



The VHPA Newsletter

Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association ®

March/April 1999 Vol. 17, No. 2



This three-quarter view of an H-34 was taken near Hue by VHPA member Curt Knapp, who was stationed with HHC, 101st Airborne Division, during his 1967-68 Vietnam tour. Does anyone recognize the aircraft?

Read about OPERATION 10,000. Details inside!

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From the President

I am really enjoying being your VHPA president. Why? Mainly because the VHPA and its membership define just who I am.

Well, you say: "get a life."

Or you ask: "Is that all you can do is live in the past?"

I don't really live in the past, I spend time there only when I am around my buddies, like you. I can't, however, escape the past.

My daily life is defined by what I believe and where I have been. I did what I believed was right and required, given the situation and times. It defines me and I cannot — nor should I — try to escape it.

Which brings me to my point.

As I have traveled around this past year, I have discovered there are folks in our society who are glad to take my place. The main problem is, they are not eligible to take my place.

I am talking about wannabes, fakes and frauds. For you see, while many of us may have ignored who and what we are in our society, wannabes have stepped up and stolen our place.

A great book has been written by Burkett and Whitley called "Stolen Valor." It very clearly shows how and what the wannabes have done.

The fakes and frauds are far more numerous than you might think.

Lately, I have run into four wannabes who were professing, IN PUBLIC, to be who I was. Each one was absolutely lying about who or what they claimed to be. Amazingly, to me it was so plain they were lying! Yet the public had no clue.

It made me sick! Yet, the public has accepted them, without question, as Vietnam vets with their awards and wild, boisterous tales!

One reason why these frauds and fakes get away with what they do is we have let them do it.

We, the true Vietnam vets, have forfeited our place in society by not proudly standing up and claiming what is rightfully ours.

Instead, we have lurked in the shadows, convinced society hated us and was ashamed of us.

That may have been the case in the late 1970s, but it is

not the case now. Society has now decided we are worthy of honor and praise. We can credit Desert Storm, movies and books written of late. Witness the increase in ROTC programs in our schools; no offense WO's.

The bottom line is this: Vietnam vets need to step forward and seek out and accept leadership spots in other veterans' organizations so the wannabes can't.

In a true Vietnam vet's presence, a wannabe looks blindingly STUPID!

I have heard the stories about how the traditional veterans groups don't care about us. But, they do. Their legacy is fading and it will not be long before none of them are left.

Then who do you think will be gladly stepping in for US? You guessed it, the WANNABES!

So, this coming Armed Forces Day on May 15 and Memorial Day on May 31, join and attend a Veteran's activity and ceremony in your town. Proudly wear your uniform or cap and watch those who take part and provide leadership.

Be quiet and respectful to all and at all times. Then ask yourself, are they for real?

As you watch and listen, I believe you can discern in your heart whether you are in the presence of the "Real McCoy."

Then decide if you should step forward and do your part, as a Vietnam vet.

I am absolutely sure you could lead with honor, dignity and, most of all, legitimacy. Do you think you could? Let's do it!

Check out OPERATION 10,000 in this Newsletter. It is my effort to enlist more new members than normal so that we can reach our goal of 10,000 members before or at the Nashville Reunion.

The member who signs up the most new members will be recognized and receive benefits equaling big bucks for his efforts.

Congratulations to Membership Chairman Hayden "Pappy" Jones and his great crew who signed up so many new members and renewed so many at the HAI convention in Dallas in February.

I went and it was a great effort by a wonderful group of guys and their gals. Thanks for your hard work.

The AAAA convention will be in Nashville this year and our newest Mid-South Chapter will be manning the

See FROM THE PRESIDENT, Page 3

Classified ads

POSITION WANTED: Experienced helicopter pilot looking for a position in the areas of EMS, natural resources or public service. Experience: Regular Army, Indiana National Guard. Class 68-27. Call Bill Resor at [REDACTED]

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Mini-reunions

CH-54 pilot mini-reunion

Skycrane pilots will conduct their second annual mini-reunion during the VHPA gathering in Nashville on July 2 from 2-5 p.m. at the Renaissance Hotel.

Contact Max Torrence at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Class 68-31, 175th AHC minis

Mini-reunions are planned for the 175th Assault Helicopter Company and Class 68-31 at the Nashville Reunion.

Times and locations will be posted in the registration area.

From the President

Continued from Page 2

booth there to find and renew members.

Good luck to them! If you live in the Nashville area and can help, give them a call and volunteer.

Finally, next Newsletter, I will be recapping this past year, letting you know how your VHPA has reached out to meet present and future challenges.

We need more new faces to run for office and I would encourage you to search your heart and see if you have what we need in the way of leadership and vision to help us move forward.

I am glad we had this little talk.

— Tom Payne, president
TomPayne@vhpa.org

Father, son visit with pilot's help

This story actually took place sometime between April 1970 and June 1970, my DEROS.

I know that, only because the unit, A/4/77 ARA, 101st Airborne Division, had left Bart's Pad and Camp Eagle behind and moved to the abandoned Air Force barracks and runway at Phu Bi and that is where this incident took place.

It was early evening and my Cobra section was on hot status for the night. Any fire missions that came down from Div Arty would be ours to scramble on.

As the truck carrying the troops to guard duty pulled in front of operations, we wondered what was up. One of our young enlisted men presented himself and asked if he might use one of the radios at the desk.

The RTO was unsure and looked to me for an answer. This seemed a most unusual request and I asked for an explanation. It seemed that "Jeff's" dad was an airline pilot, "TWA, I think" and was, at that very moment, flying to Bangkok somewhere out over the coast and he and Jeff had arranged to talk on the radio to one another.

A quick call on the land line to Div Arty to let them know we would be off the push for a short time and the radio was all Jeff's.

He changed frequencies and made his first call, "Father John, this is Son Jeff, Over."

The radio was painfully silent. Again and again Jeff tried, but no luck. His time was up and it was time to climb into the truck and go off to guard the perimeter.

As the truck rounded the building and drove out of sight, those of us left in operations chatted about how nice it would have been for Jeff's message to get through and how disappointed he must be.

As the RTO reached for the tuning knob on the radio to come back up with Div Arty, we heard this call, "Son Jeff, this is Father John, Over?"

You can only imagine our delight as we introduced ourselves as "Dragon Operations" to Father John. We explained to Father John we were dispatching a Jeep to find his son on guard duty, but that it may take some time.

Remember, Father John is out over the South China Sea, flying at 30,000 feet, at 300 knots flying south, away from us. It truly seemed as if hours had passed, but Jeff soon burst through the door to talk to his dad.

"Father John, this is Son Jeff, Over?" Garble . . . garble .

Jeff's disappointment spread to all of us. It was time to make decisions. I was 20 years old, a Cobra pilot, an A/C, a section leader, I was invincible. What could they do, send me home?

Call the five-minute backup section and get them on

Continued on Page 5

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New VHPA bumper stickers	\$1/each	_____
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Continued from Page 4

their way to operations, one of us was going flying.

We strapped Jeff into the front seat of my wingman's ship and gave him the short version of how to turn on the radios and not shoot the guns.

I was going to stay behind to scramble on a fire mission and have the five-minute crew just catch up.

As the starter was engaged, the Snake was ominously quite . . . dead battery. Time was running short. Call maintenance. Where is that five-minute section? Strap Jeff into my ship. Let's go.

This time we did not fail. In less time than it takes to climb straight out to the east, over the South China Sea, Jeff made his call.

"Father John, this is Son Jeff, Over?"

"Jeff, this is dad. How are you?"

"Dad, you're not going to believe where I am?"

Jeff and his dad talked until John was truly out of range and we had to return to Phu Bi. We refueled the bird and went back on hot status with my wingman and his new battery. The five-minute boys went back to bed. Jeff went back to guard duty, and for the rest of the night we waited.

On the way to breakfast I had rethought our flight the night before and considered avoiding the battery commander, but he had other ideas.

Maj. Coleman approached me head on and commented he had heard us go out the night before. I admitted we had flown and the mission was successful.

Retired master sergeant seeks items for collection

I am a collector. I collect crest, coins and patches from all Army, National Guard and Reserve units. I have not been doing this very long, so I don't have all that many.

I don't mean just the crest and stuff you are wearing, but those items you have cubbyholed. I intend to eventually have one from every unit in the Army. If you have any of these items for me, I will truly appreciate it.

I was in the Army for 23 years. I served from Dec. 16, 1959, until July 31, 1983. I served with the 5th SFG(A), 7th SFG(A) and 10th SFG(A) until I got out in '83.

I went to work in April 1983 until June 16, 1994, when I was hit by a (bad) stroke. There wasn't any pain, but I nearly lost my life. It was something else. I am up and around now, but I still can't drive or anything like that. My whole right side was affected.

I am stuck here doing this, collecting crests. I don't have much luck, but I try harder!

I've left my address and e-mail for immediate use, so feel free to use them.

James D. Wooten
Master Sergeant SFGA (retired)

He gave me one of his smiles and asked why I hadn't awakened him to go along and that it had sounded like a good mission.

Father John and Son Jeff probably will never read this, unless someone remembers their last names or sends it to TWA to publish, but I'm sure they have told this story as many times as I have.

Thank you, Herbie Stainton for convincing me to write this story down.

PS: Maj. Lynn F. Coleman was the yardstick I used to measure commanders with for the next 25 years. I had some goods ones in those years, but none as outstanding as Maj. Coleman. He was the best of the best.

Retired CW4 Kevin C. Scott

Call signs, nicknames would help ID friends

I have been a longtime member of this excellent organization and thoroughly enjoy and look forward to the arrival of each newsletter and directory.

With the arrival of a new directory, I pour through the names and class dates of guys that served in my unit, during my tour. I was in C/227 AHB, 1 Cav Div — the Ghostriders — from August 1970 'til August 1971. We were at Phuoc Vinh in III Corps 'til May 1971 when we moved up to Ninh Hoa just north of Nha Trang in II Corps. I believe we then became the 60th AHC, however we still thought we were in the Cav.



The reason for this letter is to request that in future directories you could have the members include their call signs. In our company we mostly called each other by those names (i.e. "Gabby," "Physco," "Whale," etc.). In most instances I can't remember their real names (my memories are afadin'). I see the names of people who were in my unit at the same time that I was and I can't put a face to the name. We had some really great folks and I would love to be able to catch up with them.

I hope that the readership includes a lot of crew chiefs of which mine, on ship 411, was the best. We all know how hard they worked. He kept our "old ugly bird" hat is all I can remember.

I would love to know that he made it home and is alive and well. I owe him a lot of drinks and dinners and would love to hear from him.

The following is a list of call signs that I remember from the Ghostriders. If any of you guys recognize yourselves, please call, write, e-mail or show up at the front door.

My wife, Kay, is very understanding. She knows there were no female chopper pilots back then.

"Gabby," "Physco," "Whale," "Tuna," "God-34" (yep,

Continued on Page 6

Continued from Page 5

he'd taught God to be an AC), "Conner," "Twinkletoes," "Bear," "Ebony," "Stryker," "Rudy" ("Six" on the radio, was our CO. I believe he is Gen. Ostovich now. He was a great CO and great guy even to the little people — War-rants!) Capt. Griffin, Capt. Pope, Lt. Bernie Swartz, (Bernie helped me recon a Korean floor show from the ceiling of the Officers Club above their dressing room. Unfortunately, he fell into the crowd of changing show girls from the ceiling and paid a heavy price at the hands of the irate Korean ladies. He did provide great cover for my E&E.)

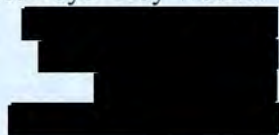


The last one I can think of (and I hate that my memory fails me so much) was "Animal." He was a true character and the one who gave me my call sign. I was flying left seat with him in preparation and asked how I was doing? "Animal" replied that I was a regular "Boy Wonder" and that I had already tried to kill him several times that day.

I have been very fortunate in my life since then. I accomplished my dream of flying for the airlines. In April 1996, I opted for early retirement from Northwest Airlines at age 50 after a wonderful 23-year career. Just like Vietnam, I miss the flying and the great people, but I sure don't miss all the hassles.

I hope that all of the guys listed or that were in the Ghostriders are well, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Russ Boyd "Boy Wonder"



Newsletter article gets a tremendous response

It still amazes me what an indelible mark one person can leave on the lives of those around them who shared, for a moment, the extraordinary time and place, and attitude, that was the "helicopter war." Even after 25 or 30 years.

The Family Contacts Committee of the Vietnam Helicopter Flight Crew Network received a tremendous response to the recent newsletter story that listed the names of those for whom we are seeking information and contacts. More than 65 responses were received by Committee Chairman Gary Thewlis; additional responses were fielded by individual committee members.

Since Feb. 1, more than 200 individual entries have been logged into our records.

Many of the newsletter responses resulted in a connection between a family member of a KIA and someone who knew their loved one while in training or in Vietnam. Some of the connections were between veterans remembering a mutual friend. Many of the replies included valuable histor-

ical information that was added to the VHPA database by Gary Roush. A number of them were from different veterans regarding the same individual.

The responses from family members and friends who finally had a connection with their loved one, through another Vietnam veteran who remembered him, were overwhelming.

Linda Aydlott, niece of James Aydlott (KIA) 121 AHC wrote, "It still takes my breath away to hear from those who had some contact with Jimmy and still remember him enough after all these years to be moved to reply to my inquiry . . . Especially since his parents and brother (my dad) have since passed and we (Jim's nieces and nephews) have no one in our family to ask these questions."

Tommy Poppell had asked for help finding people who knew his old high school friend, Bob Sizemore (KIA) 176 AHC. After VHPA member Ron Handel responded to the article, Tommy wrote, "Dear Ron, You remember Bobby the same way as I did, he was a team player, and you described him to a tee . . . We all lost a good friend and a good soldier."

Thank you, Jack Swickard and John Hastings, everyone at VHPA and VHCMA, for devoting so much newsletter space to the story and list of names. And thanks most of all to those who responded. Lots of good came of it.

Hopefully, future newsletters will have room for a list of new cases and brief explanation; perhaps the entire list could be published annually. I would hate to think that a new member who knew one of these men never had an opportunity to respond because of joining after one newsletter was published.

The song "(Still Waiting At) The Wall" by Tim Murphy reminds me of our list of names, only 200 or so, out of so many: "And every name's a father or a husband or a son, or a daughter or a brother, or a cousin to someone. Or a name might be a classmate or a friend you may recall. There's nearly 60,000 fallen names still waiting at the wall."

It's true, we all loved the same people. Thank you for allowing their memories to be shared.

Julie Kink

Sister of WO1 David Kink

C Troop, 1/9th Cav

KIA Aug. 3, 1969

Member of VHFCN Family Contacts Committee

Colleague recalls Poston, one of best pilots in Army

Robert E. "Pete" Poston was one of the very best helicopter pilots ever to wear Army Wings.

Pete was recognized for his outstanding accomplishments as an H-34 IP in Germany, as a gunship commander with the 118th Assault Helicopter Company in 1964, and for actions during his second tour in Vietnam in 1968-69.

To all who knew him, Pete was a calm, brave, clear-thinking, steady, no-nonsense leader who got the job done

Continued on Page 7

Continued from Page 6

without fanfare or confusion. The following incident illustrates Pete at work.

Pete could have stayed in an air-conditioned office in Saigon in 1964, but he volunteered to join us, his old friends from the 504th in Germany, who were now with the 118th in Bien Hoa. Pete was not even qualified in the UH-1 when he joined the 118th.

On the day after I completed his checkout in the UH-1, we took a special mission together. I had a UH-1B slick and Pete had a UH-1C gunship.

We were to take a group of Vietnamese and U.S. VIPs in search of information concerning an L-19 missing from Bien Hoa. We were to stop at several small hamlets to let the VIPs talk to the Villagers and to post a reward.

We stopped at two locations in "disputed" territory without incident. Pete provided cover while I would land and, if no problem developed, Pete would follow me in.

We arrived at the third location and we checked it out without drawing fire. We let down lower into a circling approach and at about 150-200 feet above the ground we took fire. Pete's ship was hit in the Achilles heel of the UH-1. The gunner who hit him would have qualified for an award for the perfect shot.

The bullet came up through the left hydraulic gun/rocket pylon and took out Pete's hydraulic servo controls. The bullet then went into the engine, causing a sudden engine stoppage that also took out his tail rotor drive shaft.

So there was Pete with no hydraulics, no engine, no tail rotor, no altitude, no airspeed, under fire . . . and one-day of experience in the UH-1.

Pete made a perfect autorotation under those most trying of circumstances and saved his crew and his ship. No one could have done it better.

Pete died of cancer in November 1998 very shortly after it was discovered.

I am sure the civilian community where he lived knew him as a quiet, bright, thorough and pleasant neighbor.

I doubt any of them knew he had earned the Distinguished Flying Cross and a Purple Heart, or any knew what a talented pilot he was, or knew of his bravery and many accomplishments in Vietnam.

Pete Poston was among the silent majority of the military who did their job well and asked for nothing in return.

John A. Islin II

Veteran Army aircraft fly again at foundation

The sound that a UH-1 "Huey" makes in flight is so distinctive that once heard, it is seldom forgotten.

For more than 30 years, military veterans have become very familiar with this sound, or perhaps the deeper thumping of a Chinook or the light buzzing of a LOH.

To hear the distinctive sounds made by the historic air-

craft of Army Aviation can be a very emotional experience. This experience and the story that surrounds it are items the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation (AAHF) is dedicated to preserving for the American people of today and tomorrow.



Few military branches have seen as dynamic an evolution over a relatively short period of time as has Army Aviation. Despite the distinguished achievements of Army Aviation and its many advances in tactics, performance and aircraft development, combined with the professionalism and bravery of its sky soldiers, the heritage of Army Aviation is

neither recognized nor understood by the majority of Americans.

How many civilians you meet know about Army Aviation? If asked, most would respond with a quizzical look or the assumption you are referring to the Army Air Corps of World War II or the U.S. Air Force.

With the lack of knowledge the American people have about the role and contributions of Army Aviation and it's professionals, there now comes a new generation of young adults and children who have no understanding of what these veterans have done to ensure their freedom.



Unfortunately, in the high-paced world we live in, America is not taking the time (or spending the money) to honor the brave veterans who have ensured the freedom and development of the United States. Across the country, Armed Forces Day, Veterans Day and Memorial Day celebrations are being

cut back or canceled.

It is equally unfortunate many of the aircraft Army Aviation professionals made history in are headed for extinction. These aircraft are being sold for scrap or given to foreign governments.

Until now, little has been done to preserve and restore flyable examples of these aircraft. In June 1997, a group of concerned private citizens and veteran Army Aviation professionals (some of whom are VHPA members) organized the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation to fulfill the following purposes:

- To educate Americans (particularly the younger generation) on the contributions and accomplishments of Army Aviation.
- To recognize the professional men and women who have dedicated their lives to the development of Army Aviation.
- To preserve in flying condition historical examples of aircraft that served in Army Aviation.

In order to fulfill these purposes, the AAHF will be traveling the country, sharing the story of Army Aviation by

Continued on Page 8

Continued from Page 7

presenting a series of narrated aerial presentations and static displays. The presentations will demonstrate the history of Army Aviation from World War II to present day, and will be conducted by the veterans who served as Army Aviation professionals.



These exhibitions will have a patriotic theme and will utilize historic Army aircraft in flyable condition, making the Foundation the only known nonprofit, veteran-oriented organization that is totally dedicated to the acquisition, restoration and preservation of historic Army aircraft in flyable condition.

The AAHF presently has nine flyable aircraft representing all eras of Army Aviation. However, current efforts are focused on the restoration of aircraft that served in the Republic of Vietnam.

In fact, the first restoration project of the AAHF was to restore and reconfigure the Foundation's OH-6A Hughes Cayuse, or "Loach."

Our OH-6A served in Vietnam with the 101st Airborne (Air Mobile) Division from 1968-1971 and has been restored to its original Army specifications and combat appearance as representing A Troop, 2/17th Cav. of the 101st Airborne Division.

The Loach was displayed for the first time in April 1998 at the Army Aviation Association of America (AAAA) convention in Charlotte, NC.

A crew of enthusiastic volunteers worked vigorously to prepare the aircraft for its debut, stripping many layers of old paint and replacing civilian parts with original Army equipment.

The Loach flew from Atlanta, piloted by CW5 R.M. "Pete" Peterson, USA (retired) and arrived in Charlotte in time for the helicopter to be the "Hit of the Convention." Pete served with the 3/17th Cav from 1968-69.

The next project of the AAHF is to restore the Foundation's TAH-1P Cobra. Our Cobra served with A Company, 229th Attack Helicopter Battalion, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) from 1978-82.

The plan is to reconfigure the gunship to a fully modernized "F" model. Work already has begun on this reconfiguration.

The Cobra is in excellent mechanical and airframe condition. It is the only known flying civilian AH-1 Cobra helicopter in the Eastern United States and one of only three known flying Cobras in civilian registry in America.

The Foundation is also on the search for a G or S model

airframe that would be restorable to flying condition. There are no known AH-1G models left flying.

Upon completion of this project, the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation will have the only known flying example of a civilian "Pink Team" in the country.

All of the Foundation's aircraft will appear at various times and locations as part of the educational, flying presentations. Some of the aircraft already have been restored and are in show-quality condition. Others are waiting their turn for restoration as funds become available.

The most recent aircraft acquisition to the Foundation's fleet was the arrival of our TH-13T Bell Sioux helicopter. The H-13S helicopter served Army Aviation as the Scout helicopter before the U.S. Army inventoried the OH-6.

The T-model H-13 was the last model to enter service and was used extensively as basic instrument trainers at Fort Rucker and Hunter Army Airfield.

There were only two significant differences between the S and T models — the type of skids and the instrument panel layout.

Our T model had already had the changes made to it to bring it to an S model configuration.

The aircraft will be restored to represent a flyable, armed scout S model of the 1/9th Cav with the 1st Cavalry Division in Vietnam. This will be the only known flyable Army H-13S that is restored back to its Army specifications and appearance.



Foundation President Mike Brady tells visiting Cub Scouts the history of the AH-1 Cobra gunship during their visit to the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation Museum.

The Foundation is also on the search for a flyable UH-1B/C/M model to restore to a full gunship model that will be used in the aerial educational presentations.

Any information or assistance with locating one of these UH-1 models would be greatly appreciated.

The Army Aviation Heritage Foundation is located about 25 miles south of Atlanta at Tara Field 4A7, in Hampton, GA. The AAHF receives its funding and equipment from its members, supportive individuals, and organiza-

tions. All financial and equipment donations are fully tax-deductible under IRS and Federal guidelines and contributors receive written confirmation of donations from the AAHF.

If you or someone you know is interested in supporting the development of the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation, as a contributor, volunteer or official member, please let us know. We need your assistance to build and preserve this important heritage for the future.

Correspondence can be mailed to the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] or call us at [REDACTED]

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Continued on Page 9

Continued from Page 8

at www.armyav.org

The Foundation continues to receive increasing support with each passing day. We hope you have an interest in the dedication of preserving the heritage of Army Aviation's professionals and their aircraft for future generations.

Americans need to learn of the contributions of Army Aviation and its many veteran professionals to America, for when these aircraft are gone and their stories left untold, their legacy will remain forever unknown to the American people.

The Foundation plans to bring several of its Vietnam-era combat helicopters to the VHPA Reunion in Nashville this summer.

Retired Maj. Gen. Morris T. Brady
Jim Spiers

Andy Burleigh

Army Aviation Heritage Foundation

Pilot describes Vietnam tour to his young niece

This was written to my niece, who is now about 20 years old. She had no idea who or what I was (am?) about, but she asked me to help her with a report she was doing for college.

She was to write about people she admired, but didn't know well. She was supposed to get to know them better and have them tell her about things she didn't understand.

She lived with her parents overseas most of her life because her dad is with the U.S. State Department and she had no idea about Vietnam (he was in the Peace Corps then), but for some reason thought I was some sort of hero. I dispelled that myth right off the bat, but agreed to write a short story for her.

Where I used the pronoun "I" it was understood that it was a group effort, successful only because we were a crew acting in concert for the good of the crew and the grunts we worked for every day and night. You guys know that, but I just feel the need to clarify so you don't roast me for being the only guy aboard doing anything or all of it.

These are my recollections, so if you disagree or want to straighten up a story and you were there, write to the Newsletter and roast me in public. No sweat. What are they gonna do? Send me to Vietnam and make me fly helicopters?

Ken Fritz
Minuteman 17, 176th AHC
Chu Lai, 1968-69

A Few Days in the Life of a Combat Assault Helicopter Pilot in the Republic of Vietnam

These stories, although typical, are personal in that they are told from my own viewpoint and this is why I am writ-

ing in the first person.

They are just a few memorable days out of the year I spent flying UH-1 helicopters with the 176th Assault Helicopter Company, 14th Combat Aviation Brigade, Americal Division, U.S. Army, in 1969.

I was based on the beach at Chu Lai, I Corps, and for me that was really great. I love the beach, the ocean, and the mountains.

The mountains are only a few miles from the beach in this area and they are truly beautiful with a thick jungle canopy that is over 120 feet high in many places.

My job was to fly troops into and out of combat in this Area of Operations (AO). I had a copilot beside me and in the back there was always a doorgunner and a crew chief with machine guns.

I enlisted to fly and that is what I did. I did well, too. We flew Combat Assault (CA) almost every single flying day. Flying CA means flying

the grunts into enemy fire and we lost many ships and some of our crews.

This was too often a troop insertion like what you have seen on TV with the enemy firing at us, the gunships and the doorguns firing into the tree lines.

The troops huddled inside pensively doing their best in this very dangerous situation were not allowed to fire from the helicopter because they might mistakenly shoot the crew or the helicopter itself.

The big difference between the TV portrayal and the real thing is that I never had time to chat cleverly in this sort of situation.

And no one ever cussed or swore on the radio. It is against regulations and it shows a lack of discipline. Anyone who knows me knows of my self-discipline in the cockpit. This kept me and my friends alive. Those without this self-discipline often died. I was very much dedicated to staying alive if I had some say in the situation.

Our dedication to rescuing the grunts and the downed crews was what I define as truly heroic. To me, most other acts of "heroism" seem more like grandstanding or getting

caught in the wrong place at the wrong time and having a witness.

Our living quarters, called hooches, were exact multiples of 4-by-8 foot sheets of plywood with ill-fitting corners

everywhere. As a result, I really lived almost outdoors. The ocean breezes blew the beach sand in during the dry season and the monsoons blew the rain in through the cracks and right through the plywood itself.



Continued on Page 10

Continued from Page 9

The Navy Construction Battalions (CBs, or SeaBees, get it?) had plenty of material, whereas the Army had very little. I was tired of waking up to find my boots floating across the floor of the hooch, so I fixed up a short flight to the PX (Post Exchange — like a department store for soldiers) to look for a solution.

We had plenty of helicopters to make the two-mile trip, but only one Jeep and it was for the sole use of the commanding officer.

The solution found me just outside the PX! A SeaBee who, because of his rank, was not allowed to purchase whiskey, asked me to buy a bottle for him for a little party. The perfect deal was struck: I buy the booze and he rebuilds my hooch.

I flew back to my living area and all 10 of us in the hooch pitched in and hauled everything out into the rain, covered it up with ponchos and waited for the SeaBee and his buddies to arrive the next day.

The five SeaBees had all the necessary skills, tools and materials. Within three hours they had torn down our old hooch and built a proper building without leaks. They even put doors on each end where previously we had hung canvas. This was one of my best days in the entire year.

My pilot hooch mates thought of me as a hero because we were all dry for the rest of the monsoon season and our beds were almost sand free, too.

One of the scariest days was actually one particular night when I was assigned to standby on alert to fly flare missions to illuminate the terrain for the grunts.

My copilot, John Berge, and I had supervised and helped the crew men (not my regular crew) load 50 night illumination flares into the Huey (the nickname for the UH-1 helicopter).

Soon after preparing the helicopter for immediate takeoff and arranging our boots under the cot in the alert tent, we were told to scramble into the air.



The big magnesium flares were designed to provide daylight conditions over a wide area. While I orbit the area to be lit up, the crew chief sets a small timer delay for the parachute and when I tell him the time is right, he shoves one out the door. A few seconds later the parachute opens and pulls a pin, which ignites the flare for its gentle 2,500-foot descent.

After I took off toward the target area and while over enemy territory on this pitch black night, one of the flares self-ignited in the midst of the stack of flares! This was not just a small surprise, it was a real emergency! Burning magnesium is almost impossible to extinguish.

We carried only a five-pound hand-held fire extinguisher. We were internally lit against the night sky for all the enemy to see us as a big, slow-moving target and the glaring light was so bright inside the Huey we could no longer see out to navigate or return the enemy's gunfire.

Look for newsletter editor, then buy him a drink

Please join me in showing your appreciation for the tremendous job done over the years by our newsletter editor, Jack Swickard. He's a quiet, unassuming guy who works very hard and very long hours doing what he is obviously very good at: Making a good newspaper.



Unlike most of you, I have had the good fortune to know Jack and to work with him every month (unlike most of us, he doesn't

leave his homework until the night before it is due) for a long time.

My plan is simple: At the reunion this year, look for his name tag, introduce yourself and buy him some sort of cold beverage to drink while you tell him thanks. The line may be long, but it'll be worth it.



Ken Fritz
Minuteman 17
176th AHC
Chu Lai, 1968-69

After all, the only reason I was out there was to light up the sky and the ground so the troops could see the oncoming enemy attack.

This was not a friendly place to land (even if I could have seen the ground) and there was no other choice. To make it even more exciting, that burning flare was about to ignite the whole stack, then burn through the Huey's thin aluminum floor and down into the almost full fuel tanks under the floor.

At my command, we jettisoned the pilot doors while the two crewmen in the rear shoved and kicked at the flare pile to get them all out.

I had begun a slow, controlled descent toward the beach and away from the known unfriendlies while Berge called out Mayday!

The flares were finally all ejected as I reached about 100 feet above the shoreline. Although I still couldn't see very well, I turned to follow the white, sandy beach northward to our home base.

Both rear crew members received burns, the aircraft was deemed fit to fly again after repairs the next day and I never wanted to fly flares again. (I did it when assigned, but never volunteered for the flare mission again).

This event had filled me with fear that when asked about my scariest time in Vietnam, it comes to mind first. Other events come close, but none lasted for so long as clearly recognizable encounters with death.

I will never forget the guys in the back, either. They saved us all.

Continued on Page 11

Continued from Page 10

In 1990, I attended a reunion of Vietnam helicopter pilots and one of the men in the room had a scrapbook of photos from the 176th in 1969.

As I looked over them, I noticed two crewmen in hand and arm bandages.

I asked who brought the photos and the owner proudly began to tell me the story of how he and the doorgunner in the photo had thrown out the flares to get rid of the one in the middle of the stack before it could set the Huey fatally afire.

As my eyes teared up, he related to me how cool the pilot was (not his regular aircraft commander that night 21 years ago, so he was unsure of the pilot's name) during the scariest time of his life.

The U.S. ground troops were called "grunts" because that's the sound they made as they jumped out of the Hueys from a low hover with a full combat pack.

They always jumped out and ran to get away from the Huey because they figured we were a big target and the enemy would aim for us and get them by mistake.

One day flying a combat assault (CA) into a particularly bad area with Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) troops, we were taking heavy fire from the tree lines as we attempted to land and insert the ARVNs.

The landing zone (LZ) was only large enough for one Huey at a time in a small grassy area surrounded by tall trees.

I was the second ship of a string of six to go in and, on arrival with the guns firing all around and at us, my load of ARVN soldiers decided it was too dangerous so they refused to get out.

The third Huey was almost into the LZ on top of my ship so I had to take off with my load of troops.

This did not make my crew or me very happy. It also left the ARVNs on the ground under-manned to defend themselves, so I made the decision to go into the LZ as number seven, but this time I instructed my rear crew members to force the ARVN out at gun point if necessary.

Our gunners were known for their accuracy and, on the second flight into the LZ, the ARVN decided to take their chances with the enemy instead of with us.

Did you know I built a catamaran out of surplus Marine Corps jet fuel tanks, an Army radio antenna mast and Huey tail rotor blades?

My SeaBee friends helped with the welding and I did the engineering and trading to get all the pieces. We all had a good time with it until it suffered a direct hit by an enemy rocket as it sat on the beach near the hooch.

The next day I was happy to be alive, but the boat was wrecked beyond repair.

The smell of hot coffee is great, but it is always served too hot and I burn my tongue.

On Thanksgiving Day 1969, I drank so much coffee it almost wore out my kidneys.

I had been flying in and out of the mountains for 11 months. Our mission that day was to resupply troops at distant locations and getting through the mountain passes in the monsoon season was not easy. There were no sophisticated navigational aids like we have now in the states.

There were few roads, no rail lines, plenty of jungle and the mountain tops were obscured by clouds and rain. Decent weather forecasts were non-existent.

All the mountain villages looked alike and it was not smart to overfly them to navigate by—maybe someone would take a shot at me.

I used what we jokingly called the Mark I Eyeball, compass and watch system. Good training and experience counted for most of our successes and I was elated the first time we actually made it deep into the valley to deliver hot Thanksgiving meals, ammo and water to the troops.

I was able to fly my crew and the goods in and out all day, but it was cold and we were getting wet. No doors, remember? And the Army had all the heaters taken out to lighten the Huey so it could carry more payload.

My ship was the only one to make the trip into the valley for over a week and the only thing the thankful grunts could offer us for our efforts was hot coffee and a smile.

It hurt their feelings to refuse the coffee and it kept my hands warm right through my thin wet leather flight gloves as I scalded my tongue over and over and over.

I can still see their smiles, but I will pass on the hot coffee.

The days recalled here are only a few of the memorable days. Many were forgettable days, so I don't write or talk about them.

I did my best and I have many good memories of my flying in Vietnam. I never lost a crew member. I was shot down five times and was never captured, hit or wounded. I logged 1,640 combat hours (combat hours are hours in which you actually get fired upon) out of a total of 1,760 hours flown in Vietnam.

I am proud of the job I did and the way I did it. I was 22 years old when I arrived and 23 when I got home.



Share your Vietnam memories with fellow pilots!

The VHPA Newsletter is seeking letters and articles.

E-mail material to: swickard@vhpa.org

Taps

Willis Aulbert III

Willis "Gip" Aulbert III of Bloomfield, NM, lost his battle with cancer on Feb. 25.

Gip had battled cancer several years ago and won, but in the last few months was undergoing strong chemotherapy treatments to fight back the disease that had resurfaced.

While in college, Gip was drafted in 1969, went through basic training at Fort Polk, LA, and graduated from flight school in 1970 with Class 70-15.

He served in Vietnam with the 68th Aviation and the 187th Assault Helicopter Company Crusaders at Tay Ninh during 1970-71. His call sign was "Crusader 28."

His Vietnam decorations include the Bronze Star Medal and numerous awards of the Air Medal.

After Vietnam, Gip completed his degree at Northeast Oklahoma State University in Tahlequah.

He then flew offshore for PHI Helicopters for 10 years from Houma, LA, and was transferred to the company's operations in Farmington, NM.

While in Farmington, he went to work for Williams Field Services.

He was with the company for the past 17 years, the last six as a superintendent.

Gip was active in the VHPA, attending reunions of his former combat unit, the 187th Assault Helicopter Company at Orlando in 1997 and Fort Worth in 1998.

Gip is survived by his wife Roxanne of Bloomfield; two stepsons, who live in Colorado; his brother, Cary; mother, Mrs. Ellon Aulbert of Bloomfield, and a sister, Mrs. Jan Fetter of Muskogee, OK.

Respectfully submitted by John Quesenberry, a friend and fellow former 187th Assault Helicopter Company pilot.

Otto Babel

Retired Lt. Col. Otto Babel, 65, of Bismarck, ND, died Jan. 5.

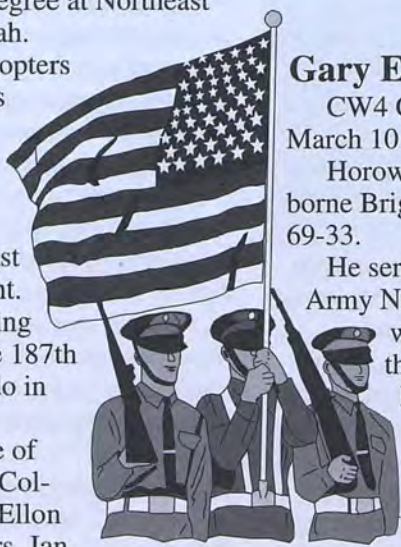
He served in the Navy during the Korean War and later in the North Dakota and Missouri Army National Guard.

He returned to active duty in the Army in 1961 and graduated from helicopter flight school in May 1963 with Class 63-3.

He served two tours in Vietnam and a tour in Germany before retiring in 1979.

His awards include the Senior Army Aviators Wings, Bronze Star Medal, Army Meritorious Service Medal, seven Air Medals and two Army Commendation Medals.

He was a member of the Eagles, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and AMVETS.



He is survived by his wife, Isabel; son, David; daughter, Judy Carson; and brother, Leo Babel.

William C. Bruce

CW4 William C. Bruce of Aurora, IL, died unexpectedly on Feb. 27.

He flew with the 155th Assault Helicopter Company in 1965-66. His call sign was "Stagecoach Wrecker."

He was active in the VHPA and planned to attend the Nashville Reunion this summer with his wife Sally.

David L. Green Jr.

David L. Green Jr. of Jonesboro, GA, died March 21 of cancer.

Green was a member of flight school Class 64-8W. He served with the 117th Assault Helicopter Company in Vietnam during 1965-66.

David and I worked together as air traffic controllers at the Atlanta ARTCC until his retirement a few years back.

— Ronald W. Disney

Gary E. Horowitz

CW4 Gary E. Horowitz of Hampton, GA, died March 10 after an extended battle with cancer.

Horowitz served in Vietnam with the 173rd Airborne Brigade in 1969-70 after graduating with Class 69-33.

He served for more than 16 years with the Georgia Army National Guard. Among the units he served with were the "Caspers" of the 173rd Aviation, the New Jersey National Guard, and the 265th Engineer Group Aviation Section.

His last unit was the 148th Medical Company (Air Ambulance).

He also was the chief helicopter pilot for Georgia Pacific in Atlanta for the past 16 years.

Thomas D. Pember

Retired CW4 Thomas D. "Pacemaker" Pember died Feb. 10 in Costa Mesa, CA, after a short battle with cancer. He was 66.

A native of Oklahoma, Tom grew up in Shafter, CA. He served as a Marine from 1951-55 and spent a 15-month combat tour in Korea.

After leaving the Marines, he took civilian flight training in fixed-wing and helicopters.

Building time as an ag pilot and flight instructor, he went to work for Southern Airways at Fort Wolters as a primary instructor in 1965.

In 1968, he joined the Army and was given a direct appointment to WO1 in officer class 69-2. After graduating from flight school, he attended Cobra transition school and was sent to Vietnam.

Assigned to C Troop, 7/17 Air Calvary, he became known as the "Pacemaker" because he was the oldest pilot

See TAPS, Page 13

Taps

Continued from Page 12

in the troop.

He served a second tour in Vietnam with the 48th Assault Helicopter Company and F/8 Cav in 1972-73.

He retired from the Army in 1984.

After flying S58's for Aris Helicopters, Tom went to work for the City of Lakewood's Sky Knight program. Flying Schweizer 300C's out of Lakewood Sheriff's Station, he distinguished himself as a truly professional pilot. A trooper to the end, his last patrol was just four months before he passed away.

His wife, Patricia; son, Bruce Whitaker; sisters, La Wanda Parton and Sherry Curtis; brothers, Glenn and Don and two grandchildren survive Tom. At his request, his ashes were scattered in the Pacific from a helicopter.

Harold F. Richardson

Harold F. "Frank" Richardson died suddenly of a massive heart attack on March 1 at his home in Daleville, AL.

He retired as a CW4 in 1977. Richardson graduated from flight school in 1962.

Richardson served in the 173rd Airborne Brigade Aviation Platoon, was attached to Company A, 82nd Aviation Battalion (later the 335th Aviation Company) from early 1966 to early 1967.

His second tour was with 355th Aviation Company from January-May of 1969, finishing out his tour with battalion operations.

He owned Hardware City in Daleville and was a deacon in his church.

He is survived by his wife Cora and a son, Frank Richardson Jr.

Thomas Earl Thompson

Thomas Earl Thompson, 74, who retired from the U.S. Army, died Tuesday, March 9 in Saudi Arabia.

At the time of his death, he vice president and general manager for Bell Helicopter Arabia in Riyadh.

Thompson was born and raised in Fort Lauderdale, FL.

He served in the U.S. Army from 1943-45 in the Pacific with the 11th Airborne through New Guinea, Leyte, Luzon and with U.S. Occupation Forces in Tokyo.

Thompson was a graduate of the University of Florida with a bachelor's degree in business administration.

He reentered the U.S. Army in 1949 for tours in Korea; Fort Benning, GA, as a parachute jump school instructor; two tours of Germany; three Pentagon assignments; the Army Aviation School at Fort Rucker; and 18 months in Vietnam, 12 of those as commander of the 22nd Assault Helicopter Battalion.

In 1970, he obtained a master's degree in business

administration from Shippensburg State University and completed the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, PA.

He retired from the Army in 1977 with the rank of colonel and began a career with Bell Helicopter International with positions in Tehran, Iran, Fort Worth, Amsterdam and the Netherlands.

Thomas was preceded in death by his wife Patricia Adams Thompson and his daughter, Gloria Jean Montfort.

Survivors include sons Thomas E. Thompson Jr. of Marlow, U.K., and Robert W. Thompson of Arlington; and a daughter, Anna Bevins of Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

John Valaer

John Valaer of Shalimar, FL, died March 29.

He was a retired CW4 Army aviator.

His wife Charlotte said Valaer asked to be cremated and his ashes spread by his son at his favorite hunting spot in Alabama.

Errol Van Eaton

Errol Van Eaton of Everett, WA, was among 13 people killed in the crash of a helicopter March 14 in Haiti, the Seattle Times reported.

Van Eaton, 51, a brigadier general in the Army Reserve, was piloting a U.N.-chartered helicopter when it crashed shortly after departing Port-au-Prince for Cap Haitien, a city in northern Haiti.

The aircraft, a Russian-made MI-8, which also carried six Argentineans and six Russians, left Port-au-Prince to help a Finnish woman hurt in a speedboat accident in northern Haiti.

Radio contact with the helicopter was lost 15 minutes into the flight, U.N. officials said.

A U.S. Coast Guard helicopter rescue crew found the wreckage of the aircraft about 35 miles northeast of Port-au-Prince; there were no survivors. The cause of the accident is under investigation.

Van Eaton was a Vietnam veteran, a former Federal Aviation Administration safety inspector and a pilot for International Charter Incorporated of Salem, Ore.

He was a member of flight school Classes 67-25 and 68-501. He served with the 179th Assault Support Helicopter Company in 1968-69.

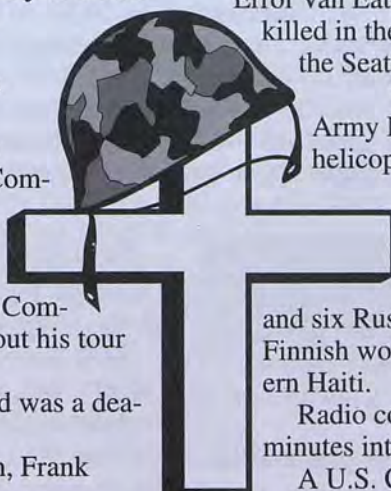
Van Eaton started with the FAA in Wyoming in the mid-1980s as an aviation safety inspector.

He transferred to the Seattle area about a year later and worked as a general aviation operations inspector, checking everything from small aircraft to helicopters to Lear jets to hot-air balloons, Lehman said.

Later he supervised aviation safety inspections, retiring from the FAA in 1994, Lehman said.

NOTE: Seattle Times staff reporters Dave Birkland and Chuck Taylor contributed to this report.

See TAPS, Page 14



Website has many international hits

After being more impressed each time I visit our website, I asked Gary Roush what it takes to make sure more people find us.

His response was simple and makes sense: "One way to do this is to put an article in the newsletter asking members to spread the word to other veterans' organizations about our site and ask the other sites to hotlink the VHPA site at:

<http://www.vhpa.org>

Makes sense, sounds easy. This is simple enough; now let's just do it.

You might be wondering what that could do for our website hits? Well, Gary answered that question, too. I think you will find the following not only interesting, but totally incredible. The people of the world have not forgotten us.

For your information, the VHPA website had 58,715 hits in January.

Here's where the hits originated: 20,017 — commercial, mainly

U.S.A.; 18,588 — network; 7,271 — unresolved numerical addresses; 4,481 — Taiwan; 2,660 — Germany; 1,062 — U.S. military; 967 — U.S. educational; 791 — U.S. government; 559 — United States.

Also, 342 — Australia; 314 — nonprofit organizations; 252 — Canada; 169 — France; 154 — Sweden; 140 — United Kingdom; 102 — Netherlands; 92 — Norway; 82 — Finland; 74 — Spain; 62 — Brazil; 47 — New Zealand; 36 — Denmark; 33 — Czech Republic, South Korea; 32 — Switzerland, Italy; 29 — Malaysia; 26 — Indonesia, Singapore; 25 — Belgium, Japan.

And, 22 — Russian Federation; 20 — Israel; 18 — Greece; 17 — Ireland, Portugal; 16 — United Arab Emi-

rates; 13 — South Africa; 12 — Hungary, Luxembourg, Thailand; 8 — Chile; 4 — Poland, Turkey; 3 — Austria, Croatia; 2 — Argentina, Egypt, Iceland; 1 — Brunei Darussalam, Estonia, Lithuania, Qatar, Slovak Republic.

Gary has done a marvelous job. Marvellous does not do justice to describe his tireless and devoted work.

January 1999 results of 58,715 hits from all corners of the world could be just the start . . . if each one of you will contact one website that is veteran, military, military contractor, etc.

Don't let Gary Roush down. What he started should be shared with the world.

With luck, we will find — or they will find us — the rest of our friends from so long ago.

— **Bob Smith, Vice President**



Taps

Continued from Page 13

Scott Alan Baker

Two days before Christmas 1998, helicopter aviation lost one of its finest.

Scott Alan Baker was operating a UH-1H in the mountains of northern California, transporting soil samples on a long line for Pacific Gas and Electric Co. He was over the Caribou Reservoir on final approach to the staging area when his engine failed.



Baker

His Huey crash landed on the shoreline, but slid down into about 20 feet of water. When the aircraft was recovered, Scott was still strapped in the pilot's seat.

Baker was a member of VHPA and was in flight school Class 66-21.

He served as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam for 22 months, flying Hueys for B Company, 123rd Aviation Battalion, Americal Division.

His decorations include the Bronze Star, Purple Heart and the Air Medal with 37 oak leaf clusters.

Scott separated from active duty in 1970 and returned home to Carmichael, CA, where he was the general manager for Excelmar Corp. for five years.

He missed flying helicopters, though, and in 1975 got a job flying for Siller Brothers Aviation. After three years, he was promoted to S64E Project manager.

Scott then started his own business, River City Helicopters, but after a time was asked to return to Siller Brothers as chief pilot.

From 1985-89, he worked as the chief pilot for Infinity Aviation and for Rogers Helicopters.

The last 10 years of his life, Scott was owner of Sunrise Air and a partner in Westwind Helicopters, operating numerous helicopters from his Rancho Cordova heliport: A Bell 47G-2, three Bell 206B's and three Bell UH-1's.

His greatest joy in flying was fighting wildland fires with his Huey. He was so highly respected by California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection that he was often dispatched alone on wildlands fires.

Scott volunteered a great deal of his personal time and of his UH-1 flight time to the University of California at Davis Center for Equine Health, Animal Rescue Center. Working closely with Dr. Madigan, he helped develop equipment and methods for safely rescuing large animals by helicopter.

His ideas revolutionized large animal rescue and countless horses were saved by his flying skill.

Scott is survived by his wife, Donanne; his son, Mark; and his mother, Lucille.

— **Will Prater**

Barb fills out details of Huey's loss

MIKE LAW

The 1994 VHPA Directory, which listed all crew member KIAs for the first time, has the names Sgt. Keith D. Griffin and Spec. 5 James G. Patterson for March 16, 1967, but nothing more.

The 1995 VHPA Directory noted these men were serving with the 155th Assault Helicopter Company — call sign “Stagecoach” — when they died, but nothing more.

Prior to the 1996 Directory, the VHPA learned the following from the 155th's unit history:

“While participating in a combat assault west of Pleiku, a flight element of the 155th came under intense enemy fire. Two aircraft were seriously damaged by hostile rounds and one other was shot down and burned upon contact. The company suffered two KIA and two WIA during the fierce engagement with the enemy.

“I saw the ship going down with flames billowing from the engine compartment. Then it hit the trees and fell through the canopy. We noticed a small clearing about 200 meters from the crash and set our ship down in it.

“The crew chief and I jumped from our ship, he with his M-60 machine gun and I with my M-16.”

This was the way First Lt. Richard Sperling described the action after the 155th Huey crashed after being hit by enemy ground fire during Operation Sam Houston on that eventful day.

The survivors of the ill-fated mission may owe their lives to the action taken by Sperling and his crew chief, Spec. 5 Michael Baucom, who unhesitatingly went to their rescue with disregard for the enemy mortars that were trying to destroy the downed crew.

These actions are indicative of the characteristics displayed by all personnel of the 155th.

Using the VHPA Helicopter database, we saw that the 155th reported the combat loss of UH-1D No. 65-

“Very soon after we started toward our ship, I realized we had a new problem. Getting to the downed crew had been easy, we just ran to the smoke. But I hadn't given a thought to getting back!”

10122 that day, so we logically assumed Griffin, a gunner, and Patterson, a crew chief, died in the same helicopter.

The 1996, 1997 and 1998 VHPA Directories carried this same information. And so might the 1999 VHPA Directory if it hadn't been for three great VHPAers, Les Davison, Bob Alberts and Dick Sperling, working on the February 1999 *Ban Me Thuot* Barb, the 155th Assault Helicopter Company Association's newsletter.

Dick Sperling was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions that day and the Barb printed his citation along with the following recently written addition:

“It was my very first mission as an AC; in fact, I still felt more comfortable in the right seat, so that's where I flew that day. Bill Cristobal was my copilot, Mike Baucom was the crew chief, and Tom DeSimone was the gunner.

“It was a hot LZ and I thought we had made it OK, but on my left I saw Chalk 2 on fire. They didn't make it very far before going into the trees.

“As Chalk 3, behind the ship that went down, it was 155 SOP for us to go down and help — and that's what we did.

“We hovered around the crash site, but couldn't see much. We found a small clearing not too far away. I'm not sure if I asked the crew or not, but I remember everyone agreed on the intercom, ‘Let's go down to help, Lieutenant.’

“I set the ship down, told Bill to stay unless it got too hot, and took off running toward the smoke. After only a few meters, I was gasping for breath, so I returned to the ship to throw off my chicken plate and helmet. I motioned Mike (and his M-60) to come with me, and we went crashing through the trees toward the downed ship.

“When we got to the crash, the two pilots and the crew chief were standing off to the side watching their helicopter burn.

“The crew chief had a leg wound; the pilots were dazed but uninjured. The ship had crashed on its right side, killing the doorgunner. Gulping air, I told them we should get back to my ship — but they wanted to stay until the fire died down so they could get their weapons! I remember using some pretty strong words to get them moving. The pilots may have been in shock, so I led them, while Mike helped the injured crew chief.

“Very soon after we started toward our ship, I realized we had a new problem. Getting to the downed crew had been easy, we just ran to the smoke. But I hadn't given a thought to getting back! I couldn't see our ship, and it was far too noisy to hear it. Uh-oh! I'm the lieutenant, I'm in charge here, and I'm lost in the jungle!

“Well, I'm pretty sure we didn't take the most direct route back, but eventually we did find the ship. That's a sight I'll never forget! We ran to it, climbed in quickly, and made it out OK.

“Of course, we talked about the mission that evening. I found out Bill had been told it was too dangerous to stay on the ground, and the C&C wanted him to depart the area — but he wouldn't leave us.

“I've often thought that just waiting on the ground, as Bill and Tom did, was probably the toughest part of all.

“There was some talk of medals for our crew, and I remember think-

See PILOT, Page 16

Pilot had to look up DSC in Officers Guide

Continued from Page 15

ing that, as a pilot, a DFC would be something to be proud of. I didn't give it much thought. Then a couple of days later, Barney Hancock, my platoon leader, told me I had been recommended for the DSC. I said that was OK, no big deal.

"Actually, I didn't even know what a DSC was — I had to go back to look at my Officers Guide to find out.

"Postscript: That's what I remember. I got a nice medal, and I think Mike got a Silver Star, but this wasn't any hero thing.

"We just did what had to be done for our buddies — because that's what was expected in the 155th. And what we did was a crew effort; that medal has my name on it, but it really belongs to the whole crew. The 155th was such a close unit because we all knew we could depend on each other. On that day, it just happened to be our turn."

There is an after-action paragraph in the *Barb* written by Bob Alberts. It said the rescued pilots were Jerry Johns and Robert Schurr, but the name of the injured crew chief is unknown. He asks for any details about Spec. 5 Patterson.

The *Barb* continues with Tom DeSimone remembering:

"I was the doorgunner on Mike Baucom's ship that day. We were supporting the 4th Infantry Division. For some reason, LZ 510A sticks in my mind; I don't know whether that's right or not. I do remember, we knew from the start it was going to be a bad one.

"Charlie was ready for a fight that day. We were in the third 'V' of three. As we headed inbound, we listened as the two flights in front of us took heavy fire on the LZ. Then it was our turn.

There was a lot of fire and I was doing what I could with my free 60,

and we made it in and got off OK. Somebody must have said something on the intercom, because I remember looking around the well to see Chalk 2 on the left side of our 'V.'

"From just above and behind the cargo compartment, the whole ship was on fire! The doorgunner was standing on the skid outside the ship, looking up at the fire. I'm sure he was telling the pilots what he saw.

"We knew he couldn't go very far. The ship gradually settled and slowed; I remember it going into the trees as if in slow motion. When the rotors hit, pieces of tree branches and rotors flew every which way, and the ship crashed on its right side.

"Lt. Sperling circled the downed ship as we all watched for survivors. We found a small clearing not too far from the crash site, and landed there. The lieutenant told Bill and me to stay with the ship, while he and Mike

See MORTARS, Page 17



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The Word: Advocate

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For sellers, JTA provides professional marketing support, assuring a fair market value for the aircraft.



Promises Kept. Expectations Exceeded.

Mortars, machine guns fire in area

Continued from Page 16

headed off toward the wreck.

"I took my M-60 about 20 meters in front of the ship and watched for enemy activity. Man, it was noisy! Mortars were going off. And there was constant small arms and machine gun fire.

"Fortunately, none of it seemed to be directed toward us — but I knew it was close. To emphasize that, one of my most vivid memories is the sound of spent 20 mm shell casings (from strafing A-1 Skyraiders) crashing through the tree branches. I have no idea how long we waited there, but it seemed forever.

"Finally, I caught sight of our guys coming back. Lt. Sperling was leading the two pilots, who seemed to be somewhat dazed.

Mike was helping the crew chief, who had a leg wound. I ran to them and, since I was bigger than Mike, threw the crew chief over my shoulder and ran to our ship. We got everyone aboard, and then got the heck out of there!"

In a recent telephone call, Dick read from his Vietnam-era pocket notebook — the coordinates for the LZ was 768394 (which is west of Plei Djereng about one klick and only one klick east of the Cambodian border), they were lifting troops from the 1/12th Infantry (which during this period was part of the 2nd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division), the air mission commander from the 4th Aviation Battalion used the call sign "Saline Control."

"We landed with no hydraulics, discharged our troops, and took off. We landed at the medevac field hospital pad with no hydraulics. They took Spec. 5 Patterson in the tent, but he was done."

Responding to Bob Alberts' plea in the Barb for more information, Barney Hancock replied with the following e-mail:

"I was the 2nd platoon leader and mission commander for the 155th. We had six slicks up there working resupply. This was a 4th Infantry Division-called emergency assault. The 4th Aviation Battalion led with the first two 'V's of three.

"On receiving fire as they approached the LZ, both flights aborted landing. I was lead helicopter in the third 'V' (the 155th had the 3rd and 4th 'V's).

"The C&C directed me to land, as I inquired because of the situation. As we approached the LZ, we descended to treetop level and flared to land as we crossed the treeline.

"Ben Davies was my pilot and Spec. 5 James Patterson was my crew chief. We took machine gun fire that entered the helicopter at the right side, passed through the hydraulic lines and hit Spec. 5 Patterson under

his flak vest in his back as he was bent over to clear the tail rotor passing the treeline.

"He said, 'I'm hit.' Then he died.

"We landed with no hydraulics, discharged our troops, and took off. We landed at the medevac field hospital pad with no hydraulics. They took Spec. 5 Patterson in the tent, but he was done.

"We took off and landed back at the PZ, where I commandeered another helicopter and rejoined the assault.

"Spec. 5 Patterson was a fine young man, a wonderful crew chief and my friend. I received the DFC for that day, mostly, I think, because I lived through it. What a day! These were all brave young men who I am very proud to have known."

Looking back at the VHPA Helicopter database, we find No. 66-0910 received combat damage that day and lists "personnel and hydraulics" in the system damage field.

Now we know Patterson died in 910, flown by Barney Hancock and Ben Davies.

The VHPA thanks the 155th Assault Helicopter Company Association for helping to sort out and record the details of that March afternoon in western II Corps so many years ago, when young men were called to duty.

In recording that history, we honor the memories of the two brave young men who died that day — and we remember all involved are truly heroes.

Newest VHPA chapter forming in southern Nevada

Under the leadership of Lad Vaughan, the Southern Nevada Chapter (Provisional) of the VHPA has moved from a "pipe dream" to reality.

In less than a month, almost all the 15 required VHPA members have been contacted and agreed to make up the newest chapter with far more than 15 identified in the Las Vegas area.

In recent e-mail messages to HQ and the EC, the following was received on March 13.

"Members of the VHPA residing in Southern Nevada are proceeding with the formation of a Chapter of the Vietnam

Helicopter Pilots Association. At present I am the Chairman of the Chapter Formation Committee (acting) of the Southern Nevada Chapter (Provisional) of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association."

The location of the inaugural meeting will be at VFW Post 1753, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. The post commander has offered the use of the facility to the organization.

If you are in the Southern Nevada area and would like to be part of the group give Lad Vaughan a call at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] His e-mail address is: [REDACTED]

VHPA seeking candidates for office

Power! Prestige! A snappy uniform! Incredible financial opportunities! A secretarial pool! Retirement benefits!

NONE of these things will be yours if you run for office as a member of the VHPA Executive Council.

What you will have is the ability to continue the progress of the best veterans group in the country.

As with any multi-ship combat assault, the flight needs a lead aircraft, an air mission commander. The crew in that aircraft steers the course and makes decisions affecting the outcome of the mission; such is the case with the Executive Council.

Just as most any of us were able to (and did) lead aircraft in combat, so too are we called upon to lead our organization into the future.

You'll have an opportunity to do just that at the next business meeting of the 1999 VHPA Reunion in Nashville. You can put yourself in harm's way by standing for elective office: Junior member-at-large or vice president.

Our constitution stipulates these two positions be elected annually at the reunion. Once elected, the incumbents continue as members of the EC for three successive years. We are asking for a few good men to take the challenge and run for office. It's easy and it's painless.

First, make a commitment to put forth the time and effort for the organization. Next, send me a brief letter declaring your candidacy for one of the two offices. The letter doesn't have to be fancy; crayons on toilet paper will do. Or use e-mail if it's more convenient.

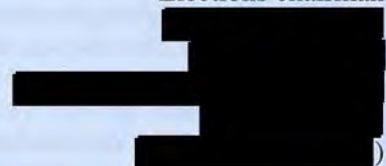
Finally, plan your campaign and be prepared to give a short presentation to the assembled members at the business meeting during the reunion.

"Wow! That's easy," you're saying. You're right. No big campaign contributions to worry about. No babies to kiss. (Although, I've seen stranger things at Reunion bars.) Just a desire to contribute is all that's needed.

Interested? Send your intention notice to me at the address below. Or, contact me any time with questions. Operators are standing by.

Joe Bilitzke

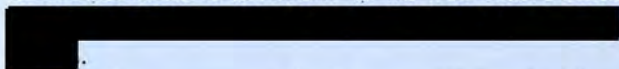
VHPA junior member-at-large
Elections chairman



VHPA briefs

Photos needed for calendar

The 2000 calendar is coming together, but I still need photos with captions and the who, what, where, when info. Send them to me NOW or we won't have calendar!



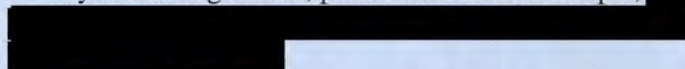
Include your name, telephone number and address — no P.O. boxes if you can avoid it.

Family would like information

Please place an information request in the newsletter concerning CW2 Clarence Donavon "Don" Loyd of Clyde, Texas.

He was killed on April 15, 1965, at Fort Benning, GA, in a rappelling accident. He was training with the 1st Cavalry Division for deployment to Vietnam.

Anyone having details, please contact Ron Cooper,



The family has been given conflicting information concerning his death. Any details would be appreciated.

Advertising rates

Display advertising rates for the VHPA Newsletter are:

- Full page, \$500.
- One-half page, \$250.
- One-quarter page, \$125.
- Business card size, \$45.

Classified advertising is \$1 per line or \$7 per inch, whichever is highest.

Advertising revenue is used to help produce the Newsletter and limit the publication's dependence on membership dues.



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(Gladiator 21)

Call me for help in getting any of the following types of products decorated with your unit insignia or corporate logo:

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Operation 10,000 seeks 200 pilots

Your VHPA has been growing at a steady rate since its beginning.

In recent months the numbers have begun to accelerate and it appears we have a very good chance to reach 10,000 members by 2000 and possibly by the reunion in Nashville.

Perhaps we are seeing the beginnings of a decade of growth brought on by retirements and an ever-greater social acceptance of the Vietnam vet.

Whatever the reason, it is a good thing for the VHPA, the fastest-growing veterans association in the United States.

Several weeks ago I got the bright idea to pursue extra steps to reach the "magic" figure of 10,000 members by Nashville.

I called upon Deb at our HQ to help identify prospective members and she quickly joined the effort, despite her normal workload activities.

The EC started HQ to working on a large database of 2,800 names, classified as "Z" members or otherwise know as "friends of the the VHPA," after the last reunion.

This effort has been ongoing at a steady pace for about eight months and has brought more than 125 new members

into the current membership.

I then e-mailed Gary Roush, our database chairman up in New York, and asked him if he could help me with a list of "fresh" names to work on from some of his many databases. Gary responded with a list of 587 names previously not worked.

I then searched the Internet for current addresses. One of the most fruitful places I found was the FAA Airman's Certificate database.

By checking the FAA database for exact name matches and a rating of helicopter, I was able to ID 111 guys with current addresses.

I forwarded those on to HQ and Deb has been methodically sending those people letters and a current newsletter to convince them to join. Results are not yet in as to how successful this has been, but I am confident.

I might mention too that Steve Lindholm assisted with a list he found somewhere on the Internet. We will keep working in this area to ID new prospects.

The Florida Chapter, headed by Marty Heuer and Gary Bortolus, have joined in the search for new members for the VHPA and their chapter.

Hayden "Pappy" Jones, our membership chairman, and a crew of dedicated VHPA members from the Dallas area signed up and renewed a large group at HAI in February.

Don Joyce, our annual star recruiter, has joined in to work his "magic" to find and sign up members across the southern United States.

I expect a good effort at the AAAA Convention in Nashville in May where our new Mid-South Chapter will man the booth. And there are others.

At last check with Deb at HQ, we had issued member number 9,800 and she receives new member applications daily.

So, we are not that far away and I am confident we can reach 10,000 members by Nashville.

What I need for you to do, as the average VHPA member sitting and reading this article, is call that old buddy you know who has been wavering in making a decision to join.

After all, what really good argument or objection can he give for not joining the VHPA?

We have no political causes, we don't lobby, we are not overly expensive! We just want him to have a good time and be with his buddies and know where they are.

I am sure that if 300-400 of you would call and personally invite just one qualified buddy, we would be able to reach 10,000 members by Nashville.

I have special plans to recognize that 10,000th member at the banquet on Sunday night in Nashville.

There also will be some prizes to be awarded and, who knows, there will also be something for the guy who personally signed up the milestone member number 10,000.

— Tom Payne, President

VHPA LOGO ITEMS

(DAVE GRIEGER, L-66)

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ARE STOCK ITEMS AGAIN**

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Reunion '99 schedule taking shape

RHEA RIPPEY

March brings us one month closer to spring rains, lawn mowers and tax preparation. If spring is just a calendar page away, how far off is July 1-5?

It's time to belly up to the road atlas, gentlemen, and recon your route to Nashville. By the time you receive this issue, it almost will be time to polish your golf clubs, dust off your track shoes, send your Sunday best to the cleaners and pack your B-4 bag for the reunion.

Past newsletter articles were designed to alert you to the many leisure and vacation options found in immediate proximity to the HQ hotel — the Renaissance Nashville — and in the surrounding area easily accessible by POV.

Now it is time to focus on the reunion itself, the gathering of comrades, the real reason for all the hoopla.

A lot of behind-the-scenes work is still going on to ensure a plush, red carpet is waiting for you in Nashville. We want to make this an outstanding 16th opportunity to greet old flying buddies, make new friends, tell a few tall tales and celebrate the golden memories of our fallen brothers.

Each year, our reunions have continued to grow in size as more and more Vietnam pilots hear about VHPA, join and attend reunions. Early hotel reservations indicate enormous interest, so Nashville may continue the trend.

Here's part of what you can expect at the 16th annual VHPA Reunion:

Thursday, July 1, is reunion registration day. Reunion registration is scheduled for the level above hotel registration.

No doubt, you will hear the hubbub when you check in at the hotel.

Throw your duffel in your room, put on your Cav hat (eat your hearts out, non-Cav guys!) and head on down to reunion registration.

You will have a nice surprise waiting in your registration packet.

The registration process is computerized, so you can register, find a buddy and reserve a place at a banquet table without leaving the room.

There also will be message boards, event schedules, mini-reunion information and every kind of vendor item you need to top off your custom hat, shirt or pin collection.

You might consider the fact these items have sold very quickly in past years, so if you see a memento you like . . . well, you might remember that saying about "a VC in the gunsight is worth two in the bush." Sorry, MPC not accepted.

The first event of the reunion is the Early Bird Reception on Thursday evening opening at 6:30 p.m. Dress is casual. The Main Ballroom will be open with multiple cash bars to facilitate brawls between units, and a live DJ will provide background music to cover the sound of breaking furniture.

We were going to book Garth Brooks for this reception, but decided past opening night receptions were far too raucous for Garth's delicate sensibilities. This reception will end at 10 p.m. — or last man standing.

Friday, July 2, is PT Day. Golf in the morning will balance out afternoon elbow exercises and liquid relaxation therapy at Jack Daniels.

Since these events overlap, you will not be able to participate in both. You will have to decide which parts of your body need exercise the most.

Golfers depart the hotel at 7 a.m. for Pine Creek Golf Course, a very nice 18-hole course with paved cart paths located in rolling, wooded hills near Nashville.

Bill Hartbarger, Mid-South Chapter member and tournament organizer, has arranged for players to choose their own teams.

This means it is possible for a foursome of scouts to be on the course with the rest of us. That's a scary thought. Cash prizes will be awarded to the first three places.

Two Jack Daniels Distillery tours offer a choice between "wet" and "dry" versions. If you can't tell the difference, you don't need to be going on this activity.

The wet operation vehicles depart the base camp at 8 a.m.

After a scenic drive through beautiful, heavily wooded countryside, the rustic distillery tour starts at 10 a.m. Survivors begin lunch at 12:30 p.m. Blue plate lunch items include barbecued pork and all the Southern fixin's.

Unfortunately, chitlins will not be available, courtesy of the political correctness police.

However, as a consolation for this gastronomical deprivation, an open bar featuring Jack Daniels and premium beer libations will be substituted.

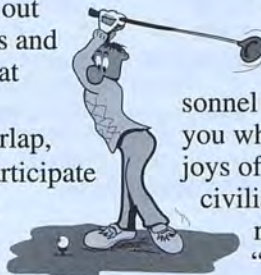
Local Lynchburg music will accompany this spectacle. Assistance is available for boarding wheeled troop-transport systems at 3 p.m. for return to base.

Dry tour participants may sleep in for an additional 45 minutes Friday morning.

Departure time is 8:45 a.m. for the same scenic drive to downtown Lynchburg.

Local real estate personnel will be available for those of you who have not yet discovered the joys of Southern living. Southern civilian living, that is. (I know how many of you were going, "Yeah, right: Lovely and gracious Fort Polk!")

After a tour of downtown Lynchburg from 10:45-11:45 a.m., you will enjoy lunch in the shaded Lynchburg City Park.



See GROUPS, Page 22

VIETNAM HELICOPTER PILOTS ASSOCIATION

16th Annual Reunion Nashville, TN July 1-5, 1999

REUNION REGISTRATION FORM

Mail to: VHPA, 5530 Birdcage St., Suite 200, Citrus Heights, CA 95610-7621

FAX signed credit card registration to: (916) 966-8743

Name:	Member No.:	Arrival date:	Departure date:
Wife/guest name:	No. of children:	Is this your first reunion?	
Names of additional guests:	How many reunions have you attended?		
Address:	Check here if notifying VHPA of an address change []		
City:	State:	ZIP:	Phone: ()

REGISTRATION FEES

	No. of people	Price	Total
Registration before May 1, 1999*		@\$25.00	
Registration after May 1, 1999*		@\$40.00	
Total from sidebar	XXXXXXX	XXXXXXX	
Early Bird Reception (July 1)		No host	
Jack Daniels Tours (July 2) (Limited to 600 people)			
• Tour 1 (dry tour) — 8:45 a.m.**		@\$20.00	
• Tour 2 (wet tour) — 8 a.m.***		@\$27.00	
Music City Welcome Reception and Music Show (July 2— 6 p.m.)		@\$25.00	
Fish Fry and Nightstalker Display; buses to Smyrna, TN (July 3 — 9:30 a.m.)		@\$25.00	
Grand Ole Opry (July 3 — 5-9 p.m.) (Limited to 900 people)		@\$25.00	
Ladies Tour of Hermitage (July 4 — 9 a.m.) (Andrew Jackson home)		@\$15.00	
Annual Banquet/Dance (July 4 — 6 p.m.) (Check menu at right)		@\$35.00	
Dues (if included)		@\$30.00	
Life Membership		@\$450.00	
GRAND TOTAL			

INDICATE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THESE

Golf Tournament:
(July 2 — 7 a.m.)
Cost: \$60. Limit: 144 players.

5k Run:
(July 3)

Sidebar total

Annual Banquet menu

Entree choices	Number
• Rainbow trout	
• Prime rib	
• Breast of chicken	

**Lodging reservations
should be made
directly with hotel.**

- ☐ Enclosed is my check payable to "VHPA Reunion '99" ☐ Charge my MasterCard or VISA card (circle one)
- * Each adult 18 and older must pay the registration fee.
- ** Dry tour (no alcohol) includes a box lunch.
- *** Wet tour (alcoholic beverages served) includes a barbecue picnic with an open bar.

Credit card No.:	Expiration date:
Signature:	

REUNION NAME TAG INFORMATION

Name you want on name tag:	Call sign:
Name of wife/guest:	Flight school class: (Number or year for Army; branch and year for other services.)
1st combat unit:	Year(s):
2nd combat unit:	Year(s):
3rd combat unit:	Year(s):
Hometown or current residence:	

Refund policy: No refund will be given for any dinner, event, registration fee, or other activity unless the member cancels the reservation by faxing or calling VHPA Headquarters no later than seven (7) days prior to the start of the first day's activities (July 1, 1999) of the reunion. Members may elect to notify VHPA Headquarters at 5530 Birdcage St., Suite 200, Citrus Heights, CA 95610 by U.S. mail of cancellation; however, the letter must arrive no later than the 7th (seventh) day prior to the reunion. Reasons for cancellation and refund, such as hospitalization, medical emergencies, death in the family, etc., will be considered on an individual basis.

Groups return to hotel to prepare for show

Continued from Page 20

At 1 p.m., your tour will begin of what is left of the Jack Daniels Distillery after the morning group.

Around mid-afternoon, you will depart for the return trip to the hotel.

Both groups will arrive at the hotel around 5 p.m., in plenty of time to freshen up for the Music City Welcome Reception and Country Music Show. This is the official reunion reception.

Beginning at 6 p.m. with finger food and DJ music until 8 p.m., the main event is Tim Matson & Black Creek. This five-piece country/western band will play for listening and dancing until 10 p.m., when the live DJ plays for the final hour.

This is Day 1, gents. Next issue, I'll talk you through plans for Saturday. Before I listed these specific reunion events, I told you this is part of what you can expect.

What's missing from that list? It's

the personal interaction with unit comrades, swapping stories and comparing notes with guys who flew other types of aircraft in other units.

It's renewing friendships forged in the fire of combat and making new friends with others who share our common and historically unique experience.

It's a gathering of helicopter warriors.

You need to be there. Register now.

Museum plans nationwide campaign

**CHARLES BOGLE
FORT WOLTERS CHAPTER**

The Fort Wolters Chapter project to establish a permanent national venue for the study and better understanding of the Vietnam era is at a pivotal point in its plan of development.

After almost four years of planning and preparation, the museum board of directors is prepared to launch a multi-year program to establish this major museum in Mineral Wells, Texas.

The kickoff of this program will be marked by a nationwide architectural competition and fund-raising drive.

Three prerequisites are necessary before we announce the initiation of this effort:

- Land acquisition.
- Establishment of charter sponsoring relationships.
- Accumulation of significant funds toward the financial goals.

Procurement of a prime, 12-acre site near old Fort Wolters by the Mineral Wells Friends of the Museum community organization has progressed well.

Acquisition funds are available and the closing on this property is planned within the next few months.

In addition, the Mineral Wells Chamber of Commerce recently distributed a letter to its members supporting the effort to further raise their awareness of the potential favorable impact to Mineral Wells and the adjoining area.

Our efforts to gain broadened museum sponsorship have been put into high gear. The program of charter sponsors is being directed by board nomination at for-profit and non-profit organizations.

A sponsor relationship has been formulated as an agreement between the sponsoring organization and the museum based on the common desire to accurately and objectively document the events of the Vietnam era and the experiences of all of those who were affected by its many significant events during this period of major political and social change.

The VHPA recently accepted its nomination as a charter sponsor and a number of other nationally recognized organizations are expected to announce their acceptance of charter sponsor nominations soon.

The sponsorship relationship doesn't require any specific level of financial or in-kind support commitment at establishment.

We feel the various types of support will develop through a better understanding of the museum needs and further coordination with the support capabilities of the sponsoring organization.

Fund-raising initiatives have begun through various individual and organizational venues.

For this museum to attain its potential as our legacy as Vietnam veterans and as a national venue of educational and historic significance, a broad base of individual and organizational support is required.

We have begun receiving inquiries from interested individuals and groups who have become aware of the museum effort through recent articles in a number of national publications.

If you are an individual or member of an organization that feels this is the time to present a historically accurate, unbiased representation of the Vietnam era and all those affected, we solicit your support.

More detailed information on the planned themes and our development plans can be obtained by e-mail through our Fort Wolters Chapter home page at:

www.fwcvhpa.org

Or contact the museum home page at :

www.nationalmuseumvwar.org

Mail inquiries should be directed to The National Museum of the Vietnam War, P.O. Box 146, Mineral Wells, TX 76068.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Charles Bogle is president of the Fort Wolters Chapter, Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association.

A.F. Spads supported SOG mission

More on the early days of SOG

Page 251 of the 1998 Directory provides a summary of the first U.S.-led SOG mission into Laos and the sad loss of Special Forces Capt. Thorne and the VNAF crew on Oct. 18, 1965.

VHPA member Seppo Hurme, being of Finnish ancestry, continues to have a passion for these events and various tributes paid to Larry Thorne.

Recently Seppo contacted retired Col. Charlie Norton, who was a SOG staff officer and later an FOB commander at Dak To, then Kontum, about the statement made in the Directory: "Three Kingbee CH-34s from the 219th VNAF Squadron were escorted by at least two Huey gunships (thought to be USMC)."

Seppo, being a Marine helicopter pilot, wanted to follow up with any of his contemporaries if this was true.

Charlie told him there were no helicopter gunships supporting this mission; rather the reference to gunships should be corrected to state they were USAF Spads.

Seppo called Mike Law with this information. Then Mike wrote a letter to Charlie, asking several general questions.

Charlie wrote back with the answers and also asked his Vietnam replacement, J.H. "Scotty" Crerar, if he could add anything.

Charlie ended his letter with: "I hope this helps. My memory of details ain't what it used to be and some things I was not privy to know."

Scotty started his letter with: "I followed Charlie in command of FOB 2 (Kontum) and then as XO of C&C (Da Nang), so we know essentially the same things but with about a four-month displacement. I have avoided reference to his letter or your material for fear that it might suggest 'memories' that weren't such. It is a disease with us ancient soldiers."

The following is an attempt to map Charlie and Scotty's comments to the questions. Seppo and Mike believe many VHPAers also would be interested in these comments; hence this

Beat up, taped bullet holes, paint peeling, holes cut in the walls for some mechanic's convenience in reaching some area, an A-4 machine gun hanging in the door on a bungee cord . . .

newsletter article.

Question No. 1: *Do you know the names of any of the VNAF crews who were involved in this mission?*

Norton's answer: No. Like most Americans, I knew them by nicknames like "Cowboy" and "Mustachio." The original flight leader was Capt. Dinh. Again, I don't know the rest of his name.

Scotty's comments: Like Charlie, I knew the VNAF aircrews by their American nicknames, of which they seemed quite pleased.

Question No. 2: *What was your working relationship with the 219th VNAF Squadron? For example, how did you arrange for them to fly your missions? The VHPA has heard they were paid a bonus for each mission they flew — can you comment on that?*

Norton's answer: MACSOG had a Vietnamese counterpart unit, Strategic Technical Directorate, which arranged all the RVN support. This included personnel and, I presume, Kingbees.

I was an FOB commander and received the RTs, helicopters and FAC from my boss at C&C. They came as a package. Nobody had a manifest — we knew who the RT personnel were, but no other names. That may have changed later on when

the operation expanded.

My tour was from the beginning of SOG Laos activities in 1965 until August 1966. Regarding aircrew bonuses, I heard this was the case, but don't know it as a fact.

Given the sensitivity of and dangers involved, I would not be surprised if the VNAF crews got a bonus for going over the fence.

Scotty's comments: When we were putting a team into Laos, we got an air package that consisted of three VNAF H-34s, a couple of U.S. Army gunships (Huey B models at that time) and a couple of USAF A1s (call sign "Sandy" or "Hobo"). We'd control the operation out of the rear seat of an USAF Tigerhound FAC O-1.

A couple of days before the infiltration we'd get the one or two day use of a VNAF U-17 (Cessna ?) for aerial recon by the team leader and one or two others. It was painted gray and looked like an O-1 from a distance, but it could carry about five people.

The VNAF H-34s were a sight! They would have given an aviation maintenance warrant officer a heart attack.

Beat up, taped bullet holes, paint peeling, holes cut in the walls for some mechanic's convenience in reaching some area, an A-4 machine gun hanging in the door on a bungee cord, its battered ammo laying in a vehicle's oil pan under the crew chief's doorside seat.

But the crews were a jaunty, cock of the walk lot who flew and lived to the limits. They were as brave a group of men as I've even known.

On at least one occasion, a VNAF helicopter took off from Kham Duc and flew through the soup to recover a team in trouble when the Americans said nothing could go up.

It was my belief at the time the VNAF crews received a bonus of 3,000 piasters (about \$27) for every out-of-country mission. Probably the best money the United States ever

See SOG, Page 24

SOG preferred to use VNAF crews

Continued from Page 23

spent in Southeast Asia.

Incidentally, I never heard the term Kingbee until many years later.

Question No. 3: Besides the 219th, did you receive helicopter support from any other unit?

Norton's answer: Not in my time, from October 1965 through August 1966. We did use U.S. Hueys as lift ships on one mission in early 1966.

These aircraft were from a II Corps U.S. aviation unit. The LZ was large (a couple of hundred yards of elephant grass) and the Hueys could get in and out.

At that time, we preferred our dedicated VNAF birds. When the 20th SOS arrived later both they and Army Hueys were used more frequently. More missions from three FOBs drove this train.

The first Army gunships I remember were in November or December 1965 when we opened FOB 2 at Dak To. These aircraft came from Camp Holloway.

Scotty's comments: About mid-July 1966 there was some problem that grounded the H-34s for a couple weeks. It had to be a 'serious safety' issue — I doubt if anyone ever put a modification on one of those ships.

Because of this, we got U.S. Army Hueys for troop lift. I believe this was the first time U.S. helicopters did that part of the job.

I think they were out of Ban Me Thuot. I believe the C.O. of the aircraft detachment supporting us was a Maj. Jack Doyle. He did a great job — pitching in when we had problems, etc.

It was a joy to be able to talk to the lift pilots on the radio during the infil/exfil flights.

With H-34s, you could only talk to them if you placed an American in the cabin with a PRC-25. It was our unsubstantiated belief the Vietnamese had thrown out the radios for weight reasons.

In any event, they controlled their flights with hand signals. An arm out the right side of the lead aircraft and then the aircraft rolled sideways to the right and literally dropped into the LZ.

In any event, they controlled their flights with hand signals. An arm out the right side of the lead aircraft and then the aircraft rolled sideways to the right and literally dropped into the LZ.

To the unprepared, as I was on my first operation, it was a truly frightening experience.

Despite the advantages of the Army aircraft's communications and two side doors, we were glad to see the VNAF come back.

The H-34 could land a right wheel on a steep hillside to unload troops and could get out of high elephant grass better.

Later, about October 1966, when the Army could not supply the gunships for a period — about a month, I believe — for our operations out of Khe Sanh, we got Marine gunships.

Officially, the commandant of the Marine Corps recently had told Congress there was no place on the battlefield for the armed helicopter, so they were not allowed to do much other than fly officers around when working for the Marines in I Corps.

But the Marine gunships loved working for us. Some infiltrations were hot, many extractions were.

And if they hadn't gotten to shoot in the AO, on their way home to Hue-Phu Bai for RON, we'd fly over the A Shau, Tabat, A Loui area where it was always possible to stir up some action.

They'd come home "dry." Unfortunately, a senior Marine later tried to

charge me personally for all of the ammo they fired.

Question No. 4: Could you describe the activities associated with the search efforts for Capt. Thorne's aircraft? Who conducted them and for how long did the search effort last?

Norton's answer: As I recall, we tasked every aircraft going west out of Da Nang to look for the missing aircraft. We used our own FACs from 21st TASS.

But the weather was lousy for a period of time after the incident and this limited the SAR efforts. In fact, bad weather drove us south to Dak To for operations.

Question No. 5: How was RT IA extracted?

Norton's answer: RT IA was extracted by the same VNAF aircrews who infiltrated them using H-34s. That was delayed by weather, also. Weather was so bad we used an Australian Caribou for radio contacts with the RT.

Question No. 6: When did Kham Duc lose its FOB status?

Scotty's comments: I am not sure when — or even if — a formal decision was made to cease using Kham Duc as an FOB.

As I remember, Kham Duc was still considered at least a potential FOB into early 1967. At that time SOG had a Nung company there located across the airfield from the CIDG camp.

The weather was so consistently bad over that terrain during the monsoon that, other than a central location, there was nothing to recommend it.

Both SOG C&C and the 5th SF Group's C Team spent weeks just trying to resupply the place.

Maj. Hamby was moved from

See KHAM DUC, Page 25

VHCMA members help fill voids

While attending the Vietnam Helicopter Crew Members Association (VHCMA) reunion, Gary Roush and Mike Law continued to update the VHPA databases.

What follows are just three of the dozen or so details they collected:

- Duane Heda concerning UH-1H No. 64-13714 and A/9 Avn, 9th Infantry Division on May 9, 1970:

I had joined A Company in December 1968. On May 9th, I was the crew chief, flying on the left side of the Huey. Spec. 4 Bob Russell was the gunner.

I think the aircraft commander was a Capt. Schultz, but we changed pilots every day.

We had done combat assaults all morning into the same, very large horseshoe-shaped LZ. They were hot inserts because the Infantry would call for medevacs before we could leave the LZ.

I remember we were doing 8-16 ship lifts into this LZ. Each was putting more troops into a different area in this large LZ.

We took a break about noon and ate our C's. After lunch, we loaded up again and my ship flew lead. We had six grunts on board.

I recall shooting into a treeline during the landing, so there were no friendlies on that side.



Then I calmly yelled over the intercom that I'd been hit. I didn't identify myself; I just thought people would recognize my voice. The pilots knew the ship had taken a lot of hits and wanted to know who was hurt.

The Huey flared to land and suddenly I was slammed back against the transmission wall.

I always tell people it was like the Jolley Green Giant had kicked me in the chest. My chicken plate had taken a hit.

I looked down to see blood coming from my left knee and my right thigh. I looked to the left and saw my arm laying on the seat.

Then I calmly yelled over the intercom that I'd been hit.

I didn't identify myself; I just thought people would recognize my voice. The pilots knew the ship had taken a lot of hits and wanted to know who was hurt.

Finally, the peter pilot looked around and said: "It's the chief!"

Five of the six grunts also were wounded.

The ship touched down, but no one got out. The pilot wasn't down long. He just brought up the power and lifted off as a medevac.

The VC fire must have been very accurate because almost everyone in the cargo compartment was hit, but the ship wasn't seriously damaged.

The pilots told Bob to go check on me. By this time, there was blood all over everything.

Not long after Bob came near me, the pilots asked how I was.

I remember looking at Bob as he answered: "Doesn't look good!" and thinking "Don't tell me this!!"

My visor was so covered with blood that I couldn't see any more, so I took my helmet off.

I noticed my left arm was vibrating on the seat. For some reason I wasn't concerned about my arm, but I didn't want to lose my watch, so I picked up my arm and put it in my lap. To this day, I am grateful that I wasn't in pain.

We flew just a few minutes to Tan An where the 9th Infantry Division had an aid station. Naturally, their job was to stop the bleeding, stabilize us, and get us out to a hospital.

The stretcher team came to me and loaded me up.

One person asked: "Where is his arm?" So I handed it to him. I don't remember how long I was at the aid station — it didn't seem to be all that long.

Then they organized six litters for the dustoff ship to Saigon. Naturally, I was drugged, but I remember what happened next.

The dustoff crew asked the aid sta-
See CREW CHIEF'S, Page 26

Kham Duc a launch site and training area

Continued from Page 24

Kham Duc to Phu Bai sometime in the early fall of 1966 and Phu Bai was considered an FOB, while Khe Sanh was its launch site.

The FOB and launch site configuration parallels FOB 2, where Kontum was the base and Dak To was the launch site.

I recall Kham Duc was still considered a launch site, as well as being a

training area at that time. It should be noted there was little organizational rigidity in SOG.

Also there were a lot of moves within SOG elements that were not very formal.

I made three major job and location changes and cannot find there were any orders directing such.

The last specific name I can associate with Kham Duc is Capt. Ed

Lesene, who was there until late summer 1966 when he moved to FOB 2.

Norton's answer: I will defer to Scott's comments concerning Kham Duc.

I do know that when I ran the first operations out of Khe Sanh in May and June 1966 we were called FOB 1.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Seppo Hurme and Mike Law contributed to this article.

Crew chief's stretcher moved first

Continued from Page 25

tion team to give them their worst case.

I sort of waited when I heard this. I knew I was having a bad day when my stretcher moved first!

I went through a few operations at Saigon and stayed there about three days.

I stayed in Japan about two weeks and then spent a long time at Fitzsimmons Hospital in Denver.

NOTE FROM MIKE LAW: The VHPA's databases had no record of this event until Duane provided these details. When the Historical Reference Directory is published, Duane's history will be included.

• Lucio Vazquez concerning UH-1H No. 67-17697 and C/2/17th Cav, 101st Airborne Division on April 23, 1969:

This was my ship, but I had the day off. Spec. 4 Barnhart crewed in my place.

The mission was to rappel a LRRP and an engineering team through some very tall trees so they could cut a new LZ in the A Shau Valley.

This was the first of four Hueys over this site, which happened to be on a well-fortified NVA camp.

I estimate the trees were well over 100 feet tall and the team had a 150-foot rappel.

The NVA shot the hovering Huey with tracers into the fuel cell or with an RPG because the aircraft suddenly exploded without any call or signs of trouble.

The front part of the ship, with both pilots strapped in their seats, separated from the rest of the Huey in the explosion and was blown well over 40 feet from the rest of the wreck.

I believe one of the pilots was a

The next back-haul was 17,000 pounds of American bodies. There were body bags at the bottom of the nets, but they had run out, so they just stacked them up.

CW3 and the other was a captain.

Both survived the explosion and the fall; but I seem to recall the captain died a few days later.

The CW3s seat landed so he was facing up toward the sky. He was paralyzed from the neck down.

Condor Blue aborted the mission, but returned with another helicopter unit and more troops.

This force was inserted at a few locations 100 yards or so from the site of the exploded Huey.

It took them 6-8 hours to recover the pilots and what remained of the others on the ship.

I don't recall if the LRRPs or the engineers had any casualties, but I'd be surprised if they didn't.

NOTE FROM MIKE LAW: The VHPA's databases had the two KIAs, but we didn't know they were serving with C/2/17th Cav. We knew No. 67-17697 was destroyed that day, but had no details. Thanks to Lucio, we have most of the story.

Question: Does anyone know who the pilots were?

• Stephen Riley concerning CH-54A No. 67-18419 from the 273rd HHC in January 1969.

My most unforgettable day in Vietnam was late in January.

There was a lot of fighting around Tay Ninh during this period. They were setting up FSBs almost on a daily basis.

I think this one was named Quick-

fox.

It was about five miles from Nui Ba Dinh, in an area that had mostly new, small rubber trees.

We had hauled in the cat and some of the bunker material the day or two prior to the event I want to talk about.

Spec. 5 Enos was the crew chief that day; I was the flight engineer.

I cannot remember the names of the pilots who flew these missions. One was a CW3 we called "Frenchie" because he spoke French.

Anyway, the NVA really wanted this FSB.

The 105s were still depressed and firing beehive rounds when we arrived early in the morning with the first load of ammo in nets.

They had already started to police the wire and bunkers that had been overrun.

The first back-haul we carried out was 17,000 pounds of Vietnamese bodies in nets. Most were still in NVA uniforms.

We took them to Bien Hoa where, I guess, the Vietnamese had some sort of morgue.

Well, that firebase needed more of anything that exploded, so we hauled in more ammo.

The next back-haul was 17,000 pounds of American bodies.

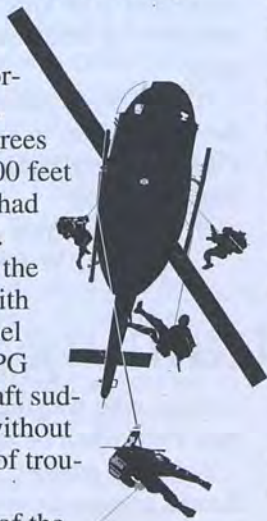
There were body bags at the bottom of the nets, but they had run out, so they just stacked them up.

Spec. 5 Enos and I had to look at that load on the way to a medevac point of some sort.

He got sick and that didn't help because now the inside of the aircraft stunk.

I can still see the faces of those Americans in my mind. That mission really upset me.

NOTE: The VHPA's databases had no record of this event until Steve provided these details. When the Historical Reference Directory is published, Steve's history will be included. — Mike Law



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