



# The VHPA Newsletter

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

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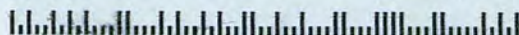


Thomas Payne photo

VHPA member Bob Fladry is interviewed by a reporter for Las Vegas television Channel 8 in the exhibitors' room at the Riviera Hotel during the VHPA Reunion 2002. Fladry, from Clarksville, TN, is a member of the VHPA Mid-South Chapter. He served in Vietnam with the 1st Cavalry Division in 1969 and in 1971-72. Bob flew for the 160th Special Ops in Panama, Grenada and the Persian Gulf in 1987-88. He also was a "Little Bird" pilot in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1993 during the ill-fated "Black Hawk Down" incident. He is being interviewed in the MH-6 he flew to Las Vegas with the 160th from Fort Campbell, KY.

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MEMBER # L00806  
R PHILL MARSHALL





## From the President

Cobra eyes are watching me as I write this. They seem to say, "It's been 19 good years so far, don't screw this up!"

As many members know, a cyclic grip in the shape of a cobra's head and mounted on a wooden base is the symbol of the VHPA president's office. Designed and presented by Bell Helicopter, it has been handed down to each succeeding president and eventually will reside in the aviation museum at Fort Rucker.

In keeping with tradition, during the final banquet at the Las Vegas reunion, I was honored to receive this device from outgoing President Dave Rittman. As your new president for the next 12 months, I aspire to maintain the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association as the premier veteran's organization. Your support and trust are truly appreciated and I will do whatever necessary to keep it.

We're a large organization, more than 8,000 members are current with their dues, more than 11,000 have submitted a membership application. With any large group, the majority are happy with the way things are; that's why they're members in the first place.

An extremely small minority are never happy with the organization, but remain members to make certain the majority knows they're not happy with anything for which they pay dues.

The majority like to read *The VHPA Newsletter*, plow through a fact-filled annual Directory, have fun at chapter/unit activities during the year, and participate in our annual reunion in July.

The minority pound the "reply all" e-mail key to advise everyone else the elected governing body is draining the treasury or the treasury is holding too much money (check "A" or "B"); the Executive Council is not telling everyone all the facts (but aren't quite sure what facts are missing); or are unhappy with:

The last reunion site, the next reunion site, the chapter policy, the current administration, the past administration, the future administration, the dues structure, the current administrative headquarters, the cost of the reunion, the voting policy, the length of the business meeting, the content of the business meeting, the outcome of the voting at

the business meeting, the quality of the rooms at the reunion, the cost of the rooms at the reunion hotel, the cost of the drinks at the reunion hotel, the cost of the reunion banquet, the quality of the reunion entertainment, paying a registration fee for the friends, neighbors and relatives they take to the reunion (which they won't like anyway), etc., etc., etc. I think you get the picture.

At the risk of beginning my administration and first *Newsletter* column on a negative note, I'd like all of you to know this organization is going through growing pains. This is not uncommon to veterans' organizations of our size and caliber.

But the Executive Council currently is spending way too much time and effort on the matters laid out above and more.

A very few members don't like the procedures used to vote for the EC, so they are suing your organization.

A very small group didn't get the contract to provide entertainment at the Las Vegas reunion so they are suing your organization.

This is taking EC time and your money. Guys, we started with Larry Clark and 65 other Vietnam helicopter pilots deciding to form a common bond. It's time the bond gets recemented.

The vast majority probably is reading the above and thinking, "... huh? What's he talking about?"

The itty, bitty minority is saying, "right on!"

The majority (who rarely express their views) is saying, "let's get on with it and get back to the foundation of this organization."

The minority (who always express their views) is saying, "in the interest of fairness, everyone is entitled to my views! And, like it or not, my views are the right views."

(The noise you're hearing is another keyboard being pounded - personal views to follow.)

It's time the silent majority be again represented. That's what I'll try to do this year.

Whew, I didn't mean to sound like an O-6 on his third tour! It's time to write about all the good things that are right with the VHPA.

For starters, the Las Vegas reunion was outstanding! Of course, I was the national reunion chairman, what else could I say? Keep turning pages in the *Newsletter* for a reunion review.

If you haven't seen our website in a while, click on

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## Classified ads

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**E-mail items to Newsletter at:**  
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This information, including but not limited to the VHPA Chapter list, shall not be used for commercial solicitation purposes or for any correspondence related thereto without prior written authorization from the VHPA president.

Correspondence relating to commercial purposes or solicitations shall only be sent to those officers, committee chairmen, and staff listed above.

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[REDACTED] 33

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# VHPA Products

You may order a past calendars with incredible color photos through VHPA Headquarters at  
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Vietnam Helicopter History CD (\$15 for VHPA members)	\$25	\$5 ea		\$
<b>Grand total</b>				\$

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Credit card (check one):	<input type="checkbox"/> VISA	<input type="checkbox"/> MasterCard	
Card number:	Expiration date:		
Signature:			



## From the President

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[www.vhpa.org/](http://www.vhpa.org/) and see the updates. For starters, Your Executive Council Forum ([www.vhpa.info/](http://www.vhpa.info/)) answers many questions in a variety of areas.

You can bring up a copy of the VHPA constitution and bylaws, financial reports from past audits, chapter information, EC duty assignments and minutes of past meetings, policy clarifications, future reunion information, a method to quickly communicate with members of the EC, and the new Commo Corner.

Use the Commo Corner to ask questions of interest to the majority of the membership. Don't use the Commo Corner to get into a keyboard debate with the minority. Oops, there I go again.

By using this forum, your question and the EC answer will be published for the benefit of all. So try the website. Our webmaster, Gary Roush, and Charles Holley work hard to keep it updated.

Welcome aboard to the two newest members of your Executive Council:

Dana Young, vice president, and Angelo Spelios, junior member at large, were elected during the business meeting and are ready to serve in their respective capacities.

Honorable mention should be made of those who also participated in the election process: Stephen Reilly, Lad Vaughan and Dennis Gartland. Although unsuccessful in the elections, these three gave a choice to the voting members and that's what elections are all about.

If you can spare 24 hours a day (plus nights), need a tax free income (zero), and like real helicopter pilots, consider running for office. Every year the EC needs two good men.

There also are committee chairmen looking for assistance. Take a look at the masthead of this *Newsletter*.

Your name could be one of those appearing under officers,

committee chairmen, and staff. Take a look and take the challenge.

In closing, it's customary to thank all those who spent the last year working so diligently for your association. I'd like to continue that custom by thanking our new immediate past president, Dave Rittman.

I can never hope to fill his shoes, but at least I'll try not to stumble over them. Dave's shoes are so big, he needs a police escort to walk the sidewalks! In this past 12 months, Dave has put in more time and common sense leadership than you can ever imagine for the benefit of VHPA. Thanks for keeping the flight straight and level, Dave.

Thanking others by name is risky; good and hardworking people are invariably excluded.

For starters, Charles Holley's term on the EC has expired. But he continues contributing to our technology updates, including the fledgling online reunion registration process. He's also helping to maintain the VHPA website with Gary Roush.

Have you called our Headquarters lately? If so you've probably spoken with Shari or Linda Whitten. They handle all the questions, complaints and an occasional "atta boy" every day. Thanks, ladies.

Check out the names of the committee chairmen on Page 3, and you'll see the heart and soul of our association. These are the guys who do the work year in and year out.

And to the members of the Executive Council, old and new, thanks for all you do.

For those of you who weren't at the reunion business meeting, I'd like to repeat my goals for this administration:

1. Do what's right.
2. Keep it fun.
3. Keep the commo lines open. My home phone number is: [REDACTED] My e-mail address is: [President@vhpa.org](mailto:President@vhpa.org)

I'm yours for 12 months. See you in the next *Newsletter*.

— Joe Bilitzke, President

## Membership information must be protected

JOE BILITZKE  
VHPA PRESIDENT

Recently a number of our members received an e-mail solicitation. Many saw it as yet another "spam," but questioned the emailer's source for their address.

It was apparent that all of us had our e-mail address "lifted" from the VHPA Annual Directory. Members were understandably outraged that a fellow VHPA pilot would use this

source.

I've personally spoken with this individual, and he has assured me that his e-mail solicitation would stop.

All members of VHPA must be able to submit their personal information via our registration form knowing it will remain only in the directory and stay within our organization.

Be assured, your data is used only in our directory. It is neither sold nor given to any other organization or agency. We treat this information as

confidential, For Official Use Only.

Any use of the personnel information is strictly forbidden and this is noted in the first page of every Directory. If your information is used for any unauthorized purpose, we will use every means at our disposal to stop it.

Our legal counsel stands ready to prosecute, if necessary. We will not allow our classified information to be used in any manner not intended or authorized by the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association.



## Letters

# Las Vegas reunion fantastic get-together

What a fantastic reunion in Las Vegas! Every one of us owe a debt of gratitude to the folks in this organization who make it possible for these great events to occur.

Speaking for many others, I'm sure, as well as myself, I want to commend you fine people for giving so generously of your time and efforts so that all of us can enjoy old friendships and make new ones within such a unique group. This was simply a great reunion.

As an added note, I am ever so grateful to the many members who have responded to my son's letter published in the April Newsletter

and also to Jack Swickard and Ken Fritz for their follow-up comments in the June issue.

The many good wishes I've received strongly reaffirm my feelings of brotherhood with every helicopter crewmember who served in Vietnam.

Some of the contacts were from men I flew with during my tours. Some were from others whom I remember from flight school. Surprisingly, several were from new acquaintances who just made it their business to find me and then made time in their schedules to call or write.

An individual outside our group probably would not comprehend the deep respect we all feel toward our fellow crew members . . . respect born of uncommon shared experiences when we were younger men.

I'd like to share with you some abiding convictions I've long held about our brothers. Some of these feelings apply just as well to the younger men and women who put on flight suits in Bosnia and Kosovo, Somalia, the Middle East and in Afghanistan.

Some of these convictions rest exclusively on the broad shoulders of Vietnam aircrews because of their pioneering efforts in helicopter warfare, our terrible losses, much trial and error, and because Vietnam witnessed the introduction of helicopter tactics and Army airmobile doctrine.

I realized years ago that I was a privileged member of a

**Surprisingly, several were from new acquaintances who just made it their business to find me and then made time in their schedules to call or write.**

**I realized years ago that I was a privileged member of a very select and infinitely small group of men who had been tested, as volunteers, in the extremes of bloody combat.**

very select and infinitely small group of men who had been tested, as volunteers, in the extremes of bloody combat. It is a group of men who never even considered ways to avoid crawling into a thin-skin piece of magic that could do fascinating things in the air, but that was, by its very nature, hazardous and vulnerable.

When someone was intent on trying to kill it, the odds became pretty questionable. These crew members were, without exception, young men whose personal makeup insisted that they come to terms with their universe not by going around it, but instead, by going straight through it.

And once these terms had been unmistakably met to their own satisfaction, then there was no longer a requirement to do it again. Some did, but it wasn't a requirement in the fraternity to prove it all over again. Rightly so.

Subsequent tours in Vietnam were at the pleasure of the Army and not because there was any need to revalidate membership in this select group of men. What was already proven was accepted fact and nothing could take away from that individual's rights of membership.

Outside our ranks, I suspect most of the country believes that we youngsters fought because of our allegiances to flag, mom and apple pie. They're way off base, aren't they? We fought because of our allegiance to one another and, importantly, because we couldn't have survived our own internal and everlasting scorn if we'd discovered ourselves shy of the mark when the chips were down and others were counting on us to measure up.

I'm immensely proud of our service to the nation. Whether Vietnam was a justified cause for our country or not is subjective and will be argued long and hard. What is not subjective, though, is that there are men and women who recognize their duty to answer the nation's call in times of crisis, and we were proud members of that team.

I applaud those who have followed in our footsteps. They're made of the same stuff and, thankfully, there are sufficient numbers of them that can be found when they're needed.

James W. "Jim" Mason

## Reunion attendee says thanks for great time

*This is a copy of an e-mail written by VHPA member Carle Dunn about his first reunion. He wrote to Ken Fritz, our reunion vendor coordinator, because Carle also was a vendor at the reunion.*

Ken, my wife and I thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. The

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## Letters

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conference was an emotional roller-coaster. I would be talking to a prospective buyer when someone in the surrounding crowd would cry out: "Dunn, I thought you were dead by now."

There would be a smashing encounter with a bear hug: Two old men grappling with each other, blubbing like babies, and I am sure those not understanding thought we were basket cases. This happened many times as this was my first conference.

Thank you and the Executive Council for a job well done. I was the executive director and finance officer for the Southeastern Outdoor Press Association (SEOPA) for a number of years. One of my duties was to check short list host facilities. I am fully aware of the work involved in putting on a successful meeting. It is hard work, with much attention to details . . . kudos, Ken!

Also, the special arrangements for the book authors were most appreciated. It was good to have us in "literary row."

Retired Lt. Col. Carle E. Dunn  
Author of *The Last Hookers*

## Aussie helicopter crews served with U.S. unit

Members of Australia's Fleet Air Arm served with the U.S. Army's 135th Assault Helicopter Company based at Vung Tau and with the RAAF's 9 Squadron.

Known as the RAN Helicopter Flight Vietnam (RAN-HFV), the first contingent of pilots and support personnel arrived in Vietnam on Oct. 16, 1967. These personnel were quickly integrated into the 135th, which was designated as an Experimental Military Unit or EMU.

On the Feb. 22, 1968, the RANHFV suffered its first fatality when Lt. Cmdr. P.J. Vickers died as a result of wounds received when his aircraft was hit by ground fire. Throughout their service in Vietnam, members of the RAN Fleet Air Arm provided tactical airlift and gunship support to Australian and allied forces.

Ray Garrison  
[REDACTED]

## Reunion results in article about death of crewmen

I came home following the reunion and wrote the article about the circumstances of the deaths of my former crew in OH-6A — 16-67079.

J. Bruce Huffman  
[REDACTED]

## Destiny joins fate

The sun pushed its way over the horizon of the South China Sea that September morning in 1968 as I wandered down to the Tactical Operations Center, with my map under my arm, to get the final briefing for the first light mission that morning.

WO Burns was my Red Bird and would drive his UH-1B to always be in a position to rain hell on any foolish NVA unfortunate to find his way into his gunsight reticle and threaten my low bird.

Ernie and I reviewed the final details of the mission and covered the tactical frequencies we'd be operating on, who would monitor the emergency radio channel, and what frequency we'd communicate in VHF to stay out of each other's way.

The mission was a simple one: Check in with a D Troop platoon that had been in an night defensive position, monitoring trail activity between the "Street Without Joy" and the distant NVA base camps in the mountains west of Camp Evans.

I was to be on the alert for military-age males without proper ARVN identification and we would snatch them for detailed interrogation at the base camp.

Our Blues (infantry platoon) were standing by, in a lager at Evans, with the lifts (assault helicopters) monitoring the operation from the TOC. We finished the rest of the coordination briefing and made our way to the revetments to preflight and get cranked up and begin the hunt.

My crew already was there and loading up OH-6A Zero Seven Niner with the tools of the trade (e.g. fragmentation grenades, white phosphorous, a few thermite and concussion grenades, ammo for the chunker (M-79), clips for the M-16 (1 tracer, 3 ball), a half load for the mini-gun, and enough M-60 ammo for Gossages' free gun to give him plenty to work with.

We weren't going on a bear hunt, but if we saw a bear it would be in some serious trouble. I loved my crew and was proud of the way we'd come together to fly safe, fight hard, and come back home at the end of the day to yet another cold Balantine beer.

My crew chief and gunner was Spec. 4 Douglas Gossage.

Doug came from Missouri and could throw a grenade, from any combination of bank and airspeed, through the opening of a bunker with predictable consistency. When his M-60 would talk, six rounds later the target would be down.

Doug had just turned 19 years old.

Our observer was Staff Sgt. John States, who had been

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trained in armor reconnaissance at Fort Knox. John was from Baltimore, got airsick frequently and had trouble reading the map early on.

States had the heart of a lion, though, and on those days when we would find 'em, he was skilled at sending the bad guys on a very long dirt nap.

As we began the mission, we flew east over the featureless terrain of the costal plain toward Quang Tri. The crews had checked their guns and our Pink Team was in the hunt. The mission was a success.

We bagged no less than six guys who later turned out to be NVA, which had been in the villages the night before and failed to get home before we turned them into prisoner pumpkins the following morning.

We had refueled and armed at LZ Jane earlier and had completed our last refueling at Camp Evans. All in all, it had been a good morning and I was looking forward to shutting down and pulling out my lawn chair to work on my R&R tan.

I landed to a hover on the nasty, oiled dirt strip we shared with Bravo Troop and saw WO Wallace running toward my bird. John Wallace was relatively new, but had shown skill and aggressiveness.

I sat the bird down and Wallace leaned in and said: "Get out! I need your bird and crew. Lobes Echo is in contact and the snake is cranking."

I said, "We've already been up for 3.8 hours. Give me the damn brief or get your own bird up!"

John replied, "We don't have time, it looks like it could be a Prairie Fire!"

I stepped out of the LOH, picked up my chicken plate and helmet, and watched as John flew over the concertina wire and turned west, headed for the foothills leading to the Ashau.

Less than 30 minutes later Cavalier White — 1Lt. James G. Ungaro — walked into my hooch to tell me, "Wallace is down and they are all dead!"

Charlie Troop's tribute to our missing warriors: WO1

**I landed to a hover on the nasty, oiled dirt strip we shared with Bravo Troop and saw WO Wallace running toward my bird. John Wallace was relatively new, but had shown skill and aggressiveness.**

**Less than 30 minutes later Cavalier White — 1Lt. James G. Ungaro — walked into my hooch to tell me, "Wallace is down and they are all dead!"**

John C. Wallace, Spec. 4 Douglas E. Gossage, and Staff Sgt. John Wayne States. KIA, 26 September 1968.

Wallace had checked in with Lobes Echo and learned they were engaged with at least a battalion of NVA troops. Echo was under canopy on the high ground that overlooked a depression held on three sides by the NVA.

Echo was a company-size unit against a much larger enemy force, but Echo had the high ground and the great equalizer: Firepower.

Wallace made the initial pass and discovered a 12.7 mm heavy machine gun in a doughnut bunker and had Gossage mark it as they blazed by.

The AC of the snake refused to shoot due to the proximity of the friendly positions. He recently had been involved in a short round incident that had wounded U.S. troops and had been badly reprimanded and humiliated by an officer who should have known better.

While the high bird was fooling around trying to get some artillery cranked up, Wallace decided to take out the gun.

He flew in and, with a combination of M-60 fire and fragmentation grenades, got the 12.7 mm. Unfortunately, the other two positions protecting the NVA regimental command post got him.

The aircraft landed in the wrecked position of the first gun.

States stepped over what once had been the front console and canopy, and went head to head with an NVA who got in the first shot.

Wallace unstrapped and went out the right door and began a run

for his life toward Lobes Echo, which was laying down an intense base of fire to cover him as he ran uphill. It was less than 100 meters from the downed bird to the ARVN position.

Wallace was hit in the legs 40 meters from relative safety. He went down hard and before he could get up, an NVA officer, in full view of the U.S. adviser working with the ARVN troops, shot him in the neck with a pistol.

Gossage had everything he needed: Lots of ammo and plenty of targets. The ARVN Rangers said the sound of the M-60 rattled on until finally the NVA fired an RPG-7 into the downed bird and the gun went silent.

When our recovery was completed, the bodies of 12 NVA were found in and around the remains of Zero Seven Niner. Gossage had done his duty!

A plaque given to Charlie Troop by Company E, 1st ARVN Ranger Division commemorating the heroism of WO1 John C. Wallace, Spec. 4 Douglas E. Gossage, and

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## Letters

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Staff Sgt. John Wayne States. KIA, 26 September 1968.

*I often reflect on "what if?" about their loss, but realize that on that day their fate intersected their destiny, with terrible consequences. It was an honor to have served with them; warriors to the end!*

## Reunion in Las Vegas personal for 500 pilots

Even though Las Vegas was our biggest reunion (more than 1,200 pilots), you may also say that it was the most impersonal one because of the environment.

However, it was not impersonal for those 500 pilots who came for the first time. It was also very personal for the one who was coming for the first time and never made it.

Las Vegas brought, more than ever, children and grandchildren. During the '60s and '70s, the civilians didn't want to know what happened there and later, justifiably, the Vietnam veteran would not talk about it.

In this new century, we are finally sharing Vietnam and is not about the funny stories anymore.

The problems before and during the business meeting are just proof that you pilots like a good fight. It keeps you alert and alive.

Your body may see the signs of time, but your minds are still sharp and hungry. The fact that the association has some problems only means that things are happening.

At this reunion for the first time (that I know of), a wife and family of an MIA pilot were acknowledged at the Banquet, on Table 19. What a standing ovation!

What a great opportunity to tell those families that we always cared, never knew the right things to say and that their husbands were and are always in our hearts.

Some trivia:

- I didn't appreciate the impersonator who played Robin Williams. I, like many others, thought it was him and I, like many others, don't shed my tears in vain.

- Since we filled out 50 percent of the Riviera Hotel's room capacity and almost all of their event rooms for four days, to pay \$10 daily for the health club is unacceptable.

- Why do we need to change the color of the dot that identifies the new pilots every year?

Rebeca Mizejewski

**At this reunion for the first time (that I know of), a wife and family of an MIA pilot were acknowledged at the Banquet, on Table 19. What a standing ovation!**

I'm writing you both in hopes this will get posted both on the VHPA website and get forwarded directly to all the guys from the Tomahawks and Gunslingers.

My brother Vince Zappini flew with the 128th AHC in 1968-69. He flew slicks and then moved into guns and was killed in June 1969 along with the rest of his crew.

I was 17. It was only a year and a half ago that we learned about the existence of the VHPA.



I was in Vietnam at the time looking for the spot where they went down. I found it and, if you want to read about it, you can find my report on the 128th's website.

A bit of irony is the fact that I lived about a half a mile from the VHPA home office in Citrus Heights, CA, for years and drove right by it almost every day, but never had any idea it even existed. Oh well.

My younger brother Dan and I came to the Las Vegas reunion this past weekend and I just wanted to let all of you know that I was blown away by the whole thing.

We met guys who actually knew our brother, who flew and hung out and drank and chased women with him after the last time we ever saw him. We learned things we never knew and it was great.

But I think that probably the biggest thing I came away from the weekend with was having had the opportunity to just be among all of you.

It's kind of hard to explain, but speaking strictly for myself, when Vinnie was killed, it was like a clock stopped.

Then, seeing all of you guys now sort of allowed me to see Vinnie as he would be today and the clock started again. So I thank you for everything, but I especially thank you for that.

I plan to make the Orlando reunion next year and look forward to spending time in your company again.

My thanks to all of you,

David Zappini

## Reunion very enjoyable, wife won BMW coupe

I want to thank all members of the VHPA Reunion Committee for putting together a totally enjoyable event in Las Vegas this year.

This was the first reunion I have attended. It was indeed a special event for my wife Jill, who won the white BMW Sports Coupe on the nickel slots!

Thanks again for all the hard work and dedication required to put together such an enjoyable event.

Greg Schwartz  
Hampton, VA

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# Letters

Continued from Page 9

## Vendor/pilot attends first reunion in Las Vegas

In Las Vegas I met a great guy for the first time at his first VHPA reunion. He sent the following letter to me as his after-action report on his reunion experience. He said I could share it with all of you.

Joe was a first timer (reunion FNG) and an author in our vendor room. He paid his money and loved every minute of it. He told me he saw and met more guys because he was a vendor than if had been out running around.

This letter explains why we do what we do to have a good reunion and why the VHPA is my summer vacation for years to come.

Ken Fritz

Reunion Vendor Coordinator

### My VHPA reunion

*This was beyond fun. It was OUTRAGEOUS!*

*But it wasn't easy to get there. Our human resources manager told me I was not allowed to take the trip because I was in a leave deficit condition and had used up nearly 38 hours of advance leave.*

*She then took the extra step of informing me that I had best not take the trip as it could "cause problems." I told her I am 57 years old and well beyond letting anyone dictate that I could not take a trip that had been planned, and had my boss' tacit approval.*

*She pushed me, so I told her, "I am taking this trip. If I come back and do not have a job here, that's fine. If I do have a job, that's fine, too, but I am going to Las Vegas."*

*I went to Las Vegas for the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association annual reunion. Some of our members are well into their 80s and a few younger ones like myself are only 53 to 56.*

*The entire week — Wednesday through Saturday night — was filled with highlights, seeing old buddies, telling war stories, catching up on 33 years of life after the Vietnam war . . . and laughing so hard you could burst.*

*I ran into Ted Cook while I was doing a book signing. Joe wrote Angel's Wing and sold it at the reunion with his*

*autograph.*

*He has aged in the last 30 years since we had good times together; I could not have recognized him at all. He said, "I see your book, you must be Joe Finch, the author. I would be "T" Cook, the friend." I looked up to see his eyes.*

*Something called out "familiar" to me even after all those years and I got up and hugged him. We both had tears of joy in our eyes! We spent a wonderful half hour and have found ways to get back in touch.*

*I went to the musical "SPLASH" and was blown away by the music, performances and the technology of that show. There were about 1,700 former helicopter pilots at the Riviera Hotel and quite a few more at nearby hotels, many of whom brought all their family etc. The total was about 2,500 people in Las Vegas for the reunion. AWESOME!*



*The fireworks on Thursday were OK, but we were all in some party or another all over Las Vegas. I kind of didn't see or miss them much.*

*On Friday night the Riviera hotel management shut the pool to everyone except those with the VHPA neckbands and we had a food and pool party until 0100 Las Vegas time! (0400 my body's time.)*

*On Saturday night the computer crashed and lost all the seating information so the tables we had carefully arranged to be with buddies, went out the window. No problem . . . I asked to be seated and noticed all the extra security, perhaps 100 extra Nevada Police, Las Vegas police and brown uniformed security police from the hotel. I didn't think much about it at the time.*

*The dining room was immense! We sat 2,200 people for a formal dinner. The hotel staff served us quickly and everyone seemed to get exactly what they asked for; the food was good and, if you ordered a medium steak, that is how it came out. Outstanding job of feeding us all.*

*I had been up since 0400 Las Vegas time and had gone jogging at 0430 their time so after the speeches I was pooped and ready to go to bed. As I turned to the family at my table to say good night, an older lady told me to stay for the floor show.*

*"What floor show?" I asked. "There is nothing on the agenda."*

*She said, "Didn't you notice all the extra security personnel?"*

*Then it dawned on me that she was probably right, so I asked her who it was and she didn't know.*

*A few minutes later our VHPA president said, "Let me introduce someone special: Mr. Robin Williams!"*

*Then out popped Mr. Dynamo himself with his "Good Morning Vietnaaaaaaaam" and he commenced to tell jokes and cut up and race around the stage and entertain. It was dynamite. How cool! That made all the effort of getting to Las Vegas worthwhile. He did the Nanu, Nanu thing and all the little things he has done over the years. I was in hog*

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## Letters

Continued from Page 10

heaven — it was great!

Then he introduced Bette Midler and I was ecstatic! She sang the "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boys of Company B," she wandered around the stage, making jokes and interacting with the audience and the whole room was just HIGH! She was so full of energy! It was the neatest thing I have ever seen. Then she said, "OK, I want to slow the pace a little here, boys. Anyone know what I'm gonna sing?"

Lots of people shouted out "The Rose!"

She said, "Naw," and started singing one of my personal favorite songs, "The Wind Beneath My Wings." I could not have been any happier. I was thrilled I had stayed

instead of wimping out to go to my room.

As she was singing, she started walking down the stairs off the stage to interact with the audience. I was bubbling over with feelings and joy experiencing this unexpected event. She patted a couple of guys on the arm or cheek, and walked into the crowd.

When she got to the part of the song that says, "Did you ever know that you're my hero," she reached down and took my hand and brought me to my feet. I WUZLED and gushed! I was so overjoyed and so overwhelmed, all I could do was hug her and say, "Thank you for everything you do."

Tears were streaming down my face and for one instant our eyes met and she puddled up, too. She quipped some-

See LETTERS, Page 12



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## Taps

### George P. Brummitt

Retired CW3 George P. Brummitt, 80, died July 12 in his Tacoma, WA, home after a battle with cancer.

Brummitt graduated from Army helicopter flight training at Fort Sill, OK, as a member of WOC Class ACHPC 54-A.

He was born and raised in Camas, WA.

Brummitt was a member of the Masonic Family, Afifi Shrine; Elk Lodge 174; and the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association.

He served in the U.S. Navy as a aviation mechanic in



the South Pacific

during World War II; and in Vietnam, as a U.S. Army combat helicopter pilot with the 33rd Transportation Company at Bien Hoa in 1963-64.

He was awarded the Air Medal with 20 oak leaf clusters and a "V" device.

He was honorably discharged in 1966. Upon retirement he flew helicopters professionally in Alaska for 16 years.

In Tacoma, he volunteered for Senior Citizens Against Crime, Pierce County Sheriff's Department; and the Gig Harbor Court System.

He is survived by his wife of 57 years, Mary Ann; daughter Cecelia, son Kent, and three grandchildren, Rian, Brendan, and Emily.

### Bill J. Comer

Bill J. Comer, 59, a retired Army lieutenant colonel who also had a career as a National Aeronautics and

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## Letters

### Continued from Page 11

*thing like, "Aw, Honey, you're gonna make me cry" to get her composure back and gently sat me back down. Then on she went with the song.*

*I haven't had a more wonderful moment in my entire life. It was better than getting married, better than watching my son born, better than being baptized. It was OUTRAGEOUS!!*

*Later I found out she was not the real Bette Midler, but that moment was too dynamic for me to ever care who she was or wasn't. To me she is Bette Midler. I enjoyed her show completely and will treasure that moment forever.*

*After hugging Bette Midler with tears of joy streaming down my face, on four of those huge sports arena video screens, I was so excited that I danced until 0100, Las Vegas time!*

*I was grinning from ear to ear, laughing at everything, hugging everyone and I even sprained my neck dancing. I had an 0700 flight out of Las Vegas, which I did arrive in time for, but I was so far down the list, I didn't make it . . . The vagaries of stand-by travel. I finally got back to DC at 0900 Monday morning, (26 hours en route) and was not in time for my 0900 meeting at the office.*

*What a wonderful experience. Best time of my entire life! And to think that the HR lady told me I could not go! Wow! Those kinds of blessings are just too spectacular to come from anywhere but God.*

*Joe Finch, NOT an FNG at the next reunion!  
joefinch@erols.com*



## Thanks for good time at this year's reunion

Just a note of thanks from one of the members. I thought the whole show came off pretty well. The banquet seating went off without a hitch as far as my table was concerned.

Thanks to all who helped bring this about. Looking forward to next year.

Grover F. (Frank) Thompson

## Article catches interest of retired Army aviator

As I was reading the April 2002 issue, the article about the CH-21s arriving in Vietnam caught my eye.

I well remember watching them being assembled and flown off the carrier. At the time I was with the 3rd Radio Research Unit (3rd RRU), a unit of the Army Security Agency.

One day later I saw one crash at Tan Son Nhut airport; I think it was doing a practice autorotation and, upon landing, rolled over on its side.

I returned to the States and, upon completion of my required three years, left the Army. However, nine months later I re-enlisted, went to Japan and promptly applied for flight school. In February 1967, I graduated with class 66-21/23. I spent about 15 years in aviation before retiring in 1982.

Thanks for the good articles.

Charles T. Fouts  
CWO-4, retired



# Taps

## Continued from Page 12

Space Administration aerospace safety manager, died of a liver ailment June 27 at a hospital in Ocoee, FL.

Comer was a Missouri native and a graduate of Embry Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, FL.

He served some 25 years in the Army until his retirement from active military duty in 1985 as an aviation safety officer at Fort Rucker.

Comer was an Army helicopter pilot in Vietnam. He later commanded an aviation company at Fort Bragg, NC, where he also was the aviation officer for the Golden Knights Army Parachute Team.

He also commanded a field artillery unit in Germany and pursued advanced studies in fixed- and rotary-wing aviation.

After retiring from active duty, Comer joined NASA at its headquarters in Washington as an aerospace safety investigator and served on the team that investigated the explosion of the Challenger shuttle in 1986.

His military decorations included two Distinguished Flying Crosses and the Bronze Star Medal.

At NASA, Comer received awards for exceptional performance and superior accomplishment.

Since his retirement from NASA in 2000, he formed a company called Air Safety Associates and authored an unpublished book about saving lives at the risk of one's own, titled, "The Glorious Quest."

Survivors include a son, Troy Comer of Winter Garden, FL; a brother; and a grandson.

## John Hicks Dewitt III

John Hicks Dewitt III, airport manager at Mount Pleasant, TX, was struck by a car and killed on May 25 as he attempted to remove a snake from harm's way on Texas FM 1536. He was 53.

Dewitt was born in Albuquerque in 1948 and attended U. S. Army flight training, graduating from Hunter Army Airfield at Savannah in 1968.

He flew with the Sidewinder gunship platoon of the 117th Assault Helicopter Company Warlords in 1968-70 and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with oak leaf cluster, the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star Medal with oak leaf cluster, the Air Medal with 47 oak leaf clusters and "V" device and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry.

Dewitt and his wife Paula resided in Saltillo, TX,



where they ran a cattle and hay operation.

## Stoney K. Fox

Stoney K. Fox of Palmdale, CA, died of a heart attack the night of May 23 at the Riverside Hotel in Las Vegas.

He had been with his sister and brother-in-law on their way to Kansas and died in his sleep.

Fox had returned from his daughter Amber's college graduation in San Diego the weekend before and they were planning to leave for Australia in mid-June as her graduation gift from him.

He graduated from flight school with Class 68-21. Fox served in Vietnam with the 35th Engineer Group in 1969-70.

## William A. Hall III

William A. Hall III flew his last flight in this world on March 29. He died of complications from lung and brain cancer at 61 years of age. He was a member of the VHPA and of the Florida LZ Chapter.

He was a 1962 Distinguished Military Graduate of North Georgia College, majoring in chemistry.

His initial assignment in the Army was as a platoon leader of the mortar battery of the 1st Airborne Battle Group, 197th Infantry, 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, NC.

Hall's command assignments included commander, Combat Aviation Brigade, 7th Infantry Division, Fort Ord, CA; 4th Aviation Training Battalion, Fort Rucker; activation and command of the Army Readiness Region II Flight Detachment at Fort Dix, NJ; and command of the 182nd Assault Helicopter Company at Fort Bragg.

His overseas assignments included deputy G1, 2nd Infantry Division, Korea, and S1 of the 16th Aviation Battalion in Germany.

Hall served two tours in Vietnam, the first as operations officer of the 125th Air Traffic Control Company, flying L-19s. His second tour was as operations Officer, 336th Aviation Company and as S1 of the 13th Aviation Battalion in the Delta.

His awards included the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal with 5 oak leaf clusters, Army Commendation Medal with 3 oak leaf clusters and the Air Medal with 19 oak leaf clusters.

Hall was a Master Army Aviator and Senior Parachutist.

His last assignment on active duty was as deputy director, Manpower, Personnel and Administration Directorate, U.S. Central Command, MacDill Air Force Base, FL. At the time of his death he was employed providing contract support to the Small Business Program of the U.S. Special Operations Command at MacDill.

He leaves behind his wife, the former Jayne Morris of Douglasville, GA, and two children: Caroline and Glen.

Those who flew with him, throughout his career, will miss him. He was one of the "good guys."

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# Taps

Continued from Page 13

— Dick Antross

## Earle C. Erwin

Earle C. Erwin, 61, died Aug. 4 at the family home in Enterprise, AL, after an extended illness.

Erwin was a native of Texas and had lived in Enterprise for the past five years.

He retired after 37 years from the Army as a CW5, having served in the Vietnam War and as a paratrooper.

Erwin was a member of Class 67-13 and served in Vietnam with the 1st Cavalry Division in 1971-72.

Survivors include his wife, June Irwin, son Charles Irwin of Roseville, CA, and a granddaughter.



## Claude T. Ivey

Retired Maj. Gen. Claude T. Ivey of Fayetteville, NC, died suddenly on June 2.

He graduated from flight school in 1962 and was a member of the VHPA.

In Vietnam, Ivey served with the 1st Infantry Division in 1966-67 and with the 10th Combat Aviation Battalion in 1968-69.

Since his retirement from the Army, Ivey had worked as a real estate broker.

## Samuel P. Kalagian

Retired Army Col. Samuel P. "Black Sam" Kalagian of Enterprise died May 4 at the Enterprise Medical Center after an extended illness. He was 78.

He served his country for 33 years.

Kalagian began his service as a fighter pilot in World War II at Iwo Jima and the invasion of Japan.

After World War II, he activated back into the Army as an infantry officer/aviator. His tours of duty included Korea, Germany, Hawaii, Vietnam, Italy and the continental United States.

He earned his Master Aviator Wings.

Kalagian earned his combat nickname "Black Sam" (The Armenian Rug Salesman) while serving as battalion commander of the 25th and 14th Aviation Battalions in Vietnam.

He was shot down twice in Vietnam, earning the Purple

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# Taps

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Heart for combat injuries.

Kalagian began a successful real estate career after he and his wife Ruby retired in 1976 in Enterprise. He was active in the Retired Officers Association, twice serving as president.

Kalagian also was in demand for lectures on Army Aviation history at the Aviation Museum.

He was preceded in death by his son John in July 2000 and his wife Ruby in August 2000.

Survivors include one son, Sam Kalagian Jr., Panama City Beach, FL.; one daughter Jo Alice K. Harp, McCalla; four grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

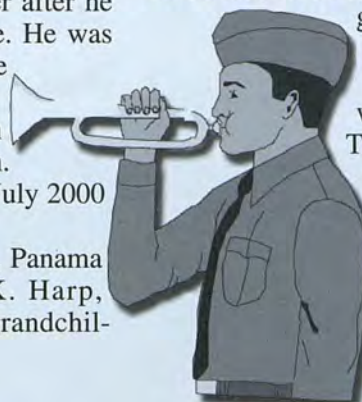
## James B. Kelly

James B. Kelly, 66, of Pensacola, FL, died May 14 after a lengthy illness.

He was born in Birmingham, AL, on Aug. 4, 1935.

Kelly graduated from Marion Military Institute in 1956, earned his bachelor's degree at the University of Alabama in 1958. He later earned his master's degree in history and counseling from Troy State University.

He graduated from flight school in ORWAC Class 59-C7 and served in Vietnam with A Company, 25 Aviation Battalion, 25th Infantry Division, earning the Distinguished Flying Cross among other decorations.



Kelly was First vice president with Morgan Stanley, a member of the Tiger Club, Pensacola North Rotary Club and the Pensacola Yacht Club.

He was an avid boater.

He also served on the board of the Pensacola Favor House and was a member of the First United Methodist Church.

Kelly is survived by his wife of 43 years, Monette Kelly; son Chris Kelly of Pensacola; daughter, Shannon S. Ferra, of Clearwater Beach, FL, and three grandchildren.

See TAPS, Page 16

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# Taps

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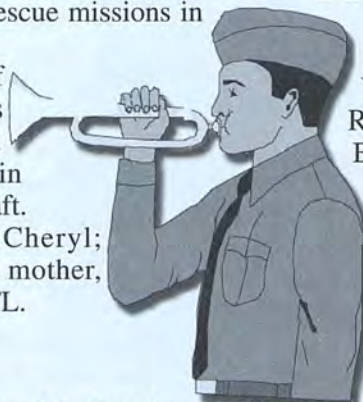
## Robert Eugene Lidster

Robert "Bob" Eugene Lidster of Mesquite, TX, died June 23. He was 56.

Lidster was an Army helicopter pilot in Vietnam. He later flew helicopter search-and-rescue missions in Colorado.

He was an active member of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, and had received many awards for workmanship in building and restoring small aircraft.

He is survived by his wife Cheryl; daughter Erika Lidster; and his mother, Gladys Thompson of Pensacola, FL.



## Michael J. Madden

Retired CW4 Michael J. Madden, 69, died Aug 8 at his Daleville, AL, home after a brief illness.

Madden was a native of Chicago.

He served in the Army as an aviator until his retirement. Madden was named Aviator of the Year in 1964.

Madden graduated from Army flight school with Class 55-F. In Vietnam, he served with the 116th Assault Helicopter Company in 1965-66.

He had lived in Alabama since the 1970s.

Survivors include his wife, Nicole Madden of Daleville; two daughters, Patricia Martis of California and Muriel Lewis of Florida; three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

## Michael F. "Mike" Mullins

Michael F. "Mike" Mullins, 56, died of cancer May 22 at Blake Medical Center, Bradenton, FL.

Mullins was a member of flight class ORWAC 70-44, served with the 92nd Assault Helicopter Company at Dong Ba Thin in 1971 and then was "Gladiator 15" with the 57th Assault Helicopter Company in 1972.

He was a member of VHPA and the VHPA of Florida Chapter.

After his Vietnam service, Mullins flew as a rotary-wing aviator at Fort Lewis, WA; Fort Bragg, NC; and in Hawaii.

He finished his military flying career with the 278th ACR, Tennessee Army National Guard.

Mullins flew EMS helicopter medical evacuation missions for Shands Hospital in Gainesville, FL, and Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville prior to moving to Ellenton, FL, in 1991, where he retired as a CW3.

He is survived by his wife, Anne R. Hetrick-Mullins,

two sons and four grandchildren.

Anne has requested that a "Michael F. Mullins VHPA Memorial Scholarship" be established by the VHPA, with the award to be presented in 2003 by the VHPA/AAAA Scholarship Foundation.

Donations in Mike's name may be sent to the VHPA, 5530 Birdcage Street, Suite 200, Citrus Heights, CA 95610-7698.

## Dave Roessler

Dave Roessler and his wife Rosemarie died in a traffic accident July 2 while on their way to the VHPA reunion in Las Vegas.

Roessler retired in March 2001 as a sergeant with the Boise (ID) Police Department.

The Roesslers had been married 32 years at the time of their deaths.

He was born in Aberdeen, SD, and attended schools in Germany, Alaska, California, Idaho, South Dakota, Kentucky and Maryland.

Roessler joined the Army in 1966 and completed Officer Candidate School in 1967.

He graduated from flight school in 1968 and served as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam in 1969-70.

Roessler served in Germany from 1970-72, when he left the Army. He joined the Boise Police Department in 1975.

The Roesslers are survived by four sons, Patrick, Michael, Gregory and Jacob.

## Eric B. Williams

The Rev. Eric B. Williams, a priest in the Episcopal Church, died June 15 at his Baton Rouge home. He was 49.

Williams served as the fourth rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Baton Rouge. He was former rector of St. Columb's Episcopal Church in Jackson, MS, and former rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Abbeville, LA.

Williams was a decorated U.S. Army helicopter pilot during the Vietnam War. He served with C/7/17th Cavalry in 1971-72 and with H/10th Cavalry in 1972-73.

He held the Distinguished Flying Cross with one oak leaf cluster, the Army Commendation Medal with the "V" device, the Bronze Star Medal, the Purple Heart Medal with two oak leaf clusters and the Honor Medal of the Republic of South Vietnam.

## John York Jr.

CW4 John York Jr. of Ruskin, FL, died July 17 of respiratory failure.

He served two Vietnam tours as a helicopter pilot, in 1965-66 with 1/9 Cav and in 1968-69 with the 243rd ASHC.

York was a member of VHPA and a life member of VHPA of Florida.





# Rittman stresses VHPA friendships

**JACK SWICKARD**  
NEWSLETTER EDITOR

The Annual VHPA Business Meeting was called to order by Tom Payne at 9:15 a.m. on July 4, 2002, at the Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas, NV.

The Pledge of Allegiance was repeated in unison by VHPA members attending the meeting.

A special prayer then was said for Dave Roessler and his wife Rosemarie, who were killed July 2 on their way to Roessler's first VHPA reunion.

## State of VHPA

President Dave Rittman gave details about the Roesslers' death in a traffic accident in Idaho.

Rittman stressed the value of friendships and making every minute count.

"This is a social organization. We are here for the camaraderie and the friendship," he said.

Rittman said next year's VHPA reunion will be in Orlando, FL. He explained Orlando was the top destination listed by members in a survey at the Denver reunion in 2001.

He said this past year has been a busy one for him and the VHPA.

## Management report

Marcia Fritz, who heads the VHPA management company, reported on the association's day-to-day operations.

She said that because of the increasing number of transactions, two people in her company are now assigned to the VHPA.

Fritz said the VHPA currently has 11,000 members.

She thanked volunteers for their help, in particular Dana Young, membership chairman; Mike Law, Directory editor who has been helping with a software systems update at VHPA Headquarters; and President Dave Rittman.

Rittman then told how Fritz, a CPA, had volunteered several years ago to take over the existing contract for

management services after the former VHPA contractor encountered financial problems. The Executive Council, acting in accordance with VHPA bylaws, later exercised a contractual option to renew the contract one time at the same price. The contract will go out for rebid next year.

## Financial report

Secretary/Treasurer Tom Payne reported on the number of telephone conference call meetings conducted by the EC during the past 12 months.

He then showed the VHPA's Income Statement for the year through Dec. 31, 2001, compared to the calendar years 1999 and 2000. Payne went through the statement, explained revenues and expenses.

Payne showed how unexpired general and unexpired life memberships were calculated.

Outside auditor

Dave Ijung, a CPA, reported on the audit.

## Legal Committee report

Counsel Jim Gunderson reported on the VHPA retaining a law firm in Kansas City, MO, to represent the association's interests. Gunderson read a letter by law firm to members attending the meeting.

## Membership report

Dana Young, Membership Committee chairman, reported on the campaign to increase membership. He said some 40,000 helicopter pilots served in Vietnam.

A letter went out to some 11,000 names of potential members. This generated a significant number of new members. This was followed up with a postcard.

Young described how the search has been made more difficult for people who left active duty before RA, W and O prefix serial numbers were converted to Social Security serial numbers.

He said about 14,000 potential members have not been identified and asked for help from members in locating them.

The number of paid members has been increasing,

**See SCHOLARSHIPS, Page 16**



Jack Swickard photo

**Joe Bilitzke (left), VHPA president; Dave Rittman, immediate past president; and Charles Bogle of the Fort Wolters Chapter report to the VHPA membership on the National Vietnam War Museum. Bogle holds a small brick, symbolic of the museum, that he presented to Rittman and Bilitzke.**

## ***Business meeting***



# Scholarships go to sons, daughters

Continued from Page 17

while the number of unpaid members has been decreasing, Young said.

## Scholarship report

Secretary/Treasurer Tom Payne reported on the VHPA Scholarship Fund, now administered by the Army Aviation Association of America (AAAA), which also matched the VHPA scholarships.

He said last year 22 of the AAAA-administered scholarships went to sons and daughters of VHPA members.

## Chapter report

Mike Sheuerman, junior member at large, reported on the status of the VHPA chapter format. He said some 12-13 percent of VHPA members belong to chapters. "Next year I hope that number will be higher."

## Investment report

Bob Smith, former VHPA president who heads the Investment Committee, reported the VHPA has made money on its investments.

He complimented Tom Payne for his conservative outlook and said Tom is the type of person needed on an investment committee at this time.

Bob said he is seeking more volunteers for the committee.

## Newsletter report

Jack Swickard, newsletter editor, said he is looking at strategies to solicit advertising for the newsletter, while improving the quality of the ads.

He reminded members present at the meeting that the newsletter belongs to the VHPA members and for it to be successful, members must send letters, articles and photographs for publication.

Swickard said items sent for publication should be first-hand accounts by members, rather than articles clipped from other publications.

He said he "runs a one-man operation, so I need your help."

Swickard then listed ways to streamline submission of items.

These included:

- When possible, send written items electronically, over the Internet, or mail them on a CD, a Zip disk or floppy disk along with a printout.
- Make certain obituaries include date of death, place of death, cause of death, age at time of death, and anecdotes.
- Photographs sent electronically should have a resolution of at least 200 dots per inch.

- Be careful about forwarding someone else's notes, as this can cause confusion about the author of an article or letter.

- When sending letters, provide the writer's name, city and state of residence, and e-mail address.

## Membership Directory report

Editor Mike Law said the 2003 Membership Directory will be 30 percent larger and will be on 50-pound paper, rather than 60-pound paper. There also will be more color on the inside pages.

Aug. 15 is the deadline for getting materials to Law for the 2002 Membership Directory, which will focus on maintenance.

## Database report

Gary Roush, Database Committee chairman, said the excess information sent for the directory is on the VHPA website, in a password-protected area.

There has been many requests each day for information on the website.

Flight school class photos can be sent scanned to Roush for placement on the website. Currently there are 640 of these photos on the website.

Roush reported on database statistics. He said the KIA list has decreased in size as the committee finds people who were listed as pilots were non-pilot crew members. Gary solicited war stories from members for the database.

He said a CD with database information is available for \$20 each.

## New president's remarks

Joe Bilitzke said that during his tenure as president he would like to reestablish the art of communication among members.

"What I would like to do is have a communications corner on the VHPA website. Questions and answers would be posted on the website for all members to read.

"I would like to continue the electronic registration for the reunion, but also would like to print the registration form in the newsletter. I also would like to conduct a survey of members in the newsletter," Bilitzke said.

He added that he also will study a "one-man, one-vote" concept.

Bilitzke also announced the 2004 VHPA reunion will be in Dallas.

## Election of new officers:

New officers elected during the Annual Business Meeting were:

- Junior member at large: Angelo Spelios.
- Vice president: Dana Young.

See VENDORS, Page 19

***Business  
meeting***



# Smashing success!

## Las Vegas reunion has many positives

**JOE BILITZKE**

**NATIONAL REUNION CHAIRMAN**

Reunion No. 19 is history and what an annual reunion it was!

The Las Vegas Riviera Hotel & Casino was our host hotel this year and, from all indications, it was good for us all. The final numbers are still coming in and will be posted to our website as soon as Headquarters approves the remaining bills.

Look for a full reunion accounting at [www.vhpa.info/financials/financial\\_reports.htm](http://www.vhpa.info/financials/financial_reports.htm) coming soon.

From the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet maintained by Dave Rittman, we were able to keep abreast of the reunion finances on a real-time basis. The reunion will show a positive cash flow.

Skyboxes were a unique addition this year. Ten balcony rooms, complete with full, sliding glass doors, sound system and video monitors overlooked the grand ballroom used for entertainment events and the final banquet.

Units purchased these rooms and turned them into TOC's for the duration of the reunion. Half of the purchase price was returned to each TOC in the form of food and libations.

From the looks of things, a good time was had by all.

Another first this year was a static display of helicopters provided by the 160th Special Operation Aviation Regiment (SOAR). A UH-60 "Blackhawk" and two MH-6 "Little Birds" were flown from their base at Fort Campbell, KY, to our reunion site.

These three aircraft, plus an OH-58 provided by the

Nevada National Guard counter drug aviation unit, were on display in the two hotel ballrooms throughout the reunion.

Our members were able to meet their young aircrews and see the aircraft that also will find their way into aviation history.

Two people who had a most memorable first reunion were Greg and Jill Schwartz. As luck would have it, Jill was playing the nickel slots and won a new BMW Sports Coupe! Not bad for FNGs.

Congratulations to Greg and Jill. We hope to see you both in your new car at the Orlando reunion. After all, from your home in Virginia down to Florida, it shouldn't take long at all in that hot Beemer!

Some members who attended the reunion questioned the use of guards. This was in light of an unfortunate misunderstanding during the business meeting.

So, given my promise of complete, open communication, I feel obligated to present the facts.

First of all, guards were used at all our events. I personally hired the security company and instructed every guard in his duties. These were unarmed guards, at my request. Most guards were also past, retired, or off duty military at my request.

Their instructions were clear: Every individual needed to present an event ticket and wear a reunion ID/name badge around his neck to be allowed access to any event requiring a ticket. Presenting these two items, the individual would have their hand stamped by the guard. This stamp and the ID badge would allow reaccess to the room

**See NOT-SO-INDELIBLE, Page 20**

## Vendors generate \$4,000 for VHPA

**Continued from Page 18**

### **Vendor Committee report**

Ken Fritz reported vendors at the reunion will produce about \$4,000 for the VHPA this year.

Turner Publishing Co. gave a royalty check for \$980 to the VHPA, as well as extra calendars that are sold to members to cover the cost of the next year's calendar.

### **Technology Committee report**

Charles Holley, Technology Committee chairman, asked Mike Law to join him at the podium.

He announced the committee this year divided technology development into two areas:

- Internet activities.
- Headquarters activities.

Holley said [www.vhpa.info](http://www.vhpa.info) is up and running as a donated site.

### **National Vietnam War Museum update**

Charles Bogle of the Fort Wolters Chapter reported on the National Vietnam War Museum. He said the museum will be more than a memorial, it also will be an educational institution. A place to acquire knowledge of the Vietnam experience.

It will cost some \$25 million to build and staff the museum at Mineral Wells. Bogle said he hopes the groundbreaking will be held during the 2004 VHPA reunion in Dallas.

Bogle presented a brick symbolic of the museum to Rittman and Bilitzke.



# Not-so-indelible ink causes problem

**Continued from Page 19**

if an individual needed to leave and re-enter. This security was in effect throughout the reunion, including the business meeting.

One thing that was overlooked was the ink of the hand stamp. It wasn't as indelible as I had hoped. This was the cause of a small problem that was allowed to be blown out of proportion.

Unfortunately, the victim of my security policy was VHPA member Roger Gould! As an association founder, life member, and our longest-term past president (September 1988-July 1990), Roger was the last person who should be detained for lack of credentials.

It all happened because of Roger's good hygiene habits. During the business meeting, Roger felt the urge, visited the restroom, washed his hands along with the hand stamp, and returned to the meeting with the stamp now obliterated.

He was denied entry by the two unarmed VHPA door guards because he lacked one of the two credentials needed for re-entry. OK so far? Now, here's the part that everyone saw.

Outside the room used for the business meeting was an armed, Riviera Hotel security guard. He happened to be there because he was on his security rounds and stopped to talk with another hotel employee — outside our meeting door.

Here's where fate intervened. Roger returned from the restroom and attempted to re-enter the business meeting. He was stopped and denied entry because his stamp was not visible to the two unarmed, VHPA guards.

The armed Riviera Hotel saw a perceived disturbance and immediately walked over and intervened. After all, it's his hotel and this is what he's been trained and instructed to do. Pushing, shoving, and raised voices ensued.

Once identified, Roger was quickly admitted and the business meeting continued uneventfully.

Following the meeting, I personally spoke (and apologized) to Roger. I also spoke with our hotel convention manager and the chief of hotel security. They, too, apologized to Roger and the matter was dropped.

**Unfortunately, the victim of my security policy was VHPA member Roger Gould! As an association founder, life member, and our longest-term past president (September 1988-July 1990), Roger was the last person who should be detained for lack of credentials.**

So you see, the part of the story everyone saw was only the very end. No armed guard was ever hired or used by VHPA. And in the words of Paul Harvey, "now you know the rest of the story."

Next year, we'll try to address some other points brought up regarding the business meeting.

We can use Microsoft PowerPoint to present items projected on the big screen. We'll also revisit the elections and where they come in the agenda.

Some members thought they were held too late in the meeting this year. However, you'll have to admit, it kept the attendance at a maximum throughout the meeting!

I've also been told the meeting is too long. We try to keep the committee reports to a minimum, but I feel each committee chairman deserves to be heard and questioned by the membership. I really see no way around it.

But suffice to say, we've heard the complaints and suggestions and they're all being taken under advisement. After all, at the end of an elected term, we all eventually return to the audience.

The ladies event proved very popular this year. In fact, we added chairs at the last minute because of the greater-than-expected attendance.

Besides enjoying a hotel brunch, they were treated to a staged "murder mystery" that was very funny and enjoyable. My question, though, is who were the three guys sitting among all those ladies? Could they have been real helicopter pilots?

Entertainment was varied and nonstop.

On Wednesday, the welcome reception opened with the old '60s favorite, Sha-Na-Na. The old group had the old pilots hopping.

Thursday included two entertainment venues and two hotel stage shows on the agenda. Included was dinner and fireworks at the view-inspiring Top of the Riv.

The KoKoMo Beach Band played poolside on Friday evening. Despite the outside temperature, our members heated things up even more with dancing and swimming.

The entertainment at the final banquet was some of the best I've seen in the 17 banquets I've attended.

Opening with "Good morning, Vietnam," out walked Robin Williams! After an opening, he introduced Bette Midler! Following a medley of her well-known songs, Robin reappeared to introduce Neil Diamond! At the conclusion of his fast-paced routine, Neil exited and Robin returned to introduce . . . Wait a minute.

**The entertainment at the final banquet was some of the best I've seen in the 17 banquets I've attended.**

**See IMPERSONATORS, Page 21**



# Impersonators big hit after dinner

Continued from Page 20

By now, a veil of understanding floated over the audience. These people are all impersonators. They're really good, they look and sound like their character, but they're impersonators. OK, it's tough to fool all the people all the time. They were all impersonators. But weren't they GREAT?!?

A big thanks to Steve Beyer Productions for providing all the entertainment for the reunion. Steve did a great job coordinating with the reunion staff to supply some outstanding acts throughout the four days. We hope you all enjoyed them, too.

And we sincerely hope those who attended the reunion had an enjoyable time, met old friends, and found new ones. We look forward to another great venue as we return to Orlando.

This will be the first city we've used a second time. In 1997 we had a very successful reunion at the Renaissance Hotel.

We should surpass all expectations this year at the Rosen Centre.

Registration will be available after the first of the year. Register early. Our room block is a maximum 950 sleeping rooms on the night of the final banquet (Saturday, July 5, 2003). Plan ahead — we'll see you in Orlando in 2003.



Jack Swickard photo

**The Four Tops singing group performs during the stage show following the Final Banquet at Reunion 2002 in Las Vegas. Other acts impersonated well-known entertainers.**

## Vendor room successful at reunion

KEN FRITZ

VENDOR COORDINATOR

The Las Vegas reunion vendor room was a resounding success.

We had a great T-shirt design, plenty of chairs and tables to visit with our stick buddies, and lots of room to move around.

With a mini-bar and the two AH-6 helicopters and crews from the 160th SOAR on display, it was a great place to reunite.

VHPA member Ron Cooper was there again with the Agusta Aerospace booth. As a returning corporate sponsor of the VHPA, our hat's off to Agusta.

How about those new helicopters

that cruise at 150 knots?

In addition to Agusta and our faithful shirt supplier Honor & Pride, we had 22 vendors in attendance with everything from wooden helicopter models and artwork to fine jewelry, books and GPS charts of Vietnam.

Turner Publications was there with the 2003 VHPA calendar for sale.

Randy Baumgardner of Turner sold out the second day of the reunion and began taking orders.

Thanks to Mike Law and Turner Publications for getting them out so early in the year!

The VHPA staff was assisted in its efforts to sell back issues of calendars and other VHPA products by the

VHPA-CCN chapter.

The chapter also sold its unique metal, laser-cut helicopter silhouettes and CCN T-shirts.

VHPA income on this activity goes to the reunion general fund and, with the vendors and chapters remitting 10 percent of their sales, more than \$10,000 was contributed.

Thanks to all of the fine vendors who support the VHPA and thanks to all of you who support our vendors and the VHPA by visiting the vendor area at each reunion.

If you have suggestions for improvements or you know a vendor you'd like to see at the reunion, please contact Ken Fritz at [REDACTED]



# Team effort

## New data received for Directory

MIKE LAW  
DIRECTORY EDITOR

Not long after attending the VHPA Reunion in Denver, VHPA member Ted Jambon sent an e-mail to the directory editor with words to the effect:

*"Along with several other fixed wing pilots, I was in helicopter transition class 60-4Q at Mineral Wells.*

*"I used to car pool with four other guys. One was named Ron Elwell and I see him in the Died During Training Section of the Directory. He was killed in a mid-air training accident in January 1960 just before we were to graduate. He and the other pilot were both flying a solo cross-country.*

*"The other pilot also was in our car pool, but I can't remember his name and I don't see another Died During Training pilot for January 1960.*

*"How can we learn more about these men and get their information in the Directory?"*

After consulting with Gary Roush and Steve Bolling, who maintain this database for the VHPA, the Directory Committee turned to VHPA member Jim Messinger.

The idea was that since Jim has been one of the leaders in The National Vietnam War Museum effort in Mineral Wells, maybe he could find a way to search the local newspapers from January 1960 to find the information we needed.

Jim e-mailed back that he would see what he could find. That might have been the end of the story, but to Jim's credit, it was not!

In January, Jim wrote:

*"A long time ago; Aug. 27, you asked for some research in the Mineral Wells Index for obituaries. I have discovered that the 1960 newspapers are currently being*

**"The other pilot also was in our car pool, but I can't remember his name and I don't see another Died During Training pilot for January 1960."**

**Jim e-mailed back that he would see what he could find. That might have been the end of the story, but to Jim's credit, it was not!**

*converted to microfilm and will be unavailable for several months. I haven't forgotten the assignment and will continue waiting for the newspapers to see if I can turn something up on the mid-air."*

Then, on Aug. 1, Jim sent this e-mail:

*"At long last! I had to borrow a microfilm reader from Weatherford College, haul it to the Mineral Wells Library, put a newspaper over my head to shade the light to make the film readable, but it worked. Remember I reported that the library had sent the papers to be filmed? Then their film reader went down. It is a very humorous story altogether."*

The *Mineral Wells Index* headline story on Sunday Jan 24, 1960, was the mid-air collision of two helicopters.

Killed in the crash were Capt Ronald S. Elwell, 31, of Tulsa, OK, and 2nd Lt Jerry L. Burton, 23, of Inglefield, IN, a 1958 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

The accident occurred at 1:15 p.m. Friday (Jan. 22 by my reckoning) 2.5 miles north of Camp Wolters on the Grady Seale Ranch.

The pilots had just taken off for a cross country flight to Abilene. (Note: they were both solo.)

These were the first fatalities in the helicopter school, which had graduated 3,000 students.

Lt. Eugene Fudge was the first to reach the crash site. The photo caption said: Death Trap — Capt. Ronald S. Elwell, 31, a student at the United States Army Primary Helicopter School died in this training wreckage Friday afternoon after his helicopter was apparently in a mid-air collision with another helicopter.

Well, it has taken about one year from the time Ted Jambon pointed this out to the VHPA to correct the information we have on Capt. Ron Elwell and to add Lt. Jerry Burton to the Directory. Great teamwork!

We owe Jim Messinger a special thanks for his attention to detail and faithful determination to get this work done.

**The pilots had just taken off for a cross country flight to Abilene. These were the first fatalities in the helicopter school, which had graduated 3,000 students.**



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