

reply mailed
12/2/97

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Home Phone [REDACTED]

Dick Detra

[REDACTED]
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Dear Dick,

I want to apologize for not answering your letter of May 1996. There is no excuse for my actions. Please accept my apology. I received your letter of 21 Nov 1997 yesterday and I am truly glad to hear from you and anyone else who was involved in "The Vietnam Experience".

If you are wondering why I am typing this letter it is because my writing is not as readable and as artful as yours. I am honored that you are asking me for information on # 179 [REDACTED] SATISFACTION. This aircraft was also my favorite and yes I do have at least one picture of the nose art and door art. The painting I had Joe Kline do was of this very aircraft.

When I was informed that the 101st had ordered the overpainting of all "unauthorized art", I went out and took photos of all aircraft that were still on the ground including the "slicks". Believe it or not the lift platoons had some pretty good art work.

Do you remember "CLIMAX", "SUPER FROG", "SNOOPY", "SUDDEN DEATH", "ERADICATOR", "THE O.D. STREAK", "FRIDAY's CHILD", "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds, LSD", "LOVE", "NUMBER 10". Unfortunately there were many more I was unable to get. It will take me some time to find, dust off and stumble through my photos or slides to find what you may need. And yes I would like know if you find any of our aircraft in the States.

In response to your question, the nose and door art were on SATISFACTION when I first flew her on 13 May 68. I am sure it was painted over by the time I last flew her on 7 Oct 68. It was about October 68 when the 101st went Airmobile and we became Co D 101. You and I know we were always "SPIDERS" and fought using their funky call signs.

You asked how many times I crashed? Just what is Joe Walker saying about me? You must remember there is a saying among pilots that "any landing you walk away from is a good landing". I was fortunate to walk and sometimes run away from all my "landings".

Actually my "Typhoon Bess" approach to LZ Sally in 471, "CLIMAX" was questionable. I believe I performed this unusual attitude approach on the evening of 4 or 5 Sep 68. Thank GOD the pilots were the only crew on board as the crew chief and gunner would not have survived.

This incident troubled me for many years. I had joined the Connecticut Army National Guard after Active Duty and was flying for some time when I was hit by a sheet of rain during a night flight. I had to overcome the fear and "flashback" of that night in the typhoon. I quickly overcame this fear and have become a more cautious and better aviator. I flew UH-1M gunships until 1979 and then continued flying UH-1Hs until leaving the Guard in 1995.

~~What troubled me was not my experience but the impact of that experience to my copilot.~~ I would like to apologize to him if I could.

 In a subsequent letter I will try to describe as accurately as possible this incident and any others I can remember as well as any you request. I have vivid memories of our action in the Ashau Valley on 5 Aug 68, when Harry Kim was killed. I also have the tape recording of that shoot down. It may take some time to locate.

I have many memories from LZ Sally. I do not remember the Gunship Platoon Leader I replaced in May 68; but I believe the then acting PL was a bald Cpt who we nicknamed The O.D. Streak, which he named his slick. I have a picture or slide of him.

I have trouble putting names to some of the faces. I took photos and sent them home for developing and then they were sent to my wife, Lois. It was years before I reviewed the photos and tried to identify the faces, some successfully and some not. Maybe between you, Joe Walker and I; we can make progress. Say hello to Greg Allen for me. You and he may be two of those faces.

Thanks for inquiring about my family. My wife, Lois and I have been married for 31 years and have two children. My daughter Erica has just begun Graduate School and my son John, is a senior at UMASS, Amherst.

As for me, I am employed by DOD at the Connecticut Aviation Classification Repair Activity Depot (CT AVCRAD), in Groton, CT. We are a Depot Level Repair facility supporting Army National Guard Helicopters in 14 States. There are 4 AVCRADs. The others are in MO, MS and CA.

Dick, don't worry about bringing back any bad memories. I have been fortunate to have served with many veterans of RVN and we have exchanged stories many times. The only guilt I feel is not remembering some of the names. I feel I owe them at least that.

I will try and write again soon. Please keep those questions coming and I will try to fill in the blanks. I wish you and your family the best for the holidays. "May the best of your past be the worst of your future".

Your Friend,

John F. Soares