



December  
2025

## **281<sup>ST</sup> ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**

No. 91

### **A MINI REUNION IN MINERAL WELLS**

As you should know by now we are planning a mini reunion in Mineral Wells, TX, a puny town about 50 miles west of Ft Worth with a fabulously renovated old hotel which also has a restaurant with a world renowned chef. The dates are from April 12 – 15<sup>th</sup> 2026. Here are some particulars: -Hotel is the Crazy Water Hotel <https://thecrazywaterhotel.com/>

-**Sunday, April 12** is the arrival date, you can also arrive on Monday.

-**Monday, April 13** is tour on your own day. As the only way to get there is by car feel free to explore. I will point out things to do in another article.

-**Tuesday, April 14** we are touring the museum and having a meal at the hotel that evening.

-The Association has some funds in the bank we don't know what to do with. Therefore we are covering the

cost of dinner for Intruders and guests. We will also cover costs of the hospitality room and snacks/drinks.

-**Wednesday, April 15** is departure time. If anyone wants to stick around for a few days I can recommend hotels and things to do. In Arlington there is a really nice Medal of Honor Museum with an interactive Dustoff helicopter extraction that is fairly realistic. Right now I have commitments from 17 Intruders, most of whom have a spouse or relative to bring. I would really like to get this up to about 40 rooms. I guarantee you will like the hotel plus you'll get to see the 281<sup>st</sup> exhibit and John Ware's replica helicopter.

I know making the trek here is a problem, I also know it will be a great time. Let me know as soon as you can if you are coming, it will help with the planning.

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





## Things To Do Around Mineral Wells

It's in the sticks but it's also a typical small Texas town that has had a revival of fortunes lately.

Things to do:

**-Ft Wolters.** It's where all us wimpy pilots trained, and a lot of mechanics were trained here also. The base is wide open and you can wander thru some old WOC barracks, drive past the airfield and classrooms, the old Officer's Club that Dennis Crowe helped design and I had my first date with Janie, who was so impressed she kept calling me Murphy. If you're brave Beach Army Hospital is a wreck but there are places to break into it and wander around. There is also a Medal of Honor plaza.

**-Cool, TX** is about 2 miles east of Mineral Wells, there's a cemetery there where the Knight brothers are buried. Jack was awarded the Medal of Honor in WWII, his brother Roy was a Skyraider pilot who went MIA in Vietnam when he was shot down, his remains were discovered in 2019 and he was buried alongside his brother. Roy's son was a Southwest Airlines pilot and he flew his dad's remains home.

**-If you're hungry** drive about west to Strawn and catch a chicken fried steak at Mary's Café.

<https://thetexasbucketlist.com/2019/11/the-texas-bucket-list-marys-cafe-in-strawn/> Mary's consistently wins the Best in Texas CFS award. A tip...don't order the large, it's about the size of a flat tire.

**-Downtown Mineral Wells** has a ton of shops the ladies love, plus the **Baker Hotel** is undergoing renovation. Cary Grant is reputed to have stayed there, amongst others. I'm sure some of our RLO's spent some time there as well.

**-Woody's.** It's been there since the mid 1950's, it's a Quonset hut serving great burgers, 33 degree beers, and some of the best pickled Jalapenos anywhere. But it's small, so get there early.

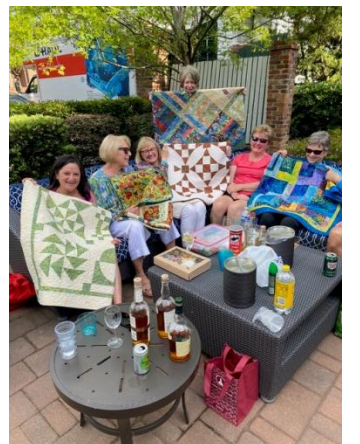
Right down the road is **The Mesquite Pit**, a good place for BBQ and chicken fried steak for those who don't want to drive 34 miles to Strawn.

Alice Walton used to live in Mineral Wells, she's Sam's daughter and also the richest woman in the US, maybe the world. Because of her Mineral Wells has a huge, and I mean huge, Wal Mart. And last but not least, Mineral Wells has their very own

**Whataburger**, hands down the best fast food burger anywhere. Try the Bacon Jalapeno Double with cheese.

## MINI REUNION, BEAUFORT, SOUTH CAROLINA

Late April 2025. Jim & Joan Baker, Linda Dissoway & Jeff Murray, Jeanette Mitchell, Marilyn Torbert, her son, Dave Mitchell, Bain & Karen Black, Wes & Dawn Schuster. Dawn made quilts for each of the ladies. We played bocce and croquet at Dataw Island, visited historic sites and had a carriage ride around town. We all stayed in the historic Beaufort Inn. A great time was had by all !



## A VERY BAD IDEA by Paul Maledy CE 67-68-69

This is from the spring 69 Delta at An Hoa. Some of you that were there might remember this.

The Air Force had sent two fighters out at night to bomb a trail in a valley. Besides being dark, the weather was cloudy. The lead went down and dropped his load, followed by his wing man. Lead noticed a large fireball in the clouds and no communication with his wingman after that. The Air Force got in contact with Delta and asked if they could put in a team and try and find HR (human remains) or something with a serial number on it to verify that was the plane.

So Delta went out with a FAC (forward air control aircraft) to look at the site. The next day we went to operations and were told about the mission. Delta

said the plane went in at the top of the north ridge of the valley that ran east and west. They said the trees at the top were very tall and there was no place to land. Their idea was to use the ladders in the ship from both sides and put all of it out the left side so it would be longer. After insertion, the Delta Team would be on the ground for 20 min and then we would pick them up again. Of course Capt. Miller volunteered my ship for this mission.

Delta came over and put the ladder in the way they wanted it. I am already starting to see problems with this idea. With all the ladder weight on one side of the ship, and with a much longer ladder than normal, when the team got on the ladder to go up or down, all the weight would be on one side of the ship with nothing to counter-balance it. It's very likely that with only three of them on the ladder, the balance would be so bad that the pilot would run out of cyclic travel to hold the ship in place, and we would start a drift that there was no way to correct with the controls. Normally with the standard ladder, only two men at a time would go up or down, but with such a long ladder it's likely more than that would due to all the climbing time involved and the desire to shorten the hover time and lessen our vulnerability while hovering. With a full ladder hanging down and several men on it, we would immediately drift so that the ladder would hang up in the trees, it would then become an anchor and the ship would crash due to total loss of control. If that didn't happen and we were able to convince the team to not load up the ladder to cause a loss of control, there was still the issue of no recovery sergeant on board the ship. With no recovery sergeant from Delta who would normally pull the ladder up after the team inserted, it was up to my gunner and I to pull the ladder back in, which meant that no one would be watching the area around the ship for obstacles or bad guys, or be on the machine guns during the entire time we pulled it up. We took off for this valley that was north of An Hoa, and when we got there, there was talk on the radio that we could be in Laos or on the border, depending on how you read the map. The weather was clear and the valley was really beautiful, narrow with tall mountain ridges on both sides. Down in the valley was a little stream with a very used trail running by it. We could plainly see where the plane went in. It looked like he just cleared the ridge but not the trees, and Delta was right, those trees were tall. The big problem though was the wind. It was blowing in from

the west right up the valley at 30 to 40mph and blowing up from the valley floor to the top of the ridge. The only way we could see to get the guys in was hovering with the wind coming from up and behind us, and I did not see how that was ever going to work. Then to drive home that point the gunship lead, Wolf Pack 36, shot a couple of rockets towards the ridge and they looked like knuckle balls. He said he could not hit what he was aiming at.



### **A normal ladder, imagine one twice as long!**

I had Capt Miller and WO Gardner flying my ship. Miller asked me what I thought and I told him "no way, we could be blown into the trees with guys on the ladder". He thought on that for a few seconds and the next thing I know he is calling 06 (Intruder command and control ship) and telling him we were going to give it a try. What! I said "Sir, there is no one down there to get out, this place will be here another day". He finally agreed and called 06 back telling him we were not going to attempt it.

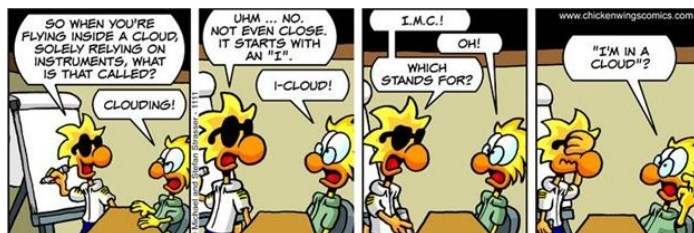
While flying back to the FOB (forward operating base) the Delta Team leader, who had a headset on and had been listening to what was going on, told me "thanks, they were not looking forward to going up and down that much ladder". And if they were under fire it would have been even worse, both for them and us.

A couple of days later I asked Miller if we were going to try to put a team in again. He said Delta told the Air Force they were not going to try it again.

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**ATTENTION: Jack Mayhew and Don Ruskauft are, or will shortly be, 94, our oldest Intruder members. Hip, Hip, Hurray!**





### ARE HELICOPTERS BETTER THAN WOMEN ?

Helicopters don't whine unless something is really wrong. However, when helicopters go quiet, just like women, it's usually not good.

**INCIDENTS I REMEMBER** One of the most fun things for both pilots and crew was low leveling across the terrain. Of course this was strictly prohibited by the higher ups, and with good reason, as it was extremely dangerous. Outside of making a mistake in a turn or climb and hitting something solid, there were wires and cables strung in all kinds of unexpected places, especially across rivers, plus, at low level, no matter the speed, you are a much easier target to hit if someone is so inclined. So a much safer way to have fun and sharpen the pilot's skills was to low level on the cloud tops. I was on at least two flights where the clouds weren't very high and not so dense that you couldn't find a spot to get back down when you wanted. Sometimes the cloud tops were only 4 or 5 thousand feet and if we weren't in a rush to get somewhere, it was too good of an opportunity to miss. It was great fun for the crew also as you could fold the gun and just sit back and enjoy the ride, as flying along on the cloud tops was like floating on a great rolling cotton landscape, plus it was nice and cool up there, just like having air conditioning again. If you missed a turn or didn't climb in time, it was no issue as you just flew through part of a cloud, not so if you were low leveling over the ground or down a river where if you missed any maneuver it could be fatal, or at least cause a lot of damage to the ship. The only risk was if someone was coming up through the clouds as you were skimming along over the tops, but the general attitude was "hell, do you want to live forever" as at that age, besides being young, we were all invincible and immortal.

### VIETNAM REBOOT by Gary Galvagni, Sheet Metal Maintenance

It's obvious that we all have stories to tell from our vacation in Vietnam. These are all treasured memories told to those who will listen. What about what happens when we return? I'm sure we all have some good ones. Mine starts in the hooches back in Nha Trang. Compared to other camps that we, as members of the 281<sup>st</sup> had the opportunity to visit, they were pretty nice. Well they did have one flaw... RATS. They liked to nibble on fingers and toes especially when sleep followed a visit to the club. I was fortunate one night to wake just as one of the furry critters was checking out one of my fingers. Finger saved. End of story? Fast forward. Out of the army, safe at home, a new wife, and a cat. Sound asleep when sweet dreams suddenly brought me back to my bunk in the hooch. I felt something licking my finger. Yes the cat(kitten). I sat straight up and pounded the kitten twice into the (soft?) mattress, picked up the imagined rat and threw it against the wall. Now awake, with my wife screaming, and me realizing what just happened, it was time for damage control. I picked up the kitten and realized it was maybe not too bad I showed it to her and things calmed down. The kitten did survive, and I'm still married to the same little girl. End of story.

### 187's New Home in Sioux City Iowa by Bain Black

The painting really depicts the aircraft in combat. The aircraft had XM21 miniguns on it with seven-shot rocket pods holding 2.75" folding fin rockets. Of course, the crew chief and door gunners had M-60 machine guns that they held in their hands, no gun mounts. This was so they could hang out of the aircraft and shoot under us when we broke out of our gun runs. I flew in the back one day to see what it was like. Damn, that M-60 weighed about 200 lbs. from the g-forces created on a break at the bottom of a gun run! Plus, riding back there with the horizon flipping all over the place made you a bit nauseous. I can't remember the crew chief on 187, but I do remember he kept the best aircraft. It was sparkling clean and in tip-top mechanical condition. It may be the aircraft in the Christmas card photo, probably is. 187 was my favorite ride and the one I flew most often. It is great to see it all shined up and looking proud again.



### **Sioux City Museum of Aviation and Transportation**

It has been my pleasure to donate an oil painting that I commissioned in 1993. I think a brief history of the mission that day would bring context to the painting. In late 1968 I was flying as fire-team leader on a recon mission in Laos, along the border with Vietnam. This was part of a 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group Detachment B-52 (Delta) operation, out of An Hoa forward operating base (FOB). Of particular interest was activity along the river you see in the picture. The aircraft I flew that day was UH1-C 66-15187, and the aircraft now sits in the museum. The tail number in the painting matches the museum treasure. Back to the mission.... While flying along the river, I glanced out of my window to the right and saw an enemy soldier a couple of hundred yards away. He was crouching in a small boat under a swinging bridge; then he stood up and began firing his AK47 at us. Perhaps he was unaware that we were a gunship? We flew past him quickly and before my crew chief had a chance to return fire. I radioed "Breaking left" to my wingman who was flying a good distance behind and to my left. We made a wide 270 degree turn to the left, lining up on the boat and bridge. The first pair of rockets eliminated the foolish enemy and we continued our recon of the river.

### **KHE SANH by Russ Erbe, CE 66-67**

We flew up to Khe Sanh which was near the DMZ in Dec. of 66, with a break for Christmas. The first part started out with good weather that allowed us to insert teams as was our mission. Some got interesting, like the one where we dropped the team down into the elephant grass right on top of Charlie's campfire. Each group took one look at each other and ran in different directions. Needless to say we had to circle back around to extract them. We started out

living in wall tents in a grassy area near the airstrip. That ended for me as a rain storm ripped a gaping hole in our tent. I took up residence in our ship to stay dry. It rained a lot from then on, and it got really muddy. The rain didn't help our mission or our resupply. Planes had trouble landing because of low clouds and the fact that the end of the airstrip was a cliff. I remember eating lettuce for breakfast as we got lower on food supplies. To add insult to injury the wind blew the lettuce off my plate as I exited the mess tent once. The Special Forces cook always had hot coffee ready when we came back from a mission, thank goodness we never ran out of it. I remember the Special Forces colonel saying that the food situation was unacceptable. When we got back from the Christmas break refrigerators and such were waiting for us. I guess the Navy was missing them. The Delta Mission really opened my eyes to our involvement with the CIA. There were boxes with SOG marked on them sitting near our ship that disappeared during the night. I never saw anyone around them which has always intrigued me. I also got to see a Pilatus PC-6 Porter take off which was amazing. It was a regular visitor to the Special Forces camp. Another visitor was General Westmoreland, he would drop in via his Lear jet. I really got lucky one day as I watched the Special Forces guys rig up a Maguire rig in our ship, and after it was installed, they asked me if I wanted to help them test it out. You bet! I linked up between two sergeants and up we went. What an experience, thank God everything worked perfectly. Our ship was sent to Da Nang for some type of resupply, and I was tasked with scrounging oil as all of our machine guns were rusting from the rain. I talked with some maintenance people and came back with a year's supply. On the flight back we were asked by the Marines to resupply some of their men which turned out to be two guys perched on top a rock column hundreds of feet high sticking up out of the surrounding jungle. There was only room for the two of them up there so we could only set one skid down on the edge of the top and I started off loading C Rations and ammo, an experience that I have never forgotten.

### **SCHOLARSHIP by Jim Baker, Chairman**

The Scholarship Fund is being discontinued. We are no longer soliciting or accepting donations, or awarding any new scholarships. We do still have 20 students on scholarship, and all will remain so until

graduation. This decision was made by unanimous vote at the last Scholarship Committee meeting on August 11. There are two primary factors for the decision: age and funding,

First, we are all getting old; health issues are now a factor within our group, and we have lost many who have passed on. It will be the end of the 2028/2029 school year before the last of our awardees graduate, and any new ones added after this year would extend beyond that. Therefore, it was felt that it is just not reasonable to expect to operate beyond then, and that now was the time to stop accepting new applications. Second, is the money it takes to support each scholarship awarded through a student's graduation. We have always tried to provide \$1250 per semester, which over four years amounts to a total of \$10,000 per student. While there is enough money on hand now to support the 20 students we have, new funds coming in have dropped off significantly. We recently lost the sizable annual donation from a corporate sponsor that had been the basis of our funding, and individual donations aren't enough to offset that, which again is probably related to the age of our membership.

The Scholarship Fund was set up in 2008 to help support descendants of the 281st in college. It has always been operated by a volunteer Board of Directors made up of former members of the 281st and/or their spouses. In those 17 years, many children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews have been helped, which is something not many Company size units from the Vietnam era have done. It is something the 281st AHC Association, Inc. can be justly proud of. But, with all things considered, it is now time to stand down.

## OBITUARIES

### Dave Garland

Served in 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon (Rat Pack) and 2nd Platoon (Bandits) as a **Pilot**.

**1-70 to 11-70**



**11-30-50 to 11-1-25**

### Daniel DiGenova

Served in 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon (Wolf Pack) as a **Crew Chief**.  
**4-67 to 4-68**



**4-22-42 to 8-12-25**

### Joe "Tommy" Ward

Served in Maintenance and as a **Gunner**.  
**2-70 to 12-70**



**7-19-51 to 8-625**

### Robert Laya

Served in the 145<sup>th</sup> ALP as the **Platoon Leader** (Mardi Gras 06).  
**8-64 to 8-65**



**12-8-33 to 6-11-25**

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