



# The VHPA AVIATOR

The Newsletter of The Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ~ September/October 2009



1972  
The 1st ABN's  
Tow Team in Vietnam  
See our "Hawk's Claw"  
story on page 12

Philadelphia  
Welcomes the VHPA  
See pages 17-22  
for a full AAR  
on our 2009 Reunion



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# From the President of the VHPA



**Gary Roush**

Today is the 20th of July, the 40th anniversary of man's first steps on the moon. Most of us remember where we were that day just like when

Kennedy was assassinated. I was in a beach house at Panama City Beach, FL watching the moon landing on TV. I set up my super 8 movie camera that was just recently purchased in the PX at Cu Chi and taped that historical event. Now those tapes have great historical significance just like your tapes, photos, slides and stories from that same era.

It is interesting to note that over half of the population of the United States have no memory of the moon landing because they were not yet born. This also means that half of the population have no memory of the Vietnam War. We need to change that. All of us have a piece of that history and we should be sharing that piece with the next generation

As of today, 7,209 of our select group of Vietnam helicopter pilots have died since Vietnam and 2,192 were killed in Vietnam. This means that about 20% of us are no longer available to contribute to our history and legacy. We are no longer bullet proof like we were 40 years ago and all of us will eventually join their ranks. We are a last man organization. This means we all must act now to pre-

serve our history.

Please do not take your piece of history with you. Leave it behind by writing it down now or recording it by any means available. Some good ways to do this are to tell a couple of war stories at our reunions or send an e-mail to David Adams our magazine editor. Don't worry about grammar or punctuation. We have guys who can help with that. Thanks to Jim Fulbrook, the reunion war stories are recorded and transferred to DVDs for all to enjoy. To illustrate the importance of this, we have had a couple of past war story participants die since telling their stories at reunions. Thank goodness they participated, otherwise their piece of history would be lost forever. If you want help preserving your memorabilia, contact our historian, Mike Sloniker at [REDACTED]

Mike can help you deposit your prized possessions at our official archives at Texas Tech.

As you can see above, a part of my focus this year is our history which is a key part of our legacy. I also want to focus this coming year on ensuring the many products and services the VHPA provides to you are top notch. Things like this magazine, the membership directory, calendar, war story DVDs, history CDs and web sites. I have not forgotten about the annual reunion. The reunion is important too but only about 30% of you have ever attended a reunion. That leaves the other 70% majority expecting the non-reunion products to justify their membership. I am going to make sure they do.

Beginning in this issue, we will be reviewing many of these no-reunion products and services for you. There are a few key volunteers working in the background to make all of these things happen. The list of committee chairmen on page 6 is a partial list. We even have a couple of non-members donating their time to help out like John Conway who donates the VHPA museum web site at <http://www.vhpamuseum.org> See his article in this magazine.

Just one example from the committee list - the technology committee is headed up by Charles "Cholley" Holley. His area covers web sites, software and hardware. Cholley is the webmaster of <http://www.vhpareunion.org>, <http://www.vhpregistration.org>, and <http://www.vhpa.info> There is a lot of programming behind these web sites and Cholley not only donates his time but also donates the cost of the servers containing these web sites. So when you renew your dues online, read the latest Executive Council meeting minutes, or register for the reunion it is Cholley you have to thank. Thanks Cholley.

One of the activities you do not see on any list is the Contact Committee. This committee headed up by VHPA member Gary Thewlis helps veterans and KIA families make a connection so they can exchange information. Ever wish you had contacted your KIA friend's family after Vietnam? You can still do that with this group's help. There are also KIA family members who would like to know more about their loved ones. Gary's group can help with that too. See Gary's article in this magazine.

*continued on pg. 5*

**E-mail items to The Aviator at: [editor@vhpa.org](mailto:editor@vhpa.org)**

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# FAMILY CONTACTS COMMITTEE

## HELPS FAMILIES FIND ANSWERS

The Family Contacts Committee of the Vietnam Helicopter Flight Crew Network was formed in 1997. Since then we have worked with more than 350 families of KIA/MIAs and DATs, helping them find answers to 40-year-old questions, and to reach peace with the past and with their loss.

Stephanie Peterson contacted the Family Contacts Committee in February of 2002, hoping to learn more about her brother, Capt. Walter (Rick) R. Speare, 119th AHC, KIA 11/11/1966. Jerry Ewen of our group connected her with men from the 119th, and she and other family members eventually attended the VHPA reunion in July 2002. She later wrote of the missing man tribute:

When taps began playing and a special toast was given to my Mother and the rest of Rick's family, I looked at that empty helmet, understood too well what the salt and the lemon stood for, and saw all those good and brave men with their hearts breaking again, I truly realized what had happened to all those young men and to Rick, my big Brother. He was killed in his youth, he was taken from his young wife, he disappeared from the protective arms of his family, and he was never coming home again to be my big brother. I truly was heart-broken and could not stop the hot tears streaming down my face.

I looked at that table and heard the sobs of all those men, felt their horrors, felt my emptiness and suddenly everything became clear and right. I had brought him back from that jungle to where he belonged, being honored and remembered by his peers; by those men who really understood the sacrifice; by those men who could still feel the pain. That is the way it should be, rather than a bag sent to us, being prayed over by a strange minister on a dark and dank winter's day. These men were proud and strong, these men gave him the highest honor possible; these men still are with him...he was never alone.

And, I was never alone. I did not bring him back single-handedly; these men of the 119th, you of the Family Contact Committee, and my guardian angel, Jerry, will forever have my gratitude and a special place in my heart.

***I thank you; Rick's family thanks you.***

Many other KIA/MIA families have sought our help, and many more recent

contacts are about veterans who died after their Viet Nam tour, family members who want to learn more about that part of their loved one's life.

Also much of our work goes the other direction, veterans hoping to find the families of buddies who did not survive. Some only wish to pass along special memories or photos; others seek emotional closure themselves.

We are sometimes able to provide immediate connections to families and veterans both; more often success follows a lengthy period of searching and following leads. And at times we cannot make the links, and must await future contacts that may bear on past efforts. To facilitate our core work we try and serve as a repository of connections and memories.

Perhaps you have remembrances of a comrade or friend, KIA or not, memories you would be willing to share with the family if they should come forth? And remember that the littlest thing can be important. Do you have a picture of a KIA/MIA? Even someone you didn't know well personally? Do you recall an anecdote about them? Even second-hand? Did you ever fly together? Did you ever go on R&R with them? These sorts of memories can be pure gold to their families, even after so many years.

Let us know. We will record the link and will know to get in touch with you if we are contacted about the KIA/MIA. And we will contact you first and let you decide what is appropriate at that time.

And consider the alternative of writing up those memories and sending them along to us as well. No telling when a contact may be made and time passes. We will record whatever you send against future need.

Send whatever you have to share to the committee chairman, Gary Thewlis. Email and scanned images are preferred, but any format is acceptable. Please provide your name and your contact info, and the name, unit, and KIA date of the person lost, or as much as you know or can recall about the former comrade you have lost contact with.

**GARY THEWLIS**

*Family Contacts Committee Chair*

VHPA Member: M08353

Vancouver, WA 98684-4123

213th ASHC

B/159th ASHB

Family Contacts

Committee Web Page:

<http://www.virtualwall.org/contacts/>

Family Contacts Committee Email:

**fccontac@comcast.net**

Current and past Family Contacts Committee members:

Julie Kink . Susan Jimison . Linda Clance  
Jon Beckenhauer . William Burleigh  
George Murray . Patrick Pavey  
John Taber . Jerold Ewen . Frank Reilly  
Jim Schueckler . John Grow . Grant Isom  
James McLaughlin . Brian Piggott  
Hank Thomas . Charles Utzman

## Thoughts from Member Rudy Ribbeck....

All the dramatics associated with the latest in-flight death of a Captain on an Continental Airlines flight reminds me of a story, years ago, when a Braniff B747 Captain died en route from Honolulu to Dallas.

The First Officer made the routine landing at DFW, did the paper work, and drove home.

In one corner of Braniff Operations, a large group of Captains was huddled, all marveling at how a First Officer was able to land the huge aircraft without the Captain's supervision.

In an opposite corner, a large group of First Officers was huddled, all marveling at how the First Officer noticed that the Captain was dead.....



# The VHPA's Legacy of Valor Museum Website .....by Jon Conway

The "Legacy of Valor" museum website began as a suggestion from my old friend Hugh Mills. It seemed a logical approach for sharing some of the photos and artifacts I had gathered from friends, collectors, and flea markets, for a display at the 1995 VHPA reunion in Kansas City. I stewed on the concept for quite a while and weighed the ins and outs of getting it done. I talked it over with a friend who does computer work for a living; he shot back quickly with a commitment to build the site if I could procure web space. My next thought was to seek a domain somehow associated with the VHPA. I wondered if it might be possible to slip in under their umbrella with the hope that the site would be well accepted by veterans and become truly an online "museum"! An e-mail discussion with VHPA webmaster (and current president) Gary Roush rendered an immediate solution with a very catchy address - **[www.vhpamuseum.org](http://www.vhpamuseum.org)**. This was March of 2001.

Bob Schwartz, my computer volunteer, quickly went to work on the home page. I used a photo taken from the cargo area in the back of a Huey as the opening image. I crafted my objective statement: The mission is not to entertain, but rather to educate the viewer and provide a glimpse of day to day life for the Pilots and Crewman who participated in the Vietnam War. I then got to work on the organization of the site. I began with the Cavalry units because I best understood their structure and knew several veterans I could count on for photos, stories, and memorabilia. I asked for input by signing guest books on various unit web sites. This initial phase yielded some dedicated supporters: Larry Brown, Steve Shepard, Mike Conway, Lou Rochat, Don Callison, Rich Neely, Jack Schwarz, Mike O'Neil, Dave Fesmire, Terry Vaughn, Tom Payne, Rick Waite, Dan Delor, Rod Willis, Jim Sheetz and many, many more. There was quite a mixture of people as well: pilots, instructors, crew chiefs, door gunners, aero rifle troops, maintenance/avionics techs, family members, and friends - you name it - even other webmasters, some of whom are named above. I got a lot of input!

The Museum website has allowed me to be a part of reuniting veterans (years after they last saw each other), informing friends and family members of details concerning the loss of loved ones, providing photos and data for books, television documentaries, investigative reports, and even student research papers. I'm privileged to work with people all over the world to preserve and share the history of the veterans of helicopter warfare in Vietnam. I have also tried to promote other websites created to represent certain units, organizations and people that served in the conflict. When looking through the site the viewer will find the "pages" arranged by type of unit or subject matter. Whenever possible a unit's page begins with a link to their main website, if one exists. The viewer may also note there are a number of units that are either weakly represented or not represented at all. On occasion I get a gentle scolding

for this problem. When it happens I always extend an invitation to contribute stories and images that will represent the "missing" unit. Sometimes they respond! I make it a point to confine input to veterans or their families. This has always resulted in pretty accurate information. Sadly,

pages for the USAF, USN & USMC units are under developed. I hope to improve on that at some point but response has been light in those areas.

To capture the essence of a museum I have included examples of patches, uniforms, awards, documents, plaques, weapons, artwork, books, maps, parts of aircraft, various souvenirs and even material captured from the "Bad Guys". Anything pertinent to the conflict seems to be of interest and often these things can best

help convey the spirit of the times to viewers. Many of the patches and souvenirs utilize cartoon characters and novelty designs that were fostered by the teenagers and young adults then in uniform. Much like the nick-names and pin up art painted on airplanes and flight jackets in WWII, images of Snoopy and the Peace sign are icons of the time. In addition to applicability on the website, much of the material I have acquired is used for displays at reunions, airshows and various military and civic functions. The last public exhibit was shown during a special event at the Liberty Memorial museum here in Kansas City. It was well received and led to the reunion of a former patient with his Evac nurse whom he had not seen, but well remembered, for 40 years. It's very hard to describe how rewarding it is to be even a small part of something that is so meaningful. It's the best pay check I've ever received!

Like anyone working on a project, I tend only to focus on what it is not, rather than what it is. I'd like to put a call out for help to create new pages for the many units not represented as well as to improve those that are. I am also in the process of formulating a book or books depending on the success of my information gathering skills. The concept would be to organize it by unit and cover details like A/O, base, aircraft markings, insignia, call signs, personalities, unit customs, and operations. I intend to start with the Cavalry units and hope to cover each by regiment, squadron, troop, and platoon. Then on to other aviation units which tend to be much more diverse and greater in number.

Often I receive e-mail messages that address the website as if it were mine. I would always prefer it be considered "our" website. You guys are still running the show, I'm just here to help keep the lights on! My efforts are and have always been not for profit. Thanks to everyone for their support and generosity in helping to make the concept a reality. A physical museum here in Kansas City has been on my planning board for many years. Maybe that's next!

**Please feel free to contact me at [redacted]  
or by phone [redacted] (toll free days)**



An outstanding product produced each year is the VHPA calendar. Mike Law puts this together with some high tech software and skills to produce a very high quality product of some of the best pictures available from the Vietnam War. Many of these pictures are available on one of our web sites <http://www.vhpaphoto.org>.

One of the most recent improvements in products is the new online membership directory at <http://www.vhpaservices.com>. This web site is updated weekly and sometimes daily by HQ to ensure you have the most recent member contact information available to you, just a click away. Also on this site are most of the past newsletters and magazines plus several complete historical sections

from past directories. We have limited space in the paper directory so much more information is available online. The online directory is now our primary membership directory that is paid for with your annual dues. The 2010 paper directory or CD directory is an additional \$10 charge with your dues renewal if you prefer one of them.

We have a new Executive Council member. He is Bill "Moon" Mullen who was elected as Junior Member at Large at the Philadelphia reunion. Moon is jumping in with both feet and has volunteered to head up the Public Relations/Publications Committee and marketing for the San Diego reunion. Please note his article in this magazine about soliciting donations to help cover reunion expenses. Also Senior Member at

Large, Woody McFarlin was elected as Vice President. Thanks to both of these gentlemen for stepping up to help run our great organization.

Finally, the Executive Council and I wish to thank Mike Whitten for his six years of service on the council, as he just moved from the past president position that Jack Salm now fills. Mike has been very effective for years running our Golf Tournament event at the reunions as well and Jack did an incredible job this past year as our president handling more challenges than space allows me to cover.

***I am looking forward to a great year as your president. Please let me hear from you about how we are doing, good or bad.***



## Looking For....

*Gary Roush received these letters of inquiry through his duties as VHPA Web Master. Gary wasn't able to help the searchers so we thought we would publish their letters for the general membership in the hope that someone out there can help these men.*

### **CPT. FRANK KEENAN**

*Dear Gary,*

I am a lifetime member of VHPA and was reading your article on It's not over until it's over. It struck a note with me as you mentioned that VHPA is all about reconnecting with our friends from the past.

I have been haunted for a long time about my wingman. We were both flying scouts with B 7/17th Air Cav SE of An Khe when my wing (Cpt. Frank Keenan) was blown out of the air. We had 30 to 40 NVA on the ground but somehow SFC Jerry Bell and I were able to pull Cpt. Keenan and his

observer from the fangs of capture or certain death.

Well, Frank wrote me a letter several weeks later once he was recovered a bit and able to get his hand working. It was a very emotional letter in which he thanked me for saving his life. In all honesty, that means more to me than the five DFCs I was awarded while in RVN, and they truly mean a lot to me.

The bottom line is that I did not write back to Frank and never established contact. I have looked in the VHPA directory and he is not listed. Do you have any other sources or suggestions on how I might be able to locate Frank Keenan? As I recall, he was an Alabama lad. This event took place in mid 1970.

*Thanks for what you and the others from VHPA do for us and our organization every day.*

*Regards,*

**Chuck Cox**

### **BRUCE J. MATHESON**

Looking for a Bruce J. Matheson that served as Commander of MAG-36 any thoughts? Help?

*Thanks!!*

**Jim Matheson**

### **CW4 CHARLIE WEST**

Does anyone out there have an email (or snail mail) address for CW4 Charlie West? He was last known living in Conyers, GA?

He headed up the OH-58 D-model Kiowa Warrior program at Mother Rucker when I was getting Chinook-affiliated and he retired about the same time I did, the last I heard was living East of Atlanta. Now I want to thank that old stogy-smoking man, I still owe him more than one cold beer for escorting me through many a memorable evening at the O-Club in Vietnam.

**Thomas H Nadeau**



## VHPA OFFICERS, COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN & STAFF 2009-10

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Vice President	Woody McFarlin
Past President	Jack Salm
Members At Large	
Senior Member	Mike Law
Midterm Member	Jim Fullbrook
Junior Member	Bill Mullen
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Membership	Mike Sheuerman
Records/Database	Gary Roush
Public Relations/Publications	Bill Mullen
Membership Directory	Gary Roush, Editor
The VHPA Aviator	David Adams, Editor
The VHPA Calendar Project	Mike Law, Editor
Chapter Liaison	John "Jack" Salm
Vendor Coordinator	Woody McFarlin
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Technology Steering	Charles Holley
Investment	Bob Smith
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VHPA EC Forum	www.vhpa.info
EC Forum Webmaster	webmaster@vhpa.info
VHPA Membership Website	www.vhpamembership.org
Membership Webmaster	webmaster@vhpamembership.org

## "HELP WANTED"

I recently read an article in the VVA (Vietnam Veterans of America) magazine that showed a picture of the United Auto Workers presenting a check for \$10,000 to help underwrite the expenses of the 2009 VVA National Convention. That got me thinking about....."I wonder just how many people and organizations would like to contribute to the expenses of the VHPA's Annual Reunion?"

I presented the idea to the Executive Council and they unanimously approved my going forward. Now I need to formulate a list of potential donors and that is where YOU come in!

Over 8,000 of our members will get this copy of this Aviator. I am asking for your suggestions as to who you think would be a viable contributor to our organization, and our Reunion. You might own a company, work for a company, know someone in a company, know an airline executive or even know someone in the management side (note I said management side here, not just the consumption side) of a beer company that wants to be the "Official (fill in the blank) of The Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association!"

I feel the potential list of donors is endless and to make this more fun, and to get you all "stimulated, er' excited, there will be a contest with the highlights as follows:

The Corp[orate or Individual Donor that contributes the highest amount to our Organization will earn you, the one that supplies me the lead, a \$500 reward, the second place "scout" will earn \$400 and third place "scout" will receive \$300 cash. Please note, all this money has already been donated and no funds for this program are coming from the VHPA. In the event of more than one member suggest the same donor, the member with earliest arrival date of the lead wins.

***There's no time to waste....submit your idea today!***

*I will need the following information so I can start the solicitation:*

- 1. Name and address of the company
- 2. Name and title of the person letter being sent to
- 3. Phone number {toll free if available}
- 4. Your name and VHPA number.
- 5. (and) Do you want a copy of the letter so you can follow up

**All lead information is to be sent to "Moon Mullen"**

**E-Mail:**

**(or) PO Box 2082, Pocono Pines, Pa 18350.**

*Will this be successful.....*

*only if YOU HELP make it successful!*

**Moon Mullen,**

*Junior Member at Large*

## AVIATOR PRIVACY STATEMENT

**The VHPA Aviator contains member privacy information the VHPA considers proprietary and confidential.**

**This information, including but not limited to the VHPA Chapter list, shall not be used for commercial solicitation purposes or for any correspondence related thereto without prior written authorization from the VHPA president. Correspondence relating to commercial purposes or solicitations shall only be sent to those officers, committee chairmen, and staff listed above, in the VHPA Officers, Committee Chairmen and Staff 2008-09.**



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**We hear from the Author of last Issue's story ~**  
THE BATTLE OF BU PRANG, CAMP A-236...

The story you carried on pages 10 & 11 of the last issue, the siege of Camp A-236 is actually a story that I wrote a few years ago. The then webmaster of the 155th AHC Website asked if he could include it in his website since it involved elements of his unit. I agreed. I can't even remember why or for what forum this story was written. It may have been a post on one of the email networks for Vietnam Helicopter Pilots and Crewmembers. It is not a copyright piece and having it published in a magazine such as the VHPA Aviator was the last thing on my mind when I wrote it. I am very flattered that you felt it worthy to be published in our newsletter.

*Again, thank you for finding room in our newsletter for my short story.*

Regards,

*Bob Mitchell*

## **To whom it may concern:**

LT Jack Columbus Rittichier was one of ten Coast Guard helicopter pilots who volunteered for service with the USAF Jolly Greens in Vietnam. He and his three USAF crewman were KIA in a daring rescue attempt on June 9, 1968, in Laos along the Ho Chi Minh Trail just north of A Shau. He was the only Coast Guard pilot who was lost in the war.

It turns out that before he joined the service, he was a very good football player at Kent State University and was Captain of their 1955 team. The Coast Guard Ancient Order of the Pterodactyl (Coast Guard Aviation Association) [www.aoptero.org](http://www.aoptero.org) is attempting to raise funds to permanently remember LT Rittichier by awarding a trophy, "The Rittichier Award," to the Most Valuable Player on the Kent State football team annually.

Unfortunately the small size of our organization requires us to solicit funds from additional sources. The initial cost of the trophy is \$6,000 (subsequent years will be significantly less, the initial cost being high due to tooling up costs)

*If anyone in the VHPA could make a contribution toward our venture it would be greatly appreciated.*

*Best regards and Welcome Home to all,*

**Jim Loomis, LCDR, USCG (ret)**  
37th ARRS, Danang, RVN 1960-70

## **Can anyone help me get a copy of a tape ...**

of the opening ceremony for this years closing banquet? It was the most moving opening ceremony I have witness in the 20 years that I have been attending the reunions. I don't believe there was a dry eye in the room.

*Regards,*

*Ray Murphy*

## **A member writes us imploring us to....**

VHPA, Please don't forget that H/Troop/10th Air Cavalry, as far as I know, was the last to be known as "Buffalo Soldiers" when we served in RVN in '72. It seems like our unit and leadership have now been forgotten. Current TV programs could lead some to think that the 10th Cav was never re-Flagged after Korea or WWII.

If I can find the pictures, I have some of our Cobras, Loaches and Huey's with the painted brown Buffalo crest on them, I shall forward same when I can dig them up.

**J. Willingham**  
"The Docster"

## **ANYBODY REMEMBER DENNIS C HAMILTON?** *Gentlemen,*

Does anyone remember Dennis C Hamilton, a CW2 killed in action January 5, 1968 while serving in the 176th AHC?

Was he married? Did he have kids? Anybody got anything on him? All I know is what's on the VHPA web site database. He was born May 4th, 1946, he was from Barnes City, Iowa, he was 21.7 years old when he died, promoted posthumously to CW3, etc. No mention of anything personal. Just the military facts as one might say.

My interest is personal. My Mom died last year. In going through her things I found one of those chrome plated bracelets people at home were wearing for soldiers killed or missing in action during the Vietnam War. It had Dennis's name on it. I guess Mom wore it though I don't remember her doing so. She never mentioned it to me that I recall. The black ink that filled in the etched name on the bracelet is missing in spots indicating wear and tear. I wonder if Mom ever put two and two together and realized we were both Army helicopter pilots. Dennis died while I was a junior in college. I wouldn't earn my wings for more than three years after his death, 38 months to be exact. It would 41 months to the day that I arrived in Vietnam.

I'd like to find his family and tell them Mom cared enough about their son, brother, husband, father and grandfather to wear the bracelet with his name on it. I'd like to get the bracelet with his name on it to someone in his family as a reminder that someone cared.

**Anybody remember Dennis C Hamilton?**

***If so, contact me through VHPA.***

**Mike Sheuerman**

## **To the Members of the VHPA**

I'm just curious to know if any students going thru flight school at Fort Wolters in Mineral Wells, TX have any memories of my Dad, Glenn McQuaid. He was a civilian instructor pilot who taught flight school there for many years.

*If so, I'd love to hear from any them at my return email address.*

*Thank you for your consideration.*

**Jill Burwash**

**Remember,  
the deadline for  
this year's Christmas in Vietnam  
Issue is Friday, October 2nd.**

**E-mail your stories to:  
Editor@VHPA.org  
or call me at  
to make other arrangements.**

**David Adams,  
Editor of your VHPA Aviator**





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## Vietnam Helo Ops Overview "Rotorheads Return" 9-23 May & 27 Aug - 10 Sep 2010

Tour Leader: John  
Powell, 1/9 Cav

Note: If you enjoyed  
John Mackel's AA Report  
"Return to Vietnam" this  
is the tour for you!



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR CONTINUED

### Dear Editor of The VHPA Aviator

On May 9th 1969, one day prior to the official start of a major operation called 'Apache Snow', units with the 2/501st. 101st. Airborne division, made large numbers of assaults into the Ashau Valley. B-Co. and its sister companies were lifted from an abandon airstrip near the base of Fire Base Birmingham, west of Hue. B-Co. was being flown to F.B. Airborne at the northern end of the Ashau, opposite hill 937.

We were in the airspace directly above the floor of the valley and had visual on Airborne, while on approach, the bird, myself and five other infantry men was riding in, veered out of formation and began circling toward the floor of the valley. We learned from a door gunner, that a helicopter had crashed and we were going to pick up the crew. Soon enough, we marked their location, but needed to land in an open area surrounded by elephant grass some 100 yards away.

We (6 infantry men) jumped out and made a small perimeter about the edge of the rotor wash, and waited for the crew to make their way to us. We could hear them shooting as they neared the D.P. and soon were coming into the clearing, the pilots emptying their 45's into the tall grass behind them as they ran.

Now we have a problem, four original crew with two 60's, six infantry with full five days of field gear, one with a 60 and four more crew, two with 60's. 14 men, field gear and 5 60's got on that UH-1. Two or three stood on the rails as the pilot gave the rotors all the 'REV' the engine had before attempting to take off.

The tail of the bird finally began lifting, higher and higher, until we could see forward motion, the skids sliding across the low grass. In seconds we were nearing the elephant grass with the rotors acting like a giant weed whip and stealing power. I think we must have crossed over a couple of bomb craters, giving ease to the rotors and making the craft go airborne. We then gained more forward motion as we barely cleared the original downed craft.

It was about that time we began to hear a couple of AK-47's open up, but the door gunners quickly silenced them. The pilot struggled to gain altitude and eventually did, and flew us all the way to what I believe was Camp Eagle, south of Hue. After everyone got out, the crew found about a dozen holes in the fuselage. We rested for a bit, but before dusk we switched to a different helicopter and were taken back to our original destination on F.B. Airborne.

I would dearly love to know who the pilot and crew were, that flew us all out of that mess. If anyone in your organization recognizes this incident, please contact me at [redacted] or e-mail me at: [redacted]

*FYI, A-Co. was overrun on Airborne May 13th, and B-Co eventually went to the top of 937, Hamburger Hill*

*Thanks,*

**Leo (Doc) Flory  
DRIVE ON**



# The "Eggbeater with Good Sense": Helicopter Medical Evacuations in the Burma Theater in World War II

By Ken McElroy, 175th Assault Helicopter Company (Outlaws/Mavericks) in Vietnam

Thanks to the popularity of the TV series "MASH", if you asked the average person, "When were helicopters first used for military medical evacuations?" the overwhelming answer would be, "The Korean War." Most civilians and a good number of military historians would be surprised to hear that the helicopter, invented by Igor Sikorsky in 1939, was being used in 1944 for medical evacuation missions in Burma during WWII.

As early as 1909, Sikorsky, then only 20 years old, attempted to build a helicopter. His initial efforts were unsuccessful, because the reality was, no one at the time, knew enough about rotor wing engineering to build a helicopter. Sikorsky, put his helicopter ideas on the back burner and became a pilot for the Imperial Russian Government. In addition to being a pilot, Sikorsky also designed fixed wing craft for the government. He left Russia for the United States after the Communist revolution and in 1923, partially funded by another Russian immigrant, composer, Sergei Rochmaninoff, Sikorsky founded the Sikorsky Aviation Company. The company built flying boats for Pan American Airways and in 1938 was bought out by the United Aircraft Company.

It was then that Sikorsky returned to the dream he had had as a 20 year old. And so in 1939, 30 years after his initial failures

could not operate.

The Army quickly saw the possibilities for military applications for the helicopter and funded early versions. After initial test flights in 1940 by pilots such as, Captain Franklin Gregory, the helicopter was modified to the point that these first units looked similar to small helicopters produced today. The Army, Navy and the British Air Force all purchased early version of the YR-4 and of the first 27 units produced, six were sent to the 1st Air Commando Group in Burma

Although purchased for military purposes, the helicopter was quickly assigned to humanitarian efforts. It had already been used by the Navy to rush blood plasma to the USS Turner, off the coast of Connecticut following an explosion on the ship and a helicopter on a training mission had been diverted to rescue a boy marooned on sandbar in Jamaica Bay, New York.



Sikorsky YR-4B during World War II



Igor Sikorsky and Orville Wright with a XR-4, May 1942

Medical evacuation procedures in the European Theater of Operations, were already well established. Most locations were accessible by motorized transport and fixed wing evacuations were usually easily managed. It isn't really surprising then that the first medical evacuation opportunities for the helicopter took place in Burma. Much of the fighting took place in primitive jungles with few roads and even fewer landing strips and as fate would have it, it was in Burma in 1944 that the helicopter first proved itself not only as a military craft but as a medical evacuation craft as well.

The Japanese had hoped, with the invasion of Burma, to take India out of the war, stir up anti-British sentiments among the natives and tie up as many British troops as possible and seemed very successful in their efforts. The British were trying to hang on in any way possible. In 1943, the British sent Brigadier General Charles Wingate to Burma to launch his pet project, Operation Longcloth. Wingate proposed sending small units of British and Gurka soldiers, far behind enemy lines. There, they would launch guerilla mis-

sions aimed at breaking the Japanese stronghold. The success of Operation Longcloth was questionable and Wingate's orders that wounded were to be left behind was very unpopular with the troops. Realistically, though, the military had no way of penetrating that far into the jungles and rescuing wounded soldiers.

Although only partially successful, Wingate was a good salesman and the concept was expanded. The new plan called for troops to operate 3 months at a time, several hundred miles behind the Japanese lines until relieved by another unit. To support these rotations, the new plan called for the creation of a series of strong points, complete with airfields. C-47 cargo planes would ferry supplies and replacement troops in and evacuate the wounded out.

As part of this military reorganization, the US 1st Air Commando was assigned to provide air support to these long range missions. The Air Commandos were led by Col. Philip Cochran, a charismatic, daredevil fighter pilot in North Africa and the model for the Major Flip Corkin character in the Terry and the Pirates comic strip. The 1st Air Commando group consisted of a squadron of 12 B-25H bombers, 30 P-51 Mustangs, 13 C-47 cargo planes, 225 Waco CG-4A gliders (one pilot was child acting star Jackie Coogan), and for liaison and observation some 100 small fixed wing airplanes.

It was to this unit that six Sikorsky YR-4B helicopters were assigned to assist in the liaison and observation missions. The helicopters arrived in Burma inside C-46 cargo planes in March 1944. When the YR-4B was deployed on its first reconnaissance mission, Col. Cochran wrote "Today the 'egg-beater' went into action and the damn thing acted like it had good sense." Although initially assigned to reconnaissance and observation missions, within a month, the helicopters were asked to perform an even more important task.

On April 21, 1944, Sergeant Ed "Murphy" Hladovcak, flying a small fixed wing aircraft was evacuating three wounded British Chindits, when he took Japanese fire and was forced to land in the jungle 100 miles behind Japanese lines. The terrain made it impossible for fixed wing aircraft to land and evacuate the wounded soldiers. Sergeant Hladovcak and his passengers managed to hide in the jungle where they suffered from heat, mosquitoes, and lack of food. The wounds on the three passengers began to fester, they were unable to travel and if not rescued would soon be in enemy hands.

continued on pg. 31



# More on The Battle of An Loc

**Editor's Note** – I hope everyone enjoyed last issue's coverage of the Battle of An Loc. Dan Fox sent me his story last March and as soon as I read it, I knew I wanted to do all that I could to bring not only Dan's story to the membership, but those of any of our other members as well. Sure enough, several of our other members sent me items to include in the issue but what has been very surprising to me, since the issue hit the membership, I've been flooded with some more very well written, and top-flight presentations about the battle.

Unfortunately there's simply not enough room in this issue to print but a couple of the stories that I've received. If you'll recall from the last issue, Dan Fox wrote about his 3-ship flight into An Loc during the battle, it now turns out that VHPA member Ed Maston was there also that day and was so perplexed by Dan's 3-ship flight, that he took a picture of them as he was on short final into An Loc itself. Ed's story, and some of his photos from that day start on the next page (11) of this issue. Starting on page 12, we have a story about the 1st Airborne's Tow Team and their battle around the city of Kontum.

Another, very involved article I received was sent in to us by VHPA member Mike Sloniker. He sent me a copy of a document he has compiled about the battle entitled: *Second Regional Assistance Command - 22aug 99*. This 42-page story is built in several parts and contains data about shot down aircraft and aircrews from several of the different units involved in the events around An Loc and Kontum and comes complete with color photographs and even parts of a couple of military papers prepared by our own Scott Fenwick and MAJ John Burns (their story is entitled *XM-26 TOW: BIRTH OF THE HELICOPTER AS A TANK BUSTER*). As I said before, there's just not enough room to print all of Mike's submission so his full presentation has been posted on the VHPA's website for all to enjoy, just enter: <http://www.vhpa.org/stories/UH-1BTOW.pdf> into the top line and you can go right to it.

But before you go running off to your computer to look it up, take the time to read this part of the e-mail Mike sent me when he passed on his work, it begins....

Dave,  
Back in 1999, Ron Timberlake started writing the story of the Loc Ninh part of the Easter Offensive of 72, unfortunately Ron was killed in a motorcycle accident on 9 May 99 before he had a chance to finish his work. I took over the writing the history

of the Easter Offensive of 72 after his death and my work, The History of the UH 1B with TOW Missile System is attached. It relies heavily on a military paper written by Maj. Burns as a research paper for C&GS. (UH-1B TOW Tank Killers).

Also, our members need to know that the low-level TOW equipped UH1Bs we used could not sustain the required 23 seconds of diving fire it took to destroy a tank with the TOW over An Loc because of the 23mm, 57mm and SA-7 anti-aircraft fire that surrounded the target. But I have included below, excerpts from the 11 May 72 Battle Log of 229th in support of their being awarded a Presidential Unit Citation. Note, we only used the SS 11 systems which are highlighted in the current Aviator magazine.

## **Battle Log – 229th Avn - 11 May 1972:**

**0420 hours** – TRAC: Tanks have been sighted at An Loc. Request Heavy Fire Team be on station at 0600 hours. Will have Lai Khe opened early.

**0530 hours** – TRAC: At 0440 hours, Intercepted enemy radio message stating that this was the last big attack to take An Loc.

**0625 hours** – TRAC: At the present time tanks are inside the An Loc perimeter. Launch second Heavy Fire Team. Skids up at present time.

**0640 hours** – TRAC: There are 200 heat rockets at Lai Khe.

**0805 hours** – RASH FAC: A-37 shot down 2 km north of An Loc. F/9 Cav heavy team covering downed at this time. (Note: The Hunter/Killer Team Leader had his hydraulics shot out while he was low level at the crash, but was able to slide onto the runway at Lai Khe. This A-37 was the aircraft of 1LT Michael Blassie, who would later be interred in The Tomb of The Unknown Soldier until a CBS News investigation confirmed his identity in 1998.)

**0920 hours** – F/79 ARTY. Three tanks at XT 715892, 5 tanks inside An Loc. A-37 shot down in item 16 was shot down by 23mm.

**1025 hours** – F/79 ARTY. Report total of 11 tanks destroyed by ground troops, TAC Air, and F/79th ARTY. F/79 claims 4 tanks destroyed.

BG Hamlet was particularly active that day, personally making the following reports:

**1040 hours** – CG: Anti-aircraft positions at XT 810902 – 37mm, XT 754865 – 37mm. XT 7585 right 1 up 1 numerous 51 cal positions. XT 7390 right 2 up 2 numerous anti-aircraft sites.

**1040 hours** – CG: At XT 746894 A-37s attacking 2 tanks and troops in open.

**1215 hours** – CG: AH-1G shot down north of An Loc, at 1215 hours at XT 755872. F/79 bird. (Note: This Cobra was destroyed by an SA-7 missile, killing CPT Rodney L. Strobbridge and CPT Robert J. Williams. Their bodies were not recovered, and because of legal considerations, Rodney Strobbridge was briefly listed as a possibility of being in the Tomb of The Unknown Soldier.)

**1425 hours** – RASH: At 0937 one FAC in O2 bird dog reported down. At 1120 another FAC reported missing.

**1740 hours** – TRAC: An Loc update total 13 tanks destroyed today. Only one penetration by two tanks and VNA platoon. Heavy buildup to the north and west of city. No ground probes in 30 to 60 minutes.

**2300 hours** – DCO-A: Send TOW missile section with MAX to An Loc. (This refers to the SS-11 Team, and not actually the TOW Team, who were not in that AO.)

The SS-11 Team, escorted by F/79 Cobras, actually flew to An Loc the next day but found no targets to engage, and on 14 May, they re-deployed to I Corps.

## **On 30 July, I received this e-mail from member John Parker:**

David,

I was finally reading the July/August Aviator and wanted to add a comment about the use of TOW's. The beginning mentioned a three-pronged attack but then only mentioned An Loc after that. The Spring/Easter offensive had three separate attacks to gain territory for the North to use as leverage at the Paris peace talks. An Loc was the most intense probably because they wanted to capture the route to Saigon. They also attacked the Central Highlands, tri-border area and I Corp to take Hue etc.

I believe the only use of TOW's was in II Corp where they had success in killing some tanks. I think they did come to III Corp first but did not employ the TOW's because of the exposure time required to guide the missile in the highly volatile AA environment around An Loc.

**John Parker**  
*Gambler Guns '68/'69*  
*Blue Max '72*

**Hopefully John's question about another part of the Easter Offensive of 1972 has been answered in this issue, is there anyone out there that can tell us more about this important event in the Vietnam War?**



# *To the Editor of the VHPA Aviator and the Members of our Organization...*

I read Dan Fox's article in the last issue on the Battle of An Loc with great interest as we shared some of the same air space at that time. I always wondered how that little flight of three ended up on the ground that day, and now I know (photo titled What The Heck?).

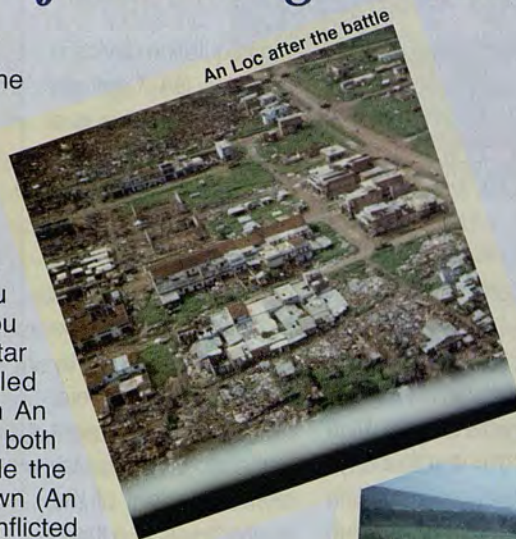
I was a wobbly one with D/229th AHB, 1st Cav, call sign Tiger 24 and I thought I would send you some of my pictures of the battleground. As you can see, the primary LZ was pock marked by mortar rounds and rocket and bomb craters (photo titled Short Final An Loc). The photo "Departure from An Loc" shows the compound in the foreground, and both a crashed Huey and a Russian T-54 just outside the wire. In the photo taken while flying over the town (An Loc after the battle) you can see the destruction inflicted on the town and although they are hard to see, in the upper right there's two more disabled NVA tanks at the crossroads. Hopefully some of our readers will find these pictures interesting, or might bring back some memories of their own.

Unfortunately, my memories are as faded as my photos, but I do remember some of the high points of the engagement. I was co-pilot on the C&C ship when we extracted the three advisers from TF 52 who were E&E'ing (escape and evading) from a fire support base. I had heard that a Medivac AC had been killed the night before our mission while trying to extract them. I wonder if any of our readers might know that story?

I will also never forget the sense of loss we felt when Loc Ninh fell. I was again co-pilot on a slick when, with the guidance of a Rash bird, we pulled an airman from an USAF AC 119 that had been shot down out in the jungle; that was a high point. The low point was when we lost a Snake with its crew. Cpt Rahm (John) and 1st Lt Barsom (Skip) were lost while performing a visual reconnaissance mission. When we finally got in to recover the bodies, I heard that John was still in the aircraft, but that Skip had been killed on the ground. The official report says that both bodies were found in the aircraft. Does anyone know what really happened? FYI - Their aircraft is set up as a memorial at the Bull Shoals, Arkansas VFW Hall, if you're ever in the area, you may want to pay your respects to their memory and sacrifice.

*Last - There is a good book about the battle written by James A. Willbanks, titled The Battle of An Loc.*

**WO1 Ed Maston  
Tiger 24  
D/229th AHB, 1st Cav**





## Hawk's Claw (TOW Missiles used mostly against tanks/other hard targets in April/May 1972):

*TOW missiles that were successfully used by UH-1B helicopter gunships against the NVA, while the 361st Aviation Company flew support for them in II Corps Vietnam, much in the Kontum or Dak To areas.*

### Scenario:

The XM-26 weapon system was deployed in combat by the 1st Combat Aerial TOW Team. The team was sent to the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) on 22 April 1972 (arriving at Tan Son Nhut AFB, Vietnam on 24 April 1972). The first few days were used to assemble the aircraft and test the weapon systems. The aircraft were considered combat-ready on 29 April 1972.

The results are as shown, the following pictures on the TOW Missiles and UH-1Bs are courtesy of Scott Fenwick, a TOW pilot and former 101st Airborne pilot.

the acquisition device in the NVA SA-7 anti-aircraft missile (This is a whole other story).

TOW fire control system. The gunner sat on the left side. The gunner put his head up against the sight and "flew" the missile to the target by keeping the crosshairs on the target. The sight unit hand control is visible to the right of the gunner's seat and this is what was used to keep the crosshairs on the target. The missile itself was self-correcting and would fly to wherever the crosshairs were placed.

*Editor's note, The following story was sent to us by Hal Manns, in the e-mail accompanying the story, Hal writes...*

### RE: your request on TOW missile efforts in RVN:

The 361st Aviation Company (Escort) had the privilege of supporting the UH-1Bs and their very effective TOW missiles during the Easter Offensive 1972 in II Corps, with Kontum being the main center of operation.

The 361st's Steve Riddle provided most of the information in the attached story and is the man to credit.

It appears in the book "Ho Chi Minh Trail, The Primary Mission of the 361st Aviation Company" that I coordinated in writing and publishing. Of course, the 57th, 119th, 189th, and 170th AHCs were integral into all of the action covered in that book, usually flying in support of the Command and Control Central Special Forces out of Kontum.

*Regards,  
Hal Manns*

*Editor's Note: Even more about the battle around Kontum can be found on the web at:*

[www.thebattleofkontum.com/index.html](http://www.thebattleofkontum.com/index.html)



The TOW aircraft were camouflaged by hand using spray paint. Visible are the optics mounted on the front left side of the aircraft. These were 13-X power, gyrostabilized optics to make it easier to keep the cross hairs on the target. Also visible is the exhaust deflector affectionately known as the toilet bowl. This would have been of some comfort if members of the Tow Team (me included) had not conclusively proven that the deflectors did NOT work and in most flight attitudes presented an enhanced infrared signature to

The decision to send the team to RVN had been prompted by the North Vietnamese Army's (NVA) all out, tank-supported invasion of South Vietnam, the Easter offensive, in the spring of 1972. The opportunity to prove that the helicopter could be used as an effective weapon against Soviet armor was just what the Army was looking for.

During the attack on Kontum City on the morning of 26 May 1972 the 1st Combat Aerial Tow Team destroyed ten T-54 tanks, an ammunition truck, and a



Camouflaged UH-1B with XM-26 TOW armament subsystem.

machine gun position that had been set up on top of a water tower. The close proximity of the tanks and other targets to friendly forces made it impossible for any other air mounted weapon systems to be used and proved the need for a highly accurate, pinpoint system.

In the period of operation from 2 May-12 June 1972 the 1st Combat Aerial Tow Team was credited with 47 total kills which included 24 tanks. With the original success of the TOW Team and continued success of the replacement team they trained in country, the funding for the next generation M65 TOW/COBRA was secured.





Kenneth Blum was one of the TOW technical representatives from Hughes Aircraft that went over to RVN with us. Here he is pictured in front of a Russian-made T-54 tank destroyed by the TOW missile system. Visible is the hole made by the shaped-charge on the side of the turret. Also visible at his feet is the rocket motor from the TOW Missile.

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### Personal TOW Missile – Hawks Claw Story by Steve Riddle:

I (Steve Riddle) was flying one of the damaged gunships on May 17th in the Battle of Kontum.

To the best of my memory; We had staged at Kontum and were waiting for further mission orders. The two Cobras were secured in revetments along with a fully loaded "Bravo" model Huey Gunship and we were watching the C130 load. It was taking on refugees leaving the city. A line of locals extended from the back of the aircraft all carrying as much as they could, trying to get out of harms way, a number of them were already on board.

Rockets started coming in from a nearby ridge and at the first explosion the C-130 pilot hit the throttles. As the aircraft rotated we all remarked that the load gate still hadn't stowed and it was going to be bad. Well it was. The ramp contacted the run-

way and caused the nose to drop. I stood there in shock as the whole thing disintegrated into a ball of flame. I am amazed that anyone survived. I never heard until I read the account today that anyone did.

With the cargo plane dispatched the enemy concentrated its fire on our Helicopters and rockets started hitting all around us. We climbed into a nearby conex that was sitting next to a small water tower and took cover. The problem was that the conex faced the line of fire. My copilot didn't like that and decided he would take cover outside. At about the same time rockets hit the revetment and the water tower. My crewmate took a chunk of shrapnel in the side and came crawling back into the container. We all decided we should try to get him to

medical help and out of the line of fire. A hurried check of the Cobras found they had both been damaged by the revetment hit, a hole as big as a basketball was in our engine cowl and I think the tail end of the other ship was gone. The Huey was untouched but heavily loaded with fuel and ammo. We had four extra crewmembers added to the four Huey guys to get off the ground. Somehow the pilot of that underpowered, overloaded helicopter managed to wobble it down the PSP until we got enough speed to get off the ground. It was a sweet, sweet moment and we all cheered.

This VHPA thing is turning into quite a hoot. I recently made contact via email with a couple of Hawks Claw guys, one pilot, Ed Smith and one Crewchief,



A picture of the TOW missile on cobras is above.

Wayne Evans. We were all waiting around Kontum together one morning when the fan became splattered. Thirty-five years ago next month, on May 18th 1972, (according to [www.thebattleofkontum.com](http://www.thebattleofkontum.com)) mortars and rockets spoiled the day and a C130 driver put the throttles to the wall with the load gate down. Ed flew us out after continued shelling and its shrapnel took out our Cobras. Ed reminded me that we had to run along side the B-Model to gain speed before we jumped in. Even after that it continued down the PSP on the skids for a while. It took all the power

the Huey had to make tree top level back to Holloway. Wayne says we smoked the hot section getting out. I don't remember who the other Panthers were that day, but one of our guys was wounded in the ribcage by shrapnel. The



A picture of a Cobra and one of the UH-1Bs that used TOW missiles during the above cited mission in Vietnam in 1972 (at Fort Rucker Alabama). All these TOW pictures through Scott Fenwick.

B-model is on display at Rucker as the first TOW bird to kill a tank. A/C #334. It's featured on the Ft Rucker website sitting just to the left of a "flying" Cobra just off the stage.

We got airborne and flew through the smoke of the C130, I will never forget that moment.

*I do remember one more thing from that day. A double Scotch was twenty cents!*



# Do You Have Maps from Binh Dinh Province, II Corps Vietnam?

For those of you who attended the Philly Reunion and saw Ron Bower in the Vendor room or listened to him during the HPF, you know that the VHPA is working with the US Geological Survey (USGS) to provide some exciting opportunities to VHPA members concerning maps of Vietnam. For the rest of you, the 2009 Membership Directory you'll

receive in October will provide all the details. Briefly the USGS has paper and digital versions of the maps many of us (1965 and onward) used during our tour. The VHPA will provide details for you to acquire those maps.

However, the USGS is missing one map and asked us to see if one of our members or friends might have a copy they could borrow.

The map we want is of Binh Khe, in Binh Dinh Province, II CTZ. This is a 1:50,000 map (used mostly by the Infantry and Artillery guys) but often aircrews used them as well as the more familiar 1:100,000 maps.

There was a Special Forces camp manned by Detachment A-123 in 1965 at Binh Khe. Needless to say but the 1st Cav and the 1st Bde, 101st Abn "enjoyed visiting" the area several times in the early years. Eventually this was part of the 173rd Abn Bde AO. The missing map's number is L7014-6736-I. The sheet immediately to the west is L7014-6736-IV and to the east is L7014-6836-IV. They look like this:



This map's name is An Tuc. You can see the 1st Cav's "Golf Course" base camp at the top and QL19 (red line) cutting horizontally across the sheet.

In the top right corner see:  
**SHEET 6736 IV**  
**SERIES L7014**

## MISSING MAP

The map's name is Binh Khe. Near the lower left corner, in the Legend it will say something like "map information as of 1965" or 1969.

On this map you would see QL19 coming in on the top left and cutting horizontally to the right center with the green area mostly on the bottom.

In the top right corner see:  
**SHEET 6736 I**  
**SERIES L7014**



This map's name is Qui Nhon. You can see the city, airfield, and port in the lower right, QL19 coming in on the left and QL1 running vertical.

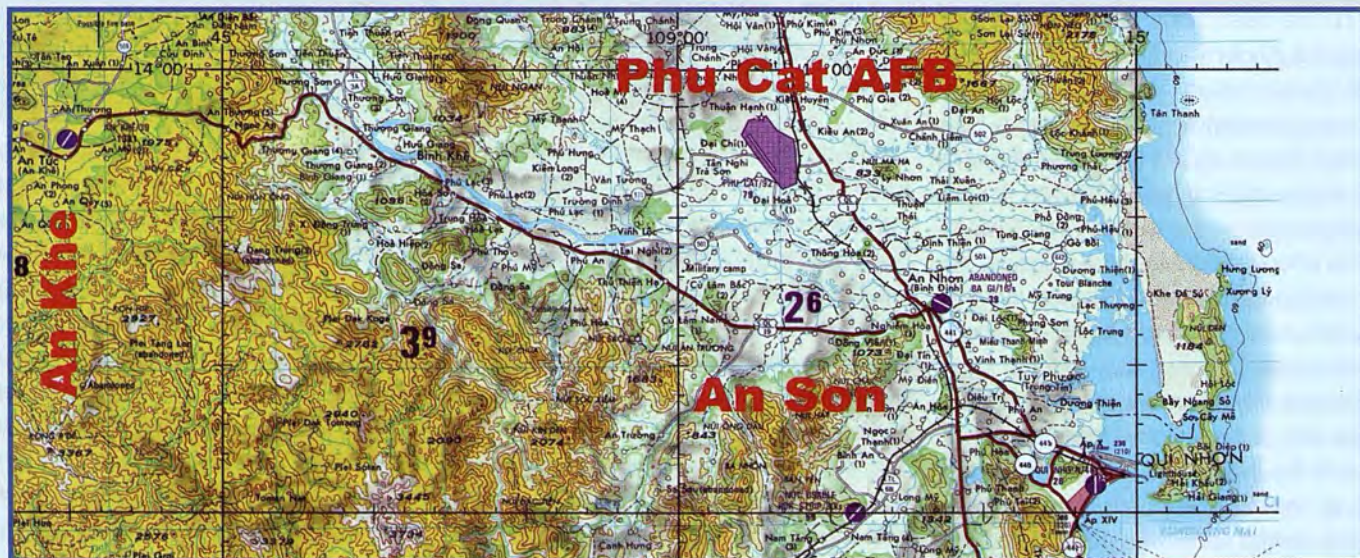
In the top right corner see:  
**SHEET 6836 IV**  
**SERIES L7014**

Remember four sheets of 1:50,000s formed a quad and each sheet had the same "quad number" (L7014-6736 in this case) plus a Roman numeral I, II, III, or IV to identify the sheet. We are interested in the I sheet for quad 6736.

If you have this sheet, please contact Don Showalter, US Geological Survey, Box 25286 Mailstop 306, Denver, CO

80225, [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Just to make certain we are all "on the same page" here is a part of the 1:250s for the area. Remember we called these 1:250s "highway maps?" Well officially the 1:250s are Joint Operations Graphic (JOG) maps. Again, more on all this in the 2009 Directory.





# COMPRISE 36 and 16 provide gun cover for DUSTOFF 601

By Jim Hunt, Lt.Col USMC Ret

*I attended the VHPA Reunion in Philly hoping to find someone who knew Dustoff 601. It was a nice reunion. Since I wasn't successful in finding one of the pilots, I hope this gets published in the Aviator.*

This is written by Comprise 36 not to tell another story as there are many much better than this one, but to try and find out some answers to question about the crew of Dustoff 601. I was never able to find out if the statement I made about the night of 24 Oct 1970 ever got to the crew of 601 and if they were ever given any recognition for their actions of that night?

As we parted that night Dustoff 601 headed south to Hawk Hill and I flew north to Marble Mountain. Dustoff thanked us for the gun cover and we talked very briefly about having a beer some time together. After almost 39 years I would still like to buy the 601 crew a beer, that's long overdue. If I could find anyone of them I would also like to apologize for not doing a better job of providing gun cover. After the fact I am very sure my door gunner spotted the enemy mortar tube flashes. I made a split second decision not to let him fire. I

observed tracers coming from the friendly position at the same time he spotted the enemy position and told me he thought he knew where the mortar tube flashes were. I was not sure exactly where we was going to fire and told him to hold fire. That was my mistake. I had over flown the enemy position and the friendly position. I then looked up from the ground and forward to turn around and come back for a rocket or gun run. The weather conditions 50-55 knot winds, rain and darkness than having no visual reference I had to make a right turn on instruments. The 180-degree turn took way too long before I could pickup the friendly LZ and ground again. By this time 601 was lifting from the LZ and I did fire seven rockets. I really doubt they came very close to the enemy position, but I know they did not come near the friendly position.

I cannot overstate the personnel danger Dustoff 601 and his crew were in. That night was the beginning of Typhoon KATE. All of MAG-16 aircraft were grounded in I Corps. There was no SAR aircraft to help 601 if he went down. Typhoon KATE hit with full force on Oct 25th which delivered extensive floods to the entire area. Over the next several days of flight operations MAG-16 aircraft rescued over 11,000 people in Quang Nam Province from flooded areas. The Air Group earned a Meritorious Unit Commendation for this.

*Anyone reading this that had knowledge of the crew of Dustoff 611, I would appreciate hearing from them.*

**Jim Hunt,** [REDACTED]

***This is the statement I wrote in Vietnam.***

While turning up two UH-1E Gunships about 2130, 24 Oct 1970, we received a call from DaNang DASC, stating that



Dustoff 601 was requesting guncover to pick up two emergency Popular Forces medevacs. We arrived over the medavac area and established communication with Dustoff 601. The situation at the time was not the best. There was no lunar illumination with a solid overcast about 3,000 feet and a light rain drizzle. The radio operator was 500 meters south of the medavac site with a strobe light. The landing zone where the medavac was located had only flashlights to mark it. There were no flare ships available because of the storm threat. The zone brief stated that the position had received small arms (AK-47) fire just a few minutes before and

there were two Popular Forces WIA emergency medevacs in the zone. The ground unit was using an interpreter to relay the zone briefs from the medavac site to Dustoff and Comprise. I informed Dustoff that we had M-79 flare rounds on board and could light the area around the zone for him.

Dustoff said he would like to use the flare rounds, so I set up in an orbit around the landing zone along with my wingman. Dustoff 601 said he would enter the zone from the south, flying low level over the first friendly position where the strobe light was located directly north to the medavac site. I had my crew chief start shooting out M-79 flare rounds while my wingman orbited a little wider and higher to cover Dustoff and myself. As Dustoff came in low level from the south he turned his lights out as briefed. He had no sooner passed over the friendly position when he began taking small arms fire. Because of the darkness and distance from the flare rounds we could not see Dustoff or locate the fire to cover him or put down suppressive fire. Dustoff 601 kept coming regardless of the hostile fire. When he arrived near the medavac site and the area lighted by flares he hovered until he could locate the zone.

When he set down on the landing zone all hell broke loose. As the last of the flares burnt out, three mortar rounds landed in the landing zone. While my wingman and I tried to locate the mortar sites, Dustoff 601 calmly sat in the zone trying to hurry the medavacs aboard as at least a half dozen more mortar rounds impacted in and around the landing zone. There were tracers going in and out of the landing zone, muzzle flashes and what appeared to be mortar tube flashes just north of the area. By the time we located the muzzle flashes and mortar tube flashes, Dustoff 601 was ready to lift from the zone. My wingman and I started our gun runs north of the landing zone to try and give Dustoff some cover as he lifted. As soon as Dustoff was clear of the area he notified us to cease-fire and stated that all his instruments were in the green even though his aircraft had received battle damage and one crewmember was wounded in the hand.

To me Dustoff 601 conducted himself in an outstanding manner, showing true professionalism, courage, airmanship, calmness and exceptional ability to go into a zone under fire, take mortars in the zone, take hits and fly out with the medavacs on board.



After flying for nine and one-half months with MAG-16 in Vietnam, I have worked three times with Dustoff. I was very impressed with the pilots and crew of Dustoff 601. As a Marine pilot I have the utmost respect for them and would be proud to work for and with them at any time and in any situation. I feel that the pilot and crew of Dustoff 601 should receive the highest recognition possible for their actions on the night of Oct 24, 1970.

This is a copy of the Headquarters USMC Meritorious Unit Commendation to MAG-16. The citation reads: For meritorious service while participating in disaster relief operations in the Republic of Vietnam from 29 to 31 October 1970. Typhoon KATE struck the lowlands of Quang Nam Province on 25 October 1970 with high winds and torrential rains which continued for five days. By 29 October severe flooding placed thousands of Vietnamese civilians in imminent danger of death. The helicopter and support squadrons of MAG-16 responded to this impending catastrophe by mounting a daring aerial

rescue operation. Plans were laid in a matter of hours, resulting in rapid commitment of the total resources of the Group in a race against the rising water. Launching into extremely adverse weather, the helicopter crews sought out and rescued over eleven thousand people from the devastating flood. They flew these missions in constant heavy rain and operated under a 300-foot ceiling in visibility which was seldom more than one-mile. Hovering with maximum loads in high winds among dangerous obstacles, inches above the raging water, they showed superb aeronautical skill while pulling the exhausted and frightened flood victims to safety. Throughout this magnificent operation the crews flew at low altitudes and reduced speed. Although subjected to intense, vicious, and accurate enemy ground fire which struck fifteen rescue aircraft, they continued their tasks in a proud display of dauntless courage. The consummate skill and dedication of Air Group maintenance personnel resulted in rapid repair to damaged aircraft, enabling the rescue to proceed unhindered.

## UPCOMING EVENTS AT YOUR NATIONAL VIETNAM WAR MUSEUM

**September 18-20, 2009** - Militaria Show, Amon Carter Exhibit Hall, Fort Worth, TX. The Friends of the Museum will again set up the museum gift shop at the Fort Worth Militaria Show, billed as the southwest's largest all militaria and military vehicle show.



**September 26, 2009** - 8 Hour Run from the Ducks! at Clark Gardens Botanical Park, 1 mile east of Mineral Wells, TX - exit to the north off of Hwy 180. Third annual 8-Hour Run from the Ducks! is held on a roughly half-mile

track. This unique "Ultrarun" event is again being hosted by Clark Gardens with net proceeds benefitting the museum.

**October 10, 2009** - Crazy Water Festival, Mineral Wells, TX Annual street festival attracting thousands of area visitors. Lots of vendors and two stages of entertainment offer a full day of fun for the whole family. The Friends of the Museum will set up the museum gift shop and display a helicopter. More information is available at the festival website.

*Y'all are invited.....*

### To the Retirement Ceremony for the Mississippi Army National Guard's last two UH-1 Huey's

The 1108th AVCRAD's is hosting a ceremony and Open House on Saturday, October 3rd, 2009, at the 1108th Aviation Classification Repair Activity Depot (AVCRAD), Hangar located at #1 Hewes Avenue, the Trent Lott National Guard Training Complex, in Gulfport, Mississippi.

The festivities start at 0900, the aircraft to be retired are Tail #'s 73-21833 and 73-21835. Refreshments will be served immediately following the ceremony, those

without a Military ID need to arrive in plenty of time to clear security.

This event will be a tribute to not only the UH-1 Helicopter and its distinguished service in the Army, but to all of the men and women who have flown the aircraft over the years, since its inception into service with the Army. The day's main focus will be towards those who have served in the Mississippi Army National Guard as UH-1 Pilots or Crew Chiefs.



# AAR on the 26th Annual Reunion, Philadelphia, PA

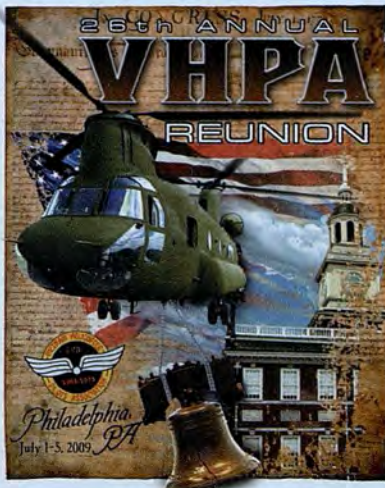
The Philadelphia Reunion is now history. From my point of view, as the VHPA Past President, it was an excellent gathering. The Philadelphia Marriott Downtown was a wonderful venue. Excellent location, right in the heart of the city, wonderful food, service, accommodations and hospitality. Over 1300 folks attended the reunion (668 pilots, 537 guests and 65 under 18), not as many as some previous reunions, but enough that we wound up with enough to both have a great time, and bring in the Reunion in the black - thanks to Dave Rittman and Joe Bilitzke and all their hard work.

The Registration was a little confusing at the start because of our lobby location as the VHPA'ers had to make their way through another organization's registration to get to our area. Once in there, registration appeared to go pretty smoothly. There are always going to be complaints, but generally they were relatively few. I thought the HQ staff did yeoman duty trying to please everyone.

The First Time Attendees and the Welcome Reception both went very well. We had 91 first timers in attendance at their reception and later that evening we had almost 400 people at the Reunion Kick-Off Reception. The food was excellent and there was plenty of it, a few folks complained about the volume of the music, some things never change. Some like it, others don't.

Most of the other tours and the in-house activities will be covered by articles and photos elsewhere in this issue.

The Annual Business Meeting (ABM) was attended by somewhere between 400 and 500 people. Presentations were made by Marcia Fritz, Headquarters and Bob Potvin, our investment advisor, I briefed on chapter activity, Mike Law talked about the VHPA calendar and membership, David Adams covered developments in The Aviator and Mike Sheuerman covered the scholarship fund and shook



us all down for a few more donations. An election was held and Woody McFarlin and Bill "Moon" Mullen were elected VP and Junior Member. Questions were asked and answered, satisfactorily I hope, and we wrapped up in about an hour and a half.

The Reunion Banquet and Dance was a highlight of the reunion as usual. Right from the start with the stirring performance of the New York City Police Bagpipers and the Missing Man sequence we were on track for an outstanding evening. The food, again, was delicious. I am always amazed at the ability to serve over a thousand people in such a short period of time. My steak was PERFECT and I really hope all of

you were pleased. After the meal we held recognition ceremonies and our change of command, then it was on to the Fabulous Hub Caps who entertained us until midnight, in fact a lot more people than usual stayed until the banquet finally quit. On course the banquet wasn't held the last night of the reunion this year, we gathered one more time, on the Fourth of July for our "Dinner at the Museum" party complete with a band and a great seat for a fine fireworks display.

The weather cooperated. Philadelphia was a wonderful city to sight see and walk around. The MOC (California North's Mobile Officers Club) was strategically positioned directly outside the hotel in the flow of traffic and did a brisk business. Several units had TOC's in operation throughout the course of the reunion and many units conducted mini reunions. All in all, there was something for everyone. I hope everyone had a great time and I look forward to seeing you in San Diego next year.

**Jack Salm**

## Vendor Room ~ A Success

The Vendor Room in Philadelphia was a success for the VHPA and most of the vendors seemed relatively pleased with their results. During the business meeting, and reflected in some of the feedback surveys, was the comment that we would like to see more vendor participation. I agree that would be a positive thing for the reunion and we are working toward helping that situation.

What can you do to help: at the reunion you need to be sure to visit the vendor room, talk with the vendors, buy something and encourage any first or second time attendees you may be aware of to visit the vendor room. Yes if you have attended the last ten reunions, you probably have all the pins and related items you need but some may be worn or lost and need replacement. As we try to add to this area of the reunion, hopefully you will see new vendors and new items that may be of interest.

The key here is that for us to have a strong vendor room, you have to participate; without interest and sales from our members, vendors have no incentive to work with our organization. If you have a desire to see a vendor or a particular product in our vendor room, send me an e-mail, we'll take a look and see if we can fill that request. We are always looking for new ideas.

If you know of any local vendor in the Southern California area who may be interested in participating in the San Diego Reunion, please pass their contact information on to me. It's even not too early to be thinking of local vendors in the Orlando area for the 2011 Reunion.

**Woody McFarlin, Vendor Coordinator**



# The 26th Annual Reunion, Philadelphia, PA



Buy Me Tea G.I.?  
Hostess's at Independence Hall



Visit to the American  
Helicopter Museum  
West Chester, Pennsylvania



A little free enterprise in the  
birthplace of our free nation..



Jack Salm calls the ABM to order



Dinner before the Fireworks  
at the Franklin Institute & Museum



The Pink Panthers successfully complete  
yet another re-supply mission







The NYC Police's "Black Watch" Honor Guard open our Annual Banquet

The Ben Franklin Bridge into New Jersey, freshly painted at a cost of only 100 Million!



One moment frozen in time on the deck of the Spirit of Philadelphia

## WHY WE MEET EVERY YEAR

by Mike Sheuerman...

Somebody sent me this in an email. It explains the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association and our Reunions so well I wanted to share it with you. I assure you I didn't write it. Hell, anyone who knows me well can tell you I'm not that smart, not that poetic and definitely not that deep.

"I NOW KNOW WHY MEN WHO HAVE BEEN TO WAR YEARN TO REUNITE. NOT TO TELL STORIES OR LOOK AT OLD PICTURES EVEN THOUGH THEY DO. NOT TO LAUGH OR WEEP EVEN THOUGH THEY DO BOTH. THEY GATHER BECAUSE THEY LONG TO BE WITH MEN WHO ONCE ACTED AT THEIR BEST; MEN WHO SUFFERED AND SACRIFICED TOGETHER, WHO WERE STRIPPED OF THEIR HUMANITY. I DID NOT PICK THESE MEN. THEY WERE DELIVERED BY FATE AND THE MILITARY. BUT I KNOW THEM IN A WAY I KNOW NO OTHER MEN.

I HAVE NEVER GIVEN ANYONE SUCH TRUST. THEY WERE WILLING TO GUARD SOMETHING MORE PRECIOUS THAN MY LIFE. THEY WOULD HAVE CARRIED MY REPUTATION, THE MEMORY OF ME. IT WAS PART OF THE BARGAIN WE ALL MADE, THE REASON WE WERE SO WILLING TO DIE FOR ONE ANOTHER. AS LONG AS I HAVE MEMORY I WILL THINK OF THEM ALL EVERY DAY. I AM SURE THAT WHEN I LEAVE THIS WORLD MY LAST THOUGHT WILL BE OF MY FAMILY AND MY COMRADES IN ARMS.....SUCH GOOD MEN."

~ Author Unknown

Many times over the past years, when new friends find out I was in the small fraternity of those who served as helicopter pilots in Vietnam and ask me how bad it was, I tell them that next to marrying my wife, Melanie, and the birth of my son, Hunter, the year I spent in Vietnam was the best year of my life. Few friendships endure like those we made in Vietnam....." SUCH GOOD MEN."

Mike Sheuerman



Another day comes to a happy end in the M.O.C.



## PHILADELPHIA GOLF OUTING

This year's golf outing at the Reunion started off with a bang and ended up as a great time. About three hours before we teed off, the Philly area was hit with over an inch of rain. There were puddles everywhere around the course when we arrived at Cobb's Creek Golf Course, and we got to see all of them when our bus driver kept making the wrong turn....

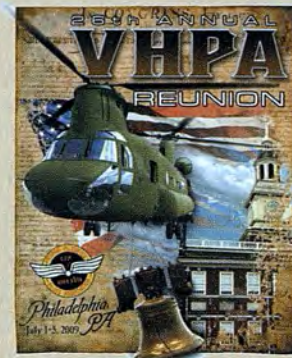
After getting settled in and putting bags on the carts, we had a small breakfast and headed out to have a great day. The course was very old and in fairly good shape with the notable exception of some of the tee boxes, I didn't know they even made Astroturf anymore! We had a lot of fun but we all wished we could have more golfers join us, but we 51 golfers were just happy to be together again.

This year I have a special thank you to Boeing

Aircraft, IDS and Mark Ballew, their Senior Manager for Marketing and Sales. Mike Smith one of our VHPA'ers worked with Mark and got a commitment from Boeing to help sponsor the tournament. Boeing came through with a \$3000 donation to help with the door prizes and green fees which really went a long way towards making this one of our most memorable golf outings. The VHPA wishes to thank Boeing and Mark for all their contributions. We invited Mark and three of his fellow workers to join us this year, and it was a real pleasure to have them.

Next year the tournament will be in the San Diego area, see you there.

**Mike Whitten,**  
**VHPA Reunion Golf Chairman**



## MEMORIAL SERVICE AT THE PHILLY REUNION

On Saturday at the Philly Reunion we had a MEMORIAL SERVICE to honor our fallen aviators during Vietnam and up until recently. Well over 200 members and guests attended. Rev. Michael E. Smith, who is a VHPA member, was our presiding pastor. The service included live organ music provided by Paul Bennett. The service included songs, response passages, prayers of course, a video segment of Vietnam action scenes, and a slide presentation listing the 107 pilots and VHPA members who passed away this past year and were listed in our Aviator TAPS section. Rev. Smith



and Paul did an excellent job and the service was very moving. We will have another Memorial Service at San Diego next year, but Mike Smith might not be able to attend, so we are seeking a volunteer with pastoral experience for next year. Gary Rossomme and Tom Payne will coordinate this event next year. Since the 4th of July falls on a Sunday for San Diego, we are planning to have the service on Sunday with the banquet on Sunday evening as well. We hope to see you there. Finally, the Memorial Service was videotaped and will be included in the 2009 DVD of reunion events.

## SHEUERMAN CASTS "NO" VOTE FOR McFARLIN IN VP ELECTION

This article is written to correct a huge misconception running rampant through the members of our fine organization that attended the Annual Business Meeting in Philadelphia and is currently being spread to the vast number that were unable to be there. I LIKE WOODY MCFARLIN. I have nothing against him. Hell, we were in school together at North Georgia College. I hold him in the highest regard. I know him to be a great guy. I'd let him date my daughter ( if I had a daughter ). I'm glad he is the newly elected Vice President ( by voice vote ) of VHPA. I

know he will do a great job.

***So why did I vote against him, you ask?***

Nothing should ever be unanimous. Not one damn thing. Reeks of bad government. Sometimes we need to stand up against the majority and just say no to just say no. And that's what I did. And, in the very, very, very remote case Woody does screw up I can say " SEE, I TOLD YOU SO!" Nothing should ever be unanimous.

***Congratulations, Woody***  
***Mike Sheuerman***

## POKER TOURNEY ADDS TO VHPA SCHOLARSHIP TOTAL

Twenty nine members and guests played TEXAS HOLD 'UM in the two Poker sessions at this year's Reunion in Philadelphia. The two days generated over \$1000 for the VHPA Scholarship Fund. Lanny Ruck was the big winner. He pocketed \$50 the first day and \$200 during the second event. His feat the second day was all the more thrilling due to his being drunker than Cooter Brown. The final hand was his opponent's pair of three's against Lanny's pair of Queens. Both players went "ALL IN." On the River (a Texas Hold 'Um expression) Lanny caught his third Queen to

cement his victory. Lanny turned to his entourage of one and celebrated with a high five. The crowd of several erupted. It was just like the shows on TV. Well, almost maybe. And, since his daughter, Lisa Ruck, had received a VHPA scholarship last year, he donated all his winnings back to the VHPA SCHOLARSHIP FUND. What a noble winner.

***Congratulations, Lanny, and THANK YOU!***  
***Mike Sheuerman***



After Action Report ~

# PRESENTATION EVENTS AT PHILLY REUNION

Greetings, VHPA members! We had another very successful year with two Historic Presentation Forum (HPF) sessions, our Luncheon Speaker session, and our two War Story Contest (WSC) sessions at our Philly reunion. Each HPF had two presentations. John C. "DOC" Bahnsen III gave a talk on The CAV Warfighter Point of View on the Vietnam War. Doc Bahnsen is the author of a book titled, *American Warrior: A Combat Memoir of Vietnam*. Doc had some great stories to tell.

The second presentation was given by Ron Bower, who is working with Jim McLaughlin (fellow VHPA members) to develop an interactive digital map called "The Vietnam Memory Map." Ron's talk covered their progress thus far. Think Google Earth with direct references to Vietnam battle sites, helicopter damage reports, and casualty reports plotted out in multiple layers. The information they are compiling is incredible. We will write more on this in a later edition of the Aviator so members can learn how to access and tap this resource.



At a Historical Presentation forum, Mike Sheuerman proves to the few men who don't know him, Woody Woodward really does exist.

founders of Peace Trees Vietnam, which supports clearing land mines in Vietnam and assisting Vietnamese victims of such mines – a worthy humanitarian effort by this non-profit group.

Our second HPF 2 speaker is another VHPA member, Tom Marshall who spoke on "Vietnam Video Archives." Tom is an author who wrote the well acclaimed book titled: *The Price of Exit*. Tom's talk was composed of a number of incredible video clips that he acquired at his own expense primarily from the DoD archives of the Vietnam War. He had a number of video segments from numerous battles to include Lam Son 719 that he showed as he provided some interesting commentary on his efforts and goals. Many clips are exclusive and have not been publicly shown before this. Tom also sold some of his books and donated the proceeds to the VHPA Scholarship Fund – thanks for your generosity, Tom.

We had two sessions of the WSC MC'ed by Doug Wornack and Mike Sheuerman. More than 14 speakers came forward between the two sessions. The stories were excellent and those who attended had a great time and "That ain't no sh\_t!" This is the 4th



Retired MG Andreson briefs the members on the current plans for Army Aviation at a special luncheon on July 4th.

Jack Salm, our esteemed VHPA President for the Philly reunion introduced our second session HPF speaker, Rae Cheney. Rae is a Gold Star Mother. Her son, Daniel Cheney, was a helicopter pilot who died during the 'Nam. Rae's very touching talk was titled, "Turning Sorrow into Service." Rae and her daughter, Jerilyn Brusseau, are co-

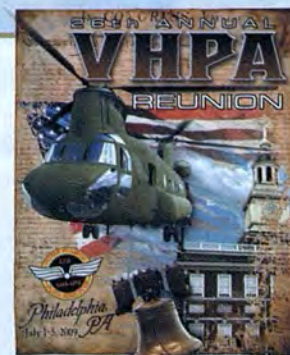
audio-visual costs and to fund the production of the DVDs. Thanks to those who attended for your support. Of course, this year we recorded these events again and will offer the 2009 DVD in San Diego in 2010, so you can see what you missed and pass it on to friends who can get to see an interesting and living archive of our stories and lives. The DVD presentations also make excellent activity choices for chapter meetings and other get togethers of 'Nam vets or even family members too and the DVD goes to Texas Tech for our history archive as well.

Last, but not least, in our reunion AAR is the Luncheon Presentation with MG (Ret) Andy Andreson. More than 120 people attended this excellent, informative luncheon. There was plenty of food served buffet style with drinks included. Andy's slide presentation was titled, "Army Aviation Today" where he covered the history of Army aviation with an emphasis on the helicopters and their specifications and capabilities and he covered what is going on these days in the helicopter fleet. While Andy had a lot of good technical information, he kept it at a level where guests could follow the ins and outs of how Army aviation is configured today and for tomorrow and he had a great set of slides.

Andy is also still active in the Army Aviation Association of America (AAAA), which manages our scholarship program. Andy gave us more info on the program and answered questions. If you are still interested in Army aviation and have a family member who wants to apply for a scholarship in the near future, you or the applicant (they have student memberships) must be a member for at least one year to apply. Last year, AAAA awarded scholarships to a number of our applicants out of their funds in addition to the ones we provided, which was very generous on their part. Thanks, Andy and AAAA!

How about numbers? Over 220 people attended the HPF and WSC events. Our poker tournament had more than 40 participants and raised a lot of money for our scholarship fund. The last internal event was the Memorial Service, which had well over 200 guests attend and was very inspiring. We cover the Memorial Service in a separate AAR article in this issue of the Aviator.

Finally, we are always seeking volunteers and suggestions for speakers for our HPF sessions and we hope more will attend our popular WSC and HPF events. Next year, we will have individual speakers again at the WSC, but we also plan to have unit teams come up to do a "story-off" to see which unit tells the best stories. We also welcome volunteers to help organize these events and we really need a capable videographer to do the filming next year if we can get someone to help out. **Please contact Jim Fulbrook,** [redacted]



year we have had these events and each year has been as good as the last. This year was the first year we charged \$10 to attend one or more of these events and to receive a free copy of last year's DVD of the events – a \$30 value. The \$10 fee cost is important to cover our



## 6th GOLD STAR FAMILY BREAKFAST BROUGHT THE MEMORIES HOME

*Some tears are "good tears" - the kind that come with the realization that you're not alone.*

There were "good tears" shed at the sixth annual Gold Star Family Breakfast, held July 2 during the reunion. The breakfast is an opportunity for families of the fallen (killed in action, missing in action, or died after tour) to get acquainted with each other and with the men who walked in our loved one's shoes.

David Woods, son of WO Alvin Richard Woods, A/1 AVN 1 INF KIA 12-31-1965, was invited to his first VHPA reunion by VHPA Member Ron Bower.

"The Gold Star Family Breakfast was quite a powerful and wonderful experience. I walked into the breakfast, not knowing what to expect. I didn't realize the emotional impact that it would have on me," David said. "But I wouldn't trade it. I owe a lot to Ron Bower and the other men of my father's unit. I hope to meet more of them at the 2010 VHPA reunion, so I can say 'Thank you!' in person."

David was one of nine Gold Star Family members who attended, representing six families of the fallen. We shared breakfast and memories with veterans and spouses who were there to support us and let us know that we too are part of the large extended family of Vietnam helicopter pilots and crews. As we went around the room doing introductions, the amount of emotion revealed how important it is to both veterans and family members to speak about our loved ones and comrades.

"We family members suffered a loss, but so did many of the vets," said Bruce Hill, brother of CW2 Bobby Hill Jr., 237 MED DET KIA 9-27-1970 and himself a Vietnam veteran. "They lost a good friend, a buddy, the so-called band of brothers. The breakfast is VERY beneficial to all of us."

Bruce, who was there with his sister Cindy, said he attended to honor his brother, "and ALL who died. And being a vet, I have the added 'benefit' of thanking the guys for the terrific job they did."

Gary Rossomme, "Ghost Rider 17" who has attended most of the Gold Star Family Breakfasts, expressed it this way: "We are, we were, and we always will be brothers. Once, in a time and place we

know as Vietnam, we would risk everything for a brother in trouble . . . Once we put the fear of flying and death behind us, life in the air is where we wanted to be, and what we could do with those magnificent flying machines was incomprehensible!

"VHPA is more than a fraternity, more than a reunion. As we gather in cities around our country and go to the last real officer's club (our trailer) and have breakfast with friends, we remember the days and nights, the stories and, most of all, the names of friends on a Wall who paid the price for freedom! A Gold Star mom or dad, sister or brother, son or daughter, are part of us - our history, their history, and the bittersweet memories we have. They, their sons and brothers and fathers, will never be forgotten! Four thousand nine hundred twenty three crew members gave up their lives for our nation. So if you have not made a Gold Star Family Breakfast or a memorial service, or called that friend's mom or dad, sister or brother, son or daughter, do so! It's never too late to say they didn't die alone, and they are not forgotten! We are more than who we think we are, we are a band of brothers!"

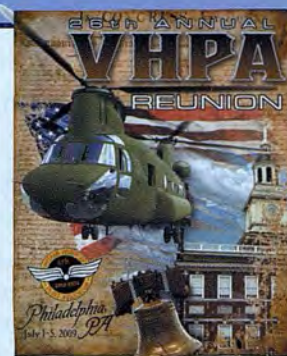
Many thanks to the contributors who donated so that no one who attended the breakfast had to pay their own way. This tradition has been carried on since the first Gold Star Family Breakfast.

We will do it again in 2010. If you have been communicating with family of one of your buddies who didn't come back, or who died after his tour, consider inviting them to attend the next reunion. The impact of spending time among those who served with our loved ones is unforgettable. We are privileged to be able to share this time with you.

**Julie Kink**

sister of WO David Kink, C Trp  
1/9th CAV KIA 8-3-1969

member of VHFCN Family Contacts Committee  
Honorary VHPA Member #3



### Editors note...

We had hoped to print the Minutes from the 2009 Annual Business Meeting in this issue of the Aviator, along with these other Reunion follow-up stories. However, (Gee...just like my old OER's..."David is a really great pilot (however comma) he refuses to (you fill in the blank)") there just wasn't enough room to properly present even an abbreviated version of Tom Payne's excellent work.

Fortunately for us active members, the full version of the Minutes is available on the VHPA Web Site, in the member's only area. The minutes are available under the file name: ABM07-03-09MinFinal.doc. The complete 08-09 VHPA Financial Data report is also there, both documents are a "must read" for all members.

## PHILADELPHIA DONATIONS FUND A QUARTER OF FOURTH VHPA SCHOLARSHIP

The Philadelphia Reunion added over \$7500 to the VHPA SCHOLARSHIP fund this year. It was fun shaming the EC on the dais in to each putting in a \$20 to get things started. Thanks to the CAV guys that passed their hats in this most worthwhile endeavor. As I said in the meeting the Vietnam helicopter pilots have two outstanding legacies. The first is all the children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and descendants yet unborn of all those guys we served and saved while flying in Vietnam. The second is the VHPA scholarships we leave for all the children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and descendants yet unborn to those in our small fraternity of Vietnam helicopter pilots. Right now only the descendants of dues current VHPA members, the descendants of those who were active members of VHPA at the time of their passing and the descendants

of those who died in Vietnam while serving as a helicopter pilot are eligible for our three scholarships. When we are all but a glorious memory in the history of our Country any descendant of a Vietnam helicopter pilot will be eligible for them. But that's 30-40 years or longer away.

We still need more money, a lot more money! The Scholarship Committee's goal is five scholarships by 2012 and ten by 2015. Any Unit can have a VHPA scholarship named in its honor if the members collectively donate \$25,000. Donate in honor of a friend. Every dollar helps

**Mike Sheuerman**  
**Scholarship Committee**  
**Fundraising**



# UH-1H "Hueys" arrive in Vietnam *(by Larry Clark)*

This headline is not from the 1960's or 1970's, but from May 2009! Yes, I recently returned from test flying two Hueys at Tan Son Nhut in "Saigon". My last flight in RVN was to TSN to catch the "big bird" home in 1966. On May 15th of this year, I picked a Huey up to a hover only a few yards from where that last flight landed 43 years before. So here is the story, with some interesting background information about what happened to the Hueys that were left behind after the fall of Saigon in 1975.

I was told by the pilots of the Vietnam People's Air Force (VPAF) that after the "re-unification" there were about 180 Hueys in their inventory plus some CH-47 helicopters. They did confirm rumors that they had 30 Cobras that were traded to Iran for oil, and that three brand new Cranes are still "in the boxes" and have never been assembled.

over 1000 hours in Hueys, and being used as an instructor for the "new" Hueys that were delivered in May 2009.

The VPAF has crashed, damaged or destroyed all but 11 Hueys since 1975. During all these years, they received no spare parts, technical information or support from Bell Helicopter. So these remaining Hueys still have the original magnesium skin tail booms and elevators, no fin spar modifications, none of the mandatory service bulletins for the airframes or engines. About two years ago, they were limited to training flights only, no passengers, and then slowly each was grounded until the last one was put down six months ago. They still pull them out of the covered revetments and ground run them once a month, but they are in very bad condition with extensive corrosion and rust. They are now equipped with Russian attitude indicators and other avionics, plus locally made all metal troop seats.

The Vietnamese Ministry of Defense in Hanoi approached an Australian company about rebuilding the 11 remaining Hueys, who in turn contracted with Overseas Aircraft Inc., in Lakeside, AZ to take on the project. First requirement was to build up two Hueys here in Arizona and ship them over ASAP so they could start flying again. The VPAF also operates Russian Mil 8 and Mil 17 helicopters, but the Russians have recently increased prices for new helicopters and spare parts. The VPAF helicopter

fleet is used for offshore oil rig support, UN wildlife operations (save the tigers) and US search teams looking for MIAs. Thus the strong interest in getting the lower operating cost, and more reliable, Huey fleet up and running again for these missions.

The two "new" Hueys, 76-22652 and 76-22654 had served with the Venezuela Army since 1977 and were recently purchased by Overseas Aircraft and returned to the USA in non-flyable condition. These two were part of the last build of 39 to go down the Bell assembly line in Ft. Worth. Over a six month period these two were rebuilt and converted to FAA Restricted Category status as N270SA and N470SA. All military radios were removed and replaced with a King KT-76 (Transponder), KX-155 (VOR/ILS/COM), KFM-985 (UHF and VHF FM) and KN-90B (GPS) units. They were not converted into the "Super Huey" configuration, but retained the T53-L-13 engines and UH-1H components, rotor blades, etc. This



Thang Nguyen and Larry Clark

"civilian" Huey was approved by the U.S. State Dept. for export to Vietnam and our team of Americans obtained visas and official permission from Hanoi to be on the military base portion of TSN to unpack and re-assemble the helicopters. The helicopters traveled by truck to California where they were loaded into a China Air 747F for the flight to Asia.

After several days of working with the mechanics to reassemble the helicopters, we did ground runs to check for leaks and make necessary adjustments. Then, it was time to fly. Each pilot that is scheduled to fly on that day is required to report to the flight surgeon's office for a quick physical. Then a very thorough briefing by the commander to include airspeeds and altitudes that WILL be flown, or else! Most of this was all done in Vietnamese, as few of the VPAF spoke any English. The tower is still called "Tan Son Nhut" and the VHF is still 118.4. A nice young lady speaks perfect English and gives me permission to start and hover. There are many commercial airline flights, so I must hold for a long time before being cleared for take-off. Then fly up the six lane highway to Chu Chi, where we were permitted to check autorotation RPM between 2000' and 500' AGL with



Highway from Saigon to Chu Chi.

They had a very large inventory of transmissions, engines, and other spares plus major repair shops and tools at Bien Hoa. A group of Australians worked a deal with the Ministry of Defense (MOD) in Hanoi several years ago to buy much of the old inventory. They have been selling some of the usable parts, but most of the material is junk. For example there is a stack of UH-1 storage cans about 50 ft. by 50 ft. and 12 ft. high which once contained new or overhauled main transmissions. Today they are all filled with rain water and rusted hunks of metal, as the lids were worth much more to the local peasants to make cooking pots.

All of the former VNAF pilots and technicians were sent to "re-education camps". So there was no flying immediately after the fall of Saigon in 1975. New helicopter pilots were trained using the UH-1H as a primary trainer. One VPAF pilot that I flew with was Thang Nguyen who was a student in that first class in 1975. He is still on active duty, with just



Photo of the two helicopters packed up and leaving Lakeside, AZ by truck.



power recovery. All flying was very restricted and planned at least 24 hours in advance. Flying over the rice paddies, I automatically started scanning the tree lines and dikes looking for the little flashes. But that was the best part of this "tour", nobody was shooting at me!

This is when I found out that they NEVER practice autorotations, not even hovering autos. I was flying with Thang Nguyen one day and turned off the hydraulics to check the TT strap rigging and his eyes got big and he said they never fly with the hydraulics off. I then asked about stuck tail rotor and emergency governor. Same answer, NEVER. One pilot told me he had experienced

THREE stuck tail rotor pedals, and they destroyed the helicopter each time trying to land. Of course it rained hard several days, and I found out they don't fly in the rain either. The transponder and GPS were new to them and I spent many hours explaining how to use these "new" radios.

After twelve days of flying both helicopters, they accepted the aircraft and started doing training (take-off and landings, hovering, flying a traffic pattern, etc.). I had one day free to walk around downtown, visit some museums where there are several Hueys parked on display. Ho Chi Minh City is a busy city full of motor scooters each day as millions com-

mute into work. The US dollar is accepted everywhere and most restaurant menus have prices in dollars. There seems to be a Kentucky Fried Chicken every mile plus a few BMW, Ford and Chevrolet dealers. The city reminds me of Hong Kong with all the busy people and bright lights. Had a few "Ba Ba Ba" 333 beers, but found the Saigon Special, a pale lager, to be much better. 26 hours back home through HKG and SFO on a United Airlines 747 this time. It's good to be home again.

**Larry Clark**



**Blaine, MN:** The American Wings Air Museum is looking for a new home for their collection or trainer, liaison and reconnaissance (including an Army OV-1 Mohawk) aircraft. Founded in 1985, this not-for-profit, all-volunteer museum has to vacate their present facility at the Anoka County Airport due to their recently raised, high lease rates levied upon them by the Minnesota Metropolitan Airports Commission.

Their current 30,000 display facility was built from donations and volunteer labor, has been their home since 1977, and has hosted thousands of visitors and tour groups. The Museum closed to the public last month and is now offering many of our vehicles, office equipment and furnishings, and even some aircraft for purchase. Please contact [REDACTED] for full details.

At the time of their closing, there were more than 18 aircraft on display and several others were undergoing restoration. The museum also owned several support vehicles and hundreds of artifacts that reflected the lives – and deaths – of the pilots and crews of the aircraft. No one wants to see the rewards of the labors of hundreds of dedicated volunteers split up throughout the country. Right now the museum's staff is asking for donations to help cover the new lease fees, but in the long term, they are also asking that anyone who might have hanger space available to relocate their collection, please contact them via their web site: **[www.AmericanWings.org](http://www.AmericanWings.org)**

## 5th BiAnnual Vietnam Delta Reunion & Vietnam Vet Appreciation Weekend

**When:** ARMED FORCES DAY WEEKEND:

**May 14-16, 2010**

**Where: Ft. Rucker, AL**

**JOIN THE FUN!**

- |                                 |                  |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| ❖ Aircraft Displays             | ❖ UH1 Huey Rides |
| ❖ Post Training Facilities Tour | ❖ Golf           |
| ❖ Formal Evening Dinner         | ❖ Picnic         |
| ❖ Closing Memorial Services     | ❖ Unit Parties   |

**And More!!!**

*This reunion is open to all:*

- ❖ RVN Vets who served in the Delta (IV Corp) Vietnam
- ❖ Their families & friends
- ❖ Affiliated Army, Navy, Air force Officers and Enlisted

*Sponsored by:*

13th CAB (combat aviation battalion RVN)  
1-13th Avn. Regt. 1st Avn. Bde. Ft. Rucker, AL

For info and registration contact:

❖ **Larry Castagneto:** [REDACTED]

❖ **Stan Gause:** [REDACTED]

❖ **Online info registration:**  
**[www.shieldofthemekong.com](http://www.shieldofthemekong.com)**

*"Early Registration Requested"*

*Early sign in: May 13, 2010: Aviation Museum, Ft. Rucker, AL*



# BALLS OF STEEL

One thing remains unfinished from my 1968-69 tour as a D/2/8 Cav grunt in Vietnam. For many years I hoped I would somehow find the Dustoff or Medevac crew that pulled me out of the jungle when I was shot up, so I could track them down one at a time to tell them how I admire their courage and loyalty to grunts like me on the ground. I doubt I'll ever find them, but I swear to God they had balls of steel.



For grunts like me, there was one great comfort in Vietnam, knowing that if we were hit in the filth of the jungle miles from nowhere, our helicopters with red crosses would pull out all the stops to come get us, and within an hour we would be with doctors in sterile operating rooms. That comfort, in my case, turned into life Vs death.

I was 17 when I learned to love my M-14 in basic training, and 18 when I learned to despise my piece-of-crap M-16, surely the oldest M-16 in Vietnam with no forward assist and a tendency to jam once every clip. We operated out of LZ Rita, a miserable little fire-base we grew to love after a few weeks in the bush, a place where we could rest easy that nothing was trying to kill us, at least not inside the wires, at least not right now.

A black guy nicknamed Queen Bee from Compton, CA broke me in. Like most guys I didn't like being dirty like we always were in the jungle. Queen Bee told me, "Hell, boy, don't worry 'bout keeping clean and fresh. You're gonna stink so bad, soon you'll smell your own ass and yell, 'What the hell is that?!'" The upside was that we needed to smell like the rotting vegetation of the jungle to blend in, to hide. We wore one shirt and one pair of pants with



no underwear to prevent chafing, which could quickly form a rash and turn into something ugly in the sweltering heat. Our clothes were rotting off our back in the field, our boots turned white from the salt of our sweat. Most importantly we had two pair of socks and changed socks every day. When I rotated socks in the morning they may not be clean, they may not smell nice, but they better be dry because the guys who didn't take care of their feet ended up being medevaced out with trench foot, our term for the terrible fungus that would take hold and eat your feet.

Our unit moved from I Corps to our new



freely, and we were coming to give them a dose of Cav reality. The terrain was steep mountain jungle and the enemy were well-trained and well-armed, NVA regulars in uniform. I never saw any VC in this area, just the much tougher NVA, infiltrating from the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Cambodia, building up to attack the population centers of South Vietnam.

In my brief time in I Corps, I was in contact just one time. But around Nui Ba Dinh our method was to sweep quietly through the jungle by day, ambush the NVA on their trotters at night, and we killed them damn near every night. I had a choice of humping ammo or walking point, and I chose point even though it was risky. I liked the way the Cav did things, like keeping point to a few men who rotated the risk, but did it often enough to be good at the job, to have a nose alert to tell-tale odors, better able to quickly spot footprints in the vegetation, eyes always scanning for the slightest movement, one slow step at a time, concentrating on what was in front and to the sides while the slack man a few yards back kept me informed on direction and distance with his whippers.

On point I didn't use a machete and I didn't hack anything. I parted the vegetation with my contraband bayonet and slowly stepped through while watching and intently listening, always alert for the small brilliantly-colored snakes we called two-steps, stopping when I saw a huge spider web to find the spider with my eyes to make sure he wasn't crawling up my back; some of those colorful bad boys were as big as your hand.

Some days we made less than a hundred meters through the thick jungle, one platoon on right and left flank with the CP in the middle, moving in parallel so if contact surprised

AO in northern III Corps in late 1968, near Nui Ba Dinh, the Black Virgin Mountain at Tay Ninh. The NVA seemed to be infiltrating somewhat

## Nick Donvito's Story Copyright © by Terry Garlock

as we could quickly form a perimeter around the CP. Our battalion CO in his C&C ship would give daily direction to our CO as he looked for evidence of trotters from above, and we looked for them all day below. We soon learned NVA traffic on their trails was mostly at night. When we found a trotter with fresh enemy sign we'd set up an ambush, usually L-shaped, with Claymores set with clackers mounted on a board so when the shit hit the fan we could just slap the board to fire a bunch of claymores at once.

While some set up the ambush claymores, others would set fields of fire and dig in, as best we could in the root-infested jungle floor. Every man carried 10 empty sand bags in his ruck, and we dug as much as we could and filled sand bags to build up the fighting hole. After we ate C-rats one man would stay awake for every man asleep, straining our eyes and ears for movement on the trotter, a little on edge waiting for the violent flashes and noise and killing, hoping we got them before they started shooting back.

After our ambush was triggered, we never checked enemy bodies at night, even though that is by the book, even though the enemy dragged away all they could, because doing it at night would get us killed. We looked them over in the morning when we could see, before emptying our sand bags back into the holes, eating breakfast and moving out.

Sometimes we found packs on the enemy dead full of empty anti-aircraft shell casings and links, humping them back across the Cambodian border to be refilled. In one fire-fight, since my M-16 was a piece of crap I threw a grenade and blew the arm off one NVA, and that tough guy kept lobbing grenades at us until I finally held a grenade for a brief delay before I lobbed it, killing him with an air burst.

One morning as we moved out, an NVA sniper shot the first three of our guys in the head. We killed the enemy, and now and then they killed us, day after day, night after night, humping, sweating, pushing our way endlessly through the jungle.

So you might understand how much we loved helicopters. Call me crazy but when I got used to combat assaults I liked the thrill of loading up in helicopters, not knowing whether the LZ would be cold or hot with gunships blasting the LZ with rockets and miniguns right outside our helicopter door. The pilots who flew us were with the 227th and 229th aviation units, and they got into it, too. Sometimes our approach to the LZ was



low-level, dodging and weaving with the hills while we sat in the open doorway with our feet dangling over the side, riding the rail, and the pilots would look back at us with great big grins when we would scream our delight at the roller-coaster ride, on our way to an uncertain reception in an unknown place.

The first time I was wounded, a flesh wound in my lower leg, I was looking forward to the helicopter ride out. But we had guys with their eyes rolled up from heat exhaustion and they filled up the chopper. I had to hump my way back to lovely firebase Rita and when I stepped over a log I jammed a stick up into my leg wound. Oh boy!. When I got to Rita they flew me to Quan Loi, not for medical treatment but to pick up the extra pair of glasses I had requested; the first two pair they sent me disappeared before getting to me. But I had a week in Quan Loi. The doc refused to look at me until I had a shower, the only shower I had in Vietnam after getting to my unit. I even found fresh pants and shirt to replace the ones rotting on me, and when the doc said stay here a few days, well, OK then! I lived off beer and Slim Jims and relaxed in safety a few days, like heaven compared to the bush.

Good thing I found fresh duds because when I got back to my unit we were in the bush over 60 days, humping slowly and quietly through the jungle by day, ambushing on the trotters by night. Your mind gets numb after a while to the fatigue of being always tired, weary of the same thing, too drained to care when you hear "Mount up!" for the thousandth time, exhausted from being on edge too long while something is trying to kill you.

Finally, we humped into a lousy little hole called LZ Joe, where helicopters would pick us up for the short trip home to LZ Rita. First they took White Skull platoon, then they came back for my Wildcat platoon, then they would come back for Range platoon last. Just as the skids left the ground the enemy opened up. It was a perfect trap. We didn't even know they were there and they seemed to be on all sides. Green and yellow tracers crisscrossed the LZ, scaring the hell out of us. Rounds went zip and whack through the helicopter while we cleared the trees and gained altitude. We were lucky - nobody in our bird was hit, but my buddy Larry Hackett was still on the ground with Range and I worried about him. LZ Joe wasn't far, and when we landed we helped the helicopter crew locate the bullet holes so they could check for damage. There were 17 holes in ours but they said it was still flyable.

We had to go back for Range platoon. A cocoon of dread settled over me and wrapped me in a tight bundle of fear. I knew this was going to be a bad one. Getting back on that helicopter was the hardest thing I did in Vietnam

There was no landing back at LZ Joe, they just got low and slow and threw us out while the NVA were shooting all over the place. I crawled in the grass lower than I have ever been, clawing my way toward the tree-line opposite of Range, and White Skull platoon took another spot on the tree-line opposite Range, so we could try to secure a perimeter around the LZ. I had never crossed an open field under fire before. The rounds zinging through the grass just above me made me think of cartoons of all things, and I must have become amazingly thin as I hugged the ground trying to merge with the dirt, anxious to pack my whole body under my helmet, doing all I could to evade a silent journey home zipped up in a black rubber bag.

We were there in LZ Joe for a week, a company surrounded by a battalion of NVA. Every time they tried to get to us, we beat them back, trying to clean weapons in between. My lousy M-16 jammed every time. My buddy Bruce and I would trade off, one on watch while the other cleaned his weapon. Once they hit us while Bruce was cleaning his M-16 and he dropped the cotter pin from the bolt in the dirt, running his finger through the dirt looking for it while he screamed and we took terrible fire. With air and artillery support to keep us alive, the NVA finally gave up and we were flown out to Rita for a few days' rest.



Then back to work, humping and ambushing.

As we helped each other stay alive in the bush, we became tight. Once our resupply log ship couldn't get to us for three days while our food and water ran out. One of our guys, John Crocker, came up with one can of C-rats ham and eggs. We gathered our squad around as we heated it up, and each man got one spoon. That may have been the best meal of my life, fitting because these 20 year old men became the best friends of my life. Queen Bee's daughter still calls me "Uncle Nick," and I love that.

One day ran into the next in the bush but January 28, 1969 was memorable. My buddy Pepe hadn't been feeling well and so I had walked first on point three days in a row,

stretching my luck. Today Pepe would take point while I walked slack to cover him, and a new guy named Warren followed me to watch and learn.

It was still early, about 07:30 and Pepe was moving too fast. I wasn't close enough to cover him as he topped a small hill and disappeared on his way down, so I stepped faster and power-whispered "Don't get so far ahead, Pepe!" Just as I said that I topped the hill and looked down because something unusual caught my eye and I heard Boom! There was a corrugated steel roof and under it were huge pots of boiling rice. I knew in a heartbeat, Oh, shit, we stumbled into an enemy base camp with a big mess hall and just as I saw it they blew a swiped American Claymore on Pepe.

I ran after Pepe through the thick undergrowth while Warren ran after me. When I got to Pepe I bent down to him just as I spotted another Claymore and yelled, "Look out!" to Warren while I instinctively turned my head and that's when it blew and sent one big pellet into my head just in front of my right ear, broke my cheekbone and came out just on the outside corner of my right eye. The blood on my face and chest came so fast it was like someone hit me with a bucket of hot water and it hurt like hell.

*But I was the lucky one.*

Warren Eskeridge, the new guy who looked to me for guidance, caught the Claymore's blast full on in the chest and stomach. He was torn up bad and as he lay there dying his last words were "Oooh, Nick!"

*They were hitting us from all sides.*

Pepe was dead. I was trying to drag his body back out of the shitstorm when an NVA soldier in a tree shot me through the forearm; my ulna bone was now sticking out. They were in the trees, in spider holes, everywhere, and we just walked into them, into their ambush on us. I tried to drag Warren's body and they shot me in the hip and my leg was suddenly gone, I couldn't walk, couldn't stand up and I couldn't find my leg, then I found it up behind my head. It was weird, my leg was gone but I could wiggle my toes.

The gunfire was deafening but I was in my own zone, time slowed down to a fascinating slow rate. I tried to stay calm. I still had my pack on my back and was sitting up, they were still shooting at me but I guess my training kicked in and I assessed my wounds one by one. I could only feel my face, I couldn't see it, my ulna bone was sticking about three inches out of my arm and my leg was messed up bad. The pain was incredible but I thought I had a chance to live through it. Two medics were hit trying to get to me. The fire-fight was very heavy, ferocious, a lot of guys were getting hit.

*continued on pg.*



# VHPA CHAPTERS

*We have 5 new chapters in the formation stage. They are:*

**South Carolina** (Celebrate Freedom) Chapter  
Larry Russell, Pres.

**Ft. Rucker Chapter**  
John A. Crowley, Pres.

**North Alabama Chapter**  
Jim White, Pres.

**Arizona Chapter**  
Bill Sorenson

**California Chapter North**  
Ken Fritz

**VHPA of Florida**  
Donald L. Welch

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

**Fort Wolters Chapter**  
Virgil Laughlin

**Georgia Chapter**  
Carl "Skip" Bell

**Mid South Chapter**  
"Pete" Norman IV

**Missouri Chapter**  
John Sorensen, President

**New England Chapter**  
Bill Williams, Pres.

**Virginia Chapter**  
Tom Mitchell, Pres.

**North Carolina Chapter**  
J.D. Lawson

**Ohio River LZ Chapter**  
Dave Garner

**Rocky Mountain Chapter**  
Gary Hurelle

**Southern California Chapter**  
Ed Holguin

**Washington State Chapter**  
David Eck

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

# CHAPTER ACTIVITIES

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN CHAPTER

The Rocky Mountain Chapter had a great June meeting for pilots and guests. We had a TH-55 and an Engstrom helicopter and our own Jerry Marshall as the instructor pilot so several pilots got some much needed stick time to maintain our control touch. Some grandkids, kids and wives also got to ride along.

On August 8-11, the Rocky Mountain Chapter's Helicopter War Museum will be in Cripple Creek, CO to help celebrate their Armed Forces Appreciation Weekend. On September 11 & 12 the chapter will be at Denver International Airport welcoming the WWII Honor Flight Homecoming. This will be our second time supporting this event that first flies WWII Vets to Washington, DC, sends them on an escorted tour of the WWII Memorial and also participates in other activities while they are there.

**Gary Hurelle, President**

## VHPA OF FLORIDA CHAPTER

The activities we will be supporting in the next few months with the OH-6 and displays are: ■ Aug 14-16 - the 7/17 Cav Reunion at the Rosen Hotel in Orlando ■ Sep 12 - Vets Appreciation Day at Arby's in Brandon, FL ■ Oct 29-31 - Our Florida Chapter's Reunion at the Crown Plaza in Tampa, FL ■ Nov 6-8 - The Vietnam Traveling Wall in Clearwater, FL ■ Nov 12-14 - Rib Fest at St. Petersburg, FL

**You're invited** to join us at any of these scheduled events. We also support the Veterans Memorial Park and all their activities on Highway 301 in Tampa, Florida. On display there is the OH-6, OH-58, UH-1H and AH1S helicopters.

**Donald Welch, President**

## NORTH CAROLINA CHAPTER

The North Carolina Chapter participated in several events in July. On July 4th the UH-1H was at the capitol in Raleigh, NC and then in Clayton on the 5th. The UH-1M was at an event in Winston-Salem on the 4th and the OH-6 was at an event in Salisbury, NC the last weekend in June.

**JD Lawson, President**

## WASHINGTON STATE CHAPTER

We held our quarterly meeting at the Olympia Air Show on June 20. Thirty eight people attended. and enjoyed the air show. Mark Hansen offered to make name tags for members. Maps were distributed to those in attendance for the Special Forces picnic on 15 August at 11 AM at Kevin Patton's ranch in Yelm, WA.

Our next quarterly meeting will be held the last week in Sept. or the first week in Oct. at Fort Lewis. A Chinook Special Ops briefing will be presented with emphasis on night operations in Afghanistan. We will also participate in the Auburn Armed Forces Day parade in November.

**Dave Eck, President.**



# CHAPTER ACTIVITIES

## GEORGIA CHAPTER

We have our bi-monthly breakfast meeting on Saturday mornings, the next one is scheduled for September 19. We usually have 12-15 people present for those meetings and they are a great time to fit a gathering in with all of the other commitments that everyone has. Call me for full details on the place and time.

**"Skip" Bell, President**

## SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER

Looks like August 29 the chapter will be meeting with Mike Law RE: The 2010 reunion in San Diego to discuss ideas on how we can help/assist with certain activities. We will again plan to participate (booth) in the 8th Annual Wings, Wheels and Rotors Expo Sunday Oct. 25th, 2009 at the Los Alamitos Army Airfield in Los Alamitos, CA. Our annual chapter meeting will be on October 3, 2009 (first Saturday of the month). We more than likely will hold the meeting at the American Legion Post #291, 215 15th St., Newport Beach, CA. You can contact me at [REDACTED] for confirmation.

**Ed Holguin, President**

## SOUTH CAROLINA CHAPTER

The last chapter meeting turned into a mini fly-in. HOOHOO. We had two starched wings and three rotorcraft. How about that for a chapter meeting? Aircraft consisted of a Stinson Gullwing owned by Rudy Ribbeck, an L-16 owned by Claude Lott, two R-22's owned by Peedee Heli of Lake City, SC and finally an R-44 owned by Ricky Gaskins. Some of the members got to spin a few laps around town and yours truly got to pilot one of those R-22's and I'm still here to talk about it. Last time I flew a manual throttled recip was in Hanau, Germany when I transitioned into H-13's, back in 1969. Just like riding a bicycle. Our next meeting is August 8 with location TBD. We're moving our base of operations from Camden, SC to Columbia, the state capitol. Still beating the bushes for more members - give me a call [REDACTED]

**Larry Russell, President**

## FORT WOLTERS CHAPTER

Our last meeting was held on June 6th and Anita Cordero from Texas Veterans Commission was our guest speaker. She spoke to our group regarding benefits for TX veterans. May 30th a replica of the Vietnam Wall was dedicated at the National Vietnam War Museum in Mineral Wells, TX. There was a large turnout and the ceremony was very nice. Joe Galloway was the main speaker. Thanks to all who worked so hard to coordi-

nate this event and also to those who worked on the Wall. Philadelphia was a great city to be in on July 4th. The weather was perfect for the reunion. We had a lot of free time to see the city and the sites. Mary Sue and I had a great time working the National War Museum gift shop. We met a lot of interesting people, some of whom were from our area and I invited them to attend local chapter meetings. We even found a great Amish eating place across from the hotel. As usual the fireworks were great. Looking forward to next year in San Diego, CA. Start making your plans to attend.

Remember, our next meeting will be election time for new officers. If you want to serve contact Richard Gaurkee, head of our nominating committee. Or, don't show up and get elected! The meeting will be held at Logan's Roadhouse in Hurst, TX on Sept. 12th. The Board meets at 11:00AM and the general meeting will start at 11:30. See you there.

**Virgil Laughlin, President**

## CALIFORNIA CHAPTER NORTH

Our chapter had a great time with all the reunion attendees in Philadelphia. The hotel staff was outstanding in their support of our ongoing needs for ice, trash pickup and security. They enjoyed the photos, stories and the party that is known as the VHPA Reunion. VHPA HQ's and reunion support transportation was subsidized by the VHPA and by our chapter. Thanks to the EC for the help with the cost of taking the MOC to Philly. It was a win-win for all. The cost to the VHPA was far less than other modes of transportation and our chapter assisted with the loading and unloading (0300 is awfully early). That saved the VHPA a ton of money too. Special thanks also go to Ramos Oil Co. and Ryder Truck Rental in W. Sacramento, CA for their generous contributions. And, of course, the contributions made by VHPA members, many of whom donated specifically to the fuel fund, our chapter will be able to repeat the event in San Diego next year. Sorry I can't name all who donated (some gave as much as \$100 to the fuel fund alone!) - the list is too long. You know who you are and so do we. We welcome all of you to Sacramento anytime for an impromptu CCN party. You can find us at [www.vhpacn.org](http://www.vhpacn.org) and in the VHPA directory.

Other news from our chapter: Awhile back PG&E (a huge utility company in CA) donated a large service truck to CCN to use for pulling our Huey to various events. The actual truck is a wonderful machine, but far too fuel thirsty and too large for our needs. We were recently approached about a swap for

a very nice dark green Ford crew cab dually pickup with big diesel engine as a trade for our ex-PG&E service rig. After considering the cost of removing and selling the working crane, the big diesel welder, etc. and then painting the rig we decided to swap for the big Ford. The Ford owner even agreed to give it full service: fluids, brakes, tires, and a detail job - the whole works and he even agreed to pay all title and transfer fees because he loves to support veterans. Additionally we have made some deals to modify our Huey trailer into a goose neck fifth wheel style trailer and install the mod's for the Ford to haul it. Mike Nord and Ken Fritz should have this done by the time you read this. Now we have the ideal pull toy! It's not what you've got, it's how you use it, right?

Our next outing will be the Veterans Day Parade in Elk Grove with our new rig and the MOC. Beyond that we have our Christmas Party set for the California State Military Museum in Sacramento for December 5th. Watch for more news on these events.

**Ken Fritz, President**

## HELP START YOUR OWN CHAPTER OF THE VHPA

We are actively looking for individuals interested in starting up chapters in Hawaii and Alaska, and also in your area if we don't already have an active chapter there.

Call me at [REDACTED]

or e-mail me at: [REDACTED]

and we can discuss what is required. There is not much effort involved in starting a chapter and let me explain the process.

We currently have seventeen chapters in the following states: South Carolina, (North) Alabama, Fort Rucker (Alabama), Arizona, California (North and South) (VHPA of) Florida, (Fort Wolters) Texas, Georgia, (Mid South) Tennessee, New England, Virginia, North Carolina, (Ohio River) Kentucky, (Rocky Mountain) Colorado, Washington and Missouri.

**My goal is: twenty separate chapters ~**

**I'd love to work with YOU!**

**JACK SALM**



# VHPA Members in the news...

Joe Galloway and Hal Moore visit with the members of the Florida Chapter of the VHPA.



Members of the Florida Chapter of the VHPA gather around their unit OH-6

## VHPA OF FLORIDA CHAPTER

The Florida Chapter of The VHPA will be at these air shows and events throughout the rest of the year:

**Aug 14-16** - The 7/17 Cav Reunion at the Rosen Hotel in Orlando

**Sep 12** - Vets Appreciation Day at Arby's in Brandon, FL

**Oct 29-31** - The Florida Chapter's Reunion at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Tampa, FL

**Nov 6-8** - The Vietnam Traveling Wall in Clearwater, FL

**Nov 12-14** - Rib Fest at St. Petersburg, FL

We also continually support the Veterans Memorial Park, and their activities, on Highway 301 in Tampa, Florida. On display there is the OH-6, OH-58, UH-1H and AH1S helicopters.

**You are cordially invited to join us at any of these scheduled events**



Three of the Army's finest gathered at last year's "Old Aviator's Reunion" at Rucker. Left to right is Charlie Quann, Sydney Cowan (recently deceased, see this month's Taps section) and Harry Bryant.

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## VHPA Member featured in Military Channel's Great Planes episode

VHPA Member Rick Roll (Class 66-16) is one of the ex-Vietnam "Huey" pilots featured in an upcoming "Great Planes" episode that originally aired on the Military Channel on 4 September 2009.

Rick reports that the episode was taped on 7/27/09 at the Air Mobility Command Museum ([www.amcmuseum.org](http://www.amcmuseum.org)) where he is a part time, volunteer docent. Starring in the show is the museum's UH-1

Huey, SN 69-15475, which flew out of Nha Trang in 1970-1972 with the 201st Assault Helicopter Company's "Red Barons". The show was taped in and around the H-Model aircraft and Rick reports that "based upon other Great Planes episodes I've seen, it should be a thorough historical overview of the Huey series of helicopters." Even if you miss the initial airing, keep your DVD's locked and loaded for a re-run of this show!



## **A long silver bar with a ball on the end just flew off the helicopter.....**

**A story by David A. West**

I just finished reading your article about the rotor heads that separated during auto-rotation and have an item I would like to add.

I was assigned to Charlie Troop 1/9, 1ST Cav Div. and flying "Guns" out of LZ Bong Son in February 1967.

We were on a routine recon mission flying a "C" in the An Lao valley looking for a reported anti-aircraft position. Our door gunner on this mission was a 1LT forward observer since we were going to fire artillery on the site once we spotted it. We actually spotted the position after we received fire from it. The AA site was on the west side of the valley so I turned east and began a climb. The FO gave me the gun target line so we could set up to observe and adjust the fire. Just as I leveled

off at 3500' I heard the FO give the fire for effect order and then he keyed the intercom and said "Dave, I don't know what it was, but a long silver bar with a ball on the end just flew off the helicopter" As I looked out of my door window I saw half the stabilizer bar about 600' below us and descending rapidly.

Then the aircraft started a severe vertical of about 12" to 14" and I could clearly see dual tip path planes, in retrospect it reminded me of the old Kaman Husky. I was loosely strapped in (for comfort) so as the aircraft went up I was on the rebound going down. Holding the collective was aggravating the situation so I let go and placed my hand on top of it. I started to enter a fast descent, but as I lowered the collective the vertical got worse. When I

pulled the collective up it got better, but who wants to climb when your coming apart.

I decided to "fall out of the sky" by putting in full left pedal, right cyclic into a steep turn and pulled in collective to smooth out the vertical and it worked. The good thing was that at the bottom when I flared and pulled pitch to land it got very smooth.

After this incident I had to brief some Bell Tech Reps three different times about how I handled the situation. Unfortunately, those hints never seemed to trickle down from Bell to other Army pilots during my career.

**David A. West**  
**C Trp 1/9th Cav., 1st Cav Div.**  
**Major Retired.**

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

1/4 page black and white ad - \$125.00, 1/2 page black & white ad - \$250.00

Full page black & white ad - \$500.00, full color ad's are available on the Back Cover, rates by request.

Contact Mike Sheuerman at: [Membeship@VHPA.org](mailto:Membeship@VHPA.org) for details

## **Army Colonel Finally Eats His Old C-ration Pound Cake...**

**By SAGAR MEGHANI**

**(Associated Press Writer),**

**Dateline July 25, 2009 9:49 AM EDT**

**Forty years later, Henry A. Moak, Jr., still loves his pound cake.**

The Army colonel popped open a military C-ration can of pound cake dated from 1969 at his retirement ceremony, and dug in. Moak got the drab olive can as a Marine helicopter pilot off the Vietnamese coast in 1973. He vowed to hang on to it until the day he retired, storing it in a box with other mementos.

After a formal retirement ceremony, dozens of friends and relatives joined Moak in the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes as he opened the can to cheers. Moak joked earlier this week that he hoped the can would-

n't explode, it let off a whooshing sound as the pressure seal broke. "It smells good," Moak said as he put a handful in his mouth. He jokingly staggered back a few feet and loudly cleared his throat, while one person yelled out, "Eeww, gross!"

Moak pronounced the cake "good."

"It's even a little moist," he said, wiping his mouth. He dared anybody "gutsy" enough to join him, and retired Lt. Gen. Paul T. Mikolashek, who was the U.S. Army Europe commander when Moak served overseas, took an even bigger piece. "Tastes just like it always did," Mikolashek mumbled with a mouthful of cake as Moak laughed and clapped.

Moak said he wasn't worried about getting sick from any bacteria

that may have gotten into the old can, because it looked sealed. But the military discourages eating from old rations. "Given the risks ... we do everything possible to ensure that overly aged rations are not consumed," said Lawrence Levine, a spokesman for the Defense Supply Center in Philadelphia. Levine named the threats as mold and deadly botulism if the sealing on the food has been broken, which isn't always visible.

Moak says though he warned his children over the years not to touch his pound cake, he did let them eat some other rations when they were growing up in the 1980s, including canned spaghetti and crackers. And how did those taste? "Fine. Well ... not like from our great restaurants."



Perhaps the soldiers of the 1st Air Commandos had heard about the helicopter rescuing that young boy in New York. But more than likely it was a good bit of that "Yankee Ingenuity" that led the officers of the Air Commando, to look at the "eggbeater" and determine that it might be the solution to the dilemma. The helicopter had only a range of 100 miles, and at the time, they were located in India on the Burma border. It had its limitations, but if it could get there, the helicopter could land where the fixed wings could not.

Lieutenant Carter Harman flew his YR-4B helicopter on a circuitous 500 mile trip from his base in India to the crash site. The Lieutenant had to set the helicopter down every 100 miles at landing sites secured by Chin-dits so he could refuel. It took Lieutenant Harman four days to pilot his helicopter to the rescue site. In the meantime, a fixed wing aircraft had located Sergeant Hladovcak and had dropped a message to him to move his wounded companions to a nearby clearing where Lieutenant Harman and his YR-4B would meet them.

Due to the altitude, heat, and humidity, the YR-4B could only extract one passenger at a time. Harman picked up the first wounded soldier and ferried him 10 miles to a sandbar where a waiting L-1 fixed wing aircraft awaited. The wounded man was quickly loaded on the L-1 and flown to a hospital within British lines. On the second trip to the sandbar with a wounded soldier, the engine overheated and Lieutenant Harman had to spend the night on the sandbar waiting for the engine to cool. The next day he flew out, made a third trip to pick up the last wounded man and finally on his fourth trip he evacuated Sergeant Hladovcak.

Although the YR-4B helicopter had limitation in range and payload, these extractions were considered a successful demonstration of the medical evaluation capabilities of the helicopter. Lieutenant Harman and the other pilots managed 15 more extractions before their aircraft were unfortunately grounded due to the lack of replacement parts in the summer of 1944. For the rest of the year there were no helicopters flying in Burma.

In January 1945 an aircraft crashed on the air route between India and China known as the "Hump". Because of the isolated location it was determined that the only way to rescue the pilot was by using a helicopter. With all helicopters in Burma grounded due to lack of parts, the military must have been so confident of the helicopters abilities that it was decided to bring a helicopter all the way from Dayton Ohio to assist in the rescue.

A YR-4 located at Wright Field in Dayton was broken down and loaded onto a Douglas C-54 for transport to Burma. Helicopter pilots were available in Burma, but Lieutenant Irwin Steiner, a veteran pilot, and Captain Frank Peterson, a test pilot with two years helicopter experience were assigned, possibly volun-

teered, as pilots for this mission. After a 74 hour flight the C-54 landed at Myitkyina, Burma with the crew and the YR-4. The exhausted crew set to work assembling the helicopter but in the middle of their assembly efforts, they learned that ground troops had made their way to the mountains and rescued the downed crew.

As fate would have it, that night, the crew learned that Private Howard Ross accidentally shot himself in the hand at a remote weather station located in the mountains near Sinkaling and he needed medical evacuation if his hand was to be saved. The helicopter was assembled and fueled, so Captain Peterson and Lt. Steiner flew out of Myitkyina to the airfield at Sinkaling. The helicopter had no radio and since the pilots were not familiar with the terrain, two L-5 fixed wing aircraft were assigned to accompany them.

The underpowered helicopter had to fly just above the jungle canopy which made it hard for the L-5 pilots to follow. Also, the top speed of the helicopter, slower than the L-5s, required that the fixed wings aircraft constantly circle the helicopter to remain in contact. Sev-



US Air Force Museum photo probably taken in January 1945, shows Lt. Carter Harman (standing left), with ground crew, including his crew-chief/mechanic, Sgt. Jim Phelan (front row right). Lt. Frank Peterson, a veteran R-4 test pilot who performed a later epic Burma rescue mission with a YR-4B, stands beside Lt. Harman.

eral times during the journey the L-5s lost contact with the helicopter but Peterson and Steiner used a survival mirror to flash contact with the L-5s. At one point, the helicopter required three tries to get over a 5,000 foot mountain. The effort drained the helicopter of gas and the crew was forced to land on a sandbar. One of the escorting L-5s flew ahead to the mountain airstrip at Sinkaling obtained fuel which was dropped to the helicopter so it could continue its journey.

The weather station was located at an altitude of 4,700 feet and was in a circle of peaks on a razorback mountain with 2,500 foot drops on both sides. The arduous experience of the helicopter barely carrying the two pilots over the 5,000 foot mountain made it obvious that it would not be able to carry two pilots and a wounded soldier once they reached the weather station. When they landed at Sinkaling, Lt. Steiner left the helicopter and became an observer on one of the L-5s. Captain Peterson landed the YR-4 at the weather

station that afternoon but there was so much turbulence that the helicopter was unable to fly out until the next day.

The next morning the circling L-5s wondered why Captain Peterson was not taking off. Unable to communicate via radio, Peterson ingeniously arranged white cloth, supplied by the local people, spelling out the word "Oil" on the ground. Quickly understanding Peterson's message, the L-5 then flew back to Sinkaling for oil which was dropped to Peterson. The flight back to Sinkaling was uneventful and Private Ross was transferred to an L-5 for a trip to the hospital at Myitkyina where he recovered.

Having gone to such amazing efforts to bring a helicopter all the way from the States to Burma for one rescue mission, demonstrated that the Army saw merit in the "eggbeater" as a medical evacuation craft. The value of the helicopter as a med evac unit was again demonstrated in March, 1945, when Lieutenant Raymond Murdock piloted another newly arrived YR-4 to pick up an injured pilot located on a jungle ridgeline.

A C-46 transport had crashed going over the "Hump". Captain James Green and a local tribal chieftain took off from Shingbuiyang Airfield in a Fairchild PT-19 in an attempt to locate the downed aircraft. They failed to find the C-46 and unfortunately they crashed as well, five miles from the airfield in 150 foot tall trees on a steep ridgeline. Green was badly injured and the chief was killed. Volunteers hauled hand tools, power saws, and dynamite to the site to construct a small platform for a helicopter to land on. Despite the high temperature and gusty winds, Murdock was able to land on the platform. Green was placed on a reclining board in the right seat. When he applied power, the helicopter barely responded but Murdock took advantage of the down-sloping terrain to gain speed and was able to take off. Green was transferred to a fixed wing at Shingbuiyang while Murdock started flying back to Myitkyina. In route, he had an engine failure and landed on the Burma Road, forced to finish the trip by truck. (1)

The use of the helicopter for medical evacuation in World War II had its limitations. The mechanical frailties of these early aircraft and the unavailability of parts severely limited the number of opportunities for medical rescue. Even with these limitations, it was obvious that the military was convinced that helicopter had great potential in rescue operations. Over the next three years Sikorsky, Bell Helicopter, and Hiller Aviation made significant mechanical and aerodynamic improvements to the helicopter. By the time of the Korean War, the "eggbeater with good sense" was ready to play a significant role as a medical evacuation transport.

(1) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARN2kjlL6So](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARN2kjlL6So)

Visit this site for a video from Military Video.com that is based on this mission.



I didn't know it at the time but my femoral artery was partially cut and pumping blood like crazy, the sun was hot and I was a complete bloody mess. I guess it was the loss of blood that made me woozy and tired, but before I dozed off I saw them carry Pepe's body wrapped in his own poncho, his hand sticking out with the wristband he always wore.

I was passed over for dead at first. When they saw I was alive and called in the medevac for another trip, the firefight was still fierce and they had to hump me to a spot where the helicopter dropped a Jungle Penetrator with a "Stokes" litter, a covered wire basket shaped for a human body, just attached at the head. The helicopter started hoisting me up. I remember spinning around on the way up, like an out-of-body experience, watching gunfire smoke from the bushes and wondering lazily whether they were shooting at me or the helicopter. I heard bullets whizzing by my head and thought that helicopter must be a huge target hovering so still overhead. I wasn't so sure I wanted to get on it if it was going to be shot down, and as they pulled me in the chopper I could hear the whacks of the chopper taking hits, which kind of woke me up out of my daze. Now I was anxious to get the hell out of there, but that pilot stayed in a hover to hoist up six more guys while they were shooting at him and punching holes through the chopper. That was when I got really scared. I guess fear hits

you when you finally think you're going to make it out and then think again you might not. We sat there hovering near a roaring battle and they kept pulling guy after guy up. Holy crap! That pilot and crew had balls of steel. They got me and six other wounded guys out of there.

The medevac crew weren't doctors but they worked like a surgical team as they brought each one of us into the helicopter and laid us out on the blood-slick deck, applying bandages and tourniquets, taking vital signs, starting life-saving fluids, giving morphine if not already done by the medics on the ground and telling the pilots what kind of injuries were involved so they could plan their hospital route based on which hospital specialized in head injuries, eyes, etc. We stopped at two aid stations on the way to the evac hospital at Long Binh near Saigon, and at each place they examined us to give immediate attention where it was needed, and I'm sure the helicopter took on fuel. They put a splint on my arm and leg and always asked if I could see because my face was a bloody mess and I kept telling them, "I can see; fix my leg!" When we finally got to the Long Binh hospital they ran us into trauma, surrounded us and a redheaded major looked down at me and said "Don't worry, son, I'm a plastic surgeon, I'll do surgery on your face for ya." I said, "Thanks Doc, but I can see; fix the leg, fix the leg!"

It was very bad for me when they straightened out my leg because the fracture

was compound and comminuted, meaning the bullet broke the bone into multiple pieces. They ended up putting me in a body cast and sending me to Japan for surgery, where I spent some time on the amputation ward and nearly lost my leg.

I was in a body cast for eight months, in and out of hospitals for two years. I still have serious pain issues and always will, but unlike some, I had the chance to live my life, to watch my children and grandchildren grow, to be retired after

a law enforcement career.

Now I am the sole survivor of my squad. The ones who lived through it all died, one by one, from weird cancers that I believe came from Agent Orange that blanketed our AO. But I still have other vet buddies from that war, and there are some things we always talk about and will never forget. My memory is crystal clear of fine young men doing America's dirty, bloody work, and in particular I will take to my grave the image of Pepe's wristband as his hand fell out from the covered stretcher. I will forever hear Warren's last breath speaking my name.

Every night I pray for the souls of my departed friends and I thank God for the helicopter crew that risked their life to save mine. I have been unable to find them but I have told you about them and how much I owe them, how much I will always admire them for what they did, what they risked, for their brothers on the ground.

For every one of you who flew Dustoff or Medevac as a pilot or crew member, so long as Vietnam veterans are alive there will be someone, somewhere, every day telling a story about the crazy things you did to save their lives, and they will think about you with gratitude until the day they die. I am one of those guys. Not a day will pass without me thinking about you and your balls of steel as you pulled my shot-up body out of the jungle. I think of you every day when I remember my buddies, Pepe, Warren, and other faces frozen young in my memory forever.

## NEW! "GUNS UP"

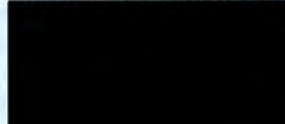


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**Nick Donvito lives in Camillus, New York with his wife, married 40 years. His long-time hobby is rebuilding Harley-Davidson motorcycles, like this special bike he rebuilt to commemorate POWs and MIAs. See [www.veteranshonorpowmia.tripod.com](http://www.veteranshonorpowmia.tripod.com)**

*This story is told at more length by Terry Garlock in his upcoming book, **STRENGTH & HONOR: AMERICA'S BEST IN VIETNAM**. Garlock, a life VHPA member who lives in Peachtree City, Georgia, was a cobra pilot with the 334th AHC, Bien Hoa, 1969.*



## **Charles "Chuck" Thomas Goodroe III**

Charles "Chuck" Thomas Goodroe III, CW4, USA, Retired, passed away on Sunday, June 14, 2009 at his home surrounded by his family. Chuck, as he was referred to by his friends, had battled esophageal cancer for 2 1/2 years prior to his passing at the age of 62. Chuck is survived by his wife of 38 years, Carol, son Christopher of Manchester, TN, daughter Tracy and her husband Edward Nichols, grandkids, Matthew, Nathan and Sarah, all of Fort. Carson, CO; brother David and wife Bernadette of Cathlamet, WA; sister Melissa Hoffmann and her husband Sigmar of Sandy, UT.

Visitation and a service were held at Schubert Funeral Home, Wartburg, TN, on June 18, 2009, followed by his interment in Circleville, OH, on June 22, 2009. The family respectfully requests memorials be made in Chuck's name to the Morgan County Humane Society, P.O. Box 55, Wartburg, Tennessee. 37887

Chuck was born in Yakima, WA, on August 28, 1946 into a military family. Twenty years later he joined the US Army and graduated from Rotary Wing Flight School Class 66-9W in 1966. His initial assignment was to Southeast Asia, with the 173rd Assault Helicopter Company, located in Phu Loi, RVN. In 1968 he returned to Vietnam for his second tour and served with the 128th Assault Helicopter Company, also in Phu Loi. Chuck spent a total of 30 months in the Republic of Vietnam. In addition to Southeast Asia, his other military assignments included: Yuma Proving Ground, AZ; Ft. Ord, CA; Schofield Barracks, HI; Corpus Christi Army Depot, TX; Nellingen, Germany; and Ft. Devens, MA. After Chuck's retirement from the US Army in 1987, he worked for Science and Technology, a firm in Oak Ridge, TN., who performed soil studies at U.S. Army National Guard sites until he finally retired in 1994.

In 1997 Chuck and Carol moved to Harri-man, TN., where he became heavily involved in the Morgan County Humane Society. His awards include the Distinguished Flying Cross with the 1st Oak Leaf Cluster, Bronze Star Medal with 2 Oak Leaf Clusters, Purple Heart, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal with 33 awards, Master Army Aviator Badge and many other awards and citations.

Chuck was a graduate of Troy State University, a member of Gamma Beta Phi Society, and the consummate aviation professional throughout his life.

*Submitted by a longtime friend,  
Ralph E. Mullens*

## **Elmer G. Anderson**

Elmer G. Anderson, 82, Retired Chief Warrant Officer, passed away Friday, July 17, 2009 in Killeen, Texas. He was interred in the Central Texas Veterans Cemetery with full military honors.

He was born Jan. 6, 1927, in Burt, Neb., to Charles and Lena Anderson. He joined the U.S. Army in 1950. He became an Aviator in 1959 as a member of Class 58-1 and served in both the Korean and Vietnam wars. His awards include: Legion of Merit; Bronze Star Medal; Army Commendation Medal w/1 Oak Leaf Cluster; Air Medal w/numerals 31; National Defense service Medal w/1 Oak Leaf Cluster; Good Conduct Medal; Korean Service Medal w/3 Bronze Service Stars; United Nations Service Medal; Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal; Vietnam Service Medal w/1 Silver and 1 Bronze Service Stars; Armed Forces Reserve Medal w/10 year device; Combat Infantry Badge; Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation; Master Army Aviator Badge; Presidential Unit Citation; Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry 2/Palm. He retired in 1981 at Fort Hood.

He then flew helicopters to off shore oil rigs in Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana and remained active with Young Eagles, he was an avid auto mechanic and a member of the Killeen Pilots Association, a Charter Member of the Army Aviation Association, a Lifetime Member of the Hot Air Balloon Association and many other aviation associations. He attended church at two chapels on Fort Hood.

Survivors include his wife, Elizabeth Jean Anderson of Killeen; a daughter, Debi Sadler of Corsicana; two grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. Memorials may be made to Young Eagles, c/o George Loffert, [REDACTED] Killeen, 76541.

## **Col. Howard "Al" Corson**

The VHPA was notified of the death of Col. Howard "Al" Corson by the following e-mail that we received on 7 July, 2009:

I just wanted the membership to know that my father, Col. Howard "al" Corson died of cancer on May 24, 2009. Dad was the pilot of the 21st SOS CH-53, call-sign Knife 31, that was shot down in on Koh Tang Island during the rescue of the crew of the freighter SS Mayaguez after it was captured by Cambodian forces in May of 1975.

Burial was at Arlington National Cemetery. Everyone wore something colorful and comfortable, Dad was a very fun person and would not want to see everyone wearing black.

Mark Corson, [REDACTED]

*Thanks,*

## **James Graham**

James "Jim" Stewart Graham, 66, passed away Friday, July 24, 2009, at Hospice Ministries in Mississippi

Jim graduated from flight school in Class 66-23/67-01, he flew in Vietnam in 1967 & 1968 with the 4th Aviation Company, 4th Infantry Division.

He was interred at Good Hope Baptist Church Cemetery, in Colombia, Mississippi. Mr. Graham is survived by his wife, Jo Ann Graham, two sons, four brothers; four sisters; and six grandchildren.

## **Kenneth L. Reusser**

Retired Marine Corps Col. Kenneth L. Reusser, 89, a highly decorated aviator who was shot down in three wars, died June 20. He lived in the Portland, Ore., suburb of Milwaukie.

Col. Reusser flew in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, he was shot down in all three, five times in all. His 59 medals included two Navy Crosses, four Purple Hearts, and two Legions of Merit. His 253 combat missions are considered the most ever by a Marine pilot.

In 1945, while based in Okinawa, he stripped down his F4U-4 Corsair fighter and intercepted a Japanese observation plane at high altitude. When his guns froze, he flew his fighter into the observation plane, hacking off its tail with his propeller. In 1950, he led an attack on a North Korean tank-repair facility at Inchon, then destroyed an oil tanker, almost blowing himself out of the sky.

In Vietnam, he flew helicopters and was leading a rescue mission when his Huey was shot down. He needed skin grafts over 35 percent of his badly burned body. These injuries forced him into retirement in 1968 after 27 years of military service.

After his retirement, he worked for Lockheed Aircraft, where he helped develop the U-2 spy plane, and then the Piasecki Helicopter Co. Retiring to his native Oregon, he was active in veterans groups.

He and his wife, Trudy, made headlines in 2004 when they defiantly refused to leave their home after it went into foreclosure. The couple had lost much of their retirement savings in a high-risk investment and then a swindle by a bookkeeper. Ultimately they were forced to obey a court order.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by two sons, Richard C. and Kenneth L. Jr. Burial was at Willamette National Cemetery near Portland, Ore.



## Sidney Carroll Cowan

CW4 Sidney Carroll Cowan, age 76, of Cumming, GA, passed away Saturday, March 28, 2009. Mr. Cowan served 20 years with the U.S. Army as a Helicopter Pilot and Maintenance Officer. He retired in August 1971 as a Regular Army Chief Warrant Officer, Grade Four. During two tours of combat in Vietnam, he was awarded the Bronze Star on two occasions (for Valor) the Air Medal with 16 Oak Leaf Clusters, two with "V" devices for Valor, and numerous service awards; each air medal is awarded for 25 combat missions.

He was preceded in death by his parents and two brothers. Survivors include his wife of 28 years, Mary Cowan of Cumming, Georgia; three daughters, two sons, two 2 grandchildren, one brother and numerous aunts and uncles. Funeral services were held March 31, 2009, interment followed at Georgia National Cemetery in Canton, GA. Full details available at [www.ingramfuneralhome.com](http://www.ingramfuneralhome.com)

William "Aubrey" Waldrop

William "Aubrey" Waldrop, born June 12, 1946, in Brevard, NC, Transylvania County, passed away June 11, 2009. He died unexpectedly while fishing near Patrick Air Force base.

Those who were with Aubrey in his flight school Class 68-23, or served with him in the 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam, probably knew him as Lurch, a nickname borrowed from the TV character which he begrudgingly tolerated with good humor. The name was appropriate in a way; he had an erect posture, stood a head taller than most of those around him and his hands were the size of baseball gloves. Proportionate to his frame was a giant smile, a friendly gaze and a substantial appetite. Aubrey loved cooking for large groups and whenever word got out that he was cooking, a crowd would develop. A man of few words, his ideas and concerns were always taken seriously.

Aubrey grew up near Savannah, GA and joined the Army in 1967. After flight school in Ft. Wolters and Hunter/Stewart, he received a Cobra transition and served with the Big Red One in Vietnam from April 1969 to April 1970. His Call Sign was Rebel 21 and he went on to fly 1,095 combat hours. Aubrey also completed two tours in Korea, one in Germany and Ft. Mead, MD where he flew C-12s. Among his many awards and citations are the DFC, 40 Air Medals, one Air Medal with V and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm.

After retiring from active duty as a CW-4 Master Aviator, Aubrey flew a variety of corporate aircraft internationally and was flying UH-1s for NASA at the time of his death. His passion for fishing and flying was evident by the way his face would light up. Anyone who knew Aubrey would recognize his special grin from a successful fishing trip or flight.

Aubrey is survived by his wife, Maria (Concha); two daughters, two step-daughters, three sisters, five grandchildren, one great-grandchild and seven nieces and nephews.

He is pre-deceased by his parents and two sisters. Remembrances can be sent to the Paralyzed Veterans of America ([www.pva.org](http://www.pva.org)) or the American Heart Association ([www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)).

## Bill (William L.) Irby

On 30 June 09 VHPA Member Tom Pratt asked us...

Can you pass along to the statistics keeper that Bill (William L.) Irby passed in the early hours yesterday, 6-29-09 of causes related directly to his service in RVN. ie Prostate cancer, a RVN presumptive disability resulting in a 100% rating, became bone cancer and took him.

Bill, Rattler "TEN", served with me in the 71st AHC, Rattlers and Firebirds, in the Americal Division in Chu Lai RVN, during 1970. I went home in Sept of 70 but I think his tour lasted well in to 1971 and on from Chu Lai to other locations with the 71st

Thanks  
Tom Pratt, 69-24?

## Robert S. Allen

Robert S. Allen, 68, originally from Elizabethtown, N.C., passed away Wednesday, Aug. 5, 2009, in Fort Worth, interment followed at the Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery.

Robert was born Sept. 28, 1940. After graduating from flight school with class 67-5, he flew two tours in the Republic of Vietnam as a helicopter pilot. In 1967-68 he served with the 134th Assault Helicopter Company and in 1970-71 Robert flew with C Troop, 7 of the 17th Air Cav. He retired from the service at Fort Hood in 1982 after serving 25 years.

Robert received numerous medals during his years in the military which include the Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal with Numerals 21, Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Medal, Army Service Ribbon, Vietnam Service Medal with one Silver and one Bronze Service Star, Overseas Service Ribbon with Numerals 3, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal with 10-year device, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm, and the Master Army Aviator Badge.

Robert was preceded in death by his father, Stephen Allen; mother, Ruby Allen; and his sister, Carolyn Smith. Survivors include his wife, Pamela Allen; son, Stephen W. Allen and wife, Angel, of Florida; grandson, Dylan Scott Allen; brother, the Rev. Willie F. Allen and wife, Alice, of North Carolina; and numerous family members and friends.

*He will be missed by all.  
God has received another warrior into his fold.*

## Roger Greenan

Roger Greenan, 67, died of a heart attack at his home in the Twin Cities area on July 25th 2009. Roger was a member of Flight Class 64-2W and flew with the 119th AVN from 1964-65.

After being shot down twice and crashing a third time as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam, Roger Greenan came to Minnesota for the quiet life. He didn't get it. In 1979, he was shot down again, when the helicopter he flew for KSTP-TV was struck by a bullet and forced to land during an incident at the Red Lake Indian Reservation.

After Vietnam, where he logged 750 combat hours flying an Army gunship, Roger worked as a helicopter pilot for an oil exploration firm in Indonesia, helped set up an offshore exploration oil well in New Zealand and worked for several years as a bush pilot and instructor in Alaska. "He lived in eight countries on five continents," said his wife, Irene. The couple lived for several years in Arizona, and Greenan commuted to Minnesota to handle his business, EAC Helicopters (later named North American Surveillance Systems) in South St. Paul. Originally a helicopter maintenance shop, the business expanded to specialize in the installation of electronic surveillance systems on helicopters throughout the world. Greenan also performed such tasks as mapping deer herds, surveying pipelines, and finding and removing land mines.

Roger Greenan's son, Scott Greenan, 33, also a pilot, died in 2001 in a helicopter crash. The cause was never determined. Greenan set up a scholarship fund in his son's name at the University of North Dakota's aviation school in Grand Forks. In addition to his wife and brother Derek Antony, Greenan is survived by a daughter, Allison Marr; brothers Tim and Sean Greenan; and three grandchildren.





# BOOK REVIEWS

By VHPA Life member JOHN PENNY

John Penny, a VHPA Life Member, served with A/377 and is semi-retired from his career as a helicopter pilot, and teacher. He lives in Ellensburg, WA, with his beloved wife of 30 years, Janet.

**A HUNDRED FEET OVER HELL** by Jim Hooper is a very intense portrayal of the Army Aviators who flew the O-1 "Bird Dog" for the 220th Reconnaissance Airplane Company, call sign Catkillers. They were also known by some as the "Myth Makers." Although this unit was based at Phu Bai, the AO of its 1st Platoon was in, around, and occasionally over the DMZ; an unfriendly neighborhood to say the least. The story of incredible bravery and sacrifice of the pilots and "back seaters" of this unit and others like them has been lost in the literature of what has become known as "The Helicopter War." The book brings the story of the 220th back to life and engages the reader in their daily struggle to protect the "ground pounders" in Northern I Corps from the NVA under very difficult circumstances.

The name of this unit does not tell you anything near the whole story about the Catkillers. To the uninformed the word "reconnaissance" might imply a somewhat less dangerous mission. Not so with the 220th over the highly disputed terrain of the DMZ. Their brand of recon was done "low and slow" and often in the worse kind of weather in aircraft that were an easy target for every weapon in the NVA inventory. A "day at the office" in this outfit usually began with low level spotting of NVA movement and calling in and adjusting artillery. However, unlike their sister units to the south, they were also trained and authorized to call in air strikes which required marking the target at great personal risk. Mix in bad weather, a unit in close contact, and it really gets interesting.

Jim Hooper, when commenting on his book, states that "A Hundred Feet Over Hell must serve as a mere outline of what these men experienced." That may be true but he has done an excellent job of researching and gathering information for this book and interviewing a number of the men who made any unit run, not to mention a high intensity combat unit like the 220th. Jim's brother, Bill Hooper, flew for the 220th on the DMZ. Bill Hooper's last mission for the Catkillers is a most riveting story of survival. He has given voice to those who flew, the men who maintained their often bullet riddled air-

planes, the operations officers, and those in the Direct Air Support Control Center. All of their voices are heard, and so are the voices of the "grunts" for whom this unit flew. The interlacing of their narratives while involved in some of their major engagements makes this a compelling read.

There is an old saying I heard when I first joined the helicopter fraternity: "airplanes fly themselves, helicopters just naturally want to crash." While there may be a grain of truth to this, it hardly applies to those who flew with the 220th and her sister units. Stick, rudder, fabric, skill, hope, and luck kept this unit in the air. A grease mark on the windshield helped them guide the rockets used for marking targets and they weren't above firing their M-16s out the window and dropping hand grenades. Where did they find the men to do this? You know where, just look around at the next VHPA reunion or chapter meeting or...in the mirror.

*A Hundred Feet Over Hell: Flying With the Men of the 220th Recon Airplane Company Over I Corps and the DMZ, 1968-1969* (258 pages, \$25.00) by Jim Hooper, ISBN13: 978-0-7603-3633-5 is available from [zenithpress.com](http://zenithpress.com), Amazon, and other book suppliers.



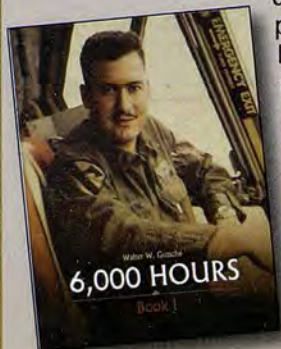
## **6000 HOURS: Book 1** by VHPA member Walter Gutsche

is the first part of a very personal memoir of his remarkable career that takes him from high school in New Jersey through 27 years as an Army Aviator, and finally to Boeing Helicopters as a test pilot. Numerous friends and family encouraged him to write his extraordinary story. He has done a great job of putting it together in a straight forward style than informs readers of all backgrounds.

Book 1 takes us through Walter's two Vietnam tours, flying the OH-13S with B Troop 1/9 Cavalry in 66-67 based at An Khe and Chinooks with the 179th ASH Company in 69-70 at Camp Holloway. He brings the men he served with, their missions, and the ways they coped and lived to the page in a way that engages the reader. As he points out in his preface, photographs also tell us stories. The photos are in color and include base camp life, active combat, and many of his fellow pilots.

Walter tells us he wrote his book to answer the question, "What did you do during your life as a helicopter pilot in the Army, Grandpa?" Four years later, he answers that question and shares it with all of us in this stimulating and well written memoir of a proud aviation career. He reports that "Book Deux" is half way written, stay tuned.

*6000 Hours: Book 1* (109 pages with color photos, \$61.99) by Walter W. Gutsche, ISBN13: 978-1-4415-2744-8 is available from Xlibris (a "print on demand" publisher) at [www.xlibris.com](http://www.xlibris.com) or from Amazon.







*OH-23Gs from the Air Section, Headquarters Troop, 2nd Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment about June 1967 at their base "outside the wire" at Chu Lai, I Corps.*

I deployed with the Headquarters Troop, 2nd Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment from Fort Meade. I was the Air Section Commander. Our ships arrived off Vung Tau in September 1966. We off-loaded and moved to Bien Hoa. It took a long time to off-load all those heavy vehicles. I remember we went down to work with the 1/4th Cav guys with the 1st Infantry Division for a few weeks. Initially we had two OH-23Gs and two UH-1Cs, but the Regiment gave the Hueys to the Air Cav Troop and we got two more OH-23Gs. When I DEROSed in August 1967 we still had those four OH-23Gs. There were eight men in the Air Section: myself, LTs Robert Hess and John Kerr, and WO Wally Handberry plus four enlisted crew chiefs. I can only remember two SP5s Nash and Knell but these guys were good. We had very high availability and we flew lots of hours. The 398th Transportation Detachment supported us from Long Binh. I remember once Wally blew an engine landing in a compound. We got a replacement engine installed and the ship was back in service in only three or four days. When we needed a part and/or a mechanic, the 398th TC guys would get it to us quickly or arrange with another maintenance unit to address our needs. I had no com-

plaints with them – in fact I give them high marks. The squadron moved to Xuan Loc in March and April 1967. I remember we occupied about a 10-acre site. We hand-cut the vegetation and were able to save the grass to reduce the dust and debris around our little flight line. Then we were sent to Chu Lai in I Corps as part of Task Force OREGON near the end of April. Naturally the tracks went by LST up the coast. We disassembled our 23s, loaded them into C-130s and were operational up there in about 24-hours. There wasn't any room on the base for us until the Marines moved north; so we set up on some sand dunes just outside the perimeter. We did a lot of scouting missions for the Armored Cavalry troops in addition to flying the commanders around plus providing air courier service and some resupply. Naturally when a tracked vehicle needed a large or heavy part, we weren't of much help. We took a lot of fire but didn't lose anyone during that year. Let me tell you – the Blackhorse guys could put out some serious firepower! I liked working with them so much I returned in 1969 and 1970 to be with the Air Cav Troop of the 11th ACR.

*Bill Abbey*