



# The VHPA Newsletter

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

February 1993 Vol. 11, No. 1



Gay DeWitt stands beside an NVA truck lifted by Chinook to show it had been captured. Letter, Page 6



## From the President

Speaking for the Executive Council, we hope each of you had the best of holidays and are enjoying the best of a new year! 1992 was good for the VHPA but 1993 looks to be even better! Several members wrote on their renewals that they have been able to find a job after being unemployed for some time — that is always good news.

Those of you who called the VHPA or attended one of the last two Reunions got to know one of the young ladies, Natalie, as a dedicated, hard-working, professional person. She worked for the administrative services contractor and recently decided to take another job with a different career path. We wish her all the best. Her replacement is a young lady named Shiela who seems to have all the professional skills and interests to be a good team member. So, Natalie — thank you for being outstanding; and, Shiela — welcome aboard!

The last few months of the year are always busy for the Executive Council — getting new members "on board," changing the guy who runs the meetings, supporting the new Vice President with his No. 1 priority (the Reunion for summer after next), making certain the Directory gets out, starting any new programs that the committee chairmen or membership need, etc., etc. I am pleased to report that "all is well." Phil Marshall did a fine job working with lots of folks in lots of cities and the Council approved Philadelphia for the 1994 Reunion. The Atlanta Reunion generated a surplus and, after considerable thought, the Council approved several membership promotional programs that we only

dreamed about in prior years. Budgets for the VHPA and for the 1993 Reunion were discussed, modified, and approved. A contract for air transportation connected with the 1993 Reunion was approved. The printing of six versus four Newsletters per year was approved, as already announced. You will also notice in the VHPA Briefs section that between now and the Phoenix Reunion, the VHPA will attend four major industry conventions. Last year we attended three and the year before that just one; so we are getting better and better in this area.

Attending industry conventions (in a cost-effective manner) is one of my "priority items." Jack Jordan, Dave Owens and many others have done a fine job with "The Gathering" during HAI. Last year Skip Butler and others helped with AAAA and AHS. This year we needed local help to be able to attend AHS and the NHA, so I wrote about 60 letters to VHPAers in the St. Louis area and 40 near Jacksonville, asking for volunteers. The response was OUTSTANDING. I love you guys . . . I love the VHPA!! I commented to a Life Member the other day how gratifying it was to receive so many replies. He said, "I'm really not surprised at all. Remember what we shared with each other in flight school and in Vietnam? Why shouldn't we continue sharing and serving each other now?" Many things are done by and for the VHPA as a "labor of love." Maybe these are a natural continuation of the camaraderie we shared at Rucker, at Pleiku, at Soc Trang, at the Golf Course, in the A Shau, at Khe Sanh, as the "Lao Highway Patrol," at Yankee Station, and a million other places. I think so!

This is Undertaker Lead — See you in Phoenix — The smoke is out — Identify.

— **Mike Law, President and Directory Editor**

## Calendar

### March 4-8

The "Gladiators" of the 57th Assault Helicopter Company who served at Kontum, An Khe and Pleiku, Vietnam, in 1967-73 will hold their first reunion at the Twin Towers Hotel and Convention Center in Orlando, FL. Contact: Steve Hayduk, Gladiator Reunion Committee, 3 [REDACTED], or call ([REDACTED]).

### Aug. 5-8

The 25th Infantry Division Association will meet in Louisville, KY. Contact: Andy Ansell, R [REDACTED] Box 336, Acme, PA 15610.

### Aug. 19-22

The Army Otter and Caribou Association Inc. will conduct its eighth annual reunion in Colorado Springs, CO. Former Army Otter and Caribou aviation personnel may contact Bill Hooks, P.O. Box 6091, Columbus, GA 31907-0073, or call ([REDACTED]).

## Newsletter advertising

### Display advertising

- Full page — \$500.
- One-half page — \$250.
- One-quarter page — \$125.

### Classified advertising

Classified advertising — \$1 per line or \$7 per inch, whichever is highest.

Advertising is solicited and approved by the Newsletter editor and assistant editors.

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## VHPA OFFICERS, COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN AND STAFF 1992-93

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PAST PRESIDENT .....	Gary Slaughter
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## Newsletter seeking articles from members about their close calls

Can you ever forget that close call you had while flying helicopters in combat?

Share it with fellow members of the VHPA.

Starting in April, the VHPA Newsletter will start publishing articles from members about close calls they had or that were experienced by another combat helicopter pilot.

To share your close call, write it down and mail the article to:

Close Call  
VHPA Newsletter  
[Redacted]

You don't have to be an experienced writer to describe your close call while flying. The Newsletter editor and assistant editors will work with members in telling their stories.

Photographs illustrating the close call or showing the people involved are encouraged.

## Bulletin board

### Reunion 1994

Phil Marshall, VHPA vice president and 1994 president, announces the VHPA Executive Council has authorized a contract with the Wyndham Franklin Plaza Hotel in Philadelphia to host the Reunion 1994.

Marshall said that for the past several years, the Executive Council has been looking for ways to bring the reunion to the Northeast.

Pennsylvania and Connecticut National Guard units were some of the earliest and strongest supporters of VHPA as the association was getting started.

The Wyndham Franklin Plaza and the Philadelphia Convention folks really went the extra mile to put together a fantastic package for VHPA, Marshall said.

Reunion headquarters will be just a few blocks from the historic Liberty Bell.

### VHPA History Book

Turner Publishing Co. will be publishing the VHPA History Book in the winter of 1993.

All current VHPA members should have received a mailing from Turner Publishing by mid-February.

Please respond directly to Bob Martin at Turner Publishing, P.O. Box 3101, Paducah, KY 42002-3101 or call him at [Redacted] if you do not receive this mailing.

Midterm Member Ken Fritz, who heads the VHPA Public Relations Committee, is seeking authors to help with the History Book.

Please contact him at [Redacted] if you have a word processor and can devote time to the project. Authors will be paid for their work by Turner Publishing.

### Videotapes still sought

Mike McDonald is still seeking videotapes taken at past VHPA reunions.

The tapes will be assembled for a program during the 10th Reunion in Phoenix in July.

Anyone with videos can contact McDonald in care of VHPA Headquarters or personally at [Redacted].

### VHPA seeking contacts

The VHPA wants a contact person for each military installation, and National Guard and reserve unit.

Periodically, the VHPA will send posters and other materials to the contact person, who will see that the materials are displayed in an appropriate place and/or give the material to the local press.



# Veteran to place UH-1H on display

The '92 Directory arrived last week and just in time, too. My wife and I took a five-day auto trip to Kansas City to my son's wedding.

The 40 hours of road time gave me a chance to begin looking through the directory during my right seat breaks. I got almost to the M's.

While trying to isolate things like my classmates, people from my state and maybe my city, and people from my unit, I couldn't help but think what a long list and there's got to be an easier way. Something like a 900 number call in to a computer that could find the requested info and then send a printout to my home. I'm sure many of you are thinking along those same lines.

Back to reality, though. I will eventually get to the back cover and, when I do, I'll complete the questionnaire.

One point of interest so far is that my unit was the 118th Aviation Company (AML) and not AHC as shown. Prior to about 1966, we were an aviation company. I hope this can be corrected for the '93 directory.

The unit patch was also changed when the transition took place.

Now, to the primary reason for my writing.

Freddy Holder, a 1965-era 118th crew chief, through an organization called BRAVO (Brotherhood Rally of All Veterans Organizations of Central Florida) has managed to get a Huey (UH-1H) donated from the government. This engineless bird will be displayed at area schools, reunions, and special events.

The ship is to be dedicated in early '93 to the crew of "Blue Tail 1" (118th Aviation Company, Second Platoon) which crashed during the Battle of Dong Xoai on 10 June 1965.

Vo-Tech of Citrus County has volunteered to repaint the ship, along with authentic stripping and

lettering.

The crew that fateful day was: Lt. Walter L. Hall, aviator; WO Donald Saegaert, aviator; Sgt. Craig L. Hagen, gunner; and Sgt. Joseph J. Compa, crew chief.

Also on board were three advisers from MACV Special Detachment 5891: Staff Sgt. Robert L. Curlee, medic; Capt. Bruce G. Johnson; and Sgt. First Class Fred M. Owens.

The donated ship's tail number is 63-8739 and it originally was a "D" model, but was converted to an "H."

Freddy Holder would like any info on this ship, such as unit history, when it served and where, and its status when it returned to the States.

Also, any bits of info at all on Blue Tail 1, the crash incident itself, pictures of the crew members or advisers with them. Really, any tidbits at all. They will all accompany the ship when it is on display.

Send whatever you have to:  
Freddy Holder  
[REDACTED]

P.S.: The advisers were dropped off in the compound before the crash during heavy small arms and incoming mortar.

The ship was hit and crashed on lift-off. Capt. Johnson radioed that the crew and his two advisers were killed and not to come in for him since it was very hot.

A subsequent search days later found no trace of the dead or Capt. Johnson.

Villagers reported that an American was captured on the day of the crash and also that seven American bodies were carried away and buried.

No other information was ever added to the after action report. They are listed as KIA/body not recovered.

Ralph Orlando  
[REDACTED]



## Snead artwork gave helmets touch of class

After reading the September issue, I rooted through the debris in my garage and found the red dust-covered helmet bag which contained the subject of the enclosed photo.

During the summer and fall of '67, I flew slicks for the 170th AHC "Bikinis" out of Camp Holoway, Pleiku.

At the time, Bob Snead was a pilot, I believe, for the second platoon. His artwork graced the helmets of a lot of us. He added a touch of class where it was in short supply.

"Little Anny Fanny" was a welcome sight around II Corps. I had more than one grunt kiss the back side of my — helmet — after a hasty departure from harm's way.

I was delighted to have Bob personalize my flight helmet back in '67 and today I'm proud to own a "Bob Snead original" work of art.

Bob — if this letter is printed — thanks and salute!

J.B. Morgan  
"Bikini 14"  
[REDACTED]



# First VHPAers sought for Reunion

As most of you know, the VHPA was founded in Phoenix, AZ, in 1984 by 66 helicopter pilots who flew in Vietnam during the conflict era (1961-1975).

It was not a matter of choice, but purely a matter of chance of "who you knew" or "who knew you" that allowed the original group to know that the meeting was going to happen.

At that meeting, we wrote the original constitution and bylaws, selected Houston, TX, as the site for our next reunion in July 1985 and we have never looked back . . . until now.

As we head back to our roots in Phoenix for our 10th reunion in July 1993 with more than 6,600 members, I have been asked to locate and get as many of that orig-

inal group as possible to attend.

This is where I need your help.

Of that group, 21 are not current members and I need help finding them.

If you know where any of these missing guys (listed below, with last known address) can be contacted, please get that information to me as soon as possible. If you have a phone number, it would be very helpful.

David E. Bartram

Mark Christian

Brian G. Clark

Thomas E. Hofer

Howard D. Horton

Alexander B. Kelly

James M. Lee

John P. Leonard

Jonathon E. Logan  
P.O. Box 16398  
South Lake Tahoe, CA 95706

Michael J. Miller

Don Norgard

John R. Palmer

G. Lane Patrick

Ronald E. Pettis

Ira W. Putnam

Gary E. Robertson

Karl Ronninger

Paul G. Stringer

James E. Thompson

Dolph A. Todd

Robert W. Waltz

I'm sure that someone out there knows where each of these guys is. Please help me get in touch with them ASAP.

Ron Wright

## Get-together planned for helicopter pilot songs

Arrangements are being made to have a special get-together to sing helicopter pilots songs at Reunion '93 in Phoenix, with the goals of having fun and remembering our traditions.

Pilots of all services, whether you sang these songs before or not, are invited.

Bring friends and family members, the more voices the merrier (we can stick with G-rated songs). Another reason to attend the reunion!

We will provide written copies of words to the songs; from the 48th AHC "Merrymen," "Three Majors and a Minor" and the WOC Chorus. See Page 190 of the '92 VHPA Directory for four of

the songs.

We are hoping for a sound-proof, padded room near the bar. Whether you are an accomplished musician (bring your instrument) or can't carry a tune in a sling load doesn't matter, never has. Show up for the fun. Bring your own tape recorder!

If you can help or want more info, please contact me by phone at ( ), by internet as ( ), from Compuserve as internet: ( ) or by mail.

Jim Schueckler  
Polecat 356

## Reunion, VHPA both outstanding

I have finally gotten around to reviewing my first Membership Directory and have just returned back here to Abu Dhabi, where I fly.

I attended the VHPA Reunion in Atlanta, along with my wife. I won't even try to explain how happy that Reunion made us.

You've heard all the stories before: Walked out of the banquet, turned right and ran into one of my best friends from flight school who I had been told 20 years ago that he had been killed in RVN.

The old friends, the new friends, it was just outstanding. Thank you for such efforts that have resulted in such a fine organization.

Jeffery S. Heritage



# Reunion was a very memorable experience

Although I'm late in writing, I want to express my thanks to all of you who made Atlanta possible. It was a great experience and one that I won't forget. I really enjoyed getting to see and reminisce with old friends; it was a very special time.

The many new friends I made, especially with a group who shared the experience of Vietnam, made the VHPA reunion that much better.

The reunion was especially meaningful for my wife. She had heard me speak of names from the past (Vietnam), but she had never had the opportunity to put a face to most of the names. One of the reunion attendees who made it very special for me was seeing Dick Marshall.

My wife was fascinated. After we returned home, she described again and again to her friends how everywhere she went there would be little clusters of pilots, with a beer in hand, talking about "pulling pitch and getting the hell out of there . . ." and all of the other typical pilot stories we were reliving.

I'm excited about seeing the directory, especially since it features our old unit.

One of the articles in the unit history was about the time we found the NVA motor pool and the 4th Infantry Division refused to believe us. Consequently, Dick Marshall got a Chinook to lift the truck back to the brigade TOC.

In the March 21, 1969, issue of The Pacific Stars and Stripes, there appeared a picture of an NVA truck identical to the one we found. I've often wondered if the picture was in fact "our" truck and another unit was given credit, especially since it was found in the same area.

In the spring of '69, A Troop's Aero Rifle Platoon found a rather substantial rice cache that had been reported by a 4th Infantry Division LRRP team.

Being an off day for me, I joined A Troop's blues



Gary DeWitt photo

**Two soldiers walk out of thick vegetation to board a helicopter after they were inserted into the wrong LZ the day before.**

on the insertion to exploit the find.

In late February or early March, the 7/17th was working the border area and one of the scout aircraft reported taking fire. The scout's observer reported seeing "tracks," which we all took to mean footprints.

In further conversation, it was discovered that what the scout meant when he said that he saw "tracks" was that he saw tanks —

not footprints!

As usual, the 4th Division G-2 said "no way" and requested that the observer be flown back to headquarters for further questioning. The scout identified the tanks as being one of two kinds, one was the PT-76. A few nights later, PT-76 tanks attacked Ben Het.

I don't remember the 4th ever admitting that the observer was correct, even though he correctly identified the tanks as PT-76s.

At the reunion, I recall seeing copy of the February 2, 1969, issue of The Ivy Leaf, which carried a story entitled "The Day Heroism Was Common." What I don't remember seeing was a copy of The Pacific Stars and Stripes which carried a brief account of the story.

As you will recall during the above action, Bob Parker inserted seven troops into the wrong LZ. Time has faded the specifics, but the next day, I ended up aboard the aircraft (in the back as a gunner) that recovered these seven men.

If my memory serves me correctly, two or three of the people we pulled out were chieu hoi scouts.

As the aircraft climbed out, one of the troopers was so ecstatic that he leaned forward and kissed Dick Marshall.

Gay DeWitt

**It's never  
too late to fly  
— even after  
23 years**

Never too late to start flying again!

Almost 23 years ago, I graduated from Fort Rucker.

However, I was one of those dumb 19-year-old WO1's who didn't take

the FAA military written comp. exam.

Last week, I took and passed my commercial pilot rotorcraft helicopter check ride in a Robinson RG 22!

I was real rusty when

I started four months ago, but after 25 hours of flight training I was ready. Now for my instrument rating!

Bill Ambrose



## Taps

### Larry Blackman

CW4 Larry Blackman was killed Dec. 18 in a single-car accident near his home in Oak Run, CA. He was alone at the time of the accident.

Blackman was a rancher, sportsman and professional forester with the California Department of Forestry. He was a CH-47 pilot with the 49th Helicopter Company, California National Guard.

He was a member of the 358th Aviation Company from 1968-70, and graduated in Flight School Class 67-23.

### Thomas W. Clark

Col. Thomas W. Clark, Alaska Army National Guard state aviation officer, died in an aircraft accident in November. He was 47.

Clark was a 1966 graduate of Army warrant officer candidate flight training. Upon graduation as a fixed-wing aviator, he was assigned as a U-1A pilot, then as an instructor pilot, to the 18th Aviation Company in South Vietnam.

He had some helicopter stick time during his two tours of duty in Vietnam, and later became rated in

the UH-1 and the OH-58.

He was a Master Army Aviator with more than 5,000 hours of flight time, including 1,900 combat hours.

He is survived by his wife Nicola, of Peters Creek, AK, and sons William, Troy and Tracy Clark.

### Michael B. Farmer

Maj. Michael B. Farmer was killed July 16 in the crash of a C-23 cargo plane near Colquitt, GA. He was 43.

Farmer, a test pilot with the Aviation Technical Test Center at Fort Rucker, was the Army Aviation Association of America's "Aviator of the Year" in 1978.

He was a warrant officer aviator with the 1st Cavalry Division in Vietnam from April 1971 to April 1972. Farmer was an AH-1G Cobra pilot during his Vietnam tour.

### Bart Gottschall

Bart Gottschall, a graduate of Flight School Class 68-513, died accidentally in December.

He was a state police officer residing in Mt. Airy, MD, at the time of his death.

Gottschall served with the 228th Aviation Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division in 1969 and 1970.

Dear Fellow VHPA Members,

I am looking to add to my collection of Vietnam War relics. I will buy those items listed below, or anything else interesting. Items received will be kept in my collection but will be displayed on occasion, such as the VHPA reunion. Request you provide biographical and historical information with items. That data to be displayed with relic. Also want interesting slides and photos for my display.

- BLOOD CHITS
- MAPS
- PARTYSUITS
- FLAGS
- MEDALS
- RIFLES
- LIGHTERS WITH CREST/INSCRIPTIONS
- VC/NVA CAPTURED WEAPONS AND GEAR
- UNIT POCKET PATCHES AND CRESTS
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- SPECIAL FORCES ITEMS
- etc., etc.
- FLIGHT GEAR
- SILK/RUBBER
- UNIT HISTORIES
- BAYONETS
- INSIGNIA
- PISTOLS

Note: I have the Viet Cross of Gallantry and the Viet Campaign medal for trade if you are one of the many that only got the ribbon.

Thanks,  
George G. Reese

## Outing brings namesake, Army aviators together

I would like to join your organization. I flew H-21s in Vietnam from September 1963 until I was wounded in April 1964. (I arrived in Vietnam on Sept. 19, 1963. The 57th Transportation Company was renamed the 120th Aviation Company the day before I arrived.)

As a matter of fact, I hosted a dove shoot on my farm near Selma, Ala., this past weekend. In attendance was Col. Patrick N. Delavan, who commanded the 120th when I was in Vietnam. He now resides in Montgomery, Ala.

Also in attendance was Capt. John Thompson, presently stationed at Fort Campbell, Ky. His father, Robert A. Thompson, and I were flying together in an H-21 on April 12, 1964, when it was shot down deep in the Delta.

I lost my right leg, but "Bo" Thompson, although wounded in the wrist, landed the helicopter and saved my life.

He was killed in Vietnam in August 1967 on his second tour. In any event, Capt. John Thompson is named after me.

The 120th Aviation Company and the 57th Transportation Company have reunions every three years. Some of your readers may be interested in knowing this.

John B. Givhan



# VIETNAM HELICOPTER HISTOR

**Attention Vietnam Helicopter Pilots:**  
Response has been outstanding for the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association History Book, but we are still waiting for you. The unique feature of this book is the section of personal biographies and special stories submitted by the pilots themselves. Please help us preserve your legacy.

The Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association has teamed up with Turner Publishing company, the leading publisher of military association histories, to create the definitive history of helicopter aviation during Vietnam. No one can tell the true story of what happened in Vietnam like the actual men who served there. This history book will not be complete without your help. **Send your biography and special experience stories today!**



*Iron Triangle, III Corps. (Courtesy of Louis Rochat)*

## THE VIETNAM HELICOPTER PILOTS HISTORY BOOK CONTAINS:

- ★ HISTORY OF HELICOPTER PILOTS DURING VIETNAM WAR
- ★ VHPA ROSTER AND FULLY INDEXED
- ★ PERSONAL EXPERIENCE STORIES
- ★ LIST OF UNITS FLOWN IN VIETNAM
- ★ BIOGRAPHIES OF VIETNAM HELICOPTER PILOTS
- ★ HUNDREDS OF RARE PHOTOGRAPHS

VHPA History Book	Qty	Price	Total
Standard Edition		\$48.00	
Leather Edition		\$84.00	
KY residents add 6% sales tax)			
Embossing Charge- \$5.00 per book		\$5.00	
Biography Charge: 15 cents per word over 150 word limit		\$.15	
Shipping & Handling: \$5.00 for first book, \$2.50 for each add'l. book.			
Please mail me a free <u>Front Line</u> catalog		<b>Total</b>	



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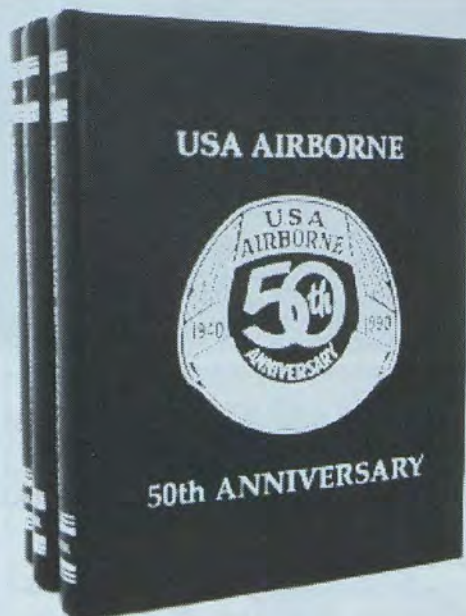
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# HELICOPTER PILOTS HISTORY BOOK

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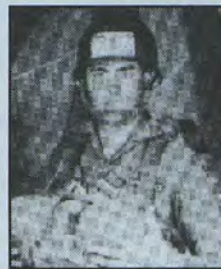
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WHAT YOU ARE DOING TODAY	



*Pictured is the USA Airborne 50th Anniversary Book. The VHPA History book will be of the same fine quality.*

## *Sample Biography*

**CHARLES D. BROWN**, enlisted in the Army in 1964 at the age of 19. His first assignment was with a Pershing Missile Battalion in Germany followed by Infantry OCS in 1966. Following OCS, Lieutenant Brown remained at Fort Benning for one year as a weapons instructor.



In Vietnam, his paratrooper unit, the 173rd Airborne Brigade, engaged in some of the bloodiest fighting of the war, to include Dak To's Hill 875 in 1967 and the 1968 Tet Offensive. Lieutenant Brown was personally awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge, the Bronze Star Medal and "V" Device for valorous actions, and the Purple Heart for wounds received from a Chinese Communist rifle grenade.

Captain Brown volunteered for a second Vietnam combat tour in 1970 and was a scout helicopter pilot with the 52nd Aviation Battalion in Pleiku. He logged 600 flying hours and was awarded seven Air Medals and his fifth Bronze Star Medal.

Brown served in many key positions in the U.S., Japan, and Thailand during the years following Vietnam. After 21 years of Army service and promotion to Lieutenant Colonel, he retired to pursue a civilian career. He is currently the marketing director for a defense contractor in Boston.

# DEADLINE: APRIL 30, 1993



## VHPA briefs

### The Gathering for 1993

Jack Jordan again will head up VHPA's activities at the Helicopter Association International (HAI) Convention Feb. 25-27 at the Miami Beach Convention Center.

"The Gathering," an evening for members and prospective VHPA members to renew friendships and share experiences, will begin at 5 p.m. Feb. 25 in the Voltaire Room of the Fountainebleau Hilton Hotel on Miami Beach.

This is sort of the winter reunion for VHPA and more than 250 Vietnam-era helicopter pilots are expected to attend.

Information: Jack Jordan, P.O. Box 395, Mt. Vernon, TX 75457, or call [REDACTED].

### Naval Helicopter Association

The Executive Council announces that Roger Harris will lead at least a dozen VHPA volunteers who will man a VHPA information and display booth at the Naval Helicopter Association (NHA) Symposium.

The symposium will be conducted March 9-12 at the Prime Osborn Convention Center in Jacksonville, FL.

Any Vietnam-era helicopter pilot is encouraged to attend the symposium, see the new technology and visit with other VHPA members.

Harris can be contacted at [REDACTED]. He can be called at [REDACTED].

### AAAA Annual Convention

For the second year, VHPA will have a booth at the Army Aviation Association of America (AAAA) annual convention.

This year's convention will be March 31-April 4 in Fort Worth.

Jack Jordan heads up the VHPA contingent. He is seeking volunteers.

He can be reached at P.O. Box 395, Mt. Vernon, TX 75457. Or call [REDACTED].

### American Helicopter Society

Bobby Sanders will lead more than a dozen VHPA volunteers to man the association's booth at the American Helicopter Society (AHS) Forum and Technology Display.

The event is May 19-21 at the Cervantes Convention Center in St. Louis.

Information: Sanders, [REDACTED].

## Corporate sponsors back 'The Gathering'

**JACK JORDAN**  
**THE GATHERING (HAI) CHAIRMAN**

Since 1988, VHPA has operated a booth and held a mini-reunion — "The Gathering" — in conjunction with the Helicopter Association International (HAI) Convention.

Through these and similar functions, VHPA has gained name recognition and new members.

These activities would not have been possible without the continued support of some very generous corporate sponsors.

VHPA would like to recognize those sponsors and ask our members to express their appreciation to these sponsors.

HAI has provided VHPA with associate membership, free booth space and continual support during its convention.

"The Gathering" would not be possible without the continued support which has been provided by the following:

- Aviation Spectrum Inc.
- Aris Helicopters Ltd.
- D&G Enterprises
- Honeywell Inc.
- Saft America Inc.



Freedom Productions Presents  
**"THE MERRY MEN"**  
of the 173rd A.H.C. Robinhoods  
Laikhe, R.V.N. 1966-67  
Captains Jerry Thomas, Mike Staggs, Greg Chapman, Joe Drew  
Every Vietnam pilot heard or heard of "The Merry Men". Gunship Drivers by day and troubadours by night. Now you can enjoy all of their music, which includes great songs such as Army Aviation, Saigon Girls and many others.

Freedom Productions 3605 Arctic #1635 Anchorage, Alaska 99503-5789 Phone # (907) 333-2342 Please, send me \_\_\_\_\_ copies of "The Merry Men" Vol.-I. Order extra copies for friends who aren't VHPA members 1- cassette \$ 19.66 additional cassettes \$ 12.00 each, + \$ 2.00 shipping and handling. Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

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☐ Check or M.O. Enclosed Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_



## MIKE STAGGS

The Merrymen of the 173rd Assault Helicopter Company "Robinhoods" began as a trio in the hold of a ship during the unit's deployment to South Vietnam in March 1966.

Lt. Jerry Thomas and Capt. Joe Drew were playing guitar and singing, while Capt. Greg Chapman kept the beat on a gut-bucket.

On reaching Vietnam, the Robinhoods were based at Lai Khe, where they shared the rubber plantation with the 3rd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division.

The long, hard task of flying daily missions and building the area into a habitat took up much of the Merrymen's time for their first two months in country.

Nights did bring some relief after the Blue Boar Inn — the Robinhoods' officers club — was established. This provided a place to relax and enjoy a cold beer in a rusty can while listening to the Merrymen.

As the group's repertoire and reputation grew, a surprising turn of events was about to occur.

Phu Loi was the home of the 11th Combat Aviation Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Joe Starker. The battalion was comprised of the 116th, the 128th and the 162nd Assault Helicopter Companies, as well as the 173rd AHC.

The 116th AHC — the "Hornets" — had just acquired a young aviator, Lt. Mike Staggs, in May 1966.

During this time, the 1st Avia-

tion Brigade was hosting a monthly commanders conference which normally was attended by battalion, group and upper echelon staff.

Although many command policies and directorates came from these gatherings, without doubt, the most memorable experiences were from the talent nights in the host area's officers open mess.

In July 1966, Maj. Wally Parker, commander of the 116th AHC, summoned Lt. Staggs to his office.

Following up on reports that Staggs had been providing vocal and guitar entertainment in the company area at nights, Parker ordered Staggs to write a song about the "Hornets." He then was sent to Saigon to sing the song at the Red Bull Inn, which hosted the commanders conference.

The 116th AHC came out victorious in the talent night competition.

Lt. Col. Starker thought it was appropriate to have the best singing group in Vietnam, so Staggs was added to the Merrymen and the Robinhoods in August 1966.

The group received many accolades during the remainder of its tour in Vietnam.

The group frequently would fly a full day's missions and then would travel to outposts and the 3rd Field Hospital to entertain the troops.

Drew, Thomas and Staggs flew UH-1C gunships with the call sign "Crossbow," while Chapman flew UH-1D slicks.

Word of the Merrymen spread throughout Vietnam and stimulated the interest of CBS News. The group recorded a live session for CBS in the network's Saigon studio. The session was aired on "60 Minutes" in early 1967.

The Merrymen's original songs included "Army Aviation," which almost became the official U.S. Army Aviation song. "Saigon Girls," "Not Alone Am I," "Sky King" and others followed.

After Vietnam, three of the Merrymen — Drew, Thomas and Staggs — were reassigned to the U.S. Army Primary Helicopter School at Fort Wolters, Texas, in 1967.

With that assignment came a recording contract from Music, Music, Music in New York. But the Merrymen turned the offer down because of contract requirements to change the songs to a more anti-Vietnam war theme.

After that and because of family commitments and military duty schedules, the Merrymen never sang as a group again.

Before departing Vietnam, though, members of the group had recorded 26 songs on tape.

Now this tape has been recovered and is being digitally cleaned up and readied for release in two volumes.

Staggs, who now lives in Alaska, recently contacted Joe Drew and Jerry Thomas after 24 years and found them well and excited about the future of the Merrymen's tape.

If this venture is successful, there could be a reunion of the Merrymen within the year.

## VHPA briefs

### Nominations being accepted

The names of members who want to run for VHPA vice president or senior member at large should be submitted to the Nominating Committee chairman prior to the 1993 Reunion in Phoenix.

Nominations will be accepted at the reunion. However, all nominees must be interviewed by the Nominating Committee chairman before the chairman submits the ballot to the Executive Council.

No nomination will be accepted later than 6 p.m.

on the day prior to the annual business meeting.

Nominations should be sent to: Charles R. Rayl, Nominating Committee chairman

### Volunteers sought for project

VHPA needs volunteers nationwide to assist the association in its efforts to get radio and television coverage of VHPA and its annual reunion.

Members who want to help will be provided with a package of forms designed to make the job easier.

Contact Ken Fritz at



# Members registering early

**PAUL USTER**  
1993 REUNION CHAIRMAN

Early registration is coming along nicely.

I have had many calls regarding which resort someone should book at.

As I mentioned in the December Newsletter, they are both fantastic. It's strictly a matter of personal taste as to the decor — The Plaza being of light earth tones and The Registry of darker wood tones.

The prizes for early registration are upgraded rooms or a reduced price if you already reserved an upgraded room.

More specifically, if you reserved a \$65 room and are selected as a prize winner, you will be upgraded to a suite at no extra cost. If you have reserved a \$75 suite, you will keep that suite, but will only be charged \$65.

We will have the first selection of winners on April 3. Those with reservations made by March 31 will be eligible.

The second selection of



The Registry resort sports Arizona's most extravagant swimming pool, plus three additional pools. The Plaza resort has five pools. The two resorts will host the VHPA's 1993 Reunion in the Phoenix/Scottsdale area.

winners will be made June 1, and the selection will be made from all who have made reservations through May 31.

As you can see on the VHPA Reunion Registration Form opposite, early registration is prior to June 1.

I also have been asked about events. A more thorough schedule will be presented in a later Newsletter, but here is a brief description:

**Wednesday, June 30**

— "Early, Early Bird" informal pool parties at both resorts.

**Thursday, July 1** — Registration and p.m. "Early Bird" dance.

**Friday, July 2** — Sports tournaments in the a.m. and pool party in the p.m.

**Saturday, July 3** — Sports tournaments in the a.m. and Western dinner dance in the evening.

**Sunday, July 4** — Midday ladies activities,

men's business meeting; dinner banquet followed by fireworks display; and "Survivors Pool Party."

Please remember that informal attire is appropriate for all functions.

NOTE: Anyone planning a mini-reunion should contact Roger Gould for details and meeting room reservations. He can be reached at [REDACTED].

## Council OK's contract with Media Travel USA

The Executive Council has approved a travel arrangements contract for the 1993 Reunion in Phoenix with Media Travel USA.

Media Travel USA is part of the Carlson Travel Network and can provide a wide variety of services for VHPA members.

Resort hotel rooms in Phoenix-Scottsdale, however, should be booked directly with The Plaza at (800) 832-2025 or The Registry (800) 247-6606.

When booking air transportation or car rental with Media Travel USA by calling (800) 283-8747, be sure to say you are with VHPA.

In years past, VHPA has signed

a contract with a major airline that offered a special discount fare structure for the reunion. The major airlines last fall discontinued those fares. As a result, the best deal the Executive Council could find for VHPA members and the association was with a travel agency.

Please do not call American West, United Airlines or Alamo Car Rental direct, but call Media Travel USA, which will monitor bookings for the 1993 Reunion.

VHPA will receive one free round-trip entitlement per airline for every 40 tickets issued.

Alamo will provide a complimentary car, plus other entitle-

ments based on bookings.

These entitlements are used as reunion prizes and to defray expenses for future reunion site selection and other required VHPA travel.

Under the agreement with Media Travel USA, VHPA members benefit by getting a good deal on travel and services, and the association benefits with lower operating expenses.

Members should be aware that the 4th of July weekend — especially July 2 and 5 — make up the biggest air travel days of the summer.

So make your bookings as soon as possible.



# VIETNAM HELICOPTER PILOTS ASSOCIATION

10th Annual Reunion Phoenix, AZ July 1-5, 1993

## 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 6/1/93*		@ \$ 10.00	
Registration after 6/1/93*		@ \$ 20.00	
Golf Tournament (includes cart & r/t trans.)		@ \$ 44.00	
Western Dinner/Dance Saturday evening July 3		@ \$ 28.00	
Banquet July 4		@ \$ 37.00	
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	
Tennis	
Racquetball	
Volleyball	
Team Volleyball	
Walleyball	
5k Run	
Kenny Bunn 10m Crawl	

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

- ☐ Enclosed is my check or money order payable to "VHPA Reunion '93"
- ☐ 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, 1993 and must include all tickets received, plus proof of payment. Refunds will not be granted for fixed-price events (the Western Dance and Banquet are fixed-priced events) 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 accounting balancing.



# Visit to memorial stirring

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Mike Sloniker, a VHPA member, attended the memorial services honoring the 10th anniversary of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. He writes his personal thoughts and impressions about the event.

**MIKE SLONIKER**

The 10th anniversary of the Vietnam Memorial was celebrated in week-long activities that began for most on Saturday, Nov. 7, when the first of 58,000 names were read aloud.

I personally visited the hospital suites of the 101st Airborne Division and the 1st Cavalry Division that day. I saw suites for the 4th Infantry Division and the 25th Infantry Division, and heard that others were in existence.

On Sunday night, I attended the fifth annual banquet of the Ia Drang Valley Association. Of the 250 members attending, the majority were former members of the 1/7 Cav that fought at LZ X-Ray and the 2/7 Cav at LZ Albany.

The Presidential Unit Citation for the Pleiku Campaign in October-November 1965 awarded to the 1st Cavalry Division was read aloud. Every participant of the battle stood and introduced himself. Present were two Medal of Honor winners.

I sat with the first commander of A/229th AHB in Vietnam, VHPA member Bruce Crandall; Ed "Too Tall to Fly" Freeman of A/229th, also a VHPA member; and two members of B/229th.

Freeman and Crandall are the subjects, in the chapter "Brave Aviators," of the recently released book "We Were Soldiers Once . . . And Young."

Freeman and Crandall made a point of letting me, the last operations officer in A/229th (1972), know that the first operations officer, Pyne Gramly, was left-handed, like me. When he put the names of the flight crews to fly on the mission board with a grease pencil, he would drag his hand through what he had just written and erase it.



**A memorial placed at The Wall by Mike Sloniker for helicopter crews centers around a list of crew members of C Company, 158th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 101st Airborne Division from 1969-71.**

They thought it was hilarious; being left-handed, I thought it was just another occupational hazard.

The authors, retired Lt. Gen. Harold G. Moore, commander of the 1/7 Cav at X-Ray, and Joe Galloway, UPI reporter at X-Ray, had numerous book signings. The most personal was on Saturday, when participants in the battle signed each others books.

After having been to five VHPA reunions with pilots only, I was impressed by the close personal bond demonstrated by the "grunts." They are living examples of the saying: "For those who have almost died, life has a flavor the protected will never know."

I wore a VHPA hat, and was told on numerous occasions that they would not be alive today had it not been for the very close gunship runs, ammunition resupplies and medical evacuations of the helicopter pilots under fire.

A very humbling experience, when you look the individual in the eye, and think of people like David Soyland, a C/158 Assault Helicopter Battalion aircraft commander who is MIA after trying to rescue members of a Special Forces reconnaissance team in May 1971, or David Poley, B/101,

who was lost trying to resupply Marine grunts in bad weather.

These experiences occurred constantly throughout the week for others also.

"The Wall" took on a new meaning with the reading of the names, especially when the words, "and my son . . ." were read by a mother.

Individuals who had never shown emotion at The Wall were seen with unashamed tears streaming down their faces as they thought, "There, but by the grace of God, goes my mother."

All were affected by the fact that it took from Saturday, Nov. 7, to Wednesday, the 11th, to read 58,000 names on a 24-hour basis.

Many were humbled by President Bush's unannounced arrival and reading of names at midnight on the morning of Nov. 11. He made it clear he wanted to do it as a World War II veteran remembering the younger Vietnam veterans.

Numerous veterans organizations also used this period to hold meetings in the Washington and Northern Virginia area because of the large number of veterans present. These meetings were con-

*Continued on Page 15*



# President Bush makes surprise visit

Continued from Page 14

ducted throughout the week.

Electronic Data Systems (EDS) operated a locator service for those who would fill out a questionnaire. Many friends were reunited by this service.

Sons and daughters, 25 to 30 years old, met veterans who knew the fathers they never had the opportunity to know themselves.

I heard one say, "I always wondered how Dad would look today, because all I have are pictures of him as a young man."

Some want to know about their fathers from someone besides their relatives.

Many of these young people

look exactly like their fathers.

My overall impression of what I witnessed firsthand was that many use The Wall as a meeting place to renew old friendships and remember the fallen.

It was a time of sadness and a time of joy, a time to pass on to the next generation the cost of going into a war without a plan, and a time to remember that that was then, this is now and we all have to get on with our lives.

Mike Sloniker, visiting The Wall on the morning of Nov. 10, captured on videotape the names "the names of those I knew or saw killed on my second tour, 1971-72."

Among them was Allan Harris, a

174th Assault Helicopter Company "Shark" gunship pilot who died in August 1971.

There also was Max Miltovich, an operations clerk "who just had to fly at least one time before he left Vietnam."

He died aboard a UH-1 in September 1971, the "last one killed in the 174th."

The following morning — on Nov. 11 — Sloniker returned to The Wall.

Names of servicemen killed in Vietnam continued to be read as Sloniker videotaped a memorial to helicopter crews he designed.

The memorial is left at The Wall each Veterans Day, Memorial Day and each Aug. 29, the day Al Harris of the 174th was killed.

## Aviators visit Vietnam memorial together

There were events all week commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. We were there for just one day, Nov. 11.

The reading of the names on The Wall had started Sunday, and was just finishing as we got there Wednesday morning.

My third time at The Wall, but the first time for Roger, who drove the nine hours with me. Roger especially needed to see and feel the names of four friends who died together on a mission that he usually took.

As we stood in line to look up their names in one of the books, Roger talked with a lady who was also there for the first time, to find her brother's name.

Roger helped her find the name in the book and on The Wall, and then the first rubbing Roger made was of a man he didn't know, and

didn't know of until a few minutes before.

Roger got the paper and crayon from a Park Service volunteer, who we found out later was the sister of a good friend of mine. Roger and I each made several rubbings.

Within about 100 feet of The Wall, everyone was somber and whispering. Another 100 feet away, however, the living met the living with joy and happy emotion.

We walked up to a group of six gunners and crew chiefs, and introduced ourselves as Roger and Jim. One of them commented on the fact that 23 years ago, they had to call us "sir," and rarely even knew the first names of the pilots.

Ironic when you consider how much our survival depended on each other.

We talked with them for about 15 minutes in a new and renewed sense of camaraderie.

One of the crew chiefs joked that one of the gunners with them got to go home four months early for getting his finger blown off. The gunner proudly held up his left hand to show that his little finger had lost two knuckles.

Then Roger showed him his own left hand, with an identical little finger. The gunner went berserk, insisting that the guys with him take several pictures of him and Roger holding up their hands.

"Just wait until I tell my wife that I met a pilot with the same war injury," he said.

Later, Roger confided to me that his was a farm accident, but it seemed that he had made that gunner's day.

— Anonymous

### Mini-reunions

#### 229th AHB

The 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, will meet July 3 at the VHPA Reunion in Phoenix.

Contact: Tom Johnson at [redacted] (work) or [redacted] (home).

#### A Company, 158th AHB

July will mark the 25th anniversary of A Company, 158th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 101st Airborne Division. The group is planning a mini-reunion at the VHPA Reunion in July.

For information about the planned reunion, old Ghost Riders should contact Gene Franck at [redacted] or call him at [redacted] (work) or [redacted] (home).



# VIETNAM HELICOPTER PILOTS ASSOCIATION

7 W. Seventh St., Suite 1990 Cincinnati, OH 45202 (513) 721-VHPA

## Membership application/change of address

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Application          | <input type="checkbox"/> Annual dues: \$30        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Address change       | <input type="checkbox"/> Life membership: \$450   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Directory correction | <input type="checkbox"/> Subscription only: \$12* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Information only     | (*Included in annual dues)                        |

NAME:

ADDRESS:

CITY:

STATE:

ZIP:

HOME PHONE: ( )

WORK PHONE: ( )

OCCUPATION:

- ☐ Please charge my MasterCard/Visa/Discover
- ☐ Enclosed is a check/money order payable to VHPA

Credit card No.:

Expiration date:

SIGNATURE:

FLIGHT SCHOOL CLASS:

SERVICE BRANCH:

COMBAT FLIGHT HOURS:

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?