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Gary R. Albin

Roush

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Mr. Mike Law
Asst Editor, VHPA Newsletter
7 W. Seventh St., Suite 1990
Cincinnati, OH 45202

Dear Mike,

As a retired Marine helicopter pilot and Vietnam veteran, I have enjoyed reading the Newsletter and hearing about similar experiences by fellow aviators. Having spent the whole year of 1969 in I Corp (Da Nang, Quang Tri and Phu Bai), I have many memories from the missions I flew and the ones I later heard about over a warm rusty can of beer.

Although most of your articles are from Army pilots, they are still easy to relate to. It is heartwarming to see that so many of your members still hold positive images of their tours and have adjusted well to a life after Vietnam.

In regards to the "Helicopter Valley" article by Jon Boulle (Oct 93 Newsletter), I noted that after twenty-four years of telling stories over cold drinks and editorial embellishment for effect (like this is a no-shitter), some of the facts can get lost.

The facts are that in 1969, Jon Boulle, Jerry Blackbird (from Kellogg, Idaho, and who later became a State Representative and was killed in a helicopter crash while inspecting timber) and I were in HMM-161. HMM-163 had returned to MCAS Tustin in the fall of 1968. Jon's memories of "Helicopter Valley" were right on track but his descriptions of flying sort of exceeded "aircraft and believability limitations." I want to make sure your readers don't believe that we were totally crazy nor did we constantly exceed aircraft limitation.

Since the primary threats at that time were small arms, artillery anti-aircraft and mortars in the zone, the practiced tactics for getting into the landing zones were the "spiral" and the "low level buttonhook" approaches.

The "spiral" approach was initiated at 3,000 feet over the landing zone and was a 360-degree autorotation, using 35 to 50-degrees of bank (45-degrees was aircraft limit), 55 to 120 knots of airspeed (depending how close you wanted to stay over the zone) and rotor speed under 108 percent (115 percent rotor speed would have required several components to be changed). As Jerry Blackbird used to say, "you come out of the sky like a turd out of a tall cow."

The "low level buttonhook" was conducted by coming in low-level at high speed from about 180 degrees out of the landing direction, then popping the nose up and rolling into 45 degrees angle of bank in order to arrive on final at 55 to 65 knots and 200 feet of altitude above the zone. It prevented the enemy mortar positions from timing your approach and greeting your arrival with mortars in the zone.

Please keep up the good work. If you find Jon please pass my comments and address on to him. I am always ready for another "no shitter" and a beer.

Semper Fi,
Gary