



THE VHPA AVIATOR

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

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Dave Rittman photo

This UH-1H veteran of the Vietnam War is one of some 30 helicopters on display at the National Air and Space Museum's new Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Northern Virginia. The center will be open to visitors during the VHPA Reunion in Washington, DC, in July. See Pages 13-23 for articles about the reunion.



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From the President

Being president of VHPA continues to bring pleasant surprises.

Recently I received an email from a member and his wife concerning a book by Margot T. Raven entitled: "America's White Table."



Mike Sheuerman

It's the story of the Missing Man Ceremony told in such a way young children can read it, understand the meaning behind the table and appreciate the sacrifices of those remembered by displaying it.

I purchased the book for my 7-year-old son, Hunter, and together we spent an hour reading it and looking at the pictures. He asked questions, made comments and had me promise to be careful if I ever have to go to war again. He's a great kid. I'm lucky to be

his father.

I recommend each of you purchase the book for your young children or grandchildren and read it with them. It is time well spent. Thanks to Lindi and Stan Wiley for bringing the book to our attention. Please see Stan's review of the book in this issue.

Aviator issue kicks off reunion

As you know, this is the VHPA DC Reunion kickoff issue. Your Reunion Committee has planned another terrific Annual Reunion for us.

Inside you will find detailed information on each event planned for the reunion. Registration is scheduled to open Jan. 16. REGISTER EARLY!

We are limited on rooms at The Wardman Park, the Marriott hotel in DC. Once those are gone, you will have to stay in an overflow hotel close by and, as you know, miss part of the camaraderie.

You will still have a great time, but you will feel you are missing something by not staying in the main hotel.

We have purposely left plenty of free time in the reunion so you can take advantage of all there is to see and do in the DC area.

This is the reunion to bring the kids and grandkids to; so much to see and do.

Dana Young, membership chairman, had the EC call the 114 members who did not renew their memberships in June of this year. Most just forgot and really appreciated the reminder. They liked hearing from a fellow member. It was and is a great idea.

If any of you would be interested in making calls in your local AO to help VHPA and Dana keep members current, please contact him at dmyoung@vhpa.org. And VHPA would appreciate the help.

Everything else goes well. We're financially sound, working on the management company RFP, updating the Headquarters software, making it easier to pay your annual membership dues online and working on several other things.

Don't forget to follow through

Please remember to do the three things I asked of each of you:

- Donate to the VHPA Scholarship Fund
- Write an article for *The Aviator*
- SIGN UP A NEW GUY!

Fort Rucker celebrates anniversary

On a personal note, I attended the 50th anniversary celebration of the Army Aviation Center at Fort Rucker in late October.

VHPA had a booth there and presented a plaque to the facility on behalf of the Association.

We still are the largest single group to graduate from there without a doubt.

VHPA had a large number of members in attendance. See the article on the event in this issue. Really enjoyed the time.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS. Give a membership in VHPA to a buddy as a gift. See you in DC.

Mike Sheuerman
VHPA president

2006 Reunion registration opens Jan. 16

VHPA statistics

- Between Sept. 23 and Nov. 14, the VHPA added 36 new members.
- During October, members donated \$160 toward the VHPA Scholarship Fund.

E-mail items to *The Aviator* at:
editor@vhpa.org

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Letters

Helicopter flies from 19th Hole

Now I know how Donald Trump feels.

Playing golf at the Stonetree Golf Club in Novato was truly a great experience for me during this year's VHPA Reunion in San Francisco. This was the first time I played golf at any of the numerous VHPA reunions I have attended.

I was hitting the ball well and I knew some lucky golfers were going to get a helicopter ride back to the city, but I didn't think I would win the prize. When Mike Whitten called my name first, I knew this was my lucky day.

The Agusta 109 Power from SouthBay Helicopters had already landed and I knew the pilot, Ray Murphy, who not only was a member of VHPA, but also California Chapter North.

As we were hustled over to meet the helicopter and get on board, I met the other lucky golfers whose names had been drawn. They were Al Flory, Tun Gist and Roy Lamb. They were all guests at the reunion, and I was the only VHPA member. (I had not been in a helicopter since January 2004, when I was able to fly America's Huey 091 over Tyler, TX.)

We were all belted in, Ray Murphy cranked up the engines and we slowly lifted off. The first beautiful view we had was of the Stonetree Golf Course and the Novato countryside.

Unofficial tour guide

I quickly realized the other passengers were not familiar with this part of California we were flying over, so I became the unofficial tour guide, pointing out various pieces of real estate and significant landmarks.

We flew over the runways of Hamilton Air Force Base, which had been closed for several years, and noticed all the new housing in the area. We continued on past Mill Valley, and then flew over San Quentin Prison. (One of California's most famous prisons. We all had thoughts about what the prisoners down below were doing.)

Then we began to fly across San Francisco Bay, toward the Golden Gate, and we flew over the bridge. We could really feel the wind blowing the helicopter around. We then headed back across the Bay and flew over Alcatraz. After looking at "The Rock," we flew back toward the Presidio of San Francisco and Crissy Army Air Field, where I landed numerous times when I was in the National Guard many years ago.

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We then flew over the city, passed SBC Park where the SF Giants were playing, and landed on the roof of the San Francisco Hall of Justice.

A friend of Ray Murphy, Dan, led us off the roof at the Hall of Justice, took us downstairs to his SUV in the basement and back to the Marriott Hotel. We thanked him and Ray for a wonderful flight.

It was an exciting ending to a most memorable day and, again, I realized how "The Donald" feels after a round of golf.

Jim Barger

Renewal card stirs memory of Vietnam

I had an experience in Nam your renewal card reminded me of.

I flew for the 188th Assault Helicopter Company out of Dau Tieng in 1967 and they were a bit confused about the infusion of experienced pilots to assist in training of the new in-country pilots. They put their pilots who came over in the AC position with little or no knowledge of appropriate flying habits in Nam.

I was infused from the 155th Assault Helicopter Company in Ban Me Thout to the 188th as an AC and, as infused pilots, we were placed in the junior pilot positions.

One day we had a very low cloud cover and had to take a mission at Lai Khe. Just after takeoff, Lead, a captain called for flight to stay trail and he maintained close proximity to the cloud base about 500 feet up.

The first 3 choppers were flying the best textbook formation I had seen since I left Rucker, having gone straight to Nam and BMT. I was flying chalk 4 and just naturally slipped into old habits of staying loose when flying low level, even though they wanted a formation 500 feet up.

Pilot ordered back in formation

Chalk 5, flown by a first lieutenant, called me over the radio and angrily said, "Chalk 4, get back in formation and stay there."

I was a low life W-1 to him and not supposed to talk back to big brother. I replied, "That's a negative. You keep this formation like this, you are going to get them all shot down!"

There was no further response from him. Chalk lead thought for a few minutes and came on the air, "Chalk flight, come up stagger trail left."

All appropriate movement took place and I continued my hanging loose. The first 3 birds were still in beautiful formation, perfect for an automatic weapon to hit them all without excessive finger strain.

Just a few minutes later, lead dropped down to a true low level and dragged his flight across a large opening. While I was just entering the opening, I started taking fire from the left and called lead to inform him.

His reply, "I got it from there, too."

Rather than diverting to keep his flight from taking hits and possibly worse, he flew us all through the automatic weapons fire. Four of the 5 aircraft were hit, 3 were unserviceable, mine wasn't hit.

The moral of the story, I hang loose in any formation and don't like being told to "... get back in formation ..."

I choose which formation I am in now and plan on doing so in the future.

Mark O. Hayes
188th AHC, Black Widow 14
Missoula, MT 59808

Crew chief strong supporter of VHPA

Thomas "Mitch" Youngblood died Sept. 8.

During 1971 and 1972, I was a slick pilot with "F" Troop, 4th Air Cavalry, based out of Lai Khe and Long Binh in Vietnam. Like many others, I served my tour and returned to the United States and put the war behind me.

A few years ago, I was cleaning out some files and ran across the name of then-Capt. Ronald Radcliffe, whom I had flown with in Vietnam. The last time I heard from Ron was in 1972 and he was a patient in a military hospital.

Wondering what had happened to him, I made several calls and finally located him. Ron put me in touch with several other troop members whom I began to call and, of course, swap war stories. One of the individuals was former Spec. 5 Tom Youngblood, Ron Radcliffe's scout crew chief.

One of the first things out of Tom's mouth was: "Are you a member of the VHPA?" I said no. However, before the conversation ended, Tom had me convinced to join and attend my first meet in Dallas.

Tom and his lovely wife, O'Naria (Ned), were there as guests of the troop. Tom, over the years, was responsible for many former "F" Troop pilots joining the VHPA.

When I arrived in Dallas, Tom had already picked up tickets for me to attend many of the hard-to-get-into shows, etc.

Tom was a "comrade in arms," a much-decorated combat air crewman and, most of all, a friend. He loved the VHPA.

This year, Tom was unable to attend the San Francisco Reunion due to his battle with Agent Orange-related can-

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cer. However, a souvenir of the event was sent to him and his exact words to me were: "You will never know how much this means to me."

On Sept. 8, Tom lost his war with cancer. Tom was buried with full military ceremony in the New Hope Cemetery, Jesup, GA. In attendance as Honorary Pallbearers were 7 "F" Troop Pilots and crew chiefs. Two of this group were speakers at the funeral service.

Tom, I know that you will always be an "F" Trooper, and that you will forever be in our thoughts.

Joseph Litton, former first lieutenant
F Troop, 4th U.S. (Air) Cavalry
Alpharetta, GA

Dust-off crew risks lives for wounded

Oct. 16, 1970, was a typical day in the jungle-clad mountains of Vietnam's northern I Corps, not far from LZ New Mexico.

The thick cloud cover yielded an intermittent misty rain. The midday temperature hovered around 65 degrees as the patrol left the 1st Platoon perimeter. Its mission was to recover a claymore mine booby trap the platoon had lain down after a brief firefight three days before.

The 1st Platoon was one of three platoons of A Company, 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry of the 101st Airborne Division. Each platoon had its assigned sector of the company area of operations to cover.

As company commander, I spent time with each of my platoons in rotation, as circumstances required. I was with the 1st Platoon during the firefight.

The platoon had been moving through an open area about the size of a football field, when a landmine exploded, seriously wounding a 1st Platoon soldier. The platoon set up a defensive perimeter and called for Dust-off. I notified battalion headquarters of the casualty.

Dust-off pilot requests smoke

Within a short time, we heard the distinctive sound of an approaching Huey helicopter. The Dust-off pilot identified himself and requested smoke so he could locate the platoon.

After correctly identifying our smoke, Dust-off made its final approach. As the chopper landed within a few meters of the platoon perimeter, we heard several loud explosions. At first I thought that the helicopter's rotor wash had set off other landmines.

I was wrong. There appeared to be an enemy force on

the ridgeline above the platoon, firing rocket-propelled grenades at the medical evacuation helicopter. Fortunately, their marksmanship was poor, and the Dust-off crew was able to load the wounded man and lift off without being hit by an RPG.

As Dust-off cleared the area, three VC were spotted running up the ridgeline. A smattering of 1st Platoon rifle fire followed the enemy until they disappeared into the jungle.

Booby trap set for VC

Since the Viet Cong often returned to the battlefield to scavenge, a Claymore mine booby trap was set up for their benefit. Apparently the VC either did not come back to the area or, if they did, they were lucky. The booby trap was not tripped.

Three days later we were ordered to go back and police it up. I decided to accompany the patrol assigned the mission.

The patrol consisted of one of the platoon's rifle squads, along with the platoon medic, Thanh, a Kit Carson Scout, and me.

Thanh had been a Viet Cong soldier who deserted to our side and, after retraining, was assigned to the 1st Platoon as a scout. I decided I could be most useful to the patrol by joining Thanh as part of the point, or lead element.

Thanh's job was to cut a path through the virgin jungle with his machete. As "drag," or second man in the two-man point team, it was my responsibility to provide Thanh with protection and to make sure he went in the right direction.

Leaving the platoon perimeter shortly, after noon, we soon worked up a sweat in spite of the coolness of the monsoon season. After a little more than two hours, the jungle vegetation thinned as we crossed a mountain stream and began to ascend the hill on the other side.

Scout detects Viet Cong

Suddenly, Thanh stopped and held up his hand, signaling me to stop. I passed the signal back to the rest of the patrol, while Thanh crouched down, pointing to the top of the hill before us.

"Dai Wi (Captain), VC! VC!"

I looked in the direction Thanh pointed. I could see nothing but jungle. Nevertheless, Thanh's urgency left no doubt he had seen the enemy. We worked our way cautiously up the hill.

"Hot damn," I thought to myself, "We're gonna get some today!"

As we neared the top of the hill, I looked down at the ground and spotted a footprint. It was not Thanh's.

Almost simultaneously, I heard an explosion and felt myself being lifted into the air, and then slammed into the ground on my back. Time seemed to stand still as the patrol dropped to the ground, rifles at the ready.

I felt severe pain in my lower left leg. Within seconds,

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the platoon medic crawled up to me. Propped up on my elbows, I could see him working on my leg. The landmine explosion had blown my boot off, and I could see the top of my mangled foot.

"How's it look, Doc?"

"You're going to be just fine, sir," he assured me. I knew I wasn't just fine, but I was alive. There were no other casualties.

Medic calls for Dust-off

The patrol set up a perimeter defense and Doc called over the radio for Dust-off. "Roger that," he said as he turned to me. "Captain, it will be 45 minutes before they can get a gunship over us to cover Dust-off."

We had been losing too many medical evacuation helicopters recently, and a policy had been established prohibiting Dust-off missions without a Cobra gunship in direct support.

"Would you like some morphine?"

"No thanks, Doc." I needed to keep a clear head.

As we settled in for a tense wait, we knew the enemy was very close to our position. We could not see them because of the jungle undergrowth. But we could hear their movement ahead of us toward the top of the hill.

The Cobra pilot came on our radio frequency about 45 minutes later, reporting he was inbound and requesting smoke. A colored smoke grenade was thrown, the smoke wafting its way upward through the jungle growth.

A few minutes later the pilot came on the radio. After correctly identifying the color of our smoke, he asked, "Where are the bad guys?"

I told him they were 25 meters north of our smoke.

"Roger that," he answered, his voice distorted by the helicopter's vibration. "I'm coming in. Get your heads down!"

Cobra makes three passes

After the third pass by the Cobra, no further enemy movement was heard. The gunship began circling the area to cover Dust-off.

Within minutes, Dust-off reported he was hovering over our smoke 120 feet above us. We could not see him, nor could he see us. He said he was sending down a jungle penetrator, a collapsible stool suspended on a steel cable attached to a winch on the helicopter. It was designed to be lowered through the jungle for extractions where no landing zone was available.

A few minutes later the jungle penetrator landed within six feet of me. Doc brought it over and helped strap me in. I cleared my M-16 rifle, handing all my ammunition and hand grenades to Doc for distribution to the patrol.



WOC Chorus recording available for the asking

When I was in WOC Class 67-17, which started in early 1967, there was a Warrant Officer Candidate chorus at Fort Wolters. In the late spring or early summer of 1967, the group recorded a 45-rpm record.

I'd have to get the record out to be accurate, but one side was the then-popular Green Beret ballad and the other was a song about helicopter pilots being "winged warriors."

I have no interest in keeping the record and it will end up being thrown away unless someone wants it. If there are still many of the records around and it is not on a website or somewhere because of a lack of interest, I'll just toss it.

If anyone would like it to stick on the VHPA site (or elsewhere), I will be glad to forward it to anyone who would like to have it.

Frank S. Potts

Montgomery, Patterson, Potts & Willard, L.L.P.

After contacting the 1st Platoon leader to inform him he was now the company commander, I gave the radio handset to Doc, who told Dust-off to bring me up.

Slowly, slowly, I was lifted through the jungle. After what seemed an eternity, I cleared the trees and saw Dust-off a few meters above me.

Crewmen's hands reach out

Seconds later, I was beside it. Hands reached out, pulled me inside and gently placed me on the helicopter's metal floor.

The pilot immediately climbed to a safer altitude and headed toward the 18th Surgical Hospital in Quang Tri.

The crew chief handed me a blanket, which promptly flew out the open side of the helicopter. Covering me with another blanket, he told me he recognized our call sign. His was the same crew that had picked up the 1st Platoon casualty three days before. This was their third helicopter since then.

In the past three days, they had had two helicopters shot out from under them. He related this to me in a matter of fact way, giving me the impression being shot down was a routine part of their job, a minor irritant on a par with mosquitoes and leeches for the Infantry.

After a 20-minute ride to Quang Tri, we landed at the hospital. I was placed on a gurney and surrounded by medical personnel. As I was being pushed from the helicopter pad to the hospital, one of them was stripping my web gear and clothing off and another was asking me questions: Name, rank, serial number, unit, where was I when I was

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wounded? "Grid coordinates Yankee Delta 398247."

The medic seemed surprised I knew the location.

"I ought to know where I was," I replied, "I was the company commander."

The men who made up the Dust-off crews are among the heroes of the Vietnam War. They saved countless numbers of lives, including mine, by going on medical evacuation missions day after day, and often several times a day, in unarmed helicopters with a big red cross on the nose.



While they went about their work saving lives, they frequently were sitting ducks for the enemy, who were said to use the red cross as an aiming point for their antiaircraft guns and RPGs.

The Dust-off crews carried out their mission professionally and with great courage, often sacrificing their own lives in order to save seriously wounded soldiers.

My war was over. Theirs went on. What for me was one of the most memorable experiences of my life was, for that Dust-off crew, all in a day's work. I pray that each of them made it safely back to the World. They have my profound admiration and gratitude.

William A. Nunn III
Whitstone, VA

Aviator recalls Jolly Green mission described in issue

I read with great interest the remembrance by John R. Weimer entitled "Jolly Green" in the September/October 2005 issue of *The VHPA Aviator*. Great interest because I was there. Please bear with my gray-haired, hopefully, accurate memory.

I was a first lieutenant in F Troop, 4th Cav (Air), flying out of Tan My Airfield at the mouth of the Perfume River, east of Hue. At that time, we were the only tactical helicopters north of Da Nang.

On the day of the evacuation of the Quang Tri Citadel,

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we were awakened early for a "self-generated" rescue mission. It turns out that with Quang Tri being surrounded and the RVN Marines retreating south out of the city, the U.S. troops and ARVNs in the Citadel included a captain of our own F Troop, serving as our assistant operations officer, and liaison for lining up our counter-Easter Offensive missions.

We also were told that there was a female U.S. GS-12 caught there. Our mission was to get them both out.

The plan was to launch two OH-6 (Scouts) with pilot, crew chief and gunner in each, two AH-1G Cobras (one of which I flew) and a UH-1 for radio relay at altitude.

We flew the 40 plus minutes from Tan My to a chosen point 5-8 kilometers south of Quang Tri. At that point, the Cobras started to circle at 1,500 feet AGL while the UH-1 climbed to hold at 2,500 feet AGL.

OH-6s head for city at high speed

The two OH-6s headed toward the city in a high-speed descent, which would put them at treetop level and high speed for the dawn run into the Citadel.

It was a good plan, but apparently, as the Scouts flew over a small hamlet about 1 kilometer south of Quang Tri, there was an NVA roll call formation being held in the hamlet.

Their immediate action was to point all gun muzzles up and empty a magazine. This was the wall of fire both OH-6s flew through.

We were relayed the Mayday calls from both Scouts through the UH-1. Both crashed. Unbeknownst to them, they were in a large sugar beet field about 300 meters north of the hamlet, with a brushy cemetery in the middle of the field, separating them from sight and sound.

Our Cobras turned toward the city, expecting, as usual,



Mission sounds pretty typical for a slick pilot

I read with interest John R. Weimer's article with regards to the Jolly Green rescue from the Citadel. What a thrilling account of a great mission.

Sounded like a pretty typical day for a slick driver.

Fred Walburn

Boomerang 26

191 Assault Helicopter Company

Feb. 13, 1968-Feb. 13, 1969

to be guided by the burning wreckage. It was not to be — neither burned.

Call received from survival radio

We were looking for them when we received a call from a survival radio. When we answered that call, he could not monitor us.

However, the other crew, having crawled into the cemetery like the first, could hear us but could not transmit.

We were looking hard as we continued north, but to no avail, until the survival radio that transmitted and didn't receive said, "Two Cobras, if you hear me, turn right 30 degrees." We heard him and turned. He then kept speaking and guided us to him.

While this was going on, both downed crews were seeking deeper cover in the cemetery brush and nearly shot each other when they met, crawling to the center.

When we sighted the downed aircraft and the cemetery, we set up a racetrack pattern for covering fire to protect them.

Every road and trail around that field was crawling with what appeared to be hundreds of NVA regulars, running in the direction of the crash. We Cobras opened up with rockets and turret guns into the treelines all around the field.

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I remember firing into the hamlet and blowing the roofs off several hooches. I wished I hadn't! Each one held a Soviet T-54 or PT-76 tank! Oops!

While we were suppressing and drawing ground fire in our own racetrack pattern above the field, we called in the UH-1 at low level. He landed right at the cemetery, loaded all six crew and scatted back out, low level, without getting hit.

We hurriedly un-assed the area before those 12.7 mm AA guns on the tanks could be manned. All got home with only minor cuts and bruises on the downed crew.

The next day, RVN Marines called us with credit for 88 NVA KIAs).

Our day was not done!

While we rearmed and refueled, our flight operations was getting orders for our part in the evacuation of the Citadel. We waited much of the day while B-52s, fighters and naval guns basically leveled the city of Quang Tri, around the Citadel.



Mission was to hold for Jolly Greens

Our mission was to launch all Cobras — probably nine — and be held in reserve to cover any Jolly Greens that may go down. We stood off 8-10 kilometers south at 1500 feet AGL and watched the Sandys lay close ordinance, precisely, just outside the walls of the Citadel, as a final protective barrier.

The Jollys set up their runs to land singly, inside the walls, where the defenders had cut down trees and torn off awnings for an LZ. Those Jollys were all very brave.

We monitored the entire mission on Guard Frequency, which the Air Force used a lot when they were excited.

My memory of the No. 4 — and last — Jolly was how he was so patient, sitting on the LZ inside the walls while a count was conducted in Nos. 1, 2 and 3 to verify all had gotten out with all squeezing into the first three Jollys.

Command of profanity impressive

I was also impressed with his nearly naval command of profanity when coming out of the LZ, under heavy fire, when he needn't have to be there at all! His gunners were shooting NVA off the walls as they came out. The evacuation was successful.

Our day still was not done!

Now all of our Cobras, our own UH-1 (in case one of us went down), and two A-1 Sandys still carrying ordinance were diverted to QL1, the main highway south out of Quang Tri.

Vehicles caught in kill zone

This ground evacuation route was stopped by a terrible NVA artillery ambush catching about 3,000 mixed military

and civilian vehicles in the kill zone. Hundreds of vehicles had attempted to escape by turning off the road, but were stuck in the paddies on either side.

Two Air Force FACs were shot down in the kill zone. The Sandys started making some runs against the hills west of the highway where the heavy artillery fire seemed to come from.

I saw a strange sight when a Sandy was climbing from a low bomb drop. A smoky contrail from the ground followed the climbing, turning A-1 until it caught it. The entire aircraft was swallowed in a huge fireball. I thought he was a goner. Just as quickly, the fireball collapsed, and the Sandy was still climbing out.

Missile goes through Sandy's wing

The ensuing conversation on Guard Frequency between the stricken plane and his wingman indicated a heat-seeking missile had gone through a wing fuel cell and blown whole cylinders off his huge, radial engine.

The wingman did a quick look-over, and reported no fires and control surfaces intact. He told his buddy to "pickle" — or dump his bombs — and follow him to the beach.

As they flew away, there was a serious discussion between them concerning the merits of punching out "feet wet" to be picked up by the Navy, or nursing the sick bird some 90 miles south to Da Nang. I'm not sure which he chose.

We then received a radio call on FM from the ground. Both of the FACs had made it out to the road and called us for help on a PRC-77 borrowed from the ARVNs in the ambush.

Our UH-1, flown by CW2 William Jesse and WO1 John Joseph Petrilla, went down to pick them up from the road. As they were climbing out, at about 600 feet AGL, I saw a fast contrail leave the bush and run right up their exhaust. The UH-1 exploded and all aboard were killed.

My platoon leader, Capt. Haney, who was leading our loose formation of Cobras, exclaimed: "That's enough of that s—t, follow me," and dove for the treetops.

This was our first encounter with the rumored "Strella" Soviet shoulder-fired, heat-seeking missile. We flew home at or below treetop level to sort out how to deal with this new weapon.

Such was my May 2, 1972.

Richard Parrish
F Troop, 4th Cav (Air)
And 187th Assault Helicopter Company
RVN 1971-72

Retired Australian officer seeks claim confirmation

My name is Peter Pearson. I am a retired lieutenant colonel of the Royal Australian Artillery, a Vietnam veteran from 1971 and a graduate of the Command and General

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Letters

Continued from Page 9

Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, 1975-76.

I presently work as an historian contracted to our Department of Veterans' Affairs to research and write reports on the historical aspects of veterans' claims for disability pensions arising from their experiences during war service.

I currently am researching a contention by a veteran that he and two mates, all serving with an Australian repair workshop in Vung Tau, flew in a U.S. Chinook helicopter which was hit by ground fire during a resupply mission to the west of Can Tho.

The date of this incident was a Sunday sometime in October or November 1970. The recollection of one of the three is the aircraft was flown from Vung Tau, first to Saigon and then to Can Tho, where it collected a "belly sling" of ammunition and other stores.

The load was delivered to a fire support base south of Can Tho to where the aircraft then returned.

The aircraft then took an underslung load of fuel to another FSB west of Can Tho. It was on the return to Can Tho the Chinook was hit by ground fire while trying to fly around a storm. The door gunners engaged the source of the ground fire and the aircraft was eventually escorted into Can Tho by gunships and landed safely.

The Australian soldiers were flown back to Vung Tau in another aircraft.

I have been unable to find any record of this attachment of Australian diggers to a U.S. aviation unit and wonder if there are any of your members who might recall the incident and be able to give me some details of the sortie.

Peter J. Pearson



Book clearly describes white table remembrance

America's White Table by Margot Theis Raven is a short coffee table book of less than 50 pages which tells the story of "the white table" which originated during the Vietnam War as a symbol of remembrance to fellow service members who have not returned.

While this is designed as a children's book and is written so kids will relate to it, I doubt that many of us can read it without emotion.

Mama explains the significance of each of the items on the table and that explanation is woven into a short story. That story highlights the Remembrance Table and how it has been woven into military dining-in/dining-out ceremonies and other organizational gatherings such as VHPA reunions.

The book closes with a brief history of the origination of the White Table with the Red River Valley (River Rats) Fighter Pilot's Association. This still active group is made up of airmen from various branches of the service whose spirit of brotherhood pledged themselves to taking care of their own and organizing reunions to ensure the memory of their fallen and missing comrades.

It was at one of the earliest reunions that the nearly 40-year-old tradition of the White Table originated.

The final lines of this book are: "In this book we salute these bravest of our brave with the POW flag motto: YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN . . . so long as there is one left in whom your memory remains."

This book should be in every veteran's hands and in the hands of their kids and grandkids.

Stan and Lindi Wiley

It's only a uniform — you can wear at reunion

I don't think I am any different from any of my flight school, and Vietnam buddies.

Just take a moment, look into that special room you have, take a peek into that drawer, look on the wall, or on the desk, and what do you see. Yeah, there's pictures of you in your Greens, flight suit, or that special picture in your Dress Blues.

There are your ribbons, your wings, and pictures from *over there*. Why are they just sitting there?

My first reunion was in Las Vegas, because that's where I live. Yes, I know, I received the postcards and emails from the VHPA and my buddies, but I just never had the time or money to attend previous reunions. But this time it's in *my town*, so I just had to do it.

Welcome home unforgettable

That was my first reunion, but it has not, nor will it ever be my last. I saw my flight school buddies, some of my Vietnam buddies, and pilots I never met. I will never forget that feeling of finally being *welcomed home*!

I took in everything the reunion had to offer. That is, until the final banquet. And there they were, a few pounds heavier, a few days older, and almost a lifetime wiser, dressed in their DRESS BLUES! I envied them! And then I cried.

The next morning, I went into *my* special closet, and guess what? There hung my original Dress Blues, right next to my Greens, and my last flight suit. The decision was made. I was going to wear my Dress Blues to the next VHPA reunion!

About 15 minutes into trying to get into that uniform, I made the startling discovery that my mind, gut, and butt were all much bigger than my plan.

I even took my Blues to several tailors and tried to convince them that Spandex never went out of fashion.

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Taps

Stephen F. Flanagin

Stephen F. Flanagin, 60, of Austin, Texas, died Nov. 10.

He graduated from flight school with class 67-5.

Flanagin served as an Army helicopter pilot in Vietnam with the 334th Aerial Weapons Company in 1967-68.

He earned a bachelor's degree in Asian studies and a master's degree in library science from the University of Hawaii.

Flanagin's career interests led him in many directions, including positions as a flight attendant for Pan Am, an actor/voice talent, a massage therapist, and a security patrol officer.

He worshipped at the Church of Conscious Harmony.

His wife, Marvean; mother, Romaine; son, Ryan; daughter, Kerri; and three grandchildren survive Flanagin.



Flanagin

Dennis Fyksen

Dennis Fyksen, 56, died of cancer on June 10 in Wisconsin Rapids, WI.

He was a member of flight school classes 68-523/68-43.

In 1969-70, he served as an Army pilot in Vietnam with the 174th Assault Helicopter Company. During his Vietnam tour, he received the Purple Heart Medal and the Distinguished Flying.

Fyksen attended college in Marquette, MI, and worked as a conductor for the Chicago Northwestern Railroad.

He was a member of the Disabled American Veterans.

Fyksen is survived by his wife, Jill Fyksen; father, George Fyksen of Sarasota, FL; mother and stepfather, Arlita and Ken Frantz of Brookfield, WI; sons, Dennis Fyksen Jr. of Iverness, FL, and Jason Fyksen of Sarasota;



daughter, Tracey Harris of Rice Lake, WI; and eight grandchildren.

Robert A. Kibler

Retired Maj. Robert A. Kibler of North Fort Myers, FL, died of cancer on Sept. 27, 2004. He was 72.

Kibler enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1950 and became an airborne infantryman. He made two combat jumps in Korea and was awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge.

He joined the Pennsylvania National Guard and rose to the rank of master sergeant.

Kibler later returned to active duty and graduated in Class 59-1 from Army flight school as a warrant officer.

In December 1961, he deployed with the 93rd Transportation Company to Vietnam and was stationed in Da Nang and Soc Trang.

In 1964, he was commissioned a second Lieutenant after completing OCS at Fort Benning, GA.

A year later, Kibler deployed with the 147th ASHC Hill Climbers to Vietnam for his second tour.

He retired from active duty in 1974.

After retirement, he was an instructor at Culver Military Academy, Luther L. Wright High School and with the Vinnell Corp. in Saudi Arabia.

Kibler's awards and decorations include the Combat Infantryman Badge, Jump Wings with two Combat Stars, Master Army Aviator Wings, 21 Air Medals, and the Army Commendation Medal with V device and two Oak Leaf Clusters.

His wife, Jeanne; a daughter, Nina; sons, Kevin and Gregg; two grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren survive him.

Roman Ochotsky

Roman Ochotsky, 57, of Pasadena, CA, died Nov. 23, 2004, of pancreatic cancer.

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Letters

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Their reply was the same: "What the hell is Spandex?" and "You've got to be kidding me."

I was really dejected. Four more reunions and seeing all the Dress Blues on the Final Banquet night didn't help. One of my closest flight school buddies, Don Winter, who finally retired from the Navy as a captain, made a bet with me at the Florida Reunion.

I told him that if he would wear his Mess Dress uniform for the San Francisco Reunion, I would wear my Dress Blues. Now, what the hell am I going to do?

Now, I know that there's no way in hell I can fit into

my original Blues, and the pawnshops and military surplus stores just laughed at me! I placed a call to the military clothing store at Fort Irwin, CA, pulled out my credit card and the rest was history.

New Dress Blues	\$250.00
New Dress Shoes	\$45.00
New Dress Shirt	\$15.00
New Bow Tie	\$5.00
Alterations	\$32.00

Showing up at the San Francisco reunion in my *Dress Blues* with my beautiful wife of 35 years, and my best flight school buddies . . . **PRICELESS!**

Why can't we all do this? After all, it's only a uniform.

Jerry C. Yost

VHPA Life Member L11412

Taps

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He graduated from Army flight school with Class 66-11 and was assigned to the 189th Assault Helicopter Company in Vietnam in 1967-68.

Ochotsky was recipient of the Purple Heart Medal, the Air Medal with 29 Oak Leaf Clusters and the Army Commendation Medal.

After leaving the Army, he flew 36 years as an airline pilot and a commercial helicopter pilot.

Ochotsky is survived by his fiancée, Christina Shymkovich of Pasadena; and his son and daughter, Robert and Melanie Ochotsky, both of Balga, Australia.

John Sherburne Sentell

John Sherburne Sentell, 62, of Baton Rouge, LA, died May 13 of an illness.

Sentell served as an Army helicopter pilot in Vietnam.

Bartholomew "Bart" Spano Jr.

Bartholomew "Bart" Spano Jr. died Aug. 25, 2004, at his home in Washington, DC, after a long struggle with cancer. He was 57.

Spano was a helicopter and fixed-wing instructor, and commercial pilot. He formerly worked for Henson Aviation as a staff pilot.

He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1966 and received his military training at Parris Island and then at Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, where he became a certified airframe and power plant mechanic.



He then attended Army flight training at Fort Rucker, AL.

In 1969, Spano served in Vietnam as a pilot with the 162nd Assault Helicopter Company.

He was awarded the Purple Heart Medal after being wounded by enemy fire while flying a medical evacuation mission.

He then was stationed to Ashaffenburg, West Germany. Spano entered the Army Reserve in 1972.

In 1975, he received a bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland.

Spano was an avid motorcycle collector and a member of the Washington Norton Motorcycle Club.

Survivors include his mother, Pari; and siblings, Diana, George, Stephen and Victor.



Spano

Roosevelt "Roe" T. Wilson Jr.

Roosevelt "Roe" T. Wilson Jr., 61, of Lacey, WA, died Oct. 11 after a battle with lung cancer and a brain tumor.

He was born June 19, 1944, in Clinton, SC. Wilson joined the Army after graduating from Austin Peay High School in Knoxville, TN, in 1962.

Wilson served two tours in Vietnam and retired from Army after 23 years as a CW3. For much of his Army career he was a helicopter instructor pilot.

He was a graduate of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

He began working for the State of Washington in 1986 and was working for the Office of Insurance Commissioner at the time of his death.

His wife, Janet; a son, Franklin of Olympia; a daughter, Shyla, of Kansas; his stepson, Bruce, of Lacey; his mother, Mary; his half-brother, Lee Goodman of Tennessee; and seven grandchildren survive Wilson.

A daughter, Mary, preceded him in death.

VHPA museum website now online

**GARY ROUSH
VHPA WEBMASTER**

In late 2000, John Conway contacted me with an idea.

Although not a Vietnam veteran himself, John wanted to do something to demonstrate his respect and admiration for those of us who served in the Vietnam War. He has been a military collector for many years and presented the idea of displaying pictures and comments from veterans on a website connected with vhpamuseum.org

Over a period of several months, John gained my trust and respect, so in March 2001 vhpamuseum.org was born. It started with unit patches and has grown to much more, thanks to contributions from many VHPA members.

The objective, as John describes on the website, is:

"This site is dedicated to the men who fought the war."

It is a tribute to those who did not return. It's the hope of all involved that you will find and enjoy information on your unit as well as others.

"If you are not a veteran of the war, we welcome your visit and hope that you will gain a new perspective of what it was like for those who were there. The mission is not to entertain, but rather to educate the viewer and provide a glimpse of day-to-day life for the pilots and crewman who lived it."

"Your input is needed. Images of the aircraft, markings, artwork, unit signs, people, places, souvenirs, insignia and sights of the war are needed to tell the story. If you don't see your unit represented, I need to hear from you."

Check it out at www.vhpamuseum.org and then let John know what you think at [REDACTED]

Reunion

Registration time nears for Washington gala

DAVE RITTMAN, JOE BILITZKE AND DANA YOUNG
2006 REUNION COMMITTEE

Washington, DC! What a location for our next reunion — in July 2006!

Ready for a great time, and to meet all those fellow pilots who meant so much to you, about — can you believe it — 40 years ago!

Our Association, and our reunions are about camaraderie, friendship, and renewing acquaintances of old, while we have a great time and do fun things together and with our spouses/guests in the process.

OK, ready for the details? In the September/October *Aviator*, we gave you a brief overview of our plans.

Our Internet registration system opens Monday, Jan. 16.

Check our website for advance details now. On Jan. 16 begin the registration process at www.vhpareunion.org

Our recommendation — register early

We have arranged for some very special events this year, but they are capacity-limited, as are the overnight

rooms in our primary “HQ” hotel. Similar to last year’s reunion in San Francisco, we have booked every available room at our host hotel, but given the nothing-short-of-fabulous discounts negotiated for our room rates in a first class hotel in one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the country at the height of the tourist season, we will sell out at our primary hotel. Regrettably, there is no question about that.

Therefore, you will want to register early to secure your reservations — both for events and the hotel itself.

How to register?

The same procedure is in place that we used for previous years. It’s easy, just go to www.vhpareunion.org (you can also get there from our main website www.vhpa.org), and follow the prompts.

Once you complete the event registration process, the system will seamlessly hyperlink you directly to another site to complete your hotel reservations. The system will permit you to reserve up to two rooms on-line with a credit card. As in previous recent years, you will not be able to

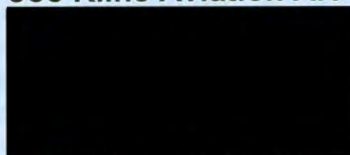
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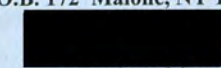
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Reunion

Registration time nears for Washington gala

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secure rooms in our room block using our heavily discounted room rate by calling the hotel directly. You must register through the VHPA first.

For very unique situations in which a member requires more than two rooms, you may call our HQ staff toll free at **(800) 505-8742** for additional information or for any other registration-related problem.

As in recent years, we cannot accept requests for "sub-blocks" of rooms for units or groups of people; each member must register himself for his own room(s).

Not computer literate? In the rear of this magazine you will find a registration form that can be completed, then mailed or faxed to our HQ in California.

Details are on the form.

Once you have registered, HQ will provide you a special toll-free number to call our third party passkey vendor who administers our hotel reservation block.

The Wardman Marriott in Washington cannot accept a room reservation directly by phone or through its own Internet registration system under our discounted room block. Questions on this can be referred to our VHPA HQ staff toll free at **(800) 505-8742**.

Our host hotel

Our HQ facility for 2006 will be the gorgeous Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, located in DC's prestigious Woodley Park neighborhood near "Embassy Row," the National Cathedral, and the Zoo. A photo tour is available now at www.marriott.com/wasdt

There is a Metro (light rail) stop just outside the hotel, and you are only 8 miles and a quick cab ride from Reagan National Airport (DCA).

The hotel itself is located in the northwest part of Washington, just off of Connecticut Avenue. The official address is 2660 Woodley Road NW. There are many restaurants within walking distance or a short cab ride from the hotel.

In the hotel, there is a full size Starbucks, a gourmet

deli serving breakfast items, snacks, and takeout sandwiches and meals, a Perle's that provides brick-oven pizza, chicken, seafood, and beef items in a casual setting, plus other informal eating places, in addition to the upscale hotel facilities.

This year, the hotel also will set up special, discounted breakfast and lunch buffets for VHPA members at various places, available on a cash basis.

During the reunion, we will have a huge vendor area in the hotel. It will include a static display of helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft.

Rooms in the HQ hotel, discounted to \$115 per night, plus tax, are expected to sell out early. The "normal" non-VHPA room rate at the Wardman Marriott is \$200 or more per night, plus tax.

As in recent years, you will be able to book events and your room at the same time. You must be registered as a VHPA member attending the reunion to obtain the discounted



Dave Rittman photo

Visitors walk and relax in the Mall in Washington, DC. At one end is the U.S. Capitol. The 2006 VHPA Reunion will be held in Washington in July.

room rate at the Marriott.

We also have negotiated complimentary use of the hotel fitness center during the reunion for all VHPA members and guests. Just show your ID badge to the desk or identify yourself as a VHPA member to the fitness center receptionist upon arrival.

Arrangements are being made at the nearby Omni Hotel to handle overflow room needs. The Omni is a short walk across the gardens and lawn that separate the two hotels. Once the Marriott reaches capacity, we automatically will change the links on our website to the Omni, which also will honor the same great pricing for VHPA members and their guests.

The events

• Marine Corps Military Tattoo – Friday, June 30th

Our reunion officially starts Saturday July 1, but last year some members and guests took advantage of the discounted hotel rates and came a day early to enjoy the city. We anticipate the same trend this year, so for you "early

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Reunion

Registration time nears for Washington gala

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birds" we have arranged something special on Friday night, June 30.

The Marine Corps will host a special military tattoo at its barracks in southeast Washington.

It's quite a show, with a lot of music, pageantry, precision parade, and demonstration of military skills.

Tickets usually are gone months in advance, but we have arranged for a block of tickets and transportation to and from the hotel, leaving about 6:45 p.m.

The show ends at 10:10 p.m., and we estimate you will be back at the hotel about 11 p.m.

This is an inexpensive, unique evening, and well worth the trip. While there is no advance security information for this function, purses and bags will be inspected and attendees may have to pass through metal detectors.

• *Welcome Reception – Saturday, July 1*

The doors will open on our "official" welcome reception this year at 6 p.m. It will last until at least 10 p.m.

This year we've arranged for various units and flight classes to have special tables marked with signs in the main ballroom.

We also will have a first-time reunion attendee orientation and welcome reception from 6-7 p.m. in the Maryland Room, near the main ballroom.

Due to time zone differences, we know many of you will be arriving later in the day than last year. Therefore, we have made arrangements for a buffet dinner as part of our evening activities.

This will allow you plenty of time to find guys from your flight school class or pilots who flew with you in Vietnam, and not have to leave the welcome reception to find a restaurant.

A small band will play throughout the evening, but the goal is to mix and visit and party.

Everyone is virtually guaranteed a good time during this traditionally popular event.

• *Business Meeting – Sunday, July 2*

The official part of our reunion starts at 10 a.m. with our annual business meeting. Dana Young, who will help moderate again this year, promises to keep it moving.

All dues-current members are invited to attend. VHPA members in good standing do not need to be registered for the reunion to attend this meeting, but as in previous

years, you must have a ticket to enter the room. Non-registered, dues-current members may pick up a ticket at our registration desk prior to the meeting.

This year, anyone having materials to present should have them in a digital format, preferably PowerPoint. We expect the meeting to run until noon.

Similar to previous years, we are planning special activities for our spouses and guests during the meeting.

Details will be in a separate box within this magazine.



Dave Rittman photo

Early U.S. Army helicopter prototypes fill some of the exhibition space in the National Air and Space Museum's Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Northern Virginia. A special visit has been arranged on Sunday night, July 2, for VHPA members and guests attending the reunion.

• *A Special Night to Remember – Sunday, July 2*

An evening at the National Air and Space Museum's new Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Northern Virginia promises to be one of the key, unique events of our reunion, like the Fourth of July Harbor Cruise was last year in San Francisco.

Unless you have been to Washington, DC, in the past two years and have traveled to Dulles Airport to the new Smithsonian facility, you have NOT seen what is going to be available to you on this special evening.

The center was built at the airport so full-size aircraft can be displayed indoors. Most aircraft and related components here are far too large to get into smaller facilities such as the downtown Smithsonian locations on the Mall.

Starting about 6 p.m., we will depart the hotel for a fabulous evening. We have complete private run of the entire facility up to 11 p.m. if you wish, and there is so much to see and do.

Plus, we are having a heavy hors d'oeuvre and banquet spread catered. The main centerpiece is the SR-71

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Reunion

Registration time nears for Washington gala

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spy plane — our food stations will surround it, as will our pre-paid open bar for three hours.

Nearby is the newly installed Concorde. The B-29 Enola Gay is on display, as well as a full-size prototype of the B-707. For us, there is a UH-1H, plus about 30 other helicopters of all types. There is even the space shuttle Enterprise, and hundreds of aircraft and related artifacts.

Want to fly one of the flight simulators — have at it. They will be available ready for you, at no extra cost. So will the IMAX Theater, at no extra cost. Want to see what an airport control tower is like? It's upstairs, complete with live aircraft conversations from Newark Airport in New Jersey (we understand for security purposes they do not use the Dulles control tower frequencies).

Top this off with a band for entertainment and you can see this is going to be a special evening. Bring your camera, for sure. While this is our most expensive event of the reunion, it is an absolute MUST to attend.

For this event, part of the price of each ticket is tax deductible, as the Smithsonian is an IRS qualified 501c3 nonprofit organization. The exact amount will be on your ticket, which can be used as a receipt for tax purposes.

Want more, we got it. On the way back, there will be

two groups of buses: One group will go back to the hotel and the other group will take a night tour of the monuments in Washington, as well as the exterior of the U.S. Capitol and the White House, before returning to the hotel. Get on the one going where you prefer.

• Golf Tournament — Monday, July 3

Play golf where the president plays golf, on the south course of Andrews Air Force Base.

Mike Whitten has made some fabulous, once-in-a-lifetime arrangements for you. Included is transportation to the course, green fees, carts, prizes, lunch, and more. Time is 8 a.m., so you will be leaving the hotel early — about 6:30 a.m. Exact times will be provided to those who register, but we estimate you should be back at the hotel about 3 p.m.

If you wish to drive to the course yourself and have an active or retired Military ID card, you can enter Andrews through the south gate in a personal vehicle.

As this event is taking place adjacent to an active, high-security Air Force base, unless you have a current active duty or retired military ID card, specific advance security information will need to be provided to VHPA as

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*Texas Residents add 8.25% sales tax
Shipping & Handling add \$7⁵⁰ per jacket. For NDAir add \$20 each.

QUANTITY	ITEM #	SIZE	AMOUNT
Total Amount			

Reunion

Registration time nears for Washington gala

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part of registration to pre-clear you onto the course.

We anticipate your full name, Social Security number, date of birth, town, state, and county of birth, and full home address will be required for each attendee, including guests, spouses and children.

Unless you have an active duty or retired military ID card, it will not be possible to sign up at the last minute for this event, as you and your guests will need to be "pre-cleared."

Those taking the bus from the hotel will be checked completely, under, around, and through — and your picture ID will be matched to the pre-event approved attendance roster.

However all the security will be worth it: The course is spectacular and you get a chance to play on a very historic course few seldom have the opportunity to do.

• Visit Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery — Monday, July 3

This was one of the most requested activities in our member survey taken last year in San Francisco. About 9 a.m., our buses will depart the hotel in route to Arlington National Cemetery, where we will transfer to special tour-mobiles that are permitted to run throughout the park area.

A number of sites will be visited, but the primary activity there will be for VHPA to place a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in a brief, but meaningful ceremony.

We then will shuttle over to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial directly across the Potomac for a second wreath laying and ceremony.

Many of you told us this was one of your most meaningful experiences a number of years ago when the VHPA last held its reunion in Washington.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, buses will be available for transportation back to the hotel, where we estimate to arrive about 2 p.m. Of course, you may stay and walk the Mall area, and return to the hotel on your own later by cab or on the metro.

• Formal banquet — Monday, July 3

Many of you are aware that this year we are switching our formal banquet from the last day of the reunion so that we can do a special event this year on the Fourth of July. Thus, our banquet is on Monday, July 3.

Doors open about 5:45 p.m. and ceremonies start about 6:30 p.m. We've got a great menu this year — your choice of filet mignon, salmon, or a veggie plate.

Our hotel is the premium flagship of the Marriott organization, which is headquartered in Washington. Each

year, Marriott organization evaluates and ranks the quality of its food and banquet staffs nationwide, and our banquet staff just won the No. 1. It should be quite an evening.

Entertainment and dancing will follow the meal. The great thing about this year is you can stay and enjoy all the fun and the party — as you don't have to pack and go home in the morning.

• Fourth of July Parade — Tuesday, July 4

Another request by many members who returned the survey last year in San Francisco was to participate in the Fourth of July parade.

Gil Ferrey is helping make this happen. Plans call for us to leave the hotel about 9:30 a.m. on buses, which will take you to the parade start point.

Buses also will be available near the end of the parade to take us back to the hotel.

With us at the parade will be 4 or 5 Vietnam-era helicopters, provided by some of our North Carolina members. They will be towed along with us.

The parade ends about 2 p.m., and we anticipate being back at the hotel about 2:45 p.m. The end of the parade is 3-4 miles walking distance from the hotel, depending on where you are on the Mall.

A word of caution: Since 9/11, a number of enhanced security provisions have been implemented in Washington. One of those has been that the bridges between DC and Virginia are closed all day on July 4.

There may be similar traffic blocks from the east side of the city, depending on what is decided later this spring. People driving that day should take the Beltway around to the north side of the city, and then drive on local streets (most likely Connecticut Avenue) to the hotel in the northwest part of the Washington.

We recommend you ride the buses back to the hotel after the parade.

• July 4 fireworks, picnic and entertainment at Bolling Air Force Base

Have we got a unique and special event worked out for you! What a way to end a reunion!

About 4:45 p.m., we will board buses that will take a special route through the DC traffic snarl that afternoon and end up at Bolling Air Force Base, home of the presidential helicopter.

Members and guests who have driven to the reunion will NOT be able to take cars to this event. You must ride the buses we provide.

Bolling is located just 2.5 miles south of the Washington Monument on the Potomac River, and we have been

Continued on Page 18

Reunion

Registration time nears for Washington gala

Continued from Page 17

invited to join base military personnel, their spouses and guests for an evening of entertainment, a cookout, games, military displays, and the prime, unobstructed view of one of the largest fireworks displays in the nation. It will be even larger than the San Francisco fireworks show, we are told.

Bolling is located across the river from National- Reagan (DCA) airport, and our site has a beautiful view of the Washington skyline, the river, and the fireworks.

Called the Freedom Fest, about 2,500 active duty Air Force airmen, officers, and their spouses/guests have invited us to join them for the evening.

A number of on-base volunteer groups and charities do various food stations and sell beverages, including beer to raise money for their causes on base. Therefore, you will have great selections for all kinds of food and beverages.

The Air Force Band will perform in the early evening.

VHPA is planning a static display of Vietnam-era aircraft there for all to view.

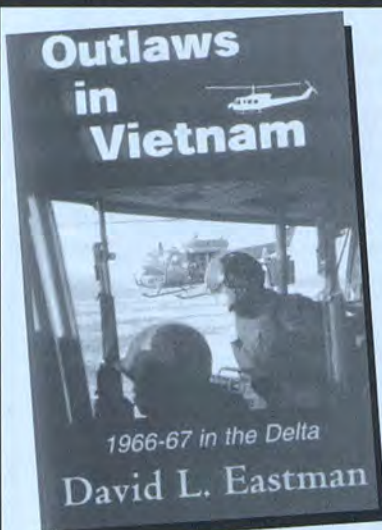
Plans are in progress, but at the moment our plans call for a special entertainment show after the fireworks end and while roads are still gridlocked with vehicles. We can't realistically go anywhere until the roads clear, so the party will continue for about an hour after the fireworks conclude. Then we will board buses for the ride back to the hotel.

Because this event takes place on an active military base with very high security, as part of the registration process, we will collect basic personal information needed to pre-clear you onto the base for the evening. We anticipate your full name, Social Security number, date of birth, town, state, and county of birth, and full home address will be required ... for each attendee, including guests, spouses, and children.

Members, guests, family members, children of VHPA members are all welcome, but you must register in advance, and there will be a final cut-off date for registering for this activity in early June, as determined by Air Force security.

It will not be possible to sign up for this event at the

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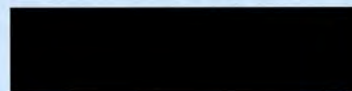
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Plus more than 4,000 patches and 7,000 unit pins



Reunion

Registration time nears for Washington gala

Continued from Page 18

last moment, or “walk in” to the event without a reservation. Everyone entering the base will be required to have a security pass and, unless you are on active duty, you need to get that through us in advance. Details will be provided elsewhere in this magazine and on the website.

Flying to the reunion?

We recommend you book flights that land at Reagan National (DCA) airport, even if you have to connect somewhere else to make that happen. The airport is located near downtown Washington and is only 8 miles from the hotel. A 10-12 minute cab ride costing \$18 will take you to the Marriott.

Dulles International is about 35 miles from the hotel. It's a \$60-\$70 cab ride to the hotel and, while there are “super shuttles” to the hotel, they cost about \$25 per person and take time. Sometimes there are heavy traffic delays.

The third airport in the area is Baltimore (BWI), which is a Southwest Airlines hub. However, the airport is about 40 miles from the hotel on the south side of Baltimore, with cabs to the hotel costing \$80-\$85. There are several shuttle vehicles that run from BWI to the hotel, costing \$44 each way per person, but they do not run very often.

The concierge transportation desk at the Marriott has more details if you need them. However, it is far easier if you fly to National Reagan (DCA), if you can.

Airline discounts with United Airlines

We have arranged again this year for a discounted group rate with United Airlines. If you book United, they will take 7 percent off their lowest published airfare if you book 30 days out, but only 2 percent if you book within 30 days. Here is how it works:

- To make reservations, call (800) 521-4041
- Provide our meeting ID Code: 538TE
- Rate is available for Reagan, Dulles, and BWI
- Dates rates are available: June 25-July 10
- Rate not valid online; you must call United Airlines directly or book through a travel agent

Renting a car in DC?

We have negotiated a 20 percent discount off of the lowest available rate at the time of booking, or the convention rate (whichever is lowest) with Enterprise Rent-a-Car, which has a desk at the hotel. You can pick up and return your vehicle at the hotel. Just identify yourself as a

VHPA member at the time of booking. There will be a link on our website, if you wish to book over the Internet.

Parking cars at the Marriott

There is a parking garage owned by an outside firm on the hotel property. The rate, as of the time of this article, is \$22 per day for self-parking and \$26 for valet service.

Motor Homes – you can park them at the hotel this year

The Marriott has a small, exterior lot that holds 15-20 coaches or motor homes. We were told the charge is \$22 per day for self-parking. However, there are no hookups.

Driving directions

The hotel is located in northwest Washington, DC, near the Zoo and the National Cathedral. There are so many routes into DC it is difficult to outline in an article like this precise driving directions.

However, many of you would come into downtown Washington across the Arlington Memorial Bridge or the Theodore Roosevelt (Rt. 66) Bridge.

You would take Rock Creek Parkway north until you get off at the Calvert Street exit. A block farther north is Woodley Road, turn left (west) and the hotel is down about a block on the left.

Another major cross road is Connecticut Avenue, which runs from the Beltway all the way to downtown DC. The hotel is on Woodley Road just to the west of Connecticut Avenue.

Driving through the city streets from the east is very possible, of course, although locals might recommend you go around the Beltway and down Connecticut Avenue, or around the Beltway, then down George Washington Parkway and then cross one of the bridges from Virginia.

You might find it helpful to look up www.mapquest.com, and plug in the hotel address, which is 2660 Woodley Road NW, Washington, DC 20008, and you can select the route you prefer most. See you there!

Use of the Metro underground light rail system

The Marriott is conveniently located on the “Woodley Park-Zoo” Metro station.

You can hop on and off the system and go many places within Washington, including the downtown Mall and government buildings areas.

Cost is very modest — our “test” ride from the hotel station to the downtown Smithsonian station was \$1.35 each way per person.

We have posted a map of the system on our Internet site.

War stories

Members can describe experiences in Vietnam

JIM FULBROOK

At the 2006 Reunion in Washington, we have two new events planned: An Historic Presentation Forum and a War Story Contest.

The forum consists of professional talks on Vietnam War topics, while the War Story Contest includes short, informal war stories by members who tell their best stories for fun and glory.

Here's a brief summary of each event so you know what to look forward to in DC and at future reunions. A full description of each event is posted on the VHPA Reunion website. We also are seeking VHPA volunteers to provide forum talks or war stories. Details to sign up are also linked to the reunion website.



Do you remember the joke: "What is the difference between a fairy tale and a war story?" The answer was: "The fairy tale starts out with 'Once upon a time,' while the war story starts out with 'This ain't no sh_t!'"

The "This Ain't no Sh_t Ultimate Vietnam War Story Contest!" will consist of VHPA members telling war stories about their Vietnam-era exploits and experiences that are entertaining, informative, audience appropriate, and hopefully factual.

Each war story should be no more than 15 minutes long and we will schedule several stories for the event. The deadline to sign up is Feb. 26.

Stories will be filmed for our history archive and each

participant will receive an award. For more information, contact Doug Womack at [REDACTED] or me at [REDACTED]

The forum will consist of more formal historic presentations on the Vietnam War. Each will be up to one hour in length and will be recorded for later distribution.

Speakers will come from member volunteers who complete an information form and provide an abstract or summary of his topic.

The deadline to sign up also is Feb. 26. Go to the VHPA Reunion website to link for more information. Anyone registered for the VHPA Reunion may attend the forum presentations at no charge.

We have three categories of forum topics:

- Aviation operations during the Vietnam War
- Non-aviation operations during the Vietnam War,
- Thirty-minute book author or video producer presentations on Vietnam War topics

Aviation (helicopter) operations is self-explanatory. Non-aviation operations could include topics such as special operations, bogus medal and service claims, Air Force bombing operations, ground operations, etc.

If you have a published book or multimedia presentation or a complete manuscript, we will organize a forum where each presenter in this category has 30 minutes to discuss his work. For instance, if we have three presenters, a 1.5-hour session will be scheduled, followed by a book signing and meet-the-authors session for the presenters.

For more information, contact Jim Fulbrook at [REDACTED]

VHPA briefs

Technology Committee seeks volunteers

The Technology Committee is seeking volunteers to assist with maintenance and development of various VHPA websites.

The needed skills are Microsoft FrontPage, CGI Scripting (Unix and PERL), HTML, Javascript, PHP, and MYSQL.

These skills do not have to reside in a single individual as the workload can be shared.

If you possess any of these skills and would like to participate as a volunteer for VHPA, please contact Charles Holley at cholly@vhpa.org

Charles Holley
Chairman, Technology Committee

Vietnam unit information

Now that you have your 2005 Membership Directory, turn to the Combat Unit index that begins on Page 516. Look for your unit and your name.

If it is not there, we have incomplete unit information for you in the membership database. If your unit and name are there, what about your fellow pilots? Are they there? If not, we would like to have that information. Dig out your orders from Vietnam listing men in your unit and send me copies.

Do the same for your flight class. If your classmates are not listed in the flight class index, it means we do not have a graduation program for your flight class.

Please send me a copy of that too and/or a copy of your orders assigning wings.

Gary Roush
Directory editor
webmaster@vhpa.org

Parade

VHPA to march down Constitution Avenue on 4th

GIL FERREY

REUNION PARADE COORDINATOR

We have just a little more than seven months before the opportunity of a lifetime reoccurs again — at least for those who chose to march in the Fourth of July Parade in Washington, DC, during our 2000 Reunion.

During the 2006 Reunion, VHPA members again will be able to march in a parade through their nation's capital on Independence Day.

Initial contact has been made with the parade's organizer and an application for the VHPA's participation has been mailed.

I have asked that we be the last unit in the parade, as we were in 2000. It gave many Vietnamese and other interested people in the area where we were formed up an opportunity to welcome us, shake our hands, and have their pictures taken with us.

Coordinating such an event takes a little time and desire to make sure as many things as possible occur correctly, while as few as possible go wrong.



Helicopters

Jerry Seago of the North Carolina Chapter has been notified and VHPA has approved funds for the chapter to bring four helicopters on trailers to Washington, as it did in 2000. We will probably have a C- and D-model Huey, a Loach and a Cobra.

We are in the process of making arrangements for the helicopters to be displayed in the hotel while we are there.

Tow vehicles

Chapters of the Military Vehicle Preservation Association have been contacted in Virginia and Maryland to provide Vietnam-era vehicles to pull the helicopters in the parade.

Vehicles such as three-quarter-ton or 2.5-ton trucks will tow the larger helicopters, while the Loach can be towed by an M-151.

Personnel

In 2000, we had some 1,300 VHPA members, spouses, children, grandchildren and significant others participate. In 2006, I would like to strongly encourage all attendees at the reunion to participate.

If you have a Vietnam-era uniform you can get into, please bring it. If you don't have a uniform, plan to wear a

VHPA golf shirt, hat, khaki shorts and tennis shoes — depending on the weather, of course. The July temperature in Washington usually is around 100 degrees during the day and it is very humid.

March order

The 40-foot-long VHPA yellow banner will be carried by a lead element.

Those in gray, cotton flight suits with "U.S. ARMY" stenciled in yellow and black and a nametag in white and black will make up the second and succeeding elements.

There probably will be a few marchers in day-glow orange flight suits as well. They march next. Here is the rest of the order march:

- UH-1C Gunship.
- Members wearing utility fatigues, followed by marchers in jungle fatigues.
- D- or H-model Huey.
- Marchers in one-piece NOMEX flight suits.
- OH-6 Loach.
- Marchers in two-piece NOMEX flight suits.
- AH-1 Cobra.
- Marchers who do not have a uniform should wear khaki shorts, VHPA golf shirt, a baseball cap, and tennis shoes.
- A tail-end Charlie vehicle such as a HumVee will bring up the rear.

Facilities

Portable toilets and some water will be available, but we will make arrangements for our own water to be carried in the helicopters and trail vehicles so we remain hydrated in the heat.

Transportation

The Reunion Committee plans to bus all participants from the hotel to the parade starting point, then pick up participants at the end of the parade and return to the hotel.

In order to determine the number of participants and buses required, we need to know if you and your guests will participate.

Please let us know when you register for the reunion.

Why march in a parade in our nation's capital?

In 2000, some participants had second thoughts about marching, but many wished they had after it was over.

We as aviators allowed an estimated 400,000 specta-

Continued on Page 22

Changes

VHPA Headquarters develops speed-up plan

A letter from headquarters

Dues

Please remember your membership dues must be current in order for you to attend the reunion. If your membership expires during or before July 2006 you must pay your dues before you can pick up your reunion packet. Save yourself some time in line and make sure your dues are paid before arriving in Washington, DC.

Pre-Registration

In an effort to reduce lines and waiting times, we are going to try something a little different this year.

As soon as is physically possible, we will mail your packing list, name badges, as much information as we can and, for those of you purchasing tickets to the first event, we also will enclose those tickets. You will need to bring these items with you to the reunion.

The goal is to head off any problems associated with your registration and correct them before you arrive at the reunion.

We will need some help to make this work. As soon as you receive your packet, please review it for problems and, if you find any, we would like you to call VHPA Headquarters at (800) 505-8472 so we can correct the



problem before you arrive in Washington. This gives our members a head start to shorter lines when you arrive.

As for the remainder of your packet, you will still pick it up at the Pre-Registration area when you arrive. A copy of the packing list and your remaining tickets will be placed in the packet, the packet then will be double audited by Headquarters and sealed.

Therefore, we will not be counting out your tickets with you at the time of pickup. If you find any problems in your packet while onsite, please bring your packet to On-Site Registration and we will correct the problem.

Pre-ordered reunion T-shirts

As usual, VHPA will be pre-selling reunion T-shirts when you register, but there will be a small change. We will have our own table in or near the Vendor Room where you will be able to pick up your T-shirts from Headquarters instead of going to the vendor.

Lanyards, badge covers and reunion mementos

Please remember to bring your lanyard, as this reduces costs for the organization. If you forget your lanyard, you will be able to pick one up at the same location where you will be picking up your pre-ordered T-shirts, along with the badge covers and reunion mementos.

Looking forward to seeing you in Washington

— Your VHPA HQ Staff

VHPA brief

Changes in three-year dues

The VHPA three-year dues program, started in 2001, has been a great success. Currently, almost 40 percent of our active members take advantage of it.

It saves a little money and a lot of annual hassle.

Unfortunately, the current program isn't generating the interest income VHPA had hoped to cover in lost revenue over the three-year period.

Due to low interest rates, we're not earning the extra revenue we had hoped for to cover the short fall.

The EC voted to continue the three-year program but, effective Jan. 1, 2006, the cost will go from \$90 to \$99 for the three-year period, a little more money, but still no hassle.

One other thing on dues — we have received several questions concerning the new Life Membership dues and the three-payment plan. VHPA will continue to offer that program at three equal payments of \$185 over a four-month period. Our management company receives \$5 each payment for additional handling.

— Your Executive Council

Last VHPA march in Washington was positive

Continued from Page 21

tors lining Constitution Avenue to finally feel good about saying, "Thanks for a job well done," something that was not cool to do in the late 1960s and early '70s when we returned from Vietnam.

Not a single negative incident was reported; all felt

only positive vibes. How often do you get to march down Constitution Avenue with fellow VHPA members and family? Take advantage of the opportunity.

A final timetable and map will be available a month before the reunion, so we will cover any last-minute details, probably during the business meeting.

Sept. 11 attacks take toll on tours

JOE BILITZKE AND DAVE RITTMAN
VHPA REUNION COMMITTEE

Once again, the American public is feeling the toll taken by the 9/11 terrorists. For VHPA, we're not able to achieve tours of the White House and Capitol during the 2006 reunion in Washington, DC.

In times past, a tour through these hallowed facilities was simply a matter of standing in line. No identification, no searches or scans, quite simply, no questions asked. In fact, the Capitol building had an open door policy, just walk in—it



was the people's house. Those days are now a dim memory.

We had hoped to accommodate VHPA members attending the reunion with a tour of the White House or the Capitol. We were unsuccessful.

Try as we did, the only way to get into either building is through your member of Congress. So if you'd like to take a tour, we recommend you contact your local member of Congress and request one.

But don't let this little setback discourage you from attending our 23rd annual reunion. The rest of the activities scheduled for your reunion are moving along. We have some great events planned that should make this reunion memorable and fun.

VHPA briefs

Directory, Aviator delivery

In the past several weeks, Headquarters received several inquiries and complaints from members who had not received their issues of *The VHPA Aviator* and annual *Membership Directory*.

It turns out several members of the Executive Council and a few committee chairmen were among those who did not receive their issues. My copy of the latest *Aviator* arrived Nov. 7. The *Directory* came Nov. 4.

Headquarters checked with the mailing house and the Post Office to see if there is a problem and what can be done to correct it short of using a different class of postage. The items left the mailing house on time.

The Post Office said to allow 3 weeks for delivery on *The Aviator* and 4-6 weeks on the annual *Directory*. That's the disadvantage of using "bulk mail." However, the cost savings make it viable.

Starting with the January/February issue of *The Aviator*, Headquarters will post the dates on the VHPA website (at www.vhpa.info) when the magazine and *Directory* are taken to the Post Office and mailed.

Please check there to find the dates of mailing. If you have not received your copy of *The Aviator* within 3 weeks of the mailing date or your copy of the annual *Directory* within 6 weeks of the mailing date, contact HQ at hq@vhpa.org

Mike Sheuerman
President VHPA

Email addresses requested

VHPA needs your current email address on file at HQ.

This will give the VHPA the ability to contact members quicker and reduce costs in labor and postage expenses, and assist in getting dues collected faster.

Please send an email with your current email address to HQ at hq@vhpa.org or use the forms on at www.vhpa.info or www.vhpa.org/info/vhpaform.html

Send it even if you believe the email address on file to be current. Be sure to include your name and member number. HQ will verify receipt with a reply email.

Recently we have found almost 50 percent of the email addresses on file are bad. In the future HQ will notify members with current email addresses of such things as dues renewal dates, requests for personal data by another member and any other information that needs disseminating immediately. Thanks in advance for taking the time to do this.

Mike Sheuerman
President

New member search

We have added a new feature to the VHPA website as an enhancement to your annual *Membership Directory*.

All new members who have joined the VHPA since the last *Membership Directory* cutoff date of Aug. 15 are now listed in a Morning Report format at www.vhpa.org/info/memsearch.htm

On this site you can search by last name, first name, unit, flight class number or call sign. Contact information is not on the site, to protect privacy.

If you would like contact information for anyone listed on this site, contact VHPA Headquarters at HQ@vhpa.org or call (800) 505-VHPA. You must provide your member number so Laura can verify you are a VHPA member who is dues current.

Your member number is on the mailing label of this magazine. The information will be updated about every two weeks. When the next *Directory* comes out, these names will be deleted from the new member site and a new list for the next year will be started. Please help add names to this site by recruiting new members.

Gary Roush
webmaster@vhpa.org

Anniversary

Fort Rucker receives plaque from VHPA president

MIKE SHEUERMAN
VHPA PRESIDENT

Oct. 21 and 22 marked the 50th anniversary celebration of the U.S. Army Aviation Center and Fort Rucker.

Several VHPA members attended and presented a plaque to the Center and Fort Rucker. Brig. Gen. E.J. Sinclair accepted the plaque on behalf of both.

The plaque contains VHPA wings, a set of Army aviator wings worn by a VHPA member in Vietnam and an inscription that reads:

**"PRESENTED TO THE UNITED STATES
ARMY AVIATION CENTER AND FT. RUCKER
BY THE PILOTS THAT FLEW HELICOPTERS
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA DURING
THE VIETNAM WAR, 1961-1975,
IN RECOGNITION OF 50 YEARS
OF OUTSTANDING SERVICE TO THE NATION
AND TO THE PILOTS IT TRAINED TO FLY
IN COMBAT AROUND THE WORLD."**

Mother Rucker has changed. Warrant officer candidates go through a 5- or 6-week course to become a WO1 and then go to flight school. There is plenty of on-post housing, so the per diem for officers is gone.

Most of the old, white, wood buildings are gone. So is the Lake Lodge. The Officers Club is now the All Ranks Club.

Two things haven't changed — great flight training and the MPs are still giving tickets.

I really enjoyed the trip. Some 10 or 12 of my buddies from the Panthers attended. A son of a buddy in the unit was there, going through AMOC and I got to meet him.

A college classmate, Bill McCrae, who initially told me of the anniversary celebration, was there with his wife, Debbie. I met at least 50 other VHPA members and signed up two new guys.



Elysia Nicolas photo

Participating in the presentation of the VHPA plaque, presented to the U.S. Army Aviation Center and Fort Rucker, at the U.S. Army Aviation Museum are (from left) Lash Wisener, Lt. Gen. Mark Curran, Ralph Mullins, Brig. Gen. E.J. Sinclair, Mike Sheuerman, retired Lt. Gen. Ellis Parker and Maj. Gen. Anthony Jones.

Any of you members from the 117th Assault Helicopter Company remember Bobby H. Freeman? He commanded the unit in 1969-70, I believe. He joined and will be in DC for the reunion in July.

I really hate to do this, but I love the camaraderie VHPA affords you and me. It is so much fun to sit around a table in a restaurant, at a bar or in a hangar talking to old friends about a time 30-35 years ago or what's happening in our lives today.

When we are together, it doesn't seem like it's been that

long since we served together in Vietnam. As my good friend "Fearless" Forrest Snyder once wrote in this publication — "If we could bottle this stuff, we'd make millionaires."

I hope all 7,500 plus of you attend the DC reunion and bring a friend.

A little side story that will amuse you and embarrass your current president:

On Friday, after we set up the VHPA booth, several of the young WO1s and lieutenants came over to talk with us about our going through flight school and flying in Vietnam.

This really cute young lady in tight, blue jeans, great figure, long red hair, maybe 110, as we would say — really hot — asked if any of us flew Chinooks.

I said I rode in one once and watched my Snake as it swung below the aircraft.

I then asked: "Does your husband or boyfriend fly Chinooks?"

She looked at me with a hard stare and said: "I fly Chinooks, Sir."

I apologized, informing her that no insult was intended, and told her there were not any pilots who looked like her when we went through flight school.

Not sure she forgave the old guy. Lash and Ken got a huge laugh out of it, though. I was really embarrassed.

Museum

Pilot has Loach delivered to Mineral Wells Airport

In late September of this year, The National Vietnam War Museum received the gift of another major asset.

Louis "Rocket" Rochat, a Vietnam veteran from Universal City, Texas, donated an OH-6A, serial number 70-17331. Rochat, a former helicopter pilot in the 1st Cavalry Division, had the aircraft delivered to Mineral Wells Airport and signed over to the museum.

The aircraft will be displayed at the airport while it undergoes restoration, and will eventually become a static display at the museum.

The aircraft has a Vietnam history, having served with the 1st Infantry Division, first with D Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, and then with C Troop 16th Cavalry between February and June of 1970.

With the phasing out of U.S. forces that began in 1969, C Troop was transferred to the 7th Squadron, 1st Cavalry, part of the 164th Combat Aviation Group (CAG), based at Vinh Long, in the Mekong Delta.

The aircraft was involved in a combat-related accident on June 24, 1970 and classified as totally destroyed. After being rebuilt in the United States, the aircraft returned to the 164th CAG in October 1971, where it served with A Troop 7th Squadron, 1st Cavalry until April 1972, when the unit stood down and departed Vietnam.

Thanks to the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, we have a fairly accurate record of the aircraft's history and a copy of the incident report for the accident on June 24, 1970.

The pilot was WO1 J.V. Wisser, and the gunner was Spec. 4 M.T. Burcham. The details of the accident, as stated in the report, follow:

Accident Summary:

The aircraft took off from Ca Mau and was working an area 10 miles south of that location. After making a fragmentation grenade run, the pilot began his pullout and struck a tree with his main rotor blades.

The pilot started a left turn and again hit another tree with his main rotor blades and also the right side of his tail boom. The horizontal stabilizer "hooked" the second tree and bent the tail boom at a point halfway between the "body" of the aircraft and the tail rotor assembly.

The boom was bent approximately 30 degrees to the left of the centerline of the tail boom when sitting in the pilot's seat facing forward.

The pilot entered autorotation and successfully landed



An OH-6A Loach donated to the National Vietnam War Museum by Louis Rochat awaits restoration at the Mineral Wells Airport.

the aircraft. When the aircraft landed on the ground and the crew exited, the main rotors again hit another tree, which was sitting very close to the aircraft.

There was one injury, but no fatalities from the accident.

The OH-6A Cayuse, commonly referred to as a "Loach," was a light observation helicopter (LOH) used primarily in a scout role.

The pilot, or pilot and gunner, working with a gunship team, would fly at low level over suspected enemy activity.

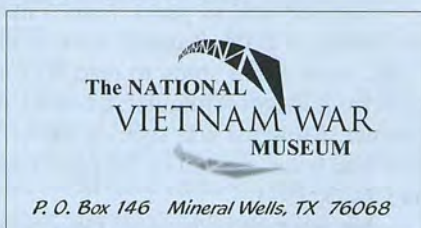
The object was to draw enemy fire, at which time the scout would mark the target and depart quickly so the gunships could attack. Needless to say, it was one of the most hazardous helicopter missions of the war.

To honor the brave young men who flew these missions, the museum plans to restore the aircraft for display in the colors of one of the Cavalry units that employed these aircraft in Vietnam.

What is needed now is a project manager to lead the restoration of the aircraft, volunteers to assist, and sponsors to fund the project.

Ideally, sponsorship of the aircraft and its restoration would come from the units it served with, but any group or individual is free to participate.

To be involved with this project, contact The National Vietnam War Museum, P. O. Box 146, Mineral Wells, TX 76068, or online at www.nationalvnwarmuseum.org



Rescue

Helicopter pilot receives DSC after 34 years

KATHERINE K. LEE

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CLEARWATER — Michael Bagnell had made up his mind to die.

His helicopter gunship had been shot down Oct. 5, 1971, northwest of Tay Ninh in South Vietnam. Pinned down by enemy fire, Bagnell, a corporal with the Army's 240th Aviation Company, knew any attempt to rescue him and three crewmembers would be futile; the enemy would use the men to draw in and shoot down would-be rescuers.

He knew his only choice was the manner of his death: by enemy hands or his own.

"I would fire my machine gun until I had one round left and then do what I needed to do," Bagnell recalled. "I would not give them the pleasure of shooting me."

But Providence intervened, dropping literally from the sky.

Gunship lands at edge of village

A gunship from the 135th Aviation Company, piloted by Chief Warrant Officer Stephen Lawrence, touched down at the edge of the village.

What happened next should have earned Lawrence one of the highest military honors in the country. But he ended his tour of duty a month later and went home to Virginia without it. In the intervening 33 years, he married, raised a family and joined the Coast Guard. His heroic act went largely unnoticed, even by himself.

But the men with whom he served didn't forget.

This month, Lawrence will go to Washington, D.C., where the medal he earned three decades ago will finally be pinned to his chest.

Lawrence's job as chief warrant officer on a gunship was to escort medevac units, flying low and drawing fire away from other helicopters. On Oct. 5, his helicopter had taken some fire when he saw another gunship go down in a ball of flames and its four-man crew jump out. Although his own helicopter was so badly damaged its guns wouldn't fire, he attempted a rescue.

"We threw rocket pods overboard, bullet casings, cans, we figured maybe if we hit someone on the head, from 1,000 feet up it would hurt. And we had to get all the weight off the plane to take on four men," Lawrence said.

Twice he attempted to land long enough for the men to make it on board. Both times he was forced to take off after just a few seconds under a rain of enemy fire. The men on the ground could see the helicopter, but they couldn't move.

"We were pinned down every time we moved," Bagnell said. "We could see the rounds hitting the helicopter."

The third time, Bagnell knew, would be their last chance. When the helicopter put down again, he dropped everything he carried, including his M-60, and ran.

"We knew this was it," he said. He recalled seeing Lawrence's co-pilot, Paul Zabriskie, trying to provide cover, shooting out the door of the helicopter with only a .38 revolver.

"I wanted to laugh. He was practicing the ultimate effort in futility up there," Bagnell said.

Three of the men dived on board. The last one to make it on, Bagnell could only jump on the skid of the helicopter before it took off with him dangling over the side, while Zabriskie hung on to his clothes.

Back at the base, Bagnell saw the helicopter had so many holes in its sides "it looked like Swiss cheese." It was so badly damaged it fell over just after landing safely, the rotor blades still going.

"We were hit by multiple rounds and not a scratch on any of us," Bagnell said. Altogether, seven helicopters were shot down in the area that day.

For his heroism, Lawrence, along with his crew, received the Distinguished Flying Cross two days later. Lawrence was recommended for the Medal of Honor as well, but he ended his tour that month, Bagnell returned to combat and the unit was broken up soon after.

Lawrence's fellow crewmembers received Silver Stars, but their pilot was long gone from the Army by then. Talk of who received what medals was forgotten.

Fast-forward 33 years. After Thanksgiving dinner with his family in 2004, Bagnell, now living in Amador County, Calif., went to his study to read his e-mail. He found a message from Roger Almquist, a retired Army lieutenant colonel. Almquist was seeking the officers from the 240th who had been rescued by Stephen Lawrence and his crew on Oct. 5, 1971.

Almquist had a request: Over dinner with Lawrence in July 2004, he discovered Lawrence had never received the Medal of Honor for which he had been recommended in 1971. He wanted to get the men's narratives together, start the paperwork all over again and make sure that this time, Lawrence got the honor he deserved.

Bagnell recalls running for life

"I just sat there and cried," Bagnell said.

Even now, his voice catches at the memory of those 90 seconds when he ran for his life through a rice paddy in South Vietnam.

"I told Roger this is way too heavy to do over e-mail, so he called me and we talked about it. I told him if I needed to be somewhere to testify to some committee, tell me when and where and I'll be there."

For his part, Lawrence had left his combat years behind, along with most of the men he served with. He returned to Virginia Beach, Va., where his parents lived, went to college, married and became a Coast Guard pilot before retir-

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Pilot receives DSC after 34 years

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ing in 1994. He kept in touch with Zabriskie and his commanding officer, but no one else.

"I had not talked to anybody I served with in Vietnam in 33 years," he said.

Although he was a member of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association, Lawrence didn't go to their reunions or look up old brothers-in-arms. The recipient of other service medals from the Army and Coast Guard, Lawrence, now 55, admits he didn't even bother to display them.

"When I came back, it was not a good time to be saying I was a Vietnam vet," said Lawrence, who now flies planes for FedEx. "And now, I don't really offer it up."

Almquist promised to get medal

But then Almquist, who had been looking up helicopter pilots who served in Vietnam, got in touch with him in late 2003. They corresponded for several months, and over that July dinner, Almquist told Lawrence he was going to do everything in his power to get him that medal.

Lawrence was touched by the effort, but didn't expect anything to come of it. Getting someone a medal years after the fact requires mountains of paperwork, but the men would not be put off.

It didn't take years. And the paperwork they were prepared to fill out was never filed. Almquist's inquiries uncovered the fact that Lawrence had been awarded a different rare medal in 1972: the Distinguished Service Cross. The cross is the country's second-highest military award, just below the Medal of Honor.

But the Army had lost it.

Only a researcher at the National Archives discovered the oversight. Lawrence learned only two weeks ago that he received the medal. He shares the distinction with just more than 13,000 other veterans who have received the Distinguished Service Cross since it was established in 1917.

"They didn't realize I was still in the Army National Guard," he said. "They could have found me, but it went into nowhere land."

On March 25, he will go to Washington, where he will stand in the Pentagons Hall of Heroes and receive his medal, 33 years late.

Lawrence's wife, Theresa, is almost happy it took that long because it means she, his three children and his parents will be there to see it.

So will Zabriskie and Bagnell.

Bagnell looked forward to ceremony

"I'm really looking forward to this," said Bagnell, who has not spoken to the man who saved his life, except through e-mails, since the war.

"I owe him a lot of beers."

Bagnell said Lawrence's actions went beyond what is expected of men who live and die in each other's company. Only 28 days from ending his tour of duty, Lawrence should not have been flying that day.

"It was an unwritten thing. In your last 30 days, they try to protect you," Bagnell said. "He should have been sitting in the officers club drinking beer with everything packed to get home."

Lawrence, however, knew he was needed. He said he didn't know he had less than a month left in country.

"You kind of feel like you'd be letting your buddies down," he said. "Some guys, when they started their tour of duty, counted down: 365 days, 364 days . . . I didn't. I didn't know it was 28 days."

Even now, he doesn't think about how his life might have been different if he could have listed on his resume all these years, "Recipient, Distinguished Service Cross."

"I joined the Coast Guard and sure, it would have been a good thing to have on my record. It would have helped with promotions," he said.

"But being the center of attention, that's not where I want to be."

He has not heard from the Army, never received an apology for years of oversight. The National Archives mailed him the 29 pages of documentation, including crewmembers narratives testifying to his actions and recommending him for the highest medal in the land.

The last two pages are the Department of the Army General Orders Number 873, dated May 1, 1972.

"Awarded: Distinguished Service Cross . . . For extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations involving conflict with an armed hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam . . . Chief Warrant Officer Lawrence's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army."

That, Lawrence said, is enough.

"If me going to the Pentagon is the 'I'm sorry, then I don't need a letter,' he said.

Wife had not heard details

Theresa Lawrence said her husband is not one to dwell on the past. Even she had not heard in detail what happened in October 1971 until Almquist got in touch with them.

"He's never told five people that story of what happened that day," she said.

But the survivors remember it vividly. Every year, on Oct. 5, Bagnell and his crew chief, Roger Marley, send each other e-mails to remind themselves how they made it through that day.

"We say happy anniversary," he said. "That's our day."

Although he is disappointed the Army didn't bother to follow up on its own medal, Bagnell is grateful that the oversight gives him a chance to thank Lawrence in person.

"It gives some closure," he said. "You know, that kind of character doesn't diminish with age. It speaks to who you are at the core. Its too bad he had to go 34 years, but I'm glad I'm still alive to see it."

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