



The VHPA Newsletter

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

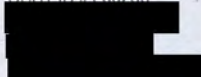
May/June 2002 Vol. 20, No. 3



David Rittman photo

This photo was taken at Phan Thiet in February 1967 when the lead elements of C/229th Aviation, 1st Cavalry Division, left for what ultimately became LZ English on the Bong Song Plains north of Qui Nhon.

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From the President

It is hard to believe it has been almost a full year since being honored to serve as your elected president.

At our upcoming reunion in Las Vegas in a few weeks, Joe Bilitzke will be taking over the leadership role for our organization. Those of you who know Joe are aware our organization is in very good hands indeed.

Our goals this year

At the Denver reunion last year, your Executive Council established some key goals we wanted to accomplish, and then we asked a number of our members, including our volunteer committee heads and chapter leadership, to help us prioritize them.

Top on the list was finding new members, our financials, membership retention, applied technology, and launching electronic data such as the morning report and other key items of interest on the Internet.

Other items on the list included implementation of unit chapters, working on future reunion sites, providing alternatives to make the reunion more affordable for some, and starting some type of strategic planning process to help determine what our organization should evolve to when we are all gone.

In the past five newsletters we have kept you up to date on our progress, which is briefly summarized and updated in the next few paragraphs:

Finding our fellow missing comrades

Since the last reunion, we have found and signed up more than 490 new members through the end of April, much of that due to the efforts of Dana Young and his committee, Gary Roush, Mike Law and many others who have been working very hard on this.

A targeted mailing was sent in early March, and we just followed up that list with an additional 11,800 postcard reminders offering an opportunity to join our association and attend this year's reunion in Las Vegas.



Dave Rittman

Chapters and other key volunteers were provided copies of the list to help contact these prospective new members.

In early March, we sent a special mailing to all members who were dues delinquent more than 180 days, provided them with an overview of our association today, the benefits of membership, and invited them to renew their membership and attend our upcoming reunion.

In early May, we sent out a follow-up, full-color postcard with a similar message, and our renewals thus far clearly reflect a significant response. More details will be presented at our annual business meeting in Las Vegas.

The net result is our membership has risen to 11,281, as of April 30, and we are far from done with this effort.

Financials

In previous editions, we have reported that our calendar year 2001 over 2000 assets have increased by \$97,201 and our cash flow is positive.

It is key to consider we are not trying to maximize assets to excessive levels, but to provide a sufficient cash flow to provide for day-to-day operations, and to fund key projects such as finding fellow pilots we have not seen in all these years.

With the help of Bob Smith, Tom Payne and our investment committee, funds were moved to provide additional revenue, while maintaining safety in the volatile months following Sept. 11, 2001. Thus, our investment values actually increased \$15,541 this year over last year, which is counter to many industry trends. Our annual statement can be viewed on www.vhpa.info

Our annual independent audit also just became available and, through the efforts of Marcia Fritz, our accountant and contractor at HQ, and our secretary/treasurer, Tom Payne, we passed with flying colors; not a single deficiency was noted.

Thank you Tom, Marcia, and your entire staff for all your efforts for us this year.

Details will be presented at our reunion in a few weeks, and posted on www.vhpa.info

Applied technology

Much has been accomplished this year . . . the expansion of the website, the launch of www.vhpa.info (the new

See FROM THE PRESIDENT, Page 5

Classified ads

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THE VHPA NEWSLETTER (ISSN 0896-3037)(USPS 001-497) is published six times yearly — February, April, June, August, October and December. Annual dues are \$36 or Life membership for \$450. Yearly subscription for nonmembers is \$36. Published by the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, 5530 Birdcage St., Suite 200, Citrus Heights, CA 95610-7698. Periodicals Publications postage paid at Citrus Heights, CA, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE VHPA NEWSLETTER, 5530 Birdcage St., Suite 200, Citrus Heights, CA 95610-7698.

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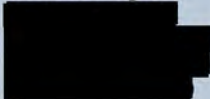
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This information, including but not limited to the VHPA Chapter list, shall not be used for commercial solicitation purposes or for any correspondence related thereto without prior written authorization from the VHPA president.

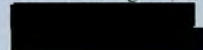
Correspondence relating to commercial purposes or solicitations shall only be sent to those officers, committee chairmen, and staff listed above.

VHPA chapters

Arizona Chapter



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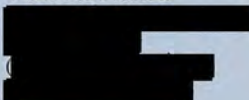
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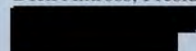
Mike Nord, President

Elk Grove, CA 95758

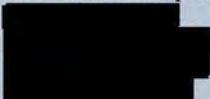
VHPA of Florida



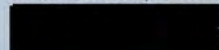
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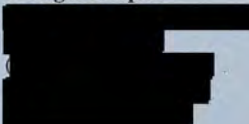
Fort Wolters Chapter



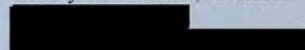
Gerald Brazell, President



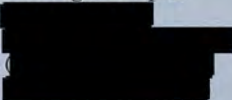
Georgia Chapter



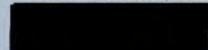
Woody McFarlin Jr., President



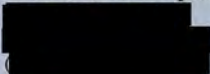
Las Vegas Chapter



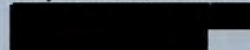
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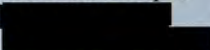
Mid America Chapter



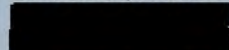
Gary Wineteer, President



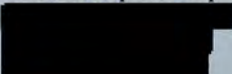
Mid-South Chapter



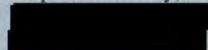
Ken Culwell, President



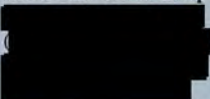
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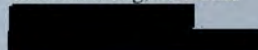
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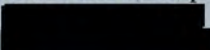
North Carolina Chapter



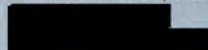
Joe Armstrong, President



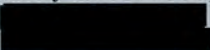
Ohio River LZ Chapter



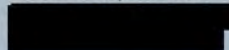
Robert Hamilton, President



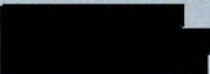
Rocky Mountain Chapter



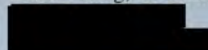
Brian Foote, President



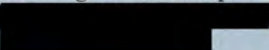
Southern California Chapter



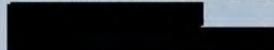
Dana Young, President



Washington State Chapter



Jack Salm Jr., Interim President



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You may order a past calendars with incredible color photos through VHPA Headquarters at (800) 505-8472 or online at www.vhpa.org

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Vietnam Helicopter History CD (\$15 for VHPA members)	\$25	\$5 ea		\$
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Card number:	Expiration date:		
Signature:			

From the President

Continued from Page 2

information site) and www.vhpareunion.org (the reunion registration process), the technology upgrade currently under way at our California headquarters operations, the automated credit card processing system, and much more.

Charlie Holley, Mike Law, Gary Roush and, of course, the HQ staff, including Linda and Marcia, have been key in this effort. The ultimate goal is to provide a more efficient way to serve our membership and to provide the best quality experience and information to our members.

This also is a work in process, with additional significant enhancements planned for the upcoming year.

Unit chapters

With the extensive help of Mike Sheuerman, unit chapters became a reality this year.

By the time we get to Las Vegas, we anticipate already having two large units in place. Many more are to come, and they will complement very nicely most of the geographical chapters that have grown so well in the past two years, and provided a quality experience for our members in between the annual national reunions.

Future reunion sites

This year we took advantage of the soft hotel market and booked our 2004 reunion, which will return to the Midwest area that year.

Planning for our 2003 reunion in the Southeast part of the country is also well under way, and more details will be announced in a few weeks at our next reunion in Las Vegas, as well as in the next newsletter.

We were able to obtain room prices at very deeply discounted levels relative to the high-quality facilities being booked. They both are going to be great locations for us.

Affordable reunions

This year in Las Vegas we intentionally scheduled different events at various price levels . . . some with food service, others without, in an effort to accommodate as many members as possible.

A survey was taken at last year's reunion in Denver. It was very helpful in planning for this year's activities (another similar survey is planned for this year's reunion).

The room prices at the Riviera are 21 percent lower than last year, and we have concentrated on providing quality, but cost-effective, entertainment at each of our events.

We also have provided a "free" pool party night for all members registered at the reunion, and booked the very well-known, original Kokomo Beach Band to perform at it.

Unfortunately, our association is not tax-exempt in Nevada and, thus, we have had to add that cost to the various functions.

Your Executive Council did decline two extremely costly proposals — \$220,000 and \$197,000 — to ensure a cost-effective reunion and the membership receive a significant and fair value for its money.

However, we have booked very high-quality entertainment throughout the reunion and, for the first time ever, a major, 90-minute stage show with some 50 performers, musicians, and technicians at our final banquet, in addition to the dance later in the evening.

With all this, the banquet does have a selection of three separate meals of your choice, while still pricing about \$5 less per person than Washington, DC, and only \$5 per person more than Denver.

Strategic planning process

The planning for how we would like our association to be remembered for in years ahead and how we will utilize our life membership assets and remaining operational funds when we are all gone is in full swing.

Bob Smith has formed a special committee and has sought the opinions and recommendations of former VHPA presidents, chapter officers, and soon the general membership.

This also is a work in process that will be finished next year. The goal is to establish a meaningful plan on what we would like our association to be 10-20 years from now, and the steps needed to get there.

Other brief items of interest . . .

Directory expanded

The annual directory that will be printed later this summer will be significantly expanded to include the names and addresses of all the new pilots we recently have located.

Mike Law, Gary Roush, Mike Sloniker and many others contribute thousands of hours to this effort, which is truly a labor of love.

Volunteers needed for your association

Over the years, we have mentioned on many occasions that our organization is built upon volunteers who provide many hours of dedicated service to advance and support the goals of our association.

Many of the key projects this year, including our membership drive, investment committee, strategic planning committee, website development and, of course, putting together the upcoming reunion were or are being accomplished by volunteers.

Much more could be accomplished with an increased volunteer base to draw from. If you have special talents in money management, history, writing skills, strategic plan-

See FROM THE PRESIDENT, Page 6

From the President

Continued from Page 5

ning, computer software development/websites, editing, marketing ads for the newsletter, CPA skill sets, attorney skill sets, and can spare the time, we could use your help. Please send you name, talent, and fields of interest to our VHPA HQ at hq@vhpa.org

Elections for new EC officers

If you are really wanting to contribute and have the time, management skills, and desire to make a difference to advance your association, we are approaching that time of year where we are looking for members to put their hat into the ring for the upcoming election at our annual business meeting for a new junior member at large and a new vice president.

A few guidelines do apply:

You must be a current dues-paid member in good standing; formally announce your candidacy and willingness to serve yourself (no third party nominations, please); provide a brief profile of background, experience and qualifications; declare your candidacy no later than one day prior to the business meeting; and physically attend the business meeting.

Those interested in running for these two positions should contact junior member at large Mike Sheuerman and provide him, in writing, the items outlined above no later than July 3, 2002.

His e-mail address is: [REDACTED]

Articles of Incorporation revised

Our By-laws and Constitution have been published annually in our directory for years, and currently also are posted on our new member information site at www.vhpa.info

They outline the goals, objectives, structure, organization and operating procedures for our association.

When it came to our attention recently that the original Articles of Incorporation, filed back in August 1989, did not specifically address longstanding member voting procedures as outlined in the By-laws and Constitution, your Executive Council voted unanimously to file and record a minor amendment in our incorporating state to bring this document in line with the wishes and intent of the founders, as contained in the by-laws and constitution.

This now has been accomplished. Specifically, our members may vote only in person at our annual business meeting, and no member shall be entitled to vote by proxy.

These documents also collectively spell out the member notification procedure, timing, and process required should there be a desire to change any text within our existing by-laws and/or our constitution.

Our next reunion

In a few weeks, we all will meet at the Riviera in Las Vegas. We currently are on track for the largest reunion ever, larger even than the Centennial in Washington, DC, in 2000.

Current trends reflect an attendance slightly in excess of 2,500, and this is before the impact of the recent second mailing sent to 11,800 new prospective members and other pilots we have not heard from in a long time.

Based on actual room bookings at the Riviera, 96 percent of our attending members have booked a room and plan on arriving the first day of the reunion — Wednesday, July 3 — and, as previously reported, based on a survey done in Denver last year, 85 percent of those arriving members that day will be in the hotel before 6 p.m. (the rest arrive after 6).

If you have not done so, book as soon as possible and lock in your airfare or travel arrangement.

By the time you receive this, it's possible all overnight rooms at the Riviera will be sold out. If this happens, we'll post on our website some area hotels that have available rooms.

We do anticipate having enough space to accommodate everyone at the final banquet July 6, the Sha-na-na welcome party July 3, the casual dance on July 4, and for the spouses, the Ultimate Comedy Murder Mystery being held opposite the business meeting on the morning of July 4.

The bottom line: This is the year to meet that special, long-lost friend of so long ago, and many newly found members will be attending.

Please make that special effort, and come. Dial up www.vhpareunion.org for the latest details. More information about our reunion is contained later within this newsletter.

Thank you

This is the time to say thank you:

- The many volunteers who have made such a difference this year.
- Our Executive Council, which has committed literally hundreds and, in some cases, thousands of hours to our association.
- Our committee chairmen and staff that have done so much in their respective areas.
- The 35-plus wonderful volunteers who will be helping us with the reunion in Las Vegas in a few weeks.
- The headquarters staff that has worked so hard to help us grow substantially, become more efficient, run a top-quality association, and much more.

It truly defines the spirit of a team effort, and I am proud to be part of their efforts over the past 11 months.

Thanks you all for everything you have done. Our next year is going to be another great year under Joe Bilitzke's leadership!

See you in Vegas in a few weeks!

— Dave Rittman, President

Letters

Article about Mason personally uplifting

The story in our last newsletter about CW4 Jim Mason, the oldest active aviator, finally hanging up his helmet was really uplifting to me.

Jim Mason was more than a large figure in my life. He was my TAC officer at Fort Wolters and, thanks to the VHPA, we were able to meet and become better acquainted.

Back in 1968, I thought he was a fine leader, even though I was more than a little afraid of him.

Not mentioned in the article was our esteemed *VHPA Newsletter* editor, Jack Swickard. Jack was a classmate of Jim's. That must have been a helluva classy class!

In fact, it was my friend Jack who reintroduced Jim to me. And I met Jack at a VHPA reunion a long time ago.

To me, this is exactly what the VHPA is all about: Finding old friends and making new ones. This is also why the VHPA is such a great group: You never know who you'll bump into next.

I can honestly say I was in awe of Jim's soft-spoken manners, smiling clear eyes and his always friendly smile when we met at that reunion. He hadn't changed a bit.

The good (?) memories of the white glove inspections, the pranks we WOCs

played on the TACs, and the hassles we got ourselves into all came back as we chatted and laughed about the rigors of flight school.

He recalled the official 7th WOC purple turtle we placed on the Head TAC's desk with all the normal turtle overnight deposits, the mule we dyed purple, the balloons we stuffed into a TAC's new VW.

He also finally found out how I always kept shiny boots under the bunk and on my feet: Three sets, wearing the same pair everyday and exchanging the pairs under the

To me, this is exactly what the VHPA is all about: Finding old friends and making new ones. This is also why the VHPA is such a great group: You never know who you'll bump into next.

With the tears of friendship in my eyes, I introduced my family to Jim. As does everyone who meets Jim, my wife and our son liked him immediately. We miss him when he misses a reunion...

bunk!

With the tears of friendship in my eyes, I introduced my family to Jim. As does everyone who meets Jim, my wife and our son liked him immediately. We miss him when he misses a reunion and I know the AR.ARNG misses him, too.

I wish each of us could find all of our lost rotary wing buddies. Like Jim said in the article, it's the people who count for more than the war stories. Those men are truly Above the Finest.

Ken Fritz, WORWAC 68-19

Mason same, soft-spoken person when sworn in

In 1965, Jim Mason and I met just minutes before we were sworn into the Army. By chance, we both had enlisted on the same day at the Army recruiting station in Albuquerque for warrant officer flight training.

I remember the recruiting sergeants got a big kick out of telling me I would be sworn in with "James Mason," an obvious reference to the film star. The two NCOs had fun with that line for hours.

Shortly after we raised our hands and took the oath of office to defend the Constitution of the United States, Jim and I were on a bus to Fort Polk, LA. In basic training, Jim was named trainee company commander; I was a trainee platoon leader in Jim's company.



He was the same soft-spoken, unflappable person Ken Fritz remembers as a TAC officer in 1968.

After basic training, Jim and I returned to Albuquerque together and were met by Jim's wife Marianne. After our two-weeks' leave, Marianne put us on the bus that eventually took us to Fort Wolters.

One of the funniest things that happened to me in flight school occurred the night before I signed in, shortly after Jim and I arrived in Mineral Wells.

It was raining extremely hard when the bus arrived in downtown Mineral Wells. The station was closed for the night, so we stood outside, getting drenched while our duffel bags were unloaded.

We had no idea how to get to Fort Wolters. However, one of us noticed there was a hotel down the street, so we decided to stay there for the night and worry about signing in at Wolters the next day.

I remember the clerk at the desk giving us a funny look when we registered.

The next morning, I learned why.

As we left our room, a couple of people were being pushed down the hallway in wheelchairs. When we found a table in the dining room, we were surprised to see some of

See LETTERS, Page 8

Letters

Continued from Page 7

the hotel guests being fed by nurses.

Jim and I finally decided we had spent the night in a nursing home. Apparently, the desk clerk had felt sorry for us and let us register as guests.

Jim Mason and I were in the same WOC company at Fort Wolters, but our Army careers split when he went on to Fort Rucker with Class 66-19 and I volunteered to stay back a month because Rucker was not ready to handle a class the size of 66-19.

Many years later, I renewed my friendship with Jim and Marianne at VHPA reunions. It's a highlight of my year when I get to see them at a reunion.

Jack Swickard

Where is that deafening CH-21 on bumper sticker?

This is a friendly letter . . . but I have a problem with our bumper sticker. Where is our old "CH-21" among all those fine silhouettes along the top of the sticker?

Us old jocks started that war with that underpowered (originally Piascki, later Boeing Vertol) flying boxcar. All of you young turbine engine fellows who think only that invention made you deaf, guess again!

That single super-charged B-17 engine, with its three screaming transmissions and accompanying drive shafts and hangar bearings, drove up the stock in hearing aids.

Earplugs must have been for sissies, because no one used them until the mid-'60s, as I recall. As a matter of fact, those of us who were stationed at Fort Riley, KS, in the late '50s got our first helmets from an Air Force Property Disposal Yard (no kidding!).

Anyway, back to my original claim concerning the imminence of the "Shawnee," there were five CH-21 companies in-country in 1962; one each at Soc Trang, Tan San Nhut, Bien Hoa, Pleiku, and Qui Nhon. The "Huey" began replacing them in 1963, I believe.

While we're at it, we should consider the CH-34 as being an early bird, with the Marines and the ARVN Air Force. It also performed some yeoman service.

I just joined the VHPA this year and don't know what has been published about the CH-21 in the past, but it must have been given significant credit, or all of the association officers would have been tarred and feathered by now.

Thanks to you and all of the selfless people who drive this organization. Hang in, and I hope to see you in Vegas.

Robert S. Jones, LTC Retired

Act in South Vietnam adds to memory of Kennedy era

All of us who were in the Vietnam era also were part of the Kennedy era.

Having marched in his inaugural parade and later stood as one of the honor company he reviewed in 1962 at West Point, he was the only president I had ever physically seen just a few steps away.



Years later, I was to have another strange relationship to add to my memory of the Kennedy era.

On Jan. 27, 1967, I was in A Company, 229th, and we were operating out of Hammond LZ on the coast and working the usual areas in and around Bong Son. On this particular day, I was flying resupply for one of the battalions and it all started out as just another boring day carrying mermite containers to grunts, who weren't always where they thought they were.

In the early afternoon, I got an urgent call from operations to immediately go over to the runway and join up with a 227th gaggle that was forming for an emergency assault north of Hammond on the coast.

This was one of those rare occasions both lift battalions were operating in the same area, supporting different brigades.

When I got over to the runway with my wingman, we were designated Purple 1 and 2. The Orange flight was made up of other A/229th slicks that had arrived before us and two more slicks joined me to complete the Purple flight.

As usual, we knew nothing of what was going on and simply followed the leader. I don't recall stopping en route, so we must have loaded up the infantry company at Hammond.

As we approached the LZ, all the chatter indicated it was a hot LZ.

The first sorties in were taking fire and several aircraft were hit. I believe one or more made precautionary landings on the beach just a short distance away.

We heard all of this as we were approaching on final to the LZ. That was the one bad thing about being a "Purple" flight, you had advance notice it was going to be a pucker situation.

As I came in on short final, CWO Larry Hurst in the Orange flight just ahead of me was climbing out and called me. He said there were wounded lying around the LZ and asked if I could pick them up:

I told him if I saw them, I would pick them up. As we

The first sorties in were taking fire and several aircraft were hit. I believe one or more made precautionary landings on the beach just a short distance away.

See LETTERS, Page 9

Letters

Continued from Page 8

landed, I looked around as best I could and didn't see a soul anywhere.

We unloaded and, as I was pulling out, I asked my crew chief, Miles T. Reid, and gunner John Gregoire if they saw any wounded. They said yes and I asked if I were to come around again could they find them? They said yes.

As soon as I cleared the palm trees surrounding the LZ, I did a low-level 360-degree turn back into the LZ. On short final, I saw some wounded lying behind a row of hedges.

I sat down with my tail rotor just forward of the hedges. After what seemed like a long time, I realized no one in the LZ was going to get up and bring the wounded to us, so I said: "Get out and get them."

Without hesitation, Reid and Gregoire unbuckled and jumped out. I looked back and there were the two of them standing hopelessly on the LZ looking at me. They hadn't seen the wounded behind the hedges as we came in and had no idea where to find them.

Later, it seemed amusing, describing the look on their faces, but I'm sure it was not amusing to them at the time.

After some wild gesturing I got them headed behind the aircraft to find the wounded. About the same time, I guess the grunts figured out what we were there for and they too started moving to load the wounded on the ship.

I don't remember how many we picked up, but at last we were done and I started to pull pitch to get out of there before our luck ran out. Before I could get light on the skids, the company first sergeant came running over and jumped on the skid next to my window.

He said the company commander had been hit and asked if we would hover over and pick him up. I nodded "OK" and proceeded to follow him at a low hover to the other side of the LZ.

They quickly carried the captain to the aircraft. I looked back and was dismayed at what I saw. As they carefully lifted him into the aircraft, one of the troopers had both

I sat down with my tail rotor just forward of the hedges. After what seemed like a long time, I realized no one in the LZ was going to get up and bring the wounded to us, so I said: "Get out and get them."

He said the company commander had been hit and asked if we would hover over and pick him up. I nodded "OK" and proceeded to follow him at a low hover to the other side of the LZ.

hands holding the captain's brain in his head. The top of his skull had been blown off.

I remember thinking at the time, "What in the hell am I doing sitting here risking my crew for a dead man?"

I departed the LZ and, as fast as I could fly, I got the wounded back to the medevac pad at Hammond.

After refueling, we went back to the runway to await further action, but it never came.

As we were waiting, the infantry company first sergeant came trotting over from the medevac area. He had an arm wound and we had brought him out with the captain. The arm was freshly bandaged and he asked us to take him back to the LZ.

I told him we couldn't, because we were on standby and he would need to go find the 227th flight leader to see if he could get a lift back in. (Although this was the truth, in reality I knew I probably couldn't find the LZ again, since we followed the leader in and, after all the excitement, I didn't pay any attention to anything except getting back to Hammond.)

A few weeks later, while flying resupply again, I asked the mess sergeant of the battalion we had supported what had happened to the captain.

Much to my surprise, he told me the captain was still alive and had been evacuated to Japan. It gave me both a warm feeling to know that I'd helped save him and a guilt feeling that I had written him off for dead and for feeling I had needlessly risked lives. After a few months, I rotated back to the States and forgot about the incident. Months later, I learned the aircraft I had flown that day had gone down on April 2, 1967, killing John Gregoire and Miles Reid.

I've never been able to confirm Reid's death and have never found him in any casualty list. These two guys were the only heroes that day when they got out of the ship to pick up the wounded.

And Now the Rest of the Story (with apologies to Paul Harvey):

In 1974, I was thumbing through a *Soldiers* magazine when I came across an article titled "Memories of the JFK Funeral."

It was written by Maj. Eugene Bickley, who was the MDW Radio-TV Officer during the funeral. In it, he described his memories of the funeral and, as an epilogue, he talked about Capt. Michael Groves, the Old Guard Company commander for the funeral and Lt. Sam Bird, the commander of the casket team.

On the Sunday after the JFK funeral, Capt. Groves collapsed and died of a heart attack.

In 1973, the author learned Sam Bird "went to Nam in '66 and was wounded on his birthday, Jan. 27, 1967. He was leading his company — B/2 of the 12th Cavalry — on an assault on the Bong Son plains." Sam was confined to a wheelchair and was to be medically retired.



Letters

Continued from Page 9

For some reason, the date and place raised a curiosity in my mind. After digging out my old records, I found the award citation and newspaper clipping that confirmed it was on Jan. 27, 1967, that I had picked up and flown out the commander of B Company, 2/12th. Now I knew his name: Sam Bird.

The real significance of my encounter was not realized until years later.

I was reading a *Reader's Digest* from May 1998. In it was an "Most Unforgettable Character" article by B.T. Collins, titled, "The Courage of Sam Bird"

Collins, an artillery forward observer, related the arrival of Capt. Sam Bird in B Company 2/12th. He described over time how Capt. Bird's first priority was caring for his troops and, by leading by example, he gained the loyalty and respect of every man in B Company.

Capt. Bird had his field duty extended for one month to be able to spend one more month with his company. On his last day, also his birthday, the troops had made arrangements to have a birthday cake brought in.

All plans were interrupted when B Company got orders to mount up for an air assault. Sam was hit on landing. Slugs shattered his left ankle, right leg, and the left side of his head.

After 17 years of daily pain and paralysis, Sam Bird died on Oct. 18, 1984. During these, 17 years Sam was married and never once complained of his plight. He always felt he was far luckier than the ones who didn't come back.

I am happy I had one small role in Sam's life and I thank John Gregoire and Miles Reid for their part in it. I only wish they had known.

Paul Maxwell

After 17 years of daily pain and paralysis, Sam Bird died on Oct. 18, 1984. During these, 17 years Sam was married and never once complained of his plight. He always felt he was far luckier than the ones who didn't come back.

Vietnam helicopter pilot rescues aviator in Hip

I work for a contractor that flies Soviet helos and fixed-wings in support of Army training and testing.

Recently, we were flying in Hattiesburg, MS, supporting a Joint Forces air defense test. We were flying some pretty boring profiles from some small airfields in Alabama.

One day we had just taken off from one of the Alabama fields in our Mi-8 Hip when we heard the AWACS bird talking about a downed aircraft. They were just giving a GPS grid, so we copied it down and entered it in our GPS and it indicated the site was 180 degrees from our position and six miles.

We began a turn to 180 and, sure enough, straight ahead was smoke coming up through the 100-foot trees.

We flew over and did a low pass, and could see a small fire, but no sign of an aircraft or pilot. We came around a second time, and the crew chief said he had a guy on the ground in Levis, a blue shirt and a red "hat."

That didn't sound to "Military" to me, so we called the AWACS and asked what kind of aircraft we were looking for. They came back with a "BD5J." By this time, we were hovering over the smoke and the guy on the ground. The copilot said, "I have a chute in the lower trees about 75 feet from the smoke."

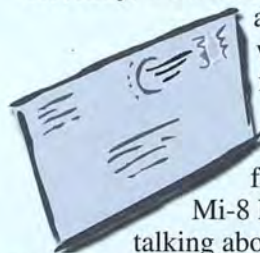
By this time, we were pretty sure we had the right location, so we started looking for a place to set down, which turned out to be about three quarters of a mile from the smoke.

The crew chief took a soft lunch pail, put two bottles of water and a power bar in it and a note saying: "Head northwest, follow us." We waited until the guy on the ground gave us a thumb's up and slowly headed for the open field.

We landed and shut down, and then we left one crew member with the aircraft and the other three formed up line abreast and headed through the woods toward the downed aircraft. We met up with the pilot, Bob Bishop, in about a quarter mile or so, brought him back to the aircraft and flew him back to Camp Shelby, MS, and the waiting med evac and doctor.

Seems he was flying a cruise missile profile — 300

See LETTERS, Page 11



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Letters

Continued from Page 10

knots and 300 feet — for the same joint test when he heard a “bump” and had fire in the cockpit. He just pulled it up into a “cyclic” climb until it began to stall, opened the canopy and pushed away.

The aircraft went straight in, which is why we did not see any signs, I don’t think it even broke a limb off a tree. He landed about 75 feet away.

He was very lucky to get down unhurt since the trees were very thick and tall.

I asked him how he felt about being picked up by a Russian helicopter, and he said he was so happy to see a helicopter he did not realize it was not American until

about halfway back to the camp.

Being the cool VHPA dude I am, I told the rest of the crew that if there had just been a few guys in black pajamas and AKs running around in the trees, it would have been déjà vu.

They just looked at me with blank stares and then I realized my attempt at flippancy was lost on them, none of them had been in Vietnam!

It still felt really good to tell the AWACS we had the downed pilot, he was OK, and we were headed for the house.

Reed T. Kimzey
El Paso, TX

EDITOR’S NOTE: Reed T. Kimzey was a platoon leader with the 118th Assault Helicopter Company in 1966-67, and was with A/25 Aviation, 25th Infantry Division in 1970 and 18th Engineer Brigade in 1971.

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Common ground

Pilots exchange information after report of typo

What began as a letter criticizing the designation of the gunship on the cover of the April *VHPA Newsletter* turned into an exchange of e-mail about a common acquaintance.

The exchange started when Rick Roll sent a note, saying:

The gunship on the cover of April 2002's cover is clearly a UH-1 "C" model, NOT a "B." The roof-mounted pitot tube, a la "H" Model, and the AH-1G rotor head are obvious and definite giveaways.

It's not an "M" because "M's" didn't make it, as far as I know, to the RVN. As a gunship pilot with "D" Troop 3/5th Cav. in '67, I was a member of one of the first groups to take the "C's" to RVN, equipped with miniguns and the "DECCA" moving-map nav. systems. A minigun is clearly shown in your cover shot.

VHPA President David Rittman responded to Roll's note with this reply:

Thank you for your note. The aircraft type is a typo on my part from the e-mail attachment with the photo . . . it is a UH-1C, not a B, of course. However the rest of the information is correct.

I personally took the photograph in December 1966.

Tom Cat was "for sure" the call sign at the time (I believe Smiling Tigers may have been changed to Tom Cat a few months before my arrival in October 1966).

I am correct that this is D/229th Avn, 1st Cav; I was physically there, and worked with them every minute of every day for a year as a flight commander (Axle/Wheel 3) for C/229th Avn. We even know who was flying the aircraft that day, Dave Hockett and Tom Mateski.

Regarding the proof reading, when the newsletter cover was e-mailed to us, we were right on deadline to get it out in time for members to respond to the Vegas reunion before we lost our exclusive room block June 2 and Jack Swickard, our newsletter editor, was getting ready to leave town on a business trip.

However, Jack was low on photos, so I pulled a high-resolution image, had it e-mailed to Jack about midnight, he plugged it in to the cover about 2 a.m., and the newsletter went to the printer by overnight express the next morning before he left on a trip.

Regret the typo and appreciate you calling it to our attention.

Roll then replied:

What a "classy" response to my e-mail. In perfect sync with your sterling reputation as a flight leader/comman-

der in the RVN.

Your mention of Dave Hockett is really uncanny. As you may recall, I was CO of an effort here in Tennessee to acquire, restore and display a UH-1D/H last year. With Gary Roush's help, we identified Dave as one of our bird's pilots and Dave flew in from Oregon for the dedication.

We sent him home with a mounted, engraved instrument from Blue Star "786" as a memento from one of his two tours in Vietnam.

Your leadership of VHPA has been first-class in every respect and you've made your classmates, including yours truly, of ORWAC 66-16 very proud.

This resulted in the following response from Rittman:

Dave Hockett (Tom Cat 36) was one of the people flying that UH-1C at Phan Thiet and, as you can see, the story goes on.

The day he talks about the tragedy west of Checkpoint 102 was very memorable for me, also. In these circumstances, you do what you need to do.

While most of the time I was leading combat assaults or running the more-than-occasional "ash and trash" runs, this one day in between missions I was test piloting a Huey that had just come out of major maintenance just west of An Khe, in the Central Highlands.

That means no guns, no crew, no armaments, just a barebones slick that had just been repaired from being badly shot up a few weeks earlier.

I heard one-half of a call made by Dave Hockett's supporting gunship, which was being pulled away from the down aircraft site to support another hot area just to the north.

There were not many rules in the Cav, but one of them was you never leave anyone down on the ground in these circumstances, not for a minute. With it was apparent no one else was around, it was time to see what red line in a Huey really was.

Sadly, as Dave notes, his copilot Mike Dueshane had already perished. Ironically, we had just had a recognition party for him a night or two earlier.

However, Capt. Hockett returned to active flight duty and really made a significant contribution to the military efforts in the area of operation over the next few months. The slick I was flying went back to maintenance to repair a few more bullet holes.

The experience really brings into focus a major part of what our association is about: The people, the friendships made so long ago, the special experiences that have shaped our lives, and the respectful memories of those much less fortunate than us.

Taps

Michael Allan Bruce

We lost another treasured soldier when CW4 Mike Bruce passed away suddenly on Jan. 19 at the age of 52.

Bruce was born and raised in the Chicago area and has been my friend since 1980. He attended flight school in late 1967 and served with the 129th AHC in 1968-69. In 1980, he joined the 305th Aviation Company, USAR at NAS Glenview, IL, and in 1988, he accepted a position as a DAC IP in Hueys. He later qualified as a Black Hawk IP.

He and I worked side-by-side as IPs for many years and when the NAS was closed, we continued to work together for the 85th Division, USAR, he as an information management officer, leading a large staff of computer and telecommunications technicians.

As can be seen, he was a skilled and versatile fellow. He also was a devoted husband to Cecilia, a dedicated and loving father, and a true and loyal friend.

Bruce was awarded the Bronze Star Medal and several Air Medals for valor in RVN and the Legion of Merit by the 85th Division for service.

No matter where he was or what he was doing, he always considered himself a patriot, and held his country and the Army in the highest esteem.

I miss him daily.

Jim Lomonaco
Ghostrider 25

William Chester Buford

William Chester "Bill" Buford, 56, of Pensacola, FL, died April 15 at his home after a brief battle with cancer.

Bill was born in Charleston, SC, in 1945. He enlisted in the Army at the age of 17, spending 6 years as a paratrooper and 16 years as an aviator.

He twice received the Bronze Star Medal during his two tours of duty in Vietnam.

After retiring from the Army in 1984, he became chief pilot for South Sea Helicopter Tours in Hawaii. He was a member of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association.

Ron Hall

Robert L. Hamilton

Retired CW4 Robert L. "Bob" Hamilton died in Los Gatos, CA, from cancer on March 19. He was 65.

A life member of VHPA, Hamilton graduated with Flight Class 58-9, and was a Master Army Aviator.

He served two flying tours in Vietnam: 1966-67 with A/228 ASHB, 1st Cav, and 1971-72 with USARV and

HHC/1st Avn Bde.

Born in Hanford, CA, on May 21, 1936, Hamilton was raised in Merced, CA, where he met his wife, Carol.

He joined the Army in 1954 and they were married in Germany in 1956. He retired at the Pentagon after an illustrious career in the Army.

In his 21 years of service, Hamilton was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, 2 Bronze Star Medals, 30 Air Medals and the Legion of Merit.

He was inducted into the Army Aviation Hall of Fame in 1986.

During his career, Hamilton also served as president of the Army Warrant Officers Association and as a vice president of the Army Aviation Association of America.

After retirement from the Army, he returned to Los Gatos. His love of flying led him again to aviation, where he was a pilot for Saratoga Savings and Loan, Terra Commercial and Aris Helicopter.

Hamilton is survived by Carol, his wife of 45 years; two daughters, Susan Dias and Barbara Fralick; a son, David Hamilton; and six grandchildren.

Samuel P. Kalagian

Retired Army Col. Samuel P. "Black Sam" Kalagian of Enterprise, AL, died May 4 in the Medical Center in Enterprise after an extended illness.

He was 78 years old.

Kalagian served his country for 33 years. He began as a fighter pilot in World War II at Iwo Jima and the invasion of Japan, with 2.5 kills.

After World War II, he returned to the Army as an infantry officer/aviator. His tours of duty included Korea, Germany, Hawaii, Vietnam, Italy and the continental United States.

Kalagian earned his Master Aviator wings and graduated from the University of Southern Mississippi.

He earned his combat nickname "Black Sam" (the Armenian rug salesman) while serving as battalion commander of the 25th and 14th Aviation Battalions in Vietnam.

He was shot down twice in Vietnam, earning the Purple Heart for combat injuries.

Kalagian began a successful real estate career after he and his wife, Ruby, retired in 1976 in Enterprise.

He was active in the Retired Officers Association, twice serving as president. Sam also was much in demand for lectures on Army aviation history at the Aviation Museum.

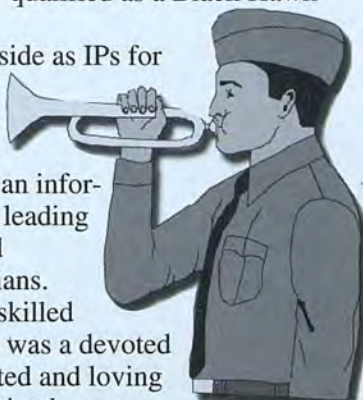
Survivors include a son, Sam Kalagian Jr.; a daughter, Jo Alice K.

Harp; and four grandchildren.

Omar Kipe

I too was saddened to hear about the passing of Omar Kipe. What an aviator, what a man.

See TAPS, Page 14



Taps

Continued from Page 13

I met Omar in September 1964 at the 26th Transportation Company, which was based in Pirmansens, Germany.

I was just out of flight school and was assigned to Germany; what a break, since almost all of my class (64-4W) all went to Vietnam and a handful to the 11th Air Assault which got there a year later as the 1st Air Cavalry.

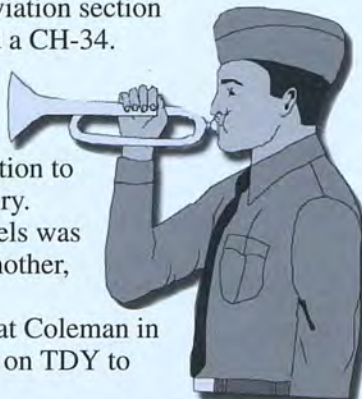
I was assigned to a little aviation section that had an OH-13, U6A, and a CH-34.

The transition to the OH-13 was simple with all that OH-23 time in flight school at Fort Wolters, but the transition to the CH-34 was a different story.

Flying H-19 C and D models was one thing, but CH-34s was another, all that power. WOW!

There were no CH-34 IPs at Coleman in Mannheim, so off to the 26th on TDY to become qualified in the 34.

Omar was my instructor pilot and did he ever teach me to fly that machine. I believe I became one of the best 34



pilots ever and fell in love with my ship, all thanks to Omar Kipe.

We had a unit based at Pirmansens, so I got to see him from time to time and then we went our own ways.

I spent my time in Nam in CH-47s in 1967 with the 213th ASHC. Omar Kipe helped me to become all that I could be. It was an honor to know him, I will not forget.

Pete Luban

Delbert Paul

Retired CW3 Delbert Paul died March 20.

He started preflight training with Class 57-1, and graduated with 57-2.

Paul served with the 1st Cavalry in Vietnam. He retired from the Army in 1968 and from the Post Office in 1988.

Robert Peyton Walters Sr.

Retired Col. Robert Peyton Walters Sr. died May 1 in Baton Rouge, LA.

Walters was an aviator with three tours in Vietnam.

He held the Silver Star Medal and the Air Medal with "V."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Items for Taps should include the name and age of deceased, date and location of death, and flight school class and Vietnam unit.



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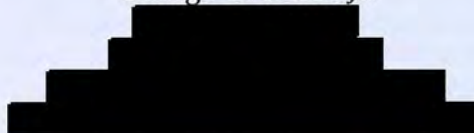
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George G. Reese Jr.



31 years later

Scout pilot awarded Medal of Honor by president

MIKE SLONIKER

HISTORICAL COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Some 31 years after he and a crew member were killed in combat, the family of scout pilot Jon E. Swanson received the Medal of Honor from President Bush.

Two days later Capt. Swanson and S.Sgt. Larry Harrison were buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

The Medal of Honor was recommended for Swanson by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the late Admiral John McCain. However, the Distinguished Service Cross was awarded. Later, a recent review of the case made it clear Swanson deserved the nation's highest military honor.

On May 1, which would have been Swanson's 60th birthday, the Medal of Honor was presented to his family.

This is the first Medal of Honor awarded to a scout

helicopter pilot.

On the morning of Feb. 26, 1971, Swanson and Harrison preflighted their B Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry OH-6A and planned their day for flights into Cambodia.

This day would be the last day they would ever prepare for battle.

In early 1971, B-1/9 Cav was assigned to support ARVN units operating in Cambodia. Because of the Cooper-Church Amendment enacted after the Cambodian incursion in 1970, no U.S. troops could be on the ground in Cambodia or Laos. As a result, there were no American ground troops in this action.

But nothing in the amendment precluded U.S. helicopters from operating in those areas.

At a time when Lam Son 719 was raging in I Corps west of Khe Sahn and into Laos, actions in Cambodia

See ACTION, Page 16

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(DAVE GRIEGER, L-66)

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Action furious for helicopter crew

Continued from Page 15

took the backseat in the attention span of many.

The 1/9 Cav was tasked from III Corps to provide E/1-9 Cav to 2/17 Cav 101st Airborne Division at Khe Sahn for LS 719, so 1/9 Cavalry Squadron was "across the fence" in Cambodia and Laos at the same time

On Feb. 17, while Swanson and Harrison were conducting a VR mission in Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia, they got into a furious action assisting an ARVN convoy caught in an ambush.

The recommendation for award of the Medal of Honor states:

"On Feb. 26, 1971, Capt. Jon E. Swanson was flying an OH-6A aircraft on a close support reconnaissance mission in support of Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) Task Force 333 in the Kingdom of Cambodia.

"Two well-equipped, enemy regiments were known to be in the area, and Capt. Swanson's mission was to pinpoint precise enemy positions. To accomplish this mission, he was required to fly at

treetop level at a slow airspeed, thus making his aircraft very vulnerable target.

"The advancing ARVN unit came under heavy automatic weapons fire from the enemy bunkers in a treeline approximately 100 meters to their front. Capt. Swanson, completely exposing himself to enemy anti-aircraft fire, immediately engaged the enemy bunkers with S.Sgt. Harrison's concussion grenades and machine gun fire."

After the crew destroyed five bunkers and successfully evaded ground-to-air fire, Swanson, discovered a .51-caliber machine gun position.

He had expended the Loach's heavy ordnance on the bunkers and did not have sufficient explosives to destroy the positions. Consequently, he directed Harrison to mark the position with a smoke grenade and then directed a Cobra gunship to attack the position.

Upon completion of the attack, Swanson returned to

the area to assess battle damage. He found the weapon still intact and an enemy soldier crawling over to man it, so he directed Harrison to engage the individual and killing him.

His aircraft then came under fire by a second .51-caliber machine gun.

Although his aircraft had sustained several hits, Swanson engaged the position with his aircraft weapons, marked the target, and directed a second Cobra gunship attack.

He volunteered to continue the mission despite the fact he was low on ammunition and his aircraft was crippled from the hits it sustained.

While approaching the target area, Swanson came under fire by yet another .51-caliber position.

In an effort to mark the position with smoke, he again flew into the objective area. Although his aircraft was taking heavy fire, he continued to fly to the .51-caliber position.

It was at this point his aircraft exploded in the air



Photo by Joe Burtas

Sandee Swanson, flanked by daughters Brigid Swanson-Jones and Holly Walker, accepts President Bush's thanks and praise for her husband's sacrifice during the Vietnam War. Bush awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously to Capt. Jon E. Swanson at the White House on May 1.

and crashed.

Swanson's actions resulted in at least eight enemy killed and the destruction of three enemy anti-aircraft positions, which would have been responsible for the destruction of many more helicopters and crews."

Many attempts were made to recover the crew.

Another helicopter landed near the site, but was forced to take off when it came under heavy enemy fire. Repeated attempts by ARVN ground troops and U.S. helicopters to reach the downed helicopter were thwarted by enemy fire.

On Feb. 27, U.S. helicopters returned to the area and crews saw what they believed to be two remains near the crash site. As late as March 7, the remains were observed near the crash site, but could not be recovered due to enemy fire."

VHPA member Mike Sloniker attended the funeral for
See FRIENDS, Page 17



Photo by Jim Garamone

Army Secretary Thomas White, Sandee Swanson, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki and Sgt. Maj. of the Army Jack Tilley pause following the unveiling of Capt. Jon E. Swanson's photo and Medal of Honor citation during his induction into the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes on May 2. A day earlier, President Bush presented Swanson with the Medal of Honor.

Friends say farewell to Swanson

Continued from Page 16

Swanson and Harrison at Arlington National Cemetery on May 3, with members of the National Capital Area VHPA chapter and former VHPA president Tom Payne, who was an ORWAC 66-10 classmate of Swanson, attending.

Also attending the funeral were former VHCMA president Chris White; B-1/Cav's Jack Shields, who was troop executive officer when Swanson and Harrison were lost; C-1/9th Cav members Walker Jones, Mark Hilton, Bill Moeller, John Powell, Jesse James, Jim Kurtz, Bob Tredway and Swanson's first tour unit, D/3-5 Cav, 9th Infantry Division.

Joe Galloway, coauthor of *We Were Soldiers Once and Young*, stood among the 1/9th attendees.

There were many black Stetsons at the funeral, which also was attended by Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki.

The joint Protestant/Catholic service was highlighted by words spoken by one of Swanson's daughters, Brigid Swanson-Jones of Westminster, CO.

She thanked the recovery teams who picked up the crew's remains in Cambodia, the many people who assisted the family over the past 31 years, the military and members of Congress whose efforts made the Medal of Honor award possible.

She finished by saying America must never give up the search for the fallen and to never forget them.

The term "Welcome Home" sometimes is overused. However, not at this funeral. Brigid Swanson-Jones looked out into the chapel at the casket and said: "Wel-

come home, Larry. Welcome home, Dad."

Brigid's sister, Holly Walker, was quoted in Denver's *Rocky Mountain News* on May 1: "This has additional significance because of the war on terrorism. Before we commit troops to war, a lot of people say, 'Is this worth losing a son for?' I say, 'Is it worth losing a father for?' Every time we send our troops in, that's what I ask."

Brigid Swanson-Jones said even though she has few memories of her father, he has inspired her to be a quiet leader.

"It's not really closure because he will always be with us," she said. "Instead, this means we're able to bring him home."

On May 1 in the White House Rose Garden, President Bush remarked:

"The Medal of Honor recognizes acts of bravery that no superior could rightly order a soldier to perform. The courage it signifies — gallant, intrepid service at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty — is written forever in the service record of Army Capt. Jon Swanson."

"The Medal of Honor recognizes acts of bravery that no superior could rightly order a soldier to perform. The courage it signifies — gallant, intrepid service at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty — is written forever in the service record of Army Capt. Jon Swanson."

Reunion 2002

Only days remain until Las Vegas kickoff

JOE BILITZKE
VICE PRESIDENT
NATIONAL REUNION CHAIRMAN

By the time you receive this newsletter, there will be only a few days remaining before we kick off our 19th annual reunion at the Las Vegas Riviera Hotel on Wednesday, July 3.

Are you coming and have you registered yet?

If not, call up www.vhpareunion.org on your computer to register and book your room at the Riviera Hotel.

As of today, more than 1,800 pilots and guests have registered, up significantly from the same time last year. That puts us on track to have more than 2,500 people at our host hotel this year.

Add to this the many recently found and new members who will be registering in the weeks ahead, and this reunion is shaping up to be a very special time for us all, with fellow pilots attending whom we haven't seen in years.

☆☆☆☆☆

Reunion schedule at a glance

Wednesday

July 3

9 a.m.-8:15 p.m.

- Registration — all day.

5:30-7 p.m.

- Welcome reception for first-time reunion attendees and their spouses/guests. (Open to all first-time reunion attendees at no admission charge.)

7-10 p.m.

- Welcome reception and party for all members and their guests Sha-na-na performance starts about 8:30 p.m.

Thursday

July 4

9 a.m.-8 p.m.

- Registration — all day.

9-11:30 a.m.

- Annual Business Meeting (dues-current members only).

9:30-11:30 a.m.

- Laughter Unlimited Murder Mystery Brunch (spouses and guests)

7-8:30 p.m.

- Stage performance of "An Evening at La Cage"

7:30-9 p.m.

- Stage show "Splash" (no one under 18 admitted — hotel policy)

9 p.m.-midnight

- Casual dance and get-together, with entertainment by Love Shack

9 p.m.-midnight

- Top of the Riviera Dinner Dance, with Susan McDonald and her band

Friday

July 5

9 a.m.-6 p.m.

- Registration — all day.

6:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

- Golf Tournament

8-11 p.m.

- Pool Party with the original KoKoMo Beach Band (free to all registered members)

Saturday

July 6

9 a.m.-6 p.m.

- Registration — all day.

5:30 p.m.-1 a.m.

- Final Banquet (NOTE: Historically, this is a coat-and-tie event. Some members prefer to wear a military dress uniform. Ladies wear cocktail dresses.)

6:30 p.m.

- Presentation of colors

7-8:30 p.m.

- Dinner

8:30-10:00 p.m.

- SoundSations Stage show

10 p.m.-1 a.m.

- The Zippers Dance

☆☆☆☆☆

SPECIAL EVENT NOTES: The brunch for spouses and guests is a very special event this year.

We have hired the complete show Laughter Unlimited Murder Mystery, with numerous actors, to put on a performance, complete with costumes, props, audience participation — all intermingled with a three- or four-course

See MURDER, Page 19



Murder mystery planned for wives

Continued from Page 18

brunch.

People who have seen the show tell me it is absolutely a hoot. It all starts at 9:30 a.m. Thursday, July 4, while the Business Meeting is going on in another part of the hotel. Guests and older children are welcome, as long as they have tickets.

The casual dance on July 4 has been significantly upgraded with the contracting of Love Shack, voted the top band in Las Vegas for several years. The band really knows how to crank a group; it should be a great party.

Welcome Reception/ Party on July 3: To accommodate some late-arriving flights, we have arranged for the original group Sha-nana to start its performance a little later, beginning at 8:30 p.m. The party itself, with music, starts at 7 p.m. Make sure you get tickets; this is going to be an outstanding evening!

Pool Party of July 5: This is a very informal get-together at the pool, starting at 8 p.m. The original group KoKoMo Beach Band will perform. Bring swimwear. Admittance is free to all VHPA registered members, spouses and guests.

An Evening with La Cage: This stage show is professionally done and very well-known in Vegas circles. Tickets have been made available to VHPA members and guests at deeply discounted rates for the 7 p.m. performance July 4, thus this an excellent value for the dollar. If you already have registered but didn't sign up for this event, call or e-mail our HQ at (800) 505-VHPA or hq@vhpa.org and Linda will adjust your registration package.

A word about security. Given the state of the world and recent events, security will be much more evident during this reunion. You must be registered to receive a name badge and you must wear your name badge to attend any VHPA event.

If an event requires a ticket, please take that ticket to the event. Name badges will be checked and tickets will be collected. You must have both for entrance into an event.

No exceptions! Your cooperation is appreciated in helping us maintain a safe, harmonious, fun-filled, 19th annual reunion.



UH-1



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ARVN squads getting out of the Hueys were being mowed down in the deep, blond rice paddy grass as if a giant piano wire were sweeping through the LZ, cutting them off at the knees. Whole squads of ARVNs were losing their lives due to the grazing fire. The radio was full of guys screaming, "I'm hit. I'm hit! I'm HIT!"

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VHPA can determine its legacy

ROBERT SMITH
STRATEGIC PLANNING CHAIRMAN

What is the meaning of the word "legacy?"

• **According to the Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary:**

Main Entry: leg-a-cy Pronunciation: 'le-g&-sE Function: noun Inflected Form(s): plural-cies Etymology: Middle English legacie office of a legate, bequest, from Middle French or Medieval Latin; Middle French, office of a legate, from Medieval Latin legatia, from Latin legatus Date: 15th century 1 : a gift by will especially of money or other personal property : BEQUEST 2 : something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past (the legacy of the ancient philosophers)

• **Cambridge International Dictionary of English:**

legacy noun (C) money, possessions etc. which you agree to give to another person when you die, or fig. something that is a part of your history or which stays from an earlier time

• **Webster's Dictionary:**

Legacy (n.) n. 1. A gift of property by will, esp. of money or personal property; a bequest. 2. A business with which one is intrusted by another; a commission; — obsolete, except in the phrases last legacy, dying legacy, and the like.

Before you all begin to think we have gone off the deep end or just plain carried away playing with the dictionary, think of the word "legacy" and the meaning it has when you think of the VHPA.

At the annual VHPA reunion this past year our president, Dave Rittman, discussed several new projects he wanted to accomplish prior to the next reunion.

One project Dave outlined was to identify and implement our long-term legacy. His direction was to determine where the VHPA would be 10 years from now, 20 years from now and, finally, how would we want to be remembered by future generations.

To answer that question, a committee was formed, plans were laid out, and we started the project. To start the process, it only seemed appropriate to contact those who have been in command over the past years or who now lead.

With that in mind, a letter went out to all the past presidents of the VHPA, the current Executive Council, and the chapter presidents.

Shortly after the letters were sent, the e-mail messages began to arrive. The replies were all over the spectrum, ranging from the very detailed to general observations to an avenue to vent some steam.

I would like to share with you the thoughts and ideas of those who responded.

To condense several pages into one, I have taken the liberty to reduce paragraphs into short sentences.

For those that took hours putting their thoughts together, forgive me. For those of you who are interested in the full text, drop me an e-mail and I will send the complete text.

• The VHPA Scholarship program: A scholarship program in conjunction with the AAAA Scholarship Foundation. It is up and running with the first scholarship awarded last fall.

— Past president

• The Vietnam Center/Archives at Texas Tech University: This is the official depository for the historical information and data belonging to the VHPA

— Past president

• The National Museum of the Vietnam War in Mineral Wells: This is an effort of the Fort Wolters Chapter to build a museum dedicated to just the Vietnam War.

— Past president

• Support the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation to keep the memory of the helicopters we flew in the eyes of the public.

— Past president

• Support chapters focused on activities that promote the VHPA: The Florida and North Carolina chapters have promoted the VHPA through several worthy projects.

— Past president

• Continue and increase the effort to find all those who flew in Vietnam. Through the numbers this will generate, it will help ensure our legacy

— Past president

• Work toward becoming recognized by the U.S. government as a "Nationally Recognized Veterans' Organization."

— Past president

• Reach out to other veteran organizations such as the VFW, American Legion that have an interest in resurrecting a surplus helicopter.

— Past president

• Promote an annual award, sponsored by the VHPA, that honors a retired helicopter pilot with the most the most accident-free flying hours.

— Past president

See HOW, Page 21

How should VHPA be remembered?

Continued from Page 20

- Promote an effort to have airports named after helicopter pilots who died in Vietnam during the war.

— Past president

- Return to the basics of our organization: "Come and sit by me, have a beer, tell me your war story." Let's quit trying to be something "grand" and return to something fun and simple.

— Past president

- "Make sure all funds left in the organization go to a scholarship fund for descendants of VHPA members and potential VHPA members."

— Past president

- "No monuments or memorials because we have The Wall."

— Past president

- Continue the organization by including veterans from post-Vietnam conflicts into the organization.

— Chapter president

- Ensure our legacy by making sure we continue with the basics, the newsletter, the directory, and the annual reunion.

— Past president

- Remain a nonpolitical organization so we do not alienate any member.

— Past president

- "We should make available any and all materials we have to pass on to our following generations so they know what we did, and what we contributed. We must leave

behind a good history of ourselves for future generations to learn from."

— Past president

From Dave Rittman's remarks at last year's reunion: "What do we want our association to be 10 years from now, 20 years from now, and how do we wish to be remembered when we are all gone?"

It's a significant question that will require much thought and consideration to gain consensus, but with everyone's help, we will accomplish this and lay the groundwork for our ultimate future and commitment to society when our membership has long dwindled."

It is your time to respond and add your thoughts to the list above. Please contact our committee by phone or e-mail.

If you have nothing additional to add, we still would like for you to indicate which idea or ideas you like the most.

Please indicate in order of importance those ideas you support.

We will print the results in our next newsletter.

Bob Smith
President, 1999-00

Roger Gould
President, 1988-90

Bob Potvin
Financial Advisor

VHPA briefs

Hornets plan mini-reunion

The 116th AHC "Hornets" will have a mini-reunion at the National VHPA Reunion in Las Vegas on July 5 from 1-5 p.m.

CONTACT: Joe Duvall at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Calendar available in June

This year the VHPA Calendar will be available for purchase in June instead of December as in the past.

Turner Publishing Co. plans to have a booth at the Las Vegas Reunion and will be selling copies of the 2003 Cal-

endar. However, anyone can order copies by calling (800) 788-3350. Order by June 30 and save 15 percent.

Until June 30, the price is \$10 per copy vs. the normal \$12. There is a \$5 S&H fee for up to three copies.

This is the eighth annual edition of the VHPA Calendar.

Booby trap downs helicopter

On the night of June 30, 1969, a medevac chopper was going from Duc Pho (LZ Bronco) to pick up a load of KIA's on a hill located a short distance North of LZ Liz.

As the chopper was landing to pick up the KIA's, it was taken out by a booby trap explosion.

Do you know where I can find information on this incident? I do not know the name of the medevac unit.

James E. House
[REDACTED]

Roulier receives belated Air Medals

Gary "Mike" Roulier, who flew his last helicopter mission with the 162nd Assault Helicopter Company in Vietnam 30 years ago, was presented 11 belated Air Medals by Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber.

"The paperwork just never got done," Roulier said. His wife Donna said, "if I earned them, I ought to get them."

This set the wheels in motion. The oversight recently was discovered when Roulier's records were being updated because he had volunteered to return to active duty, following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

However, that is another story . . . read on.

Roulier, who lives in Salem, OR, with his wife, works for the Governor's Office and is still in the active reserve. He is a senior Army aviator with more than 3,600 hours and two tours in Vietnam.

Several of Roulier's old friends were on hand to celebrate the presentation of the Air Medals, including Hayden "Pappy" Jones of Midland, TX, who read the citation from Army Secretary Thomas White at the ceremony.



Gary "Mike" Roulier (left), who flew his last helicopter mission with the 162nd Assault Helicopter Company in Vietnam 30 years ago, receives 11 belated Air Medals from Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber (center). Hayden "Pappy" Jones (background) of Midland, TX, reads the citation from Army Secretary Thomas White at the ceremony.

Now, the rest of story:

Roulier volunteered to return to active duty after the Sept. 11 attacks. For a long time, he heard nothing from the Department of the Army.

However, his tour is now firm and he will begin it sometime this summer.

Roulier initially was told he would go to Kuwait and be assigned to the Army Safety Augmentation Detachment of

U.S. Forces Command.

But, like the old saying goes, "the needs of the Army" has taken over and it is pretty firm Roulier will be going to Afghanistan! He will be airfield manager of Bagram Air Base.

Many of you will remember Roulier as the driving force behind the WOC Chorus we all love to hear at reunions.

The chorus has sung at many banquets and festivities for a number of years for the VHPA.

Tom Payne
VHPA Secretary/Treasurer

Member recounts how crew member died

MIKE LAW
DIRECTORY EDITOR

Jim Hague, who joined the VHPA Rocky Mountain Chapter in April, said to me after a meeting in Denver: "I want to tell you how Spec. 4 Dennis Bolton died." He then told me the story:

I believe a first lieutenant or junior captain was flying as aircraft com-

mander and fire team leader this day. I was the pilot.

I seem to recall that we were supporting a combat assault, but I am not certain as to our mission. I believe David Higgins was the wingman AC on this mission.

Our gunship took hits during the firing run. I clearly remember that the mini-guns stopped firing and the engine had lost power by the time we were ready to pull out of the firing

run.

We crashed through the palm and banana trees and bounced back up into the air briefly before rolling on the left side.

The crew chief, Spec. 4 Dennis Bolton, was on the left side of the aircraft and I was flying from the left seat. Bolton had been firing his M-60 free gun under the tailboom for suppressive fire.

See AIRCRAFT, Page 23

Aircraft comes to rest on its left side

Continued from Page 22

He may have had his lap belt very loose to fire under the aircraft as we made our break.

This aircraft did not have monkey harnesses and both gunners held their M-60s in their laps (no bungee cords); hence, the term "free gun."

The aircraft came to rest on its left side. The windshield on my side was completely gone. My left hand was trapped between the smashed left pilot's door and the collective.

The engine was still running and making a terrible noise. Without the burden of having to power the transmission, which had broken loose, the engine was now in a runaway condition. JP4 was leaking somewhere.

As I was trying to deal with all these things, I remember the AC yelling: "What happened?"

I was glad to see he did not seem to be seriously injured and yelled back that I needed a little help here!

I was able to reach the electrical switches and he could turn the engine

throttle, so we got the engine shut down. We struggled to get out of our seats and climbed out the left front windshield.

At first, I couldn't see Bolton, but noticed the gunner, Joe Kowalczyk, hanging by his lap belt inside the cargo area in a semi-conscious condition, with his eyes bulging out.

I climbed inside and made the mistake of getting under him when I released his belt, so he fell on me. Within a short time, he returned to as normal as one can be after just crashing, he retrieved his gun and broke off several hundred rounds of mini-gun ammo from the cans.

We could hear shots coming past us and figured out the general direction they were coming from.

Kowalczyk sent a hundred rounds or so back in that direction and we were not seriously bothered with the fire again.

I also remember watching our wing-ship firing in that general direction.

After helping Kowalczyk, I noticed Bolton's boot and most of his leg under the aircraft. I reached under as best I could and tried to find a pulse in his leg. There was none.

About 30 minutes after we crashed, some ARVN troops arrived. Of course, no one spoke English! We managed to get them to help push and rolled what was left of the aircraft off Bolton just enough to pull him out.

We recovered Bolton's body and, not long after that, one of our slicks returned for us.

We flew Bolton to the morgue. I remember they wouldn't take our word for identification purposes; they needed a primary staff officer or the commanding officer to make Bolton's ID.

This was just one more sad and distressing thing to add to an already very sad and EXTREMELY distressing day!

As I recall, the rest of us, bruises, cuts and all, were back flying missions in a day or so.

Film series tries to dispel myths of war

In March 1968, Army photographer Calvin Crane stepped off the bus at the 90th Replacement Center in Long Binh.

More than 30 years later, filmmakers Christel and Calvin Crane set out with their three young children on a two-year journey to film *The Long Way Home Project* — a landmark documentary on the Vietnam War era.

Now complete, the four-hour series is introduced by Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, who says:

"The Long Way Home Project will give all viewers a powerful new perspective on the events that shaped that war and the men who fought it."

Information about the series and the filmmakers is at www.ourpatriots.com

The films just won the Gold Jury Award — the top honor for documentary television series at the prestigious International Film Festival in Houston.

Inspired by her father, a Marine Corps. veteran and helicopter crew chief, film producer Christel Crane had long chafed at the myths about veterans and America's

Her determination led Christel Crane to cash out of the family home and savings, and put everything on the line to produce the series.

longest war. But no network or cable channel was interested in doing anything that would tell her positive story of that era.

Her determination led Christel Crane to cash out of the family home and savings, and put everything on the line to produce the series.

The first film in the series, "Men Versus Myth," dispels the myths about the soldiers in the Vietnam War.

Two other films in the series, "How We Won the War" and "How We Lost the War," feature the most important surviving players of the period, including Secretary of Defense Schlesinger, Gen. McCaffrey, and Ambassador Whitehouse.

Producer Calvin Crane says, "Vietnam is a country, not a war. In 'The New Diaspora,' we focus on the brave South Vietnamese people."

While doing the series, Crane said he discovered something remarkable: "Our young people are ready to take on the responsibilities to protect our freedoms — we've just got to reach them."

VIETNAM HELICOPTER PILOTS ASSOCIATION

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SOCIAL SECURITY NO.:

Information about each Vietnam tour:

Date of tour			Unit	Location	Call sign
From:	To:				
1st					
2nd					
3rd					
4th					

Information about you: Helicopters flown, medals/awards, talents, hobbies, and anything else:

How did you learn about the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association?

**NOTE: Life memberships may be purchased with three bi-monthly payments of \$150 each.*