

**A PILOT'S VIEW OF
FIRST CAV LRRPS**
(YOUNG IN YEARS, BUT SO MATURE IN WHAT REALLY MATTERED)

From Jim **Bracewell**

As a young rookie helicopter pilot, flying slick Hueys in 1966/1967, I was totally ignorant of Infantry operations. I think my first combat mission (LZ Bird, Dec '66) gave me an instant and enduring respect for our men on the ground. I thought I would never see more courage in another group of men ... but I did.

For some reason, I was made an Aircraft Commander quite early in my tour. Shortly thereafter, I was told that I was going to provide support to the 1st Cav's newly formed Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol unit. Huh? What's that? I found out when I met with CO, CPT Jim **James**; XO, ILT Ron **Hall**; ISG, SFC Fred **Kelly**; and Team One leader, SSG Ron **Christopher**. Once they told me about the LRRP mission, my first thought was, "Are these guys nuts?" Then I had to try to explain the capabilities of our aircraft, and how my crew and I could get them to where they needed to go. I decided on a navigation technique called "time-distance-heading." We selected a point (usually a guard tower at base camp), and flew to the desired coordinates after calculating the time required for the flight at 100 knots, based on the latest wind speed and direction. We flew the missions at twilight, when visibility had diminished, and we flew at quite low level. We often had to remove vegetation from our landing gear during our post-flight inspection of the aircraft, much to the dismay of our Maintenance Officer. All of that aviation stuff is nothing compared to what our "passengers" did.

It occurred to me that I was rubbing elbows with the bravest men I would ever know. I still feel that way forty-four years later. Most of those LRRPs were very young (I was 25, and almost felt like a senior citizen). I learned quickly that age in years is not indicative of age in terms of knowledge, proficiency and dedication to the mission. From the first LRRP mission I flew, I knew that these men were special. My respect and admiration for them skyrocketed, and only has intensified over the years.

One of the greatest thrills of my adult life has been reuniting with the 1st Cav LRRPs at reunions over the past few years. Perhaps the greatest, though, is my being inducted as an honorary member of the 1st Cav LRRP/Rangers Association. I received more than my share of awards and decorations during my career, but that one tops the list.

I am forever grateful to my Aviation Company Commander and CPT Jim **James** for giving me the opportunity to work with greatest soldiers in the universe ... the 1st Cav LRRPs.

Jim **Bracewell**

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