

CHAPTER

Capt. Jack Johnson
Platoon Leader - 2nd Platoon
Raider 26

24 May, 1964 - 9 February 1965

DFC, AM w 18 OLC, ARCOM w/v, PH, VN Cross of Gallantry w/Palm, VN SF PARACHUTE BADGE

AVIATION

The UTT/68th AVN CO holds a place in Army, ^{THE} Tactical History equal to the innovation created through the development and employment of the 11th Air Assault/1st Cav. Division. The use of the Armed Helicopter to support Air Mobil Operations and unit maneuver on the ground was developed totally under combat conditions by the men of the UTT/68th AVN Co. I believe that this unit has never been given the recognition it earned in Vietnam and this effort ^{TO WRITE A HISTORY} will go a long way in documenting the ^{STORY} history of this truly unique unit.

I arrived in Vietnam on the 26th of May 1964. I had been involved with the early development of the Armed Helicopter at Ft. Rucker in 1957-58 timeframe when I was an IP and Instructor in The Dept. of Tactics. We obtained 30 cal MG's from the Navy. A 50 cal MG from somewhere and some small rockets (8 mm ORLECON) from the French, as I recall. We bolted the 30's on some H-13B Helicopters along with a couple of rockets and went out to Matson Range and shot them. We also tried some weapons on an H-21 and an H-34 but the H-13 was the most maneuverable and best platform to shoot from. The H-34 was being developed as a platform to deliver 3.5 inch rockets as aerial field artillery at Ft. Sill, OK by Captain James Merryman at about the same time. ^{JIM WOULD BE MY BATTALION COMMANDER ON MY SECOND TOUR IN VIETNAM IN 1967-1968.}

We landed the H-13 on a PT Stand about 10 feet in the air, jacked up the rear of the skids until the aircraft was in a normal forward flight attitude, bolted the MG's on each side and aimed them for straight ahead fire. They worked pretty good so we started to fly them normally and tried to shoot something. We did the same with the ~~50~~ CAL, but when it was fired on the PT Stand, in a static mode, the ~~mus~~ blast was so strong the bubble split completely open right in front of the instrument console. We did not try to fly or fire the 50 cal after that. I left Ft. Rucker for a three-year tour in Germany and when I got back was reassigned to Ft. Rucker from 1962 to 1964 where I was a Flight Commander and IP in the RW Department. In 1962 we had UH-1B's with the Flexgun kits installed but little or no chance to fire them. I was qualified as an IP in the UH-1A,B, C & D before I was deployed to Vietnam in 1964.

^{50 CAL} I arrived at TSN Airport on the 25th of May and was immediately assigned to the UTT Helicopter Company. I guess in part because I was qualified in the UH-1B that was equipped with the gun kit, and because I had some armed Helicopter flying experience. There was no other reason for my assignment because I did not know anyone in the unit other than W. O. Watts who had been an IP at Rucker with me before we all ended up in Vietnam. When I reported into the unit I was given command of the 2nd Platoon, The Raiders, since their last commander, Captain John Britton, had just ^{DEROSSED} ^{most}. I had two of the best, experienced, fire team leaders I could ever want, Bob Matlick and Gary Ramage. I think that they really wondered what they had as a new platoon leader, but things did work out and I felt that the 2nd Platoon was equal

to any job we were assigned and, in fact, we were better than Dick Jerrett's 1st Platoon or George Crooks' 3rd Platoon. There was a vigorous competition between Platoons, but a very close relationship between individuals on a personal basis within the unit. Pat Delevan was the CO and my impression was that he was a wild man with a death wish because he was fearless in the face of any hostile situation.

CONG L

My first few days in the unit were pretty standard, in processing, uniforms, get a room in the villa we had on Congly Street just outside the gate at TSN, and get adjusted to 12 hours of time change and heat that knocked you down. I guess maybe it was the second afternoon in country when a bunch of us were at the bar in the villa around 5 o'clock having a beer. In comes Gen. Stilwell and someone yells, "Everyone say hello to Gen Stilwell." Everyone yells, "Hello chicken shit," and then it goes into "Sing him a hymn" and you know the rest, "Hymn, hymn fuck him." I was pretty sure I was in the wrong place and that any career I had was going fast. He just laughed and told us we were all invited to his place tomorrow night for a barbecue. The rest of the guys then told me about "Gunner 6" and his door gunner flights with Delevan. Anyway, the next evening Delevan grabs me as the Newbee Platoon leader along with a couple of other old hands and we head out to Stilwell's villa right across the street from TSN. There's a big gate and several white mice guards who let us through, similar to the guards we had at our villa on Gongly. Sometime later, after more than too much to drink, Delevan yells, "It's time to go, load up." We all jump into his jeep and with him at the wheel we roar off toward the gate. The white mice are a little slow on the uptake and with the gate about one-quarter open, Delevan hits it. The gate flies, the jeep bumps over it and he's yelling at the white mice to get their shit together and get the gate open quicker. Now I'm sure I'm in the wrong place and I'll be in jail as an accessory to an assault on Gen. Stilwell's gate. As you can guess, nothing came of it and the General was there at our place many more times, both to drink with us and be an SP 4 door gunner as we went on our way each day.

TAC E

I got my in-country check rides, flew the Cambodia border up by Tay Ninh, got my maps and SOI and was about ready to become a real combat pilot by the end of the second week. I'm in Operations at the flight line at about 4 o'clock and in comes Delevan in his jeep at about 60 miles per hour. He jumps out, yells, "Start my aircraft," something about a TAC E, and looks at me and says, "Come on Johnnie, you're checked out and my co-pilot." We run out to his ship, which is on standby, and away we go. Sometime later, a couple of other ships forming a light fire team catch us as we go to ~~Tay Ninh~~ Tay Ninh where an American Special Forces Adviser, along with a bunch of ARVN, are pinned down and getting shot up bad. Delevan gets them on the radio and the communications are so bad you really can't make out much so Delevan says, "Hell pardner, I can't help much if I don't know what's going on so I'm going to land and see what's up." He makes out where the U.S. Advisor is and with me looking at the ground and everywhere else through the flex gun sight, he lands. The Advisor is on the ground laying up against a rice paddy berm and Delevan waves at him to come over to the ship. Delevan looks at me and tells me to stow the guns before I accidentally shoot someone. The whole firefight stops and the VC beat feet away from the fight. I guess the audacity of a helicopter landing right in the middle of them sent them running. The Advisor gets his bunch together and backtracks out of the area while we provide overhead cover until they clear the area. This was my first mission, first taste of combat, and an insight into what the next year would be like.

I had just gotten settled down into my room at the UTT Villa. It was a wonderfully comfortable place to live compared to other living areas occupied by the rest of the company on TSN Airbase. The Villa was a hotel of some kind right next door to the U.S. school for children of diplomats and other U.S. personnel who had their families with them in 1964. Maybe the only better living in Saigon would have been the Rex Hotel downtown, but my private room with a shower, hot water, and a flush toilet was very, very nice. Each Platoon had its own stairwell so all of us Raiders were together in the front of the building right by the driveway. We sat back off of Congly Street by maybe 50 yards and were right across the street from the Vietnamese Joint General H.Q.'s. We had 24 security at the front gate provided by Vietnamese white mice police. Each one of the Platoons had a $\frac{3}{4}$ ton truck that was our transportation from the Villa to the flight line. We took a rotating beacon off of one of the wrecks and put it over the center of the windshield. We put a flag post on the right front finder and somewhere from downtown Saigon we got a flag embroidered with the Raider emblem and the numbers of the three light fire teams I had under my command. I was given that flag the day I was med evacuated out of TSN and I still have it today.

We soon ran out of enough room space at the original Villa and a second Villa was rented out for the CO and HQ's people. The second Villa was behind the original Villa with a walkway between the two. The second Villa was facing on a separate street and had a large front yard area. It was a very comfortable place to live as well.

The original Villa had a kitchen and small mess hall where we had most of our meals prepared. It was sort of a short order arrangement where you could get something to eat most any time during the day. No late night meals were available but if you came back late from a day's mission you could get some food at the mess hall on TSN. We had a bar in the Villa as well and with ^{Club} Jack Saint as our Mess Officer, Club Officer, Entertainment Coordinator, we had food, drink and entertainment right there at home. We even had some 16 mm movies that were shown from time to time. In addition, we had a nasty monkey, named Saigon, a bear, unnamed as I recall, and a dog, whose name I can't recall, that lived with us. The monkey would run the house girls off if they got near him and he would bite you from time to time depending on his mood. One night old Saigon got loose and was on the fence next to our Villa trying to avoid recapture. Several of us had consumed a few cold San Maguel's and decided that Saigon was really a VC agent and we would do the Company some good by ridding ourselves of this thug. Someone, Danny Sullivan I think, had a native cross bow and we decided that it would be the appropriate weapon to be used to dispatch this cursed VC that was in our midst. We also decided that since we were all skilled gun ship drivers we would only shoot at him from high above, true, diving fire, appropriate to our military training. Anyway, we all went up to the third floor balcony that went around the Villa and with trusty cross bow prepared to attack. You can guess what happened. We shot our three arrows and never came close enough to do anything but make Saigon madder. He would chatter and move back and forth on the fence but no harm was done. In addition, being a true free loader, he came back to his place on the Villa patio next morning when the chow was put out for him.

If you wanted to go downtown to the big PX, Tudo Street, or some other attraction, we would grab one of the little blue and yellow Reanau cabs. They were a thrill to ride but they were

really the only way to get around. Now there was one other way to get around and that was to get ^{CPT} John Talley to give you a ride in his Ford Convertible. How he ever came up with a convertible that would run, but barely, is the wonder of the world. He loaded the thing up with six of us one night and off we went to Cholon to the Arconsel Nightclub. When he drove up to the door in an American convertible he was given the VIP treatment. I hadn't been in the Unit that long and I was amazed at how we were given the best table, etc., but soon learned that unless you bought lots of "Saigon Tea" you were soon a "Cheap Charley" and a non-person to the "Hostess". Most of the times I went anywhere in that convertible with its top down, which was down all the time, I worried about someone giving us a grenade as a present.

Before any new guy was cleared for operational flights there was a series of check flights each person went through. I had been a Flight Commander at Ft. Rucker and one of my IP's was CWO Watts; now he became my Check Pilot at TSN and checked me out before I could fly as an Aircraft Commander. I was his student now and he put me through a tough and complete checkout before he would turn me loose. This was the standard and no one got by without a full and complete orientation, which I think in the long run was the only way to go. The new WO's and Junior Officers may not have liked the intense check-outs, but it may have saved their life when it counted. CWO ~~Watts~~ took me up into the Iron Triangle where we found plenty of places to learn how to shoot the rockets which I would have on the Platoon Commanders UH-1B with the XM-3 Rocket System. Since I was a Field Artillery trained Officer, I used the XM-3 as a support ship with direct fire support of the light fire teams we deployed routinely. The light team would attack and break then I would follow and cover any area that the light team had not fully covered. When we prepped an LZ I could go either left or right side of the formation and saturate ~~sucks~~ ^{slck} whichever side of the LZ ~~that~~ presented the most danger to the landing ~~sucks~~. CWO Watts showed me how to decelerate slightly then bring the nose down to the target and let the ^{THK} _{ROCKER} firing blast bring the nose down further until the target was covered. We would adjust the aim of ^{GARY} _{sight} so that it tracked the first pair of rockets fired then it was pretty accurate for the rest of any firing run we made. One of the tricks Watts used was to have the Crew Chief pull hard on the bungee cords on the back of the seat and let it go with a bank. Sounded just like you were taking fire and got you used to reacting quickly with evasive maneuvers and turns to get out of the danger zone. After he worked me over I felt fully prepared to take over command of the Second Platoon and go out and rough it up with my light fire team leaders, Bob Matlick and ^{GARY} _{Lee} Ramage. I was extremely fortunate to have them and a bunch of squared away WO's as members of the 2nd Platoon. They never backed away from a fight and they never did anything stupid that hurt someone, and they brought me along until I could lead without screwing them up, for which I'm forever grateful.

Bob Matuck was a very talented guy who could draw combat pictures, sing songs, play the Ukulele, make up songs which would make fun of our daily routine and lead his team like a tiger. Gary Ramage was cool, clean and a walking model for a Hollywood version of The Army Helicopter Pilot. Each one was an exceptional leader and made my job a piece of cake. I cannot say enough about how they performed their duties and I was blessed to have had them as members of my Platoon.

Once the checkouts were completed, the daily routine was pretty much the same. We would rotate the Lead Platoon doing the missions with a standby Platoon to respond to TAC E's.

Our area of operations was mostly north and west of Saigon and south and west of Saigon centered on the cities of Phuoc Vinh, Tay Ninh, My Tho and Can Tho. We supported the Special Forces Units a great deal of the time and also supported ARVN Units that had American Advisors helping them. There were no fully manned American Units in country when I was there on this tour. It got to the point where we could recognize the voices of the Advisors on the ground after we worked with them day after day. The Special Forces guys were always getting into trouble because they were aggressive, going after the bad guys in their area. We made many gun runs for them around their little outposts all along the Cambodian border north of Tay Ninh. We got pretty close to all of the Special Forces guys and they would be in and around the Villa all of the time.

I got most of the guns I carried from the Special Forces. I started out with a Thompson Sub Machine Gun and soon realized that it weighed a ton. And, when you carried enough ammo to make it worth while, it was another ton so I got rid of that sucker and went to a grease gun. It soon turned into another ton of metal to haul around so I got rid of it and while I was at Bu Dop Special Forces Camp I asked for and got an M-2 A2 fully auto Carbine. Now I did the Hollywood trick of taping a pair of banana clips together and carried another pair of clips to I was ready to go. I would hang the carbine on the seat and didn't pay too much attention to the cleaning and care of the weapon which was almost a fatal mistake. We got called out one day to cover a Special Forces Team that was going into the jungle to blow up the wreckage of an A1-E that had been shot down by Phuoc Vinh. The SF guys were in a single slick and we were supposed to give them cover – well, that would have been impossible so I elected to land and walk in with them to blow up the wreckage. I leave the H-1B "Hog" and tell them if they hear any shooting tell the Fire Team overhead, get up to full power on the slick and the "hog" and watch for us to book out of the jungle. I get about thirty yards away from our aircraft and decide that I better get my trusty Carbine ready for action. I pull the operating handle to get a round in the chamber and it's jammed, full of dust and dirt and won't move. I now have in effect a club to help defend these guys who are loaded to the gills with C-4 and primer cord to blow up the A1-E. God looks out for fools and we get the wreck all hooked up and set the fuses without a problem and make it back to our aircraft. As we pulled out we started to take fire from a tree line about a 100 yards away so Charlie was coming. I heard the A-1E blow and we started to unload on the tree line and get out of there ASAP. Shortly after that I got an MP Short Barrel Pump Shot Gun as my weapon for close in defense if we got shot down. You could sink that sucker in a muddy rice paddy and it would work like a champ if you needed to get some bad guy's attention.

We were sent to My Tho one day to provide escort and LZ prep for a combat assault by an ARVN Unit. The lift ships were old and well-worn H-21's that looked like they were ready for the bone yard. It had to have been one of the last units in Vietnam using H-21's and it must have been one of the last combat assaults using H-21's. We did our thing and wouldn't you know one of the H-21's went down about half way back from the LZ. It did make a safe landing but there they were with no local defensive troops and no way to get the ship out except fix it and fly it out. We flew overhead cover while the Maintenance Officer fixed that sucker and then he flew it out. There were no Chinooks to lift out a downed aircraft at that time and an H-21 couldn't have been easily removed anyway. It seems to me that any time we went to Can Tho, Vinh Long, My Tho or Moc ~~#10~~ we had a thrilling day.

H/H

Not too long after I took command of the Second Platoon we got an emergency call from an American Advisor who, with his ARVN troops, had been ambushed and pushed up against the Saigon River northwest of Saigon. They had made it back to a complex of cement block buildings, had the river to their back and established a defensive perimeter, but they were under heavy attack. By the time we got called to come out and help it was dark and there were no ~~flair~~ ^{Flare} ships to help us. It wasn't too difficult finding the friendly position because of the exchange of fire between the two groups. We were able to provide direct fire to the VC but I found that the rocket sight we had was so bright, even with the rheostat turned down to minimum light, that it was blinding to try and use the sight to aim. While we were involved the radio chatter indicated that one aircraft, I think it was ^{CP} Ed Riley, had a crewman WIA. They took off for Saigon and when we got back that night we had suffered the first KIA since I had joined the Unit. SP-5 Leonard Lockhard was lost on July 10, 1964. I had been in the Unit about 5 or 6 weeks when this happened.

It was only another month later when we had our next KIA. This happened during a normal LZ prep when Dick Jerrett's Playboys were covering the prep and mark of the LZ. They made their gun runs and as they marked the landing spot for the slick lift ships they took a direct hit head on to the pilot's seat where Lt. Harold McNeil was flying. The round came right through the gun sight base and there was no other protection except our old floppy flack vest which didn't stop much of anything. I can still hear Dick on the radio reporting, "I have a serious WIA or maybe a KIA and I'm on my way to Saigon." The war had gotten serious and would continue to get more serious as the year went on.

periodically
We ~~drew~~ the mission of doing ^{for} a road recon overhead cover ^{to} for the opening of Highway 13 north to An Loc, Quan Loi, Song Be ~~everywhere~~. The VC would close the road every night and build berms or road blocks that were booby trapped or set up ambush positions alongside the road. We could always expect to get shot at somewhere along the way and get in the chance to work on some new techniques. Someone from SOG or some other development agency came up with a device that we could use to drop smoke grenades out of the XM-3 Rocket Tubes. You had to turn the rocket tube cluster backward and then a trap door arrangement fit over the tubes and a timer inside the aircraft would open up the door on each tube allowing the grenades to be ejected in a steady stream. Each tube would hold 8 grenades so with 48 tubes you could load 384 grenades. We thought about regular old smoke grenades to use to ~~find~~ an ambush position then someone suggested we use white phosphorous grenades. They put out plenty of smoke and burned the hell out of anything within their range. The problem was that as you loaded each grenade you had to had to pull the pin and slide it into the tube until all 8 grenades were in place and then you could close the door to hold them all in place. There was a coil spring in each tube so when the door opened the grenades would fly out thunk, thunk, thunk, the ~~pin~~ ^{SOG} would fly off and four seconds later you had a Willy Pete explosion. The crew that loaded each tube was very careful because every grenade had its pin out and if one of those doors was accidentally opened you had 8 Willy Petes on the ramp under your aircraft. Anyway, we got the hog loaded with WP and up highway 13 we go looking for something to bomb. We found an obviously hostile village where the road was all cut up with ambush bunkers along the road and I became the Willy Pete bomber. The fire team covered me and I went downtown at about 100 feet in the air so the grenades would burst about the time they hit the ground. The timer was set to open a tube up

every 5 to 10 seconds apart so the grenades would hit the ground in a continuous row and would cover about a quarter of a mile with overlapping white phosphorous. It worked like a champ and we hit a few very hostile positions along that highway.

The other trick we had for that setup occurred when we participated in a rescue attempt for POW's Nick Rowe and Herb Versance. We were briefed late one night on a plan to rescue Rowe and Versance based on intelligence received about their location in the area north of CaMau. We were required to proceed from TSN to Soc Trang with complete radio silence. In fact, the radios were turned off so no unwanted transmission would give our presence away. We had the hog loaded with 384 CS gas grenades. The plan was that we would fly over the POW Camp, drop the CS, which would allow the Special Forces A Team making the rescue to hit the camp with everyone under the effects of the gas. The big worry was that we would gas ourselves and maybe lose control of the aircraft. The solution to the problem was that the co-pilot would take over while the pilot masked up. We disconnected the microphone from our flight helmet and stuck it into the front of the gas mask so that when we did turn on the radios we could talk to each other. When we launched off we found the area right away and the Special Forces Team, all Americans because of the priority to get the POW's, hit the ground to find that the camp had been evacuated some time within the last 24 hours. We were all heart sick to find the empty camp with evidence that Rowe and Versance, or at least other Americans, had been there. As it worked out, Herb Versance was executed later because of the resistance he made as a POW and Nick Rowe escaped and was picked up by friendly helicopters some five years later. As a Unit we were involved in several search missions along the Cambodian border through the Plain of Reeds to War Zone C looking for Rowe and other American Pow's. ~~After~~ this mission ended the big problem was to get the 384 CS grenades out of the XM-3's tubes without letting one of them go off. We did download them and that was the last time that we used the XM-3 as a bomber for anything. The whole system worked well but we thought that using the hog to deliver 3.75 inch rockets was a lot better use of our equipment.

ADD
(FROM BELOW)

The Commanders I served under were a complete contrast. When I reported in Pat Delavan was the CO and by all accounts was a legend. He was fearless and would do things that made you suck in your breath in disbelief. I have already described my first and only mission I flew with him before he left country. I felt that at the end of his tour his appearance indicated that he had been under a great strain and he really looked tired and worn out, but whenever the bell rang he would be out there mixing it up with great zeal. He would come out with a pickup wing man and jump right into ~~one~~ of the flights we were getting into at that time. I was always in awe of Gen. Stilwell in the door gunner's seat with his personal M-60 with the single star of a Brigadier General on the cover plate. I was there one day when Delevan made an emergency landing and we were all providing overhead cover and trying to convince Delevan and Stilwell to let us pick them up. Delevan refused and Stilwell was out at the right rear of the aircraft with his M-60 providing ground security as the door gunner should until maintenance came in and fixed the aircraft, which they flew out. When Delevan left we got Maj. Ralph D. Irvin as boss. This guy was a bull, both in physical appearance and his approach to others. He was a glory seeker and was out for himself in everything he did. We came under organizational control of the 145th Avn. Bn. while he was CO and he didn't care one bit about trying to cooperate with and work for the 145th CO. Two things stick out in my mind about Irvin's time as a Commander. The Second Platoon was working out of Tay Ninh covering a Special Forces Unit working through the jungle

ADD
--- CO-PILOT, CREW CHIEF AND GUNNER WOULD FLY WITH THEIR MASKS ON, I
WOULD FLY WITHOUT THE MASK UNTIL GAS WAS PRESENT IN THE AIRCRAFT WHEN 7
THE CO-PILOT --- WOULD TAKE OVER

west of Nui Ba Den Mountain. We had been providing overhead cover and recon as the Unit moved along. We had been covering them with rotating Fire Teams and were accurately aware of where they had been and were going. Irvin comes up on the radio and relieves us ordering us back to Tay Ninh until he calls us back. After he's on station for about an hour he calls us back out and when we are on station he proceeds to drop a bunch of smoke into the rear of the troops on the ground and orders us to shoot it up. I refuse to shoot and Irvin goes nuts and orders me back to TSN to report to him in his office. The ground troops call us and ask about all of the smoke that has fallen into their rear ranks but by now Irvin is off their push and on his way back to TSN. I follow him back leaving my two light Fire Teams to cover the SF's and prepare to have a new assignment by nightfall. Irvin has fire coming out of his eyes, ears and mouth when I report to him. I make my case about being aware of where the friendlys were and that he had dropped smoke into their positions so I wasn't about to shoot at them. I also point out that he might want to check with the SF's and get their take on where the smoke landed. He grounded me for the day and night and must have followed up because next day he called me and put me back on duty. He didn't recognize his mistake or make any apology but chewed me out again for disobeying his direct orders to fire on the smoke. At this point I decided that I would give him a wide space and stay out of his way as best we could as a Platoon.

We didn't have to wait too long before he took care of himself. When we came under control of the 145th we were invited to participate in their social activities at a Mess Hall on TSN. Irvin ordered us to go to some event but that we would go in shirts and ties and be real standoffs. We went and had a pretty good time and later Irvin and the BN XO came back to our Villa to drink some more. I was in bed asleep when I was awakened with the loud noise of an argument followed by a crashing sound of furniture flying about. My room was on the second floor above our club so I could hear pretty plainly what turned out to be a fight between Irvin and the BN XO. I guess it was really more of a one way beating delivered by Irvin on the XO. I stayed out of it and by next morning the bar mess was cleaned up, the XO was in hospital with a badly fractured eye socket and cheek and Irvin was gone. He was a dangerous man with a very bad temper and would have gotten us in trouble if he had continued as the CO.

Irvin was followed by Joseph N. "Jim" Jaggers and what a change that made. Jim Jaggers was maybe one of the coolest, smoothest, solid Commanders I ever had while I was in the Army. He let us be Commanders over our own Platoons and supported us in any way he could. There was no comparison on how Dick Jarrett, Jack Johnson or George Crook ran their Platoons but we all did and we achieved good results in getting our missions done. Even though we were very competitive between Platoons we recognized that we were there for each other ~~and~~ when we got into a fight. We may have put the mouth on each other in the Villa but we stood together in the field. Jaggers lead by example from the front and I really think that the 68th AVN Co. really became the Unit it was when Jaggers came in as our CO. Obviously his abilities were recognized by his eventual promotion to Major General and the successful career he had ~~later~~ before he retired.

Shortly after we came under the operational control of the 45th Aviation Battalion, we were assigned a mission that was unusual and ~~credited~~ a certain embarrassment for the Second Platoon. All of us "Gun Ship Drivers" felt that we were somehow "better" than our fellow Slick Ship buddies so when the UTT was given the mission to remove the guns and use our aircraft on

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an upcoming mission as Lift Ships we were insulted and to make even worse the Second Platoon got the mission. We slicked up our aircraft and prepared to do our thing with the other slicks out of the 145th doing a combat assault somewhere around Saigon. None of us wanted to use the "Raider" call sign when we were slicks so we got into the SOI/SSI which we all carried and never used and found that our real assigned call sign was "Magnolia" some number of that day. That's what we became for that combat assault. I flew lead and we set down along with some five other aircraft from the 120th, as I remember, in some farmer's field and dumped out a company of ARVN on a search and not find anything mission. The LZ was cold; not a shot in anger was fired and as we lifted out the Playboys let us know that we were all safe and covered as they escorted us. Thank heaven we only had to do that once and we got our guns and rockets back on the next day to resume doing our normal flying. The Magnolia thing came up several times at the bar, all in good humor, but we were never Slicks again while I was there.

We were forever getting called out to cover some Special Forces walk in the jungle around the Tay Ninh area when they got hit. One night we got the call and the weather was pretty crappy with low overhead and rain. When we got up by Nui Ba Den we were reconing around the base of the mountain trying to help the SF's get untangled with the bad guys. The mountain was always a bad place to fly around and at night low level was even worse. I was Number 3 in trail following the Light Fire Team and because of the visibility they had running lights going while I was black out. We came too close to the mountain and old Charley couldn't let us get by without that. They must have had a smooth bore cannon of some sort because it made the biggest bang I've ever heard. When the second ship in the Fire Team was in their zone of fire the VC let that sucker go. There was one huge flash with all sorts of junk in the air, like it was filled with old bicycle parts, nuts, bolts, bottles and anything else they could stuff into it. Luckily they were way off target and I was in position to make them pay for their efforts. I could clearly spot their position and we unloaded most of the 48 rockets we had onboard in one ripple against the mountain. It was a great show and when all the rockets hit the SF's called to tell us that the VC had broken contact and were beating feet out of the area. It was a pretty good outcome for a lousy night to try and support anyone on the ground.

We had probably 75% of our missions in early 1964 in support of the Special Forces somewhere along the border with Cambodia north and west of Tay Ninh. We got to know the SF guys pretty well and every so often a bunch of them would show up at our Villa and we would have a cool one with them. One night a bunch of them came by to coordinate a parachute training exercise they were doing the next day and that we were flying for them using CPT Dick Hatton's Maintenance Slick as a drop ship. After maybe too many San Magels, several of us were challenged to come jump with them next day. They were jump qualifying a bunch of their mercenary soldiers as well as some of the SF's, so we were invited to join in, no matter that we hadn't been to Jump School anywhere. I had never made a jump, but wore a parachute for years when I flew fixed wing aircraft, so I figured I needed the experience before the real thing came along. Anyway, we fly over to the SF Compound and with a slight hangover at least two of us rig up with their chutes and take the five minute course in what to do if that sucker doesn't open up when we step off of the Skid. I think we had six, three on each side, and away we go. The first drop is great, everything opens fine and the landing in somewhat dry rice paddy goes good. We all rig up again and go up for our second drop and full jump qualification in the Vietnamese Army. Second drop is fine but now the wind is up somewhat so when I land I'm

now in a wet rice paddy and I'm making like a boat behind the chute. Anyway, one other guy from the UTT is in front of me and we are at least together in this thing. Neither one of us knew how to collapse a chute so we just drag on until we run up against a fence and a dike along the outside perimeter of their drop zone. The SF's are on the ground laughing so hard ~~they~~ in pain and we don't know crap about how to get that devil stopped. In the end the SF's did put in the paperwork to get us jump qualified and after I got back to the U.S. I submitted my paper work to DA and have it officially entered on my record that I earned Vietnamese jump status along with authority to wear their jump wings. I have my wings on display along with other badges I earned and I'm proud of them, but I've never made a jump since that day.

It's always strange what guys will do when they are in situations like we were in. Soldiers who are often accused of being indiscriminant killers by dissident people who don't really know us can do some of the most decent and worthy acts of humanitarian kindness. I was in the Platoon for maybe a month or two and had no knowledge of what some of the guys, mainly Matlick and Ramage, were doing for an Orphanage downtown. One day they asked me to come along with them in civilian clothes, while they went to the Orphanage and did some repair work. We took ~~our~~ $\frac{3}{4}$ ton truck assigned to the Platoon and in the back were several sheets of plywood, a bunch of C Rations, and boxes of used baby clothes sent to Matlick and Ramage from home. When we arrived at the place somewhere in downtown Saigon we were welcomed like visiting dignitaries. Several of the guys go to work on the roof putting up the plywood while others help the staff sort out clothes and move the C-Rats into the building. Others are playing with the young kids who have mobbed us and want to be swung around in circles. The guys had been doing good deeds for a long time at the Orphanage and Gary Ramage had already taken steps to adopt one of the kids to take home with him. I can't remember for sure, but I do believe that he did leave with a little girl maybe three years old when he derosed. That may be something he can fill in when he adds his part to our history.

During the October/November 1964 period the 2nd Platoon was given the mission to escort 10 Slicks from the Delta (can't remember the Unit or its call sign now) to Da Nang where we established the early use of Eagle Flights and worked with Marine Aviation Unit HMM-365. This turned out to be a very interesting and worthwhile mission. When we arrived at Da Nang the local Army Aviation Unit had never used Eagle Flight techniques to find, fix and attack the local VC units. They started out trying to tell us what we would do, which was totally out of whack with what we had been doing successfully for some time down south, so our first task was to convince them that we could show them a new concept. This we did in the most diplomatic way possible with me, a Captain, telling a full Colonel his ideas were all screwed up. However, between the Lift Ship Commander and myself working together we were able to get the local Aviation CO to let us ~~show~~ him our thing. We got a local ARVN Battalion to supply our reaction force, along with some American Advisors to go with them, set up a Radio Center to alert the Reaction Force, set up a local grid code on our maps to allow direct references to a release point or IP which we could give to the Lift Ships in the clear, and went hunting with heavy fire team. I acted as the mission Commander and would call out the Eagle when we found something we wanted to look into. We would direct the Lift Ships to a set of grid coordinates, set up uniformly on our maps but made up from a set of random numbers or letters so no one could tell where we were going unless they had one of our maps. The Lift Ships would hit the IP, pick up a direction, have an escort of gun ships and be directed to assault an LZ marked and prepped by

the guns. The amazing thing was that the VC were so unfamiliar with our capabilities that we caught them out in the open or had them expose themselves by firing at us that it became a turkey shoot after the first day of operations. We had a truly target rich environment and we had some unbelievable success. We caught a platoon of VC walking down a road in formation with ~~weapons~~ ~~armies~~ in view trying to look like a rag tag bunch of friendlys ^{we} pinned them down and dropped the "Eagle" right on top of them. The local folks couldn't believe what we were able to do. Anyway we kept this up for the first ten days or so and the locals decided that we needed to get the Marines of HMM 365 involved.

The Marines were a real hoot to work with. First, they were pretty stiff about working with a bunch of Army pukes but after a few days we really got a neat deal going. Their CO, LTC Joe Koler, was a good guy and he was a real go getter to try out some new staff. He later retired as a Marine Major General ^{CPT} which says a lot about him as a Commander. One of the lead pilots we worked with was a George Bomberman who was a real tiger and welcomed us Army guys to their area. The Marines started to arm up their H-34's with two rocket pods on each side, with 18 rockets to a pod, and a pair of M-60's, one out the window on left side, one in the door of the right side. They planned to arm up at least three of their H-34's then take over the mission we were doing in their area. The one thing we didn't have ^{WAS} a name for them which was solved one night in the bar of their club where we were all hanging out one evening. We were drinking Stingers which was a favorite drink at their bar and someone suggested that the guns they were flying were a bad bunch of "Stingers" with their rockets and M-60's. That's how the Marine Armed Helicopters became Col. Koler's Stingers. They had distinctive patches made up for the crews who flew the Stingers and when we got back to TSN I received my own Stinger patch with my name on it, which I still have today. The Marines got pretty good at doing Eagle flights and shooting from their armed H-34's, but when HMM 365 left after their rotation in country there were no more armed Marine helicopters used in country that I know of.

During the Christmas Season of 1964 the UTT's received a Christmas card from the guys of HMM 365, their official unit Christmas card, and on it was two of their H-34's with two of our armed UH-1's in close escort formation. I have that card today along with my Stinger patch and they are very prized possessions of mine which are reminders of a unique and worthwhile mission we did in 1964.

When we arrived in Da Nang there was a problem of where to put us up during our stay. The Marines didn't have room for us and the Army Aviation Air Lift Platoon stationed there didn't have any room for us so we were split up with the officers/WO's being sent to 9 Gia Long Street, the Airlift Platoon BOQ, and the EM staying at Da Nang Airfield. We were billeted in the rooms with the Airlift members so a two-man room became a four-man room all at once. Now this didn't go over too well and I can understand that because I was stuck in one of those canvas cots with no mattress between the beds of the two guys who were already crowded into the room. The second problem we had was that we had no transportation that was ours so we had to rely on getting a ride by bumming one from others. The Airlift Platoon at first left their vehicles parked in front of the BOQ unlocked and you would expect we commandeered their vehicles, (that's stole them) to go to the club or mess shortly after we got there. Next day I got my butt chewed by their CO and the vehicles were all locked up. We worked out a ride

arrangement to get out to the flight line each day but getting back and forth from the club in the evening was a problem.

The club was some distance down Gia Long as I remember and most nights we could catch a ride with the Airlift guys. But sometimes we would walk to the club. I remember one night I decided I was ready to get back to the BOQ but no ride was available so I started to walk home, in the dark, by myself. Dumb. Anyway, I did have a .357 Magnum I carried and I had it with me so I felt that I could protect myself somewhat as I got back to the BOQ. It was the darkest, longest walk I've ever made and probably the dumbest as well. I would have been an easy target for some VC to pick off knowing that we had walked back from the club or drove back along the same route before and, beside, we were half in the bag from drinking as well. After I did that walk once that was enough and most of us just hung around the BOQ or stayed at the Marine Compound for a while after dinner at the airfield and then got a ride back to the BOQ. I know the Airlift Platoon guys were glad to see us return to TSN and so were we, but they did their best to help us out while we were plunked down into their midst.

When the Raiders returned to TSN following our release from the Da Nang mission, we landed and were met by Gen. Deck Oden while we were shutting down. He told me to come with him; we were going to see someone who was very interested in what we had done while we were up north for the last thirty days. I had no idea where we were going until we pulled up to MACV HQ's and we were in Gen. Westmoreland's office. There I was, pretty scruffy looking, with Col. Klingenhagen, Gen. Stillwell, Gen Oden, Westmoreland and me sitting around a coffee table. We had captured more VC, picked up more weapons and had worked so well with the Marines he wanted to know how we had done it. Wow, what a welcome home. Anyway we had a nice chat, got lots of atta-boys, and maybe made some little history for Joint Operations. It really was a unique experience that probably won't ever happen again. Funny thing, I have a print out of the web site of HMM-365, 1964-65, and they don't mention our Joint Operations but describe their use of the Stingers – so goes life.

Not too long after Jim Jaggers took command he rotated around on missions and flew with each Platoon. The first time we went out with the Second Platoon we had the job of providing gun ship cover for the ~~Bunch Hands~~ The U.S. Air Force Unit that sprayed Agent Orange defoliant out of C-123 aircraft. They would go out with five C-123's flying in an echelon formation at about 200 feet and spray the defoliant over an area like 1,000 feet wide by a ~~couple~~ ^{few} ~~of~~ three miles long. They had A-1E's over head and in front of them making continuous firing runs with 20 mm cannon all along the path they were flying. We would meet up with them when they left Bien Hoa and fly along their flight path as fast as we could ready to put security fire around any position where an aircraft was downed and assist when a rescue attempt was made by the Air Force. They would go as fast as they could and with the A-1E's laying down suppressive fire they would usually get by at least one run without receiving too much ground fire. We started the day's run over the Ho Bo Woods and things were going pretty good until some brave guy who must have been in a bunker let loose with some very accurate automatic fire and hit one of the 123's really good. The 123 peals out of the formation and makes it back toward Bien Hoa leaving the rest of the formation to continue on with the A-1E's still shooting for them. The 123's making all the speed possible and we are on the verge of blade stall trying to keep up with ~~them~~ ^{HIM} in case they have to go down en route. They make it back OK with at least two wounded onboard

and no hydraulics but still flyable and our aircraft vibrating all over the place trying to stay close to them. We got a nice message of thank you from the crew after they got back and Jim Jagers got a little taste of Agent Orange which we all got covered with when we flew cover for the Ranch Hands.

Air

Another experience I had with the ~~Air~~ Force started one morning very early when we cranked up way before day break to fly down to Rach Gia to cover an ARVN airborne drop into an area along the Cambodian Border. The standard procedure was that the aircraft Commanders and I would meet in Operations and get the brief while the rest of the crew did the pre-flight and get the aircraft ready. The AC's and I would get to the aircraft, crank up, do our radio check and then brief the crew in route over the intercom. In the dark I couldn't really see who was in the door gunner position and when the intercom check was made the voice wasn't familiar either. It wasn't a complete surprise to have some Saigon strap hanger get cleared by Operations to fly door gunner on our missions but normally it would happen during daylight and on local staff not on long duration/night take offs. When I didn't recognize the voice of my door gunner I asked him to ~~ID~~ himself and to my surprise I had an Air Force Major back there. Anyway, we get to Rach Gia, have the mission to recon and prep the drop zone and stand by after the drop, rearmed and refueled, to assist the ~~ARVN~~ Red Hats if they get into trouble. We hit the LZ and with all guns laying down suppressive fire we prep the drop zone. We pull off and watch the C-47's drop the airborne and head back to rearm. During the prep the noise from the door gunners M-60 was pretty loud and I thought I heard some rounds hitting our aircraft but no one else reported a hot area so I didn't think much more about it until we landed. When I opened my door to get out and help carry ~~rockets~~ to rearm the "hog" there were three holes in my door post right behind my seat. To say the least I was a little hot about the Major's ability with the M-60. Since I was a Captain and he was a Major I didn't get too direct about discussing his proficiency but we quickly changed our routine for rearm. I took the pilot with me and the Crew Chief stayed with the ship to load the rockets and the Major found out what it was like to haul 48 2.75 inch folding fin rockets from the ammo dump to the aircraft. The dump was also a hundred yards away from where I parked the "hog," last in line, in our formation. I can't remember ever seeing him again on our flight line or operation~~s~~ at TSN.

I'm sure that others will give their thoughts about how and when we would get some R&R while in country. Here are some of my recollections. The Company had somehow arranged for a Villa in Vung Tau and the routine was that a crew of four with maybe a couple of passengers would fly down there. The crew that had been on R&R there for four or five days would fly the aircraft back and then, during the next week, another rotation of crews would happen. This worked out great especially for the enlisted guys who could get a few days hanging out at the beach, drink beer and foster~~ing~~ goodwill relations with the local single girls who wanted to perfect their ability to speak English, yeah right. Anyway, I only got to fly down one day, for the day, and take the Company $\frac{3}{4}$ ton out to the beach for a day. There were four of us and I wasn't real comfortable about running around a pretty isolated stretch of beach without some protection. When we left the airfield, unfortunately, the only thing I had was my 8 mm movie camera and a ~~45~~-cal pistol. Never let it be said that fear of being shot on the beach would stop us so off we go. I guess it was true that in 1964 both the VC and the Americans shared the Vung Tau area, in peace as both of us sought some diversion from the war. We had a great day

swimming and I have the movie film to prove that Vietnam had the potential to be a wonderful tourist attraction, under the right circumstances.

Now one other option was available for R&R and I took advantage of it after I had been in country for about six months. The Air Force flew a C-54 from TSN to Hong Kong once a week and you could book a seat on the flight on a seat-available basis. ^{CPT} Ed Riley, Company XO, and I signed up and we got a seat assignment right away. We get all ready to go and wouldn't you know the aircraft was down for maintenance on the day we are supposed to depart. We go home and next day it's ready to roll and we go to Hong Kong only missing a day out of our R&R – no big deal. Anyway we check into The President Hotel, find the highly recommended tailor shop – Cheap Charley, and prepare to have a super time exploring all of the cultural attractions of this ancient city. What we did find was a bunch of wonderful nightclubs, restaurants and the China Fleet Store where you could buy most anything at wonderful prices. One of the things I wanted to get beside some alligator shoes, elephant hide shoes, shirts and slacks tailor-made, was a full blown white dress uniform with all the trimmings. After all I was a regular Army Officer and a cheap tailor made white, Panama weight, uniform was an irresistible deal. Cheap Charley lived up to his reputation and I had my uniform all ready to go before the R&R was over. We all turn out for the return flight and here comes the same old C-54 to get us home. We load up and then here comes the Air Force guys with enough boxed up stereo equipment to fill several discos. They load up all the storage space and then start setting it up in the aisle with just enough room to slip by on the sides. Anyway we are all pretty much in need of some sleep because of our vigorous activity enjoying the local cultural attractions so it's wheels up and eyes closed for most of us. About an hour or so out from TSN over open water the number 3 engine decides that it's had enough and it craps out with a big belch of oil coming out of the engine cover. You could hear the eyes snap open when the engine quit. That was soon followed by some concerned talk from the crew that with the engine out and loaded down as we were with all the stereo equipment in the aisle, the next thing we would do was lighten the load if she couldn't maintain altitude. After a bit of careful consideration it was decided that we could make it without dumping the load and we flew on to a very deliberate approach to TSN. Now, the tragic part of this story. I was ~~wounded~~ and had to be med evacuated to the States without being able to secure my personal belongings at the Villa. The guys from the Platoon did that for me but they had to leave the stuff open at the Air Force Terminal for Customs clearance before they shipped it all home to me. When I got my baggage after about 3 or 4 months my brand new white uniform in the shipping bag Cheap Charley gave me was missing along with some other clothing that really did not mean much to me then. So I never got to impress anyone in my spiffy new uniform and ended up buying one from Lautersteins with the money I got from the claim I filled for my missing stuff.

This next memory is sort of a "How bad a war was it?" tale. Shortly after I got to the unit several of the Second Platoon members derossed back home. I thought we would just have a little going home party at the Villa but was really surprised when I was told we would all go out for dinner at the Carivelle Hotel in downtown Saigon. So here we go in shirts and ties or Raider Platoon shirts which we all had made with a Raider patch on the front with our call sign under the patch. Somewhere over the years that shirt just got away and I really wish I had it now but don't. We all go up to the 10th floor, as I remember, and in the big ballroom restaurant we have white table cloths with napkins, china and center pieces on the table. This is war? I remember

we had a bunch of drinks, a fine French dinner and at the end of the evening gave each departing Raider a wooden plaque with the Raider Patch and a plate with the time and hours flown with the Platoon. I mean it was as good as any haul and farewell as you could expect in the U.S. Sometime after I got wounded I got my Raider Plaque in the mail and over the years, like my Raider shirt, the plaque has gone as well. I can't remember ever going back to the Caravelle after that but we did go to the Rooftop at the Rex Hotel, had dinner and drinks, and watched the fire fights going on around Saigon with flares and tracer rounds lighting up the sky.

The UTT was organized in three Platoons made up of two fire teams with a Platoon leader flying an XM-3 "Hog" B Model. Some time after Jagers came onboard the Second Platoon was expanded to have three fire teams plus the Platoon leaders aircraft. I think that the Second Platoon was the only Platoon that had three ~~fire~~ Teams and when I got that third team I got Jim Dameron as a Fire Team leader. He was very much like Ramage and Matlick and I was blessed to have had guys like that for leaders. Jim was one cool dude and could always be depended upon to do the job right. Just after we expanded into the three Fire Teams we got a flag made up somewhere in Saigon with the Raider embroidered on the flag in color and the 21-22, 23-24, 27-28 Fire Team call signs under the patch. When I was wounded the buys brought the flag to the Navy hospital when I was about to be evacuated and gave it to me. I have that flag today in my scrapbook and I'm very proud of it. Who knows, maybe the guys brought me the flag as a way of indicating that they were glad to be getting rid of me so I got the flag for good riddance. I hope not.

There is one other momento I got somewhere between taking command and being evacuated and that was a hand-painted character of me done by ^wDanny Sullivan. It is a beautiful rendition of an Aviator in flight jacket with red eyes, tattoos, cigarette hanging out of mouth holding a VC Flag. I love it. Danny Sullivan was a good guy who maybe had the worst luck of anyone. He just seemed to have no luck at all but was there all the time when he was needed. Danny will be part of another story later but Danny would fly the "Hog" with me a lot and I really appreciated him being part of my Platoon. Danny would be involved in some horrific aircraft accidents after his tour in Vietnam and would die of brain cancer in December of 02.

I can't remember why we were out doing a single ship recon but we were and I remember we were looking for a route of infiltration that we suspected was being used to bring VC into the area north and west of Saigon. We were at 1500 feet or so because at that altitude we seldom got shot at and we could see the area pretty good. We found what looked like a well used trail, but when it went into more dense jungle it disappeared. The VC had ~~tied~~ ^{tied} the jungle canopy together or filled in the area over the trail and had obscured the trail rally well. We were doing a slow left circle when we heard this loud bang and knew that we had been shot at and hit some where inside the helicopter. From the angle of the aircraft it was pretty clear that some bad guy in the vicinity of the camouflaged trail had taken a shot at us and hit us. I made another circle and got lined up with the direction the trail disappeared into the jungle and pulled the aircraft up into a big flare, pushed over into a steep nose down altitude, set the rocket firing switch on a full ripple of all 48 rockets and let them go. As the rockets rippled off the nose came slowly up distributing the rockets in a neat rectangle right on top of the camouflaged trail. It looked as good as any air strike and covered an area a good 300 to 400 yards long. I often wondered what the guy who shot at us thought after we unloaded on him. When we got home we found the

LEFT

bullet hole in the center console beside the co-pilot seat. The round had come in through the open cargo door and hit the console passing under the co-pilot's seat. We were so high that it had slowed down pretty well and just barely made a hole in the console. That was one of the few times I was able to dump a full load of rockets in one shot. It's impressive from the inside of the aircraft and I hope that we impressed the bad guys on the ground.

Sometime after I was in the unit we started to run into 51 cal machine guns being fired at us. That was something that quickly got your attention. The smaller caliber weapons would start to arch over 1000 to 1500 feet in the air but a 51 would still be going straight up at 4000 when the tracer would burn out. They could truly reach out and touch you. Some one in the Armament Section came up with this big old 50 cal American machine gun in a neat aerodynamic pod. We hung that sucker on the side of one of the gun ships and we went out to see how we could use it against other 50 cal's we ran into. I guess we thought we could stand off and shoot it out with one of them on the ground. The first thing we found was that at the range it had we really couldn't tell how effective our fire was. It was real difficult seeing the bullet strike unless we were shooting into a solid tile roofed building, which we didn't do too much. The second thing we found was that it would jam up most of the time after a three or four round burst. This was not much fire power when you were going after another 50 cal on the ground. There was supposed to be some mechanism to recycle the bolt and clear jams but it didn't seem to work and the crew couldn't lean out and clear it because it was in this neat aerodynamic pod. The best thing we ever used it against was a bunch of Sanpans on the Saigon River because you could see the bullet strike on the water and if you could keep it firing it could tear up some boats. It was another of those things that looked good in theory but didn't work out well for us. It disappeared after a few days of playing with it.

ARVN

I was in the Villa one afternoon when we heard this big commotion on Cong Li Street directly across from our Villa in front of the ~~A~~un Joint General Headquarters. This big crowd had gathered to protest something and we were all up on our roof or 3rd floor balcony watching when a bunch of gun fire broke out. We all ducked for cover and someone called our Operations to see if any of our people were in the area and could check it out. I think it was the Playboys who were just coming into TSN and OPNS diverted them to fly over the area and check it out. They came hauling down the street at roof top level and made a series of low level passes over the crowd but at no time was there any aerial firing going on. Anyway, after they made a few passes they went back to TSN and the crowd continued to mill around. Very shortly the crowd started to erect some sort of a platform and laid out a couple of guys who had been shot dead from inside the gate at the HQ's. They brought in a bunch of monks and had one big ceremony for the rest of the afternoon and even into the night. We got a call from MACV wanting to know why we had made firing passed on the crowd because that was the report they were getting from somewhere. We all assured them that not one shot had been fired from our aircraft and all the shooting had come from the HQ's. They sure didn't give us much credit for being a lethal force to shoot up a whole crowd and only kill a couple of guys.

Somewhere toward the end of December 1964 we started to do an operation that would be the most deadly one we had been committed to so far. There was a very peaceful Catholic village named Binh Gia east of Saigon and north of Vung Tau that would be the site of one of the biggest battles fought up to that time. It all started for us with a simple road recon north of Vung

Tau going toward Xuan Loc that the Raiders were doing. We found this huge VC Flag hanging from a tree beside the road and you know we couldn't let that go without trying to capture it. We looked it over from altitude and then I decided to go in and see if we couldn't hover up by it and snatch it out of the tree. We got up pretty close and luckily before the door gunner could grab it we spotted a rope or something going up the tree 5 or 6 feet and attached to what looked like a big round Chinese Claymore mine. I pulled away but I'm sure if we had succeeded in getting a hold of that flag we would have been a cloud of smoke. It was a great booby trap and we were almost the boobies. We backed off and tried to shoot that sucker down but we just weren't accurate enough to bring it down or make the mine go off.

WAS OVER RUN
Several days later on the 28th of December 1964 the NVA 9th Division overran Binh Gia and started one of the longest running, bloodiest battles we had seen to date. Shortly after Binh Gia got over run the ARVN sent a relief column up the highway from Vung Tau and when they got up by the place where we saw the VC Flag they were ambushed and effectively wiped out. There were a lot of RPG's and recoilless rifles used in the ambush and someone should have realized we were up against something more than the usual VC Battalion we had engaged up to that time. The ARVN responded by sending in a Ranger Battalion and a Marine Battalion with American Advisors helping them. We were flying support for the Units with all of the UTT/68th Fire Teams being involved in rotation so we were all there. On December 30, 1964 one of our aircraft with Roy Azbill, Steve Morgan, Frank Porter and Ted Winowitch came under fire from at least three 51 cal anti-aircraft weapons and were shot down with all the crew lost. The battle was becoming serious now.

We are
Day after day most of the available helicopter assets were used to bring in all of the ARVN Units at hand for relief of the town and to search for many missing American Advisors. There ~~was~~ something like 12 American Advisors plus the four crewmen on our aircraft that were missing and presumed captured or dead. It was a real mess and everywhere we flew we drew fire in unbelievable volume. Soon the 4th Marine Battalion, the 30th Ranger Battalion was reinforced by the 33rd Ranger Battalion and all of them were decisively engaged, overrun and for the most part wiped out.

We were covering all of the combat assaults and one of them was set up to land north of the Village in this big open/dry rice paddy. Most of the fighting had been east and south of Biên Gia in a big rubber plantation and jungle that surrounded a road that went east out of town toward another town near where Azbill and Morgan had been shot down. When ~~we~~ got on short final with the lift ships all hell broke loose on the LZ. The NVA had ambushed the LZ with covered fighting positions right out in the open with two 51 cal anti-aircraft guns on each end of the line of fighting holes. We were lucky enough to pull the lift ships off ~~of~~ the approach and go to work on the fighting holes, but the 51's were kicking our tails and we had to back off. We had some VNAF Fighter/Bombers, A-1E's that were there to help us ~~so~~ we called for their help really wondering how brave they would be going up against two known 51 cal positions.

Much to our delight when the A-1E's answered my radio call the pilot spoke English and was a U.S. Air Force Advisor with a Vietnamese pilot with him, along for the ride ~~for~~ what I could tell. An Airforce FAC was there but he handed the mission off to me because we knew where the bad guys were and because he was standing off due to the 51's which were kicking his

tail as well. The A-1E's rolled in and the tracers from both sides kind of crossed then they became parallel with each side receiving direct fire on each other. Unbelievable guts to keep rolling in and exchange direct fire but the A-1E's continued to do so until the guys on the ground were wiped out. When the "Blue Eyed VNAF" re-formed to go back home they were calling out damage assessments to each other as they inspected each other for damage. I don't recall one of them not reporting some sort of damage with some it pretty serious like hydraulics out, or engines running rough, or fuel leaking out of punctured wing tanks. They were outstanding and in many ways turned the battle our way because from then on we saw a lot less fire directed our way. Maybe the NVA figured it out if you shoot at a helicopter you get an A-1E shooting at you. Bad exchange!!

We continued to move troops into the area with one Battalion of Rangers going into the town and another going south of the town where the area was covered with garden plots and banana palms. The unit going into the town with Captain Robinson as Advisor got about half way through the village when they were pinned down by an ambush near the church in the center of town. They were able to fight their way back to the west end of the village and set up a night defensive position. At the same time, the 33rd Ranger Battalion with Captain James Benhke was moving eastward through the garden plots south of the village. The 33rd became decisively engaged and broke up into small groups shortly after they moved into the area south of town. Benhke, with a group of 5 ARVN, were cut off and surrounded almost immediately and was frantically calling for someone to come get them. There had already been other Advisors who had been cut off and captured who ~~were~~ on the radio to the last calling for help. It was the most sickening feeling to hear someone say they were surrounded and giving up and hear the radio go silent. We heard more than one call of this kind during our mission at Binh Gia.

I had the "Hog" with ~~the~~ two light fire teams there and when Benhke called I told him to put out smoke and I would get him. My idea was that I would land quickly, hit the electrical jettison switch which would pop the rocket pods off, and snatch Benhke in what would essentially be a B-Model Slick. Benhke popped a ~~white~~ smoke but it was a ~~dead~~ ^{dead} ~~and only a little~~ ^{pu} ~~white~~ smoke came out. We called for another smoke and Benhke responded he was putting out green smoke. Within seconds there were at least three green smoke marks out but only one of them had been preceded by a very small puff of white smoke. That's where I headed on the fastest approach I've ever made. I can't remember who the rest of the crew was but I had this little, I mean really small, young WO who had just joined the unit and was along for the ride before we put him into a gun ship. I'm sure he must have thought that this was one hell of a way to do a tour in Vietnam.

We pulled a big old flare and plopped down almost on top of Benhke and his ARVN^{'s} and they wasted no time jumping on board. I think we had 5, luckily small ARVN, and Benhke on board and before we could try to jettison the rocket pods I'm very gently pulling pitch to see if this baby will fly out. Wonders of wonders, this beautiful B-Model lifts off with every warning light and audio signal telling me we are at about 5800 RPM. I did see the rotor tach somewhere below the lower red line as we kind of just mushed into the air. The rotor RPM was so low that the tail rotor was almost ineffective and we were swishing back and forth trying to go straight ahead and get into some form of translational lift. My little WO co-pilot is pushing the "beep" button forward until it's almost bent off trying to get more RPM's and I decide it's time to

unload the rockets and lighten the load, plus maybe give old Charley a reason to keep his head down. We went right through the top of a banana palm with a big splat and I shoot off a pair of rockets right in front of us. The second miracle of the day, following the first which was that the helicopter was flying, happened when the rockets blasted a big hole in the under growth and we just followed along as each pair of rockets went out.

We got maybe 100 feet into the air and off to my right comes the lead aircraft of my light Fire Team in tight cover. They were beautiful to see but the lead had a trail of smoke coming out behind it and despite getting all sorts of attention from Charley they were covering us. We made a 180 turn back over the village going toward the west which was the safest place to go right then. We barely got to the west end of Binh Gia when the lead Fire Team sort of just stopped flying and went nose over into a tree, inverted, and crashed. When I got to a place where I could sit down we landed and ran back to the crash expecting to find no one alive. When I got to the crash there was Danny Sullivan helping 1st Lt. Paul Murray the A/C, who was pretty badly hurt but very much alive. The rest of the crew PFC Carr C/E and SP Casprowitz were a little banged up but alive as well. Casprowitz was knocked out cold from what I could tell but he was being helped by Maj. Dick Heubner, S-3 of the 145th AVN BN who had also landed near the crash. The only thing that saved the crew was the fact that the helicopter hit the tree top and inverted it went into the remains of an old house that had a basement or dug out cellar and the mast, engine and transmission went into the depression leaving the body above ground and survivable. Here was one time when Danny Sullivan had the best luck of his life. *Fuse longe*

Paul Murray was evacuated to the United States with a badly broken foot and many other serious but not life threatening injuries. He was eventually discharged and started a new life as a Stock salesman in a brokerage house in San Francisco. In September 1967 I was on my way back to Vietnam for my second tour, which I was going to after being wounded to end my first tour, when I met Paul for lunch in San Francisco. He was doing fine, had a noticeable limp, but was adjusting well to his new status. When I was ~~discharged~~ discharged from Fitzsimons Hospital, following my first tour, I went to C&GSC at Ft. Leavenworth and while I was there I got a call one day from Maj. James Benhke who was an ROTC Instructor at a college in Missouri not far from Ft. Leavenworth, inviting me to come over for the weekend. When I got there one of his teaching buddies was a Special Forces guy that we had supported many times in the Tay Ninh area during 1964. Needless to say we got very drunk, told terrible war stories and celebrated life with vigor.

Somewhere as the fighting went on around Binh Gia we found time to stop flying for one day to hold a funeral ceremony for the Azbill/Morgan crew. We all turned out in Khaki uniforms to go to the chapel at TSN where the ceremony was held. The crew had been recovered during the operation where they had crashed and had been buried in shallow graves by the NVA. Gen Westmorland, Gen Oden and several other senior military attended the ceremony but it was one sad day in the unit.

Just before the Binh Gia operation started I was approaching 8 months of command of the Second Platoon. I had flown many missions and the SOP in the unit was to rotate people out of the daily combat flying toward the end of their tour if we could work it out. I had a new Captain, Lyle H. Erwin, who I had been training up to take over and I was going to replace Joe D. *Cpt*

Jobe in Operations when he left. Lyal was out one day with a light fire team and somehow he hit the high wires out north of Ben Hoa Airbase on the 15th of January 1965. We were still chasing the remnants of the NVA force that had overrun Binh Gia so we continued to go back there and I remained as Platoon Leader of the Second Platoon. We had too many funeral ceremonies during the December 1964 and January 16th timeframe.

1965

Sometime in January the NVA withdrew and the area around the town of Binh Gia could be completely cleared. I was parked with the rest of a Fire Team in a cleared area near the church in the center of town when a large convoy of 2½ ton trucks came by carrying out the bodies of the ARVN forces that were killed. As I remember there were 8 or 10 trucks with the back cargo compartment filled with the remains stacked like wood. This was one of the most costly battles fought up to that time with something like 12 or 15 American Advisors and 300 ARVN troops killed. The ARVN lost three Battalions completely in Binh Gia and it wasn't over yet because we would continue to chase the remnants of the main body of the 9th NVA Division well into February 1965.

When the ARVN Ranger and Marine Battalions were destroyed the ARVN Airborne or "Red Hats" were deployed into the area. The Red Hats, called that because of their distinctive red berets, were the elite palace guard for the ARVN Army. They probably had the best equipment of any ARVN Unit and no doubt had the best Advisors the American Army could provide. Most all of the Advisors were fast movers, mostly West Point graduates, who were all going to go somewhere in their careers. They went after the 9th with high expectations but found a hurt ^{AN} vicious foe to fight.

Combat assort

We were tasked again to cover a ~~CA~~ where the Red Hats were to be inserted to run down some of the 9th Division. The LZ that was selected had been burned over by a grass fire a day or two before caused by our tracer fire into some bunkers sighted on one side of the area. The area was covered by a deep black ash which we didn't think would cause any problems but found to be a disaster later. When the lift was on short final, ~~really~~ touch down, the whole area lit up with enemy fire just as the slicks went into zero visibility caused by blowing black ash. At least two of the slicks went down immediately with many injured along with many casualties from the intensive enemy fire. We continued to provide suppressive fire and escort more slicks into the LZ to reinforce the troops on the ground. While we were covering the next lift into the LZ, one of my Light Fire Team ships was shot down in the LZ. The crew was Lt. Jim Price and WO John Urban flying. Can't remember the C/E or door gunner. I had WO Jack Saint as my co-pilot, "dust off" in the "Hog" so we set up to go into the LZ and pick up the crew of our gun ship. The dust off's were full picking up wounded from the first two downed slicks and other wounded from enemy fire so we were going in fast to get our guys out. We started one approach and the fire was so heavy with tracers going up and down in front of the windshield that we backed off and went around to make a firing run on the area we were receiving the most fire from. We needed to do that anyway because I wanted to unload all of the rockets we had to get a lighter ship to pull out the downed crew. I had learned from Benhke's rescue that a light ship was better.

We made our second approach and got to maybe 200 to 300 yards from landing when all hell broke out again. Jack Saint had started to unbuckle getting ready to jump out and haul wounded when two rounds came through my door. One hit me in my right lower arm, smashing

a bone and amputating the long extensor muscles in the arm before it ricocheted out the windshield by the outside air temp gauge. The second bullet just went behind my head missing my right ear by inches. Thank God we had an SOP in the UTT that when you were low level and in a fight you had shoulder harness locked, face visor down and force trim on. I had the ship in a decelerating flare with a pretty high nose up when I got hit. My arm was blown away from the cyclic and thrown up into the air in front of me. The force trim set the cyclic in the same position so the flare held steady and the aircraft remained stable. Jack Saint kind of looked surprised when I stepped on the mike with my left foot and told him to take over I'd just been hit. ~~He~~ quickly pushed the ship over and accelerated out of the LZ. ^{UNTIL JACK TOOK OVER} The crew helped me get a combat dressing on my arm and we went over a damage assessment as we made it back to the "DUST OFF's" assembly area we were working out of near Vung Tau. We got back and waited for the dust off's to assemble with all of the wounded. Because of the high number of casualties we had the whole ~~DUST OFF~~ dust off crew was committed and they were shuttling wounded out of the LZ and then consolidating the worst to fly them back to Saigon. Since I wasn't too bad I got a ride back to Saigon on the second or third lift out of the assembly area. When I got on board for my ride back the body of WO John Urban was in the lower stretcher in the cargo compartment. John died of a clean shot somewhere to his body and was very peaceful in death as we rode back to Saigon together. Don't know if he had been shot in the air or while on the ground where we were trying to rescue them. Some years later I went to the Vietnam Memorial to look up my guys and was surprised to see John's name on the first panel, the 55th name on the Wall. Had my head been a little bit further back or the VC a little bit more forward my name would have been 55th and maybe John's would have been 56th. *None*

After I was med evacuated my personal belonging's caught up with me in Denver where I was a patient at Fitzsimons Army Hospital. I had a camera with me that usually hung by its strap from the emergency door release T-handle on the front door. When I looked at it, it appeared that the film was gone but when I opened up the back it was there and had been completely exposed. I had it developed and there were several pictures of the numerous bullet holes we had taken trying to get that crew out. One of the hits was directly through all of the laminations of the blade grip where the main spar was bolted to the rotor head. Why that blade didn't fail and fold up is beyond me because it sure should have. I'm here to tell you I'm glad Bell Helicopter made one tough aircraft and that this one had saved our bacon on the 9th of February 1965. So, on the 9th of February, I ended my first tour in Vietnam with a trip to the Navy hospital, ~~west~~ to Clark Air Force Base, Travis Air Force base and Fitzsimons Army Hospital in Denver. It would be nine months at Fitz before I was healed and discharged to start trying to get back on flying status so I could eventually go back to Vietnam in 1967-68 as Commander of the 188th Assault Helicopter Company.

Now here are some random thoughts about my experience with the UTT/68th. The main thing I remember about the guys that I served with was their cool courage under some of the most dangerous situations we got into during 1964-65. After I left it only got more intense and by all reports everyone continued to serve with courage and dedication. Lt. Jim Price who was with John Urban got out of that LZ and after his tour was assigned to Ft. Sill, Oklahoma for the Captain's Career Course. He was not Fixed Wing Rated but volunteered to fly co-pilot in an Army L-20 as part of a demonstration for the school. The aircraft struck a barrier pole during a max performance take off demonstration and stalled into a left turn and out of control crashed

behind the stands. He was killed doing a demonstration he shouldn't have been involved in at all. He was a good guy and had great potential but was lost through a silly decision to fly when he shouldn't. I've already discussed Matlick and Ramage as members of the Company. I was extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to command the Platoon with them as my Fire Team leaders. They were without peers in their ability to do the job. Another guy who was the coolest most competent aviator was WO John Thompson. John was tall, quiet and the best aviator I've ever seen. He could get all shot up and act like nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Hugh Bertolet was the loud, boisterous, nearly insubordinate member of the Platoon. He always had a quick opinion and wasn't bashful in giving it. Most of the time he had a cigar in his mouth. Jack Saint was my stick buddy on many missions. He could always be relied on to be ready and had some of the worst luck anyone could have. Jack Saint was almost as regular a stick buddy as Danny. Jack spent a lot of time in my left seat working radios and helping me keep track of where the Fire Team was and where were the friendlys. Jack saved the aircraft and crew the day I got hit and I owe him a great deal for flying that poor shot up old 'Hog' back to the assembly area. Captain Weeks was a new guy we got and I can't remember too much about him other than he was a Texan and seemed to fit in pretty well. WO's Dunn and Barber were just unbelievably quiet and efficient as members of the team. They needed no supervision and were mission ready 100% of the time. I couldn't have wanted any more than these guys as members of my Platoon.

Joe D. Jobe was a good friend while we were in Vietnam and after Nam when we were both stationed at Ft. Rucker. I got to know Joe and his family at Rucker and learned to really appreciate his dry wit and cool humor. We did a lot of things socially and I wish I had taken time to keep up with him more, which is my loss.

I know that there were others in the Unit but as time passes and memory fades it's hard to recall with accuracy some of the things we did. I hope that my recall of the events I've tried to document will help others understand just how unique this Unit was to the history of Army Aviation. I also hope that those who were there with me will not find too many errors or deviations in what I've tried to describe as our time shared in a Unit that I'm very proud to have been a member.