

August 4, 2012

Gold Star Breakfast Presentation

Welcome

Thank you to VHPA President for leading this organization, this year.

Thanks to former President Gary Roush for managing this event this year. His continuous service to VHPA since the beginning in 1986, is truly remarkable.

Thank you to Gary Rossome for inviting me to participate, this year.

In any military veterans organization, it is the camaraderie emerging from shared experiences, difficulties, along with the memory of tragic losses, shared and acknowledged, among Veterans.

VHPA veterans served as patriots and warriors, in a declining war effort, that became socially and politically controversial. The experience is unique to the Vietnam era.

VHPA Veterans understand Duty, Honor, Country, in a way, most Americans can never experience.

I have put together two historical film clips.

The first includes audio tapes, collected by Captain Don Peterson. Lt. Col. Mike Sloniker edited them in November 25, 1989, for the Defense Intelligence Agency, KIA-MIA office, to encourage the individuals, involved for the search for lost crews.

In both films, these are men whom I knew and flew missions with.

The first crew lost, was on Feb. 8, 1971, the second mission trip, invading Laos. It involves the loss of CW2 Paul Stewart, WO1 Tommy Doody, Crew chief Charles Bobo and gunner, PFC John Robertson.

Lets run February 8, 1971:

The audio tape in that clip was taken by Aviation artist Joe Kline, Crewchief for CW2 Al Fischer, a Kingsman. I met Tommy Doody's brother, Jim, at VHPA in Nashville, in 1999. Jim eventually became mayor of Fruita Colorado and successfully promoted the Western Slope of the Rocky Mountains, Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It featured a Huey Helicopter on a pedestal, with the crew's names on it.

The second film includes a taped letter from PFC Mike King to his mother, Elsie, who lived in Calhoun Georgia. Mike had written his brother, a Marine veteran, with a Purple Heart. He told his brother he "wouldn't be coming home." Elsie King received this tape about 10 days after she was notified of her son missing in action status.

Lets run the film.

Lt. Col. Mike Sloniker retired on October 1, 1990. On October 2, Mike Sloikwer was told by Col. Joe Schlater of DIA, of a Phoenix Crew ceremony, scheduled for October 5, 1990. Mike called former Phoenix Jack Glennon in Virginia Beach VA and Don Peterson in Chicago, IL. He had met them at VHPA in the previous July. The phone network sprung into action.

I met Elsie King and Evelyn Hatley in Arlington, at the crew ceremony on October 5, 1990. There were 8 other Phoenix from across the nation, along with recently retired Mike Sloniker. Some Phoenix had arrived with less than 24 hours. notice, of the ceremony. Evelyn Hatley read her now famous poem. Mike was eventually given a copy of the taped letter by Elsie King.

I will close with the words of Neal Pointer on the Texas Vietnam War Memorial Monument, "In the harsh reality of war, the wounds that run the deepest, are the wounds of uncertainty.....These are the wounds that cannot heal.

The emotional wounds over MIA's would fester for many years. Not only in the heart of loved ones,but also with men who served with them.

The families should know..... We lost them, too.

Thank you and May Peace be with you.