



July
2024

281ST ASSAULT HELICOPTER **COMPANY ASSOCIATION** **NEWSLETTER**

No. 87

OUR NEW EXHIBIT by Bain Black, Reunion Chair

Some of you may have noticed that we Intruders are advancing in years. Our days of great full-blown reunions have passed; we now gather in smaller groups when time and place permit. Over the decades we have collected many items of significant historical importance. We have probably the best website of any company size unit that served in RVN. Thank you Brent. The 281st has a storied history and is designated as the first Special Ops Helicopter Unit. Many of the tactics we developed are still used in Special Ops today by the 160th SOAR. Jay Hays collected memorabilia that represents our history, and today Doris has allowed us to continue storing our collectables in the business. So, what's next?

Last October Walt Pikul, Tom Ross and I met with Airborne and Special Ops Museum (ASOM) management to inquire about placing a 281st Exhibit in the museum. Tom Ross is the biggest supporter of everything 281st. He represents the bond we had with Delta and 5th SFG. The museum offered us temporary exhibit space right in the grand entrance. They asked for a sketch of our proposed exhibit; our sketch was approved, and during our second meeting held in May, they asked us to ship the exhibit on 2nd August. We agreed and things have moved right along.

The Exhibit

Two cases are under construction. **Case 1** will be made of wood and Plexiglas that will reverently display the guidons of our 53 MIA/KIAs. A bronze colored plaque with names and dates of their demise will sit on an easel near the case itself. **Case 2** will be constructed of wood with a top shelf under glass. History of the unit, books written about the 281st, and select artifacts will be under glass. Below the glass shelf will be drawers that will

contain other 281st memorabilia. Do you have anything of significance that you want to contribute? Between the two cabinets will be an electronic touchscreen that will access a computer with www.281st.com downloaded. It will also have Walter Cronkite's video telling of the **Rescue in the Valley of the Tigers**. The video has actual footage of Tom Ross and 281st aircraft and crews. Thanks to Brent Gourley for tirelessly working on this project. Lastly, the 281st Guidon complete with battle streamers will be proudly displayed.

Schedule of Events

- Currently: Construction of cabinets and electronic display.
- Collect books, frame 281st history, request memorabilia from membership.
- 2nd August: Deliver exhibit to ASOM in Fayetteville, NC
- Following receipt, the museum will install the exhibit.
- 15th August: Book signing by Tom Ross
- 6:00 PM at the Museum on the 15th, an event celebrating the 56th anniversary of the Rescue in the Valley of the Tigers. Museum donors will attend and all 281st Association members are invited as well.
- Our temporary exhibit will remain in the Museum lobby through September and we hope to eventually have a permanent home here. Approval for permanent exhibit comes from command over all Army Museums, out of Fort Eustis.

For those who can attend, this would be a good opportunity to spend some time together. That's all folks...for now!

THE INCONGRUITY OF THE VIETNAM WAR**by Thomas Lundrigan, Pilot 68-69**

Story 1. I had arrived in-country and just completed my in-country check ride. The next day was my first mission in Vietnam. Being a new guy, I was a little nervous, excited and of course, I didn't know what to expect. In the morning, I did the preflight and was ready to go. The AC came out to the aircraft carrying two canisters of tennis balls. That's right, tennis balls. We flew south for about an hour, all the way I was thinking, a four man crew and a Huey to deliver tennis balls? Upon landing, we delivered the tennis balls and that's when I found out what the real mission was. We were picking up a human arm. We were bringing it back to base to be shipped back to the States with the rest of the corpse.

Story 2. The mission was to fly to 4 corps and then head WEST to Phu Quoc an island off the west coast of Vietnam. I was a little anxious because it was a lot of open water, single engine and foggy. If we had mechanical problems and had to ditch, we were done. If we missed the island, we were done. The flight to the island was "snaky" both literally and figuratively. We had fog, no horizon and were using dead reckoning. Also, the cargo was an aircraft load of snakes. Evidently, the island was overrun with rodents, The FS folks hoped the snakes would alleviate the problem. I never did hear if it did solve the problem.

Story 3. This story points out, from one meal to the next, how different things could get. All the way from missing meals to restaurant quality. After leaving the military, I worked civilian jobs. One of the guys I worked with knew I'd been to Vietnam and wondered "Did you ever have hot meals, since this was before MREs?" I told him, not always, but most of the time we'd get to eat breakfast and dinner. Helicopters were a prime target, so we were required (if possible) to get the aircraft to a secure location for the night. This usually meant a base somewhere. That also meant a hot breakfast before the day's mission and a hot dinner at the end of day. There were times when we didn't eat at all because we were too busy. There were times in the field where the mess hall was a tent with metal trays like the TV show MASH. There were times when we were back in Nha Trang, it was like being in a restaurant in the States. If we were stuck someplace, we always had C-rations. I explained C-rations was a box of tin cans that contained different food items. I explained that you

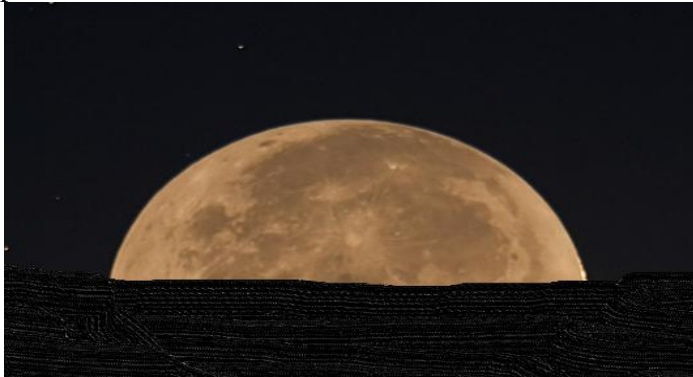
would find the can with crackers (or something similar), take them out, fill the empty can with dirt, go under your helicopter and drain some turbine fuel from the sump into the can with the dirt and light it up. Then open the other cans and heat them over the fire. My friend laughed, saying, " So, did everyone get a helicopter with their box of C-rations?"

INCIDENTS I REMEMBER Being good is a good thing. Being lucky is even better. Being good and lucky is the best of all. On pages 141 to 143 of the book "Above The Best" is a story of unfortunate circumstances. Not mentioned was a near tragedy beyond what was recorded, and survival due to luck and skill. As detailed in the story, we, in aircraft UH-1H 68-15252, had spent the afternoon and evening as part of the effort to recover the LRRP team and crew of UH-1H 67-17715 which had crashed in the jungle west of Phu Hep on February 18, 1969. We had expended all our M60 ammo twice by doing pedal turns above the downed aircraft and firing our guns out at 30 to 45 degrees as we spun in a circle over them, due to no gunships being on station while they refueled and rearmed.

After flying back to Tuy Hoa a third time to rearm and refuel, we returned after dark to find a C-47 Spooky Gunship orbiting the crash site, dropping flares and firing their guns. To stay out of their way, we orbited higher up and off to the side but stayed in the area in case we could be useful. As we were orbiting, with our attention on the action, we failed to notice how close the clouds had gotten. Suddenly we flew directly into a cloud bank. As we entered, the flares were almost directly behind us and below and a shadow of our main rotor blades rotating directly above and ahead of us on the clouds looked for an instant like another helicopter was right on us and we were about to have a midair collision. One of the pilots hollered a warning and they both were completely shaken up for several seconds. This caused such disorientation that along with now being in zero visibility in the dense clouds, they both got vertigo, one after the other in quick succession. There just was not enough time to transition from VFR (visual flight) to IFR (instrument flight) and their traumatic disorientation made the transition even more difficult.

After hearing the vertigo calls from the pilots, I looked at the instruments and saw the airspeed going rapidly to zero. So here we are, at altitude, at night,

zero visibility, zero airspeed, and pilots with vertigo who were still trying to adapt to instruments. With their vertigo, I knew we only had a few seconds before we rolled over, blades collapsed, and we became a rock falling to the jungle. The pilots needed information and fast. So I released my seat belt and stepped outside onto the gun mount with my monkey strap still on. This put my head above the top of the aircraft and gave me a complete view of the sky. In only a second, as I was now running on adrenalin just like the pilots, I spotted a small hole in the clouds with stars showing. I jumped back inside so the mic would be clear and told them "I've got stars at 10 o'clock high". Immediately, the AC took the controls from the Pilot, who had been trying to adapt to IFR, and performed a zero airspeed hover straight up through the hole. As we came out on top of the clouds, we were facing almost due west and the setting moon was visible on the horizon in front of us with its lower half cut off by the horizon, so it gave us an immediate visual orientation of level. So then the pilots were back to VFR and back to normal.



After that, the AC decided we should head back to Tuy Hoa as we probably weren't any more use out there until morning. So, what did it take for us to survive? Here is what I've determined after more than 50 years. Outside of the slim chance that the pilots could have recovered in time to keep us from rolling over, this is what saved us.

1. If the hole in the clouds hadn't been there for me to see, we probably would have died.
2. If our airspeed wouldn't have been zero, we would have passed the hole before the pilots saw it, and we probably would have died.
3. Coming out of the clouds on top, if the moon on the horizon hadn't been there to give us a quick level reference, we might have died.
4. If the pilots hadn't been able to recover from their disorientation to respond immediately to my sighting, we might have died.

Now, the moon. I always remembered it as a full moon. But it's not possible to have a full moon in the west setting shortly after sunset. So I thought that maybe we were facing east, and I saw a rising full moon. But when I checked a moon phase calculator, it said that on that date it was only two nights after a new moon, so it's dark of the moon, and the moon is near the sun, and sets after the sun. How could I see a full moon? I contacted an astronomy organization and explained the situation to them. They said what I saw was a full looking moon due to the reflected light from the earth (much like a full moon eclipse) and the bright shining crescent of the moon was already set below the horizon so it allowed the upper half of the moon to show fairly brightly due to the reflected earth light (earthshine) and appear as a full moon. They said one day before or one day after that and it wouldn't have been possible, at least that bright to the naked eye. Also, 15 minutes earlier or later and it wouldn't have shown as a half moon on the horizon either. We were very lucky in our timing. So, as a crew, we were both lucky and good, and as a result we got to live.

About Rules: a. The rules are a good place to hide if you don't have a better idea and the talent to execute it. b. If you deviate from a rule, it must be a flawless performance (e.g., if you fly under a bridge, don't hit the bridge.)

OLD REMEMBRANCES by John Hyatt, Pilot 65-66

As I was going through and clearing out some documents I came across one that stirred a faint memory. And my memory is getting fainter every day, along with my eyesight and hearing. A bit of trivia: Some years ago at a SOA reunion in Vegas, I met a 281st DG named John Paul Doney who was in the unit several years after I left. We talked and told our war stories. He grew up in a large family in Oregon. He didn't know some of his older brothers very well because they were grown and gone from home while he was small. He also told me that he served in RVN at the same times as two of his brothers. His oldest brother Robert, was 20 years older than John, a Navy commander and serving at MACV HQs. He had not seen him in many years,

maybe 10 or 15. They had quite a reunion. Some time much later I remembered that a SGT Doney was a member of Delta during my time in the 281st. After some research on the Project Delta website I found SGM (Ret) Norm Doney's bio and a photograph. He was one of John Doney's older brothers. I contacted SGM Doney and we spoke several times before his death. He was undoubtedly a true soldier and great human being. I didn't realize that I had actually inserted then SFC Doney's Delta team about a month before I came home. See the photo.



WHAT WE DID by Paul Maledy, CE 67-69

Here are two pictures I took from the 1968 An Hoa Delta Operation. The first photo is of two hole ships that will be inserting their Delta teams shortly. The second photo is a ship heading down to put their team in for the last insertion of the evening (barely visible as a light dot against the dark earth background, just below center in the photo, zoom in to see it). Last light above but getting dark down below. This picture evokes more memories and feelings than any other picture I took over there. I flew with a lot of AC's (Aircraft Commanders) while in the 281st and no two would head for the hole the same. The ones that told the peter pilot (co-pilot) to "beep me back to 6400" you knew what was coming next. Beeping back refers to cutting back on the throttle control, which makes an audible beep over the aircraft intercom and slows down the engine speed which then slows down the main rotor speed, all to allow for faster descents. Then collective to the bottom and you would just about fall from the sky. You knew you were falling fast when the rolled up ladders outside the ship would be almost sticking out straight instead of hanging

down normally. Passing through around 300 to 500 ft AGL (Above Ground Level, very close to the trees, ground, and enemy fire) your nose would start to pick up the smell of the jungle. In no time you were over the insertion hole. Maybe you got to see it on a recon flight with the team earlier that day but you never knew what surprises would be lurking in it. Small trees, snags, vines, and rocks, let alone bad guys. Once over it and in a hover, you had seconds to figure out how to get the ship into the best position to get the team to the ground. Now you are talking constantly to the AC, and along with the gunner, giving him directions to maneuver the ship as far down and as fast as possible to unload the team. Can you use both ladders or just one? Lots of questions had to be solved in seconds. Once the ship is in the best spot possible and can go no closer to the ground, a nod to the team, down the ladders go, and the team starts climbing down. All senses are on high gain. Finally you get to say "last man down, ladders coming up". Then it is "up left" from the crewchief, "up right" from the gunner, and the AC calls out "coming out". After the climb out and a short flight across the treetops to pick up full speed, there's a fast zoom climb to altitude and we start looking for the gunships and the rest of the flight. At some point the AC hands off the controls to the pilot and we join up with the flight. If the AC smokes he would light one up. Kind of like after sex or something. Then we all sit back and enjoy the flight back to the FOB (Forward Operating Base). The second photo shows the "loneliest" ship in the "loneliest helicopter company". Now after I got home from Vietnam, I found out I could not get people to understand just what kind of work we did with helicopters in the 281st. Even combat veterans that were in other Huey outfits sometimes thought I was making this stuff up.





A SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT THANK YOU

Dear Members of the 281st AHC, I would like to express my gratitude for awarding me the 281st AHC Memorial Scholarship. Your support means the world to me as I pursue my college education. Receiving this scholarship eases the financial burden of college and motivates me to excel. Thank you for believing in my potential. Knox Stroman (great nephew of Jeff Murray)

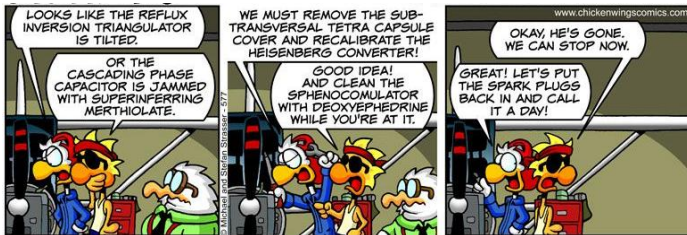
OLD MEMORIES by Brent Gourley, Pilot 66-67

Now and again, old memories pass through my consciousness like floaters across my vision. A few are 281st; some more persistent than others. Sometime between May and December 1967, the Rat Pack responded to a rush mission to bail out the 48th AHC. They had hot stuff going on; between attacks on their airfield and ground troops in the field, they had holes

in ALL of their aircraft. So we had the task, late in the day of course, to resupply some folks out in the weeds NE along the coast from Ninh Hoa. It was dark, but clear out there. A number of us circled high and nearby, while one a time, we would drop down, cut all the lights, and approach a flashlight out there in the low brush of the area. The ground guys appeared from the dark to unload, and in my mind, appeared grateful for whatever we hauled in. I'm assuming now, it was the usual load of bullets, water, and food. Another good day for the Rat Pack. We attracted that sort of thing, of course. Another mission assigned about sunset; go to FOB II at Kontum -**NOW**- for a combat assault mission in the morning. Oh, it's the wet season, of course, and we launch at night in our single engine machines, climbing above the clouds before we reached the real mountains back there where folks hesitate to fly in the daylight. But that USAF airborne controller was on the UHF radio, and he knew the way to Kontum, so we followed his vectors. I seem to recall an NDB (Nondirectional Beacon) in that area, and anticipated an ADF (Automatic Direction Finder) approach in the mountains at night. Enough to chill the spine. However, upon arrival, the city lights provided a hole big enough for us to descend over downtown, and the ceiling was sufficiently high to allow us to follow the highway south to perhaps the second intersection where the little farmyard with barn and bunker contained the company hid out in plain sight. Saved us from an ADF approach at night in the mountains. Larry Ouverson attended the briefing the next day; he reported the briefing officer (Lt. Col.) in terms of an old movie line: "Look at the guys to your left and right, one of you ain't coming back." We had D models (1100 HP), to carry troops behind the other unit's H models (1400 HP), to a pinnacle somewhere too far west and off the maps. My first ever loaded pinnacle approach in an aircraft that was too loaded to hover out of ground effect; I just did get it down on the top. A couple of years later at Ft Carson, late in the day approaching the weekend at the operations desk of the D troop, 1-10th Cav, I had a chance to explain on the phone to a Lt. Col. of the Congressional Liaison Office why the Army was spending money replacing perfectly good engines on D models and calling them H models. By that time (71-74) I had Instructor Pilot time in A, B, D, and H models and could make sense of it for him.

THE EXTRA C MODEL by Jack Mayhew, CO

67-68 The 281st AHC arrived in Vietnam without a qualified Maintenance Officer. However Captain, then later Colonel, Lou Lerda had been relocated to Nha Trang to fill the position. His job required scrounging spare parts for the maintenance teams and he had one problem, he could not get the use of a helicopter to pick the parts up as they were all committed to Delta and the 5th Special Forces Group. So he did the next best thing. He built himself a B Model UH-1. He had connections in the salvage yard and they gave him a B frame, a log book, and a data plate. The rest is history, until an inspector saw the B Model and instructed him to turn it in, which he did. At the turn-in point in Saigon they accepted his B Model and issued him a new slick C Model UH-1 which he returned to Nha Trang in. At some point the Wolf Pack claimed the C ship and we used it for admin (beer) runs on Deltas. The striped C was more powerful and a bit faster than the Ds were. It was never on the books that I know of. Then again, many of the 281 Jeeps were not on the books either and some had several coats of paint of different colors.

**SCHOLARSHIP REPORT by Jim Baker, Chair**

So, as we all know, our Association is no longer scheduling our annual formal structured reunions for obvious if unthinkable reasons ..., after all it has been over fifty years Anyway, your Association is not shutting down. The newsletter still exists, the website still exists, the email nets are still existing, and the Scholarship Fund still exists. As of this writing we have 15 students on scholarship with 7 new applications for the upcoming year. The awardees these days are grandchildren or great nieces or nephews with outstanding academic achievement. Your 281st AHC Association Scholarship Fund is helping a lot of our kids, and the future looks busy. I won't gaslight you though ..., the program only exists through your donations and contributions. We are seeing a precipitous decline in that area from past

years, hopefully because there is no longer a reunion registration form on which donations may be added. However, you may still make that donation by sending your check to: **281st AHC Memorial Scholarship Fund, c/o Walter J. Pikul, PO Box 41035, Fayetteville, NC 28309.** I urge you to please continue making a donation, it will certainly help, and each scholarship awarded goes to help a descendant of someone who served in your unit those many years ago. It becomes a way to help keep our history alive.

SCHOLARSHIP ENDOWMENTS If you plan to donate money from an IRA or insurance policy, your beneficiary designation is important. It can't be the "281st AHC Association, Inc." or the "281st Scholarship Fund" or something close. The correct name is the: **"281st AHC Memorial Scholarship Fund"** and it must be exact. Even if you have a will, **when a retirement account or insurance policy has a named beneficiary, the will is irrelevant. The beneficiary takes precedence.** Contact Walt Pikul or Jim Baker with any questions.

OUR PX by Jeff Murray, President

So a few stalwart Intruders ventured up to Lordstown to check out the inventory at Jay Hays old office. We had no idea what to expect and I'm sort of flying blind here, but let me start by saying Jay had one helluva business in an impressive shop. Doris is not only holding it together, she is operating at max capacity and turning business away. She and Jason make quite a team with help from Donna, the girl who does our mailings. When we walked into the office our stuff was in, we almost walked back out, it was crammed that full of Intruder things. T-shirts, hats, pins, flechettes, pictures framed and boxed, pictures left at reunions, enough printed unit histories to make a couple dozen LA phone books, the old guidon in a frame, and most of all...books. Some of you guys need to order Jack Mayhew's book (Beep, Beep) AND The Valley of the Tigers. That said we had no idea what to do, we had one mid-sized truck to transport what we salvaged back to an already full garage in North Carolina. Everything else, well, decision time. A lot of stuff hit the dumpster, some of it seemed important but to whom? We had maybe 2 dozen St. Louis paperweights, a hundred individually boxed flechettes, an old popcorn machine, a pair of cowboy boots, VCR tapes, DVD's,

challenge coins, we even had a few dozen individual flower vases. Let's just say we have a lot less than before. So here is the deal. We are giving away what we have left that we can't put in the museum. Some of it, especially books (and we just have those 2 titles) can be ordered from Donna. You can order one and she'll send you 5, give 4 to your kids or take them to your local library or find a free library on the street and stick them in their box. Or order 40 and tuck them away with instructions to give them out at your funeral, what better way to get a crowd when we exit than to announce mourners will get a free book? The Association will foot the postage. Honestly, the remaining items are things that are hard to sell. If you want something email myself or Bain, if we have it we'll get it to you. We're not putting out an inventory list, just ask and we'll respond.

Jay, my man, we really miss you and now I know exactly how hard you worked for us.

ONCE UPON A TIME by Brent Gourley

The webmaster recalls flying a Huey slick, in a flight of three or four, to exchange aircraft with the Delta detachment at an FOB west of Da Nang. We had to pass the Marine Corps air station at Chu Lai. We were listening on the tower frequency when we heard some fighter pilot receive permission to "boom the tower"; meaning to make a low altitude high speed pass down the runway. Did I say Buddy was flight lead? Next thing on the radio Buddy requests permission to "boom the tower"! Permission granted, we altered course to line up down the runway and proceeded across the airfield at a preposterous 100 knots or so. Passing adjacent to the tower, Buddy yelled "BOOM" on the radio. Some of the memories we have.

OBITUARIES

Kenneth Daniel

Served in 3rd Platoon
(Wolf Pack) as a Pilot.
5-68 to 4-69



11-16-41 to 11-27-23

Daniel "Ace" Miller

Served in 1st Platoon
(Rat Pack) as a Pilot
& Platoon Leader.
11-68 to 11-69



8-14-46 to 5-27-22

Leon "Buck" Yancy

Served in 2nd Platoon
(Bandits) as a Pilot.
9-68 to 3-69



3-27-47 to 4-23-24

William Whittaker

Served as a Pilot.
1967



1-9-44 to 5-22-21

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The Maint guys that worked on Broussard's ship!!



Broussard's Min-Gun Aircraft he just got



Broussard (M) & Sgt Lewis (R)



Panelle, Franco, ?, ?, Seaton



John Lukason - Curtis Bierman - David Johnson
Who is holding who up???????

