

RICHARD ALAN DETRA: After being drafted in January 1967, he took basic training at Fort Lewis, Washington. Then flew directly to Fort Polk, Louisiana's "Tiger Land", for light weapons infantry training. He reported to the Oakland Army Depot after a 30 day leave in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He was then bused to Travis Air Force Base in California and eighteen hours later he landed at Tan Son Nhut Airport in South Vietnam. First stop was in country processing at the 90th Replacement Center in Long Binh. On June 12, 1967, at the age of 20, he embarked on his first chopper ride. A one way sortie to Dau Tieng, base camp for the 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, and home of the 188th Assault Helicopter Company, "BLACK WIDOWS"

(When the 188th formed up at FT. Campbell, Kentucky in November 1966, all of the Door Gunners were volunteer Airborne Qualified Personnel. Due to heavy casualties inflicted on U.S. Airborne Units, all Airborne Qualified Personnel were, by MACV directive, immediately transferred out of the unit to the 173rd Airborne Division. That directive made it possible for Infantry Replacements to be assigned to Aviation Companies as Security Guards.)

He would not be there long, his MOS was changed to 11B2F, Aerial Gunner. All his skills were to be learned underfire. After spending his first four months in the 2nd Flight Platoon (Slicks), he then volunteered for the "SPIDERS" Gun Platoon. All major Infantry Units in the Western III Corps and Northern IV Corps A.O. were supported by the "Black Widows". In November 1967, volunteer flight crews flew T.D.Y. to Nha Be in support of Seal Team I Operations. During one of the missions, one of our Light Fire Teams had returned to rearm and refuel. On take off the trail ship piloted by W.O. Robert Watts, failed to reach transitional lift and crashed into the Nha Be River, near Sandy Point. Pilot, W.O. Mike Mullen and Crew Chief SP/5 Tom Bartleson, saved Gunner SP/4 Dan Wooley's life, by pulling him out of the sinking gun ship. Due to the current and lack of visibility under water, they were unable to save Mr. Watts, who was pinned inside the cockpit.

The unit flew operations in all four Corp Areas and Special Operations with the 5th Special Forces, into Cambodia. While accumulating 750 hours of flight time, he was shot down twice, and in both cases was picked up soon after. On his return to the States, he was re-assigned to A CO 4/46 Infantry, 1st Armored Division at FT. Hood Texas. The entire Unit was Vietnam Veterans. In August 1968, Anti war demonstrations were disrupting Chicago's Democratic National Convention. The Unit was flown to Chicago and went on stand-by at Great Lakes Naval Base. On the ride into the base, the anti war demonstrators threw objects at the bus and spit through the open windows, on the vet's riding inside. Once inside, he was assigned to a two man sniper team, which would take out any civilian snipers. It was the lowest point in his military service. Thank God we were not ordered to fire on our own people.

In December 1968, he received an early out to attend Metropolitan State Junior College in Minneapolis. After a failed marriage in 1971, he relocated to San Francisco, California. A Journeyman roofer of 27 years, he is currently employed by the Port of San Francisco. He is engaged to Karma Jones and they are planning to be married in the Bahamas in May 1997. For the past 7 years he has been gathering Unit information that will one day be published as a history and a book.