CHAPTER NINE

LT. GARY F. RAMAGE
Fire Team Leader—Administrative Officer
Raider 21—Saber 1
February 1964-February 1965
DFC, BS w V, AM (w 30 OLC, 3wV), VN C of G w PALM, RVN
SPECIAL FORCES PARACHUTE BADGE

ORPHANAGE AN LAC – 1964-65:

The barred metal gates were closed and locked. All seemed serene within the tiled courtyard beyond. Could I have misunderstood my directions? No, the sign on the wall stated simply but clearly, even to my rusty French, "Orphanage An Lac." This must indeed be that refuge of love and nurture for hundreds of Vietnamese war orphans that the splendid American Navy Doctor Tom Dooley had described in his inspiring 1956 book, "Deliver Us From Evil." This was the 'orphanage of Madame Ngai' and maybe, just maybe, one of those children within would become the little sister that Margo and I hoped to adopt for our toddler son, Patrick… I rang the bell again.

Moments later, a strikingly attractive Tonkinese woman of indeterminate age billowed forth in a spotless white ao dai, the traditional Vietnamese dress. Hers was long-sleeved, fitted from shoulder to waist, and slit from waist to ankle. Two panels of gauzy fabric fluttered front and back, butterfly-like, over loose-fitting white trousers. This approaching vision in white beamed a warm welcome as we exchanged greetings in French, our only common language. I was meeting the most unforgettable person of my life, Ba (Madame) Vu Thi Ngai, directress of Orphanage An Lac.

Trailing Madame Ngai was a cheering, laughing, irresistibly giggling throng of dark-eyed, raven-haired children, mostly toddlers, and almost all naked from the waist down. No diapers or training pants for these tiny naturists! I later learned that 'bare bottoms' was highly practical and popular during the toilet-training phase of raising children in tropical Vietnam.

Madame Vu Thi Ngai, Directress of An Lac Orphanage with a small number of "her children."

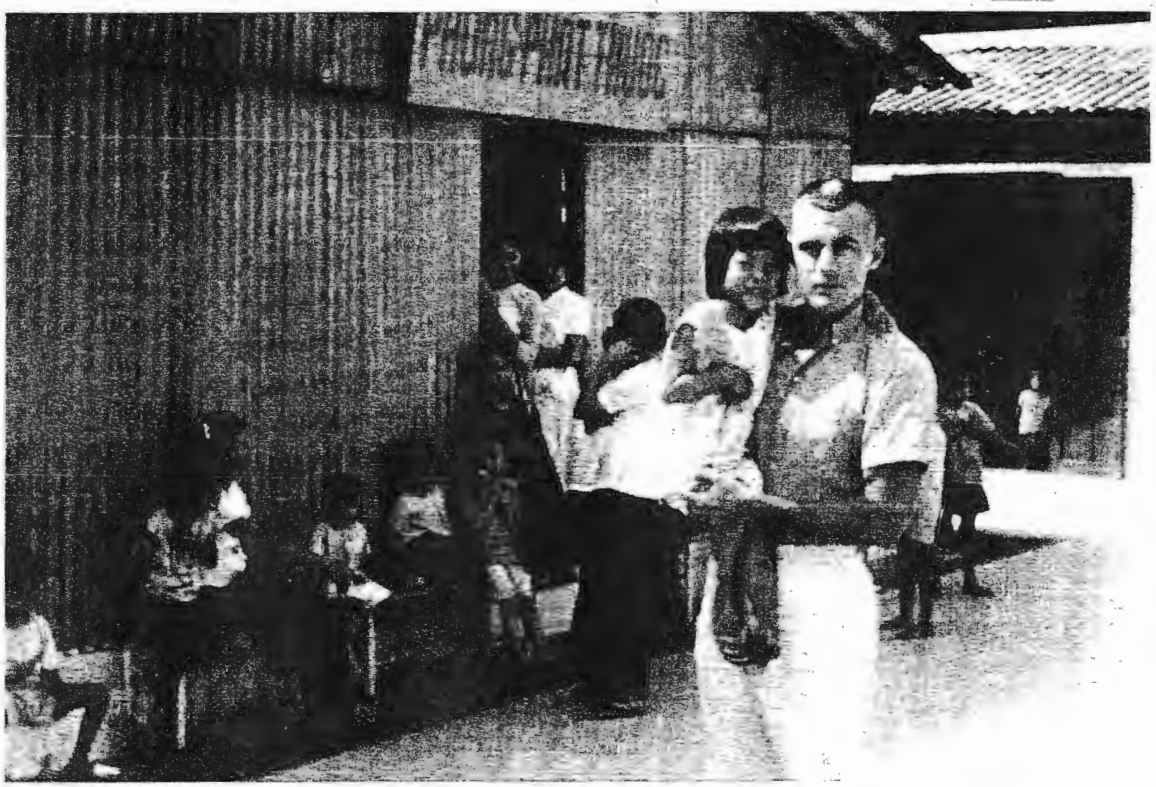
With me on this March 1964 visit to Madame Ngai's orphanage was 3-man team (Greg Shuker, Abbot Mills, and Dan Draysin) shooting film footage for a planned TV [1]documentary about the UTT Helicopter Company. This was our first meeting with Madame Ngai and 'her children'... nearly 200 at her Saigon location alone. During coming months, visiting the children of Orphanage An Lac ("Happy Place") would become a regular off-duty activity for many UTT members. It was always a welcome, meaningful break in the routine of our combat missions, and also became a link to wives, communities, and businesses stateside who shared our commitment to improve the lives of these delightful children, and their surrogate mother, Madame Ngai.

Located on a quiet side street of bustling downtown Saigon, this orphanage was home, clinic and school for the youngest An Lac children. Their ages ranged from newborns abandoned at the orphanage gate to about 7 years old. Our main role as part-time volunteer helpers was providing friendly, smiling support & love to these young Vietnamese. Because of their sheer numbers, most of these kids were hungry just to be held, hugged, and given individual attention. They loved being picked up, tossed in the air, or just wrapping their little hands around a grownup finger. In truth, for those of us who visited An Lac regularly, the opportunity to interact with these affectionate, love-starved children was healthy therapy & recreation for us, too. Most of us were parents

[1] shown that fall on ABC as "The Daring American: Letters From Vietnam"

ourselves, and the chance to have 'practice playtimes' with these delightful kids was irresistible.

In a practical sense, our UTT involvement was mostly donating manual labor for building repairs such as patching leaky roofs, replacing rusty door & window hinges. We gave cash donations, and usually brought useful supplies available to us but too expensive for the orphanage. We also coordinated with the flight surgeon, "Doc Ralph" for medical help, including 'house calls' and surplus antibiotics, lotions, and dressings. Once our An Lac project was well established and boxes began arriving from the US, we delivered summer clothes, toys, and material, which the orphanage's young seamstresses transformed into dresses and shirts. Nothing was wasted. For example, on a visit after we had donated a surplus parachute, we found all the little boys happily and charmingly outfitted in camouflage silk smocks.



Gary and Hoa Hung in An Lac orphanage school grounds

Among the early UTT Raider "volunteer helpers" at the orphanage were CWOs John Thompson (my mentor and a unit IP with an uncanny helicopter control touch), Bill Parker, Hugh Berthot, Chad Clay, and WO Dan Sullivan. "Raider 26," Captain Jack Johnson, and CPTs Gordon Stone and Jim Weeks also helped out prior to their being wounded and/or reassigned. 1LT Bob Matlick and I co-led the project, having discovered the orphanage and its many needs during that spring of 1964 while I was trying to adopt a Vietnamese child. Unfortunately, after selecting our prospective 'daughter' and applying to adopt her, my wife and I confronted then-restrictive Vietnamese law, which required seven years of marriage and establishing that applicant adoptive parents were of the same

religion as the adoptee. Being married only two years, and neither Buddhist nor Catholic, Margo and I were unqualified on both counts.

Gary and "Hoa Hung" the little Vietnamese girl he and his wife wanted to adopt.

Bob Matlick and I were Raider Platoon fire team leaders, "Raider 21" and "Raider 23" and UTT 'hoochmates' for the last six months of Bob's tour. We fought and lived closely and developed a brother-like bond of trust and confidence in each other. Our friendship forged in battle was refined during hours of conversation, and time shared at the orphanage. Before joining the Army, Bob had been a commercial artist. He also was a talented singer and guitarist, who often led in the singing of UTT songs, usually parodies of popular ballads, poking fun at 'rear echelon' warriors. For example, a favorite line of his popular "Saigon, O Saigon," went:

"They stand on the runway, they scream and they shout,
About many things they know nothing about.
For all that they're doing, they might as well be,
Shoveling ---- on the isle of Capri!"

After we had been visiting the Saigon orphanage for several months, Madame Ngai evidently became confident of our interest in and commitment to the children. During one particular Raider work session, she took Bob and me aside and extended to us a highly unexpected invitation. Would we, she asked, be interested in visiting her "farm school" where her older children lived, worked and attended class? She explained that the farm was about 45 minutes drive outside Saigon over unsecured roads, which sometimes

were patrolled by VC, but that she thought we two might find such a visit interesting. She offered her car and driver to take us there early one morning, returning after lunch. Madame Ngai advised us to wear inconspicuous civilian clothes, and stressed that secrecy was so important that even her long-time driver would not be told the "who or when" of our visit. Would we like to go?

We understood the potential danger. If a VC roadblock stopped us, we couldn't pass for Vietnamese, or even as French plantation owners. With our army aviator crew cuts, we would clearly be in trouble. However, the unique chance to visit her other orphanage facility and meet hundreds more of Madame Ngai's large "family," was more than tempting. Besides, daily danger on UTT gunships was our routine, so why fear a little road trip in the countryside? We told Madame Ngai that we would gladly visit her farm, but would have to let her know when at our next visit.

Bob and I discussed 'just going' without informing anyone at UTT until we safely returned (after all, the idea that "it's easier to beg forgiveness than to ask permission" isn't new). However, we quickly concluded that it made more sense to at least inform our immediate chain of command about Madame Ngai's invitation, and our wish to accept. Our UTT orphanage project was well known; both ABC and NBC TV had publicized it. We therefore felt confident that we would get at least tacit approval. In fact, our platoon leader (Jack Johnson, I think) and then UTT Commander, Major Ralph Irvin, quickly agreed, with the precaution that we would each carry self-defense weapons. Since Madame Ngai had specified civilian dress, we each borrowed tiny pistols to conceal on our bodies.

On the appointed morning, Bob and I strapped on our 'hardware' under casual clothes. Bob wore a holster inside his shirt and I strapped MAJ Irvin's 2-shot derringer to my right calf under my pants leg. We donned floppy hats to conceal our hair, and caught a blue/white Citroen taxi to near the orphanage, then walked to the gate to meet our Vietnamese driver. Madame Ngai had gone to the farm the previous day to prepare for our arrival. We were keyed up, apprehensive, and particularly alert at likely roadside ambush points; however, our cross-country drive to the farm was uneventful.

Madame Ngai greeted us warmly when we arrived. Surprisingly, no children were in sight. As we followed Madame Ngai toward the large warehouse-looking building at the center of the fenced complex, our hostess explained that while the surrounding villages and countryside were full of "many VC," they seemed to respect her orphanage mission and only occasionally stopped her car or searched the school. We were only somewhat reassured. As we entered the doors of the main building, suddenly the air was filled with hundreds of children's voices welcoming us with joyous shouts of "hello!" "chao ong!" and "bonjour!" These older children were delighted to receive two special visiting "American teachers" (as they had been told). Bob and I were about to witness how much happiness and talent could thrive in such simple surroundings under Madame Ngai's loving leadership and example.

For the remainder of that morning, Madame Ngai, a few staff assistants, and her oldest children (who were student teachers) demonstrated for us a "typical" day at their farm school. The kids' program included recitations, solo and group singing and dancing, and team food preparation. Bob and I were deeply touched by the talent and enthusiasm of the children, and uplifted by the obvious pride and love shown by the staff. It was one

of my most moving, positive experiences in Vietnam, and one neither of us would have missed, whatever the risk. We were then luncheon guests of the children, Madame Ngai and her staff, who translated and relayed our praise to the students for their impressive presentations.

Afterwards, we toured the entire facility that, though simple, had orderly and immaculate living areas, well-tended vegetable gardens, chicken coops, a small library, a sewing area and classrooms. Madame Ngai stressed that all her students were being taught essential life skills that would allow them to become productive members of Vietnamese society after they 'graduated' from Orphanage An Lac. Bob and I had much to discuss during our ride back to Saigon that afternoon. Later, we resolved to encourage even broader unit support in the Raiders' UTT orphanage support project, and to promote expanded stateside participation.

In the coming months, Bob's wife, June, and my Margo became even more active in publicizing and promoting to American businesses opportunities to contribute through UTT to support of Orphanage An Lac. For example, one West Coast diaper service sent several thousand diapers, while the Mattel Toy Company sent hundreds of "Chatty Kathy" dolls for all the girls and other nice toys for the boys. Each of the Saigon orphanage children received a present from America for Christmas, 1964.

After Bob and other former Raider Platoon members rotated back to the states, newly assigned replacements became active helpers at the orphanage. Among these new Raiders were three of the finest 'fledgling' Warrant Officers I ever knew or served with. WOs Steve Morgan, "Pete" Rawls, and Bill Gault came to UTT directly from flight school. Each of these young men touched my life indelibly. I was honored to be their combat fire team leader for a time. Sadly, Steve Morgan died when shot down in a combat action at Binh Gia, north of Vung Tau. Pete Rawls went on to become one of the Army's top Cobra instructor pilots (and was my co-pilot and unit SIP when I commanded the 334th in Germany in 1975-6). Bill Gault was a quiet, attentive, and utterly dependable young Warrant that I relied heavily on and respected greatly during our short time flying together. Unknowingly, Bill Gault later inspired me to persevere when I was struggling to survive.

In June 1997, I was diagnosed with inoperable cancer and given a "50-50 chance" of surviving one year *even if* my body could withstand the aggressive chemotherapy and radiation proposed by the oncology team at Walter Reed. Some weeks later, while literally reeling from the immediate after-effects of my third dose of chemo, I received a surprise phone message from an unfamiliar voice. "Sir, this is Bill Gault." the recorded voice said, "...You won't remember me, but I was a young Warrant assigned to work for you in UTT in 1964... I heard from the grapevine that you weren't doing too well... I just wanted to let you know that I've always wished that I'd told you how much what you taught me and your example meant to me during my life. Thank you... and I hope you beat this cancer thing!"

I certainly had never forgotten Bill Gault. But his typically succinct, encouraging message came at a personal low point for me, and reminded me that 'giving up' was really not an option, no matter what the odds. Bill's thoughtful outreach to me, across over forty years, mentally and physically uplifted me. However, I regret that he did not leave me his phone number so that I could have thanked him and reassured him that I

vividly remembered him and his valiant service to UTT and the Army. Sadly, I recently learned that Bill himself, fell victim to terminal cancer. I wish I had been able to encourage him during his final battle. My sympathy and best wishes to Mrs. Gault, who I understand has contributed her own chapter to this anthology.

Gary preparing for a parachute jump with Vietnamese Special Forces

CHAPTER TEN

CAPT. JACK JOHNSON
Platoon Leader – 2nd Platoon
Raider 26
24 May, 1964 – 9 February 1965
DFC, AM (18 OLC), ARCOM w/v, PH, VN Cross of Gallantry w/Palm

Prior to Vietnam

The UTT/68th AVN Company holds a place in Army Tactical History equal to the innovation created through development and employment of the 11th Air Assault/1st Cav. Division. The use of the Armed Helicopter to support Airmobile 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 will go a long way in documenting the 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 4.5 inch rockets as aerial field artillery at Ft. Sill, OK by Captain James Merryman at about the same time.

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 well, so we started to fly them normally and tried to shoot something. We did the same with the 5O CAl, but when it was fired on the PT Stand in a static mode the muzzle 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-IB's with the Flex gun 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.

Assignment to the UTT/ the Early Days

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 Deros'd. 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 Jarrett'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. Major 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.

Jack Johnson shortly after arrival in UTT

My first few days in the unit were pretty standard in-processing, uniforms, get a room in the villa we had on Cong Ly 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 f*#k 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 (Vietnamese Police) guards who let us through, similar to the guards we had at our villa on Cong Ly. 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.

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 TACE, 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, really west of 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 back tracks 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 Cong Ly Street by maybe 50 yards and were right across the street from the Vietnamese Joint General H.Q.'s. We had 24 hour security at the front gate provided by Vietnamese white mice police. Each one of the Platoons had a ¾ 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. A second Villa was rented 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 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 Miguel'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, Tu Do Street, or some other attraction, we would grab one of the little blue and yellow Renault 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 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.

Flight Check Rides

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 equipped 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 whichever side of the LZ that presented the most danger to the landing "slicks." CWO Watts showed me how to decelerate slightly then bring the nose down to the target and let the firing blast bring the nose down further until the target was covered. We would adjust the aim of 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 bang. It 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 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.

Jack with 2.75 in rockets.

Bob Mattlick 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 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 Emergencies. 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.

Personal Weapons

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 UH-1B "Hog" and tell the rest of the crew, 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 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 Muc Hoa we had a thrilling day.

SP-5 Leonard Lockhard and LT Harold McNeil

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 out to help it was dark and there were no 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 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 Jarrett'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.

Hogs, but without Rockets

We drew the mission of performing a road recon, and providing overhead cover for the opening of Highway 13 north to An Loc, Quan Loi, or Song Be every so often. 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 steam. 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 bomb 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 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 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.

POW Rescue Attempts

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 Ca Mau. 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 the Viet Cong under the effects of CS 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, crew chief and gunner would fly with their masks on, I would fly without the mask until gas was present in the aircraft, then 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. 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 2.75 inch rockets was a lot better use of our equipment.

Company Commanders

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 most of the fights 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 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 pointed 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 berth 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 the event but that we would go in shirts and ties and be real standoffish. We went and had a pretty good time and later Irvin and the BN

XO Frank Klein 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 Major Joseph "Jim" Jaggers and what a change that made. Jim Jaggers was 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 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 Armed Helicopter 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.

Slicked Out---Without Guns

Shortly after we came under the operational control of the 145th Aviation Battalion, we were assigned a mission that was unusual and created 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 an upcoming mission as Lift Ships we were insulted and to make it 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.

Salvation----Armed Again

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 reconning 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 blacked out. We came too close to the mountain and old Charley couldn't let us get by with that. They must have had 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.

Jumping with Special Forces and ARVN

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 Dick Hatton's Maintenance Slick as a drop ship. After maybe too many San Miguel's, 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 when we step off of the helicopter skid. I think we had six people jumping, three from each side, and away we go. The first drop is great, everything opens fine and the landing in a 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 very 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're 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. After I got back to the U.S., I submitted my paper work to DA and had 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.

Jumping with US Special Forces

The Orphanage

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 ¾ 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.

Da Nang and Working with the Marines

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 me 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 in view trying to look like a rag tag bunch of friendlys, 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 stuff. He later retired as a Marine Major General which says a lot about him as a Commander. One of the lead pilots we worked with was a George Bomerman 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 a name for them--- which was solved one night in the bar of their club where we were all hanging out for the 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-1B'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 which was 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. 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 from others. The Airlift Platoon at first left their vehicles parked in front of the BOQ unlocked, and as 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.

Home Again With the UTT

When the Raiders returned to TSN following our release from the Da Nang mission, we landed and were met by Gen. Delk 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.

Escorting the "Ranch Hands"

Not too long after Jim Jaggers took command he rotated around on missions and flew with each Platoon. The first time he went out with the Second Platoon we had the job of providing gun ship cover for the "Ranch 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 or three miles long. They had A-1E's overhead 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-IE's laying down suppressive fire they would usually get at least one run in 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-IE's still shooting for them. The damaged 123 is making all the speed possible, and we are on the verge of blade stall trying to keep up with him in case they he has to go down en route. They make it back to Bien Hoa 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 Jaggers got a little taste of Agent Orange, which we all got covered with when we flew cover for the ranch hands.

Untrained Door Gunner

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, 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 stuff, 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 Airborne "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 then 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 at TSN.

UTT Villa at Vung Tau (a Day at the Beach)

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 fostering 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 ¾ 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.

R&R in Hong Kong

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. 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 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.

Hail and Farewell

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 were due to dero's 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 Caravelle 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 his time and hours flown with the Platoon. I mean it was as good as any hail and farewell as you could expect in the U.S. Sometime after I was 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.

Memorabilia

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 Jaggers came onboard the Second Platoon was expanded to have three fire teams plus the Platoon leader's aircraft. I think that the Second Platoon was the only Platoon that had three Fire Teams, and when I got that third team, Jim Dameron as assigned Fire Team leader. He was very much like Ramage and Matlick and I was blessed to have 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 guys 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 caricature of me done by Danny 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 2002.

Concealed Trails, and 50 caliber Machine Gun Pod

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 tilted and tied the jungle canopy together or filled in the area over the trail and obscured it really 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 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 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 cals 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 sampans 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.

Falsely Accused

I was in the Villa one afternoon when we heard this big commotion on Cong Ly Street directly across from our Villa in front of the Vietnamese Joint General Headquarters. This big crowd had gathered to protest something. 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 passes 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.

Battle of Binh Gia,
28 December, 1964--9 February, 1965

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 develop into one of the biggest battles fought up to that time. It all started for us with a simple road recon that the Raiders were doing north of Vung Tau going toward Xuan Loc. We found this huge VC Flag hanging from a tree beside the road. 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 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 grabbing 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.

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 was overrun the ARVN sent a relief column up the highway from Vung Tau. When they got near 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 Battalions that 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 the entire crew lost. The battle was becoming serious now.

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 who 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 Binh 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 cal's were kicking our tails and we had to back off. We had some VNAF, A-1E's that were there to help us. 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. A US Air Force 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 from the 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 their buddy's aircraft for damage. I don't recall one of them not reporting some sort of damage, with some 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 that time 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, then 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 smoke but it was a dud and only a little 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. They wasted no time jumping on board. I think we had five, 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, but despite getting all sorts of attention from Charley they

were covering us. We made a 180 degree 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 Fire Team lead sort of just stopped flying and went nose over into a tree, inverted, and crashed. When I got to a place where I could set 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 aircraft commander, who was 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, inverted and went into the remains of an old house that had a basement or dug out cellar. The mast, engine and transmission went into the depression leaving the fuselage above ground and survivable. This was one time when Danny Sullivan had the best luck of his life.

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. 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 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 eight 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, Lyal H. Erwin, who I had been training to take over, and I was going to replace Joe D. Jobe in Operations when he left. Lyal was out one day with a light fire team and somehow he hit the high wires 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 1965 timeframe.

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 drove 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 wounded and vicious foe to fight

Supporting the "Red Hats"

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 own 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. I can't remember the C/E or door gunner names. I had WO Jack Saint as my co-pilot 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.

You Can't Win Them All

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. 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 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, the whole 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 while 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.

After I was med evacuated my personal belongings 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, then 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.

Jack (center), Jim Jaggers (next right) and a gaggle of others see Johnson off as he is Med evac'd to USA.

Looking Back

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 Reed 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 Thomson. 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 Bertelot 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. Danny Sullivan 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 the friendly troops were located. Jack saved the aircraft and crew the day I was 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.

Wingman—Fire Team Leader
August 64- August 65
DFC (1OLC), BS (1OLC) AM (56 OLC), MSM, ARCOM,
VN CROSS OF GALLANTRY (4 AWDS), PUC, VUC, MUC

AS WRITTEN BY RENEE LYNN CAMPBELL GAULT
WIDOW OF WILLIAM J. GAULT

THE UTT/197TH

The week of November 23, 2003 I went to my mailbox and found a letter addressed to my late husband William Joseph Gault who passed away of lung cancer three and a half years earlier. The return address was retired Colonel James Booth. Curious, I opened the letter to learn it was a form letter written to the men of the UTT, inviting them to share their stories and memories of their tour of duty in Vietnam with this well known unit. I laid the letter on the coffee table and there it sat for three days. Every time I looked at it I thought what a pity Bill, as I called him, was not here because I knew he would have wanted to participate as he had many stories to share of those days long ago. On the fourth day, I picked up the phone and telephoned Colonel Booth in Tennille, Georgia.

That week marked the 40th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. I had been glued to the History Channel on television and a lot of long ago emotions were coming to the surface. Kennedy was killed while Bill was in the first phase of helicopter flight school at Fort Wolters, Mineral Wells, Texas. Nine months later at Fort Rucker, Alabama, his flight school class 64-4w would be sent to Vietnam. The Tonkin Bay had been bombed and President Lyndon B. Johnson was sending more American troops to Vietnam. The flight class of 64-4w had but ten days after graduation to settle their families and report for duty "in country" in August of 1964.

I am getting ahead of myself. Our story really begins in the summer of 1962. I, Renee Lynn Campbell Gault, had been an "Air Force brat." I had just returned to the states from having graduated from Izmir High School in Izmir, Turkey, where my father, the late Lt. Colonel William C. Campbell was stationed for three years. I met Bill at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia. At that time Bill was in the Air Force and a jet engine mechanic, however, during the summer months he and I both worked as lifeguards at Langley. At the time I met Bill, he already had a fixed wing pilot license and was a member of the Aero Club on base. He had no car when we first met so we dated that summer flying a Cessna, Tri-Pacer and a T-34. Little did I know at that time he had but 100 solo flying hours! I was seventeen and Bill was twenty-four that summer. By October of the same year, he was discharged from the Air Force after eight years. His dream was to go to airline school but, of course, reality was he couldn't afford to and in the meantime he had heard about the Warrant Officer Program at the Army Aviation Center, Fort Rucker, Alabama. He enlisted in the Army. After completing basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, he returned to Langley on leave and we were married at Fort Monroe, Virginia, an old Civil War fort built with a moat around it on December 29,

1962. We would spend the next ten months at Fort Kobbee in the Panama Canal Zone while he awaited orders to report to flight school. At that time, Bill was a PFC and I was not authorized to go with him. I paid my own way and followed him to Panama with sixty-two pounds of allowed luggage, half of which was my hard shell 1960's baby blue Samsonite itself. We lived on the economy on Via Porus in Panama City opposite the bull fight ring and ate like the natives, eating all form of dried beans, rice and plantain (fried bananas). Panama was a happy time for us.

Our son, Michael, was born while we were living in this tropical paradise. In October of 1963, we returned to the U.S.A. as Bill had received his orders to go to flight school.

In those days, the wives were not allowed to go with their husbands to the first phase of school at Fort Wolters, Texas. In March of 1964, Michael and I joined Bill at Fort Rucker, Alabama for the second phase of flight school. Our first daughter, Kelley LaRae, was one of three babies born at Fort Rucker to the Class of 64-4w.

The memory of Graduation Day still gives me goose bumps even today. The General stood at the podium and asked all the men with orders to Vietnam to stand up. The whole class rose to their feet. Then the general asked all of those related to one of these men on their way to Vietnam to rise, and as we looked around the entire room was on their feet.

WO Bill and Renee Gault after Flight School graduation. Photo taken at the Castaways Hotel two days prior to Bill's departure for Vietnam

Bill and I were one of the more fortunate as some of our class mates had to travel across the country as far as California to settle their families and be in Saigon within ten days. I went home to South Florida to my parents.

At that time, I was but nineteen years old with a thirteen month old and a six week old baby. We had a brand new 1964 Chevrolet. The insanity was at that time I did not know how to drive! Bill would tell my mother, "If Renee does nothing else this year while I'm gone, see to it that she learns how to drive," I hate to tell you how many Styrofoam ice chests I crushed while he was with UTT. I used them as markers while learning how to parallel park!

I wrote Bill every day he was with the UTT, always numbering the outside of envelopes so that should he get a batch all at one time, he would know which to read first. In those days, it was an evening ritual that my family and I gathered around our black and white television to watch "The Huntley Brinkley Report" for updates on the Vietnam War. Warrant Officer John Urban was the first of the Class of 64-4w to be killed in Vietnam. His wife and I had both had babies born during flight school.

In the fall of 1964, my parents took me to a church pot luck dinner and well meaning civilian people inquiring about my husband asked, "Vietnam, where is that"? It was then I vowed if ever he had to leave me again, I wanted to be near a military installation in order to be close to people who understood.

Bill in Vietnam at a 197th stage field

By March 1965, I was still driving on a restricted license. My mother, Louise, was riding "shot gun" with me so to speak. We had driven into the city of West Palm Beach to shop for a black garter belt and black strapless bra to wear with a sundress that I was planning to take to Hawaii to meet Bill on his R and R (rest and recuperation). A West Palm Beach policeman pulled me over when I made an illegal left hand turn. He asked to see my license and later informed me as a suggestion that I should go home and have my husband teach me how to drive before I ventured into the big city at which point I began to cry. When he asked what was wrong, I responded, "I don't have a husband at home. He is in Vietnam." The policeman was kind and only wrote me a warning. On April 1,

1965 I left West Palm Beach airport with our twenty-one month old son, Michael, to meet Bill in Hawaii. The same day that year, Pan American Airlines went on strike and I lost my reservation at Fort DeRussy on Waikiki Beach because of having been delayed twenty-four hours in Los Angeles, California. Passenger priority was being given to those people who lived in Hawaii trying to get home. Once on the plane, because of the strike, we were served boxed meals.

Upon arriving in Hawaii, we rented a small motel room with a kitchenette near the old military parade field. Bill rented a car and we had fun touring the island of Oahu, Sea Life Park, the pineapple plantations, and the beaches and seeing Don Ho singing at the International marketplace.

As a "military brat" myself and the oldest of six, I was raised by a father who always took us on Sunday drives when it was a sin not to stop and read historical markers. I wanted so much to go the Punch Bowl, the U.S.S. Arizona and Pearl Harbor; however, Bill defiantly refused to take me. He said that he had just left a war zone area and did not wish to see anything that reminded him of it. It would be some thirty-three years later before I would return to Hawaii again and see those places.

Toward the end of Bill's tour with the UTT, he took a short R and R to Hong Kong with Jerry Cobb also a member of his original flight class 64-4w. Jerry was a wonderful person and played a mean guitar. He died years later in the early 1970's flying his own private fixed wing plane at Headland, Alabama. I remember it was on a Mother's Day Sunday. The Chaplain from Fort Rucker, Bill, and I went together to notify his wife, J.D. as she was known. Bill was the military bodyguard who escorted his friend Jerry's body home to Hickory, North Carolina. At the graveside service, Bill handed the American flag that had covered the casket to J.D. Jerry's identical twin brother, Mike, was standing beside her. Bill later told me that it was all very eerie.

My husband spoke very little about his Vietnam days, unless, of course, with the individuals had been there themselves. That was a different matter, for then he felt they had a common bond. Seldom did he speak of his own awards or metals earned while there which were listed on his retirement papers. They were as follows: National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Bronze Star Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster, Distinguished Flying Cross with one Oak Leaf Cluster, Air Medal with 56 Oak Leaf Clusters, Presidential Unit Citation, Valorous Unit Award, Meritorious Unit Citation, Vietnam Gallantry Cross (4th award), Senior Army Aviator Badge, Vietnam Civil Actions Units Citation, Army Commendation Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal and Meritorious Service Medal.

Bill served a total of three tours of duty in Vietnam. The first was from August 27, 1964 to August 17, 1965 flying the Huey gun ships with the UTT. The second tour was from December 12, 1966 to December 13, 1967 flying Chinooks at Chu Lai and the third tour was from August 8, 1969 to August 3, 1970 flying the CH-54 Sky Cranes.

There is one story during Bill's time with the UTT that he often told about a courageous young door gunner on his gun ship that while flying a mission and receiving rounds of incoming fire, climbed out onto the skids of the helicopter while in mid air to unjam the mounted machine gun. Bill wrote this man up for a medal and he did receive the medal. I wish that I knew his name because I would want him to know that Bill thought a lot about his heroism that day. In 2000, as Bill was dying of cancer, we

returned to the Aviation Museum at Fort Rucker, Alabama and in front of the Huey helicopter display he told this story to his family of the young brave UTT door gunner.

Bill retired from the Army, October 31, 1974 and went on to continue flying for Petroleum Helicopter Incorporated of Lafayette, Louisiana. He was assigned to PHI'S BASE AT Venice on the mouth of the Mississippi river as lead pilot flying roustabouts and supplies to the offshore oilrigs in the Gulf of Mexico. The last few years he flew for PHI in Angola, Africa on an Exxon oil compound. Bill left PHI in December 1989.

While he was going through chemotherapy and radiation treatment for his cancer, Bill spent many hours on our front porch listening to the "Songs of the UTT" tape that I had ordered for him. He so enjoyed singing along to those songs. WO Michael Davis who had written many of those songs had been another of Bill's classmates in flight school. One of the songs Mike had written and the Class of 64-4w had sung at the Graduation Day ceremony before going to Vietnam was "Tie Me Rotor Blades Down Boys." Mike, if you read this, know your music really touched Bill, as I'm sure it has many others.

Bill passed away in his sleep, July 23, 2000. He had fallen in love with a certain 1935 Waco Biplane and wanted his ashes spread over the Destin, Florida East Pass leading out into the Gulf of Mexico. Our two daughters, Kelley and Karen, who were born during Bill's second tour of duty in Vietnam in 1967, went up in the plane with Bill during his last flight. On the beach, friends and family gathered near the white sand dunes. As fifty helium balloons with eight-foot lengths of ribbons were released to float into the air, the well-known aviator poem, "High Flight" was read. Attached to the end of each ribbon was a card which friends were invited to write a message to Bill if they so chose. Our daughters later said that they were mesmerized as the balloons floated up near the plane. I personally flew a seven-foot wingspan Delta colorful kite over the Gulf waters from the beach. As a dutiful Army aviator wife, I tried to keep Bill flying during his last days while he was ill even if it was just kite flying.

Bill may no longer physically be with us, however, I feel his spirit lives on in the heart of a small three pound miniature white Chihuahua named Poncho given to Bill by our daughter Kelley, for Father's Day one month before he died. For the past three years, Pancho has worked as pet therapy dog at the Emerald Coast Center, a local nursing home and on Monday mornings he works as an Air Force Pet Therapy dog in the pediatric clinic at the 96th Medical Group Hospital at Elgin Air Force Base, Florida. The children love Pancho because he is so small, well behaved, cuddly and he dresses in costumes every time that he visits much to their delight. Our favorite outfit that Pancho wears is a fatigue camouflage Army green shirt with "Pancho US Army" spelled out on the back. On the collar, he wears Bill's W-3 bars and the Warrant Officer Squash Bug emblem. Pinned on a small camouflage cap, Pancho wears Bill's actual silver Army Senior Aviator Wings.

Recently the Air Force Hospital Commander at Eglin Air Force Base, Colonel Gary S. Forthman, at an awards ceremony presented Pancho with a diploma and camouflage triangular kerchief with the 96th Medical Group patch and a patch that reads "Pet Therapy Team." As the hospital commander shook Poncho's paws, I was overwhelmed with emotion when he then saluted Bill's wings.

Easter of 2003 during the war on Iraq, Poncho dressed up as Uncle Sam and I had our photo taken at a local supermarket with an Easter bunny. As Poncho and I sat down beside the Easter bunny, a female voice inside the Easter bunny outfit spoke out from beneath the costume. "I simply must have a copy of this photo with you and your little dog. My husband is deployed and in Baghdad." I asked her when the last time she had spoken to him was. She told me, "two days earlier via a cell phone". Her brother-in-law was also in Iraq and had allowed her husband to talk to her on his cell phone for five minutes. I thought to myself how different times are now compared to the Vietnam era. I had only once during three tours of duty in Vietnam talked to Bill by way of a ham radio. All to well, I remembered how frustrated it was trying to remember to say "over" after every comment. I then asked the Easter bunny if she had any children and she told me that she did not. I said, "You really are all alone aren't you." At this point, the Easter bunny began to cry and so did I. Two total strangers we were, and yet we each understood one another and had made a mysterious connection. I then asked if the military had a support group for the waiting wives, as was the case during the days of Vietnam. She said yes. I learned the Easter bunny's name was Lena. I then told her, "Lena, you will get through these days with God's help, one day at a time.

Renee Gault and Poncho with the Easter Bunny. Left is Poncho's business card with the Okaloosa County Sheriffs Department

The next day, I returned to the supermarket to pick up the photos and this time I met Lena without her Easter bunny costume. She was so young. As I looked at her, she reminded me of myself when Bill was with the UTT. Together, we chose our photos.

The one photo of the Easter bunny, Poncho and I was sent by computer to her husband serving in Baghdad, half way around the world. As we said our good-byes that afternoon, I hugged her and told her, "Lena, sometime down the road in your life time, you will be able to use these experiences you are living through now and share it for the good of another individual."

I say to you reading this that there were lessons to be learned from Vietnam and today I feel that it is our responsibility having lived through those days to pass what we learned on to those who follow in our footsteps. We, indeed, have a message to share.

In July 2000, just days before Bill Gault died, he told his Hospice nurse, "This little dog, Poncho is going to give Renee a lot of enjoyment and comfort after I am gone."

In May 2004, TSGT Pachari Lutke, reporter and producer of Air Force and Television News in San Antonio, Texas flew to Eglin AFB to videotape Poncho with the children in the hospital pediatric clinic. The tape was aired nationwide on the Air Force TV News broadcast, and to our Troops in Iraq.

In March 2004, Pancho became a mascot and volunteer working in the crime Prevention Department of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office. In his Deputy Sheriff's uniform, he has gone to elementary schools to help teach children the "Stranger, Danger Program." Bill Gault, a true animal lover, was correct in predicting his little dog would bring happiness and joy. Poncho continues to touch many people's lives. Bill would have been so proud of his little "stud muffin".

God Bless You,
Renee Lynn Campbell Gault
Widow of William Joseph Gault.

I

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CAPTAIN RICHARD S. JARRETT
PLATOON LEADER/OPERATIONS OFFICER
PLAYBOY 16—SABER 3
SS, DSSM, LOM (2 OLC), DFC, BS, MSM, PH, AM (33 OLC), ARCOM (1 OLC wV), PUC, MUC

FNG Days

"Welcome to Việtnam, don't take any smoking loaves of bread."

My initial reaction was what kind of silly comment was that? I was hot, somewhat hung over from my last night in San Francisco, and totally exhausted from my long flight across the Pacific to Tan Son Nhut Air Base in the Republic of Việtnam. I looked at Captain Ed Riley incredulously, to see if he was serious and noticed that he was not

smiling. Seeing my confusion, he explained that just the day before an American had been handed a loaf of French bread in which an explosive charge had been placed. The unlucky recipient had not lived to enjoy the bread. Thus, began my first day in Việtnam.

Ed Riley was a squared-away looking guy in crisply ironed jungle fatigues that fit him like they had been tailored by someone from "Central Casting" in Hollywood. On the way to the Replacement Center, he kept up a running chatter about how lucky I was to be assigned to the UTT—the world's first and only Armed Helicopter Company. Ed was the Executive Officer of the UTT and the official greeter of "new guys" assigned to the unit. He proudly commented that, despite the company's having the highest casualty rate of all aviation units in Việt Nam, I was indeed lucky to have been accepted into its ranks. Somehow, I didn't feel particularly lucky or, for that matter, grateful.

The Company Commander of the UTT, Major Ralph Irwin, was not nearly so friendly. He was a powerfully built man with a bull neck, an intense, intimidating manner and, as I was soon to learn, not at the slightest risk of ever being awarded a Humanitarian Service Medal. Entering his office, I saluted and stated "Captain Jarrett reporting for duty." He fixed me with a malevolent glare, which seemed to last for a full minute. Then, in a snarling tone, he advised me that he did not appreciate anyone "politicking" to get into His unit. He added that the only reason I was assigned to the UTT was because of the f@!*ing letter I had written to Brigadier General Joseph Stillwell.

It was true. I had written to General Stillwell, the Commander of U.S. Support Forces in Việt Nam, from Ft. Rucker where I was undergoing CH-21 transition training. My orders stated that I was to be assigned to the 121st Aviation Company at a place in Việt Nam called Soc Trang. At the urging of Captain Ernie Woods, an associate of mine from the 24th Aviation Company in Germany, I learned that the 121st was flying tired, old CH-21's, while the UTT was flying almost new, and much more powerful, armed UH-1B helicopters. (UTT, by the way, stands for "Utility Tactical Transport" Helicopter Company, a somewhat misleading name that was a "left over" from the unit's original mission.

As Ernie and I consumed more than a few beers around the swimming pool at the Daleville Inn outside Ft. Rucker, he waxed eloquently about how great the UTT was and how a guy like me, a "Gung Ho" Infantry Airborne Ranger, would be much happier in a unit where I could shoot back at the bad guys. It made good sense to me and, since I didn't know General Joe Stillwell from Adam's House Cat, I composed a letter to him stating my preference. I figured, "What the heck? It's worth a try." Besides, the only good thing my instructor at Ft. Rucker had ever told me about the CH-21 was that the gas tank was a full 22 feet from the cockpit! Little did I know that General Stillwell would actually read and act upon my letter, and would direct that my assignment be changed from the 121st Assault Helicopter Company to the UTT.

As I maintained a position of rigid attention, Major Irwin told me three other things that contributed to my already somewhat sickly condition. First, that I was to be the unit's Operation Officer. Second, that there was a major operation commencing the following morning at 0400. And last, that I was to, "Get the F*!K out of this office!" and report to my place of duty. Thank God there were a couple of "Short-Timers" working in operations. Captain John Talley and CW-3 Merle Watts were due to rotate back to the states in a few days and, taking pity on me, they helped me through the next 24 hours.

Major Irwin had not exaggerated about it being a "major operation." There must have been close to 100 helicopters involved in a dawn raid to free U.S. POWs in a remote area of the Mekong Delta called Rach Gia.

As we landed our Huey at the stage field, I noticed that none of the other helicopters or crews from our unit appeared to be present. Suddenly, twenty-two armed helicopters flew over the stage field at an altitude so low they almost caused me to hit the dirt. I heard someone from one of the other units that had already landed say, "Man, this must be a really important operation, the UTT's here in full force." At that moment, I realized I was in an organization that was held in awe by the members of other aviation units. That was no small achievement, since aviators are not normally inclined to compliment other units.

While I had confidence in my ability to perform my assignment as Operations Officer, I recognized that I had a lot to learn, and that it might take a while before the members of this elite unit accepted me. Somehow, I got through my first day and my first combat operation without mishap. Unfortunately, the POWs who were to be freed in the dawn raid had been moved—apparently the result of an intelligence leak among our esteemed ARVN colleagues (not an uncommon occurrence in those days). This did not, however, keep the UTT from "hosing" down the area with rocket and machine gun fire, a procedure which was not only condoned, but strongly encouraged by Major Irwin, our illustrious and super-aggressive leader.

That afternoon, as I stumbled exhausted into the former French villa which was to be my "home away from home" for the next year, I noticed two lovely Vietnamese girls sitting at a table in the bar area. Two young Warrant Officers, who were obviously proud of their attractive consorts, accompanied them. Suddenly the door burst open and Major Irwin strode into the bar. He was wearing a non-standard leather gun belt that held about 50 cartridges in its loops and a 9 mm Browning Pistol. He looked even fiercer than he had in his office. Without acknowledging my presence, he gruffly blared out, "Who do these broads belong to?" The two young Warrant Officers gulped, averted their gazes and remained deathly silent. After the briefest moment's hesitation, Major Irwin said, "Well, if they don't belong to anyone else, they must belong to me!" With that, he grabbed each by the arm and dragged them up the stairs to his room. I learned at that moment that the rules of civilized behavior did not apply to Major Irwin. He was the kind of guy who did or took whatever he wanted, whenever it suited him.

The next few weeks went by quickly and my learning curve was very steep—as I tried to absorb as much as possible about the tactics and techniques for employing armed helicopters. Having been an Infantry Company Commander, the Operations Officer of the 101st Aviation Company, as well as the Executive Officer and the S-3 of an infantry battalion, I was not particularly overwhelmed by the challenge of being Operations Officer of a relatively small armed helicopter company. What I was not prepared for, however, was the smug, standoffish attitude of the members of the unit toward what they referred to as "F@!*ing New Guys" (FNGs).

Notwithstanding, I followed a procedure of personally debriefing members of returning Fire Teams, after their missions. I was particularly demanding in my line of questioning when any of their aircraft had taken hits and, particularly, when someone had been wounded. While the crews of the returning Fire Teams tolerated my debriefings, it

was obvious that they did not appreciate any "FNG" questioning their tactics and techniques.

On several occasions, when I challenged some pilots on their tactics, they said, "Well, Chunn says this, or Chunn says that." I didn't know who this guy Chunn was, but it was obvious that he had made a profound impression on many of them. One day I had an occasion to go back to the villa for something I had forgotten. Upon entering the dining area, I noticed a handsome young Captain with impeccably tailored fatigues enjoying a leisurely breakfast. Not having seen this individual before, I walked over to introduce myself. When he looked up from his creamed beef on toast, he thrust out his hand and said "Don Chunn." Somehow, I had assumed that, with a name like Chunn, he would be of Asian descent. Instead, Chunn turned out to be a trim, Caucasian guy with a blond crew cut and an infectious grin. Not to be deterred by his obvious charm, I asked why he was sitting around the villa eating breakfast instead of flying with his platoon .

Instead of answering my question, Chunn took a paper napkin and, with his ballpoint pen, he drew an oval shaped figure. He said to imagine that it was a landing zone, the time was 0600 and the wind was 10 knots out of the East. He asked me to tell him exactly how I would employ a platoon of armed helicopters to pre-strike that LZ and prepare it for the landing of unarmed troop transport helicopters.

Recognizing my discomfort at not knowing how to respond, he went on to say that I would probably want to attack from the East with the sun at my back, to blind enemy gunners. He said that by attacking with the Easterly wind at my back; my apparent ground speed would also be greater. It was obvious that Don Chunn had given a lot of careful thought to the employment of armed helicopters and, if I could keep my big mouth shut long enough, I just might learn something from him.

Undeterred, I persisted in asking him why he wasn't out flying with his unit. Chunn calmly advised me that, as the Platoon Leader and the one who flew the "Hog" (a UH-1B configured to carry 48 rockets, rather than the normal 14), he picked and chose his missions. He said that, on this particular day, his Platoon was not performing any missions that required his personal presence. He added that, as the Platoon Leader of the Dragon Platoon (one of the three operational platoons in the unit, the others being the Playboys and Raiders), he normally reinforced potentially dangerous reconnaissance missions and led all deliberate attacks.

Speechless at his seemingly nonchalant arrogance, I decided that I had to fly with the legendary Chunn—to see if he was really as good as they said he was. Shortly thereafter, I scheduled myself to fly a pre-strike mission with him. Because I was senior to him, I naturally assumed that I would be the Aircraft Commander (A/C). Chunn advised me, in no uncertain terms, that he was the A/C and that if I flew with him, it would be in the Co-Pilot's seat. He added that I should try to make myself useful and inquired if I owned a grease pencil? When I said I did not, he handed me one. He told me to keep it handy and, when I heard frequencies or map coordinates mentioned on the radio, I was to write them on the Plexiglas of the side window or windshield. His rationale was that you never knew when you might have to tune into another frequency or proceed to an unanticipated location. He basically told me, in a not too polite way, to keep my mouth shut and my eyes and ears open.

The Dragon Platoon's mission for that day was to perform a pre-strike of a hostile landing zone near a place called Duc Hoa. Chunn explained that he intended to divide the landing zone into sectors and assign a sector to each of his two Fire Teams. He said he would reinforce one Fire Team and lead their attack on the right side, because that was where intelligence had indicated the most likely threat. He added that we would make two passes, with the first pass covering the periphery of the landing zone from the 12:00 to the 3:00 O'clock position, and the second from the 3:00 to 6:00 O'clock position. The other Fire Team would handle the 6:00 to 9:00, and the 9:00 to 12:00 O'clock positions.

As we rolled in for our first firing pass, I was very impressed with how Chunn placed his rockets exactly where he intended them to go. While we were in a right break, I noticed a Việt Cong in black pajamas running across a rice paddy dike, near the area we had just struck. I pointed him out to Chunn, who immediately kicked in left pedal and punched off a pair of rockets. I was absolutely amazed because, despite the aircraft being cross-controlled, both rockets landed right where the Việt Cong was running. All that remained of his presence was a smoking hole in the rice paddy dike. Chunn continued around in the break without comment. After a few moments, I said, "I suppose you are going to tell me that you shoot like that all the time?" He just smiled and said "Yep. All the time." I learned a great deal from Don Chunn in the weeks ahead and vowed that I would strive to someday become as expert as he was in the techniques of employing armed helicopters.

While Captain Don Chunn was perceived as the "Guru of sound armed helicopter tactics," it was obvious that our commander, Major Irwin, could care less about tactics which could minimize his, or anyone else's, exposure to ground fire. I learned this from personal experience since, as Operations Officer, I was most often pressed into service as his "Wing Man" during his forays. He operated on the absolute belief that he and his aircraft were virtually "bullet proof" and that his sole purpose in life was to personally engage and kill as many of the enemy as he could. In this regard, he often flew around the operational area long after the transport helicopters had off-loaded their troops, engaging what he referred to as "targets of opportunity." There is no doubt in my mind that many of these "so called targets of opportunity" were merely harmless peasants who happened to be working in their fields at an inopportune time.

Not satisfied with targets of opportunity during the conduct of airmobile assaults, he also derived great pleasure from attacking sampans that operated on the area's numerous rivers. At one point, he directed our Armament Officer, CW-2 Ralph "Doc" Holloway, to fabricate some grappling hooks with heavy nylon lines attached. His Crew Chief and Door Gunner were directed to attach the lines to the tie-downs in the aircraft and use the hooks to snag and pull thatched roofs from the tops of sampans. Those of us who had to fly with him were concerned that the Việt Cong would eventually catch on to this technique and position anti-aircraft machine guns in some of those sampans. Amazingly, he continued to operate with impunity—often coming back from missions with mud and straw on his windscreen. I did not envy Doc Holloway, who was probably the only person in the company Major Irwin seemed to like, and who had no choice but to fly as his Co-Pilot.

On the 12th of August 1964, a huge, 100+ helicopter airmobile operation was launched near Bên Cat. On that day, I was flying the wing aircraft in a Fire Team led by Major Irwin, whose call sign was Saber 6. My call sign, as Operations Officer, was Saber 3. My co-pilot for that mission was our unit's Personnel Officer, First Lieutenant Harold McNeil. McNeil had been shot in the foot a few months earlier and, hearing the news, his wife had suffered a nervous breakdown. Consequently, McNeil had been placed in a duty position where he would not have to fly as much as the pilots in the three operational platoons. "Mac" was a tall, handsome Texan with a wry sense of humor and a very good "control touch." I was happy to have him as my Co-Pilot, especially, since at that point, he was one of my very few friends in the unit.

Intelligence reports indicated significant enemy forces in the Bên Cat area. Accordingly, it was decided that both artillery and fighter/bomber aircraft would be used to soften up the landing zone, before the armed helicopters conducted their pre-strike and the troop transport helicopters conducted their landing assault. In theory, it appeared to be a sound plan that might have gone well—if executed both as planned and as scheduled. However, after the artillery and fighter/bombers had pounded the landing zone, and before the armed helicopters could conduct their pre-strike, a fog bank moved into the area and the airmobile assault was put on hold.

Since Bên Cat was relatively close to Saigon, Tan Son Nhut Airbase was selected as our staging field until the weather improved enough to resume the operation. While sitting in our helicopter smoking, "shooting the bull" and waiting for the fog to lift, Sgt. Saiki, my Operations Sergeant, drove up and told me that I had a phone call from a Colonel at MACV. Since Captains normally accept phone calls from Colonels, I told Lt. McNeil to move to the right seat while I took the call. My rationale was that, since the UH-1's starter is accessible from the right seat and we would want to get the aircraft into operation immediately—if the mission were momentarily resumed, he could initiate the start sequence while I was returning to the aircraft.

While talking on the phone to Colonel Dobson, a former commander from my days with the 101st Aviation Company, I noticed the rotor blades of our helicopter beginning to turn. I hastily informed Colonel Dobson that it appeared our operation "was back on" and that I had to go. After running out to the aircraft, I asked McNeil what was happening. He said that our original mission was still on hold, but that a "One-shot Charlie" had taken a shot at a commercial airliner, just off the South end of the runway. Our commander had been ordered to take his Fire Team and "Check him out." It seemed a bit strange to me that any self-respecting VC would remain in place, where he could be "checked out" by armed helicopters, after taking a pot-shot at an airliner. McNeil asked if I wanted to change seats and assume my original position as Aircraft Commander. I told him that we would most likely be back on the ground in five minutes and to go ahead and fly from the right seat.

As it turned out, the VC at the end of the runway was nowhere to be found (not too surprisingly) but, while our Fire Team was still airborne, a call came over the command frequency to continue with our original mission and proceed to the landing zone (LZ). I was amazed that, after signaling our intent to use that particular LZ by pounding it with artillery and fighter/bomber strikes, the Mission Commander had elected to continue use of the same LZ—after a two hour delay! It seemed to me that, if any

enemy forces were in the area, they would have had ample time to reinforce their positions and they would be ready to engage the helicopters. I didn't realize at the time how right I was!

Instead of waiting for the LZ to be pre-struck by a full platoon of armed helicopters, according to the over-all mission plan, Major Irwin immediately led us, at low-level, straight into (and right down the center of) the intended and "well-advertised" LZ. I was busy manning the flexible machine guns, from the Co-Pilot's seat, when I observed a heavy volume of anti-aircraft tracers coming up at the lead aircraft from three separate locations. I simultaneously heard Major Irwin's radio call, "Saber 6 receiving fire!" We had stupidly blundered into a .50 caliber or 12.7 mm machine gun ambush from three well-emplaced gun positions. Not only were these weapons able to engage our Fire Team from our immediate front, but they had us "locked-in" from both sides as well. I quickly engaged the foremost gun position with our flex machine guns, since that appeared to be the biggest threat to my commander's aircraft.

While I was placing machine gun fire under the lead ship, McNeil decelerated to fire rockets into the enemy position. As he acquired the enemy machine gun position in his sight, I heard a very loud bang that was followed by a cloud of debris and, out of the corner of my eye, I observed McNeil being slammed back into his seat. Just before he slumped forward, he triggered-off a pair of rockets, which miraculously landed directly on and neutralized the most threatening enemy anti-aircraft position. Looking back, I don't know whether it was merely a reflex, or the deliberate action of a dying man. Whatever it was, it surely saved Saber 6 and his crew from being destroyed by anti-aircraft fire from that weapon position.

At that point, McNeil slumped forward against his restraining harness, with some of his weight pressing against the cyclic stick. It was all that I could do to pull the aircraft out of a steep dive while shouting to Sgt. Duchscharer, our Crew Chief, to pull Mac's seat into the rear of the aircraft and to administer first aide. I assumed that he had suffered a sucking chest wound, and told Duchscharer to place a folded poncho over the hole and to wrap it tightly with his belt.

I could have saved my breath, because Sgt. Duchscharer stated a moment later that Lt. McNeil was dead. Flying from the left seat, still taking heavy fire from the two other AA positions and with a ragged ceiling at around 600 feet, I had no option but to suck back on the cyclic stick and try to escape into the clouds. My situation was further complicated because, when it came through the cockpit, the .50 caliber/12.7 mm armor piercing round had plowed through the armored glass panel of the windshield, the instrument panel, the rocket sight mounting bracket and had knocked out both the Attitude Indicator and Directional Gyro. It also went through the front and back of Lt. McNeil's flak vest and the armored seat back behind him. I was too busy to realize until sometime later that a fragment of shrapnel caused by this round had also penetrated my upper right arm.

Climbing up through the clouds, with a partial instrument panel and a serious case of vertigo, I instructed Sgt. Duchscharer to come forward, to kneel where Lt. McNeil's seat had been and, from that position, to observe the standby compass and call out compass headings to me. I used to laugh at "old timers" who talked about flying in the clouds with nothing but "needle, ball and airspeed." I soon found that being in this situation was no

laughing matter. Without the benefit of an Attitude Indicator and a Directional Gyro, it seemed like a very long time before we finally broke out on top of the clouds at about 5,000 feet. Once I got my bearings, I reported my situation to Saber 6 and headed southeast toward the U.S. Navy hospital in Saigon. It was only after the ambulance met us at the hospital pad that I noticed that I was bleeding from my arm. After getting it bandaged, I flew to Tan Son Nhut, where Major Irwin had also landed to re-arm and refuel his helicopter.

He grunted something that sounded like "good job" and, in a matter-of-fact tone, informed me that, since we had no more operational pilots available, Sgt. Duchscharer would continue to act as my co-pilot for the remainder of the day's mission. If he had any sympathy for me or, for that matter, Lt. McNeil, I was never able to detect it. As it turned out, his orders did have some beneficial effect on me. Not only did I finish out the day with a "Buck Sergeant" flying illegally as my co-pilot, I was forced to put the death of McNeil behind me with no opportunity to become morose over the incident. Like a man who almost drowns and goes right back into the water, my close call and immediate return to operational flying status was the best thing that could have happened to me.

If I had become somewhat zealous over the need for sound tactics and techniques in the employment of armed helicopters, this incident caused me to become a virtual fanatic. After a couple of days, I was able to think back on what had occurred and realized that, had we employed proper tactics and techniques, Lt. McNeil might still be alive. Our first mistake had been assuming the landing zone had been neutralized by the pounding it had taken from artillery and fighter/bomber strikes. Second, we should have conducted a thorough high and low reconnaissance of the landing zone from offset positions, before boring down the middle at low level and, third, McNeil and I should not have been flying so close to, or directly behind, the lead aircraft—thereby exposing our aircraft to the same sources of enemy fire.

On a somewhat positive note, the company had recently instituted a procedure of flying all attack missions with the forced trim in the neutral and "On" position. This procedure undoubtedly saved the lives of our remaining crew, during that time between Lt. McNeil being knocked off the controls and my taking control of the aircraft. We had also recently adopted the procedure of flying with our helmets' clear visors down, at all times. If my visor had not been down, bits of debris and shrapnel from the passage of the armor piercing round would most likely have blinded me—at least momentarily. As it turned out, there were some pockmarks on my clear visor and a bit of metal fragment was imbedded in the Plexiglas. Because of these lessons, learned the hard way, I became a merciless 'pain in the butt' in my debriefings of crews who had taken hits during missions. I also worked extra hard to become as knowledgeable as possible on the tactical employment of armed helicopters.

Surprisingly, the incident produced an inexplicable phenomenon: Where I had initially been perceived as "just another FNG" with very few friends, I suddenly became "one of the boys" who had passed some sort of unwritten and unspoken test. It was very strange that other guys in the unit actually went out of their way to talk to me and, in some cases, to buy me drinks. Some actually began to seek my advice. I would be a liar if I denied that it felt pretty darn good to be accepted into the ranks of the UTT, after having

been shunned for a month. On the other hand, getting your Co-Pilot killed is a hell of a way to conduct a "right of passage."

From Arrogance to Excellence

Soon after Lt. McNeil's death and my acceptance into the ranks of the UTT, an incident occurred which was to change the course and destiny of our unit. The name "UTT" (Utility Tactical Transport Helicopter Company) was a holdover from an earlier mission the unit had while it was unarmed and stationed on Okinawa. Re-designated as the 68th Armed Helicopter Company, the unit was ordered by the Department of the Army to be integrated into the 145th Aviation Battalion. This was a logical move, since the company was not part of any formal organization and, therefore, was technically unaligned with the Army's troop list. We had been under the operational control of the 145th Aviation Battalion on some occasions, and had worked closely with the 118th and 120th, both fine Aviation Assault Companies. However, the idea of being subordinate to a Battalion Headquarters had the same effect on Major Irwin as a red cape has on an already-enraged bull. He ranted and raved over the inequity of this dastardly decision, to the point that he became truly insufferable.

Dick along side his "Hog", wearing 68th Armed Helicopter Company patch on his pocket and a Playboy Platoon Beret.

Invited to attend a 145th Battalion Party, where departing members of the UTT were presented with plaques thanking them for their contributions, Major Irwin showed his true colors (and the level of his appreciation) by punching out Major Frank Klein, the

145th Battalion's Executive Officer. Half "in the bag" and in a very surly mood, Irwin had departed the party, before it was over, after having made some unjustified and very uncomplimentary comments about the 145th Battalion and its subordinate Aviation Units. In the hope of placating Irwin, Major Klein came back to our villa with a group of us, to see if he could calm our commander and establish a more amicable relationship with him. In the course of their conversation at the bar, Klein said something like "What makes you think your unit is so special?" Klein had no sooner gotten the words out of his mouth, than Irwin "sucker punched" him in the face. I am not exaggerating when I say that Irwin's punch was so devastating that blood and snot actually flew from Klein's terribly injured face and landed on a mirror that hung on the wall at the opposite side of the bar.

Major Klein was a big, strong man and may well have held his own in a reasonably fair fight. However, he dropped as if pole-axed from Irwin's unexpected blow. Those of us who were in the bar that night were startled but, frankly, not surprised. Major Irwin had always acted strangely, but of late, he had become even more testy and irritable than usual. He was like a ticking bomb waiting to go off. Apparently, Major Klein's rather innocuous comment was just enough to cause him to explode.

The following day Major Irwin individually approached each of us who witnessed the incident. He expressed no remorse whatsoever for what he had done. Instead, he tried to get us to say that we observed Major Frank Klein throw a punch at him and, therefore, he had no choice but to defend himself. I did not endear myself to Major Irwin when I told him that was not the way I had observed the incident. He became enraged and bellowed out, "What kind of G*!@amned man are you, who won't lie for his commander?" I told him I was sorry, but I could not support his story that he had merely been defending himself.

I knew at that point, that my days in the UTT were numbered, if Major Irwin remained as our commander. Fortunately for me, there were others present at the bar who also provided written statements to the investigating officer that Major Irwin was definitely not "defending himself" and that he had punched Major Klein without provocation. Shortly thereafter, Major Irwin was transferred out of the company and was assigned to a field hospital in Nha Trang for what was initially diagnosed as a bad case of "combat fatigue." Combat Fatigue my butt! The guy was just plain nuts! Later he was evacuated to Letterman Army Hospital in California, for further psychiatric treatment. I was told that some time later, Major Irwin was reassigned back to Việtnam as the S-4 of an Aviation Battalion in the Mekong Delta. I also heard that he was involved in another altercation where he punched out another officer in that unit. Why was I not surprised? To the day he died, Major Frank Klein bore crushed cheekbones and discoloration marks from Major Irwin's sucker punch. What does the Bible say? Blessed are the Peacemakers? Don't bet on it.

Major Irwin's departure was the best thing that could have happened to our company. Shortly thereafter, Major Joseph N. "Jim" Jaggers, Jr. was assigned as our new Company Commander. I had attended primary flight training with Jim, at San Marcos, Texas. We had also been together for advanced tactical and instrument training, at Ft. Rucker. Unlike Major Irwin, Jaggers had a quiet, confident and unassuming way about him. Moreover, he seemed genuinely interested in people. Knowing that he was a reasonable sort of guy, I suggested that he ought to try to master the basics of flying

armed helicopters—before he began asserting himself as our commander. He agreed, and we set up a training program to prepare him for this task.

Starting as co-pilot in the Wing Man's ship of a Fire Team, Jim progressed to flying as Aircraft Commander in that position. After he was satisfied that he fully understood what the Wing Man was supposed to do, he moved into the co-pilot's seat of the lead aircraft of the Fire Team and, in due time, assumed the flight position of Fire Team Leader. At that point, he began flying with all three Platoon Leaders, in their "Hogs," to learn first-hand what their role was. For a while, some members of the unit seemed skeptical about their new Commander's leadership ability. He had merely flown where he was assigned to fly and asked thoughtful questions—having offered almost no comments to anyone. As an old friend of Jim's from flight school days, I understood that he was "biding his time" and waiting for an appropriate opportunity to show that he had learned his lessons well.

During an operation in the fall of 1964, it all came together. A South Vietnamese convoy of armored personnel carriers had been ambushed near a place called Ba Ria. The situation on the ground was horrific. There were many burning APCs with hard core Việt Cong soldiers swarming over them in their quest to capture the .50 caliber weapons mounted on the APCs and to kill the crews. We scrambled all available helicopters to come to the aid of the ARVN troops on the ground. However, it was almost impossible to sort out the chaotic situation. Suddenly, on the command frequency I heard Jim Jaggers' voice. He was no longer "in a learning mode." Instead, he became a veritable one-man Command and Control Center. He not only conducted and directed armed helicopter strikes, he called-in and adjusted artillery fire onto enemy positions. Additionally, he directed several fighter/bomber strikes—marking targets with rockets from his own aircraft. In short, he was in total control of the tactical situation and imparted a high level of confidence to everyone involved in the operation.

First Lieutenant Jim Damron, who was flying with Jaggers that day, summed it up when he came into the bar that evening. He said that he had, "...been flying with a General Officer who was masquerading as a Major." Damron said that never in his life had he witnessed a transformation as dramatic as that of Jim Jaggers—when he decided it was time to assume command. From that day forward, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that Major Jim Jaggers was the kind of leader the unit truly deserved. Whereas, Major Irwin had been bombastic and crude, Jaggers was thoughtful and considerate. He fully embraced the idea that a good unit does not brag about how many hits it takes from enemy fire, but rather, it carefully analyzes those incidents and tries to minimize future exposure to enemy fire by developing, learning and using sound tactics and techniques.

Major Jaggers followed through by assigning the task of writing down what became known as the "Twelve Cardinal Rules for Armed Helicopter Employment" to Lt. Damron. Damron proved himself to be a bright young officer with an excellent grasp of tactics and an above average writing ability. Not only did Damron codify these rules, we all learned and adhered to them. Subsequently, the job of Operations Officer, particularly with respect to mission debriefings, became much easier. Not only did Jaggers stress sound tactics and techniques, he imparted a sense of professionalism in other areas as well. For example, our radio checks, which had previously been a casual verbal interchange between aircraft, became formalized and abbreviated—crisp and disciplined

exchanges that demonstrated professionalism. Likewise, the use of standard fire commands (similar to those used by tankers and artillerymen) not only simplified and clarified target identification and strike instructions, but also further enhanced our unit's professional image. In his low key but positive manner, Jaggers transformed the unit from a bunch of "undisciplined cowboys" who reveled in their ability to "hose down" everything in the area—with little or no provocation—and who bragged about how many times they got shot down or how many of their crew members had been wounded or killed. Under his leadership, the unit became a team of true professionals who prided themselves in their ability to accomplish even greater, more dangerous missions while maximizing their own survivability. The call sign "Saber 6" became legendary in the months ahead and Major Jim Jaggers was respected by all with whom he was associated.

Shortly after Jagger's arrival, I exchanged job positions with Captain Joe Jobe. He became Company Operations Officer (Saber 3) and I became the Platoon Leader of the First Platoon (call sign: Playboy 16). My task as platoon leader of the Playboys was made much easier by the fact that Joe Jobe had run a tight organization. Shortly after I took command of the Playboy Platoon, I was assigned a young Captain and a senior First Lieutenant as Fire Team Leaders. They were Gene Fudge and Jerry Childers. Never was there two guys who were so unalike in their personal mannerisms, but so similarly professional in the performance of their duties.

Dick and the XM-3 "Hog" he loved to fly. Because the "Hog" was the most powerful firepower in the Company, it was usually flown by the Platoon Leader

Gene Fudge (call sign: Playboy 13) was an out-going, gregarious Texan with a taste for "Jack Black" (Jack Daniels, black label) whiskey, poker and Days Work—"plug" chewing tobacco. He was a distinguished graduate from Texas A&M where, academically, he had scored among the top ten graduates in the entire history of the school. He was an Infantry, Airborne, Ranger who was fond of singing songs like "Bessie the Heifer," and "Kaw-Liga the Wooden Indian." Beneath his "devil may care" exterior, however, he was a thoughtful and serious combat leader who always set the example and who was fiercely protective of his men.

Jerry Childers (Playboy 11) was similarly intelligent, but a courtly, soft-spoken individual. He was a first-class Artilleryman and the kind of leader who wins the respect of his subordinates and associates without a lot of "hoopla" or fanfare. He, like Fudge, quickly absorbed the techniques and tactics of armed helicopter employment and insured that all members of their Fire Teams followed them to the letter. While these men could not have been more different in their demeanor, they were equally superb Fire Team Leaders who inspired confidence, loyalty and professionalism in their subordinates.

My third Fire-Team Leader was Captain Wilfried "Bill" Kast (call sign: Playboy 17). Bill had been the personal pilot of Colonel Jack Klingenhagen, the Deputy Support Command Commander. Bill came to us from "higher headquarters." Therefore, it took him awhile to "earn his spurs" and gain the trust of his fellow aviators. However, he was an excellent pilot and a solid, dependable combat leader. Bill had been a "Lodge Act" Soldier, who was integrated into the U.S. Army as a German national after World War II. As such, he tended to retain some quite humorous (and a few hard-headed) Germanic mannerisms. Notwithstanding these "peculiarities," Bill was a solid, dependable and courageous Fire Team Leader.

Around the same time that the Playboys acquired Gene Fudge and Jerry Childers as Fire Team Leaders, we also had a couple of really fine young Warrant Officers assigned to the platoon. Their names were James M. Lee and Christopher G. Hunt. Jim was assigned to the Playboy 11 Fire Team, commanded by Jerry Childers, and Chris was assigned to the Playboy 13 Fire Team, commanded by Gene Fudge. Looking back now at the assignment of these individuals, I find it ironic that Jim Lee, who was gregarious and outgoing, wound up with quiet, soft spoken and introspective Jerry Childers. Hunt on the other hand, was a taciturn, low-key guy—practically the direct opposite of Gene Fudge. Notwithstanding this quirk of fate, both Warrants were superb pilots, highly dependable in their tactics and exceptionally cool under fire. In fact, they were so good that I selected both of them to come back for their second tour in Việtnam as members of the AH-1G New Equipment Training Team (NETT), the first unit to introduce the Huey Cobra into combat.

I also inherited some other outstanding individuals from Joe Jobe, like Lieutenant Bill Swift, CW-2 Colin Dunn and CW-2 Jerry Irwin. All were sound tacticians and superb pilots from whom I learned a great deal. In fact, after he got out of the Army, Jerry Irwin went on later to become a Flight Commander at Ft. Rucker, where he trained my oldest son David to fly helicopters. Sadly, Colin Dunn died in a tragic crash after being transferred out of our unit during an "infusion" operation. Under the "infusion" process, seasoned helicopter pilots were occasionally re-assigned from experienced units to new organizations arriving in-country. Colin had the tail boom of his helicopter come

off at an altitude of 1200 feet while flying in the Mekong Delta. I was not there, but I was told that his last transmission as his aircraft fell to the ground was truly horrible to behold.

As I became more familiar with the members of the Playboy Platoon, they also became familiar with my particular leadership style. In very short order, we developed into a cohesive and very effective unit. In fact, we became so proficient in conducting pre-strike operations; we were assigned this mission on a more frequent basis than the company's other two operational platoons. This suited us just fine and we worked hard at further perfecting our techniques.

Unlike Major Irwin, our wild and bombastic former commander, Major Jaggers established a role for himself that earned him the profound respect and admiration of all with whom he was associated, particularly the pilots assigned to the Air Assault Companies. Jaggers decided that, prior to recommending a landing direction and touchdown spot to assault helicopter pilots—who would be landing in a particular landing zone (LZ), he would personally conduct a low, slow reconnaissance of the LZ.

I doubt that Major Jagger's ever realized it, but that decision put a "double monkey" on my back. Not only did I have to insure that enemy forces along the periphery of the LZ were neutralized, I also had to be concerned about my Commander (and friend) being shot down while making a low level reconnaissance. It was, however, a great comfort to the troop lift pilots to hear Jaggers, in his calm, Oklahoma twang, describing the landing zone conditions and recommending a landing direction and touchdown spot. Not only did Jaggers personally make a low, slow drag of the landing zone before recommending that the lift pilots land in it, he always remained in the immediate area—able to assist any of them who encountered enemy fire.

After expending my aircraft's 48 rockets during a pre-strike, my unspoken and self imposed mission was to remain in the area to assist Major Jaggers, should he find himself in trouble. The UH-1B helicopter in the M-3 "Hog" configuration was ideally suited for a potential medical evacuation mission. Once all 48 of its 2.75" rockets had been expended, the remaining weight of the aluminum rocket pods was negligible. In fact, the system was so devised that if one wanted to eject these pods completely, it could easily be accomplished by triggering a switch, which in turn blew the explosive bolts that retained the pods.

I am happy to say that, although I consistently remained in the area and in position to rescue Saber 6—should he be shot down, I never had to do so. Notwithstanding, I was privileged to hear some of the most unusual radio transmissions one could ever imagine. In one instance, some assault company commander was attempting to contact Jaggers and was tying up the command net with frequent calls of "Saber 6, Saber 6. Come in Saber 6." Suddenly, in normal, unhurried and perfectly calm voice, Major Jaggers responded, "This is Saber 6. Stand by a moment, I'm on fire." Everyone in the area was astounded at how cool Jaggers was in his response, but they were even more amazed when a short time later they heard, "This is Saber 6. Go ahead." That was "pure Jim Jaggers" and quite typical of his calm, unflappable composure under fire. Apparently, an enemy tracer round struck his rocket pod and started a fire in one of the rocket motors. He eventually ejected the burning pod, but never lost his cool or gave any indication of the extent of his problem.

The Legend of Dustoff

While Major Jim Jaggers was rapidly becoming a legend in his time, there was another individual who had already achieved legendary status—he was Captain Paul Bloomquist, a member of the 57th Aeromedical Evacuation Detachment, call sign: Dustoff 57. Perhaps a reader might wonder why someone who was not a member of the UTT should occupy such a special place in my recollections. If you ever had the honor of observing Dustoff 57 in operation, you would know why. There was no doubt that even among the bravest of the brave in our elite company, Paul Bloomquist, Dustoff 57, added a special meaning to the word courageous.

The UTT's bar in Saigon was a favorite "watering hole" for members of many other units, in addition to the guys in our company. Our regular guests included our close comrades from B-220 Special Forces Detachment. Naturally, a bar that catered to men who considered themselves to be a cut well above normal mortals, was bound to be a bit wild and raucous. The war stories that regaled those who were sober enough to remember them the next day were the kind of stuff that one reads about in adventure novels. However, most of the stories told at our bar happened to be true. When you have a unit comprised of men who strap armed helicopters to their rear ends on a daily basis, and go out to stalk a dedicated and determined enemy, you are bound to hear some hair-raising tales. However, if you wanted to witness a room of boisterous, half–drunk aviators grow absolutely silent, you only needed to be in the bar when Dustoff 57 walked in. The reason was because every one of those "bad-asses" at the bar knew that, when compared to Paul Bloomquist, they were like "a bunch of Girl Scouts." In a place where courage was fairly commonplace, his particular brand of courage was clearly extraordinary.

One could write an entire book about Paul Bloomquist—just by collecting testimonials from those who had personally witnessed his bravery. In fact, Bloomquist was so well respected that he was mentioned in a song that was often sung by our unit's Balladeer, Warrant Officer Mike Davis. The words, as far as I can recall them, went something like "And for our lives we did not fear, for we knew that Dustoff was always near." Simply stated, each and every pilot who flew in our unit was absolutely convinced that, should he be shot down and "Dustoff" was anywhere in the area, Paul "The Bear" Bloomquist would come and get him. In essence, he was like our own $1,000,000 life insurance

Paul Bloomquist (right foreground) and unidentified dustoff pilot.

Perhaps the greatest, though least known, tribute to Paul Bloomquist came from Major Jim Jaggers. When Jim was informed that he was being considered as the U.S. Army Việt Nam's candidate for "U.S. Army Aviator of the Year" for 1965, Jaggers said, "Thank you, but I could not accept such an honor as long as Paul Bloomquist is around." It was Jim Jaggers' view that Paul Bloomquist was far more deserving. I subsequently had the privilege of writing up Captain Bloomquist for this prestigious award, which was presented to him at the 1965 AAAA convention in Washington, D.C.

Paul Bloomquist died, as he had lived—violently. A shard of glass, from a terrorist's bomb in Germany, severed his jugular vein. It is truly ironic that a man who received multiple Distinguished Flying Crosses and Purple Hearts, for personally evacuating over 1,800 wounded men from battlefields, should die from loss of blood because no one could get him to a hospital in time to save his life.

Fall/Winter 1964-65

One of the most memorable operations where Jim Jaggers and I flew together was what we fondly refer to as the "Giant Christmas Rat F@%! of 1964." The objective area was near Tay Ninh, site of the famous Nui Ba Dinh, or Black Virgin Mountain. It was another one of those "dawn raids" that are normally fraught with all sorts of opportunities for monumental screw-ups. As Jaggers and I flew Westerly, through the darkness toward the Black Virgin Mountain, we had about 100 helicopters from various units following behind us. Unfortunately, while chatting on the intercom, we weren't paying careful attention to our navigation. Jim was flying in the Co-Pilot seat of our M-3 "Hog" Huey, in which we were to lead the pre-strike attack on the intended landing zone. As we flew over the landscape, which appeared to be an endless network of similar rivers, Jim asked me where we were on the map. I said, "I don't know. You have the map." Jaggers pulled

out the map and, after studying it for a while, admitted that he didn't have any idea where we were. He then asked me what I thought we should do—since we had about 100 helicopters following behind us and the thought of not being able to find the LZ was something neither of us wanted to contemplate.

In every unit, there always seems to be one guy who is a better navigator than everyone else. In this, our unit was no exception. For the Playboy Platoon, W-1 Kent Paxton was that guy and, Thank God, on that day he was flying co-pilot with Jerry Childers (Playboy 11) in the aircraft immediately to our rear. As Jaggers and I flew blindly onward, I had a brainstorm. Breaking radio silence, I told Childers that we had spotted something down below that "looks a bit suspicious" and directed him to proceed to the landing zone while we broke off to take a look. I told him that we would catch up after we had checked out this "suspicious sighting."

Of course, there was nothing down below but a network of small rivers, all of which looked identical to Jaggers and me. Jerry responded with a crisp "One One, Roger" and immediately took the lead. Because Kent Paxton was navigating for him, Jerry knew exactly where he was—even if we didn't. Sure enough, after a short while, Jaggers and I began to see some landmarks we recognized and, in a matter-of-fact tone, informed Playboy 11 that we were resuming the lead. I still get shivers when I think about how badly things could have gone, had we continued in the lead and not been able to find that landing zone. It would not have been a very Merry Christmas.

Being, at that time, the only armed helicopter company in Việtnam, we were often called upon to support operations in other Corps areas. Our normal operational area was III Corps, with I and II Corps to our North and IV Corps to our South. Consequently, we became familiar with virtually all of the operational areas in South Việt Nam and could respond rapidly to an enemy threat in any of those locations. Even though it was the closest to North Việtnam, I Corps had not experienced as much activity as the other Corps regions had. Many believed that was because enemy soldiers coming from the North wanted to be well into South Việtnam before commencing combat operations. Notwithstanding, during the latter part of 1964, activity up North started to increase and we were asked to send elements of our Dragon Platoon to Da Nang, to lend our support.

Marv Myers and his Dragon Fire Team were selected for this mission, which they performed with great enthusiasm. After leveling a hostile village, whose enemy casualties included the Village Chief's daughter, Marv and his guys were pronounced "persona non grata" by a Senior (and a very nervous) U.S. Advisor, and were summarily ordered back to Saigon. It seems that this particular Senior Advisor had been diligently working toward a Legion of Merit for good deeds leading to a "total pacification" of his area of responsibility. Well, Marv and his "Team of Trained Killers" (as the Senior Advisor labeled them) had screwed up the works. Apparently thinking that things couldn't get any worse, Major Jaggers assigned Playboys to replace the Dragons on station in Da Nang.

Now everybody who has ever read a Playboy magazine knows that those who wear the famed Playboy Bunny emblem are supposed to appear cool and suave and are expected to uphold the Playboy image. In keeping with expectations, we decided that, since we were to be in Da Nang for a whole month, it only made good sense to take along

our portable bar—with its permanently emblazoned Playboy insignia. What the heck, we never knew when we might be called upon to host a social affair! Since the floor of my M-3 Hog was not burdened with ammunition boxes, as were the floors of the other gunships with flex machine guns, we decided to load the Playboy bar into the back of my helicopter. It barely fit, and almost caused the door gunner and crew chief to stand on the skids, but somehow we managed.

The flight to Da Nang was uneventful, until we arrived in the vicinity of a place called Quang Nai. While flying along the beautiful Viet Nam coastline at about 4,000 ft, I heard a transmission on UHF frequency 266.0 that sounded like a Dragon Fire Team engaged in some sort of fire support operation. We always flew with a full load of ordnance and, since it sounded like there was enough enemy action for everybody, I called Marv Myers and offered our assistance. Marv was delighted with our offer, stating that his Fire Team had just expended their ordnance on an enemy force that had the lead elements of a Vietnamese Airborne Battalion pinned down near a small village. He told me that the U.S. Advisor's call sign was "Red Hat 6" and gave me his FM frequency. I was familiar with Red Hat 6, a good troop named Captain Bob Losik, because I had supported him on other occasions in the III Corps area.

Flying to the coordinates Marv had given to me, we approached a village that certainly looked like an area where a battle was being fought. Coming up on the Vietnamese Airborne Battalion's frequency, I contacted Red Hat 6 and asked if we could "lay a little death and destruction" to his front. Bob was happy to hear from me and asked if I could make out his radio operator, who had an orange panel sewn to the back of his uniform. He said that his guy was laying face down in a rice paddy.

I immediately spotted the soldier with the orange panel and asked Bob for instructions on where he wanted me to conduct our strike. Bob was an old hand at adjusting armed helicopter strikes and came back with an immediate response. "From my panel, 45 degrees, 500 yards." I noted that the place Bob had indicated, as the major source of enemy fire, appeared to be the exact center of a small village. I called Red Hat 6 and asked for confirmation that enemy fire was, in fact, coming from the center of the village. Bob came back with a simple and abundantly clear, "Affirmative. Over" and I told him, "Stand by for rockets."

When arming for missions, particularly during the dry season, we routinely took on a mixed load of High Explosive and White Phosphorous rockets. My rocket load at the time was consistent with that practice. Consequently, shortly after we rolled in on the target that Bob Losik had identified as the enemy stronghold, the small village, with its thatch roofed buildings, merely ceased to exist. After confirming that we had destroyed the desired target and saying farewell to Marv and his Dragons, we rearmed and refueled at Quang Nai. We were a bit surprised to note that, in doing so, we used all of the 2.75" rockets that had been stockpiled at that location.

When we arrived at Da Nang, I noted a very agitated U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel pacing up and down the ramp where we had been directed to park our helicopters. While my Co-Pilot was shutting the helicopter down, I disembarked, walked over and reported to him. "Captain Jarrett with a Platoon of Playboy gunships reporting for duty, Sir." The first words out of his mouth were "Where the hell have you been

Jarrett, you are late! I expected you to be here two hours ago." I told him "Sir, we would have been here sooner, but we had to destroy a hostile village enroute." To say the Colonel appeared to be suffering from an immediate attack of apoplexy would be an understatement. I should have realized that this was the very same Lieutenant Colonel who had pronounced Marv Myers and his Dragon Fire Team "persona non grata" for their destruction of a similar village. Fortunately, our strike had been in support of a Vietnamese Airborne Battalion, which was normally stationed in the III Corps area. The "Red Hat" Airborne Battalions were considered "elite forces" within the South Vietnamese Army and the Colonel knew that making an issue over a legitimate support mission for visiting "elite" troops would not be politically correct.

Nonetheless, he proceeded to talk to me like a retarded schoolboy. He told me that there was an airmobile assault scheduled for the following morning and that he wanted my unit to be ready to support the assault helicopter company that was stationed at Da Nang. He told me to coordinate with a Major Crockett, the commander of that unit, as soon as possible. When I reported to Major Crockett for our mission briefing, I asked him about the availability of 2.75" rockets and machine gun ammunition for the upcoming mission. Major Crockett told me not to worry, because there were 82 rockets in the ammunition dump. I must have appeared disrespectful, because I actually "snorted" when I heard that. Never known for tact or diplomacy, I maintained my image by saying "Hell Major, we normally plan on consuming 300 rockets and 100,000 rounds of 7.62 mm ammunition on a daily basis." I advised him that 82 rockets would not even provide one basic load for my Platoon.

Major Crockett had a platoon of armed helicopters as part of his assault helicopter company. However, it appeared that, because of the Senior Advisor's Pacification Program, they were restricted from doing much shooting. To Crockett, 82 rockets was a substantial quantity of ordnance. To us, they were hardly a drop in a bucket. I immediately ordered Sergeant Yokum, our most aggressive (and meanest) Crew Chief, to hurry over to the ammo dump and steal every rocket that he and his guys could lay their hands on—for the following day's operation. I also contacted Major Jim Jaggers, advised him our situation, and requested an immediate (and appropriately sized) re-supply of 2.75" rockets, for our stay in the I Corps area.

From our perspective, the Playboy mission in I Corps was quite successful, but I think the local lads—particularly the Senior U.S. Advisor, were delighted only to see us depart. As far as they were concerned, we were nothing but a bunch of trigger-happy gunslingers, bound and determined to destroy their carefully crafted Pacification Program. It was not much later when North Vietnamese (NVA) troops crossed over the DMZ into I Corps in force and they were, suddenly, begging for additional support.

Some of the more frustrating missions we performed while in I Corps were in support of a U.S. Marine Corps Aviation Squadron. They had flown ashore from a "pocket aircraft carrier" to replace another Marine unit, which had been there for a short TDY tour. The Lieutenant Colonel commander of this unit (call sign "Emblem 6") was a "hard-assed, hard-headed" guy who appeared to have been born with an inbred hatred for Army Aviators.

When I reported to him for our first support mission, he showed me an LZ on the map and told that he intended to make a "surprise airmobile assault" into that LZ at 1000 hrs the following morning. When I asked for any particulars on how he wanted us to "prep the landing zone," he replied, "You are not listening Captain. I said this is to be a surprise airmobile assault." Looking at the map again, I noted that the intended LZ was the only logical one in that entire area. Again engaging my mouth before my brain, I commented, "Colonel, there are no surprise airmobile assaults into an area like this. They will be selling Segi (orange) pop and bananas in the LZ if, and when, your troops arrive." He didn't appreciate my attempt at humor, but then I didn't appreciate his incredible naivety. This wasn't my "first rodeo" and I sincerely believed that landing troop helicopters into that LZ, without a preparatory strike, would be nothing short of foolhardy.

Then, as respectfully as possible, I asked the Colonel if he would allow us to make a high and a low recon of the landing zone, to ascertain if there was an enemy force in the area, prior to the troop ships' landing. He agreed. Then I got him to begrudgingly agree that, if we received fire while conducting our recons, we could then back off and pre-strike the LZ. I took Bill Kast aside and told him what I wanted him to do. Being a German, Bill was as dogmatic as Adolph Eichmann when it came to following orders. His orders were quite simple. He was to conduct a high and low level reconnaissance of the LZ and, when his lead aircraft crossed a small creek that divided the LZ, he was to call "Receiving Fire!" and have his Crew Chief throw smoke. At this point, his Wing Man was to put a pair of rockets under his aircraft, following which we would all back off and "knock the holy bejeebus" out of the LZ. Bill was a bit slow on the pick-up that day, and asked what he should do if he didn't actually receive fire? I just stood perfectly still and stared at him for a few seconds—then a look of comprehension came over his face. "Ah so!" he said, "I understand. *When* I receive fire, I will so advise...and we will then pre-strike the LZ." I said "Ya! Wilfried, good boy! I knew you would understand."

As Bill and his Playboy 17 Fire Team flew over the small creek, during his low recon, he dutifully called "One Seven Receiving Fire." His Wing Man responded with a pair of rockets, which landed along the creek bank—beneath the lead ship. I immediately called for and led a standard pre-strike of the landing zone. I could sense the seething anger in the tone of the Marine Corps Squadron Commander, as I reported what we were doing. From his perspective, I had completely screwed up his "surprise" assault. As we broke off to rearm and refuel, I heard the radio chatter between the pilots of his USMC H-34 helicopters. Assuming the area was secure and flying around low level, they got two of their choppers shot up in very short order. So much for surprise attacks! I later made up with the Marine Lieutenant Colonel, when I presented him with a 1903 Springfield rifle that was still in its original condition. It turned out that this guy was a gun nut, and I couldn't have selected a better peace offering. You can always tell a Marine—but you just can't tell him much.

Binh Gia and III Corps Operations

In early January 1965, the Playboy Platoon returned to Saigon to learn that CW-2 Roy Azbill and his crew had been killed at a place called Binh Gia. Azbill was a gifted young Warrant Officer who had demonstrated sufficient combat leadership ability to

merit command of his own Fire Team. He was a member of the Dragon Platoon and had been engaged in a low level reconnaissance when his aircraft came under heavy enemy anti-aircraft fire. This was the first death the unit had suffered since Lt. McNeil had died, and we all took it hard. It seems that the Dragons' new Platoon Leader (whose name shall go unmentioned) was not in position to provide suppressive fire under Azbill's aircraft, when he came under fire. In fact, some reports indicated that the Platoon Leader was climbing through 4,000 feet altitude and was not even pointed in Azbill's direction! Once the situation was understood that Platoon Leader was rapidly transferred out of the company. Additionally, that incident precipitated WO Mike Davis' transfer from the Dragons to the Playboys.

To infuse positive leadership and bravery into the badly demoralized unit, Captain Marvin O. "Marv" Myers was elevated from Fire Team Leader and given command of the Dragon Platoon. Marv had demonstrated, on many occasions that he was a competent and absolutely fearless combat leader. Through personal example, he quickly turned the demoralized Dragon Platoon into the first-class fighting unit it had been under Don Chunn. In fact, Captain Jack Johnson, the Raider Platoon Leader, and I had to work hard to keep the Dragons from assuming the dominant role in our unit's day-to-day combat operations. While the deeds performed by the three Platoon Leaders were not intended to be a "tit for tat" competition, the various members of the three platoons often compared stories at the bar. I can tell you, frankly, that Marv Myers was "a tough act to follow." Not only did Marv do some rather bold and crazy things, like land his helicopter and jump out—to personally run down a Việt Cong and shoot him with his .357 magnum pistol, he had a way of inspiring his guys to do things that set them apart from the other members of the company.

For example, one day Marv announced that, come the next Saturday evening, the Dragon Platoon would host a unit party at a particular restaurant in Saigon. Nothing special about that, you say? The thing that made it special was that Marv told them the dress for the party would be "Black Tie." Now you have to understand that in Việtnam we wore Jungle Fatigues. We had a hard enough time just coming up with enough khaki uniforms for all members of the company, when we were presented the Presidential Unit Citation by General Westmoreland. Telling someone to show up in a tuxedo was a seemingly impossible demand. Notwithstanding, Marv viewed this order as a simple test of his unit's discipline and initiative. Amazingly, every attendee at the party showed up in a tuxedo. I wouldn't be surprised to learn that some of them held a pistol to the head of Cheap Charlie, the tailor whom our unit most often frequented, to meet this seemingly ridiculous requirement.

Marv was not the only guy who, by personal example, earned the respect and total loyalty of his men. Captain Jack Johnson, the Raider Platoon Leader was also a guy whose deeds were often recited at the bar. Jack was the fellow from whom I borrowed a phrase he sometimes used when supporting U.S. advisors on the ground. Jack believed, correctly, that a guy pinned down under heavy enemy fire needed to be calmed and reassured that things were going to be alright. Therefore, he would normally come up on a beleaguered Advisor's frequency and, in a perfectly smooth tone of voice, say something like "Red Hat 3, this is Raider 26, flight of three, how about letting me spread some death and destruction to your front." Hearing a calm, assertive voice like Jack's put

a lot of steel in the spines of a lot of guys who were lying down with their faces in the stinking mud of rice paddies.

Unfortunately, Jack didn't make it through a full tour. While flying in the same Binh Gia area where Roy Azbill had been killed, Jack took a bullet through his right wrist, making his dangling right arm totally useless. Undeterred, and in typical Jack Johnson fashion, he quickly grasped the cyclic with his left hand and braced the collective with his left knee until his co-pilot could take over the controls. The Raiders lost a terrific leader when Jack was evacuated for his wound. Surprisingly, Jack Johnson recovered full use of his right arm and, I am told, he did an equally great job during his second tour in Việt Nam.

Skunk Hunts

If one were to study a map of Việt Nam, it would be noted that just North and Northeast of Saigon there is a vast area of jungle. In our days, this area was called "War Zone D" and it was one of the primary sanctuaries for the Việt Cong in the III Corps area. It was so infested with enemy forces that the entire area was designated as a "Free Strike Zone." Simply stated, this meant that any activity observed in that area was presumed to be hostile and, therefore, should be militarily engaged and destroyed. War Zone D was a spooky place with triple canopy jungle and many trees that topped 200 feet in height. It was also the place where our company perfected a technique we called the "Skunk Hunt."

Deep inside War Zone D, there was a friendly outpost, with a dirt airstrip, called Phúöc Vinh. A relatively small ARVN detachment and an even smaller group of U.S. Advisors manned it. The leader of Phúöc Vinh's Advisory Team, and of the region, was Lieutenant Colonel John Hill. Colonel Hill was a "Soldier's Soldier" who, among other significant events in his military career, had received a Distinguished Service Cross for bravery in Korea. He was also an exceptionally intelligent guy who easily understood that firing 2.75" rockets at enemy forces operating under triple canopy jungle was not always effective. Other members of Colonel Hill's Advisory Team included a couple of (crazy) Air Force Captains who were Forward Air Controllers (FACs) and who used the call sign "Copperhead." These Air Force guys piloted a couple of O-1 aircraft, which they used to spot and mark targets for Air Force fighter/bomber aircraft that were assigned missions in War Zone D.

Colonel Hill (call sign: "Easy Aces") realized that our armed helicopters, which received hostile fire almost every single day while operating over War Zone D, could do little to effectively destroy the enemy forces in the denser parts of the jungle. Even with the high levels of accuracy we possessed, neither our 7.62 mm guns nor our 2.75" rockets had more than minimal effect at ground level under triple canopy jungle. Further, Col. Hill knew that the Air Force's fighter/bombers, with their 500 and 2,000 pound bombs, napalm and 20 mm cannons, could easily blast the jungle canopy away—a benefit of their vastly more powerful ordnance. He also realized that, unfortunately, the fighter/bombers routinely stuck targets that were at least 24 hours old and often did little more than manufacture toothpicks—long after the "reported enemy" had moved on. Colonel Hill reckoned that there had to be a better way to do business. He invited us to a meeting at Phúöc Vinh, where he put us face-to-face with his Air Force Advisors/FACs.

Together, we developed a plan to capitalize upon the best features of the Army's Armed Helicopters and the Air Force's fighter/bombers.

The plan was fairly simple. We would send a Reinforced Fire Team into War Zone D on an almost daily basis. However, prior to conducting our reconnaissance, we would land at Phúöc Vinh and pick up one of the Air Force FACs. He would ride in the back of our helicopter using a "jerry rigged" headset, with which he could talk with us, over the intercom, and to the fighter/bomber's Flight Leaders while they orbited in the vicinity of the Phúöc Vinh airstrip. Since Air Force pilots were more inclined to conduct a strike if the person controlling their operations was a "Blue Suiter" (one of their own), they readily accepted instructions from a "Copperhead" FAC—who just happened to be riding in the back of our helicopter.

Simple as it was, the "plan" immediately became an incredibly effective method for tactical operations. In our "pre-Skunk Hunt" days, we had grown accustomed to receiving fire from the enemy in War Zone D, on a near-daily basis, with not a great deal that we could do about it but to take our lumps. For instance, while flying a low reconnaissance over a particularly dangerous area, Jim Lee had taken a bullet through his knee. Fortunately, it did not cause permanent damage, but it did put Jim out of action for a few weeks. When we located occupied and hostile positions, using "Skunk Hunt" teamwork with the Air Force, we could totally destroy the enemy's equipment, installations and personnel—irrespective of how dense the jungle canopy was or, how well dug in the enemy's positions were.

Operationally, it went like this: The moment they drew enemy fire, during a low level reconnaissance, a Reinforced Fire Team Leader's Crew Chief and/or Door Gunner would throw a smoke grenade. The Fire Team's Wing Man would immediately fire a pair of rockets under the lead ship and both aircraft would break away from the source of the enemy fire—so far, all consistent with our previously established tactics and employment practices. But on Skunk Hunts, flying in his normal position behind the Wing Man—at about 1,000 feet in an M-3 Hog, the Platoon Leader would then fire four to six pairs of White Phosphorous rockets slightly to the rear of the spot where the Wing Man had placed his rockets. Using the Hog's White Phosphorous rockets as his mark, the Air Force FAC in the back of our helicopter would call in the fighter/bombers and adjust their strikes.

As far as the two services were concerned, this was truly a "Win—Win" proposition. The Air Force got a chance to destroy real, live and currently-occupied enemy positions, not merely coordinates on a map, and we were able to inflict almost immediate and truly serious "pay back" on an enemy who had previously been able to shoot at our helicopters with near impunity. We always conducted a post strike reconnaissance of the places where the Air Force bombed and were frequently amazed at some of the things we became able to observe. Before, we had been totally unable to see down through the triple canopy. Suddenly, we could totally obliterate large sections of jungle canopy and, just as suddenly, we started making some truly significant finds. With "The Best Eyes" in the Platoon, Chris Hunt was most often the first to see tell-tale traces of what turned out to be several huge caches of rice, reinforced bunker entrances and even some vehicles. To the best of my knowledge, our "Skunk Hunts" were the finest example of U.S. Army/U.S. Air Force cooperation ever to come out of the Việtnam War.

I don't know whether the traditional "Roles and Missions Fight" between the Army and Air Force had anything to do with it but, after working together very closely for a number of months, word came down "From On High" that we were to immediately cease and desist from these joint missions. I never learned how the Air Force guys felt about it, but we were really ticked off at the summary termination of something that had worked so well. By late spring of 1965, the "Skunk Hunt" was no more and the enemy reoccupied War Zone D in force. So much for Army/Air Force Roles and Missions. I hope that whoever bore the responsibility for terminating those operations recalls that the enemy forces who attacked, cratered and almost overran Bien Hoa Air Base—during the Tet Offensive of 1968—came right down out of War Zone D.

I do not mean to infer that the Air Force didn't also encounter considerable risks while flying missions over War Zone D. I recall that one time, while flying a convoy support mission near Bên Cat, I heard an American voice on the Guard Frequency call "Mayday, Mayday." and announce that his A1-E Sky Raider was going down. I quickly contacted Paris Control, the air traffic control center for the area, to obtain a fix on the downed aircraft. Paris Control advised that they had, in fact, gotten a transponder fix on where the A1-E Sky Raider had crashed and gave me the coordinates. The coordinates placed the Sky Raider in War Zone D. The good news was that the aircraft had crashed not very far from our position. The bad news was that our aircraft's "20-minute" Low Fuel Warning Light came as we approached the crash scene. Looking down, from above the triple canopy jungle, it was virtually impossible to determine if anyone might have survived the crash. The Sky Raider fighter/bomber had come to rest at the end of a small, teardrop shaped clearing that it had ploughed into the dense jungle. The airplane was burning vigorously and it was impossible to clearly see the cockpit, through the smoke.

Circling the downed aircraft, I was faced with a real dilemma. If I heeded our low fuel warning light, I should depart very soon to refuel at Phúöc Vinh—the closest place with a refueling capability. On the other hand, if the pilot were still alive, he would probably not survive unless he was medically evacuated within the next few minutes.

My decision to go refuel or try to land and ascertain the status of the downed U.S. pilot was influenced by the recollection of a similar crash that had occurred only a few days earlier. An Air Force C-123 transport aircraft had also been shot down in War Zone D. The Air Force Search and Rescue helicopter crew who arrived on the scene made a judgment call that no one could have possibly survived the crash. Therefore, they did not attempt to either land or send a Paramedic down on their hoist. Sadly, after a ground patrol arrived on the scene a day later, they found that one of the members of the crew appeared to have died only moments before their arrival. With that thought in the back of my mind, I felt that it was absolutely critical that we somehow determine if the pilot in the downed Sky Raider were still alive.

Unable to land directly in the crash site, because of stumps and exploding ordnance, I tried to find a clearing close enough to approach the burning aircraft from the ground. Locating a small clearing about 200 yards away from the crash site, I made a near-vertical decent down through the 200 ft. trees. Pointing at the fuel gauge, I told CW-2 Bobby Smith, my very fine Warrant Officer Co-Pilot, that if I wasn't back within five minutes, my orders were for him to take off, refuel at Phúöc Vinh and return. He

"Rogered" my order, but I could sense from his expression that he was reluctant to leave me—regardless of the risk or my orders. Armed with the M-14 rifle that hung from the back of my seat and accompanied by my Door Gunner, who carried his M-60 machine gun, we made our way through the jungle toward the crash site.

Having been through the Ranger Course, I thought I knew something about how to move through thick jungle-like terrain. How wrong I was! Moreover, I developed even greater respect for "grunt infantry" soldiers—who routinely operated in this type terrain. As we made our way toward the crash site, guided by the sound of 20 mm ammunition exploding from the heat of the fire, the dense jungle rapidly took its toll on us. I was exhausted after only a few dozen yards of traversing deadfall and being whipped about the face and neck by brush and low hanging vines.

When we finally broke through into the clearing made by the crashed aircraft, I was shocked to note that, in addition to the 20 mm ammunition which was exploding from the heat of the fire, there were two very large unexploded bombs still affixed to the hard points of what was left of the wings! Fearing that these bombs might also explode at any moment, we quickly made our way to the cockpit. Sadly, there was nothing left of the Air Force pilot but his charred remains.

Realizing there was nothing we could do for the pilot, we fought our way back through the dense jungle toward the clearing where we had left our helicopter. I noted from my watch that we had already been gone longer than five minutes, and realized that, if CW-2 Smith had followed my order to the letter, our aircraft would not be there when we reached the clearing. Fortunately for us, Smith had decided to disobey my order. Thank God! Making a maximum performance take-off and flying directly to Phúöc Vinh, low over the triple canopy jungle, we barely made it past the perimeter wire of the airstrip when the aircraft ran out of fuel. Had this occurred only 30 seconds earlier, we would undoubtedly have crashed and, most likely, would have killed our entire crew. As you might expect, I did not reprimand CW-2 Smith for his actions that day. In fact, Smith was so well regarded for his cool composure, that he was eventually selected to become Major Jim Jagger's co-pilot.

The Battle for Song Be

There was a Vietnamese Special Forces Camp called Song Be, near the Northern edge of War Zone D. We knew the U.S. Special Forces Advisors in the camp, quite well. We sometimes dropped in for an intelligence update or to re-arm and re-fuel at their airstrip, while conducting armed reconnaissance missions in their area. Song Be was situated along the bank of a river and was dominated by a small but steep, 2,405 ft. mountain peak that overlooked the camp. Although located in a fairly remote area adjacent to "Indian Country," it had not, as yet, been decisively attacked.

During the spring of 1965, we started getting intelligence reports that enemy forces were moving across the border of Cambodia, and proceeding into areas North of Tay Ninh and, from there, were believed to be heading toward the East. Attempting to locate these forces, we sent Fire Teams into the area, for armed reconnaissance, on a regular basis. However, all we could see from the air were large quantities of fresh ox cart tracks and human footprints—indications of movement by a fairly large force.

Trying to discover their exact location, by inducing them to shoot at us, we conducted "Reconnaissance by Fire" strikes in numerous locations where we believed the enemy might be holding up during successive days. In spite of our repeated and vigorous attempts to engage them, they never fired a single round back at us. We firmly believed that a substantial enemy force was, in fact, moving through the areas that we were probing with substantial volumes of machine gun fire and rockets. Being unable to force them into returning our fire made it obvious, at least to us, that we were confronting military elements who must have been highly motivated and who must have had some specific objective(s) in mind. Further, because of their exceptional discipline, it seemed clear that they were not permitting themselves to be prematurely engaged. Day after day, the ox cart tracks and footprints moved slowly and consistently to the East. However, no enemy forces were sighted during daylight hours.

Eventually, one day while flying a reconnaissance mission over War Zone D and using Phúöc Vinh as our staging area, our Playboy 13 Fire Team—which I happened to be reinforcing on that day—jumped a group of enemy forces with ox carts just to the West of Phúöc Vinh. Almost instantly, it became a veritable "Turkey Shoot!" There was no way the enemy could escape and we became like a swarm of sharks, with blood in the water. As the enemy attempted to flee, they began scattering and, I am embarrassed to say, our normal use of sound tactics was momentarily abandoned. We damn near ran into each other in our eagerness to engage and destroy them. What we didn't realize at the time was that the force we had encountered was but a very small part of a much larger, regimental-sized force that had been moving slowly, but steadily, toward the Special Forces Camp at Song Be. Shortly thereafter, we received an urgent call in the middle of the night to scramble all aircraft and fly to the aid of the Song Be encampment, which was "well and truly under siege" from all quarters.

Flying over War Zone D during daylight hours had always been "spooky" enough. But flying there in the middle of the night, in bad weather and with no visible horizon, was downright scary. Nonetheless, we mustered every armed helicopter that we could get off the ground, in an attempt to keep the enemy forces from overrunning the beleaguered camp. The enemy forces used the nearby mountain, as their primary observation post and the site for most of their mortars and recoilless rifles, to place devastating fire into the camp. They simultaneously attacked, through the barbed wire and minefield defenses from numerous "spider holes" they had surreptitiously dug all along the perimeter. When our first Fire Teams arrived, the enemy had already succeeded in breaking through parts of the outer defensive perimeter and overrunning a significant portion of the camp.

To describe the scene that confronted us as "chaotic," would be gross understatement. Numerous explosions and heavy tracer fire, coupled with burning buildings and dead bodies strewn throughout the area, gave Song Be a truly hellish appearance. In fact, from its external appearance, it was difficult to believe there could be anyone still alive in the compound. Miraculously however, there were survivors and they were valiantly fighting for their lives. I don't recall the name of the Lieutenant Colonel who was the ranking Special Forces Officer at Song Be. However, he had been seriously wounded early in the fighting and had been carried to the mess hall where the wounded were being treated. Suddenly the Việt Cong burst through the door of the mess hall and

killed everyone who appeared to still be alive. The seriously wounded Colonel was conscious, but in very bad shape. Realizing that the enemy was not taking prisoners and that he would be summarily killed if he moved, he forced himself to lie absolutely still. Later recounting the incident, he told us that a Việt Cong commander had actually squatted on the floor next to him and rested his hand on his leg, giving orders to his subordinates, while the Colonel played dead.

A lot of people did some pretty amazing things that day, but Jim Jaggers and Paul Bloomquist come particularly to mind for their special contributions. Jaggers directed air strikes, coordinated air mobile assaults, kept higher headquarters informed of the fluid situation on the ground and, generally, ran the show. Of particular note was his rescue of a U.S. A1-E Sky Raider pilot who was badly shot up and had to make a forced landing on the airstrip. It sounds nice to have a runway available, when you need one. That was the good news. The bad news: The strip was being held by enemy forces, at the time. As the A1-E rolled to a stop, the pilot bailed out of the cockpit while Jaggers, seemingly oblivious to the enemy gunners, swooped in and landed a scant few feet away. The grateful pilot jumped into Jaggers' aircraft—which sped away before the enemy gunners could effectively react. Somewhere in my collection of photos, I have a picture of Jaggers and that Air Force Captain, puffing away on a couple of big cigars; each of them with an even bigger grin on his face.

Captain Paul Bloomquist not only flew repeatedly into extremely heavy fire and rescued some very critically wounded personnel, but he managed to save the South Vietnamese Senior Commander from imminent capture and most certain death. I clearly recall his initial flight into the compound while the battle raged, because I escorted him during his approach. I literally fired rockets directly beneath his skids, and did not stop till he reached his touchdown point. I will always remember one enemy soldier, in the top of a lone palm tree, who was shooting at Bloomquist's aircraft. My door gunner killed him with a well-aimed burst from his M-60 machine gun—reminiscent of scenes from WW-II newsreels, which showed U.S. troops shooting Japanese snipers out of the tops of trees, in places like Guadalcanal.

With effective assistance from the Air Force and with ARVN reinforcements, who were air landed by elements of the 118th and 120th Aviation Companies of the 145th Combat Aviation Battalion onto the recaptured airstrip, we were finally able to defeat the enemy forces and save what was left of the defenders in the Song Be compound. However, the cost, in lives on both sides, was tremendous.

There were several individuals who, quite rightfully, received recognition for their actions that day. As I now recall, however, no one ever got around to writing up Jim Jaggers or Paul Bloomquist for their conspicuously heroic deeds at Song Be. I guess that, when we finally got back home, we were all just too damn tired to put pen to paper. Unfortunately, that occurred more often than I like to admit.

Unrecognized Heroes

As I look back, it becomes clear that there were many brave acts performed by the men in my Platoon and others in the Company that should have been written up and submitted for appropriate awards but for some reason, were not. Some that come to mind,

in particular, were those of Captain Eugene "Gene" Fudge. I don't know whether it was sheer laziness on my part, the procrastination that accompanies the intake of too much booze, or the fact that just about every time I got ready to sit down and write Fudge up for an award, he'd go out and do something else that was equally, or even more, heroic.

Two specific examples of back-to-back acts of bravery performed by Gene, aka: "Marshall" Fudge come to mind. While providing convoy cover for a Vietnamese unit near the town of Cu Chi, Gene and his Wing Man, Warrant Officer Christopher G. "Chris" Hunt, observed a jeep getting blown up by a command detonated mine. A U.S. Advisor happened to be riding in that jeep. The force of the explosion was so great that it hurled the vehicle into the air, severely wounding the American Advisor and killing all the other passengers in the jeep. Simultaneously, the Việt Cong opened up on the convoy from well-camouflaged positions on both sides of the road, with heavy automatic weapons fire. In short, it was a well-executed classic ambush. Without hesitation, Fudge directed Chris Hunt to cover him while he landed his aircraft directly in the killing zone, to save the life of the critically wounded Advisor.

Hunt flew a tight, low-level pattern around Fudge's totally exposed and vulnerable helicopter while his Co-Pilot, Door Gunner and Crew Chief attempted to suppress the enemy. When Fudge set his helicopter down about 10 yards from where the wounded advisor laid, his Co-Pilot, CW-2 Claude Webber—a former Special Forces Medic, bailed out of their exposed helicopter and ran to lend immediate aide to the stricken Advisor. As Webber approached the wounded Advisor, he noted that a large flap of skin had been torn from his forehead and that he was bleeding severely. Staunching the flow of blood with a "field expedient compress" applied on the spot, Webber carried the unconscious Advisor to the helicopter. Fudge, in the meantime, had been calmly sitting on the road, taking multiple hits at point blank range—despite the suppressive fire being laid down by his and Hunt's crews. Somehow, "Marshall" Fudge was again able to defy all odds and miraculously survive the killing zone of a well-organized ambush, thereby, saving the life of an American Officer who, by all rights, should have died on the spot.

Captain Gene Fudge the day before tour completion and departure for the USA.

I vowed that, for such remarkable acts of bravery, I would write up Fudge and his crew for appropriate awards. That night at the bar in our Villa, Gene Fudge, Claude Webber, Chris Hunt and Chris' Co-Pilot, whose name now escapes me, were toasted with many rounds of drinks for their incredible courage. I guess I helped them celebrate a little too much that night and, at least partly because of that, I did not go directly to my room, put pen to paper and write up the recommendations for their awards. I might even have rationalized that I would surely get around to it the next day.

As it turned out, however, the following day an O-1 Pilot was shot down near Song Be. Flying to the scene, Fudge could see that the burning aircraft, with its wounded pilot, had crashed in a very dense bamboo thicket. There was no suitably open place to land and, while in the air, he was taking fire from the same enemy automatic weapons that had shot down the O-1. Consequently, Fudge determined that an immediate and direct decent, down through the bamboo thicket, was the only viable option for saving the severely burned pilot. He knew that time was of the essence and that, as soon as they had an opportunity to react, the Việt Cong would spare no effort to capture the American pilot.

Most people have never encountered the meshing of bamboo and helicopter rotor blades. Some may recall that normal wood, up to a thickness of about 3 or 4 inches can be severed—with relative ease-- by the metal edge of a B-Model Huey's rotor blades. Bamboo, however, is an entirely different matter. Bamboo is tenaciously fibrous and extremely difficult to cut cleanly—except by a very sharp and obliquely applied cutting edge. Therefore, as Gene Fudge descended down into the tall bamboo thicket, the tough bamboo stalks took a terrible toll on his rotor blades.

Disregarding the realization that he would be hard pressed to generate enough lift for a vertical climb from his precarious position, Gene continued his decent and was able to retrieve the still conscious, but badly burned pilot. Somehow, he "finessed" a vertical ascent, up and out of the bamboo thicket, with the helicopter's shortened blades coned upwards as he fought for altitude. To keep the flesh of he pilot's badly burned hands and arms from sloughing off, from rubbing against objects in the back of the helicopter, Fudge directed his Crew Chief to secure the pilot's arms to the "D-Rings" in the aircraft's ceiling, while he flew him to a field hospital. When Gene landed back at our ramp and shut down his aircraft, his rotor blades were each found to be about two feet shorter than normal.

I was definitely going to write-up that act of bravery—just as soon as I finished writing up Gene's landing and picking up the American Advisor who had been blown up by the mine. Looking back, I regret to say that I never got around to writing up either act of heroism. I don't know why I did not. However, because of my failures to do so, I will forever carry an abiding sense of shame. Gene Fudge left Việtnam with a Distinguished Flying Cross, but he should have had at least three of them, or better yet, a couple of Silver Stars. In recalling other acts of bravery where a Silver Star should have been awarded, but was not, the April 1965 actions of Warrant Officer Michael J. "Mike" Davis, in the "loop of the river" at Duc Hoa, will always come to mind. Let me digress a bit, to give you a little background.

Shortly after the Playboys returned from a stint in Da Nang, where we set the "I Corps Pacification Program" back at least a few years, Bill Kast departed Việtnam and was replaced, as the Playboy 17 Fire Team Leader, by First Lieutenant Luther D. "Dee" Young. Shortly after arriving in country, Dee Young had been one of the few individuals who actually witnessed Major Irwin's vicious assault on Major Frank Klein. Had Irwin remained as our commander, he would undoubtedly have summarily transferred Young out of the unit. But fortunately for us, Irwin went, Young stayed and, under the leadership of Major Jim Jaggers and teamed with Mike Davis, as his Wing Man, Young performed superbly and was soon deemed worthy to command the Playboy 17 Fire Team.

Going back a bit further, Mike Davis had become our "Number One Balladeer" on his very first evening in the unit, back in September of 1964. Davis took over from Captain Bob Matlick who, up until then, held this title. Mike walked into the unit's club as a fresh-faced, right out of flight school Warrant Officer. Matlick, then a well-seasoned Fire Team Leader in the Raiders, was playing his bass ukulele and belting out an inspirational song that he had written about brave Gunship Pilots. Davis observed Matlick's performance with rapt attention and, when he had finished, Mike deferentially commented to Matlick that he, "...sure would like to learn the words to that song." Bob

asked if Mike played any music and he responded, again with evident deference, "Well, ahhh, I do pick the guitar a little."

Bob casually commented that he was getting tired of playing and singing, and why didn't Mike go get his guitar and play a tune for everyone? Mike said, "OK" smiled and headed for the Dragon's stairwell to fetch his guitar. As Davis came down the stairs with an obviously expensive Martin guitar, Bob gave a knowing wink to those of us who were in attendance. Davis straddled a bar stool and asked if there was something in particular that anyone wanted him to play. Matlick fixed him with a straight face and said, "Yeah, how about Malagueña?" Mike said, "Yes Sir." bent over his Martin guitar and proceeded to render such a dynamic version of that famous classic that it sent chills up the spines of all present.

When Davis finished his introductory tune, Bob Matlick picked up his bass ukulele, put it in its case, turned to those of us who were in the bar and said, "The King is dead! Long live the King!" Bob and Mike often played together afterwards, but that was the day that the title "UTT Balladeer" passed from Bob to Mike. To this day, Mike Davis holds that title.

In addition to being an accomplished guitar player and vocalist, Mike Davis was an excellent helicopter pilot and, once paired with Dee Young, he became a superb Armed Helicopter Wing Man. Mike's problem, however, was that he just couldn't keep from screwing up. Although he never missed a mission briefing, a pre-flight or a take-off time, he routinely overslept—particularly if we had visiting dignitaries in the Villa. More than anyone else I ever knew, he had a peculiar knack for such things as hovering his helicopter over ditches or where it could blow dust all over things and people, especially VIP's. He was "just on the verge" of incurring some sort of disciplinary action—seemingly most of the time.

While assigned to the Dragon Platoon, Davis was one of those guys who showed up, dressed "to the nines" in a brand new, custom tailored tuxedo, at Marv Myers' Black Tie party. Nothing special about that you say? Well, leave it to Davis to make it different. During the party, a call came that eventually scrambled the whole company for what turned into a major battle. Being in the Fire Team that launched immediately, Mike wound up flying the entire two or three day engagement in his tuxedo—covered, not too discretely, with a flight suit.

Davis all too frequently came up short in both decorum and the ability to stay out of trouble, but he never came up short on courage. One day, while flying as co-pilot with Dee Young in the lead ship of the Playboy 17 Fire Team, they were supporting a Vietnamese operation in the Duc Hoa area. Duc Hoa was a place by a nearly full-circle bend in a major river. In and around "The Loop," as the area was nicknamed, our unit had often been called upon to support operations that almost always went bad. This operation proved to be no exception. The Vietnamese unit's U.S. Advisor, a Captain, had been shot in the head and evacuated, while he was helping to load his wounded Sergeant and some ARVNs onto a Dustoff helicopter. Subsequently, the situation on the ground became pure chaos.

The friendly forces were drastically outnumbered and outgunned by the Việt Cong and there was no one on the ground to communicate with the armed helicopters but one lone U.S. Sergeant named Beasley. Unknown to any of us at the time, Sgt. Beasley

had spent all but four days of his one-year tour as an "administrative-type" in MACV Headquarters. He had absolutely no experience in field or combat operations. He had been relegated to spend two of his last four days in country out in the field with an ARVN unit, as "pay-back" for having pissed-off some MACV Colonel. Looking back, we can see that Beasley and Davis already had rather a lot in common. After darkness fell, Beasley found himself literally in the fight of his life, out of ammunition and about to be overrun by rapidly advancing enemy forces. He radioed his plight to the helicopters overhead.

Dee Young talked calmly over the radio to Sgt. Beasley, trying to "get a fix" on his position so they could attempt rescuing him. Flying low over the totally dark battle area and asking for "Turn Left"–"Turn Right" directions from Beasley, Young received Beasley's last radio transmission, "You're on top of me right now!" Without hesitation, Young plunked the heavily laden armed Huey into a rice paddy and Mike Davis bailed out of the co-pilot's seat in an attempt to locate, and hopefully to save Beasley. Leaving the aircraft with his sidearm, an M-79 Grenade Launcher and a bandolier of 40 mm ammunition, Davis waded through the rice paddies calling out for Beasley. Moving toward the spot from which he thought Beasley had made his last transmission, Davis observed that two enemy machine gun emplacements were engaging other helicopters in the area. He destroyed both of them with the M-79 and continued his search.

Reaching a small canal, he heard an alive but very exhausted Sgt. Beasley splashing into the water on the other side of the canal. Beasley called out that he could not swim. Swimming the canal and grabbing Beasley by the arm, Davis was somehow able to get him across the canal. Davis and Beasley then came under fire from yet another enemy automatic weapons position. Using the 40 mm Grenade Launcher, Mike neutralized that threat and eventually reached the Huey where Dee Young and the rest of their crew were patiently waiting. After helping Sgt. Beasley into the Huey and crawling into his own seat, Mike gave the "Thumbs Up" signal and Dee Young pulled all the power available, to get out of the area as quickly as possible. Just 20 minutes later, a mud-covered Mike Davis was photographed in our Operations Shack, having coffee with a very grateful, and similarly mud-covered, Sgt. Beasley.

Mindful that Mike's act of bravery was deserving of at least a Silver Star, I flew down to the ARVN 21st Infantry Division's Headquarters the following day, to ask if they intended to write Davis up for an award. The American Advisors there assured me that they would definitely do so, if I would provide them with Mike's name, rank, serial number, etc. I had anticipated this need and had all of the pertinent information with me. Thinking that I had done something worthwhile for a change, I returned to Saigon assuming that Mike would get what he deserved.

You can imagine my surprise when, two and a half years later and assigned to the AH-1G HueyCobra New Equipment Training Team (NETT), Mike reported for duty at the Bell Helicopter Plant—without his Silver Star! When I inquired about the award, Mike merely shrugged and said he didn't know what happened, but that he had never received it. This made me very angry, particularly since the two-year statute of limitations, for submitting that award, had expired. Fortunately, however, Jim Jaggers was then the Department of the Army Staff Officer for the AH-1G and he personally

appealed Mike's case to Brigadier General Robert R. Williams. General Williams was scheduled to replace Brigadier General Phillip Seneff, as the First Aviation Brigade Commander in Việt Nam, and agreed that we should try to pursue this award, even though the statute of limitations had run out. With Mike's assistance, I sat down, resurrected and documented his actions on that fateful night in April 1965 and wrote up his award.

One evening, about six months after we returned to Việt Nam with the AH-1G NETT, Davis was riding his Honda through downtown Bien Hoa shortly after the TET Offensive of 1968. An ARVN sentry, who was sleeping at his guard post beside the road, startled by the noise, woke up and shot Davis through the ankle with his M-1 Carbine. Mike was Medivac'd back to the States aboard an Air Force C-141—in typical Davis fashion, with his Martin guitar sharing his litter. While recovering from this wound in Brooks Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Davis was ordered to attend an awards presentation ceremony. His Silver Star was finally presented to him, shortly before he was medically retired from the Army. Looking back at what he did that night in the Duc Hoa area, I probably should have recommended him for a Distinguished Service Cross.

Mike Davis' repeated demonstrations of great courage strongly influenced my decision to choose him as my personal Wing Man, when I took command of the AH-1G NETT. I guess I figured if I couldn't have Paul Bloomquist as my "Million Dollar Life Insurance Policy," I would be just as well off with Mike Davis "flying my wing." I was absolutely sure that no matter what happened to me, Mike would not hesitate to come in and pull me out—or die trying.

"The rest of the story" is that I considered it prudent to always keep Davis close at hand. That way, the next time he screwed up and "irritated someone from any of our Higher Headquarters"—which was, after all, inevitable—I'd be right there, Johnny on the Spot, in the best possible disposition for conducting an effective Damage Control campaign.

The Battle for Dông Xoài

Located deep inside War Zone D, the strategic hamlet of Dông Xoài was the site of one of the bloodiest, hard-fought battles of the entire Việt Nam War. Prior to that battle, our unit had not experienced significant enemy activity in the Dông Xoài area. However, a U.S. Special Forces Camp had recently been established on the site of an old French fort on the Western side of the hamlet. Looking back at that epic battle, which began in the middle of the night of 9 June 1965, it is understandable why the enemy wanted to take control of the intersection of the two major roads in the area. Additionally, overrunning both U.S. and Vietnamese Special Forces camps at the same time, in a well-coordinated attack, would have provided them with a great strategic, as well as psychological, victory.

We were alerted in the middle of the night that the U.S. Special Forces camp was under attack. At the time, we were not aware that a Vietnamese Special Forces camp was near the Eastern end of the hamlet. In fact, we were well into the operation before we learned of that camp's existence. Scrambling every helicopter we could, our unit rushed to the scene of the besieged U.S. camp, which was about to be overrun. As usual, Major

Jim Jaggers was one of the first on the scene, and he took charge of the Army air operations. I had reverted to my earlier position as Operations officer (call-sign: Saber 3). I reinforced First Lieutenant Carl Mangold's Raider Fire Team with a UH-B "Hog"—which was kept at the ready for such occasions.

As in the earlier battle at Song Be, the enemy's forces in the Dông Xoài area were at least of regimental strength. In fact, it is highly likely that some of the elements that had fought at Song Be were also involved in the superbly coordinated attack at Dông Xoài. The Lieutenant manning the radio of the Special Forces camp had the call sign "55 Body Jab." It is a call sign that those present on that fateful day are unlikely to ever forget. I later learned that the Lieutenant was named Williams, but I never had the honor of meeting him, personally. Fortunately, the enemy had not knocked out the radio antenna in the camp, as they often did, so we were able to maintain communications with 55 Body Jab throughout the entire battle. To say that this guy was cool under fire would be an incredible understatement. I only wish it had been possible to tape his radio transmissions. Had they been recorded, I am sure they would have been preserved for posterity in the U.S. Special Forces Museum at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina.

In addition to the few Special Forces soldiers who were defending the camp, there was a small detachment of personnel from a U.S. Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (Seabees) who were also holed-up in the old French fort. In short, it was a very small group holding out against multiple human wave attacks. Without reinforcements, and/or evacuation, their chances of surviving were virtually nil. Knowing that the Special Forces camp would not be able to hold out very long, elements of the ARVN 7th Regiment were air-lifted by the 118th Aviation Company (under the command of Major Harvey Stewart) into a road strip landing zone about two kilometers Northwest of the Camp. Almost immediately after the "slicks" landed the Airborne Soldiers, they were attacked and virtually annihilated by well-positioned enemy forces.

To make matters worse, one American Advisor was killed and another American Advisor (whose name shall also go unmentioned) panicked and requested that he be immediately evacuated. Had he remained on the ground with his unit, and at his radio, he might have called in multiple fighter/bomber and armed helicopter strikes on the enemy. As it turned out, there were armed helicopter and Air Force fighter/bombers stacked up overhead. However, without someone to communicate in English—particularly to differentiate the locations of the remnants of the ARVN 7th Regiment from those of the enemy, the "air assets" were unable to render fully effective assistance. I later served with that American Advisor at Ft. Benning, Georgia. When he learned that I was at Dông Xoài, he could hardly look me in the eye.

During the battle, wave after wave of hard-core, fanatical enemy soldiers hurled themselves against the wire and minefields of the Special Forces camp, only to be beaten back by the defenders of the camp, napalmed and strafed by fighter/bombers, or rocketed and machine gunned by armed helicopters. As one wave would attempt to breach the wire and minefields, they would be decimated. The next wave would come in with ladders to carry out their dead and wounded, and the following wave would hit the wire again. It happened time and time again. Through it all, except when he was refueling and rearming at Phúöc Vinh, Jim Jaggers continued orchestrating armed helicopter and troop

lift operations, as well as identifying enemy positions for Air Force fighter/bomber strikes.

The enemy had planned their operation very carefully. Consequently, the entire hamlet of Dông Xoài was ringed with multiple, well-camouflaged anti-aircraft sites. At one point during the battle, they captured a South Vietnamese armored car and were planning to use its .50 caliber weapons system against our helicopters. Thanks to the keen eye of Warrant Officer "Breeze" Elmore, who figured out that the armored car was no longer in the hands of friendly forces, a well-placed 500 lb. bomb, from a USAF fighter/bomber aircraft, ended that threat. Still, from well-emplaced locations, numerous AA guns were directing near-continuous and devastating fire at the helicopters that ventured anywhere near the hamlet of Dông Xoài.

Air landed reinforcements were critical, if the occupants of the Special Forces Camp were to survive. The few remaining members of the ARVN 7th Regiment, who had not been wiped out during their air assault landing, were in total disarray and in an "escape and evasion" mode. At that time, Lieutenant Colonel Robert "Bob" Cunningham, Commander of the 145th Aviation Battalion, came up on the command frequency and directed me to conduct a reconnaissance of a landing strip that was adjacent to a rubber plantation compound to the North of Dông Xoài. From altitude, the plantation's landing strip appeared ideally suited as a landing zone for reinforcements. However, there was something strange about the scene that prompted me to conduct a low-level reconnaissance. With Carl Mangold and his Wing Man covering me, I made a low, slow drag down the length of the landing strip, seeing no activity whatsoever and receiving no fire.

Despite an appearance of absolute tranquility, there was something unusual about the rubber plantation that caused alarm bells to go off in my head. It dawned on me that here was a compound that should have been occupied by people, dogs, pigs and other domestic animals and yet there was nothing whatsoever moving on the ground. It was like a virtual graveyard. I reported this to LTC. Cunningham, who then asked, specifically, if I had received any fire? I reported to him that I had not, but restated that "something did not seem right" about the rubber plantation compound and its adjoining airstrip.

Colonel Cunningham, the Air Mission Commander, was obviously desperate to get some troops on the ground to reinforce the beleaguered Special Forces camp. Therefore, he made a judgment call that that, since no hostile fire had been received, the strip was most likely suitable for an air assault landing. In retrospect, it was a tragic, although completely understandable, mistake.

As I watched the first flight of helicopters touch down on the airstrip, in trail formation, I observed what appeared to be enemy mortar or recoilless rifle rounds land almost on top of the lead ship. The lead and second aircraft immediately burst into flames, killing all who were on board. Virtually all other aircraft in the flight reported receiving heavy automatic weapons fire from the plantation itself and, to avoid a fate similar to the lead and number two aircraft, they immediately pulled maximum power and broke to the East over the dense rubber trees.

I guess we will never know for sure, but it appeared that the enemy forces had anticipated our use of the rubber plantation's airstrip as a landing zone for reinforcements. They had positioned emplacements well inside the actual "tree lines" of the rubber plantation. They were set-up far enough back into the trees to avoid being observed and to be just beyond the "beaten zone" of the LZ's pre-strike aircraft. However, because of the neat, orderly alignment of the rubber trees, they were able to clearly observe the airstrip and to direct grazing and interlocking fire, at the airlift helicopters as they landed to discharge their troops, from well back in the trees.

Shortly thereafter, I received a call from Jim Jaggers, who was heading back to Phúöc Vinh to refuel and discuss the situation with the senior U.S. and Vietnamese Officers, in a hastily established Forward Command Post that had been set up at that location. Before departing the area, Jaggers told me that Warrant Officer "Breeze" Elmore had observed what appeared to be friendly forces—waving at his helicopter from the Eastern part of the Dông Xoài hamlet. Jaggers asked me to "fly over there and check them out." I wasn't exactly sure what "checking them out" meant. However, if there were any friendly forces on the ground near that part of town, it was reasonably sure that they would most likely not survive much longer without some serious help.

My co-pilot on that fateful day was Captain Duane "Brof" Brofer. Brof was so new to the unit he had not yet received either a proper checkout or an area orientation—before we were scrambled to Dông Xoài. Notwithstanding, like the good soldier that he is, he strapped himself into the left seat of my Huey "Hog" and joined me "For better or for worse." Duane and I had been friends since our days together in the 24th Aviation Company in Augsburg, Germany and I knew him to be a superb pilot. Therefore, I was confident that he could easily take over control of our aircraft, if I were to become incapacitated in any way.

As we approached the Eastern edge of the hamlet, we observed what appeared to be another small triangular fort. These triangular forts were common "left-overs" from when the French had tried to establish their "hedge hog" defense system, before they were defeated by the Viet Minh. They were merely earthen berms with firing positions interspersed along their walls. No sooner had we begun our high reconnaissance, to see if we could observe any friendly activity, we were taken under heavy anti-aircraft machine gun fire from multiple locations. We would learn later, from survivors on the ground, that there were no less than five .50 cal. and 12.7 mm anti-aircraft weapons deployed around that small fort.

We could see some activity below—that appeared to be people waving. However, because we could not communicate with them, we were unable to confirm whether they were friendly. Regardless of what direction we tried approaching the fort, each time we were taken under heavy anti-aircraft fire. After several futile attempts, I decided to use the concealment of the jungle to the immediate North for a low level approach. I directed First Lieutenant Carl Mangold and his Raider Fire Team to cover our aircraft and began my descent over the trees. In spite of the obvious risk, Carl and his Raider Fire Team flew an attack pattern that exposed them to the enemy's multiple anti-aircraft weapon positions. Thus exposed, they were able to fire rockets and machine guns all along my approach path. As we cleared the edge of the jungle and reached the open area, I flared steeply to decelerate and made a near vertical decent into the small fort. Brof followed

me on the controls, in the event that we were about to land in the midst of an enemy force.

I should explain that, since Duane Brofer had only been in-country for a short while, he barely recognized the uniforms of the "regular" South Vietnamese Army. You can, therefore, appreciate his shocked look when we came face to face with a bunch of Vietnamese Special Forces soldiers in "Tiger Stripes"—definitely not a uniform he had ever seen before. I can't exactly remember what Duane said, when we flared to land and all those guys rose up before us, but it was some sort of expletive like "Holy Sh*t!"

As we touched down, the scene before us was appalling. There were wounded Vietnamese Special Forces soldiers virtually everywhere, some lying on litters while others, not as badly wounded, were still manning the berms. While I wound back the throttle, a very "squared away" Vietnamese Special Forces Captain came up to my side of the aircraft. He signaled that he would like to load some of his most seriously wounded soldiers aboard. I nodded to him, and he barked orders to his troops—who immediately began loading the most critically wounded. At one point, a soldier with his arm in a sling tried to come aboard. The Captain slapped him and obviously told him, in no uncertain terms, that his wounds were not serious enough to merit medical evacuation.

While I had some previous experience working closely with Vietnamese Special Forces soldiers and knew them to be first class troops, I could not help being impressed with how this Captain conducted himself. He was in virtually the same position as Colonel Travis at the battle of the Alamo. Very much to his credit, the Vietnamese commander was calm, totally focused and very much in charge. Humbled by his bravery and eager to help in some way, we took on as many wounded as we could safely handle—and then a few more. Only partly because of our overweight condition, we off-loaded every bit of ammunition, rations, medical supplies and water that we were carrying on the Hog. As I prepared to lift off, he motioned that he wanted to write something for me to take back to Phúöc Vinh. I handed him a piece of paper and a ballpoint pen and he calmly drew a diagram of the fort, adding the positions of all the anti-aircraft weapons systems that encircled his pathetic defensive position. He also wrote something in Vietnamese, which I could not read—but which I assumed was a status report for his superiors. I never saw that Captain or any of those brave Vietnamese Special Forces soldiers again. However, I was told by a reliable source that he survived. I do know that in the face of overwhelming odds, he hung tough, did his duty and insured the medical evacuation of only those men who were so badly wounded that they could not man a weapon.

We got back to Phúöc Vinh with our "20 minute fuel" warning light on. Once there, I had a devil of a time locating an ambulance to off-load the critically wounded solders we had on board. I had an even harder time finding somebody of "authority" to receive the note the brave Special Forces Captain had written. I knew that his report was important and, because at that point I didn't really care how obnoxious I had to be to get somebody's attention, I waved down a Vietnamese Lieutenant General, who was accompanied by (then) BG William DePuy—the MACV J-3, and thrust the note into his hand. At first, he appeared visibly annoyed that an American Captain would act so disrespectful toward him. However, as soon as he looked at the note and realized its

importance, he started shouting orders to his subordinates and then went into conference with General DePuy.

While Brofer and I were evacuating wounded from the Vietnamese Special Forces camp, Jim Jaggers had become airborne again and was busy reconnoitering a circuitous flight route—for an airmobile assault force to skirt the anti-aircraft positions and land where they could lend support to the besieged U.S. Special Forces camp. Somehow, despite the many well-emplaced AA positions, Jim was able to "thread the needle" and pick a flight route that enabled a successful troop landing. As Jaggers led slicks from the 118th Aviation Company into the LZ he had selected, Captain Bill Fraker was busy doing something even more spectacular.

The Lieutenant manning the radio (55 Body Jab) was one of the last survivors of the U.S. Special Forces camp. Despite numerous human wave attacks by a dedicated and determined enemy, he had remained at his post and had called in every kind of attack helicopter and fighter/bomber air strike imaginable. However, it was obvious that despite their losses, the enemy forces were determined to overrun the camp at all costs.

When Bill Fraker received the call that the enemy was actually climbing over the earthen berms of the old French Fort, it became clear that 55 Body Jab was about to be over-run and killed or captured. Not hesitating for an instant, Bill "plunked" his UH-1B Hog down in the center of the camp and sat there taking fire while Lieutenant Williams ran to his chopper. The situation was so bad that Fraker's Door Gunner and Crew Chief were machine-gunning enemy soldiers off the berm, and his Co-Pilot was shooting them from his cockpit window with his .45 caliber pistol. Amazingly, Bill Fraker was able to make a successful take-off—with a very grateful 55 Body Jab on board—just before the camp fell into enemy hands. For his incredibly heroic rescue, Bill was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross—an award he definitely deserved. For their actions on that fateful day, Lieutenant Williams (aka: 55 Body Jab) and CM3 Marvin Shields (a Navy Seabee) who, already twice-wounded, helped Williams knock out a machine gun position with a 3.5 inch Rocket Launcher, were both awarded The Medal of Honor. For those of us present on that day, it seemed an appropriate award for men as conspicuously brave as they were.

With the reinforcements air lifted into the LZ that Jim Jaggers had selected, the tide of the battle began to turn. Those enemy forces that were still alive began to collect their dead and wounded and fade away. I don't know how many dead they carried away, on the ladders they had used to breach barbed wire and minefields, but I do know that Americans spent the next few days carrying away dead bodies that they had been unable to recover. Because it is quite hot in Việt Nam, human bodies tend to decompose rather quickly. Therefore, every available helicopter, whether troop transport or gunship, was pressed into service—hauling bodies to a common gravesite. The stench of napalmed bodies is something that one is not likely to ever forget.

As the battle wound down, General Westmoreland, the Commander of all U.S. Military Forces in Việtnam, personally visited the Forward Command Post at Phúöc Vinh. When briefed about the battle and some of the actions of various participants, he immediately began issuing instructions to Captain Dick Hooker, his Aide de Camp, for "impact" awards. Bill Fraker was recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross, as was Major Harvey Stewart, Commander of the 118th Aviation Company, who led the air

mobile assault into the hot landing zone where reinforcements were landed. Jim Jaggers and I were both recommended for Silver Stars, as were some others who participated in that bloody battle. I was happy to see Duane Brofer, my Co-Pilot eventually get a Distinguished Flying Cross for his contribution. In fact, Duane calls me every year, on the 10th of June, to remind me of that fateful day.

We won the battle of Dông Xoài, but not without first paying a tremendous price in the cost of lives. As I think about it, I can't help but admire the courage of those enemy soldiers who hurled themselves onto the wire, braving air strikes and minefields, to get into those camps. I can now perceive how the French defenders must have felt at Dien Binh Phu—when they confronted a similarly dedicated enemy.

Support of Arc Light Missions

June of 1965 saw a dramatic increase in the intensity level of the air war against enemy forces in Việt Nam. Where Air Force fighter/bomber aircraft had previously been the primary means of destroying hardened and well entrenched enemy positions, the introduction of the first B-52 strikes marked a whole new dimension in the use of U.S. air power. These B-52 strikes were given the code name "Arc Light." I am not sure who came up with this name, but to all those witnessing it for the first time, it was a truly awesome and frightening sight.

One evening in late June, Major Jim Jaggers called me into his room to brief me on a special mission he wanted me to perform the following day. He was not able to share much in the way of specifics, except that I was to recon and mark three separate, though contiguous landing zones, all in one pass—if possible. I knew better than to question Jim, who was obviously operating under strict orders to not disclose the exact nature or details of this special operation. Jim further advised that I would be carrying three special, colored smoke marking devices in my aircraft—one for each of the LZ's. One device was to be red, another yellow, and the third one would be green. Jim stated that these devices were U.S. Navy issue, and were designed to remain burning, even if fully submerged in water.

Jim stated that three separate, company sized lifts of Vietnamese Special Forces troops, each accompanied by their American Advisors, would be inserted simultaneously into these landing zones, which had to be, at least generally, adjacent to each other. Adding to the mystery even further, he said the troop lift aircraft would not take off in the direction of landing, but would all do 180 degree turns, in the LZ, and back come out over the path they had entered.

The stage field selected for this operation, was Phúöc Vinh, the same place from which the battle for Dông Xoài had been staged. Shortly after gathering on the stage field at first light, we witnessed a sight that no one present is likely to ever forget. In the direction of Bên Cat, about 20 kilometers to the West, we saw a huge mushroom cloud rising to a height of around 60,000 feet. At first, I thought that someone had made the decision to use a tactical nuclear weapon. However, shortly thereafter, we heard the sound of so many heavy explosions, all so close together, that it sounded like they were coming from some kind of a gigantic automatic cannon. At the same time, the ground beneath our feet began trembling, from the force of these intense explosions.

We later learned that 27 B-52 heavy bombers, based out of Guam, had dropped over 1,750 bombs, each weighing 750 lbs, within a 4 X 4 kilometer area near the town of Bên Cat. Gazing at the cloud of debris raised by these explosions, I began to understand why it would be necessary for the troop lift aircraft to come out of their landing zones over their entry paths. It would have been impossible for any aircraft to fly out through the tremendous cloud of dust and debris caused by the B-52 strike.

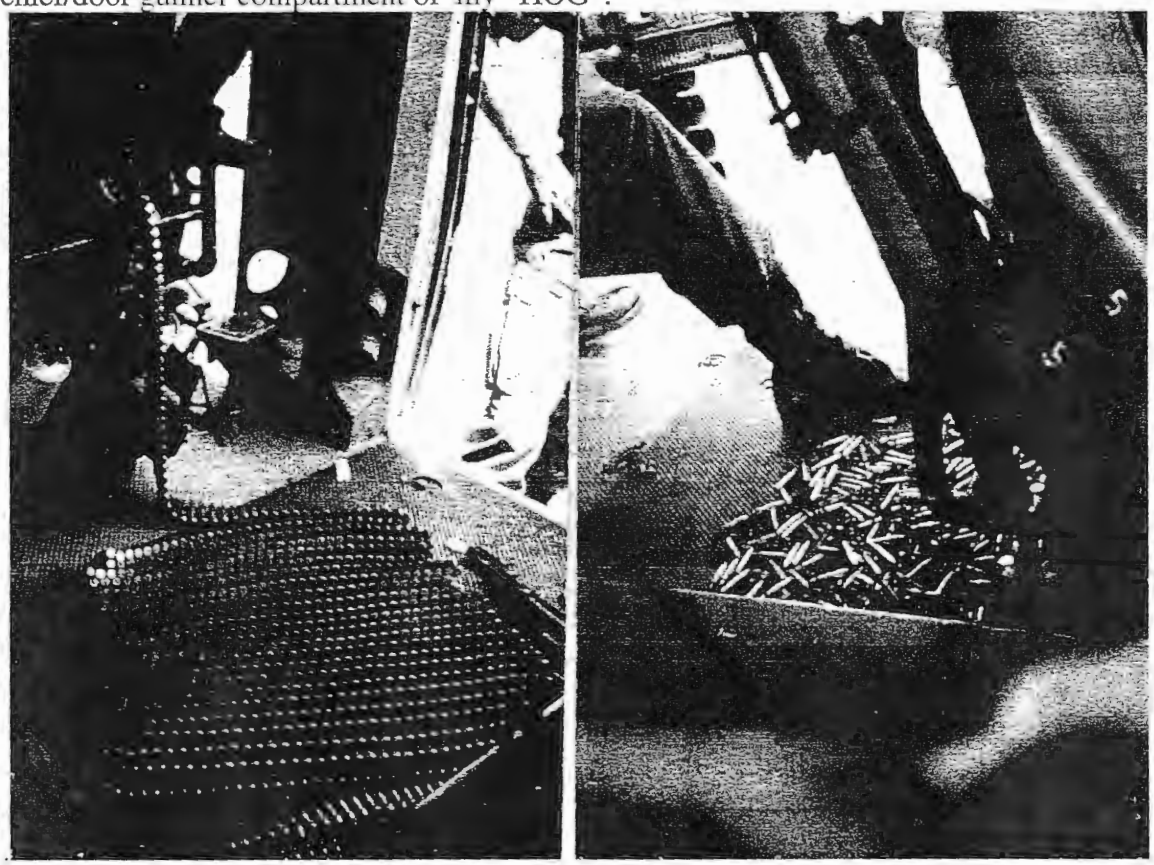
Flying to the landing zones I was to mark, I was appalled at the horrific sight before me. Fortunately, the wind was blowing the debris cloud to the South, and I was able to make a single elongated pass from West to East, which enabled me to drop the special smoke canisters in all of the intended landing zones. Unlike normal smoke grenades, these marking devices were activated by lanyards tied to the floor of my aircraft. Seconds later, with the smoke devices burning brightly, the three troop lifts touched down, discharged their troops and, after their 180 degree hovering turns, took off in the opposite direction of their landing. So far, so good—or, at least so we thought.

During the previous night, 30 of the B-52 bombers had initially taken off from Guam to perform that that first "Arc Light" mission. However, two of the bombers collided shortly after take-off. A third B-52 crashed over Việtnam, with the 27 remaining aircraft performing this historic "first of a kind" mission. The eerie thing about B-52 strikes is that one rarely sees the aircraft involved, since they usually drop their bombs from altitudes over 30,000 feet.

Using 750 lb. bombs and with the 27 B-52s carrying an estimated 65 bombs per aircraft, there was well over a million pounds of ordnance being dropped in the raid. Consequently, the "planners" assumed that, after such a horrendous strike, there would be little left of the enemy forces on the ground. How wrong they were! Even though the jungle had been literally eviscerated by the bombs, when the Vietnamese Special Forces troopers and their American Advisors charged into the jungle they found a great surprise. It seems that the technique for "carpet bombing" as we later called it, had not been perfected at that stage of the war. The bombs had been dropped in parallel "strips" which did not join each other. In the "strips" where the bombs had fallen, the terrain looked very much like the craters on the moon. However, between them, there were other strips of jungle that were virtually untouched. It was within these strips of "un-bombed jungle" where the enemy showed a level of courage and dogged determination that earned them the profound respect of all who were involved. In the aftermath of that operation, U.S. Special Forces Advisors reported that, despite bleeding from their ears and noses and ruptured capillaries in their eyes, the surviving Việt Cong forces continued to place heavy fire on the Special Forces units attempting to sweep through the area.

I still have a home-made Việt Cong rifle, with an engraved plate, which was presented to me, shortly after that strike, by (then Lieutenant) Ken Kubasik. Ken gave me this memento in appreciation for assisting in his extraction from a very hot pick up zone. Kubasik was the last one to be extracted from the LZ and, to neutralize the automatic fire directed at the "slick" that picked him up, I had to fire rockets within a few meters of his aircraft. Despite the tremendous pounding and horrendous casualties that "Charlie" had taken as a result of that first B-52 strike, at the end of the day: He still owned the terrain.

Another reason why I recall that day so very well is because of another incident. It was something that I can laugh about, now 38 years later, but it did not seem the least bit funny at the time. Virtually all of the door gunners assigned to our unit came from the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii. When I took off that morning, I told my Door Gunner, a sharp young Sergeant, and my Crew Chief that I would give them the word to test their machine guns as soon as we crossed the river on Southern edge of War Zone D. This was common practice in the "Hog" because we did not have flexible machine guns, and we depended heavily on the proficiency of our Door Gunners and Crew Chiefs. Because the Door Gunner was an "FNG" I also told him that after checking his machine gun I did not want him to fire unless he was so directed or if we were receiving fire. He "Rogered" my order and we proceeded toward the objective area. The pictures below are of the crew chief/door gunner compartment of my "HOG".



"Before" Crew Chief/ Door Gunner Position "After"

After verifying their machine guns were, in fact, operable, the Door Gunner and Crew Chief settled down to await my commands. Suddenly, I heard a bang from the rear, and the embarrassed door gunner came on the intercom and apologized for inadvertently firing his weapon. With only ten days remaining in my tour of duty, I guess I was a bit jumpy and I "chewed on him" a bit for his mistake.

Later, while flying over the area where the B-52's had dropped their 750 lb. bombs, I heard another bang. Thinking that my "over eager" Sergeant had popped-off still another round, I got on intercom and said "Damm it, I told you to hold your fire until

fired upon or until I tell you to shoot." In a very calm and somewhat righteous voice, the Sergeant said "Sir, I didn't fire my weapon," Confused, with his response, I looked down at the floor between my legs and, low and behold—about two inches forward of both the edge of my seat and my "family jewels"—I saw a neat bullet hole. Glancing up at the "green glass" over my head, I saw the exit hole from the bullet that almost turned me into a Soprano. I apologized to the Sergeant, who I believe was secretly delighted that this "crabby-assed" Captain had almost gotten his "come-uppence."

When I returned that evening, elated at having all of my most important parts still intact, I commented to Major Jaggers that for a guy with 10 days to go before his rotation, today's incident was cutting it a "bit fine." Jim chuckled and said "Heck, that's why I quit flying yesterday." Still in a jocular tone, he said that he had "a great mission" for me for my last 10 days in country. I was skeptical of any "great missions" that Jim Jaggers might think up but, at that point, I was in a listening mode. Jim said that our unit had been given the task of providing an Escort Officer for a Senior Vice President from Bell Helicopter, a guy named Hans Weichsel, who would be traveling around the country for the next week or so. Weighing the alternative of possibly taking another hit too close for comfort, I readily accepted the job.

Looking back, I still laugh when I think about the first morning I went to the Caravelle Hotel, in downtown Saigon, to pick up Hans Weichsel. I checked the desk for his room number, but when I knocked at the door, a small Vietnamese man answered it. It was obvious he was not Hans Weichsel, so I went back down to the desk and asked why? The concierge apologized and said "Oh, Mr. Weichsel. He move last night—to different room." And so it was for the entire time that Hans stayed at the Caravelle. Apparently, the guy who gave Hans his pre-departure security briefing at Bell Helicopter had scared the living hell out of him. Part of that briefing had been that, just to play it safe, he should not stay in the same room two nights in a row. I later learned that Hans was also sleeping in the bathtub, because the security guy had told him that a bathtub could attenuate any shrapnel that might come from mortar or RPG rounds.

I can honestly say that I never enjoyed myself so much as during those days I spent escorting Hans. One day he told me that he had a great hankering for some good seafood and asked if I knew of a good seafood restaurant. I told him that just a couple of blocks away was the Mekong Floating Restaurant—clearly one of the finest seafood restaurants in all of South East Asia. Hans was very happy to hear my enthusiastic endorsement and we started down the street toward the Mekong restaurant.

Now, those of us who have known Hans Weichsel recognize that he was a bit of a character who never met a stranger. Hans got to know people all over the world and Việt Nam was not to be an exception. While proceeding toward our restaurant, which was still about two blocks away, we encountered a U.S. Army Colonel whom Hans had met somewhere. Chatting briefly with the Colonel, the latter tried to persuade us to join him for a great Chateau Briand steak and some good French red wine at the William Tell Restaurant. Hans politely demurred, saying that he would love to do that some other time, but that he really had his heart set on some great seafood.

Just then we heard two explosions, the first not quite as loud as the second. As we looked in that direction, a man came around the corner screaming and bleeding profusely from the face and neck. He kept babbling in broken English that someone had blown up

the Floating Restaurant! I will never forget the deadpan look on Hans' face as he said, in an almost comical voice "Do you have any other good ideas for a seafood place?" Apparently, the VC had thrown a grenade in the bow of the boat, and when everyone ran toward the gang-plank at the rear, they caught them with a Claymore mine. I later heard reports that 80 people died in that attack.

Aside from these somewhat humorous incidents, Hans Weichsel performed a very important mission while he was in Việtnam. Ostensibly, the purpose of his visit was to show Bell Helicopter support for the almost 3,000 Hueys that were being operated in-country. However, his real purpose was actually quite different. While paying a courtesy call on Brigadier General Jack Norton, the U.S. Support Command Commander, Hans chatted about this and that for a few minutes and then he reached down into his briefcase for some 8 X 10 color photos. Sliding them over to General Norton, he said "What do you think of that, Jack? We call it the HueyCobra"

As I peered over Hans' shoulder, I got my first glimpse at an aircraft that I would eventually share the privilege of introducing into combat. General Norton was clearly impressed with these photos, particularly the head-on shot where the 36" wide Cobra was sitting side-by-side, next to a "B Model" Huey. Since General Norton had pinned a Silver Star on me within the past week, he knew me and asked "What do you think about this aircraft Jarrett?" My response was short and unequivocal. I said "Sir, we need it as soon as we can get it." General Norton nodded and said to Hans "I agree. Let's see if we can get an appointment with "Westy" and see if we can sell him on it." General Westmoreland was COMUSMACV (Commander U.S. Assistance Command, Vietnam) and the ultimate approval authority for anything that was urgently needed to prosecute the war.

Fortunately, I had attended the Infantry Career Course with General Westmoreland's Aide De Camp, Captain Richard "Dick" Hooker. So, I phoned Dick and made an appointment for Hans and General Norton the following day. I knew General Westmoreland from my days with the 101st Airborne Division. Fortunately, he didn't remember me. "Fortunate" because: The last time he'd seen me, I had just dropped him and his Aide, Captain Weldon Honeycutt, via parachute from an L-20, into a rather bristly stand of pine trees at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky. The Army was experimenting with the wearing of shorts, and both the General and his Aide were so attired.

General Westmoreland shared General Norton's enthusiasm for the new HueyCobra and told Hans Weichsel that he would lend his support for the Army's procurement of the Cobra—If Bell Helicopter could assure the Army that it could be delivered to Việtnam within two years. Looking back now, on that mid-August day in 1965, I am quite sure that Hans wasn't "authorized" to accept that challenge. However, without even blinking, he assured Westy that Bell could and would meet his scheduling requirement. The rest of the story is history. On the 14th of August, 1967, I had the honor of being part of the Army's AH-1G New Equipment Training Team that unloaded the first production batch of six HueyCobras at Bien Hoa Airbase, Republic of Việt Nam. I'll save "the details" of that remarkable experience for another time-- and another story.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MAJOR JOESPH N. (JIM) JAGGERS
Company Commander
Saber 6
November 64-June 65
SS (1 OLC), LOM (3 OLC), DFC (4 OLC), BS w V (1 OLC), AM (44 OLC 1 w V),JSCM, ARCOM (3 OLC), AFCOM, PUC (1 OLC), MUC, GS Badge, JCS Badge, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry w Palm, CIB w Star

Living the Legend

I have never really wanted to write about my Saber 6 experiences, or any of my other war experiences for that matter. But over the years many people have urged me to do just that, people I trust and respect, including my good friend Dick Jarrett and my ultra-persuasive wife. I felt reluctant for many reasons, not the least of which was that telling war stories is tricky. Doing so reminds me of the old poem about the blind men and the elephant; the war story each of us tells depends on just which part, or parts, of the war we got in our grasp. Four men can go through the same battle in the same helicopter and yet each of their stories will reflect an entirely different experience. So, I guess I'll just tell you about the part of the elephant *I* got hold of during my time in Vietnam.

The Legend Arises

The Saber 6 legend was birthed in the minds of a few pioneers of Army Aviation, rather coincidental with the arrival of the UH-1A in the Army inventory. It toddled and grew teeth on the drawing boards and in the shops at Fort Rucker during the mid 50's, and entered puberty in 1957, when the Army transferred most of the Army Aviation Center armed helicopter assets to the 2nd Infantry Division at Fort Benning, and organized them into D Troop of the 7th Cavalry Squadron. Eighteen months of experimentation and training produced a never-seen-before Division Aerial Reconnaissance and Support (ARST) capability, which the Army Field Forces was ready to incorporate into TO&E units. In 1959, the Infantry Branch rejected the ARST as an Infantry capability (abdicated the throne, in my personal opinion), and the Armored Branch became the proponent of armed helicopters. Three-plus years later, in 1962, Major Robert Runkle arrived in Vietnam with the UTT (Utility Tactical Transport Company). Shortly thereafter, his executive officer Major Ivan Slavich assumed command. Somewhere along the way, the commander of the UTT adopted the call sign of Saber 6, and that call sign lived on in successor units, including the 68th, 197th and

334th Aviation Companies.

Jim Jaggers Commander 68th and 197th Armed Helicopter Companies

Technically speaking, the name Saber 6 was the radio call sign for only the commanders of the unit. Over the years, however, the name became a symbol for the whole unit, a unit noted for the innovative use of helicopter-borne firepower, finely honed aviator skills, and aggressive support of the ground soldier; a unit whose arrival on the scene of a battle meant a reshaping of that conflict; a unit that stood as the last hope for any beleaguered ARVN advisor or wounded soldier; and an all important weapon, as the U.S. Army learned how to conduct counterinsurgency operations against a skilled and worthy opponent, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA).

To paint a more complete picture of the part I played in the Saber 6 story, I should probably start with a little of my background. I enlisted in the Army Air Corp in 1946 as

a 17-year-old high school dropout. World War II had just ended and the soldiers were returning with tales of a GI Bill that would pay for their college educations. I came from a really a poor community in Oklahoma. When I was about 9 years old, my dad ran off and left my mom alone with five kids. My grandparents did a good job of helping my mom get us raised, but I couldn't see much of a future for me there. I'd learned enough in high school to know I needed a college education if I wanted to get out of that situation. I finally talked my mom into signing the papers so I could enlist in the Army Air Corp. I was sent to Okinawa with the 301 Fighter Wing, and ended up working in operations at the time that the Chinese nationalists were being run out of China. My squadron was assigned to go to China and pick up these nationalists and fly them to Formosa. As a really junior guy I mostly worked late at night along with a young Lieutenant named Dave Parker who had just been graduated from West Point. We spent long hours together, and I got to asking him about his experiences at West Point. Meanwhile, back in Oklahoma, my mom had begun working for an oilman who knew Senator Elmer Thomas from Oklahoma. My mom's boss got the senator interested in me, and Lt. Parker got our squadron leader to request a presidential appointment for me. So I got to attend the U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School in Newburgh, NY, where they prepared people to enter West Point. Lucky for me they didn't have computers at that time, and no one figured out until after I had passed the entrance exam that I didn't have my high school diploma yet. So, I was able to take the GED, and then my high school agreed to give me a diploma, and off I went to West Point.

Right after being graduated from West Point in 1952, I was sent to Korea. I went over as a Second Lieutenant, then was promoted a few months later to First Lieutenant and got command of my first rifle company. Most of my classmates from West Point did not get to Korea before the war ended in 1953. For those of us who did, it was a great training ground and really influenced what we were able to achieve in our careers. A little combat experience takes you a long way toward getting recognized in the service.

Several years later, while attending the Army Command and General Staff course at Fort Leavenworth, I decided to become a counterinsurgency expert. I had read books about the British and their counterinsurgency roles in Southeast Asia, and I wrote a paper on the subject for the masters program. The paper talked about what was happening with the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan at the time. I considered it a pretty insignificant little paper, but over the years I've been amazed by the number of phone calls and requests for more information that piece of writing has generated. Since I thought I knew something about counterinsurgency, it seemed like Vietnam might be just the place to use that knowledge … so I volunteered to go.

I had it all worked out in my mind where I thought I might be assigned and how the year's tour might unfold. When I received orders to the 120th Aviation Company, 145th Battalion, I was naïve enough to think those orders were etched in stone. I went prepared to command a *Slick* company (a helicopter company whose aircraft have no mounted guns). When I arrived *in-country*, however, another major had gotten there ahead of me, and, since he had a record equal to mine, they put him in the position I'd expected to get.

With no immediate position open for me, I met with then Col. Jack Klingenhagen, who had taken over personnel assignments for all aviators assigned to Vietnam. He put

me into a slot as the Command Safety Officer—a holding position until something else opened up—and he told me, "That's a good job for you while you wait."

In my mind Col. Klingenhagen, who was Gen. Westmoreland's brother-in-law, got me involved in an assignment as safety officer that I thought might cost me any future jobs. As a safety officer, I didn't have a desk to get to every morning or anybody to command.

I needed transportation to get up there on that particular night, and Captain Wilfried "Bill" Kast, another headquarters flunky, showed up and said, "We'll go down to UTT and get an aircraft." When we got there, I ran into Captain Dick Jarrett. He and I knew each other from our flight school days, so I just chuckled when he tried to harass me by saying, "Too bad you're not good enough to be in the UTT." My friendship with Dick, a great combat commander, has grown stronger and stronger through the years.

Taking Command of UTT

Lots of people didn't think I was off to a good start in Vietnam, but Col. Klingenhagen thought I was, and he was the kind of guy that counted.

After about six weeks in the safety officer job, I heard about some problems in the UTT. Seems it was a unit that had gone wild, with lots of unprofessional activities going on; even people getting killed who should never have been put in that kind of danger. I was out of Saigon on another assignment when the commander of the UTT punched the 145th Aviation Battalion's executive officer. Col. Klingenhagen and others decided that Irwin had to go, and they selected Captain Ed Riley to replace him. As the unit's Executive Officer, it was natural for Riley to get this assignment initially. But then it was decided that I should take over … and the politicking began. Some folks from the UTT came up and talked to Klingenhagen about what a wonderful guy Riley was, and they said for goodness sakes "don't send Jaggers down there."

I never knew just why Riley fell out of favor, but when Klingenhagen told me, "I'm sending you down to command the UTT," he gave me two or three days to get my act together and finish up some things I was doing for him. This gave me a chance to catch my breath and go drink a beer with some people I'd gotten to know. Then I went down and we had a change of command. Riley stayed on as my executive officer for just a short while.

I tried to make the transition as quiet as I could, but I still heard comments from some of the guys like: "You might not think this a good way to do something, but this is the way we do it." They were dead right … I didn't think much of the way they were used to doing things. Everything had to be changed, and Dick Jarrett and Joe Jobe, who had taken over as operations officer, had a lot to do with helping me carry out those changes. Jobe was as disgusted as I was with the way things had been done. As it turned out, lots of the guys in the unit were walking the walk and talking the talk, but they didn't really believe in what they were doing. Mostly, they just needed to hear a better way of getting the job done. All of our pilots were good at what they did; they were all there to do their jobs, and I never saw fear or *quit* in any of them. They were brave soldiers who could put the rockets and machine gun fire just where they wanted to; they just needed to be corralled and told how best to channel their effort. So I spent the better part of 60 days

figuring out what we were capable of and how we should apply this to support the ground soldier, which was why we were there in the first place. At the time, the Army command didn't really command anything other than the UTT (68th) that they could actually send out to shoot at something. The only combat forces consisted of Vietnamese forces and some U.S. advisors.

When I arrived at UTT, I saw no reason to rush into things, so I took my time getting to know the unit and the equipment, flying in all the various seats to learn what each position required. I hadn't planned on really inserting myself into the unit until we had a company-wide operation, which happened a couple of months after I got there, when all available helicopters were called in to help a South Vietnamese convoy of armored personnel carriers that had been ambushed near a place called Ba Ria. Because I'd been rather quiet up to that point, just watching and learning how everyone interacted, I guess I surprised some people when I came on the command frequency that day and began directing armed helicopter and fighter/bomber strikes and marking targets with rockets from my aircraft. That was probably where I first began to get my reputation as a calm, cool guy. In reality, I was always just as scared as anybody who's being shot at, but I attempted to put forth an image of someone who could keep his head and get the job done. I had learned just how important this composure was from talking to the U.S. advisors who were frequently on the ground at the focal point of battles when we arrived. We would frequently pick these guys up and bring them back to our villa and talk to them about what sort of help they needed from us. It turned out the thing they needed the least was some agitated pilot who was getting shot at yelling and screaming on the radio about what was going on. That approach got everybody wound up but it didn't contribute anything to getting on with the fight. Plus, a bunch of excited guys tend to do dumb things. So, we made some specific changes regarding radio communication during battle. To start with, I insisted that we keep all radio transmissions brief and that we roger all transmissions (as opposed to the senseless mike click used by many). I also decided we would be more effective if the fire team leaders were the only ones heard over the radio during a battle. So, other than giving fire commands prior to an attack, the only time our guys said anything over the radio was when they were receiving fire, or were on fire. When the Saber 6 unit arrived on the scene with a flight of 20 aircraft, the only voice anyone heard over the radio was mine. Guys who were not in our unit have said that this one characteristic about our unit inspired the most awe in other units. They said the fact that all 20 of these heavily armed aircraft were so obviously under the control of one person was impressive. Once the battle was joined, only leaders talked, and followers rogered.

Once everyone understood the reasons behind this approach to radio communication, the whole unit became much more effective and professional, and the advisors on the ground really appreciated us even more than before. When these advisors would come back to Saigon, they often wanted to meet with and thank the pilots and door gunners who supported them in battle. In fact, often they would go on R & R and bring back fancy whiskey and other small gifts for the pilots.

Another change that really added to the professionalism of Saber 6 was when we standardized fire commands, adopting ones similar to those used by Armor or Artillery crews. Prior to the change, listening to a fire team leader describe a target to be engaged

was pretty frustrating. One heard useless descriptions such as, "Hey 14, see that hooch down there? Let's put a couple of rockets in it." After we changed to standardized commands, the exchanges sounded more like this: "Saber 7 this is Saber 6. Fire Mission -- Enemy Sampan three o'clock low -- expend 50 percent rockets, two passes -- North to South --break right." Clear communication like this eliminated confusion and cut down on verbose radio transmissions. I suspect it also added to the Saber 6 reputation for cool professionalism.

Twelve Cardinal Rules

When I first took over the UTT, I heard pilots bragging about taking hits from enemy fire. I tried to quickly turn that around so instead these same pilots spent time figuring out what they could do to *avoid* getting hit in the first place. To help them do that, we developed something called *The 12 Cardinal Rules for Armed Helicopter Employment*, which not only laid out guidelines for the tactics to be used in battle, but also dealt with mission debriefings and radio communications, as I mentioned above. I assigned Lt. Jim Damron, a bright young officer who wrote well and really understood tactics, to write these rules down.

The 12 Cardinal Rules

1. Do not fly in the dead man zone without a reason.
2. Always make a high reconnaissance first.
3. Never fly directly behind another aircraft.
4. Never fly parallel to any feature.
5. Do not over-fly the target.
6. Always assume the area is hot.
7. Never fire until you have the friendly forces identified.
8. Avoid firing over the heads of friendly troops.
9. Fire only when you have a worthwhile target.
10. Always know the situation.
11. Brief your elements, to a man.
12. Take your time.

Simple but effective, these Cardinal Rules became the core of our training and combat operations. Consequently, we improved immensely as a combat team and our hits and losses declined.

Leading By Example

When it came to leading the Saber 6 unit, I tried to always be friendly and approachable, but as Dick Jarrett so aptly described it, I "never got down in the mud and the blood and the beer." There was a good reason for that: I was the one guy who *had* to be alert enough any time of the day or night to select someone to fly a fully armed helicopter into battle. I made sure that on any given day we always had one whole platoon in which nobody was drinking. I didn't spend that much time in the club because I found it hard to be in there and not come across as a prude. But some people might be surprised at how much I actually knew about what went on—largely because I wasn't drinking.

As a leader, I tried to use sound tactics, good judgment, and a disciplined approach to the accomplishment of our mission. When I told someone to do something, they could trust that 1) it was something I would do myself, and 2) the assignment was well thought out and made sense. I hoped, by my example, to promote confidence and initiative in my subordinates. I was always a hands-on commander, but I tried not to stifle the initiative of my subordinates. I would assign a man a task to do, and then expect him to carry it out to the best of his ability. I've been told that this approach promoted a quest for excellence on the part of my subordinate commanders, as well as a keen sense of competition regarding whose platoon could be most professional. Consequently, teamwork and mission accomplishment became more important than taking hits, burning hooches and cutting ears. I know I was a lot less flamboyant than some leaders, but I like to think that my approach helped establish a professionalism that led other units to really respect Saber 6.

I guess I also tried to lead by example, although I'm not sure I was aware of that at the time. For instance, I always made a low, slow drag down the center of a potential LZ (landing zone), before recommending a landing direction to troop transport helicopter leaders. Although I put myself at risk on many occasions by doing this, I believe my doing so gave the men who had to land in these often *hot* LZ's a sense of confidence. They figured if the commander of the UTT/68th/197th had put his personal safety on the line to insure the zone was safe, then it must be okay to land there. I've been told that my doing this "put steel in the backbone of many who would otherwise find an excuse to break off and abort a landing."

Friendly (?) Fire

We talk a great deal about the people who actually did the flying, but the enlisted men also played a very important part in Saber 6 and its success. They were the ones who had to take these aircraft that had been shot up, over-shifted, and put through hard landings and make them flyable for the next day. Each aircraft had a crew chief assigned to it to oversee these repairs, and each of these men played a crucial role. These same men also served as our door gunners, and they saved our lives many times, as they actively manned the machine guns in the doors.

We had a young gunner specialist (crew chief)—married, with a young child—who was very popular in the unit. But he was pretty much a hell-raiser and drinker who wanted to be like the officers and pilots. One night he broke some rules, and although I can't recall exactly what he did, the next morning the First Sergeant came and told me what had happened. I knew we had to take some immediate action, so I called him in and reduced him one or two grades, which had a major impact on his pay. An hour or so later, he came back and told me about his wife and baby at home and how they wouldn't have enough to live on if we reduced his pay. He claimed that neither his parents nor his wife's parents had any extra money with which to help them. I found the tearjerker aspect of his story less interesting than the fact that he was so concerned about the welfare of his young family. So often we had trouble getting these young soldiers to think at all about their families back home. Many of them, who knew they would be gone for a year, thought they didn't have to worry about their families back home. They figured it was

their wife's problem to take care of everything while they were gone. So it pleased me to see this young man's concern, and I agreed to suspend this punishment for him. Unfortunately, he had already been relieved of his job, so I told him he would have to fly with me for the time being so that I could watch him. He agreed to that, and was with me when I explained the situation to the First Sergeant, who apparently misinterpreted what I said. Within the hour, I learned I would be flying with a fire team up to a roadblock. I headed to the airstrip, and got briefed on the way. When we arrived at the airstrip, I was met by this young specialist who I had disciplined earlier. Seems the First Sergeant thought I meant that *every time* I flew, this specialist would be the door gunner.

We took two aircraft and flew up to the site where the Viet Cong, who had set up the roadblock, had only six troops situated in a big open rice paddy at a little bridge. We landed a copter on either side of the troops, and they knew they had to give up. The crew chief and I got out and disarmed them, tied their hands, and put them in the helicopters to take them to a nearby post to drop them off. Just before we took off, a weapon discharged and two rounds came through the back of my seat. I felt the impact of one round in my back, but my flak vest kept the bullets from doing any real damage. The second round hit Captain Gene Fudge in the knee or calf - a minor injury. I turned and saw that the young crew chief had fired the rounds. I fussed at him about being careless with his weapon. When we got up to drop our prisoners off, I glanced back and saw that the young gunner was a trembling mess. I got him aside to find out what was wrong, but he wouldn't respond. So Fudge talked to him. It seems the young soldier was in a panic thinking that what he had done probably meant that I would revoke the suspension on his punishment. More importantly, he kept thinking that if he had accidentally killed me, the Army would have assumed he did so because of our earlier encounter.

Although some people thought I should have been harsher with the young man, I just laughed the whole incident off; I knew it was an accident. Col. Klingenhagen was one person who thought I should have dealt with the guy more severely. He even made a visit to me at the UTT just to make sure I wasn't being bullied by somebody. But my approach to the incident went a long way towards putting me on the right path with the enlisted men in the company.

Song Be

In his chapter of this book, Dick Jarrett gives an excellent description of the Vietnamese Special Forces Camp called Song Be and the battle that took place there in early May of 1965. As I recall, we arrived just before daylight that day and did a lot to help the survivors get out of there. We didn't have anyone from the UTT killed; but two US advisors died there. I believe some people from the UTT received medals for that operation and I may have been one of them, but I don't know what particular incident may have triggered that. What does stick out in my mind was an incident with a downed US pilot. Enemy forces had been driven back south of town beside the Song Be airstrip, but we were still flying reconnaissance and doing some shooting. An Air Force pilot came on the radio and reported that he had taken a round though his fighter aircraft and he was going to have to land at the Song Be airstrip. We knew that was the worst place he could choose to set down at the time. But he said he was landing, so we put down some suppressive fire on the point where we'd located the most enemy, and they quit shooting

momentarily. Because of the way the strip was laid out, the pilot was landing downhill and also downwind, which is a no-no when landing. He figured that based on the direction he'd seen the enemy fire coming from that landing this way would keep him away from that fire. As he rolled to a stop, I landed beside him. He quickly jumped out, ran over and jumped into our helicopter. I thought, "This is going well." But then he jumped back out and ran back to his aircraft. We were beginning to draw a little fire and I thought we should probably be getting back in the air. Then he came running back with a paper in his hand. It turned out he'd left his SOI (Signal Operating Instructions) in the aircraft. This very confidential document could cause damage if it fell into enemy hands. As soon as he got back in, we took off, with lots of fire coming at us. My wingman had stayed airborne while we were on the ground and his aircraft took two or three hits … however, despite these hits, we all made it out unscathed.

Jim Jaggers (with the cigar) and A1E pilot Capt George just after rescue. CWO Bobby Smith looks on from the cockpit.

Beginning during WWII, we started learning how terribly U.S. prisoners were treated by their Asian captors (across the board); so one prime thought in everybody's mind was don't get captured. If someone did get captured, everyone did whatever they could to free him. I've always believed that the best time to do anything is *now*. The best time to get a divorce is when you first think seriously about it; the best time to pick up a soldier who's been shot down is right now … without asking anyone about it.

In this incident, we felt pretty sure the Viet Cong had captured this Special Forces soldier and taken him into Cambodia, where we weren't supposed to go. My bosses asked

me how I felt about flying there and I said, "I'll go to Cambodia as quick as anywhere else."

Someone suggested that our best chance of finding this guy would be to neutralize this little area, not over 200 acres, and we knew we would need some time to accomplish this. It was decided that we would use a powder called CS, similar to tear gas. When this CS powder gets in the air, you just can't breathe or operate. The plan was to go in and drop lots of this stuff via grenades. We would then send in a small force, including some of my door gunners, to find this guy.

We quickly realized that everybody involved on our side would need a gas mask, and it would be impossible to fly without one. We also knew that if the operation was to succeed, we had to keep the whole plan a secret. So Capt. Jarrett, acting as disciplinarian, had been beating everybody on the head, exhorting them to not say anything to anyone that might suggest we would be using CS powder. They were also told not to mention the gas masks, as that could also give away the plan. We held a practice run the night before to make sure we could pull this off. To insure that we didn't give anything away, we told everyone involved just to not talk at all. We successfully completed the practice run, and felt good about how things had gone. Then suddenly, over the radio loud and clear, we heard Jarrett ask his wingman, "How do I sound with my gas mask on?" We all got a good laugh about that.

Recognition from the President

Out west of Saigon a ways sat a little town called Duc Hoa, with maybe 30 grass hooches and a bigger stucco-like building that seemed to have some type of reinforcement built into it. Up close you could see it had all types of gunfire holes lacing the sides of the building. The town sat right on a bend of the river that served as a main infiltration route for the North Vietnamese into the Mekong Delta. The U.S. had an advisor out there with the ARVN force, and on two different occasions that I can recall, a fairly large NVA force came through there... and that's when the rockets and weapons fire would start. We'd be called out in the middle of the night to go help. The amount of firepower was unusual and these fights lasted past daylight and well into the day, which should have tipped me off that these were not just the Viet Cong that we were fighting, but hardcore regular troops.

The first fight I was in at Duc Hoa, the fire team leader in the air learned enough that he could tell the resistance was so strong that we would need the whole company. We called the advisor to ask where he was located, and he said, "Well, I'm in the burning hooch," referring to the stucco-like building. Sure enough, when I got out there I saw some smoke billowing from that building. Plus, most of the fighting seemed to be taking place within 500 yards of that structure. It seems that's where the advisor had his headquarters, along with his radio antenna, so it always took heavy fire.

During these battles at Duc Hoa, we all had the opportunity to talk to this advisor in the burning hooch. At the end of one of these battles, we learned that the 38th NVA Regiment had infiltrated through that area. This provided us with significant knowledge to use in the war against the NVA, and we were rewarded for our efforts with the Presidential Unit Citation (PUC), an award that's presented not to an individual but to an entire unit/organization for some significant action.

Major Jim Jaggers and the 197th Armed Helicopter Company receive the Presidential Unit Citation from Gen William Westmoreland, Commander US Military Group, Vietnam. BGen John Norton, Commander US Army Support Group, Vietnam looks on.

For some reason, I received the original of that award, which seemed a bit unusual. I'd never heard of a company commander getting the award, and I received no instructions about what to do with it, e.g. keep it for two weeks, show it to the men, and then send it on to company headquarters. When we got the award, being aviators, we made light of it, saying, "Well, now that we're flying for Lyndon..." and other flippant comments. But the truth was we all felt very proud to have received it.

Mangoes and Bananas in the Delta

Almost from my first day in Vietnam, I began to feel a disconnect between the war itself and what we were really doing. On occasion, in some bizarre way, we had an almost delightful time. For example, during many of our standby missions the ARVN would be conducting an operation that involved no contact with the enemy. During my time in-country, fully 50 percent of these standby missions involved flying out to these ARVN positions and shutting down what the ARVN claimed were safe sites, although they weren't always safe. So, we'd arrive at those positions that were safe and end up just sitting around all day, sometimes in extremely hot sunshine. We didn't really have much

to do but forage for bananas and mangoes or whatever else we could find. Sometimes we ate things we shouldn't have, and then everybody would get an upset stomach. But those long slow days were almost disconcertingly relaxing. Likewise, visits to the Rex Hotel, where many of the U.S. advisors and officers stayed, also brought on that feeling of disconnectedness. In order to keep people off the street, the hotel had a big dining area on the roof. We would go up there and grill a steak and sit and have a glass of wine. People would talk about the towns that were getting hit, and we could actually see the tracer rounds from the roof. There was almost always an advisor of some sort up there who would narrate what was going on for everyone. I remember thinking "What the hell kind of war this is."

I had volunteered to go to Korea years before, and most of the time I was there we were in a hell'uva fight … no grilled steak and wine. At one point in Korea, I went without a bath for seven weeks. When I finally was able to get one, I had to take it in an ice-cold stream. Other guys had a shower truck that came by every day, and they could get a good hot meal and be back on the hill (in combat) by dark. I guess I never really quite got over it, and I guess Korea was my *stick in the ground.* So, during my first tour in Vietnam, I couldn't help but compare it to Heartbreak Ridge in Korea, where I spent a large part of my tour. Consequently, I spent some of my time in Vietnam just trying to get the war straightened out in my own mind, to make sense of the odd disconnect I often felt.

The Power of the Legend

From the time I arrived in Vietnam, until I left 12 months later, I witnessed the Saber 6 unit undergo an impressive transformation … and I'd like to think I played a part in that transformation. I know that many of the changes we instituted such as regulating radio traffic, standardizing fire commands, and developing the 12 Cardinal Rules, made for a much more confident and better-coordinated unit. Having such a high caliber, professional group of soldiers under me made it possible for me to quickly take charge of any situation when Saber elements came on station. Regardless of how chaotic and confused an operational situation appeared to be, when Saber elements arrived on the scene, we quickly sorted out the situation and began giving directions on what needed to be done to whoever was participating. I've been told that my reputation (and, in turn, the reputation of my other commanders) was such that other units were willing to defer to us when it came to hard decisions. On many occasions (Dong Xoai and Song Be come to mind) we literally took over command and control of the air war. Not only did we identify and direct fire on the enemy, we orchestrated med-evac missions, recommended troop lift (and Dustoff) touchdown sites, and recommended to and marked targets for Air Force Fighter Bomber aircraft. That would not have been possible if we weren't confident in our grasp of the situation, and willing to lay our reputation for excellence on the line. People have told me that lots of guys claimed they would like to be part of our unit. However, not many were willing to step forward and do what it took to be part of Saber 6.