



The VHPA Newsletter

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

September/October 1998 Vol. 16, No. 5



George Abernathy photo

A Huey Cobra from A Troop, 1/9 Cavalry crosses the berm on short final, going into Firebase Buttons at Song Be, Vietnam, in late 1970. This photo was taken by George Abernathy, a crew chief/gunner with A Troop.

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The Vietnam LZ Series

by Joe Kline



The first in a series of highly detailed, limited-edition prints depicting helicopters of the Vietnam War. These prints can be ordered in the standard versions as shown, or in a personalized version with unit markings, nose art and tail numbers of your choice painted by hand directly onto the image by the artist. Each has an image size of 17" x 25", is printed on heavy, acid-free stock, and is signed, numbered and shipped rolled.



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Standard versions are \$80 each. Personalized versions are \$100 each. Visa, MasterCard, check or money orders are accepted. Call, write or e-mail to order. Satisfaction guaranteed. Please allow 2 weeks for delivery.



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Artist Joe Kline served as a Huey crew chief with the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam. This background has enabled him to capture such detail, feeling and technical accuracy in his art that some have commented that they can almost "hear the radios and smell the smoke."



Joe Kline Aviation Art

From the President

Very soon, the VHPA, will be welcoming its 10,000th member!!

We are presently at member number 9,500 and are adding new ones at the rate of 50-60 per month. Yes, after 16 years and very little widespread advertising to the general public, we have grown steadily with no causes, no political agendas, no reason other than fraternity, memorial and, "Yes, I flew in Vietnam, too."

The founders should be proud of the movement they put in motion which has grown almost completely by word of mouth.

While Wanda and I were driving to and from Nashville, recently, I was struck by the huge number of 18-wheelers on Interstate 40. No doubt, half of the vehicles we met or passed were trucks.

And, I noticed when I drove to Las Vegas last January that at least 75-80 percent of the vehicles on Interstate 40 then were trucks.

Idea!! Man, if we could get our VHPA logo and 800 number in 5 to 6-foot diameter size on the back doors of half a dozen of those coast-to-coast trucks, there is no telling how many potential members could be reached.

Remember, I told you how at Fort Worth the comment from FNGs most often was: "Gosh, I didn't know the VHPA existed because if I had, I would have joined years ago!"

Have I sold you yet? Do you get the picture? Time is running out! We can do it!

So, is there any member out there who could step forward — or know someone who would offer — to paint our logo and 800 number on six coast-to-coast trucks to get out the word?

Maybe you work for a trucking firm, maybe you own

one and drive for a living. Whatever the case, get word to me so we can get the expenditure approved by the Executive Council and the paint to drying. It is worth a try, don't you agree, considering the cost of nationwide advertising today? I believe the results would be amazing!

Fritz Co. our contractor is doing a very good job handling our affairs (sorry, no pun intended).

Deb Cavoto, our full-time contact at Fritz Co., is doing a great job of receiving calls, letters, and inquiries on our behalf with quick and positive response.

As a result of our contractor's consistent and business-like approach, the VHPA membership has the highest percent of paid members in five years.

The benefits to the VHPA are many, including financial and member satisfaction. Another very important non-tangible benefit is a higher esprit de corps. Let's face it, members don't happily pay their dues unless they are pleased and receiving some tangible and intangible benefits from belonging.

On our behalf, our contractor very soon will begin a new approved program to bring in new members from a database of "interested pilot inquiries" which had not been worked before.

With efforts like this, I think it is entirely possible to move our paid membership to at least 75 percent or more by next reunion.

Thanks, Deb, Lindsay and Marcia!! Efforts to sign up new members, as well as renew those who have "fallen through the cracks," will strengthen our VHPA.

Buckle your seat belts, VHPA members! I challenge you to spread the word. The newest member to be issued Certificate No. 10,000 will be this year. Who will it be? Will it be a buddy you asked to join? Or, will it will be someone who saw our logo on the back of an 18-wheeler? Whoever it is, it will be a special day when it happens!

— Tom Payne, President
TomPayne@vhpa.org

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

- November/December 1998 — Nov. 3
- January/February 1999 — Jan. 5
- March/April 1999 — March 2
- May/June 1999 — May 4
- July/August 1999 — July 6

Classified ads

POSITION WANTED: Experienced helicopter pilot looking for a position in the areas of EMS, natural resources or public service. Experience: Regular Army, Indiana National Guard. Class 68-27. Call Bill Resor at [REDACTED].

CALORAD: All natural wellness product. Would you like to lose inches/weight while you sleep? Build lean muscle mass? No diet or exercise necessary. Too good to be true? An 86% long-term success rate speaks for itself. Available retail or wholesale in an excellent business opportunity. Call VHPA member Paul Uster (L200) at [REDACTED] Extension/PIN 8936, or [REDACTED].

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VHPA chapters

Ohio River LZ Chapter	Jack W. Shrode Jr., President [REDACTED]
Great Lakes Chapter	John Becker, President [REDACTED] [REDACTED] home
North Carolina Chapter	Vic Rose, President [REDACTED]
New England Chapter	Bob Whitford, Past President [REDACTED] [REDACTED] home
Fort Wolters Chapter	Angelo Spelios, President [REDACTED] [REDACTED] fax
Mardi Gras Chapter	Don Hunt, President [REDACTED]
VHPA of Florida	Marty Heuer, President [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
California Chapter North	Bill Lang, President [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Mid America Chapter	Gary Wineteer, President [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Mid-South Chapter	Charles Bell, President c/o FCC, Inc. [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Volunteers sought for HAI HELI-EXPO

KEN FRITZ

PUBLIC RELATIONS CHAIRMAN

The VHPA will have a booth at the HAI HELI-EXPO '99 in Dallas, Feb. 21-23, 1999.

VHPA volunteers are needed to man this booth for the show and will be responsible for setting up some flags, banners, etc.

Additionally, the job entails careful accounting for the sales of memberships, newsletter subscriptions and VHPA goods such as calendars and historical reference directories.

We have a written SOP, which makes it very easy to do this rewarding job.

You will meet lots of members and others who are

interested in the VHPA and the exploits of our membership, while you get to see all the latest in rotorcraft aviation from all over the world.

There are some world-class parties after hours, too, if you are so inclined.

The VHPA pays for the freight to get the stuff to the show, where you will receive it and make sure it gets to the booth and set up.

After the show, you will put it back into the cartons for shipment back to VHPA headquarters.

All personal expenses are those of the individual. This is a chance for you to have fun and help the association grow on a very personal and rewarding basis.

Interested? Contact Hayden "Pappy" Jones at membership@vhpa.org or [REDACTED]

What is a vet? — many people

Some veterans bear visible signs of their service: A missing limb, a jagged scar, a certain look in the eye.

Others may carry the evidence inside them: A pin holding a bone together, a piece of shrapnel in the leg — or perhaps another sort of inner steel: The soul's ally forged in the refinery of adversity.

Except in parades, however, the men and women who have kept America safe wear no badge or emblem. You can't tell a vet just by looking.

What is a vet?



He is the cop on the beat who spent six months in Saudi Arabia sweating two gallons a day making sure the armored personnel carriers didn't run out of fuel.

He is the barroom loudmouth, dumber than five wooden planks, whose overgrown frat-boy behavior is outweighed a 100 times in the cosmic scales by four hours of exquisite bravery near the 38th Parallel.

She — or he — is the nurse who fought against futility and went to sleep sobbing every night for two solid years in Da Nang.

He is the POW who went away one person and came back another — or didn't come back AT ALL.

He is the Quantico drill instructor who has never seen combat — but has saved countless lives by turning slouchy, no-account rednecks and gang members into soldiers, and teaching them to watch each other's backs.

He is the parade-riding Legionnaire who pins on his ribbons and medals with a prosthetic hand.

He is the career quartermaster who watches the ribbons and medals pass him by.

He is the three anonymous heroes in The Tomb Of The Unknowns, whose presence at the Arlington National Cemetery must forever preserve the memory of all the anonymous heroes whose valor dies unrecognized with them on the battlefield or in the ocean's sunless deep.

He is the old guy bagging groceries at the supermarket — palsied now and aggravatingly slow — who helped liberate a Nazi death camp and who wishes all day long that his wife were still alive to hold him when the nightmares come.

He is an ordinary and yet an extraordinary human being — a person who offered some of his life's most vital years in the service of his country, and who sacrificed his ambitions so others would not have to sacrifice theirs.

He is a soldier and a savior and a sword against the darkness, and he is nothing more than the finest, greatest testimony on behalf of the finest, greatest nation ever

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VHPA Products

MAIL FORM TO:

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5530 Birdcage St., Suite 200
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FAX CREDIT CARD ORDERS: (916) 966-8743

New VHPA bumper stickers	\$1/each _____
Back VHPA Newsletters (Limited availability)	\$10/year _____ (\$5 P&H each set)
1994 VHPA Directory	\$10/each _____ (\$5 P&H each)
1995 VHPA Directory	\$10/each _____ (\$5 P&H each)
1997 VHPA Directory	\$10/each _____ (\$5 P&H each)
Vol. I Historical Reference Directory — 352 pages	\$15/each _____ (\$5 P&H each)
Vol. II Historical Reference Directory — 832 pages	\$20/each _____ (\$5 P&H each set)
1995 VHPA Calendar	\$5/each _____ (\$5 P&H each)
1996 VHPA Calendar	\$5/each _____ (\$5 P&H each)
1997 VHPA Calendar	\$5/each _____ (\$5 P&H each)
1998 VHPA Calendar	\$5/each _____ (\$5 P&H each)
1995-98 VHPA Calendar set (Limited availability)	\$17.50 _____ (\$6 P&H set)
VHPA History Book, Vol. I Turner Publishing limited edition. Only a few left.	\$39/each _____ (\$6 P&H each)

GRAND TOTAL _____

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known.

So remember, each time you see someone who has served our country, just lean over and say, "Thank you." That's all most people need and, in most cases, it will mean more than any medals they could have been awarded or were awarded.

Two little words that mean a lot, "Thank you."

David F. Clemmer

Roush helps fill void in airline pilot's life

A person on your team did something for me that filled a large void in my life. Mr. Gary Roush, database/records chairman, found Vardaman Russell Smith for me. I'll never be able to thank him enough!

Let me explain. Last October, I was looking at my 50th birthday in November. Probably, in most peoples lives, there are people who, for one reason or another, are/were very important to them. For me, Russ was one of those people.

We had gone through basic training, flight training, a year in Vietnam (different units), shared an apartment in Savannah, GA, while we completed our tour of duty (we were flight instructors at Hunter).

He married Terri and started the next phase of his life. I taught half a day in flight standards, spent half a day at Coastal Flying Service (getting my fixed-wing ratings), and another half day at Armstrong State College trying to finish a third year of college. We were both busy and it was obviously too easy to drift apart.

So, when I decided that I really needed to find him, find out what had become of his life, tell him about mine, I began a fruitless search with letters and phone calls . . . a lot of phone calls from address books that were 27 years old.

A buddy of ours, a fellow Delta pilot, wrote: "Tony, the last time I spoke to Russell, he was in graduate school at Penn State." Bernie Auer was an Air Force OV-10 pilot. He and Russell were in the same unit in Vietnam.

John Fleig and Tom Giorgio (flight school mates) had no ideas, nor did many others, of what had happened to Russ Smith.

Then there was David Carpenter (we have been friends since we were five; he was an Army captain and he had flown helicopters in Vietnam. Dave had always wanted me to join the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association. I finally did last week.

When I called Dave, he was out on a job interview, but his bride Diane came through with the VHPA phone number for me. Calling Sacramento, a woman checked your records, gave me 20 minutes of her time, with no luck. But she did say I could try Gary Roush, in upstate New York. Maybe he could help me. I called and left a voicemail message.

The next night he calls. (I'm on the computer writing Russ Smith a letter explaining my need for closure, etc., etc., saying that if he didn't want to write, I'd understand . . . yeah, sure, but that he should drop Bernie a letter.) Then Gary calls and says, "You are who you say you are," which got my attention. "I'll probably be able to have a phone number and an address for you in a couple of days." What do I say?

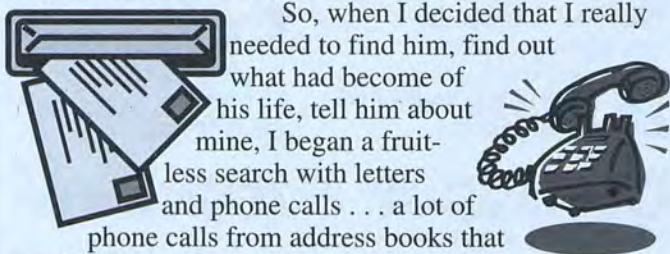
The next night he calls me from Philadelphia, I believe. He says, here's the phone number and address. I couldn't thank him enough.

So, I make the call. A young man with a deep Virginia accent answers the phone. It's Russell's teen-age son, age 15. His eldest son is a junior at the College of William & Mary.

Anyway, I ask if this is the Smith residence? "Yes, Sir." Is your father Vardaman Russell Smith? "Yes, Sir." Can I speak with your father, please? "Yes, Sir."

A few moments later, Russell gets on the phone. With an older, deeper Virginia voice, he says, "Hello." I say, "Russell, you may not remember me," and he says, "Tony, is that you?" We hadn't spoken in 27 years.

That night, we talked for quite a while. Russell is a Ph.D. in economics and a professor at James Madison University. At the end of the conversation that night, Russ said, "Tony, you never told me what you do." I said, "Russell, I'm a captain for Delta." There was a long silence and then he said, "You did what you said you were going to do."



Pilot, wife say thanks for Fort Worth reunion

Mrs. Martin, Maria, and I thank and salute the past and present leadership, the committees, the Fort Wolters Chapter and the active membership for a great reunion in Fort Worth, July 1-5, 1998.

It was our first, but certainly not our last. Thanks again for a wonderful and meaningful time!

Don Martin
Crocodile 6, 1967-68
Seminole, OK



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After that, there were many phone calls, a lot of e-mailings, and finally a visit in late July to California.

Again, there are no words to convey my sincere appreciation in helping me locate Russ.

Anthony G. Maglio

Last week in country erupts in excitement

Chu Lai, Feb. 2, 1968

The night had been fairly quiet. Only a few mortars and probes, to the best of my knowledge. Of course, I was slightly in the "who cares" mode.

My bud from flight school, Bobby Zahn, and I were due to DEROS on Feb. 9. That would make us 365 days in country.

We had stood down from flying on the 31st of January at Camp Evans. Anxious to get back to An Khe, where we could do some serious partying until DEROS, plus Camp Evans really sucked, we caught a maintenance flight headed to An Khe.

The Huey landed at Chu Lai to refuel so Bob and I decided we had not properly told the doughnut dollies there goodbye, soooo we tell the pilot that we'll just stay for a day or two here.

Of course, we never heard anything about AWOL or stuff like that.

We gather our gear and find an empty place at the Americal Division Admin Pad and head straight for the club.

We close the club in real cav fashion and fight the doughnut dollies off so we can get some sleep. Somewhere around 0400 hours, we hear and feel a giant explosion.

We look out and see a large fireball. We thought we had been nuked. Hoped it was a bad dream. Went back to sleep.

We got up rather late and stumbled out to the Admin Pad, almost stepping on a mortar round stuck in the PSP. We wander down to the division headquarters area and find everyone all upset. They all said something about attacks and blowing up the bomb dump. Didn't make sense to us.

We went to the club. Tried to get a ride south, but nothing was going. Air Terminal said good luck.

We found an ARA crew that had a Huey in maintenance they were going to fly back to Camp Evans sooo we could ride with them and catch a ride back out of Hue/Phu Bai or Evans. No problem!! Take off early morning headed north up Hwy. 1. Weather is a little stinky, but we can get 50-100 feet AGL.

The two ARA pilots have no weapons or bullet bouncers and the crew chief is some new kid with no experience or weapon. The C-model Huey is without weapons systems. I

New VHPA member misses '98 reunion

I must say I was pleased to find that my first copy of the newsletter had come. I didn't know when it arrived because my chief of staff didn't tell me that it was here.

As a new member of VHPA, I was sorry to miss the convention in July. I signed up late in the year and had other commitments. I hope that I might attend Nashville '99.

You guys can give me a hand if you could run this in the next newsletter.

I am trying to locate all pilots and enlisted men that flew for the 199th Light Infantry Brigade in Vietnam from the time the brigade was organized at Fort Benning until its standdown.

The 199th will have a reunion in Washington, DC, in May next year. We would like to have as many Fireball pilots attend as possible.

They can write me or call. I will put my address at the end of this.

Thanks a lot, you guys are doing an outstanding job, keep up the good work.

Jerry D. Kelley

have my M-16 and trusty .38 and Bob has his .38.

Bob decides to fly right gunner, so he takes my M-16 and I get in the middle. I do not plug in so I can't hear all that is going on. It's all pretty routine until somewhere north of Da Nang. We are low leveling up the highway and I'm reading a book, you know one of those blue-covered mimeographed things.

I look out every once in a while. I notice there are a lot of hooches burning and some trucks and stuff burning along the side of the road, but not much else. Suddenly, I hear rounds hitting the aircraft. Bob starts firing and I can hear gunfire from the ground.

We turn sideways like the pilot put in full right pedal. The wind whips through the open doors, blowing out everything not tied down or heavy. I look out the door and see what looks like a company of troops in formation, marching with a guidon. It has a red star on it. The troops all have funny little helmets and those are not M-16s they are carrying.

We straighten out and start to climb, but the groundfire picks up. I can hear the rounds hitting and stuff is flying all around. We turn sideways again and start for the ground. We are only at 50 feet, so we don't have far to go. I see no movement up front. Just the ground coming up in the left door.

I sit on the radio console and grab the pilot in the right seat. He has his hands on the controls. When I grab him

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and holler at him his head rolls to the side. I then see a bunch of blood on his chest and all over the instrument panel.

I take the cyclic and pull back. This stops us from hitting the ground, but we are sideways about 10 feet off the ground and still doing about 40 or 50 knots.

I look around to the left seat and the AC is slid down in the seat with blood all over. I can see blood pumping out his left inner thigh every time his heart beats.

I unplug the pilot's helmet and plug mine in, asking what the &*\$# is going on. Bob says someone said they were hit bad in the chest. I ask the AC how he is. We are still sideways. He says he is hit in the arm and leg. Can't stay awake.

I push the pilot's legs with my hands, reaching between the seats, until we are at least pointed in the direction we are flying. I set the force trim and ask the AC to keep it pointed away from the ground until I can get into the pilot's seat.

Bob and I pile the baggage in the aircraft against the transmission wall and in the seat. We pull the red handles and lay the seat back. We took the pilot's body out and laid it on the floor. This was not an easy task. He was not a little person.

I got in the seat while it was laid back. Bob and the CE pushed the seat back into place. I looked around at the instruments and it appeared nothing was working. So why worry.

Bob worked on putting a tourniquet on the AC's leg. Just like they taught us. Used his belt and found a screwdriver or something to tighten it with. The AC went unconscious. I ask Bob where we were. North of Da Nang was his answer. No &*\$#.



I went on Guard with a "Mayday." I believe it was Crown on Guard who answered back. Of course, he wanted to know where I was. The weather had us at about 100 foot max with the rotor system in the clouds. He had me fly left and right, but I did not go back the way we came!

He finally found us on radar and gave me a vector to Hue/Phu Bai. He stayed with me the whole time, talking to me. I know I didn't sound like I was under any stress. You know how we always practiced being cool on the radio. Right!

As we approached the field, he turned me over to the tower. The tower asked about the wounded on board (one KIA and two WIAs, Bob had taken a round across his leg) and talked us down to the medevac area.

I forgot that the AC was slid down into the seat until it was landing time. No aft or left cyclic. That made for an interesting landing.

We did stop with the blades about two feet from a building. Hospital crew came running out to the aircraft and I guess I looked pretty bad because they kept trying to help me out of the aircraft and wanted to know where I was hit. I told them nowhere. I was covered in blood.

Vietnam War museum gets off to a good start

The National Museum of the Vietnam War has just announced a special fund-raising program: The first 200 individuals donating \$1,000 or more will be declared "Honorary Landowners of the Museum."

The funds will be sufficient to buy the land, and the museum will be well on its way.

Donations may be sent to the National Museum of the Vietnam War, P.O. Box 146, Mineral Wells, TX 76068.

We announced the fund-raiser in the Mineral Wells newspaper Sunday and got our first "landowner" Monday.

Jim Messinger

The inside of the cockpit was covered in blood, so it looked like I had to be hit. I told them I was fine and to help the guy in the left seat. I got out of the aircraft and proceeded to fall on my face. Something about when the adrenaline flow stops you just kinda shut down.

Bob and I got home all right. I'll tell you how to hijack an Air Force Caribou one day.

I never knew the pilot's names. I think they were both 1st Cav ARA (2/20th). I can't find a listing of an ARA pilot's death on Feb. 2, 1968, but they may not have gotten around to declaring him dead on that day. Things were rather busy at the medic area that day.

This is a day that I will remember forever.

Loren McAnally

Were you in Vietnam during spring of 1972?

I am Ron Timberlake, and I will be working on a report of the Easter Offensive of 1972, for the history portion of the 1999 VHPA Membership Directory.

While my normal reaction would be to wait until a week or so before the project is due, I know that procrastination will not work well in this case.

I would like to make the report as comprehensive as possible, and will not sacrifice accuracy.

One of my major goals at this stage in life, is to try to contribute to our grandchildren and their children being able to read the truth about what we did in Vietnam, since our own children have not been given that opportunity.

Accurate reporting of what we VHPA members did in our war is essential to that end.

Our members who fought in the Easter Offensive have recently been able to assist in providing information about the identification of our war's "Unknown Soldier." There is

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much more we could tell.

While the battles around Loc Ninh, An Loc, and Kontum are documented to some extent, the fighting up north is something with which I am not at all familiar.

Other things I "know" raise almost as many questions as are answered by "knowing." For instance, where did the M-model gunships sent from Fort Bragg fight with their French SS-11 wire-guided missiles?



The exploits of the TOW-armed B-models are known, and I saw their gun camera film in 1973 or so, but while I actually know the platoon leader and pilots of the Fort Bragg contingent, we all need to know what they did on their deployment.

The Battles of An Loc and Kontum were absolutely crucial to the future of Army Aviation and the attack helicopter.

Any of you who participated in the fighting there, up north, or from the Marine helicopter carriers, have information that is very important to our history. I would be grateful for anything you could tell me about that spring, and would also try to make room for any exceptional photos of the action.

Written information, photos, slides, or video can be used. If you send it, please specify whether it is a copy, or if you need it returned to you, because I do not want anyone to lose a treasured memory.

Ron Timberlake

Society attempts to bring rescuers, rescued together

My name is John Carlson. George Marrett and I are pushing The Society of Combat Search and Rescue. The function of CSAR is to get the principals involved in a particular rescue together — albeit after, maybe, 30 years.

On April 13, 1971, Lt. Col. Warren L. Henderson spent a few uncomfortable hours on the ground in Cambodia somewhere north of Phnom Phen after leaving the air conditioned comfort of his F-100. At the time, he was the commander of the 614th TFS, 35th TFW.

The story, as he tells it, is that the Jolly Greens refused to enter Cambodia without the Sandys. I'll bet there is more to it than that, though.

Anyway, an Army chopper piloted by a major swooped in and got him. Warren has vivid recollection about everything except the pilot's name.

The first CSAR meeting will be Oct. 17-18 at Nellis Air Force Base. The Fighter Weapons School wants us to put on the debrief of Streetcar 304, a Navy pilot who spent three days exploring the flora, fauna, and geology — close up — of that part of Southeast Asia not friendly to U.S. cit-

Former crew chief writing book on history of OH-6A

Writer (and former LOH/UH-1 crew chief) is seeking information, photographic materials, unit operational data and history, and personal experiences of VHPA members who flew the OH-6A for book on aircraft's history.

Material is carefully handled, copied, credited and promptly returned. Contact Wayne Mutza [redacted].

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Wayne Mutza
Mequon, WI

izens. We would like to expand the scope of the meeting to include other rescues and rescue attempts. If we can find Henderson's savior and/or others who were involved, and get them together in Vegas, we will have closure on one of the more than 3,000 combat rescues during the Vietnam experience.

I understand you have quite an organization. I met one of your guys standing next to a Huey at Sun 'n Fun and another one just this morning in Clovis, NM, Dudley Hale.

Hopefully, you'll be able to dig into your records and find the pilot. I'm pretty sure Warren will buy him a beer.

John Carlson

Guidon in reunion photograph shows 170th Aviation Company

The VHPA Newsletter is super, the Fort Worth Convention was the best yet, and you deserve applause from those of us who sit back and enjoy the fruits of your efforts.

I was delighted to see in the last *VHPA Newsletter* the enclosed picture of my 170th Aviation Company guidon. It is the Vietnam-era guidon, and has the platoon/section patches of that company sewed on it.

It was, unfortunately, identified as the 120th Aviation Company rather than the 170th Aviation Company.

I have enclosed a picture of the 170th Guidon and a short historical sketch of that unit. A correction in the next Newsletter might keep the Bikini WOPA off my back.

George S. Crawford
Palatka, FL

Last company commander
Keeper of 170th Aviation Company guidon

THE 170TH AVIATION COMPANY "Bikinis"

The 170th Aviation Company, the Bikinis, was born in 1965 at Fort Benning part of the 14th Aviation Battalion.

Continued on Page 10

Continued from Page 9

In 1966, the Bikinis deployed to Pleiku, Vietnam, and joined the 52nd Aviation Battalion.

In early 1970, the Bikinis moved to Kontum City, 38 miles to the north of Pleiku on the Ia Drang River: The



only TO&E American unit in Kontum Province.

The primary Bikini mission was "Over the fence" helicopter support to the Military Assistance Command Special Operations Forces Group (MACSOG), 5th Special Forces.

It was this Special Forces FOB-2 (Forward Observation Base 2) mission which involved daily operations in Cambodia and Laos where there were no other American forces.

The helicopters, staging out of Dak To, inserted and extracted Special Forces-led Montagnard long-range reconnaissance patrols deep in the mountainous jungle along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Helicopter support was also provided within Military Region II to Command Control Central, the 22nd ARVN Division and other units in Kontum Province.

Used as the over-the-border assault helicopter company in W.E. Griffin's best-selling novel of the Vietnam War, "The Aviators," featured in the lead-in film of the TV series, "The A Team," and highlighted in Philip D. Canary's collection of aviation units of Southeast Asia in "Life on the Line," the 170th was one of the most decorated and elite helicopter units of the Vietnam War.

That book's opening dedication is a poem written by a Bikini pilot, killed in action in Cambodia and posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

The men of the 170th earned the Valorous Unit Award in May 1966, the Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm in March 1967, again in March 1967 through May 1968, and again from April through June 26, 1970.

Bikinis also earned The Republic of Vietnam Civil Action Honor Metal, First Class, for the period July through October 1970.

Thanksgiving Day 1970 saw the last Distinguished Service Cross being earned by a Bikini warrant officer for bravery in Laos.

That warrant officer was also the Army Aviation Association Aviator of the Year in 1970.

Through February 1971, the 170th's primary mission was insertion and extraction of these Special Forces-led Montagnard reconnaissance patrols on the Ho Chi Minh Road network in Laos.

Simultaneously, Bikini pilots were training South Vietnamese helicopter pilots while maintenance personnel were rebuilding battle-damaged 170th UH-1H model slicks to

Vietnam War memorial now has Internet website

The Vietnam War In Memory Memorial Inc. now has a website:

<http://members.aol.com/vietwarmem.plaque.htm>

Please try it.

On July 11, 1998, this project was endorsed by the (national) Vietnam Veterans of America.

Ruth Coder Fitzgerald
Fredericksburg, VA

the better-than-new standard of the VNAF program.

The company also defended its compound, the Bikini Beach, against North Vietnamese infantry at night until there were not enough Americans to man the perimeter.

One last motor march south to Pleiku brought the 170th to the relative safety of Camp Holloway and into the dust of history.

The final DA-1 Morning Report was signed early the morning of March 16, 1971, on the hood of the last Bikini Jeep in Vietnam.

Blue Max gunship pilots important to telling story

First, I hope this letter finds everyone well!

I am trying to locate some of the pilots who were in the Blue Max gunships of A Battery, 2nd Battalion, 20th Aerial Rocket Artillery, 1st Cavalry Division. Also, A Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Air Cavalry.

I need to contact these members, who flew into a Battle of Vietnam, who were there in 1970.

It was War Zone C (Tay Ninh Province), Dog Head, Fire Support Base Illingsworth, on April 1, 1970.

This is very important!! Clearing a Unit (A, 2/32 Artillery) name and telling the story right!

This unit was two 8-inch S.P. artillery guns and two 1.75 S.P. artillery guns — the two 8-inch guns were used as bait for the enemy!

This unit was stationed in the jungle for more than two years and supported the Army, Navy, Air Force and several other units.

This one battle, second hour to the fourth hour, friendly artillery bases around shot 3,372 artillery shells — Illingsworth was a small, unprotected, fire support base — less than two acres.

Please, I need your help!!

Sincerely,
Ralph H. Jones

Taps

Michael L. Burke

Michael L. Burke, news director of Sacramento TV station KTXL-TV, died Aug. 9. He was 50.

Burke was diagnosed with multiple types of cancer in March.

He was a decorated helicopter pilot during the Vietnam War, flying medevac missions with the 1st Cavalry Division. He was shot down several times trying to rescue others.

His broadcast career spanned almost three decades.

He started out as a radio reporter in Hartford/New Haven and moved into television as a producer/anchor and reporter at WTNH.

He was news director at KHTV in Houston and moved to KTXL in 1993.

Burke played football for The Fighting Irish of Notre Dame.

He is survived by his wife Kathy.

Robert B. Caldwell

Robert B. Caldwell, 52, died after a three-year battle with cancer.

Caldwell, who graduated from flight school in Class 67-19, served with the 195th Assault Helicopter Company in 1967-68.

After leaving the Army, he owned and operated Caldwell Flying Service Inc., an agricultural flying company in Williams, CA.

He is survived by his wife, Lorraine, and sons, Ian, Brett and Ron.

David T. Carter

David T. Carter of Nevada, MO, died June 23.

Carter was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam with the Marine Corps HMH-463 in 1967-68.

He underwent Marine flight training in 1966.

Carter is survived by his wife, Marianne.

William C. Gilbert

William C. Gilbert died of cancer Sept. 8. He was 50.

Gilbert was a Cincinnati firefighter until he retired in 1995.

He graduated from flight school in Class 68-31 and served in Vietnam with the 195th Assault Helicopter Company in 1969.

In Vietnam, he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross.

He is survived by his wife, Mary Kay Gilbert; two sons, David and Dennis; his father; and a brother.

Thomas Hawkes Jr.

Dr. Thomas Hawkes Jr. of Vernal, UT, died after enduring the effects of injuries suffered during the Vietnam War. He was 53.

Hawkes served as a medevac pilot with the 54th Medical Evacuation Company in Vietnam in 1968. He later retired from the Army with the rank of colonel.

He held the Silver Star Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Purple Heart Medal.

Before joining the Army, he attended the University of Utah, where he was a, All-WAC linebacker, assisting the Utes in the 1964 Liberty Bowl Championship.

Hawkes graduated from the University of Utah Medical School in 1974, and completed his internship and residency in orthopedic surgery in 1979.

He was recognized for his relief efforts in Bosnia, Croatia and recently in Vietnam.

Hawkes is survived by his wife, Ethel; seven sons and three daughters.



Jesse Calvin Miller

Jesse Calvin Miller died Aug. 13 after an illness. He was 51.

Miller owned a helicopter and flew for Channel 13 in Houston until three years ago when he lost the contract due to failing health.

He was a life member of the VHPA and attended all but three reunions.

Miller started flight school with class number 69-7 and graduated with 69-19.

He attended AH-1G transition course immediately after graduation and then served in Vietnam for 18 months with the 334th Assault Helicopter Company.

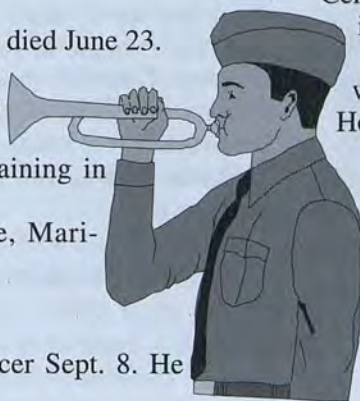
Miller was laid to rest Aug. 19 in the VA National Cemetery in Houston with friends and relatives attending.

A helicopter fly-by and missing man formation was performed by news media helicopters from the Houston area.

He is survived by his wife, Patricia; a daughter, Janiece Boden; a brother, Joe; a sister, Jan; and his mother, Mo.

Awards he received for his Vietnam service include a Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross with Oak Leaf Cluster, Bronze Star Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster and the Purple Heart Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster.

— Hayden "Pappy" Jones



Larry Nobles

Larry Nobles of Tulsa, OK, died Aug. 18 after a lengthy battle with a brain tumor. I considered Larry to be a fine pilot and a friend. He will be missed.

Nobles flew with D Troop, 3/5 Cavalry and C Troop,

See TAPS, Page 12

Taps

Continued from Page 11

3/7 Cavalry in Vietnam.

The family asks that he be remembered by making donations to the American Brain Tumor Association, 2720 River Road, Suite 146, Des Plaines IL 60018

Paul Zaneske
D Troop, 3/5 Cavalry
Vinh Long 1970-71
Lemoore, CA

Larry Steilen

It is with great sorrow that I inform you of the death of Larry Steilen.

Larry was killed in a helicopter training accident just after 11 a.m. on Sept. 25

The crash occurred east of Eagle Mountain Lake on the Texas National Guard training ground. Larry was an instructor pilot for DEA.

Larry was killed in a Vietnam vintage OH-6. Ironically it was the same aircraft he flew to the static display at Fort Wolters for the "98" Reunion.



Larry is survived by his wife, Liz, and daughter, Marie. We will miss you "Stinky."

C. David Owens, Ph.D.
Dark Horse 26
Guardian 39

William Edward Tharp

William Edward "Stumpy" Tharp died in May of liver failure while hospitalized in Indonesia. He was 55.

He graduated from flight school in Class 67-503 and served with the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam in 1968-69.

James William Turner

James William Turner of Sarasota, FL, died July 22. He was 53.

He served as an Army helicopter pilot during the Vietnam War and held the rank of captain.

Turner was born Aug. 18, 1944, in Bartow, FL, and moved to Sarasota 10 years ago from Tallahassee.

He owned A London Frame Gallery in Sarasota. Survivors include his mother, Hazel Turner of Sarasota.

VHPA briefs

1998 Directory is on the way

The 1998 Membership Directory was at the printer Sept. 14 and it should arrive by Oct. 16.

If you are in the U.S.A. and don't have it by Oct. 16, e-mail, fax, write or call VHPA Headquarters.

When you get your Directory, please look in it and see if all your info is correct. If not, e-mail, fax, write or call VHPA Headquarters to get it straightened out. Then check a couple of your friends' info for accuracy.

If you find an error, contact your friend to shoot the bull a little as you remind him of the errors in his records and have him contact VHPA Headquarters to straighten out his own records.

Update records when you move

VHPA member David Watters sent to me a really nice suggestion for a VHPA bumper sticker.

He recently asked if I would return the original artwork to him. Well, as promised, I put it into the mail and it just came back to me marked undeliverable.

I had used the address in the VHPA Membership Directory.

I then contacted VHPA Headquarters to see if I had his correct address.

Voila! He had moved and given his new address to the home office, so I was able to mail the package to him.

If we all were this good about keeping our VHPA file current, the Newsletter and the Directory would always be current and we'd all be able to remain in touch with each other. Good job, David.

Now for the rest of us: It is imperative when you get your new 1998 Directory to open to your own info and check it to verify accuracy. Then, for the heck of it, do the same for a couple of your friends, too.

If you find discrepancies, research them and give the changes to VHPA Headquarters right away via e-mail or fax or letter.

Phone works, too, but it is more time-consuming for the busy staff.

VHPA Calendar sent to publisher

The 1999 VHPA Calendar has been sent to Turner Publishing Co. for publication. Shipping is planned for late September

Turner is set up to take orders for the calendar now.

The price is \$12, plus shipping and handling. Call (800) 788-3350 to order with a credit card.

Oct

Sep

VHPA launches condolence letters

Because of a member's question and implied request, the VHPA Executive Council approved sending a letter of condolence and a certificate of appreciation to the widow or family of deceased members.

The question was raised by member Gil Ferrey in a letter appearing on Page 6 of the May/June *VHPA Newsletter*.

President Tom Payne brought the item to the council at a special meeting after the general membership meeting in Fort Worth.

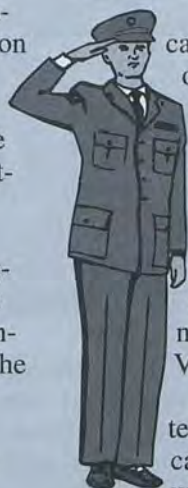
"I was so impressed with the suggestion offered by Ferrey and felt it was the kind of thing we should consider doing, I brought it up cold at the meeting," Payne said.

The council discussed it briefly and voted unanimously to approve the new policy. The policy will go into effect immediately.

Implementation of the new gesture of sympathy will be done, initially, in

the following manner:

1. VHPA Headquarters must receive a letter of notification from the widow, a family member or a very close friend informing the VHPA of the death of a member.



2. The letter of notification must request the letter of condolence and certificate of appreciation.

3. For verification, the notification letter should include a newspaper obituary or a funeral program, but at least an address and telephone number for verification by VHPA Headquarters staff.

In addition to the letter of condolence and certificate of appreciation, the widow will be informed the VHPA Newsletter will be continued to the anniversary date of the deceased member's dues.

After that, the widow may continue receiving the Newsletter at the normal subscription rate, as long as it is wanted.

Payne said he believes the letter and certificate will be widely accepted and shows what a sound suggestion it is in light of members' advancing ages.

"Widows of deceased members are recognized as having contributed greatly to the VHPA and are invited to continue to come to reunions, as guests of members, until there is no one left in the VHPA," Payne said. "In fact, it would be a wonderful gesture for the friends of a deceased member to personally contact and invite widows to come and be their personal guests whenever they can."

"Remember, there will need to be at least one witness (probably a widow) when the last man in the VHPA stands holding the 'Cobra Trophy' at the last reunion," he said.

Association relies on volunteers to function

I know you learned not to volunteer, but . . .

Have you ever wanted to be of help, to be more active in the VHPA, to have more say in what happens or how it's all done? Or do you just want to have a good time? Well, it's pretty easy to do both.

Have you ever wondered how to get involved with VHPA? Here's how, for starters:

1. Encourage others to join and show them a Newsletter. It will be a real surprise to them to see what a fine quality publication we have and you will be amazed at the reaction you get when you introduce the VHPA to non-members (maybe they wish to subscribe?), too.

2. Submit articles or stories to the Newsletter. This usually causes a stir among the rest of the guys who flew your AO better than you did (I know there aren't any really qualified to make the claim, but you understand, I'm sure) and we get great "secondaries" from your input.

Include photos with captions, too. You will get your photos back. This is a solemn promise.

3. Help with a local chapter or help get one going. To get some guidance, e-mail or write to headquarters for more on this. It's not too tough and it is a really great time for all concerned.

The chapter mini-reunions at the annual reunion have been very good parties within a party. Need I say more?

4. Volunteer to work on a committee. This can be any

time of the year. Want to help with history or with membership?

5. Volunteer to work on a project or an event at the chapter or national level.

6. Seek office as a VHPA officer. Be ready for at least three years of fun with this one. If you want some answers to your questions on this, get in touch with President Tom Payne or any of the guys on the Executive Council.

Just e-mail or write to the appropriate committee chairman per the address in the Newsletter.

If you have an idea and have it sort of figured out or completely in the bag, let your Executive Council know so we can all get it going.

If you don't know what is out there to do and/or if you have specific interests, just get in touch with whoever you think might know the answer or e-mail/fax/call headquarters. They'll get your requests to the right person.

It's very rewarding to get to know more guys who have "been there and done that" — just like you did, even if some of them won't admit that you did it as well as they did.

All joking aside, this is a volunteer organization and the more who get involved, the better. Above The Finest says it all. Join up and be a contributor while you can. You won't ever be sorry!

— Ken Fritz

Bell elected president of chapter

The VHPA Mid-South Chapter held its inaugural meeting on Aug. 15 and elected the following officers:

- Charles Bell, president.
- Tom Reeves, vice president and Membership Committee chairman).
- Rhea Rippey, treasurer.
- Ross Rainwater, secretary.

• Bob Fladry, member at large (Clarksville/Fort Campbell area).

• Rick Roll, member at large (Chattanooga area).

• Chuck Bell, member at large (Memphis area).

• Jim Delvaux, member at large (Cookeville area).

A primary role of the members at large is to recruit in their local geographic areas as part of the vice president's role as Membership Committee chairman.

As membership expands, we expect to add other members at large to cover additional areas (Knoxville, Tri-Cities, Huntsville, etc.).

Also attending were Bill Hartbarger, Rick Haines, Mike Haley, Jim Price and Arnold Bailey.

Special guests were National VHPA President Tom Payne and VHPA Past President Kenny Bunn, who helped with the "birthing" of the new chapter.

A goal of the new chapter will be to aid in the formation of new chapters in the Mid-South area as local interest grows.

Annual membership dues for the chapter were set at \$10, with renewals due 12 months later. (Membership in the VHPA is required.) An application form can be printed and mailed with annual dues to the address shown on the form.

General consensus was that, as the chapter grows, it would rotate meeting locations to other cities where membership has grown in order to continue growth in as wide an area as possible.

Among other possible "social"



Attending the VHPA Mid-South Chapter's inaugural meeting are (back row, from left), chapter President Charles Bell, VHPA President Tom Payne, Bill Hartbarger, Rick Roll, Ross Rainwater, Rhea Rippey, Arnold Bailey, Mike Haley and Bob Fladry, and (front row, from left), past VHPA President Kenny Bunn, Chuck Bell, James Selvaux, Tom Reeves and Rick Haines. Member Jim Price is not in photo.

functions, a weekend visit to Fort Rucker was discussed.

Bill Hartbarger reported fund-raiser golf tournament signups have been brisk and he expects to fill all slots on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The chapter's next meeting is scheduled for 1 p.m., Oct. 17, at the Air-field Operations Building, Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1, Smyrna, TN.

The meeting was adjourned by President Charles Bell, and was followed immediately by an update and review of the VHPA '99 Reunion in Nashville by reunion committee members.

Planning reunion

VHPA Nashville Reunion, "A Grand Ol' Time in '99."

A primary purpose of the visit by Tom Payne and Kenny Bunn was to review the meeting facilities at the primary hotel, The Renaissance. Since registrations for '99 are arriving at a brisk pace, two additional hotels have been added:

• Marriott Courtyard Downtown, 170 Fourth Ave. North, 37219, (615) 256-0900/(615) 256-0901 (fax), brand new, very near The Renaissance.

• Marriott Courtyard, 1901 West End Ave., 37203, (615) 327-9900/(615) 327-8127 (fax), near Vanderbilt University, about 15 blocks from The Renaissance.

Rates at these two are \$89 per night. When the "official" hotels sell out, we expect to provide information on other "unofficial" hotels in order to provide as many options and price ranges as possible.

Events, entertainment, and related topics were discussed, with consensus the '99 Reunion is shaping up to be an excellent gathering, with plenty to do and see.

We plan to provide as much information as possible about sightseeing opportunities for those who want to do "on your own" planning, as well as provide "as requested" information for any special interests or needs by attendees.

Rick Haines volunteered to coordinate unit mini-reunions.

— Ross Rainwater, Secretary

Chapter report

Book tells untold stories of crews

"The Price of Exit" by Tom Marshall 357 Pages; 20 photos; 3 Maps Copyright 1998 The Ballantine Publishing Group

Another book about the valor and courage of helicopter pilots in Vietnam could be considered nothing new.

And, one would think in 25 years, about everything possible to tell would have been written. WRONG !!

No way can all the stories be told in only 25 years; probably not even 125 years. It will take several lifetimes to tell most of the stories about what we ALL experienced.

"The Price of Exit" by Tom Marshall serves to fill the gap of the untold stories of one short time segment in Vietnam which would have been untold had

he not accepted the challenge and filled it. Nice job, Tom, and welcome home without having to pay the ultimate price of exit.

When I was an IP at Fort Wolters during 1968-70, it was very evident that a lot of pilots were being trained . . . so many that it constantly crossed my mind a great number of lost lives was anticipated.

However, thank God, the losses ultimately experienced were far, far below those planned for at the highest levels of military planning.

The bomber pilots of World War II and the helicopter pilots of Vietnam seemed to closely parallel each other in this aspect.

However, the one major factor that was underestimated was the resolve and spirit with which the bomber and helicopter pilots of all services executed their jobs under the most hellish of conditions.



"The Price of Exit" by Tom Marshall is the kind of book which truly reveals the glorious story of the triumph of U.S. helicopter pilots under the harshest of battle conditions, mainly the anti-aircraft capabilities of the NVA, a rapidly growing threat during later years of the war.

Tom Marshall was a member of Class 70-5 at Fort Wolters. Tom said the class lost roughly 30 percent of its members.

In the years since Vietnam, Tom has been able to uncover the stories of many of those lost class members. And, he chronologically intersperses many of their losses throughout the book.

Such a foreboding atmosphere is created by this technique that the reader is filled with suspense and dread as the pages are turned for fear of seeing one more member of Class 70-5 in the KIA category.

Book review



The book is hard to put down, trust me.

Tom Marshall admits, "This is the story of many who served in Army helicopters. The last two major actions in I Corps were the major events of 1970 and 71.

"No one wanted to be the last man killed there, yet they served proudly, winning personal battles and enduring hardships despite a declining war effort."

Marshall entered the war in August 1970 at An Khe in II Corps with the 4th Infantry Division.

When they stood down and departed, he transferred to C Company, 158th Aviation Battalion, 101st Airborne Division, called the "Phoenix."

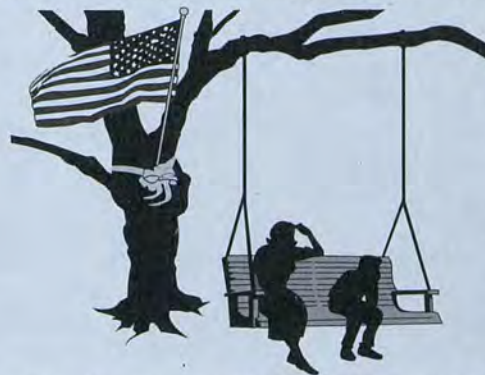
Here Tom learned the important lessons of survival with a unit that reportedly sent back to the United States only 9 of the 20 original Hueys they came to Vietnam with.

About halfway through his tour, Marshall transferred to the 163rd Aviation Company to fly OH-6 Loaches. After all, it was the Loach he had received transition training into back in the States.

And, along with that transition came a designation of voluntary INDEF to his military status.

In the closing chapters of his book, Marshall describes the very special experience of attending a funeral at Arlington National Cemetery for the returned remains of MIA crewmembers of a Phoenix aircraft shot down in Laos, southeast of LZ Sophia on March 5, 1971.

"Auction Lead, Capt. David Nelson, aircraft commander; WO1 Ralph Moreira, pilot; Spec. 4 Joel Hatley, crew chief; and Spec. 4 Mike King, gunner, were finally coming home."



He describes the emotions of both he and his fellow pilot friends who attended, as

well as the crewmembers' families who attended after so many many years.

For the first time a poem written by Evelyn Laton Hatley, mother of Spec. 4 Joel Hatley, is published. My eyes sparkled with tears and my heart ached for the lost but now found aircrew of that Phoenix aircraft.

"The Price of Exit" by Tom Marshall deserves your attention and time. Pick it up and read it, especially to reinforce the fact that you and I served proudly during a difficult time when many chose to take the easy road.

Tom Payne

**118th Assault Helicopter Company
1966-67**

Tour of duty

Helicopter pilots trained in Mineral Wells visit base, recall role in Vietnam

*Reprinted with permission of
The Dallas Morning News*

BY JACQUIELYN FLOYD
STAFF WRITER OF THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

MINERAL WELLS, Texas — What's left of the old Army base at Fort Wolters is a pretty sorry sight: crumbling barracks, a chapel with plywood nailed over the windows, a few old hangars refitted to house little start-up businesses.

But in the 30-year-old picture that Jerry Barnes carries in his head, the base is a sleepless beehive of jeeps and trucks and soldiers in a hurry. Overhead, an insectile line of helicopters a hundred choppers long hangs in the sky.

"We got our wings over here," said Mr. Barnes, who toured the old fort Friday with 1,000 other members of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association. "This is where it started."

"It," of course, is the road to Vietnam, the abrupt shove a half-million kids got over the threshold of adulthood during the 1960s. More than 20,000 of those soldiers were helicopter pilots, virtually all of whom learned to fly at Fort Wolters.

Helicopters went to Vietnam in

unprecedented numbers, serving as the cavalry in a theater where conflict erupted in chaotic hot spots instead of along conventional battle lines. At the war's height, Fort Wolters — the first half of an eight-month flight training program — processed fledgling pilots like sausages, churning out a fresh class of 400 fliers every two weeks.

The Independence Day weekend marks the 15th annual reunion of the helicopter pilots, held this year in Fort Worth. With more than 1,000 pilots and another 700 or so family members, it's the largest reunion in the organization's history. It's also a far cry from the first reunion, when association founder Larry Clark rounded up 66 war buddies for a get-together in Phoenix.

"I just wanted to try to find some of the guys I went to flight school with," said Mr. Clark, who develops flight training systems for Honeywell Corp. in Glendale, Ariz.

Conspicuously absent from the reunion plan was any political component — a policy that Mr. Clark believes led to the association's rapid growth. The group never lobbies or endorses candidates, and if its members break down over the trauma of their Vietnam experience, they do it

in private.

"My wife wouldn't come this year," said Loren McAnally from Montevallo, Ala. "She said, 'You're just a bunch of old farts who want to drink beer and tell war stories.'"

Mr. McAnally, who piloted the vast Chinook transport helicopters, shrugged philosophically as if to ask, "What's wrong with that?" (Piloting one of the helicopters is "like flying a house trailer," he noted.)

The reunion attendees, on the whole, looked like prosperous tourists: fifty-something guys in shorts and topsiders, toting cameras and griping good-naturedly about the Texas heat. You had to eavesdrop on their conversation to recognize their former selves: gonzo kids, barely out of high school, giddy at the prospect of piloting million-dollar machines.

At Fort Wolters, they learned the basics of flight. They learned to fly solo, to land on a tight target, to maneuver out of dangerous situations. They learned to do everything they would do in Vietnam, but without the element of people trying to kill them while they did it.

It was dangerous work. VHPA records show that 2,179 helicopter

See GROUND, Page 17

VHPA briefs

176th AHC plans get-together

Members of the 176th Assault Helicopter Company are called to muster at the VHPA annual reunion in Nashville.

Time and date for the Minuteman Manor Madness get-together will be announced in a future *VHPA Newsletter*. Plan to bring albums, videos, etc., to the reunion to share so we can further document the history of the best unit ever!

Advertising rates

Display advertising rates for the VHPA Newsletter are:

- Full page, \$500.
- One-half page, \$250.
- One-quarter page, \$125.
- Business card size, \$45.

Classified advertising is \$1 per line or \$7 per inch, whichever is highest.

Advertising revenue is used to help produce the Newsletter and limit the publication's dependence on membership dues.

Reunion reservations traffic heavy

**RHEA RIPPEY AND
ROSS RAINWATER**

As early fall leaves flutter toward the ground, Mid-South Chapter members continue to work toward next summer's 16th VHPA Reunion.

The big news from Nashville is room availability at the reunion headquarters hotel continues to plummet. Early room blocks are dissolving like an ice cube on firebase PSP at noon as pilots snap up reservations to be at the center of the action next July.

Our headquarters hotel, The Renaissance, is reporting heavy reservations traffic as it nears capacity. Official backup Courtyard hotels soon will be taking overflow reservations.

The message is clear: Book early! Subsequent articles in later newsletters will carry a series of

informative items designed to make your 1999 Reunion an event to remember.

These articles will address such subjects as interesting en route attractions, a comprehensive listing of local and area activities for wives and families, and non-touristy, in-town attractions such as music venues, restaurants, unusual shopping areas and leisure activities.

This article will concentrate on the current reunion overview: Scheduled events, logistical information and important Mid-South Chapter contacts.

Keep in mind that additional details will continue to be added as we move toward lift-off.

***VHPA Nashville reunion
"A Grand Ol' Time In '99"
July 1-5, 1999***

Headquarters hotel:

The Renaissance, Nashville
611 Commerce St.
Nashville, TN 37203
(615) 255-8400
(615) 255-8163 (fax)
(800) 327-6618
Rate: \$84 per night

Official overflow hotels:

Marriott Courtyard Downtown
170 Fourth Ave. North
Nashville, TN 37219
(615) 256-0900
(615) 256-0901 (fax)
(800) 321-2211
Within easy, three-block walk of
headquarters hotel
Rate: \$89 per night

Marriott Courtyard (\$89/night)
1901 West End Ave.
See WIDE, Page 18

Ground troops dependent on pilots

Continued from Page 16

pilots were killed or lost and presumed dead in Vietnam — about 10 percent of the pilots who served.

They derived motivation from the awful, heart-wrenching dependence of ground troops on pilots for supplies, for protective firepower, for medical transport and for rescue from certain death.

"The guys that were on the ground were where they were at and there wasn't much they could do about it," said Ron Wright, a founding association member from Cedar Park. "For us, you set your own safety aside and just went in and did it, but at least you had a choice."

Larry Jackson of Littleton, Colo., said, "We felt sorry for them. It was tough there on the ground."

Richard Freeman, a veteran Southwest Airlines pilot who lives in Denton, earned a nickname during the war that stuck: Sweet Griffin. He got the name from a frantic infantry radio operator as he flew in to pull a pla-

toon out of a bloody firefight.

"Griffin" was the emblem for his unit, his radio call sign. "Sweet" because they were so glad to see him.

For all the fear and danger and losses, many of the pilots think they were less traumatized by Vietnam than were other vets. Their job, they say, was less in fighting an elusive enemy than in taking care of the guys on the ground.

"We won our part of it," Mr. Freeman said. "There was a sense of mission. There was a sense of completion."

Jim Vernon, who now lives in Santa Rosa, Calif., remembers trying to round up treats — sodas or candy bars — to add to the supplies they would deliver to combat units.

Mr. Clark, who flew the all-purpose Huey helicopters, did a little of everything, ferrying men and supplies, providing fire cover combat. The only task he hated and doesn't much like to talk about: "Hauling bodies," he said tightly.

Sighing, Mr. Wright said: "The main things we remember are the funny things and the scary things."

Sometimes, incongruously, they went together: Day after day, any mission could be your last, day after day, your reward was a repulsive C-ration meal. More than three decades later, men who stared down death every day can still feel the triumph of snagging canned beans-and-weanies or the dejection of being stuck with ham and lima beans.

At least, they said, pilots could have hot food, even in the field, by warming the cans on the helicopter transmission or toasting them in the tailpipe exhaust.

Mr. Wright voiced what might be the Vietnam helicopter pilots' creed: proud to have gone, glad to have come home.

"The best way I could describe the experience I had in Vietnam would be that I would not trade it for anything," he said. "But I would never do it again."

Wide range of events scheduled

Continued from Page 17

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- Picnic and Aircraft Static Display, Army Aviation Support Facility, Smyrna, TN, with support from the 160th "Night Stalkers," Fort Campbell, KY, and Tennessee Army National Guard.

Featured banquet speaker: Adrian Cronauer of "Good Morning, Vietnam" fame

Tentative reunion schedule

July 1 (Thursday)

- Early Bird Reception

July 2 (Friday)

- Mini-Reunions
- Golf Tournament (7 a.m.-2 p.m.)
- Jack Daniels Tour (9 a.m.-3 p.m.)
- Evening Reception, Buffet, Band at headquarters hotel.

July 3 (Saturday)

- 5k run
- Mini-reunions
- Picnic and static display (9:30 a.m.-3 p.m.)
- Grand Ol' Opry (5-9 p.m.)

July 4 (Sunday)

- Church service (8-9 a.m.)
- Business meeting (9 a.m.-noon)
- Ladies Social (9 a.m.-noon)
- Mini-reunions
- Banquet (6-9 p.m.)

- Dance (9 p.m.-1 a.m.)

July 5 (Monday)

- Departure day

Reunion planning notes:

The Renaissance Hotel is in the heart of downtown Nashville, within easy walking distance of the Ryman Auditorium (original home of the Grand Ol' Opry), historic Second Avenue with all its attractions, Riverfront Park, NASCAR Cafe, Hard Rock Cafe, Planet Hollywood and Nashville Arena.

Low-cost trolley service — \$8 for three-day, unlimited use; \$5 for seniors — is available to many other sites beyond walking distance, including the Country Music Hall of Fame.

REMINDER: Opryland Theme
See OPRYLAND, Page 19



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Opryland Hotel unaffected by closing

Continued from Page 18

Park is undergoing complete renovation to become a major shopping and entertainment complex, but will not reopen until 2000.

Opryland Hotel was not affected by the park closing, but is not very convenient to the downtown reunion site. It is near the new Grand Ol' Opry House to which we will bus on Saturday night.

FOR THOSE TRAVELING BY CAR: There are major attractions en route to Nashville, including the Corvette Museum (Bowling Green, KY, visible from I-65), Elvis Presley's Graceland (Memphis, I-40/59), U.S. Space & Rocket Center (Huntsville, AL I-65), Casey Jones Museum (Jackson, TN, I-40), Dolly-

wood (Pigeon Forge, east of Knoxville, I-40), Tennessee Aquarium (Chattanooga, I-75/24), Fort Campbell (I-24), Fort Knox (I-65), and Redstone Arsenal (Huntsville, AL, I-65).

COUNTRY MUSIC FANS:
Numerous bus tour companies provide tours of the stars' homes.

The Mid-South Chapter is committed to providing the utmost in Southern hospitality for each attendee.

In order to insure that critical event and planning information reaches you as quickly as possible, reunion updates will appear in this newsletter and on our chapter website located at <http://www.Angelfire.com/tn/msvhp/>

We also post regular updates on

two private Vietnam computer lists, the Vietnam Helicopter Flight Crew Network (VHFCN) and Heli-Vets. Links to both these nets can be found on our website.

For those of you who wish to schedule unit mini-reunions in Nashville, our chapter contact is Rick Haines.

Rick will work with you to coordinate your minis within the existing schedule of events, either on-site or off. Contact Rick at ([REDACTED])

For other special requests, contact either Ross Rainwater at ([REDACTED])



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VHPA briefs

Chapter plans mini-reunion

VHPA-California Chapter North (CCN) is planning its second VHPA mini-reunion in conjunction with the big VHPA bash in Nashville.

All interested VHPA members and CCN members should make their reservations ASAP.

More info will be available in *The VHPA Newsletter* and in the chapter newsletter.



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Hiller 360 flew out of Hanoi airport

JOHN KONEK

Despite their obvious utility, helicopters appeared very late in Indochina.

In 1950, two machines were acquired by the medical service of the French forces and were operated by the Air Force. In 1952, this number grew to 10 through purchase and private contributions.

This increase required an organization to be formed and, between January and April 1954, the Army organized a helicopter training command.

A heliport was built in Saigon and plans were made to procure a total of 100 machines in the course of the same year.

Meanwhile, the Air Force also had looked forward to organizing some helicopter formations, but funding restrictions required the resources of both services to be grouped into one mixed squadron in which Army and Air Force personnel would work together until the Army would have large enough formations to warrant its independence.

As a result, by the end of the war they were still in an organizational stage characterized by centralized administration and maintenance.

It was planned to include the 65th Group with a headquarters, a light squadron with 25 helicopters, a medium squadron also with 25 helicopters, and a maintenance squadron. In actuality, this unit received only 28 helicopters by the end of the war.

The need to organize small detachments to meet the requirements of the area command had appeared very quickly. In fact, they quickly recognized there were essentially two types of areas, and these they equipped one after the other.

First, there were the deltas, or coastal areas, characterized by level ground, short distances, high civilian

From March 14-25, helicopters evacuated 101 wounded from Dien Bien Phu in 53 hours of flight time. From May 7-July 20, 80 escapees from Dien Bien Phu were rescued by helicopters operating in very difficult conditions, high altitude and forest, using winches and rope ladders.

population and troop densities, and generally favorable weather conditions.

The second type was the plateau and mountain areas, characterized by forest cover, small, scattered, specialized troop units, long distances, high elevations, and usually poor weather.

In fact, in the first type of area, the light Hiller helicopter, which had little power and limited endurance, could lift only two passengers at sea level, proved excellent.

In the second type of area, the aircraft had to be powerful and reliable, required navigation instruments, and normally had

to operate at higher altitudes. The S-51 could hardly meet these requirements and was soon replaced by the U.S.-manufactured Sikorsky H-19.

The dispersal of the helicopter detachments and the long distances involved created many problems.

The assignment of H-19s to Laos out of Saigon involved 30 hours of flight time (round trip) out of 150 hours available between maintenance checks; this was 20 percent of the total time.

It was occasionally possible to deploy helicopter detachments by ship or aircraft carrier, but priority requirements seldom permitted the delays

involved. Thus, the deployments cost some 1,500 flight hours, 400 of which probably could have been saved.

With few exceptions, helicopters were used for rescue-type missions. Their main service involved the evacuation of wounded, sick, liberated POWs, and the pick up of escapees or stragglers.

As of July 31, 1954, 10,820 wounded and sick had been air evacuated, and 38 pilots and 80 escapees had been recovered incident to 5,400 sorties involving 7,040 hours of flight time.

Examples of these types of missions follows:

On Nov. 30, 1951, a Hiller 360 was disassembled at Saigon, loaded aboard a Bristol, flown to Hanoi and reassembled at Gia Lam Airfield the same day.

On Dec. 2, this helicopter was to evacuate 24 seriously wounded from a French column in the Region of Ban Mo, Thai country.

On Dec. 14, 1953, one H-19 evacuated 76 wounded from a strong point at Dien Bien Phu to the central command area. Subsequently, the evacuation of 50-60 wounded by one aircraft happened more than once.

From March 14-25, helicopters evacuated 101 wounded from Dien Bien Phu in 53 hours of flight time. From May 7-July 20, 80 escapees from Dien Bien Phu were rescued by helicopters operating in very difficult conditions, high altitude and forest, using winches and rope ladders.

One H-19, after the war, rescued the crew of a British commercial ship that was sinking in the Bay d'Along.

The execution of helicopter missions was often hindered by ignorance of their proper utilization.

Too many commanders were prone to think in terms of demonstrations they had seen at some air show under ideal conditions. These attitudes provoked the following commentary from pilots:

"Insofar as the Army is concerned, an effort must be made to familiarize officers and men with the helicopter

See TWO, Page 21



Two of 42 helicopters shot down

Continued from Page 20

and modify their optimistic ideas about its performance in vertical flight. Since these often result in inadequate landing zones and the consequent need for some fancy aerial acrobatics, which fortunately usually succeeded."

There usually was a considerable delay in obtaining helicopter support because the requests, during operations, passed through the air support request channel.

At other times, requests passed through the territorial command net. In the Tonkin Delta and in Cochinchina, the processing of a request took from 2-3 hours, plus the flight time. This was acceptable, but in the course of combined operations, particularly in Central Annam, these delays might extend to 5 or 6 hours.

Viet Minh anti-aircraft fire often hit

helicopters, not only at Dien Bien Phu, but also in other regions.

At the time of the cease fire, all helicopters working in the Delta had been hit by ground fire, one having received 23 hits while in the sector of Hung Yen.

Losses were nonetheless "non-prohibitive." Out of 42 helicopters delivered to the

theater during the war, nine were lost for a variety of reasons and only two were shot down. Of these 42 helicopters, nine were returned to France.

To provide some protection for the crews, the following measures were adopted:

- A minimum cruise altitude of 3,000 feet to avoid anti-aircraft fire and to permit selection of a landing zone in case of accident.

- To facilitate navigation, 3,000 feet because in these types of aircraft where there is little time to read maps or use the radio, the normal practice was to overfly secure roads along which there were friendly posts.

- At 3,000 feet this altitude permits 1.5 minutes of autorotation, and a landing within an area of more than one kilometer.

- And finally, if the unit requesting the helicopter deemed it necessary, a fighter escort was assigned to provide protection in the area of the landing zone.

This latter point could be interpreted as a violation of the Geneva Convention, which, in theory, provides immunity for vehicles, ships and aircraft engaged in the transport of wounded, sick or medical personnel. Geneva Convention of 8/1949, Chap III, Articles 19, 20, 35, and 36.

However, there was too much tension.
See H-19 USED, Page 22

Heroes, Traitors and the Men We Left Behind

By Frank Anton

- CW4 U.S. Army (retired)

- Classes 66-23 and 67-1

- POW in both South and North Vietnam

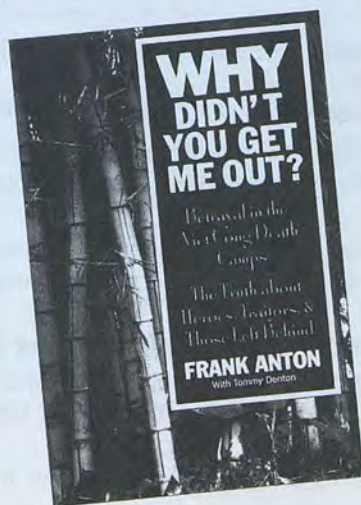
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H-19 used to land commando unit

Continued from Page 21

dency to think painting a red cross on an aircraft guarantees its safety. There were too many cases where guerrillas in the delta area fired on medical evacuation aircraft and these had to be protected.

One can ask whether the use of fighter escort for helicopters led the Viet Minh to look upon these as hostile aircraft and act accordingly.

As a matter of fact, ground units too often asked for a medical evacuation flight with fighter escort for the sole purpose of having combat air support.

The helicopter pilot, upon landing, would be shown certain objectives and be asked to relay the information to the escort aircraft. Whether annoyed or not, the pilot would always gladly provide this service with the result that, thanks to him, the appearance of his helicopter usually meant a pre-emptive and murderous air strike.

It was for this reason that at Dien Bien Phu the helicopters became prime targets whose protection required increasing the number of fighter planes (with as many as

16 being used for one mission) and even B-26s (six of these being used at one time for bombing and strafing, while two were used to lay smoke).

The small number of helicopters available during the war did not permit them to be used tactically. Nevertheless, an H-19 was employed to land a commando unit, in two trips, for a special operation in Central Annam.

The mission was a complete success and the helicopter landing was never discovered.

Another similar incident took place in Cochinchina where a commando unit was secretly landed in a Viet Minh-controlled area.

A pathfinder element was first parachuted at night in a drop zone previously selected from aerial photographs. Radio contact was established with the helicopter carrying the others of the commando unit and it was directed to the LZ.

The helicopter later withdrew carrying one wounded, the parachutes and some equipment of the airborne unit.

The French command anticipated being able to multiply these types of missions.

The plan to procure 100 helicopters by the end of 1954 would certainly have been only a first step, since studies completed in 1953 (Study on employment of helicopters in colonial wars by allied tactical studies group, May 26, 1953) spoke of "a new form of tactical maneuver which, because of unusual mobility and security, would far out-class enemy forces moving overland."

One French officer states, "By being able to undertake a series of successive concentrations of all available resources without jeopardy to the security of the whole — by being able to operate without concern for land line of communications either in hostile zone, in rear of enemy forces, or in friendly areas, these successive operations should seek to encircle and destroy the Viet Minh divisions, which generally operate at several days march from one another."

While not so ambitious, the views of other Army officers began to be heard.

One armor captain wrote:

"Armored cars, tanks, and amphibious vehicles are no longer sufficient to permit the cavalry to carry out its traditional missions.

"If we do not learn to maneuver our tactical echelons in three dimensions, we will again be one war late when the next one starts."

Light army aviation, which included helicopter formations, would have satisfied these views, or so they thought in 1953-54, which were also voiced by most of the commanders.

Such an organization might well have been born in Indochina.

We proud Americans tend to think it was born at Fort Bragg.



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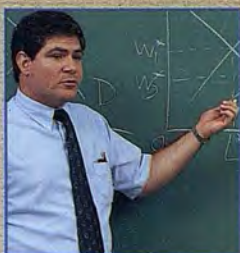
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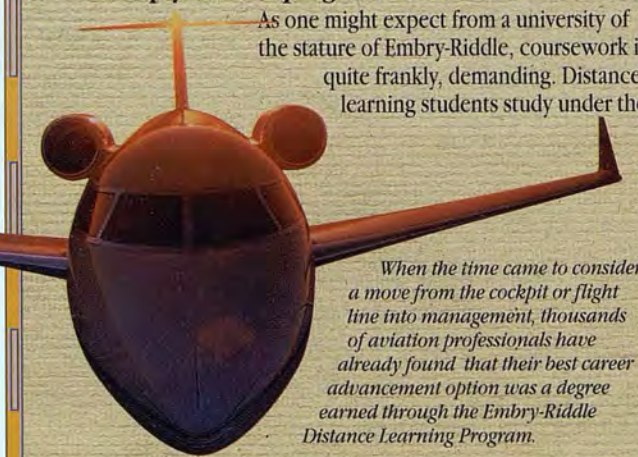
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