



THE VHPA AVIATOR

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

May/June 2008 Vol. 26, No. 3



Dave Rittman Photo

UH-1Ds from C Company, 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division conducting a Combat Assault (CA) in August 1967 on the plains northwest of the An Khe "Golf Course" base camp. The white smoke signals that the artillery had fired their last high explosive rounds into the Landing Zone so the helicopters can land without fear of friendly artillery fire. * This photo also appears in the 2008 VHPA Calendar for the month of September.

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IT HAS BEEN AN HONOR TO SERVE AS YOUR PRESIDENT

This is my final column for the year I have been the President of the greatest Veterans Association I know of.

It has been a challenging time for me but I have enjoyed it very much. My term started off with the loss of dollars at the Phoenix reunion but we are a strong Association and we have moved forward with strong strategic planning and investing, money-wise we are still a very healthy Association. The Executive Council contracted for a survey to see what direction we should be going in the years after 2010.

We hired a firm that specializes in this sort of thing and last fall they reported back the results which we immediately published in *The Aviator*. Basically the results said that on the whole, the membership was satisfied with the direction the EC has been taking the organization and the membership thinks that the EC will lead us safely into the future. I did receive several emails from members stating they doubted the results because they weren't selected to participate, and I'm sorry if you were not picked, but the survey organization chose who would be called. The participants included both current and past members and the probability of us receiving back viable results from the survey easily lies above the 95% range.

The one item that we are looking at is moving the reunion to a different date since we had a large amount of interest on doing that from our membership survey. The reunion committee is getting the bid results from several hotel chains who want to provide us with a three-year hotel contract with varying locations, coupled with an affordable rate. A few of the hotel chains are even offering to pay down some of the cost of the loss incurred at the Phoenix Reunion. This is not the only consideration we are looking at, but it is a nice end result.

We then worked on the San Antonio Reunion coming up 2-5 July and decided to scale back on some of the activities that we have offered in the past. This helps keep your cost down for the VHPA sponsored events plus it also lets you

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Mike Whitten

spend your time enjoying downtown San Antonio. In other words, this year you will have more time to shop, eat, visit and drink beer with your friends and comrades. I hope that you will come to the reunion, those of us who have made that decision will have a great time renewing old friendships and making new ones. I personally will be meeting an old friend who I haven't seen in over 25 years, thanks for coming John and Linda.

We had a little trouble this year with the *Aviator*. It seems that Jack Swickard is going great guns on his professional business and had trouble getting the magazine printed on the schedule we had hoped for. I made a call to the guy that talked me into joining the VHPA way back in 1990, David Adams, who has considerable expertise in putting a magazine together and getting it to print. David worked with his assistant Kay Taylor to provide what ever help Jack needed and we are back on track and almost on-schedule. Thank you for your considerable help David!

To the Executive Council for all their support this year, a heartfelt thank you. I also must say thank you to Wally Magathan our legal council for his tremendous insight and wisdom in keeping me and the EC on an even keel. To all of the committee chairman and support people Dana Young, Mike Law, Bob Smith, Bob Potvin, Jack Swickard, Gary Roush, Ken Fritz, Charles Holly, Jack Salm, and Richard Buzen, the VHPA owes you a debt of gratitude for all of your hard work and tireless support. To the Headquarters personnel at Fritzco and Marcia, thank you for your hard work. We now have the highest number of current members we have ever enjoyed!

And finally, to you our members. It has been an honor to serve as your President and one that I will never forget. May the Lord bless you, our brothers in arms and our great country.

— Mike Whitten, President

E-mail items to The Aviator at:
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Attend Reunion 2008 in San Antonio



THE VHPA AVIATOR (ISSN 1930-5737) (USPS 001-497) is published six times yearly — February, April, June, August, October and December. Annual dues are \$36 or Life membership for \$540. Yearly subscription for nonmembers is \$36. Published by the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, 5530 Birdcage St., Suite 105, Citrus Heights, CA 95610-7698. Periodicals Publications postage paid at Citrus Heights, CA, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE VHPA AVIATOR, 5530 Birdcage St., Suite 105, Citrus Heights, CA 95610-7698.

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LETTERS

Looking For The Family of Paul Getz

***I have a little mercy mission for you,
if you choose to accept it.***

In the 60's my parents had a friend named Paul Getz, who was a bartender at their bowling alley. Paul was an Army helicopter pilot called out of Reserves and had been shot down numerous times in Vietnam. During one of his trips home (I was 9 or 10) he brought me a gift of an authentic Vietnamese cross-bow which I still have and will never forget him for giving it to me.

One day while stateside, between tours in Vietnam, Paul flew a squadron of Chinook helicopters to Antelope Valley. Paul landed his at Fox Field and took my whole family for a little excursion around the valley in a Chinook helicopter. Meanwhile he made the whole squadron hover over the eastside of the town till we were through.

Loud, obnoxious, larger than life, this guy was a true hero, man I loved him - but we lost all contact with Paul after his next trip to Vietnam. Recently I "Google'd" him and found out he was killed in 1969 during his next tour over there. Paul was able to crash land his helicopter and save the entire crew of 5, that was everyone except himself.

I noticed on the Army report of the incident that Paul was married which I didn't know and at the time he was living in North Las Vegas. Now I would like to find his widow or his children and give them the crossbow. They are quite valuable when selling on E-Bay but I would rather it go back to his family.

Sound like an interesting idea? I certainly hope someone out there can help me get in touch with anyone remaining from Paul's family.

Last, let me Thank You for your service to our country, we will always be grateful. May God Bless all Americans who served in Southeast Asia.

Kevin D. Kesler

☆☆☆☆☆

LETTERS

VHPA SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM WORKS

Kevin J. Oden, the first recipient of a VHPA Scholarship, graduated from the University of Arkansas with a B. S. degree in Industrial Engineering, Honors College, and Summa Cum Laude.

Kevin is my grandson and wants you to know he appreciated the financial aid the VHPA provided. I thought maybe those that donate and contribute to the scholarship fund would like to know that their money attributed to his success.

**See you in San Antonio,
Jim Oden M08188**

We are getting close to funding a third VHPA Scholarship. If you haven't participated, please consider doing so. We have over 7800 active members. I'm always amazed at the generosity of our members. Thanks in advance for contributing to OUR scholarship program.

**Mike Sheuerman
Scholarship Committee/Fund Raising**



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YOU IN
SAN ANTONIO

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with 7915 current members.

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After Action Report - Return to Vietnam

Part 1 of a 3 Part Series

After Action Report - Return to Vietnam.....

By John Mackel

CHAPTER I – BACKGROUND

From May 7-21, I, my 24-year-old son, Luke, and nine other members of a customized tour organized by Military Tours Inc. visited Vietnam.

It had been 37 years and 17 days since my last visit, compliments of the U.S. Army. The big difference was that my first trip was for 12 months as an Army soldier and this one was for two weeks as a friendly tourist.

This visit, like the first one, was going to be a trip into the unknown. I don't think anybody except the tour guides knew what to expect, so everyday was a new adventure for me.

The tour guides were John Powell and Ed Garr. Powell, also known as "JP," "Cavalier 22" or "Kung Powell," served in Vietnam with our very own Charlie Troop 1/9 Air Cav Squadron, 1st Cavalry Division as a scout and later a Cobra pilot in 1968-69.

Garr is a 74-year-old crusty but lovable ex-Marine who had two Vietnam combat tours.

The tour was specifically tailored by JP to visit the 1st Cav Division Area of Operations (AO) in I and II Corps in the north and the III Corps area in the south around Saigon. To accomplish this, we spent the first week in the III Corps area and the second week in and around I and II Corps.

Tour participants included seven 1st Cavalry veterans or honorary Cav members, three veterans of the Marine Corps and one Army Artillery type who had two combat tours in Vietnam.

Participants were myself (1969-70), Luke, Dave Keel (1968-69, 1972), wife Renee, Julie Kink in memory of her brother, David Kink, KIA 1969, Jeanie Anderson in memory of her father John KIA 69, and Medal of Honor recipient James (Mike) M. Sprayberry (67 - 68). Mike served with D Company 5th Battalion 7th Cavalry and the rest of us were with C Troop 1/9. The Marines were Dick Walker, who landed with the Marines in 65 and set up an artillery position west of Da Nang, Tony Homes, who was badly wounded northwest of Da Nang in 69 and Terry Funk who was a communications technician in 67. Last but far from least we had Bob. Bob Weekly was a retired Army Colonel who served two tours in VN as an Artillery Commander. He was in III corps in his first tour (66) and in I & II Corps with the 101st Airmobile Division during his second tour (72). This diversity of experience from different in-country periods, fighting units and areas allowed us a wider perspective of what was going on in different places and time. It was something I had not expected but believe it really enhanced the trip.



John & Luke along with 4 other members of his tour group photographed in front of the bridge at Hoi An, an old Japanese silk trading settlement that's still active today. John (the author) is the 3rd person from the left in the photo, his son Luke is to his right.

I had mixed emotions going and leaving Viet Nam on both my tours. In both cases I was ready to come home because I missed my family and friends but I would miss certain aspects of being in VN. My first time was during a dangerous period, but it was interspaced with fun times, interesting times, and some difficult times. I made some good friends, and the memory of that tour is burned into my brain. Leaving VN the first time was a milestone event I was looking forward to experience. The end of a Combat VN tour meant that you had lived through a short period in your life where the chances of dying on any given day during your 365 day SE Asia excursion were very high. My own personal feeling was that I had pushed my luck and it was time for me to leave but I knew I was going to miss the action, the flying and the guys. The second time I left was also an emotional time for me but not as traumatic. I made some great friends, the trip was a fabulous experience and I saw VN from a totally new perspective.

In both cases I can say in all honesty that I looked forward to my trip. My first trip I really can't say I was ready to go with the same enthusiasm I did the second time but I was still looking forward to a year of flying helicopters. Understandably my anxiety level was pretty high, but I wasn't overly worried. For example, with my first trip I wondered where I was going to be sent, how bad it really was, how was I going to react when the bullets started flying, was I up to the task? All the normal concerns that a young man would have before he is put into a position where he might be judged pretty harshly by his new combat buddies and by himself. This time I had different concerns. For example, am I bringing enough underwear, do I need to label all my medicines so that the VN customs folks

don't confiscate something thinking it is dope, am I bringing enough cash, do I have enough bug spray or sunscreen, have I packed enough trail mix, will I be able to wash my clothes, should I bring an extra roll of toilet paper? All the things an older traveler worries about, because you don't want to be embarrassed in front of your fellow more seasoned travelers. But in both cases I had a support group I could fall back on. For the first trip I had about 10 guys I went through flight school with who joined up with me in San Francisco and flew over with me. Since we were all facing the same thing we gave each other confidence. Plus I knew some guys that were already in country and they had relayed back their experience. That was a big help and really lowered my anxiety level. This time I had Luke. He is a year older than I was the first time I toured VN. But for him the experience was not going to be a combat one, he was going for the fun and enjoyment of visiting a far-away exotic country. He wasn't worried one bit. We both didn't know what to expect but so what, we were going to have a good time!

My goal for my first tour was to get a lot of flying time, keep a low profile, keep out of harm's way as much as possible, not get killed, and of course did I say, get a lot of flying time. In fact, I was a little worried that Nixon was going to live up to his election promises and end the war before I got there therefore denying me the thrill of flying those fantastic whirly-bird machines.

My goal for the second tour was just to revisit the old Area of Operation (AO). I didn't have any other desire but to go back and see what the place that had captured a year of my life looked like after almost forty years. I never had the desire to go back until now because I had been to busy. Now I had the opportunity, the time and the curiosity to see what the old stomping grounds looked like. What had changed or is it the same?

I am not going to go into the flight or the time we had in LA prior to our flight over. I think you have all heard or you can remember how long it takes to get to VN. But, in case you have killed off those brain cells that held that memory, it still takes a long time. The difference is, this time the plane was bigger and except for our tour companions the plane was full of Asians. Also this time around different thoughts bounced around my brain. For example, how can these planes stay in the air so long, after all this sitting will my butt regain feeling, how can Powell sleep like that, how do those Korean stewardesses keep their scarves so straight, is a little Asian guy flying this plane? The first time I just thought about things like: why didn't I bring four bottles of Johnny Walker Red instead of one, will they give me an M-16 as soon as we land so I can protect myself, why are we flying to war in a commercial jet with stewardess's (WOW), and other assorted intelligent things? Anyway, you get the picture; it takes a long time to get to Viet Nam. The good thing however is that like the first



Photo of the old 90th "Repo Depot" complex. Still a fixture at the Ton Son Nhut International Airport in Ho Chi Minh city.

time I went over, everything was pre-arranged. The first time by the US Army and this time of course by Military Tours. All in all the to/from parts of both trips were pretty similar; I fly to the west coast, catch a long boring flight to Asia, sit a lot, and sleep.

CHAPTER 2 – ARRIVAL SAIGON

After a short stop and plane change in Seoul we arrive in Saigon or more specifically Ho Chin Min City's Ton San Nhut Airport. As we taxi to the terminal a couple of things are familiar. The big hanger type building that housed the 90th replacement depot is still there along with the semi-circle revetments lining the runway. Most were empty but there was a Huey in one and some assorted Russian Helicopters in others. Memories are starting to come back. The place seems familiar. We hustled through customs and baggage and then were met by Garr and our Vietnamese Tour Guide Thahn (Tang). It was hot and humid but not much different from summertime in Houston. There is still that sweet, stinky aroma in the air that you are exposed to in a tropical location. One big change from my first tour is that now there is air conditioning. The only time I had air conditioning my first tour was in a Cobra and that didn't always work.

I had spent a couple of days in Saigon my first tour with my good friend Ed McDerby. We had taken an unauthorized recon for a couple of days by thumbing rides on helicopters heading south. We hung around control towers and the guys in the tower bummed rides for us. We stayed at the Presidential Hotel and visited a couple of assorted bars in the Cholon District. Had a fine old time. Caught some crap when we got back but it was worth it. I was wrongfully accused by our CO of influencing a young hard working WOI but I had the good sense to keep my mouth shut and not state that the trip had been McDerby's idea. McDerby had some down time and I was also flight inactive after having an unfortunate engine failure in our only Charlie Model gunship. The streets are still narrow, and the city basically looks the same but now there are more motor scooters and the city is active until 2 or 3 in the morning. I don't know where all these people are going but they are going. Another thing you notice beside the abundance of motor scooters is the multitude

Back to Viet Nam After-Action Report..... Continued

of electrical lines. In the US we have maybe four or five lines running from pole to pole. In Saigon there must have been 50 little lines. Pollution is a little more under control than forty years ago. There is still some trash scattered around but the blue smoke from the mo-peds back in 69 is gone. Now the motor scooters are cleaner. Traffic control is also a little better. Scooters, mini-buses and cars are flying thru the street beeping their horn. The message is get out of the way or die. There are some traffic lights and people stop for them but don't be in the way when the light changes. But compared to my first trip it looked a little less chaotic, a little cleaner, more organized and not as populated. The war had pushed the population of Saigon to a level it couldn't sustain and I think now they have that under control.



View of Ho Chi Minh city (Saigon) from our room in the Majestic Hotel, one of several nice hotels we stayed in during the southern path of our Viet Nam tour.

The first two nights we stayed at the Hotel Caravel. It is a beautiful Hotel near the Presidential Palace and close to the center of town. It reminded me of a modern Five Star hotel in the States with a Marble entry, fancy pool area and very nice rooms. It was first class plus it had a rooftop bar area that overlooked the city. That was cool. First day we were real tourist. We saw the Presidential Palace and the old US embassy and visited the VN War Museum. At night Powell and Garr took us on a river boat restaurant ride on the Saigon River. It was unique and fun. We also got our first taste of street vendors. Viet Nam might be a Communist country but the people are the most capitalistic folks you will ever see. They are persistent to the maximum degree. Not rude, just selling, selling, selling. They sell baseball caps, T-Shirts, watches, flags, maps, water, whatever. Don't waste your breath with "No Thanks" to a street vendor because they don't accept that answer. Just ignore them and turn away.

My first tour I stayed at the 1st Cav replacement/training facility after my initial check-in and assignment from the 90th Replacement Depot. The 1st Cav replacement center (1stCav RC) was in Bien Hoa and the new replacement officers stayed in an old stucco building. The accommodations were good even with the constant boom boom boom



John (our author) trying to break into today's Presidential Palace compound in Ho Chi Minh city, where some of the most dramatic scenes of the final days of the war played out.

boom of the outgoing artillery. The original ten from my flight class that flew over together were now down to four: Bill Gill, Al Ashcraft, Richard Rowell and yours truly. Four WO1's joined us so now there were eight helicopter pilots and a bunch of enlisted personnel awaiting assignment to a unit in the field. During our stay at the replacement center we were supposed to spend our day re-learning how to fire an M-16, play with grenades, and other assorted military training. My little irresponsible group didn't participate in the training activities. We slept in and then took advantage of the 1st Cav Officers Club and some recreational facilities located close by. Most of my memory for these first few days is kind of fuzzy except for how they assigned us our unit. When we all arrived at the 1st Cav RC the Officer in charge with his senior NCO partner had the eight of us fill out a questionnaire that, in addition to some personal data, allowed us the opportunity to request what unit we wanted to be assigned. The four warrants must have been exposed to a 1/9th veteran that hyped them up about flying LOH's because they all requested the 1/9th. My bunch, me included, requested the 227th Aviation Battalion. I just don't remember being that aware of how the Division was organized plus flying LOH's would violate my goal of not dying so the 1/9th was not my unit of choice. In typical Army fashion my four got assigned to the 1/9th and the warrants got the 227th. Everyone was dismayed and disappointed but we learned the lesson of not asking for what you want in the Army cause you ain't gonna get it! I assume the honcho's at the replacement center had a big laugh.

CHAPTER 3 – NORTH FROM SAIGON

The third day of our 2006 tour we packed up for our trip North along Hwy 13. Our agenda over the next couple of days were the Cu Chi tunnels, Lai Khe, Quon Loi, Dau Tieng, Tay Ninh, Nui Ba Din, Dong Xai, Song Be, Nui Ba Ra, Phouc Vinh, and LZ's DOT, CAROLINE & RITA. It was to be a 3-day 2-night exclusion with overnight stops in Tay Ninh and Dong Xaoi. In 69 I was sent direct to Phoch Vinh by C46 Caribou so my initial impression of the country was from 2,000 feet plus I really didn't have any contact with the people. This time we went everywhere by mini bus and of course viewed everything at ground level. I flew a

Back to Viet Nam After-Action Report..... Continued

few times from Phouc Vinh to Bien Hoa and other area's south but I didn't realize or had forgotten how hilly the area was. It is lush and green but rolling and extremely beautiful. Seeing it from ground level gave a person a more detailed view of what the countryside looked like. We now saw the countryside from a Vietnamese perspective and watched the people go thru their daily lives. The people work hard but are somewhere just above the "poor" level. I tried to imaging the people of Viet Nam back in 1969 going about their daily lives with the presence of a huge foreign army roaming over the countryside and flying all over the sky. Maybe I'm wrong but I feel that the majority of the people were unsure of our intentions and why we were really there..

One thing you realize traveling by bus is that the distances between locations that we flew around was not that great. My first trip I just didn't comprehend how short the distance was from Saigon to the border. I really spend the majority of my first tour either east of Phouc Vinh or north of Song Be. I can now see how the NVA could, with no skilled defenders in their way, race to Saigon and take over the country in a short time. It didn't take us anytime to get to Lai Khe. Granted it took us longer than it would have if we had flown but it would take you longer to drive from Houston to Waco than drive from Saigon to Tay Ninh. When you visit Lai Kai, or Tay Ninh or stand where firebases were once active battle areas, if you had not been there during the war, it would be hard to imagine what it looked like 40 years ago. Understand that except for parts of the ground where we used to spread that nasty-ass thin asphalt-like stuff which deters any vegetation from growing everything has grown back or been build over. Lai Khe , except for the rubber trees, looked like a serene tropical area. But we did get a taste of America while we were wandering around what was left of Lai Khe. An older Vietnamese man was watching us from the road and finally came over. Turns out he had worked at the base as a kid shining shoes and cleaning up and he had picked up a number of American phases, most of which I can't add to this story because they were very colorful in a

perverse sort of way. However I really think he enjoyed seeing Americans and it was a great fun visiting with him. The normal Vietnamese in Saigon didn't give us a second glance but the countryside locals paid us a lot of attention and acted like they enjoyed seeing us. When we left the guy really acted sorry to see us go, and following Mike Sprayberry's lead we all gave the old boy a few bucks just to help him out. I mention this about Sprayberry because even though he was our Medal of Honor recipient and as such as proved his fierceness in battle he was a very compassionate person in his dealing's with the VN people.



Part of the preserved Tunnel Complex at Chu Chi, a 75-mile-long underground maze where during the war thousands of fighters and villagers could hide.

I don't want to skip over the Cu Chi tunnels because the history of that area is interesting and fascinating but now it is set up for the tourist and to promote some distorted historical propaganda message. For example we were subject to a lecture on how the heroic villagers of Cu Chi built the tunnels and lived in fear of the imperialistic puppets. Fortunately Powell or Garr cut

that presentation short but in all honestly in was interesting to get the perspective of the "other side". There was also a huge temple and other monuments with the names of the 20,000 folks that died defending that area . Historically interesting but more interesting and a surprising aspect of this jaunt north to me was the construction of new highways and new villages. We had a four-lane highway with esplanades all the way up to Dau Tieng and from Dong Xoai back to Saigon. Our east/west drives followed narrow roads that I enjoyed more because you saw more of the countryside. A continuous ribbon of houses and shops cluttered the scenery along the four-lane highway.

Once in Tay Ninh we got our first real taste of Vietnamese provincial life. The town was busy with trucks and motor scooters everywhere flying down the main road. But there were also a lot of villagers walking down the road stacked up with goods carrying them to market. The Hotel we stayed at was not like the Caravel in Saigon. It was clean and nice but a little more Spartan. For example, the bathroom didn't bother with a tub or shower curtain. There was a shower nozzle in the wall and the water just ran off through a drain in the floor. It did have an in-room AC and TV if you like Vietnamese shows.

Back to Viet Nam After-Action Report..... Continued

I didn't really spend much time in Tay Ninh my first tour so I really can't compare what things are like now to 37 years ago but the street in front of the Hotel used to be the old runway. You would never have known it now; things are changing as I say over and over in this report. Another big change was the huge mountain of Nui Ba Din. During the war it was a good spot for both American and NVA to occupy for strategic reasons but now it was a religious area with a cool bobsled like ride to the bottom. It was a blast flying down on that ride.

The stay in Tay Ninh was fun for me because it was my first real Viet Nam "mingling with the locals" experience. After Luke and I wandered around we ate with our group in a small restaurant on the first floor of our Hotel. There was only one other group in the place and that was of about 8 or 9 Vietnamese of mixed gender that stayed to themselves but were drinking vodka and having a good old time. After dinner we walked around the area just to check out the town.

The next day we loaded up to head east to Song Be and points NE after a side trip to the Cao Dae Temple. Cao Dae is a Buddhist sect that prays to Buddha, Confucius, Jesus Christ, Joan of Arc, Victor Hugo, Charlie Chaplin, Laurel & Hardy and a host of other religious, pop culture and historical figures. The Cao Dai icon is the all "Seeing Eye" which they have plastered all over their pagodas. It sounds crazy but it's true. Ngo Van Chieu who established the religion was a movie nut. In the early 50's there were two million members and they had an army of 25,000. It is probably a pretty good concept cause you pray to almost everybody so you cover all the bases.

Before we loaded up JP pulled out a map and gave us an overview of where we were going, what the 1st Cav's mission was when it arrived in III Corps and the firebase hopping strategy. Prepared with this knowledge we were on our way. This little overview might not seem important to most of you but remember we had our marines and non-combatants in our group. In fact the Marines were interested as to how we conducted our combat operations and

after four days of visiting our old sites and discussions they were really impressed as to what we did and how we did it. Anyway, off we went and visited LZ Caroline, Dot, Rita and Bravo's Troop's base at Quon Loi. Tony had a GPS device so we knew where we were even if we didn't always recognize the terrain. Let that be tip #1, if you want to find a specific place in VN take a GPS. You might have been a great "dead reckoner" at one time but things have changed and the maps aren't that good.

On the ride east we traded stories of what was going on in late 68 and 69. Powell and Keel had both been scout pilots and had some interesting experiences. Both of them were with C Troop when it moved down from II Corp and started operating in III Corps. Moving the 1st Cav down to III Corps effectively closed the Ho Chin Minh (HCM) trail from Cambodian into VN. No other division had the maneuverability like the 1st Cav to move fast into an area that needed the leaks plugged. When I joined Charlie Troop in 69 no American unit that I was aware of was covering the area north of Song Be to the border. Therefore getting a perspective of what had been going on

before I got there added to my appreciation of what our Airmobile Division was capable of doing. Powell & Keel had seen their share of trouble and were lucky to be alive in my opinion. When I got in country Powell had moved to Guns and Keel was the operations officer.

LZ Dot was north of Tay Ninh and was set up to start covering the HCM trail as one of the first LZ's in a long string toward the border. Now it was in the middle of a small village north of Tay Ninh. Except for the old traces of asphalt you wouldn't even know it was there. But the village was a micro-picture of all the villages in VN. The villages concentrated along main roadways and the buildings are narrow in the front but long and normally two or three stories high. My understanding is that families lease the land from the government and the building are built per government specs. The first floor was open like a garage and that was usually a business area. For example, one family in the village sold fans, another sold watches, another sold appliances and so etc etc. I'm not sure if the government controls how the business should be set up or if it evolves naturally but everyone in the village has one particular business and I guess they sell to each other. I visited a cell phone business at LZ Dot and I was the only customer. Further down the street is the main food market but it wasn't like the grocery store at home. Without refrigeration



He's Back! John at Phouc Vinh as it looks today. As with almost all the US installations in today's Viet Nam, little is left of what was originally the "stomping grounds" of our youth.

Back to Viet Nam After-Action Report..... Continued

-tion animals were not only sold here but slaughtered as well. In the back the stench was nasty. I could see where the bird flu could get out of hand in such conditions.

LZ Rita was a spot in the jungle. No trance of anything U.S. or other wise.

It was the same for the area around Quon Loi. All traces of American presence has been plowed under. I recognized the geography of Quon Loi but it was hard to imagine that thousands of troops were here and it was busy with a lot of helicopter traffic. Now it was a hilly wooded area with some rubber trees but mostly quiet and empty. I had been at Quon Loi a couple of times and I think the area we walked around on this trip was close of where Bravo Troop lived. Sometime early in my first tour I was given the task of investigating a helicopter crash right off the runway. In fact one of the pilots that died was a buddy of Bill Gill, a friend of mine from flight school that was assigned to Bravo Troop. The problem was it wasn't known if the helicopter was shot down as it cleared the runway or had some other problem so I was sent up to do an accident investigation. Turned out it was shot down by a 50 caliber Machine Gun right off the end of the runway. Bravo Troop's campsite was on the downward side of a small hill and in the rubber trees. I remember it was quite scenic. I guess I felt that way because Phoc Vinh was more open and flat. But the highlight of my visit was having a mortar round land about 100 or so feet from me in the middle of the day as I was out in the open visiting with Bravo Troops Commanding Officer (CO). Fortunately no one got hurt but the point is, the area I stood in May of 2006 looked a lot like the area I stood at in May 1969. Now it is peaceful, serene and beautiful but back then it was also deadly.

HELICOPTER TRUISM'S

courtesy of Jay Elliot, Cobra 5

- The only time you have too much fuel is when you're on fire.
- If the wings are traveling faster than the fuselage, it's probably a helicopter -- and therefore, unsafe.
- Never trade luck for skill.
- The three most common expressions (or famous last words) in aviation are:
"Why is it doing that?" "Where are we?" and "Oh Shit!"
- Airspeed, altitude and brains. Two are always needed to successfully complete the flight.
- If something hasn't broken on your helicopter, it's about to.
- Don't draw fire; it irritates the people around you. - Your Buddies

From Quon Loi we traveled to An Loc and had lunch. An Loc was a pretty robust town with a lot of activity and hustle bustle. We ate at a small little outdoor place. Normally our lunch's were somewhere out in the countryside. We had a 7-course meal of real authentic Vietnamese food that was quite good with warm beer or warm soda. "No water, no ice", was Garr's refrain from day one, so that forced me to drink beer, cause I didn't need the sugar in the warm soda's. The food was sort of stir-fried cooked on a stove normally right out in the middle of the place and actually was quite good. Imagine eating lunch in a hot garage with open sides, made hotter with the cooking, some fans, warm beer, lounging dogs, little half-naked babies roaming around and picnic tables. That's how it was. Some places were a little better, but it was a great "Cultural Immersion" experience.

From An Loc we drove to a "Peoples Resort" at Dong Xoai between Song be and Phouc Vinh. In 69 there was really nothing at Dong Xoai that I remember but now the four-lane highway traveled thru the place and it was quite nice. The people's resort had tennis courts and plenty of Tiger Beer. Some government officials were having a meeting here and their families were with them. They were very interested in us. The kids that accompanied the adults hovered around us and used us to practice their English. The schools must be pretty good because I took Spanish in high school and college and can't speak but a few phrases but they could converse on a basic level with us.

In the next issue of The Aviator we cover John's visit back to his old A.O. and share his memories of some of the battles where so many soldiers of the 1/9 Cav fought, and died.

Go Green with the VHPA & Save A Tree!

The 2008 Membership Directory is now available by request on a stand-alone CD!

Compatible with all Microsoft operating systems, including Vista, the CD contains more member information than what's available of the paper version, plus it also contains a complete history section and most of the Aviator Newsletters back to 1994!

Full details on ordering a CD Membership Directory are available at: HQ@vhpa.org

CHECK OUT OUR NEW ONLINE MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY at: www.vhpaservices.com

Here you will find the latest & greatest Membership Information plus the newest Aviator Newsletter is often posted here weeks before you get your hard copy in the mail!

Gary Roush, Directory Editor

Army Pilot earns Distinguished Service Cross for rescue of downed air crew in Vietnam

Army Pilot braved fire to save downed helicopter crew.

By Fred L. Borch
Reprinted from the Army Times,
September 24, 2007



In 1967, 1LT Richard Sterling stands next to one of the 155th AHC slicks.

For Richard A. Sperling, being a Vietnam helicopter pilot meant risking everything to attempt a rescue of his fellow soldiers.

Born in Illinois in 1942, Sperling graduated from Western Michigan University in 1965. He served briefly in air defense artillery and, in 1965, trained as a helicopter pilot deploying to Vietnam. Initially he was a section leader and intelligence officer in the 155th Assault Helicopter Company on Ban Me Thout, Vietnam.

On March 16th, 1967 then 1st Lt. Sperling was piloting a UH-1 near Duc To. It was his first day as an aircraft commander. After helicopters dropped infantry into a landing zone near a suspected Viet Cong stronghold, they came under intense fire. Armed helicopters and bombers were called in but were not able

to silence the heavily fortified enemy. When Sperling's element reached the LZ, one of the helicopters was hit by intense automatic weapons fire and the Huey careened into the jungle and crashed.

Sperling volunteered to attempt a rescue. His superiors advised him not to attempt to land again in the "hot" LZ, nonetheless, Sperling touched down in a small clearing about 150 yards from the wreckage. He left his helicopter on foot and plunged into the jungle. According to official records, as Sperling moved toward the downed helicopter crew, "he was repeatedly subjected to sniper fire and mortar explosions". Braving this heavy barrage, Sperling arrived at the burning helicopter and found that Viet Cong troops were rapidly closing in on the crash site. Sperling then inspired the downed crewmembers to follow him and he led them back to his waiting aircraft through a hail of bullets and shrapnel. He assisted them aboard his helicopter and flew out of the jungle clearing just as Viet Cong troops penetrated the surrounding tree line.

For his extraordinary heroism in this daring rescue, Sperling was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, second only to the Medal of Honor for gallantry in combat.

In May 1967, Sperling was reassigned to the 188th Assault Helicopter Company in Dau Tieng, where he served as a section leader and aviation safety officer. He left Vietnam in November 1967 but remained on active duty until October 1968, when he transferred to the Army Reserves. For the next 27 years, Sperling served in a variety of increasingly challenging and important assignments. He completed the CH-47 Chinook helicopter aviation qualification course and the Rotary Wing Instrument Course. He graduated from the RCNSC (Reserve Components National Security



1LT Sperling is photographed with his crew the day after the rescue mission, from left to right they are: WO Bill Cristobal (C/P); Sp4 DiSimone, Door Gunner; PFC Mike Baucom, Crew Chief; and 1LT. Sperling (A/C) Sp4 DeSimone later became an Aviation Warrant Officer and now is a member of the VHPA.

Course) conducted by the National War College. Sperling also commanded the 195th Aviation Company and the 820th Engineer Battalion. When he retired as an aviation branch colonel in May, 1995, Sperling was the principal regional military emergency coordinator, Sixth U.S. Army, at the Presidio of San Francisco.

In addition to his many years as a soldier, Sperling was a pilot for United Air Lines. He retired from that career in 2002; he now lives in California and carries VHPA Membership card #M04526.

The author of this story, Fred L. Borch, retired from the Army after 25 years of service and is now working as the regimental historian for the Army JAG Corps.

On May 15th 2008, in a note accompanying these photos, Dick Sperling wrote "I feel it's very important to emphasize that this mission happened on my first day in Vietnam flying as an aircraft commander, and of course I had never before flown with this crew. Please make sure that we give proper recognition to every member of that flight crew that day, for unfortunately they never received any formal awards for the valor they also displayed. We all worked well together to accomplish that rescue and I am very proud to have served with each and every member of this very fine air crew."

BEETLE BAILEY



Reunion *See You In San Antonio!*

Detailed Schedule of Activities

Tuesday, July 1

11:00 AM – 2:00 PM	Vendor set up – Salon J-M
1:00 PM – 5:00 PM	Pre Registration – Registration Desk 2
2:00 PM – 6:00 PM	Vendors open for business - Salon J-M
8:00 PM – 12:00 PM	Early Bird informal get together – Salon I

Wednesday, July 2

9:00 AM – 8:00 PM	Registration – Registration Desk 2
9:00 AM – 2:00 PM	Highlights of San Antonio/Market Square Tour
9:30 AM – 2:30 PM	Sins and Saints Tour
10:00 AM – 6:00 PM	Vendor area – Salon J-M
6:00 PM – 7:00 PM	First time reunion attendee special orientation welcome reception – Salon I
7:00 PM – 11:00 PM	Welcome reception , buffet dinner, and party for all members and their guests – Grand Ballroom A-I (Full Buffet Dinner served at 8:00 PM to 9:30 PM)

Thursday, July 3

6:00 AM – 2:00 PM	Golf Tournament at Canyon Springs Golf Club; includes lunch and mementos
7:30 AM – 2:00 PM	The "unofficial" VHPA Member's Motorcycle Ride (Riders Meeting First)
8:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Mini-reunions (8:00 AM – noon and 1:00 PM – 5:00 PM)
9:00 AM – 2:00 PM	Highlights of San Antonio/Market Square Tour
9:30 AM – 2:30 PM	Sins and Saints Tour
9:00 AM – 6:00 PM	Registration – Registration Desk 2
9:00 AM – 6:00 PM	Vendor area – Salon J-M
11:30 AM – 1:00 PM	Luncheon with "Jug" Burkett
1:00 PM – 3:00 PM	War Story Contest
1:00 PM - 5:00 PM	Poker (I)
3:15 PM – 4:30 PM	Historical Presentation Forum Special Documentation Presentation –
9:00 PM – midnight	Vince Vance Concert Grand Ballroom A-I

Friday, July 4

8:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Mini-reunions (8:00 AM – noon and 1:00 PM – 5:00 PM)
7:30 AM – 2:00 PM	Participation in New Braunfels Parade
9:00 AM – 6:00 PM	Registration – Registration Desk 2
9:00 AM – 6:00 PM	Vendor area – Salon J-M
2:30 PM - 6:30 PM	Poker (II)
2:30 PM – 6:30 PM	Historical Presentation Forum II

Saturday, July 5

8:00 AM – 9:15 AM	KIA/MIA Gold Star Family Breakfast
9:00 AM – Noon	Registration – main floor registration desk Registration Desk 2
10:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Annual Business Meeting Grand Ballroom A-I
10:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Brunch and Face Reader for spouses and guests
Noon - 4:30 PM	Vendor Area Salon J-M
1:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Mini-reunions
1:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Veteran's Benefits Seminar
1:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Women's Seminar
3:15 PM – 4:30 PM	Historical Presentation Forum III –
5:45 PM – 12:00 PM	Doors open - Banquet, entertainment, & dance (Coat and tie event. Some members wear military dress uniform. Ladies wear cocktail dresses) – Grand Ballroom; ceremonies start at 6:30 PM

Sunday, July 6

AM Departure	Check out for majority of reunion attendees – returning home
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Reunion *See You In San Antonio!*

EXCITING NEWS REGARDING THE VETERANS SEMINAR

I have great news that should add some real substance to the Veterans Seminar on Saturday, July 5.

The Audie Murphy VA Center in San Antonio will provide at least 1-2 speakers to our panel of experts, in addition to our own Pike Anderson.

The San Antonio Center will have one person from the Benefits Division and one from the Application Division to speak about their respective divisions and answer questions regarding individual situations.

This may be the one time you can sit down with someone from the VA and discuss your specific claims, application or other related issues, get some answers and, hopefully, a better understanding of how the VA works and what it needs to hear from you regarding health issues.

I encourage all of you to bring appropriate paperwork and previous claim history you have accumulated, i.e. applications, letters of denial, etc. and other information that would allow them to give you specific direction on your claim.

We have limited seating, so please sign up when you submit your reunion application and we will make sure there is a space reserved for you.

I look forward to seeing all of you in San Antonio.

Rich Buzen

■ Have you been denied for something while some of your friends have successfully been approved and you do not understand why? This may be your opportunity to find out what you need to do or what you didn't do the first (second or third) time.

■ Don't understand what is covered and what is not? Bring your questions to the seminar and get the information you need to make a successful claim with the VA.

■ Want to know which diseases are covered and which are not, need to know if your hearing loss is covered, want information regarding the various forms of cancer that the VA has specifically attributed to Vietnam Service, this is the place.

THE "UNOFFICIAL" MEMBERS MOTORCYCLE RIDE (VIII)



Just a reminder, we are planning the "unofficial" Members Motorcycle Ride (VIII) to coincide with the 25th VHPA Reunion in San Antonio.

The Blue Knights also will accompany us on the ride. I suspect it will be much like the way it was organized in Denver with the Chapter of the Blue Knights, there.

We are planning the ride on July 3rd with a riders meeting at 7:30AM and returning that afternoon. Prospective riders could contact me at [redacted] and [redacted] or George VanRiper at [redacted] for more information about ride length, motorcycle rental locations, and so forth.

It will help us a lot to know how many riders to plan for as getting out of the city and into the desired riding area will need a fair amount of coordination with the Blue Knights, so an email to me or George letting us know of the member's intent to ride would be appreciated.

— DENNIS DEWINE

MEMBERS MOTORCYCLE RIDE

NOTE: This activity is not sponsored, sanctioned, or supervised by the VHPA. It is an activity independently planned, organized and monitored by members in their individual capacity, and not as agents or representatives of the VHPA.

REUNION POKER TOURNAMENT

3 July 1-5PM AND
4 July 2:30-6:00 PM

Entry Fee of \$25.00 may be paid at the door
Pat "Father" Ewing, Vance Blaylock
and several other volunteers will be dealing.

All proceeds go to the
VHPA Scholarship Fund

COME JOIN US AND HAVE FUN!



Cpt. "Snow" Anzalone Receives the Distinguished Flying Cross...



Caption: Left to Right: Major Bill Giese, Captain "Snow" Anzalone, LTC Gerald Kirklighter (deceased)

"DECEMBER 1966; Captain Fernancy "Snow" Anzalone receives the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry for conspicuous gallantry in aerial combat. Congratulating him are Major William (Bill) Giese, Copperhead 16, armed helicopter platoon leader and LTC Gerald Kirklighter, CO, 162nd Assault Helicopter Company (AHC), 11th Combat Aviation Battalion (CAB), Phouc Vinh, Vietnam. Captain Anzalone, from Independence, LA, served at the as the 162nd AHC Flight Surgeon from April 66-May 67. He was also awarded several Air Medals and the Bronze Star Medal for accompanying numerous 162nd AHC in-flight combat operations throughout III Corps during his tour.

"Doctor" Anzalone still maintains a thriving medical practice in Independence, Louisiana.

Richard Yood, MAS
Gladiator 21


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TAPS



Lowell Edgar Thomas

Lowell Edgar Thomas, 67, of Pearland, passed away April 4, 2008 in the Michael DeBakey VA Hospital in Houston. He was born March 12, 1941 in Calhoun, Illinois.

Lowell was a loving husband, father and grandfather who lived a very honorable and admirable life. He was highly respected and adored by his friends all over the city of Houston. He was a man who never met a stranger, and treated everyone as if they were his family.

Lowell served in the U. S. Army 1959-1963 and re-enlisted in 1968 to serve as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam. He was a pilot with the 240th Assault Helicopter Company (The Greyhounds) in 1970-1971 (Bearkat).

He owned and operated Lowell Thomas Foundation Repair in Pearland, Texas for more than two decades. Lowell is preceded in death by his father, his mother, both his father and his mother-in-law and one grandson. Jeremy Thomas. He is survived by his loving wife of over 40 years, Judith Ann (Conway), his mother, 4 children, 6 grandchildren, 4 sisters, 1 brother, numerous aunts and uncles, an honorary daughter, an honorary son and 25 nieces and nephews.

He was very proud of his service to this Country and his deepest passion was flying helicopters. His love for this great nation was second to none. His favorite holiday was the 4th of July. In January 2008, he was asked if he ever missed flying a helicopter...his response was "Only every day of my life."

★★★★★

Thomas W. Hall

Retired Lt. Col. Thomas W. Hall, 80, died April 28 in Lawrenceville, Ga., from complications of Alzheimer's disease.

Thomas graduated with Flight Class 57/11 and served as Rattler 5 with the 71st Assault Helicopter Company in Vietnam from July 23, 1966, through July 1, 1967.



He was drafted into the Army; he then attended OCS and, after graduation, served as a Corps of Engineers officer in the Korean War. After completion of the Army Language School, he was based in Caracas, Venezuela, as a pilot and a Spanish interpreter.

During the Vietnam War, Thomas flew Huey assault helicopters, ending his tour of duty as the executive officer of the 71st Assault Helicopter Company (Rattlers), but only after surviving a helicopter crash in the South China Sea.

He ended his Army career serving as a U.S. advisor to the Puerto Rico National Guard. After retirement, he remained in Puerto Rico and worked for a private aviation company during which time he was the personal campaign pilot of former Puerto Rican Gov. Hernandez Colon.

Thomas returned to the United States, where he attended law school and earned his degree as a JD and then went on to open law practices in Decatur and St. Mary's, Ga., where he also served a term as the town's city judge.

His survivors include his wife, Gretchen; daughters, Jean Hall, Brenda Fritz and Carol Charping; stepsons, Andrew and Adam Arrowood; 5 grandchildren and 4 step-grandchildren.

Thomas' military honors and awards include the Purple Heart Medal, the Bronze Star Medal, an Air Service Medal with "V" device and 8 Oak Leaf Clusters.

★★★★★

David Eugene Holt

David Eugene Holt, 67, died April 17 in Mineral Wells, Texas, after a lengthy illness.

He was born June 20, 1940, in Hunt County, between Lone Oak and Point, Texas. He married his childhood sweetheart, Elizabeth Ann Venters, on March 29, 1958, in Dallas, Texas.

Holt was a veteran of the Air Force, the Army Artillery and Special Forces. He was a paratrooper and a helicopter pilot, receiving his aviator wings with Class 69-48.

His tours of service included Europe, Central America, Asia and Southeast Asia. He received several decorations, including the Bronze Star Medal, the Army Commendation Medal with "V" device for valor, the Air Medal, the Vietnam Croix de Guerre, and various others.

Holt was honorably discharged from the service for medical reasons in November 1972.

His daughter, Yvette Rene Holt, preceded him in death, but he is survived by his wife of 50 years; daughters, Sherry McAdory, Eugenia Curtice, Erika Brackhahn, Ellen Murph and Amanda Holt; sons, David Holt II and Christopher Holt; 20 grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren.

★★★★★

Edward L. James

Edward Lee James, 76, died April 12 in a Fort Worth hospital.

James was born April 11, 1932, in Big Mountain, W.Va., to Orb and Virginia Pearl Wickline James. He was a member of the Warrant Officers Association and Willow Park Baptist Church.

James served his country with distinction in the Army, serving one tour in Korea and two tours in Vietnam. He earned his army aviator wings, graduating with Flight Class 57-05 and ended his service with the rank of Chief Warrant Officer 4, along with the rating of Master Army Aviator.

His wife Catherine James preceded him in death, but his survivors include his children, Edward Lee James, Carlton Glen James, Jeanmarie James-Shelly, Vicky Lynn James and Martin Lee James; nine grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

★★★★★

William D. Macey

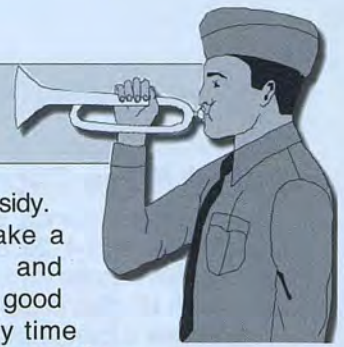
William B. Macey, 74, of Topeka, Kan., died May 2008 at his home after a battle with stomach cancer.

He was one of 4,500 Kansas ARNG soldiers placed on 24 months of active duty in 1968 in support of the Vietnam War. Upon his death, he was a dual-rated, Master Army Aviator, a military flight instructor, an aviation maintenance officer and an aviation safety officer.

Macey retired in 1986 as a lieutenant colonel in the Kansas ARNG, where he served as a GS 13 civil service technician and an aircraft pilot supervisor.

His wife, Barbara Mackey, four daughters, 11 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren, all of Topeka, survives him.

TAPS



Gerald D. Paul

Gerald D. Paul, 69, of Coppell, Texas, died on March 26 in St. Paul Hospital in Dallas, Texas from complications following a cardiac ablation procedure.

Paul served in the Army.

He is survived by his wife, Sue Paul of Coppell; children, John, Jim, Brenda, Brian Paul and Marshall Wiggins; stepchildren, Theresa Carpenter, Paul Colton, Stephen Colton, Suzette Price Doherty and Cherie Price.

☆☆☆☆

Kurt Rhodehamel

Kurt Rhodehamel's wife, Nan, notified me that Kurt passed away on April 1. He died peacefully, in a place where he was happy, well known and very, very comfortable — Hooter's Orlando Airport in his usual seat on the patio.

Kurt requested no services be held and Nan has requested that we remember him by . . . "Next time you'll all are together, have a Miller Lite, think of something funny he did. . ."

I know that will not be a hard thing for any of us to do. He gave us many funny moments that will always be remembered.

Kurt was awarded a Purple Heart Medal for his bravery in Vietnam as a gunship pilot. He served his country valiantly while being wounded. He retired as a major after his last tour of duty as executive officer at PM TRADE.

We all know that an enemy round went through the collective and blew his right index finger off. As a civilian, I always thought he was just "checking the windage" while flying one day.

Kurt is survived by his wife; his son, David, and granddaughters, Codie and Desiree; his daughter, Lisa, and grand-

daughter Kassidy.

Please take a moment and remember a good time, a funny time you shared with Kurt. If you will, please share it with me and his family via email. Nan will be getting his email at: krhodehamel@cfl.rr.com

I first met Kurt at Jekyll Island one year in the early 80s. Shortly afterward we worked together, but mostly then and now he was my friend. Yes, I shared many funny times with him. He was always quick-witted, thoughtful and ready to share his friendship.

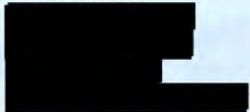
He had many friends from the "industry," from his neighborhood, from the Boggy Creek Golf Course and from Hooter's.

From a friend who will truly miss his humor and his friendship.

Arthur L. Banman

VHPA CHAPTERS

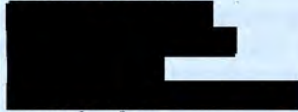
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Bill Sorenson



California Chapter North
Ken Fritz

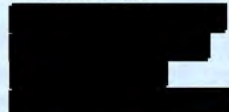


VHPA of Florida
Donald L. Welch

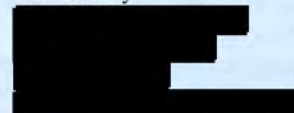


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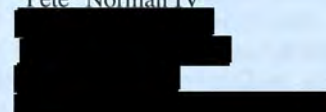
Fort Wolters Chapter
Adam Steczko



Georgia Chapter
Bill Stanley



Mid South Chapter
"Pete" Norman IV



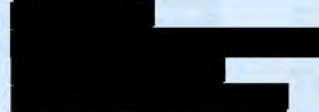
North Carolina Chapter
J.D. Lawson



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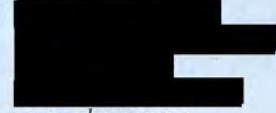
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The VHPA and Chapters share information and guidance with one another for the mutual benefit of their members. Chapters are separate and independently managed organizations not under control of the VHPA. Neither the VHPA nor any Chapter is authorized to act as agent or representative of the VHPA or any other Chapter.

CHAPTER ACTIVITIES

GEORGIA CHAPTER

Our next scheduled meeting is the June 7 breakfast at Christophers Restaurant, 1247 Powers Ferry Rd., Marietta, GA at 0900. All members and potential members are invited to join us.

Bill Stanley, Pres.

VHPA OF FLORIDA

Our chapter participated in Fun N' Sun, one of the largest fly in get togethers in the country on 8-12 April. Although we didn't get any new members for National we did get 4 new members for our chapter. We are using our large memorabilia display at the numerous reunions around the state.

Don Welch, Pres.

NORTH CAROLINA CHAPTER

NCC is participating in air shows and fly-ins around the area. On 17 May we will be at Lumberton, NC for the air show, 24 May in Florence, SC for the "May Fly Air Show", May 31 and 1 June at Danville, VA.

J.D. Lawson, Pres.

OHIO RIVER CHAPTER

The Feb meeting in Columbus was great, super door prizes. Everyone had a fabulous time. Chapter members are involved in a multitude of activities in support of USA Cares, VFW and American Legion.

John Flanagan, Pres.

MID-SOUTH CHAPTER

"Pete" Norman IV was elected new president of the chapter. We approved \$1,000 to pay for some of the fuel for the choppers flying to the Wall in D.C. for Memorial Day. We are also going to provide lunch for the crews while they refuel here in Lebanon, TN. The Fort Campbell Band is going to play and there will be a register for people to sign to send messages to the Wall. We are still looking for help on restoration of the TH-55.

Chris Horton

CALIFORNIA SOUTH CHAPTER

The guys had a great time at the Chili Cook Off and the St. Pats quarterly meeting at the American Legion in Newport Beach. May 3 is our next quarterly meeting. The theme will be Cinco de Mayo. It will consist of a bar-b-que and pool party at Ed Holguin's house. Contact Ed at his e-mail address for directions. All members or prospective members are invited.

Ed Holguin, Pres.

WASHINGTON STATE CHAPTER

The next chapter meeting will be held at the Olympia Airport, Olympia, WA on June 14 in conjunction with the annual air show on the 14th and 15th (Sat and Sun). We invite all of you in the area, members or not, to join us at the show.

Paul Fleming, Pres.

FORT WORTH CHAPTER

Chapter will have its monthly meeting on June 7 at Logan's Road house. If you are in the vicinity drop in and say "hi".

Adam Steczko, Pres.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN CHAPTER

RMCVHPA will display th Helicopter War Museum at the Armed Forces Day activities to be held at Bittersweet Park in Greeley, CO on May 17. The Order of the Purple Heart will be dedicating a memorial at the park on that day. In addition the '091 reunion will take place along with a fund raising Bar-b-Que to raise funds for the Weld County Veteran's Memorial operating fund. The RMC will host the beverage sales - beer, soda and water...food is to be prepared by ladies auxiliaries from donated beef and pork.

On June 21 the chapter members and guests will take a luncheon train ride through Royal Gorge (home of the high-

est suspension bridge in North America). The southern Colorado location of the event is hoped to encourage some of our membership from the Colorado Springs area to join in the trip. To date (early May) 12 couples have signed up for the deeply discounted trip at \$51. pp which includes lunch in the vista dome car.

Those RMC members not attending the Annual VHPA Reunion in San Antonio will be displaying the Helicopter War Museum over the week of the 4th of July at the Thornton, CO Veterans War Memorial.

The travelling "WALL" will be on display at this event and incoming president Rick Beaver will oversee Museum operations.

The event runs from July 1-6. Please check our website www.vhparmc.org for details, directions and volunteers to help.

We elected Rick Beaver to be chapter president as of 1 July.

Ed Fickes, Pres.

CALIFORNIA NORTH CHAPTER

CCN has the following events scheduled:

May 13 & 14 - MOC and Huey wash, inventory cleanup, 0900-1400 hrs, Western Truck School. VOLUNTEERS needed. Bring lunch and a drink.

May 26 - Memorila Day Parade with the MOC and Huey.

July 1-5 - MOC open to all VHPA members and guests at the VHPA Reunion in San Antonio, TX.

July 2 - VHPA Reunion Welcome Reception meeting of CCN members.

August 9 - Burgers 'n Beer 'n Chicken at Oxbow Marina, Isleton, CA.

Sept. 13 - Golf Tourney/ Challenge to Southern Cal Chapter, location and course TBD.

Oct 13 - Veterans Day Parade, Elk Grove, CA with the MOC and Huey.

Dec 6 - Christmas Party at Mc Clellan AFB, / Lion's Gate Hotel.

Ken Fritz, Pres.

The owner of Florida license plate UH 1D writes...

I am attaching a photo of my Florida automobile vanity license plate for you to run in "The VHPA Aviator." I've done a complete range of vanity plates recalling my 20 years in the Army but still have a couple of aircraft remaining.

This UH 1D plate has been kept the longest because it is recognized by many Vets here in Pensacola. I get stopped virtually everyday and get to listen to their Huey war stories. Then I get the "thank you" meant for all the Army Huey drivers who helped them get home safely.

I flew Huey's for A Company, 25th Aviation Battalion, 25th Infantry Division (Little Bears) out of Cu Chi in Vietnam from Feb 67 to Feb 68. I graduated from Class 66-19/21 and am presently living in Pensacola, Florida.



Ronald D. (Ron) Hall
ronaldhall2@aol.com

Jim Kreutz asks.... Am I a Hero?

I recently attended my first meeting with the local Distinguished Flying Cross Society. Introductions revealed there were members present from World War II, Korea, Vietnam and a member from Iraq who could not be there.

Several had been in both WW II and Korea and one in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. These guys that flew P-38s, P-51s, B-17s, B-24s, F-86s, etc. against the Nazis, the Japanese and the Commies were my heroes when growing up in the late 1940s and 1950s. They were my inspiration and set the example that Mom and Dad said motivated me to tell them at about 8 years old that I wanted to grow up to be a military pilot and they said I was emphatic that I did not want to be a airline pilot, crop-duster or any type of pilot other than a fighter pilot.

Driving home after the meeting, I felt pretty humble and kind of questioned whether I really deserved to sit with these guys. So for the first time I started thinking about the meaning and significance of heroism and how it related to my awards and service.

During my first tour in Vietnam while an "Avenger" gunship pilot in the 189th Assault Helicopter Company I received two Distinguished Flying Crosses, an Air Medal for Valor, an Army Commendation Medal for Valor and the Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Silver Star.

Did this make me a hero? Our primary mission was supporting Special Forces teams out of Command and Control Central at Kontum. These teams performed highly classified missions in Cambodia and Laos.

Because of the classifications very few awards were made for these missions. Consequently, in thinking about the missions where I received the awards, only one was in my opinion in the top 10 of what I considered to be my most difficult and dangerous missions. Did that mean I should have gotten awards for the rest of the missions?

The awards all have words to the effect, "For heroism while participating in aerial flight evidenced by voluntary actions above and beyond the call of duty."

I just don't think these missions met those criteria. Our duty was to provide gun support to slicks (troop carriers) and to the Special Forces teams on the ground and to take out specified enemy targets, so in every case where I got an award, I was only doing my duty. I could understand the awards being recognition for doing a good job, but not for over and above.

If I deserved the awards, then what about the rest of my crew, and our entire fire-team? Typically, as the aircraft commander or fire team lead, I would get an award and the other people would get lesser awards. To me this was totally wrong; we functioned as a team and to be successful, everyone had to do his job and if one deserved an award then all did.

Taken another step, how about the guys we were supporting on the ground? If we were heroes in the air, these guys were eyeball-to-eyeball and muzzle-to-muzzle with the enemy. Didn't they deserve at least as much, if not more, than we did?

Later I got to thinking about friends who got killed during flight school, all other troops killed in combat and even the so called non-combat clerks and jerks killed by rockets, mortars, accidents or because of medical problems. Shouldn't everyone who puts on a uniform and swears to defend our country, then does their job to the best of their ability be a hero and those that give their life serving our country be the ultimate heroes?

These thoughts, of course, are only my own, but I have met others who seem to share similar opinions about awards and heroism.

Years ago I had a long conversation with a friend who was a Medal of Honor winner and who, in my opinion, deserved at least two more of them. Fred always maintained that he never felt like a hero because even during the mission that earned him the medal he felt he was only doing what needed to be done

So, am I a hero? I really appreciate the awards as recognition for doing a good job under difficult circumstances. But a hero? Only as long as everyone else who has ever put on a uniform to defend our country is considered one!

Jim Kreutz

We Were soldiers then And young

The 1st cav was my home
For a year and a day.

I flew c & c, if it be known
And the huey was the best I would say.

The fear of battle was soon over come
When the first shot rang true.
Over the "whop-whop" of the huey
The sound became familiar too.

I took a little of the idrang
On every mission I flew
My cargo were commanders
That had been there too.

We flew to happy valley,
An lo, ke sanh, and hue.
The body count was the tally
We lived to fight another day.

You can't pick us out from the crowd
We were hero's unsung
We were the Cav and proud
We were soldiers then and young

Written by Cwo paul s. gould
11 gs avn co. 1st cav - 67-68
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Senior Aviator

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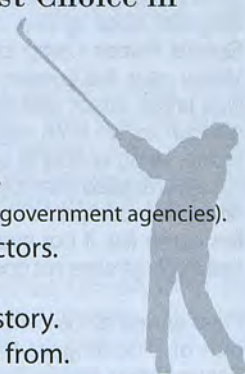
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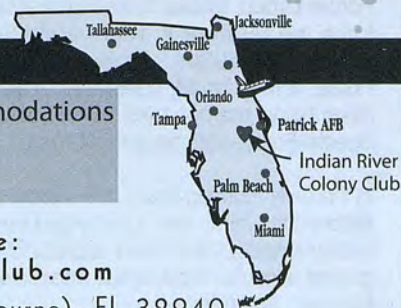
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Contact

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John Bradford's tale of heroism in the A Shau valley....

Late in the afternoon of 9 March 1966, I was a young, badly wounded, Special Forces Sergeant holed up in a bunker at the A Shau Special Forces Camp located in the A Shau Valley near the Laotian border. The Camp was under attack and on the verge of being overrun by an NVA regiment. With daylight fading, being unable to walk, and after watching several failed attempts to evacuate me and other wounded personnel, I knew that when the camp fell, if not evacuated, our odds of making it out were not good.

I had arrived at the camp two days earlier, as part of a contingent from the 5th Special Forces Group, Mobile Strike Force sent to reinforce the resident A Team and their Vietnamese irregulars. Known as the "Mike Force," it was largely composed of ethnic Chinese Nung mercenaries trained and led by Special Forces Officers and NCO's.

In the early morning hours of 9 March, the NVA flattened the camp with a prolonged mortar and rocket barrage and then launched several ground assaults. As a result, approximately 50 Nungs, 30 Vietnamese irregulars, and 2 Special Forces personnel were killed. About 100 irregulars and Nungs and virtually all of the remaining 15 Special Forces personnel were wounded. Two of the latter, including myself and the resident Team Sergeant, plus about thirty Nungs and Vietnamese irregulars, were judged by our medics to be in serious condition and in need of medical evacuation.

In conjunction with the main attack, the NVA overran several peripheral outposts and ringed the hills around the camp with 12.7 and 37mm AA sites. Due to very low cloud cover, air support was extremely vulnerable to these weapons and small arms fire. Virtually every aircraft that entered the valley near the camp or overflew the camp was hit and a number, including an A1E Skyraider, a C47 "Spooky" gun ship and several helicopters were shot down.

Around mid-morning, an Army O1 Bird Dog, piloted by an unknown aviator with some large cojones, landed and evacuated the Team Sergeant who was literally dragged to the airstrip by two Special Forces Soldiers and

thrown, head first, into the aircraft. Late that afternoon, a Marine H34 which tried to evacuate the remainder of the seriously wounded was hit and crashed in the Camp. Another H34, which came in shortly thereafter, departed as soon as the crew of the downed H34 jumped aboard, and made no attempt to load anyone else. After being carried several times, under fire, to the Camp LZ, only to be brought back to the bunker because an attempted medevac had failed or was aborted, it seemed that I and the others in critical condition needed a miracle to get out of the Camp alive.

The miracle arrived in the form of a CH3 which landed in the Camp with a roar of turbines and in a cloud of dust and debris. I remember a solitary Airman firing an M-16 from the door as it touched down. Despite taking fire while Special Forces NCO's lifted the wounded, including me, over a mob of panicked Vietnamese irregulars trying to board the aircraft, the pilot held steady and lifted off only after we were safely on board. Thirty minutes later, I arrived at a Navy/Marine Corps medical facility at Da Nang from which I was evacuated to Okinawa.



Drawing by Luc Pieterbourg

I subsequently found out that the camp had, in fact, been overrun and that the survivors were forced to E & E for several days until they were picked up by Marine and Army aircraft. I also learned that Several Special Forces soldiers attempted to carry a wounded comrade as they evacuated the Camp evading pursuing NVA, but he died during the process and his body was hidden and left behind. It was never recovered. Since that time, I periodically attempted, without luck, to identify the guys who manned that CH3. About three years ago, a friend who is a former Air Force Special Operations helicopter pilot, said that he would try to obtain the information I was seeking. He recently informed me that he had located a Frank Kelly, the pilot, and only surviving member of the crew.

I contacted Kelly and he confirmed that on 9 March 1966, he; co-pilot, Captain John T. Baggs; and crew chief, Technical Sergeant, Lyle Keller; crewed the CH3 that evacuated the wounded from Camp A Shau. During the course of our lengthy conversation, I began to realize that I had been rescued by a very special man; a real American hero that served his country during three conflicts.

Briefly stated, Kelly joined the Massachusetts National Guard in 1940 as a private in a field artillery unit; was selected as an aviation cadet in 1943; completed flight school in 1944 and was commissioned as a 2Lt. in the Army Air Corps; and flew B25's on bombing missions in Italy in 1945. He was discharged and returned to Massachusetts shortly after the end of the war. In 1953, during the Korean conflict, he was recalled to active duty with the Air Force and flew B25's and T29's that served as training platforms for student radar operators. While at Waco, Texas, Kelly saw a helicopter "take off backwards" and was so impressed that he requested qualification as a helicopter pilot. After completing the 90 day transition course at San

Marcos, Texas in 1955, he remained on active duty, serving in Japan, Korea and CONUS, flying a number of aircraft including the H19, H5, H21 and CH3 on various missions.

Among the exploits Kelley related to me were ditching an H21 in the Atlantic off Massachusetts and spending several hours in a life raft - Kelley still regrets that press coverage of

the incident credited him, a Bostonian, with saving the crew while ignoring C. B. Jeannes, a Texan and instructor pilot, who actually flew the aircraft; flying one of the first CH3B models

Kelley arrived in Vietnam in 1965 as part of the 20th Helicopter Squadron, initially known as "Pony Express" and later the "Green Hornets." Stationed in Nha Trang, his section, consisting of six CH3C's, rotated between various airbases in Vietnam and Thailand performing a variety of missions. He explained that on 9 March 1966, while in I Corps en route to Khe Sanh, he was diverted to the A Shau Valley to pick up the crew of a C47 "Spooky" gun ship that had been shot down near the Special Forces Camp. As

Continued on bottom of next page

"The Rest of the Story"
on this issue's Back Cover Photos....

THE 11TH ACR PHOTOS BY DONIVAN EARHART

The bottom photo shows AH-1G Widow Maker coming in to refuel at Phu Loi in late 1971. This was the cover photo for the 1994 Calendar. We believe the full tail number is #68-15095. This Cobra served with the Air Cav Troop of the 11th ACR from Aug 1969 until they stood-down in Mar 1972 when it returned to CONUS. You can read "Bill" on the back seater's helmet. For years we believed this was CPT Billy Ray Johnson. However, recently the really Billy Ray said, "That is not me! I certainly remember the aircraft." So we are all back to trying to identify these guys. We also don't know the name of the front seater but his helmet is rather distinctive! You have to love the Warrant Officer bars painted on the engine intake cowling. The white stenciling near the rear

canopy read AC CPT P.E. LE?? and CE SP4 ?HITCTH??
Clearly if you can identify these guys – please contact Mike
Law or call VHPA HQ.

The center photo shows OH-6A #67-16470 Cheap Thrills also coming into the Phu Loi refuel point. This was the March photo in the 1994 Calendar. This LOH served with HHT and ACT/11th ACR from Nov 1971 until they stood-down in Mar 1972. The names stenciled in white read AC CPT H???TT and CE SP5 FA???

The top photo shows an AH-1G and an OH-6A from the ACT/11th ACR parked outside of a revetment area. This was the January photo in the 1994 Calendar. It was titled "A Pink Team Taking a Day Off."

The Story of The VHPA's Calendar Project...By Mike Law

Donivan Earhart's Gift

THE BACK PAGE OF THE 1994 VHPA CALENDAR (the VHPA's first Calendar) reads in part: "The idea of producing a calendar using Vietnam era helicopter photos is not new. Many who flew or crewed helicopters in Vietnam have talked about and dreamed of this idea. Usually each had one or two photos he was rather proud of – hardly enough for a complete calendar. Over the years, the VHPA Directory Committee collected half a dozen – again not enough. Just prior to the VHPA 10th Reunion held in July 1993 in Phoenix, Donivan Earhart sent a letter and a copy of his Widow Maker to the VHPA asking if it and others could be displayed in the Vendor Area during the Reunion. During subsequent conversations, he mentioned his dream of using his photos in a calendar and his frustration at not being able to find a partner."

Mike Law, then the VHPA Membership Directory Committee Chairman, recalls: "When I opened Donovan's package, the first print I saw was Widow Maker. I immediately knew the VHPA could launch the Calendar project!" Mike continues, "The VHPA had a great working relationship with Rand Publishing in Wichita, KS and I believed the Executive Council was willing to add something new to its successful string of "products" (the Newsletter, the Directory, and the Reunion). Literally Donovan's gift was final piece we needed to make it all happen. The Executive Council approved a business plan for the Calendar and we started working on our first issue." Mike's closing comment on the history of the VHPA Calendar Project includes a promise to provide details about how former VHPA President Ken Fritz and

Turner Publishing Company saved the project from financial disaster and retooled it in the wonderful product we still enjoy today.

SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT DONIVAN

Donivan served as a CH-47 crew chief in Vietnam with the 213th Aviation (Assault Support Helicopter) Company, the Black Cats, at Phu Loi from 1970 to 1972. He was fresh out of AIT when he reported to the 213th. Not long after that the First Sergeant handed him a camera with the instructions to "go take some good pictures." Donivan recalls, "I was always chasing after helicopters but the pictures weren't very good. Then the First Sergeant told me to position the camera at the refuel point and let the helicopters come to me. Brilliant! Not only that but I'd be really close up while they were still in the air. I quickly started taking some great pictures. In fact I had so many that finally I'd only took one if I thought something was interesting – like the nose art or the paint scheme or the ship's name." When Donivan got off active duty he continued to use his mechanics and photography skills. He has his own commercial photography shop at 507 Cheyenne Lane, Clarksville, TN 37042 and he works for DynCorp International at Fort Campbell.

DONIVAN COULD USE YOUR HELP...

Donivan has faithfully supported the VHPA Calendar Project since the very beginning. However, some how he was not able to obtain a copy of the 1999 VHPA Calendar. If you have one for sale or trade, please contact him at 931-645-4256 or the address stated above.

Continued from page 20 ☆☆☆

he approached the valley, Kelley was contacted by Major Bernard Fischer, flying lead for four A1E Skyraiders providing air support for the Camp (Fischer was awarded the Medal of Honor for landing, under fire, on the Camp air strip the following day and rescuing his wing man, who had earlier crash landed there). Fisher suggested that because of the low ceiling and the intense AA and ground fire, that Kelley follow him to the crash site. Kelley did so and, after running the gauntlet down the valley and determining that no survivors were present, headed to the Special Forces Camp. He recalled land-

ing near the downed H34; the frantic, unwounded Vietnamese mobbing the aircraft as the wounded were loaded; how, on take off, he "wiggled" the aircraft to insure that the persons clinging to its undercarriage and sponsons were dislodged; and how a young GI in a tiger suit refused to sit down after being carried aboard - unknown to him, I had been wounded, among other places, in both buttocks.

Kelley retired in 1968 and returned to Massachusetts. He and his wife, Eleanor, live in Plymouth. I suspect that most of his neighbors don't know of his

exploits and some see him as an old warhorse put out to pasture. If they only knew - this guy is the real deal, a hero that the George Clooneys, Tom Hanks and other Hollywood types portray in movies. How do you thank a person for giving you forty-plus extra years of life? When I tried, he replied "If you ever need help again, you know who to call."

John W. Bradford

What's Up with the Aviator's New Back Cover?

Since the front and back cover pages are printed on one pass, the old black and white membership application form that appeared on the back cover for years was actually printed with a color press. The Newsletter committee now hopes the readers enjoy seeing some neat color photos from the VHPA Digital Photo Collection – also known as everything the VHPA Calendar and Directory editors have collected over the years.

The DMZ Dustoff Association guys were pleasantly surprised and pleased to be featured in the March/April issue. Hopefully the Black Horse guys will smile when they get this issue.

What is the theme for the Back Cover?

While this isn't cast in stone, here are the ideas we are currently playing with:

1. Devote each issue to a specific unit or a specific aircraft type.
2. Include unit patches if at all possible.
3. Have pictures of people with their helicopters if at all possible.
4. Include a short historical explanation of what the photos present.
5. Re-run some of the best photos from the early VHPA Calendars because there are lots of us who haven't seen them.

Do you have photos you'd like to see published?

Please contact Mike Law, the VHPA Calendar Editor and "librarian" for the VHPA's Digital Photo Collection, at 303-988-7797 or calendar@vhpa.org or 6969 West Yale Ave, Unit 72, Denver, CO 80227. Additionally if you have some creative suggestions for how we might be able to present some old photos/patches/stories – contact Mike.

How can I see what photos the VHPA already has?

Go to WWW.VHPAPHOTO.ORG. Under the CALENDARS tab, you will see a short pull-down list. Click on 2000s and a second pull-down list appears. Click on the 2007 or 2008 tabs. You will see some header information that appeared in the publication, then a thumbnail version of each photo plus the narrative description that appeared with the photo.

The photos appear in the sequential order printed in the publication. You can also see the owner of each photo.

What sort of photos does the VHPA need?

- We have relatively few good photos of Army OH-13s, OH-23s or UH-1Cs in Vietnam, of actual Combat Assaults, of VNAF or Korean or Australian or Thai helicopters, of U.S. Navy helicopters (other than HA(L)-3), of USMC UH-34s, UH-1Es or CH-53s, of U.S. Air Force CH-3s or CH-53s. The Marines only had their twin-engine Cobras, the AH-1J, in Vietnam for 90 days during Lam Son 719. We have only one very poor quality photo of them.
- We also need photos that nearly tell the story by themselves. For example – the famous photo of the 478th HHC CH-54A with a 10,000-lb bomb or the 57th AHC UH-1H with four guys attached to rope ladders or a Shrimboat CH-47 lifting a piggy-back load or the only DUSTOFF OH-6A.
- How many people remember that an Air Cav Troop had 10 OH-6As, 9 AH-1Gs, and 7 UH-1Hs (or OH-13s, UH-1Bs, and UH-1Ds in the early years)? Hundreds of guys will say – Sure. But do we have one with all three types in the same photo? NO!!
- Additionally we have nearly a complete void for some units – the Engineers, Army Security, Maintenance, and Signal to name a few.
- How many of you flew in an ARA unit? We have a few UH-1B photos but virtually zero with Cobras.
- In the last couple of years we have been blessed with some wonderful CH-21, CH-37, UH-1A and UH-1B photos from the early days – however, we could always use more.
- Thankfully the artists in our community (Joe Kline, Mike Leahy, and Paul Frett to name a few) have been willing to share their artwork with the VHPA.

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**NOTE: Life memberships may be purchased with three bi-monthly payments of \$185 each.*



11th ACR photos
by Donovan Earhart.

See page 21 for full details on them,
and Donavin's contributions to
the VHPA Calendar Project.



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