



The VHPA Newsletter

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

July/August 2003 Vol. 21, No. 4



Lt. Ron Richtsmeier stands beside a napalm canister attached to a UH-1B gunship of the 119th Assault Helicopter Company's Crocodile Platoon at Lane Army Heliport near Qui Nhon in early 1966. Richtsmeier and Capt. Bob Wright flew the aircraft when it dropped napalm on a Viet Cong bunker complex. Story on Page 22.

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CUST ID: M07662



From the President

The Orlando Reunion marked the recognition of the VHPA's 20th year. From the "Original 66" we have grown to an active membership of more than 7,500.

Those who attended the reunion participated in the recognition of not only some of those who attended the first reunion, but also some of the 20 past presidents, who have been instrumental in our continued growth.

Writing a column like this is not as easily done as one would think. Reading the columns of my predecessors made it seem as easy as swapping a war story at the bar after a few brews. Not so.

After several misfires, I decided to revert to a checklist of sorts. I pulled out my history of *VHPA Newsletters*, looking for examples of the "first" columns by each president. As luck would have it, the first copy I had was Volume 5, No. 5. (December 1988)

Déjà vu all over again. A president had resigned because of membership polarization; the bylaws were put to the test, and passed with flying colors; and the first review by a CPA of our financial statement was published. Hard to read, the font was small, but the association was in a sound financial position.

Two other significant items caught my eye. The first was a reference to an additional 1,000 names to be added to the Membership Directory. The second, the cover.

The cover showed a picture of the VHPA Cobra, the one passed on to me by our past president, Joe Bilitzke, and an explanation of the symbolism associated with it. Very powerful.

For those who have not seen that explanation, we will make sure it is published in a future issue.

Jump to August 1993 (Volume 11, No. 4). The after-action article on the Phoenix Reunion noted the original members and the "Original 66" were recognized at the original hotel in Phoenix, site of the first reunion.

The president, Phil Marshall, in his column, urged members to find other members and noted there was lim-

ited time to do it.

The more things change, the less they change?

Orlando Reunion amazing

The Orlando Reunion was an amazing event. It could not have been near the success it was were it not for some key volunteers making it happen.

Joe Bilitzke, our national reunion chairman and president, was called to active duty and Dave Rittman, assistant reunion chairman, took over. I cannot find the words to express my appreciation for all Rittman did to fill the void. Were it not for him, the reunion would not have been nearly as successful.

The feedback from attendees, members and their families, has been extremely positive.

We have a few course corrections to make for the Dallas Reunion, and they are in process.

In Orlando, we initiated the use of an event coordinator to assist with the on-site support of the reunion. By all accounts, the process worked and we are looking to the future to see how we can use this type of service to enhance our ability to keep reunion costs down and the site selections up. It's not a difficult task when your membership is 66, but extremely challenging when you need to support more than 1,900 attendees.

The business meeting was well attended this year. Those attending voted overwhelmingly to support the update of the bylaws presented by the Executive Council. Basically they are similar to those that worked so well in the past and combine our previous corporate bylaws and constitution into one document to facilitate and clarify VHPA governance. The new bylaws are posted on the VHPA website.

The EC gained two new members: Mike Whitten, junior member at large, and Hayden "Pappy" Jones, secretary/treasurer.

To gain two, we lost two.

Dave Rittman ended this term as past president and now is able to relax a bit and enjoy the privileges of membership.

Tom Payne tendered his resignation, after three years, prior to the Orlando Reunion. Tom will continue to be our focal point for our participation in the VHPA/AAAA scholarship program.

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Classified ads

SEEKING REVOLVER: I am looking for a Smith & Wesson .38 special that most Army helicopter pilots carried in Vietnam. If anyone knows of a source please contact Mike at [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED] Also, does anyone know the actual model number and barrel length?

E-mail items to Newsletter at:
swickard@vhpa.org

THE VHPA NEWSLETTER (ISSN 0896-3037)(USPS 001-497) is published six times yearly — February, April, June, August, October and December. Annual dues are \$36 or Life membership for \$450. Yearly subscription for nonmembers is \$36. Published by the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, 5530 Birdcage St., Suite 200, Citrus Heights, CA 95610-7698. Periodicals Publications postage paid at Citrus Heights, CA, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE VHPA NEWSLETTER, 5530 Birdcage St., Suite 200, Citrus Heights, CA 95610-7698.

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Correspondence relating to commercial purposes or solicitations shall only be sent to those officers, committee chairmen, and staff listed above.

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Letters

'Bus Eight' article reminder of reunion

I was pleased to see a copy of my little story about Bus Eight printed in the special reunion edition. Not because it's so well written, ahem, but because it reminded me of that day and that whole reunion.

I was the blacksheep of the group when I joined up in 1986, an infamous celebrity. It was a very conflicted time in my life. *Chickenhawk* was a best-seller and I had recently become an ex-con. So, when I was invited to speak at the '88 reunion, it raised eyebrows. I was even warned that a small group of members was threatening to walk out of my talk in protest.

So, the day before the event, we all got on a bunch of buses and drove out to Mineral Wells. Patience and I had a great time with my cockpit partner for most of my tour, Jerry Towler, and his wife Martie, with whom we were acting like kids on a field trip.

At Wolters, we ate, drank beer, wandered around the old barracks, saw the WOC Rock and got harassed by former TAC officers.

When we sat down to watch a presentation by the Mineral Wells Chamber of Commerce on the merits of opening up a little industry at the former Camp Wolters, film and slides, the guy sitting in front of me turned out to be Woody Woodruff, my old comrade in arms from the Preachers who I hadn't seen since my tour.

Amazing feelings, these reunions. So, on the way back,

and after having had consumed 200 cases of Coors, the field trip turned . . . jovial, maybe even rowdy?

It all started when one of the buses passed us on a downhill run on the way back to Fort Worth. It was as though a gauntlet had been flung in our faces! We, the collective drivers, the motivators, the very being of, Bus Eight, were highly pissed. The driver was chastised, to his utter astonishment, that he'd let goddamn Bus Six pass us??!

Then Bus Eight reached into their pockets, collected some cash, told the driver the wad was his if he got back to the hotel first. So the driver gets religion, he joins the team.

And, well, you can read about it in the article.

**The next morning
I'm in bed with a major headache and I realize I'm supposed to talk at the luncheon meeting. There's going to be hundreds of people, and, oh yeah, the guys who're going to get up and walk out. So, what should I talk about?**

The next morning I'm in bed with a major headache and I realize I'm supposed to talk at the luncheon meeting. There's going to be hundreds of people, and, oh yeah, the guys who're going to get up and walk out. So, what should I talk about?

I grabbed a note pad at 10 a.m. and began

scribbling a story about the great bus race. At 11:30 a.m., we're in the huge ballroom, tables filling with members and their wives. Patience and I sit up front with Jerry and Martie.

I'm looking around. Who's going to walk out on me? I'm introduced. I'm at the podium. I'm looking out at hundreds of people, waiting for the interruption . . . but, nothing, yet. So I went ahead and told them the story that later was published in the newsletter, without crediting the

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addresses for names with SSANs.

That is just the start. When you look in the Directory, it is your turn. Find someone with whom you once flew, "adopt" him, and make sure we have current information. Keep our database current!

The first 20 years showed how to do it right. The challenge will be to continue what the original members started and make it work as well for the next 20 years.

My goal is to make sure we continue to adhere to the basics that make us what we are: The VHPA.

We are a limited population. No new members. We provide the opportunity to meet and renew once a year at an annual reunion.

We communicate with six newsletters and a Membership Directory each year.

The only way this works is with your participation. Let us, the EC, know what is going well; let us know what needs improvement.

Like the helicopter in RVN, we are here to support . . .

— Dana M. Young, President

From the President

Continued from Page 2

We move into the 21st year with a stronger membership, a larger budget, and a strong financial position that will ensure our ability to support life members, even those who 10 years ago paid only \$300 and are receiving the same benefit as those who pay \$36 per year.

Our thanks to the investment committee for making that happen. We have yielded 5 percent on our investments during the past three years, when others have lost.

We also move into the 21st year with a continuing need to find all those eligible to join. The latest Membership Directory will have added more than 12,000 names.

Most will have current contact information, thanks to Gary Roush, his database, an individual who can find SSANs for names that had none, and a firm that can find

Letters

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author, and my laugh-o-meter told me everybody had a good time.

Somebody taped the talk, if you don't believe me (which, by the way, I've never seen, and wonder if somebody is willing to furnish me a copy?)

And, happily, no one walked out. I've seldom felt as good about people not doing anything than at that moment. And, as I said then, thank you very much.

So, to set the record straight about this uncredited story published 15 years ago in *The VHPA Newsletter*, I hereby claim "The Race" as my own. Somebody has to.

Robert Mason

Orlando reunion a first-class event

Tuesday, July 1, began five days of fun, tears of joy, tears of laughter at least twice, and tears of victory in Orlando as I met aviators I had flown with in Vietnam 34 years earlier.

The Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association knows how to put on a first-class event.

The selection of entertainment and entertainers was excellent, the timing and sequence of events was excellent. You could not help but have a good time. Every event was well-coordinated and well-timed, and the selection of the activities was excellent.

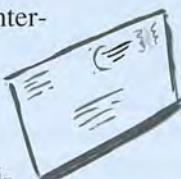
My days started at 5:30 a.m. and I went until I crashed every night at about 11 p.m., but every moment was worth it.

The entertainment for Wednesday night, called Arabian nights, had some absolutely stunning acts. One that stands out above the others was the Indian princess riding on a Pinto with hand-painted Day-Glo colored designs.

The rider was superb, whoever she was, and when they flooded the floor with carbon dioxide under black lamp lighting, it created the illusion that she was riding on the clouds. With her hands stretched all the way out to her sides, she alternatively rode and raced that horse all around the arena.

At one point she had the horse at full gallop, leaned back in the saddle, and the horse slid to a stop. It was amazing horsemanship. The music that went with that vignette was stunning. The entire show was tailored to the VHPA and at the grand finale a rider with a VHPA flag raced around the arena to the tune of "Proud to be an American."

It was rousing patriotism and people stood without cue



Original VHPA member honored with plaque

Yesterday I received a package in the mail with a return address of Hunter & Associates, with Mike Sheuerman's name on it, also. I had no idea what was in the package.

Was I surprised when I opened it. There was a beautiful plaque from the VHPA — with my name on it — honoring me as one of the "Original 66." I really felt honored.

I am sure these plaques were passed out at this year's reunion to the Original 66 in attendance. However, I was unable to attend.

I already have hung it on my history wall, along with my other Army and Vietnam stuff. I want to thank Mike Sheuerman and the VHPA for this beautiful plaque.

Chuck Topalian
Class 67-15

out of sheer patriotic respect. An awesome spectacle!

Our Fourth of July fireworks were the best I have ever seen. The monsoon rains and thunderstorms gave way to a pleasant evening and gentle breeze. We were treated to a Warrant Officer Chorus singing patriotic songs, and a very good live band playing largely patriotic music choreographed with a display of laser lights and a full 20-minute fireworks display.

The clouds parted, the moon peeked in and out of the clouds, I had my feet in the pool enjoying a slight breeze, and watched all this light and magic surround me. It was dazzling.

On Saturday, I was one of 16 pilots selected for an interview with representatives from the Library of Congress. I highlighted my tour and showed them a copy of "Angel's Wing" and tried to express the importance of our teamwork and the importance of each member of the air crews, especially the crew chief who kept us all alive.

I met several "Little Bears" from the 25th Aviation Battalion in Vietnam and many of the folks I flew with in Vietnam in 1969; signed books for 60 people, let a number of people read Kathy Solomonsen's poem, showed off Larry Carter's map of our area of operation, and had a great time interacting with VHPA members and a few tourists who happened to be in our hotel.

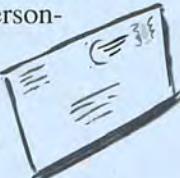
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The final banquet on Saturday night was very good and it was especially memorable for Kenny, who got the same treatment this year that I received in 2002.

Susan McDonald was our principal entertainer. She is beautiful, talented, vivacious, and very personable. She pulled Kenny out of the crowd, took his coat off, loosened his tie, cuddled up to him, and began singing "You Are The Wind Beneath My Wings." That was awesome.



This little note does not cover all the details of five superb days in Orlando, but gives a hint at the level of activity and the spread of events at a first-class hotel and first-class reunion sponsored by the VHPA. It is a highlight of my year.

Joe Finch

Reunion has new twist in Orlando

I have enjoyed attending 15 VHPA reunions over the years.

It has always been a pleasure to see old classmates and people from my unit. Some of these friendships have grown to family affairs where weddings are attended, holiday meals are shared and frequent phone calls are enjoyed. True lifelong friends are brought together.

This past reunion has brought a new twist. Frequently we read in the *Newsletter* about old stick buddies finding each other and old friends finding friends. These reunions are priceless.

During the reunion, my wife Madeline took a phone message at the hotel from a lady from the Library of Congress who wanted to meet with me. Well, I had

seen the poster in the registration area that they were conducting interviews, but I wondered how and why she singled me out. Oh, what have I done now?

Nevertheless, the following day I contacted Sandi Shaw, introduced myself and asked how I could help her? It turns out that she is my stepsister, whom I never knew existed.

I had recently contacted my father after many, many years of not speaking. Figuring that several decades is long enough to let bygones be bygones. I was pleasantly surprised to get a warm reception and we chatted for about an hour.

First VHPA reunion a wonderful event

As "blue dots" — first-time reunion participants — my wife and I would like to express our thanks and gratitude for a wonderful experience in Orlando during the 20th VHPA Reunion.

We especially enjoyed the July 4th fireworks. How you achieved such a fabulous display was amazing.

We will also always cherish the emotional and moving tribute to our fallen comrades, and remember the terrific entertainment by Susan McDonald at the final banquet.

Meeting many new colleagues and our discussions about flight school and life after Vietnam, i.e., family, careers, etc., was a real treat. I was personally impressed that talk about the Vietnam experience wasn't a main topic, since we've all been there and done that!

Anyway, we are hooked and look forward to being in Dallas next year and to many more future VHPA reunions. Thanks again for providing a very memorable 2003 reunion.

Tom Wood

Class 67-13

B Company, 101st Aviation Battalion

Black Angel 22

P.S. I have signed up a brand new member and had a "delinquent" member renew his membership. Both will be attending the Dallas reunion!

I had recently contacted my father after many, many years of not speaking. Figuring that several decades is long enough to let bygones be bygones. I was pleasantly surprised to get a warm reception and we chatted for about an hour.

I mentioned to him that I had flown helicopters in Vietnam and was soon going to Orlando to attend the annual reunion of the VHPA. I didn't give it much thought, as we had other things to talk about. He never mentioned a word of Sandi's existence.

Little did I know that Sandi Shaw's mother is married to my father. Sandi had been passing through Georgia on her way to the reunion, visited shortly with her mom and my dad, and my dad mentioned to her that I probably would be there and she should try and look me up.

I was shocked, to say the least. What a pleasant surprise to find a long-lost relative who I didn't know I had.

Those of you who were interviewed by Sandi can agree she is truly a lovely girl. I am so grateful that I met her and intend to carry on the relationship forever.

Let's hear it for VHPA reunions. Can you imagine all of the stories she heard at the reunion?

Lee T. Strickland

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Letters

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Some of claims about PTSD preposterous

The November/December 2002 *Newsletter* contained my letter critical of Dave Ambrose's claims that "All combat veterans have some of the (PTSD) symptoms" and "75 percent or more" of VHPA members have PTSD.

The January/February *Newsletter* contained a response from George Williams. But, if you strip Mr. Williams' letter of the hysteria, personal attacks, and misleading

statements, there really isn't much left to it. I will skip over the hysteria (e.g., the VA wants veterans to go away and die, almost every Vietnam pilot has been married more than once) and the personal attacks (e.g., I should pull my head out, I prefer ignorance over knowledge) and just focus on the misleading statements.

Mr. Williams maintains that Mr. Ambrose was refer-

PTSD Question

ring only to "every VHPA member I know." Mr. Ambrose does make that statement, so I'm glad I am not counted as one of his acquaintances; however, he also makes the preposterous claims cited in the paragraph above.

Mr. Williams cites PTSD incidence figures from a survey conducted by the National Center for PTSD (NCPTSD), an organization that owes its very existence to its ability to find PTSD in the population. I went online to learn more about the NCPTSD study. Researchers interviewed 3,016 Vietnam veterans, Vietnam-era veterans, and non-veterans.

So the study began with perhaps 1,000 Vietnam veterans, did a statistical analysis, and concluded that 30.9 percent of men serving in country exhibited the symptoms of PTSD at one time or another.

However, an incidence rate of 30.9 percent was not high enough to satisfy the professional PTSD hunters from the NCPTSD. So they invented a new term — partial PTSD — and concluded that an additional 22.5 percent of the veterans had suffered from "partial PTSD," for a total incidence rate of 53.4 percent.

Partial PTSD covers "significant stress reactions that are insufficient to qualify as PTSD." In other words, the NCPTSD created a new category of PTSD, one which is not officially recognized by the mental health profession,

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We know of one investment that always does well.

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Letters

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so that it could jack up the reported incidence rate.

But even the NCPTSD is forced to admit that the rate of male Vietnam veterans currently suffering from PTSD is only 15.2 percent.

If one is willing to accept the incidence rates from this PTSD study, it still does not support Mr. Ambrose and Mr. Williams because the study is about Vietnam veterans, not about Vietnam helicopter pilots. I completely agree with Dave Eastman's statement in the January/February 2003 newsletter that "flyboys and grunts . . . are not the same." I would expect the grunts to suffer from a higher rate of PTSD.

Nor does the survey establish a causal relationship between Vietnam and PTSD. Here's an example. As a child, I was sexually abused by the local priest. Later in life I served a tour in Vietnam. A year after returning home I was driving the family car and got into a crash that killed my wife and three children. A year later, I completed this PTSD survey, which concluded that I exhibit symptoms of PTSD.

But what was the cause of the PTSD symptoms? The sexual abuse? The year in country? The crash? A combination of the three? PTSD is a response to a profoundly disturbing event or a biological problem. How many of the men in the study sample experienced childhood trauma, dysfunctional families, developmental problems, accidents, biological factors, etc., which would have resulted in PTSD even without the Vietnam experience?

And let's look at the results when the survey asks a question that is completely objective and factual, a simple yes-no question. The survey reports that 40 percent of male Vietnam vets have been divorced. Since the national

divorce rate is close to 50 percent, can we conclude that serving in Vietnam has improved our chances of avoiding divorce?

In 1980, the Disabled American Veterans published *Forgotten Warriors: America's Vietnam Era Veterans*. The DAV estimated the incidence of PTSD among Vietnam veterans to be 18 percent! This is close to the NCPTSD current estimate of 15.2 percent.

But it is far lower than the incidence rates put forth by the NCPTSD, Mr. Ambrose, and Mr. Williams.

 There's an old saying that goes something like this: If you are carrying a hammer, everything tends to look like a nail. Mr. Williams is "100 percent service-connected for PTSD." And the NCPTSD exists for no other reason than to find PTSD. Therefore, it is not surprising that they both would see PTSD everywhere they looked.

No one I know is denying the existence of PTSD. (Veterans of previous wars knew it as shell shock or battle fatigue.) But let's get over this ridiculous idea that anywhere from 30 percent-100 percent of Vietnam helicopter pilots suffer from it.

Rick Curtin

PTSD Question

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native to taking responsibility for your actions and controlling your own life.

What I find more amazing than this topic even appearing in our *Newsletter* is that VHPA members would question why so few helicopter pilots suffer from this imaginary malady.

We all went through the same screening process to earn the wings we so proudly wear. Whether the journey began at a service academy, OCS or Warrant Officer Candidate School and ended up in the cockpit of a helicopter, we were all subjected to extreme mental and physical stress during that journey.

If you couldn't take it, you didn't make it. Small wonder, then, that the vast majority of us made it through the trauma of combat and pressed on with our lives without want or need of a psychological crutch.

Do not ever doubt that we were specially selected for the job we were given. The military, for all of its shortcomings, managed a system of mental and physical screens designed to ensure that those who succeeded would not only survive, but, excel in a combat environment. It also ensured that we would survive and excel in the wake of that experience.

So let's leave discussion and analysis of PTSD to other veteran-oriented publications and clear space in our newsletter for the most important of all topics . . . War Stories. If it doesn't begin with "Now this is no . . ." it is not worthy of print!

Dennis Hogan
Centaur 28

Psychological diagnoses come in and out of favor

I have read with interest the ongoing discussion of the oft-misdiagnosed PTSD from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

I returned from my tour to my mother's apartment in downtown San Francisco and, needless to say, was not treated well. This was also evident in other less liberal geographical areas.

Then the media and Hollywood started their barrage of propaganda denoting Vietnam vets as mostly all experiencing the mental disorder PTSD.

Sure, there are veterans from all wars who are appropriately diagnosed with PTSD. But the treatment received

upon their return to "civilized society" has been a greater detriment to mental health to the Vietnam veterans than the situations experienced over there.

Having been a school psychologist for over 27 years, I have found that certain psychological diagnoses come in and out of favor over the years. PTSD is one example, as is Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, and Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder.

Anybody can flip through the pages of the DSM and identify with characteristics of any cited disorder. It is only pertinent when it becomes so overwhelming that it interferes with success in one's daily life.

I believe that many Vietnam veterans who have present problems would have had those same problems regardless of their Vietnam experiences. Drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and divorce rate are not confined predominantly to Vietnam veterans, but are commonplace in our society today. These problems started to increase before the Vietnam era.

The "politically correct police" love to group people into stereotypical categories and then blame something wrong with the American society for the problem.

After my tour, I served and flew with the National Guard for 25 years, with many of those years with very successful Vietnam veterans. I married my blind date from flight school at Mother Rucker and am still married, with two wonderful, grown, industrious children.

Alan McCulloch
Black Widow 25

Pilot's daughter seeking information about cancer

Hello. My name is Heather Bartol. I am the proud daughter of a Vietnam veteran helicopter pilot (1st of the 9th) and VA employee.

On April 26, 2003, my dad was diagnosed with glioblastoma (malignant brain cancer). He has since undergone three surgeries and will be starting chemotherapy and radiation treatments.

Given the fact Agent Orange and petroleum fuels are known carcinogens, his neuro-oncologist believes his current condition may be linked to his military career and exposures. Glioblastoma, however, is not on the list of presumptive conditions the VA already has recognized as being a result of Agent Orange exposure.

The VA, Institute of Medicine and Academy of Sciences currently are studying this condition to determine if it is linked to Agent Orange.

Does anyone know of any other Vietnam veterans who have been diagnosed with this condition? Please have them contact me directly.

Heather Bartol

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Letters

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Museum invites president to fund-raiser in Texas

I am working with the Vietnam Museum volunteers, trying to get seed money to build the museum in Mineral Wells.

I have invited President Bush to speak at a fund-raiser for the museum in the Dallas-Fort Worth area this Veterans Day, in November 2003.

Please put this in the next newsletter so if any of our members has any ideas how to get Mr. Bush to accept, help us.

Any members having ideas, please e-mail me or the nationalvnwarmuseum.org

We have a small chance to see this museum happen if each of us gives a little thought the challenge.

Frank Gilbert
Maddog 39
Lancer 7

First WOC class graduated from Camp Rucker in 1955

On April 30, 1955, my flight class, ACHPC 55-Fox, Camp Rucker's first WOC class, graduated.

Arriving in September 1954, Class 55-Fox participated in the reopening of Camp Rucker, which had been inactive for several months, and started flying in October 1954.

Our classmates who are no longer with us: Don Lusk, Jack Snipes, Don Beachnaw, Raymond Smith, Henry "Hank" Beau, John "Jack" Williams, Joseph Truitt, Robert Buechter, Eugene "Gene" Price, Leonard Brown, Mike Madden, "Stan" Beedy and Joe Griffin.

Beau, while flying a CH-21C, was the first Army aviator wounded in Vietnam.

Price, a former H-19 line chief, was the first WOC to "solo" at Knox Field, the first "stagefield" at the newly reopened Camp Rucker, in mid-November 1954. Years later, he set several world altitude records in a CH-54A, above 25,000 feet!

Williams and I "soloed" on the same day, Nov. 30, 1954, and we were photographed and written up by the Dothan Eagle. Must have been a slow newsday!

Now a retired airline pilot, "Chuck" Hall in April 2000 flew his P-51 "Six-Shooter" to Kissimmee, FL, to attend the Mustang Gathering, and had a mini-reunion with several classmates.

Madden was selected as the "Army Aviator of the Year" in 1960.

Griffin was awarded the DFC as a pilot in the first flight of two HU-1Bs to the South Pole — 1963.

William Ruf, Bobby Bruce and Carl Burhanen spent several tours as VH-3 pilots in the Presidential Executive Flight Detachment.

I was honored to be inducted into the Army Aviation Hall of Fame at Fort Rucker, in 1986.

Looking back, with pride and memories . . .

- The enlisted men who were selected for WOC classes had to be NCOs: Sergeant, sergeant first class or master sergeant, E-5, E-6 or E-7. EM with special qualifications also attended, i.e., Pvt. "Chuck" Hall, who was an airline pilot when drafted.

- ACHPC (Army Cargo Helicopter Pilot Course)

- MSC (Medical Service Corps): The only Branch, prior to Vietnam, that sent its commissioned officers to rotary wing training only. When warrant officer helicopter pilots began fixed-wing training in 1959-60, MSC Officers were part of our "Gold Hat" classes once again.

- WOJG (warrant officer, junior grade): One of the only two warrant officer ranks at the time.

- CWO (chief warrant officer) the higher rank for warrant officers at that time.

Camp Rucker's first WOC Class, ACHPC 55-Fox, graduated and were awarded the silver wings of an Army aviator and the EM pinned on the WOJG insignia.

Class Roster of EM, Warrant Officers and MSC Officers of ACHPC 55-Fox:

Capt. Glen W. Jones — class leader
1st Lt. Donald F. Lusk
1st Lt. Willie M. Dixson
1st Lt. Curtis O. Greer
1st Lt. Jack C. Snipes
2nd Lt. Raymond E. Smith
CWO William L. Ruf
WOJG Jack M. Hendrickson
Master Sgt. Donald C. Beachnaw
Master Sgt. Henry R. Beau
Master Sgt. Carl Burhanen
Master Sgt. John F. Williams
Master Sgt. Joseph M. Truitt
Master Sgt. Robert W. Buechter
Master Sgt. Meckie I. Keys
Sgt. 1st Class Rex C. Flohr
Sgt. 1st Class Raymond T. Kline
Sgt. 1st Class Eugene E. Price
Sgt. 1st Class Louis L. Share
Sgt. 1st Class Jay L. Dugger
Sgt. 1st Class Leonard T. Brown
Sgt. 1st Class Donald R. Joyce
Sgt. Stanton L. Beedy
Sgt. Bobby G. Bruce
Sgt. Michael J. Madden
Sgt. Joe Griffin
Pvt. Charles R. Hall

Class 55-Fox had its first reunion at Cheap Charlie's Restaurant in Saigon in September 1962. Classmates came from several bases in Vietnam and Thailand.

Many of the surviving members of 55-Fox meet yearly in June at Fort Rucker, during the annual W4 Reunion.

Don Joyce

Taps

Michael A. Baker

Michael A. Baker of Colorado Springs, CO, died along with his wife Kathy; a business partner, Rick Mohnsen; and two friends, Richard V. and Catherine Lohman, while en route to Anchorage, AK, from Colorado Springs on July 3.

Baker was piloting a Cessna 421C which went down 2.5 miles northwest of the Sitka, AK, airport in poor weather. The cause of the crash is under investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board.

Baker was a member of flight school Class 67-3. He served in Vietnam in 1967-68 with the 247th Medical Detachment.

All the people on board were business partners and personal friends of mine. They were all wonderful people and will be greatly missed by me and all who knew them.

— David J. Livingston

Robert Howard Cowen

Robert Howard Cowen, 57, died Jan. 9 at the family home in Pacific Grove, CA.

He was born on April 10, 1945, in Monterey, CA, and was a lifetime resident of Pacific Grove, except for the years he lived in Big Sur and his four years in the military.

Bob and I went to school from kindergarten through eighth grade. We were competitors and would raise the bar for each other. He'd push, I'd push back. I would do something well, Bob would do it better.

My family left the Monterey Peninsula in 1959 and I lost track of Bob.

He graduated from Pacific Grove High School in 1963, and joined the Army in 1964.

He completed his basic training at Fort Ord and the Warrant Officer Rotary Wing Aviator Course with Class 65-1W at Fort Rucker. He completed his flight training in the top 10 of his class, just two days before his 20th birthday.

After the official graduation ceremony on April 13, he took the routine leave time and then was sent to Southeast Asia.

Bob served in Vietnam and received the Army Aviation Badge, the Purple Heart and the Air Medal with 5 Oak Leaf Clusters. He also received a special award of the Air Medal with V Device on Oct. 23, 1965.

He obtained the rank of CW2.

Bob returned from Vietnam and worked as an instructor pilot at Fort Wolters for two years until his discharge in 1968.

He then worked for Southern Airways of Texas as a contracted flight instructor to teach primary flight training Fort Wolters for two years.

He also was a member of the Texas National Guard.

He later worked as an instructor pilot for Doss Aviation at Fort Rucker, teaching primary flight training.

He also worked for Columbia Helicopter Inc. in support of logging operations in Northern California and transported surveyors for the James Bay Hydroelectric

Project out of Quebec, Ontario, Canada, as a Helicopter Pilot for Trans Quebec Helicopters Ltd.

Bob and his brothers worked together in their business, Tub Technics, in Pacific Grove for about seven years.

Bob was a past member of the Civil Air Patrol, Boy Scout Troop 115, Monterey Peninsula Order of DeMolay, Pacific Grove Kiwanis Club and was a past director of the Pacific Grove High School Alumni Association.

The next time I ran into Bob was when we had high school class reunions in 1988 and 1993.

It was very good to see Bob again, to shoot the BS, compare notes and life.

It was interesting how our lives had continued to parallel each other: the Army and helicopter flight school, Fort Wolters and Fort Rucker.

We probably passed each other at Wolters in 1968, without realizing we both were there at the same time.

I tried to get Bob to come to the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association reunion in Santa Clara, CA, in July 1996. It didn't work out for him at the time, and that was the last time I was in touch with him.

Bob had just recently been diagnosed for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and given 100% disability from the VA, and was finally able to make great plans for his future. But his health had considerably deteriorated by the time this was determined.

His death certificate listed "Diabetes Mellitus" as a "contributing cause of death". The VA representative noted it could be caused by Agent Orange, for which Bob was continuously being tested. This diabetes showed up just a few months before his death.

Bob is survived by his parents, Howard and Wynette Cowen of Pacific Grove; two sisters, Barbara Seubert of Windsor and Kathy Ireland of Lakewood, CO.; and three brothers, Ron Cowen of Seaside, Gary Cowen of Prunedale and Ken Cowen of Big Sur.

Life is uncertain and can be far, far too short.

— Jim Carroll Jones
ORWAC 68-36

Gary Freeman

Gary Freeman, 55, died May 22 when his UH-1H Bell helicopter crashed and burned during the Navy's ord

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nance cleanup of an island once used by the military for bombing practice.

Freeman was a Vietnam War veteran.

He had been flying for Pacific Helicopter Tours Inc., a Navy subcontractor working on the cleanup, for four years and worked the entire time on the Kaho'olawe project, the Honolulu Advertiser reported.

Freeman had flown helicopters for more than 35 years and had more than 10,000 flight hours.

FAA investigators who were immediately sent to the scene determined the accident was caused when a long-line cable struck the tail rotor.

The crash occurred near Ahupu Bay at 11:50 a.m., shortly after the pilot dropped off a load.

Witnesses said the helicopter fell from 2,000 feet, landing upside down and bursting into flame as soon as it hit the ground.

Michel Louis Frye

Michel Louis Frye, 56, of Temple, TX, died Aug. 14 in an offshore PHI Petroleum Helicopters crash 70 miles south of Morgan City, LA, in rainy weather in the Gulf of Mexico.

He was a senior pilot for PHI.

One passenger was killed and two others injured.

Frye was a graduate of flight school Class 67-17. He served in Vietnam with the 117th Assault Helicopter Company in 1967-68.

Frye retired as a major in 1985 after 20 years in the Army.

He is survived by two daughters, both of Temple.

Billy J. Hampton

Billy J. Hampton of Mesquite, Texas, died May 19. He graduated in flight school Class 63-3.

Billy flew two tours in Vietnam, one with the 121st Aviation Company and second with the 205th ASA Company.

He leaves a wife, Lois of Mesquite; two children; and two grandchildren.

May he rest in peace.

— Gerald R. Meador
WORWAC 63-3WT

James "Jimmy" Allen Hardt

James "Jimmy" Allen Hardt and his wife Anita died June 15 at their home in Enterprise, AL.

Anita had been very ill and it was reported that when Jimmy found her dead, he suffered a heart attack.

They had been married almost 40 years.

Hardt was in the last F Troop OCS Class at Fort Knox, KY, where he was commissioned a second lieu-

tenant in September 1967.

He graduated from flight school with Class 70-14. Upon graduation, he was sent to Vietnam, where he was shot down and badly injured.

After extensive rehabilitation at VA hospitals, Hardt and his wife settled in Enterprise, where he had purchased a home prior to deployment to Vietnam.

They had no children.

Thomas J. Janis

Thomas J. Janis, 56, of Montgomery, AL, was executed after his U.S. government airplane crashed on Feb. 13 near Florencia, Colombia, during an intelligence mission over rebel territory.

The Associated Press reported three other Americans were seized by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as FARC. Janis and a Colombian sergeant were killed at the crash site, Colombia's army chief said.

Janis had a bullet hole in the back of his head, the AP reported.

The Congressional Record said Janis was piloting a Cessna Caravan on a counter-narcotics mission over Southern Colombia when his aircraft experienced engine failure.

Though Janis was able to land the aircraft without loss of life, the crash site was in the center of a zone controlled by the FARC narco-terrorists.

"While seeking to reach a safe area, Tom and a Colombian colleague were deliberately killed by the FARC," the Congressional Record said.

Janis was born on Nov. 23, 1946, in Chicago.

His military career began in 1966 when he entered the Army and served as a military policeman. While serving in Korea, he became interested in Army aviation and, in 1969, he graduated from flight school as a warrant officer.

His tours of duty included service in South Vietnam, Panama and Germany.

Janis logged more than 12,000 flight hours and had several assignments as an instructor pilot.

After 32 years of active duty, Janis retired as a CW5. His awards included the Bronze Star Medal, four Meritorious Service Medals and an Air Medal with V Device.

After leaving the Army, he flew drug interdiction and counter-terrorism missions in South America.

John Robert Keily

John Robert Keily died May 31 on the 18th hole of a golf course in Martha's Vineyard. He was 56.

Keily graduated with flight school Class 71-26, and served in Vietnam with the 1st Signal Battalion and in the Gulf War with the 1109th AVCRAD.

After Vietnam, Keily was stationed in Germany, where he met his wife, Barbara. When he left the military,

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he stayed in Germany for six years as a teacher.

Back in the States, he joined the Connecticut National Guard, continuing to fly helicopters and rose to the rank of major.

I served with Keily in B Company, 126th Aviation for most of his time in the Guard. His civilian job was as a construction estimator.

Keily was an Eagle Scout and served as an assistant scoutmaster.

Following in his father's footsteps, he was an avid golfer and birdwatcher.

The most important part of life, the thing that gave him the most joy, was his family.

Besides his wife, he leaves his daughter Lynn Anne, and son Karl, as well as two brothers and three sisters.

There was a large turnout of Vietnam veterans and Guard at the wake. We went over to a pub call Finnegan's afterwards to share stories and toast John, a good Irish wake it was.

John was buried on June 5, with full military honors. I had the honor of presenting the flag to his wife Barbara.

Goodbye, John, we know you are doing the recon for those who will follow. Don't look for us to soon though, because as you always reminded us: "Life is good."



— Tom Bothur
Cowboy 23
Class 69-21

Jim Merryman

Gen. Jim Merryman died June 24 at Walter Reed Army Hospital after a lengthy bout with cancer.

Merryman, who lived in Springfield, VA, had re-entered Walter Reed in mid-April shortly after the 2003 Army Aviation Association of America convention in Fort Worth and remained in the hospital until his death.

He is survived by his wife, Jane; his only son, Jim; and a brother Bob, who resides in Arkansas.

Paul L. Messa

Paul L. Messa passed away in his sleep from heart failure on Feb. 12.

Messa graduated from flight school with Class 64-2W.

He then spent 1964 with the 121st Assault Helicopter Company in Soc Trang. He then was a UH-1B helicopter gunnery instructor at Fort Rucker from 1965-67.

After his Army career, Messa spent 25 years flying helicopters for a major oil company in the Gulf of Mexi-

co. He had been retired for 10 years.

He is survived by his son, Wade, and two daughters, Jerri and Evette.

— David T. Messa
Paul's brother and a VHPA member

Lawrence Andrew Olson

Lawrence Andrew Olson, 58, of Olympia, WA, died July 27 when his single-engine plane crashed in Aberdeen, SD.

The plane he was flying had just taken off when it crashed into a parking lot at the Aberdeen airport, destroying an several vehicles on the ground, The Associated Press reported.

Olson was the only one on board the plane when it crashed, officials said.

The plane had just refueled in Aberdeen on its way to Oshkosh, WI.

Olson was in flight school Classes 68-519 and 68-35. He served in the 1st Cavalry Division in Vietnam in 1969-70.

John Popovich Sr.

Retired CW4 John Popovich Sr. died March 12 of non-Hodgkins lymphoma. He was 68.

Popovich retired from the Army in 1978.

He is survived by his wife of 48 years, Phyllis Popovich, and a son, retired CW4 John Popovich Jr. and his wife Ginga of Enterprise, AL; and three grandsons, Sam and Ben of Enterprise and Josh Popovich of Keesler Air Force Base, MS.

Phillip Layne Rutledge

Phillip Layne Rutledge of Bakersfield, CA, was killed June 13 in the crash of his agriculture helicopter near Bakersfield.

He was a member of Class 71-74 and served with C/158, 101st Airborne Division, in 1971-72.

He was the owner of Rutledge Ag Air.

Michael V. Stratton

Retired Lt. Col. Michael V. Stratton died in an accident on July 9.

Stratton was a 1968 Infantry Officer Candidate School graduate, Ranger, Army aviator/test pilot who served from 1967 until 1988.

He graduated with flight school Class 69-18.

Stratton was a Vietnam veteran who served for 2.5 years as a helicopter pilot with the 187th Assault Helicopter Company in 1969-70 and C/2/17 Cavalry, 101st Airborne in 1970-71, and as an infantry company commander.

Upon his retirement from the Army, he worked as an aeronautical engineer for L-3 Communications. His most recent project was the F-18 flight simulator.

He is survived by his wife of 24 years, Elizabeth, and their three children, Michelle, Sarah and Victor.

Annual Business Meeting

Income up, spending down

Orlando, FL

July 3, 2003

Call to Order

President Joe Bilitzke called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.

Opening

Secretary/Treasurer Tom Payne gave the Invocation prayer and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Introductions and State of the VHPA

Bilitzke announced the Annual Business Meeting was an open meeting. However, anyone not a current dues-paid member and thus, in good standing, were asked to leave the room. Bilitzke also announced the meeting was being recorded.

Procedures for conducting the meeting were explained and Bilitzke announced the agenda was available at the back of the room. Other housekeeping items were covered.

Bilitzke introduced the members and guest sitting on the dais at the front. Special recognition was given to Dave Rittman for his work on the Orlando reunion.

The resignation of Payne as secretary/treasurer was announced. Hayden "Pappy" Jones will take his place.

Bilitzke reminded everyone of his three promises at the last Annual Business Meeting in Las Vegas: "Open Communications," "Do What's Right" and "Have Fun." He felt that probably two of the three were accomplished. He outlined the initiation of the "Commo Corner," where members could email questions to the Executive Council and receive answers.

Next, he said EC members had put their heart and soul into carrying out the objectives of the VHPA and did it by doing what's right and honorably as volunteers. Finally, he said the past year had NOT been fun. The number of telephone conferences that took place during the year numbered more than 25.

Approval of Las Vegas Reunion 2002 minutes

Payne reported the minutes of last year's Annual Business Meeting had been posted on the VHPA website at www.vhpa.org and were published in *The VHPA Newsletter*.

He asked if there were any additions or corrections to those minutes. Hearing none, he requested a motion to approve. A motion was made by numerous members, and seconded. It was approved unanimously.

Bilitzke had all new members and first time attendees at the reunion stand up to be recognized. They received applause from members attending the meeting. (NOTE: it appeared there were about 100 new member attending).

Auditor's report

Bilitzke introduced Dave Ljung, CPA, from Gilbert Accountancy in Sacramento, CA, to give the Auditor's Report.

The annual audit was conducted at FritzCo and lasted about three days. Cash and investments were inspected, receipts, dues, cancelled checks and invoices were all examined during the audit.

Ljung went through the audit, pointing out many of the significant increases in income, dues, new members and life members. Disbursements were covered, showing significant increases in expenses due to increased numbers at the last reunion. Only the highlights were covered in the report.

(NOTE: the annual audit also is available on the VHPA website.)

The amount of funds in cash and investments is now in the area of \$789,000. He touched on the fact VHPA funds are very conservatively invested in certificates of deposit, high-quality corporate bonds, government securities and some mutual funds.

He finished the report by pointing out the VHPA recognizes and has designated more than \$723,000 to provide benefits and services to Life Members.

Ljung asked for questions; there were none.

Financial report

Bilitzke introduced Payne, who went over the annual financial statement of Dec. 21, 2002, as prepared by FritzCo, our contractor in Sacramento, CA.

Payne showed an overhead projection of the 2 to 3-hour-long, 25 conference calls the EC participated in, primarily due to litigation, over the past year.

He also went through the report comparing the year 2001 with 2002. The sharp increase in renewals was the main reason for an increase in income. Other increases noted were scholarships.

Significant reductions in expenses were pointed out, especially in reunion funds.

Areas that stayed about the same were pointed out, also. Bottom line net was \$96,601 for 2001; for 2002, the amount was \$160,402. Total assets for 2001 were \$633,656; for 2002, they were \$795,104.

Finally, Payne pointed out the amount of funds — \$723,000 — designated by the EC for 2002. He reported the EC has spent the funds well and in a frugal manner, and VHPA audits and booking are tops.

Payne asked for questions. There were none. He then asked for a motion to accept the financial report as presented and on the VHPA website. The motion was made by Hayden "Pappy" Jones. It was seconded by numerous

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Legal advisor reports on litigation

Continued from Page 14

members of audience, and was unanimously approved.

Bilitzke said life members and the money they paid must be protected.

Legal report

Bilitzke introduced Wally Magathan, volunteer VHPA legal advisor, who read a letter prepared by the law firm of Gunn, Shank and Stover of Kansas City, MO, summarizing the legal litigations the VHPA was involved in over the past year.

The letter/report covered:

- Proposed consolidation and modification of VHPA Bylaws and Constitution.
- Articles of Incorporation Amendments Based Upon Income Tax Issues.
- Other amendments to the association's articles during past year.
- Pending litigation.
- Missouri case and appeal.
- New Kansas case.

Bilitzke closed the report by telling members the legal

challenge to the VHPA in Nevada by the production company that failed to get the entertainment in Las Vegas had been settled out of court and dismissed, with prejudice. There was no financial loss to the VHPA in this suit.

Membership Committee report

Dana Young reported a more positive and successful effort was undertaken during the past year to identify and find potential members.

Gary Roush spends lots of time putting together the membership chart found on the VHPA website. The VHPA has, over the past year, identified more than 14,000 potential members.

Young reported that if the SSAN is available for a prospect, there are companies that will provide an address and, sometimes, a telephone number for a reasonable fee. If no SSAN is available, Roush has been able to run three batches of about 3,000 people each through a military locator.

The VHPA's goal is to find every person eligible to be a member and let them know about the association. The effort has been fairly successful.

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Invite the VHPA to the dedication ceremony for The National Vietnam War Museum



July 3, 2004



- Visit the Museum site and walk the property
- Tour Fort Wolters, Mineral Wells, the Baker Hotel, and Downing Heliport
- Enjoy real Texas Bar-B-Q and entertainment
- Maybe meet your old Fort Wolters IP



Start making plans today for this Reunion 2004 side trip
and don't miss this once in a lifetime event!

Bring your camera, bring your tape recorder, and bring
your memories, but most importantly, bring yourself to

Mineral Wells for this celebration!



Plan to attend Reunion 2004

VHPA reports 12,000th member

Continued from Page 15

Young reported that Richard Pratt was at the reunion and is the 12,000th VHPA member, but was not in the meeting.

Finally, from the membership side, there is a need for everyone to check the flight school pictures on the VHPA website and try to find someone you know who has not been found. The easiest to find missing pilots have been located, yet there are still many to be found.

Investment Committee report

Bob Smith, Investment Committee chairman, and Bob Potvin, VHPA account advisor with PaineWebber, reported the short history of how the Investment Committee began and how PaineWebber was selected to manage VHPA's investments.

Currently, the VHPA is paying .003 percent to invest account and much of that is being returned by advertisements in the Newsletter and sponsorships for the golf tournament.

Potvin reported the bottom line was good and no funds had been lost. He showed a summary of the debt instruments. No investment paper with a maturity of greater than five years was used.

There was a small amount of funds that recently was invested in stock mutual funds. The VHPA has made money every year.

Former President Phil Marshall asked if there is any protection for a failure of PaineWebber. Potvin responded the short answer is "yes."

Newsletter report

Editor Jack Swickard reported *The VHPA Newsletter* relies on members to provide the copy. It takes 6-8 weeks to complete each issue of the *Newsletter*.

He said more letters are needed and it would be helpful if obituaries include date and location of death.

Swickard reported that he had been doing the *Newsletter* for 13 years, equating to about 70 *Newsletters* with a total of 1,500 pages.

2003 Reunion Budget report

Dave Rittman provided the budget report in some detail.

He reported the Arabian Nights program had been especially customized to fit the VHPA.

Financially, the goal of reunions is not to make a lot of money. What the EC tries to do is have a positive cash flow, which is what was done last year at the Las Vegas.

Rittman reported some 1,900 people attended the Orlando reunion, and that 71 people showed up on the first day of registration who had not pre-registered. It is anticipated that at least that number will be "walk-ins" before this reunion is over.

As of the meeting date, the reunion is about \$15,000 in the black, which is not much considering a total budget of several hundred thousand dollars.

Each event at the reunion was designed to be cash positive. The final banquet was designed to be special. Budgets are healthy and the reunion looks to be all good. There were no questions.

Scholarship report

Tom Payne introduced Forrest Snyder as the VHPA representative to the Army Aviation Association of America.

Payne said it was a great experience to sit on the AAAA selection panel and go over 300 records the first day and more than 300 records the next day to select all the recipients of scholarships, including the VHPA Heritage Scholarship. The VHPA applicants did very well in winning other scholarships.

He said the VHPA scholarship program is one of the most worthwhile things the VHPA does, other than getting together to renew old friendships.

Snyder has agreed to represent the VHPA again.

Payne said that the recipient of the 2002 VHPA Heritage Scholarship was Carey M. Sweeney II, whose father is retired CW4 Carey M. Sweeney of Enterprise, AL.

The program is going very well and \$4,920 have been donated so far this year. These donations came in with membership renewals and reunion registration forms. This brings the VHPA fund close to \$25,000.

Steve Spree asked several questions from the audience about how many VHPA members were members of AAAA and why our applicants had to pay AAAA membership to apply for the VHPA Heritage Scholarship.

Payne said AAAA Scholarship Foundation membership is a requirement for all student applicants. The main reason for the requirement is to prevent unrelated outside students from applying for and receiving "our" scholarships.

Another question was: Are the scholarships awarded based on need or scholarship?

The answer is the AAAA and VHPA scholarships are based on scholarship only.

Special presentation

John Hart of the Choctaw Veterans Association of America made a special presentation to Joe Bilitzke, thanking him and the VHPA for assistance in establishing their association by using the VHPA Bylaws as a model.

The Choctaw Veterans Association of America was established last year in Oklahoma. The group decided to use the VHPA Bylaws after examining those of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

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Website gets 100,000 hits in month

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Directory/Database Committee report

Gary Roush gave a brief report on the four websites he currently is working with for the VHPA. They are:

www.vhpamuseum.org
www.vhpafightclass.org
www.vhpainfo.org

The main site had more than 100,000 hits in one month.

Roush encouraged members to send him war stories and details that need to be recorded and remembered. He said there is still lot of missing information.

Of the 2,201 pilots killed in Vietnam, we still don't have the units of 31 of those pilots. Likewise, we don't know the units of 305 KIA crew members. Roush appealed for help in collecting this info.

He reported that VHPA historian Mike Sloniker was unable to attend this year's reunion due to health reasons.

Roush now has records on some 50,000 men who attended flight school during the Vietnam era and he believes about 40,000 actually served in Vietnam (others were foreign, National Guard, etc.).

The Membership Directory this year will contain all 50,000 names of people who went to flight school. The Died after Tour database is growing, and about 8 percent — or 2,582 — of the potential members have died that we know of. He said 92 members reportedly died this past year, a 42 percent increase over last year.

Roush said it is urgent we locate all eligible members.

Mike Law, our prior Membership Directory editor, is on a church mission in Africa. Roush agreed to temporarily pick up the job.

The focus on this year's Directory is on flight classes. Ross Rainwater is assisting by writing the stories about flight school.

Members are encouraged to examine Directory information to see if it is correct. If not, send an email to Gary with corrections.

Some 30-40 percent of the email addresses are incorrect. Therefore, this year's Directory will not include email addresses.

Roush said the historical CD's are available from Headquarters and at his table in the vendor room.

Bilitzke asked that everyone remember Law and his wife Diana, who had NEVER missed a reunion.

Bylaws discussion and vote

Joe Bilitzke recognized Rod Dykhouse, a member of the Original 66, who helped write the original bylaws. Other members of the Original 66 were recognized.

Bilitzke gave a brief history of the VHPA, its original incorporation and IRS designation.

He explained that three documents make up the

VHPA: The Constitution, Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation. These documents give the VHPA a legal basis to exist.

Bilitzke pointed out that in 2002 and 2003, the EC amended the Articles of Incorporation, which the EC is legally able to do. Those amendments were intended to follow the laws of Kansas, our state of incorporation. He also explained the concept of proxy voting vs. one-man, one-vote, and how that was dealt with in the amendments to the Articles of Incorporation.

He explained the VHPA tax status, as well as actions taken by the EC concerning the addition of wording from the IRS Code and why it was added to the Articles of Incorporation. He explained how such EC action put the VHPA on an equal plain and footing with other veteran organizations.

He also explained why the vote today proposed by the EC was being taken. Briefly, the term "Constitution" is rarely used in the corporate realm. Also, combining the corporate Bylaws and Constitution into one document would both facilitate and clarify VHPA governance. He went on to state that according to the corporation's governing documents, the Bylaws can be amended by approval by the VHPA members in attendance at the Annual Meeting.

Bilitzke also explained how the EC appointed Mike Sheuerman to look into the question of one-man, one-vote and the election process.

Sheuerman then asked Lad Vaughan to assist with the task. Vaughan went further and organized a group of about 12 people, called the National Working Group (NWG).

Instead of addressing only the election process as requested, the NWG came up with a new set of bylaws to deal with the one-man, one-vote issue, and submitted them for a vote by members at the Annual Business Meeting.

The vote taken at the meeting was to decide if the original constitution and bylaws, as combined and slightly amended by the EC, or an entirely new set of bylaws as proposed by the NWG will be adopted for the VHPA.

Steve Reilly, representing the NWG, was recognized to give a five-minute presentation on how the group's new set of bylaws would address the one-man, one-vote issue as originally requested.

He said that when Vaughan put together the dozen people to do the one-man, one-vote, they examined the current governing documents and decided changing them would be a good way to implement one-man, one-vote.

Reilly said that the NWG put together its proposal to go forward from here to honor the founders and those that came afterwards with a plan for continuing the next 20 years. He said this has been a divisive issue, and people

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Members strongly back EC plan

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on each side had gotten emotional and personal.

He suggested the NWG and EC form a committee to look at the documents together. If this were done, Reilly said the issue could be voted on at the Dallas reunion next year. Everything, he felt, could be simplified for a later vote.

Bilitzke said there is no need to replace the original eight pages of documents with a new set of bylaws of 22 pages. He said he would leave it up the members to vote.

The floor was opened for questions.

A motion was made to vote on the issue.

Mike Sheuerman took charge of the meeting and the voting. He instructed each voter to check only one of three blocks on the ballot. The three possible votes were:

- The EC bylaws version.
- The NWG bylaw version.
- Neither version.

After the VHPA legal counsel advised there could be a voice vote, such a vote was taken and no determination was ruled.

The opinion of Sheuerman was that a vote by written ballot should be taken. Ferguson reminded all that there had to be a two-thirds majority for a proposal to win.

Results of the vote on the bylaws were: 365 for the EC proposal; 30 for the NWG proposal and 27 for no change. There were 3 no votes. The EC proposed bylaws were adopted by the VHPA.

Reunion attendees

Joe Bilitzke recognized members who have attended all 20 VHPA reunions. Some 25 people stood.

Introduction of new president

Incoming president Dana Young made some brief comments about his ideas for the coming year.

He pledged to work with the webmasters to make the websites more user friendly, as well as continue to find lost pilots.

Next year's reunion will be in Dallas. Announcing reunion years in advance is not yet possible, though the reunion will continue to be moved across the United States.

Young expressed his gratitude to Tom Payne for his service as secretary/treasurer.

Vendor Committee report

Ken Fritz reported that this was his last year as Vendor Chairman. The person who would take his place would be Rich Busen.

Election of new officers

Mike Sheuerman announced the new policy for elections has been revised by the EC and is posted on the

VHPA website (www.vhpa.info). These rules were followed this year for the first time.

Since only two people filed for office, they each were allowed two minutes to speak.

Mike Whitten, who filed for junior member at large, gave some brief comments. By a voice vote, he was unanimously elected.

Dan Ferguson then was introduced as the only person to file for vice president. He also made a few brief comments.

By voice vote, Ferguson was unanimously elected.

Technology Committee report

Charles Holley reported the Headquarters staff, Gary Roush and Mike Law participated in improving registration.

He drew attention to the www.vhpa.info website because of items available there to members.

This year the in-line registration process was redesigned and worked much better than last year, some 80 percent were able to register by Internet this year, compared to about 50 percent last year.

There was a manual backup system this year. Some problems cropped up this year with the interface between the Headquarters, but that will be corrected.

Other business

Joe Bilitzke passed on to Dana Young books by Lin Vo that were presented to the VHPA several years ago.

Shadow of the Blade overview

Pat and Cheryl Fries showed an eight-minute video on the *Shadow of the Blade* and explained the project, which tells the story of the helicopter in Vietnam and about the people who were affected by the war.

A UH-1 helicopter flew around the United States and symbolically visited 42 landing zones, bringing back many emotional experiences.

Cheryl Fries introduced the pilots and crews who made the flights possible.

Adjournment

A motion was made and seconded from the floor to adjourn.

By a voice vote, the meeting was adjourned.

Orlando Reunion attendance totals 1,942 pilots, guests

Final figures show 977 pilots and 965 guests attended Reunion 2003 in Orlando, said Dave Rittman, national reunion chairman.

He said the number of people over the age of 18 attending the reunion totaled 1,942.

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BY JOE BILITZKE
PAST VHPA PRESIDENT

Poof! The magic carriage ride returns to the pumpkin patch. But what a wild ride it was! And so my year ends as your president.

It was an honor, privilege, and sometimes a wild and crazy adventure to serve you, the members of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association.

The year saw record numbers join VHPA. Your dues were invested and actually made money — despite the deplorable economy. The annual Membership Directory contained more pages than any before. The *Newsletter* was delayed a few times, but you still received six, information-filled editions. The last edition was included as a reunion handout to every person who attended.

And speaking of reunion — what a grand time we had in Orlando!!! More on that later.

I'm not aware of another VHPA president who had a term in office altered by a simultaneous mobilization to active duty. But these are strange times indeed. Because of duties to Uncle Sam, my involvement in VHPA was reduced to just the waking hours. I can't say enough about all those who helped me through the year — but I'll try.

The members of the 2002–03 Executive Council (EC), Dana Young, Dan Ferguson, Mike Sheuerman, Angelo Spelios, and Tom Payne were extraordinarily supportive of me.

The member not included above is Dave Rittman. That's because it's difficult to put in words all that Dave did directly for me and indirectly for each and every one of you reading this. He is an amazing individual, one for whom the term "multi-tasking" was invented.

Dave has concluded his elected term of office on the Executive Council as past president. However, he has agreed to continue serving on the reunion staff and legal liaison. Thanks, Dave, for all you have contributed to VHPA.

Another Executive Council member who is stepping down is Secretary/Treasurer Tom Payne. Tom served as president 1998–99 and concluded his term as past president in 2000.

The EC appointed him secretary/treasurer, during which time Tom served with distinction. During the Orlando reunion, Tom advised the EC that he would be stepping down. Regretfully, the EC accepted his resignation.

In his place, Hayden "Pappy" Jones was nominated and accepted the position of secretary/treasurer. For those of you who know him, you are aware this office is in very good hands. Pappy has served as national membership

chairman in the past and as a longtime, reunion-attending member, he is well known by a majority of the members as a hard-working, congenial, bear of a man. Welcome aboard, Pappy.

The "unsung" heroes continue to faithfully perform in their quiet, productive roles.

Our *Newsletter* editor, Jack Swickard, tirelessly continues to crank out interesting, readable, and informative newsletters.

Gary Roush maintains our database that is so complete, the Department of Defense calls on him for information. He, together with past president Charles Holley, manages our VHPA website (www.vhpa.org) where you can find all kinds of information.

Ken Fritz is our calendar editor and has been the vendor coordinating chairman at the reunions. Ken is stepping down from his reunion duties and turning them over to past president of the California Chapter North, Rich Buzen. Thanks, Ken for an outstanding job at the reunion and welcome Rich to your new duties.

I can't forget our legal counsel, Wally Magathan; our financial gurus, chairman Bob Smith and investment expert, Bob Potvin.

Mike Law remains in Africa, completing a two-year mission for his church. But he's with us in spirit as a tireless contributor.

And finally, please welcome our newest EC member, junior member at large Mike Whitten.

I know I'm missing a lot of names here, so my apologies if yours doesn't appear. Needless to say, a lot of people provided the fuel to keep this thing flying. Hat's off to you all.

These accolades wouldn't be complete without mentioning our Headquarters staff at FritzCo.

Marcia Fritz, CPA, is president and owner of FritzCo, a successful accounting firm. Her staff on the VHPA side of the house, is your conduit to VHPA.

Tannith Mitchell recently assumed her duties from Linda Whitten. Tannith attended the Orlando reunion and was an integral part of the Headquarters staff. Her mother, Colleen, is a daily fixture at Headquarters as well.

I urge you to go to our website and click on the Executive Council Forum (<http://www.vhpa.info/>). After putting in your last name and membership number, you'll find, Who's Working For You. Click on the URL (http://www.vhpa.info/committees/vhpa_duties.pdf) and you'll see all the individuals who are behind the scenes, working to ensure the VHPA continues to operate in a smooth, well-oiled manner while continuing to increase in membership and maintain fiscal integrity and growth.

And how did you like the reunion? I've heard from many of you who attended and was told it was the best reunion ever.

For the first time ever, we concluded a reunion with
Continued on Page 21



Joe Bilitzke

Bandit tactics revived after 35 years

BY TOM PAYNE
PAST VHPA PRESIDENT

No doubt you have heard the old saying, "You can't teach an old dog, new tricks."

Well, here is a wonderful story about how "young dogs" have learned some old tricks."

Recently, as webmaster for the 118th Thunderbird website (www.gorilla.net/~118ahc), I received an e-mail from CW3 Zac Noble, Blue Max 11 of C/1-229 Aviation Regiment at Fort Bragg, NC.

Noble is an AH-64D Apache standardization instructor pilot and instrument examiner.

He wrote: "Just a note to thank you guys for posting your tactics on the web! (<http://www.gorilla.net/~118AHC/BanditTactics.htm>). I was a Cobra pilot several years ago and a lot of the (118th Bandits) tactics you have posted were common knowledge and used often, then. But, with the age of technology, those tactics went by the wayside. We are equipped with the Longbow Apache now and recently returned from the war in Afghanistan. We are preparing to return to the theater of operations (or somewhere else) in the near future."

Noble could be considered an "old hand" in Army aviation today and takes his job very seriously. He knows his efforts to train and qualify the young Blue Max pilots is very important and could save their lives to fight another day or to return to home from half a world away.

In Afghanistan, the Blue Max flew in situations which are, to say the least, extreme. He talked about not only the dust, temperature and terrain, but density altitudes from 5,000 feet to more than 12,500 feet.

He said the minimum airspeed was about 60 knots and if the helicopter got much slower than that it acted just like an airplane and would "stall" or not continue to fly.



CW2 Dave Thoresen (left) and CW3 Zac Noble in cockpit.

Those conditions made it necessary to do only running or diving fire when the mission dictated.

Noble continued, "Now step into today . . . and guess what? We are using tactics you guys (118th Bandits) defined over 35 years ago. There are not very many of us former Cobra pilots still around, so we are looked at like crazy people when we talk of running and diving fire, and close range shooting."

"Before we went to Afghanistan last year, we printed several copies of the 118th Bandit Tactics Guide from your website and used it to train by. The end result was . . . we had a successful tour! We flew 5,400 combat hours in country in six months and we lost only one aircraft," Noble said. "Also, I would mention and thank the great men of the 2/20 and F/79 ARA, Blue Max. We are very close with those gentlemen and they backed up everything you guys wrote in your tactics when we began our training for the war in Afghanistan."

"I recently downloaded the entire 118th Bandit Tactics and will distribute it to all of my aviators," Noble continued.

"One thing will be for certain, however, Army aviators will always need to know ALL the ways to service a target and support the guys on the ground. And, sooner or later, things come full circle and the wheel will be rounder than it was the day before."

The Blue Max is very fortunate to have a SIP/IE like Noble, who recognizes there are ways to do the mission that were learned the hard way in Vietnam.

Such men as he are a huge credit to the fighting force America can be extremely proud of and MUST support. Better yet, I bet all of us would cherish a check ride with Noble, even today. Kind of gives me butterflies in my stomach, just thinking about it.

Reunion 2003 ends with Caribbean cruise

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an optional Caribbean cruise that was the highlight of the week and a tremendous way to end our gathering.

Well, one can never thank enough people, accomplish everything on the agenda, or feel the year's efforts were creditable enough. But any of my 19 predecessors can tell you that very few things can equal the feeling of knowing we were "chalk one" for a year.

This vehicle we call the VHPA continues to move onward and upward.

Thanks to each and every one of you, the active membership, who help make VHPA the finest, fastest-growing, and one of the largest veterans' organizations in the U.S.A.

It was an honor and privilege to serve as the 20th president of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association.

Pilot describes dropping napalm

The photograph on the cover shows me standing beside a UH-1B gunship assigned to the Crocodile Platoon of the 119th Assault Helicopter Company. It was taken at Lane Army Heliport, just west of Qui Nhon, in early 1966.

To the best of my knowledge, this was the only B Model gunship to drop napalm during the Vietnam War.

At that time, the 119th AHC was part of the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion based at Camp Holloway near Pleiku. We were sent to Lane for several weeks to support ARVN and ROK operations northwest of Qui Nhon.

The whole area belonged to the VC and was pretty much a free-fire zone.

I was in Qui Nhon arranging to pick up an aircraft that had been repaired when I met an Air Force master sergeant who was in charge of the ammo dump. He gave me a tour of the facility.

I became interested in the napalm bombs and asked him to tell me exactly how they operated. The more I learned, the more intrigued I became.

I offered to "help him out" by taking about four of them off his hands. He said he couldn't do that because he would quite likely get in trouble with his boss.

After pondering my dilemma for a bit, I remembered that the enlisted troops could not buy firewater in Vietnam, only beer. There was no regulation I was aware of that said I couldn't trade him a bottle of scotch for four napalm canisters, four igniters and an appropriate amount of powder to turn JP4 into flaming jelly.

He was happy, I was happy, so we loaded the booty and off I went with my treasure.

As you may be able to see from the photo, the canisters were longer than the Huey is wide. When we landed with canisters sticking out of both sides of the aircraft, the platoon leader, Capt. Bob Wright was watching and had his head cocked a bit as if asking: "Now what?"

The Crocs all were pretty intrigued at the prospect of playing with Air Force toys. The canisters fastened perfectly to the rocket pod fittings and came within a couple of inches of touching the ground.

That night we adjourned to the tactical bar to decide just exactly how who would do what. Since Capt. Wright was the boss, it was decided he would fly the aircraft. I was to be in the left seat as the "bombardier."

We didn't really want to drop them both at the same time, but we had no idea how the bird would handle if we dropped one and had 250-plus pounds still hanging on the other side.

We decided to have the crew chief pull the manual release for the one on the left side, and I would have my finger on the switch to drop the second one electrically if we started to go out of control.

Lt. Bob Heisterman and Lt. Ron Rendleman were to fly our wing and take 8 mm movies of our attack run.

We were up bright and early the next morning, not exactly sure how our day was going to go.

Wright went to Operations to get approval to fire in the area we had selected. The rest of the platoon gathered around as the fuel truck filled the canisters, the jelling powder was added, and the igniters screwed into the ends.

After a little chest-thumping, we jumped in to go on our firewater mission.

Many of you know that a fully loaded B Model starts shaking pretty badly over about 80 knots. "So there we were" at about 75 feet and 80-90 knots, bearing down on the target.

On command, the crew chief pulled the release and the left napalm was on its way.

Wright immediately put the aircraft in a steep bank to the right; at that time the two of us up front were thinking two different things. I thought he'd lost it and we were about out of control, so I pickled the second one into a rice paddy.

Actually, he had full control and wanted to bank it over to see where it hit. Bob was not happy at that point, knowing we had wasted a canister and an opportunity.

That night, Wright apologized.

So, new plan, new day, new target, and off we went, armed with our last two napalm.

Again, the crew chief pulled the cord and dropped the one on the left side, again Bob put the aircraft in a steep right bank and assured me he still had control.

I leaned way over to my right trying to see the result of our effort. It turns out that it was a great time to lean. When I did, a bullet came through my window and smashed through my windshield, barely missing my head.

Bob looked up, saw the bullet hole, and asked if I was OK — several times. I assured him I was, so we came around and dropped the second one and headed back to Lane.

The CO happened to be standing there when we landed. He saw the bullet hole, and came over to see if we were OK.

He saw we didn't have any rocket pods and asked what happened. When we explained what we had "accomplished" he made it clear that ordnance testing was not part of our mission and made it even clearer that we were not to do it again.

As it turns out, napalm dropped from a UH-1B at 80 knots really doesn't do as well as if dropped from an F-4 at 250 knots. It only spreads out about 50 feet or so.

So we went back to our 2.75-inch rockets, 40 mm, and 7.62 mm, and let the Air Force have the firewater mission.

Ron Richtsmeier
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