

VHPA,  
Sacramento, CA.

CW3 CLIVE H. COLLINS, USA, RET.

Dear VHPA,

Here's the true story and relative facts about the "Proud Mary" Hog Charlie-gun in the 1997 Calendar, September section. (I presume you have the fullsize calendar hanging on your wall? — if not, here's a scaled down color copy so's you know what you're looking at!)

I wrote this 5 page story up to accompany the 14 calendars I purchased to send to relatives and old Army buddies for Christmas '97 — hence the use of simple terminology in places, to explain to the uninitiated what I was talking about.

If you'd like to use it in the Newsletter or Directory I give

VTHPA my permission to do so, and to edit (out) any superfluous parts which us ex-pilot vets would find irrelevant (i.e. known <sup>to</sup> us, no explanation needed) so long as the <sup>basic</sup> story and my form of Rumor (?) is not distorted, (i.e. made 'politically correct', or into paffie-driuel etc.). It might help you sell more calendars, who knows!

If you don't wish to re-print it, then kindly return the color copy (\$2 a pop), keep the story for the archives to set the time frame straight of the photo, and I'll submit it to the VHCMA (Crewmen's) association for them to use if they want to. (... or you can forward it to them to Charlie Raines, if you're in constant touch with them.)

I'm a laryngectomee from cancer (no vocal chords or larynx) and 'breathing water' still surviving after 3 years,

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and intend to start on a book  
in which this story will probably be  
a whole chapter (with a rewrite and  
brush up). I'm going to do this for  
my kids, and after constant pressuring  
over the years from an old schoolchum  
of mine in England who's a respected  
journalist with the BBC (British  
Broadcasting Corporation) - the Brits'  
PBS. Anyway, I thought I'd  
give you first choice as you're my  
Association, and I applaud the  
work you're doing for us ol' timer  
vets of the khaki-airforce.

Thanks, as always,

Clive T. O'Brien

Member # 3727

Dear

Christmas 1996

"PROUD MARY"  
(...or, what's in a song?)

In this 1997 VHPA Calendar, in the September section, there's a photo of a Bell UH-1C 'Charlie' Model gunship 'hot' refuelling at a POL point at Phu Loi (..20 miles NNW of Saigon..)- this is their story. (Their story?...yup, 'cos there's a lot more than one "Proud Mary".)

After serving for three months with B Troop, 3rd Squadron, 17th Regt. Air Cavalry in, and all over, III Corps Region of S. Vietnam, I went down to the Mekong Delta (1V Corps) in November of 1970 to join the 135th Assault Helicopter Company, the "EMU's". EMU stood for Experimental Military Unit, besides being a non-flying Australian native bird, ...being formed of Aussie Navy Personnel within a U.S. Army Unit. Actual pilot 'strength' was about one griping Aussie for every eight Americans...they bemoaned their fate in flying over land and rivers without Fosters' Lager instead of off a Heli-Carrier below the horizon, chock full of goodies and clean sheets, while peering about for lurking submarines, for which they'd been trained. I guess they had a point, but it wasn't the ol' chargin'-Charlie attitude of the Air Cav I'd left behind. (Their motto, " If you ain't Cav you ain't shit " aptly summing up their outlook complete with appropriate mental derangement which also happened to suit my own.) After flying troop-carrying Slicks for a couple of months, and getting to know the Area of Operations, I volunteered for the Taipan gun-platoon in order to get some payback-time for being shot at, shot up, and generally shat upon by the VC and NVA who had also exacted a toll from personal friends and classmates of mine.: Around this time I started to call my aircraft " Proud Mary".

Now, down in the Delta region of 1V Corps ( ..Fourcore ") you didn't paint names, slogans and Mother-in-law wishes on the doors or cowlings of your aircraft sides for a variety of reasons..the main ones being that the average Charlie-model gun ship lasted for about 3 weeks before being retired and retrograded back to Corpus Christi, Texas repair facility, due to battle damage in the form of bullet holes through the main formers and stringers (,, load bearing chassis of the helo) which seriously weakened the airframe if not the aircrew. Hence, the effort of painting and cartooning was a major - waste of effort except to the admiring eyes of Texan mechanics and other assorted Back-in-the-World fans of ours. The other main reason was any Dink in the Delta could hear and see you coming for miles and miles which gave him time to prepare a warm ~~hello~~ for you, so you didn't really need to paint 'Kick-Me' signs on your means of ingress/egress as well as providing a convenient hold-over sighting point for his magazine or belt fed Welcome-wagon smokepole, as it was rather self-defeating in the long run, and sometimes painful. Unlike our brothers and cousins in Cobras and 'Hooks we of the ultra-close support strategists were low and slow and of the heavy-air-breathing society, cutting donuts and wagon-wheel pirouettes (..like heavy-Loaches. (Light Observation Helicopters)) on our flat footed (..Lycoming L-11 underpowered) mounts. When we started to get replacement "M"-Mike models, which were beefed up Charlie-models with L-13 engines, we could take off with a normal load plus, without the Crewchief and doorgunner having to run alongside until the bird began to want to fly and then leaping back inside an instant before the skids came unstuck and flew away without them !; while keeping these crew-members fit, lean and somewhat haggard looking, besides costing the tax payer enormous extra amounts of money for new booties, it was always disconcerting not to feel the hot empty brass cases spraying your neck from your favorite gunner behind, when the doo-doo hit the fan, and realizing your little pal had missed the bus. But I digress. So in lieu of exterior art work I'd paint the name "Proud Mary" on an empty area of the gray colored instrument panel to remind me of an alternate reality and to dispel the oft-held notion that pilots are a superstitious lot. (..groans of dismay from the peanut gallery, do I hear?).

Continued... page 2...."Proud Mary".

Sooo, why Proud Mary? It wasn't fashionable in the 'Nam to call or name helicopters after pretty women, girlfriends, mothers or even shady-ladies of the lamplight, unlike the practice common in World Wars One and Two. In fact a few that come to mind were The Kat, Pressed Rat and Warthog, Mo-ron, Surferbitch, Big John...you get the idea...besides all the death-dealin', card-carryin' names, cartoon figures, and sometimes just names that only their painters or owners could interpret. It was, after all, the start of the Heavy Metal era and we were handing it out albeit .30 caliber, .50, and 20 mike-mike laced with 21 and 17 pounder folding-fin rockets and pink-cotton-candy puffs of flechettes to colour the proceedings up and nail down the attention span of our gatecrashing concert non-fans. "Ah yes, of course," I hear you say.. "...Proud Mary, early hit top twennie, who else..Credence Clearwater Revival, none finer that's who, all comes back to me now..late '60's, early '70's scene, should have remembered..and whatwere the lyrics, I remember the tune???"Well, you lucky people, just for your amusement here they are, and with my connotations to illuminate the meaning of that time and place, 'tween heaven and hell, and why (besides a few Beach Boys'epics) it was my favorite reminder of what had been, might be and could become; optimism mixed with memories in a few short lines of a song which also happened to be good walkin'-music where the Chorus was a quiet, constant prayer, the background sound to that turbine whine beckoning us on another valkyrie ride to the lair of the zipperheads waiting balefully like malignant dwarfs ready to up and piss on our Parade again. Here goes noth'n, comin'hot !! !

♪♪♪ "...Lookin' fer a job in the City..

.. Workin' fer the Man every night and day..." (Being a Brit from London I'd already been around the world once building flight hours wherever I could, and whenever the jobs or pay would allow... and then, as now in the 'Nam, I didn't get much in the way of sleepy-times, and now 'The Man' was the Uncle Sam and his Army !)

"...And, I never lost a minute of sleep in worryin' 'bout the way things might have been..."  
(Chorus) .." Big wheel keep on turnin'.... ( Rotor blades, up over my head circling round, don't come off and fly away..)

.."Proud Mary keep on burnin'....( Jet-turbine engine whistlin' that song I love to hear; don't quit now...I'm too low and too heavy and too damn slow...)

.." Rollin', rollin', rollin' on the rivah !! ( Shootin' dice, cuttin' corners, along the length of the Big Blue, that ol' Mekong River, crap-shoot of the Delta..)

(end chorus)

.."Seen a lot o'places, an' Memphis..

.."Pumped a lot of fame down in New Orleans.." ( I'd made a side detour to Memphis enroute from Detroit to Miami in 1965, out of deference to another favorite song.. "Memphis, Tennessee" by Chuck Berry, in the early '60's, while still living in the Channel Islands, U.K.....and I'd lived 3 months in Noo-Orlin's pumping aviation fuel for Harper Aviation at Lakefront ..)

..." ..but I never saw the good side of the city..

" ..'til I hitched a ride on a riverboat Queen.." ( I'd worked my way from Australia to Hawaii aboard a West German freighter in '64, and had gone to dances and ridden the paddle-wheelers when living in the Big Easy in '65..) ( ..as in ..who live on, around <sup>the Mekong</sup> and often in tunnels or camo hootches with a spiteful attitude problem, and a great desire to make

..." If ya come down to the river, bet you're gonna find the people who live...

loud noises and possess your gonads in a box.)

..."you don't have to worry....(..much !!)

.. 'though ya have no money.. (..it's all on allotment to the missus and Jodie..)

..."people on the river are happy to give." (...like .. triangulated

.. 51 fire, rocket propelled grenades, Strella's .. get the picture..)

continued....page 3...."Proud Mary".

Repeat-

(again...chorus.) .."Big wheel keep on turnin'...(" is that just a piece of ragged blade-skin or honeycomb I hear, needing a turn or two of 'Hundred-mile-an-hour'tape to stop it's slapping scream, or is it an almost-shot-thru push-pull tube, and why is the 'one-to-one' vibration getting worse...??"

.."Proud Mary keep on burnin'...

(...."Christ on a bike!..what's the 20 minute fuel-low warning light doing on?..we're still a ways from home and it's getting dark out there. Sure we took some hits back there, but the' Bear' would have smelled the leaking Juicerino sooner or later, wouldn't he? As the Bishop said to the actress, "Keep that fire lit; Lordy, don't fail me now...!"

..."Rollin', rollin'; rollin' on the river!!

(...".Dumbo, what the hell you doin' here..a 34 year old overage alien Rock-and-Roller who should know better, what with a wife and kid back home betting only on yer SGLI..(that's the Gubbenmint Life Insurance, to the uninitiated) ..and this raggedey summibich ain't going to do no'rollin' on the river'without floats on the skids, more like cartwheels for quarter-mile or more,

right fast and quick , never mind yer 409 and big-slip-daddy...dammit, should have called you "Little Deuce Coupe", but you still had four doors instead of two (...hold the phone, I can see the twinklin' lights around the 7th ARVN friendly TOC, and the .....one of these days they'll put in a control tower and landing lights alongside the PSP steel matting that the starch-wing jokers refer to as a 'runway'!) Like the Bible says.." FourCorps and ten is the average lifespan of a one-tour Wobbly One", so about now I'd like to trade off a few RPM's for, say, two minutes of actual flying time..huh? Whaddyathink, deal? I'm set up on a fast straight-in with three other sets of eyes looking straight ahead in 1,000 yard stareswilling the Ol' Gal to get her legs on the deck before the elastic in her knickers lets go and winds us all up.

Glory-be, we're over the'fence', the wire and berm are behind us; careful fast hover into the L-shaped revetment and down on the collective pitch, accompanied by studious yawns all round and cramming of gear into flight bags while the engine idles for cool-down, and we get ready for an abbreviated post-flight inspection before the Turnkey closes the bar for the night.

Another day at the office Ma . Sixteen hours in the saddle and no end in sight. Hootch-maids have paced off the area for the in-coming mortar specialists, set up across the river on the night shift, and have gone home to kin and hearth. Hope the bastards are low on rounds so we'll get some sleep. I swear, I'm too 'Short' (..time of Tour left to do), too dumb and good lookin' to desert and swim to Sweden, and definitely gettin' too old for much more of this crap....besides that, I heard about this geezer name of Clinton sitt'n on his arse in my old-country, dodging the Draft (..and I don't mean Budweiser) and puffin' on joints, saying he was putting in for President one day...now if that ain't an irony then I don't know the price of kippers. Good night all.... and that's almost the story of "Proud Mary", but not quite. They got me in the end..with 6 weeks to go to greasy-rail home time a 30-cal AP round came thru the two door skins, shed it's jacket by my boot as it tumbled thru my lower leg, went up and through the panel knocking out a bunch of instruments, knicked the other pilots thumb and buzzed on out the open window. The other pilot was the Unit IP and check pilot, a grizzled CW3 about my age, name of Smith. First name forgotten but "Smitty" to the lads, natch. Same guy mentioned in the calendar photo, and the recipient of the easie st Purple Heart he'd ever imagined! To set the record straight the photo <sup>PROBABLY</sup> was taken after I was wounded on 12 July 1971, and before the 135 th AHC 'stood down' finally on 14 February 1972. After the Aussies packed up and went home first week of June 1971, the now all-American "EMU's" left the Delta and moved up to Di An in 3 Corp, about ten miles North of Saigon in the just vacated 1st of the 9th Air Cav troop area.

continued..page 4..."Proud Mary"

In the Delta, when part of the 214th Combat Aviation Battalion as our guiding light, our tailboom insignia was a pentagon within a triangle (...which looked like a green outhouse inside a white ding-a-ling..), whereas when we relocated up to 3 Corps we fell under the auspices of the 11th and then 12th CAB. I presume this accounts for the two vertical bars, parallel North to South on the tailboom of number 623. Also Phu Loi was real close to DiAn, and would have been a handy POL point....the aircraft is also painted in the spiffy later dark green shade, and with the M-5 Chunker blocked off I'll give you odds it's a Michael-mod and not a Chuck, as down in darkest Delta we'd hang on all available ordnance devices to get that extra edge and bigger bang for the buck. Things got a lot quieter away from the U-Minh forest, and the 7-mountains area down South, once we were in 3 Corps, and this is reflected by the nice paint job and name(s) painted on the four doors. (..wiley crewchief can still swap out the doors to his next ship if needs be.) Prior to this time the only items painted in the 'guns' were the 19-shot Hog rocket pods ...decorated as Stars and Stripes or Budweiser beer cans, and the tail-cone, all easily detachable and remountable. I forget who was the crewchief on the day I was hit; may have been Jackson, so either he or Smitty renamed the replacement bird with my "Proud Mary" moniker as my ragged out and bloodstained ship was an XM-21 variety with twin Miniguns and 7-shot pods mounted, and no Thumper recess door in front. Whoever continued on with that aircraft nickname had to have been there that day (..must have been Smitty and his sore thumb!)..and wanted his good luck to keep on holding, even if he didn't know why it was named that. I'd got through about five "Proud Mary's" up to that point; I don't know how many followed in the remaining seven months the 135th AHC was 'In-Country'. Hopefully none.

Oh, incidentally, did I happen to mention that Mary was the name of my wife ??..mother of Justin and later Nicole ; and who started this rumour that helicopter pilots were a superstitious bunch of n e'er-do-well's, that's what I'd like to know!!

**CW3 CLIVE H. COLLINS, USA, RET.**

**Addendum:**

Y'know, the more I study that photo the more I have to agree that it does look suspiciously like 'yours-truly' skulking in the left seat taking betting-slips from the crewchief !

Several things might support that supposition while attempting to penetrate the veil of fog and shadow of the intervening twenty five years:...the much washed and sunfaded 1st Aviation Brigade patch on the upper left arm denotes an OI' timer, not an F.N.G. (..Fussy New Guy, or similar expression), and that far door seems to spell ENG for Engineer, or maybe GNR for gunner. (The common practice in the UH-1 series was to paint on only the crewchief and doorgunner/helpers' names and not the pilots, because they were always assigned to the one aircraft and flew on every mission or stayed down with it when it went into the hangar for mods. or maintenance. The Cobras, having no 3rd and 4th crewmember flying, but waiting on the ground like 'fighter' aircraft ground-crews, would paint only the pilots names on the side.)

Also, I always favored the left seat of a UH-1 series because the visibility was better and you could lower the seat all the way to the floor, stretch your legs out and still see over the panel... and in the gun versions you could flex the guns, whereas the right seat position brought them back into a front-facing stowed forward firing mode upon pressing the shooting tit. The swing down rocket sight mounted only on the right side was never used...it obscured vision, and would end up in the front of your head in a decelerating crash of the rapid variety, so a grease pencilled cross of reasonably placed accuracy on the windshield more than sufficed, with Kentucky windage, to place those bad boys where you wanted them. (..and I was an ex-fixed wing type remember.)

I had 3 call-signs while over there, and after having a bad reaction to the Ketamine anaesthetic liberally pumped into me at 3rd Field Hospital Saigon my memory of the move from Dong Tam to DiAn became fuzzy and receded into the mist except for the rather vivid day I was shot.

continued...page 5..Addendum. "Proud Mary".

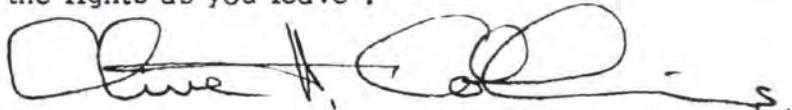
I thought my old callsign was Taipan '33', but it may have lodged in my remaining grey cells because of my propensity to suck down quantities of 'Ba-me-ba' (..Vietnamese brewed beer... Ba mi ba translating to Thirty-Three, and the commercial logo being "33"-export..) when available, or it may have been Smitty's callsign and jammed like a stuck record in the events leading up to and subsequent, of that rather trying day and the following months of recoup.

My callsign, in other words, may very well have been Taipan'31', not 33; you inherited your callsign from another pilot who no longer needed it because of geography or disposition, and guns were always a 3-prefix. "36" was always the gun platoon leader's callsign, leaving a maximum of nine other numbers available...and we were very low in available pilots having lost two departing Aussies who left for clean sheets and Foster's in Australia, both at once, and besides 'Chuck' Curry (Platoon leader), myself, and Smitty (..who came to us Opcon from Operations, where he was IP/check pilot, because we were so low in gun-pilots with experience), it's really hard to recollect who that guy in the photo could be. We only had a total of about 4 or 5 gunnies left at that period in time, and I can't remember who the other one or two were, nor what they looked like. That is not Smitty nor Chuck Curry, so in view of the other clues it may very well be me in that freshly painted bird...probably as little as a day or two before I was 'struck out', I honestly can't remember. I know it's not the aircraft I was shot-up in... that was an XM21 mini-gun and 7-pod ship because I remember the left gun jamming up during the run (fourth lot of ord nance expended that afternoon, close to Ben Luc, southwest 3-Corps) and giving the asian Leprechaun a clear shot for Uncle Ho when he popped open that spiderhole, shoved out that Degtyarev RP-46 onto it's bipod and clamped down on the trigger, allowing me at 60 knots and 3 feet above the paddy erstwhile shooting rockets between the trees into his bunker complex attempting to put a damper on their fun in their gymnasium, PX, MacDonalds and whatever else they were playing at in there, to gracefully 'run the gauntlet' of his burst from nose to tail. (That lad had read his Training Manual correctly, he was not using tracer which would have given away his position, and at first I thought the huge blow to the leg was because I'd either had a prematurely exploding rocket or I'd flown through my own shrapnel and debris.)

However, instead of collecting his reward of two pairs of wooley socks and a tin -gong it also turned into a bad-hair-day for him as he found himself the unwelcome recipient of a pair of 21-pounder folding-fin Big-Macs that ended up in the hole with him, courtesy of Chuck Curry who'd been at my 6-o'clock and seen the whole scenario.

...And so, the good fortunes of "Proud Mary" were still holding...it was just my luck presumably not to be flying her that day and she must have been shining her light on another crew or, more likely, sitting back in the hangar with her skirts up awaiting inspection and the attentions of the GoodWrench boys. Which means she didn't let me down after all..we were just both in the wrong place at the wrong time and not together where we belonged. That sounds familiar, but that's another story in a different place about another time....and so it goes.

'Goodnight Nurse, and kindly turn off the lights as you leave'.



**CW3 CLIVE H. COLLINS, USA, RET.**

...with all due apologies to the brothers John and Tom Fogerty, and their great Creedence band.

A UH-1C from the 135th Aviation (Assault Helicopter) Company. About September 1970. This photo belongs to VHCMA member Donivan Earhart. From 1970 to 1972, Donivan was at Phu Loi, and during his spare time set up a camera at the refuel point. Traditionally, the 3d platoon in an AHC contained armed helicopters and used a different radio callsign from the transport helicopters in the 1st and 2d platoons. The 135th's guns were Taipans and their slicks were Emus. The Charlie Model was an extremely popular gunship because of its power, speed, and its doorgunners. The distinctive features of the UH-1C are the cambered shaped of the tail rotor pylon and the "540" rotor head with a wider blade. Taipan 31 is armed with the XM200 launcher full of 2.75-inch rockets with 17 lb. high explosive warheads. To put this warhead in perspective, it had more destructive capability than a 105mm howitzer round! The rocket pod was big and heavy, hence the name "Hog." The helicopter once had a "thumper" (a M-5 40mm grenade launcher) mounted in the nose. The small rectangular covers on the battery compartment door mark where that weapon system was. The names on the pilot doors read AC Smith and CE Jackson. It might be possible to date this picture because the 135th lived at Bear Cat (not far from Phu Loi) until about October 1970, when they moved to Dong Tam. The 135th was unique among all Army AHCs because about one-third of its personnel were Australian. The Australians' hard-working, fun-loving attitude always was appreciated by the Americans.

	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
2	1LT Ante 118 AHC WO1 Gilder 118 AHC WO1 Mattern 118 AHC CPT Burch 191 AHC WO1 Cederlund 191 AHC CPT Oliver 60 AHC CPT Hanning 60 AHC WO1 Tittle A/227 AHB 1 CAV WO1 Hanna A/227 AVN 1 CAV WO1 Hughes B/158 AHB 101 ABN CW2 Sutton B/158 AHB 101 ABN WO1 Maness C/158 AVN 101 ABN CW3 Lange C/228 AVN 1 CAV	3 <i>see</i> 1997 CALENDAR - SEPTEMBER.	4	5
6				
9	10 "REFUELLING A 'TAIPAN' HOG." CPT Bauer 1 AVN BDE WO1 Lundberg 1 AVN BDE WO1 Pepe 1 AVN BDE WO1 Pelich 114 AHC WO1 Blohm 176 AHC	11 CW2 Makintaya 1 AVN BDE 1LT Gibson B/1 AVN 1 INF	12 WO1 Kuhns 118 AHC CW2 De Santis 129 AHC WO1 Sawran 129 AHC 1LT Dickinson A/4 AVN 4 INF CPT Lang B/228 ASHB 1 CAV WO1 Kowalski B/228 ASHB 1 CAV 1LT Hanson D/14 CAV 1 INF CPT Le May D/14 CAV 1 INF	13 " CPT Abel 68 AHC WO1 Higgins 68 AHC WO1 Andersen A/7/17 CAV WO1 Jacobs A/7/17 CAV CW2 Manzanares B/1 AVN 1 INF CPT Plunkett B/1 AVN 1 INF WO1 Fortin B/3/17 CAV
16	17 WO1 Butler 1 AVN BDE WO1 Mayer 3 BDE 9 INF 1LT Snowdon 3 BDE 9 INF WO1 Davis B/3/17 CAV WO1 Skiles B/3/17 CAV WO1 Dechene D/229 AWC 1 CAV	18 WO1 Lucci 498 MED CO	19 CPT Hartman 1 AVN BDE MAJ Bonnarens 201 AVN WO1 Vilas 335 AHC 1LT Pennington VMO-2 1LT Reed VMO-2	20 WO1 Clemmer 1 AVN BDE CPT Presson 187 AHC CPT Martin 39 ARRS WO1 Baldwin C/158 AVN 101 ABN 1LT Finn C/158 AVN 101 ABN LJG Barden NAVY LCR Cover NAVY
23	24 CPT Ebel 1 CAV WO1 Ellison 1 CAV CPT Silberberger D/2/1 CAV	25 CW3 Fishleigh 1 LOG COM WO1 Miller 117 AHC 1LT Beasley 281 AHC WO1 Jackson 71 AHC CPT Heil AIR FORCE CPT Ducat HMM-161	26 WO1 Wallace 1 CAV MAJ Dupre 114 AHC CPT Mosburg 114 AHC MAJ Grundman 25 INF WO1 Barnett A/3/17 CAV WO1 Holtom C/229 AVN 1 CAV 1LT Sullivan C/229 AVN 1 CAV WO1 Bauer C/229 AVN 1 CAV 1LT Lawson C/229 AVN 1 CAV	27 CPT Rogers 1 AVN BDE 1LT Rueppel 1 AVN BDE CW2 Morris 1 CAV CPT Jacobs 101 ABN CPT Langman 101 ABN DIV WO1 Kamehni 187 AHC CPT Kintaro 187 AHC WO1 Bradley 237 MED DET CW2 Hill 237 MED DET MAJ Pittard 38 ARRS 1LT Hurst 9 INF DIV CW3 Smith A/9 AVN 9 INF