



NOVEMBER 2026

281ST ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

No. 92

From the New Editors

Greetings, this is our first newsletter since last December. As most of you probably know, our last editor, Dean Roesner, passed away in March of this year. My wife, Joan, and I have agreed to take on the publishing duties in his place. Dean was a combat engineer, helicopter crewman, construction engineer, business owner, author, and he will be missed. Life goes on and so do we. This is our first attempt with your newsletter, but Dean had the foresight to lay things out for us in advance. Without that we couldn't have produced this issue.

Following is an obituary provided by his daughter, Heather.
Jim Baker

There are some lives measured not simply in years, but in the strength of their presence, the structures they build, the people they love, and the quiet ways they endure. Dean Glen Roesner lived such a life.

Born on August 22, 1947, in Redding, California, Dean was raised alongside his two sisters by his mother, June, and father, Elmer. From the very beginning, his life was rooted in family, hard work, and the natural world. As a boy, he roamed outdoors with curiosity and energy, developing a lifelong love of nature, hunting, and adventure. He found wonder early, captivated in the fourth grade by Tarzan, and equally enchanted by the rhythmic motion of his Lionel train set, which carried his imagination through childhood.

By the age of nine, Dean was already working alongside his father, learning the trade that would shape much of his life. Through long days and steady effort, he built not only houses, but also a deep respect for craftsmanship, responsibility, and perseverance. Those early years laid the foundation for the man he would become, a builder in every sense of the word.

As a young man, Dean excelled in trap shooting, earning numerous awards in competition. He was a strong student, active in track, and continued working alongside his father in carpentry. After high school, he enrolled at Sacramento State University, but soon felt called to join the military to pursue his dream of flying.

Dean served in Vietnam as part of the 168th Combat Engineer Battalion and later as a crew chief with the 281st Assault Helicopter Company, the Army's first special operations helicopter company. He completed two tours in Vietnam, an experience that would shape him deeply and one he later reflected on in his book, A Two Year Adventure of a Lifetime. He was also invited to record his experiences for the Library of Congress and contributed to several other works.

After returning home, Dean continued his education and earned his Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering. He went on to establish a successful construction business, designing and building homes with the same care and precision he had learned as a boy.

It was during this time that he fell in love with his younger sister's best friend, Penni. Dean and Penni were married in 1971, beginning a love story that would span more than five decades. He built their home on a beautiful piece of land, where they shared views of both Mount Shasta and Mount Lassen. There, they raised three children and welcomed nine grandchildren, creating a legacy rooted in love, laughter, and togetherness. Dean was a devoted husband, a steady father, and a proud grandfather. Their home was more than a place. It was a gathering ground filled with warmth, celebration, and unmistakable joy. Their table was always full, and their door always open.

After 25 years as a general contractor, Dean returned to school to earn his Master's degree in Structural Engineering, an achievement that reflected both his intellect and his lifelong commitment to growth. He later served as a structural engineer for the Sundial Bridge at Turtle Bay. Like so much of Dean's life, the bridge stands as both a literal and symbolic testament to strength, endurance, and quiet beauty.

Together, Dean and Penni filled their years, both before and after raising children, with adventure. They skied, backpacked, panned for gold, rafted rivers, and camped beneath open skies. From annual abalone trips in Fort Bragg to nearly 40 summers spent at Patrick's Point, their lives were rich with tradition and memory. In later years, they continued their travels in a fifth wheel trailer, carrying their shared spirit of exploration across new landscapes.

Dean also cherished a full and vibrant life with his lifelong friends. Together, they rode horseback into the mountains on bow hunting trips, made annual journeys to the desert at Massacre Lake, and traversed rugged terrain in his meticulously restored Land Cruiser. He tested limits on snowmobiling expeditions and spent countless weekends in Lake Shastina, playing games and sharing laughter while surrounded by close friends.

Dean passed away on March 27, 2026, at the age of 78.

He leaves behind not only a remarkable life of accomplishment, but also a deeper legacy, one of integrity, resilience, and unwavering love.

Those who knew him are invited to a memorial, where we may gather to remember a man who could design a bridge, tell a story, fix what was broken, and sit quietly beside you when words were not needed

8-22-47 to 3-27-26



Dean Glen Roesner
Served in 1st Platoon as a
Crew Chief
07-68 to 06-69

Greetings From Your President Emeritus

OUR MINERAL WELLS REUNION

I want to thank everyone who came all the way to Mineral Wells for the reunion, I know that was a trek. It's a small town, a typical Texas city, and there's not much to do. The hotel was, I thought,

really nice and the food surprised me, banquet food is often dry and tasteless, this was pretty good. The Museum is stocking the inside of their expansion, i.e. the second half of that building they had. They plan on installing our 512 Huey in it once they put the blades on, and if they want to move our inside exhibit they haven't told me yet. The main man on that museum is Jim Messinger, a retired Warrant, but he is really slowed down lately due to dementia. That's sad because the guy was a force of nature and a college professor; he's still active but no longer in the decision making process. The museum is losing its base due to aging members but Ian, the curator, seems energetic and has really upgraded things.

Speaking of reunions I know we keep saying there will be no more reunions, but I think we can have one more and again we can pay for everything except transportation and lodging. But, I need some feedback. I think St Louis will be a good central location, the same hotel. I did do an informal inquiry and the room prices are about the same as the Crazy Water, but I got a bit of conflicting feedback on dates. So let me know what you want and we'll try and gin something up. It's impossible to accommodate everyone, but I can try. We had close to 80 attendees in Mineral Wells. By comparison, I'm friends with a member of a sister AHC of ours, the 192d in Phan Thiet-they have a reunion planned and are expecting over 125. I don't think we can do that but we can try.

From Reunion Committee Chairperson: Bain Black

Wow, how time does fly. It seems just like yesterday that we were planning our trip to Mineral Wells, TX for what was to be the last, last 281st Reunion. The plan was to stay at the beautifully renovated Crazy Water Hotel. Although Mineral Wells has seen tough times after Fort Wolters closed, it seems to be making a comeback. They have a saying that MW will thrive again "When Pigs Fly." Local establishments have pictures of flying pigs in the store fronts. Of course, there are some of the old places where you can get a cold beer and a burger, like WOODY'S.

MW was chosen as our reunion site not only because of the history of Fort Wolters, but also because the National Vietnam War Museum is located there. The museum is expanding and has quite an array of VN era equipment, including our 281st H Model greeting people at the entrance. Once inside, on the second floor is the Intruder exhibit previously located at the Airborne and Special Ops Museum in Fayetteville, NC. Several of us relocated the exhibit to its new home. A feature of the exhibit is a memorial to those Intruders who did not return home from Vietnam. The interactive kiosk has much of our history and many hundreds of photos. If you have not seen the exhibit, you will enjoy it, for sure.

Reunion activities included a buffet meal at the hotel and a trip to the museum. While there, we toasted Bob Mitchell and all other Intruders who have passed on. The engraved bottle of Woodford Reserve was set aside by Bob years before his passing. His daughter notified us of the bottle among Bob's collectibles and handed it over to us. The toast and fine bourbon put a smile on our faces! Some of us spent a couple of days in Fort Worth seeing such sights as the Medal of Honor Museum, the stockyards and eating at famous Cattleman's restaurant. We had a great time.

Our very respectable attendance was around 100 for our Mineral Wells gathering. You may recall that Dayton, OH was supposed to be the last formal reunion. Now Mineral Wells is the last, last reunion…but we are planning a last, last, last reunion. The likely location is St. Louis. Early summer or fall are possible dates. Details to follow. As our ranks continue to dwindle, time spent together is precious. It would be great to see you all again.

Bain

JACK MAYHEW

Jack Mayhew is 94 years old. For a 94 year old guy he's fairly healthy but has moved into a place that is sort of an upscale old folks home. He calls often, and we have good conversations. He would really like it if you guys would call or email him. He doesn't always answer but he's good at calling back. When you call, make sure you tell him your name and that you were in the 281st and what you did. He's lonely, and if that doesn't resonate with you then you're lucky. My kids call when they

need money. Old folks tend to get forgotten and pushed aside, and when you're stuck in a home and can't get out and about, the phone is all you've got. Jack was the glue that held us together for years, let's not let him be forgotten.
Jack's contact information is:
410-562-6791 Intruder06@me.com

I'm A College Professor - Jeff Murray

Not really. During dinner at our reunion I alluded to my taking classes at TCU for seniors-non-credit classes. The students are the teachers, but some classes are really in depth. I took one-modular nuclear reactors taught by a retired professor of nuclear engineering at North Texas University. It was way over my head but I did learn that a single modular reactor about the size of a pick up truck could power an entire data center. That was interesting.
And I got wrangled into teaching a class with an ex-pilot from the 192nd AHC out of Phan Thiet who was in our battalion from June 1969-1970. He said his unit was a major recipient of 281st parts during our standdown; he even remembers working directly with Gary Stagman a lot. Our course is a 4 part, 90 minutes @, class entitled A Helicopter Pilot in Vietnam. This is the 2nd time we've taught it and both times the class was sold out with a huge waiting list. The first time a lady student introduced herself as the widow of a LOH pilot killed on his 2nd tour. We also had an ex-F-4 back seater who retired as an engineer at Bell Helicopter, he kept me in line when I attempted to discuss some aerodynamics. This current class a guy raised his hand and said he was a WOC graduate from a 1967 class with a tour in the 161st AHC. Talk about putting a damper on the war stories. Programs like this are held at more than a few colleges across the country, so if you live near one check out if it's offered. It's never too late to learn something.

A Special Visit – Wes Schuster

It was a beautiful summer afternoon. The sky had puffy clouds, the temperature was in the low 80's and the 15-knot breeze was perfect for sailing. The best conditions for a sail on the 122-foot-tall ship, "Adventure". Built in 1926 as part of the Gloucester, MA fishing fleet, the Adventure is one of a few surviving fishing schooners. Before engine driven fishing vessels, schooners were designed for speed and maximum cargo space. They had to sail to the Grand Banks off Newfoundland and return to Gloucester as fast as possible to obtain the best price at market for their catch.
On this day, the crew was sailing for the pleasure of veterans. It was the second year that the Gloucester Veterans Services has arranged for veterans to cruise the outer harbor to the Eastern Point Breakwater. At the northern end of the harbor is Stacy Boulevard which for many years has proudly displayed 200 American flags, dedicated to individual veterans. It is home to the famous statue of the "Man at the Wheel" and the cenotaph with 10,000 names of fishermen lost at sea since the founding of Gloucester. At the other end of the boulevard is the World War II memorial and the Vietnam memorial listing the 11 men from Gloucester killed in action in Vietnam, two of whom I knew from my neighborhood and at school.

A day of pleasure, reflection and remembrance.



It's not my age that bothers me - it's the side effects.
I'm not saying I'm old and worn out, but I make sure I'm nowhere near the curb on trash day.

Ramblings by Jack Mayhew, CO 67-68

I spent 4 years in VN, Laos and Thailand. I was there when there were only 520 of us in the country and most were advisors living with the VN troops. I traveled with the MAG Commander (2 Star) for the first year. He was a great guy caught in the middle between the Washington crowd and the VN Army leaders who were fighting the war. I was sitting behind him when the head of the VN Army asked him to stop bringing troops that DC wanted to send and to only send equipment and trainers. The VN General was known as "Big" Minn and his brother was Little Minn. Both were generals and Big Minn was the head of the Army. A week or so later I left my favorite bar late one night and as I was walking down the street I ran into a small group of army guys who had just gotten off ships with a load of CH-21s and American troops. The VC & the NVA loved the CH-21.

The next month or so was consumed with finding safe locations for the units and I must say getting the CH-21 unit out of the plush Saigon hotel they occupied and into tents in Quy Nhon was a challenge for the general. He tried his best to control the inflow of units and more advisors. However, in came the US military forces with little, or no knowledge, nor preparation for what they were getting into.

The other side beefed up the VC and soon all Hell broke out. The day it happened we received word that several SF men were killed while conducting weapons training in the Da Nang area and we immediately flew up there to help if possible. Late in the afternoon we were headed back to Saigon when the general got word that a C-123 had been shot down in the Delta and we went there. The War was now in our back yard.

One story that I will never forget; we were in a very large, hot tent close to Kontum where the senior MAG advisor was briefing the Sec. Def. on a combat assault that the South VN soldiers were conducting. He had just left his troops and looked like he had been fighting for days. McNamara was interrupting him with questions of a statistical nature and when the young major finally had enough he paused for a few seconds and then said. "Mr. Secretary, our mission is to kill the bastards, not count them". The session ended and the secretary departed.

Shortly thereafter the general was relocated to DC where the DC folks could control him.

The Flight Det. Cmdr. assigned me to fly to Bangkok to pick up the new MAG Commander which I did. He was a Three Star General with a Full Col. as his Aid. The Aid read an insurgency book on the trip to Saigon and the general read Playboy. When we landed in Saigon he handed it to me and asked that I pass it around. I guess I should have offered to take him to the Playboy Club?

When I left the country, the folks who lived there were among the most honest hard working people in our world. When I returned 4 years later I reported in to the Avn, Group in Nha Trang and had to wait until evening to see the commander, so I went to the beach and fell asleep. I laid my sun glasses next to my book and when I woke up, both were gone! So much for nation building.



EARLY TIMES by John Hyatt, Pilot 65-66

When I arrived in Vietnam in October 1965, I was originally assigned to the 6th Airlift Platoon (ALP) located at the time at Tan Son Nhut air base. We soon moved to Bien Hoa and later to Nha Trang where we merged with the 145th ALP. In Mid-1966 the two platoons were absorbed by the 281st AHC.

In late 1965 or early 1966 while at Bien Hoa, we were briefed by our platoon leader, Jack Dahill, that we would be moving to Nha Trang and supporting the 5th Special Forces Group. That's about all we knew. But that was about to change.

This was one of the 6th ALP's earliest, if not the first, covert mission.

While at Bien Hoa In early1966 the platoon received a mission to support Special Forces training conducted by Detachment B-56, Project SIGMA. Detachment B-56

was located at Camp Ho Ngoc Tau. Ho Ngoc Tau lies about halfway between Saigon and Long Binh.
Special Forces B-56 Project SIGMA was to conduct water training on an island off the southern coast of South Vietnam, primarily using the small island of Hon Ngang as a training site for maritime operations and insertions. The B-56 Project was designed to train Special Forces teams in maritime operations, including waterborne infiltration, underwater demolition, and coastal reconnaissance, which made training on an island off the South Vietnamese coast crucial. The primary island used for this training was Hon Ngang, located near the southern coast of South Vietnam.
As I recall the 6th ALP deployed two UH-1B's with crews to the island where they remained until the training was completed (maybe 1-2 weeks).
Fuel was taken in 55 gallon drums and the aircraft were refueled by hand pump.
I think the detail was led by CW2 Chuck Baird.
Rumor has it that the aircraft crews sometimes wore swim trunks and t-shirts when flying and that the island was used as an in-country R&R site for female nurses and Red Cross Donut Dollies, but I can't verify that.
The B-56 Project SIGMA was part of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam - Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG).
I don't know if the B-56 Project SIGMA ever performed any water operations, but I believe they did do some prisoner grabs for MACV-SOG.

OBITUARIES

Kenneth Robert Hamilton
Crew Chief in First Platoon (Rat Pack),
10-67 to 10-68.

5-5-43 to 12-6-25

281st AHC Association Contact Information

Jeff Murray, President/Treasurer Tamu73@sbcglobal.net
Dave Mitchell, Secretary djmitch0470@gmail.com
Bain Black, Reunion Chair kbainblack@gmail.com
Brent Gourley, Internet Groups Administrator
bgrlyy@gmail.com
Will McCollum,Assoc.ResidentAuthor
willdanmac@yahoo.com
Jim & Joan Baker, Newsletter bakerjw@icloud.com



"512" at the Museum



Bain Black, Jeff Murray, Jim Baker





The Saluatory Toast



Jeff Murray & John Hyatt



An Addition to the Display Case









A Mini Reunion in Germany



Murray, Baker and Black



On the Elbe River