

Ladies and gentlemen of the Ghostriders, it is a rare privilege to be among you, celebrating life and experiences that formed personal bonds, while in service to your country. It was in a distant place and time, some thirty-eight years ago. It reminds me of one of my favorite movie lines, "A long, long, time ago, in a Galaxy, far, far away..." It was a long time ago, some 37 or 38 years, depending on your tour dates. But we all carry memories from then. We often have something remind us, of events that happened during our tours. We are fortunate, to carry those memories in normal way, that honors the experiences with others, and does not absorb the present. Tonight is a night to celebrate camaraderie which originated way back then.

Veterans have a unique perspective on world events and history. You served our nation in a most difficult place and time, you and your fellow warriors. You have lived the difficulties and uncertainties of war. You have also shared the personal triumph, of accomplishing difficult missions, in support of Americans on the ground, in need. The vow to "leave no one behind," may not have been possible to keep. It remains a lofty goal, for today's soldiers as well. You men know what "do or die trying" means. Most of you have lived it. All of you know someone, who gave their lives, and are not forgotten, in your hearts.

Trust ... is very special

You have also shared the intense emotions experienced, after simply surviving another combat assault, or a hot extraction, saving American and allied lives. You, much more than the typical American citizen, understand how difficult it can be to accomplish military operations, safely, overseas. I believe ^{the} single, most remarkable trait of warriors, especially Army Aviation Veterans, is the willingness to do or die trying, to save another man in their unit, or Americans on the ground, in need, anywhere. At a Phoenix Veterans luncheon at Fort Riley Kansas, years ago, my son was there. I asked him if he knew what distinguished veterans from other groups. After I told him, I quickly realized, he didn't get it. In fact, he still doesn't get it today. Neither do most American civilians. They simply haven't volunteered to train in difficult skills, to operate in foreign lands, on missions that require coordination and precision, under intense enemy opposition. You certainly get it! You did it!

the very difficults we've had flying in and with

This is a pretty rare, special crowd tonight. Today our nation is at war, with Muslim extremists, worldwide and at home. Roughly one percent of our population is currently serving in the military. According to the veterans administration, there are some three million three hundred thousand Vietnam era veterans. In a recent 2008 issue of men's health magazine, the veterans administration was

Next 2,500 are coming

quoted as reporting and then there are nine million five hundred thousand who claimed to be Vietnam era veterans. That means there are a lot of men, who want to claim a status, Viet Nam era veteran, which they are unworthy of claiming. Apparently, a lot of men in their later years, realize if only, they would a, could a, should a.

Today, less than three percent of American population, according to the veterans administration, either are serving or have ever served in the united states military and armed forces.

We have traveled many different paths in our lives, after Vietnam. We have shared experiences from that era. Like most veterans, I departed the army after only four years of service. In August, 1971, I returned to Fort Rucker Alabama. There I became an instructor and the department of graduate flight training, transitioning jet pilots from the air force and Army fixed wing pilots, into helicopters, flying the OH 58-A. I left the service in the April, 1973. I graduated Troy State University in June that year with a degree in business administration. Through my V. A. Benefits I completed a commercial multi engine instrument rating in Airplanes. I proceeded with the usual challenges growing a business, raising two sons, dealing with life's normal issues and opportunities. All the while carrying the experiences of a long year in Vietnam. That experience was hard to reconcile, until many years later. It was not until in 1989, that I attended the V. H. P reunion in Chicago. That year was I going through very difficult time in my personal and professional life. With a divorce after eighteen years, my business was in a declining real state economy. They were simply, very difficult years, financially and emotionally. In October, 1990, Former Phoenix warrant officer, Jack Glennon in Virginia Beach, VA, called me and asked "Did you know Captain David Nelson and Warrant Officer Ralph Moreira?" My mind instantly spun back to a mental replay of my first CCN mission. I was a copilot, with Captain David Nelson. I instantly replied to Glennon, "yes, I flew my first CCN mission with him." Glennon continued "they're being buried at Arlington National Cemetery, ten thirty, tomorrow morning". He continued on explaining that they would meet at the Sheraton at "Arlington National Cemetery tonight." Several pilots from across the nation were flying in. I told Glenn and I would be there. I called my travel agent and got a flight around four that afternoon to Washington DC. I got there about eight thirty that night. A group was already there. The story is told in the Price of Exit.

The next day after the ceremony we met briefly with the families. Understanding how they missed so much, in the unlived lives of their sons, fathers and brothers, really made a lasting impression on me.

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it is had
Then understand

That afternoon after lunch, retired Lieutenant Colonel Michael Sloniker gave me a copy of the Lam San 719 after action report. I first read it on the way home. I was stunned by the portrayal of actions and the losses incurred.

day 237th

Another week,

It left me disturbed, Even angry. I had already been reading many books on the Vietnam era. Keith William Nolan came the closest to describing our experiences in his book "Into Laos." ~~But it barely scratched the surface of my experiences and observations. By 1993, I had come to the conclusion that the book I wanted to read had not been written.~~ As a child, I grew up in a navy aviation town, Pensacola. I grew up in a neighborhood that included active military in the navy and marines as well as veterans of world war two. ~~That was an era when the military was respected and appreciated, unlike the post Vietnam years.~~ Writing The Price of Exit became my obsessive, compulsive, interest in life, after making a living. At that time I had twenty years experience as a technical report writer and investigative researcher in the real estate appraisal industry. I have read many military history books, that read like a text book. Simply full of military acronyms and statistics. I wanted to write a book that can be read by most people and easily understood. How did I start writing? First, I had my letters home, which my wife saved for me, as a diary. In the letters home, were glimpses into what I was dealing with. I could, however, remember what was not being said, between the lines. I started by writing short stories that had been brought back to mind in my letters home. I then incorporated the Lam Son 719 descriptions of actions and wove them around my stories. With the help of Lt. Col. Sloniker, who also introduced me the Air Force CHECCO Reports, which gave running observations by FAC's and Air Force gunship pilots. I also used the VHPA directories. I knew my class lost a lot of members killed. My former TAC officer, saw me at Rucker, after I returned. He said to me "your class really took heavy hits", referring to the number killed in action. When I made the decision to report the deaths, in a calendar narrative, I was surprised by the number killed. For me, the most compelling reason to tell their stories, was to commemorate those lost, as well as those that served with them. I also believed it useful to the families, who still grieve them to this day.

One of the remarkable things was, that while reading the after-action reports, I knew many of the pilots and crewmen involved. Our experiences allow us to read between the lines of written history. You men were there. You have different memories of certain actions and experiences. Combat is like car wreck. Four people witness it and there are four different stories. Where I referee to the Ghostriders, you know where I got the story right, and where I didn't.

When people tell me "I got something wrong," I simply acknowledge "yes, you were there."

I relied upon several unit newsletters printed by veterans groups.

One thing became very clear. In trying to understand the severity of losses in Lam Son, I decided to relate it to the Ripcord action. When I was down at the fourth infantry division in August, 1970, most of the 4th Infantry Division pilots were talking of the horrible losses taken around Ripcord, by the 101st.

When researching the Ripcord story, in the historical light of Lam Son 719, the casualties struck me. There were three days in particular, in March, 1971, where each single day, exceeded all the losses of nearly four months around Ripcord. That is three days, each exceeding the total losses at Ripcord.

That gives a pause to think, to really comprehend what it means.

Ripcord was the largest movement of troops out of an area of operations, under continuous contact during the ten years of Vietnam. I believe the military term is retrograde, withdrawal under enemy

contact. Confuses with the word retreat, doesn't it?

I pose a question to you? Who flew the last aircraft picking up the very last troops on Ripcord? Ghostrider Lead. A Sergeant, who received a Bronze Star acknowledging him as the last man off, wrote me and told me of it. You Ripcord Vets have a standing invitation to the Ripcord Reunions, held in November, each year. I bet your money is no good there, you couldn't buy a drink there.

I believe any pilot or crew member veteran, would be welcomed with open arms at a Ripcord reunion. They are held in November of each year, around Veterans Day. You can find out about them at the Ripcord website.

What unit flew the lead ship into the Laos, the morning of February 8, 1971.

Ghostrider Lead, led the way.

Last off Ripcord, First in to Laos, quite a distinction, Gentlemen!

I have some slides
to show, rather an ~~an~~
- and some video clips

Endless Scars

Arbuthnott
1990

Arbuthnott 2006