



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

No. 90

FROM THE PREZ by Jeff Murray Pilot 68-69

As you may have heard we have a new exhibit spotlighting the 281st at the National Vietnam War Museum in Mineral Wells. It consists of a corner display which was transported from a Fayetteville, NC museum down south and put together by a few Intruders and their ladies. We also have a helicopter which is being painted with a 281st crest and it will go on display right at the museum entrance. We are working on trying to arrange a time for a 281st gathering in 2026 once we overcome the obstacles associated with holding functions in the middle of BFE Texas. Stay tuned.

As you know most of us are getting older by the day. We lost a lot of Intruders last year and those numbers will surely increase in the near future. You guys please continue to keep in contact with your buddies, don't assume everyone is just OK. That includes spouses, I can say from experience that losing a spouse is one horrible event but the support from friends helps more than you know. A few of us spent a couple of days with Marilyn Torbert a while ago and I'm not sure who enjoyed it more, Marilyn or us. Finally I am inundated with offers to bury myself and learn how to protect my estate once I go. 99.9% of those offers suck (don't fall for the free rubber steak) but I am a member of the TCU Silver Frogs, a large group of seniors who attend non-credit classes at TCU on a variety of subjects. Some of the best I have taken are on how to help your heirs settle your affairs after you're gone along with classes on group living, hospice, Medicare/Medicaid options, VA benefits, all taught just to provide info. I'm sure TCU isn't the only college offering such courses, check with your local college and see what they have for old folks. I can tell you from my old job working

for Bank of America/Merrill Lynch that very few people know what they should know, mainly because they think they're going to live forever. Knowledge is Power.

A NEWBY GETS HIRED by Jack Mayhew. CO

A very few days after I joined the 281st, the Operations Officer and NCO left for the states, leaving us high and dry in the ops area. I went to everyone I knew, and some I did not know, looking for help. Response was quick and I selected folks for interview. The first NCO to show up was a very young looking Sgt. sent by one of my best friends. Before I interviewed him, I called my friend and asked why he sent me a boy for a man's job. He laughed and advised me to look past his age and appearance. So I interviewed this young man and hired him on the spot. He remained our Ops. Sgt. for the rest of his tour and left for home with our deepest respect and thanks. When we started the Reunion Association. he jumped in it with both feet. I could write books about Will McCollum and the magnificent job he did for us.

THE HOME FRONT 1964 TO 1975

For us it was the six o'clock news, for them it was a reality.

We called for pizza, they called for medics.

We watched children play, they watched children die.

We learned of life, they learned of death.

We served dinner, they served their country.

Our passion was success, theirs was survival.

We forgot, they can't.

From Reunion Committee Chairperson: Bain Black More Update ref 281st Exhibit

In the last newsletter our exhibit was being prepped for shipment from NC to the National Vietnam War Museum in Mineral Wells, TX. I'm happy to report...Mission Complete. The exhibit is safe at home in Mineral Wells. Professional movers hauled the exhibit to the museum.

Jim and Joan Baker came from the coast to our home near Charlotte for a fun evening. Then we headed West for MW. We arrived at Linda and Jeff Murray's in Fort Worth, then we all met the mover and initiated the task of unloading the trailer. The following day, May 18, we started hauling our heavy cabinets and boxes into the tiny elevator and up to the second floor. Jeff, Jim, Bain, Linda, Joan and Karen were exhausted after working all day. We set everything up in the designated spot on the second floor. Wouldn't you know, the Museum Curator arrived and decided there was a better place for the exhibit, in the back corner on the other side from the elevator. He was correct; it was a much better location but a LOT of work to move. I should mention that we had concerns about the interactive Kiosk. Well, we connected everything and powered it up. Once again, thanks to Brent Gourley. Everything worked beautifully.

After three days and job completion, we celebrated. See the picture taken at Woodie's, a well-known spot from flight school days. If you look closely, you will see John Hyatt in the picture. John was one of the early promoters of the museum. Jeff Murray was the photographer. We did more celebrating at one of Jeff and Linda's favorite dining spots.



It was an uneventful trip back to NC.

So, here is a recommendation for a mini-reunion. Mineral Wells is a bit out of the way (about an hour west of Fort Worth). It is a typical little Texas town that would be fun. There is a beautifully renovated 1881 hotel, restaurant and bar called the Crazy Water. It is a fun place with a brewery as well. This would be a festive place to hang out before and after we took a tour of the museum. We could split time between Mineral Wells and Fort Worth, perhaps visiting the Bell Helicopter plant. Discussions have focused on early April as a tentative timeframe. Everything is in early consideration. Send ideas to Bain or Jeff.

On to a serious topic. Many of our Intruders have been diagnosed with Prostate Cancer. Some have even died of this often-slow developing disease. I know several Intruders who are fighting it now. Lance Ham was recently diagnosed, and like most people, he searched for the best treatment for his particular case. Lance said that I could share with you what he found as a course of treatment: Proton Therapy for Prostate Cancer. At the time we talked, there were twelve locations in the country offering the procedure. Lance is in JacksBonville, FL receiving treatments over a 28 day period, 5 days a week. He had his second treatment today and he said it was a piece of cake, much like having an MRI. Dean Roesner is currently undergoing treatment as well as Lee Brewer. Lee has been fighting prostate cancer for several years. Jim Baker and Jeff Murray are two more who have successfully addressed the disease.

I don't know all the details, but the VA does attach a significant disability percentage for prostate cancer.

**He who demands everything that his aircraft
can give him is a pilot; he who demands
one iota more is a fool.**

TET 1968 by Ken Smith, Pilot 68-69

I arrived in Nha Trang at the 281st AHC at 5th Special Forces Group Headquarters (5thSFG/HQ) on or about 15 JAN 68. Along with 4 other new pilots I was greeted by Major Ruskauff, Commanding Officer (CO) of the Maintenance Company that was part of the 281st. He emphatically told us all to get rid of the standard issued "Jungle Boots" if we did not want the medics to cut them off me with my ankles &

feet still in them. If an air crewman is engulfed in flames all synthetic material will melt into the skin, Jungle Boots had a synthetic upper portion that covered the ankle & lower calf. This was important for infantry soldiers in the jungle and wetlands of the countryside since the material allowed the boots to dry fast.

Fortunately I had a set of Corcoran Jump Boots with zippers in the side for quick on/off and panic situations. The lazy days of January were mostly local ash & trash flights (re-supply & logistical support missions) and teaching the new guys the ways and culture of the 281st. I was assigned to the 2nd Lift Platoon, the Bandits. 1st Lift Platoon: the Rat Pack & the 3rd Gun Platoon (armed helicopters or “gunships”) Wolf Pack were out on a Delta mission & due back at the start of TET HOLIDAY (Chinese/Vietnamese Lunar New Year Celebration) since there was a mutually agreed truce for the holidays. North Vietnam officially said in late 1967 that they would observe a seven-day ceasefire from January 27 to February 3, 1968; this had always been the way in the past years of the war.

On 30 or 31 JAN 68, all hell broke loose! In more than 100 major South Vietnamese cities with Viet Cong (South Vietnamese Communist Guerilla Forces also known as the National Liberation Front) & the North Vietnamese Regular Army launched massive assaults that erupted in street-by-street, house-by-house warfare. Never had there been such massive infiltrations and attacks including many of our well fortified US & allied forces military compounds being overrun.

The 281st was scrambled and airborne in moments and in the thick of the action. I recalled being terrified; first I had not seen combat at night and hardly any combat at all, and second I was a new guy with no good feelings about being #2 in an aircraft in such conditions. I was flying with aircraft commander (A/C) Chief Warrant Officer 2 (CW2), Cal McDougal. We were flying one of our newly delivered UH-1H “Slicks” (troop & cargo lift helicopter). These new “Hueys” (nickname for the UH-1 Iroquois Bell helicopter) were far more powerful and capable than the UH-1D that they replaced.

Our first mission was to pick up large flares and drop those flares all around the perimeter of the city. Ironically, the flares in large silver canisters were ones that I had probably personally painted in my

father’s Machine Shop in East Texas since we had a contract to do this with Thiokol. I knew I had painted them since I was the best spray painter and was the only one that never got one rejected from the tape & pull quality control process that the inspectors used. The sky looked like the biggest 4th of July celebration I had ever seen with multiple explosions going on all over Nha Trang. This included the most spectacular of all explosions when Wolf Pack Platoon Leader, Captain Fred Mentzer, flying his gunship along the west perimeter road, put a rocket into the Shell Station that was just north of 5th SFG HQ. Fred put a rocket right into a large propane tank. I think the rocket was a “Willie Peter” (White Phosphorous) & the explosion was spectacular.

There is a giant White Buddha at the top of a hill in the northwest part of downtown Nha Trang. It rises 44 meters (79 ft.) above the base and there are about 150 stone steps from the street to the base (about 100 feet). In the base of the statue there are relief busts of Thich Quang Duc and six other monks who self immolated (burned themselves with gasoline) in the religious protests of 1963. Thich Quang Duc is the Buddhist Monk who set himself on fire in Saigon because of the religious persecution on Buddhists. On that first night of the Tet Offensive and the attack on Nha Trang, I recall that occupation of the high ground around the giant Buddha statue, changed hands several times. Special Forces A-Team 502 (A-502) brought their Vietnamese reaction forces (about 600 local volunteers trained at the A-team west of Nha Trang) and were defending the Buddha position as well as attacking forces below on the streets. A-502 was charged with protecting Nha Trang and especially 5th SFG/HQ from attacks from the west & north. They were close to taking the hilltop again, but were running seriously low on ammunition (ammo). We were ordered on a new mission of resupplying food, water, ammo, ordinance and first aid equipment to the site during the heat of this battle. We made our approach from the west, not using the “shoot me light” (large bright landing light) to the first large observatory deck below the main statute. We came under heavy fire on our approach to the landing zone (LZ) but did not take any hits to our Huey or to any of the crew on the aircraft. We quickly unloaded supplies and flew out; once again without taking a hit from enemy fire that was above & below our approach/departure paths. To this day, I do not know whom we resupplied. I was so scared and just glued

to watching the gauges to make sure all was right with our landing & takeoff. I was assured we resupplied A-502, but to this day I could not swear to that.

For three more nights we lived through constant mortar/rocket attacks and threat of another force of VC and/or NVA over-running 5thSFG & the 281st HQs. It never happened, but it was not easy to sleep at all. Antidote: at least one Vietnamese employed at 5th SFG/HQ was found KIA (killed in action) to the west of our base! He was obviously VC (Viet Cong) and spying on us the whole time he worked there. We increasingly carefully screened Vietnamese help as well as 5th SFG relied heavily on Filipino hired help for the civilian support work.

MEMORIES FROM A RAT PACKER by Ron Turner, Pilot 1970

There were many types of missions I really enjoyed flying with the 281st, but flying the low level, nap of the earth or treetop 'Sniffer Mission' (Hunter/Killer team) flights were probably the most exciting...and most risky. Sniffers were set up to detect ammonia and at first worked pretty well but the VC developed some simple countermeasures. We heard that the VC would hang buckets of mud with urine in trees and then move into another area where they'd have a better view of the Sniffer birds and take shots at us. A few of the slick crews from the Rat Pack always seemed to volunteer to take the Sniffer mission, which meant they had to fly just above the treetops and slow (60-70 kts) as they "sniffed" areas that could be VC controlled. Behind them, high and above, were the fully loaded gunships. Sometimes we'd get a really strong reading and even if we couldn't actually see the VC, we'd call in the Wolf Pack gunships that were flying behind us to roll in hot with whatever they were carrying (rockets, 40mm grenades, machine guns, etc. Occasionally, the VC would shoot at us and then all hell would break loose. One of the Wolf Pack pilots I got to know pretty well was Mike Phipps, who often led the killer cover birds on the sniffer missions. The gunships always had a huge mess to clean up when they returned. I can see why a gunship pilot would want to fly the sniffer mission, but why anyone would volunteer to fly the sniffer bird itself, basically volunteering to get shot at, is beyond me. Another thing about Nha Trang, I couldn't believe how good the SF guys and we ate. Seems like we had steak at least twice a week and

lobster or scallops every weekend. It was pretty unreal compared to the C-Rations we took with us every day we flew. The SFG club always seemed to bring in local Vietnamese "bands" who tried their best to play American music. Did great on the music but the words were sometimes mixed up since they don't really have a 'V' in their vocabulary. Creedence Clearwater Revival's 'Rolling on the River' wound up being 'Rolling on the Ribber'. When we had down time in the club, we ate, drank, sang, drank, played a little poker, drank, played with the 10 slot machines they had in a small room off the bar, drank, etc. Come to think of it, we drank a lot. I know we tumbled back to our bunks most nights likely legally intoxicated. Not sure how we did it and really not sure how we were alert & ready to fly again each morning...but we were.

(Editor's note: We were very young!).

In mid-September 1970, we got the word that the 281st was standing down and going home, along with the 5th SF Group. We were all pretty frustrated since we knew we enjoyed supporting the SF mission and had it pretty good in Nha Trang. The fate of any of us with time remaining would lay in the roll of the dice with the 10th Group detailers back in Dong Ba Thin. I'm sure there was a logical reason for the Company doing what it did as far as reassigning pilots and crews as we got assigned to one of four other companies. I was going to the 48th Blue Stars up in Ninh Hoa with about six other guys from the 281st, but before I was able to get excited about the move...since I was still one of the FNGs (Foolish New Guys) even though a CW2...I had to stay with the Company until all of the equipment was turned in. More damn downtime without flying. A Company Stand Down is really a horrible experience, especially for the RLOs (Real Live Officers). Basically, everything in the company had to be accounted for, inventoried, cleaned up, boxed up, and driven to the Cam Ranh Bay depot for turn in. Inventory is a word I never wanted to hear again. Imagine doing an inventory of all the stuff in your house and multiplying it by 1,000,000. Every fork, spoon, knife, dish, glass, tray, salt and pepper shaker, sheet, blanket, tent, sleeping bag, pistol, rifle, helicopter, jeep, etc. had to be accounted for. I quickly learned how to drive a duce n' a half. It seemed we'd count stuff all day, go to the Club and eat & drink until full and when we woke up, we'd drive about 100 miles through small towns and

villages until we got to Cam Ranh Bay. Everyone in Vietnam seemed to have a moped or bicycle and they are always riding them whenever we tried maneuvering on those small streets. There are no stop signs, no lights, no lines, no traffic rules. When you throw a couple of duce n'a halves into the mix, you have chaos, especially since we weren't that good at driving these vehicles. We unfortunately and unintentionally caused a few mopeds, bikes, and mini taxis to drive off the roads. Finally, on 13 December I was told I would be heading up to the 48th by the end of the day...and flying again.

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.

A PROPER DEFINITION OF A HELICOPTER

A million rotating parts in close formation around an oil leak flown by a 20-year-old pilot using both hands, both feet, mouth, fingers, eyes, ears and other such parts, listening to 4 radios and 6 frequencies, looking at a map going 110 knots three feet above the treetops. Smiling in 1966-1975 and singing "These Are The Days".

A helicopter, affectionately referred to as a "chopper" by those who trust it, is a marvel of modern engineering that seems to have originated from an inventor's fever dream. Imagine taking the blades of a blender, supersizing them, and then attaching them to a sleek fuselage. This contraption defies every layman's understanding of aerodynamics by managing to lift off and hover in mid-air with an elegance that can only be described as "coordinated chaos."

Far from the linear, straightforward flight path of an airplane, the helicopter prides itself on its ability to take off and land vertically, pirouetting in the sky like a mechanical ballerina on an adrenaline rush. Its main rotor whirls at dizzying speeds, creating a downdraft capable of turning calm hair into a wind-tossed masterpiece.

Inside, the cockpit is a festival of gauges, levers, and displays, making it resemble the control room of a small spaceship. Pilots, revered as sorcerers by those who dread turbulence, operate this airborne contraption with a mixture of precision, skill, and perhaps a touch of madness. They orchestrate maneuvers that range from delicate aerial ballet to what can only be described as a desperate tango with gravity.

When an Army UH-1 "Huey" helicopter comes in to land, it does so with a dramatic flair, as if announcing its arrival to the world. The rotors slow but never really settle, still vibrating with the thrill of having defied natural laws.

In essence, a helicopter is a testament to human ingenuity, wrapped in a shell of mechanical bravado. It's a buzzing blend of defiance and engineering prowess, serving its purpose while flirting with the boundaries of aerodynamic sanity.



Future pilot in blue, his eyes are on the objective, future crew chief in red, his eyes are looking for what the pilot has missed.

NIGHT OPERATIONS by Bain Black, Pilot 68-69

I recall nighttime operations with a SEAL team. Departed Nha Trang with SEALs for an island (Hon Tre?) around midnight. Mission as I recall was to meet village chief and interrogate. John Wehr led two slicks and I led the Wolf Pack fire team. We may have brought the chief back with us. Memory fades with time. No enemy contact.

Everything went as planned. All I really remember was a very dark night over the water and covering the hole ship from high orbit. If anyone recalls this mission, please add to it. Late 68 or early 69.



Paul Maledy receives his Quilt of Honor

THE NATIONAL VIETNAM WAR MUSEUM

The National Vietnam War Museum is in Mineral Wells, adjacent to what was the primary helicopter school during the Vietnam era. All of our pilots trained there, some of our enlisted did also (Richard Houston for one). A sole pilot started the museum and it grew and while it's not nearly as nice as the Airborne & Special Operations Museum (ASOM) in Fayetteville it's still nice. There is a replica Wall with a searchable database, a mounted helicopter, lots of smaller and diverse equipment pieces and just recently a new helicopter arrived which is destined to wind up with 281st markings and put on display right in front of their main building. John Hyatt is honchoing this for us, without his involvement we would be an afterthought. Additionally the display currently housed at the ASOM will be moved down here, giving the 281st a nice presence. This is way early but once it is completed we may try and crank up a reunion in Mineral Wells. It's a nice town since the Army left and the local cuisine (BBQ, Burgers, Chicken Fried Steak, Catfish) rivals anyplace in the state. Stay tuned.

<https://www.nationalvnwarmuseum.org/>

A SCHOLARSHIP THANK YOU From Trevor Hendrix, nephew of Jay Hendrix (CE 66-67). Greetings: It is with utmost gratitude I extend for your continued support of the pursuit of my degree in Biosystems Engineering for Machine Systems & Agricultural Engineering. Your generosity is greatly appreciated. May the memory of SSG John Alan Ware be eternal.

OBITUARIES

Terry Hogan

Served in 1st Platoon
(Rat Pack) as a **Pilot**.
1970



6-9-45 to 2-11-25

Alvin Cartwright

Served in 3rd Platoon
(Wolf Pack Platoon
Leader) as a **Pilot**.
10/66 to 10/67



12-29-34 to 2-14-25

Phillip English

Served in 2nd Platoon
(Bandits) as a **Pilot**.
66 to 67



2-8-43 to 11-9-24

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