

Survivors: Vietnam chopper pilots unite for first time

By Larry Levy
Republic Aviation Writer

There was an empty place set at a banquet Saturday for the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association.

The place was for the estimated 1,400 Army, Marine, Air Force and Navy helicopter pilots who were killed during the war in Vietnam.

About 100 pilots met at the Granada Royale Homotel, 1515 N. 44th St., for the first meeting, which organizers hope will be an annual event.

Larry Clark, who flew helicopters in Vietnam during 1965 and 1966, is founder of the growing organization that has about 650 members.

"Only the U.S. government knows for sure"

how many chopper pilots served in Vietnam, he said, "but we believe in excess of 10,000."

The war in Vietnam was "a helicopter war," Clark said, and over the years, association members flew the same kind of missions in the same kind of helicopters from the same bases and used the same radio call sign.

Clark, who was wounded in the neck, estimated 80 percent of the pilots at the meeting were awarded the Purple Heart.

Many people don't know how fragile a helicopter is, with its many moving parts, said Clark, with Sperry Flight Systems of Phoenix.

Choppers were hit by enemy fire on nearly every mission, Clark said, noting his was forced down several times, but only once was it "bad."

He said his Huey gunship was "shot out of the sky." Clark, his co-pilot and two gunners crashed into a rice paddy surrounded by the enemy.

Clark said a bullet had gone around the inside of his co-pilot's helmet and lodged in an earphone, but the co-pilot wasn't scratched.

They were trapped for four hours as Air Force planes dropped napalm on the surrounding area until they could be rescued by another chopper.

Many Vietnam pilots remained in aviation, and Clark would meet them in his travels. It was after such a trip last fall that Clark and his wife, Terrie, got the idea of starting the group. They mailed letters to "see what happens," and the association got off the ground.

Clement fell short of blaming AHCCCS for the jump in the number of women who

"We need to know if they did not receive it because they had no

investment for the state, he said.

Prenatal