



# THE VHPA AVIATOR

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

July/August 2007 Vol. 25, No. 4



Robert A. Rich photo

Robert A. Rich, a pilot with the 118th Assault Helicopter Company stationed at Bien Hoa, took this photo of a "Thunderbird" Huey on top of a Riverine boat south of Saigon. Rich, who served with the Thunderbirds in 1968-69, was a member of the crews supporting River Division 553 of TF 116 in III Corps.



## From the President

This is the first of six *From the President* columns I will be writing in the next year. I am deeply honored to serve as your president and I hope the VHPA will have a great year and top it off with a great reunion in San Antonio next year.

I just got back from a wonderful time in Phoenix and have pleasant memories of the good time and fellowship with all who attended. In the September/October issue of *The VHPA Aviator*, we will spend several pages on the Phoenix reunion and then have just the articles you send in tell the story.



Mike Whitten

At the Annual Business Meeting, the membership voted to have Jack Salm continue to serve on the Executive Committee as your vice president and Mike Law to serve as junior member at large. Congratulations to both of them, and I want to tell you they will be busy trying to improve your Association.

Angelo Spelios, 2006-07 VHPA president, announced at the meeting Fritzco was selected as our management services company for the next three years and charged with specific responsibilities we have not had in the past. Congratulations to Marcia Fritz and her company.

This will be an interesting three years trying to grow the organization and providing the services we expect.

### Members offer advice

Several members came up to me and gave me some advice and suggestions, and I will be working with the EC to discuss and develop the ideas into reality if possible. Thank you for your ideas.

We, the members of the EC have been asking, pleading with you to help us get in touch with past members or pilots who have never been members before and share our experiences. Again, I am asking you to get in touch with someone you know who has not joined or has let his membership expire for whatever reason to join or renew and get involved.

We had more than 70 first-time attendees at the

Phoenix reunion, including one who sat with me at the final banquet and said he really enjoyed his first reunion and probably would come to the next one. His wife was happy he said that because she really enjoyed herself, also.

At the hotel, I met a first-time attendee who really caught me off guard.

As some of you know, I took my father to the previous reunion in Washington, D.C., and was very proud of that. He wanted to see the World War II Memorial and it was the perfect time for him to do it. The VHPA member I met wore the same kind of World War II shirt my father wore, with pictures of WWII planes.

I approached him, thinking someone had brought his father to the reunion, only to find out Archie R. Taylor was one of us. He is 91 years young and was attending his first reunion. I hope and pray he will attend many more. And I thought Jack Salm was the oldest attendee. He's just a kid next to Archie.

We also had Waldo B. Tomlinson, who is 79, attending. Though the reunion was not attended by the number of pilots we have had in the past few years, we did pick up 49 new members.

### San Antonio reunion locked down

Dana Young has most of the San Antonio reunion locked down and I will let him write the big article telling you about the fun things we will have in store for you next year.

One thing he did announce is that through the great efforts of Mike Sheuerman, Vince Vance will be appearing on one of the nights. If you missed the act in Dallas on 2004, it was a fun time for all.

And, of course, you know as golf chairman, I announced the course we will play next will be Canyon Springs. Al Flory helped me with this selection. Thank you, Al.

One of you who I met offered assistance in the legal field and I didn't get your name or phone number. Please call HQ or write me and let me know who you are, Wally would like to talk to you about helping him.

Again, thank you for the privilege of serving as your president for the upcoming year and I will keep you informed of the actions of your EC through this column and on the website.

— Mike Whitten, President

## VHPA statistics

- Between May 8 and July 31, the VHPA added 55 new members.
- During this same period, members donated \$5,007 toward the VHPA Scholarship Fund.

**E-mail items to The Aviator at:**  
***editor@vhpa.org***

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

## Letters

# Drivers praise helicopter pilots

I am an independent filmmaker working on a documentary about a group of reservist truck drivers stationed at Long Binh 68-69. They drove to Quan Loi, Tay Ninh, Cu Chi, etc. delivering ammo and supplies.

During the course of interviews I conducted with some of them, two of the guys mentioned helicopter pilots specifically, and I thought it appropriate to pass along their comments to those who deserve to hear them, but seldom get to. Below:

*John B.: I just praise the Lord for the pilots of the helicopters. If it weren't for those chopper pilots, a lot of us wouldn't be here to tell the stories. So if anybody knows any chopper pilots, or if their granddaddy was a chopper pilot, we really appreciate what they did, giving us protection over there.*

*John T.: Generally, if it was a long convoy, we had a tank in front of us, and we'd have an armored personnel carrier; we'd have helicopter gunships, and I've never been able to thank those guys, but they were wonderful. If there was ever any trouble, they took care of the trouble. We were well protected. I can't say enough for that. Basically, we just drove the trucks to whatever destination we had.*

I just wanted to pass along these few words so you would know you and your efforts were noticed and appreciated.

James Henderson

## Articles about benefits belong in The Aviator

I take issue with Andrew. Belmont's letter about VA benefits not being included in OUR Aviator.

The VHPA Aviator is a source of war stories, which to some stimulate negative reflections.

I have pilots from my own unit who insist PTSD is not a valid diagnosis. I have seen the effects of PTSD on my fellow aviators and crewmembers.

If having information about VA benefits run in The VHPA Aviator saves one person or helps anyone to get their due, is that not worth it? Those individuals who think they

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## Letters

do not deserve some type of benefits because of pride or peer pressure are missing out.

Does sharing information about topics like PTSD, VA benefits, and available health care not directly enhance our cohesiveness? As we are getting older and wiser, do we not realize that the esprit de corps we had and the traditions of valor so many years ago are not lessened by broadening our scope to include issues that help support our brothers?

Frank H. Hichens  
Life Member

## Tracing family tree can be enlightening

During our last reunion a classmate of mine (Class 66-23) told me that he had just finished tracing his family tree back nearly to medieval times.

Apparently, many churches kept excellent records of births and deaths within families. As a result of his search, he discovered that his family name had been changed several times by his ancestors.

The oldest record that he could find showed that his original family name was Shat'Ena'Hatte. He found several variations like Cl'Eanina'Hatte, Du'Pana'Lowde'Ina'Hatte, and Lo'Sta'Lowde'Ina'Hatte. Conspicuously missing from the names he found was Igo'Ttacleen'Hatte.

Now my classmate is wondering what it would take to update all of his old records to reflect his actual name.

Research has shown that in the majority of cases the older family names are based in some fact about the family such as "Jackson" being the Son of Jack and "Rippy" being the revised spelling of "Ripped'Won" who was well known to have had a flatulence problem.

So . . . finally to my question, can my friend update all of his old records? Any advice that you can give or that any of our other members can give will be appreciated.

R.M. "Mike" Jackson

## Reduce reunion expenses, change date to spring, fall

Reference: Pilot enjoys reunions, but Phoenix "spendy" — *The VHPA Aviator*, May/June 2007

Way to go George! This has been talked about for years, but it was finally published.

As we retire and get on fixed incomes there will probably be less and less attendance. Maybe a change to the spring or fall would help instead of being in the middle of the vacation season.

It seems strange that our bank account keeps growing and the cost of reunions keeps going up. I keep hearing that the money is to take care of the life members; they must think they are going to live for a long time.

I love seeing you guys, but have other things to spend money on, too!

John Parker  
Gambler Guns 1968-69  
Blue Max 1972  
Ruthless Riders 1972-73

*Continued on Page 5*

## Former Vietnam 'Headhunter' flies in Iraq

I'm a former "Headhunter" with A Troop 1/9th Cav in 1969 and returned home on March 22 after a tour with the 3rd Army in the Middle East. I was commander of an airplane detachment, flying three C-12s. We logged 2,100 flight hours on seven pilots in six months.

The detachment was comprised of 10 ARNG members from five states. Baghdad was our primary destination, landing there 97 times in six months. We landed at various airports in Iraq a total of 175 times.

CW5 Chuck Adkinson  
"Apache 34"  
Class 68-521



Chuck Adkinson in front of aircraft one day before DEROS'ing from Middle East tour.



## Letters

*Continued from Page 4*

# Aviator, Loach get back together

As some of you already know and the rest of you are about to find out, I have been reunited with the very Loach I flew in Vietnam.

Back in 1968 when I was a pilot in the 2nd Brigade Aviation Section of the 101st Airborne Division at LZ Sally, we traded our OH-23s for a single OH-6. Don't tell Chris Noel, but I'd found a new love! The Loach (No. 66-17795) and I went through the usual boring, thrilling, and hairy moments together. You guys know how that is.

But in December, I DEROSed, and 795 and I went our separate ways.

In 1999, my buddy Bill Savedge told me 795 was alive and still flying with the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation outside of Atlanta. I caught a flight out from the Left Coast, and, sure enough, the aircraft looks better now than when we got it brand new in VN.

### Flyable aircraft on display

I'm now a Georgia resident and a life member of AAHF. We display our impressive, flyable aircraft collection at 8-10 air shows a year, so far only in the eastern portion of the country due to the high blade time involved.

Part of the mission of the Foundation is to connect the American public with the U.S. Army's aircrew members and machines. We have three major ways in which we do this.

First of all, the Sky Soldiers, using four identical, specially painted, AH-1F Cobras are now the official aerial demonstration team for the U.S. Army.

Second, we are the only civilian organization to have an exemption from the FAA to provide rides to the public in former U.S. Army UH-1 Hueys.

I could say a lot more about these two great programs, but this letter is mainly about our air cav combat assault demonstration, which shows the people what you and I did on virtually a daily basis in Vietnam around 40 years ago. This demo combines two Cobras, two Hueys, "my" Loach, an L-19 Bird Dog, a CV-2 Caribou, an OV-1 Mohawk, plus lots of pyro, music, narration and re-enactors for a stirring rendition of a typical air cav combat assault.

### Pilot emotional about operation

When I'm an aircrew member, it's lots of fun and I'm pretty busy keeping track of all those aircraft. But when I see the operation from the ground, I get pretty emotional. So do a lot of the audience members.

The latest combat assault program we did was for

## Looking for pictures of Richard F. McCoy Jr.

Richard F. McCoy Jr. was in flight class 66-21 at Fort Wolters and 66-23 at Fort Rucker. He served in Vietnam with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment from March 1967 to March 1968.

He became notorious by hijacking United Airlines Flight 855 on April 7, 1972, and parachuting out the back door with \$500,000 in ransom money. He was quickly caught and put in jail.

More on this story later. Right now, I have a need for pictures of Richard F. McCoy Jr. from flight school and/or from Vietnam. If you are able and willing to help, please let me know.

Gary Roush

Week of Eagles at Fort Campbell, Ky. I was to fill the role of one of our VC re-enactors for the first time. Black pajamas, conical straw hat, plastic AK-47, the whole bit.

As I was walking out to take my place on the "battlefield," it occurred to me I was about to be attacked by my own Loach!

If you've got a similar story, we'd all like to hear it.

Curt Knapp

## Organization shows support for troops

The first time I heard the words "Welcome Home" was at the dedication of the Vietnam Memorial in 1982.

One goal I set was to make sure veterans of future conflicts didn't have to wait that long to realize their service was recognized and appreciated.

Fast-forward about 25 years and I'm the treasurer of Support Our Troops Inc. Although I didn't start this endeavor, I prepared the application and secured our 501(c) 3 status from the IRS.

Support Our Troops Inc. is a nonpolitical organization dedicated to supporting our troops who are serving or who have served in Afghanistan and Iraq. We currently send care packages overseas, we donate to other organizations to support the wounded, and we provide moral support through cards and letters.

Another important function we perform is meeting R&R flights that arrive daily at the DFW airport. There aren't many dry eyes among the hundreds of people who line the hall as the soldiers embark. I shake hands and say: "Welcome Home."

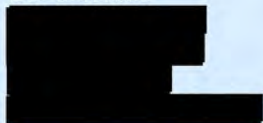
I urge all of you to support our troops. Through VHPA

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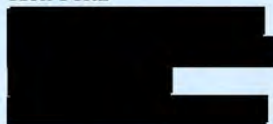


## VHPA Chapters

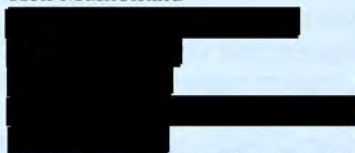
### Arizona Chapter Bill Sorenson



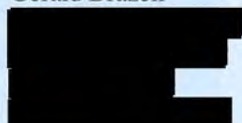
### California Chapter North Ken Fritz



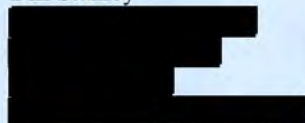
### VHPA of Florida Ken Mulholland



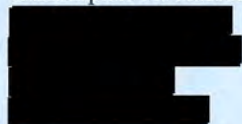
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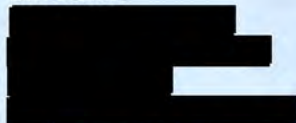
### Georgia Chapter Bill Stanley



### Mid South Chapter Christopher A. Horton



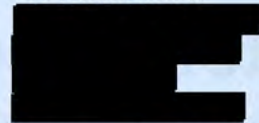
### North Carolina Chapter Bill Doran



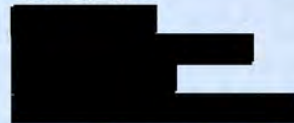
### Ohio River LZ Chapter John Flanagan



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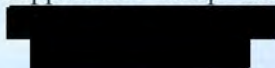
## Letters

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we can support our generation of helicopter pilots, but our new combat soldiers need your help too. If you don't have a charitable organization in mind, I can assure you 100 percent of your donations to Support Our Troops Inc. will get to the troops. We're all volunteers, and our members donate all administrative expenses.

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Support Our Troops Inc.



Feel free to call me at (940) 262-1106 or visit our website at [www.supportourtroopstexas.com](http://www.supportourtroopstexas.com) to see learn more.

Quinn N. Sowell

Class 67-23

D Troop, 3/5 Cav 1968-69

## Many Vietnam pilots never got medals

It was a big night in the 128th Assault Helicopter Company in July 1967. During a rocket attack, I took a piece of shrapnel in my leg while sprinting for the bunker.

After all clear, I went to the med station by the 128th and they pulled it out, slapped a bandage on it, and I went

back to my hooch.

I never did hear anything more about it. So there went my Purple Heart!

Not too many years ago, while on a visit back home, I went to church and met a lady who had started going to that church. She had been an Army Nurse in 1967 in Bien Hoa.

When she heard I had been a helicopter pilot, she started telling me about some patients she had had who kept talking about a crazy helicopter pilot who had landed in a minefield to medevac them out. I cracked up and had to explain to her that I remembered the action very well. I was the pilot.

Looking back, it really might not have been the brightest thing I have ever done, but I remember on the first pick-up, guys were trying to help buddies over to the helicopter and they were stepping on mines.

After the second one, I had them relay a message that no one was to move and that I would hover around and pick up the rest of the injured where they were. No one was to move till the mine-clearing team got there to help the uninjured move out of the area.

I cannot remember the officer who was my copilot that day, but he was commissioned and getting some flight time on his record to get flight pay.

He wanted to do a write-up on the mission and put us in for a DFC or Bronze Star. Never heard about that one, either.

I have always let it go, since many of our comrades did much more and never made it back.

Barry Grimm



# Taps

## LeRoy B. Applegate

LeRoy B. Applegate, 72, of Cocoa, Fla., died Dec. 27 at Vista Manor Nursing Center in Titusville, Fla.

He was a member of flight school Class 62-2W and served two tours in Vietnam, with the 228th ASHB and the 271st ASHC.

A 20-year Army veteran, Applegate was awarded two Purple Heart Medals and a Bronze Star Medal.

He worked at the NCO Club at Patrick Air Force Base, Fla.

Applegate is survived by his wife of 34 years, Ina Applegate, and four sons, Christopher, Stephen, Patrick and Leonard Applegate.

## Jack Cranford

Jack Cranford, 86, of Santa Rosa Beach, Fla., died April 10.

He graduated from flight school with Class 47-1.

During his tour in Vietnam, Cranford served as commander of the 227th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, at An Khe. He was commander when the battalion deployed to Vietnam from Fort Benning, Ga., and remained commander during his Vietnam tour in 1965-66.

## Richard Edwin Glasgow

Richard Edwin Glasgow, 76, died Feb. 21 at his home in Olympia, Wash.

He enlisted in the Army after high school and served a tour in Korea.

Glasgow was a member of Army flight school Class 55-Q, and served two tours in Vietnam: In 1962-63 with the 33rd Transportation Company and 118th Aviation Company, and in 1967-68 with the 200th ASHC.

When he retired after 30 years of service, Glasgow was a master aviator and was ranked CW4.

During his military career, he received awards for superior achievements, including the Bronze Star Medal and the Meritorious Service Medal.

While stationed in Germany, he met and married

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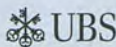
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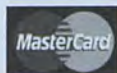
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# Taps

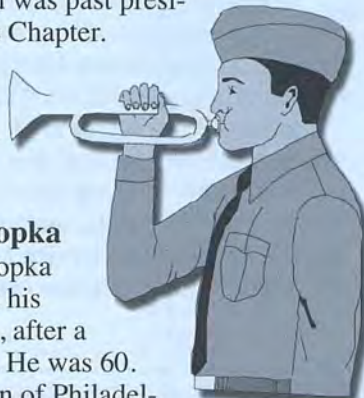
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Ursula Anna Maria Zientek on Feb. 6, 1954.

After leaving the military, Glasgow worked for Wilson and Graves homes and then ventured out on his own, running his own cabinet and hardwood floor installation business.

He was a lifetime member of the Flying Bear Association. He also was a lifetime member of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association and was past president of the Washington State Chapter.

Glasgow is survived by his wife of 52 years, Ursula Glasgow; and their children, Karl, Helene and Ursula.



## Robert Alan "Bob" Konopka

Robert Alan "Bob" Konopka died of lung cancer May 7 at his home in Weeki Wachee, Fla., after a brief battle with lung cancer. He was 60.

He lived in his hometown of Philadelphia until enlisting in the Army on April 13, 1967.

After completing flight training, he was commissioned a warrant officer and assigned to the 118th Assault Helicopter Company at Bien Hoa as a pilot. He served in Vietnam from July 1, 1968, to June 30, 1969.

Konopka received the Purple Heart Medal for wounds that ultimately led to his release from active military duty. He also was recipient of the Army Commendation Medal and the Air Medal.

He served in the Army reserve until he was honorably discharged in 1978.

Konopka worked as an aircraft inspector for various international airlines and traveled the world. He always

called himself an "aviation prostitute," and would do anything he could in aviation to make a buck.

Residing in south Florida for most of his adult life, new business interests took him to Victorville, Calif., where he stayed until his move to Weeki Wachee in February 2005.

Surviving are his wife, Robin Lee, of Weeki Wachee; daughters Tracy Stibitz of Laramie, Wyo., and Raquel Russo of Sunrise, Fla.; a son, Randie Swanberg of New York City.

## Charles "Charlie" J. Rains

The VHPA has lost a good friend and fellow Vietnam veteran.

Command Sgt. Maj. Charles "Charlie" J. Rains died June 10 at his home after a two-year fight with cancer.

Rains was the executive director of the Vietnam Helicopter Crew Members Association for 13 years. During those years, he worked closely with the VHPA by exchanging information on potential members and attending many of our reunions.

He was a crew chief in Vietnam with A/229 AHB, 1 CAV. Rains was liked and respected by everyone who got to know him and that was hundreds of Vietnam veterans. He will be greatly missed.

Rains was a graduate of Memphis Catholic High School and attended Memphis State University, where he was a member of Phi Kappa Theta Fraternity and the Newman Club.

During his service in Vietnam, Rains received the Bronze Star Medal, 3 Army Commendation Medals, 24 Air Medals, 2 Army Achievement Medals, the Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, and Republic of Vietnam Civil Action Medal.

He was a 2000 graduate of the Sergeant Major Academy and recently retired after 30 years with the Army Reserve.

Rains was the recipient of the Legion of Merit Award,

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## War Story DVD is great

I just got the DVD our photographer developed of the War Stories and Historical Presentations from the Phoenix reunion and it is fantastic.

There are 29 war stories, plus very informative presentations about the Texas Tech Vietnam Archives and how to do unit histories by Mike Law, Mike Sheurman and Doug Womack.

This one is definitely a keeper. It will make a great Christmas present for those who want to know about your Vietnam experiences.

By the time you read this, HQ will have DVDs ready for sale, so pick up the phone and call (800) 505-VHPA (8472) and order yours today.

Gary Roush  
webmaster@vhpa.org

**Richard Yood, MAS**  
Gladiator 21

  
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# Taps

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Meritorious Service Award and Medal, the Military Outstanding Volunteer Award Certificate, the National Defense Service Medal, the Armed Forces Reserve Medal and the NCO Professional Development ribbon.

He was a member of the First Calvary Association and the Vietnam Helicopter Crew Members Association.

He is survived by his wife, Jo Anne Rains; his daughter, Jennifer Weirich of Olive Branch, Miss.; and a son, Jeff Rains of Marion, Ark.

## Gregory A. Sedgwick

Gregory A. Sedgwick, 58, of Horse Shoe, N.C., was killed April 16 when a large pine tree toppled onto his truck during a windstorm.

He was a graduate of Ohio State University.

Sedgwick working at Rockwell International before moving to Troy, Mich., where he retired from Arvin Meritor to return to Horse Shoe.

He was a members of flight school Classes 68-503 and 68-3. Sedgwick served with D/1/10 Cav, 4th Infantry Division as a helicopter pilot in 1968-69.

Sedgwick was a lifetime member of the VHPA.

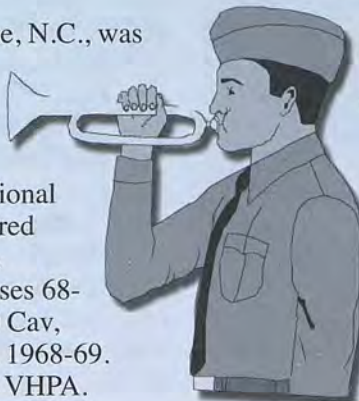
He is survived by his wife of 14 years, Margo D. Sedgwick; and two sons, Mark Sedgwick of Houston and Marc Campbell of Troy, Mich.

## Daniel E. "Shifty" Shifflet

Daniel E. "Shifty" Shifflet, 64, of Prospect, Ohio, died April 28 of cancer.

He was a member of flight school Class 70-9. In Vietnam, he served with the 174th Assault Helicopter Company, the 196th Light Infantry Brigade and F/8 Cavalry, where he flew with the call sign "Blueghost 13."

A fellow pilot in Vietnam recalled Shifflet "quickly established himself as an excellent pilot and was respected by all. Shifty was known for his 'weather checks' after which he mysteriously always needed to rearm with ammunition and grenades."



On a mission north of Chu Lai, he was shot down and seriously injured with numerous injuries and broken bones, which required an extensive stay at a military hospital.

Shifflet then left the Army, went to college and on to law school. He had a very successful law practice.

He is survived by his wife, Patty Shifflet.

## Charles S. Wingate

Charles S. Wingate died Jan 8 in his Mandarin, Fla., home. He was 76.

Wingate joined the Army at the age of 17 in 1948. He served in Japan as a Military Policeman until the Korean War began.

He was a rifleman, squad leader and platoon sergeant in the 23rd Infantry Regiment in Korea.

Wingate rose to the rank of master sergeant with the 508th Airborne Infantry before attending Field Artillery OCS in 1955.

In 1956, he attended Army Flight School at Gary Air Force Base in San Marcos and Fort Rucker.

He flew the Otter in the United States and in Germany. In 1960, he trained to fly the Caribou before returning for his second tour in Germany 1962-66.

He transitioned into helicopters in Germany before being sent to command A Troop, 1/9th Cav, 1st Air Cavalry Division in Vietnam in 1966-67.

After attending Command and General Staff in 1969-70 he returned to Vietnam to fly with Long Trip, the Command Aviation Company, and served in the 1st Aviation Brigade headquarters.

After retiring as a colonel, after 32 years of service, he went to work at Hughes Helicopter, which became McDonnell Douglas Helicopters before being purchased by Boeing.

He was active in the Episcopal Church and in community efforts such as helping to build homes for the needy and providing relief to victims of Hurricane Katrina.

He is survived by his wife of 52 years, Betty, three sons and two daughters.

## VHPA Scholarship Fund increases

The Phoenix Reunion is only a memory, but the contributions to the VHPA Scholarship Fund by the pilots attending it will continue to provide scholarships for years to come.

In all, \$8,456 was given, \$4,013 during early registration, \$1,015 from the Poker Tournament held at the hotel and \$3,428 passing the cav hats during the annual business meeting.

Thanks to the guys from D/3/5 for helping out with the collecting.

We now have more than \$80,000 in our scholarship

account with AAAA. For every \$28,500 we have as of Sept. 1, VHPA draws enough interest to fund a \$1,000 merit scholarship given in the name of our Association to a direct descendant of a dues-current member.

This year two will be awarded.

If we can raise another \$5,000 in the next month, VHPA will award three in July 2008.

I want to thank each of you who gave to this program.

If you feel the need to donate, go online to [www.vhpa.org](http://www.vhpa.org) and make a donation to this program.

Mike Sheuerman  
Scholarship Committee



# Reunion

## *Many members at Phoenix first-time attendees*

DANA YOUNG  
NATIONAL REUNION COMMITTEE

Those who braved the heat over the Fourth of July weekend in Phoenix experienced another memorable VHPA Reunion.

We had more than 70 members who attended their first reunion and they shared that experience with more than 100 family members and friends they brought with them.

The intent of having reunion sites throughout the United States is to give members who are not financially or physically able to travel an opportunity to join us at a location closer to home.

In Phoenix almost 15 percent of the attendees were "first-timers."

Feedback from reunion attendees has been positive.

"The fireworks were the best I have ever seen" was a reoccurring statement. The Veteran's Forum and the Spouse Forum were overwhelming successes and will be

held again in San Antonio. Those who attended the Lee Greenwood concert had nothing but rave reviews.

The other two mainstays of the reunion, the business meeting and the banquet also got positive comments.

Because the Marriott in Phoenix was not located close to any local attractions, we provided the selection of tours and activities that members could, if they wished, select from if they desired to leave the facility. Of the seven tours available, the Boeing Apache Tour, River Rafting and the Hot Air Balloon ride got the highest ratings.

San Antonio is our next reunion site and will be held July 1-6, 2008. As we have done for the past three years during the banquet, we pulled a name from the box of surveys collected during the reunion to give a complimentary room for five nights at the San Antonio reunion. The name drawn was Paul Nelson of Tucson, Ariz.

The next issue of The VHPA Aviator will have details about the 2008 Reunion. The Welcome Reception will be on July 2 and the Banquet on July 5. We will fill in the blanks in the next issue.

# Survey

## *Results indicate many members plan to attend 2008 reunion*

DANA YOUNG  
NATIONAL REUNION COMMITTEE

Those who dropped their completed survey into the box at registration were automatically entered into the drawing for the complimentary room for five nights at the San Antonio Reunion in 2008.

Paul Nelson, Tucson, Ariz., was the winner of that drawing.

There were more than 570 members attending the Phoenix Reunion. Fewer than 200 members participated in the survey or were eligible for the drawing. Next year we will include the survey in the envelope with the tickets in an attempt to get a larger response.

Some of the results of that survey:

- More than 85 percent of respondents plan to attend next year
- More than 90 percent thought the hotel was fairly priced
- About 50 percent felt the events were fairly priced
- A little more than 50 percent favored the Fourth of July for the annual reunion date. The rest were 30 percent for Labor Day, 15 percent for "No Holiday."
- The only "tour" mentioned or requested for San

Antonio was a trip to the Alamo

Many members did not like the isolation of the resort this year and the limited opportunities for food.

The San Antonio Reunion will be from July 1-6. The tentative evening schedule is as follows:

- July 1 (Tuesday) — Early Bird reception
- July 2 (Wednesday) — Welcome Reception
- July 3 (Thursday) — Vince Vance
- July 4 (Friday) — Knibbe Ranch
- July 5 (Saturday) — Business Meeting, Banquet

The "typical" member would be expected to arrive on July 2 and depart on July 6, spending four nights at the hotel, which is located on the River Walk. The hotel will not be the sole source of meals for those that like options.

Vendor room, seminars, mini-reunions, War Stories, Historical Presentation Forum, Golf, etc. will be scheduled during the day.

We have not priced events yet but, for planning purposes, Knibbe Ranch on July 4 will be about \$85 per person for transportation, dinner, fireworks, and a variety of entertainment (rodeo, armadillo races, mechanical bull, etc.) The buses will depart the hotel about 6 p.m. and return to the hotel at 11 p.m., so the "heat" issue, if there

*Continued on Page 11*



## Reunion briefs

### Poker tournament a success

Not bad for the first go-around! The Texas Hold em' Poker Tournament raised approximately \$1,000 for the VHPA Scholarship Fund.

We had hoped for a larger response, but it was not a VHPA-sponsored event and, perhaps, should have been better publicized.

Next year, in San Antonio, I hope to have the event listed on the registration form so attendees to the reunion can choose to play in advance and send their entry fee along with their other fees.

I would particularly like to give a great deal of thanks to Pat Ewing and Vance Blaylock for acting as dealers for the event. Both of them did a super job.

I observed their actions on several occasions and can say they were outgoing and humorous and made the games fun for all. Thank you so much.

Income from the tournament was split 50/50 half for prize money for the winners, some of whom donated the money to the scholarship fund, and the balance to the scholarship fund.

Look forward to doing it again in San Antonio.

— Jack Salm

### Welcome back, Chapters

Finally, the chapters are back under the national umbrella. Hopefully, we will operate even closer than we did in the past.

All chapters operate independently and are not supervised by the national organization. It is hoped that there will be a better exchange of information and cross correspondence between the two entities.

Please send any articles, information or other newsworthy items to me for enclosure in The VHPA Aviator. Cutoff dates for submission are the first week of the lead month (i.e., July/August is July 9, September/October is Sept. 9, etc.). Welcome back.

— Jack Salm



Singer Lee Greenwood visits with VHPA members before his concert at the Phoenix reunion.



Ken Fritz (left) and Bob Allen meet

## Minutemen share call sign

At the 2007 Reunion in Phoenix, "Minuteman 17" Ken Fritz (1968-69) met up with "Minuteman 17" Bob Allen (1971).

It was the first time the 176th Assault Helicopter Company has had more than one pilot with the same call sign at the reunion.

Allen and Fritz had been in email contact prior to the reunion and were looking forward to meeting.

Besides being the first reunion for Bob Allen, it was the first for "Musket 31" Gary Williams (1968-69).

Williams and Fritz had lots of history to catch up on — they hadn't seen each other since 1969.

— Ken Fritz

## Survey taken by fewer than half

*Continued from Page 10*

is one, should be minimized.

The choice: Do we provide a quality event on July 4 or do we have the members fare for themselves? The local area will be sold out and we have not identified a site where we can put 1,800-2,500 people in one place to watch fireworks for free and let them easily get something to eat and drink.

Vince Vance will be in the \$20- \$30 range and those

who want a free night can do it in lieu of the concert, if they desire.

Banquet and registration costs have not been finalized yet. Band? Speaker? More than 60 percent of those who responded want entertainment, but entertainment that is not so loud.

We still have time to make minor changes to the program. If you have suggestions or requests, email me at [dmyoung@vhpa.org](mailto:dmyoung@vhpa.org)



# Directory

## *Three versions offered to members this year*

**GARY ROUSH**  
DIRECTORY EDITOR

The 2007 Membership Directory will be published in three forms this year.

They are the traditional paper directory (minus the geographical index); a CD directory, including email addresses and phone numbers; and an online directory on a secure password protected website.

The CD version of the Directory will become primary in 2008 and the online directory will become primary in 2010.

There are several advantages to the CD and online directories: First, they do not take up much space and, second, they contain more information than the paper directory and, in the case of the online directory, it is always up to date.

Phone numbers and email addresses and the ability to search by first name and call sign are not available in the paper directory. The CD also has a high-tech search fea-

ture called "Soundex," which helps you find names even if you do not know the exact spelling.

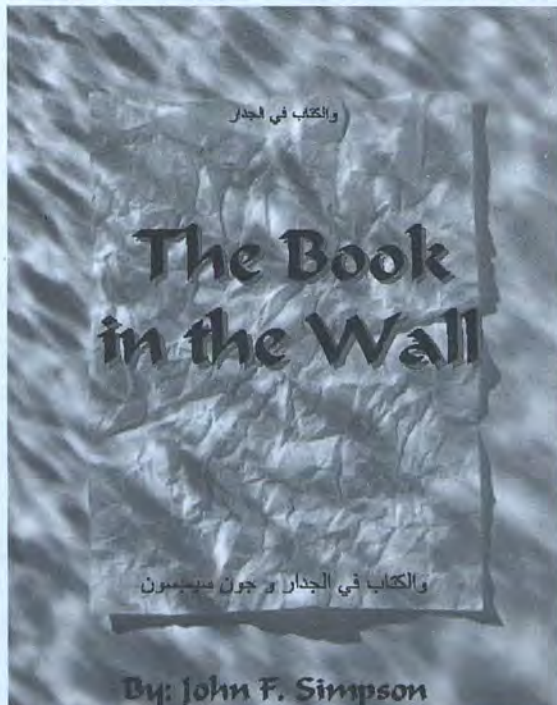
Even the concern about not being able to flip through the pages like you can with a paper directory is available on the CD and website because there is an Adobe Acrobat file of the actual paper directory available so you can electronically flip through the pages.

Another advantage of this feature is the ability to print out one or more pages of the actual paper directory if you want parts of it in hard copy. You can search by call sign, unit, flight class, branch of service, and of course first and last name. And, finally, the CD and online directories do not kill trees.

Since there is extra space on the CD and online, we have included the full text of the history section and past newsletters and magazines back to February 1993. We plan to continue these additions with other information as we develop it. This extra information alone is worth switching.

Although this extra information in PDF format can be

**Have you ever wondered what the world would be like if we lost the war on terrorism? This new book by the author of *Ten Months in Iran* exposes one very possible and terrifying possibility.**



## The Book in the Wall

**The Book in the Wall** takes place in the year 2084 and presents a nightmare version of the world to come if we loose the war on Islamic terrorism. It is a startling and powerful novel that creates an imaginary world where the government outlaws technology it considers offensive and punishes the most minor of offences with a public execution. The story is completely convincing and draws heavily on contemporary events. The story is an insightful prophetic view of the world our grandchildren may have to endure if we do not act now to prevent the nightmare from becoming a reality.

**The Book in the Wall is available online from Barnes and Nobel (BN.com), Amazon.com, and from the publisher (Rubricpublications.com). It can also be ordered at Barnes and Nobel book stores.**



# Review

## *American Warrior aptly titled book about Vietnam*

**AMERICAN WARRIOR** by John C. Bahnsen

If ever a book was aptly titled, this is the one. *American Warrior* is an autobiography by John C. Bahnsen, a graduate of West Point, Class of 1956 and a retired brigadier general.

"Doc," as he is known to those closest to him, always wanted to be a soldier. He is a dual-rated Army aviator.

The book is the true story of his two tours in Vietnam, though it does touch briefly on his life prior to and after his service in Vietnam.

Originally slotted to serve as a Caribou pilot in Vietnam, Doc realized rotary-wing aviators were fighting the real aerial combat war.

Wanting to fly "guns," he found a sympathetic ear and was able to wrangle a transfer to the 118th Assault Helicopter Company, where Doc served as platoon leader of the "Bandits," the B-model attack helicopter platoon.

What a combat leader. As you read the exploits of Doc in the Bandits, you start asking yourself: "Is this guy for real?"

As you read the firsthand comments of those who served with him, you will tell yourself: "This guy is for real."

Highly decorated during his 8-9 months as platoon leader, he made sure all those under his command also were given decorations for their valor. His last several months of his first tour were as an assistant S-3 on staff at the 12th Combat Aviation Group as a major.

After a year and a half of duty at the Pentagon, he was hand picked by then-Col. George C Patton III, commander of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, to lead his air cavalry troop.

A protégé of Patton, Doc was known as a no-nonsense combat leader who believed in finding the enemy and not letting go. As the 39th colonel of the Blackhorse, Patton gave Doc the freedom he wanted and the results spoke for themselves.

Later, Doc was given command of the 1st Squadron and continued to excel. He exceeded the exploits of his first tour, if that is possible.

Again you will ask yourself the same question as before: "Is this guy for real?"

Those who served with him say: "Yes, sir."

Doc is not perfect. He does not hide his shortcoming, though they are few and far between.

As a person, he admits he has made mistakes. But as a combat leader, he always measured up and was not found to be lacking.

The first-person narratives in this book are fantastic. Those who served with the author speak well of him, even those he was forced to relieve for not getting the mission accomplished.

Every commander he worked for, every man who served with him, every man who served under his command, say the same thing: "If I have to go to war, I want Doc Bahnsen with me."

This is great story. The author truly is an American Warrior.

He earned 18 decorations for valor, including the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star with four oak leaf clusters, the Distinguished Flying Cross with two oak leaf clusters, the Bronze Star Medal for Valor with two oak leaf clusters, the Air Medal for Valor with two oak leaf clusters, the Army Commendation Medal for Valor two awards of the Purple Heart Medal and three Republic of Vietnam decorations for valor.

He also has another 48 Air Medals for flight in combat.

I highly recommend this book to all Vietnam helicopter pilots and anyone who recognizes and appreciates bravery. Enjoy the read.

And, as Doc would say: "Fight fiercely."

— Mike Sheuerman

## Directory available in multiple formats

*Continued from Page 12*

read using McIntosh computers, the search program for the CD directory will not work on Macs, but will work online.

If you elected to receive the directory on CD last year, that option is still in effect for 2007.

If you received a paper directory last year and want the 2007 Directory on CD, please contact HQ at [HQ@vhpa.org](mailto:HQ@vhpa.org) or call (800) 505-VHPA (8472) and tell them of your selection.

If you want to receive both the paper and CD directories, please notify HQ. There is a \$20 fee to receive both. If you do not want to receive either the paper or CD directories and just use the online version, let HQ know that, too.

If you do not want your phone number or email address to appear in the CD or online directory, please notify HQ.

The cut off date for new information or corrections for the 2007 Membership Directory was Aug. 15.



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# Review

## *Blue Max — Missions and Memories a great read*

Blue Max — Missions and Memories

By N. G. Brown

Outskirts Press, Inc.

Denver, CO

Paperback, 205 pages,

Photos, 28 pages

Our memories are definitely strange, yet wonderful things. After waiting and think about his Vietnam experiences for over 30 years, N.G. (N.? & G.?) Brown decided to complete his memories before they became any more bizarre! Good decision!

You will enjoy very much his short stories from flight school through his postcard RLO period as he remembers the interesting and oft wild missions with the Blue Max from the DMZ south to Saigon.

And, as he plainly states in the very beginning, "So, if you read this book and remember something differently than I presented it, just keep your mouth shut." Ha, my sentiments, exactly!

N.G. progresses "normally" through flight school, through Cobra transition and on to Vietnam to fly B and C model Hueys as the Blue Max transitions to the Cobra.

And, during his tour in Vietnam, the Blue Max moves from Camp Evans all the way South to Quan Loi, in tents, of course. He very crisply and matter-of-fact like tells

about his missions and memories in a way that "gets the job done."

You will enjoy his humor and assessment of people and situations, which will make the book a short, read of only one or two evenings. I did it on a 5-hour flight to Hawaii, with no problem.

All through the book at the beginning of each chapter, of which there are 20, Brown has inserted poignant and germane quotes.

My favorite is at the very beginning by Richard Nixon, "No event in American history is more misunderstood than the Vietnam War. It was misreported then, and it is misrepresented now. Rarely have so many people been so wrong about so much. Never have the consequences of their misunderstanding been so tragic." I think this strikes a common cord among most of us Vietnam vets.

Buy and read "Blue Max-Missions and Memories" by N.G. Brown and you will definitely be swept back some 30 odd years to your favorite memories about your experiences flying in Vietnam. If not, you have definitely begun to lose your memories and sense of humor . . . TINS (This is no \*#@&)

Tom Payne

Vietnam

1966-67 & 1970-71

## Interested in starting a chapter? Here's how

Are you interested in starting a chapter in your area?

Chapters are separate and independent organizations not under VHPA control, whose goals and membership criteria are similar to that of the VHPA.

The VHPA currently recognizes 11 active chapters, all of which share information and ideas for mutual benefit.

If you are in an area that has no chapter and you would like to have more than just the once a year national reunion maybe a local chapter could fill the bill. It is not all that difficult.

True, there is some paperwork involved, but it is not overwhelming. Contact me at [johnsalmjr@aol.com](mailto:johnsalmjr@aol.com) and I will get you started.

A list of prospective members in your area is a starting point.

In 1998, I got the list for Washington State, contacted all the prospects and started the Washington State Chapter with 85 members. We now have 150 members.

If I can do it, you can too. Let me know what area you want to cover and I will get you a list. Do not take away from existing chapters.

Let me know and I will assist you in your effort. Also, we would like to invite the Las Vegas and National (D.C.) Chapters to reorganize and rejoin us.

Jack Salm

Chapter liaison officer

# Attend the San Antonio reunion in 2008



# Reunion

## *Class 66-11 Green Hats hold event in San Antonio*

The Green Hats, flight school Class 66-11, and some graduates of Class 66-13, held their second reunion in San Antonio Texas, on May 17-20.

Without the tenacity of Ed and Anita Duke, who spent hours and hours finding the class members, neither reunion would have taken place. Please except our thanks.

The class first met in Fort Worth in May 2006.

The men met and paid tribute to those who were MIA and those who DAT.

A trip to Fort Wolters brought back memories and a shock at seeing the old base. We have all changed and so has Fort Wolters, as it is now somewhat of an industrial park.

Later, most enjoyed themselves at the renowned Billy Bobs. The weekend ended with a nice dinner and all agreed the next gathering would be in San Antonio in two years.

Plans were changed when it became known that the VHPA National Convention would be held in San Antonio in 2008. The gathering in San Antonio began when the group caravanned from the Embassy Suite Hotel to the bedroom community of Bulverde.

There they were greeted and treated to a scrumptious Tex-Mex buffet. Those attending were introduced to some of the culture that makes this area inviting.

Each man was given a memories bag. Inside they found items that represented different aspects of flight school. As they drew out different objects each would tell his memory of the real item. Included in the bags were toy helicopters, the now famous "pink slip," a dust bunny and so forth. Laughter set the tone for the evening as all had many stories to tell.

Friday morning became serious when another tribute was made to our missing comrades.

Afterwards, it was off again, this time driving through the Texas hill country, still abundant with wild flowers.

After a picnic lunch and a tour of the Becker Vineyard, the group headed for the Admiral Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg. Most enjoyed the military history and then slipped out to stroll arid shop in this quaint old Ger-

man town.

After a Pleasant German dinner, the group headed back to San Antonio where conversation, drinks and laughter went on until the early hours of the morning.

Saturday most rested until lunch, when the group again met, this time at a local Chinese restaurant, and indulged in different types of cuisine.

Charles Qualline, author of "Flying Alligators and Silver Spurs," spoke about the importance of memories. He encouraged the men to take the time, as they are all getting older, to write down or record their memories: The good, the bad, and the ugly memories. Each one of us must tell our children, and our grand children, let them know about our life, tell them about ourselves, for our experiences will never be found in a history book.

The day continued with a guided tour of the Alamo. The men were honored as the guide recognized them and their service. However, the tour ended with tears when a woman came up and said, "Thank you. People do remember."

A stroll, drinks, and a ride on the River Walk brought us to the last event of the weekend, the stage production of Fiesta del Norte in the River Theatre. Fiesta del Norte highlights the diversified cultures, in song and dance, that make up the San Antonio area.

Sunday, after many goodbyes, we went our separate ways, promising to meet again in 2009. We may meet on a cruise, or in Maine, or take another trip down memory lane at Fort Rucker. Wherever we meet, we know we will be able to renew old friendships, laugh, talk and have a good time.

If you started flight school with Class 66-11 or know of anyone who did, would you please contact me. You may not want to take part in a reunion, but you are part of our memories and we would like to know how you are doing so many years later. We think about you often.

Until we meet again.

Terry Price

## Interested in advertising in *The VHPA Aviator*?

The cost for a black-and-white ad is only \$125 for a quarter-page ad, \$250 for a half-page ad, and \$500 for a full-page ad

Contact Mike Sheuerman at [membership@vhpa.org](mailto:membership@vhpa.org) for details



# Intruders

## *1st Cavalry's ARA saves the day before VC attack*

JIM FORD

It was early October 1966 and units of the 1st Cav were involved in Operation Thayer, a search-and-destroy operation in an area just north of the coastal city of Qui Nhon in South Vietnam.

One of those units was A Battery, 2/20 Artillery (ARA), my unit, and I was the battery operations officer. Our C model Hueys with forty-eight 2.75-inch rockets had been very busy supporting the ground troops during the operation.

From the time the 1st Cavalry Division arrived in country in October 1965, this area was one where there was always a lot of VC activity and one where the Cav had seen a lot of action. Periodically, units of the division would move into the area, do S&D missions and leave. Then a few weeks or months later other units would return and do it all over again.

### **Intelligence indicated VC division**

During Operation Thayer, there had been considerable contact with the enemy and intelligence gathered from captured prisoners indicated the equivalent of a VC division was operating within the area. While interrogating the most recent captives, three of them indicated a heavy mortar attack against the LZ was to take place this particular night. They confirmed their unit had been practicing for the night operation for several days.

Come nightfall, all personnel at the LZ were on high alert and our battery was on standby with instructions that, if a mortar attack occurred, the aircraft were to get airborne and destroy the enemy weapons and personnel. Not a big deal. We did that all of the time.

The problem this particular night was the monsoon season had started and it was raining extremely hard with zero visibility. We were concerned that even if the aircraft could get airborne, they probably would not be able to see anything.

At any rate, assuming there would be an attack, crews were in their aircraft with the aircraft "hot" so they could be airborne within the tactical time of two minutes and they were prepared to empty their rocket pods on the bad guys. Of course, the problem this particular night was there was a raging monsoon in progress.

In the operations tent, while operating by flashlight, we kept abreast of the general situation by monitoring three tactical radios.

While we sat and waited there was extensive field artillery firing from a howitzer battery within the LZ. Ordinarily, the artillery didn't bother us, but that night with each "boom" we would all jump — not sure if it was

outgoing or incoming. Then, periodically the sounds of machine guns firing on the perimeter would make us wonder if the enemy had begun an attack.

### **Rain produced steady roar**

Hours into the wait, the heavy rain had continued and the sound of it striking the operations tent produced a steady roar that made it hard to hear the radios.

Finally, one of the radio operators transmitted they had radar reports that approximately 45 people carrying objects were moving around to the north of the LZ.

According to the radio operator, radar could plot the activity, which was good. Also, outposts on the perimeter could hear the intruders. So, we now, at least, knew that somebody was out there.

Once the Fire Direction Center had developed target information, it transmitted a fire mission to our operations and we, in turn, sent it on to the aircraft. The aircraft engines were started but, after seeing they had zero visibility, the platoon leader aborted the mission. So, the wait continued.

Finally, the rain slowed a bit and one of the aircraft commanders volunteered to give it a try. The aircraft was able to get airborne, make a run on the target, dump a load of rockets and get back on the ground — all within 10 minutes. A second and then a third aircraft did the same thing.

At the conclusion of the three missions, we were informed that radar reported no further activity in the area. The outposts confirmed this. We still had to sit and wait. The aircraft were rearmed and the crews continued to stand by at their aircraft.

### **Rain stopped about 6 a.m.**

At roughly 6 a.m. the next morning, the rain had stopped, daylight was on its way and we had not been attacked. We all wondered if, in fact, there was to be an attack or were the enemy captives either wrong or misleading our intelligence people.

With daylight, infantry patrols were dispatched to the area and later in the day we received reports the patrols had discovered mortar positions, unfinished foxholes, blood trails and some enemy wounded. So, obviously an attack had been in the making but, thanks to our brave ARA helicopter crewmembers, it never happened.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The author of this article wrote an account of the above events for his hometown newspaper that night in 1966 when the events were actually occurring. His article was printed in the Napa (Calif.) Register on October 24, 1966. That newspaper article was used as a resource for the above.



# March 18

## *Date remains etched in Air America pilot's memory*

**BEN VAN ETTEN**

There are certain dates in a lifetime of events that stay etched in your memory.

I can vividly remember, for example, my wedding day, where I was the day that JFK was assassinated, and other events important to my family. Another time was March 18, 1972.

I was the pilot on an H-34D helicopter for Air America Inc. It started as a routine flight from Udorn, Thailand, to Pakse, Laos. My passengers were mainly flight crews "dead heading" up-country for a crew rotation. I was scheduled to remain six days in Pakse.

"King" was the call sign of the Air Force airborne controller for search and rescue (SAR) missions in Laos. I was about 10 minutes from landing for refueling in Savanaket, Laos, when "King" broadcasted a message for "any Air America helicopter in the Savanaket area that might be available to help rescue a downed pilot."

### **Air America made many rescues**

Normally the military took care of their own SARs, but Air America made many rescues simply because we were in the area.

Sometimes the Air Force was its own worst enemy because by the time birds were scrambled, briefed, cover provided, MiG cap provided, and authentication of the downed pilot (as if the enemy would stage a fake crash) were made, he'd probably be captured.

On two other occasions I'd picked up a downed crew, moved them to a safe area, and finally the military would make their pickup.

I responded that I could be available, after refueling.

I was given a radio frequency to contact "Sandy 1" once I was back in the air. He would be the on-scene commander directing the rescue operation.

The downed aircraft was an OV-10 forward air controller (FAC) out of Vietnam. It had been shot down by AA over Route 9 (part of the Ho Chi Min Trail) about 40 miles east of Savanaket. The crew was hiding on the east side of the "road," which was alive with massive AA activity, and a quick pickup could avert certain capture by the NVA.

I contacted "Sandy 1" shortly after takeoff and was advised to "head east to Route 9 and take up an orbit, but don't cross Route 9."

"Hotel 70," my call sign, "Rogers." Sandy 1 and Sandy 2 were a flight of A1E Sky Raiders and normally escort the CH-53 (Jolly Green Giant) rescue helicopters.

As I flew closer to the area I could hear Sandy 1 talking to the downed pilot over the UHF guard frequency. He

was OK, but the NVA soldiers were starting to look for him.

I might add at this point that March is the height of the "smoky" season when the farmers in that part of the world slash and burn, clearing areas of the jungle for planting the next seasons crops. Visibility on that day, because of the smoke, was down to about one mile with no ceiling.

### **Pilot begins orbit, calls Sandy**

I flew up to Route 9 and began an orbit when I called Sandy with my position. I also requested the coordinates of the downed airman, which he refused to pass.

"Besides," he said, "the Jollies were on the way and would be making the pickup."

That was just fine with my crew and me. We didn't relish the idea of flying through 37mm AA, not to mention the 23mm and 12.7s that were reported in the area.

Finally, I heard the Jollies call Sandy with an ETA of 15 minutes.

Sandy replied with "continue inbound while I descend toward the target to get visual on the downed pilot".

A few seconds later, Sandy's wingman reported ground fire directed toward Sandy 1. Sandy replied with "Roger, I heard the shots, but didn't take any hits."

Even though I was only a mile or so away from the pickup point, I had yet to see the Sandies because of the smoke.

The next radio transmission was from one of the Jollies, saying with a nervous sounding voice that he needed to RTB (return to base) because of a fluctuating gage (probably his blood pressure). Number 2 came back with "I'm right behind you." He sounded relieved.

I called Sandy again and requested coordinates.

He was going to make another pass over the area and would get back to me.

### **Sandy 1 hit, on fire**

Again Sandy 2 broadcasted, "You're receiving fire."

Sandy 1 answered, "I've been hit and I'm on fire!"

I interjected at that point to turn to 270 before bailing out.

"Negative, I'm heading south and ejecting right now!"

Obviously, I wanted him to head west toward us and bail out on the west side of Route 9. We hadn't had visual on him yet. As he was making his last transmission, I turned the UHF homing switch that showed his position from us as 080.

I was orbiting at 3,000 feet and nosed over to descend

*Continued on Page 19*



# March 18

## *Date remains etched in Air America pilot's memory*

**Continued from Page 18**

to treetop level, before crossing Route 9.

The two other crewmembers (Capt. B.J. Ruck, my copilot, and flight mechanic Jim Nakamoto) both agreed to go on with the rescue. There was no doubt this one could definitely turn into a “\*&@# sandwich.” We all needed to be on the same sheet of music.

Another Air America H-34, piloted by Dave Ankerberg and Bill Johnson, arrived as my backup and would remain in orbit west of the “trail” while I went for the pickup.

We were low level with the wheels inches from the treetops, heading 080, pulling lots of power, maintaining max airspeed (above VNE, no doubt). When we crossed Route 9, which seemed like a four-lane highway, we were exposed much longer than we anticipated. It took about 10-15 seconds to cross! The “pucker factor” was also “red lined,” but we never heard a shot! Back over the trees we breathed a bit easier.

Looking ahead through the smoke and haze, we could see the fire and black smoke bellowing from Sandy's wreckage. I turned a few degrees left, figuring the plane probably flew on for a few seconds after the pilot ejected.

### **Sandy 1 hanging in tree**

About that time Sandy 1 called on his survival radio that he could hear us and we were headed straight for him. I spotted his orange parachute and noted with some dismay he was hanging about 50 feet up in a tree!

I settled to a low hover over him for a hoist pick up with the jungle penetrator. Jim operated the hoist as I hovered the aircraft. B.J. had his Uzi, loaded, on his lap, watching out the left side. (As if the Uzi would do us much good against a squad of NVA soldiers with AK47s!)

Sandy 2 was in a tight orbit over us. We felt good about that; those A1Es packed a lot of firepower!

The pilot was looking up at us with a big grin as Jim worked the hoist to lower the penetrator. I was thinking it was a bit early for celebration; we had a long way to go.

This particular hoist only had one speed, slow. It seemed to take forever for it to get to him.

Meanwhile, we were expecting the bad guys to come running out of the jungle with guns blazing. Under the triple canopy the ground appeared open.

Jim came over the intercom and advised us our grinning pilot couldn't reach the penetrator! Jim was trying to swing it to him, but because of the dense tree foliage, it wasn't happening.

About that time we heard the first round explode above us! I'm not sure if “Charley” was shooting at our cover A1E or was trying to lob an air burst at us. Anyway,

times were a bit tense.

We retrieved the hoist while the pilot was able to rapel to the ground, unhook from his survival pack, and move to a more open area.

We moved over him again, lowered the penetrator, he hooked up and we began the extraction. A second explosion was heard overhead. It sounded close!

### **Low-fuel light on 20 minutes**

To add to our concerns, the 30-minute, low-fuel light had been illuminated for about 20 minutes. We finally got him into the aircraft and figured we'd been hovering there for 34 minutes! Luck was with us; the bad guys were still a no show.

I gave “King” a call to let him know we had “Sandy 1” on board and were heading out.

King advised us not to re-cross in that area, but to head south and cross the road near the town of Saravan where it was safer. Unfortunately, we were too low on fuel to go far. If we were going to run out of gas, the west side of the road was our best option. I advised “King” we'd have to cross at the same area where we came in.

I'd radioed to have a drum of fuel brought out. After crossing Route 9 (again, without incident) we rendezvoused with the other chopper, landed in a field, and hand-pumped 55 gallons of gas into what must have been only fumes left in the tank.

While we were refueling, we were all feeling pretty good about saving the downed pilot, but mainly we were glad to still be alive. Being the nice guy I am, I decided to have a little fun with the pilot.

There was a rumor going around (with the Air Force) that Air America crews received a \$10,000 bonus when we recovered a downed airman. Not true.

I got with the pilot and told him we wouldn't be taking him directly back to his base (NKP Thailand) and would be going on to Paske. Of course, at that point anything I said would have been fine with him.

### **‘Bonus’ for pickup sounded reasonable**

I further explained he was worth ten grand to my crew and me, and I hadn't been paid for our last rescue. So we wanted to make sure we turned him over to the right person to get credit for the bonus. Naturally, it all sounded very reasonable to him.

Within an hour, we landed at the Pakse Airport, turned the happy pilot over to his Air Force representative, and reported in to our “customer,” Jim Butler. Jim (call sign “Gray Fox”) told us to assemble in the briefing room. We had a mission (ex-fill) in the Bolivans Plateau.

**Continued on Page 20**



# March 18

## *Date remains etched in Air America pilot's memory*

**Continued from Page 19**

Another hot one to finish out the day, March 18, 1972.

Three helicopter crews were assembled in Jim Butler's briefing room. A battalion of Thai soldiers had been under daily attack by NVA artillery and had about 30 wounded soldiers to be picked up.

They were on the Bolivan Plateau and were on the move to an area that would be safe enough for a helicopter pickup. The LZ would be on a high, open area about 30 miles east of Pakse.

### **CIA case officer enters room**

I was going to be the flight leader in "Hotel 70," with the other two H-34s to follow close behind. The third aircraft would remain high and become the SAR aircraft in case one of us was shot down. Piece of cake!

Then into the room came the "customer," a CIA case officer. We all looked at each other with the same thought, the case officer didn't have the greatest reputation for honesty. He'd tell a chopper crew whatever they wanted to hear so they'd attempt the mission.

He was determined to win the Medal of Honor, even

if the chopper was shot down in the process.

The plan was the case officer would ride in my bird, be dropped off at the pickup zone, sort out the wounded while we orbited overhead, and call me in when they were ready. We'd land one at a time. If the first aircraft didn't receive any fire, the second would land and pick up more wounded. We'd continue making trips until all of the wounded were picked up, or we started to receive fire.

On the Bolivans the enemy (NVA) had artillery and some light armor. The Lao and Thai soldiers were not as heavily armed. All they had was limited air support when the weather permitted and, of course, Air America.

The Pakse airport is located on the Mekong River and during that period was a relatively safe area. About 15 miles east, where the high plateau of the Bolivans begin, was pretty much controlled by the enemy.

The Royalists (Lao Army) had occupied most of the plateau (at least the populated areas) until late 1971. Gradually, the NVA had pushed the Royalists out and by March of 1972 controlled most of the Bolivans.

One of the real travesties associated with the Commu-

*Continued on Page 21*



### **Crew chief restores Huey**

Mike Carroll has acquired an H model Huey (T/N 68-16425) and has restored it to static display condition.

Mike, a crew chief for the 142nd ASHC "Hill-climbers" in Vietnam, had a dedication ceremony in Loxahatchee, Fla.

I presented Mike a letter of appreciation from my old unit, the 178th ASHC "Boxcars," for keeping alive the spirit and memory of the aircrews in Vietnam.

I've enclosed a photo of me (on the left) congratulating Mike next to his bird, attached to the 123rd Aviation Battalion.

He is looking for further information on the Huey.

Bill Jeczalik

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# March 18

## *Date remains etched in Air America pilot's memory*

*Continued from Page 20*

nist takeover of that part of Laos was that developing the immense natural resources of the area would stop.

The Bolivan Plateau was a mountainous area about 40 miles square, ranging from 2,000-5,000 feet in elevation. It contained some of the most fertile land in Laos.

Anything could grow there and that could amount to about four crops a year.

US AID had spent time with the farmers and introduced many hybrid crops which all did amazingly well. Even strawberries flourished in that area. It was a crop previously unknown to Southeast Asia.

### **Rivers on plateau clear, cold**

Because of the higher elevation, the rivers on the plateau were clear and cold. There was a waterfall on the eastern edge we called Niagara Falls. It was a beautiful setting and could have been developed into a world-class resort.

Wild game abounded in the area, including tigers, wild gaur, and elephants.

Obviously, nothing good will happen there until Communism goes away. Keeping the locals underdeveloped and progress at a minimum is how they retain control.

After about 15 minutes of flight time we were nearing the landing zone. We remained high and looked for the proper signal panel to appear on the pad. A white "O" was put out and I could see about 30 soldiers standing around the LZ. The fact that they were not hidden from view meant that there probably hadn't been any recent enemy contact.

I dropped off the case officer while the other two H-34s remained high overhead. The landing caused a great deal of brown dust, which would definitely alert any enemy in the area that a chopper had landed.

In about five minutes the case officer called that they were ready for the first aircraft — me. The litters with the wounded were lined up next to the pad where I landed; again, creating a large cloud of dust.

I kept the RPMs up and the aircraft light on the struts, expecting incoming fire at any time. The wounded were being loaded when I heard the first explosion about 300

meters behind us!

I would wait about 10 seconds before taking off, giving the case officer a chance to get in the aircraft. I figured that if a second round were fired, it still wouldn't hit us (hopefully).

There were several litters and walking wounded at the doorway when the second round hit. Right in the middle of the troops next to the aircraft! Five feet left and we would have been history.

I was looking down from the right seat at the loading procedures when the round exploded. The concussion and noise from the impact were instantaneous, but the resulting mass of bodies being thrown in all directions seemed to happen in slow motion. Just like a "Spaghetti Western."

I hoped the case officer had jumped aboard because we were out of there. We had a heavy load, and because of the high elevation, it seemed to take forever for the H-34 to gain airspeed. As we were climbing out, another round went off under us. They were trying to shoot us out of the air!

The case officer was with us in the aircraft, but he'd received a shrapnel wound. There was also a wounded soldier hanging onto the wheel strut! The back of his shirt was covered with blood and, as we gained airspeed and altitude, I expected to watch his body drop hundreds of feet into the jungle. Too bad.

### **Mechanic pulls soldier inside**

Suddenly, the muscular arm of my flight mechanic, Jim Nakamoto, reached out the aircraft cargo door, grabbed the soldier's shirt, and yanked him inside. Another life saved, as we heard later, because the soldier survived from his wounds.

By the time we arrived back at Pakse, the sun was setting. We inspected the aircraft for damage, but there were only a couple of small holes. No problem.

The mission would be continued in the morning. This would give the Thais time to move to another location.

Meanwhile, after a very eventful day to say the least, we were ready to suck down a few cool ones. As I had mentioned before, March 18, 1972, is a day I'll always remember.

# Attend the San Antonio reunion in 2008



# Small world

## *Three incidents relate to tour as helicopter pilot*

**BILL MOLINE**

When people talk about how small the world can be, I have to smile. In my life the world is indeed, very small.

Three incidents point that out very clearly. All have to do with my tour in Vietnam as a helicopter pilot from July 1967 to July 1968.

In July 1969, I entered the U.S. Military Academy at West Point as a plebe (freshman). Surprisingly, two of the three incidents happened at West Point directly related to my duty in Vietnam.

The first happened at Camp Buckner during sophomore summer training. During a break in the training, we were gathered in a small group and the tactical officer, an infantry major, and I were talking about Vietnam.

When I asked where in Vietnam he had been, he mentioned Tan An. I said that's a coincidence, I had been on several operations with the 199th Light Infantry Brigade out of Tan An. I mentioned the time we got really shot up in February 1968.

### **Major looking for chopper pilot**

He said he remembered that operation and, in fact, had been looking for a pilot who had picked up his friends who were wounded. I asked if he remembered the call sign of the pilot. He said yes, "Thunderbird 27."

I asked if his friends could have been the company commander and first sergeant who were wounded.

He said, yes.

I said, "I'm Thunderbird 27." He couldn't believe it; the pilot he was looking for was one of his cadets in sophomore summer training at West Point.

After summer training, when I was no longer one of his charges, he and his wife invited my fiancée and me to dinner at his house on post. When he invited us, in he introduced himself as Jimmy. He explained that by doing that, he had put us on a nearly equal standing, meaning . . . at his house we weren't really cadet and major, but friends.

This doesn't happen often; in fact, hardly ever. Over the next three years our friendship grew, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel and would be the best man in my wedding, the day after graduation.

The other incident wasn't nearly as dramatic, but it still points out what a small world this can be.

While I was flying gunships in Vietnam, I used to go on a mission called the Dong Ngai recon. At dusk, we would take a light fire team of two gunships and fly up and down the Dong Ngai River just north of Bien Hoa Air Base.

We did this so the intelligence officers that were rid-

ing with us could check out the countryside for signs of VC movement. It was a rather mild mission as missions go, but occasionally we would see the stakes that were necessary to be set up during daylight that the VC used to aim the 122 mm rockets.

The 122 mm rockets were fairly devastating on impact and took out several structures on Bien Hoa Air Base during their attacks.

### **Rocket hits maintenance hangar**

One hit the top of a hangar used for aircraft maintenance and splattered shrapnel over four helicopters, making them unusable until all the holes were fixed.

One of the regular intelligence officers who flew with us was a West Pointer and got stationed at West Point as an instructor. We met one day on campus, wondered why each looked familiar and figured out the Dong Ngai recon was what we had in common.

He and his wife were very nice and had my fiancée and me over for dinner a few times. He and his wife came to our wedding, also.

Jump forward 33 years. It's the year 2000, I'm talking to a couple at the Tampa Hyde Park Rotary Christmas party for the Boys and Girls club and the subject of Vietnam comes up.

The wife (Jean) said her husband was in Vietnam about the same time I was.

I said, "Oh really, where?"

He said, "Well, a little Special Forces camp between Bien Hoa and Saigon, you've probably never heard of it."

I said, "You mean, Ho Ngoc Tao?"

He said, "You have heard of it."

### **Pictures taken to restaurant**

I said I have pictures of it. I gathered up the pictures and, at a later date, we met this couple for dinner at a restaurant.

As it turns out, I have pictures of this guy taken when he was in Vietnam, he did not know anybody had pictures of him there. He's currently happy in his dream job as a charter boat captain out of St. Petersburg, Fla.

It is such a small world!!

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Bill Moline is a career management strategist and vice president at Wakefield Hall International in Tampa, Fla. He advises mid- to senior-level executives on career marketing, management and development. After flying with the 118th Assault Helicopter Company in Vietnam and graduating from West Point, he took his commission in the U.S. Air Force, flew fighters and retired as a lieutenant colonel.



# Heaven or hell

## *General can enhance or destroy aide's career*

The aide-de-camp normally is an assistant to the general.

His duties can encompass social events, scheduling, insuring proper uniform, travel, etc. The position is a much coveted one.

The aide wears distinctive brass, a gold cord and is a very visible member of the General Staff. He can be any officer rank from lieutenant to colonel, depending on the rank of the general.

The assignment can be great or it can be a nightmare, depending on the personality of the general. The general normally selects his own aide through some type of vetting procedure. There are usually several candidates and the general selects the most qualified or the one he thinks will do the best job for him.

Personalities enter into the selection. Obviously, the general wants someone who will do his bidding, someone he can trust to operate in his best interest and, most importantly, one he can get along with — or someone who can get along with him.

The assignment can be a career enhancement or, conversely, can wreck a career, depending on the performance report the general writes.

I was an aide for a little over a year to two major generals. This, in itself, is unusual. When a general is replaced, his aide also is replaced. The new general selects his own aide, just like the changes in political office usually result in a complete change of personnel.

I was selected for the position after a meeting with the general and was very pleased he had chosen me. I had the utmost respect for the man. He was brilliant. It is interesting that when you are the aide everyone likes you. You are next to the big man.

If you are realistic, you know it is only because you

are in a position they might be able to exploit to get to the general. It is easy to allow your importance to go to your head.

The man I worked for was a super individual. He followed a set schedule, planned a week ahead, almost to the letter. Things worked smoothly. I also was his pilot and flew him to most of his out-of-town/out-of-state meetings and conferences. We flew in Beechcraft King Air (U-8), twin engine, fixed-wing aircraft. It carried 8-10 people and was a pleasure to fly.

This assignment was outstanding. After about eight months, the general retired and I thought I'd be reassigned.

Imagine my surprise when the new general asked me to stay on for a while. I agreed, thinking he meant a week or two. It was like night and day. Where the first general followed a set schedule, this one was all over the place. He wouldn't follow any schedule, would show up unannounced, couldn't understand why things were in such disarray and was very unhappy with the whole situation.

What he couldn't see was he was the root of the problem. He was the one causing all the confusion. How do you tell a general he is all screwed up? An idyllic job changed almost overnight. I couldn't do anything right.

I thought I would be replaced, but days dragged into weeks and then months. I was absolutely miserable. Would this nightmare ever end?

After three months, I was finally released. I was like a bird let out of a cage. A tremendous burden was taken off of my shoulders. This experience exemplifies how circumstances and personalities can affect a situation. I had the same job with two different bosses — one was heaven, the other absolute hell.

— Jack Salm

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