



# The VHPA Newsletter

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

May/June 2005 Vol. 23, No.3

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# VHPA

LZ  
San Francisco  
CALIFORNIA



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# REUNION

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## From the President

*"I Gotta Turn Over The Reins, It's The Last Thing I Have To Do*

*VHPA's Light Will Continue To Burn, There Will Be Even Better Days For Me And You"*

*— To the tune of "We Gotta Get Out Of This Place"*

*"The Time Has Come To Say Good-Bye To All Our Family . . ." Okay, enough already!*

It seems like only yesterday I was struggling trying to write my first president's column and now it is time to



**Dan Ferguson**

write my last column. I will turn the office of VHPA president over to Mike Sheuerman this July at the San Francisco Reunion and begin my year as past president.

It has been an honor and privilege to serve this organization and its membership on the Executive Council for the past 14 years. I am committed to the belief the VHPA is the finest veteran's organization of its type — period.

What makes this organization so special is the quality of our membership, some of the finest patriots this country has to offer.

Unbelievably, some are still serving in our nation's current conflicts. To those members, I salute you. Flight school had it right, "Above the Best!"

It has been a busy and productive year for the VHPA, which was made possible by the hard work and efforts of a number of volunteers who put in countless hours behind the scenes to make our organization successful.

I almost hesitate to name names because I know I will forget somebody. If I do, please forgive my oversight and chalk it up to a "senior" moment.

### Executive Council

**Dana Young** — Past president

Dana has been very instrumental in coordinating efforts and communications between the Executive Council and Headquarters. Dana also has taken over the task of

developing a new RFP for our management contract and working with the Reunion Committee to develop a Reunion Matrix for reunion planning and task timelines and assignments.

Dana also has worked very diligently with Gary Roush, performing member searches and mailings in an attempt to contact each and every potential member.

**Mike Sheuerman** — Vice president

Mike has assumed the task of membership growth and retention. Mike will be coordinating a "Sign Up A Buddy" table at the San Francisco Reunion, where members can sign up a stick buddy as a gift and introduce them to the VHPA.

Does Mike have a flair for bringing in members? Just visit the "Stick-It Inn" and ask some of the Panthers. I think some of them sign up just to stop the phone calls and emails.

**Angelo Spelios** — Senior member at large

Angelo has been a stable influence on the day-to-day decisions of the Executive Council and his experience as a past reunion chairman. Angelo brings a philosophy of moving the VHPA forward, but without compromising the original intentions of our founders.

**Mike Whitten** — Middle member at large

If you are a golfer, I need say no more. Mike is in charge of the reunion golf events and has arranged for some very successful and memorable golf outings.

**Jack Salm** — Junior member at large

Jack is the quiet thinker of the group speaking up when he feels he has heard all of the comments and has the facts. Jack will be in charge of elections at San Francisco.

**Hayden (Pappy) Jones** — Secretary/treasurer

Pappy served in the position of secretary/treasurer until illness forced him to resign his position earlier this year. Pappy, thank you for your many years of support and service to the VHPA in the many and various roles you

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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***

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Assistant editors	Ken Fritz, Thomas Payne
Vendor Coordinator	Rich Buzen
Historical	Mike Sloniker
Technology steering	Charles Holley
Strategic planning	Robert Smith

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

## From the President

*Continued from Page 2*

have performed. We all wish you a speedy recovery.

**Rich Buzen** — Secretary/treasurer and vendor coordinator

Rich agreed to fill in as secretary/treasurer when Pappy had to resign. His financial business background makes him uniquely qualified for that position.

Rich also is our reunion vendor coordinator, striving to bring in new and varied vendors. If you visited the Vendor Room in Dallas you know what I mean.

I can't wait to see what new surprises Rich has in store for San Francisco.

### Committees

**Jack Swickard** — Newsletter editor

We have one of the best, most professional looking newsletters of any veteran's organization. Jack's background as a newspaper editor probably has a lot to do with it.

This is a full-time job. When one newsletter goes to press, it is time to start the next edition. And what impressive publications they are. Glossy paper, pretty pictures . . . but I read it for the "articles." (Sound familiar, Ladies?)

**Gary Roush** — Database and webmaster

Gary is the maestro of our databases and has developed our databases over the years to the point that government agencies often seek Gary's assistance in some of their research.

You see a small example of Gary's database work in the Annual Membership Directory, which has grown so large over the years we have to move some of the information from the Directory to the website.

Gary also is one of our webmasters and is responsible for [www.vhpa.org](http://www.vhpa.org). If you have visited this website, received a mailing contact list from the VHPA, looked up a buddy in the Directory, you have come into direct contact with Gary's handiwork.

In fact, Gary took the lead on the Directory for the past couple of years during Mike Law's absence.

Gary has also been very active with Dana Young in the member search project to locate and contact all potential VHPA members.

And, yes, capture that information in the database.

**Bob Smith/Bob Potvin** — Investments

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# From the President

*Continued from Page 3*

Bob Smith and Bob Potvin head up our Investment Committee. Together with their committee members, they have navigated through some very difficult times in the financial marketplace and through their guidance and expertise our investment account weathered the storm and remained profitable. Great job guys.

## **Mike Law** — Directory/calendar

Mike has been instrumental in the development of the VHPA from the very beginning and has produced our Directory, Histories, and Calendars for years. Mike has been a reunion chairman and VHPA president. I am not sure there isn't a hat he hasn't worn.

Mike just returned from a two-year missionary journey and has jumped right back into the Directory and Calendar. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Mike home. I also would like to thank Gary Roush for filling in for Mike on the Directory and Al Harinck for taking over the Calendar during Mike's absence.



## **Charles Holley** — Webmaster and online reunion registration

Charlie runs the secure VHPA website [www.vhpa.info](http://www.vhpa.info) where our governance documents, minutes, financials, etc are posted. Charlie also runs the "online reunion registration." If you have registered for a reunion via the website, you have run into Charlie's handiwork.

## **Mike Sloniker** — Historical

Mike has headed our Historical Committee for several years, but has brought an added dimension to the job. Living in the DC area and having numerous military and private sector contacts in the region, Mike has been very instrumental in helping members with their specific needs relating to past military service.

It is quite a relief to receive an email or phone call from a member seeking specific information or assistance and know I can simply put them in contact with Mike and it will be handled. Thanks, Mike.

## **Joe Bilitzke and Dave Rittman** — Reunion Committee

I don't even know where to begin. Joe and Dave have been planning and executing our reunions for several years. I cannot begin to explain the dedication and hours upon hours upon hours of work they perform to bring us the absolute finest veteran's reunion anywhere.

Dave's background as a reunion planner for Ford

Motor Co. and Joe's many years providing audio and visual support for reunions, trade shows, conventions, etc., make them exceptionally experienced and qualified. And it SHOWS!

Dave has also taken the lead in our efforts to gain "national recognition" for the VHPA. A Herculean effort indeed. (There will be an update on this effort elsewhere in this newsletter)

## Contracted help

### **Fritzco** — VHPA HQ

Marsha Fritz and her staff (Nancy, Colleen, Laura and Tina) handle the day-to-day VHPA operations and are very involved in reunion preparation and onsite reunion support. Thank you, ladies, for all your hard work and support.

### **Linda Irvine** — The Brat

Several years ago, Linda and her firm, The Reunion Brat, was brought onboard to help with the planning and day-to-day reunion activities. Linda and her staff provide much needed support for our overtaxed Reunion Committee.

(While Fritzco and The Brat are compensated for their work, it is certainly nice to work with people who really care about the organization. Many thanks to Fritzco and The Brat.)

## Special Mention

I would like to personally thank the wives, girlfriends (shame on you if you have both), and families of all our volunteers that make the success of the VHPA possible. I know you put up with hours upon hours of your "family time" being devoted to VHPA work by your brave-hearted, courageous, fling-winged warriors.

The late dinners, missed events, never-ending phone calls, just to mention a few. Not only do you endure this intrusion, some of you ladies even pitch in and help! Without your understanding and support, our success would not be possible. To the "Ladies of the VHPA," thank you!

Last, but certainly not least, thanks to the many loyal members who have supported the VHPA throughout the years. San Francisco will mark my 18th consecutive reunion, and there are many, many friends and familiar faces I see year in and year out. You can just count on seeing a large majority of our regular reunion attendees every year.

If you are a VHPA member but just haven't gotten around to attending a reunion . . . come on . . . join us . . . see what you are missing! (I spoke to a member this past weekend who fit that category and he told me he would register the following Monday)

Break, Break

This is Dan Ferguson signing off for the last time.

— **Dan Ferguson, VHPA President**



## Letters

# Pilots

## The finest men I ever knew flew helicopters in Vietnam

For nearly 30 years, I said nothing publicly, and little privately, about flying helicopters in Vietnam, for several reasons.

First, I took the Army's early-out offer for warrant officers in 1971 and never looked back. I put Vietnam, flying and the Army behind me to get on with life.

Over the years, a few times I talked to John Synowsky, one of the guys who rescued me in Vietnam, and he tried to interest me in the VHPA, but I always said no. That part of my life was done and I didn't want to keep reliving it like a victim.

Second, I would be presumptuous as a spokesman for Vietnam veterans because, like John Kerry, I spent a short tour there, while so many of you served your full tour or two or even more. I did always wonder how Kerry could come home from a short tour, pose as an expert and hero and then smear the rest of us as monsters. By contrast, I learned a deep and permanent admiration for all of you.

Third, some stories are hard to tell.

So I put Vietnam behind me. After a couple of decades, in 1991 the Gulf war buildup prompted bad dreams and my admittedly odd catharsis was dusting off my medals and hanging them on the wall. For some reason it worked.

In 1998, my wife Julie and I adopted Melanie at 12 months old in China's Anhui Province, and in 2003, we adopted Kristen at 12 months old in China's Guangdong Province. Now Melanie is 8, Kristen is 3 and I'll be 57 this year. Maybe I'm too old to be a first-time father, but the girls have radically changed my life.

One thing that changed is I started to think quite a lot about the Vietnam War. What kind of revisionist history would my girls read in their schoolbooks? What would they hear in school and see on the news and documentaries since the anti-war left's lies about us were repeated so many times they became accepted as the truth and the

aging conventional wisdom on Vietnam is so wrong?

The more I thought about this, the more I realized the things I learned in Vietnam might be the most important lessons of my life.

I needed to find a way to make sure my children know the truth about all of you. I want them to know that, however imperfect each of you may be, I learned from your example the true meaning of duty, honor, commitment, trust, loyalty and courage. I tell Melanie and Kristen you are *The Finest Men I Ever Knew*. The grammar could be improved, but the sentiment cannot.

So I decided to tell my story in an August 2000 column for the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. My story isn't so dramatic as many I have heard, and it isn't really about me. The underlying story is about the two guys who risked everything to rescue me, and how they are so much like all of you.

Most important to me, it's about telling the true story of America's finest in Vietnam, correcting for my kids the dirtiest lies I know — the lies about you.

I flew Cobras with the Dragon Platoon of the 334th

Attack Helicopter Company out of Bien Hoa. I was front seat that day, Dec 17, 1969, with Ron Heffner in the back seat of the wing ship of a light fire team of two Cobras.

We had been scrambled to help an ARVN convoy ambushed south of Lai Khe in III Corps. We arrived on station, traded fire with the enemy and took a bunch of hits, lost our tail rotor without much air-speed, lost control and went down hard, spinning like a top.

The impact broke my back in the hard front seat, my legs were paralyzed, Ron and I were unconscious, the aircraft lay on its left side, trapping my cockpit door closed, the turbine was still running, fuel was leaking and the enemy was nearby.

Capt. John Synowsky was fire team leader in the lead ship, with WO Graham Stevens in the front seat. They made the Mayday call and then broke all the rules by

landing beside our wreckage.

John and Graham shut down our turbine, helped Ron out of the aircraft, broke through the canopy to drag me out and, since my legs didn't work, Graham dragged me by the collar of my flight suit away from the broken bird, in case it blew.

I vividly remember singing "I'll be home for Christmas" through blinding pain as I lay in that field, because surviving when you are certain you will die is a powerful



**Capt. John Synowsky (top) and WO Graham Stevens pose in front of their Huey Cobra at Bien Hoa, South Vietnam.**

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# Letters

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narcotic.

Despite the risk of being captured or killed, John and Graham stood guard with pistols until the medevac arrived, and stayed to help load me on a stretcher.

They received two things for their actions that day — an ass chewing by the CO for putting their Cobra on the ground and the Soldier's Medal for saving lives.

John and Graham served two tours and received a number of decorations, but both of them are particularly proud of the Soldier's Medal, maybe because, amidst all the killing and dying, I was one they were able to save.

While John and Graham continued fighting the war every day, I spent months in hospitals in Vietnam, Japan and the United States. I learned to walk again and, after some medical leave for recuperation, I was assigned as Warrant Officer Rotary Wing School TAC officer at Fort Rucker and later took the early out.

I seemed to realize more with each passing year I have a debt to John and Graham I can never repay. I remembered when I thanked them for what they did for me, they brushed it off and said, "Any of the other guys would have done the same thing."

## Thoughts led to two things

It took some years of thoughts bubbling in my head, but I came to realize two things:

First, I knew they were right — most of you have seen a fellow pilot put their life on the line without hesitation to keep their brothers alive, or you have done it yourself.

Second, knowing our brothers would risk anything to get us out of a jam is the most important part of this story. The folks back home never knew the incredible things you did for one another almost like it was routine, whether pilots or grunts or in between, and harrowing, true stories of young men selflessly risking their life for one another in Vietnam are just too many to count.

John Synowsky and Graham Stevens are, to me, a metaphor for all of you because I feel I know you even if I have never met you; I have seen enough of you in action to expect the best from you.

When I am amidst Vietnam helicopter pilots, whether I know you or not, I look around and think to myself . . .

*"They're all different, but all the same. No matter their height, they stand far taller than politicians and celebrities and the know-it-all talking heads on TV. While others evaded and dodged in a hundred ways, these men stepped up to serve their country in a difficult time."*

*"While the White House played stupid games micro-managing a kind-of, sort-of, half-war that fed America's sons to the meat grinder, these young men did their duty, they learned to do difficult things under fire, and they*

*fought desperately to bring their brothers home alive.*

*"While not one general officer resigned over not being allowed to win the war, these fine young men fought a tough enemy with skill and courage and never lost a major battle."*

*"They returned to an ungrateful nation that turned its back on them and our country believed the anti-war left's fabrication that they were baby killers or worse."*

*"America seemed to blame these men for the miserable war few of them wanted to fight, and yet their patriotism never wavered."*

America has yet to realize the truth about you.

## Synowsky called on Veteran's Day

Last Nov. 11, while I was cooking spaghetti for dinner, John Synowsky called, and I asked him: "How the heck are ya?"

"Well," he said, "I'm sitting on my horse on top of a rise, looking down at some of my cattle. I just lit a \$5 cigar, I've got some whiskey in a cup and I'm watching the sun set on the horizon."

I am not making this up. John lives in Fort Worth and has a ranch west of the city.

"Wish I was there."

"Yeah, me too. It doesn't get any better than this. Called to say happy Veteran's Day. How are the kids?"

John's question flashed me back in a heartbeat to Christmas 2000 when Melanie was not quite four years old and she met John. She pulled on his red beard to make sure it was real and her eyes lit up when he promised to teach her how to ride a horse if her Daddy would ever bring her to visit.

As we were leaving that night, John gave Melanie a kiss on the cheek and she said to him with no prompting from me, "Thanks for saving my Daddy, Mr. John!" Exactly right.

I said "The kids are great."

John said, "Sounds like all is well. Gotta go. Bye."

## Cowboys are my heroes

As Willie said, my heroes have always been cowboys.

When I wrote that first column in the Atlanta paper, Andy Burliegh tracked me down to invite me to join the Georgia chapter of VHPA. I said "No thanks!" because I still didn't want to hang around a bunch of vets reliving the Vietnam War like professional victims.

Andy persisted and I went to a meeting. I discovered there what many of you already know, I had been dead wrong about VHPA all along. I joined and became active and attended my first annual reunion a few years later in Orlando.

I continued to write a newspaper column about Vietnam now and then, and I began speaking to college and high school groups, and in other places when the opportunity arose.

Last year, I arranged with the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation to have a Huey — one that flew in Vietnam —



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# Letters

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land in the parking lot of Newnan High School in Georgia with a Vietnam veteran crew and Skip Davis, one of our Georgia VHPA members, as aircraft commander.

The kids loved touching the helicopter and talking to Skip and his crew about their exploits in the Vietnam War, and the History Department head and principal had the thrill of their first helicopter ride.

## Book to help girls understand

I wrote a book about my girls with the decidedly uncommercial title *Sisters Redeem Their Grumpy Dad*.

I wasn't concerned with book sales because the book's purpose is not to make money.

The book's purpose is to help my daughters understand, when they get older and deal with issues of losing their unknown birth family, that they couldn't possibly be more loved if they were our biological children.

At the end of the book, I tell Melanie and Kristen about

Vietnam in a very long chapter titled *The Long Story of the Elephant*. I tell them I was a witness to an important story that needs to be told, and I tell them all about *The Finest Men I Ever Knew*.

Why do I now enjoy gathering with my brother and sister veterans when I resisted for so many years?

I think maybe seeing one another takes us back to our youth, to a time when we accomplished difficult and dangerous things while lesser men sat on the sidelines and pointed fingers of blame.

Maybe we see in one another what is best about ourselves.

I'm glad I finally discovered fellowship with the ones who are all different, but all the same, and I'm certain now my daughters will know two things — the history books are not always right and I am damned proud to be one of you.

Terry L. Garlock  
VHPA Georgia Chapter  
Secretary/Treasurer

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## Letters

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### Helicopter pilot, crew became subject of poem

*"If you are able, save for them a place inside of you and save one backward glance when you are leaving for the places they can no longer go.*

*"Be not ashamed to say you loved them, though you may or may not have always. Take what they have taught you with their dying and keep it with your own.*

*"And in that time when men decide and feel safe to call the war insane, take one moment to embrace those gentle heroes you left behind."*

This was the poem written by then-Capt. Mike O'Donnell in Dak To, South Vietnam, on Jan. 1, 1970.

Dak To was the normal staging area for the 170th Assault Helicopter Company, the 361st Escort Company, and the Special Forces and their Montagnards of Command and Control Central (CCC).

These elements gathered daily for inserts or extractions to or from Laos or Cambodia to determine what the NVA were up to along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

It is unfortunate the poem's subject became about him, his crew, and (as I recall) eight folks from the CCC recon team.

On March 24, 1970, Mike was the 170th AHC pilot of the UH-1H Huey that flew backup to pick up any downed pilots from the 170th "Bikinis" or the 361st "Panthers" (Cobra gunships). Mike was from Springfield, IL.

The rest of his UH-1 crew were WO John Charles Hosken of Chagrin Falls, OH; Staff Sgt. Rudy Morales

Becerra of Richmond, TX; and Spec. 4 Berman Ganoe Jr. of Belleview, FL.

The CCC recon team ("RT Pennsylvania") consisted of Team 10— Staff Sgt. John Arthur Boronski of Ware, MA; the 12 — First Lt. Jerry Lynn Pool of Freeport, IL; the 11 — Sgt. Gary Alan Harned of Springboro PA.

There were an additional five U.S. Special Forces members and Special Command scouts, whom I presume were Montagnards or mountain tribesmen. The Montagnards were men whom I strongly respect; who, almost to a man, followed the Special Forces leaders so faithfully.

The eight-man CCC recon team had been engaged with an enemy force in Cambodia for three days, about 14 miles inside Cambodia. The CCC recon team was clearly at a point where the team was likely to be killed or captured by the enemy if it was not extracted.

The enemy had forced the CCC recon team toward the open front and the bottom of a horseshoe-shaped ravine. There was discussion of dogs being after them and there had been multiple days of close contact with the enemy.

The Special Forces and their Montagnards had a mission beyond artillery range and, in the spring of 1970, I don't recall one CCC recon team coming out without being in contact with the enemy. The accomplishments of the Special Forces recon teams in the nearly one year I spent on this mission just blow my mind. The 170th (and 57th before them) and 361st crews similarly and routinely performed outstandingly and courageously over this time.

To help RT Pennsylvania, Spads provided air support and the 361st Cobras provided air support, making several runs against what appeared to be significant enemy positions ("reportedly hundreds of NVA in the valley").

There was smoke and fires that were moving in the direction of RT Pennsylvania.

The regular extraction UH-1 helicopters had to return to Dak To for refueling while we were providing air support. The conditions on the ground appeared to me to have been a situation of the recon team's imminent capture or death.

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## Letters

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The recon team requested immediate extraction or said, in effect, it would be too late. The enemy fire from ground to air was still very heavy despite all the ordnance air support had expended.

Mike O'Donnell, promoted to major posthumously, though not on scene for an extraction mission, bravely said to the effect, "We'll go in" for the extract. I felt goose bumps as he said it, fearing he and his crew would perish.

It was a true act of extreme courage. I saw many acts of courage in two years in Southeast Asia, but few if any like Mike O'Donnell's and his crew's actions.

In a radio conversation, Bikini lead Jim Lake tried to tell O'Donnell to wait for his UH-1 and another UH-1 to return, but O'Donnell believed, as I did, he could wait no longer.

He flew his chopper to the open front of that horseshoe ravine and picked up all eight CCC recon team members, despite very heavy enemy fire. He lifted out of the ravine, with our Cobra gunship just behind his UH-1.

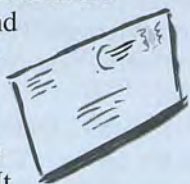
We were starting to feel relief, but then were shocked when O'Donnell's chopper simply exploded in the air in front of us. The initial explosion and then a rapid, subsequent explosion clearly killed all 12 people aboard the chopper.

The SOG note on this says no rescue was attempted due to heavy enemy fire. It was clear to me all who had been in Mike O'Donnell's aircraft were dead and any rescue attempt simply would have resulted in additional casualties.

My fire team tried to look closer, and took tremendous fire from the large enemy force. The 170th's CWO Lake also investigated in his UH-1 "by making a power dive, but watched thousands of tracers rounds flash by all sides of his aircraft and neither (he nor his copilot) believed that any person could have survived the explosion and 200-foot fall."

My recollection is a CCC "Bright Light" team — a team that would go in after a recon team to help them get out — did go to the crash site days later. I understood they were unable to find anything or any body from the recon team in a search of the area.

I flew copilot that day to Capt. Mike Jimison, Panther lead that day. He was a veteran leader and handled a very tough situation as best as anyone could.



## Infantryman seeks name of pilot he helped rescue

I was with the 1/11th Infantry, 5th Mech. OPCON'd to the 1/1 Cav. I want to find the name of the pilot extracted by three others and me from crash site XD688414 on Feb. 11, 1971.

My company C/1/11th Infantry, 5th Mech was working a ridgeline northwest of Kilo Sierra, not far from Laos. We got a call for the closest friendlies to respond to a little bird going down by .51 fire.

I was an RTO for Capt. Barry S. Buckley and asked him if we would respond. Affirmative. So a UH-1 picked up Capt. Buckley, Kurt Grockau RTO, Robert Wood and me. We flew from our POS to the west and south, crossing the Tchepone River. We found the pilot in his gnarled bird with just the part of the tail and the pilot's seat intact. It was partially inverted on a slope.

Doc Wood checked him out and he had a strong pulse. We called his unit and asked for a dust-off with penetrator. We extracted the pilot and then were hooked up with the Hoc Bao and sent back to our original position.

It has haunted all four of us since to know the disposition of the pilot. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Garry C. Beeson

That also was the first day I recall having actual SA-7 or similar type shoulder-fired rockets shot at us.

March 24, 1970, was one of the two saddest days of my life, the other being the loss of a number of pilots, crews, and infantry inside Vietnam.

The ironic recent discovery I made of finding Mike O'Donnell's poem as the Page 1 item on the Vietnam Wall webpage brings back this sad memory.

I understand there is a concourse at Atlanta Hartsfield dedicated to Mike O'Donnell.

We need to honor and remember Mike O'Donnell and his crew and thank God for their unbelievable courage. It could have been any of us down there and they would have tried to do the same for us.

Thanks, Mike O'Donnell, John Hosken, Rudy Becerra, Berman Ganoë, John Boronski, Jerry Pool, Gary Harned, and to the unknown Montagnards.

Hal Manns  
Panther 16

361st Aviation Company, 1969-70

**Make reservations for San Francisco Reunion**  
**Register online at: [www.vhpareunion.org](http://www.vhpareunion.org)**



# Taps

## Charles Walter Anderson

Charles Walter Anderson, 75, of Fort Worth, died May 2 at his home.

Anderson, a retired Bell Helicopter pilot, was born Oct. 19, 1929, in Brookfield, MO. He joined the Army in 1948 at the age of 18. He was assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Paris and learned to speak French fluently.

He met his wife, Lois, while stationed at Sandia Base in Albuquerque in 1953. They were married in August 1954.

Anderson then was assigned to Fort Rucker, where he earned his wings as a helicopter pilot.

Before the Vietnam War, he was with the unit that took the first armed helicopters from Thailand into South Vietnam. His second trip to Vietnam was in 1965.

He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross three times for rescue and medevac missions.

After retiring from the Army in 1968, Anderson joined Bell Helicopter as an instructor and test pilot. He flew the corporate Citation jet until his retirement from Bell in April 1990.

Survivors include two daughters, and four grandchildren.



## Rick Beam

Rick Beam of Newbury Park, CA, died unexpectedly at his home on April 4 with his wife Linda and son Derek at his side. He was 57.

He was born Sept. 22, 1947 in North Hollywood, CA. At the age of 17, Beam met Linda in high school Spanish class. They married three years later in 1967.

Beam served as a medevac helicopter pilot in South Vietnam with the 44th Medical Brigade in 1968-69. He was stationed in Panama in 1970-71.

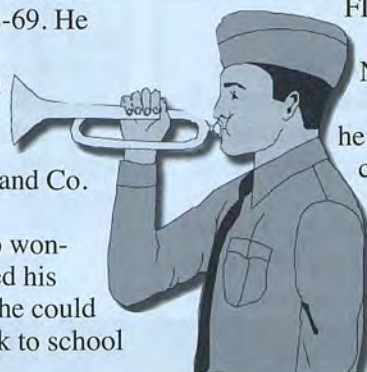
After completing his military service, Beam graduated from CSUN and USC, earning a master's degree in economics.

He went to work for Robert Charles Lesser and Co. as a financial feasibility consultant.

Then Linda and Rick were blessed with two wonderful children, Janelle, and Derek. Beam adored his children and wanted to work closer to home so he could share in all the joys of fatherhood. He went back to school to become a MAI so he could work for himself.

He is survived by his wife of 38 years, Linda, and his two children, Janelle, and Derek Beam.

"He was looking forward to attending the reunion in July and seeing all of his friends again. Please keep him in your memories," his wife said.



## James S. Coble

James S. Coble, 61, of Aurora, CO, died March 29 at his home after an extended illness. He was 61.

He was a member of flight school class 66-19. He served as a Robin Hood with the 173rd Assault Helicopter Company at Lei Khe from January 1967-68.

After his military service, he worked as an airline pilot until his recent retirement.

He is survived by his wife of 38 years, Patricia, and their children, James J., Jared and Michelle, all of Aurora.

## James Robert Cox

James Robert Cox, 66, of Trophy Club, TX, died Dec. 12 of a heart attack.

He was an Army veteran.

Cox is survived by his wife, Gloria.

## Howard K. Hostler

Howard K. Hostler, 74, of Winter Haven, FL, died of lung cancer on March 25 at his home.

He was a native of Evansville, IN.

Hostler was a retired colonel in the U.S. Army. He was highly regarded as a combat commander by the pilots who served under him when he commanded the 118th Assault Helicopter Company, stationed at Bien Hoa, South Vietnam. He was shot down three times in Vietnam.

Hostler was recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross.

He was a member of the Army Aviation Association and the Officers Club at MacDill Air Force Base. Hostler was a member of St. Joseph Catholic Church, where he served as an usher.

He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth L. Hostler of Winter Haven; a son, Kevin Hostler of Winter Haven; a daughter, Carrie Spiegts of Temple, TX; and three grandchildren.

## Gregory F. Roche Jr.

Retired Lt. Col. Gregory F. Roche Jr., 70, of Deland, FL, died April 16.

Roche was born in Atlantic City, NJ, and moved to Deland in 1974.

During his 24-year Army career, he was an infantry officer and served two combat tours in Vietnam. He was a member of flight school classes 58-14 and 60-6QC.

Roche served in Vietnam with the 1st Cavalry Division in 1965-66 as a member of C Company of the 227th ASHB. During his second tour in 1968-69, he served with the 271st ASHC.

He was a recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross.

After retiring from his last assignment as a military science professor at Stetson University in 1977, Roche

*Continued on Page 11*



# Charter

## *Legislation would give congressional recognition*

Over the past year, VHPA volunteers have been working on a long time key goal of the membership:

To certify the Association to be eligible for receipt of surplus helicopters of all types from the Vietnam era direct from Department of Defense (DoD), and to obtain national recognition as a federally chartered veterans organization.

The two goals are linked together in a number of ways.

Enhanced security requirements and operational policies resulting in the post Sept. 11, 2001, era have made donations of DoD aircraft highly restricted and difficult to accomplish without a Charter enacted by Congress, which also provides congressional recognition of the VHPA as a national veterans organization.

Working with members of Congress from the House of Representatives and the Senate, in cooperation with DoD, we are nearing our goal of being declared eligible for receipt of surplus aircraft and war birds for purposes of display and overall preservation of history.

The required documentation, eligibility criteria, verifications, and related materials were all submitted to the various entities and governmental agencies during the fall of 2004.

Earlier this year the House Legislative Committee wrote the physical bill, which is a bipartisan endeavor, with support from both parties within the House.

Already nine congressmen from both parties have agreed to cosponsor the legislation in the House, and key bipartisan support has already been lined up in the Senate for a similar version to be passed soon.

Once the bill has passed in the House and Senate, we anticipate the Act to become law with the signature of President Bush.

The title line of the cover page communication to all 435 House Representatives a few weeks ago says it all ... *"Say Thank You to Those Who Served."*

Your Executive Council approved the National

Recognition project shortly after our reunion last summer in Dallas.

The VHPA is, per our bylaws, a nonpolitical entity. However, passing this legislation will be very meaningful to our Association and to you, as one of its members.

Our Association's mission is to enhance and accredit the cohesiveness, esprit-de-corps, and the traditions of valor of rotary-wing aircrews who flew in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam era.

Preservation of our history, including Vietnam-era aircraft, and the national recognition status this bill would provide is a key goal of this Act, which is well on the way to becoming reality this year.

— Dave Rittman

## *How to help*

*Could you make an important phone call on our behalf?*

Listed below are the details of our efforts to gain a federal charter to provide national recognition for our Association, and to provide access direct from DoD Vietnam-era helicopters for preservation and historical purposes.

While we already have 9 bipartisan cosponsors in the House of Representatives as of early May, as charters of this type are very rare, it would be very helpful in our efforts to expedite this bill if several more members from the House of Representatives were willing to become an original cosponsor of this bipartisan legislation.

There is still time for them to do so.

You can help by calling your local U.S. House of Representatives for your district in Washington and request that he or she cosponsor the above bill, and support it when it comes to the floor.

Our congressional experts advise us phone calls are much more effective than emails ... and letters take too

*Continued on Page 12*

## Taps

*Continued from Page 10*

began a career in real estate and became the broker/owner of West Volusia Realty. He later became a certified property appraiser.

He also served as an instructor at West Volusia School of Real Estate at Daytona Beach Community College.

Roche also was a member of the Rotary club, the Moose Lodge, the Order of the Elks, the DeLand Quarter-

back Club, and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

I never had the pleasure of serving with Greg, but he became a good friend and confidant. We shared many stories and I was always reminded that he was the "World's Greatest H-13 Pilot." I am sure he now is sharing that thought and some of the same stories with other Army aviators who have made that final flight to the West.

Roche is survived by a son, Greg, of Hillsboro, NC; and three daughters, Terri McIntyre of Ormond Beach, FL; Leslie Rak of DeLand, FL, and Chris Pugh of Tucson, AZ; and eight grandchildren.

— Wayne M. Stewart



# Vet Centers

## *VA to have presence at San Francisco Reunion*

**RICH BUZEN**  
VENDOR COORDINATOR

In addition to all of our fine vendors who will be in the Vendor Room at the reunion, I am pleased to let you know the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Vet Centers will have a major presence at our San Francisco Reunion.

The Vet Centers will have several booths in the vendor area on Saturday and Sunday, July 2 and 3, with people on hand to talk to as many of you as would like an "ear," and will provide guidance and support on exactly what types of issues the VA can help treat and how to apply for those benefits.

In addition, the Vet Center representatives can guide you through the maze of what you need for evidence of injuries, what you need to support your claim, and counselors who can help separate what is "normal" (OK, normal for helicopter pilots) and what may be a longtime gift from our vacation in Vietnam.

For the past two years, I have been working with the Vet Center in Concord, CA, on some of the "baggage" I brought back with me from that "live-fire exercise across the big pond."

### **Work began with chance visit**

It started with a chance conversation at the Vietnam Traveling Wall with Jeff Jewell, a Vet Center counselor, and has continued on a path I believe finally will help me put to rest some of the same "stuff" many of us still carry with us.

I also have been successful in applying for and obtaining benefits from the Vet Center to help me uncover

and, hopefully, get rid of a lifetime of repressed emotions and feelings.

Most importantly, I am just starting to realize the profound effect this has had on those people I love and care most about. Well Rich, I am glad for you, but why are you telling us all this?

### **Little guidance available**

One of my revelations as I have been going through this "process" is how little guidance there is available regarding the nuts and bolts of determining your eligibility for benefits.

First is recognizing them, and then the process of applying for the assistance and support you have earned by your service to your country.

Each step of the way I was confronted with a plethora (I just wanted to use that word in a sentence) of forms and confusing documents, unaware you need to know not only what form to fill out (or not fill out), but how to write them so that they "speak" to the VA in its language.

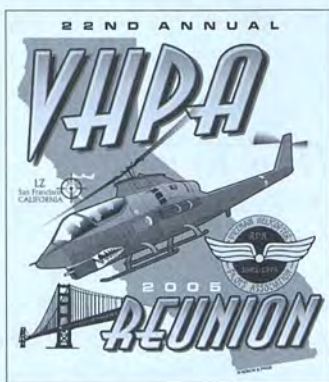
Making sure your military records are correct, getting copies of your medical records and making sure they are correct, and many other issues, sometimes are so daunting many veterans just give up or, worse, get denied because of procedural issues that could have been avoided.

On May 4, I met with Denver Mills, director of the Concord Vet Center, and Jewell, a counselor at the center, and invited them to set up "shop" at the reunion.

They were excited about the prospects of reaching so many Vietnam-era veterans and will pull from many of the surrounding Vet Centers to make sure they have the people and resources necessary to assist as many of us as they can.

I can tell you from personal experience this is the most supportive, most dedicated group of people I have ever worked with, and they will bring to this reunion the same level of support to each of you.

*Continued on Page 13*



## Charter would let VHPA receive aircraft

*Continued from Page 11*

long. However, by whatever method you can accomplish contact will be appreciated.

If you need the telephone number or other contact information for the U.S. representative for your District, just go to [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov), type in your zip code, and then click on the name of the representative whose name appears on your screen to gain contact information.

You also can call the House of Representatives direct-

ly at (202) 225-3121, advise the operator you wish to speak to the representative for your district, and give him/her your zip code. It's easy.

The host contact for your representative's staff to call (not VHPA members) to cosponsor this bipartisan act is Congressman Sam Graves.

Mark Ratto is the staff contact, and his phone extension number at the House is [REDACTED] or by email to [REDACTED]



# Space available in Vendor Room

*Continued from Page 12*

Have questions about your hearing, injuries that continue to affect your quality of life, PTSD, and any other issues? This is the time and this is the place.

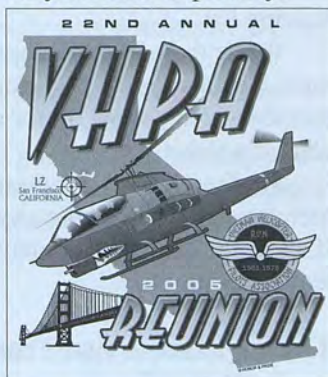
There will be designated areas in the Vendor Room where you will be able to discuss your case in privacy.

As it stands now, the Vet Center representatives will be set up all day Saturday and Sunday in the Vendor Room.

Bring all records and information you have collected regarding your claim. (DD 214, medical records, etc.)

If you have applied to the VA and been turned down or never applied but have your records, bring those with you as well.

If you have never applied for benefits and want to know what is covered and what you need to prove your



claim, these are the guys to ask.

Also in the Vendor Room at the reunion will be:

- **Joe Kline Aviation Art** — all types of aviation art;
- **US Images** — insignias, shirts, hats, unit patches, pins, silk screening;
- **C. Zultner** — fashion jewelry; B. Heisterman — tumblers and insulated products with the VHPA logo;
- **Sugar Poppy** — hand-painted patriotic shirts and jewelry;
- **Turner Publishing Co.** — Vietnam-era books, calendars;
- **Rings with Wings** — jewelry, watches, pins, shirts;
- **Flight Line Design** — aviation embroidered sportswear, custom silk screening;
- **Honor & Pride** — Shirts, hats, pins, insignia's, key chains.

The list is growing every day. Please check your registration envelope for an updated list of vendors.

If you have ever wanted to have a booth at a VHPA reunion, this is the year.

Total cost to have a booth at the reunion is only \$200. If you do not do at least \$2,000 in gross sales, you receive a portion of that back, up to a \$100 refund.



*Army  
Aviation,  
Vietnam*

Full Color, 20" x 28" limited edition print of all U.S. Army aircraft used in Vietnam. \$80 standard, \$100 customized with unit markings of your choice.

**Joe Kline Aviation Art**



[www.joekline.com](http://www.joekline.com)

## SPECIAL VHPA ANNOUNCEMENT:

The VHPA is beginning work on a *new* Commemorative Book to document the pilots and machines that flew the war-torn skies of Southeast Asia.

It has been 7 years since we last published such a book.

We are working with Turner Publishing Company, with offices in Nashville, Tenn. & Paducah, Ky. Turner has published past VHPA historical volumes and the annual VHPA calendar.

A Turner representative will be attending the upcoming 22nd Annual Reunion in San Francisco to kick-off the project.

Every VHPA member will be invited to take part in this historic work. We need your input to make this project a success.

**Bring your ideas and your memories to San Francisco.**

**Turner®**  
PUBLISHING COMPANY

**1-800-788-3350**

**[www.turnerpublishing.com](http://www.turnerpublishing.com)**

**Register for Reunion 2005**



# Reunion

## *There's still time to register for San Francisco*

**JOE BILITZKE AND DAVE RITTMAN**  
REUNION CO-CHAIRMEN

For several newsletter editions you undoubtedly have read about the unique opportunity to meet that special someone from years ago, all the unique events, the special entertainment, and the need to register early.

However, we do recognize a number of our members still fly for the airlines or are in the military.

Both categories have significant difficulty being able to determine their availability or plans until almost the last minute.

Certainly we understand others within our membership also may not be able to know for sure if they could come until about now. The message: It's not too late!

### **Hotels will honor VHPA discounted rates**

By the time you read this article, it should be early June, less than 30 days from the start of what will be the largest reunion ever, but there is still time to join all the fun.

While our primary hotel (the downtown Marriott at 55 Fourth St.) already may be sold out, we have made arrangements at two nearby great hotels to handle you. The Hilton and the Argent have agreed to honor the special VHPA rate of \$109 that is being offered at the Downtown Marriott, our host facility. How about that!

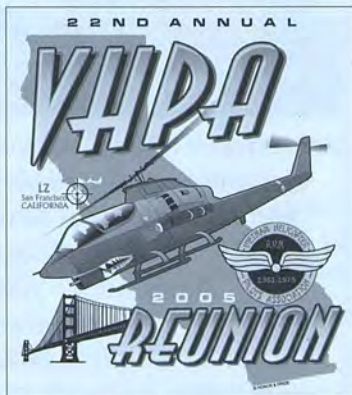
Our website will have the latest information, as will our HQ staff.

Once the Marriott is truly not accepting any additional reservations, we will post all the details for the nearby overflow hotels.

### **We can fit you in for most VHPA events**

We have sufficient room at most VHPA functions to fit you in, including the welcome reception party with Eric Burdon and the Animals; the fabulous Las Vegas style Cabaret Party with names you will recognize; the spouse's culinary exhibition, and the Annual Business Meeting.

The final night banquet seating is going to be real tight, but at the moment, we believe we can handle most, if not all of you in the main Yerba Buena ballroom.



The only main evening event that is truly sold out is the 4th of July bay cruise, though you can sign up on a waiting list.

While there are no guarantees, of course, our experience says that in the past, for whatever reason, a few members don't show up for an event for which they purchased a ticket.

So, for a few of our more adventurous members/guests, standing by the buses might get you on if someone else doesn't arrive by the time the last bus leaves for the ship.

### **The key: Get to San Francisco**

For those who are driving to the reunion, no problem as long as you park across the street in the city-run parking area (the hotel parking lot is very expensive). Details were in earlier newsletters and on the website.

For members who work for the airlines, if you are on passes, you know how it works. San Francisco has huge lift capacity in and out of San Francisco International and also at Oakland across the Bay Bridge. A third choice is San Jose, down the valley about 50 miles.

If you need tickets, check with your travel agent, or dial up one of the airline travel sites. Of particular note, Southwest Airlines has a hub at Oakland and is dominant there. We also have a discount program with United Airlines, details on the website and in earlier newsletters.

The bottom line for most of you is: If you make the commitment to come to the reunion, you can get to San Francisco at a reasonable price.

### **Last-minute decisions to come**

Website registrations will cut off June 27 at 9 a.m. Pacific time so our HQ people can finish up the processing, load the reunion data into their computers, and get over to the host hotel to set up.

If you truly can't commit until the last minute and our automated registration process is already shut down, check our website for status updates and then call the hotel numbers indicated to make your own overnight reservations.

We will handle your event registration at the Marriott when you arrive.

### **Remember what we are about**

Camaraderie is the key word. The annual reunion is about renewing old friendships formed years ago in a hostile environment and being there for each other.

We always have great entertainment, special tours,

*Continued on Page 15*



# Attendance highest ever

*Continued from Page 14*

activities for our spouses/guests, and much more. However, it's meeting that person who meant so much to you years ago that rounds out the memories and makes our reunions so special.

As of May 7, when this article was written, we are on track for the largest attendance ever experienced for a reunion in our 22-year history, and there is even better news.

Several hundred pilots and guest will be coming to a reunion for the first time. That truly increases the chances of meeting stick mates you haven't seen in almost 40 years!

## The party starts early

Much has been written about all the activities and special events in our previous newsletters. While the "official" start of the reunion is Saturday, July 2, many of you are taking advantage of the low airfares and highly discounted room rates at the Marriott and our two overflow hotels to come at least one day early.

It's a great idea, and highly recommended. The informal early bird party typically held each year will be well attended on Friday, July 1. It's a great opportunity to come early, enjoy the town, and meet your friends of old in a casual environment.

## Two major evenings of entertainment

Eric Burdon and the Animals kick off our Saturday evening, July 2, welcome reception.

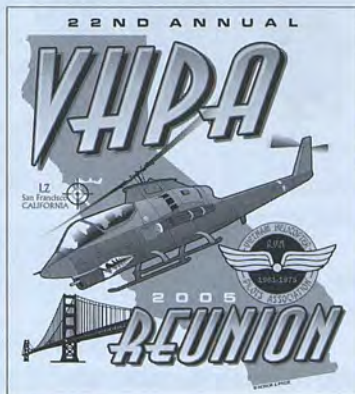
Remember our "informal" theme song: *We Got to Get Out of This Place*? It's Eric's song and he will be playing it twice during the performance. It's in the contract.

On Sunday morning, July 3, there is a culinary demonstration for spouses while the members attend the Annual Business Meeting.

Later that night, we will have a special Las Vegas-style cabaret party with some very, very special performers and entertainers.

You will recognize some of the names for sure.

The facilities at the Marriott for the above events are large enough that if you can come, we can get you in.



## Sunset dinner cruise on July 4

Monday night, July 4, is the sunset dinner cruise on San Francisco Bay aboard a large yacht — 1,200 of us — and we will have a front seat to one of the most spectacular fireworks shows in the country, fog permitting.

Regrettably, the event is sold out.

Tickets were non-refundable by VHPA once purchased, but as mentioned above, we have established a waiting list on our website should any of the members who already have purchased tickets are not be able to go and wish to offer them to others.

If you would like to be put on the wait-list, please click on [www.vhpareunion.org](http://www.vhpareunion.org) and follow the prompts.

## Final Banquet night

The final banquet is on Tuesday, July 5, with all the special activities and ceremonies, and great entertainment. We are nearing a sellout for the final banquet, but as this article is written May 7, we believe we can get most, if not all of you, in the main room.

We are working with the hotel management to maximize the capacity within the grand ballroom, which is one of the largest in San Francisco.

## Need an extra hotel room?

Already registered, but need an extra room? Just call Nancy at VHPA Headquarters toll free at 800-505-VHPA.

Once she verifies your member/registration status, she will provide you with the direct, toll-free number to a third party vendor who works closely with the Marriott Hotel system and is managing our room block on our behalf.

Once the Marriott does sell out, we will refer you to one of the two nearby hotels that also will honor the VHPA rate.

## We're pulling pitch — are you attending?

OK, it's decision time, if you have not already registered.

Can you join us for a truly special weekend? If so, dial up the Internet [www.vhpareunion.org](http://www.vhpareunion.org) and register for your events and hotel.

Prefer to use a manual form? There is one printed in this newsletter. It can be faxed or called in to HQ up to 9 a.m. Pacific time on June 27. The numbers are on the form.

We look forward to seeing you for a fabulous few days with great friends from long ago.

See you there!

# Events still open at reunion



# Overflow

## *Alternate hotels near Marriott to honor VHPA rate*

The reunion article in this *Newsletter* outlines much of the last-minute planning if you have not already registered or booked a hotel room, but would like to attend our reunion in San Francisco in a few weeks.

By the time you read this article, it is likely our primary host hotel, the downtown Marriott at 55 Fourth St. will be sold out. Therefore, we have made arrangements for two nearby hotels within a short distance of the Marriott to honor our VHPA special rate of \$109, plus tax. They are:

### **Hilton San Francisco**

[www.sanfrancisco.hilton.com](http://www.sanfrancisco.hilton.com)

(Hilton's national reservation system)  
Advise clerk you are with VHPA

### **The Argent Hotel**

[www.argenthotel.com](http://www.argenthotel.com)

Ask for in-house reservations 7 a.m.-5 p.m. PDT  
Advise clerk you are with VHPA

Here is how it will work: Once the Marriott physical-ly sells out and stops accepting reservations for our

reunion, VHPA will switch our automated hotel Internet link on our registration website from the Marriott to the Hilton and the Argent.

You will be able to select which hotel you prefer by clicking on that hotel's name.

All you have to do is register per the normal VHPA

procedures on our website [www.vhpareunion.org](http://www.vhpareunion.org) and click on your hotel of preference. The software will link you to that hotel automatically. More updated information will be on our website when you log onto the site.

If you are truly last-minute and the June 27 deadline for registering online has passed (see our

reunion article in this *Newsletter* for details), pick up the phone and:

1. Call the Marriott direct in San Francisco to see if they have any cancellations and if you can get in. Their number is [REDACTED]
2. If there is no room at the Marriott, call one of the above hotels directly, advise it you are with VHPA, and book your room directly.

See you in San Francisco in a few weeks.

— David Rittman



## Reunion briefs

### **New guys get special table**

The reunion is almost upon us.

If you have the *2004 Membership Directory* handy and will attend the reunion, start looking for a stick buddy from flight school, a member of your unit from Vietnam, or some fellow pilot you met and flew with after returning home to sponsor at the New Guy Table.

Our goal is to sign up one new VHPA member for every member pilot at the reunion. That should give us close to 1,200 new members by the end of the reunion.

But feel free to sign up more than one. There is no maximum number. Help make our Association grow. Give a buddy the gift of VHPA. Look for the New Guy sign-up table in the South Wing of Reunion Registration.

If you're unable to attend, don't let that stop you. Get

out your Directory now, select that person or two you want to sponsor and call (800) 505-8472 or email Headquarters at [www.vhpa.org](http://www.vhpa.org) and sign him or them up. Don't put it off. Those attending the reunion shouldn't have all the fun.

— Mike Sheuerman, Vice President

### **Bring old lanyards to reunion**

If you're attending the San Francisco Reunion, don't forget to bring your lanyards from past reunions to be reused — and to help save VHPA a little money.

Hey, \$2.25 times 1,000 reused lanyards equals \$2,250 or 62.5 new memberships for guys who can't afford it or a new piece of equipment for Gary Roush to help with maintaining the VHPA database or one of many other extras VHPA needs throughout the year.

This doesn't cost you anything and helps the Association.

— Mike Sheuerman, Vice President



# Golf

## *StoneTree in great shape, prizes to be awarded*

**MIKE WHITTEN**  
**REUNION GOLF CHAIRMAN**

The time has arrived for us to get together for our annual golf outing.

I hope all who have signed up have been practicing because this is one course where you will need your "A" game. We have had a lot of rain this winter and the course is in the best shape ever, rich green grass that is a pleasure to play on and greens that are out of this world.

Last year at Tour 18 we played on replicas of famous holes around the United States, but some of the tees and fairways were beat from the rain and heat of Texas.

StoneTree will impress you with its turf conditions. StoneTree has Calloway or Cobra rental clubs for \$45, if you need them.

This year, I have arranged for some great prizes that should be interesting. I have got Ellis Brooks Chevrolet-GMC-Cadillac-Buick-Pontiac to sponsor a hole-in-one contest on the 10th hole at the 165-yard distance.

**The prize will be a Chevy Colorado.**

All who want to go for it will have to hit their tee shot from that distance. There also will be prizes available at



the three other par 3s to keep your interest up. We also will have some gifts donated by Bell/Agusta, which was a great help last year and has come through again this year. Many thanks to Bell/Agusta and to Lou for making it happen.

We also are going to have premium wine donated by one of our members from Windsor Vineyards. Bob Potvin and USB are helping out again this year and his contribution is always appreciated.

The highlight is still in the workings and I will tell you about it at the golf course. It's going to make four of you the envy of all who come to the reunion.

**Make sure that you have your ticket this year for golf, it will be the only way to be eligible for door prizes. You will keep the ticket and we will collect the stub and have the drawing from the stubs.**

We have not had a lot of photos from our golf adventures in the past, so I would like to ask those of you with cameras to bring them and shoot pictures and let's get them in the newsletter or a newspaper for us to enjoy.

Like I said in the last newsletter, I have booked the South Course at Andrews Air Force Base for our Washington, DC, reunion and that should be a great venue, also. It is the course of choice for President Bush, so it must be a good course. The Air Force wouldn't let him down would it?

See you in San Francisco, we are going to have the time of our lives, and for those of you who are going to go on to Maui: Aloha!

## Two bike rides planned for reunion

We have two motorcycle rides planned at this year's VHPA reunion.

The first is on Saturday, July 2, starting at 7 a.m. to the 58th Hollister Independence Rally. The ride will include breakfast with members of the American Legion.

We then will ride over to the coast and then head north on Hwy. 1 back to San Francisco in plenty of time for the opening party with Eric Burdon and the Animals.

The second ride will be on Monday, July 4, also starting at 7 a.m.

This ride will go through San Francisco, with riders crossing the Golden Gate Bridge, riding up Hwy. 101 and

then traveling through the historic wine country to Vallejo.

We then will cross the straits at the Benica Bridge. While crossing the bridge, riders with good eyes will be able to see the U.S.S. Missouri in the mothball fleet and, farther out, Travis Air Force Base.

We then will ride south and then head west back to San Francisco Bay and the U.S.S. Hornet for lunch and a look-see. Then it is back to the hotel in plenty of time for the dinner cruise.

Even if you can't make the rides, send me a email note so I can keep you informed on future reunion rides.

If you are wondering why the rides start so early, San Francisco is a big-time destination for everybody local, as well as for tourists from around the world.

Ken Lindstrom

**These rides  
are not  
sponsored  
or  
sanctioned  
by the  
VHPA**



# Schedule:

## *San Francisco reunion events begin on July 1*

### **Friday, July 1**

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 9:00 AM – 6:00 PM  | Vendor set up – Golden Gate Hall A-C                                    |
| 1:00 PM – 6:00 PM  | Registration for pre-registered guests only – Yerba Buena Ballroom area |
| 6:00 PM – Whenever | Early Bird informal get together – 2nd floor hotel Atrium area          |

### **Saturday, July 2**

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| 10:00 AM – 8:00 PM | Registration – Yerba Buena Ballroom area   |
| 9:00 AM – 7:00 PM  | Vendor area – Golden Gate Hall A-C   |
| 6:30 PM – 7:00 PM  | First time reunion attendee special orientation welcome reception – Nob Hill A-D         |
| 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM  | Welcome reception and party for all members and their guests – Yerba Buena Ballroom area |
| 8:30 PM – 10:00 PM | Eric Burdon and The Animals performance – Yerba Buena Ballroom                           |

### **Sunday, July 3**

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| 9:00 AM – 6:00 PM   | Registration – Yerba Buena Ballroom area  |
| 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Annual Business Meeting (dues current members only) – Salon 8 & 9; Yerba Buena Ballroom               |
| 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Brunch for spouses and guests, including culinary exhibition of master gourmet chefs – hotel area TBD |
| 12:00 PM – 7:00 PM  | Vendor area – Golden Gate Hall A-C  |
| 1:00 PM – 5:00 PM   | Mini reunions   |
| 1:30 PM – 4:30 PM   | Alcatraz Island Tour – departure time exact schedule per your pre-purchased tickets – approx 4 hours. |
| 5:30 PM – 8:30 PM   | Informal get together with great 2-piece combo – 2nd Floor Hotel Atrium                               |
| 9:00 PM – midnight  | Cabaret Entertainment and Stage Show – Yerba Buena Ballroom   |

### **Monday, July 4**

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| 6:00 AM – 4:00 PM  | Golf Tournament at Stone Tree Golf Club; includes lunch and mementos                           |
| 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM  | Mini-reunions  |
| 9:00 AM – 6:00 PM  | Registration – Yerba Buena Ballroom area   |
| 9:00 AM – 6:00 PM  | Vendor area – Golden Gate Hall A-C   |
| 6:00 PM – 11:00 PM | 4th of July Dinner cruise, dancing, and weather/fog permitting very major fireworks display    |
| 10:30 PM- 1:30 AM  | Party continues with great 2-piece combo inside the hotel lounge area – 2nd Floor Hotel Atrium |

### **Tuesday, July 5**

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM  | Mini-reunions  |
| 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM | Alcatraz Island Tour – departure time exact schedule per your pre-purchased tickets – approx 4 hours.  |
| 9:00 AM – 6:00 PM  | Registration – Yerba Buena Ballroom area   |
| 9:00 AM – 4:30 PM  | Vendor Area – location to be announced (relocated from Golden Gate A-C)  |
| 5:30 PM – midnight | Doors open - Final Banquet & dance (Typically this is a coat and tie event. Some members wear military dress uniform. Ladies wear cocktail dresses) – Yerba Buena Ballroom |

### **Wednesday, July 6**

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| AM Departure | Check out for majority of reunion attendees – returning home  |
| AM Departure | For members and guests going on the post reunion trip to Maui, Hawaii only – flight leaves SFO enroute to Maui – exact departure times included in your trip package. |

**Register at [www.vhpareunion.org](http://www.vhpareunion.org)**



# VIETNAM HELICOPTER PILOTS ASSOCIATION

22nd Annual Reunion • San Francisco, CA • July 2-6, 2005

## NATIONAL REUNION REGISTRATION FORM

**Register online at [www.vhpareunion.org](http://www.vhpareunion.org) or mail completed form to:**

VHPA Headquarters, 5530 Birdcage St., Suite 200, Citrus Heights, CA 95610-7698

*Fax signed credit card authorization to: (916) 966-8743*

Member name:	Member No.:	
Flight class:	Chapter:	
1st combat unit:	Call sign:	Year(s):
2nd combat unit:	Call sign:	Year(s):
3rd combat unit:	Call sign:	Year(s):
Address:	Address change?	Yes No
City:	State:	Zip:
E-mail address:	Telephone: (     )	Fax: (     )
Wife/guest name:	Hometown:	18 or older? Yes No
Guest name:	Hometown:	18 or older? Yes No
Guest name:	Hometown:	18 or older? Yes No
Guest name:	Hometown:	18 or older? Yes No

**If using this manual form in lieu of the VHPA Internet website, once registered, you will need to contact the San Francisco Marriott Hotel, 55 Fourth St., San Francisco, CA 94103-3199 yourself to complete your room reservation. The hotel's telephone number is: [REDACTED] Be sure to identify yourself as a VHPA member to receive the heavily discounted rate. A credit card number or one night's advance payment will be required to hold a reservation. Please review the reunion refund policy for further details. Limit of 2 rooms per member unless approved in advance by VHPA Headquarters.**

EVENT	No. of people	Price	Total
Registration through 4/30/2005*		@ \$55.00	
Registration after 4/30/2005*		@ \$65.00	
Total from sidebar (**Advance reunion T-shirt purchase closes June 12)			
Welcome orientation for first reunion attendees only (July 2)		No charge	
Welcome reception (July 2)		@ \$35.00	
Spouse/guest brunch (Culinary demonstration) (July 3)		@ \$30.00	
Golf Tournament (July 4)		@ \$100.00	
San Francisco Bay Cruise (July 4)		@ \$120.00	
Wheelchair transport needed? Number _____	<b>SOLD OUT</b>		
Alcatraz Trip — July 3	<b>SOLD OUT</b>	@ \$22.50	
Alcatraz Trip — July 5		@ \$22.50	
Final Banquet/Dance (July 5)		@ \$60.00	
<i>Non-registered guests at banquet only</i>			
VHPA dues (if not dues current)	1 year	@ \$36.00	
VHPA dues (if not dues current)	3 years	@ \$90.00	
Life membership		@ \$450.00	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>			

T-SHIRTS (Thru June 11)**		
QTY.	SIZE	AMT.
	S@\$17.50	
	M@\$17.50	
	L@\$17.50	
	XL@\$17.50	
	XXL@\$18.50	
	XXXL@\$19.50	
<b>SIDEBAR TOTAL:</b>		

QTY.	BANQUET MEAL
	Beef
	Fish
	Vegetarian

Membership Fund contribution:	\$ _____
Scholarship Fund contribution:	\$ _____
General Fund contribution:	\$ _____
Vietnam War Museum contribution:	\$ _____

\*Each person 18 and older must pay registration fee. (Except non-registered banquet guests.)

### CREDIT CARD PAYMENT

MC or Visa No: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### CHECK or MONEY ORDER PAYMENT

In lieu of a credit card, you can mail a check or money order payable to "VHPA Reunion 2005" with form.



# New Guys

## *Signing up members major goal of new president*

**MIKE SHEUERMAN**  
VICE PRESIDENT

As I write this article, the San Francisco Reunion is only 84 days and a wakeup away.

Four days after that, I assume the post of president of VHPA for the coming year. Each of the outstanding guys who have preceded me as president has strived to make and keep this Association the premier veteran's organization it is. I hope I can continue in that effort.

My overriding goal as president is growing the membership of VHPA. I want to get the guys you and I served with who have never experienced the camaraderie, esprit de corps and brotherhood of our Association to become members of VHPA.

I want to find out why more than 4,000 of our fellow pilots who did join have chosen not to renew their memberships. To do this I need your help.

Guys join because of other guys they know and served with. They join because a friend, a buddy from a time years ago, invites them to. They join for the simple fact of a friendship that can never be replaced.

People who didn't experience what we did can't understand it when I say to them: "Aside from marrying my wife, Melanie, and the birth of my son, Hunter, my year in Vietnam was one of the best times of my life."

They think I'm nuts, suffering from some combat-related illness. But I know you guys understand.



This year, starting with the reunion in San Francisco, the VHPA will be active in getting members in attendance to help the Association grow. We will have a "SIGN UP A NEW GUY" booth where attendees can give the gift of VHPA to an old friend or two or three who have never been a member before.

As of today, April 9, more than 847 pilots are registered for the reunion. That's more than twice as many as those who registered for last year's reunion by the same date.

Based on the early registration numbers and the fact the reunion city is San Francisco, we are expecting more than 1,200 pilots to attend and would not be surprised if 1,500 showed up. That's between 15 percent and 20 percent of our current membership.

More than 80 reunion FNGs are registered already.

If each one of us in attendance signs up one new guy who has never before been a member of VHPA, our Association grows by a substantial number. I'm not asking you to do something I'm not willing to do. I plan on signing up two guys I knew during my days as a helicopter pilot, guys I've wondered about, guys whose names I found in the *VHPA Membership Directory* and would like to see again.

Please join with me in giving the gift of VHPA to a guy or two or three you would like to be in contact with again. If you can't make the reunion this year, don't let that stop you from giving a VHPA membership to a buddy.

Contact VHPA at [www.vhpa.org](http://www.vhpa.org) or call (800) 505-8472 and do it.

Thanks in advance for helping VHPA grow.

## Secret Commandos fascinating book

### **Secret Commandos Behind Enemy Lines With The Elite Warriors of SOG**

"Secret Commandos," the latest book by John Plaster, is a fascinating read. It details his three-year tour with the SOG mission based in Kontum.

He served as a member of a recon team, the leader of several different recon teams and finally as a "Covey Rider," the aerial observer for teams on the ground flying in an Air Force O-2 or an OV-10.

He describes in detail the inner workings of the recon

***Book  
review***



team/air asset package to accomplish the clandestine missions in Laos and Cambodia. Working with Army, Air Force, Marine and Navy aviation units, he had unique perspective during his time in Vietnam and gives the reader a sense of being right there on the mission. His appreciation of the aviator as a team member is second to none.

Based on his actions in the Central Highlands, many of the missions he describes were flown by people I know. Several of them involved people I flew with on missions I flew.

His descriptions are vivid. He pulls no punches. He talks about the dedication of aviation units to the mission, loss of friends, personal decisions and why he stayed

*Continued on Page 21*



# FSB Coral

## *Battle fought in 1968; author, vets return in 1998*

JOHN EATON

The Cobras initially were having problems neutralizing the enemy 12.7 mms.

At one point, a Cobra at about 250 feet commenced to fly slowly down the upcoming stream of green enemy tracers.

At almost a hover, the Cobra pilot let go with his own guns. Almost eyeball to eyeball, the U.S. pilot in his Cobra, the enemy with his HMG, just hammered away at each other.

Green tracers streaking skyward and the opposing red tracer streaming down from the night sky.

This, I feel, was a remarkable display of courage from both combatants.

The enemy 12.7 mm was eventually silenced by some good old, gung-ho, American guts. One Cobra pilot switched on all his navigation lights and lit up like a Christmas tree.

The enemy gunner didn't see the trap or couldn't resist and let rip with a burst of fire.

The other Cobra, still blacked out and slightly behind and below, let go with a salvo of rockets at the source of the green tracer. Problem eliminated.

As the airstrikes were going on, the infantrymen's personal battle was raging on the ground. Among the rubber trees, men from both sides were fighting and dying.

The enemy tactic was to move in close and avoid the

artillery and airstrikes. Wave after wave of enemy troops, displaying remarkable courage, were being repulsed time and time again.

It was bloody infantry fighting at it's worst. No quarter asked for and none given. The casualties were mounting.

The Cobra's duel with the 12.7s was about when the battle reached its peak. It was indeed a spectacle. The noise is difficult to describe. The clamor of hundreds of M-16s, SLRs and AK-47s, machine guns, grenades, salvos of supporting, incoming artillery shells, the thunder of outgoing artillery, Cobras strafing and rocketing, F-4 Phantoms bombing, strafing and then the thunder of their afterburners, Spooky letting rip with mini-guns and the Dusters pouring their shells out into the distant tree line.

To complement the crescendo of battle was the pyrotechnic display of illuminating flares, red and green tracers streaking through the base and ricocheting into the night sky, the boiling, rolling fireball of napalm.

*Continued on Page 22*

### Part 2 in a series

**To complement the crescendo of battle was the pyrotechnic display of illuminating flares, red and green tracers streaking through the base and ricocheting into the night sky, the boiling, rolling fireball of napalm.**

## Commando author great storyteller

*Continued from Page 20*

three years with candor and heart. He is a great storyteller.

As a "Covey Rider" on Sept. 27, 1971, he and his OV-10 pilot were flying north along the border at the edge of their tactical operations area. As they start to turn back to the south, they

picked up a faint emergency beeper on guard. Thinking it might be Stormy 03, a downed Air Force

reconnaissance aircraft, the pilot said, "Beeper, beeper, come up voice. Are you Stormy 03?"

"Prairie Fire, Prairie Fire" was the reply on guard from RT Kansas, a recon team out of CCN, based in Da Nang. The team members were running for their lives.

### Book review



Several members were wounded and at least one was dead.

Not having any of the frequencies, call signs, maps or authorization to be in the area for the CCN mission, but hearing no other response from any other aviation asset, Plaster and the pilot went into action.

While the pilot scrambled fighters, Plaster has the team pop smoke. He starts directing them to a PZ, while the pilot dives in and shoots rockets behind them.

A voice comes up on guard and tells them to "get off guard."

The Covey pilot replies he has a tactical emergency and has to use guard. Another voice breaks in and says "Covey, this is Widowmaker 27, a flight of four Cobras out of Da Nang. Could you use a little help?" And on and on and on. It's a great book.

— Mike Sheuerman



# FSB Coral

## *Flares, tracers, napalm overwhelm the senses*

*Continued from Page 21*

All the senses were just overwhelmed.

As first light approached, the enemy, in typical fashion, started to withdraw. The firing dwindled until only sporadic small arms fire could be heard from the northern and western perimeters.

The early morning light illuminated a surreal scene of devastation. An eerie silence hung over the battlefield.

Smoke and dust haze covered the base, and a pungent odor of cordite and napalm permeated the area.

Diggers started to move around the area. Most of us displayed signs of fatigue and shock. The adrenaline was wearing off and exhaustion was setting in.

Approaching RAAF 9 Squadron Hueys broke the early morning calm. They came thundering in from the southeast low level over the open grassland. Their urgent mission was to evacuate the dead and wounded to the nearest hospital facility.

Patrols moved outside the perimeter to clear the immediate area. The ghastly sight of numerous enemy corpses confronted us. Those who had not been killed in the close combat along the perimeter by small arms fire had been literally blown to pieces by artillery and aerial bombs.

All the bodies had to be searched and then prepared for burial in a mass grave, a most unpleasant task carried out in the tropical heat.

So came to an end the battle for FSB Coral.

Patrolling continued around the base for some days and sporadic contact was made with the enemy.

On a couple of nights, the enemy fired mortars into the base. Those sporadic attacks caused considerable alarm and some casualties, but the base was never

**Approaching RAAF 9 Squadron Hueys broke the early morning calm. They came thundering in from the southeast low level over the open grassland. Their urgent mission was to evacuate the dead and wounded to the nearest hospital facility.**

**Patrolling continued around the base for some days and sporadic contact was made with the enemy. On a couple of nights, the enemy fired mortars into the base.**

attacked in force again.

We never returned to that area again. It was a phenomenon of that war that a unit would accept considerable casualties to take, secure and occupy a specific piece of real estate. That force would be in total control. Then would come the orders from on high to move somewhere else and repeat the process.

Meanwhile, the enemy would move back into the area we had just vacated. What a pointless strategy. Bloody madness when all things are considered. All those dead and wounded. Lives changed forever and for what?

### **The battlefield today**

A group of Australian veterans visited the battle site in 1992 and were surprised to find a significant memorial constructed there.

The Vietnamese had discovered one of the two mass graves a couple of years previously while they were clearing the old rubber plantation for replanting. Obviously, they realized the significance of the location from their own point of view.

Sometime since 1992, an additional memorial has been constructed around the actual gravesite. This memorial is located about 100 meters from the main memorial.

In May 1998 my wife, I and other veterans and their partners visited Vietnam. This tour was organized to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the battle of Fire Support Base Coral.

This pilgrimage was a rather daunting experience for most of us vets.

It was a very subdued group as we touched down at the now almost-deserted old Tan Son Nhut Airbase.

We spent a couple of days in and around Saigon, acclimatizing and reminiscing about the good old days before venturing out into the countryside.

The return to the old FSB Coral battleground was certainly a very profound experience for us all. The excited anticipation was replaced by a more somber mood as we drew closer to the location.

We drove along a dusty track into the cool gloom and shadows of the rubber plantation. In a clearing, illuminat-

**The Vietnamese had discovered one of the two mass graves a couple of years previously while they were clearing the old rubber plantation for replanting. Obviously, they realized the significance of the location from their own point of view.**

*Continued on Page 23*



# FSB Coral

## *Visit to battleground brought back clear memories*

*Continued from Page 22*

ed by the brilliant morning sunshine, contrasting starkly with the surrounding plantation, stood the memorial.

The memory of that moment is almost as clear as the actual event. Thirty-year-old memories came flooding back. Some of the group became very emotional.

Most were thankful they had wives there for support. Indeed some of the wives also were overcome by this unique experience.

After a short service conducted by our battalion chaplain, we all placed a rose on the memorial and held a minute's silence to pay respects to the fallen.

We then began to move around the area, searching for any signs of our previous occupation. It was very difficult to locate any specific areas as the new rubber plantation totally covered the area.

Evidence of old command bunkers was still obvious and we did manage to locate the old BHQ garbage pit. Other than that, not much else.

I carried a handheld GPS with me in the hope we could locate the other mass gravesite and advise the Viet-

**The memory of that moment is almost as clear as the actual event. Thirty-year-old memories came flooding back. Some of the group became very emotional. Most were thankful they had wives there for support. Indeed some of the wives also were overcome by this unique experience.**

namese authorities. Unfortunately, this proved too difficult, as we only had limited time in the area.

The local People's Committee understandably was a little apprehensive about a group of veterans (their old enemy) wanting to visit their memorial. Restrictions were placed on our movements around the area. They were our hosts and we respected their wishes.

All things considered they were extremely friendly and generous during our stay at the old battle site. Indeed our hosts treated us with the utmost respect for the duration of our tour.

It was a quiet, pensive group that departed the old battleground. Many of us were emotionally drained and very much in a reflective mood. We returned to the Australian Consulate in Saigon, where a proper and very moving service was held.

We spent a further few days in-country, visiting other areas where we had served all those years ago. The Iron Triangle area up near Ben Cat, Cu Chi, Bien Hoa, Vung Tau and the old Task Force Area at Nui Dat.

All things considered, the return to Vietnam was an enlightening experience. I would recommend such a journey to fellow vets who are in the position to do so. It certainly laid a few ghosts to rest for me.

**All things considered they were extremely friendly and generous during our stay at the old battle site. Indeed our hosts treated us with the utmost respect for the duration of our tour.**

## CCN has holiday party in San Francisco

Last Dec. 4, members of California Chapter North and their significant others attended a holiday party in San Francisco.

The party was held at the San Francisco Marriott – the same location where the annual reunion will be held in July.

After dinner, CCN president Jim Gunderson thanked all attending for their support during 2004 and VHPA president Dan Ferguson presented Gunderson with a plaque of appreciation for CCN's community involvement, especially with the Mobile Officers Club and Huey the group tows to parades and events in Northern California throughout the year.

(This effort would not be possible without the generosity of Mike Nord, who houses and maintains the

MOC and the Huey at his business location in West Sacramento.)

For those who have not been to the San Francisco Marriott and plan to attend this July, be prepared for a wonderful experience! The facilities are spectacular and the staff provides personal attention to your every need.

The location in downtown San Francisco is perfect for sightseeing and within a block or two of several types of public transportation around the entire Bay Area.

The one and only drawback we observed is the expense of auto parking in San Francisco. There is a parking lot within a couple of blocks of the hotel that charges \$25 a day and the hotel charges \$40 a day.

We hope to see you all there in July!

— Jim Barger, Treasurer CCN



# VIETNAM HELICOPTER PILOTS ASSOCIATION

5530 Birdcage St., Suite 200 • Citrus Heights, CA 95610-7698

(800) 505-VHPA (voice) • (916) 966-8743 (fax) • HQ@vhpa.org (e-mail) • www.vhpa.org (website)

## Membership application/change of address

☐ New application

☐ Address change

☐ Directory correction

Membership dues:

☐ Annual: \$36

☐ Three years: \$90

☐ Life: \$450\*

Newsletter subscription only: ☐ Annual: \$36 ☐ Three years: \$90

Add \$ \_\_\_\_\_ as my contribution to: ☐ Membership Fund ☐ Scholarship Fund

NAME

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☐ Please charge my MasterCard/Visa credit card.

☐ Enclosed is a check/money order payable to VHPA.

☐ Add \$15 for current Membership Directory, plus \$5 for postage and handling

Credit card No.:

Expiration date:

SIGNATURE:

FLIGHT SCHOOL CLASS:

SERVICE BRANCH:

COMBAT FLIGHT HOURS:

SOCIAL SECURITY NO.:

Information about each Vietnam tour:

Date of tour			Unit	Location	Call sign
From:	To:				
1st					
2nd					
3rd					
4th					

Information about you: Helicopters flown, medals/awards, talents, hobbies, and anything else:

How did you learn about the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association? Referred by? Was membership a gift? From whom?