



281st Assault Helicopter Company Association

**"INTRUDERS"**

NHA TRANG  
1965 - 1970

NEWSLETTER  
NUMBER 41  
Winter  
2009



MERRY CHRISTMAS

AND



HAPPY NEW YEAR



*to all the Veterans of the "FIRST" US Army  
Special Operations Helicopter Company...*



281st AHC Monument  
Dedicated 17 September 2009



Army Special Operations Museum (ASOM)  
Fayetteville, NC

## **From the President**

Unlike our good friends on Rippling Shore Court, Marilyn and I do not get our Christmas decorations up by the first week in November. It is all we can do to have them in place by Christmas Eve. But this year, because our youngest son Andy spent the night with us on Thanksgiving Eve, he helped us to get everything up from the basement Christmas Closet and we did a pretty good job of having everything in place by the first week of December. As we were going through the boxes we found the small, crystal vase that we were given at last year's reunion. How it got in with the Christmas stuff I don't know, but there it was. Marilyn immediately found a rose to put into the vase, and it is displayed on our serving counter along with several Christmas candles. This is the vase that was given to each lady as a special favor at our dinner. Such a nice gift! I can not pass by that crystal vase without thinking about that gift and most importantly the giver. You know, every once in a while you meet someone who just has a little more spark, or excitement, or twinkle in their eyes, (call it what you want) than most everyone else you meet or come into contact with in your day to day events. She is one of those special kinds of people. What a pleasure it is to be around her, to talk with her, to party with her, to know that your life has become better by having gotten to know her. I hope and pray that the good Lord will shine his grace on Ilona, and make her well and we look forward to seeing her again in St. Louis. Buck, our thoughts and prayers are also with you, as you become the caregiver, and the steady rock of your family, God bless you my brother!

It is real hard for me to explain and to describe the excellent work done by Jim Baker and Walt Pikul, and their teams of helpers on the Dedication at the Airborne and Special Operations Museum in Fayetteville, NC. I am really sorry if you missed this event. Thanks again to Jim and Walt for an excellent celebration as we were officially recognized as the First US Army Special Operations Helicopter Company. If you are ever anywhere near the Fayetteville area you need to plan on spending some time at this wonderful museum. The 281st Memorial Stone is in place at the front entrance for everyone to see that comes to visit the museum. A fitting tribute to the lasting memories of the excellent legacy of our company. As part of the planned activities of the dedication I went with many others on a tour of Ft. Bragg which had been pre arranged by Walt, with a wonderful driver and guide to take us to several stops on the post.. One of the stops was at Simmons Army Airfield where I was assigned 40 years ago on my

return from Viet Nam. We went to see the helicopter simulators where actual training was in progress. We had a wonderful instructor who led us by groups of two or three as we watched members of the Virginia National Guard fly in instrument training. As our group climbed the walk way to get into the back of the simulator, the instructor had us wait as it was time for a crew change in the training schedule. The Major and Captain who had been working in the simulator, climbed out, and the instructor looked at me and said that the next crew would not be there for a few minutes would I like to take the Blackhawk for a flight around the airfield. I do not know how it worked out that I was the one to get to fly, but of course I jumped in. "The helicopter is already running", the instructor said, "Just pick it up to a hover, and I will talk you around." I could not believe that after 40 years I was flying a helicopter again. After flying around Ft. Bragg we landed again at Simmons, maybe I bounced a little as I set the bird down. The instructor said, "you Huey pilots with flying experience from Viet Nam were the best ever, I would put you up with any other pilots we have, young or old." I guess it is like riding a bicycle, you never forget. It was a thrill that I will remember for a long time to come, wonder what we will be flying in the next 40 years.

Have a wonderful Christmas and Holiday Season, and Marilyn and I send our best for a happy, healthy, and prosperous New 2010.

Jim "MOM" Torbert  
President

## **The Veep Peep**

### **2010 Reunion**

I want to start with a reminder that the 2010 Reunion will be held starting Wednesday the **August 4<sup>th</sup>** and ending on Sunday **August 8<sup>th</sup>**. As I announced at the 2009 Reunion Banquet and in the "281<sup>st</sup> AHCA Fall Newsletter", the room rates will be \$60.00 per night. The official name of the Reunion is the **281<sup>st</sup> Vagabond Reunion 2010**. The booking code for room reservations at the St. Louis Airport Crown Plaza Hotel is "**VAG**". Detailed information will be on the 281<sup>st</sup>.com website.

We continue to generate a lot of interest from both the 10<sup>th</sup> CAB and other units of the 10<sup>th</sup> including the the 92<sup>nd</sup>, 155<sup>th</sup> and 192<sup>nd</sup>. I have received request from some of the representatives of these organizations to attend out 2010 Reunion Planning Committee meeting in February.

**The Planning Meeting for the 2010 Reunion will be held at the St. Louis Airport Crown Plaza Hotel on 11 FEB 10.** The meeting starts promptly at 0900 on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Reunion Committee members are urged to attend and be there on time. I will be preparing and sending out a Reunion Planning Committee Agenda in early January on the 281<sup>st</sup> Reunion Net. More details and decisions from the committee will be posted here in the Spring Newsletter.

We will be discussing some additional events for this coming reunion like a potential River Boat Dinner Party on Thursday 5 AUG 10, and there is a proposal to continue with the Friday Night Buffet and R&R theme. Other topics to be discussed are PX and sufficient meeting areas for our fellow Vagabonds as we think the attendance could be as high as 300 this year with the enthusiastic response we seem to be getting from the 10<sup>th</sup> CAB and the other AHC Associations.

### **History Update on PUC Activity**

If you have been following some of the traffic on the 281<sup>st</sup> HQ net then you know that a new project has been announced and put on the 281<sup>st</sup>.com website by Jack Mayhew. This new project is titled the:

**"Presidential Unit Citation Project MACV-SOG / 281st AHC".** It can be found on the 281<sup>st</sup> site by simply clicking on any of the moving red letters below the "COMPANY BULLETIN BOARD" on the 281<sup>st</sup> website Home Page: <http://www.281st.com/>

I have made preliminary contact with CA Congressman Mike Thompson's Office (Napa), and they referred me to the Woodland, CA office near me in the Sacramento area. Initial contact indicated that they would prefer that a 281<sup>st</sup> member be in Cong. Thompson's district. My effort to locate anyone in the counties he represents has come up dry. You may recall that Cong. Thompson was first associated with the 281<sup>st</sup> AHCA when he processed a request for an Air Medal for Paul Swol who was a member of his district in Ft. Bragg, CA. Cong. Thompson, a Vietnam Vet with a Combat Infantry Badge on his lapel awarded the Air Medal to 281<sup>st</sup> Door Gunner Swol on 18 MAY 02 just 24 hours before Paul succumbed to cancer in a hospital in the Santa Rosa Hospital where the award ceremony took place. I mention this because I think this link will be strong enough to persuade Cong. Thompson to assist us in the PUC application.

In addition to this contact with the Thompson Office; I have spoken directly with my wife's cousin, who is a California State Assemblyman and who is a close friend and political affiliate of Cong. Thompson's. He has asked me to write a letter to him giving a brief recount of the Swol Ceremony as

well as our project to seek a PUC for the 281<sup>st</sup> and he will personally contact the Congressman and ask that I get direct access to him to continue the effort.

The holidays and a refurbishment of one and a remodel of the other bathroom at my house (with a deadline to be ready for multiple guest over Christmas) have temporarily side-lined my effort, but I will get the letter out as soon as the New Year roles around. Watch the website for any updates.

Ken Smith  
Vice President

### ***The Bean Counter***

**J**ust sitting around at this writing and looking out the window at 15 inches of snow and 25 below wind chill. It's one of the benefits (?) of living up north. A thought just came to me that maybe we should have the reunion in a warm climate in the winter. I'm sure that this has been bounced around before by the membership. But maybe now that many of us are retired or retiring winter get-a-ways are easier. Anyway I better finish this and tackle that 4 foot snow drift in my driveway.

Preliminary reunion operating results were submitted to the Executive Board and the Reunion Committee on August 30 and although some of the numbers have to be finalized we ended close to break even as required by the By-laws. Since we had such an increase in attendance with the other units it took more extensive planning by the Reunion Committee to attain that goal.

**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.**

Fred Beck  
Treasurer

### ***The Membership Chairman***

**I**n 10 years we have gone to member # 361 !!! This past year 2010 dues have come in very slow. If it wasn't for them being included with the reunion registration it would be worse. It could also be better too.

Number 361 is an ole Intruder 06, George W. Little of the Aug 69 to Jan 70 timeframe.

It's that time of the year again. Yes this year's Annual Dues are due again. Starting 1 Aug 2009 was the start of the NEW dues year for 2010. I was happy to see the amount of 2010 dues that came in with the reunion registrations. In fact I've had some that are catching up on their dues now, THANKS!! So things are now looking up in this area.

Please do send them as soon as possible. The by-laws state that dues could be sent using reunion

registration form. Of course the person receiving the reunion registration forms, must keep me up-to-date, then I will have a straight roster of members in good standing, for the voting of Association Officers on the ballots. Thanks! I really enjoyed seeing all the people attending the first 281<sup>st</sup> Vagabond Reunion. I feel that it was a success. Hopefully the next one will be twice as good. The numbers I do believe are going to increase due to the comments I have heard from other units within the 10<sup>th</sup> CAB..

All NEW applications for membership and RENEWAL DUES will come to me (unless sent in with reunion registration form) at the address on the membership form. If you need a renewal form or application, email me at: [cooter@charter.net](mailto:cooter@charter.net) You can also get the application off the 281<sup>st</sup> web site at [www.281st.com](http://www.281st.com)

I want to thank everyone who has been sending me their new information to update the master roster, this saves postage and you get your newsletters faster. If for some reason you do not receive your newsletter by email or snail mail, go to [www.281st.com](http://www.281st.com) and click on newsletters and you can print it off. PLEASE keep your information on the master roster up to date then you should receive your newsletters as they come out. If you have a good email, then it saves postage in mailing. The latest master rosters have been uploaded to the Intruder Website, so they are much more complete and that's due to you all providing the updated information.. Thanks !

Thank you for your continuing support, to the 281st AHC Association!! This allows me the extra time to try to help others thru information to pursue their claims within the VA system.

The actual dues year is: 1 Aug 2009 to 31 Jul 2010. Next year it will be 1 Aug 2010 to 31 Jul 2011.

Again thank you for your support and have a Very Safe Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year's Holidays.

Gary Stagman  
Membership Chairman

## ***The Scribe***

### **A NEW YEAR APPROACH'ETH**

**A**s I look back on the fast receding past year I tend to ponder on things I am thankful for and wonder what in the heck could happen this coming year to top the previous years. So I decided to start with a list of things to be thankful for:

**-Health.** Well, I've had issues, including at least 10 surgeries in the past 12 years, some minor, some major. But what the heck, I'm still here, even if 100% of my used to be working body parts are either MIA or not working. In addition my wife was diagnosed with

cancer and given about 18 months to live and a week later the diagnosis was changed to "Oops, you're all well, we spoke too soon," so I guess I can't complain about health too much. After all I'm still here and not on the DAT list just yet.

**-Friends.** Since becoming a part of the 281<sup>st</sup> Association I've found the reunions are a must-attend affair. Maybe the venue is getting stale, perhaps being labeled the Secretary Emeritus is really getting stale, heck, even some of you guys are stale but it's more fun each year. I actually look forward to seeing the Beetle Bailey's, the Darryl Evangelho's, the Crowe's, MOM & MOP Groups, the Sergeant Major and even Jack, I swear he gets younger and I guess I need to be drinking whatever he drinks. I really hope buck & Ilona can come this coming year. Combine that with BP's holiday gathering in south Tejas and that about sums up the Murray schedule for the year ahead. Actually we took a cruise to the Bahamas and trekked all over Colorado and rented a cabin to boot so no, Janie, we didn't just vacation with the Intruders.

**-Missing Friends.** It's hard to reconcile being here today with the memories of folks not here. I was fortunate to spend an entire tour in the 281<sup>st</sup>, others, not so fortunate. 2 that continually spring to mind are Bob Gardner and Alan Johnson. I wasn't there when they were lost, I wasn't there when they were buried, but I've been to The Wall in DC and the VN Memorial in NYC and those two, especially, will be burned in my memory forever. Bob George & Jim Brown too. Life is not always fair but those two would have never said as much, and my mind tends to wander toward their examples a lot of times as well.

**-The Economy.** It ain't so hot, or so they say. Jobs are scarce, companies are downsizing, healthcare is a problem, but have no fear, Obama's here. Before you know it we will all have jobs, everyone will have health insurance, and your kids will move out of the house and live on their own. Wait, I have a job, even if I did get a new name on my nametag. I actually have healthcare, two insurers in fact. I also have a solution for the healthcare crisis but no one wants to listen to my idea. And my kids, well they're all employed and living on their own, one is a high rise apartment in downtown Dallas that I couldn't afford to live in even if I wanted to live in Dallas. It comes with her job but who cares. Kids not in my house is a great invention.

So what can 2010 possible bring that would make it a better year than 2009? The only thing I could think of would be more attendees at the St. Louis Reunion.

And no more surgeries.

Jeff Murray  
Secretary

## The Chaplain's Corner

This will probably sound crazy coming from a minister but this is a quote from the International Coordinator of the organization that holds my ordination credentials. "Some of the most irritating signs of the times are the billboards that proclaim the slogan: "Keep Christ in Christmas."

How can we keep Him in a holiday after excluding Him from the center of our lives! Every time you turn around the A.C.L.U. is trying to eliminate God from our society.

We persist in treating Him like one more ornament. We seek to turn His Spirit on and off like the lights on a Christmas tree. We try to bring Him in at the last minute of our preparation, the midnight service; the way a cook sticks a sprig of holly in the pudding, just before she carries it in from the kitchen.

God will not be unplugged! God will not be a decoration! Christ cannot be kept in Christmas. He can only be kept in the heart: in the whole of man's being. We must believe the message of the Christmas angels. "We can only have this Child as Savior, Christ, and Lord." Nothing less will suffice.

God sent the Christ child to earth to prove His love for humankind. During these days of Christmas celebration, we come again to the manger. The angels proclaimed to the shepherds "Peace on earth, goodwill toward men." Well, we certainly don't see much peace in this world right now. If we could just spread a little goodwill around I believe there would be a whole lot more peace this Christmas season and all year long.

We thank God for the Christ of Bethlehem, The first Christmas gift so splendid, so powerful that peace can come on earth among men of good will.

Have a Blessed Christmas

Norm Kaufman  
Chaplain 281<sup>st</sup> AHC Assn.

*... Brothers Passed On ...*



**Veron "The Greek" Mondrinos**  
**31 October 2009**  
*Wolf Pack DG 1966-67*

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**Dale Dunbar**  
**December 17, 2009**  
*Rat Pack DG 1967-68*

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**William T. "Bill" MacHarg**  
**December 21, 2009**  
*Rat Pack CE 1967-68*

## Rest in Peace, Brothers

*For information about our brothers passing please visit the 281<sup>st</sup> AHC website Bulletin Board and the Remembrance DAT section. <http://281st.com>*

## The Senior Member @ Large

Well, it's Newsletter time again and as usual I'm delaying Fred Mentzer from going to press because I can't think of a subject of interest to the membership that I can expound upon. But, then those of you who have made the mistake of getting cornered by me at one of our annual reunions know that interesting subject matter has never been one of my strong points and I'm rarely at a loss for words – it's just that Mentzer insists we make some effort to put them together into reasonably coherent sentences.

Since becoming your Senior Member @ Large some five months ago I've done what any good SM@L would do and successfully "flew under the radar" and avoided any major responsibilities and so have no "official" report to render. However, I would like to comment on some of the "Intruder Activities"

past, present, and future that I'm sure will be addressed in more detail in other areas of this Newsletter.

As you all know by now, on October 17, 2009 the 281<sup>st</sup> AHC was officially recognized as the First U.S. Army Special Operations Helicopter Company and enshrined in the Airborne and Special Operations Museum at Fayetteville, NC with the official dedication of the Unit's Memorial outside the entrance to the museum. While all our fellow Intruders were not able to attend, let me assure you that the Unit was well represented with the ceremonies and associated activities more than living up to your highest "Intruder Standards". Once we on the EB got out of the way and let the "NC State Mafia" (Baker, Pikul, Black, and Rose) execute their plan, the mission was accomplished flawlessly in true Intruder style. (**I've never before seen so many new suits together in one place at the same time.**) Check out the website if you don't get enough details elsewhere in this Newsletter. I've always been proud of my time in the 281<sup>st</sup> and of my fellow Intruders but never more proud than on October 17<sup>th</sup>. (**I think I actually reached that six foot height mark, without standing on my "tip toes", that I've been striving to reach for the last 67 years.)**

Ed Haas  
Senior Member@Large

## ***The Remembrance Committee***

We have some action in the remembrance area to report. A few years ago we decided to include the members of the 145<sup>th</sup> who were KIA in our web listing and in our individual guidon project. We listed the six individuals that the 145<sup>th</sup> lost on the web with the information that we could gather. However, we were only able to make contact with the family of WO Bishop who provided us with his photo and information.

In the last few days we have made contact with a family member of SPC Charles Millay who has agreed to assist us with his photo and information. In addition, we have received information with a picture of 1LT Josef Thorne and are in the process of developing his sketch and write up.

We still have three 145<sup>th</sup> KIAs that we need assistance with. They are: SPC Joseph Foss, KIA 4-5-65, SPC Terry Mills and SPC Gilbert Olivar both KIA on 4-19-65. We also need to obtain guidons for 5 of these individuals. If you can help us with photos, information, and or guidon cost please contact me. [Intruder06@comcast.net](mailto:Intruder06@comcast.net).

We would like to complete this phase of the project. For more information please go the web site at:

[http://281st.com/281Remembrance/remem\\_html/kia-mia-index.htm](http://281st.com/281Remembrance/remem_html/kia-mia-index.htm)

Jack Mayhew  
Chairman

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## ***Notes and Comments***

### ***The following from Buck Sorem concerning the recent illness of his wife Ilona.....***

15 December 2009

Dear 281st members and their wives:

For those of you that we have been able to meet and have had the pleasure to develop a relationship with, we thank you for your calls, letters and cards you have sent to Ilona as she goes through these health challenges. So far she has met each mountain and climbed it. But we have a couple of additional mountains to climb and if you know Ilona she will be out front saying "Follow me".

We cannot thank you enough for your support and prayers in these trying times for our family.

Cordially,

Ilona and Buck Sorem

PS: Have a very "Happy Holiday" and we will see you at the reunion in August.

### ***A December email from Honorary Member Karen Heinz-Forcht....***

To all of the wonderful 281st folks a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I am looking forward to spending Christmas morning watching my grandchildren (1 and 4) open their gifts from Santa. The evening of the 25th I am going to Orlando for 5 days--along with 20+ high school basketball players and my daughter/son-in-law and kids. Should be quite an experience--I'll be the shortest one on the bus. - Karen

**Email from Jay Hays to the Editor.....**

Fred,

I wasn't on your newsletter report list but will suggest the pictures on Gary's attached email with Joe Boarman, Don Moore, and Lou Llerda.



Joe Boarman – Don Moore – Lou Llerda

I have attached three pics, the first is Norm, Russ Erbe with wife Beth, and Mike Lime with his guest at the Veterans program in Youngstown, OH, November 7, 2009.



Norm Kaufman Russ Erbe Beth Erbe Mike Lime



John Wehr Jay Hays Tom Ross



Jay Hays Tom Ross John Wehr Ken Smith

The guest speaker was author Tom Ross. A DVD will be available soon. There were about 250 in attendance. As usual Tom talked about his hero's, the 281<sup>st</sup>, but brought the ladies into it by talking and showing footage about the courage of women serving in Viet Nam. He talked about the door gunner Paul Greiner who turned 18 the day of the mission, the A/C who had Minor stamped on His military ID card and how the last day could have turned out much different if the crews hadn't rescued the reporters and a few soldiers after a monsoon came in. Tom had told the audience the reason he came was because of some of their home town hero's. Then in closing he said one of the 281<sup>st</sup> crew chiefs was there and asked Russ Erbe to stand, reminded the audience about the "minor" who is today an ordained Minister and asked Norm to stand up. Then about the crew that came back against difficult odds and today the crew chief is a local "soft spoken" (my kids will argue that point) businessman, Jay will you stand.

The program was opened and closed by song writer and singer Jimmy Flynn and there wasn't a dry eye in the house, his web is: [www.jimmyflynn.net](http://www.jimmyflynn.net) He writes patriotic songs and would be a great addition to one of our St Louis reunions.

The second photo above is John Wehr, Jay Hays and Tom Ross at the dedication service in Fayetteville and it was the first time the three had been together since Aug. 10, 1968 flying 113 on the rescue mission in the Valley of the Tigers described in the book *Privileges of War*.

The third photo is at Fayetteville with Jay Hays, Tom Ross, John Wehr and VP Ken Smith. Fred, I'm sure you have plenty of pics and material to report on from the dedication, use any of this at your discretion. Jay Hays

## **The Editor Speaks.....**

Well that's it for this newsletter and for that matter, this year! It's been a year of significance for the 281<sup>st</sup> AHC Association. For the first time our annual reunion included the 10<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Battalion, our parent headquarters in Viet Nam. Also attending were veterans of the 48<sup>th</sup>, 92<sup>nd</sup> and 192<sup>nd</sup> AHC. As was shown by post reunion emails and letters, one and all had a fantastic time and intend to return next year, in force! Speaking of reunions, the theme of Reunion 2010 is to be *Return to Viet Nam*, so bring your memories and pictures and be prepared for a wonderful event.

Perhaps the most memorable and significant event of the year was the recognition of the 281<sup>st</sup> Assault Helicopter Company as the first US Army special operations helicopter company. This honor was commemorated by the placement of an inscribed monument at the Army Special Operations Museum in Fayetteville, NC.

There are a number of our members who merit recognition for their efforts over the years in causing the 281<sup>st</sup> AHC to be honored. Firstly, early on and in particular Bob Mitchell, along with Fred Funk researched and organized the requisite history. Next, Ken Smith devoted many hours of conference and travel to put together the proposal for the recognition and became the project manager. His devotion, perseverance and boundless energy resulted in success. Congratulations, Ken. Lastly, we must applaud the efforts of our "boots on the ground" at Fayetteville, the Commemoration Committee, headed by Jim Baker, with Bain Black, Vic Rose and in particular, Walt Pikul. So, there you have them and as the Aussies say; "Good on'ya, mate!" Congratulations guys, for a job well done! When you see these guys at the reunion be sure to express your appreciation.

So, on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009, in Fayetteville, NC over 100 dignitaries, veterans and family members attended the dedication. A truly momentous occasion filled with pride and even a tear or two. Check it out on the association website at <http://281st.com>.

Alright, that's it! To all the veterans and families of the 281<sup>st</sup> AHC, Karen and I wish you a...Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. – Fred Mentzer

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**"Sure the LZ is secure, I'm whispering because I have a cold. Trust me."**

## **281ST AHC ASSOCIATION, INC. Established 4 July 1999**



### **EXECUTIVE BOARD**

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