



The VHPA Newsletter

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

October 1993 Vol. 11, No. 5



A UH-1D returns home from a mission in the III Corps of South Vietnam in 1967.

Jack Swickard photo

From the President

Pride is this letter's topic . . . pride in the fact that I am a member of an organization that includes some of the finest men who have ever walked the face of this planet. We have lots to be proud of and, I suppose, what is so nice about it is the fact that most of us don't go around bragging to everyone about it; each of us knows it when we meet or when we reacquaint ourselves with each other every Fourth of July. It doesn't require words. We just know it is there in each of us.

One of those "reacquaintances in July" was a pilot in my Dustoff unit . . . "DMZ Dustoff" out of Quang Tri and Camp Evans. Dave Gomez and I were Peter Pilots at the same time in the 237th Medical Detachment and became good friends, but we never got to fly together. One of my favorite war stories to non-aviation friends was about the fact that Dave was the unit voting officer for two months before they realized he wasn't even old enough to vote. Gomez was 19 years old. He couldn't even

legally buy a beer in the States; but, here he was, flying single-ship combat missions with the sole purpose of saving lives while bad guys were doing their best to end his. A snot-nosed kid who enlisted for flight training right out of high school.

That used to be the end of my story; but in Scottsdale, I learned one more thing from Dave. When he made aircraft commander, he was still 19! I was speechless and all I could do was give an incredulous shake of the head as I looked at him. And I felt one of those huge surges of pride in what we did as helicopter pilots in an "unpopular" war.

We all had a difficult job to do and we did it well; as a group, we were not found to be lacking. Even as older boys and younger men doing an old man's job, we accomplished our missions and pioneered a whole new method of fighting for democracy. We done good!

I don't believe we did it for the glory; I believe we did it simply because we wanted to do it. For that, I am proud of all of us and enjoy the aura that surrounds us when we are together. And that, gentlemen, is a big reason why I am a part of this group.

See ya in Philadelphia!

— Phil Marshall, President

Seeking

Seeking former "Charger" pilots (196th LIB, Americal Division, LZ Baldy, 1969): Sells, McMahon, Burke, Merchant.

Dr. Dick Elgin

VHPA member Dave Bennett, who lives in the Dallas area, has "gone missing" for the last year plus. Dave attended a number of VHPA reunions and was certainly "the life of the party in New Orleans," however, he moved and the VHPA is unable to get in contact with him.

Dave was in 68-35 and flew Dustoff for the 283rd Medical Detachment out of Pleiku. Indeed, the VHPA Directory Committee is very interested in talking to Dave about one of the Dustoff war stories

he told at the New Orleans Reunion.

Anyone with a clue as to how to get in touch with Dave is asked to call [redacted] or contact Mike Law via VHPA Headquarters.

Mike Law

I am seeking the aircraft commander and/or pilot of a slick shot down during combat assault near Saigon in 1967.

The Huey flipped over when it crashed, but all four crew members survived.

I was the AC of the UH-1D that landed behind you and picked up the crew seconds after the crash as NVA-Viet Cong advanced toward aircraft.

The crew was taken to the hospital at Long Binh for checkup before returning to its base at Cu Chi.

I cannot remember the name of the unit, but I do recall all or most of the lift aircraft involved in the combat assault were shot down in the LZ.

Jack Swickard

Chapter listing planned

The VHPA Newsletter plans to compile and publish a listing of the association's various chapters, contacts, chapter officers, addresses, and telephone and fax numbers.

Chapters should send information to:

**Chapter listing
VHPA Newsletter**

THE VHPA NEWSLETTER (ISSN 0896-3037)(USPS 001-497) is published six times yearly — February, April, June, August, October, and December. Annual dues are \$30 or Life membership for \$450. Yearly subscription for nonmembers is \$16. Published by the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, 7 West Seventh Street, Suite 1990, Cincinnati, OH 45202. Second-class postage paid at Cincinnati, OH, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE VHPA NEWSLETTER, 7 West Seventh Street, Suite 1990, Cincinnati, OH 45202.

Calendar

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Legal Adviser	Charles R. Rayl
Financial Adviser	Phillip G. Monte
VHPA Headquarters	(513) 721-VHPA

Nov. 10-14

American Red Cross women who served in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam era will have a reunion headquartered at the Sheraton National Hotel in Arlington, VA.

Contact: Linda Wilson, 3473 Andrews Court,
No. 201, Laurel, MD 20724.

Feb. 9-13, 1994

Lawyer-Pilots Bar Association meeting at the Sheraton Cancun in Cancun, [REDACTED]

Aug. 9-14, 1994

International Flying Farmers will hold 50th anniversary celebration during the association's annual convention and industry exhibition in Stillwater, OK.

Contact: International Flying Farmers,

Sept. 7-11, 1994

The Army Otter-Caribou Association will hold its annual reunion in Orlando, FL.

Contact: Jimmy N. Moore,

1993 Membership Directory on its way!

The 10th edition of the annual VHPA Membership Directory went to the printer in early September; all 322 pages of it!

It contains data on the 9,565 living Vietnam-era helicopter pilots known to the VHPA as of Aug. 13, this year's Directory cutoff date. This is 1,168 — or 14 percent — more pilots than in 1992.

It contains four major history sections, including some new After Action Reports (we receive many requests for this type of information). It contains data on 2,188 KIAs/MIAs, about 30 percent was updated since last year. It contains four pilot indices: The U.S. Army Flight Training Class Index has 9,745 pilots in 587 classes, the Branch of Service Index has 899 pilots in 10 services (excludes U.S. Army); the Geographic Index has 8,852 pilots in 3,472 locations (mostly cities); and the Combat Unit Index has 12,861 pilots in 505 different units.

Members should receive their

1993 Directory as early as mid-October. We use Fourth Class mail from Wichita, KS, and it takes from one to three weeks for all to be delivered. So, if you have not seen your copy by mid-November, please contact VHPA Headquarters.

If your member number is less than 7094 and your dues are current through August 1993, you are entitled to a copy of the 1993 Directory. If your address in the VHPA database is marked "bad" (because mail is being returned for that address), then you will not be mailed the Directory but are still entitled to a copy. Any pilot who joins after member number 7093 (about Aug. 13) will appear in the 1994 Directory and will not receive the 1993 Directory as part of his VHPA dues. Any VHPA member, regardless of dues-current status, can purchase a copy of the 1993 or 1992 Directory for \$10 (subject to availability). Extras are printed for this purpose.

The Researcher's Edition (everything except the confidential parts, which are the Member and Potential Member roster and the indices) of the 1993 Directory will be mailed to subscribers during October. The subscription fee is \$14 and includes First Class postage. Anyone can purchase the Researcher's Edition (subject to availability).

The Directory Committee “learned a ton” working with members and the database to build the 1993 Directory. The Combat Unit, Geographic, and Flight Class indices required hundreds of hours of work and literally thousands of updates. We may have changed your record correctly, but then again, we may have made a mistake. Please, please, take the time to check your address, flight class, and combat unit information in the Directory. If it isn't correct, if it isn't what you want, please contact VHPA.

— Mike Law, Directory editor

History book for VHPA delivery set in May 1994

*Final deadline for reports,
biographies, photos is Nov. 1*

Dear VHPA Members:

Your history book is progressing along to completion. As of 23 September 1993, we have 540 VHPA members who have mailed in their biographies and photographs for inclusion. Numerous others have sent in "after-action reports" and 'Nam photos which will help tell your story.

The final deadline for sending in your biographies, photos and "after-action reports" is 1 November 1993. Therefore, if you want to be in the book, send your materials today!

Please remember, there is no charge to have your stories included and all photographs are returned after the book is printed.

There are three VHPA writers working on the history.

The history will cover a chronological record of helicopters, pilots, crew, and unit operations during Vietnam.

A special feature will be a section devoted to and written by the wives and ladies of VHPA members.

It takes six months after the final deadline to compile, proof, design, print, bind and deliver your book. Therefore, your book will be delivered in May 1994.

Bob Martin
Chief Editor
Turner Publishing Co.
Paducah, KY

EDITOR'S NOTE: The final Turner Publishing Co. ad soliciting write-ups and photographs from VHPA members for the history book appears on Pages 8 and 9 of this Newsletter.

Continued on Page 5



This 11th Armored Cavalry Cobra is one of 13 Vietnam helicopter photos to appear in the VHPA 1994 Calendar. The calendar, which costs \$17.50, measures 11 by 17 inches. At least 500 orders must be received or the project will be canceled. To order, see below.

VHPA Calendar/Historical Reference Directory Order Form

Mail to: VHPA, 7 W. Seventh St., Suite 1990, Cincinnati, OH 45202
Signed credit card orders can be FAXed to: (513) 721-5315

Name: _____ Member No.: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Phone: () _____

	Quantity	Price	Total
VHPA 1994 Calendar		@ \$17.50	\$
Historical Reference Directory, Volume 1		@ \$15.00	\$
	TOTAL		\$

☐ Enclosed is my check or money order payable to "VHPA."

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

Credit card No.: _____ Expiration date: _____

Signature: _____

NOTE: Calendars will be mailed in early December. Orders received after Nov. 1 will be honored only if supplies are available.

Pilot suffers major health problems

Two years ago this month, MWO 4 Duke Flannagan was transferred from Korea to Fort Gordon, GA, and Eisenhower Medical Center for a hip joint replacement and then retirement. Unfortunately, before any of this could be done, he fell and suffered a brain injury.

I was working on the Intensive Care Unit at Eisenhower when he was transferred in from a civilian hospital where he was taken by an EMT. He was in a coma and given 72 hours at best to live.

The doctors may well have let him die had it not been for his flying experience.

While doing a patient evaluation, one doc took Duke's left hand and yelled for Duke to squeeze. Duke did not respond until I went

over and told him to "Pull pitch, Duke." He moved his left hand! The doc still had his hand and felt the movement; they immediately began an all-out effort to bring him back.

It was not completely successful. Duke is now at a VA hospital in Tampa, FL. But he is showing some signs of improvement.

He has gained some short-term memory; he can now recognize his wife one day to the next and is able to sit up in a wheelchair.

Duke is one of us. Therefore, this letter. Would it be possible to grant him a sort of membership whereby he would receive our Newsletter? Nothing more. A Newsletter, with its pictures and articles, that could be read to him by his wife or a nurse might have some therapeutic effect. Put his name in the Directory, but not highlighted. That way, his friends would know where he is. Their letters could also be helpful.

No one knows or can tell me if any of this will help, but I know that it can't hurt.

Hayden "Pappy" Jones

EDITOR'S NOTE: Duke Flannagan's name and address will be listed in the Membership Directory, along with his brother Vietnam helicopter pilots.

Picking up burlap bag dangerous

This is a story that took place in the late spring of 1968 while I was a member of B Company, 1st Aviation Battalion, 1st Infantry Division (Call sign "Longhorns").

There was a curfew for all Vietnamese from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. We were a single-ship UH-1D returning from Quan Loi to Phu Loi a little before dusk when we noticed a

Continued on Page 6



DEAR ASSOCIATION MEMBERS,

It is with great pride that I write to you of my affiliation with the finest safari company operating today in South Africa and Zimbabwe. **Hunters & Guides Africa**

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If you or any of your associates are considering an African Hunt, I would certainly appreciate the opportunity to present to you our programs. When one is contemplating a journey halfway around the world to fulfill a life long dream of Safari; who can risk accepting second best or booking with an outfitter who is not 110% professional.

Travel arrangements, passport/visa, gun permits and even recommended taxidermists will be handled.

I will close by saying thank you for extending the courtesy of reading this letter. I hope I can be of service in the near future.

Cordially yours,

Michael P. Chase

Michael P. Chase
United States
Regional Agent

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Rucker Officers Club solicits memorabilia

My name is Capt. Scott K. Wagner, and I am currently assigned as an assistant S-3 for the 1/145th Aviation Regiment, Fort Rucker.

I am the project officer for the Officers Club Council. Currently, we are trying to decorate the Dawn Patrol Lounge with aviation memorabilia. Unfortunately, I've had close to zero response from the battalions here. Items are starting to trickle in, and I've scoured the DRMO for aircraft parts.

Sir, you would be doing Army Aviation here at Fort Rucker a great service if you could please print a notice in the VHPA Newsletter, soliciting donations of memorabilia for the Fort Rucker Officers Club's Dawn Patrol Lounge. Maybe a VHPA plaque representing your organization would be more appropriate.

The address to send any items is the following:

**Directorate of Community Activities
ATTN: ATZQ-PA**

**RE: Dawn Patrol Lounge Memorabilia
Fort Rucker, AL 36362**

If there is an avenue for me to promote the VHPA, please contact me. I'd like to become an honorary member or make a donation. Thank you.

Scott K. Wagner
Daleville, AL

Continued from Page 5

Vietnamese man riding a bicycle down a lonely road. He had a burlap bag tied to the back of his bicycle.

The pilot decided the man shouldn't be there because of the curfew, so he told the doorgunner to shoot in front of the man to make him stop so we could pick him up. The man continued to ride on until a few rounds got a little too close to him. At that point, he jumped off of his bicycle and disappeared in the engulfing darkness.

The pilot decided to land without any lights on, and he told the crew chief to go out and retrieve the burlap bag.

After a moment or two, we started receiving small-arms fire from AK-47s, so the pilot began to take off. Since the crew chief was still somewhere out in the darkness, I held down the collective until he was safely on board with the burlap bag.

After taking off, we also began receiving fire from a .51-caliber machine gun. Throughout the episode, we luckily didn't receive any hits. Probably because they could only hear us, but could not see us.

We called for assistance from some gunships at a nearby base. They commenced to shoot up the area when they also began to receive fire from the .51.

We found out the next day that a ground unit went through the area at first light and found some wounded people.

After we were safely out of the area, we found out that the burlap bag was full of empty pop bottles. So, the next day, the burlap bag with bottles was returned to the spot where we took them from.

The next day we were shot at with AK-47s shortly after taking off from Quan Loi on our way back to Phu Loi at the end of the day.

The right side doorgunner was hit in the chest by one round, but he wasn't injured, and one round came up through the floor, right between my feet, and bounced off the bottom of my seat. I still have that round as a souvenir.

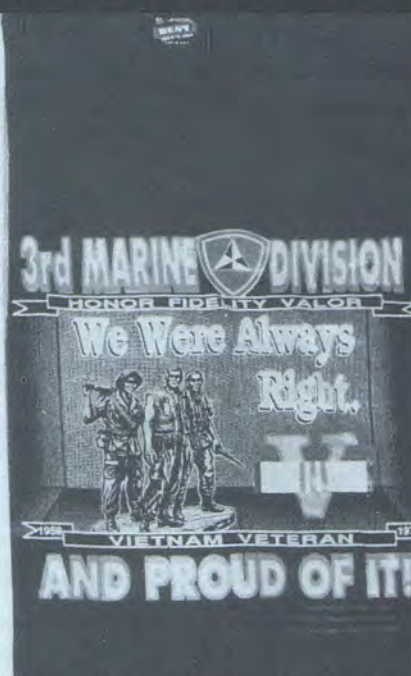
It was also my last day of flying

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24 HOUR ORDER LINE : 716-624-5256

Continued from Page 6

with that aircraft commander.

John R. Becker

VHPA Reunion was a healing experience

PHOENIX*
(RISING FROM MY ASHES)

*On the Fourth of July Nineteen
Hundred and Ninety Three,*

*I stood watching rockets on the
lawn of the Registry.***

*Tears running down my cheeks
in the dark.*

*Remembering the men I had met
recently.*

*We mastered complex machines,
and through our fear, flew bravely.*

*The men who had flown Heli-
copters in Vietnam, like me.*

*Recalling my experiences as a
young man in Vietnam.*

*I take a deep breath, and let it
out slowly.*

*Again I am in the forest of the
tall men,*

*Shoulder to shoulder, with men
much like me.*

*Service to others, honor, living,
and action,*

Were important to them and me.

*We did more than any one could
have asked us, you see,*

*We offered our lives for oth-
ers in country.*

*These acts make my life more
valuable to me.*

*I had lost sight of my service, in
country.*

*In Phoenix a transformation
came over me.*

*Relating with men of like stature,
I remembered how large the
heart is inside of me.*

*I left our reunion proud, walking
as tall as could be.*

*Reunited, with men who flew
Helicopters in Vietnam, like me.*

* A city in Arizona near the site
of the 1993 VHPA Reunion; also a
mythical bird that rises out of the
ashes.

** One of the resorts the '93
reunion was held at.

Money clip lost at reunion

During the last annual
reunion (either Thursday night
or Friday night), I lost a gold
money clip. Please place a
notice in your next newsletter
about this.

Hopefully, someone there
might see my notice and return
it to me.

Tim Messett

In February 1967, I arrived in
Vietnam aboard a C-141. Almost
immediately, I felt the anxiety of
the combat zone.

In May, hot metal ripped
through my flesh and I observed
my blood pooling on the floor of
the helicopter. I was the aircraft
commander.

Chuck, the pilot flying with me,
was also wounded. He later was
medevaced to Japan.

We were part of a 13-helicopter
flight, extracting men under fire.
We picked up as the flight took off
from the LZ.

An explosion near the left rear
of the aircraft indicated we were
narrowly missed as an RPG (rock-
et-propelled grenade) passed
under our helicopter.

We set back down when my
gunner noticed two more men
were left in the LZ. The flight dis-
appeared over the rim of the
canyon. We secured the two men
aboard and left the LZ under
heavy fire.

That night a local artillery bat-
tery pounded the area of the bat-
tle. With each shot, my body stiff-
ened. A fitful sleep finally came.

The next day, I awoke changed.
I was no longer invincible. The
flashes while flying over villages at
night, the sound of being fired at
while flying, the incoming rocket
and mortar fire all took on a new
meaning for me.

From that time forward, I felt I
was living alone in a hostile world.
I brought that world home with
me.

That is the easiest description I

know for my PTSD (post traumatic
stress disorder).

It also included a detachment or
numbing, a suspicion of others, a
lack of feeling of accomplishment,
and a lack of feeling accepted.

I maintained this sense of my
reality for 18 years. The point of
change was the death of my wife
(an ex-Army nurse and Vietnam
veteran).

As I worked through my grief,
the issues of Vietnam came back
into the foreground of my con-
sciousness.

Realizing I was marginally func-
tional, I turned to the Veterans
Outreach Center for help. I
received both group and individual
counseling.

As I began dealing with my
issues, life took on a new meaning
for me. I decided I wanted to
become a counselor, and entered
the master's program in counsel-
ing at California State, Fullerton.

Through the self-reflective writ-
ing of the program, and additional
counseling I have received, I have
put my experiences in Vietnam
into a new and more positive per-
spective.

With this new perspective, I
made the journey to Phoenix.

In Phoenix, I did not meet any
of the men I trained with or flew
with in country. I did meet some of
the most outstanding men I have
the pleasure of knowing. Some
were still flying, many of us had
gone on to other pursuits.

As we exchanged stories, what
became most apparent to me was
that each of us had offered to lay
down our lives for others on many
occasions. This was not done to be
heroic, to be recognized, or to be
awarded a medal. It was done sim-
ply because it was a part of our
nature.

This newfound knowledge,
along with the fellowship, was very
healing for me.

I left Phoenix walking taller and
feeling prouder than I have for a
long time.

What a unique fraternity we
belong to, those of us who wore
the wings in combat.

Welcome home. See you in
Philly in '94.

David A. Roblyer

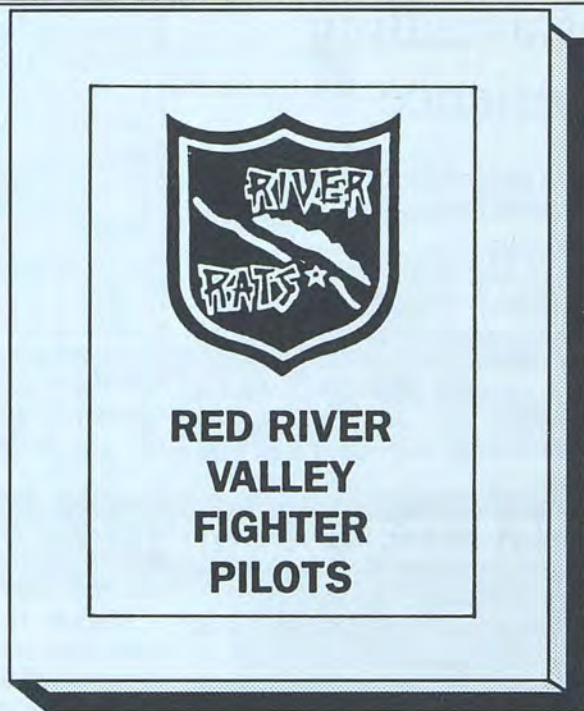
Vietnam Helicopter Pilots History Book

Response has been outstanding for the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots History Book. We have hundreds of responses from dedicated members of the VHPA. This book will become known as the Encyclopedia of Vietnam Helicopter Pilots.

As a Vietnam Helicopter Pilot we are giving you one final opportunity to be a part of military history by leaving your thumbprint (biography) in time in the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots History Book. We need your support and cooperation to make this book successful. We want everyone to be included.

I am proud of our accomplishments as veterans and have submitted my personal biography and photos for inclusion in our commemorative history book. Won't you join us in preserving the past? The book will be a treasured keepsake to hand down to children and grandchildren. The book is to be printed in mid-1994.

Sincerely,
Ken Fritz,
VHPA Executive Council



Pictured is the Red River Valley Fighter Pilot. The VHPA History book will be of the same outstanding quality. Printed on acid free paper for superior photo reproduction with a Smyth sewn binding for durability, the book will be treasured for generations to come.

THE VHPA HISTORY BOOK CONTAINS:

- ★ HISTORY OF HELICOPTER PILOTS IN VIETNAM
- ★ BIOGRAPHIES OF VHPA MEMBERS
- ★ HUNDREDS OF RARE PHOTOGRAPHS
- ★ VHPA WIFE'S STORIES
- ★ "AFTER ACTION" REPORTS BY VHPA MEMBERS
- ★ LIST OF HELICOPTER UNITS IN VIETNAM

Book Style	Qty	Price	Total
Standard Edition		\$48.00	
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(KY residents add 6% sales tax)			
Embossing Charge- \$5.00 per book		\$5.00	
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MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES	
AWARDS/MEDALS	
DATE DISCHARGED	RANK ACHIEVED
FAMILY DATA	
WHAT YOU ARE DOING TODAY	

VHPA



Sample Biography

FREDERICK W. BREUCHE, was born 18 July 1939 in Wilkes-Barre, PA. After an early career as an insurance broker he enlisted in the Army in November 1966 for flight training. He completed Army Aviation training in class 67-19. After Cobra transition WO Breuche was assigned to Vietnam. He arrived in-country on 4 February 1968 at the start of the TET Offensive and assigned to C Troop, 7th Armored Squadron, 17th Cavalry in Pleiku and Chu Lai. As copilot in a C-Model gunship he was shot down on 16 March 1968 near My Lai and medevaced to the U.S. He was awarded the Air Medal, Purple Heart and the Distinguished Flying Cross. He spent 6 months at Walter Reed Army Hospital and returned to flight duty as Instrument Instructor Pilot then Flight Evaluator with Flight Standards Division at Hunter Army Airfield, Savannah, Ga.

He is a VHPA life member and currently self employed in the vending and medical screening business in Eustis, Florida. He and wife, Caroline, have 5 children and 5 grandchildren.



FINAL DEADLINE: NOV. 1, 1993

Standby duty becomes memorable

GARY L. LUCAS

It was 11 p.m. on Dec. 31, 1968, in Tan An, Vietnam.

Two Cobra gunships and a UH-1D "Huey" rigged with an array of lights to spot enemy movement at night entered into a firefight over a river canal leading toward Cambodia.

A Viet Cong river convoy transporting supplies was destroyed. During the battle, one Cobra sustained two hits from small arms fire, but was able to land safely at an ARVN outpost near where III Corps and IV Corps bordered.

Close call hits from small arms fire, but was able to land safely at an ARVN outpost near where III Corps and IV Corps bordered.

The gunship was still flyable but no longer mission ready, so the firefly team commander asked that a replacement Cobra be flown to his location to continue the mission.

Being in the second rotation of standby pilots that night, I flew the replacement Cobra to the team, along with a maintenance sergeant tech inspector in my front seat. His job was to assess damage and determine if the shot-up Cobra was safe to fly back to base.

Locating the team's position and successfully making an approach to a PSP pad with the aid of a fellow aviator pointing a red-lens flashlight at my landing spot, I was happy to have my skids on the ground, even though we were in a heavily infested enemy area termed "VC Alley" by our unit.

The rotors still turning at flight idle, the tech inspector and I exited the replacement Cobra, turning it over to the crew awaiting our arrival.

Then, running in the dark with helmet, gloves and chicken plates still on, the tech inspector and I tripped on a piece of PSP, falling into a depression between the Cobra we had just left and the Cobra we were to inspect and fly back to base.

While we were picking ourselves up and brushing the mud

Articles sought on close calls

The VHPA Newsletter is seeking articles from members about their close calls while flying helicopters in combat during the Vietnam War.

To share your close call with other VHPA members, write about it and mail the article to:

Close call
VHPA Newsletter
7 W. Seventh St.,
Suite 1990
Cincinnati, OH 45202

and dirt away, a Viet Cong mortar round landed about 50 meters away, prompting us to dive headlong back into the depression.

As I lifted my head to assess the situation, I could see the ARVN troops on the perimeter of the small outpost returning ground fire from VC advancing from all directions.

As other crews started the turbines on their aircraft to get into the air before being blown to bits by mortar rounds, heavy machine gun fire poured down on us.

After the split second it took for the tech inspector and me to see we were the only American troops left inside the outpost, we made a quick run to the Cobra.

Cranked up and pulling pitch, we fastened our belts and shoulder straps in the air, dodging tracers from every direction. Going hot on the guns and rocket pods were to no avail, as the prior crew had expended all ordnance during the previous battle.

With 40 pounds of torque available in my left hand, the best course was to point the nose up, and grab as much airspeed, altitude and distance as I could. Quickly we left the mortar explosions and machine gun tracers behind.

The firefly team also managed to get all its aircraft in the air. The team thanked us by radio and ordered us back to base. It was now engaged in the battle

and had another support fire team en route to its location.

Relieved to have escaped the situation behind us with no physical damage, I took a few deep breaths and pointed the Cobra toward the lights of Saigon while climbing to 4,000 feet. Turning my head, I looked back over my shoulder one more time to see the intense firefight behind us as I listened to the FM radio.

Suddenly my view was obstructed by what I thought was a small cloud.

Weather had been reported as clear and Saigon stood out as clearly as a Christmas tree when I passed through 3,500 feet. Turning back to the instrument panel, everything looked good. Then I committed the IFR cardinal sin.

With rotating beacon flashes bouncing reflections off what I thought was the small scud cloud I would pass through in seconds, I took my eyes off the gauges and watched the dancing light show going on around me. It was a bad mistake.

I was dazzled by the light show.

As I continued looking at the cloud, the Cobra started bucking and bouncing like a rodeo horse bent on throwing its rider.

Immediately, I froze my eyes onto the gauges. What I saw caused my heart beat to double as it climbed into my throat. Wings level, nose high, zero airspeed, rate of descent needle pegged past 4,000 feet per minute.

Even for an new aviator, it didn't take but a split second to recognize the settling with power I had so foolishly induced.

With my head up and locked, my instincts had me push forward on the cyclic, which caused mast-bumping, increasing the jerking motion and cyclic feedback to major proportions.

Then I tried increasing collective pitch and forward cyclic together, which induced a bucking effect that caused my helmet to slam against the canopy and loud, strange noises which fur-

Continued on Page 12

Experiences frighteningly similar

Pilots share tales at Reunion in Phoenix

SCOTT LYMAN

While reading Dick Zeigler's "After Action Report" in the 1992 Directory (also recounted by their passenger, Lt. Col. Purcell, in the recent Reader's Digest), I was reminded of one time I had to fly up to Bao Loc from Phan Thiet in

Close call

some pretty stinky weather.

I had to fly rather close to the ground and followed a valley, then a road most of the way. I half expected to run into the same sort of thing Dick did — pass over an enemy unit that just pointed their weapons skyward and fired.

I remember being very uncomfortable about that flight, even though nothing happened.

Not long after that flight to Bao

My commo was shot out and the ship looked like an oversized pepper shaker, but it got us back home.

Loc, I did have the same experience Dick described, and I shared it with him during the reunion in Phoenix.

The day before, we had been involved in a battle up above Song Mao where we left the area littered with several slightly used enemy.

The next day I was showing the area to an officer from the squadron S-3 shop.

The rest of the troop was working an OA further up-country, trying to shoot holes in some

more folks.

On the way back, I flew through an inverted rain of bullets from the guys sent to bury their buddies.

My commo was shot out and the ship looked like an oversized pepper shaker, but it got us back home.

The only blood spilled in that little foray was from the right ear of the ARVN observer, who shed possibly two drops from an infinitesimal nick in the upper rim of his ear.

But, as I recall, the ship did not fly again for several months.

One of the scariest parts about that was to see the cable from my cyclic control cut completely through, minus one thin strand of wire.

That was a rather close call.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Scott Lyman, who served with B/7/17 Cav in 1969, currently resides in Orem, UT.

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Shot on location at the VHPA reunion in Phoenix, this program would not be possible without the gracious assistance of the VHPA. In appreciation, 10% of the proceeds from the sale of this program will be dedicated to the Vietnam

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Control changes induce bucking effect

Continued from Page 10

ther increased my sweat and pucker factor.

No matter what I tried, nothing changed. Visual inputs from the gauges and mental analysis of corrective actions taken were not in sync, so instant vertigo added to my now seemingly insurmountable problems.

With the vertigo trying to tell me to fly by physical sensations and some other part of my brain telling me to continue working with the instruments, a third part of my brain screamed in panic, telling me we were about to die in a very stupid fashion.

Knowing if I continued my foray with the collective and cyclic, the rotor head would depart from the mast, I somehow decided to center the cyclic, lower the collective, take in some air and talk to God with more intensity and humble pleading.

Seconds seemed like hours. I was anticipating the big thud at any moment.

Then something dramatic occurred that, to this day, I can only recount with awe-inspiring confidence the master aviator of the universe took pity on us.

By now the Cobra, falling backward with increasing speed, had cleared the cloud. I had no other recourse but to look out the canopy into the now quiet, black stillness of the sky or the jungle below to spot a landmark to realign my cranial gyro or kiss the

black rose as we entered into peaceful sleep.

With panic — yet “concentrated aviator’s composure” — something told me to continue looking over my right shoulder.

There it was. In the blackness, analogous only to falling backwards down a deep, dark pipe, I spotted a bluish-white shaft of light below me. It glowed like a mist.

Immediately, the vertigo departed. For the first time since the nightmare began, my cranial gyro caged to give me a reference from which I believed I could take effective action. What I did worked for some unknown reason.

Without any further thought, I pushed hard right and forward on the cyclic, almost into a split “S.” The words “Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” now rang in my head.

As the nose of the Cobra started descending below the horizon, the airspeed needle climbing, aircraft control returned. Banking sharply toward the glowing mist below, I applied a steady pull on the collective to 40 pounds of torque. Airspeed rapidly increasing toward 180 knots, I applied more back pressure on the cyclic.

The misty shaft of light, I now saw, was focused on a bomb crater full of water whose reflective glare now was coming up at me at what seemed an impending collision, provided another focal point to enhance my knowledge of relative bearing to the ground.

Using that knowledge, I pulled back harder on the cyclic and leveled out under full control, with my skids about six feet above the ground — instead of six feet under.

That altitude wasn’t hard to judge because, as we leveled out, we flew only a few meters from the reflective mist glowing from the surface of the pool.

Passing by, I noticed the misty shaft of light seemed to emanate from within or under the water, protruding upward only a few meters with no diffusion, but rather a clear shaft with symmetrical sides and a definite top or stopping place. It was a silver-blue and white enigma of lifesaving light.

To further stagger the imagination, but with obvious reluctance, I’m still compelled to add: When I returned to the United States and, in conversation with my father-in-law, he related without prompting the entire episode described above, but with a very dramatic addition.

In his dream, he was somehow in the cockpit with me, behind my right shoulder talking me through the steps I followed that saved our lives.

Needless to say, the phrase “Go toward the light” is indelibly inscribed in my mind for very good reasons.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Gary L. Lucas currently lives in Newbury Park, CA.



Founders

Jim Ellis photo

Founding members of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association gather in Phoenix during the 1993 VHPA Reunion. The VHPA returned to Arizona to mark the 10th anniversary of the association’s birth.

Deceased member status OK'd by Executive Council

The family of deceased Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association members will continue to receive VHPA products for one year if the deceased was a life member or until the dues renewal date for regular members.

This change was approved by the VHPA Executive Council in August.

The family — defined as wife, parents, brother, sister or children — will be sent a renewal notice and will continue to receive VHPA products as long as annual dues are paid.

These products include the VHPA Newsletter, Membership Directory and the right to attend reunions.

In the past, VHPA membership and access to VHPA products terminated when a member died. This was implemented by chang-

ing the member's record from life or regular member to deceased, and the programs that produce mailing labels did not recognize the deceased status.

The most obvious benefits from this change are that the family will continue to receive the Directory and the right to attend reunions because anyone can subscribe to the Newsletter. The family also will receive standard membership services such as renewal notifications.

It is important to note this change applies only to someone who is or was a VHPA member. The Executive Council did not approve the case in which the family of a deceased Vietnam era helicopter pilot who never joined the VHPA now wants to join the association in behalf of the deceased pilot.

Newsletter advertising rates

Display advertising rates for the VHPA Newsletter are:

- Full page, \$500.
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VIETNAM HELICOPTER PILOT

I commissioned Lieutenant Colonel Darrell Combs, USMC, one of the nation's top award-winning military artists, to sculpt a pewter figure of a Vietnam helicopter pilot. The figure stands 6.5 inches high and weighs almost 3 pounds. It represents a pilot who has just completed a mission and is walking back across the flight line. He is wearing: The two-piece Nomex flight suit, black leather boots, fatigue hat, "chicken plate," survival vest and a belt complete with a holstered .38-caliber pistol and a survival knife. In addition, he is carrying a CAR 15 in one hand and his APH-5 helmet in the other.

Darrell created the figure after looking at hundreds of photos of Vietnam helicopter pilots and after seeing the actual equipment we carried. He has painstakingly recreated in minute detail the tired facial expression, the aviator's watch, a dog tag in the laces of one boot, Nomex flight gloves hanging from a lower leg trouser pocket,

individual bullets on the belt, zippers and mesh on the survival vest, headphones and head pad inside the helmet, combat-loaded magazines in the CAR 15, and grease pencils in the shoulder pocket.

In order to make this figure generic, there are no unit patches. The rank on the fatigue cap and collar is a nondescript bar that could be either a lieutenant or a warrant officer. The same is true for the branch insignia on the collar. It could be Infantry, Cavalry or warrant officer.

The figure comes in three different finishes: Bronze, Pewter or Painted. Without shipping, the bronze and pewter figures are \$100.00 and the painted figure is



\$125.00 All figures will be shipped first class mail and insured. The shipping cost is \$6.25. For a painted figure, allow five to six weeks for delivery. Payments should be in the form of a money order or cashier's check made payable to Stephen R. Pullen. Mail orders to

[Redacted]. No personal checks will be accepted. If you have any questions, call me collect at [Redacted]-9999.

This figure will make an excellent addition to your office or den. It will remind

you of a time long ago when we flew helicopters and made aviation history in the greatest helicopter war the world has ever seen.

Steve Pullen/Banshee 11

Mason book shows healing near

"Chickenhawk: Back in the World" by Robert Mason. Publication date: March 16, 1993, by Viking Press, 388 pages, 10 photographs. List price: \$22.50.

Twenty-six years is a long time after October 1966 for Robert Mason to wrestle with Vietnam — but he did, and so have many who lived their year there, over and over and over.

Robert Mason's original book "Chickenhawk," published in 1983, set the stage for a great sequel, which he apparently had not originally planned to do. Taking up where he left off after returning to the "World" in October 1966, he separates his life into three very distinct episodes and writes about them candidly in such a way that there is no doubt about what he felt, thought, and wanted out of life.

The harsh realities he so vividly wrote about in the original "Chickenhawk" are still as real as these new words flow before the eyes in "Chickenhawk: Back in the World."

Beginning with a stint as an IP at Fort Wolters where OH-23s and TH-55s present their own peculiar problems, Mason very vividly describes how the bigger problems in his head still scar him. No one seemed to understand and many didn't want to take time to understand. There was a war to be fought, and everything and everyone were

rushing past him to get into it.

After Wolters, Mason puts into words how he tries, time and time again, to get something going to fulfill his "American dream." Over and over, his business ventures and efforts at an education are overshadowed by the images of his psyche and horrors from Vietnam. He describes how his family suffered from his behavior and actions. He knows there has to be more to life for them and himself — but what?

Book review

Finally, a grand scheme emerges. Masterminded by another Vietnam vet, the scheme is to smuggle by small sailboat a large amount of marijuana from Colombia in order to get out of debt. "Chicken" and "Hawk" feelings once again boldly emerge and pour out of Mason as he throws himself completely into the trip.

Never having sailed before, he applies his strong survival instincts to a long and dangerous mission full of surprises and new challenges, almost *deja vu* to other dangerous missions he had once faced half a world away. Ultimately, both missions end with very serious consequences, both of which he never intended.

The final segment in this fine book is one where Robert Mason deals with the consequences of his actions. As an inmate in a federal prison, he wrestles with

daily life and describes the people he lives among. Thank God most of them were supportive or his life would have been more hell.

He describes and makes you feel like you are part of his closed world, while yet being a celebrity back in the "World." The white-collar prison environment is comfortable to Mason, similar to Vietnam at first, and he excels — therapy of sorts.

There is an epilogue to "Chickenhawk: Back in the World." Had there not been, there would have been a concern about healing and closure.

Real healing seems to be at hand for Robert Mason and his wife Patience. Robert Mason now sees life more clearly. So clearly that he is able to focus in on his dreams of being a writer and to begin to say that he sees his American dream. Welcome home, brother.

Enough cannot be said about Patience Mason. Throughout her husband's entire journey back, she provides understanding, support and comfort. She epitomizes the kind of wife many Vietnam vets had and more needed.

Having, herself, traveled a long road to this point, she is an author in her own right. Her book, titled "Recovering from the War: A Woman's Guide to Helping Your Vietnam Vet," was published in 1990 by Viking. We all look forward to more contemporary works from the Mason family.

— Tom Payne, Bandit 32

'Helicopter Valley' avoided like the plague

Attention: "Phrog Phlyers" — do you remember how to fly in "Helicopter Valley?"

VHPA member Jon Boule flew CH-46 Sea Knights with HMM-163 in I Corps in 1969. The Marine CH-46, also built by Boeing-Vertol, was a close cousin of the Army CH-47 Chinook. Why the HMM-163 folks called themselves the "Phrog Phlyers" is a story for another day. The Marines named a valley almost on the DMZ and west of Con Thien "Helicopter Valley" because of all the UH-34s shot down there during the early years. Sadly, many CH-46s would share the same fate in the same valley in the later years.

Jon recalls: "Helicopter Valley" was in our AO and

we avoided it like the plague. The valley ran east to west, and must have been on the "NVA preferred routes" list. In 1969, the NVA tried to take Con Thien. The Marines had an outpost there and the powers-that-be on our side decided to head them off at the pass, so we inserted and then supplied the blocking forces in and around "Helicopter Valley." The NVA were dug in on the north and both ridges, so anything flying into the valley or trying to land in it was immediately brought under a heavy cross-fire. Since the NVA had the high ground and generally knew exactly where our combat units were in the val-

Continued on Page 15

NVA held high ground above the valley

Continued from Page 14

ley, they set up a pretty effective anti-aircraft network. We developed a variety of techniques to fake them out as we'd go into or out of an LZ. Once I flew with Jerry Blackbird from Montana. He flopped that thing around the sky so much that I lost track of what he did! I couldn't even guess what he did, but it worked!!

My favorite techniques were either to come in very high and use a tight spiral into the LZ or to come in very low, say beneath the treetops.

The tight spiral, when done properly, was a thing of beauty and finesse. From 3,000 AGL directly over the LZ, you dump the collective and go into a 65- to 75-degree bank. In one 360-degree turn, you would come out on a heading for the LZ. Manipulated properly, you build up rpm to about 105-115 percent and roll out level just as you are about to land. Since you have all that rotor rpm for braking power, you pull the collective up into your armpit to keep from smacking into the ground and rolling yourself up into a ball of tinfoil.

I preferred the low level approach for two reasons. First, the CH-46 can be heard from behind and not from in front like a Huey, so I could be past them

before they knew I was coming. Second, there was always a lot of mist, haze, and smoke in the valley. Even a CH-46 could not be seen very well from above on the ridge lines. I would come into the LZ at cruising speed, dump the collective, throw the bird into a hard right or left bank to slow it down, and end up with a final approach of about 100 to 250 feet. Of course, this required absolutely great engines and systems, because one error and you wipe yourself all over the trees or the side of the hill.

Both techniques had their drawbacks, but in Vietnam it seemed like there were lots and lots of drawbacks!! The real key was never do the same things twice and never go out the way you came in. Those were the basic rules we all learned to live by and they generally kept us alive.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Jon prepared this material several years ago. Phil Chinnery used it in his "Vietnam: The Helicopter War," published by the Naval Institute Press. Jon last corresponded with the VHPA in 1988 with a Chicago address that is no longer valid. If anyone knows Jon or has a current address for him, please contact VHPA Headquarters. Mike Law would be delighted to buy him dinner during the 1994 VHPA Reunion in Philly.

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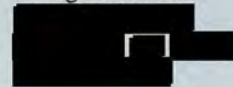
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Note: I have the Viet Cross of Gallantry and the Viet Campaign medal for trade if you are one of the many that only got the ribbon.

Thanks,
George G. Reese



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