



# The VHPA Newsletter

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

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Jim Oden photo

A 10,000-pound bomb is loaded into a special "cradle" on a CH-54A Skycrane before its first bombing mission in Vietnam in September 1968. Pilot Jim Oden describes bombing by helicopter on Page 22.

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# From the President

The VHPA Executive Council continues to strive to improve our association. We need your ideas and your participation to enhance the organization. Please take a few minutes to communicate your ideas on how to improve our association, its reunions and other VHPA activities and services.

Your input is welcome as to reunion locations, activities, hotels, speakers and programs. Tell us what is good, bad and how to do our reunions better by communicating in writing to VHPA, 949 University Ave., Suite 210, Sacramento CA 95825 or sending e-mail to VHPA dnxn26a@prodigy.com.

The 1997 VHPA 11-by-17-inch, full-color calendar is available from Turner Publication for \$10, plus shipping and handling, by calling (800) 788-3350 to order.

Jack Swickard continues to publish an outstanding newsletter. The last issue was 28 pages of the right stuff. A tip of the 10 gallon Cav hats to the man from the Land on Enchantment, the general manager of the Roswell, NM, newspaper. Jack was recently honored with a lifetime pass for his long service as a board member of the Eastern New Mexico State Fair.

Mike Law puts out our wonderful directory on time and on budget. Mike has dedicated a large portion of his time to assuring that we, the membership of VHPA, enjoy such a quality publication. In my judgment, it is without peer for our size of veterans organization.

Kenny Bunn, Jack Jordan, Mike Hurley and I have been in the "scouts out mode" making several future reunion site visits.

Artistic culture is watching Ken Bunn's reaction to a display by a twenty-something racetrack circuit groupie of her Georgia Bulldog tattoo. Ken is in clinical nurse's training. Can you even imagine being almost dead sick and waking up to look at Bunn in nurse's whites with a syringe in his hands. I think I would rather fall on my saber. Good luck to Ken as he pursues his career change training.

Ken Fritz continues to ably oversee the smooth contractor transaction and has sought out new publishing companies for our newsletter and directory to our economic advantage. Ken is taking time to do a couple of scuba diving trips to Cozumel and Baja.

Jack Jordan has volunteered the services of his com-

pany's communication system to facilitate the VHPA Executive Council telephone conference meetings. We think it will be a cost savings for VHPA. We are going to try it.

It is guys like Jack who step forward, not only with their time, but also make resources available to VHPA that make our association work.

The 1997 reunion is coming up sooner than you think. You should start making your plans and hotel reservations.

Look for announcements and information in the newsletters. Renaissance Orlando Resort is our main hotel. If I were to ask a hotel company to build the perfect hotel for a VHPA reunion, I would start with this one for a pattern.

To make your reservations, call 1 (800)-HOTELS-1. After the August/September newsletter came out, I received a call from Bob Inglett, who was my air cav troop commander, telling me he would be attending his first VHPA reunion in Orlando.

Bob is one of the leaders I admire. This is what makes the VHPA really worthwhile. It gives us all an opportunity to see some of our wonderful comrades from units and flight school. It is the VHPA newsletter at work.

Closer to home, I live in the sparsely populated tall grass prairie region of Kansas. Our entire county has less than 3,000 people.

We are now in process of constructing an All Veterans Remembrance Memorial in our local park. You guessed it, the center piece of military hardware is none other than a UH-1 from the Kansas Army National Guard.

The ole girl is a Vietnam vet. We peeled off her rotor system and loaded her up on a Harshman Construction lowboy, carefully measuring her to assure she would clear all the underpasses on the Kansas Turnpike and after clearing the first underpass without a crunching noise, Frank Harshman put the pedal to the metal and the ole girl achieved the ground speed of her lifetime from Topeka to Cottonwood Falls.

And, all this was accomplished without the assistance of any speed control interception by the Kansas Highway patrol.

I bring this up to encourage you to participate in the local veterans activities of your choice.

My wife, Merry, and I wish you and yours a Happy Holiday Season and a prosperous New Year. Yes, Merry was born on Dec. 25 of 19... oh well, that is not important enough for me not to survive to bring in the New Year.

— Charles R. Rayl, President

## Pilots flew with Little Bears

I am interested in finding Joseph Wasmond and Peter Gallimore. They flew with the Little Bears, 25th Infantry Division in 1969-70.

If anyone knows their whereabouts or has some old orders with names and social security numbers from flight school or the 25th, please send them to me or call.

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# Guys in back were real-life heroes

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just too easy of a target to resist.

After I became an AC, I never required any crew member to stand on the skids because of the danger involved, but they all did it, anyway. Not smart maybe, but the guys who did their job in the back of the aircraft will always be admired by me as real-life heroes.

Hoist missions were always a little nerve-racking, never more so than at night, with the grunts in contact and half the helicopters in RVN flying around your head as you tried to get the wounded out.

Those simple, overlooked facts served to make that night one of the most memorable of my tour.

Having committed myself, I gathered my gear: Helmet and my security blanket, a very large chickenplate I had swiped from a Cobra revetment at Xuan Loc somewhat earlier in my tour.

(If the owner of that chickenplate is reading this, I hope you did not need that protection as much as I did. The original chickenplate issued to me at the 45th was an extra small and it rapidly shrank before my eyes as I sat in my first hot LZ. Later, when I spied that extra large chicken plate

sitting all by its lonesome in a revetment, my survival instincts took over and I merely did a one-for-one exchange.)

Outside our hooch that night, the Ops officer introduced me to CW2 Fred Behrens, who was to be the AC for the mission. Fred asked if I had a weapon. As I shook my head "no," he said "come on" and we ran to his hooch, which housed a small, personal armory. He grabbed a holstered .45, tossed it to me and we hustled off to the flight line.

I asked what the mission was. Fred said he was not sure other than it was a hot hoist with multiple urgents. Translated, that meant there were wounded grunts in the LZ who would die shortly if we did not get them to back to the 85th Evac in Phu Bai.

It also meant the bad guys who had just wounded them were still there and trying their best to finish the job. At that news, my pucker factor started to climb.

Two days prior to my arrival at Camp Eagle, Jim Zwit, a 20-year-old grunt with D Company 3/501st 101st, and 77 other grunts had been airlifted to a location southwest of Bastogne.

Their mission, documented to be the last offensive mission by U.S.

ground forces in Vietnam, was first a search-and-attack mission with the additional mission of recovering a U.S. KIA Company A was unable to recover after a firefight on April 12.

Around 1800 hours on the 15th, Company D began preparation for night defensive positions. The commander directed the first platoon leader, Lt. McKenzie, to search to the south with his platoon to assure the area was secure.

McKenzie's platoon members dropped their rucks and moved out down the trail. They replaced Zwit's third platoon as point element. At point were Jerry Sterns and Lt. McKenzie.

Around 1848 hours, the unit after action report reads, "the second platoon made contact with the enemy in the vicinity of YD581010. The enemy opened up with small arms fire when five or six individuals crossed the fallen log."

Contact in this specific moment in the war was the death of Sterns and the severe wounding of Lt. McKenzie when the small arms fire, RPGs and mortars started raining on the grunts. As happens in combat initially, confusion reigned.

*NEXT: The rescue attempt.*

## Taps

### Darrell Edward Maitlen

Darrell Edward "Codge" Maitlen of Denver died of cancer Sept. 16 at University Hospital in Denver. He was 52.

He was born Oct. 8, 1943, in Cushing, OK, and graduated from Cushing High School in 1961.

He attended Oklahoma State University, where he was a member of the skydiving team.

On May 26, 1964, Maitlen married Dorothy Lavera White in Cushing.

He served in the Army as a heli-

copter pilot in South Vietnam, where he flew 320 combat missions, earning numerous decorations.

Maitlen was a member of flight school classes 66-23 and 67-1.

He was employed by Bell Textron since 1976 as a regional marketing manager and salesman.

The company honored him with its "Outstanding Sustained Superior Sales Performance Award."

Maitlen held commercial helicopter instructor and fixed wing instructor ratings.

He also held airframe and power plant licenses.

He is survived by his wife; a son, Gregory Allen of Denver; a daughter, Katherine Rene.

### VHPA Newsletter advertising rates

Display advertising rates for the VHPA Newsletter are:

Full page — \$500

One-half page — \$250

One-quarter page — \$125

Classified advertising is \$1 per line or \$7 per inch, whichever is higher.

Advertising revenue is used to help produce The VHPA Newsletter and limit the publication's dependence on membership dues.



Sikorsky Aircraft photo

The first helicopter bomber, a CH-54A Skycrane from the 1st Air Cavalry Division's 478th Heavy Helicopter Company, flies toward a target near the DMZ in 1968.

## Bombs dropped from helicopters

JIM ODEN

I was one of the first Army CH-54A "Skycrane" pilots and deployed to Vietnam with the 478th Heavy Helicopter Company as part of the 1st Cav in 1965.

I served with the company for one year and was one of that small group of pilots and enlisted men who helped pioneer the combat support role for this huge helicopter.

In those early days, the 478th only had four Cranes in Vietnam; so, when Al Gajan, "Shady" Lane and three enlisted died in our first total aircraft loss, it was a terrible blow for our small company.

Anyway, I was at home preparing for my second tour in Vietnam when the chief of staff at Fort Rucker called and directed me to report there for an assignment that could not be discussed over the phone.

There I met CWO "Bo" Brown, who had received the same message.

We learned we were the Army part of a joint Army-Air Force effort to

use surplus 10,000-pound bombs to blow instant LZs. These bombs, originally made for the B-36, were stored in the Pueblo Depot.

The solid fins had been sold for scrap so all we had was a large, round bomb.

We were placed on special duty with the Air Force and told to report to a USAF Col. Smucker at Fort Benning.

Col. Smucker was the director of the Skycrane side of the project. He had the money and the authority to work with the local commanders to get us what we needed to conduct the tests.

After Col. Smucker briefed us at Fort Benning, Bo and I returned to Fort Rucker, picked up a CH-54 and crew and returned to Fort Benning where a test site had been selected in a "Vietnam-like," tree-covered area.

The Air Force had moved a 10,000-pound bomb from Pueblo and had built a tripod stand so it would explode about three feet above the ground.

Their engineers told them that if it blew three feet off the ground, it would knock down the trees without creating a big crater.

Initially, the tactics were to hover over the area, lower the bomb onto the target, fly away, and detonate it by remote control. Our "test LZ" was large enough for Hueys to land an engineer team with chainsaw which cleared a reasonably large LZ in quick order.

As encouraging as these results were, in the post-test briefings, we discussed the safety aspects of flying a "hot" bomb over enemy terrain, hovering to lower it onto the target, the possibility of it getting "hung up" in the triple canopy jungle, and the chances of FM radio transmissions prematurely detonating the bomb.

Col. Smucker sent us "home to await further orders" while the designers "went back to the drawing board."

In a day or so, we were told to meet Col. Smucker at Kirtland Air

See CRADLE, Page 23



A 10,000-pound bomb is shown being dropped from a Skycrane helicopter over the DMZ in 1968. The bomb was released from a 6,000-foot altitude. Parachute cords are shown trailing the bomb.

## Cradle attached to CH-54 fuselage

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Force Base in Albuquerque.

In the meantime, Bo Brown had suffered an accident, so he was "off the team."

Our Kirtland team came up with a series of modifications so we could use drop tactics.

First, a "cradle" was attached to the fuselage that would hold the bomb secure horizontally under the Skycrane.

Second, a field-fabricated harness attached the bomb to the Crane's cargo hook and winch cable. Now the bomb could be winched snug against the cradle. When the cargo hook opened, the bomb would fall away from the helicopter bomber.

Third, we installed a three-foot piece of pipe with an arming mechanism to the fuse in the nose of the bomb. A pin kept a small propeller from turning, but the pin was pulled as the bomb fell away, which allowed the propeller to spin and the fuse to arm.

Fourth, the Air Force designed a parachute to stabilize and retard the

bomb's descent.

Fifth, somehow we ended up with a World War II drift meter which presents a grid on the landscape below so the aircrew could determine and correct for drift. This was our crude, but workable, "bomb sight."

I called the 291st Heavy Helicopter Company at Fort Sill and they sent a CH-54.

Two more Crane pilots, CWOs Merle Handley and Marc Wilson, joined and we began to develop bombing tactics with deactivated bombs.

After determining where the unit commander wanted the LZ, we would over fly it at 6,000 feet AGL, at a steady 60 knots on a specific heading, and our "bombardier" (Wilson) would view the target through the drift meter. On his command, the crew chief would drop a hand-held target missile with a smoke grenade in it.

Once it hit and Wilson observed this through the drift meter, he would pass the necessary corrections on to the pilot.

If the simulated bomb landed, say, 500 feet to the left and 300 feet long, we would do a 360 turn and approach the target with those corrections in mind at the same airspeed, altitude and heading.

Sort of Kentucky windage for a CH-54 rifle and a 10,000-pound bullet — why not?!

We made three smoke passes; the fourth was the real thing.

I must say that accuracy was THE problem and we started testing at 3,000 feet. The safety engineers ended up recommending 6,000 feet, which gave us 26 seconds after the release to gain more altitude.

Now, I am not the only one who will testify that an unloaded Crane really has one superior advantage over all other helicopters — with those two huge engines and six blades, it can really gain altitude fast!

When we got to Vietnam, we were assigned to the 478th Heavy Helicopter Company. They called themselves the "Uptight Hurricanes" and were based at Red Beach, north of Da

*See ONLY, Page 24*

# Only drift meter brought from U.S.

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Nang.

Though they continued to support the 1st Air Cav Division, they were controlled by III MAF (Marine Amphibious Force), which was a U.S. Marine Corps command. At that time, III MAF controlled all U.S. ground forces in I Corps.

I briefed the various commanders about the project.

The only thing we brought from the States was the drift meter.

The 478th gave us aircraft No. 13418 and we started modifying it to become the first (legal) BH-54 (Bomber Helicopter).

Then we went about retraining ourselves with simulated bombs just off the coast above Da Nang. This was in September 1968.

Our first drop was west of Hue where the ground commanders wanted it placed on top of a tree-covered hill.

When Wilson yelled "bombs away," we pulled full power and got all the altitude we could.

What a blast! The concussion shook the helicopter as if all the blades were out of track!

We circled back and observed our work, feeling pretty confident that any VC in the area had a bad headache and ringing ears.

Accuracy again left something to be desired, as I believe we missed the hilltop by 120 meters.

Eventually we dropped three more bombs, all near the western side of



A bomb, dropped from 6,000 feet over the DMZ, explodes in the jungle below. Though the bombing mission was classified "secret," North Vietnam knew the helicopter's crewmen by name and sentenced them to death three days after the bomb was dropped.

the DMZ in late September or early October.

Only one — and it fell on a hillside — was, after a little clearing, used as an LZ. It was still about 90 meters from where they wanted it.

I went into this LZ to retrieve a downed CH-47 a few days after we blew it and that was an interesting experience.

The thing that amazed me the most was that two days after we dropped the first bomb, Hanoi Hanna labeled us war criminals for doing this and read each of our names (including the enlisted men) over the air! There was a security leak someplace!

Anyway, that finished the Army phase of the project.

The Air Force would continue to drop 10,000- and 15,000-pound "Daisy Cutters" from the back of C-130s.

Wilson and I stayed to finish our year with the 478th, while Handley returned to Fort Sill.

I understand Merle Handley passed away recently and I am sad to say I

don't know where Marc Wilson is today.

He had been commissioned and claimed to have bombed Qui Nhon during World War II. After the war, he was rifted and became a warrant officer.

He was in excellent physical shape when he celebrated his 50th birthday during this tour.

One of his good friends from their officer training program days was a colonel or a general in Vietnam, so Marc would often spend time with him because they ate and lived a lot better than we did.

I am sad to say I cannot recall the names of the enlisted men who crewed our bomber, but it would be good to talk with any of them again.

As for BH 13418, it was returned to the standard Skycrane operational configuration and the bomb sight was crated and left in the supply room.

Look at the June photo in the 1995 VHPA Calendar titled "A Helping Crane" — that is No. 13418.



478th Heavy Helicopter Company