



# The VHHPA Newsletter

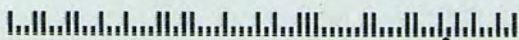
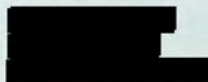
Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

July/August 2001 Vol. 19, No. 4



Members of the WOC Chorus give a concert at the final banquet of the Denver reunion. Members of the chorus are (from left) Mike Roulier, Tom Percy, Hayden "Pappy" Jones, Jim Schueckler and John Tucker.

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## From the President

We truly have come a long way.

In a way, it does not seem all that long ago we were together in a far different, much more hostile place, wondering what our future held for us "in-country" and once we returned stateside.

It is not difficult to remember what kept many of us going during those years — the camaraderie, friendships, sense of mission and, of course, each other.

Some 30 years later, plus or minus a few, more than 1,000 pilots get together again each July 4th.

What motivates us to make the trip and possibly give up some of the unique local activities and events in our own hometowns over that weekend? It's no secret — the camaraderie, friendships, sense of mission and, of course, each other.

Our association is about each other — sharing the good times, remembering our heritage, exchanging memories and, most important, bringing old friends back together again.

In recent years, our membership has grown to more than 11,000 pilots and that number increases daily as more of our comrades hear of our organization.

However, we know there are thousands more of our fellow pilots who do not know we exist and time is truly running out.

All one needs to do is read elsewhere in this newsletter about some of our comrades who are no longer with us; and, with every newsletter, the number will gradually increase. Age will take its toll with our membership in definitive numbers than our arch-enemies in Vietnam could not even dream about.

### Long-term priorities get attention

Your elected Executive Council members and committee chairmen spent time during our recent reunion in Den-



Dave Rittman

ver to start thinking about our long-term priorities and their prioritization.

I strongly believe in the team approach and, thus, we also have been seeking similar input from all of our chapter presidents in the past few weeks.

It is a "work in process" as of the print deadline for this newsletter. However, I can tell you what is clearly surfacing as one of the highest: Finding our missing comrades — now, while we still have the vigor in life and time to enjoy their friendships once again.

Technology is on our side.

Gary Roush, Mike Law, and many others have been working very hard on this for a long time, and recently extracted from orders more than 10,000 social security numbers for pilots "missing in action" since those years long ago.

This will allow us to use various commercial and public databases to find and contact them in the months ahead.

### Young group to seek missing pilots

Dana Young is heading up a committee of dedicated volunteers to develop the details to locate our missing comrades this year and get them to our future reunions.

We'll keep you up to speed on our progress in future newsletters, but I sincerely believe we are going to see some exciting things happen this year with the assistance of our chapters, our individual members, project volunteers and, of course, your executive council, committee chairmen and headquarters staff.

If you have not been to a reunion or haven't been to one lately, you have been missing out big time.

We just finished up another great get-together in Denver, and I know all who attended sincerely appreciate the extraordinary efforts of Mike Law, the Rocky Mountain Chapter, and the many volunteers from the Denver area who made this reunion so successful.

They literally spent thousands of organizational hours over the past two years to put on the reunion for all of us. On behalf of the entire organization, thank you all for all you did.

Going to next year's reunion? We hope so, and we have a great location for you, Las Vegas . . . that's the new Las Vegas, which if you have not been in the past year or two, you absolutely will not recognize.

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## Classified ads

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| VHPA reunion website      | www.vhpareunion.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.

# VHPA chapters

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[Redacted]  
(work)  
(fax)

Albert Rodriguez, President

[Redacted]

## California Chapter North

[Redacted]  
(work)  
(fax)

George Larson, President

[Redacted]

## VHPA of Florida

[Redacted]  
www.vhpafl.org  
[Redacted]

Gary Bortolus, President

[Redacted]

## Fort Wolters Chapter

[Redacted]  
(work)

John Grow, President

[Redacted]

## Georgia Chapter

[Redacted].com  
www.ga-vhpa.org  
[Redacted] (home)  
[Redacted] (work)  
[Redacted] (fax)

Woody McFarlin Jr., President

[Redacted]

## Las Vegas Chapter

[Redacted].et  
www.VHPALasVegas.org  
[Redacted] (home)  
[Redacted] (work)

Lad Vaughan, President  
[Redacted] 185  
[Redacted], NV 89103

## Mid America Chapter

[Redacted].com  
[Redacted] (home)  
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Gary Wineteer, President

[Redacted]

## Mid-South Chapter

[Redacted]  
(home)  
(work)  
(fax)

Charlie Bell, President

[Redacted]

## National Capital Chapter

[Redacted]  
(work)  
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Peter Kacerguis, President

[Redacted]

## North Carolina Chapter

[Redacted]  
(home)  
(work)  
(fax)

Joe Armstrong, President

[Redacted]

## Ohio River LZ Chapter

[Redacted]  
(home)  
(work)

Andy Archer, President

[Redacted]

## Rocky Mountain Chapter

[Redacted]  
(work)  
(fax)

Ellwood V. Soderlind, President

[Redacted]

## Southern California Chapter

[Redacted]  
(home)  
(work)  
(fax)

Carl Cortez, President

[Redacted]

## Washington State Chapter

[Redacted]  
(home)

Jack Salm Jr., President

[Redacted]

# VHPA Products

You may order a past calendar with incredible color photos through VHPA Headquarters or online at <http://www.vhpa.org> The 2001 Calendar may only be ordered by calling Turner Publishing at (800) 788-3350.

| Product                                                        | Each        | P&H           | No. | Total     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|-----|-----------|
| Bumper sticker                                                 | \$1         | Free          |     | \$        |
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| 1999 Directory — 1972 Easter Offensive                         | \$15        | \$5 ea        |     | \$        |
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| 1998 Calendar                                                  | \$5         | \$5 ea        |     | \$        |
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| Historical Reference Directory — Vol. I. (Highlights 1961-65)  | \$10        | \$5 ea        |     | \$        |
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| Vietnam Helicopter History CD-ROM (\$15 for VHPA members)      | \$25        | \$5 ea        |     | \$        |
| <b>Grand total</b>                                             |             |               |     | <b>\$</b> |

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Complete this form, then mail or fax it to:

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| City:                    | State:                        | Zip:                                |  |
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| Card number:             | Expiration date:              |                                     |  |
| Signature:               |                               |                                     |  |

# From the President

## Continued from Page 2

There are fabulous activities for the whole family, incredible entertainment, quality everything, and literally the No. 1 tourist destination in the world. Everything seems new, and absolutely first class.

Our headquarters hotel is the Riviera, which has just completed a \$130 million-plus renovation and expansion.

The hotel has great facilities, a great staff and a great location. Get out your calendars and mark them now. Arrival day is Wednesday July 3, 2002.

Likely plans include some type of Fourth of July pool party, possibly major entertainment on Friday the 5th, and our final banquet is Saturday evening, July 6.

While most members will check out Sunday the 7th, you can arrive up to three days early and stay up to three days later at the same, very low, negotiated VHPA rates.

Additional details will be available in our next newsletter and we will open up the registration process about Jan. 1, 2002, by using our [www.vhpa.org](http://www.vhpa.org) website.

## Registration to be computerized

Something that you will really like is a newly developed, totally computerized, on-line registration process for our event/banquet activities and for making hotel reservations. It all can be done at one time, and you get confirmations back by e-mail within minutes.

You will need your membership number, so if you don't know it, save this newsletter, which has the number on the address label.

For those of you who do not have computer access, don't worry, we will have a manual backup procedure for you.

In order to ensure all of our heavily discounted rooms are used for our membership, it will not be possible to call the hotel directly to get a room at our special rate. That can be done only through the website or by the manual procedure we'll provide to members who request it.

Early registration will be very important this year, as the Fourth of July in Las Vegas is going to be a total sell-out.

Plan early and book your airfares early while they are inexpensive. The heavily discounted flights will sell out long before the 21-day normal advance airfare cutoff because of the holiday weekend.

## Legacy to get attention

One of the other key new projects we will be working on over the next year is to identify and implement our long-term legacy.

What do we want our association to be 10 or 20 years from now? How do we wish to be remembered when we are all gone?

They're a significant questions that will require much thought and consideration to gain consensus, but with everyone's help, we will accomplish this and lay the groundwork for our ultimate future and commitment to society when our membership has long dwindled.

To help guide us in this process, I am please one of your former association presidents, Bob Smith, has volunteered to head up a committee to strategize and work through this very important planning effort.

Another new committee this year centers around technology.

Charlie Holley has agreed to head up this committee, working with our headquarters staff to provide it the best possible equipment and database software, development of the new reunion on-line registration system, the automated links to the hotel, possible new methods of communication with our members.

Mike Law, Gary Roush and many others will be helping on this, and their efforts will be very apparent in the months ahead.

I am very proud of your volunteer committee and elected council members who donate so much of their time to help further our association — hundreds and, sometimes, thousands of hours annually.

Through their collective efforts, we are financially sound and provide you with so many individual efforts and labors of love: The newsletter you are reading today times six each year, the annual calendar, the database and historical books, membership listings and addresses, the reunions, and so much more.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will find a copy of our annual certified audit, which we passed with flying colors (thank you, Tom Payne, Dan Ferguson and Marcia Fritz), and a list of our Executive Council and committee heads, along with some of the key projects they are doing on your behalf. Thank you all for everything you are doing.

Our camaraderie does not start and end with just our annual reunion. For a number of us it goes on throughout the year in our own geographical areas.

## VHPA has 14 chapters

We currently have 14 chapters around the country. Their locations are listed near the front page of this newsletter.

Want to join? Call them. You will not regret the experience.

No chapter near you? Start one! It's not all that hard, and we'll help by providing a list of pilots who live in your geographical area.

We do ask that the minimum number to form a chapter be 15 members, and all the documents or forms you would need are available on our [www.vhpa.org](http://www.vhpa.org) website.

Mike Hurley is heading up the chapter coordination efforts this year, and our HQ staff is literally just a phone call away. Call (800) 505-VHPA, ask for Linda, and she

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## Letters

# Julie Kink becomes honorary member

Julie Kink, well known to many of our members, has been extended honorary membership in VHPA.

In the history of our association, we have had only two previous honorary members: Terrie B. Clark and Carter Harman.

Honorary memberships are awarded, by vote of the VHPA Executive Council, to "distinguished persons, such as aviation pioneers, guest speakers, and aviation dignitaries."

Julie was nominated by VHPA member Jim Schueckler.

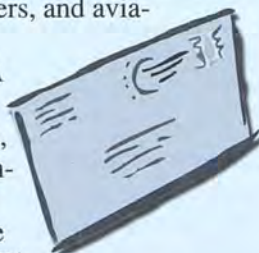
When notified of her selection, she responded, in part: "I just cannot tell you what an honor and a surprise it is for me to receive the honorary life membership in VHPA. It brought tears to my eyes."

Julie's association with VHPA began in 1996 via the Vietnam Helicopter Flight Crew Network (VHFCN) in her quest for information about her brother, WO1 David R. Kink.

At the time of his death, David was 19 and Julie had just turned 8. She had scant information about David's life after he entered the military.

Her initial inquiry produced a response saying, "Your brother was our brother," and an offer of help.

Over the years, Julie has come to be known simply as "Little Sister" by many of our members.



However, Julie was not inducted as an honorary member simply for being the sister of one of our fallen brethren; rather, it was for what she has done over the years that have caused "Little Sister" to become synonymous with Julie Kink: Her continuing support of our organization, as well as others, and her enduring efforts on behalf of all families who lost loved ones in Vietnam.

She works with unselfish devotion through the Family Contacts Committee of VHFCN to assist family members of helicopter crewmen and pilots who were casualties of the Vietnam War.

At the VHPA Reunion in Washington, DC, Julie gave a memorable address on behalf of the Family Contacts Committee. You can learn more about the Family Contacts Committee at <http://www.virtualwall.org/contacts/>

You can read Julie's own story at <http://www.virtualwall.org/dk/KinkDR01a.htm>

Welcome to our newest Honorary Member, Julie Kink.  
VHPA Executive Council

## Pilot's Vietnam memories linger three decades later

*Ngoi but toi la gio  
Trai tim toi la may.*

*My pen is the wind  
My heart is the cloud.*

The helicopter pilot warmly asked me to jot down a few words in Vietnamese, the musical language he had heard while he was a freedom fighter in the Vietnam War.

Now, the Fourth of July 2001, three decades later, at the 18th reunion of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, his Vietnam memories still lingered.

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## From the President

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will help you off to a running start.

One thing you can do for all of us: Each of you know a few of your fellow pilots around the country somewhere. Are they members?

You can check them out in the directory, but if you are not sure, ask them. If not, please let them know our address or phone number . . . and let us know their address and phone number so we can get it into our database and the directory.

Send them a newsletter, ask them to dial up the [www.vhpa.org](http://www.vhpa.org) website, and see how they react when they

hear that first audio clip: The deep whop, whop, whop, whop, whop that we all heard from our aircraft every time we flew. It's hard not to be moved by that opening audio clip if you haven't heard the sound of rotor blades for a long time.

Follow up with them, if needed. They will thank you dearly down the road.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to all of you for expressing your confidence in me to be your president for the next year. It's a title you will not see me use much; "Dave" works much better.

However, I do sincerely appreciate your support and will work diligently with your other elected officers and volunteer committee heads to further the goals of our association.

When we were all "in-county" years ago, we were a quality, dedicated team. We are once again within this organization. It's going to be a great year.

— Dave Rittman

# Letters

## Continued from Page 6

The Colorado River echoed in my heart. The Rocky Mountains seemed to lift my soul. I penned down my inspiration, next to my autograph for the papa-san in my books of poetry "Dear Daddy" and "To America, Love and Gratitude:"

*Ngoi but toi la gio*

*Trai tim toi la may.*

*My pen is the wind*

*My heart is the cloud.*

Linh D. Vo

July 2001

**POET'S NOTE:** I kindly wish to receive word from the helicopter pilot who inspired me to write the above lines in Vietnamese at my book signing table, at Denver's Adam's Mark Hotel. Please write to Love@ [redacted]

## Rocky Mountain Chapter did great job with reunion

First and foremost, my gratitude goes out to Mike Law, Ellwood Soderlin, and all the guys of the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the VHPA.

Countless hours of hard work, blood, sweat, and tears goes into putting on an affair of this magnitude.

Sadly, not everyone can possibly be pleased, so at the same time, those who did so much work will also receive a ration of grief from folks who "don't have time" to get involved in helping.

As for Bruce, I was very pleased with 99.9 percent of the whole affair. Given that I am a person who loves open spaces and quiet, Denver was about as good of a "city" location as possible.

Sadly, some don't agree with me. I have been told that many didn't go because Denver didn't promise to be exciting enough.

Of course, I would like to go 30 miles north of East Overshoe, where we would have no "distractions" from our fellowship. Apparently, next year we will have a record crowd because we will be at Las Vegas.

I have also discovered that being a vendor has great advantages. As a vendor, everyone comes to me and I don't have to go looking for them. Of course, if I sell a few books, the whole trip also becomes a tax writeoff. Since I plan to attend anyway, this situation becomes a win-win situation for this boy.

Clearly, VHPA has become one of the high points of my year. Having spent the past 30 years yearning for the "mystical" fellowship I shared with so many in Vietnam, I get to have a faint taste of it for a few days each year.

Each reunion I have the thrill of bumping into someone whom I went to flight school with, flew with in Vietnam, flew with somewhere else, or have come to know through the nets.

This year, along with seeing and talking with so many great guys, I "roomed" with Jose Martinez. We stayed up to the wee hours of each morning just telling lies and savoring memories and a forming new memories.

Accuse me of being a sentimental old fool, if you like. Yet, I hold that to be in the fellowship of such men is a rare honor of which I am not sure I am deserving.

Be that as it may, I savor the moments I share and "re-live" when I am at the VHPA and at the 7/17th Cav reunions.

For those of you who have yet to reach forth and rejoin at the many reunions which are open to us, PLEASE do so as soon as possible. You will discover that this is an experience you will savor.



Oh yes, I want to thank all of you who gave me the great honor of delivering the Invocation at the closing banquet. I am not at all sure I can ever convey the warmth of my heart as I stood before you with the huge flag as a backdrop. (However, I do have a picture of the ole gray bear standing with the flag as his backdrop.)

Looking about the mass of America's best, I thought my heart would burst with pride in being in the same room. When I said I was offering my humble prayer in love and respect for one and all, I spoke from my heart.

Obviously, I worked hard at my presentation. For those of you who were present, I am sure you appreciate the fact it took great planning to stage the only thunder clap of the evening to announce my ascension to the podium.

Bruce Carlson  
[redacted]

## Helicopter associations help family of crew chief

To the exceptional Vietnam Helicopter Flight Crew Network and the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, I want to extend my thanks and gratitude.

This past March 9, it had been 32 years since my older brother, Spec. 5 Charles P. Girard, perished in South Vietnam. Chuck was part of B Company, 101st Airborne Division Kingsmen at Camp Eagle; he served as a crew chief on a Huey.

Chuck was scheduled to return home on March 16, 1969, but on March 9, his helicopter crashed and all five men aboard were killed.

I was 12 years old at the time he was killed; my father had died two years earlier, in April of 1967 — the year Chuck graduated from high school.

Chuck left behind a widowed mother and 10 siblings,

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## Letters

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ranging in age from twin boys almost 21 to my youngest brother Steve, who would turn 9 just a month after Chuck's death.

Chuck and my mother were very close; the depth of their relationship would not hit me until many years later when I sat down to read his letters. Most were signed 'Your Loving Son, Chuck.'

Although surrounded by her other children, none of us were equipped to help her deal with her grief.

Mom convinced herself that Chuck was angry with her when he died — there have been various reasons that she conceived, and nothing that anyone could tell her would relieve that ache in her heart.

Our answer was to not talk about Chuck, because it only made her cry. Although never forgotten, Chuck was never discussed, so I never really knew much about him.

When he left for Vietnam, I was 11, and Chuck was much closer to my older brothers. We were just not at the ages where brothers and sisters do much together socially.

Every year on Memorial Day, Veterans Day, on Chuck's birthday and on the anniversary of his death, my sister Barbara and I wear our Purple Heart survivor's pins.

We work together, and this year, a new co-worker asked us about them. After telling him Chuck's story, he suggested that we get a case for Chuck's flag and medals. I began to look for one on the Internet, then began searching for information about Vietnam.

For many years, I wondered what Chuck had done with the 101st Airborne — all I knew was that he as a crew chief. I had looked for books to read about Vietnam, but I didn't know what would give me information about what my brother did, what his role was specifically.

As I searched, I found the website:

[www.thevirtualwall.org](http://www.thevirtualwall.org)

What I found there touched me more than I could have imagined: A gentleman who had served with Chuck by the name of Frank Tresenrider had posted an open letter to his family. There was an e-mail address, so I immediately responded.

Believe it or not, Frank had grown up just miles from where I live. Though not living in the area at the time I first contacted him, he and his wife were preparing to relocate within the next month.

We met at my home on April 3 and a friendship was made that I hope will last a lifetime. Frank has since met my entire family.

He loaned me William Meacham's book "Lest We Forget," which I found fascinating.

I started to look for more information about the 101st Airborne and found the VHFCN and the VHPA. With the



## Captain seeking information about cavalry unit in Vietnam

I am looking for some information on the 7/1 Cavalry unit.

We are putting together some pictures and background info on different units for our conference rooms.

I need the history during Vietnam, description of their mission and location of unit during the Vietnam War. Just a basic overview and the weapons systems used for their missions.

I appreciate and help you could give me.

Capt. Jonathan Bentley  
Fort Rucker, AL

help of Gary Thewlis and Julie Kink, I began to search for others who might have known Chuck — the response has been overwhelming!

So many people have either called or written, all with wonderful and loving words about Chuck. I finally knew the names of the other men who perished with Chuck — this was the first Memorial Day that I could remember them by name.

I have been in contact with Jean Erickson, the sister of copilot Daniel O'Neil, which has been wonderful.

I received a 60-minute audio tape with a small snippet of Chuck speaking. After 32 years, I could hear his voice again!

One gentleman was kind enough to send my mother flowers for Mother's Day, along with a very poignant letter.

All of these people taking time for strangers — I was and still am blown away.

What has been the most gratifying thing for me has been the change I have seen in my mother.

Frank has been able to put to rest her fears that Chuck was angry at her — being able to speak to someone who was there with him up until the last moment has been a blessing beyond belief.

She now knows that Chuck was and always will remain her Loving Son. That is a gift that I could never buy her. With heartfelt respect and gratitude;

Victoria Girard Chandler  
Sister of Spec. 5 Charles Pierre Girard  
B Company, 101st Airborne Division Kingsmen  
(KIA 3/9/1969)

## Many stories emerge from Denver reunion

Imagine four women who just met, "sisters" by virtue of the fact that they each lost a brother to the Vietnam War, sharing thoughts they never before shared because nobody else ever knew quite how it felt to lose a sibling in such a

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# Letters

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way . . .

Imagine a young man who was an infant the last time he saw his dad, when he left for Vietnam 31 years ago, sitting in a room full of men sharing stories about the place where his father last flew . . .

Imagine a young lady who hears on her office radio that there's a convention of Vietnam helicopter pilots in town . . . who decides to see if she can find out something about the uncle she never knew . . . and ends up reading the actual report of his crash and talking with somebody who knew him in flight school . . .

Imagine a Gold Star Mother standing in the spotlight of a huge banquet room, surrounded for the first time by hundreds of men who did exactly what her son did in Vietnam, and thought of him as a brother . . .

Imagine a Gold Star Mother and Father spending the day with a man who was with their son in his last days . . . and another brother of a helicopter pilot being at a reunion of his brother's comrades for the first time.

These are only a few of the stories that came out of the VHPA reunion in Denver July 2-7.

In my wildest dreams, all the while I was growing up, I couldn't imagine such things happening. Even since finding the Vietnam Helicopter Flight Crew Network, the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association and the Vietnam Helicopter Crew Members Association in 1996, I still find it hard to believe the kinds of connections that are made between helicopter veterans and us "KIA families" — a term I use for lack of a better explanation for who we are and why we do what we do.

The VHPA reunion is many things to many people. To me it's an opportunity to see the people who helped me

learn more about my brother when no one else could, who stand as examples of who he might be today, had he come back. . . and who come as close as possible, without taking his place, to "being there for me" in the way that only big brothers can.

But I remember going to my first VHPA reunion in 1997, with a very different set of emotions. I was concerned that being a "KIA sister" meant I would carry a dark cloud wherever I went. I wanted so much to meet men who did what my brother did, but they were going there to remember the good times, not the bad.

I, on the other hand, was going essentially because of a death. (Talk about feeling like you're crashing the party.) I didn't want them to feel obligated in any way to talk to me, console me, shelter me, lower their voice for me, weep for me, smile for me, search out information for me, help me or do anything else special to acknowledge my presence.

As it turns out, they have done all of the above, many times over, over the past five years!

To family members of our fallen, going to a big reunion like this is a very, very special thing. We don't want to



intrude. In fact, some of us (myself included)

are so concerned about intruding we let years go by without even trying, seriously, to find veterans whose lives might be upset by the mention of that distant time and place. Once we find out there are organizations dedicated to keeping the history alive, and recognizing the pride with which helicopter veterans served, it's like walking into a clearing in the middle of a forest one has wandered for 30 years.

What it all comes down to, I think, is this: Each of those young men who lost their lives in Vietnam is still remembered and missed deeply. Whether they were there for a day, or a year, or longer, they experienced a camaraderie that only one group of people, brought together once a year to celebrate a unique bond, can recapture. Thank you for allowing us family members to share that bond for a moment. It means more than you know.

The warm welcome that was given each of the family members that attended some part of the VHPA reunion in Denver is absolutely thrilling to me. I can't adequately describe how great it feels to be in the same room when a family member meets fellow unit members of their loved one. I want to thank everyone who hugged a family member and helped them learn about what their loved one — and you — did in Vietnam.

Thanks to the Denver committee for making everything run smoothly and making us all feel so welcome.

And thanks to everyone who stopped at the Family Contacts Committee table, which was located near Gary Roush's database and KIA/MIA/DAT Rolodexes, and Mike Sloniker's history table. We gathered a lot of information on existing cases, for which we have some connection already established with a family member or friend of the

## F-4 pilot would like to meet UH-1 crew that rescued him

A friend of mine, (USAF F-4 driver), would like to reconnect with the UH-1 crew that picked him up on May 12, 1970.

His F-4 was shot down west of Plei Djerang in Cambodia. He bailed out and spent a short time on the ground before the UH-1 crew picked him up.

He remembers a UH-1, a Cobra, and CH-47 in the area.

The UH-1 crew flew him to a dispensary at Plei Djerang. Later that day he was taken to Pleiku. (There are different spellings of Plei Djerang, it was west of Pleiku, close to the Cambodian border.)

Perhaps you could put an inquiry in the newsletter?

Thanks for doing such a great job, the newsletter gets better every issue.

Steve Sullivan

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## Letters

### Continued from Page 9

KIA, and also got quite a few "points of first contact" for those who remember someone in particular who was lost, who would be willing to share memories with his family member should they ever come forward seeking information through the committee.

Please remember, if you see inquiries from family members of helicopter casualties on guest books or list servers, you can always refer them to the Family Contacts Committee and we can try to assist: <http://www.VirtualWall.org/contacts>

Gold Star families who were there are:

- Susan Clotfelter Blaker, sister of WO1 Mark D. Clotfelter, 361 AVN, KIA 6-16-69. Susan is a member of the Family Contacts Committee.
- Jim Branaugh, brother of WO1 Larry J. Branaugh, B/229 AHB 1 CAV, KIA 4-20-68.
- Jerilyn Cheney Brusseau, sister of 1LT Daniel B. Cheney, A TRP 3/17 CAV, KIA 1-6-69, Rae Cheney, Dan's mother.
- Ari Harrison, son of CPT Ellis David Greene, C/227 AHB 1 CAV, KIA 5-23-70.
- Camie Headrick, niece of WO1 Ralph Allen Dunn, 114 AHC, KIA 6-29-64, Class 64-2W.
- Sherry Leeper, sister of CW3 Wallace Wilson Leeper, 48 AHC, BNR 12-2-67.
- Al and Nancy Thoman, parents of WO1 Theodore Vail Thoman, 192 AHC, KIA 3-31-69.

In addition, Dave Greene, who was on the reunion committee, said a sister of a KIA was there helping with registration. If anyone can tell me with certainty who she was and who her brother was, please let do so.

And if I have missed any KIA families who attended, please let me know that, also.

I also want to thank all those sneaky types who participated in my surprise birthday party, held in the ARA Tactical Operations Center (hospitality room), and those who wished me well via e-cards. It seems the occasion of my 40th birthday was well publicized. The only joy I get out of my age anymore is that my "big brothers" are all so much older than I am!

I posted my reunion photos at: <http://communities.msn.com/JulieKink/shoebox.msnw?Page=1>

That is page one. There are two pages of photos. To get to page 2, click on the yellow triangle in upper left corner of the page where it says "Page 1." To view a photo at full size, and see the caption, just click on the thumbnail image.

Thanks for everything!

Little sister,  
Julie Kink

Sister of WO1 David Kink  
C Trp 1/9th CAV June-July 1969  
KIA 8-3-69

<http://www.VirtualWall.org/dk/KinkDR01a.htm>  
Member of VHFCN Family Contacts Committee

## Meeting Bill Coors a highlight of reunion

Most reunions have some moment more memorable than others. Denver was no exception for me and included this one . . . I had enjoyed a day in Golden, CO, highlighted by a tour through the Coors Brewery.



Tom Payne with Bill Coors

The free beer really was true! The wife and I were in one of the later groups and didn't make it back to the city park for the great barbecue and Coors beer until about 2 p.m.

The crowds were down and most everyone had eaten and returned to downtown Golden or the Railroad Museum or back to Denver.

The wife and I were standing at the bus pickup when someone asked: "Did you meet Bill Coors?"

I immediately perked up and remembered seeing an elderly fellow standing around the beer wagon as I ate in one of the tents.

The wife got on the bus and I ran back to the tents and beer wagon and there he was. Bill Coors was just standing around, visiting with several guys.

I walked up and joined the group. He acknowledged me and we shook hands.

After visiting for about 15 minutes, I asked if I could have my photo made with him and he said, "Sure."

What a nice fellow. He is in his 80's and has a very good sense of humor. Conversation covered several subjects, all of which were present day social and political in nature.

I thanked him for the hospitality and left to get on a bus with the sense and thought that I had just met an icon of American business.

The end of a great day at the 2001 Denver reunion. And yes, from the photo it can plainly be seen . . . he had had a Coors beer, too!

Tom Payne  
Tulsa, OK

## Writer shares feelings after attending service

I thought I would try and share some of my feelings on the memorial service for Freight Train 053 with all of you. I have never claimed to be a writer, so please forgive any errors that I make.

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# Letters

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As some of you know last year I rode my scooter from San Diego to Ontario, CA, then cross country to DC as part of The Run For The Wall/Rolling Thunder.

For anyone not familiar with The Run, it is a ride in memory of POW/MIA's from all wars. It ends with a parade from the Pentagon parking lot, past the White House to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It is done the Sunday before Memorial Day. This was its 14th year. There were reports of 100,000-200,000 bikes in town for the run this year. I don't know if the number is correct, but there were a bunch, a big bunch.

This year, a few days before the run, I found out about the ceremony for the crew of Freight Train 053. I did not know any of the crew, but I wanted to pay my respects, so I changed my plans and arrived in town on Thursday night in time to go to the mortuary where there was a memorial gathering for the family and friends of the crew.

As with all gathering of veterans, my not knowing anyone did not matter. I was amongst brothers and was continually asked who I was with in Nam.

I was standing in the hall when I was approached by a sister of one of the crew members. I had never seen her before, but when she saw me she made a beeline to me and grabbed me and started sobbing uncontrollably in my arms.

I held her for what had to have been at least five minutes, with her unable to contain her tears and sobs. Her family (and I) not knowing what the connection was. The connection was The Run For The Wall. She had seen my vest with the POW/MIA and Run For The Wall patches.

When she was able to control her emotions, she thanked me for all that Rolling Thunder and Run For The Wall did to remember the POW/MIA's. I had found out before when

## Reunion motorcycle ride a very enjoyable event

A big pat on the back and many thanks to those who made the "Rumble in the Rockies Motorcycle Ride" happen during our recent Colorado reunion.

I heard nothing but good comments from those I spoke with about that day. I've attended 14 of our reunions and can readily say that this was the single most enjoyable VHPA-sponsored event I have participated in . . . and I heard similar remarks from others.

I do very much hope this sort of thing will become common at future reunions. There are, after all, a good number of our members who have no interest in golf . . . so a motorcycle event would for many be a welcome alternative.

Again, thanks to those who put that day together.

David Sheppard

talking to family members of POW/MIA's that they feel very much alone in their grief, as if no one cares about their missing loved one.

My vest with the POW/MIA patches formed a connection. She knew that there were thousands that did care enough to make The Run every year. No way was I able to control my tears during that exchange between her and I.

I was able to visit with many family members and they were all very appreciative of all the guys that had shown up in honor of the crew. Many more tears.

The Memorial Service on Friday was one of those times that "You just had to be there."

When I arrived, most of the people were already in the chapel. There were not many seats left so I stood in the back of the chapel. We could hear the heels hit the pavement in unison as the honor guard approached, so I went out side to get pictures.



The precision and perfection of "The Old Guard" was nothing short of magnificent. There was a full platoon honor guard, the band, and the color guard.

Then the caisson, pulled by six black horses with riders and another horse and rider in charge, arrived. They were all at parade rest but snapped to attention and saluted as the casket arrived.

Eight pallbearers arrived and in slow motion removed the flag covered casket containing the commingled remains of the crew. They slowly carried it into the chapel. The service was very moving. More tears.

After the service the casket was carried out of the chapel. Again, with very slow, precise movements the pallbearers raised the casket and slid it on the caisson. They tucked the flag and readied the casket for the trip to the grave again, in what seemed to be super slow motion. When everyone had time to get to their cars the caisson moved out led by the band, honor guard and color guard. They were followed by four stretch, and I do mean stretch, limousines for the family members. More tears.

At the gravesite, the casket containing the commingled remains of the crew was placed next to a casket containing the remains of one crew member which the family chose to be interred separately. The band, honor guard, and color guard were at attention about 50 yards to the right front.

To the left front was the honor guard that would fire the twenty one gun salute. The chaplain spoke very moving words and then silence. In the far distance you could hear the beating of rotor blades. Closer and closer and finally they burst over the trees. A flight of three Chinook's flying the missing man formation. WOW! What a spectacular sight.

All of our hearts were pounding a hundred miles an hour. More tears.

We were then told to move back as the eagle flight was about to take place. I thought they were going to have a flight of jets fly by.

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# Letters

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All eyes were straining when about 20 feet in front of us and about five feet above the ground a beautiful bald eagle, wings slowly propelling him along, glided past us. Awesome, just awesome. They had one handler off to our left front and the other was to our right rear. To see such a magnificent bird soaring in honor of the crew . . . More tears.

The band playing "America the Beautiful" as I never heard it before. More tears.

The folding and presentation of the flag to family members. More tears.

The love and respect between family and strangers. More tears.

The superb service and respect presented by The Old Guard. I have never been prouder to be a member of the Armed Services. More tears.

It used to bug the heck out of me whenever these old eyes of mine would mist up, because men aren't suppose to cry.

Then one day it dawned on me: What greater honor can I show someone than to do something men are not suppose to do, shed a tear in their memory. I am proud to say that I shed many a tear at the ceremony and again while writing this. I hope some of you will join me and shed a tear for The Crew of Freight Train 053 and all the other crews that have gone on before us. There but for the Grace . . .

I walk a little straighter now.

Ron Paye

129th Assault Helicopter Company

## Helicopter pilot keeps 33-year-old promise

I spent my time in Vietnam from August 1967 until August 1968 flying Huey "slicks" for the 1st Cavalry Division and the 101st Airborne Division.

These were the helicopters used for troop and supply transport.

With the 1st Cav, I did a lot of combat assaults, but with the 101st, I did mostly resupply. I took the troops hot meals, mail, ammunition, extracted their wounded and their dead.

For the most part, my job was very gratifying, especially when I was able to help someone come home: Like the times when I extracted someone who had been wounded or rescuing another pilot who had been shot down.

The worst part was witnessing the insanity of the war and the way the war was being fought, causing the senseless loss of life to friends and strangers.

Too many times there was this hill/outpost or valley that we were told was an enemy stronghold and it was critical to the war that we make an assault and take the ground.

Our courageous troops would do that, sometimes it would take a few days, and others would take weeks. It didn't seem to matter how long it took to "take" the ground, orders would always come shortly after victory to move out, to another location.

It became crystal clear that the object in Vietnam was to make sure you survived and to help as many others "go home" as humanely possible.

During this insane time, in order to maintain your sanity, I and most of the guys would make plans for what they were going to do when they got back to the "Real World."

Besides ice cream, milk, long hot showers/baths, we had bigger goals such as cars, motorcycles, cruising, girls, and family. My goal and promise to myself was to buy a new Harley and ride and ride and ride.

However, when I got home, it always seemed that life, i.e. food, clothing, shelter, and medical, always required the money that was for my Harley and making a living didn't leave time for those rides.

It has been 33 years in coming, but with the support and encouragement from my family, I got my Harley — A 2001 Ultra Classic.

For the maiden ride, approximately 4,500 miles, what better place to ride than to The Wall, the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC, and what better time to ride than over Memorial Day and what better group to ride with than the Rolling Thunder group.

New Mexico doesn't have a Rolling Thunder chapter, but it does have the "Missing . . . But not forgotten" group from Albuquerque. I was invited to ride with them to DC and then join the Rolling Thunder parade down Constitution Avenue.

The "Missing . . . But not forgotten" group is a great group of veterans and friends of veterans and I couldn't have gone with a better group of people. The town of Dumfries, VA, has a special relationship with this group, and the town gave us a great welcome and a police escort from Dumfries to the Pentagon parking lot, the staging area for Rolling Thunder.

Trying to explain the emotions that I felt during this trip is impossible. It is like trying to explain Vietnam to someone who wasn't there.

As we rode across the country with ours flags waving, showing our pride in country and of our service, a lot of support was shown from fellow motorists, with many thumbs up, horns honking and waving, showing appreciation for what we were doing and what we had done.

The people along the parade route also were so great. They weren't just standing around clapping nonchalantly, but many had their hands fully extended clapping and many would look you right in the eye, showing their appreciation.

They were along the sides of the road and standing on the overpasses. A truly moving experience.

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# Letters

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This ride has shown me that Americans have not forgotten their veterans.

Milo M. Overstreet  
Company B, 227th Avn Bn, 1st Cav Div  
Company A, 101st Avn Bn, 101st Abn Div  
Roswell, NM

## One-Shot draws fire

Each area had its share of One-Shot Charlies. Ol One-Shot was issued an SK rifle and a hand full of bullets and seemingly little or no training.

The slicks were flying one morning southbound in an area southwest of Song Be. The flight and the lead gunship had just passed over a large open area that was dotted with small brush.

My doorgunner called out that the flight was receiving fire and opened up with his M60. He described and pointed to a hole in the ground with his M60 fire at our 1 o'clock.



This hole in the ground was an underground bunker that had been collapsed by a nearby bomb crater. This hole was about 12 feet square and about 5 feet deep.

I lowered the nose of the C-model gunship and maneuvered slightly to the right and put my grease pencil rocket site on the hole in the ground.

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## VHPA business directory

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## Letters

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I squeezed off a single rocket. My rocket flew true and cleared the edge of the hole closest to us and went into the bank of the hole on the far side.

As the rocket went off, Ol One-Shot Charlie came flying out of the hole, sailing up in the air at least 15-20 feet. He made at least three turns head over heels, with his arms and legs flailing in the air.

Charlie made a very ungraceful landing on his head on the southern bank outside his protective hole.

In his forced departure from his post, he was separated from his trusty SK rifle.

Upon his landing, he rebounded very quickly by leaping to his feet and started running in circles, about his third 360, he fell down. He immediately jumped to his feet again to continue his circular running pattern.

He fell again, then got his feet under him again, made one more circle and got some direction to his movement and headed for a tree line about 200 yards away.

The intercom and the VHF radio got very busy with comments describing the comic site we were witnessing.

Ol One-Shot made it to the tree line without anyone firing another shot at him. It's hard to man a weapon system or a M60 when you're debilitated with laughter.

I asked the crew, when he went into the tree line, "Why didn't you get him when he was on the run?"

"Sir, it's hard to shoot when you're doubled over with laughter" was the answer.

"Alright, the next time I pop one up in the air for you, get him on the fly, don't wait for some one to holler pull. Clay pigeon shots don't come by every day."

This started another round of laughter. One-shot Charlie was last seen headed for II Corps as fast as his legs would

carry him, and without his trusty SK rifle.

Craig Porter  
Crossbow 38

## Old soldiers have chance meeting on Mexican beach

During the time when I returned to active duty in 1986, I spent a lot of time camping on the beach in Puerto Penasco (Rocky Point) Mexico.

One night I think it was in the summer of 1990, an old motor home pulled up next to me, and a husband and wife started setting up camp.

I had the fire going and had shrimp on the barbie and some cold Corona, so we hit it off and started to visit.

This guy Jeff had a very deep and rasping voice and sounded like he had a load of gravel in his mouth.

As the night progressed we talked about Vietnam. Jeff was on PBR's with the Navy in the Can Tho area during the Tet offensive in 1968.

As we shared stories of that night, a chill came over me and I felt as someone had stepped on my grave.

Jeff said to me: "I will never forget the call sign of that Cobra fire team that came to our rescue. It was Satan 19."

I said, "Jeff, that was my call sign."

We compared notes and it was the same engagement. What a small world it is at times that two brothers could meet on a beach in Mexico 30 years later.

Greg Smith

Satan 19



## Taps

### Charles Borgstorm

Navy Capt. Charles Borgstorm died July 2.

In Vietnam, he served as commander of HA(L)-3, the Seawolves, in 1971-72.

### Walt Casey

Walt Casey, a Marine helicopter pilot, died May 27 in San Diego.

He held the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism and the Air Medal.

### Charles E. Gallagher

Charles E. Gallagher "Blue Ghost 22" died April 13 of lung cancer.

### Richard Everett Gardner

Richard "Dick" Everett Gardner, 53, of Gresham, OR, died March 10 in Portland.

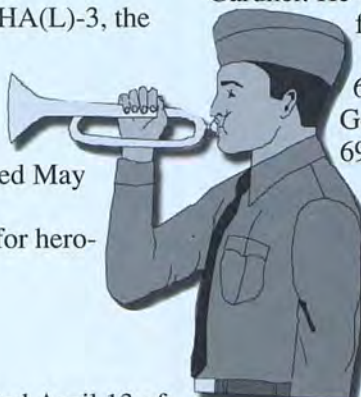
Gardner was born in Ashland, OR, to Royal and Fay Gardner. He was raised in Molalla, OR, and graduated from Molalla High School.

Afterwards, he joined the Army (Class 66-21 B1 2nd WOC Company) and served in Germany and Vietnam (243rd Ashco — 1968-69) as a Chinook helicopter pilot.

He then served in the National Guard as a pilot and instructor. In 1973, he transitioned into fixed-wing, flying the Mohawk surveillance airplane.

He was highly decorated and attained the rank of CW4.

On May 10, 1969, he married Kay Rold in Silverton, OR.



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# Taps

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Upon completion of his active military service, they moved to Gresham. He attended Mt. Hood Community College and Portland State University, where he earned a bachelor of arts degree.

Gardner was active in real estate.

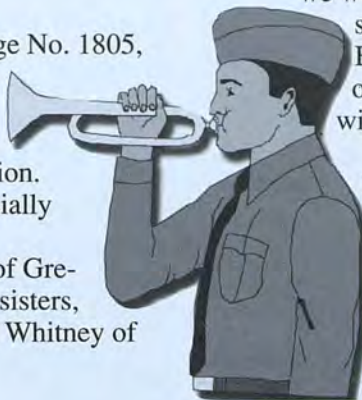
He was a member of Gresham Elks Lodge No. 1805, American Legion Post No. 1, Eagles Aerie Lodge, Disabled American Veterans Portland Unit No. 1, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association.

He loved fishing and the outdoors, especially central and eastern Oregon.

Survivors include his wife; a son, Jared of Gresham; his mother, Fay Gardner of Molalla; sisters, Mary Rossman of Tigard, OR, and Marceil Whitney of Redmond, WA.

## Brent Hannawalt

Brent Hannawalt, 52, of Five Points, OH, died July 15



at his home after a 25-year stomach/intestinal illness.

He lived his life in the only home he ever knew and was truly admired in his community.

Hannawalt graduated from flight school in the class of 68-17. His Vietnam career was from the fall of 1968 to 1969 with the 189th Assault Helicopter Company at Pleiku. His call sign was "Ghostrider 27."

For those of us who had the pleasure to fly with Brent, we were truly blessed to have served and known such a compassionate and kind individual. Brent's skills as an aviator were truly superior. After Vietnam he was an instructor pilot with the Ohio National Guard.

I was fortunate to reacquire myself with Brent after my return to Ohio. I will treasure the times we relived all the humorous times so many of us shared with him.

Brent, you'll be remembered by all who served with you. Good friend, a good Christian whose smile was only surpassed by the size of his heart.

Hub Roberts  
Ghostrider 28  
Greenfield, OH

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## Book airline reservations for Reunion 2002 in Las Vegas

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# Taps

Continued from Page 15

## James W. "Jim" Jay

Retired Army Col. James W. "Jim" Jay died July 28 in Dothan, AL, after a battle with cancer resulting from Agent Orange poisoning during his service in Vietnam.

Jay served with the 118th Assault Helicopter Company in South Vietnam.

## James A. Jones

On May 8, CW3 James A. Jones died from multiple cancers. I knew Jim from his service in Vietnam as "Condor 14," a scout pilot for C Troop, 2/17 Cavalry, 101st Airborne Division.

Jim's death celebrated his life, and I want to share with you the last e-mails he sent me . . . he tells of his life better than anyone else could. I wrote him and sent an e-mail hug. The following are the last e-mails from Jim to me.

29 April 2001:

Hey Mac,

You guys will never know how much your thoughts mean to me. It is icing on the cake of my life.

I wish that everyone could understand my philosophy of life. I have never worried or been afraid of death: From the day a man is born he is headed straight to the grave. Nothing that I know of can change that.

I am already 30 years older than I thought I would be after the first mission over Laos in Lam Son 719! I credit that to two things: The finest soldiers ever assembled in one place — the Condors — who would sacrifice their lives to pull out their downed comrades out of trouble and protect each other at any cost. And to my God with whom I have been at peace for a long time.

In this life, I have done everything I could ever do. Dying is the only thing I haven't done yet and I am honestly looking forward to it, curious about what's next.

In a word, I am peacefully happy. I wanted my funeral to be celebrated in the O-Club, with me laid out on the bar and my friends throwing a hell of a party. Like the one we had at Quang Tri about halfway through Lam Son 719 when the MP's came and threatened to arrest everybody.

And we went past the table where the MP was taking names and telling us we would all be sent to Long Binh Jail.

And we all went out the front door, came back in the back door, got in line again and gave the names of our buddies who were going back into Laos the next day.

But instead of LBJ, the bastards sent us back to Khe Sanh. Maybe each of us should have busted that MP major in the mouth to enhance our chances for LBJ!

I didn't keep any records except my DD214 and a copy of the DFC citation.

I wasn't the hero type and just wanted to do my job as best I could. It was my intention to keep as low a profile as possible to discourage anyone from checking my background and primary unit (previous classified assignment).

I don't think anyone except "Condor 6," Jim Newman ever had a clue. He somehow got hold of a Christmas card from a previous employer and looked at me kinda funny for awhile, but thankfully never said anything to anyone.

I also think he had already figured it out when J2 MACV tasked me to drop a bunch of political propaganda material up and down the A Shau and the Ho Chi Minh trail west of the valley in Laos.

I think I worried CW2 John Barron (gun pilot) a time or two when I did something particularly dumb. And I may have irritated my slick cover (I think it was WO1 John Oldham) when I hovered over the .51 pit near Currahee to keep NVA heads down while 1Lt Ed Kersey and the Blues were inserted. Pat Bunting was my CE that day and I think he evacuated his bladder — but he kept that M-60 on Rock 'n' Roll.

And Jim Newman probably got mad at me when I had a low cap on the Infantry unit which had been overrun in The A Shau Valley. I had enemy positions in sight and we were hosing them pretty good when 6 ordered me to move out and let ARA take over.

Then he cleared 4/77 ARA to "empty on the smoke the survivors popped to mark the bad guys."

I "didn't hear the order" and was still in the hose mode when I noticed a small red cloud in the sky.

Just then it started to rain on the ground. I realized what was happening and got out of there in a hurry. Jim told me when we got back to Phu Bai to "monitor UHF as well as FM" when he was in the AO.

Other than winning the coveted title "Troop Drunk," that is about it. I hope you don't need a history of my first tour (1967-68) in Kontum Province. Because of the activities, I was up to my ears in, I don't talk about it.

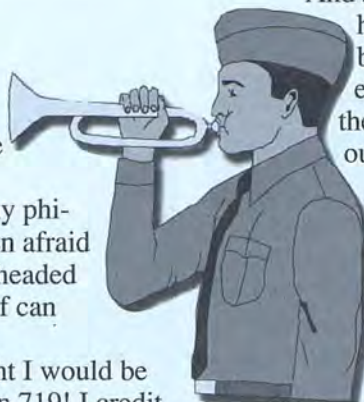
When I worked for Bob Molinelli (squadron commander of the 2/17 Cav in Vietnam) at Foot Hood, he would come by the flight line and "order" me to the club. We would get about half blotto and he would take me to his quarters, where we would continue sippin' and refight the battles of the 2/17th.

His wonderful wife, Donna, would sit in on the stories until we got totally wasted, then Mo would pour me in the guest room and we would be out for the duration.

Donna always called the SDO the next day to have my Jeep picked up at the club and delivered to their quarters.

It's been a great life, Mac, but I'm looking forward to dismounting at Fiddlers Green to renew old acquaintances and wait for the rest of the Condors. Eventually, we'll all

See TAPS, Page 17



# Taps

## Continued from Page 16

be there and have a hell of a reunion. Just keep in mind that I love all you guys and will have a cold beer waiting when you dismount.

And I'll always take a "cyberhug"

Jim Jones  
Condor 14

And Jim's last e-mail that I have, just days before he dismounted and went to Fiddler's Green, showed his good humor and faith to the end, a picture of what he described as a "Vietnamese cabover SUV."

Jim Jones was a wonder Condor, husband, father and friend . . . you just gotta love this man . . . he lived his life well, and cheated death of it's agony.

Farewell, Jim, and we'll meet you at Fiddler's Green.

Mac Jones  
Condor 03

## Francis W. LaRoue

Francis W. "Butch" LaRoue died of a heart attack Aug. 28, 1998 — 30 years to the day he returned from Vietnam. He was 56.

LaRoue flew UH-1's with the 117th Assault Helicopter Company. He logged more than 960 hours of combat flight time and survived being downed five times.

LaRoue performed duties as combat operations officer, airmobile commander and as a standardization instructor pilot.

He also was a member of the 214th Combat Aviation Battalion Safety Council. LaRoue completed his tour with the 117th AHC, having been promoted to captain.

His decorations include two Distinguished Flying Crosses, 23 Air Medals, the Bronze Star Medal, two Army Commendation Medals, and the Republic of Vietnam Service Medal

After his Vietnam tour, LaRoue served as an instructor pilot and personnel officer at the Advanced Helicopter Training Center at Fort Rucker, AL.

Advancing his formal scholastic credentials, he also completed a Master's of Science degree in Education at Troy State University. Discharged from the Army, LaRoue joined the Missouri National Guard, where he served as the Aviation Detachment commander with the 35th Combat Engineering Battalion until receiving his honorable discharge from the military.

After the Army, he entered the field of human resources and administration, embarking on a career that would span more than 25 years.

LaRoue contributed to the success of several large corporations, including Molson Brewery of Canada, where he served as lead negotiator for management during a

lengthy, nationwide labor strike.

As vice president of Burrard Yarrows Inc., a large shipyard on the West Coast, LaRoue authored and implemented collective bargaining agreements and successfully negotiated with 23 separate trade unions, the greatest number of unions working for a single employer in Canada.

As senior executive vice president, he coordinated construction of a six-story office tower, simultaneously managing the merger of two large resource companies to form Cameco Corp., the largest uranium mining company in the world.

At Teleflex (Canada) Inc., a global manufacturing company, LaRoue designed and implemented a number of staff training and recognition programs, coordinated the smooth transition to a unionized workplace and was the lead project coordinator for ISO 9000 certification.

## George A. Nielsen

You may remember the Bikini Mini (170th AHC) at Denver hosted by George A. Nielsen.

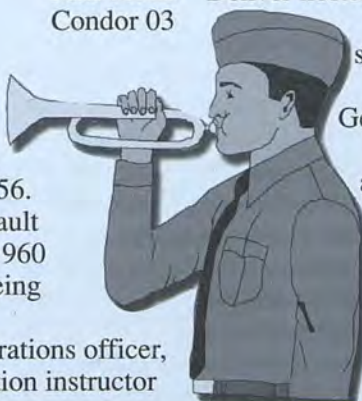
George was critically ill and his wife had said he was staying alive just for the mini.

On July 14, nine days after our mini, George passed away.

On July 20, there was a wake in Denver at the Brown Palace for George.

Take a moment and hoist one for a fallen warrior.

CW3 Donald S. Lewis  
"Bikini 25"  
170th AHC, 1967-68  
Lumberton, TX



## Jim Reba

My old school chum Jim Reba followed me to flight school in 1968.

He and I shared a lifetime of memories. We delivered the Cleveland Plain Dealer newspaper together in the dead of winter from the trunk of his car.

We swapped spit with some lovely girls in the back seat of that same car. We drank our first beer together, underage though we were.

My mom was born and grew up in his hometown, Cleveland, and his sister was a longtime friend of our family. His sister's husband and my dad were buddies in the Air Force and flew together frequently.

It was natura Jim and I would have similar plans for our life. I was a year older than he was so I got to go first. He was in class 68-13, I was in 67-11.

Jim wanted to serve in Vietnam, but a medical condition caused the Army to discharge him early. Jim went to work as a civilian helo pilot and, while doing a reseeding project in West Virginia, his aircraft hit a power line and he was killed.

Though Jim doesn't qualify as a VHPA member, I

See TAPS, Page 18

# Holley reports on a strong VHPA

JACK SWICKARD  
NEWSLETTER EDITOR

The VHPA membership meeting was held on July 6, during the Denver Reunion.

President Charles Holley reported a better return on association investments, the start of scholarship fund relationship with the Army Aviation Association of America, and changes in how the VHPA will handle reunions.

"Every problem we identified with last year's reunion, we fixed this year. For 2002, will have fully automated online hotel and reunion registration," Holley said, adding "the VHPA is stronger than ever."

The association recently signed up member No. 11,000.

Holley reported Charlie Rayl resigned earlier this year as legal counsel; the VHPA now has legal committee, with Jim Gunderson serving as committee chairman and VHPA legal counsel.

Minutes from the year 2000 business meeting were approved.

Mike Hurley, acting junior member at large, announced Joe Bilitzke was appointed VHPA vice president. He was the only person seeking that office, so — under the VHPA constitution — the election was waived.

Mike Sheuerman was elected junior member at large.

Marcia Fritz, who heads the management company, reported on the day-to-day operation, and complimented the work of the Denver Reunion chairman.

"Mike Law has done a great job



**VHPA members attend the annual membership meeting at the Adam's Mark Hotel, headquarters for Reunion 2001. Outgoing president Charles Holley gave an upbeat assessment of the VHPA.**

heading the reunion committee," Fritz said.

She announced online registration will be used for the next reunion.

Fritz said the management company has been actively telemarketing membership, calling members who have not renewed their memberships.

She reported some family members of KIAs and MIAs would like to get more actively involved in VHPA and attend reunions.

Tom Payne, secretary/treasurer, gave the annual financial report which showed a net loss of \$7,774 in 2000.

He said year 2000 Washington Reunion losses were responsible. The VHPA lost \$85,000 at the Washington Reunion.

A major part of the problem was the primary hotel in Washington didn't provide enough rooms, then freed some rooms later. This resulted in some members shifting from the two backup hotels.

Payne added, "We are in good shape financially."

He said 1,796 people — of which 955 were pilots — attended the Denver Reunion.

The financial report was approved by a vote of members present.

Payne then reported effective at next renewal or Jan. 1, 2002, "we will be raising dues \$6, from \$30 to \$36. However, members have the option of paying dues for three years at one time at the \$30 rate."

Members then approved a proposed bylaw change that stated the VHPA shall not engage in partisan political causes.

Joe Bilitzke reported on the National Reunion Committee.

He said the purpose of the National Reunion Committee is to take the burden off a particular chapter that takes on a reunion.

"In 2003, we will have a national reunion where there is not a chapter.

**See COMMITTEE, Page 19**

## Newsletter deadlines

The following are deadlines for submitting items to *The VHPA Newsletter*:

- September/October 2001: Submit by Sept. 1, 2001.
- November/December 2001: Submit by Oct. 1, 2001.
- January/February 2002: Submit by Dec. 1, 2001.
- March/April 2002: Submit by Feb. 1, 2002.
- May/June 2002: Submit by April 1, 2002.
- July/August 2002: Submit by May 1, 2002.

## Taps

**Continued from Page 17**

think he would have been an asset to our ranks. Maybe some of you out there remember my friend Jim Reba, class 68-13.

He was a good guy, the finest kind and he also served.

Greg Smith  
Satan 19

## Reunion mixed the new, traditional

**MIKE LAW**  
**REUNION CHAIRMAN**

The Denver Reunion provided many innovative features and events, mixed with the traditional.

The final count was 955 registered pilots, plus 841 family and friends.

Members of the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the VHPA, their family members and several relatives of Vietnam KIAs all received a loud and enthusiastic thanks for their hard work from



more than 1,300 people attending the Closing Banquet.

I expressed this idea during my part of the banquet ceremony just after President Charles Holley presented my wife Dianna with a large bouquet of flowers.

"While my name and Dianna's name may be strongly associated with the success of this reunion, in reality our names are simply tokens to represent the more than 50 people who worked so well on this labor of love we call a Reunion," I said.

The chapter's Reunion Committee had been working with the Executive Council and other reunion committees

**See MINI-REUNIONS, Page 20**

## Committee would remove burden

**Continued from Page 18**

We need the ability to find sites not limited to where we have active chapters," Bilitzke said. "We could go out and hire a company in the event organizing business, much as we do for managing the VHPA and managing our investments."

Ken Fritz, vendor coordinator, said there was good turnout on pre-ordering of the reunion T-shirts. We had two dozen vendors this year."

Gary Roush, database chairman, said figures show 2,200 helicopter pilots were killed in Vietnam.

He said "the most rapidly growing area of our database is died after tour."

Roush added that Hueys and Cobras had more combat flight time than any other military aircraft in history.

Members of the Database Committee are working on a patch project.

Roush also has been doing research for the Army and the Pentagon, for Joint Services Task Force, to help locate people.

He also has been helping expose wannabees.

Dana Young, Membership Committee chairman, stressed the importance of members finding potential members, such as at air shows.

"We would like to come up with a master calendar of events where potential members may be," Young said. "We need help from all mem-

bers."

He said some 37 percent of members are delinquent in paying dues, as of June 2001.

Jack Swickard, Newsletter editor, reminded members it is their newsletter and they provide the material fellow members look forward to reading.

Swickard said he does not — except in rare circumstances — publish articles printed in other publications because:

- The purpose of the newsletter is to let VHPA members share stories with one another.

- Republishing articles requires the permission of the original publisher, which sometimes is difficult to receive and can cost the VHPA a fee.

Swickard said newspaper obituaries are a good source of information for Taps.

He said when obituaries are sent to him for publication, they should include the date of death, the place of death, and the residence and age of the deceased. Swickard said many times this information is missing when he receives notice of a member's death.

He listed various ways items can be sent to him for publication: On a CD, Zip disk, a floppy disk or by e-mail.

Member Gil Ferrey suggested using United Services Automobile Association to track down members.

Mike Law, Membership Directory editor, said changes have been made in the format of the directory to help reduce expenses.

"One year, we put data on CDs, but have gone back to putting most of data in directory," Law said.

Vice President Dave Rittman talked about the planned big push for membership this coming year.

He also said the Riviera Hotel, headquarters for the 2002 reunion in Las Vegas, "prides itself as a family hotel. It spent more than \$130 million in renovation in recent years."

Rittman said the hotel room lock expires June 3, 2002 — 30 days out. "Rooms will not be available for people who walk in late."

He also said airline fares to Las Vegas are inexpensive, "if you book early. Don't until last minute or seats will be sold out.

"This will be a people-friendly reunion. There will be a focus on entertainment," Rittman added.

The VHPA now has 14 chapters.

As incoming president, Rittman said: "I am committed to expanding the number of chapters. How do we create chapters in areas that don't have them? We're going to involve chapters in looking for the 11,000 potential members who are not members.

"Who are we? What are we going to be in 5 years, in 10 years? What is the legacy we are going to lead?"

## Mini-reunions may have set record

Continued from Page 19

for more than two years to pull off several innovations.

The yellow, cloth lanyard with "VHPA Reunion" printed in black letters holding the plastic name badge was probably the most visible innovation.

Supporting 35 mini-reunions for units, chapters, flight classes and even aircraft types may be a VHPA record. It was neat to see nearly two dozen unit and chapter banners hanging overhead in the preregistration and non-smoking LZ areas.

Everyone appreciated the vendor area in a room more than twice the size of the Washington or Nashville allocations.

Bob Mason, in coordination with the National Vietnam War Museum in Mineral Wells, teamed with the Reunion Committee to present two standing room-only showing of the Flight Line video that aired nationwide recently on television.



**Dr. Maurice Geldert and his wife Mary at the start of the Closing Banquet.**

minefields and plants trees in Vietnam.

The large-screen display of the banquet seating table assignments was a big hit.

Besides his normal printer, Gary Roush also had a large screen display for his demonstration of the new Vietnam

Helicopter History Interactive Multimedia CD-ROM.

Mike Sloniker did well collecting historical material and Julie Kink continued her successful "In Touch" efforts.

The "Rumble in the Rockies" was the first VHPA motorcycle ride organized as a reunion event. The Golf Committee must have selected a real winning course because several guys played it two days in a row.

Many people were thrilled with The Nacho Men, who played for the Welcome Reception, and asked if we could have them again next year. The 101st Army Band, which played at the Closing Dance, had to do two more numbers before it quit at 11:45 p.m. — they were on active duty to support the VHPA.

Those who attended the Artists Luncheon, where Joe Kline shared many a neat story, and the Authors Luncheon, where Robert Mason, Bruce Lake, Ralph B. Young and Dave Eastman



**Mike Haley and his wife Marilyn enjoy the tour of the Coors Brewery during Reunion 2001. Mike was Nashville Reunion chairman.**

described how to get "the book in your head, published" — all said do that again next year.

It may be difficult to top the Denver Reunion's two successful picnics held at the same time.

Great Texas style barbecue, free Coors beer on tap, helicopters fly-ins, and almost perfect weather. Gen. Woodmansee was wonderful as the guest speaker at the Closing Banquet.

Finally, about 130 people attended the Colorado Rockies-Anaheim Angels baseball game Saturday. It was neat to see the Colorado National Guard Huey fly through Coors Field.



**Tom Baca listens to Tom Payne during the 118th Assault Helicopter Company mini-reunion in Denver. Baca, who is from Albuquerque, flew slicks; Payne, past VHPA president from Tulsa, OK, flew gunships.**

# Reunion survey helps plan event

DAVE RITTMAN  
VHPA PRESIDENT

Your Executive Council is always interested in ways to make our reunions more enjoyable for the membership, and thus we provided a two-page survey to some 1,000 pilots who attended the Denver reunion.

Next year we will meet in Las Vegas July 3-6. Checkout for most people will be Sunday morning, July 7, although you can arrive at the hotel up to three days earlier or stay up to three days later than these dates at the heavily discounted VHPA room rates.

Thank you to the many hundreds of members who returned the survey before they left the hotel.

On occasion in the future, we will be doing other surveys of the membership using this newsletter and our [www.vhpa.org](http://www.vhpa.org) website.

However, the responses given in Denver do provide a very high statistical cross-section of accuracy for us to plan the best possible reunion on your behalf.

Some very interesting information was developed as a result of the responses.

While not all of the many details have been outlined in this article, for example, we learned about 90 percent of our membership would arrive on July 3 and stay all four nights, checking out on July 7.

An average of 87 percent will attend all the evening functions except the first night, where the percentage drops to 74 percent. That's due to the later arrival schedules for some of the folks flying in, combined with a few members not arriving until the next morning, July 4.

Surprising to us, we also learned 88 percent of the members would be in the hotel by 6 p.m.

The bottom line: Plan on coming July 3, as most of your friends and comrades will be there in time for our early evening welcome party on that date.

Some 72 percent of the members anticipate flying — almost everyone

*Some 71 percent of the members preferred entertainment in comparison to a guest speaker, but we think we can do both gracefully, particularly if the speaker is a high-profile, well-known person.*

except the Southern California and Nevada folks.

Fares to Las Vegas are very inexpensive if you book early, as Southwest, National and America West are hubbed there.

However, don't wait until 21 days out, as Las Vegas is sold out every July 4 weekend and the deeply discounted fares are gone long before then.

A word to the wise: Book as early as possible, even now.

The dates above are locked in. Thus, you can really "steal" your airfare if you do so relatively soon and do not wait to until April, May or June.

I already have practiced what I preach — Kansas City to Las Vegas is \$89 each way on Southwest or Vanguard. That's a three-hour, non-stop flight.

Some 71 percent of the members preferred entertainment in comparison to a guest speaker, but we think we can do both gracefully, particularly if the speaker is a high-profile, well-known person.

Only 3.7 percent indicated they would stay at other hotels, primarily due to their free comps or hotel frequent flier tie-in's.

The Riviera is a great facility, having undergone a \$130 million renovation and expansion over the past year. Except for a few, we'll all be there.

We asked whether we should provide food for some of the functions (other than the final night banquet).

Often the hotel requires us to serve some food in order to obtain the space, but if a choice were present,

70.2 percent preferred to eat on their own and then attend a quality function with the overall membership.

That's valuable information for our planning committees.

We also asked if the membership would prefer one summary price to attend all functions vs. paying for each event separately, as there would be some savings realized by doing so.

The response was that more than 71 percent preferred this.

However, when cross referencing the responses to other questions, about two-thirds of the 30 percent who responded negatively did so because they were planning another activity that night or were not going to be arriving at the hotel yet.

Thus, their feelings were they would be paying for something they would not benefit from.

We will further review this question in the weeks ahead before final decisions are made regarding our Las Vegas events.

The summer heat will not impact our golfers, even though we indicated on the survey we would start early in the morning due to the midday desert heat.

Some 15.1 percent of the membership indicated they would play golf, which is a much higher percentage than at our Denver, Washington, Nashville, Fort Worth and Kansas City reunions.

We asked about members' interest in attending the high-quality stage variety stage show "Splash," which is located at the Riviera.

We estimated a negotiated, discounted cost of about \$40 per person vs. the normal rate at the box office of about \$70, plus tax.

This show often is sold out days or weeks ahead of time, particularly on weekends. It really is spectacular, and you would not have to leave the hotel to see it.

Some 83.7 percent indicated they would like to attend the show, possibly on July 5. We'll work on it.

It's going to be a great time. Get out the calendar and make your plans.

# Reunion chairman provides update

JOE BILITZKE

CHAIRMAN

NATIONAL VHPA ANNUAL REUNION COMMITTEE

With this and subsequent reports, I intend to keep you, the membership up to date on the status of our reunions.

As your appointed chairman, National VHPA Annual Reunion, I've been tasked with providing you a centralized operational and information source. To that end, these reports will appear regularly in the newsletter.

By all accounts, the Denver reunion was a big success.

Mike Law and his local committee provided the brains and brawn for our first reunion in the Rockies.

It was a reunion of other "firsts." These included the first-ever VHPA-sponsored motorcycle ride and the first time in recent memory we were all housed in one hotel, the Adam's Mark.

Thanks to the Rocky Mountain Chapter for a job well done.

As this is being written, the accounting is still under way. Future status reports will let you know how we came out financially on this reunion.

In the meantime, Reunion 2002 in Las Vegas, continues in the advanced planning stages.

The Reunion Site Selection Committee chaired by Kenny Bunn did an outstanding job in securing the Riviera Hotel two years ago. It too, should have the capacity to house all those who attend this reunion.

Our Las Vegas Chapter, led by Lad Vaughn, is working diligently to assist President Dave Rittman and me in coordinating another memorable reunion event.

This is our first reunion in the "city that never sleeps" and the local chapter knows how to harness all those "wide awake" sources. Again, in subsequent briefings, I'll keep you current on what's happening in Las Vegas.

Our 2003 reunion and those beyond are still in the planning stages.

Kenny Bunn continues to look for properties that meet the requirements and criteria we've established.

It's not an easy task trying to forecast attendance, how many pilots will be taking kids (and now grandchildren), who likes beef vs. chicken, how many will still be able to play golf in five years, and the countless other details that go into a site decision.

Watch this space for details on future sites. We'll try to keep you posted on our site selection progress so you'll know what's happening down the road.

A questionnaire was issued in Denver with questions pertaining to Las Vegas.

The target audience was those members in attendance at the Denver reunion. It's my intention to expand on that idea and extend a survey that will "pick the brain" of the entire membership as it pertains to reunions.

This has the potential to cost the association some money and will have to be approved by the Executive Council. I believe, however, we can learn a lot about your likes, dislikes, desires, and ideas as they pertain to future reunions. More on this idea in later briefings.

That's where the National Reunion Committee stands to date. As we gain a foothold and expand operations, we anticipate more "streamlined" reunion procedures for you. Let me know how we're doing.

## Most members computer literate

One of the most interesting items on a survey taken of the some 1,000 pilots who attended our recent Denver reunion was their current use of the Internet.

Ready for this? It's 93.5 percent of our members have Internet access and consider themselves sufficiently computer literate to use a new, fully automated registration process for the upcoming Las Vegas reunion.

The idea is to use our [www.vhpa.org](http://www.vhpa.org) website to register for our association functions and hotel room at the same time, with confirmation being e-mailed to the member within minutes from the Riviera. A manual system will be available for any non-computer users.

Our technology committee headed up by Charlie Holley is also collecting and updating e-mail addresses with the assistance of Dan Ferguson, Mike Law, our headquarters staff, and others.

This information is only used for interim communication between the members, and is not published beyond the association or provided to other groups, services or companies.

A good example of the use of this database in the recent past was when we became aware of available and pending scholarships from other military oriented organizations.

Our newsletter already had been printed and the scholarships had award deadlines before our next edition would be mailed.

We used the e-mail database to alert as many of our members as possible, and thus we had good VHPA representation. The result was several scholarships were awarded to members that otherwise would not have happened.

If you have not provided your e-mail address to us recently (or if you have changed in the last year or two), just send a brief e-mail to Linda at [hq@vhpa.org](mailto:hq@vhpa.org) with:

1. Your name.
2. Current U.S. mail address (to ensure we are posting info for the right member).
3. Member number (it's on the front of this newsletter).
4. Current e-mail address.

That's all there is to it.

— Dave Rittman, President

# Current times exciting for VHPA

**JOE BILITZKE**  
VICE PRESIDENT

"Joe B. for V.P." was seen all over the Adam's Mark hotel during the Denver reunion.

You must have taken my appeal to heart and for that, I thank you.

"Wait a minute," you say, "no one voted for you."

By golly, you're right. By virtue of running unopposed, I either received the vote of everyone at the business meeting, or I received the vote of no one.

Either way, I'm yours (again) for the next three years. You have all my efforts going toward maintaining the

best veteran's organization in existence.

To that end, these continue to be exciting times for the VHPA.

We have an outstanding Executive Council, led by our new president, Dave Rittman.

We have new blood on the Executive Council in the person of Mike Sheuerman, newly elected junior member at large.

Jim Gunderson begins his first full year as VHPA legal counsel following the retirement of our counselor emeritus Charlie Rayl.

And we have a new reunion direction through the inception of our National VHPA Annual Reunion Committee.



**Sheuerman**

Our primary goal continues to be our unfound fellow pilots.

Dave Rittman will keep you posted on our efforts to find each and every perspective member still unsigned by the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association.

My personal aspiration is the annual reunion: An event that is fun, cost effective, fun, well-coordinated, fun, with reasonable beer prices is the goal.

Please let me know what your thoughts are on this and anything else you that's on your mind.

The elected Executive Council is responsible for paying the bills and taking the blame.

In between, we try to keep the shiny side up, greasy side down, and the master caution lights to a minimum.

Thanks for opportunity.

*Our primary goal continues to be our unfound fellow pilots.*



## Walnut Medal Display Case

Brass hinges/hasps, foam liner inside velvet liner.

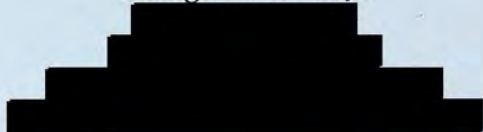
Cost of \$100 includes

Shipping in the USA. If you served in Vietnam, you were awarded the Viet Cross of Gallantry and the Campaign Medal. Cost \$15 each plus shipping.

Visit [www.flyarmyair.com](http://www.flyarmyair.com) to see

- Photo gallery by unit
- Nam memorabilia collection
- Display case and medals

**George G. Reese Jr.**



## Chapter recognized



Dave Rittman presents a VHPA check for \$500 to Andy Archer, president of the Ohio River LZ Chapter of the VHPA. The chapter completed all requirements for becoming a fully recognized VHPA chapter.

**Book your flight early  
for Reunion 2002  
in Las Vegas!**

# VIETNAM HELICOPTER PILOTS ASSOCIATION

5530 Birdcage St., Suite 200 • Citrus Heights, CA 95610-7698

(800) 505-VHPA (voice) • (916) 966-8743 (fax) • HQ@vhpa.org (e-mail) • www.vhpa.org (website)

## Membership application/change of address

- ☐ New application      ☐ Annual/renewal dues: \$30 (Newsletters included)  
☐ Address change      ☐ Life membership: \$450\*  
☐ Directory correction      ☐ Newsletter subscription only: \$30  
☐ Add \$\_\_\_\_\_ as my contribution to the Membership Fund

|                          |  |                          |            |
|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|------------|
| NAME _____               |  | DATE OF BIRTH: _____     |            |
| ADDRESS: _____           |  |                          |            |
| CITY: _____              |  | STATE: _____             | ZIP: _____ |
| HOME PHONE: (    ) _____ |  | WORK PHONE: (    ) _____ |            |
| E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____    |  | OCCUPATION: _____        |            |

- ☐ Please charge my MasterCard/Visa credit card.      ☐ Add \$15 for current Membership Directory, plus \$5 for postage and handling  
☐ Enclosed is a check/money order payable to VHPA.

Credit card No.: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration date: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

|                            |                            |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| FLIGHT SCHOOL CLASS: _____ | SERVICE BRANCH: _____      |
| COMBAT FLIGHT HOURS: _____ | SOCIAL SECURITY NO.: _____ |

Information about each Vietnam tour:

| Date of tour |       |     | Unit | Location | Call sign |
|--------------|-------|-----|------|----------|-----------|
|              | From: | To: |      |          |           |
| 1st          |       |     |      |          |           |
| 2nd          |       |     |      |          |           |
| 3rd          |       |     |      |          |           |
| 4th          |       |     |      |          |           |

Information about you: Helicopters flown, medals/awards, talents, hobbies, and anything else:

How did you learn about the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association?

*\*NOTE: Life memberships may be purchased with three bi-monthly payments of \$150 each.*