

Tom,

I am enclosing this quick note to apologize for being late. I just received information from Bill Harting regarding the Seawolf Association and reunion. He had only just received the information last week after his wife saw an ad in a magazine and wrote to you. He called me as soon as he received the newsletter. We had kept in touch for a while after 'Nam until I left the Navy, and aside from an occasional Christmas card, this was our first real contact in 18 years. I have been unable to locate any other past 'wolves until now. I am intensely interested in re-kindling old friendships as well as meeting those who flew the flag after we left. I was among the first reinforcements in-country the year after HA(L)-3 was organized. I was also one of the first gunners to regularly use the 50-cal heavy barrel in the lead ship. I understand the squadron became quite sophisticated in later years, but we were still in the pioneering stage in '68. We even bombed sampans with sandbags full of empty brass until we got so good at it that we became a nuisance to 'friendly' shipping along the Bassac. We were required to cease and desist. But we still had to dump the empty brass and 'accidents' sometimes happened.

I am concerned at the lack of printed history that exists on our unit. As you know, Vietnam is popular today. How different from when I came home in 1969! Many stories are now being told. Ours however, is still relegated to a few pages in some specialty books dealing with helicopters or riverine. God bless these folks for remembering, but I feel our story deserves a more popular telling. While I feel a kinship with all who served, our experience was not what is shown in "Platoon", "Tour of Duty", "China Beach", "Full Metal Jacket" and etc. I hope that this organization will be the start. After all, how can we expect anyone else to remember if we forget ourselves! There has not been one single day since I left that I have not thought at least something about Vietnam. Some days more than others but some part of my thoughts every day are still there. It has affected me as no other single year in my life. I know this is not something I have to explain to you... you know what I mean! It is good to be able to talk to someone who understands. That's why I am coming to this reunion whether or not it's too late to get reservations for the banquet.

There are relationships in life and there are loves, but there is no greater bond among men than that which pulls us together in crisis or danger. There is no higher honor we can share than this; that we would gladly fly with one another and entrust our lives to each other. I want to see you guys again! I want my wife and kids to know you. I guess my motive for wanting our story told is not for the sake of history, but to remember who we were and what we experienced. We all have our memories and our stories, but those shipmates who left everything they had behind have only the memories of we who knew and loved them to keep them and their sacrifice from disappearing from the face of the earth. We cannot allow that!

The KIA list you printed has helped me. I knew or at least knew of most of those killed in '68 and '69. One especially was a good buddy, Mike Schaffernocker. We spent lots of time together in Tung Tau the first two months in-country waiting to go to our detachments. We moved and washed many birds while on the line crew and other maintenance duties while waiting for flight crew status. We both got what we wanted and were able to fly. I flew some with a couple of the officers, LTJG's Reardon and Hart.

Well, this quick note has rambled on for two pages and I could ramble on for many more. It feels good to put it all down like this and I appreciate your patience. I look forward to meeting you and all the others in Pensacola in June. Whether you may be old friends or new ones, we are all Seawolves!

Remembering,


Richard A. Rutledge (BINJO)