



# The VHPA Newsletter

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

August/September 1996 Vol. 14, No. 4



Donald R. Joyce photo

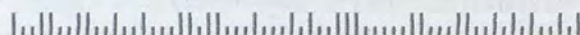
A CH-47 "Chinook" sets a 105mm howitzer precisely in the center of a sandbag revetment at a firebase near Dakto in November 1967.

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## From the President

The 1996 VHPA Reunion at Santa Clara was a memorable event.

We had a ringside, rooftop seat to the Fourth of July fireworks. The various side trips were fun and enjoyable. The tribute to the missing man, choreographed by member Joe Bilitzke, was inspirational. The Marriott Hotel staff was dedicated to making our stay pleasant.

All this added up to a terrific reunion.

Congratulations to Ken Fritz, president, and Bob Norona, reunion chairman, and all the dedicated California members and their families, who did an outstanding job of hosting the reunion.

Past president Kenny Bunn, as usual, added goodwill and humor to the gathering.

The truck raffle was a new event and was successful as a fund-raiser.

The focus for the upcoming year will be future planning for membership, historical publication financing and marketing, chapter development and goals for where the VHPA will be in the future and what will be its activities.

The members of our Executive Council have developed and agreed to the delegation of future planning and day-to-day operations as follows.

### **Ken Fritz, past president:**

- Day-to-day activities — Publications, Newsletter and calendar, Turner Book, bumper stickers, annual directory, public relations and contractor liaison.

- Long-range activities — Explore ideas to publish the history, i.e. plan.

### **Mike Hurley, vice president:**

- Day-to-day activities — Complaint response.

- Long-range activities — Chapter planning, support

and development.

### **Jack Jordan, senior member at large:**

- Day-to-day activities — Vendors.

- Long-range activities — Vision plan for VHPA.

### **Bob Smith, midterm member at large:**

- Day-to-day activities — Short-range fund-raising, advertising for Newsletter, lottery, etc.

- Long-range activities — Finance and marketing of history publication.

### **Bob Johnson, junior member at large:**

- Day-to-day activities — Conference and roster call arrangements.

- Long-range activities — Membership promotion and development.

- Immediate — Membership Committee formation by October 1996.

Please consider volunteering your time and talent to assist the EC member responsible for the various areas outlined above by contacting the responsible EC member.

The VHPA has a lot of members who can make a contribution to the VHPA's future by serving in some capacity on a committee.

The president's column will be shared in the future by EC members writing about their progress in their respective areas of responsibility to keep the membership informed.

Plan to attend the 1997 reunion in Orlando, FL. Jim Basta is the reunion chairman and the Florida Chapter Committee has some dynamite programs for us. The reunion committee will be publicizing the reunion in the Newsletter in the next issues.

The past presidents and Executive Council members have left a legacy of a financially sound organization dedicated to the principles set forth in its constitution. I thank Ken Fritz, immediate past president, for his outstanding stewardship. See you down the Rayroad.

— Charles "Railroad" Rayl, President

## Seeking

My Army Infantry OCS graduating class of Sept. 6, 1968, seeks classmate Harley J. Baker.

Baker, a Kentucky native, was a jumpmaster and had served a Vietnam tour with the 101st Airborne Division before he attended OCS. He was a sergeant first class before commissioning.

Baker became a Huey pilot with an aviation unit attached to the 173rd Airborne Brigade, probably in 1970-71.

He is known to have achieved at least the rank of captain.

D.B. Ashton

## Photo taken by Grant

The color photo on the cover of the February/March 1996 VHPA Newsletter was submitted by me, but was taken by Robert Grant, who served as an aviator and aviation section leader in 3/11th ACR while I was in the 1/11th ACR from August 1966-August 1967.

— Gil Ferrey

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## VHPA chapters

Ohio River LZ Chapter	Paul Cotter, President [REDACTED]
Great Lakes Chapter	John Becker, President [REDACTED] [REDACTED] home
North Carolina Chapter	Lawrence T. Lanier, President [REDACTED]
New England Chapter	Bob Whitford, Past President [REDACTED] [REDACTED] home work
Fort Wolters Chapter	Charles Holley, President [REDACTED] [REDACTED] fax
Mardi Gras Chapter	Don Hunt, President Lee Overstreet, Vice President New Orleans, LA
Florida LZ Chapter	Judd Chapin, Executive Director [REDACTED]

## Chapter officer succumbs to sudden illness

James L. Yoho, Florida LZ Chapter secretary/treasurer, died unexpectedly on Aug. 7.

He experienced chest pains at home and, later at the hospital, had a massive cardiac arrest. He was 64.

Jim's passing is a great loss to VHPA, but especially to our Florida Chapter. No one has the energy and skills that Jim exhibited and we will never be able to fill this void.

He had been selected to be a main organizer for the VHPA Reunion in Orlando next year. During the past year, he had reorganized our LZ's inventory, treasury and planning.

He put in many hours at Sun N' Fun in Lakeland and manned our displays at the MacDill Airfest in April. He was at the Vietnam Memorial Moving Wall at Medard Park nearly

every day and it was Jim who set up everything for the Fourth of July parade in Brandon.

Jim served his country well with more than 20 years of active duty as an infantry officer helicopter pilot.

He received his commission through OCS at Fort Benning and arrived at Fort Wolters for helicopter school in January 1962. He was a member of Class 62-7.

After flight school, he was assigned to Korea and served with the 55th Aviation Dragon Flight 1963-64.

Before his tour in Vietnam, he was part of the 229th Assault Battalion, 11th Air Assault Division (later the 1st Cavalry Division) and then served in Vietnam with the 196th Light Infantry Brigade in 1966-67.

Later he had five more years of

duty in Korea with the 2nd Infantry Division and the 805th Aviation Detachment at Taegu.

After his retirement from active duty, he served 17 years as ROTC commandant at local Hillsborough County high schools.

Jim's delight was being with VHPA members and talking about helicopters, Vietnam, etc.

He remembered those who didn't make it back better than most of us because Jim lost a brother in Vietnam.

And we'll remember Jim Yoho as a brother.

Our prayers are with his wife of 38 years, Jean, son Mike, daughter Janet, grandson Trey, granddaughters Jessica and Grace Anne.

— Ken Mulholland



# Pilot finds trip back to Vietnam incredible

I recently returned from an incredible "first trip back" to Vietnam, since my only tour in 1968-69.

I was a Marine Corps helicopter pilot and flew "dogs" for most of my tour with HMM-363, the Lucky Red Lions (although I flew with several others as we were giving 34s to the ARVN and sending 34 squadron colors to CONUS to convert them to 46s).

I crashed near Highway 1 at Phu Loc on a medevac mission out of Phu Bai on June 8, 1968. Joe Bob Smith was the HAC and I was copilot.

The lead truck of a northbound Army convoy had hit a mine and the driver's legs were a mess. On our approach, we lost the entire tail section (rotor, gearbox, and all) and started spinning right.

Before we could give ourselves an engine failure, we hit the mountain below the road nose-low, inverted. I scrambled out — which made me climb up past Smitty (who looked dead to me).

I was standing on top of the wreckage and reached in to unstrap Smitty. I couldn't get him out alone and I called for the crew chief (Cpl. Hatcher). He was on top instantly and the two of us got Smitty out just as the aircraft exploded.

Nobody had any exposed hair left and I needed my butt and my head stitched up — my buddies said I must have bent over to kiss it good-bye! A 53 picked us up at the top of the mountain at Phu Loc.

Well, 28 years later, after standing on the spot where I went down, I walked up to the rescue site.

A farmer by the name of Luu Binh Phuc has a drink stand (free market economy) on the east side of Highway 1 at the top of the mountain.

He asked me what I was doing there and when I told him, his eyes got big and he shouted, "Lai day!" (Come here!). He grabbed me by the wrist and started up the mountain on the west side of the road across from his stand.

You couldn't see my crash site from his stand, but when we'd climbed high enough for me to see it, he stopped. He pointed right at it and said in English, "Big fire! Me so sorry for you!"

It turned out that Phuc was a 20-year-old in 1968 (probably VC, but I couldn't get him to admit it — he only laughed) and still lived in the same house.

He has 14 children, one of whom he tried to give me —

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You couldn't see my crash site from his stand, but when we'd climbed high enough for me to see it, he stopped.

## VHPA Product Order Form

### MAIL FORM TO:

VHPA  
949 University Ave.  
Suite 210  
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New VHPA bumper stickers \$1/each \_\_\_\_\_

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"She 'Numba 1 girl — you keep!"

I didn't. I now correspond with Phuc and send pictures. You can see them at his stand if you'll stop.

The rest of my self-designed trip was spectacular! Hoi An, Loc Vinh, China Beach, Danang, Hai Van, Phu Loc, Phu Bai, Hue (I could live there), Quang Tri, Dong Ha, Cam Lo, Camp Carrol, LZ Stud, Rock Pile, LZ Shepherd, Khe Sanh, Hills 861,881,950 1015, Ho Chi Minh Trail, Montagnards, Con Tien, DMZ, Vinh Moc tunnels, Hanoi, Air Vietnam (take a coat if it's a Tupolev Tu-134!), and more!

It was therapeutic to see coffee and rubber plantations where there had been so much blood and death. I highly recommend it!

Capt. Duke Hammond, 095278  
HMM-363

## Losing a crew member like losing family member

Aug. 30, 1967 — the events that happened that day never will be forgotten by me!

Mine was not a singular experience. I'm certain it was repeated hundreds of times by slick pilots in Vietnam. Those of us who are still alive are very lucky to have had God by our side.

The morning's lift totaled 40 slicks from four companies and all the gunnies we could muster in the air or on ready standby. The LZ appeared to have been prepped with everything short of an arc light; maybe that would have been a good idea.

The insertion was normal — free fire until touchdown and the 25th Infantry Division troops were on the ground.

We departed in formation and at about 300 feet I noticed the engine oil pressure drop to zero. Since the engine was maintaining full power, I figured it was probably just a gauge failure.

We maintained our position in the formation, not knowing that we had indeed taken a hit. The single armor-piercing round had cut both lines to and from the oil cooler, which was completely draining the engine oil reservoir.

The bullet had continued on, hit a bolt holding the fuel control unit, glanced aft, and cut a line going into the engine diffuser. This line was now spraying JP4 all over the engine.

About midpoint in the 25-minute flight back to Cu Chi, the pilot directly across the formation called that we were "smoking pretty bad." I thanked him and asked that he keep an eye on us.

We landed long at Cu Chi and found all the makings of a nice fireball! Thank God we never got to see it!

WO Chuck Restivo had been hit in the leg during the assault and his ship was without a full crew, so WO J.J. Spearman and I transferred to that aircraft. It was crewed by Spec. 4 William Sondey, with Pfc. Alfred J. Smith, "Smitty" to us, as the gunner.

Shortly thereafter, we were asked to make an ammo run back out to the Horseshoe. The entire crew agreed to take the mission, so we loaded up and took off.

When we arrived on station, a Dustoff ship was requesting that the artillery fire be brought in closer for covering fire. The request was denied because the shells were already hitting within 500 meters of the friendlies and there was no room for safety.

We radioed the Dustoff that since we had ammo to deliver, we would get their wounded. We asked if they could continue to circle until we were clear and watch us in case we needed a pickup ourselves.

The Dustoff quickly agreed to that arrangement and we were glad to have the cover.

To lessen our exposure to hostile fire, I approached downwind over heavy covering fire from the infantry, kicked a hard left pedal, and landed adjacent to a treeline where most of our guys were. Sondey and Smitty threw out the ammo as quickly as possible.

The wounded were all on Sondey's side, so he helped them aboard. The last one at that part of the LZ was gut shot and was lying on a poncho.

Sondey was hit while bent over pulling in the man on the poncho, but there were three more about 100 meters away across the open paddy area with no treeline for protection.

About that time someone came over the intercom saying, "Sir, I'm hit." Glancing back, I saw Smitty hunched over in his seat, clutching his left shoulder.

"Smitty, are you going to be all right?" I asked.

He replied, "I think they broke my shoulder, but I think I'll be all right."

"OK," I said. "We'll go get the rest."

We picked up the Huey, turned and hovered across the open rice paddy to pick up the other wounded. Smitty was hit again, this time on his right side.

As soon as all the wounded were on, we pulled max power and then a little more in our haste to get out of there.

WO Spearman flew back to Cu Chi while I tried to raise the 12th Evac on the radio. I had left the 12th Evac to go to flight school, so I felt a special bond with that unit.

I tried many times, but there was no reply. Later I found out that they could hear us, but we weren't receiving them.

While tuning the radio for the 20th time, I noticed a strange sound and vibration and glanced at the airspeed

While tuning the radio for the 20th time, I noticed a strange sound and vibration and glanced at the airspeed indicator climbing for 140 knots.

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indicator climbing for 140 knots. I screamed at Spearman to slow down because I thought we were approaching retreating blade stall speed.

We also were racing a huge monsoon that looked like a solid wall moving toward Cu Chi.

We made a straight-in shot to the 12th Evac and landed just as the full fury of the storm struck.

Later I counted 43 holes in that Huey. Chuck Restivo had taken one and we had collected the rest.

Smitty died about 45 minutes later.

That has always been hard on me. We depended on the guys in back 100 percent of the time and they on us. It's like part of my family died that day.

Being in the VHPA, talking with others at the Reunion who lost crew members and working with the committee to help record these details — that all helps, but I never will forget Aug. 30, 1967.

Mark O. Hayes  
188 AHC, Black Widow 14

## Aviator reassured mom shortly before his death

*"I've only seen one aviator killed since I've been here. You see, you're never alone on a mission. There's always somebody to protect you and get you out even before you hit the ground," my brother wrote in his last letter home, July 14, 1969.*

He was trying to reassure Mom.

*"I just don't want you to get upset because if you go down, you're only on the ground for about 3 minutes before they get you out of the area. We have what they call a downed bird alarm in all of the hooches. Whenever a bird goes down every bird here is airborne and en route to provide assistance to the bird in less than 2 minutes. That includes running to your aircraft, starting it, and taking off. So you see there's really nothing to worry about."*

A week later, on July 21, 1969, my brother was an observer in a Loach hit by a secondary explosion.

He was the only one to survive the crash and was transferred to 106th General Hospital where he died on 8-3-69 at age 19. I was eight years old at the time.

Now, 26 years after my brother wrote home about the protectiveness and loyalty that Army aviators felt for each other in Vietnam, I am experiencing the same thing.

Three years ago, I began a haphazard search for guys who might have known my brother, hoping to find out what kind of a person he was so that I could change his memory, in my mind, from a box of old letters and newspaper clippings, and a wallet that smelled of Vietnam, into a person.

Then I stumbled upon the VHPA via the Internet in

## Many families in dark about loved ones' deaths

Saw an item on the listserver that I recognized immediately. It involves an OH-6 crew blown out of the sky by a camo 250-pound bomb they were unknowingly shooting at (recon by fire).

The WO1 AC and the gunner were both KIA at the site and the WO1 observer survived two weeks.

To make a long story short, the observer's sister, Julie Kink, appealed to the listserver for info on her brother, David Kink. She was only 8 at the time and really knew nothing about the incident, nor did her parents.

I happened to be in another troop within the Unit (1/9 Cav), but remembered the incident very well. The AC and I were pretty good friends in flight school.

Anyway, I told her what I knew via AOL and she sounded very relieved and interested to finally learn what happened.

I can't help but believe there are thousands of other relatives still in the dark like this family. Thought you'd like to know. Later.

Chuck Adkinson  
Apache 34  
A Troop, 1st Sqdn, 9th Cav, 1969

April, received a copy of your newsletter and sent e-mail to Mel Canon and Mike Sloniker, my search was thrown into fourth gear!

Mike forwarded my message to Jim Schueckler, who has been tremendously supportive and willing to help me try to locate people who knew David.

He is obviously very experienced at this type of thing and brought tears to my eyes when he wrote in his first e-mail to me, "Your brother also was 'our' brother."

I have guarded hope that someday I will be able to talk with someone who can tell me what my brother laughed (or cried) at, what kind of music he liked, what he thought of being in C/1/9.

Under the protective "wing" of pilots who have provided assistance, I have also gained some insight into what it truly meant to be an aviator during the war and now.

I continue to be amazed that so many people are so willing to help me — I'm just a little sister, I wasn't even there, and I have nothing to offer in return.

I'll always be grateful for the help I've received from those associated with the VHPA ("You're never alone on a mission") and encourage your continued support of this essential link between those of us who were left behind and all of our brothers on The Wall.

Julie Kink

C/1/9 First Cav, WORWAC 69-11, KIA 8-3-69

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## Sister would like to hear from brother's friends

The sister of WO1 David R. Kink, C/1/9 First CAV, WORWAC 69-11 KIA 8/3/69 is hoping to hear from guys her brother knew in flight school or Vietnam.

Please write, call collect or e-mail to Julie Kink, [REDACTED]

Jim Schueckler  
Polecat 356  
[REDACTED]

## 'The Shower' a big part of civilization in Vietnam

The spot was perfect, picturesque overlooking the emerald blue of the South China Sea. The palm tree next to it looked as though it were planted there by Mother Nature, just waiting for the arrival of "The Shower."

The importance of this piece of equipment eluded me until that fourth layer of skin called "Vietnam crud" had to be removed without resorting to a steel GI scrub brush. I considered this body maintenance as important as learning combat approaches in a "Dog" model Huey without becoming a smoking hole.

Being an FNG, I was busy being farmed out to other outfits for "experience" while the remainder of the flying machines of Company A, 82nd AVN, 82nd Airborne Division, was being shipped from CONUS.

I do not know exactly who built or engineered "The Shower" while I was away, but there were a number of second tour "yankers and bankers" involved.

The components of this magnificent butt scrubbing machine were traded, bartered and swapped for, bought and pilfered.

Many hours of "off duty" engineering and labor by about everyone in the company, except yours truly, had a hand in its creation. Built and engineered by second tour guys who knew the score . . . well, almost.

As my journeyman's tour of other outfits continued, I was quick to notice that the locals would often as not, fill the air with high-speed projectiles, which upon bodily contact, would cause great pain and much leakage of body fluids over the rest of the crew.

Being a sensitive type guy and trying to forget the days discontent, I consumed large quantities of anything alcoholic at the Ay Ha "O" club at Chu Lai.

One of Mr. Murphy's Laws somewhere states that if something can go wrong, eventually it will — and it did.

Having somewhat solved my part of the day's social unhappiness, I stumbled down to the gaily lit "H" of the main helipad, proceeded to find my hooch, get into shower battle dress and remove as much of Vietnam as I could from my skin.

## VHPA members perform flawlessly pouring wine

To all members who helped us pour at our wine-tasting at our 13th reunion at the Marriott, Santa Clara, CA, we want to personally thank you for your help.

We had prepared a list of all the names of those who poured but, unfortunately, the list has been misplaced.

The tasting was not only flawless but one of the highlights of our convention. We all agreed that, because of your fine presentation and professional approach, our tasting was such a huge success.

Not only were we pleased, but the 511 members who attended our tasting were delighted that we put on such a fine event. Again, thank you all for your generosity and assistance.

Patrick M. Donaghue  
Assistant: Jo Ann Frank

Standing in front of this fine example of American ingenuity in Ho Chi Minhs and a towel, with soap, flashlight and hand cannon, I bent over. I bumped something.

The aviation fuel that was intended to flow down the inside of the drip pipe now seemed to be on the outside. Too late, the die was cast — or lit.

Wow! That night launch of the 55-gallon drum of aviation fuel was downright impressive at "ground zero," as I recall, spreading hunks and bits of flaming debris everywhere. Welcome to hell with a bare ass and a .45.

As a newly appointed Wojie Bear by the secretary of the Army, I knew I had way too much fire than I could use. I brought all biological and physical liquid assets (garden hose) to bear on the imposing inferno. It was literally too little too late.

Between the hooting and hollering of the assault company across the small cove from us and the cursing and cocking of .45s from my outfit, I knew I had just screwed the pooch.

As the last burning ember died, the new, completely charcoaled structures, along with the fried palm tree, seemed suspended by our gaping mouths and disbelieving stares.

Silence. Somebody said a comment about some crew member's mother and it all came crashing down, along with applause from the neighbors.

More hoots and holler came through the moonlit soot cloud, along with moans and groans from the darkness behind me. I heard more .45s being cocked and the word "murder" at least once — then a piercing voice that sounded like the C.O.'s that said something I thought very profound: "Hey, Tiesing, I think your water's hot!"

Jack E. Tiesing  
[REDACTED]

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## Flight engineer takes dog to Nam, then back home

One of my clerks' father served in Vietnam and she enjoys the stories in the Historical Reference Directory. Thanks, VHPA.

The story about Tuffy, the Soc Trang tiger, brought to mind a story about another animal Newsletter readers might enjoy.

When the 200th ASHC, Pachyderms, came in country in early 1966, I was infused from the 147th and one of their flight engineers had this scruffy dog that was always around his aircraft.

I'd been there quite some time when I finally heard all the story. Here it is:

As the 200th formed at Fort Benning, it participated in field exercises in the wilds of Georgia. During one of these trips, this flight engineer (I cannot remember his name, but if anyone does, please contact me) found a dog in an LZ in the middle of nowhere.

As is the nature of the American GI, he policed up the dog and made him a pet.

Some weeks later, when the unit deployed, he conned a C-130 crew into flying the dog to California; so when the Chinooks were loaded onto the carrier, the flight engineer and the dog also boarded.

Some 30 days later, the carrier, Chinooks, flight engineer, and dog land at Vung Tau and, hence, to Bear Cat.

I remember somehow that animal knew his master's aircraft over all the others in the unit. He would spend his days lying around Operations or Maintenance and would only react to this one Chinook; ignoring all others.

I left Vietnam in October 1967 for Fort Sill as a CH-47 IP. We were doing the same thing at Sill — building up Chinook companies and sending them to war.

Some months later, I walked out to a CH-47B and, lo and behold, here was the same Pachyderm flight engineer. Of course, we talked over old times and what happened after I had left.

As I was looking over the logbook, a rather nice-looking dog bounded up the ramp, came over to me and began nuzzling my hand, wanting some attention.

I said something like: "Oh, you got another dog."

As soon as I said that, by the look on his face, I knew it was the same dog I'd seen at Bear Cat.

Contributing to me not recognizing the dog was the fact that this was the first time I'd seen him clean!

I remember somehow that animal knew his master's aircraft over all the others in the unit.

I know everyone remembers the red clay dust from over there and, of course, the dog always had a red hue to it.

More of the story.

When this flight engineer was due to leave, he went to Saigon and shipped the dog to the United States at his own expense. I seem to recall there was some trouble with quarantine and he made more than one trip to the coast before being reunited with his war buddy.

Anyway, this animal had much of the same things happen to it as happened to us . . . join the Army, learn to work with helicopters, go to Vietnam, return to the U.S. and serve out the rest of our time in some boring stateside assignment.

Over the years, I have told and retold this story and hope I have kept at least 50 percent of it straight.

I only wish I could remember the dog's name and the name of the flight engineer who, to me, typified all that was good about that particular generation.

Maybe someone will read this who has a better memory than I.

It would be great to learn the whole story vs. only the parts that I can remember.

George Miller  
Pachyderm 3A

## Association seeks information on 1970 loss of UH-1C crew

If you were flying about 22 miles southwest of Nha Trang on Feb. 23, 1970 (or a few days after that), please read on.

The 155th AHC Association wants input from anyone who can provide details concerning the loss of one of its crews and a UH-1C on the 23rd.

We already know the following:

- A team of two Falcon (the 155th's gun platoon) UH-1Cs were supporting a training mission for the Special Forces training center at Nha Trang.

The Special Forces training would have included such subjects as long-range patrolling, air insertion and extraction, requesting and adjusting supporting arms, etc. for Vietnamese and other foreign nationals.

- Three UH-1Hs from the 281st AHC and a FAC were the other aircraft supporting this mission.

- We believe VHPA member Keith Marchbanks was the Falcon team leader flying the other gunship.

- WO1 Joe Erickson was the PIC, WO1 Paul Dolik the pilot, Spec. 5 Dave Nachtigall the CE, and Spec. 4 Calvin Serian the gunner on UH-1C No. 66-0518 that crashed about 1745 hours.

Various reports list the grid coordinates as BP812472, AQ805047, and BP806475 in Khanh Hoa Province. They all died in this crash.

- The daily staff journal for this period suggests the 92nd AHC might have provided a flare ship that evening and includes the comment: "No enemy contact."

*Continued on Page 9*



## Continued from Page 8

• The journal for the 24th records aircraft from the 281st and 48th AHCs may have been used to insert an investigation team plus a MSF (Mobile Strike Force) security team. The journal suggests this mission was completed about 1300 hours.

• VHPA member Les Davison, who served with the Falcons at this time, believes the 10th CAB did the investigation and the team saw bullet holes in the tailboom of 518.

• The VHPA helicopter, KIA, and histories databases support the information just presented.

Basically, we want to know what happened?

Anyone who can provide more information is encouraged to contact the VHPA or the 155 AHC Association Historian, [REDACTED]

Tom Mullen

## Wife of National Guard pilot writes poem about The Wall

My name is Laura Eder, and I have recently been encouraged to send you the enclosed poem for consideration in a future issue of The VHPA Newsletter.

My husband, Capt. Daniel J. Eder, is a Huey/Blackhawk pilot in the Illinois Army National Guard.

He did not serve in Vietnam, as he is only 31 years old. However, he flies with several veterans in the Guard, and it is they who recommended I contact you.

I visited Washington, DC, for the first time in October of last year. It was quite an experience for me.

The atmosphere was so energetic and I spent days wandering around the city to see all the tourist landmarks. Among them, the Vietnam Wall had the most profound effect on me. I wrote about it in my hotel room that night, and the enclosed poem is the result.

I am blessed in that I did not have a name to look for, the few soldiers I knew came back alive.

Yet, standing in the presence of those less fortunate than myself, I began to understand the significance of the memorial.

Laura A. Eder

### *The Wall*

*I stood at the wall today and waited for  
some feeling to come over me.  
Some; feeling of pain  
or loss,  
or sense of death.  
Some frustration for an unjust war.  
But none came.*

*I read a letter a survivor wrote  
to the men he served with.  
He would not have made it back without them.*

*Yet he did not come back with them.  
They are names on a wall  
Unfamiliar to me.  
Heroes of whom I have no memories.*

*The author promised to tell the young people.  
To forever keep them alive.  
And I believe he will.*

*Three other men found a name  
they had been searching for.  
On tip toe they traced it to paper —  
a perfect stencil.  
They were smiling.  
I wondered for a moment who he was to them.*

*A man walked by missing part of his right arm  
and I felt sorry for him.  
I thought he would probably hate that  
I felt sorry for him.  
There were tears in his eyes,  
but they were not for his own missing limbs.*

*A woman stood touching the wall —  
motionless  
for what must have been half an hour.  
I noticed her casually as I walked by.  
I will never forget how she looked.*

*I felt left out, as I stood at the wall.  
Half-wishing I had a name to look for,  
Half-thankful I did not.  
They are names on a wall  
Unfamiliar to me.  
Heroes of whom I have no memories.*

*I am thankful others do.  
For I understand . . .  
we must never forget.*

— Laura A. Eder

## Member claims amazement at seeing gunships on ground

The Newsletter is getting better with each publication! I realize I may start something here, but I was amazed when I saw the photos of the downed Shark gunships on Page 11 of the April/May 1996 newsletter.

Having served as a Firebird in the same battalion as the 174th AHC, I wasn't aware that the Sharks ever flew down on the trees with us oxygen breathers!

I'm surprised the NVA could see them, let alone hit them at the altitudes they flew! Hope no one was hurt.

(Hey, Firebirds, just because I started it, don't let them beat me up!!)

Ken Wiegand  
Firebird 95



# Orlando site for 1997 VHPA reunion

**JIM BASTA**

**ORLANDO REUNION CHAIRMAN**

If you were at Santa Clara for the reunion, you received information on the resort in Orlando for the 1997 reunion.

As promised, here is additional information to assist you in making your plans to attend.

The Renaissance Orlando Resort is the main facility. Some of the features to look forward to are:

- A 65,000-square-foot atrium, the focal point for all activities.
- Complimentary champagne on check-in.

## Type of rooms, prices

- 650 standard room (single through quadruple occupancy) — \$79.

- 75 club floor rooms — \$129.

- 20 two-bedroom suites — \$375.

- 10 one-bedroom suites — \$250.

- Complimentary coffee and newspaper delivery each morning when guest places a wake-up call with operator and requests this service.

- Some 780 luxury guest rooms, largest in central Florida.

- On-site recreation facilities, including lighted omni-turf tennis courts, sand volleyball, table tennis and jogging course.

- Five restaurants and two lounges featuring American, Oriental and seafood specialties.

Reservations can be made now until the cutoff date (June 4, 1997) by calling 1-800-HOTELS-1.

This number is the central reservation office and is good for all rooms except suites.

Requests for suites should be made direct to the Renaissance Orlando Resort at (800) 327-6677.

## Santa Clara reunion turnout very good

**KEN FRITZ**

**PAST PRESIDENT**

The 1996 reunion was a success by most measurements: Lots of new members and a tremendous turnout by those who have attended reunions in the past.

It was a great time for all those who visited Santa Clara to celebrate and recall the great and not-so-great times spent as Vietnam helicopter pilots.

Al Gerbino of the Darkhorse Group in Long Beach brought his UH-1M and beautifully restored LOH.

The banquet featured the actual stage backdrop used by Dave Letterman when he did his TV show from San Francisco, while Al's two helicopters in the banquet hall set the theme for a nice tribute to those of our friends who were remembered in a dramatic Missing Man Tribute.

The raffle for the pickup truck was a success, too.

West Valley Dodge of San Jose supplied a beautiful vehicle, but the first place winner needed a car for his son, so he chose to take the \$21,000 cash prize.

The lucky 49 tickets drawn beyond first place actually featured two VHPA members who had purchased more than one ticket. There were two guys who were lucky enough to win twice each — they each got \$200 back!

Anheuser-Busch did a nice job with some sponsorship this year and we hope it will repeat next year, as well.

The announcement that Orlando will be the site of the 1997 reunion was met with enthusiasm by virtually everyone.

The host hotel is next to Sea World and you can be sure there will be plenty to do and see in the area.

## VHPA briefs

### Turner to produce calendar

Turner Publishing Co. will produce the 1997 VHPA Calendar.

Expect this fine 11-by-17-inch, full-color calendar to be out in October. The price will be \$10, plus shipping and handling, with 5 percent going to the VHPA.

Contact Turner Publishers at (800) 788-3350 to order your calendars. They make great gifts!

### New chapter forming

There is not yet a northern California VHPA Chapter, but about 20 guys gathered during the 1996 reunion at Santa Clara to initiate the formation of a chapter devoted to the same objectives established by the VHPA constitution.

One of the fledgling group's first actions will be to contact every northern California member in the VHPA database.

Interested volunteers to help get this organized may contact Ken Fritz at [REDACTED] or fax [REDACTED] or write to the address shown in the VHPA membership directory.

### VHPA member wins honors

GREENVILLE, SC — Randy Crew, a VHPA member, won "Best of Issue" in the fiction category of the 1995 South Carolina Writers Workshop Anthology for his work, "Prologue To A Novel."

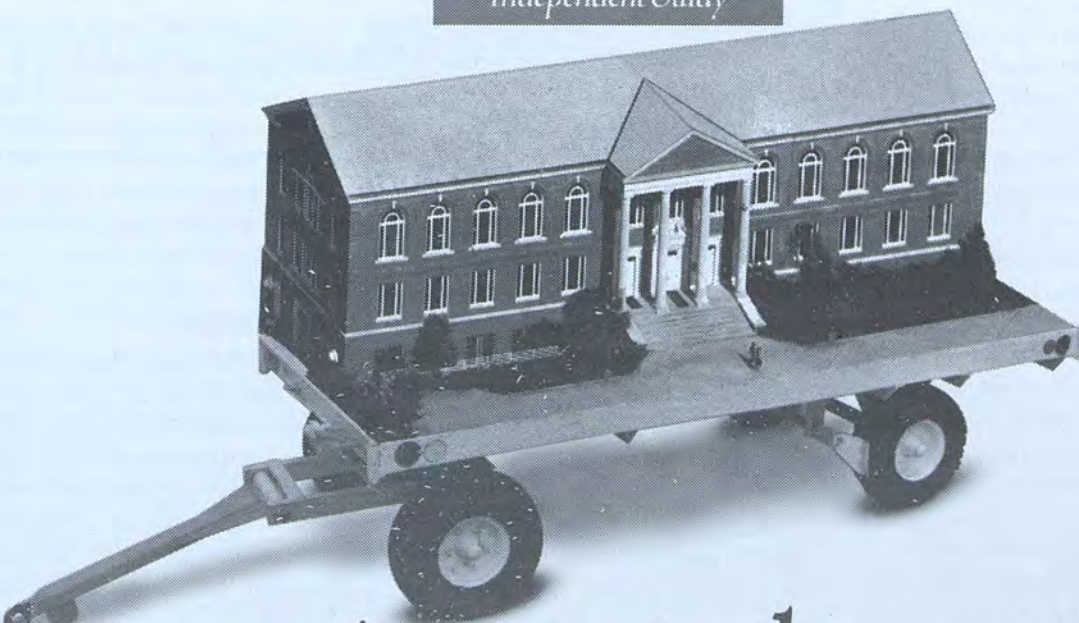
The prologue is from Mr. Crew's novel "The Killing Shadow."

Crew also won the essay category with "Mom's Launch," the story of an unusual Christmas gift.



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VHPA2 8/96

Accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.



# Fritz, EC report to VHPA members

SANTA CLARA, CA — President Ken Fritz called the annual VHPA business meeting to order at about 8:30 a.m. on July 6.

Fritz reported cost containment is an ongoing Executive Council concern.

He also said more than 1,200 people registered for the 1996 reunion. Of that number, more than 600 were VHPA pilots.

Fritz introduced Ross McCoy, the new VHPA management contractor.

He said this had been a good year for finding new members, which he largely attributed to the membership's efforts. He also reported there has been increasing interest in local chapters and cited some of the activities of the Florida Chapter.

Fritz also commented on the growth of the on-line group headed by Mel Canon.

## Financial reports

Secretary-treasurer Dan Ferguson presented the VHPA financial reports, including the administrative report, annual income and expense reports, and the dues allocation chart.

The financial reports were approved as presented.

## Orlando Reunion in 1997

Jim Basta, 1997 Reunion chairman, gave a brief promotional talk about the 1997 Reunion in Orlando.

The dates are July 1-5, but the hotel rates will be good for the entire week.

The room rate was reported at less than \$80 a night.

## Elections

Mike Hurley was elected VHPA vice president and Bob Johnson was elected junior member at large.

Vice President Charles Rayl will move automatically to president, junior member at large Bob Smith will move to midterm member at large and midterm member at large Jack Jordan will become senior member at large.

**Gary Roush, Database Committee chairman, reported that as of May, there were 689 life members and 4,007 regular paid members, for a total of 4,696 paid members.**

## Database Committee

Gary Roush, Database Committee chairman, reported that as of May, there were 689 life members and 4,007 regular paid members, for a total of 4,696 paid members. In addition, there are 3,610 people who have not renewed their dues.

Roush said 14,645 pilots have been identified, and there are 34,000 names in the flight class database, some of whom did not serve in Vietnam, were foreign nationals, and so forth.

He estimated 20,000-25,000 helicopter pilots flew in Vietnam.

## Membership Directory

Mike Law, Membership Directory Committee chairman, introduced various members of the Membership Committee.

He compared the previous directory, which cost \$7.50 each, to the 1995 directory, at \$6.25 each, which was on budget. The new directory will look much like the 1995 directory, but for about \$1,000 less. It will spotlight the Americal Division.

## Turner Publishing

Fritz introduced Dave Turner of Turner Publishing Co., who gave a

brief history of Turner Publishing doing military books.

He announced Turner Publishing will be preparing the next VHPA calendar. Turner presented the VHPA with a leather-bound copy of the VHPA History Book, which was auctioned for \$350.

## Newsletter

Jack Swickard, Newsletter editor, said that during the past year, 144 pages were printed in the Newsletter, more than double previous years.

Swickard reported revenue at \$7,250 since August 1995 to the current issue. Most of the revenue is used for the color covers, mass mailing, etc.

He made an appeal for member input for the Newsletter.

## Chicago Art Museum

Art Jacobs gave a brief report about the new art museum being set up in Chicago which will feature Vietnam-era art, helicopters, etc.

## Statement of direction

Incoming President Charles Rayl briefly described his goals for the VHPA. They include:

- Support of chapters. (Mike Hurley will head this effort.)
- Long-range planning. (Jack Jordan will be in charge.)
- Preserving our heritage and tradition. (Bob Smith will be responsible.)
- Chaplain Committee under The Rev. John Plummer.

Hurley discussed setting up an SOP to help new chapters form and building a relationship between the VHPA and the chapters.

Jordan gave a talk on long-range planning, which included:

- We need a good motto.
- We need to plan our future, or someone will do it for us.
- We need to preserve our history.
- Set up a scholarship fund.

Rayl asked for anyone who has experience in writing grant proposals to contact Bob Smith.



# VHPA patch archive continues growing

JAY RISEDEN

VHPA UNIT PATCH PROJECT

Thanks to the members who brought copies of their patches to the reunion at Santa Clara, the VHPA Unit Patch Project now has more than 400 items.

After the 1995 reunion in Kansas City, we had just 40 patch copies.

We are doing well, but still are only about halfway done in assembling the color copies of all Vietnam helicopter unit patches.

I had a chance to meet many of our members when they stopped by the Unit Patch Project table to view the collection. Please don't forget to send those patch copies you promised!

Some initial discussions have been conducted exploring the possibility of publishing of a book of our unit patches. If your patch is not in the collection, it is not going to be in any future publication.

Quite a few members are having reproductions made of their unit patches. I have received enough of them to start a spin-off project. When we get enough of these, we will have them sewn on a blanket or poncho liner for display at the reunions.

Send one of your reproductions when you get them made. Please send color copies of your unit patch to:

Jay Riseden  
[REDACTED]

# Association being formed for 2/20 ARA, F/79 AFA

VHCMA member Russ Warriner has been working for many months to pull together an association.

Russ also writes the "2/20 ARA and F/79 News" column in SABER, the 1st Cav Association newsletter.

Russ has managed to locate 420 guys who served in the 2/20 ARA or F/79 AFA, and is compiling an honor roll for those units.

After considerable effort, he was able to locate some unit histories but he could use our help.

**Russ has managed to locate 420 guys . . .**

The copies he received were only extracts of the full unit history documents and he is missing many documents completely.

Here is what he has:

- 1965: Battalion

History — 7 of an estimated 20 page document.

- 1966: Battalion History — 11 of about 28 pages.

- 1970: Battalion History — 5 of an estimated 12 pages.

- First quarter of 1971: Battalion History — 6 of an estimated 12 pages.

- 1972: F/79 Arty: 19 of an estimated 30 pages.

Not only is he missing 1967, 1968 and 1969, but he has none of the letter battery unit histories.

If you can help with copies of these histories or if you want to join the association, contact Russ at [REDACTED]

e-mail address is: [REDACTED]

## Collector's item!

Buy an original edition  
of the **VHPA History Book**

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Call (800) 505-VHPA to order now!



# Marine Corps pilot's novel is strong

**"A Killing Shadow" by Randolph E. "Randy" Crew. Hardback. 370 pages. Maps of I Corps. July 1996. Publisher — Artec Publishing, P.O. Box 25103, Greenville, SC 29616**

Many of us Army helicopter pilot types forget the U.S. Marine Corps had a fairly large contingent of helicopter aviation assets in Vietnam, located in I Corps, north of Danang.

Randy Crew, author of "A Killing Shadow," actually flew Marine UH-1E gunships in the I Corps AO, and has written a strong and detailed fictional novel based upon actual situations during 1969-70.

All the pilots and characters in the book are composite fictional characters who didn't really exist — right!! At least three of the characters I could swear I met when I flew in I Corps in 1970-71. "A Killing Shadow" is a wonderful fictional novel, instead of an autobiography.

The author said that during his 12-month tour in Vietnam, he had five COs, six XO's and knew dozens of soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, and none of them are in the book.

A fictional novel is a great idea and a fresh approach to telling the Vietnam story. I am unaware of any other book published to date about Vietnam that is purely fictional.

I can very highly recommend "A Killing Shadow" by Randy Crews as a book all helicopter pilots will want to read.

The lead character is Ross Teemer, a Marine "brat" who, with his flight school buddies, Bill Catlett, Rod Wysowski and Walt Dupont and some 20 other first lieutenants, fly Huey gunships all around northern I Corps for HML-467 "Hardball."

They struggle to fly as fresh green "peter pilots," just as U.S. Army helicopter pilots did.

They struggle to cope with a less-than-competent commander named Lt. Col. Mickey Houser and an eccentric XO named Maj. Richard P. "Bull" Angus who early on in the book exhibits a strange bent for top secret missions, and some unknown personal agenda.

The Marines flew basically the same Huey gunship as the U.S. Army, except they designated it the UH-1E, instead of the UH-1C.

They still had the same wonderful enlisted crew chiefs and doorgunners as the Army, and they were just as valourous and important to the mission as all who fired the M-60 from our Huey doors.

Some of the terminology used in "A Killing Shadow" is different, which makes for interesting reading. For instance, the "chicken plate" is called the "bullet bouncer."

And, the Marine Huey gunship was equipped with a twin M-60 chin-mounted turret gun called a TAT-101, which the Army didn't use.

The Marine Corps jargon throughout the book makes for interesting

comparisons to those of us who flew in the Army.

In the book, "we" actually save the day for a couple of Marine Hueys shot down.

Through the 33 chapters of "A Killing Shadow," Randy Crew very skillfully sets the stage, telling about people, places and situations so the final climax is a real surprise.

The reader knows and senses he is being set up for something "big" and, sure enough, in the final pages of the novel you are swept away by rotor wash as the true purpose of the strange characters you have been reading about all along, is played out.

You, the reader, never will be able to second-guess just what the climax is going to be. You will very much enjoy the way the author weaves and prepares you for the end.

As a former Vietnam helicopter pilot, I have never read a book even remotely like "A Killing Shadow." The title, a quotation from the English poet Ben Jonson, has a very significant meaning that is not evident until late in the book.

"A Killing Shadow" is one of the most interesting and gripping Vietnam books I have read.

All U.S. Army helicopter pilots need to read the book to better understand the special situations experienced by the U.S. Marine Corps helicopter pilots in Vietnam.

— Tom Payne, Bandit 32  
1966-67, 1970-71

## VHPA offering 1997 calendars for sale

The Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association is offering its 1997 calendar for sale for \$10 (plus \$5 S/H), through Turner Publishing Co.

The 11-by-17-inch calendar will feature full-color reproductions of rotary aircraft in use during the Vietnam era: A classic Marine Corps UH-34D HUSS, circa 1964; an OH-6A from the 11th Armored Cavalry's famed Blackhorse Regiment, c. 1971; a 237th Medical Detachment UH-1H flying "DMZ Dustoff," c. 1969; the ship-based Navy UH-1B Seawolf, c. 1976; Cobras, Super "C" Chinooks, Taipan "Hogs," Purple Foxes and more.

Each month will showcase a different helicopter, including a description of the craft and its surroundings.

Photos are from VHPA members Dan Ross, Phil Marshall, Jack Dale Jordan, Fred Thompson, Doug Stenberg and Doug Orahood, Vietnam Helicopter Crew Members Association member Donovan Earhart, photographer Art Dockter and the U.S. Navy.

This year's calendar also will include the names and units of the 2,173 helicopter pilots killed or declared missing in action from 1961-75.

To order your calendar, call Turner Publishing Co. at (800) 788-3350, between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. CST, Monday through Friday, or order by mail by writing to: VHPA Calendar, Turner Publishing Co., P.O. Box 3101, Paducah, KY 42001.



# Presentation causes tremor in congregation

**MIKE SLONIKER**  
VHPA MEMBER

Back in the fall of last year, one of our Vietnam Helicopter Flight Crew Network (VHFCN) members, Roger Ek, a former Navy Seawolf, wanted to honor John Plummer, the VHPA chaplain, for his ministry to members of the net.

Roger intended to find a UH-1 "Jesus Nut" and have it mounted, then present it to John.

Although Ek and Plummer had never met, they had regularly communicated by electronic mail.

Roger knew this would be a formidable task, so he enlisted the aid of the other members of the Net, swore the participants to secrecy, and went to work.

The first person he went to was Lou "Helicopter-parts-R-us" Rochat. Through his own private sources, Lou was able to procure (read "scrounge")

a "Jesus Nut" that came from a Navy UH-1.

Lou sent the nut to Roger, who had it mounted on a plaque and added an appropriate inscription.

Roger then decided he wanted it presented to John in front of his congregation at Bethany United Methodist Church in Purcellville, VA, a little town 40 miles northwest of Washington, DC.

I was next to be "volunteered" and sworn to secrecy by the "gentleman flier of the Delta" with the task of presenting the plaque to John in front of his congregation.

This did not seem like a difficult task to me. I mean, what could happen? After all, these are friendly folks in John's church, and I got in my mind, I was doing God's work.

I had been in the church the previous month for Memorial Day and had the layout down.

I told Ek I would give it to Plum-

mer during the introduction of guests at Plummer's church at the 11 a.m. services by just walking up to the front when I would be asked, as a guest, to stand up and introduce myself.

That was the plan, but here's what REALLY happened.

Plummer had changed the procedures so visitors were no longer asked to stand and introduce themselves, but to simply raise their hands and receive a visitor's card to fill out.

I decided to go to Plan B (which I was making up as I went), so I would just stand up and start talking.

I walked up to the front of the sanctuary and turned to the congregation and said: "This is a Jesus Nut, presented for two that could not be here, Roger Ek and Lou Rochat."

At the mention of Rochat's name, I felt the church tremor. Plummer, somewhat pale by now, looked at the

*See PLUMMER, Page 16*

## VHPA news

### Buying VHPA products important

Many VHPA members want to see more of the story of our role in the Vietnam conflict.

They want to see it portrayed accurately and they believe the VHPA is the best source for this information. The rub comes when it comes time to pay the publisher.

Our volunteers do a terrific job of gathering and organizing the information, but printing is very expensive.

Your association leadership has tried to find others to publish this research and, while we continue our search, we need to recoup our investments in the projects already completed.

This is another reason why we all need members and their friends to call (800) 505-VHPA to purchase VHPA products.

Libraries are very appreciative of your tax deductible donations of this type material. They probably have plenty of bare shelves in the Vietnam helicopter history section.

Our works can fill those shelves and provide the true story for generations to come.

We need to get this stuff written and out there before it is forgotten, recorded in error or rewritten to suit someone's political agenda.

## Calendar

### Sept. 13-15

All Boomerangs and Bounty Hunters from the 191st Assault Helicopter Company will meet at the Galt House in Louisville, Ky.

Contact: Jack E. Tiesing at [REDACTED] before 2 a.m. or leave message. Galt House reservations: [REDACTED]

## Previous years' calendars offered at low, low prices

The 1995 and 1996 VHPA Calendars are truly collectibles.

The photos alone are worth more than the sales price, but VHPA must liquidate these items.

Now you can purchase them for:

- 1995 Calendars — \$5 each, plus \$3 P&H.
- 1996 Calendars — \$6 each, plus \$3 P&H.
- One of each — \$10 per set, plus \$5 P&H.

Call (800) 505-VHPA or use the order form on Page 4.



# Rev. Plummer felt need to explain

*Continued from Page 15*

aghast congregation and explained that a "Jesus Nut" is the part on helicopters that keeps it all together.

I think he interpreted the congregation's expression to mean, "Did the fat guy just say, 'Jesus is a nut?'" so he was working fast to try to clear up the confusion.

When I sat down, I noticed Plummer was sitting in the preacher chair by the altar, looking at the heavens and smiling. He and his church had just witnessed the true meaning of "brotherhood" and an example of our bond as helicopter pilots.

Then, on July 1, Paul Pelland in Lancaster, PA, made the next part of the Jesus Nut story happen with the following.

Paul told us: Roger Ek (Seawolf) was in the AO visiting his sister on his way to the Seawolf reunion in DC on the Fourth of July weekend. We planned to have dinner and I posted this to the net.

The Rev saw the posting at 1600 and called me. Dinner reservations were for 1830, so I knew The Rev would need to drive VNE to make it on time.

I told Rev I wouldn't tell Roger he was coming. We met, sat down and swapped stories. I was worried about The Rev getting messed up by my bogus directions and kept stalling Roger for time.

We were sitting there and I noted a tall, well-built, mustachioed guy



**John "The Rev" Plummer holds the "Jesus Nut" presented to him in his church on Sunday morning.**

wearing a preppy sport coat and coiffed with a full head of very dark, well-groomed hair walking through the restaurant, acting as though he was looking for someone.

I always envisioned The Rev as being an old codger, kinda ridden hard and put away wet. A Johnnie Cash kinda guy. I expected him to

show up in dull black or brown clerical garb, Roman collar to boot.

It turns out The Old Rev is the picture of health and looks like the dashing young captain of yore. Guys, I'm serious. The Rev doesn't look a day over 35.

The Rev walks up, says, "Hi Papa," and Roger is standing there looking uncomfortable. I turn to Roger and say, "Roger, meet John 'The Rev' Plummer."

If someone would have thrown a piece of popcorn at Roger's belly button, he would have caught it in his mouth.

What a sight; a crowded restaurant and two middle-aged guys are standing there hugging and embracing.

We yakked and yakked; talked about other net members, old friends and told war stories over drinks.

Rev offered the prayer and we all held hands while John asked the Blessing.

We had a nice dinner and some not-so-quiet conversation. I got pictures afterward and, with more hugs and more back-slapping, we said our goodbyes. It was a wonderful time.

You should have seen the faces of the other diners that night. Evidently, the waitresses told the others we were Vietnam helicopter crew members reuniting after a long period of time.

While there may only be a "few" of us, we are a "special few." You could tell by the looks in the people's faces in the restaurant last night.

## VHPA member, son assist bomb victims

**MIKE SLONIKER**  
**VHPA MEMBER**

VHPA member Rick Lester of Marietta, GA, was behind the tower and 30 yards from the explosion when the bomb went off in Atlanta's Centennial Olympic Park on July 27.

He was with his 16-year-old son, Jonathon, listening to a concert at 1:20 a.m. when the blast occurred.

Just before the explosion, the lead singer of the band on stage said: "We have something special planned."

Rick's son was hit in a backpack by a piece of the pipebomb.

At the time of the explosion, Rick thought there might be another explosion and was on the ground shielding his son from the debris that was falling on them.

As he looked up, he saw people coming out of the smoke from the explosion with some very serious wounds. Rick took immediate command of the situation and administered first aid.

His son had a first aid kit that Lester had packed in his backpack.

When I asked Rick about it, he quietly said it was just something he always did.

*See RICK, Page 17*



# Medevac 33 in thoughts each day

Who was Medevac 33 on Jan. 16, 1971?

I think of this fine, brave, dedicated, caring soldier nearly every day of my life and I would like to have the honor of knowing his name so I can send him a much-belated thank you for his efforts on that tragic day.

On that day, I commanded B/15th Cav. Late in the day, we walked directly into a VC bunker complex at grid 767274, east of FSB Apache.

We were wary, for earlier that morning my 2nd Platoon had been ambushed a few hundred yards away, and several men, including the platoon leader, Lt. George Dupuy (now deceased), had been medevaced by hoist mission — but we encountered no resistance getting into the bunker complex.

That the complex had been very recently evacuated was evident by abandoned equipment and a pool of fresh urine.

I had two platoons inside the complex, while the third guarded our “rucks,” which we had dropped when the complex was discovered.

We advanced crawling and crouching, and soon the line became ragged, so I ordered a halt to get better align-

ment for the sweep, and moved forward a few yards to confer with my 1st Platoon leader and friend, 1st Lt. William H. Thigpen of Tarboro, NC.

It was quiet in the jungle, and I was amazed and elated that we’d gotten into the complex without a fight.

Foolishly, Bill Thigpen and I stood to talk about how we’d complete the sweep. We were face-to-face, less than a foot apart, when the treetops positively erupted with automatic AK fire.

Several bullets cracked past my right ear and one of them hit Bill high in his left chest and knocked him to the ground.

I went down on one knee and searched the trees for enemy, but the foliage was so thick that all the snipers were invisible.

Bill’s platoon medic was right there. He and one of my RTOs got Bill into a nearby enemy bunker and began to treat him.

I remained outside with my radios, called for an urgent Medevac and gunships, and began to pull the platoons into a perimeter.

The enemy continued to fire at any movement, but still we could not see a single one of them.

Within minutes, the medic from the other platoon, a young and inexperienced “kid,” crawled over and slithered into the bunker where Bill was being treated. I did not know it at that time, but Bill already was dead.

Soon, Medevac 33 came onto my company frequency and announced he was “inbound” with two Cobra escorts and suggested I “pop smoke.” We immediately put smoke out — I remember it was purple smoke — but the canopy of the jungle was so thick the smoke dissipated before clearing the trees.

A couple of soldiers risked their lives to cut saplings and we tied smoke grenades onto them and shoved them up into the trees.

Finally, Medevac 33 identified the smoke, got good bearings, and told me to stop the smoke.

I lay on my back on the jungle floor and talked to Medevac 33, guiding him to a spot directly above me, and when I shouted, “Now!” his crew chief dropped a rigid litter through the trees — it landed right at the edge of the bunker.

The Medevac helicopter was directly above me; I could feel the

*See MEDEVAC, Page 18*

# Rick said it was something he always did

*Continued from Page 16*

Lester applied direct pressure to a profusely bleeding artery in one victim’s neck, stopping the bleeding by holding his finger on the puncture wound.

He was assisted by an ACOG volunteer who said she was a “first-response medical technician.”

Together, they began working on a second victim, who had a nasty abdominal puncture. All through this controlled chaos, Jonathon Lester was assisting his dad.

A third victim showed up with a clean puncture wound in his calf that required treatment. By then, Rick was getting assistance to treat that.

He continued to render aid for more than 30 minutes, when the victims were placed in the ambulances.

According to VHPA member Max Torrence, who is a close friend of Lester’s, this action is typical of Rick, who wanted no recognition for what he did and left the park after giving his statement to the FBI and Georgia Bureau of Investigation, and avoided the media.

A member of the ACOG staff who knew Rick saw the statement and gave the information to the press.

Rick agreed to discuss the incident with the press only if the stories included other volunteers who helped the victims in the park.

NBC News immediately contacted Rick and wanted the piece on him making reference to his Vietnam War experience. He explained to them his opinion of the media and a happy medium was reached.

So, on Friday night, Aug. 2, I was taping the NBC news and, fortunately, saved the piece, which was the start point for this article.

In Max Torrence’s words: “This is a great example of a veteran continuing to serve his country long after hanging up his uniform.”

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** Rick Lester served in Vietnam with the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion in 1969 and the 48th Assault Helicopter Company in 1970-71. He graduated from flight school in WORWAC class 68-15.



# Reading article an emotional shock for pilot

DICK CERESKO

While I am not a member of the VHPA, I really enjoyed the February/March issue of the Newsletter.

I need to begin by saying how much of an emotional shock it was for me to read Mike Law's "The first CH-46D loss in Vietnam" article. This mission and its unfortunate outcome are as vivid in my mind today as it was on Feb. 5, 1968.

I was the first pilot of the UH-1E gunship from VMO-3 escorting Maj. Demko's CH-46D from HMM-364.

It was a common practice in MAG-36 and other Marine helicopter groups to assign the task of medevac for the

entire day. Our first mission was in the vicinity of Phu Loc, south of Phu Bai.

I believe the 1st Marines were engaged with an NVA unit blocking Highway 1.

Maj. Demko did an outstanding job of landing under fire to pick up wounded Marines while we fired rockets into the NVA positions. The weather was slightly improved from what it had been (no rain) but the ceiling was still around 500 feet.

In weather situations like this, our standard procedure was to fly as close to the deck as possible.

While they dropped the wounded at the evac hospital  
*See CEILING, Page 19*

## Medevac helicopter was directly overhead

*Continued from Page 17*

downwash and could see its shape through the canopy. Medevac 33 hovered his bird about 10 feet above the treetops and held it rock steady.

This intrepid pilot told me he'd stay there until we got our casualty in the litter, and then he would drop the "hook" to haul him up — he didn't want to orbit somewhere safe while he waited, because he thought he might have trouble finding the exact spot again.

Almost as soon as the litter hit the ground, several VC opened up on the bird with bursts of full automatic fire.

Tree branches rained down on me and the others huddled below the helicopter.

I fairly screamed into the radio handset — the pilot might have heard me without a headset — "Break away! Break away! You're taking fire!"

The helicopter wavered not a bit and Medevac 33 responded to my shrieks with a calm and clear voice. "I'm not taking any hits right now. I'll just stay here until you get your man on the litter."

I was awed by that pilot's coolness and dedication, and hearing that voice helped to calm me down.

His doorgunners and his escorting Cobras couldn't shoot to suppress the enemy fire because we were all over the area below him, but that wonderful pilot elected to remain exposed to shave a few seconds off the time it

would take to get a wounded GI aboard.

Just then, the younger medic poked his head out of the bunker and tried to say something to me. He was crying, and all he could say was, "Sir, he's . . . he's . . ."

In my heart I knew he was trying to tell me Bill was dead, but he just couldn't say the words. VERY conscious of the risk Medevac 33 was taking in hovering in the gunfire, I shouted at the young man: "Son, I have to know. Is he dead?"

The medic gulped and nodded his head.

Immediately, I rolled over onto my back and radioed Medevac 33, "Break away, NOW! My man is a Line One, there is nothing further you can do."

The helicopter lifted away and as he banked his bird for home, Medevac 33 sent a last transmission: "I'm sorry. If you need us again, we'll be nearby."

After the Medevac bird departed, the two Cobras helped us out by hovering down into a clearing and with their guns just below the tops of the trees, they cut loose while doing pedal turns.

The bullets clipped down quite a bit of the jungle and we had no more firing from the snipers in the treetops.

When I recall Medevac 33's actions that day, I get a lump in my throat even after the passage of 24 years.

That pilot and his crew risked everything for a man they didn't know, but who was a fellow soldier. And they did it with a coolness and a devotion to duty very much in keeping with the noble motto: **THAT OTHERS MIGHT LIVE.**

America lost a fine soldier and I lost a friend that day.

Bill's wound was mortal and nothing anyone could have done would have saved his life.

Medevac 33 did his very best; he did far more than what was called for by "bounden duty."

To my shame, it took me 24 years to try to find this gallant soldier so that I might express my gratitude and respect for his efforts that day.

If this gets to him, maybe it will remove some of the guilt I feel for not trying to find him earlier.

Medevac 33, whoever you are, wherever you are: Thank you and God Bless, you!

Most respectfully,  
Retired Lt. Col. Hugh F. Foster III  
U.S. Army

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This article appeared in the July/August, 1996 issue of SABER, the 1st Cavalry Division Association's fine Newsletter. Comments concerning this article can be sent to them at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. The Medevac call sign was used by the 15 air medical helicopters of the 15th Medical Battalion, 1st Cav.



# Ceiling was still around 500 feet

*Continued from Page 18*

across the runway, we were refueling and rearming, and during this time we received orders for another emergency medevac in Hue at the LCU ramp on the south side of the Perfume River.

What occurred next requires some advanced explanation regarding Marine operational procedures, tactical realities and aircraft limitations.

Our standard procedure for medevac required the gunship to be the flight leader, handle all communications with the ground unit, and to scout the LZ (generally this required making a low pass across the zone) prior to the actual medevac bird, a CH-46 or CH-34, landing to do the pickup.

Virtually all Marine Corps medevacs were done by a team of one gunship and one transport helicopter.

The CH-46Ds were a vast improvement over the prior "Alpha" models and were now the fastest, most powerful medium helicopters in the Marine Corps.

A UH-1E gunship with no doors, two large rocket pods, eight M-60 machine guns (including the TAT-101 turret mounted under the chin) could barely make 95-100 knots in straight and level flight under full power. A CH-46D was at least 40-60 knots faster.

Because of the performance difference and our medevac

procedures, it was tough for us to stay together as planned when we were in the "on the deck mode" required by the bad weather.

Returning to the situation Feb. 5, Maj. Demko and I were trying to decide the best way to accomplish the mission. The tactical situation was very confused as the enemy seemed to be everywhere, particularly in the southern part of Hue.

On Jan. 31, while attempting a medevac from the MACV compound, my gunship had sustained 14 hits, including one to the doorgunner and we had been forced to turn back because of the heavy fire. Later, many medevac flights occurred after dark for the obvious reasons.

Ultimately, Maj. Demko decided to make a full power run at low level and hoped the element of surprise would permit him to approach and land at the LCU ramp before the fire got too intense.

I was going to trail him as fast as possible, at low level, and hopefully catch-up with him at the LZ and provide cover for his return flight.

As we took off, I felt uncomfortable with this decision since it would be very difficult for us to protect him as we were supposed to do.

Having been in Vietnam since July, I knew the mere  
*See GUNSHIP, Page 20*

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# Gunship enough to keep VC down

*Continued from Page 19*

presence of a gunship was frequently enough to keep the VC down.

As a 24-year-old first lieutenant, I took my responsibility very seriously and to this day still have a twinge of guilt and difficulty accepting what occurred.

Within five minutes we were a mile or more behind the CH-46, but I could see it over the southeast part of Hue when the helicopter suddenly climbed very steeply and began a turn back toward Phu Bai.

Simultaneously, Maj. Demko was on the radio telling us they had sustained numerous hits and had a wounded crewman.

I immediately opened fire in the direction from which he had taken the fire. Even though we were well out of range, I was compelled to do something and almost immediately some Marine ground unit was on our net telling us to cease fire as our rounds were striking their vicinity.

Maj. Demko told us he had a hydraulic warning light, but was going to attempt a return to Phu Bai. Next, he said he was experiencing control problems and was going to land.

By this time, he was within a few miles of the airfield and we had closed to within 500 meters of the aircraft.

Almost immediately, he said something like: "Watch out, Scarface, I'm losing it!"

The CH-46 looked like it was flaring to land, but kept right on going back over until it crashed in an inverted position. Essentially, it did a loop and the forward rotor and upper cockpit area struck first as it accelerated into the ground.

Immediately, there was a large explosion and fire. We made several low passes to assess what had occurred and to see if there were any survivors.

I called the Phu Bai control tower to request the crash

truck, but we quickly realized the crash was too far outside the base for that.

Our puny fire extinguisher would have been useless against the inferno.

Since our crew chief spotted an armed individual, apparently enemy, in the immediate vicinity, Jim Knox, the copilot, and I decided to begin an orbit at a higher altitude and wait for additional help.

We were both skeptical there were any survivors, given the nature of the crash, and the fire continued to burn very intensely.

I called VMO-3 base and within 10 minutes, Lt. Col. Glen Hunter, the squadron CO, was on the scene with a wingman. By then the flames were subsiding and to everyone's amazement an individual began crawling away from the wreckage.

His body appeared entirely black and he did not appear to be wearing a helmet. Lt. Col. Hunter landed immediately, picked him up and flew him to the hospital.

At this time we were relieved at the crash site by Maj. Lowery, the squadron maintenance officer.

Although I helped answer some of the questions, one big one still remains — who was the person who crawled from the wreckage and what happened to him?

My speculation is he was the corpsman. Hopefully, some other reader of this Newsletter can help us with this question.

In closing, I would like to compliment Mr. Law's and the VHPA's work in helping to record the true history of the helicopter war in Vietnam. Most Americans have little or no appreciation for what we and many others did.

To me, the greatest tragedy of the war is all the fine people we lost there. Looking at America today, we sure could use their help!

Keep up the good work, Semper Fi!

## Escorting medevac caps long day of flying

LES DAVISON

Ban Me Thuot, October, 1969.

The sun's last rays were fading as we refueled our Charlie model gunships for the sixth and last (or so we thought) time.

We were five minutes from shutdown, the end of a LONG day.

Just as they had done during the monsoon season last year, the bad guys had come across the border from their Cambodian sanctuaries and were hitting hard at the Special Forces camps of Bu Prang and Duc Lap.

We had launched before dawn and had flown continuously all day; stopping only to rearm and refuel.

Our asses were dragging and the last thing I wanted to hear was my call sign on the radio.

"Falcon 2, this is Operations." I recognized the voice as Capt. Gior-dano, the 155th AHC's operations officer.

"This is 2, go ahead."

"Are you able to go back out to LZ KATE to escort Dustoff for a pickup?"

LZ KATE was one of the artillery fire bases near Bu Prang and the

scene of heavy fighting. We had expended there twice during the day.

Pause. I wanted to say no. I looked over at Falcon 9, our trail ship.

Jack Coonce had heard, anticipated my question, and signaled a thumbs up.

"We're on our way, Ops," I replied.

"Roger 2, contact Dustoff 63 on company uniform. Good Luck. Operations, out."

Dustoff escort was a familiar mission. And 63 was Denny Harrell; good pilot, good friend.

*See MARKINGS, Page 21*



# Markings did not deter enemy guns

*Continued from Page 20*

As soon as we lifted off, I called 63.

"Thanks for coming out, 2. Spooky can't be on station until 2230 and the guys on the ground are hurting."

"No sweat, 63, we need the night-time," I responded.

Our crew chief, Dave Nachtigall, groaned — but every one of us knew we wouldn't have let the Dustoff crew go out alone. The Red Cross markings did not deter enemy gunners in the slightest.

It was about 45 minutes to KATE and the ride was mostly a quiet one. We had been SO close to shutdown and all of us had begun to unwind from the day's tensions.

Both our Falcon crews were trying to get on edge again as we flew toward the firebase.

Twilight was long gone as we passed near Duc Lap. There was a little horizon, but not much.

It happened so gradually we didn't seem to notice — and then it was just all gray outside and the rotating beacon was flashing off the gray into the cockpit. What the . . . ?

"Break left, Falcon 9, we're in the soup. We're coming around to the right on instruments."

I instructed the Peter Pilot, Bob Maddox, "Kill the beacon and watch the instruments with me. I haven't done this since flight school. You guys in back watch for ground references."

We turned OK and broke out within a minute or so — but it sure seemed like a long time.

I never knew you could start sweating so quickly.

From the back came, "Nice goin', Mr. D." Quite a compliment from Cal Serain, the quiet doorgunner.

We rejoined with Falcon 9 and headed west at a somewhat higher altitude this time.

Now we started to see patchy ground fog forming and it was getting thicker as we flew on.

I can't speak for the others, but I

**Fifteen minutes later, Denny was told the wounded man was about 10 minutes from KATE.**

was certainly back on the edge!

Twenty minutes later we were orbiting over KATE. More accurately, we were orbiting over the fog over KATE.

We listened as 63 talked to the U.S. adviser with the ARVN artillery unit.

"It's been pretty quiet here since sundown . . . a few mortars and some sporadic AK fire, mainly from the west.

"One of our LP's just took sniper fire, they're bringing in another badly wounded ARVN. Estimate arrival in 15 mikes. Counting him, we've got five WIA's," he told Denny.

"Roger, we're ready to pick up. I can see your light, but this ground fog may be a problem.

We'll just hang around up here a bit. Let us know when you're ready."

Fifteen minutes later, Denny was told the wounded man was about 10 minutes from KATE. "Falcon 2, say fuel?" he asked.

**We listened as the adviser talked the Huey in to the PZ. And then, just a few seconds after touchdown, we heard him scream, "Incoming mortars! Get out, Dustoff!"**

"Two's got 700 pounds. Falcon 9?"

"Nine is just under 800 pounds."

A bit more than lead, just like the book said. Well done, Jack, I thought.

"Six-three, this is 2. We're OK for a little bit."

Of course, it was more than 10 minutes — it always was. I was just about to call Bingo when the adviser told 63 that all five wounded were finally ready.

"OK, we're coming in," Denny replied immediately. "Keep your light on. Copy 2?"

No way we would leave now.

"Roger, 63. I'm not sure we're going to be of much use to you with this ground fog," I answered.

"That's OK, it makes me feel good just knowing you're around. Here we go."

Denny blacked out, descended, and hovered down the light. The stuff those Dustoff guys did was unbelievable!

We listened as the adviser talked the Huey in to the PZ. And then, just a few seconds after touchdown, we heard him scream, "Incoming mortars! Get out, Dustoff!"

I sensed rather than saw Bob flip the "Master Arm" switch to "Hot," which he confirmed over the intercom even as the adviser finished his warning.

But a quick check found that none of our Falcon crews had seen any tube flashes through the fog. Without targets, we could do nothing but wait.

The mortars would be impacting any second . . . come on, Denny.

"Dustoff 63 coming out to the east!" Denny's voice had risen a bit.

Seconds later, three mortar rounds flashed in the darkness.

"Falcons are at 2,500 directly overhead, watching for you," I called.

"We're breaking out, 2, coming up bright flash," said Denny.

"Contact," I told him. "Are you going to try again?" I might have heard a chuckle. "Don't have to. We got 'em all."

*See DUSTOFF, Page 22*



# Kingsman reports on Lamson 719

On the morning of March 20, 1971, I was flying as Chalk 2 behind Maj. Jack Barker, Color 6, in a flight of 10 UH-1Hs flying from Khe Sanh to a PZ near FSB Brown in Laos.

B Company, 101st Aviation Battalion's traditional call sign was "Kingsmen," but we were "Color" during Lamson 719.

As was the case in most instances, I really didn't know all the details as to what had or what was happening as we headed out to extract more ARVNs who were surrounded. By this time in the operation (six weeks) it seemed every PZ and LZ was hot in Laos, some just hotter than others.

On the way out, we got on top of what I thought was smoke from a recent Arc Light. I have since read in Keith Nolan's book "Into Laos." It could have been a naval smoke screen.

As we approached the PZ, we kept about a one- to two-minute separation. We were no longer setting our aircraft down, but rather coming to a hover in the PZs and holding until the crew chief and/or gunner said we were loaded. If we sat down, we'd be swarmed by the ARVNs and not be able to take off.

Lead, Maj. Barker, rolled left off the smoke. It was hard to keep him in sight as the air was hazy from all the bombing.

About 90 seconds later I dropped the collective and actually skirted the smoke band on the way down, keeping the airspeed at about 120. I lost sight of the lead ship, but had the PZ in sight. Not long after I started my descent, it appeared as if the whole area around the PZ started sparkling — muzzle flashes from everywhere.

*See AIRCRAFT, Page 23*

## Dustoff picked up all five wounded

*Continued from Page 21*

"You picked up five in that time?" I was incredulous.

"Yep, those guys down there have got their sierra together. Let's go home."

Amen to that!

The U.S. adviser thanked Denny and his crew profusely as we turned east and climbed out.

Four hundred pounds, 45 minutes — it was going to be close.

Bob took the controls for the flight back, and 15 minutes later we saw the lights of Ban Me Thuot.

I called in, "Operations, Falcons 2 and 9 are inbound, ETA is three zero. Lead is a little short on gas. This one is going to be real close."

The fuel gauge showed 250 pounds.

"Understand 2. Keep us advised," said Capt. Giordano.

The Dustoff ship was lighter and faster than our Charlies, so it was quite a ways ahead of us.

"Falcon 2, this is Dustoff 63. Weather is good all the way back. We're switching to tower freq now. Thanks again for coming out."

"Great job, 63, call us anytime. See you in the club."

Click, click.

The first flicker on the 20-minute light. Ban Me Thuot still looks a mil-

lion miles away.

I can't stand it. I'm so tense I have to do something, so I take the controls back from Bob.

Then, the CO's distinctive voice. "Falcon 2, this is Stagecoach 6."

Maj. Owen had been a gunship pilot during his first tour. He knew who was flying late, and who might be in trouble — and he cared.

Just under 150 pounds.

"This is 2, go ahead."

"Do you want us to send a slick with fuel to meet you on the road?"

A night landing to an unsecured area, with lots of flashing lights from two helicopters — not my idea of a good time.

"Ah-h-h, you might have them start getting ready, just in case, Stagecoach 6. We're about two-zero out, and the fuel light just came on."

"Roger 2, we're standing by," came back Maj. Owen.

Except for the whine and the whop-whop, it sure is quiet in here.

"Chief, how far has anyone gotten into your fuel light?"

"Capt. Cunningham used 11 minutes coming back from Happy Valley, but that was in the daytime." No one laughed at Dave's joke.

Twelve minutes into the light; eight minutes left.

There, I can see the lights on the

landing strip. Bouncing just under 100 now. Is that gauge accurate?

Oh me, oh my, pucker factor is WAY UP.

It's funny, the things you think about. I'm back with the Air Force recruiter, and he's telling me to stay in school, get my degree, and then I can come fly with them.

I should have listened, I could be doing 500 knots right now . . .

Sixteen minutes. I hate to, but dog-leg just a bit south to avoid the most heavily populated areas of the city and angle in to the strip from high above.

Fifty pounds, give or take. We're high and fast on the approach, just in case — but it's so fast that we shoot right past the taxiway turnoff!

It takes almost all of the 2,500-foot runway to get stopped.

I'm soaked in sweat, shivering cold, and nearly frozen on the controls as we settle onto the runway.

Nobody said a word. We made it.

Nearly eight hours until the next mission.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Dedicated to Joel Erickson, Paul Dolik, Dave Nachtigall, and Cal Serain, the crew of Falcon 484, who were lost when their gunship went down near Nha Trang on Feb. 23, 1970.



# Aircraft took hits at perimeter of PZ

*Continued from Page 22*

Lead did not report any information on the PZ. Later I found out it was receiving heavy fire and made a go-around.

We didn't receive any hits until we were right at the perimeter of the PZ. Because I was coming in hot, in order to slow down, I stood the bird on its tail and pulled in all the pitch I could.

At this time I could see the ARVNs through my chin bubble, crouching in the middle of the PZ with no weapons.

At the same time, all hell broke loose inside the bird. It sounded as if every NVA had a hammer and was pounding on the bottom of the bird.

My co-pilot, WO Edward R. Cash, jerked back as both of our greenhouse windows shattered. Cash took a round through his flight suit leg, but it never touched his skin.

Cash, a former Green Beret for two tours, had his M-16 with scope slung over his seat. A round entered the eye piece and exited the side of the scope.

More rounds came through the radio controls and instrument panel.

The crew chief, Spec. 4 Lyle C. Smith (now deceased), and gunner, Spec. 4 Roger L. Perales, were shooting and hollering to keep moving.

Still taking hits, I rolled the nose over and radioed Chalk 3 not to follow my path in as the NVA were right on the edge of the PZ. Our climb-out was to the east.

Smith and Perales got out on the skids to assess the damage. They reported we were hit numerous times through the tailboom and rounds had come out the tail rotor drive shaft housing. We also were streaming fuel.

I called lead, Maj. Barker, and told him we would be climbing to altitude and heading back to Khe Sanh with the wounded bird. I don't recall him answering.

We lost our UHF and VHF radios, as it seemed everything quieted down except for FM. Chalk 3 aircraft commander WO Gene Haag and Chalk 4 aircraft commander WO Tom Hill went in low level after my call and were both able to pick up troops and get out.

Chalk 5 aircraft commander WO Bruce Sibley was hit by something larger than an RPG. He crashed short of the PZ. I didn't find out about this until the crew was rescued by Capt. Willis E. Wulf, our recovery ship.

Our attention was on our crippled aircraft. We decided we would pick up Route 9 and fly right at the base of the

clouds. We crossed our fingers and headed for Khe Sanh.

Just after reaching the cloud base, I believe it to be about 4,000 to 4,500 AGL (I couldn't see — everything was smoky), it felt as if someone had punched me between the eyes.

As my senses came back I found us in a dive heading what seemed to be straight down. I pulled back on the cyclic and started to pull in power when I noticed most of the instrument panel was gone and all I had was flight idle.

It seemed things were happening faster than I could comprehend. The images impressed on my mind are: My co-pilot, Ed Cash, was slumped over in his seat; I thought he could be dead.

The windshield in front of both of us was blown out. Even the center post for the windshield was gone. Wires were dangling and sparking from the upper control panel.

I tried talking to Smith and Perales with no results. I turned to see Smith looking at me wide-eyed and talking, but I could not hear him. With the radios all out, shouting became our communication.

I noticed a big hole about the size of a football going into the transmission wall, which didn't help my confidence any.

Later Smith said we received an airburst in front of the bird, thought to be from a 37mm radar-controlled gun. The blast knocked Cash, Perales and me out. I slumped forward and pushed the bird into a dive.

Smith said he was forced back against the wall and couldn't get forward, and that's when I came too.

There, right in front of us, was a hilltop, FSB Delta 1. At the time I thought it was FSB Delta. This later caused a little problem which could have been fatal for us.

We were to evacuate this FSB later in the day after we evacuated the first PZ. This firebase had about 400 ARVNs on it and was overrun later in the day. Only a few survivors ever made it back to Vietnam. This count came from "Into Laos."

We were autorotating. As we crossed over the perimeter, we started receiving heavy small arms fire. This base was surrounded by NVA, who were right up against the perimeter.

As soon as the skids touched the ground, I bottomed the pitch. I wasn't going to take the chance of floating along and getting shot at any more than we needed. We slid some, but the surface was level. We continued taking heavy fire from the right side of the bird.

*See ARVNs, Page 24*

It seemed things were happening faster than I could comprehend. The images impressed on my mind are: My co-pilot, Ed Cash, was slumped over in his seat; I thought he could be dead. The windshield in front of both of us was blown out.



# ARVNs rush aircraft from a bunker

*Continued from Page 23*

Cash and Smith both got out very quickly. Suddenly, I heard a burst from an M-16 right behind my head.

The ARVNs had rushed the bird from a bunker on the left side and were pinning Perales in the bird. He was able to have them back off when he fired toward them over their heads.

Cash had gotten around and helped him take off the M-60 and as much ammo as they could carry. The three of them headed to a trench about 30 or 40 yards away that had been bulldozed out.

I was crawling for the trench when I remembered I hadn't pulled the self-destruction handle on the scrambler. I didn't think about it not working with all the damage we had taken. I remember shooting it about four or five times with my M-16.

Crawling for the trench, I rolled in and landed on top of an ARVN soldier with a bandaged, bloody leg. He let out a hell of a yell.

Cash had already gotten the CE and gunner set up with the M-60 on the western edge of the 15 yard-long trench. They were suppressing fire from the closest perimeter.

I had my survival vest on with the portable emergency radio that put out a beeping sound on guard. When I listened, all I could hear were other beeps from either other downed aircraft or jamming by the NVA.

This trench had about 15 or 20 ARVNs in it — with no weapons, except one ARVN officer with a pistol. They had given up fighting and were waiting to be withdrawn. At the far end of the trench was the ARVN officer with a PRC 25 FM radio.

Even though I didn't speak Vietnamese, I convinced that ARVN I was going to use the radio for awhile. I should have taken his pistol too, as he gave me the impression he might use it to get his radio back.

I called on our company frequency, but didn't get a response. Now the mortars started coming in. It was easy to see they were working the hill top to try to take out the bird.

After some time, I received a response on the radio from "Kingsmen 69," CWO Bill Singletary, Chalk 6, with crew members WO Joe St. John, CE Sgt. Bill Dillender, and doorgunner Pfc. John Chubb. (Later that day, Dillender and Chubb, Capt. John Dugan and Maj. Barker were shot down and listed as MIA's. Eventually their status was changed to KIA BNR.)

Singletary's bird had also been hit and couldn't make the

PZ. I told Singletary and St. John we were on FSB Delta, but they couldn't see a helicopter on the ground. He asked for a long count and homed in on us on Delta 1.

I told Bill it was getting very hot with small arms and mortars and that he should break off and not risk it. He replied with a chuckle and said he would come in low level from the north.

As he was about to break over the edge of Delta 1, we were to give him a mark. I distinctively remember hearing both the bird and the shooting increasing steadily as he approached.

I told Bill it was getting very hot with small arms and mortars and that he should break off and not risk it. He replied with a chuckle and said he would come in low level from the north.

As soon as he broke over the edge and came into view, Smith jumped out of the bunker onto his knees holding his M-16 over his head in a "T" fashion to mark our position for Singletary. He couldn't have been in that position for more than a few seconds when the dirt all around him exploded from small arms fire.

Thinking the worst, I figured he was dead or wounded badly and that this would cause us not to escape. Pretty selfish of me when I look back at it.

Smith, from a prone position, held his M-16 up again to give a mark — he wasn't hit. Why, I'll

never know. I believe our guardian angels were working overtime this day.

Either Singletary or St. John said he had marked us. Whether they told us to take off running to the bird that was going to touch about 20-30 yards from us or it was instinctively the only thing to do, I can't recall.

We did know we had to be the first ones to the bird or it would be overloaded with ARVNs.

The following sounds like something out of a John Wayne movie.

As Singletary was flaring hard to slow down, all four of us took off running to where we thought we could jump on without the bird stopping.

As we ran we were shooting under the bird's path at the far perimeter to suppress the increased fire. Bill never had to stop as we jumped on. I was the last.

When I jumped to get on, the bird was going up. My chest hit the floor of the bird and knocked the wind out of me. The very next thing I felt was someone (I think it was the CE Dillender) grab my coat by the back of my shoulders and literally throw me across the bird. I reached out my right arm and caught the back of Singletary's seat or I'd have been back out the other side.

As I came aboard Singletary pulled in all the power he had and nosed over, staying as low as possible until we

*See ALL SIX, Page 27*



# VHPA attends EAA Convention

*Volunteers sign  
17 new members  
at Oshkosh fly-in*

The Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) invited VHPA to participate in a tribute to veterans of Korea and Vietnam during the annual EAA Convention and Fly-in at Oshkosh, WI, Aug. 1-7.

The largest air show and fly-in in the world, this was a first for VHPA, and 17 new members who had never before known of VHPA joined up.

VHPA members Bob Bradley, Bill Medsker, Chip Brown, Tom Gehman, Craig Smith, Bob Smith and Ken Fritz took turns at the VHPA display signing up members and selling calendars and Historical Reference Directories.

While doing all this, they also chatted with many visitors about their experiences as pilots in Vietnam.

Thanks to these volunteers for the time and effort they spent on behalf of the association.

Medsker brought his "helicopter" of Kansas City reunion fame to Oshkosh and it was one of the showpieces of the fly-in.

FAA administrator David Hinson



**VHPA member David Van Liere and his son, Chris, in front of 1956 Hawker Hunter jet at Oshkosh.**

got some stick time in it and now Medsker can claim to have the only helicopter to be grounded before the FAA got to it!

Hinson is a longtime friend of Fritz, immediate past president of the VHPA.

EAA has invited the VHPA to attend again next year, so if you are in the area and want to help on a volunteer basis, please watch the Newsletter for details.

During this year's convention and

fly-in, VHPA member David Van Liere negotiated the purchase of a 1956 Hawker Hunter MK51.

Van Liere's company buys, restores and flies British Vampire, Venom and Comet jets, as well as Korean War-era MiGs.

The Hunter jet carries four 30mm guns, two 1,000-pound bombs or 16 rockets, and flies at speeds of up to 683 mph.

Several weeks earlier, Van Liere purchased an F-100 Super Sabre which he will restore and sell to some lucky individual.

He renewed his VHPA membership at Oshkosh this year after VHPA's spot in the Korea-Vietnam Pavilion Tent caught his attention.

Van Liere was Playboy 13 and Dragon 38 with the 334th Attack Helicopter Company at Phu Loi in 1970-71. Welcome back, Dave!



**FAA administrator David Hinson (left) receives dual time from longtime friend Ken Fritz in modified Medsker AH-1X.**

Several weeks earlier, Van Liere purchased an F-100 Super Sabre



# Santa Clara reunion a good party

MEL CANON  
MELCAN@AOL.COM

Well, for all of you who didn't make LZ Santa Clara . . . you missed a good party. This being my first reunion makes it a bit difficult to judge this one compared to others but no matter . . . this one was good enough for me to say it was a good party.

One of the highlights of the entire occasion was the appointment of our own JOHN "Reverend Thunderhorse" PLUMMER

(██████████) as the official VHPA chaplain. Congratulations John . . . I know that, with your appointment as chaplain, we will be one divinely blessed group of rotors in the year to come.

The Online group was at the reunion in force this year. We set up a comcenter with some great expectations that didn't materialize . . . but we did have a lot of fun. We were instrumental in helping several people track down old friends/stick buddies and we helped many understand a bit more about the computer and how it can be of help to them.

That, in itself, was worth the effort that went into the comcenter feature this year. What was amazing was they would go by Gary Roush and Mike Law's database display and get the database info on an old long lost classmate or stick buddy, then bring the info to the comcenter. There, we'd enter it into Internet databases and try to come up with an address and phone number for them.

Most of the time it worked and a few times it didn't. Our batting average was well above .500, however. People were amazed that we could do that. I hope that we gave at least a few of them reason to join the computer revolution.

Of course, there were tons of old holdouts that avoided the comcenter display like it was the plague.

We had intended to put up some pictures of reunion events on the VHFCN Homepage

(<http://www.vhfcn.org/>) but that didn't happen as planned.

This being my first year to attend a reunion, I wasn't sure just what it was all about and really got behind the power curve with coordinating the comcenter activity. However, we had

## On the InterCom

some devout volunteers that did pitch in and handle most of

the comcenter activities. My thanks go out to them all: JOHN "lower case" FULLERTON

(██████████), LARRY TABERT (██████████), GARY WINETEER

(██████████), J.C. PENNINGTON (██████████), DOUG RUSSELL (██████████), MIKE SLONIKER

(██████████), JOHN PLUMMER (██████████), GARY THEWLIS (██████████), PAUL JENKINS (██████████) et), and JIM McDaniel (██████████)

I'm sure there were more than this that helped out with the comcenter so, my apologies to any that I left out.

We had a host of others out in the rest of the world that checked in on the chat facility through the VHFCN Homepage. These people were the most disappointed with the difficulties we were having at reunion central.

I'm sure they expected to see more out of the comcenter . . . I know I did. But, I accept the hit on anything that didn't get done as planned. We had planned to have a morning report posted to the homepage but had difficulty getting that information from the VHPA computers . . . something to do with a glitch in the database.

We had more than 30 members of VHFCN show up at the reunion itself, most of which came by the display and checked in with us. There were

some net members there who didn't get a chance to make it by . . . but we were glad they made the reunion and I'm sure they had a ball just like everyone else.

We held a mini-reunion for VHFCN on Friday at noon. We had about 16-18 members show up for that, plus a few new inductees into the VHFCN family.

At the mini, we started off with an invocation by the "Reverend Thunderhorse." We then place chairs in a circle and had a session whereby everyone introduced themselves and told us all something about how they came to be a part of the net . . . and what it's meant for them. We took up the entire time allotment and had a great time.

After the close of the '96 VHPA reunion we all packed up and went back out into reality. For two of us, the nostalgia mode was maintained for a time.

Doug Russell and I made a trek across country on what was know as the Canon and Russell Patriotic Trek Across America Extravaganza. The trek ended at Atlanta, site of the 1996 Summer Olympics.

Doug and I spent our first night at my abode on California's Central Coast, then headed out to Laughlin, NV. We arrived late in Laughlin and didn't get to do much gambling, but I did manage to drop a little loose change in some of the slots.

The second night we stayed in Williams, AZ, and visited with net member LARRY BRICE (██████████)

(██████████). We helped Larry to overcome a minor glitch in his computer and headed out next morning for Prescott, AZ . . . temporary hang-out of net member RON BLACK

(██████████, not the Peruvian pack animal) on fire contract there. Met up with Ron and his lovely wife Pam . . . who works at the same location on the Forest Service side of the operation. Ron flies for a Colorado contractor.

See TRIP, Page 27



# Trip takes pair to the Four Corners

*Continued from Page 26*

We had a nice visit then moved on after a few hours.

Next day we headed up to a little place called Teec Nos Pos in the Four Corners area of Arizona. This is in the middle of the Navajo Indian Reservation. Doug has some friends there (Navajos) who invited us to spend the night on the reservation . . . and we did. That was an interesting experience, to be sure.

The next morning we pulled pitch for Odessa, in West Texas, where some of my folks live. We spent a couple of nights in West Texas then moved on to Dallas and the big party that awaited us there.

Met up with the Texas crew at a place in Dallas called Randy White's Bar and Grill . . . owned, of course, by the famous Dallas Cowboy, Randy White. Didn't get to meet up with Randy but we sure did meet a bunch of old codgers there.

Let's see there was LOU "Rocket" ROCHAT ( ) who came up from San Antonio for the occasion, LEE WESTBROOK

( ) . . . his wife Nancy, daughter Debra Mattox and granddaughter Christina Mattox, IRA McCOMIC ( ), ARNOLD "Bigfoot" CHRIS-TENSEN ( ) and his wife Jan, VANCE BARTON ( ) and his wife Robin, LARRY EADS ( ) . . . the token Oakie of the group who drove in from Oklahoma City, JOHN GROW ( ) and his wife Gretchen, JR BARNES ( ), and HERB GATES ( ) who, ironically, turns out to be Doug Russell's cousin.

We ate and did all the normal stuff rotorheads do when they get together . . . drink and tell lies to each other. The wives and other family members were very indulgent to allow us this small pleasure of life and even sit through it with us.

From this point the trip took on a different flavor. Doug had to fly on into Atlanta to take care of a problem with his mother and I made the rest of the trip solo. A tough job for an old

codger like me. I did manage to snake through the rest of the trip without incident, stopping off to visit family and friends in New Orleans, Shreveport, LA.

I made a stopover at Fort Rucker and toured the Army Aviation Museum. If you haven't had a chance to do that and get anywhere near Rucker . . . I recommend it.

Once I arrived in Atlanta we had a small reception party amongst what's become known as The Atlanta Social Club. We got together at Doug's house on Saturday, July 27 . . . just after the bombs went off at the Olympics. Present at that gathering were LARRY TABERT

( ) and his wife Janice, CLIFFORD McKEITHAN ( ) and his wife, STEVE CRIMM ( ), and Doug and myself of course.

Well, I'm really looking forward to the next reunion in Orlando . . . hope to see you all there. So, I'll say so long till next time, when we listen in On The InterCom.

Looking for a:

- Long-lost stick buddy?
  - A classmate from flight school?
- Look the easy way. Use VHPA's "Find-A-Friend"

Simply send a No. 10, self-addressed, stamped envelope — and the name of the person you're seeking to:

Phil Marshall

## All six in back were firing

*Continued from Page 24*

broke free of the small arms fire.

All six of us in back were firing with two M-60s and four M-16s. We returned to where the Kingsmen birds were to sit at Khe Sanh.

After landing, Singletary's bird was considered Red X-ed due to the hits it had taken.

Later in the day, Maj. Baker took 185 since it had better Red Xs than his bird. That ship and crew were lost.

If any of our members recall this flight, I'd like to know how the gunships fared. I can't recall who they were or if any were lost.

Our flight of 10 consisted of seven Kingsmen and three Blackwidows (C/101st Aviation Battalion) birds.

There is more to this story as half the day was left. Those details will come at another time.

It has only taken me 25 years to put this experience down in writing. It should take a little less time to write down the rest of the days' events.

I thought I would remember all the details. Not until I started writing did I find time has taken the edge off some the specifics.

CWO Bill Singletary (now deceased), and Capt. Willis E. Wulf received Silver Stars for their heroic efforts to save CWO Bruce Sibley's crew and my crew that day.

Al Fischer

( ) 8  
B Company  
101st Aviation Battalion  
101st Airmobile Division  
"Kingsman 18"  
May 1970-April 1971



# VIETNAM HELICOPTER PILOTS ASSOCIATION

949 University Ave., Suite 210 Sacramento, CA 95825 (800) 505-VHPA

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Address change       | <input type="checkbox"/> Life membership: \$450*                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Directory correction | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter subscription only: \$32       |
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