had stopped, and it appeared that the NVA Sappers Teams had been repelled and suffered a number of losses. I have no idea what time it was when the last incoming came in, but as daylight came, units were checking the area for NVA or VC. The Aussie ambush team which was posted outside the fence during the attack called in and stated that they were going to sweep the Juliet area for any, possible VC or NVA. About ten minutes later, they called in the location of a dead NVA soldier. At approximately 1147 hrs. the Aussie Ambush team radioed in that they had captured one VC. They were advised to take him to the Korean compound for interrogation. The Koreans were very good at getting answers. What they did I don't know, I am sure it wasn't good, but they got results.

When all the sweeps of the entire base and perimeter were complete, a final damage and loss report was made. The base was declared secured at 1245 hrs. after a little over twelve hours of fierce fighting and continuous incoming mortars and rockets along with ground penetration from NVA Sapper Teams. The 35th SPS had repelled the all-out attack with no U.S. personnel KIA's (Killed in Action).

The report was a follows:

The Base took 74 incoming rounds of 122 Rockets and Mortars
15 NVA (Killed in action)

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- 1 NVA (Wounded in action and Captured
- 14 Security Policeman WIA
- 0 U.S. Personnel MA
- 1 Aussie WIA
- 1 K-9 Dog WIA
- 1 K-9 Dog MA
- 2 F100 Fighter Jets destroyed
- 11 Damaged aircraft

Many aircraft damaged, revetments damaged, buildings around flight line damaged.

Recovered weapons and explosive form the NVA Sappers:

- 7 Satchel Charges
- 6 Bangalore torpedo, mortar tubes & numerous mortar rounds
- 43 Hand grenades, numerous rifles, AK-47's and Ammo
- 12 B-40 Rocket rounds
- 2 B-40 Rocket Launchers

The actual ground attack lasted over six hours, with the base not being declared secured until some twelve hours after the first attack.

On a personal note, I can only say I was so proud of all the K-9 men, tower guards, SAT Teams and everyone else who went through this fierce ground, rocket and mortar attack and repelled the enemy. I was so proud to say I was a member of Panther Flight. It was one hell of a wild night, but we did our job and got it done.

It was about 1230 hrs. when we were finally relieved in CSC. We walked outside and saw the large hole in the building where the rocket and mortars had hit. The walls were full of shrapnel. We were very lucky. Once outside we went to turn in our weapons at the armory. They had already brought in the dead NVA and had them lying on a tarp. They were sure shot up. A few of them had to have been hit by the mini guns, as they were ripped apart. Next to them there were all the recovered weapons and explosives. The dead were later taken and buried in a mass grave filled with lime. I never found out where they were buried, not that I really cared.

Upon returning to work for our normal shift that night we learned the following information from the Koreans who had interrogated the NVA prisoner. The NVA prisoner said he was a member of the 351st H-13, NVA Sapper Company. He said that his company had been making preparations, including reconnaissance of the base, since June, 1968. They trained for months on penetration tactics to get through the wire, learned methods of night observation and the acquisition of weapons. He said his company commander had directed the attack, that the local VC acted as guides to the base and the perimeter. He said they were trained on how to

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approach the fence and how to select sections of the wire to cut. They were also trained on how to disarm mines and trip flares. He said that they had very little information on how we did night observations and the equipment we had (Starlight scopes). They were also trained on listening and sound for the night attack. He said that two weeks before the attack they received a number of weapons for the attack. Also the VC would begin the mortaring, 122 and 107 rocket attack simultaneously with the ground attack. Once they hit the wire, they were trained to strip down to nothing but a loin cloth in order to get through the wire cleanly. I have to admit they had good recon as he told the interrogator that they knew the distance from outside the fence to the aircraft pad to be one kilometer, and they knew that there were five fences in that stretch, each consisting of three rolls of concertina wire. But they knew nothing about the mines and flares, and they had no idea of the number of security guards and the types of weapons they had. They were told that the K-9 dogs were stupid and afraid to leave their handlers. He said after the briefing from their commander, they broke up into four cells and each man was assigned a specific job. The first cell consisted of five men. Their mission was to destroy aircraft by placing satchel charges near the wheels of the aircraft of the large planes and placing tin can grenades on the wings of smaller aircraft. The two NVA soldiers assigned to this task carried two satchel charges, two tin can grenades, and two hand grenades. The other three soldiers were to penetrate the wire, destroy the towers, and use B-40 rockets and small arms fire. They also were told to destroy the bunkers and the men in them. We found this very interesting and laughed about the K-9 Dogs being afraid.

About a week later, a Korean captain came to CSC and invited us to come to their compound to celebrate the victory. We went there, not knowing what to expect because the Koreans were killing machines and didn't care about anything. Once there we were taken to a show area where they apparently had movies. Beer was brought out, and the party was on. There beer was terrible, and it was warm. I had a hell of a time drinking it but did. The movies began and all they showed was porno movies and the Korean troops went wild. We stayed about two hours to be polite and told the captain that we needed to get some sleep as we had to report back to duty in a few hours. That was quite an experience. Very few Korean soldiers spoke English. Two days later the Aussie soldiers invited us to their place and we drank beer most of the day as we were off that night. I just loved to hear their accent.

March of 1969 was a very active month with occasional probes and we received, according to Air Force records 148 rounds of incoming mortars and rockets. Sometime in early March, Lt. White and I were talking in CSC one night, about how fun it might be after we got off duty. to grab a jeep and take a ride up in the mountains to a hamlet called Nui Cado. He had been told that it was a retreat area for military to relax, eat a good meal and unwind. We were both off the next day, so Lt. White got the jeep and had a M-60 machine gun mounted on the back and two M-60 cans of ammunition. My job was to pick up some beer. Lt. White picked me up at the NCO Barracks. We headed to the Chow Hall, emptied the ammo cans, filled them with ice, and put the beer in them to chill down, and off we went.

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Nui Cado was about twenty miles up in the mountains. At the time, I don't think either one of us had a care in the world after being in Nam for over ten months. We had the mindset that whatever happens, happens. We drove up the mountain on this dirt road in mostly jungle terrain, drinking beer and just bull-shitting. We went thru a couple of small hamlets where peasants were working the rice paddies in their black PJ's and straw hats. It took us about two hours to get there. We had drank about three-fourths of one case of beer by this time. Nui Cado was a small little hamlet with a few eating and drinking places, a beautiful area in the mountains. There were some U.S. military people there and some Vietnamese eating and drinking. We stayed there awhile and drank Barn Barn beer (Vietnamese beer which tasted terrible) and ate.

At about 3:00 p.m. we thought we should head back to Phan Rang because we didn't want to be on the mountain road when it got dark. As we drove down the mountain side, I thought about how stupid this was for us to take this little road trip. Lt. White agreed. Here we were out in the middle of a jungle on a mountain road, just the two of us, with no communications. Nothing would stop the VC or NVA from ambushing us and killing us. What would we do if we had a vehicle problem? No one even knew where we were. Not smart. I thought to myself, how stupid are you, Joe, with a wife and two small children at home. What if I never got to see them again. I kept saying to Lt. White that we were not very smart. After being in Vietnam this long you just had that attitude. We did make it back to Phan Rang between 5-6 p.m. Later, we found out that Nui Cado was a retreat for VC and NVA troops, and we wondered just how many of them were there in their black PJ's. I never left the base again. Thinking back, we were damn lucky. A number of things could have gone wrong.

May was approaching I had talked to Nancy through the Ham Operator last month, for the last time. I was getting very excited to go home, wondering if May 26 would ever come. I had a short timer picture of a naked woman on my locker, and as each day ended I would fill in a number telling you how many days you had left in country. Once she was fully colored in, it meant my tour was up. I finally got down to the last three days. I worked my last shift and prepared to clear base. The troops in the barracks had a big party for me, and we got totally intoxicated. My time was here to go home and during my tour here Air Force records showed that the base received 580 rounds of incoming rockets and mortars along with a ground sapper attack. I was lucky.

The next day I cleared base and took another Chopper ride to Cam Rhan Bay to catch that beautiful Freedom Bird home. Damn, I couldn't wait to be home with my wife and kids. Once at Cam Rhan Bay I hopped off the chopper and went directly into the terminal where I turned in all my MPC ("monopoly money") and got good old greenbacks. My flight was not scheduled to leave until the next day, but to be damm sure I didn't miss the flight, I slept (or tried to) in the terminal that night. As I waited, many random thoughts went through my mind. I thought about how scary it was standing guard out on those towers, just watching the fence line looking for the VC. Then I thought, just think no more C-Rations. Actually I did like some of them especially the beans and hot dogs, pound cake, cheese and crackers. We used our P-38 to open the cans;

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everything was sealed in a can except for the five cigarettes that were in each box. I don't remember if they were Marlboro or Pall Mall. I thought about how I would take your peanut butter from the box and open the can and put mosquito repellent in it and light it to cook your rations. It did a pretty good job.

"I thought about those soldiers in the Army and Marines that were stationed in the Bush their entire tour and the pure Hell they must had gone through."

Time was going so slowly waiting for the plane to take me home. I continued to think about my year in Vietnam. I thanked God for keeping me in one piece and thought about all the soldiers, young and older who had been killed or wounded. I thought about those soldiers in the Army and Marines that were stationed in the Bush their entire tour and the pure Hell they must had gone through. I couldn't even begin to comprehend what that was like or what they were going through, walking the jungles, the fire fights, their buddies being killed or wounded. I was pretty lucky to be where I was for the past year. It is really funny how the mind works.

By the time daylight came, I hadn't slept at all during the night just thinking about the past year and my family at home. I decided to take a little walk out on the flight line, and then I spotted a C-141 parked with the large cargo door open. I stood there looking at men on forklifts bringing out flag-draped silver boxes of dead soldiers being loaded on the plane for their trip back home. I had a big lump in my throat. Even though I didn't know any of them, they were all my brothers in arms. I have no idea how many bodies were loaded on that plane but there were a lot. Each casket was loaded with dignity and honor, heroes, going home for the last time. I thought about the pain and hurt that their families were going to go through and how lucky I was not to be on that plane.

Most of the soldiers in Vietnam were in their late teens or early 20's. All the horror, hell, and the terrible things they had to go through day in and day out through their tour! I thought about them then and still do, 45 years later.

I am so angry at our government for tying the hands of our military leaders in Vietnam and not letting them run the war to win. This was totally a political war. So many soldiers lost their lives for politician's greed. They put restrictions on the bombing, and the no shoot policy was absurd.

These politicians sat back in their plush chairs, in their nice offices in Washington and had no clue what the young men in Vietnam were going through. The U.S. Military fighting man never lost a battle in Vietnam, but the government didn't want the war won. It wasn't like World War II. All the soldiers killed and wounded "for what". LBJ, President at the time, had his wife's construction company there. Think of the money she made! The government should have been totally ashamed of themselves for what they did. To those Senators and Congressman that did

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not stand behind the military leaders in Vietnam nor allow them to run the war to win and defeat communism, I hope they all take that guilt to their graves. There were just so many things the politicians did to tie the hands of the fighting men. If the politicians would have run World War II that way, we wouldn't have the freedom we have today. At least back in World War II our country's leaders had a backbone, thank God.

I remember hearing stories from soldiers, that they would fight for a hill in the jungle and once it was taken they were told to let the VC take it back. What in the Hell was that all about? Could you imagine if they were told to do that during World War II? At least in past wars the United States fought to win. Not this war. What in the hell was the government thinking? They surely didn't value the lives of all of us soldiers.

“The enemy was all around us though out the entire country...”

In Vietnam, as opposed to WW II, we never had a Front Line and back then the enemy wore uniforms. It only took you about a week in country to realize that. With the VC and peasants both wearing black PJ's, you never knew who the enemy was. They would work on bases or they were in the rice paddies during the day and at night they would be probing your perimeter or firing Rockets or Mortars at you. The enemy was all around us though out the entire country and blended right in with the peasants.

Retreat with Honor. Bull Shit. Tell that to the 58,000 names on the Wall and their families Mr. Nixon, or the thousands of wounded, paralyzed, homeless Vietnam Vets. One might ask, am I bitter and the answer is yes.



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](#).

Joe and Nancy Kaupa with their children,
Scott, Debra, Amy and Katie.

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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.

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!



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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.

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.

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Here's some basic information about our reunion for those that haven't had the pleasure of attending one before: The dates for the 2016 reunion are **6 through 9 October**. Most people arrive on Thursday afternoon 6 Oct. Over the years we've seen more and more people arriving earlier and we usually have get-togethers with each other and I know that many are already planning on an early arrival. On Friday, 7 Oct. we traditionally have a group tour and this year we are planning on going to Tinker AFB, but that planning process hasn't started yet. Also we may plan another activity in conjunction with the tour. On Saturday, 8 Oct. usually is a free day where you can explore the local area and in the evening we have our gala banquet. The hospitality suite is open all of the time, except during the tour and banquet. Most people check out Sunday morning, 9 October. I hope this brief overview will give you some idea as to what to expect.

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](#).