



# The VHPA Newsletter

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

February 1995 Vol. 13, No. 1



Jack Swickard photo

Its M-60 machine guns on the ready, a UH-1D leads a flight of 10 Hueys toward yellow smoke marking an LZ during a combat assault in the III Corps of South Vietnam in 1967.



## From the President

Since you have honored me with election as president, I have found that I receive the most pleasure out of seeing the enthusiasm that comes from the membership in furthering the comraderie and brotherhood of the VHPA.

I have often heard comments from pilots who were in Vietnam before 1965 that when they read our publications and attend a reunion, they get the impression that the war did not start until 1966.

Well, one of our newest members has decided to do something about that! Thomas R. Messick of Newtown, CT, attended his first Reunion in Philadelphia and came away so excited about it that he wants to organize a mini-reunion of ALL the H-21 crews who flew in Vietnam.

Being an H-21 pilot himself, Tom has first-hand experience of the early days of the war and wants his buddies to know the VHPA is for them, too. Tom is retiring and relocating at the end of January, but be on the lookout for his announcement.

He tells me it may be too late for the '95 Reunion, but it will make '96 that much special. For all you guys who flew the H-21s, be sure to get in touch with Gary Roush (Database) and Bob Davies (Historical) so we can accurately document those important, heroic, first years of the Vietnam conflict and the role of the helicopter in it.

You OH-23 and OH-13 Scout pilots need to check in, too. We need pictures! My thanks to Tom Messick for volunteering to coordinate the H-21 effort, and I look forward to seeing all of you at a future Reunion.

On a personal note, for those of you who have heard my graveled whispering voice of late, I want you to know that I am well on my way to recovery from a serious bout of bronchitis after a short visit to the local hospital . . . yes it was a HUMAN hospital.

Thanks to all of you who sent cards and get-well wishes. I was touched by your thoughtfulness and look forward to giving my thanks in person. My appreciation to Kenny Fritz for taking lead position while I was rendered "Hors De Combat."

— Kenny Bunn, President

## VHPA chapters

### Ohio River LZ Chapter

Paul Cotter, President

[REDACTED]

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Bruce Rodewald, Vice President

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

### New England Chapter

Bob Whitford, Past President

[REDACTED]

### Mardi Gras Chapter

Don Hunt, President

Lee Overstreet, Vice President

New Orleans, LA

### Florida LZ Chapter

Barry Speare, President

[REDACTED]

## VHIPA news

### Motorcycle ride planned for K.C.

If you are riding or trailering a "scooter" to Kansas City for the reunion, Dennis Hogan is planning for a ride up to the Lake of the Ozarks on July 3.

Departure from the hotel is at 8 a.m., with lunch at the lake and back to the hotel in time for the evening festivities.

Contact Dennis at [REDACTED] for additional information.

### Reunion videos still available

A two-hour, condensed video cassette of the 1994 Philadelphia Reunion is available for \$28 each.

Also available on video cassette is the complete luncheon presentation by Col. Jay Strayer, Son Tay Prison Camp raid pilot, for \$23.

To order copies of the video cassettes, contact ABS Reunions at (800) 484-7475, Ext. 0808.

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Newsletter.....74127.442@compuserve.com  
Mel Canon, VHPA Online.....

## Newsletter to launch cyberspace versions

Through the efforts of Gary Roush, The VHPA Newsletter will be available in an electronic format.

Roush, VHPA Records/Database Committee chairman, has been gearing up to store the newsletter on computer for distribution to those who would like to receive it electronically. Full details are not available at this time, but everything should be in place shortly.

At press time, Roush was experiencing some technical difficulties, but he should have those corrected soon.

Initially, the electronic version of the newsletter may be distributed via the VHPA e-mail network (VHPA-L) and/or individually via e-mail.

For those who have not signed up for the VHPA List-server, contact Mel Canon, Online Coordinator, via e-mail at: melcan@aol.com.

## VHPA briefs

### VHPA to work booth

The VHPA will man a booth at AAAA's annual convention in Atlanta March 29-April 1.

VHPA members are encouraged to visit the booth, to share Vietnam experiences, to help recruit new members, to look at VHPA publications, and to provide input such as Directory corrections or material for publication.

For more information contact Mike Law, (303) (office) or (303) (evenings).

### 1995 VHPA Calendar

More than 1,000 copies of the 1995 VHPA Calendar have been distributed to those who ordered them.

Copies are still available for purchase. (See order form on Page 4.)

The Executive Council has approved dividing responsibilities on the VHPA Calendar. Mike Law will continue as calendar editor and is responsible for producing the calendar. Phil Marshall takes over responsibilities of advertising and distributing the calendar.

If you have pictures or comments about the content of the calendar, contact Mike at (303) (evenings) or (303) (office). If you know of an organization or commercial activity that could resell the calendar, contact Phil at (303) (evenings) or (303) Ext. (office).

### 1996 VHPA Calendar

The VHPA desires to produce the 1996 VHPA Calendar prior to the Kansas City Reunion.

We currently have only four of the 14 pictures needed for the 1996 edition. If you have a picture that could be a candidate for the VHPA Calendar, please contact Mike Law at (303) (evenings) or (303) (office) as soon as possible.

### Vol. 2, Historical Reference Directory

The Directory Committee is on schedule to produce Vol. 2 this spring.

Vol. 2 will include at least the following: Unit histories, short stories, the final installment of the Army Flight Class Rosters database (classes 67-1 and higher), the 1966 and 1967 installment of the Incident Database.

The Incident Database contains details on individual helicopters, helicopter and major combat units, major combat operations, helicopter crews, and helicopter units.

The cutoff date for receiving electronic copies of unit histories or short stories is the end of February.

Please contact Mike Law at (303) (evenings) or (303) (office) if you can provide material for the Historical Reference Directory.



# Ex-Army aviator top aerobatic pilot

First off, let me say I am impressed with the VHPA founders' understanding for the need for an organization that includes all rotor heads who flew in Vietnam. Not just Army, but everyone who went to war in a machine that couldn't fly much faster than a duck, and was twice as ugly.

I have always wished I could have been lucky enough to express my anger with the enemy by means of multiple 750-pound bombs and multiple 20mm cannon fire from the fire-belching F-4s of the Air Force or A-6 Intruder of the Navy. Unfortunately, somebody had to go get the job done. That left us.

Now, how many of you Army guys always felt a little out of place in the aviation community because you didn't fly the jets? Felt a little inferior because you couldn't break the sound barrier unless you had an overspeed.

Well, put all that behind you. I have good news.

The 1994 United States Aerobatic Champion is none other than Phil W. Knight of Class 65-14, with the 197th AHC in 1965-66 and B/228 Avn, 1st Cav in 1968-69.

You got it right folks. A U.S. Army helicopter pilot beat all them Air Force, Navy and anyone else who showed up at the U.S. National Aerobatic Contest last September in Denison, Texas. Phil has represented the United States on the U.S. Aerobatic Team for the last two World Championships. We're talking Olympic flying here, folks.

Phil is a life member of VHPA and is an electrical contractor in Florida.

Believe me, it isn't all helicopter touch. He practices daily and devotes a good part of his life to the art of aerial ballet which we know as aerobatics.

Congratulations, Phil, you make me proud to be a helicopter pilot first and a Army aviator second.

Phil flies an EXTRA 300S and can be seen in airshows and contests all over the United States.

Al Ellison  
Fang 7

# APOs worked better during Vietnam tour

Just got through my August issue of the VHPA Newsletter. Didn't get the previous issue talking about e-mail.

Twenty-nine years and still using APOs, think they worked better back in 'Nam. Remember getting one addressed only to: "Mike Lopez, Army Helicopter Pilot, Vietnam." It took only 10 days. It still takes 10 days with the full address. E-mail, is a lot faster!

*Continued on Page 5*

## VHPA Product Order Form

**MAIL FORM TO:** VHPA  
7 W. Seventh St.  
Suite 1990  
Cincinnati, OH 45202

**FAX NUMBER FOR  
CREDIT CARD ORDERS:** (513) 721-5315

VHPA bumper stickers	\$1/each	_____
Back VHPA Newsletters (Complete sets only.)	\$20/set	_____
1992 VHPA Directory. (7/17 Cav history)	\$10/each	_____
1994 VHPA Directory (Lam Son 719 history)	\$10/each	_____
Vol. 1 Historical Reference Directory	\$15/each (\$5 P&H per order)	_____
Vol. 2 Historical Reference Directory*	\$20/each (\$5 P&H per order)	_____
Researcher's Edition 1994 Directory	\$14/each	_____
1995 VHPA Calendar	\$7/each (\$3 P&H per order)	_____

**GRAND TOTAL** \_\_\_\_\_

\*Available in April 1995

### TO ORDER

Send check/money order or charge to your VISA, MasterCard or Discover card.

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_



*Continued from Page 4*

Veterans Day was my 28th anniversary arriving at Camp Alpha. Seems like another life. Today we're living in the shadow of Germany's highest mountain, the Zugspitze, at the base of the alps. Quite a change from the heat and humidity of Vietnam.

Uniquely, we're training former enemies here at the Marshall Center about democracy and civilian control of the military in the emerging democracies of the former Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union.

It took a lot of soul-searching to consider this assignment. All my life I've been training to defend my country from theirs. But hopefully the networking and basic ideas being shared will help prevent some of the conflicts amongst the nations of Europe.

For several years, I lived in Washington, D.C. Many times I'd taken friends to visit The Wall. But for so many of those visits, I couldn't remember anyone's name on The Wall.

## Dooley wrote letter shortly before death

I read with surprise and sadness the letter in the December VHPA newsletter from Jim Dooley, describing his CS drops from Chinooks while with A/228, 1st Cav in 1969.

Col. James E. Dooley, III, passed away on Dec. 17, 1994, from Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, a rare degenerative brain disease caused by an as yet unidentified virus.

It was a shock to us all! I worked with Jim in his final Army assignment where we both served as military assistants to the Federal Aviation Administration in Washington, DC. I stayed on with the FAA after retirement while Jim hired on with a contractor supporting the FAA.

The onset and speed of his disease was astounding! I'm sure Jim did not know he was ill when he wrote his letter to VHPA describing his CS "bombing" mission. He only learned of it a day or two before this past Thanksgiving when he experienced the first symptoms, and he went from being athletic, energetic and healthy to bed-ridden and comatose in the span of just three weeks.

Those of us who knew Jim can be somewhat comforted knowing he was in good spirits up to the end and did not suffer a prolonged, painful illness.

Jim was a terrific guy and will be missed. Some of his friends may not know that Jim lost his wife, Angela, in a whitewater rafting accident over a year ago when she fell out of the raft and drowned. Life is fragile, and we should all count our blessings. Please allow me to propose a toast to one of us who has died too young.

Jim McDaniel  
Shark-4 (1967-68)  
Hornet-20 (1971)

Jack Jordan caught up with me last year with a 25-year-old Thanksgiving Day menu. His semi-annual 361st AC(E) newsletter listed long forgotten names.

I downloaded the names from The Wall from CompuServe, and started through the names on the wall. Also, joined the VHPA. Your directory helped me find a lot of old friends.

So, last Thanksgiving, I had a time of healing, and went to The Wall to visit those whose names I couldn't remember for so long. Thanks to all the folks who have spent so much of their time researching and documenting our legend.

Looking forward to getting my 1994 Directory and seeing many of you in K.C. in '95.

Mike Lopez  
129th AHC  
361st ACE  
1st Avn Bde

## Pilot changes his mind during VHPA reunion

We received our Newsletter today and are quite anxious to respond to the article regarding the missing 13,000!

My sister, Becky, and husband, David Fry, invited us to attend the 1988 VHPA Reunion unbeknownst as to what we were in for.

I thought a trip to Fort Worth sounded like fun, so I mentioned the invitation to Rand. You would have thought we received an invitation to hell from the devil himself by the reaction I got. The responses were along the lines of, "Why should I drive four hours in the July heat to sit and listen to a bunch of guys tell war stories and watch them cry in their beer?" to be followed by, "NO! I do not want to go," and, last but not least, "Go if you want, I do not care."

I said, "OK" and began planning my trip. Needless to say, David Rand and I attended our first VHPA Reunion in 1988 at Fort Worth.

Rand assumed to be uninterested and extremely bored, until he met a buddy from RVN and a classmate from flight school. By evening, Rand was the one telling war stories and recapping six months of flight school.

I heard stories that I had never heard before and several lies, too, I'm sure. I saw Rand have more fun than I thought possible. The fellowship shared that weekend was amazing and offered Rand an opportunity that was long overdue.

We were unable to attend another Reunion until 1990. We went to New Orleans and reunited with two of Rand's classmates from Class 68-17, B-1, 2nd WOC Company at Fort Wolters.

In 1991, our limited classmate reunion added another member. Three guys from flight school together again!

*Continued on Page 6*



## Continued from Page 5

More stories were told and one classmate's memory would jog the memory of another story, and so on. Suddenly, three classmates began to wonder what ever happened to . . .

Of 30 classmates, one TAC, and one super senior, we have contacted 23 classmates, one TAC, and one super senior.

You're absolutely correct to admit finding guys after 26 years is not a piece of cake! I have enclosed the names of guys who are not listed in the Training Class Index or Directory. We hope this information will benefit

**You're absolutely correct to admit finding guys after 26 years is not a piece of cake!**

the next directory.

Green hats off to you on a job well done! Keep up the good work and please know how much it means to us to be a small part of a superb organization. See you in Kansas City!

Alice Marie Rand

"Dragon 35 Alpha"

## Helicopter etiquette found with old papers

I found this while looking through some old Army papers in a trunk.

I believe it was given to me as part of a group of new pilots during the initial in-country 101st Airborne Division training prior to being dispatched to our units.

I got a chuckle out of it, I hope you do too.

John S. Donaldson  
VHPA member  
Lancer 14 — "Pig"  
B/158th, 101st Ambl (RVN)

### Helicopter etiquette for aviators

1. Don't land your helicopter in the middle of the chow line. If there is one thing that is sacred to every trooper, it's his food. Don't fill it with sand and debris.

2. Land far enough away from all tents, buildings and bunkers to preclude blowing them full of sand or blowing them over. One-holer latrines are especially susceptible to the latter.

If your passenger tries to insist on being set down in the middle of troops or buildings when another suitable area is within walking distance, pretend the INTERCOM system went on the blink and you couldn't hear a word being said.

The troops on the ground will love you for it.

3. Don't stop in unannounced; establish radio contact. If this is not possible, overfly the area and give the personnel on the ground a chance to police the area, secure loose objects and pop smoke.

The wind may have shifted since you were last there, and a downwind approach can be rough on the old torque meter, not to mention the possibility of the skids ending up around your ears.

4. Landing a LOH in the middle of a VIP welcoming ceremony is not a recommended practice.

If you see troops in formation, guidons flying, and the band standing by, you will probably be safe in assuming that they have not gathered to watch you post-flight your LOH.

Unless you are carrying persons participating in the ceremony, don't land.

5. All aviators are aware of the requirement to run the Huey engine at flight-idle for a two-minute cool-down prior to engine shutdown, but after the two-minute period expires, shut it down!

Better yet, drop off your passengers and then move to a shutdown area away from the CP or the troops if such an area is available.

6. When passengers board your aircraft, give them time to get seated, fasten their seatbelts and secure their personal gear before you start pulling pitch. Personnel hanging from the skids during take-off create an unpleasant and unsafe condition.

7. So every trooper doesn't know everything there is to know about helicopters; you might find it difficult to organize and conduct a night ambush.

And when you've finished your day's work in the cockpit, parked your aircraft, eaten dinner, stopped by the O-Club and hit the rack, stop a moment and reflect. If it weren't for all those troopers out there, you might find going to sleep rather difficult.

## Vietnam chopper pilots meet in airliner cockpit

At 19 years of age, learning to hover, and staring Vietnam in the eye, gave me little cause to concern myself with the future 25 years hence.

The guys we endured so many hardships with remain in our memory banks, with details faded and fuzzy. However, it becomes inevitable, if you stay in the flying business, some event of present day will clear the haze of past ordeals.

As it was on Dec. 3, 1994. Having just completed captain upgrade at Southwest Airlines, I was looking forward to the challenge presented with the privilege of command. It had been a few years since being in the left seat.

Perhaps there was a little apprehension present. Would I get an FNG with zero experience in the 737 who would

Continued on Page 7



*Continued from Page 6*

bear considerable attention? Would he be up to the task of operating with a new captain while I got my sea legs? With these thoughts in mind, I might have missed a few winks of sleep the night before. Will I be tired all day? Get over it Rick. The training was complete, you did good, you wouldn't be doing the job unless the boss was sure you were ready. Sure, okay.

While checking in, I discovered the first officer (first victim) was to be Rich Norloff. Never heard of him. Wonder how new he is? What experience does he have? Through the usual crew room trial and error method we determined each other's identity. Good, I think to myself, he's at least as old as I, so likely he has some experience.

As we wander towards the jet, I inform him of my lack of left seat time and that any help he could offer will earn multiple beers at the end of the trail. He reassures me that he won't let me down, that he had flown with a new captain just last week and they had an equal number of takeoffs and landings.

As we took our assigned seats, the magic words were finally spoken. Rich said, "I started out as an Army heli-

## Pilot helping friend gather information

I am writing on behalf of a good friend of mine, Don Riggs, in the hope one or more of my fellow pilots can help shed some light on the disappearance of his brother while on a mission in RVN in 1967.

According to the Directory, CW3 Thomas Riggs was presumably killed, along with CW3 Quentin Beecher and CW2 Dean Clinton on June 11, 1967, while flying for C/227th, 1st Cav. Since no bodies were recovered and all three were carried as MIA until they were declared dead on June 5, 1973, the June 11, 1967, date is presumptive.

The family was initially notified that Tom was MIA and later that he was declared dead, but little or no additional information was provided about the nature of the mission, weather conditions, location or the circumstances of his death.

Since I did not arrive in the Cav until November 1967, I don't even know where C/227th was based at the time of Tom's death.

If any of you guys have information about Tom Riggs, please contact me. I'd like to put together a small history of Tom for Don and his family and help put to rest some or all of the questions and doubts they've had all these years. If anybody can do it, I know you guys can.

Remember, keep the green side down !

Bob Potvin, "White 25"

## Membership Directory is the finest one to date

Well, I've got some time here on the road and just had to write and give a much deserved congratulations to the people who put this year's Membership Directory together.

It is without a doubt the finest one to date. Tons of information on units, people, mission profiles and just about anything else a person could want from their organization. WELL DONE!

Andrew Dulay

A/228th, 1st Air Cav, 1967-68

copter pilot." I felt the concern for his quality of airmanship drain from my body. Those words said volumes.

This was a man who knew teamwork, dedication, bravery, fear, self-preservation. This man was handpicked by God to be at my right hand for the next three days.

The trip went smoothly. We commiserated like the pilots we were trained to be. We had an equal number of takeoffs and landings. I made good on my promise of multiple beers.

Had I been able to think of the future while at Wolters, I doubt I would have given a thought to someday being an airline pilot. I would have never thought my first captain flight would be shared with someone who must have the same thoughts, while in the same geographic location. All that can be said of that coincidence is "LUCKY ME!!!"

Rick Weiss

## Former Vann aide/pilot looking for colleagues

When John Paul Vann, profiled in Neil Sheehan's "A Bright Shining Lie," became Dep/CORDS in June 1967, he was assigned an aide/pilot (Page 660). I got the job and would like to contact my many successors to trade notes and experiences.

As those who flew for Vann well know, driving him around Vietnam could be more hazardous than routine combat flying. Prior to working for Vann, I had been an AC and light-team leader in UH-1C gunships with the 3/5th Cav out of Bearcat.

I encourage any/all Vann alumni to drop me a note/call/fax.

Henry "Rick" Roll (ORWAC 66-16)

(Fax)



# Trip to shower burned into memory

ED WOLFE

Like most warrant officer pilots in Vietnam, I was new to the Army and pretty naive about military stuff.

I understood all the basics, of course, (any good warrant officer would never admit otherwise), but there were some things that often jumped up and took me by surprise.

I recall one instance of that very vividly . . .

We were flying some long missions out of Cu Chi in the fall of 1970. I was assigned to B/25th Avn with the 25th Infantry Division and it was hotter than blue blazes.

The air was so thick you could cut it with a knife and, no matter how fresh your clothes, in minutes they were like wet gunny sacks hanging heavy on your body. This particular day was especially hot and muggy.

To make matters worse, I was decorated with all the usual pilot stuff — chickenplate, helmet and bag, CAR 15, extra ammo, maps, SOI book, and what seemed like tons of little odds-and-ends stuff sticking out of every pocket on my flight suit.

After a 12-hour day in Hueys the day before, my aircraft commander, a

New Yorker named John Hoey, and I had been given standby duty on Cobras all night. We were standing down in the morning and all I wanted was a cool shower and an empty bunk . . . in that order . . .

I dragged myself to my hooch and let all the gear fall to the floor in a clump.

I ripped off the soggy flight suit and shucked the jungle boots in a flash.

I grabbed a towel off my cot, found my soap, and headed for the shower point.

I stepped out of the hooch right into the path of our battalion sergeant major. He was walking with our supply officer, a CW2 who I didn't know very well.

I was pretty new to B/25th and didn't really know many people in the unit. It was the first time I'd seen the sergeant major and I guess it was the first time he'd ever seen me.

He looked wide-eyed at me as I stepped from the hooch with the towel wrapped around my waist and nothing else but shower shoes, soap and a smile.

Taken by surprise, his mouth dropped open as he tried to say some-

thing to me.

Finally, he blurted out, "Soldier, don't you salute warrant officers?" referring to the CW2 beside him.

I was a little surprised myself and a whole bunch of embarrassed. I hadn't expected to see anyone but maybe some of the other pilots as I made my dash to the showers.

"I'm a warrant officer, too, Sergeant Major," I managed. "I don't salute other warrant officers."

His face sobered quickly as he snapped a salute that would have impressed any officer. "Good morning, Sir. I'm sorry."

His face was crimson as he made haste to get away from me and continue on his way through the company area.

He didn't even notice that I hadn't returned his salute.

There are many things about the war that come back to me from time to time . . . most are sort of hazy. This incident with the sergeant major will always be clearly burned into my memory banks, however.

**EDITOR'S NOTE: Ed Wolfe, who lives in Langhorne, PA, flew with B/25 Avn, 25th Infantry Division in 1970-71.**

## Seeking

We are trying to locate a former Vietnam colleague, Lt. Col. William LaRue Williams, from DeRidder, La., who served as executive officer of the 4th Aviation Battalion during the period 1967-68. Please send any information to either of the following:

**George P. Brown**

Telephone: Ofc. ( ) /Qty. ( )

E-mail: ( )

**George Shields**

P. O. Box 154

Toloyana Park, OR 97145

I am seeking breast patches from the following units I served with: The "Warlords" 123rd Infantry Americal and

the 68th Medical Detachment "Dustoff" at Chu Lai.

**Joe Whisenhunt**

P.O. Box 434

McAlester, OK 74502

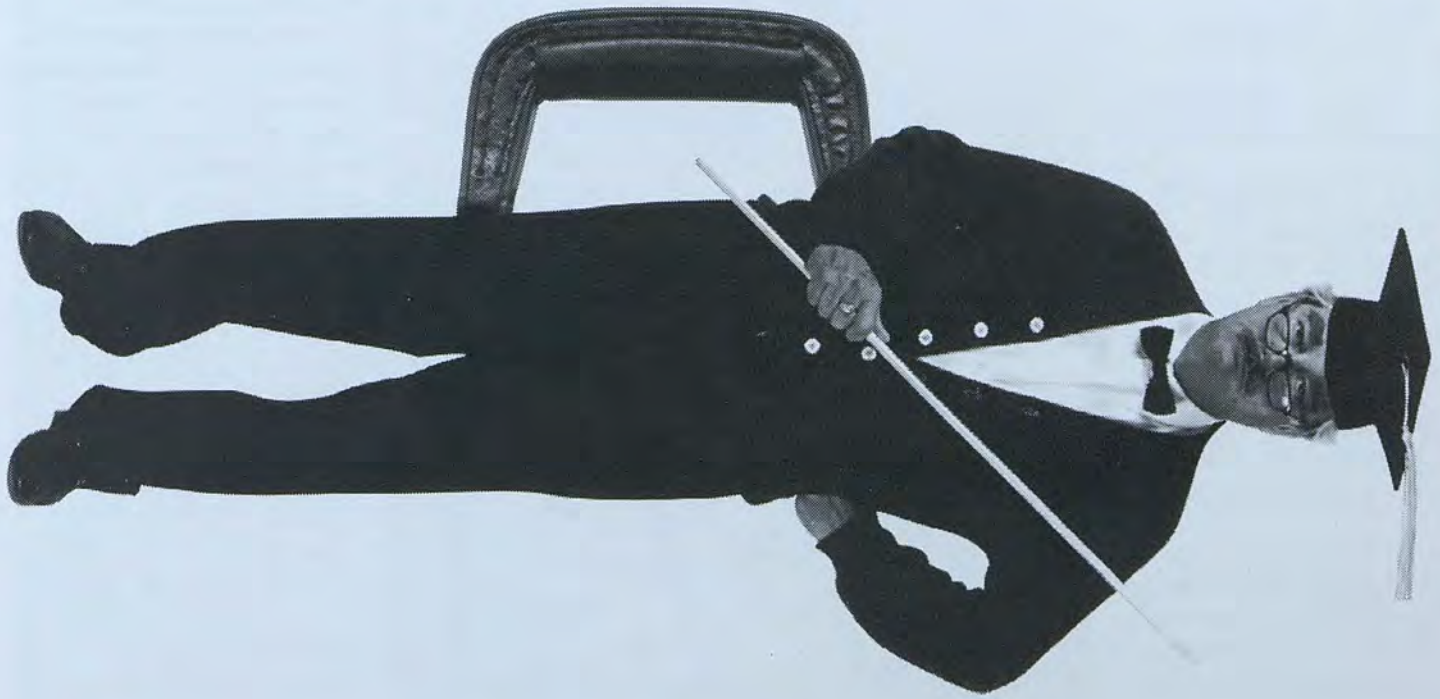
I am trying to chase down records or witnesses to help substantiate a petition for an Air Medal. I would also like to just contact some of the pilots I flew with as a part-time doorgunner.

They flew LOHs for the 176th Aviation Battalion "Minutemen" out of Chu Lai, mostly in support of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, Americal Division.

The pilots are: WO1 Bill Lawrence (I believe from Pennsylvania); WO1 Warren (on second tour, his first tour was as an EM grunt with the 101st Division); and WO1 Ralph Bigalow (KIA in June 1970).

**John "Dutch" DeGroot, National Commander  
Americal Division Veterans Association**





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VHPA1 2/95



# It's time to make plans for reunion

**BOB SMITH**  
REUNION CHAIRMAN

I trust you all had a very enjoyable holiday season. Can you believe it . . . 1994 is already history, and YOUR annual VHPA reunion is only a few short months away.

Now's the time to book those discounted airline tickets, while fares are REALLY low, and some of the airlines are still offering two-for-one promotional sales.

Just pick up the phone, make your reservations, and send back your registration form now . . . before time slips away and prices go up.

Speaking of saving money, did you notice one of our major activities starts on Saturday, July 1, this year? Many of you traveling by air will take advantage of significantly lower advance purchase fares requiring a Saturday p.m. stay.

Early registrations indicate a substantial number of our members will check in Saturday afternoon. We wanted to do something special, and have set up a great early bird event starting at 6 p.m.

Remember those in-country and island R&R days? That's our Saturday night theme — a Polynesian pool party, complete with hors d'oeuvres, live music and a 10-member Hawaiian dance group, including hula, fire and knife dancers.

Bring your swimwear and be ready to mingle and party! We have added a \$10 per person charge to cover costs.

The December Newsletter did not mention this additional amount. However, with the large anticipated turnout, we felt it important to set up a first-class, fun-filled event to help start the weekend festivities in a top-quality fashion.

Sunday, July 2, will be a full day,



**The Westin Crown Center is reunion headquarters.**

with mini-reunions, a large static display, and optional Major League baseball. The Kansas City Royals take on Chicago in an early afternoon game that will get you back in time for the evening's festivities.

It's important you register in advance if you want to go to the game, as it has always been sold out weeks ahead of time in years past. We will hold a block of tickets as long as we can — but, unfortunately, this event definitely is "first-come, first-serve."

Remember the M\*A\*S\*H-theme party we told you about in the December Newsletter? Well, Sunday is the night, and be sure to wear your fatigues, flight suits, etc. . . . and get some for your spouse or guest, also!

Major entertainment and great food have been arranged throughout the evening. It'll be the time and place to really "light the fires" and "crank."

Monday's schedule includes an

option to play in our own golf tournament, takes trips to Worlds/Oceans of Fun, the zoo or the Truman Library. (Sorry, we just learned the Nelson Museum will be closed that day.)

Monday night is Casino Night, which will start with a reception, and include dinner, entertainment and our own "private" gaming casino in the hotel.

Oh yes, you'll be able to win things, too. We're planning on some significant prizes, too!

Later in the evening, for those who would like to try their luck on the real thing, we'll have transportation available to one of the new riverboats that have just been licensed in town.

Prefer to stay in the hotel to party and dance? We'll have music provided by a very well-known local radio disc jockey.

Tuesday night, July 4, it all will wind up with the final banquet — with two bands, no less! We told you Kansas City was going to be special! Awards, entertainment, short presentations, plus a few other "surprises" we're still working on.

Sound like a great, fun-filled reunion? You bet . . . but you have to make plans to attend now!

Low airfares, low room rates, low beverage prices, and a high energy, exciting get-together. It's a simple formula for a great time!

## Mini-reunions

To schedule a room and audio-visual equipment for your mini-reunion, contact Bill Medsker, [REDACTED]. You can phone or fax him at [REDACTED].

Scheduling will be made on a first-come, first-served basis.

A listing of mini-reunions will be published before the reunion in the Newsletter.



# Reunion hotel in heart of the city

The Westin Crown Center — headquarters hotel for the 1995 VHPA Reunion — is in the heart of Kansas City and is connected to Crown Center's 65 shops, a theater, restaurants and six movie screens.

From the beauty and bustle of the lobby to a spectacular indoor waterfall spilling over a five-story tropical rock garden, the Westin Crown Center is a unique hotel.

The hotel has 725 suites and guest rooms, and more than 37,000 square feet of meeting space, along with restaurants and lounges.

The Westin's full-service health club features year-round swimming, tennis, a jogging track, steam sauna, massage and tanning.

For those with young children, there is the Westin Kids Club to help

## *Stop stampede for banquet seating*

If you are willing to coordinate with your friends and plan ahead a little, you will not have to participate in the stampede for seating which has become an infamous part of the reunion banquet.

Here is how it works: When you fill out the reunion registration form, you will be able to purchase one ticket, an entire table (10 seats) or several tables for you and your friends.

It will be on a first-come, first-served basis, the best seats assigned as the orders come in. (We will try to honor requests for the side, back of the room, etc.)

When you arrive at the reunion, the tickets you purchased for you and your friends will be in your registration packet with numbered table assignments. At the banquet you will be required to give your numbered ticket to the waiter to obtain your seat and banquet meal.

make your stay more relaxing. There's a children's recreation area and custom children's menus in all the hotel's restaurants.

Make your plans now and call the

hotel directly at [redacted] reservations. Tell them you are with the VHPA and take advantage of our special low rate of \$69 a night.



## Book Now and Save to Kansas City! Exclusive VHPA Travel Discounts to the 1995 Reunion

Call the official travel agency of VHPA and receive exclusive airline and car rental discounts for travel to Kansas City. These are special VHPA rates, available only through Carlson Travel Network/Media Travel USA.

You save money and VHPA wins, too! CTN/Media Travel USA will make a donation to VHPA for each airline ticket purchase. Make plans now to meet in Kansas City July 1-5, and take advantage of the exclusive discounts provided by these companies:

**NORTHWEST  
AIRLINES**



**UNITED AIRLINES**



**Carlson Travel Network®**

Media Travel USA

**1-800-283-TRIP**



# VIETNAM HELICOPTER PILOTS ASSOCIATION

12th Annual Reunion Kansas City, MO July 1-5, 1995

## REUNION REGISTRATION FORM

Mail to: VHPA, 7 W. Seventh St., Suite 1990, Cincinnati, OH 45202

FAX signed credit card registrations to: (513) 721-5315

Name:	Member No.:	Expected arrival date:
Wife/Guest name:	No. of children:	Is this your first reunion?
Names of additional guests:	How many reunions have you attended?	
Address:	Check here if notifying VHPA of an address change [ ]	
City:	State:	ZIP: Phone: ( )

### REGISTRATION FEES

	No. of people	Price	Total
Registration before 6/1/95*		@ \$ 25.00	
Registration after 6/1/95*		@ \$ 35.00	
Early Bird Luau (July 1)		@ \$ 10.00	
M*A*S*H Party (July 2) (Food, show and dance.)		@ \$ 25.00	
Riverboat casino (July 3) (Transportation, food, admission.)		@ \$ 25.00	
Banquet (July 4) (Order 1 or 100; stop the stampede.)		@ \$ 35.00	
Dues (if included)	1 year	@ \$ 30.00	
You can make 3 payments over 6-month Installment period if you wish	Life installment No. 1	@ \$150.00	
	Complete Life Membership	@ \$450.00	
	GRAND TOTAL		

Indicate if you want to participate in these activities

**Royals baseball game:**  
(July 2. Transportation, ticket.)  
**Cost: \$17**

**Kansas City Zoo:**  
(July 3. Transportation, entrance fee.)  
**Cost: \$12**

**Truman Library:**  
(July 3. Transportation, entrance fee.)  
**Cost: \$12**

**Worlds of Fun/Oceans of Fun:**  
(July 3. Transportation, admission. Slight additional cost to enter both.)  
**Cost: \$21**

**Golf Tournament:**  
(July 3. Transportation, cart and entry fee.)  
**Cost: \$50**

**5k run or crawl:**  
(July 3.)  
**Cost: No charge**

\* Each adult 18 and older must pay the registration fee.

☐ Enclosed is my check or money order payable to "VHPA Reunion '95"

☐ Please charge my: MasterCard VISA Discover (circle one)

Credit card No.: Expiration date:

Signature:

### REUNION NAME TAG INFORMATION

Name you want on name tag: Call sign:

Name of wife/guest: Flight school class:  
(Number or year for Army; branch and year for other services.)

1st combat unit: Year(s):

2nd combat unit: Year(s):

3rd combat unit: Year(s):

Hometown or current residence:

**Refund policy:** No refunds will be granted prior to the Reunion. All refund requests must be submitted to VHPA headquarters no later than Aug. 5, 1995, and must include all tickets received, plus proof of payment. Refunds will not be granted for fixed-price events (the Banquet is a fixed-price event) that lose money unless the entire Reunion has a positive cash balance. The VHPA headquarters will process and pay all refund requests within 10 days of completing the Reunion account balancing.



# Crewmembers join VHPA network

MEL CANON  
ON-LINE COORDINATOR  
(██████████)

Fess up . . . how many new computers did Santa bring out there in VHPA land? We were up to nearly 50 online members before the holidays . . . hope Santa was good to you and you show up on the net.

The VHPA Listserver is in place and operating fine. Traffic sort goes from light to heavy . . . depending on whether there are any hot topics to talk about or not.

An interesting thing has taken place, however. We have invited crewmembers to join us on the net. These are all members of VHCMA. The first one to check in on the net was GREG OFFRINGA. I'll talk more about Greg later.

We have also established an advisory committee to set up procedures and guidelines for the nets operation. The Advisory Committee consists of:

GARY ROUSH (██████████), DOUG RUSSELL (██████████), JIM SCHUECKLER (j██████████u), RICHARD YOOD (██████████), and myself, MEL CANON (██████████).

If you have questions about the net, you may contact any of those committee members. Committee members will accept complaints regarding operations of the net and order up a gun team to take care of any problems.

The net goes into 1995 with, roughly, 50 participants. Some are there all the time and others just jump in occasionally.

We have no participation from the Marines, Navy and Air Force. Where are you guys? I know the Army had more R/W Aviators in RVN than any other service, but VHPA is for us all.

So is the net.

I think I will begin 1995 with a new twist. Now that the net is in place and the traffic is fairly constant, I thought it might be nice to include a little cockpit traffic for those of you who are not using computers online. I will try to incorporate a little of that into the column each issue if it works out.

I'll try it out and, if you like it, let me know. I will continue to highlight some of the folks on the net, but will cut down on my commentary to give you some blow-by-blow.

The following could have been heard on the net in mid-November:

**Muleskinner (Gary Roush, ██████████):** A couple of years ago at a VHPA reunion, I conducted a "scientific" study about why helicopter pilots got shot at. My thesis was that it was because we drank alcoholic beverages. To test the

**VHPA  
Online**

theory I asked during our business meeting — how many people drank alcoholic beverages in Vietnam. Nearly everyone held up their hands. I then asked how many got shot at and they all held up their hands.

So, see its true — we got shot at because we drank alcohol! It had nothing to do with being low and slow.

**Gordon Eatley (██████████):** I do believe that there is an alternate reason we got shot at. It was lack of sex. I never heard a pilot getting shot at on R&R.

**Muleskinner:** I thought I was getting shot at on R&R. My wife met me in Hawaii. For some reason we spent a great deal of time in bed (can't remember why anymore).

In any case, there was a Chinese wedding at the Hilton Hawaiian Village one afternoon which included fire crackers. Much to my wife's amazement, I was under the bed before she knew what was happening. This was just after my careful explanation of how safe it was flying Chinooks in Vietnam.

**TigerShark 17 (Mel Canon, ██████████):** Gary, I know the feeling . . . we must have been at the Hawaiian Hilton at the same time. I too had the same experience . . . a Chinese wedding with firecrackers that scared the crap out of me and sent me to the floor in the room.

My wife just thought I wanted to get kinky and jumped on the floor with me. I was shaking too much and we went for a walk instead . . . the honking horns on the street sent me back to the room.

Life is full of similarities . . . just when you think you have something unique to talk about along comes somebody with a similar story . . . Sorry.

**Potato Masher 18 (Doug Russell, ██████████):** I think the reason we got shot at was because the NVA/VC were so ticked off at us because our loud helicopters woke them up while we were still 5 clicks away.

**Polecat 356 (Jim Shueckler, ██████████):** Way back then, did we *really* think that we could sneak up on anybody with a Huey? Heck, I work with a deaf guy who can *feel* a Huey coming!

**TigerShark 17:** I believe, Gary . . . we got shot at because we drank alcoholic beverages. And . . . we didn't have nuclear war till women got the vote. No offense, Carol.

**Carol Wickingham (██████████):** No offense taken, Mel. Any idjit can see cause and effect at work there, right?

**John Shepardson (██████████):** Ok, ok . . . it was because we drank and because we weren't having sex. What about "why we got hit so damn often?"

Back in the days when we were all teen-age gods of the sky, I was under the impression that my C model was one hot machine while making a gun run at or near VNE.

A few years ago I went to an airshow which included some simulated attacks by World War II vintage torpedo bombers and a few early fighters like the P-40. The announcer said that the attack speeds "approached 150 mph."

I was shocked when he said that because I had just been thinking how fat and slow those old airplanes looked . . . EASY targets, I thought. If I remember right, the UH-1C VNE was

*Continued on Page 14*



# Flying Cranes in I Corps and Laos

ED STRAZZINI

On my second tour, I flew CH-54As for the 478th Aviation Company (Heavy Helicopter) which at the time was assigned to the 159th Assault Support Aviation Battalion (which included three CH-47 companies) for the 101st Airborne Division.

The 478th was based at Red Beach, just north of Da Nang, in a compound erected to support rear echelon activities. Our AO covered all of I Corps and west into Laos. Besides the 101st, we supported the Americal Division, the U.S. Marine Corps, the U.S. Air Force, the Vietnamese Army and the Royal Laotian Army.

I'd like to describe two incidents that still stand out in my mind, but a little background information will help.

The Crane had the capability of

hydraulically winching 15,000 pounds, and its cargo hook system was capable of handling up to a 20,000-pound static load.

The high density altitude conditions we encountered in Vietnam's mountains reduced some loads to 17,000 pounds. Therefore, we removed the armor plating, the cargo hook system that secured the pod, and other extraneous items to obtain what we called "super lifters."

The first incident involved the recovery of a Marine Corps CH-53 Sea Stallion which had a basic weight in excess of 24,000 pounds. It occurred in early 1971 near An Hoa, south of Da Nang. I have never heard of any other instance of a CH-53 being recovered by another helicopter up to that time.

During a monsoon rescue operation, the CH-53 was hovering over a flooded area to pick up some Vietnamese civilians. I guess the crew

was distracted by the mission, because they had a tail rotor strike. The aircraft settled into the water and tipped over on its side but suffered relatively minor damage overall.

During some hasty coordination, the Marines assured us they'd remove the rotor system, transmission and some other components to get its weight down to 17,000 pounds. However when we made the initial pickup hover check, the winch load indicator said we had in excess of 20,000 pounds on the hook.

In any other case we would have put it back down for further lightening, but with daylight fading and the reputation of the Army to uphold, we stayed.

We held at a hover for about 30 minutes to burn off 2,000 pounds of fuel, leaving the absolute minimum needed to get us to the Marine base with the load. The always reliable

*Continued on Page 15*

## World War II planes slow during attacks

*Continued from Page 13*

140 knots!! It's a wonder that Uncle Ho's children didn't hit us with every shot they fired. Of course, there was one day when I think they did . . . but then that's just another war story.

**Alley Cat 4** ( )

**(m):** Speaking of getting shot at, has anyone ever figured out how many rounds of 7.62 or how many rockets it took to kill one NVA or one Cong?

My experience was that it took a bunch. Maybe all that drinking and the lack of sex explains being a rotten shot.

**Assault 11** ( ): OK, OK . . . we've heard about getting shot at, sex, drinking, and being (or not being) hit.

I have a question that my kids ask me often, and I'm sure there is an easy answer but as a former scout, I haven't a clue. Why weren't we issued parachutes? Do like commercial helicopter pilots like the guy over there in Indonesia flying around at 20,000 feet? Are helicopters so inherently safe, a parachute was considered superfluous? Would the blade (if there still was one) chop us up?

I really don't know the answer and feel stupid when asked. Thanks.

As you can see, things haven't changed much since the war! What was that song . . . "Still Crazy After All These Years?" Speaking of craziness . . .

BOSTON, MA — Hello, GREG OFFRINGA. Greg was a crewmember for the Cowboys (335th AHC) in 1968-69 and the first VHCMA member to sign onto the net.

He is currently the executive director of the New England chapter of VHCMA. His post-Vietnam duty included serving as a crew chief on OH-13s with D/2/9 Cav., 24th Infantry Division at Fort Riley, KS.

After the service, Greg went back to school, majoring in psychology and currently finishing up his studies for a doctorate in clinical psychology.

He's been in private practice in Boston and Sharon, MA, and joined our net at the end of November. He was immediately put to work, and rather than keeping the bugs off our windshields these days, he's trying to extricate them from our heads.

Greg stopped in to see what the net was like, decided we were in dire need of his talents and decided to stick around. He probably finds this to be a good forum for psychological research.

Well, that does it for another fun flight in cyberspace. Come join the gaggle! We now have maintenance and doorguns for the slicks, gun cover, ARA, Hooks to haul the big stuff and even a Crane driver in our midst.

We could use a little Marine Air and a Jolly Green or two on this mission. Till next time . . . keep your heads on a swivel and those rotors in the green.



# Hover burns 2,000 pounds of fuel

*Continued from Page 14*

Crane made it look easy as we lumbered into Marble Mountain and gently deposited the tarnished CH-53 on the maintenance pad.

By the way, after landing, I walked over to examine the CH-53 and was shocked to discover the recovery crew had loaded much of what they had removed from the aircraft into its cargo bay!

Some of the other aircraft we recovered were U.S. Air Force CH-3 Jolly Greens, A4s, and C-7 Caribous, Marine OV-10 Broncos, Army OV-1 Mohawks, and all types of helicopters.

We also moved air cushion vehicles, bridges, engineer equipment, railroad cars, ammunition, rations, fuel bladders, and artillery pieces.

Periodically, the 478th was tasked to support U.S. interests in Laos.

Many of our missions supported the USAID activities assisting the Lao civilians driven from their homelands by invading NVA. The U.S. Embassy also gave us missions to assist the Royal Lao forces.

Once we recovered a Royal Lao Air Force CH-34 to Vientiane so Buddhist monks could exorcise it. The Lao pilots had determined the aircraft was not flyable because it had been inhabited by evil spirits!

In June 1971 we were asked to help Gen. Vang Pao's troops by lifting a couple of Chinese 122mm howitzers they had just captured from the NVA in a battle on the Plain of Jars.

My response was the standard one,



**A Chinese-made 122mm howitzer being lifted by Crane from the Plain of Jars in Laos in 1971.**

"What does it weigh?" Well, nobody present had any idea, but we concluded that it had to be less than a U.S. 155 mm, since it was a noticeably smaller piece.

I took advantage of an Air America S-58T flight to get a glimpse of the site where the guns were being guarded by the general's troops. We landed briefly just to let off a team of American riggers and then returned to Long Tien where we quickly readied for the mission.

A pair of Royal Lao armed T-28s (each loaded with six 250-pound bombs and two .30-cal. machine guns) escorted us into the PZ.

The hook up and flight out were uneventful; the gun weighed some-

where around 8,000 pounds, I seem to recall.

We carried the gun to the airfield at Long Tien where the camo-dressed Gen. Vang Pao personally thanked us. As we had undertaken the flight with minimal fuel, we were delayed while Air America refueled us before going after the second gun.

Before we could get cranked up, a messenger reported the mission was suddenly canceled. Shortly afterward we learned why: The NVA had counterattacked and took back their lost howitzer!

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Ed Strazzini, who lives in Charlottesville, VA, served as "Mustang 11" in 1967-68 and as "Hurricane 3" in 1970-71.

## VHHPA briefs

### Attention CH-54A drivers

The Directory Committee is researching the first year in Vietnam for the 478th Heavy Helicopter Company, which took four Cranes to Vietnam with the 1st Air Cavalry Division.

We know the names of some of the men in that company: Maj. T.C. (or T.J.) Clark Jr. was the CO, CWO Carl Burhanan was an IP, Maj. Dave Senay, CWO C.R. Brown

and CWO W.H. Davis were in the unit.

If you know how to get in touch with any of these pilots, please contact Mike Law at [REDACTED] (days) or [REDACTED] (evenings).

### VHCMA directory available

The Vietnam Helicopter Crew Members Association's 1994 Directory, including an update through December 1994, is available to VHHPA members.

Cost of the package is \$8, including postage. Orders should be sent to the VHCMA, [REDACTED].



# AF choppers used in reconnaissance

J. DAVID MCCLUNG

When permanent assignments were posted for Air Force Helicopter Class 67F, most of the assignments were as expected — two H-43s to Vietnam, two 43s to base rescue assignments in the United States, and two HH-3 assignments to “Jolly Green Giant” Squadrons.

But, to our surprise, two of us were assigned to the Strategic Air Command, 100th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing (SRW). That was the unit that flew U2 spy planes.

We wondered, “What kind of strategic reconnaissance does the Strategic Air Command do with CH-3E helicopters?”

When I reached my assignment at Davis Monthan Air Force Base, AZ, I was briefed by a seasoned senior master sergeant. He drew pictures on a blackboard, explaining how I would be catching jet aircraft in midair with my helicopter.

I laughed and said, “I may be a second lieutenant, but I am not that gullible! There is no way that I will ever catch an airplane in the air!”

The next day, I made my first midair recovery. Over the next four years, I made dozens of midair recov-

eries in Vietnam, Korea and other locations.

Long before the war started in Vietnam, the 100th SRW established a practice of 90- to 120-day assignments for its overseas detachments.

In Vietnam, we operated as “Detachment 10” at Da Nang Air Force Base. I served with this detachment for three different rotations.

At Da Nang, our two CH-3E helicopters flew from a helipad near the mortuary on the northeast corner of the base. Our mission was to catch unmanned reconnaissance airplanes in mid air after they returned from the North.

The unmanned airplanes, called “drones” or “bugs,” were carried under the wings on large pylons of a DC-130 to a position off the coast of North Vietnam.

When they were launched, they flew a predetermined route over targets in the North. Some flew at extremely high altitudes and could stay aloft for hours. Others were equipped to fly at low altitude.

Some were even configured to take flash pictures at night or to drop chaff.

Whatever their mission, none of the drones had landing gear, so all of

them needed to be recovered by a helicopter.

The CH-3E recovery helicopters had an energy-absorbing winch mounted directly under the main rotor shaft. A hole through the hull allowed the cable from the winch to hang below the helicopter at the center of gravity.

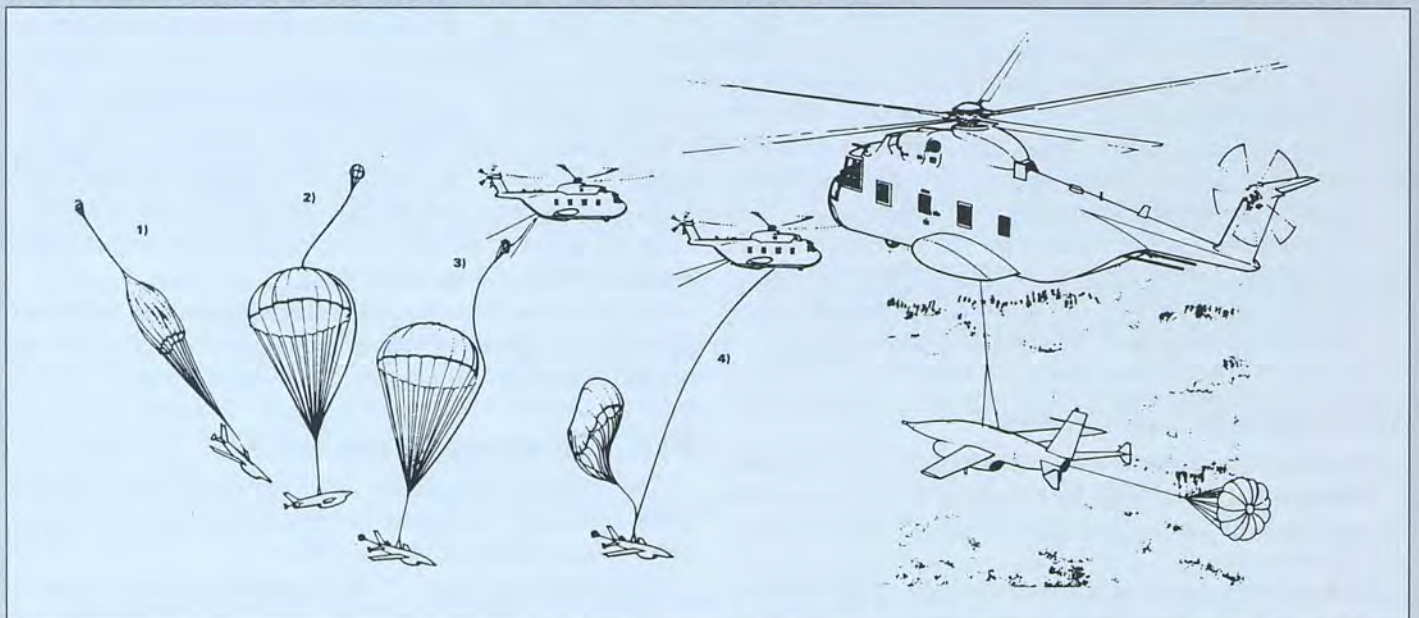
When it was rigged for a recovery, the cable from the winch was connected to three hooks that were held below the rear of the helicopter on aluminum poles.

When a drone completed its mission, it returned to a point about 25 miles northeast of Monkey Mountain where the helicopters circled at 10,000 feet.

As it approached the recovery point, the drone was above 60,000 feet. It shut off the engine, dumped any remaining fuel and deployed a small parachute to stabilize it during descent.

As it passed through 15,000 feet, a 100-foot diameter parachute deployed. Attached to the top of the this parachute was a 14-foot, nylon-reinforced recovery chute that was connected to the drone by a 6,000-pound test load line.

*Continued on Page 17*



Drawing courtesy of Spyplane: The Secret World of Aerial Intelligence-Gathering

Recovering a drone with a CH-3E helicopter over South Vietnam is shown in this series of drawings.



# Smaller chute attached to large one

*Continued from Page 16*

To recover the drone, we had to snag the recovery chute with the hooks suspended below our helicopter.

The trick was to pass only a few inches above the recovery chute at 60 knots, while matching the rate of descent of the helicopter to that of the drone. The air turbulence created by the 100-foot main chute caused the recovery chute to bob and weave, so the approach frequently got quite exciting.

Our greatest fear was winding a parachute in our rotor system.

When the hooks snagged the recovery chute, an automatic release separated the 100-foot chute from the drone and the energy-absorbing winch in the helicopter allowed cable to play out until the drone was in tow.

When all went as planned, the drone was suspended approximately

600 feet below the helicopter. (See the diagram from David Donald's *Spyplane* published by Motorbooks International, Osceola, WI 54020.)

Frequently, things did not go as planned.

With the helicopter flying at 60 knots and the drone hanging 600 feet below, the drone would sometimes begin to swing wildly from one side of the helicopter to the other.

As it swung like a pendulum, it could gain enough speed to actually fly on its own until the load line pulled it back. Sometimes, it was difficult to know which aircraft was controlling the other.

I remember several occasions seeing a drone come alongside the helicopter like it was flying in formation. More than once, it was necessary to cut the drone loose to save the helicopter.

On most missions, it would take

about 30 minutes to reel the drone in to a position about six feet below the helicopter. When the drone was tucked safely below the helicopter, we returned to Da Nang Air Force Base.

Over more than eight years of operation in Vietnam, Detachment 10 successfully flew thousands of missions without losing a helicopter or a flight crew member.

The aerial photography provided by the drones was an important source of intelligence throughout the war.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** While using an on-line computer service, David McClung recently learned about the VHPA and joined. That sort of makes us all even — David learned about the VHPA and the VHPA learned about an extremely interesting use of helicopters in Vietnam.

## Taps

### Terrence L. Adkins

Terrence L. "Terry" Adkins, a member of class 68-20 at Fort Wolters and 68-12 at Fort Hunter, died in a helicopter crash off the Oregon coast on July 24.

His body, which ejected from the aircraft at the time of the crash, was recovered two days later.

Adkins, who was a management analyst in the Washington County Sheriff's Office in Hillsboro, Ore., was flying a helicopter sightseeing tour out of Seaside when the accident occurred.

Interment with full military honors was in Willamette National Cemetery in Portland on July 29.

Adkins' wife Becky and mother Rose reside in Portland.

### Donald Lee Craft

Donald Lee Craft, a retired Army CW3 and Vietnam helicopter pilot,

died Nov. 17 at Holmes Regional Medical Center in Melbourne, FL.

He was 60.

Craft was born in Clendenin, WV, and moved to Brevard County, FL, in 1993 from Savannah, GA.

He served two combat tours in South Vietnam and a tour in South Korea.

Craft held the Air Medal with "V" and 10 oak leaf clusters, as well as the Combat Infantryman Badge.

He is survived by daughters Beth Eller of Bonaire, GA, and Deborah Welch of Florence, SC; sons Jerry Craft of Moncks Corner, SC, and Donald Craft Jr. of Texas; his mother, Nellie Skaggs of Melbourne, FL; sisters Shirley Shepherd of Duluth, GA, Dolores McCarty of Winston-Salem, NC, and Connie Wilhite of Riverside, CA; a brother, Leon Craft of Charleston, WV; and nine grandchildren.

## Newsletter has e-mail addresses

VHPA members can communicate with *The VHPA Newsletter* editor and the *VHPA Online* coordinator using electronic mail — or e-mail.

Articles, notices and letters for publication can be sent to the Newsletter directly via CompuServe and over the Internet.

*VHPA Online* coordinator Mel Canon can be contacted via America Online and over the Internet.

Newsletter editor Jack Swickard can be reached on CompuServe at:

**74127,442**

His Internet address is: INTERNET [REDACTED]

Online coordinator Mel Canon's e-mail address is: [REDACTED]



# CLOSURE: A Vietnam story

MIKE AUSTIN  
VHPA MEMBER

On April 2, 1972, near the of DMZ of South Vietnam, an Air Force FAC pilot, call-sign Bilk 34, made a call on guard for assistance to rescue the lone survivor of an EB-66 radar surveillance plane that had been shot down by a SAM fired by the North Vietnamese Army near Cam Lo.

Flying his UH-1H Huey helicopter near Quang Tri to observe the three-day-old invasion by the NVA, Army Lt. Byron Kulland, "Blue Ghost 39," answered the call. Byron was a short-timer slick pilot with F Troop, 8th Cavalry.

Copilot Warrant Officer John Frink, crew chief Spec. Ron Paschall and doorgunner Pfc. Jose Astorga also knew full-well the dangers of such an impromptu rescue attempt in the midst of concentrated enemy forces.

There had been little reconnaissance of the area since 45,000 NVA attacked March 30 across the Ben Hai River, only 12 miles north of them, and from the west out of Laos. For Hanoi, this was a desperate crusade to conquer the South once and for all, taking complete advantage of the American withdrawal.

The situation changed almost hourly. No one was sure how far south or east they had progressed. Certainly, they were in Cam Lo.

To make matters worse, fighter air cover was unavailable. They would have to rely solely on Cobra gunships for protection on the quick snatch extraction. It was also getting late. And the weather was closing in.

Still, they decided to try anyway. After all, any one of them could be in similar straits at any time, given the uncertainty of the moment.

Without hesitation, Byron refueled at Ai Tu combat base (Quang Tri), then departed north at full power toward the town of Dong Ha with Capt. Mike Rosebeary following in a Cobra gunship.

They died doing the most noble thing warriors could be asked to do: Risking their own lives so another might live.

He made a hard left turn and dropped to a 50-foot altitude to follow the Cua Viet River, as the crew began to hunt for the airman, evading the enemy somewhere below. Immediately after crossing the river, ground fire raked both helicopters. Rosebeary's ship was shot up so badly, the emergency panel lit up like a Christmas tree.

He ordered a retreat and headed for the coast, losing his engine along the way. Luckily, a Jolly Green SAR chopper was there in minutes to pick up the two-man crew.

Meanwhile, back on the lone Huey, Kulland had tried to turn and escape with Rosebeary, but his ship began trailing heavy smoke from .51-caliber hits on the engine. Astorga's machine gun jammed while attempting to suppress the fire. Two rounds exploded into his chest plate and one leg, knocking him unconscious.

Then they crashed hard.

Astorga awoke in a daze to find the badly injured crew chief unconscious and barely alive. Outside, he located Kulland's lifeless form on the ground a few feet away, thrown clear by impact.

Frink's voice startled him, coming from somewhere in the crumpled cockpit. Astorga found the copilot pinned in the wreckage. Using all the strength he had left, he kicked and pulled at the door, while Frink pounded from inside. It would not budge.

Knowing his time was running out, Frink shoved his own survival vest through a narrow slit, ordering the gunner to take it and save himself. It

would be a last great act of selflessness.

Gravely injured, Astorga crawled away, as the NVA rushed in, firing madly at the ship. Paschall and Frink were executed by the volley.

Weak from loss of blood, the gunner was easily captured. He survived and was transported to Hanoi as one of America's last prisoners of war.

That is how my friends and fellow soldiers met their fates on an Easter Sunday, while searching for a man known to them only as BAT 21.

They died doing the most noble thing warriors could be asked to do: Risking their own lives so another might live.

In the long years since this tragedy occurred, seldom a day goes by I do not think about it and draw some new inspiration from the act. In large part, it was the memory of Blue Ghost 39's crew, and that of six others we had to leave behind in a string of similar tragedies, that eventually drove me back to Vietnam.

Sept. 4, 1993, I held my wife, Lynn, for a long moment at the Philadelphia airport before departing alone on an odyssey into my past.

By the time my plane touched down on Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport 30 hours later, I was too strung out to care that a Russian MiG-23 was taxiing beside me, blowing the weeds low that grew through cracks in the poorly maintained runway with hot exhaust.

Numbly, I passed through immigration and customs to meet my guide. Only he wasn't my real guide, he explained over a Heineken in the sultry bar. I would meet him when I flew up to Da Nang that afternoon.

Wasn't I the one who sent the fax requesting to meet with former enemy soldiers? Yes, I had expressed an interest. Good, he said, because I would be glad to know my permanent guide was a former VC. He smiled, waiting for my reaction.

*Continued on Page 19*



# My guide would be a former VC

*Continued from Page 18*

I had only asked to meet with them, not live with one for two weeks! Too tired to care, I boarded the aged Russian airliner for the short hop to central Vietnam.

The man waiting at Da Nang looked too young to have fought in the war. Tru's demeanor was so disarming and exceedingly polite, I had to question him immediately about his past involvement in the war.

To my relief, I found he was merely a child during the conflict. But he had been a communist soldier, drafted out of college in 1979 to fight against the Chinese when they invaded Vietnam's northern provinces.

After 6.5 years in uniform, he returned to complete his degree in international business. He now hated the army and felt only slightly less loathing for government policy, but was nonetheless a model citizen, I was sure. It was just the type of personality he had.

In the days ahead, my initial judgment prevailed. Tru proved to be a trusted friend as well as gracious host. Between him and my driver Tan, a former South Vietnamese Army truck driver stationed at the same base at Marble Mountain as me, I was treated to an incredible journey back in time.

The trips to Hill 55 and the Arizona Territory, or "VC Holyland" as Tru called it, were electrifying. The roughest part came when I visited My Lai, site of the infamous massacre.

At Tru's urging, I agreed to go at the last moment, under protest, as an excuse to see the Chu Lai area again. Once there, however, I was taken by the somber beauty of the memorial. And enraged at the thought we were even capable of such an act.

"We expected that from the VC, but that's not how Americans were trained to fight," I told Tru, who offered a sympathetic shrug.

Next day, I toured the Citadel, which still bore the scars of Tet 1968. In fact, I almost expected to see a flak-jacketed Marine, or sandal-clad

The trips to Hill 55 and the Arizona Territory, or "VC Holyland" as Tru called it, were electrifying.

Viet Cong, jump from the dark recesses of a blown-out building. Time had stood still in Vietnam, preserving one of the greatest battles of the war.

Tru described the enemy's month-long occupation of the city, when as many as 5,000 citizens were killed for suspicion of being collaborators with the Saigon regime.

"They were shot, hung, hacked to death, burned or buried alive. Some were weighted down with stones and drowned in the river."

As at My Lai, we were both appalled at the scope of inhumanity, regardless who was responsible. Even though a communist, Tru was one of the most understanding men I had ever met. By this time, I considered him not only a friend, but a confidant as well.

That evening, as we sat at the edge of the Perfume River, I watched the sun set on the western hills. Tru joined me in a toast to the six Blue Ghosts who were still out there, killed June 11 and 12, 1972, in three separate crashes. Three-Nine's crew still lay up near the Z, where we would travel next.

The next two days were full up

That evening, as we sat at the edge of the Perfume River, I watched the sun set on the western hills.

with visits to such war icons as Camp Carroll, Ai Tu combat base and Khe Sanh.

At Carroll, where only a stone monument marks the once great artillery base, I was surprised to see a couple dozen men emerge out of the jungle shortly after arriving. They were dressed in filthy rags, and carrying picks and shovels, the tools of the present day scrap-metal hunters.

Tru explained they were selling U.S. dog tags, which they claimed to have found in the outlying countryside. I thumbed through the crusted metal plates, but was too uncomfortable to pull out my wallet, since I was probably carrying 10 years' wages for the average Vietnamese at the time.

At my urging, we left for Khe Sanh, leaving them disappointed and me curious as to the identities on those tags.

Stepping around live ordnance that still littered the ground a quarter century later, I felt genuine fear in Vietnam once again at Khe Sanh. Tru hurriedly grabbed some loose shrubbery to cover a pile of rusting grenades lying in a shallow hole, as children approached us from the nearby village.

Then we quickly walked away so not to draw their curiosity to the deadly explosives. What a way to have to grow up, I lamented. Tru agreed, explaining as many as 10,000 civilians had been killed by land mines and other explosives left over from the war by both sides. Countless others were maimed, including many children. The legacy of Vietnam continued.

After a claustrophobic tour of an underground tunnel network used by the enemy, and my first trip across the Ben Hai River into what was North Vietnam, I returned to my final destination, Dong Ha, checking into what passed as its only hotel. The ugly, Russian-built structure was filthy, with bugs and lizards crawling everywhere, but I took it in stride.

Thoughtfully, Tru had arranged for

*Continued on Page 20*



# Ugly, Russian-built hotel was filthy

*Continued from Page 19*

a room that overlooked the plains where Kulland, Frink and Paschall were shot down. Standing on the small balcony, I adjusted the worn MIA bracelet with Kulland's name on it that fellow pilot Chuck LaCelle had sent me to wear on the occasion of my return.

Chuck and gun platoon leader Tim Sprouse had both nearly been killed trying to rescue them. It was his way of remembering.

After returning to the lobby, I was surprised to see two 4-wheel-drive vehicles pull up in front of the hotel and a dozen or so young American men get out. They were dressed casu-

ally in loose civilian pants and T-shirts. Some had bandannas tied around their heads as sweat bands.

As they unpacked their rucksacks and boxes of supplies, I walked out to introduce myself. To my amazement, I found they were members of the Joint Task Force! Naturally, I asked if we could meet later at the small hotel bar to talk.

"Right after we get cleaned up," replied one. "It's was a long hump out to the dig today."

Later, I found myself in the company of exceptional men, each hand-picked for his assignment. They came from all branches of the military, possessing a variety of skills: A medic,

an ordnance expert, two linguists and a few infantry types, among others. Conversing over some Ba Ba's that evening, I found myself thinking back to times spent with similar-looking men 22 years before.

Inevitably, the discussion turned to the war. Giving them a flavor for the local history after the invasion of 1972 (the hotel would have been behind enemy lines by Day 3), I then asked about their work. Not surprising, it was sometimes frustrating, sometimes rewarding they all agreed, but they were dedicated to the cause in any event.

With all that unexploded ordnance

*Continued on Page 21*

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# The discussion turned to the war

*Continued from Page 20*

lying around, their job was certainly not without risk, I observed, cringing to think one of them could be hurt while searching for the bones of long-dead Americans. This prompted a short but spirited discussion among them on how to divide their limited resources the following day.

"Okay, if your team gets the medic, then we get EOD," one said firmly, ending the friendly argument.

Their tales of painstaking investigation and back-breaking work to resolve the fate of the missing-in-action were captivating.

Because of their professionalism, and national sensitivity to the MIA issue, they were careful not to reveal actual names or locations of unresolved cases when telling the stories. But that in no way detracted from the incredible narrations I was hearing.

Looking toward the open window that faced north, I mentioned the fact I had lost a crew of men somewhere out there, "probably within a mile or two of this hotel."

When one of them asked their names, I retold the story of Blue Ghost 39's ill-fated rescue attempt.

A Navy petty officer, Jeff Newman, then set his glass down and allowed that he had personally excavated their crash site in April. They were now in the lab in Hawaii awaiting identification.

"Nothing's positive, but if you're asking my personal opinion, I feel I've accounted for all three of them. That's all I can say at this point."

I was speechless for a moment, looking at this strapping young sailor who had gleaned their precious earthly remains from the sandy soil. "Where did you find them?" I was finally able to ask. Jeff stood and walked to the window.

"See that ville just across the river? Right next to it."

I stood motionless, trying to sort through the flood of emotions I was feeling. Tru leaned close to me.

"They are no longer missing.

"Nothing's positive, but if you're asking my personal opinion, I feel I've accounted for all three of them. That's all I can say at this point."

Maybe you should make the bracelet a gift," he almost whispered. Tru's suggestion moved me. How appropriate.

Removing the silver band from my wrist, I handed it to Jeff, asking him to accept it from the crew's families and friends as a token of our deepest gratitude.

Back at the table, I ordered another round for everybody.

"Now, I'd like to tell you something about the personalities behind those bones you found . . ."

Clouds grayed the morning sky April 29, 1994, as we approached the old chapel at Fort Myer, next to Arlington National Cemetery.

Al Rushatz, the former Blue Ghost commander, was there, as was Frank Leggio who had roomed with Kulland. Tim Sprouse and Chuck LaCelle were also present and accounted for.

A surprise visitor, Darrel Whitcomb, one of the Air Force FAC pilots on station when they died, was in attendance as well.

We met with the families briefly before entering through separate doors. Inside, we sang hymns and bowed through the moving eulogy. Outside, a team of six white stallions paced nervously while the metal casket was loaded onto the caisson. The line of mourners followed the horses down Grant Avenue.

Eight soldiers carefully lifted the

casket to follow Chaplain Pierce through neat rows of white monuments, down to the final resting place of Blue Ghost 39's crew.

It was a heroes' burial. The 21-gun salute. The bugler standing alone under a shade tree while playing Taps, the loneliest song ever written. The chaplain presented three crisply folded flags, one to each family.

After the services were concluded, a solitary soldier stood ramrod straight, charged with guarding the men until they were lowered into the ground. I lingered a few moments longer to remember them one last time.

Those who could attend were invited to go the Vietnam Veterans Memorial — The Wall. There, three soldiers from Fort Hood, Texas, who had escorted the remains from California, held a short ceremony in the crew's honor.

Lts. Perito and Hoyt joined with Sgt. Jackson to place a plaque from the men of 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry below the familiar names on the monument. Then, they stood at attention and saluted the polished black granite.

I swelled with pride at the sight of these men honoring their cavalry forbears. Perito, who led the delegation, was handed John Frink's MIA bracelet by Chuck.

Now representatives of all the men responsible for bringing them home had been duly thanked, both here and in Vietnam.

As I left the nation's capital for the drive home, I felt a contentment I hadn't known before I came. I was sure the others were feeling it, too.

If a piece of us had been left behind in Vietnam, a piece of us had surely come home with these brave souls.

**EDITOR'S NOTE: Darrel Whitcomb of Burke, VA, provided details about Blue Ghost 39's crash. Darrel was one of the Nail FACs operating out of Thailand and was overhead when it occurred.**



# How 'Helicopter Valley' got name

MIKE LAW  
DIRECTORY EDITOR

Almost anyone who flew in I Corps near the DMZ after the summer of 1966 is familiar with the name "Helicopter Valley."

I have always wondered how this well-known landmark got its name.

As good as the Marine Corps official histories are, the 1966 volume did not answer all my questions.

A visit to the USMC History Center and Museum at the Navy Yard in Washington helped answer my questions.

Early on July 15, 1966, MAG-16 (equivalent to an Army aviation battalion) launched 41 helicopters from Marble Mountain to Dong Ha in support of Operation Hastings. This was D-Day for Hastings in which a regimental-sized (equivalent to an Army brigade) Marine task force and an ARVN force worked several AOs near the DMZ looking for the NVA's 324B Division that MACV believed had just moved into South Vietnam.

The Marines had been using Dong Ha as their northernmost operations base for several months. The Marine task force had recently positioned four infantry battalions at Dong Ha for this operation.

The aircraft arrived at Dong Ha about 7:15 a.m. and shut down for their final briefing.

Col. Richard Hall, commanding officer of MAG-16, flew a UH-1E, used the call sign "RoseAnn Playboy" and was the TACA (tactical air commander airborne) for the day.

The infantry battalion commander decided to insert his entire unit at LZ Crow, less than three kilometers from the DMZ. It was a pasture some 300 feet by 300 feet on the west bank of a stream in the Ngan River Valley.

The 24 CH-46As were divided into six divisions of four aircraft each, since the first zone appeared large enough to accommodate four aircraft landing together.

Each CH-46A carried 14 troops, plus a crew of four.

About 7:45 a.m., RoseAnn Playboy confirmed the prep was on schedule, the zone was clear and could accept troops at 8 a.m.

Each division launched from Dong Ha at two-minute intervals for the 10-minute flight to the LZ. Since numerous automatic weapons positions were located to the northeast, the final approach heading was generally southeast, which caused the terrain to slope downhill to the zone.

There was a tailwind of about 5 knots.

The first two divisions landed in the zone without incident. HMM-265's EP-155, in the third division, overshot the landing point and hit a tree line, causing strike damage to the aircraft and minor injuries to the crew and passengers. It came to rest to the right, outside the zone and was smoking.

HMM-164's YT-15, flown by Maj. Tom Reap, was the fifth division leader. The second ship in the fifth division was HMM-164's YT-18, flown by Capt. W.J. Sellers.

HMM-265's EP-160, flown by Capt. R.O. Harper, was the third ship and Capt. L. Farrell in EP-174 was the last ship in the fifth division.

Just before they started the approach, Reap directed that the fifth division fly a free-trail formation.

In the report of aircraft mishap, Reap stated he believed he was slightly high and fast on final. Rather than flare and place his wingman in an awkward position, he picked a clear area about 75 feet east of the LZ.

He came to a hover and the crew helped him avoid a small ridge already occupied by Marines. He started losing rotor RPM as he pulled power to move over the ridge. The aircraft dropped the last 8-10 feet to the ground and landed hard.

Sellers was about four rotor diameters behind the leader and a little higher. He flared to about 20 degrees nose up to get rid of his airspeed and moved abeam of the leader as he came to a high hover. Some trees near the stream, a stand of 20 foot bamboo, and troops already on the ground lim-

ited his touchdown choices.

He started losing rotor RPM in the hover and set down to the left of the leader. Both aircraft were on uneven ground.

YT-18 was only on the ground about four seconds before it meshed aft rotors with YT-15, which had already lowered its ramp and troops were leaving.

Both aircraft began to shake and vibrate violently, then broke at the manufacturer's splice, just forward of the aft pylon. The pylon dropped, injuring some men inside. YT-15's blades killed two Marines who had just left the aircraft. The crews shut down the engines in both aircraft.

Harper had put an extra 100 feet between EP-160 and YT-18. About the time he noticed the two lead ships would land long, he realized they were landing downwind.

He was still 200 feet in the air when YT-15 and YT-18 meshed rotors. At first, he attempted a wave-off, but because of the wind, weight and density altitude, the capability was not there.

After dropping off his troops, EP-160's crew helped the crews from the three crashed CH-46s load wounded, equipment and crew members.

Farrell was able to execute a wave-off. He landed on the next pass and helped evacuate men and equipment.

Two other HMM-164 ships were hit by small arms fire during this assault. A Marine passenger was killed in one aircraft. The other was hit in the aft pylon.

At 9 a.m., three aircraft from HMM-164 successfully executed an emergency extraction of a 35-man recon team west of Dong Ha. At 9:30 a.m., the RoseAnn flight inserted the second Marine battalion into LZ Dove.

At 11:30 a.m., two HMM-164 aircraft were hit by enemy automatic weapons fire while departing LZ Crow.

The wingman sustained hits in the transmission oil cooler. The aircraft

*Continued on Page 23*



## Wingman gets hit in transmission oil cooler

*Continued from Page 22*

landed hard during an emergency landing and sheared the port main landing gear strut. This crew was evacuated by the other aircraft.

A security force was placed around this aircraft, along with a maintenance crew. Four hours later it was flown out, but received more small-arms fire and damage as it took off.

At 2 p.m., the RoseAnn flight moved 1,400 ARVNs from Dong Ha and Cam Lo to Base D-5.

At 6:15 p.m., while inserting a reaction company to guard the three downed CH-46s in LZ Crow, EP-171 from HMM-265 flown by Capt. T.C. McAllister, with Sgt. R.R. Telfer as crew chief, was hit at 1,500 feet by 12.7mm automatic weapons fire.

The rear of the aircraft was on fire and photos taken from the ground show smoke coming from the cockpit windows. When it tried to land at LZ Crow, smoke filled the cockpit so much no one could see. It nearly crash landed on the infantry battalion's CP and mortar section.

The aircraft exploded after hitting the ground and 13 Marines died, including the crew chief.

LZ Crow had accumulated four crashed CH-46As in less than 10 hours!

That's how this area became known to the Marines as Helicopter Valley. But the story doesn't end there.

On the morning of July 18, the two Marines battalions around LZ Crow started moving out. By 3 p.m. there

was only one company, plus some engineers, left at Crow when the NVA attacked.

At one point in the battle, the NVA actually occupied the downed CH-46As. The Marines called in a napalm strike that burned about 20 NVA, along with the aircraft.

By 7 p.m., the battle was over. Capt. Modrzejewski, commanding officer of Company K, and Sgt. McGinty, the 1st Platoon leader, both won the Medal of Honor in this battle.

Their company lost 14 KIA and 49 WIA in four hours, but the NVA left more than 138 dead at LZ Crow.

**EDITOR'S NOTE: A detailed account of this action will appear in Vol. 2 of the Historical Reference Directory.**

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