

C-7A Caribou Association

Volume 28, Issue 1

USAF Caribou Celebrates 50 Years!

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It has been 50 years since the Army transferred the Caribou to the Air Force. In the early 1960's the Army and Air Force struggled over helicopter and fixed-wing roles, missions, and resources. The Army did not want the Air Force to expand its helicopter role into airlift support. The Air Force wanted to limit the Army's use of fixed-wing aircraft. This organizational conflict intensified in 1965 as the support requirements for U.S. troops fighting in Vietnam exceeded the resources available. In late 1965, the Chiefs of Staff of the Army and Air Force began private discussions on these issues. Successful negotiations resulted in an agreement, signed by the two Chiefs of Staff on 6 April 1966, which included transfer of Army Caribous to the Air Force by 1 January 67.

In 1966 few blue suiters knew what a Caribou was or knew about its critical mission in Vietnam. But, the clock was ticking and the Air Force did not waste any time. The first USAF pilots arrived at Ft. Benning, GA, on 30 April 66 for training. Trained USAF Caribou pilots, flight mechanics, and support personnel soon began arriving at the Army aviation companies in Vietnam. The transition was underway.

It was a tremendous undertaking – less than eight months to train, organize, plan, prepare, move personnel and assets, and continue uninterrupted support to user organizations in an active war zone. Two major bases, Cam Ranh Bay and Phu Cat, were not ready with proper facilities on 1 January 67, but the transfer of assets and operational command and control was completed as scheduled.

Histories of the Vietnam War rarely mention the significant contributions of the C-7A's. It is easy to overlook an ugly duckling of an aircraft that once belonged to the Army and had little interface with other USAF units, organizations, or missions. However, if you talk to Army ground pounders, Special Forces green beanies, or Marine grunts who served in Vietnam, almost all will remember the Caribou. It was part of their day-to-day existence and the Caribou was often called on and depended upon when things got tough.

Fifty years? Really? Sometimes, it feels like it was just yesterday. Many of us were disappointed when we received our Caribou assignment, but, for more than a few, it turned-out to be the best assignment we ever had.



Army – Air Force Agreement

6 April 66

Key points of the agreement signed by Gen. Harold K. Johnson, Chief of Staff, U.S. Army and Gen. John P. McConnell, Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force

a. The Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, agrees to relinquish all claims for CV-2 and CV-7 aircraft and for future fixed wing aircraft designed for tactical airlift. These assets now in the Army inventory will be transferred to the Air Force. (CSA and CSAF agree that this does not apply to administrative mission support fixed wing aircraft).

b. The Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force, agrees:

To relinquish all claims for helicopters and follow-on rotary wing aircraft which are designed and operated for intra-theater movement, fire support, supply and resupply of Army forces and those Air Force control elements assigned to DASC and subordinate thereto....

To retain the CV-2 and CV-7 aircraft in the Air Force structure and to consult with the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, prior to changing the force levels of, or replacing those aircraft.

To consult with the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, in order to arrive at take-off, landing, and load carrying characteristics of follow-on fixed wing aircraft to meet the needs of the Army for supply, resupply, and troop movement functions.

c. The Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, and the Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force, jointly agree:

To revise all Service doctrinal statements, manuals, and other material in variance with the substance and spirit of this agreement.

That the necessary actions resulting from this agreement will be completed by 1 January 1967.

One of the First

by Frank Woznicki [536, 66]
from C-7A Newsletter 22-2, Nov 2011

I believe I was the first Air Force Flight Mechanic assigned to the Army 61st Aviation Company (AvCo), later to become the 536th Troop Carrier Squadron. For those that did not fly with the Army during the transition period of the Bou to the Air Force, it was a different world. No set hour for a crew day, take-off before daylight, and get back to the base whenever the mission was done. The Army mentality was “If you broke them, you fixed them.” If you weren’t flying, you were on the flight line doing maintenance on the airplane.

If an aircraft was on a Red-X status and they needed it – if the engines would run and the flight controls worked and it could get off the ground, they would downgrade the Red-X and off you would go. I remember one flight when we took off and the pilot said we had a nose gear light on after take off. I checked the nose gear through the inspection window. The doors had closed before the gear came up, jamming the doors into the wheel well. I informed the pilot and he dropped the gear. Then he retracted the gear, jamming the doors more, but we lucked out and the gear came out into the down and locked position. We flew the rest of the day with the gear down. At the end of the day, when we got back to Vung Tau, the Army Sgt. looked at the jammed doors and told me to be back there in the morning to fix the doors. I hope he is still waiting.

On another flight, we were flying out of Bien Hoa and we broke for lunch. SSgt. Troy Shankles was with me as we were short of help that day. Troy and I went to lunch and looked around the PX, then went back to the flight line and our plane was gone. I figured it would come back sometime so we took a little nap on the edge of the ramp where we had parked the bird. Sure enough, I woke up as the bird taxied

in. We walked out to the plane as the pilots were getting off and I asked them if they enjoyed the flight. They were not happy campers. I guess the Army pilots didn’t have a sense of humor. Oh well. We loaded up some livestock and airdropped them someplace.

I found out that the 61st AvCo had a two plane detachment at Can Tho, so I volunteered to go there and spent most of the rest of my tour there. We supported the 5th Special Forces camps in the Delta. We were among the first Air Force crews to airdrop and LOLEX loads before the Air Force took over the Bous on 1 January 1967. Our Detachment Commander was Maj. George J. Peck. A fine officer and the best commander I ever served under. We also had some great pilots with us. Don’t remember their names, but they were the cream of the crop. We were known as “Peck’s Bad Boys.”

When the Army was at Can Tho they didn’t check out who they were hauling on their flights so they didn’t get shot up too much. After the Air Force took over, we started taking a lot of hits. A rumor had it that a VC (Viet Cong) commander sent a thank you letter to the Army commander for hauling his troops around.

Our mission in the Delta was mostly resupplying the Special Forces A camps and the mercenary forces under Maj. Maracheck. You would never know when you went into the camps what you would encounter. There were usually no landing strips, just open fields.

Two different times when we landed at camps, we were mobbed by Vietnamese trying to get on the plane after we unloaded the supplies. I would push them off the ramp, but there would be so many people trying to get on the plane that they would never touch the ground, they would be pushed back in. As soon as I was able to get the ramp up we would start taxing out, otherwise we would not be able to get off the ground. That night or the next day, the camp would get hit. That is why they were trying to get out of there.

USAF Caribou – Green to Blue

Late 65: Private negotiations begin between Gen. John P. McConnell, Chief of Staff, USAF, and Gen. Harold K. Johnson, Chief of Staff, USA on transfer of Army CV-2 Caribous and CV-7 Buffalos to the USAF. (At the time there were approximately 150 Caribous in the Army inventory, including 19 at Fort Benning, GA. Army procurement of Buffalos was pending, but never completed.)

6 Apr 66: Formal agreement to transfer CV-2 and CV-7 aircraft to USAF by 1 Jan 67 signed by Gen. McConnell and Gen. Johnson.

30 Apr 66: Six USAF pilots begin flight training at Fort Benning and Lawson Army Airfield, GA, in Army CV-2 Pilot Transition Course, Class 66-8.

1 May 66: 4449th Combat Crew Training Squadron (CCTS) established at Fort Benning, GA, under command and control of 4442nd CCTW, Sewart AFB, TN. Full manning of 4449th with trained personnel planned to be completed by 15 Aug.

23 May 66: First all-USAF Caribou flight transition training class, Class 66-9, begins with 26 pilots and 16 USAF flight mechanics receiving training provided by Army instructors.

8 Jun 66: Joint Basic Plan (*Red Leaf*) for CV-2/7 transfer published jointly by USAF and USA to provide implementation guidance for the transfer.

8 Jun 66: First cadre of USAF personnel for 601S Field Training Detachment, Air Training Command, arrive at Fort Benning, GA, to assume responsibility for USAF Caribou ground training.

11 Jun 66: Class 66-10 begins, the first Caribou flight transition class of USAF pilots and flight mechanics conducted by only USAF instructors.

1 Aug 66: Target date for USAF instructors to begin training of USAF direct support personnel to replace Army support personnel in Vietnam.

Jul – Dec 66: Trained USAF Caribou pilots, flight mechanics, and maintenance personnel arrive in South Vietnam and are attached to the Army Caribou Aviation Companies.



Fort Benning, Lt. Col. Harold Bailer, Commander 4449th CCTS and Col. J. Elmore Swenson, Commander 10th Army Aviation Group with new USAF Caribou pilots, Maj. Clifford Tyler, Maj. John Stewart and Capt. Edward Clark

4 Oct 66: Program Action Directive 67-1 tasked the 483rd Troop Carrier Wing (TCW) with detailed planning of CV-2 transfer and assumption of command and direction of USAF C-7A squadrons by 31 Dec 66:

17th Aviation Company (AvCo) at An Khe to become 537th Troop Carrier Squadron (TCS), moving to Phu Cat AB when adequate facilities permitted

92nd AvCo at Qui Nhon to become 459th TCS, moving to Phu Cat AB when adequate facilities permitted; the 92nd platoon at Nha Trang to be moved to Pleiku; the 92nd platoon at Da Nang to remain in place.

134th AvCo at Can Tho to become 457th TCS, moving to Cam Rahn Bay AB (CRB) when adequate facilities permitted.

135th AvCo at Dong Ba Thin to become 458th TCS, moving to CRB when adequate facilities permitted.

57th AvCo to become 535th TCS and remain at Vung Tau Army Airfield (AAF).

61st AvCo to become 536th TCS and remain at Vung Tau AAF.

15 Oct 66: 483rd TCW re-activated at CRB.

15 Dec 66: The last USAF student class, Class 67-7, graduates at Fort Benning.

17 Dec 66: 4449th CCTS moves to Sewart AFB, TN.

Late Dec 66:

Personnel and assets move from Can Tho to CRB via C-130; some assets move by LST (Landing Ship, Tank) in early Jan 67.

Personnel and assets move from Dong Ba Thin to CRB by road.

Personnel and assets move from Qui Nhon and An Khe to Phu Cat by road.

Personnel and assets move from Nha Trang to Pleiku by Caribou.

All movements completed by Dec 31 except for the assets moved by LST.

31 Dec 66: Army transfers Caribou aircraft to USAF.

1 Jan 67: USAF and 483rd TCW assume operational command and control of all Caribou assets.

Six USAF C-7A TCS are activated:

457th TCS, CRB, Tail Code KA, Tail Swatch Blue, Call Sign *Cuddy*

458th TCS, CRB, Tail Code KC, Tail Swatch Red, Call Sign *Law*

459th TCS, Phu Cat AB, Tail Code KE, Tail Swatch White, Call Sign *Ellis*

537th TCS, Phu Cat AB, Tail Code KN, Tail Swatch Orange, Call Sign *Soul*

535th TCS, Vung Tau AAF. Tail Code KH, Tail Swatch Green, Call Sign *Tong*

536th TCS, Vung Tau AAF, Tail Code KL, Tail Swatch Yellow, Call Sign *Iris*

Mar 67: First month the 483rd TCW averaged more than 100 flight hours per assigned aircraft. and also the first month the average aircraft available exceeded daily mission requirements.

25 Jul 67: C-7A IRAN (Inspection and Repair as Necessary) program begins in Manila, Philippines.

1 Aug 67: 483rd TCW re-designated 483rd Tactical Airlift Wing (TAW) and the six squadrons are re-designated as Tactical Airlift Squadrons (TAS).

Main Bases

Cam Ranh Bay AB. During the Vietnam War, Cam Ranh Bay, with the best deep water port in Southeast Asia, was the primary U.S. military seaport and logistics hub in Vietnam for the off-loading of supplies and military equipment. Cam Ranh was a huge, sprawling installation where all U.S. military services had a presence. Cam Ranh Air Base (CRB) was a part of the larger Cam Ranh Bay logistics facility.

In early 1965, the U.S. Navy Civil Engineer Corps and civilian contractors began construction of the airfield. The airfield, with two parallel 10,000-foot runways, was turned over to the USAF on 8 Nov 65 and immediately became the home of the F-4C Phantom II's of the 12th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW).

The 483rd Troop Carrier Wing (TCW) was activated at CRB on 15 Oct 66. However, facilities to support the Wing and the 457th and 458th Troop Carrier Squadrons (TCS) aircraft and personnel were far from complete on 1 Jan 67.

Phu Cat AB. In early 1965, U.S. forces selected an area west of Qui Nhon to build a major airbase. Construction on Phu Cat AB began in May 1966, after the Republic of Korea Tiger Division had secured the area from the Viet Cong.



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Cam Ranh Bay AB in early 1967. The Caribou ramp is the dark, apparently bare space, in the lower center of the photo.

The base was only about 50 per cent complete when the 459th and 537th TCS began operating from Phu Cat AB on January 1, 1967.

The Caribous used the laterite strip constructed in 1966 that had recently been lengthened from 1,500 to 3,000 feet. The taxiways and ramps were pierced steel planking (PSP). Torrential rains, seas of mud, and security concerns added to the transition challenge. Ellisville, also called Camp Ellis, was the 483rd TCW tent maintenance area used while the base was under construc-

tion. The 10,000-foot main runway became operational in May 1967, but the temporary runway remained in operation until August 1967.

It was not until August 1967 that all of the then designated 483rd Tactical Airlift Wing maintenance units moved into permanent facilities.

Phu Cat AB was also the home of the 37th TFW, including the 416th Tactical Fighter Squadron which pioneered the Fast FAC (Forward Air Controller) concept over North Vietnam using two-seater F-100F's and the *Misty* call sign.



*Phu Cat mud, early 1967
Photo by Bob Cummings (459, 66)*



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*Ellisville and Caribou Ramp,
Phu Cat AB, early 1967*

Main Bases (from Page 5)

Vung Tau Army Airfield (AAF)

The transition from Army CV-2's to USAF C-7A's was easiest at Vung Tau AAF because everything stayed in place. Although a physical move was not necessary, the transition to USAF operations was still challenging.

Vung Tau AAF, with its 4,500 foot runway and established support base, already had a long history with Army and Australian Caribous. The 57th and 61st Army Aviation Companies began operating from Vung Tau in Dec 63. The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) began operating Caribous from Vung Tau in 1964 and established the No. 35 Squadron, also known as *Wallaby Airlines*, there on 1 Jun 66.



Vung Tau AAF, 1967

Operating Locations and Missions

The initial 483rd TCW Concept of Operations established the following Mission Site Commanders, Operating Locations (OL), and missions to provide a single point of contact and support for user organizations in the respective areas:

- 535th TCS: Tan Son Nhut AB
- 536th TCS: Can Tho
- 537th TCS: An Khe AAF
- 457th TCS Can Tho
- 458th TCS: Nha Trang
- 459th TCS: Da Nang AB
- 459th TCS: Pleiku

The **Tan Son Nhut (TSN) Mission** was a Liaison Officer who functioned as a single point of contact for all C-7A airlift operations with the Army Air Transportation Coordination Officers (ATCOs) on a continuous basis. The Caribou Scheduling Officer at the 834th Air Division Airlift Control Center (ALCC – *Hilda*) at TSN provided the Liaison Officer with information on all C-7A aircraft operating through TSN.

The **Can Tho Mission** provided direct support to the 5th Special Forces Group (SFG) with two aircraft daily.

The **An Khe Mission** provided two radio relay aircraft at An Khe on a standby basis. The 24-hour radio relay alert mission provided inter-locking FM communications between 1st Cavalry units when they moved into a new area of operations. In May 67, the Mission at An Khe was closed and the radio relay requirement was supported from Phu Cat AB.

The **Bangkok Mission** supported JUSMACTHAI (Joint U.S. Military Assistance Command, Thailand) with two aircraft at Don Muang Airport. Originally the responsibility of 457th TCS, starting in the third quarter 1967, all six squadrons began to rotate crews and site commanders to Bangkok.

The **Nha Trang Mission** originally supported the 5th SFG with four aircraft on a daily basis. The requirement was reduced to two aircraft in the second quarter of 1967.

The **Da Nang Mission** supported the Third Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) with four aircraft and the 5th SFG with one aircraft on a daily basis. The I Corps Tactical Operations Center (TOC) was the single point of contact for both users. When III MAF did not have a need for all four aircraft, which happened often, the aircraft were released for use by the 5th SFG, First Field Force Vietnam, U.S. Army

(IFFV), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).

The **Pleiku Mission** supported IFFV with three aircraft and 5th SFG with one aircraft on a daily basis. Coordination was conducted directly with II Corps and Fourth Division representatives. On 7 May 67, the 457th TCS assumed responsibility for the Pleiku Mission from the 459th TCS and the daily aircraft commitment was reduced from four to two.

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Jess Cogley
244 Mecca Dr
San Antonio, TX 78232-2209

Jungle Survival Delayed

by James E. Wood [537, 66]

When I received orders for Vietnam in 1966, there was no mention that I was to attend Jungle Survival School. I had recently read that all aircrew members were required to complete that training prior to arriving in country. I questioned the Sergeant in Personnel and he said that my orders didn't include the code letters that authorized sending me to Jungle Survival School. I asked what the code letters were and he said, "S-E-A." I asked him if he knew what S-E-A stood for and he said, "South East Asia." OK. I asked, "Where is Vietnam?" He said, "In Southeast Asia." "So send me to Jungle Survival School." He repeated that my orders didn't have the code letters S-E-A. I finally gave up.

When I processed in at Tan Son Nhut AB in August 1966, I asked if I could be assigned to Vung Tau. The Sergeant said that I was going to be assigned to An Khe and they weren't starting to man the unit at Vung Tau until the next week. He also noted that I hadn't attended Jungle Survival School and I needed to do that. I said, "Send me to the Philippines for Jungle Survival School and when I return, you can send me to Vung Tau." He said I would go to An Khe and then I would receive orders to attend the survival school.

Actually, An Khe turned out to be a good assignment. We were attached to the 17th Aviation Company of the 1st Air Cavalry Division. In January 1967, the 537th TCS moved to Phu Cat AB and we continued to support the 1st Cav.

True to their word, I received orders to attend Jungle Survival School. They arrived at the end of July 1967, two weeks prior to my DEROS (Date of Estimated Return from Overseas). Needless to say, I didn't go.

I've often wondered if it was someone's idea of a joke.

Commander Remembered

by John Schuepbach [535, 70]

My memories of Lt. Col. Rupert Richardson (535th TAS Commander, 12/31/70-7/12/71) are good and bad.

The good was that he was the most forgiving officer that I ever worked for in the Air Force. I was young and stupid in Vietnam and I gave him ample opportunities to bust me down to Airman Basic. He always chewed me out and told me how disappointed he was with me, but he never wrote me up for anything.

The worst was the incident in which I accidentally hosed down Lt. Col. Richardson. It happened at a *fini* flight celebration that was delayed because the aircraft landed about a half-hour later than expected. Many members of the squadron were on the flight line ready to celebrate. I had the fire hose from the fire truck ready to hose down the *fini* pilot. I remember that Lt. Col. Richardson had a very expensive camera with a long telephoto lens. He was very fond of his camera and he always had it close at hand at the Squadron.

On this day, while we waited for the aircraft to arrive, two Flight Engineers ran up behind me, took the fire hose from me, and they hosed me down. They then dropped the fire hose and ran back into the crowd. I picked up the fire hose and decided that I was going to return the favor. The engineers quickly moved behind Lt. Col. Richardson for protection. As I neared the Colonel with the fire hose, he told me, "Airman, if you get me and/or my camera wet, I will have your ass." I respectfully asked him to step aside because I was going to get those two engineers.

The engineers then ran one direction and I started to open the valve on the fire hose. They suddenly stopped and ran back behind Lt. Col. Richardson just as the water was released. The end result was that Lt. Col. Richardson and his camera became very wet. I remem-

ber that he became quite upset with me (AGAIN!). The chewing out I received made the others feel like child's play in comparison.

To this day, I regret my actions because I am sure I gave Lt. Col. Richardson grey hair and high blood pressure in Vietnam.

When I left Vietnam, I received orders for Forbes AFB (C-130) in Topeka, Kansas, which is about 60 miles from my home in Kansas City. I was the Chief Clerk in the Orderly Room for the Chief of Maintenance.

One day, I was busy writing something when someone entered my office. Without looking up I said, "I will be with you in a moment," when this person loudly said, "You made Sergeant?!" I recognized the voice as Lt. Col. Richardson, but I thought, "No, it can't be him." I slowly looked up and Lt. Col. Richardson was standing there. I stood up at attention and stated, "Welcome to Topeka, sir! You're looking well!" He just stood there in disbelief that he and I had met again, especially in Topeka, Kansas of all places. It truly is a small Air Force!

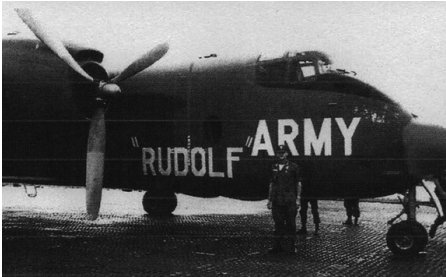
My boss (an O-6) exited his office to greet his old friend. I started to introduce Lt. Col. Richardson when he suddenly exclaimed, "You hired this guy?? Did you check him out??? You promoted him?" They went into the Colonel's office for about 30 minutes.

When Lt. Col. Richardson exited the office, I wished him a safe journey home. He did not say a word to me. After he left, my boss looked at me and asked, "Did you do half of what he told me you did in Vietnam?" I could not confirm or deny that question. I thought that he would bust me back to A1C, but he never did.

As I moved up through the ranks, I used a lot of the leadership skills I learned from Lt. Col. Richardson with my subordinates in hopes that it would sink in and change marginal Airmen into leaders. By the grace of God, it finally happened to me that day in Topeka.

Army Operation Rudolph

from *Army Aviation in Vietnam*
1963-66 by Ralph Young



Before the USAF Santa Bou, there was an Army Rudolph.

The 134th Aviation Company's *Rudolph*, believed to be S/N 62-4193, flew one last time in unique colors and markings delivering Christmas packages to all the Special Forces camps in IV Corps on 24 December 66. Lt. Col. Landry wrote that, "Operation Rudolph could not have been carried out ... without the aid of many others.

The IV Corps Special Forces personnel at Can Tho packed and helped load all items for the air drop. They notified all their field based personnel of our pending arrival so as to help with 'smoke' and good drop areas." USAF personnel also contributed by specially painting the aircraft, including a red nose! While the Caribou was destined to leave the Army, in the 134th it went in spectacular style!

Major Bob Landry, just before being promoted, was *Rudolph's* Aircraft Commander and Capt. Pribnow (shown in photo above, courtesy of R. L. Landry), the last 134th Operations Officer, was the Copilot.

Because of extensive flooding throughout the Mekong Delta, the Christmas packages were airdropped. To make their low-level rounds of all the IV Corps Special Forces camps took approximately five hours of flying time.

Fright Night at An Khe

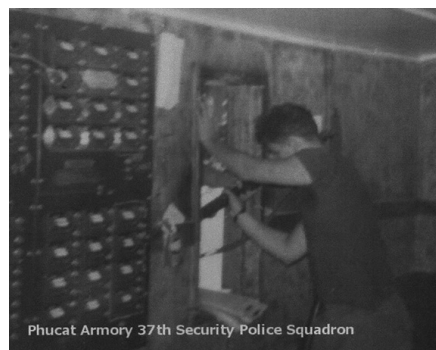
by Bob Cummings [459, 66]

My day at Phu Cat AB in early January 1967 started out as usual and went all day without too many problems. But, as the planes came back from their daily missions, one did not come back. We only had a few aircraft at that time and they still had "Army" on them.

Mike Hall, a Canadian from New York, and I were told that we were going to go on the first flight out the next morning to be dropped off at an Army base manned by the 1st Air Cavalry at An Khe. I had never been there before. We were to go fix the aircraft that was left there because of engine problems.

We were advised not to be late for the flight, so we needed to get our gear and toolboxes together the night before. It was a much earlier flight departure than normal, because they needed the aircraft to fly that same day.

We did not get real good information on what was wrong. The only thing we were told was that the number one engine needed major work. We loaded some gaskets, rubber hoses, and seals in our toolboxes for minor repair. We didn't know what else to take since no one knew exactly what the problem was. We bedded down early for the trip.



The next morning we got our gear: helmet, flack jacket, web belt, canteen, and C-rations and went to the weapons shack manned by the Air Police to check out our M-16's.

When we got there we were told we

did not need our rifles for such a short flight, besides, An Khe was a secure base. You were always supposed to take your weapon with you on every flight. That was the rule, but we were not allowed to take our weapons.

We left and went to the flight line to board the aircraft for the short fifty miles flight from Phu Cat to An Khe. We departed and got to An Khe in just a few minutes. We off-loaded our toolboxes and headed for the Caribou parked on the northeast end of the runway. The aircraft was fairly close to a building and out of the way from other activities. We had to hunt a B-4 stand and finally found one. It seemed like forever pushing that stand the half-mile from where we found it to the C-7A.

We returned to the aircraft and opened the cowling to inspect the engines. There were several push rods and push rod covers leaking. Some crossover tubes were also leaking. We fixed everything we saw that might have caused trouble.

After we fixed the things that we had seen, we ran the engines up. A new magneto was needed because the mag drop was terrible and not in tolerance. Also, one of the engines was popping and sputtering, so we needed spark plugs. We called on a land-line to Phu Cat for parts late in the day and they were not able to deliver the parts to us until the next morning. Things did not set too well with the people at Phu Cat, because they wanted the aircraft home.

We were supposed to catch the plane we were working on back to Phu Cat, but it was still broken down. With no other options, we ended up staying the night at An Khe.

Being fly boys, we did not ask the Army for anything, not even C-rations. Besides, C-rations were not our favorite. Some guys would take them for the cigarettes and throw the rest away.

There were some not so good feelings between the Army and the Air Force because of the takeover of the

Continued on Page 9

Fright Night (from Page 8)

Caribous by the Air Force which caused the Army Warrant Officer pilots flying the CV-2 Caribous to lose their jobs. Most of them had to become helicopter pilots. A lot of those Warrant Officers were not happy.

Mike and I decided to spend the night on top of the wings because it was so hot. We opened the top hatch and crawled out on the wing for the night.

Sometime in the night there was a loud explosion. I estimate it was only about 100 yards from us. We bolted up from a dead sleep and saw VC (Viet Cong) running everywhere. So much for being at a secure base! The VC had broken in the northeast side where the 175 mm and 155 mm howitzers were located and they were running wild. Gunfire was going on everywhere.

We hugged the wing for a few minutes and I decided we needed to get down before some sapper threw a satchel charge into the plane. We were taking a big chance, but we had no weapons, because they did not let us check our weapons out for such a secure base. HA!

Armed with only our crescent wrenches, we went back down through the hatch. As soon as we hit the ramp, we started running southwest as fast as our legs would carry us. All of a sudden we see this culvert about 6 feet high and 6 feet deep as we rounded a building, so we jumped in and headed into the culvert. When we stopped, turned around and looked, we realized this was not a good place to hide because if someone came around the corner of the building they could see us clearly. So we climbed out and started running from the gunfire again with our crescent wrenches in hand. This was all taking place sometime after midnight and it was seriously dark. There was still a lot of gunfire and loud explosions going on. We kept running until we reached the base perimeter and found some people with weapons in an open bunker.

Later that night we learned the big-

gest explosion was when a sapper threw a satchel charge into a C-130 taxiing with the ramp door open, killing several people and destroying the aircraft.

It was the last time I ever left Phu Cat without my weapon, whether heading to Qui Nhon, Da Nang, Hue Phu Bai, Quang Tri, or any other place. Really, I would've preferred to have slept with my M-16 every night.

That was the kind of night that will make you wet your britches.

Are You Willing to Share a Story?

by Ron Lester [459, 67]

The success of this newsletter depends upon your stories. While the newsletter includes various items of interest, it primarily exists as a forum for us to share stories about our Caribou-related Vietnam experiences. Without your personal stories, this newsletter would not exist.

Vietnam changed us all, in big ways and small. For each of us, our time and experiences in Vietnam changed the direction of our life.

We all have stories to tell. There are some stories we are willing to tell to just about anyone, anywhere. There are some stories we are willing to tell to fellow veterans. There are some stories we will only tell to a few trusted friends or close family members in private. There are some stories we will not tell anyone, sometimes, not even ourselves.

Why do we tell stories? We tell stories to give our memories life and substance, to make them real. We tell stories to put our version of events on the record. We share stories in the hope that they will endure and that people will read them and have a more human understanding of what occurred and the sacrifices that were made.

We tell stories about anything and everything. We tell stories about the day-to-day grind: the heat, the rain, the mud, the chow, the sights, the sounds, the smells, the friendlies, and

the enemy.

We tell stories about the absurdities and disconnects that occur when a modern bureaucratic organization, the U.S. military, operating under "stateside" rules, finds itself in an Asian country with little to no infrastructure fighting a war where there are no front lines and the enemy plays by its own rules.

We tell stories about events and people that made us laugh. We remember those who taught us and helped us. We tell stories about those who did extraordinary things under difficult, and often dangerous, circumstances. We tell stories about the bad things that almost happened but didn't because of fate, or luck, or chance, or Divine Intervention.

We also tell tragic stories, because it was war. Regardless of why peoples and nations fight each other, the wages of war are always the same: death and destruction, pain and suffering. To honor those who did not return, we tell stories to recall and recognize their sacrifice, even though it hurts to do so.

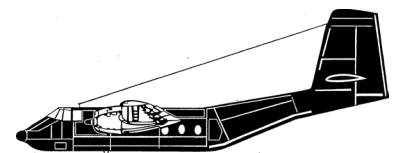
Why do we read stories? We read stories because they help us remember our own experiences. They spark memories that were long hidden or vaguely recalled of similar events, places, or individuals. They confirm to us that our memories really did happen. Our memories are no longer isolated remembrances, but they become part of a collective shared memory and experience. When we read stories, we are not alone.

All we really have in life are our memories and our relationships. By sharing our memories we strengthen the ties that bind our relationships with others.

Are you willing to share some of your stories?

Please send to:

ron.lester43@verizon.net



Seavey's Courageous Rescue

by Wayne Dickerson [458, 69]

1/Lt. Derril Seavey (458, 68) was the bravest person that I knew in Vietnam. We were both pilots in the 458th TAS at Cam Rahn Bay AB (CRB) during my tour from 1969 to 1970. He participated in a joint Air Force/Army exchange program with three other USAF pilots at an Army base. One day, they were all given rides in helicopters to acquaint them with the Army mission. They were intended to fly only locally and not into combat.

Unfortunately, no one informed the Viet Cong (VC) and one of the copters, a Cobra, was shot down with a visiting USAF pilot on board. Lt. Seavey was on board a Huey and talked the Army pilot into landing in a clearing near the downed chopper. Derril believed the USAF pilot on board was a fellow Caribou pilot. As he approached the burning chopper, the phosphorus munitions on board, designed to mark targets, started going off. Despite the firing munitions, Derril pulled out the Army pilot, who was already dead. He then extracted the Air Force pilot, who turned out not to be his friend, but an F-4 pilot from another unit at CRB. He carried the pilot through the brush back to the Huey and they were flown back to the Army base. Although the Air Force pilot, Lt. Cherry, died a few days later, the Army recommended 1/Lt. Seavey for a Silver Star, which he richly deserved and subsequently received.

In early 2015, I called Derril Seavey just to catch up after all these years. He told me additional information about when he was extracting the pilots. A VC had a rifle trained on him during the process, but elected not to shoot. The enemy, out of humanitarian concerns or some other unknown reason, had decided not to kill the rescuer.

Additionally, after returning to the U.S., Derril attended a USAF Mess Dress affair wearing all of his medals,

earned both from the Air Force and from the Army during an earlier tour when he was an Army enlisted man. I was completely unaware of his previous time in the Army. The preponderance of medals on his chest was called into question by a Colonel, which led to an altercation resulting in the Colonel being offered an opportunity to resign, which he did.

Derril also told me that he was dying and was making preparations. I learned recently that he passed away shortly after our conversation. His obituary included a Distinguished Flying Cross for a Caribou mission, in addition to the Silver Star. I'm proud to have served with this hero who is not unsung, but is not heralded enough.

Derril Seavey passed away July 30, 2015 at his home in Summerville, SC.

Caribou Actor

John Karamanian [536, 66]



John Karamanian appeared as one of the cadets at Randolph AFB, TX in the 1951 movie drama, *Air Cadet*. Joseph Pevney directed the film starring Stephen McNally, Gail Russell and Richard Long.

Air Cadet featured USAF pilots in training along with actors mixed into the training courses. The film had a small, early role for 26 year old Rock Hudson and a scene with future astronaut Gus Grissom.

Production of *Air Cadet* began at Randolph AFB on October 4, 1950. The scenes at Randolph were filmed in five



days and the cast and crew transferred to Williams AFB near Mesa, AZ where the majority of the film was shot, with filming wrapped mid-December 1950. Some sequences were shot at Tyndall AFB in Panama City, FL. Before he became widely known as an astronaut, Gus Grissom was an extra seen briefly early in the film as a USAF candidate for the Randolph AFB flight school.

When the film was shot, some of the T-33's had under-slung tip tanks, not the in-line tip tanks of later models, and others did not. There are also some P-80's in the shots.

The aerial sequences, which were the highlight of *Air Cadet*, were shot from a B-25 which had been converted into a camera platform. The cinematographer had to lie on his stomach using a 60 pound film camera bracketed onto the tail assembly of the B-25. Choosing high-contrast sky backgrounds meant when the sky was clear or blue, photography was not possible.

Caribou Association member John N. Karamanian passed away in San Antonio, TX, on November 6, 2016. Prior to flying Caribous in Vietnam, John flew B-29's in the Korean War. He retired from the USAF in 1969 with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Tap Code

by Randy Roughton
Airman, January 27, 2016

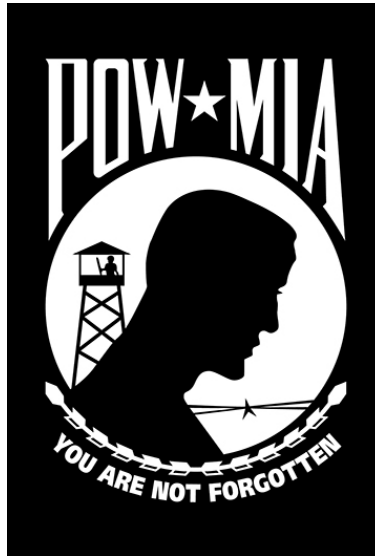
USAF Col. Carlyle Harris, a former prisoner of war (POW) in Vietnam, is credited with introducing the tap code used by the prisoners to communicate.

Questions consumed Capt. Carlyle S. “Smitty” Harris’ mind in the early days of his eight years as a POW in North Vietnam. Harris’ thoughts focused mostly on his pregnant wife and two children back home near Kadena AFB in Okinawa, Japan. Harris also wondered how the POWs could maintain any semblance of leadership and morale without a way to communicate with each other. For eight long years of captivity, the questions lingered and gnawed at his mind.

Within five months after he’d joined the 67th Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS) in Thailand, Harris launched his second F-105 *Thunderchief* mission against the Thanh Hoa Bridge on April 4, 1965. After Harris hit his target, his F-105 was hit by anti-aircraft fire, and he was forced to eject. About 20 people from a nearby village immediately captured the pilot, and he was quickly surrounded by almost 50 villagers armed with hoes, shovels and rifles. Just as he was about to be shot, an elderly man stepped in because of the government’s orders to capture American pilots alive. Harris remained in captivity for 2,871 days, much of it at the Hoa Lo Prison, which POWs called the “Hanoi Hilton.”

After Louise Harris learned that her husband was missing, she remained at their home in Okinawa with their two young daughters, Robin and Carolyn, until after their son Lyle was born. Six weeks after Lyle’s birth, she took her family to Tupelo, Mississippi, where her sister lived. Even before she received her first letter from her husband, Louise believed he was still alive and made certain the children kept the faith, too. As Lyle grew older, he’d tell his mother, “There goes Daddy,” when an airplane flew overhead.

Shortly after his capture, Harris was placed in a cell in the Hoa Lo Prison with four other POWs, and, at that time, he remembered a conversation with an instructor at his survival school training. The instructor had told him about a tap code Royal Air Force POWs used during World War II, and Harris taught



the other four POWs the code. Their captors put them back in solitary confinement a few days later, but that only helped them spread the code throughout the seven-cell area, and ultimately, to POWs throughout North Vietnam.

“As we were moved to other camps away from Hanoi, someone always took the tap code with them and was able to pass it on,” said Harris, who retired from the Air Force as a Colonel in 1979 and spent the next 18 years working in business, law, and marketing in Mississippi. “So, no matter where you went in the POW system in North Vietnam, if you heard a tap, the guy on the other side of the wall would respond with two knocks in return, and you’ve started the communication process.”

At the “Hanoi Hilton” and other POW camps in Vietnam, the tap code was not only a means to communicate with each other, but it also became a lifeline. In the code, the alphabet was arranged on a grid of five rows and five columns without the letter K, which was substituted with C. The first set

of taps indicated which row the letter was on, and the second represented the column. So one tap followed by another tap meant the letter A, and a tap followed by two taps indicated B.

As soon as a POW returned from interrogation, he would begin tapping the wall to communicate what happened. When a prisoner returned from a particularly brutal interrogation, as soon as the guard turned the key and left the block, he’d hear a series of taps that communicated three letters: G, B, and U for “God bless you.”

When Harris was being interrogated, for strength to resist demands for information, he thought back to his squadron commander in the 67th TFS, Lt. Col. James R. Risner. “While I was being interrogated the first couple of weeks, when it was pretty darned intense, I thought so much about Robbie Risner,” Harris said. “Mentally, I put Robbie Risner on a stool right beside me. It was my greatest effort to not do or say anything that he would not approve of. That really helped me.” Risner was later captured, and confirmed the birth of Harris’ son after another POW first relayed the news through the tap code.

As the U.S. began its withdrawal from Vietnam, almost 600 POWs returned home in 1973, and Harris was finally released on February 12. As he looked forward to his reunion with his family at Maxwell AFB, AL, one question remained in his mind – the reception with his children after eight years of captivity, especially the 8 year-old son he’d never met.

When Harris stepped into the quarters where his family was waiting, Robin and Carolyn squealed and ran to his arms. “Oh, thank you, Lord,” he said, “They haven’t forgotten.” But, when he saw Lyle for the first time, his son didn’t hug him back. However, about a half-hour later, as his father opened his arms, Lyle ran across the room and fell into his embrace.

After eight years, Harris had the answers to all of his questions.

Down at LZ English

by Don Alsbo [1st Cavalry, 66]
and James E. Wood [537, 66]

Captain Don Alsbro, USA remembers a scary day at LZ (Landing Zone) English:

“The Air Force had just taken over the Caribous on January 1, 1967. On January 8, I was on a C-7A that was shot down. I was in the 1st Cavalry and we were flying out of LZ English. I barely made the plane as it was starting to taxi down the runway. There were only about eight of us on the flight. I started to strap myself in and a voice told me not to sit there. I looked around and there wasn’t anyone that said that so I continued to buckle up and the voice told me again ‘Don’t sit there.’ So, I got up and moved across the aisle to another seat.

As the plane was rising in the air, there was a ping in the cabin and we looked up and saw red fluid running out of the ceiling. We yelled and the crew chief came back, looked, and ran back to the cockpit and started frantically pumping. The more he pumped the more the liquid ran out.

I looked out the window and all I saw was a rice paddy and we were about to crash. The plane hit the runway and bounced – really bad. Finally, we stopped. We disembarked and the pilot (an Air Force Major) was shaking and said that it was the worst landing he’d ever made.

I went back in the plane and found out that a .51 cal. bullet had gone thru the seat that I originally sat in. That was the hydraulic line that controlled everything mechanical (landing gear, wing flaps, wheel brakes, and nose wheel steering) on the plane. I know where that voice came from!

I remember the Chaplain sitting across from me. When I heard the voice, I first looked at the Chaplain to see if he said it. My interpreter and I had just come from a Vietnamese leprosarium that was run by Catholic nuns.



I was infantry with the 1st Cav, except for a year when I was a Civic Action Officer for the 11th Aviation Group. Our unit sponsored a village that had just been moved from inside Camp Radcliffe to the outside along the Song Ba River and the little town of An Khe.

Our unit had the 227th Assault Helicopter and 229th Assault (Huey) and 228th (Chinook). Our troops contributed \$9,000 toward building a high school because the highest grade in An Khe was the sixth grade. We also had a village pig co-op. I went to Saigon and got 18 small piglets (the pilot and crew of the C-123 were not too happy to be hauling these piglets from Saigon to An Khe). When I left the Republic of Vietnam six months later, there were 147 pigs.

My Vietnamese interpreter was Sgt. Rep, a college graduate who spoke almost perfect English. I had a contact in Charleston, SC who developed an RSVP (Rally Support Vietnam Persons) and he had sent a CONEX (Container, Express) filled with dolls, jump ropes, and other items. After we took Santa Claus (in costume) to our village by helicopter, we still had a lot of items left over. Sgt. Rep suggested that we take the items to the leprosarium in Qui Nhon. I later found out that the Viet Cong looted the leprosarium in 1972, burned all the buildings, and killed the Catholic nuns who ran the program.

As I recall, we had just reached flying altitude when the bullet struck us. I was under the impression that within a couple of minutes or less we turned

around and headed back. I remember the crew member who came back to see what was going on. He ran back to the cockpit and I could see him pumping vigorously. The red liquid was flowing out of the hydraulic line. I don’t recall very much time elapsing from the time of the shot to seeing the rice paddy and thinking that we were crashing.”

Maj. James E. Wood, the Aircraft Commander that day, remembers the flight:

“I remember that flight and think of it often. We took off from LZ English *en route* to An Khe. As we turned toward the water and were over a small village, I heard a couple of pings that sounded like ground fire and realized that we were losing hydraulic pressure. My first thought was to lower the landing gear and hope that it went down and locked. It did and then I shut off the hydraulic system.

The weather was not good at An Khe and the runway at our home base, Phu Cat, was just 1,500 feet of dirt. We were not going to have brakes, so I elected to return to LZ English, which had a decent runway and reverse thrust would stop the airplane. I have often wondered if that was the correct decision.

We contacted operations at Phu Cat. Lt. Col. John E. Jolly, Jr. tried to bring us a part to repair the airplane, but the weather deteriorated at English and he wasn’t able to land, so we ended up spending the night there. I spoke with a few of the passengers. One was

Continued on Page 13

LZ English (from Page 12)

a chaplain who told me that the round came through the seat next to him and between him and a Private. He said he was really glad to see the landing gear come down. So was I. Another said he thought that the red fluid was blood. The landing wasn't too bad, but taxiing was a bit difficult without brakes or nose wheel steering. I had to steer with differential throttles and use reverse thrust on alternating engines. As I recall, it was downhill from the runway to the ramp and there was a big ditch near the taxiway.

I spent the night in the tent with the commander of the small detachment there. He told me he was glad to have us there because we doubled his strength and they were expecting to be overrun. I really didn't need to hear that. There was a lot of artillery fire that night and I asked about it the next morning. The commander said that the ARVN (Army, Republic of Vietnam) Colonel ordered it because he said if there was one Viet Cong in a village, they were all Viet Cong and the village was shelled all night.

The next day, a piece of hose arrived from Phu Cat. The hydraulic line was patched and we left LZ English. As we left, I observed that the village where the round came from was gone. I felt bad about that.

I was, and still am, very glad that no one on the airplane was injured and that no one was in that seat. It's a good thing that Don Alsbro listened to that voice. Maybe it was good to have a chaplain on board."

7th AF DFC Citation S.O. G-1189, 11 Aug 1967

Major James E. Wood distinguished himself by extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as a C-7A Aircraft Commander at Landing Zone English in the Bong Son Plain, Republic of Vietnam, on 8 January 1967. On that date, while making a maximum takeoff, his aircraft was hit

by hostile ground fire which severed a hydraulic line and caused complete loss of the hydraulic system. Due to his outstanding knowledge of emergency procedures, excellent judgment in deciding to make an emergency landing at English, and exceptional composure under fire, he prevented further damage to his disabled aircraft or injury to his passengers. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Major Wood reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

New Military Rifle

from *Fox News.com*



The MXT135 Counter Defilade Target Engagement System has a range of roughly 7,800 feet and is to be deployed in Afghanistan soon.

The rifle's gun sight uses a laser range finder to determine the exact distance to the obstruction, after which, the soldier can add or subtract up to 10 meters from that distance to enable the bullets to clear the barrier and explode above or beside the target. Soldiers will be able to use them to target snipers hidden in trenches rather than calling in air strikes. The 35 millimeter round contains a chip that receives a radio signal from the gun sight as to the precise distance to the target. A patent granted to the bullet's maker, Alliant Tech Systems, reveals that the chip can determine how far it has traveled.

Lt. Col. Christopher Lehner, project manager for the system, described the weapon as a "game-changer" that other nations will try to copy. The Army plans to buy 42,500 MXT135 rifles this year, enough for every member of the infantry [*sic*] and Special Forces, at a

cost of \$11,900 each. Lehner told *Fox News*, "With this weapon system, we take away cover from [enemy targets] forever. Tactics are going to have to be rewritten. The only thing we can see [enemies] being able to do is run away."

The MXT135 appears to be the perfect weapon for street-to-street fighting that troops in Afghanistan have to engage in, with enemy fighters hiding behind walls and only breaking cover to fire occasionally. The weapon's laser finder would work out how far away the enemy was. The U.S. soldier would then add one meter using a button near the trigger. When fired, the explosive round would carry exactly one meter past the wall and explode with the force of a hand grenade above the Taliban fighter.

The Army's project manager for new weapons, Douglas Tamilio, said, "This is the first leap-ahead technology for troops that we've been able to develop and deploy." The weapon is relatively cheap. Mr. Tamilio said, "You could shoot a Javelin missile, and it would cost about \$69,000. These rounds will end up costing \$45.00 apiece."

Lehner added, "This is a game-changer. The enemy has learned to get cover, for hundreds if not thousands of years. Well, they can't do that anymore. We're taking that cover from them and there's only two outcomes: We're going to get you behind that cover or force you to flee." The rifle will initially use high-explosive rounds, but its makers say that it might later use versions with smaller explosive charges that aim to stun rather than kill.



Help!!!

Check your email address on our web site, <http://www.c-7acaribou.com/>. Send any change to:

pathanavan@aol.com

We Will Never Forget

The first USAF Caribou casualties were sustained 4 Oct 1966, when a 17th Aviation Company (AvCo) CV-2, S/N 63-9751, struck Hon Kong mountain west of An Khe, killing all of the crew and all but ten of the 28 passengers aboard. The aircraft was piloted by **Capt. David O. Webster, USAF**, and 1/Lt. **Francis H. Bassaillon, USAF**, with flight mechanics **SSgt. Daniel P. Marlowe, USAF**, and SP4 John T. Bird, USA.

When a 135th AvCo CV-2, S/N 62-4167, crashed in the mountains southwest of Tuy Hoa on 20 Nov 1966, pilots Capt. John W. Clayton, USA and **Capt. Anthony F. Korpics, USAF**, and flight mechanics Specialist 5th Class Arnold Pearson, USA and **TSgt. Glendell E. Yates, USAF**, lost their lives.

A1C Willis A. Karickhoff, USAF, was killed when 135th AvCo CV-2, S/N 61-2405, hit a mountain near An Khe in bad weather, 28 Nov 1966.

Why Me?

by Kris Kristofferson, 1972

Editor's Note: Country singer and songwriter Kris Kristofferson was the son of a USAF Major General. Kristofferson earned a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford University. He later joined the Army where he became a helicopter pilot and completed Ranger school. Kristofferson was stationed in the Federal Republic of Germany in the early 1960's and left the Army in 1965 with the rank of Captain.

"Why Me" is a slow, gospel-like song. Kristofferson gives thanks for a life that goes on despite personal failings. He wonders why grace has been given.

Are there any of us who has never thought, "Why Me? Why am I still standing?"

"Why me Lord what have I ever done
To deserve even one of the pleasures
I've known

Tell me, Lord, what did I ever do
That was worth lovin' you or the kindness
you've shown

Lord help me, Jesus, I've wasted it so
Help me Jesus I know what I am
But now that I know that I've needed
you so

Help me, Jesus, my soul's in your hand

Try me, Lord, if you think there's a
way

I can try to repay all I've taken from
you

Maybe Lord I can show someone else
What I've been through myself, on my
way back to you

Lord help me, Jesus, I've wasted it so
Help me Jesus, I know what I am
But now that I know that I've needed
you so

Help me Jesus, my soul's in your hand

Lord help me Jesus, I've wasted it so
Help me, Jesus, I know what I am
But now that I know that I've needed
you so

Help me Jesus, my soul's in your hand
Jesus, my soul's in your hand."

A Veteran Is...

A veteran is someone who at one point in their life, wrote a blank check made payable to The United States of America for any amount, up to and including their life.

Bou Drops Cargo 2 Miles from DMZ

from *Caribou Courier*, June 1967

Con Thien Special Forces camp is located only two miles from the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone). If you happen to land there you can expect small arms fire on any approach. After landing you can expect a few rounds of 81 mm mortar or a couple of 105 mm howitzer

rounds – anyway it's somewhat "hot."

On 2 May 1967, Maj. Clarence Beardsley, 1/Lt. Raymond Valentine and SSgt. Lewis Shedd, 459th TCS, departed Da Nang AB loaded with ammo for Con Thien. They were to airdrop the load. They arrived at Con Thien and established drop configuration and altitude. Now, flying a drop pattern at 500 feet sometimes invites problems. It did. On the first pass two .50 caliber rounds with explosive heads hit the rear section of the aircraft, one round tearing a hole approximately eight inches wide on top of the fuselage. The other round creased the exterior skin of the tail section. Sgt. Shedd said, "I moved closer to the front of the aircraft." In addition, the load hung up so another pass was required.

On pass two, "Charlie" improved. One round came in behind the cockpit, one round blasted another hole on top of the fuselage, cutting both mixture cables and missing the control cables by inches.

The drop was successful and the crew turned their ventilated Bou toward home. Because of required maintenance, the Bou was returned to Phu Cat. The crew jumped out, looked casually at an occasional hole here and there, pre-flighted another aircraft, and departed for Da Nang. "Another day, another 118 Piasters," called one of the crew.

Editor's Note. The official exchange rate was 118 Piasters per dollar.

Importance of Reading

by Gen. James N. Mattis, USMC
November 20, 2003

Just before Marine General James 'Mad Dog' Mattis was getting ready to deploy with the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force to Iraq in early 2004, one of his colleagues asked him about the importance of reading for military officers who sometimes found themselves "too busy to read."

The legendary general, sometimes referred to as "The Warrior Monk," carted around a personal library of 6,000 books with him everywhere, and he had plenty to say on the topic. His response went viral over e-mail, in the days before Facebook and Twitter:

Military historian Jill R. Russell unearthed the e-mail and posted it to the blog "Strife" by King's College, London in 2013. With Mattis now serving as the Secretary of Defense, it's worth re-reading again.

Here's what General Mattis wrote on November 20, 2003.

"The problem with being too busy to read is that you learn by experience (or by your men's experience), i.e., the hard way. By reading, you learn through others' experiences, generally a better way to do business, especially in our line of work where the consequences of incompetence are so final for young men.

Thanks to my reading, I have never been caught flat-footed by any situation, never at a loss for how any problem has been addressed (successfully or unsuccessfully) before. It doesn't give me all the answers, but it lights what is often a dark path ahead.

With TF (Task Force) 58, I had with me Slim's book (*Editor's Note: "Defeat into Victory" is the memoir of British Field Marshal Viscount William Slim, Commander of the British 14th 'Forgotten' Army in the WW II Burma Campaign.*), books about the Russian

and British experiences in Afghanistan, and a couple others. Going into Iraq, 'The Siege' (about the Brits' defeat at Al Kut in WW I) was required reading for field grade officers. I also had Slim's book; reviewed T. E. Lawrence's 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom,' a good book about the life of Gertrude Bell (the Brit archaeologist who virtually founded the modern Iraq state in the aftermath of WW I and the fall of the Ottoman empire); and 'From Beirut to Jerusalem.' I also went deeply into Liddell Hart's book on Sherman, and Fuller's book on Alexander the Great got a lot of my attention (although I never imagined that my Headquarters would end up only 500 meters from where he lay in state in Babylon).

Ultimately, a real understanding of history means that we face NOTHING new under the sun. For all the "4th Generation of War" intellectuals running around today saying that the nature of war has fundamentally changed, the tactics are wholly new, etc, I must respectfully say... 'Not really.' Alex the Great would not be in the least bit perplexed by the enemy that we face right now in Iraq, and our leaders going into this fight do their troops a disservice by not studying (studying, vice just reading) the men who have gone before us.

We have been fighting on this planet for 5,000 years and we should take advantage of their experience. 'Winging it' and filling body bags as we sort out what works reminds us of the moral dictates and the cost of incompetence in our profession. As commanders and staff officers, we are coaches and sentries for our units: How can we coach anything if we don't know a hell of a lot more than just the TTPs (Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures)? What happens when you're on a dynamic battlefield and things are changing faster than higher HQ can stay abreast? Do you not adapt because you cannot conceptualize faster than the enemy's adaptation? (Darwin has a pretty good theory about the outcome for those who cannot adapt to changing circum-

stance – in the information age things can change rather abruptly and at warp speed, especially the moral high ground which our regimented thinkers cede far too quickly in our recent fights.) And how can you be a sentinel and not have your unit caught flat-footed if you don't know what the warning signs are – that your unit's preps are not sufficient for the specifics of a tasking that you have not anticipated?

Perhaps if you are in support functions waiting on the war fighters to spell out the specifics of what you are to do, you can avoid the consequences of not reading. Those who must adapt to overcoming an independent enemy's will are not allowed that luxury.

This is not new to the USMC approach to war fighting. Going into Kuwait 12 years ago, I read (and reread) Rommel's Papers (remember 'Kampstaffel'?), Montgomery's book ('Eyes Officers'...), 'Grant Takes Command' (need for commanders to get along, 'commanders' relationships' being more important than 'command relationships'), and some others. As a result, the enemy has paid when I had the opportunity to go against them, and I believe that many of my young guys lived because I didn't waste their lives because I didn't have the vision in my mind of how to destroy the enemy at least cost to our guys and to the innocents on the battlefields.

Hope this answers your question.... I will cc my ADC (aide-de-camp) in the event he can add to this. He is the only officer I know who has read more than I.

Semper Fi, Mattis"

Command Guidance

Be polite, be professional, but have a plan to kill everybody you meet.

Gen. James N. Mattis, USMC,
current Secretary of Defense

Operation Babylift

by John Moritz, *Military Times*,
April 25, 2015

With the Viet Cong making their final push toward taking Saigon in April 1975, the fate of thousands of Vietnamese orphans was uncertain until President Gerald Ford ordered remaining forces to evacuate the children.

Forty years after the final flight of Operation Babylift left Vietnam, 20 evacuees and their adopted families gathered Saturday for a reunion along with some of the servicemen who took part in the rescue.

“Operation Babylift is one of the few great things to come from the Vietnam tragedy,” said Lana Mae Noone, organizer of the event staged at the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Noone also is the founder of the website Vietnam Babylift, which aims to connect adoptees, their families and veterans involved with the mission. In all, 2,547 children were rescued and adopted by families in the United States and allied countries.

Noone, 68, of Garden City, New York, adopted her two daughters, Heather and Jennifer, after they were among the last children evacuated to the United States. Heather developed pneumonia on her way to America, and died in May 1975.

“I promised her I would make sure Babylift would never be forgotten,” Noone said.

Dressed in a black *ao dai*, a traditional Vietnamese silk dress, Leah Heslin, 42, said she looked forward to meeting other adult adoptees who, like her, were raised in America, but find interest in their Vietnamese heritage.

“It’s been very exciting, very anxious. I’m kind of nervous,” said Heslin, who attended with her adoptive mother, Carole Heslin, 72. “It brings it back to home a little bit.”

Participants dedicated a plaque inscribed with the names of 138 children, volunteers and soldiers who perished when their C-5A *Galaxy* crashed while

headed to Clark Air Base in the Philippines.

Greg Gmerek, a medic for the 9th Air Evac Squadron, survived the crash.

“Mud was flying at me and I went flying around all over the place,” recalled Gmerek, who was not strapped in because all the seats were filled with two children strapped in each one. “We just started getting the babies out as best we could.”

Gmerek said he broke six ribs and had a partially collapsed lung from the crash.

“I thought about them all the time,” Gmerek said of the children.

Kim Lan Duong said she was orphaned in the streets of Saigon before being flown to Detroit during Operation Babylift, where she was adopted and raised by her single mother and grandmother, Sandy and Violet Howard.

“To be able to see adult adoptees, it warms their hearts to see us grown up,” said Duong, 43, who now lives in Dallas. “They still call us kids and that’s OK.”

1st Complete Engine Built by 483rd CAMS

from *Caribou Courier*, 10 May 67

The 483rd CAMS (Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron) Engine Shop became the proud producers of Vietnam’s first 100% built-up R-2000 engine on 26 April 1967. This was made possible through the diligent efforts of the 483rd CAMS Engine Shop, the outstanding cooperation of the 483rd Material Control Section and the ingenuity of the 483rd Electric Shop, names too numerous to mention.

Upon arrival at Cam Ranh Bay, they were issued 12 Quick Engine Change kits which averaged 55% filled with the required parts. During the period of 1 Jan thru 26 Apr 67, a total of 63 engines were produced averaging 84% complete. Through local manufacture, reclamation and repair of used parts and cooperation of all supporting personnel,

the realization of a 100% complete engine came to be.

The ultimate goal of the Engine Shop is for all engines to be 100% complete, test run, and quality control inspected prior to being placed in the serviceable pool of the engines maintained by this squadron at the three Caribou Operating Locations.

Our hope is that this trend will continue and the 483rd TCW can continue to surpass previous records set by our Army counterparts during their period of Caribou operation.

Cam Ranh Bay Reunion

Sep 28 – Oct 1, 2017

A Cam Ranh Bay Air Base (CRB) reunion will be held at the Crowne Plaza-Dayton, Dayton, OH, Sep 28 – Oct 1, 2017, for all military personnel who were stationed at CRB and their families.

Highlights of the reunion will be tours of the National Museum of the Air Force, Wright-Patterson AFB on Friday and Saturday and a banquet on Saturday evening.

Anyone who was stationed at CRB is encouraged to attach personal CRB photos to the reunion Facebook page.

The reunion registration deadline is July 31, 2017 and the hotel registration deadline is August 29, 2017.

Reunion details and registration forms can be found at the reunion Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/156407821446646>

If interested in attending, you can also contact Diana Westphal by phone (920) 609-5672 or e-mail at:

dwestphal8@new.rr.com



Bananas and Milk Duds

by Rick Reilly, *Sports Illustrated*

This message is for America's most famous athletes: Someday you may be invited to fly in the back seat of one of your country's most powerful fighter jets. Many of you already have: John Elway, John Stockton, Tiger Woods, to name a few. If you get this opportunity, let me urge you, with the greatest sincerity...

Move to Guam.

Change your name.

Fake your own death!

Whatever you do.

Do Not Go!!!

I know.

The U.S. Navy invited me to try it. I was thrilled. I was pumped. I was toast! I should've known when they told me my pilot would be Chip "Biff" King of Fighter Squadron 213 at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach.

Whatever you're thinking a Top Gun named Chip "Biff" King looks like, triple it. He's about six-foot, tan, ice blue eyes, wavy surfer hair, finger-crippling handshake – the kind of man who wrestles dyspeptic alligators in his leisure time. If you see this man, run the other way. Fast.

"Biff" King was born to fly. His father, Jack King, was for years the voice of NASA missions. ("T-minus 15 seconds and counting." Remember?) Chip would charge neighborhood kids a quarter each to hear his dad. Jack would wake up from naps surrounded by nine year-olds waiting for him to say, "We have lift off."

Biff was to fly me in an F-14D *Tomcat*, a ridiculously powerful \$60 million weapon with nearly as much thrust as weight, not unlike Colin Montgomerie. I was worried about getting airsick, so the night before the flight I asked Biff if there was something I should eat the next morning.

"Bananas," he said.

"For the potassium?" I asked.



"No," Biff said, "because they taste about the same coming up as they do going down."

The next morning, out on the tarmac, I had on my flight suit with my name sewn over the left breast. (No call sign, like *Crash* or *Sticky* or *Lead foot*. But, still, very cool.) I carried my helmet in the crook of my arm, as Biff had instructed. If ever in my life I had a chance to nail Nicole Kidman, this was it.

A fighter pilot named "Psycho" gave me a safety briefing and then fastened me into my ejection seat, which, when employed, would "egress" me out of the plane at such a velocity that I would be immediately knocked unconscious.

Just as I was thinking about aborting the flight, the canopy closed over me, and Biff gave the ground crew a thumbs up. In minutes, we were firing nose up at 600 mph. We leveled out and then canopy-rolled over another F-14.

Those 20 minutes were the rush of my life. Unfortunately, the ride lasted 80 minutes. It was like being on the roller coaster at Six Flags Over Hell, only without rails. We did barrel rolls, snap rolls, loops, yanks, and banks. We dived, rose, and dived again, sometimes with a vertical velocity of 10,000 feet per minute. We chased another F-14, and it chased us.

We broke the speed of sound. Sea was sky and sky was sea. Flying at 200 feet we did 90 degree turns at 550 mph, creating a G force of 6.5, which is to say I felt as if 6.5 times my body weight was smashing against me, thereby approximating life as Mrs. Colin Montgomerie.

And I egressed the bananas.

And I egressed the pizza from the night before.

And the lunch before that.

I egressed a box of Milk Duds from the sixth grade.

I made Linda Blair look polite. Because of the G's, I was egressing stuff that never thought would be egressed.

I went through not one airsick bag, but two.

Biff said I passed out. Twice. I was coated in sweat. At one point, as we were coming in upside down in a banked curve on a mock bombing target and the G's were flattening me like a tortilla and I was in and out of consciousness. I realized I was the first person in history to throw down.

I used to know "cool." Cool was Elway throwing a touchdown pass, or Norman making a five-iron bite. But now I really know "cool." Cool is guys like Biff, men with cast-iron stomachs and freon nerves. I wouldn't go up there again for Derek Jeter's black book, but I'm glad Biff does every day, and for less a year than a rookie reliever makes in a home stand.

A week later, when the spins finally stopped, Biff called. He said he and the fighters had the perfect call sign for me. Said he'd send it on a patch for my flight suit.

What is it? I asked.

Two Bags.



Buong Long Evacuation

by Harvey Argenbright [458, 70]



In June 1970, President Richard Nixon announced that American forces would cross approximately twenty miles into Cambodia to destroy sanctuaries of the North Vietnamese. Those of us who were in that area had known that U.S. forces had been operating in Cambodia for a long time and this incursion was an expansion of ongoing efforts to interdict the Ho Chi Minh trail.

After reaching the planned time limit for the incursion into Cambodia, U.S. forces began their pullback into South Vietnam. Many local Cambodians feared the North Vietnamese Army (NVA), which was streaming back into the vacuum created by the withdrawing Americans, would impose severe reprisals on them for helping the Americans.

Reportedly, three thousand Cambodia refugees had assembled at the dirt airfield of Buong Long located west of Pleiku and approximately thirty miles inside Cambodia. When the Air Force was tasked with evacuating the refugees, it quickly became apparent that the C-7A was the only fixed wing aircraft with light enough footprint to operate on the rain-soften dirt runway.

On the morning of 23 June, twelve C-7A aircraft were assembled at Pleiku to attempt the evacuation. After waiting for the weather in Cambodia to improve on 24 June, the first mission to Buong

Long began when it was almost noon. I was the Copilot, Capt. Palmer G. Arnold, the Aircraft Commander, and TSgt. Phil Esparza, Jr. was the Flight Engineer. Our first mission to Buong Long was aborted because the landing gear of our aircraft refused to extend normally when we arrived in Cambodia. We returned to Pleiku where an alternate gear extension was accomplished and we landed uneventfully.

After changing aircraft, we flew to Buong Long three more times that day. The single dirt runway had a small parking ramp and a crude terminal on the west side of the north-south runway at midfield. The Caribous would land and stop just short of the parking area.



Then, they would enter the ramp and pinwheel counter-clockwise until the parking area was full with a maximum of three aircraft.

Each aircraft would drop its cargo ramp and allow the refugees to scramble on board. We had troop seats on each side of the cabin, which were designed to hold twenty-eight passengers. For this mission, the seats were left stowed along the walls and the passengers were packed into the cargo bay standing up. When the cargo bay was full, we closed the door and taxied for takeoff.

After the second takeoff from Buong Long, TSgt. Esparza called the cockpit to ask if we knew anything about de-

livering a baby. A Cambodian woman was having contractions at six-minute intervals. We flew to Pleiku at Max Continuous Power and the baby was born in Pleiku.

On the last mission, TSgt. Esparza waited until the cargo bay was full and then swung the manual hydraulic pump handle at the remaining panicking refugees until he had enough room to close the cargo door. At one point, he looked up to see a baby thrown through the air by its mother who was unable to board the aircraft. In flight, he was usually trapped in the aft cargo compartment near the cargo door due to the densely packed passengers standing between him and the cockpit.

On one trip we carried eighty-two refugees, but Lt. Dickerson transported over one hundred refugees on a single flight and claimed the record. With no idea of our gross weight, we used the takeoff and landing speeds for the maximum weights published and added another ten knots.

The mission required Forward Air Controllers (FAC) and fighter cover. OV-10 FAC's controlled the operation and A-1E *Skyraiders* provided fire support. At first, the ground fire was light, but it increased throughout the day as more and more NVA assembled around the field. By the end of the day,

Continued on Page 19

Boung Long (from Page 18)

the ground fire had become significant. We relied more and more on the directions of the FAC to avoid the ground fire pockets. Additionally, the NVA had begun dropping mortar rounds on the waiting refugees. Obviously, the panic level increased significantly among the refugees.

On our last flight into Buong Long, a panicked Cambodian soldier approached the aircraft from the right wing tip. He was looking at me in the cockpit and did not realize that he was walking into the propeller of the idling engine. One instant he was looking at me and smiling. The next, his headless body was convulsing on top of an overstuffed duffel bag.

After returning to Pleiku, we had dinner, which included a fair amount of Scotch, and went to bed around 0100. At 0300, a Sergeant from Operations pounded on the door and said to get dressed. We were going back to Boung Long to extract the three-man Combat Control Team, call sign *Tailpipe*, which remained behind and was in immediate danger of being overrun. They were the only Americans there and were with a force of South Vietnamese Rangers.

The briefing in Ops said that we were to land on the blacked-out airfield, pickup the team, and depart. An AC-119 gunship with the call sign *Shadow* was to be at five thousand feet over the airfield providing heavy fire around the U.S. position. When we got on final, they would illuminate the area with the huge lamp they carried beneath their aircraft and turn it off when we landed. That was to be the only illumination. We were to take off blacked-out.

Five thousand feet was thought to be safely above the ground fire envelope. A second C-7A accompanied us and orbited at five thousand feet to be in reserve in the event we were shot down.

When we arrived at the field, *Shadow* was circling the field focusing their considerable firepower around the perimeter of the runway. A rubber



plantation parallel to the runway provided excellent cover for NVA forces who could fire unrestricted toward the runway.

After aligning the aircraft with where we thought the runway was, we notified *Shadow*, who was positioned above the runway, that we were ready to attempt the extraction. *Shadow* turned on his massive light, which burned for a few seconds and was then shot out. That told us that there was at least .51 cal. AAA (antiaircraft artillery) in the area.

Capt. Arnold's Plan B was to have the team activate a strobe light and we would use a compass heading to line up on the strobe. Plan B was discarded when we could not find the strobe among all the flashes from the small arms fire.

His Plan C was to have the team launch a parachute flare and we would use the compass to line up on it. The flare burned out when we thought we were on final. Capt. Arnold then told *Tailpipe* that we were going to turn on the rotating beacon for a couple of seconds and he wanted them to tell us if it looked like we were aligned with the runway. When the switch was flipped on for about three seconds it was like the switch was connected to hundreds of lights on the ground – which were small arms firing toward us.

We landed and stopped beside the team. They scrambled aboard thinking that we were going to load their Jeep and trailer with thousands of dollars worth of radios and Secret documents. Arnold told them that we were leaving and that they had better strap in.

On departure, there was more ground fire and, when we got some altitude,

we informed the FAC that the team had left their Secret communications info on the jeep. The FAC brought in concentrated ordinance on the jeep and it was thought that the material was destroyed. As we departed the area, the gray of predawn was evident. If we had been twenty minutes later, the mission would have been impossible. The light was sufficient to see that the NVA had overrun the field as we left the area.

Ground fire as viewed from the cockpit always appeared less than it actually was. TSgt. Esparza had a better view aft of the aircraft through the open cargo door. He and Lt. John W. Staley, the Copilot of the reserve C-7A, stated that .51 cal. weapons had been placed on each side of the final course which, along with hundreds of small arms, fired at the aircraft on final. Almost all fire failed to lead the aircraft enough because they were firing at the sound of the aircraft and the tracers passed behind us.

Several weeks later Capt. Arnold was flown to Saigon to receive the Silver Star from Vice President Spiro Agnew.



Proteus, a tandem wing, twin-engine research aircraft built by Scaled Composites, 1998

7th AF Silver Star Citation S.O. G-4135, 16 Sep 1970

Captain Palmer G. Arnold distinguished himself by gallantry in connection with military operations against an opposing armed force at a Cambodian airfield from 24 June 1970 to 25 June 1970. On those dates, Captain Arnold, a C-7A Aircraft Commander, made three sorties into the besieged airfield, which was under heavy hostile attack and, with personal disregard for safety, evacuated 207 refugees. Later, with less than minimum crew rest, he returned during the hours of darkness to rescue a combat control team which was in grave danger of being captured. Captain Arnold's courage, his disregard for personal safety and outstanding airmanship enabled him to successfully make a hazardous night approach and landing into an unlighted airstrip under sustained fire and to safely rescue the entire combat control team. By his gallantry and devotion to duty, Captain Arnold has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

7th AF DFC Citation S.O. G-4392, 5 Oct 1970

First Lieutenant Harvey S. Argenbright distinguished himself by heroism while participating in aerial flight as a C-7A Pilot in Southeast Asia from 24 June 1970 to 25 June 1970. On those days, Lieutenant Argenbright, a C-7A Pilot, made three sorties into the besieged airfield located in Cambodia, which was under heavy attack, and with personal disregard for safety evacuated 207 refugees. Later, with less than minimum crew rest, his aircrew returned during the hours of darkness to rescue a combat control team which was in grave danger of being captured. The outstanding heroism and selfless devotion to duty displayed by Lieutenant Argenbright reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

B-17 Navigator's Log



11-26-43, Mission No. 11.

Paris, France. Another ball bearing works in the center of Paris. Carried six 1,000 lb. demolition bombs. Only one Wing was going. Our Group led. We flew in No. 2 position in the lead squadron. Rest of the Wings went to Bremen, Germany. Briefed at 0300. Took off at 0630 and left England at 1030 at 23,000 feet. It was 35 degrees below zero and we had an 85 mph tailwind. Supposed to have P-47 escort and Spits. Got to IP (Initial Point) at 1115 and Paris was completely covered by clouds. Only thing visible was the Eiffel Tower sticking up through the clouds. Did not drop our bombs and headed home.

150 German fighters picked us up. We had P-47's at the time, which helped a lot, but the Germans were eager, determined, and plenty smart today so they got in plenty.

Flak hit one Fort at Paris which then dove down and crashed into another. Two minutes later fighters knocked a Fort out and followed it down. Two minutes later another Fort went down burning with no chutes out. About five minutes later another Fort went down burning and exploded in a forest. Saw three chutes out. About five minutes later, another went down. Ten minutes later saw three chutes float past and farther on another B-17 burning on the ground. I got three good shots from the nose gun. Hutch dropped out at the French coast with two feathered engines but he got back to England OK. We got to England at 1200 and home at 1245.

Germans seem to have as much or more than they had three months ago. [Their] planes looked new and pilots were plenty smart coming out of the sun. Saw some good dogfights between P-47's and Me-109's.

Caribou Kill

by Frank Godek [537, 69]

Upon returning to Pleiku after one of our day drops at Dak Seang and going upstairs to Operations for a cup of coffee, I was approached by Major Brown. He told me our crew just got an EKFP.

I said, "Sir, what is an EKFP?" He said it meant Enemy Killed by Falling Pallet. I said, "Huh?"

Major Brown said that when the Special Forces camp personnel went to retrieve the load, they saw two hands sticking out from under the pallet. One VC (Viet Cong) had crawled under the wires and penetrated the camp, only to have a pallet land on him.

Bingo! A CARIBOU KILL!!

The next day, when we returned to fly another airdrop, we noticed that an extremely efficient and conscientious maintainer had painted a stick man on the side of the aircraft!

483rd TCW Flies 50,000th Sortie

from *Caribou Courier*, 10 May 67

On 30 Apr 67 the 483rd Troop Carrier Wing flew its 50,000th sortie since taking over the C-7A Caribou aircraft from the Army on 1 January 1967.

The 537th Troop Carrier Squadron, commanded by Lt. Col. Charles C. Smith, 48 of Vernon, TX, had the honor of flying this sortie.

The crew consisting of Maj. Paul F. Pulse II, Aircraft Commander, 36 of Hillsboro, OH; Capt. Joe H. Roberts, Copilot, 32 of Whitwell, TN; and A1C Glenn L. Davis, Flight Mechanic, 42 of Brooklyn, NY flew eighteen combat injured 1st Cavalry troops from Landing Zone English to An Khe Army Airfield. On board were TSgt. Odell Broom, Jr., 33 of Winston Salem, NC and TSgt. William Williams Jr., 34 of Brooklyn, NY, Aeromedical Technicians of the 903rd Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron.

Air Action at A Shau

by John T. Collier

AFA Magazine, October 2004

In the northwest corner of South Vietnam, in Thua Thien province lies the narrow A Shau Valley. Running north-south for 25 miles, it is one mile wide, covered in elephant grass and flanked by deeply forested mountains rising to 5,500 feet. Bisected with a hard crusted dirt road with A Luoi to the north and the A Shau Special Forces (SF) camp to the south, this valley was the scene of some of the hardest combat between U.S. forces and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and was one of the strategic focal points of the Vietnam war.

Because of its importance to the North Vietnamese the A Shau became a major battleground from the earliest days of the American involvement in South Vietnam. The Special Forces established their camp in 1964 at the lower end of the A Shau Valley. It was two miles from Laos and was a constant problem for the North Vietnamese. From this camp, the Green Berets could observe and impede traffic on the Ho Chi Minh Trail on the other side of the border. They were also astride the infiltration route toward Hue and Da Nang.

Being in a very remote corner of the Central Highlands, the SF camp was extraordinarily reliant on air power. Material to build the camp had been flown in by USAF C-123's. Resupply was by C-123's and Army CV-2 Caribous which made landings and airdrops several times a week.

The camp consisted of some barracks buildings, a triangular fort, and an airstrip made of pierced steel planking. The fort had a mortar bunker at each corner. The walls consisted of steel plate and sandbags. The airstrip was east of the camp, just outside the barbed wire perimeter.

The valley lay beyond the range of U.S. artillery, so its only defensive support was from the air. The area around the camp was six miles long and a little more than a mile wide. Hills rose up on

both sides, ascending 1,500 feet above the valley floor. The mountain valleys were often hidden by clouds and low lying fog. The valley was called "the tube" by the pilots who had to fly there.



In February 1966, the NVA decided to put the camp out of business and moved a fresh regiment down the Trail to join the 325th NVA Division, which was operating in the vicinity of Hue.

On March 5, two NVA defectors walked into the camp at A Shau and warned that an attack was coming on March 11 or 12. They said the 325th Division was about seven kilometers east of the valley. U.S. aircraft promptly struck that location.

On March 7, C-123's brought in reinforcements, increasing the strength of the camp to 17 Green Berets and 368 South Vietnamese irregulars and Chinese Nung mercenaries.

March 9, 1966

The attack came sooner than expected. About 2 AM enemy bombardment began, emanating from the surrounding hills. Mortars, artillery, and rocket-propelled grenades pounded the camp, killing two Americans and wounding 30 of the camp's defenders. The barrage, which stopped at dawn, set the buildings and the supply dump afire. Some 2,000 NVA regulars were situated to take the fort. Until the clouds lifted (some were hanging as low as 200 feet) air strikes were not feasible.

The NVA force prepared to rush the fort, but visibility was improving. At 11:20 AM, with the cloud ceiling at 400 feet, a USAF AC-47 gunship, *Spooky 70*, got through the clouds and flew up the valley at treetop level, strafing the attackers. On the gunship's second

pass, it was hit hard by ground fire. The right engine was torn from its mounts. Seconds later, the other engine was knocked out. The bullet-riddled AC-47 crash landed on a mountain slope, five miles farther up the valley,

The crew established defensive positions around the AC-47. Capt. Willard Collins, pilot, and SSgt. R.E. Foster were killed by intensive NVA machine gun fire. 1/Lt. Delbert Peterson, copilot, was killed when he charged a NVA position as a helicopter rescued the other three crew members. Capt. Collins and 1/Lt. Peterson were posthumously awarded the Air Force Cross.

With the gunship gone, the C-130 Airborne Command Post diverted two A-1E's from the 1st Air Commando Squadron at Pleiku, call sign *Hobo*, and sent them to the aid of the A Shau SF camp. Leading the A-1E flight was USAF Maj. Bernard F. Fisher, a 39 year-old fighter pilot from Kuna, Idaho. Fisher had flown jet aircraft in the Air



Defense Command (ADC) before coming to Vietnam. When he buckled into the propeller driven A-1E, he still wore his helmet with the silhouette of an F-104 painted on the side.

Also known as the *Spad*, the single-engine A-1E *Skyraider* was undeniably an old airplane, but it was well suited to a number of missions. It was adapted from the Douglas AD-5 dive-bomber the Navy had flown in Korea. It mounted four 20 mm machine guns and carried a wide assortment of ordnance. Cruising speed was 240 mph. It had exceptional endurance and could stay airborne for six to eight hours. It's ability to fly for long periods at low altitude

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Battle of A Shau (from Page 21)

made it ideal for close air support. The A-1E's also had two seats side by side.

Diverted to A Shau after the gunship crashed, Fisher and his wing man, Bruce Wallace, found the mountains blanketed by clouds. Upon arrival, Fisher began probing to find the canyon in which the camp lay. On his third attempt, he emerged from the overcast and barely missed colliding with a helicopter that had just come from A Shau with wounded aboard. The helicopter pilot directed Fisher toward a saddle in the mountains, where he found an opening in the clouds about five miles northwest of the camp. He and Wallace went through the hole and flew down the valley at very low level. The enemy AAA (antiaircraft artillery) was intense.

Airborne Command Post told Fisher to destroy the AC-47 before the NVA captured its weapons. Fisher assigned that task to Wallace who dropped six bombs on the wreckage and obliterated it while Fisher went to the direct assistance of the fort. For the next several hours, Fisher and Wallace collected arriving aircraft above the clouds and led them down into the valley. Fisher guided an HH-3C helicopter that came to evacuate the badly wounded. He also led A-1E's in a strike to break up a force that was massing for attack.

Two C-123's and two Caribous penetrated the overcast to make successful munitions drops. The mountains were tight on all sides, and forward visibility was less than half a mile. They began taking fire seven miles north of the camp. Fisher suppressed the ground fire as the transports airdropped supplies for the fort from an altitude of 50 feet. One of the C-123's was badly damaged but made it back to Da Nang.

Low on fuel, Fisher went through the clouds one more time to help a Forward Air Controller (FAC) lead two B-57 bombers down the valley. In all, Fisher spent about two hours under the clouds. He made an emergency landing at Da Nang, 20 minutes away, with almost no

fuel left in his tank.

Thirty-one missions were flown: Air Force 17, the Marine Corps 10, the Army two and the South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) two.



Maj. Fisher would be awarded the Silver Star for his role as on-scene commander on March 9, and Wallace would receive the Distinguished Flying Cross. However, Fisher had not yet seen the last of the A Shau Valley.

March 10, 1966

On March 10, the attack resumed at 2 AM. The NVA shelled the camp relentlessly, and, shortly before 4 AM, launched an assault on the southern side. Before daylight, the attack broke through the barbed wire perimeter and breached the south wall. The defenders were pushed into the northern part of the fort and the NVA dug in between the airstrip and the camp.

Two C-123's and an AC-47 dropped flares throughout the night. Radar bombing of enemy positions by Marine Corps A-4's began just after 5 AM. Fire support was continuous from Air Force and Marine aircraft. Resupply ended after Caribou airdrops descended into enemy hands. About 11 AM the defenders reported that they could hold out for no more than another hour and that airdrops to resupply them with ammunition should stop, since they could not retrieve the bundles.

Bernie Fisher and his wingman that day, Capt. Francisco "Paco" Vazquez, were en route to provide air support to Army forces near Kontum when they received an emergency radio call to divert to A Shau. Fisher's call sign was *Hobo 51*, and Vazquez's was *Hobo 52*.

By 11:15 AM, *Hobo* flight had joined numerous other aircraft that were stacked and circling at 8,000 feet and higher above the valley. They had not yet gone to the aid of the camp because of the danger of running into mountains hidden by the cloud cover.

One of the other A-1 flights in the stack was led by Maj. Dafford W. "Jump" Myers from the 602nd Fighter Squadron at Qui Nhon. Myers was *Surf 41*, and his wing man, Capt. Hubert King, was *Surf 42*. Myers was an old friend Fisher had known back in ADC. He had been nicknamed "Jump" when he was a soda jerk in high school. Myers was a hard-bitten chain-smoker who once made his living running a billiard parlor.

Myers suggested that there might be an opening to the west. Fisher went to see, found a hole, and called on Myers and King to follow him and Vazquez into the valley. Fisher told the other A-1E flight to stay in orbit above the clouds. There was not enough room in the valley for six airplanes to operate, so Capt. Jon T. Luke Lucas, *Hobo 27*, and Capt. Dennis B. Hague, *Hobo 28*, continued to circle.

Fisher, Vazquez, Myers, and King flew down the valley in trail formation. It was too tight to go in side by side. The cloud ceiling in the valley was at 800 feet. Better than the previous day, but the visibility also helped the enemy gunners, who were shooting down on the aircraft from the 1,500 foot hillsides.

The defenders had fallen back into a bunker at the northwest corner of the fort. The NVA was making a ground attack, so the A-1's flew three strafing runs, which stalled the attack.

On the first run, King's aircraft was hit in the canopy, shattering the Plexiglas. He had to break off and go to Da Nang. On the second pass, Myers' airplane was hit by shells of a heavy caliber. His engine conked out and the cockpit filled with smoke. At 400 feet, he was too low to use a parachute.

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Battle of A Shau (from Page 22)

“I’ve been hit and hit hard”, Myers radioed.

“You’re on fire and burning clear back past your tail,” Fisher replied.

“Rog,” Myers said. “I’ll have to put her down on the strip.”

Myers’ cockpit was filled with smoke. He couldn’t see, so Fisher talked him down. At the same time, Fisher laid down suppressive fire in front of Myers and gave battle instructions to the other aircraft.

Myers was going too fast to land on the short runway, so he would have to belly slide in. He jettisoned his bombs and retracted his landing gear, but his attempt to release the center line fuel tank failed. The fuel tank exploded on contact with the ground. *Surf 41* skidded about 800 feet, trailing fire, then veered off the runway on the west side and exploded. Incredibly, Myers survived. Fisher saw him clamber out of the airplane and run to a ditch between the airstrip and the fort, where he was screened by a clump of weeds.

Fisher called in Hague and Lucas. “It was like flying inside Yankee Stadium with the people in the bleachers firing at you with machine guns,” Hague said.

Vazquez, meanwhile, was operating with a dead radio.

The A-1E’s put down saturated fire, driving back the NVA troops who were trying to get to Myers. The Green Berets later said the attack wiped out a company of the North Vietnamese.

As the A-1E’s continued their strikes, Fisher called for a rescue helicopter. Ten minutes later, the command post said the helicopter was at least 20 minutes out. Fisher figured it would not get there in time. It wouldn’t be long before the NVA closed in on Myers and killed him.

Fisher thought about going to get Myers. The runway looked short. He called the Command Post and asked the length. It was 3,500 feet, he was told. That would be long enough.

Even in the best of conditions, it was

almost suicidal to land an aircraft as large and slow as the A-1E while exposed to direct enemy fire. Fisher said in his 2004 book, *Beyond the Call of Duty*. “A helicopter crew can fire their weapons from the side doors to hold the enemy at bay while executing a rescue, but I’d be defenseless while sitting on the ground.

It made no logical sense, but I felt a strong impression that I should do this. Jump was one of the family. One of the fellows we flew with and I couldn’t stand by and watch him get murdered without at least trying to rescue him.”

The odds getting out were not good. He would be landing in a crossfire from 20 anti-aircraft gun positions that lined the valley. The enemy also had hundreds of automatic weapons. The runway was a major hazard. The pierced steel planking was slick, and shards of it torn by the mortars and bombs were sticking up and could rip airplane tires to shreds. The runway was cratered and littered with shell casings, pieces of Myers’ aircraft, and other debris.

Fisher counted on the other A-1E’s to provide him fire support. He approached the airstrip from the north, which gave him the advantage of landing into the wind. Unfortunately, the wind was also blowing thick smoke from fires ignited by the bombs and napalm in his direction, obscuring his vision. When he broke out of the smoke, he saw that he was over the runway but too far along it to stop the airplane in the distance remaining. As he passed by at low level, he caught a glimpse of Myers.

He powered up, holding the aircraft a few feet above the ground to avoid ground fire, made an S-turn, and approached the runway from the opposite direction of his first attempt.

The other three A-1E’s continued to strafe to cover Fisher as he went in. Vazquez went “Winchester” (out of ammo) on the first pass. After three more passes, the others ran out of ammunition, too.

“I’m Winchester”, Hague declared.

“So am I”, said Lucas. “Lets keep making passes, though. Maybe they don’t know it.”

Fisher touched down at the very end of the field, stood on the brakes, and skidded down the runway. His brakes began fading from heat at 2,000 feet. The landing attempt was successful, but violent braking and rudder action were not always successful in avoiding debris on the runway. Maj. Fisher utilized all his flying skill to miss mortar craters and pieces of Myers’ A-1E.

Fisher had been told wrong about the length of the runway. It was 2,500 feet, not 3,500. It was too short for an A-1E under any circumstances. He overran the runway onto some grass and crossed a small embankment, which slowed him down. As he swung the aircraft around, he slid into a fuel storage area. His wings passed over the tops of some 55 gallon drums, although he hit several of them with the tail of the airplane.

Fisher taxied 1,800 feet back along the runway in full view of the enemy. He saw Myers waving his arms as he passed by. It took Fisher about 100 feet to stop. He couldn’t see Myers, who was running behind the airplane, off to the right side, with bullets following him along. Myers later said it was the fastest dash an old man of 46 ever made. Fisher expected Myers to climb into the cockpit momentarily. When he didn’t, Fisher figured Myers must have been hit. He unbuckled and set the brake to go looking for him.

As Fisher climbed out on the right side of the airplane, he saw two little red beady eyes trying to crawl up the back of the wing. It was Myers, his clothes burned and muddy and his eyes reddened by smoke.

Fisher had left the engine running fairly fast, ready for a quick getaway, and the airflow from the big four-bladed propeller was blowing Myers back as he tried to reach the cockpit. Fisher cut power to idle, risking a stall. As bullets continued to strike the aircraft, he

Continued on Page 24

Battle of A Shau (from Page 23)

pulled Myers into the cockpit head-first.

Myers first words were, "You dumb son of a bitch, now neither of us will get out of here." He drank some water from Fisher's canteen and asked for a cigarette. Fisher did not have any.

As Fisher pulled Myers aboard, Lucas, who had taken a severe hit in his hydraulic system, led Hague and Vazquez in a dry pass over the camp. The three *Spads* went hurtling by at low level. It was enough to hold the NVA back momentarily.

Turning his aircraft around, Maj. Fisher saw that he had less than two-thirds of an already too short airstrip ahead of him. Calling on all his skill, he applied power and worked his way through wreckage and debris, gaining enough speed to lift off at the overrun. Flying just above the ground at insufficient airspeed to climb, he gradually built up speed, still under intense hostile fire, and began a climb into the 800 foot overcast above the valley.

It was reported that defenders in the fort cheered as Fisher's A-1E roared down the strip and rose into the air.

Fisher and Myers flew to Pleiku, where the medics met them at the flight line. Myers was not badly hurt, although he was singed, covered in soot, and smelled awful, according to Fisher.

Myers wanted to buy Fisher a year's worth of whiskey, but Fisher didn't even drink coffee. Instead, Myers gave him a Nikon camera engraved, *A Shau, March 10, 1966*.

Fisher's airplane had 19 holes in it. There were 23 in Vazquez's.

In all, 201 air strikes were flown in support of the fort on March 10. Of these, 103 were by the Marine Corps, 67 by the USAF, 19 by the Navy, and 12 by the VNAF. Including Myers' A-1E and the AC-47 gunship, six Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps aircraft were shot down in the Battle of A Shau.

Fisher was the first airman in the Vietnam War to receive the Medal of Honor. It was presented by President Johnson

at the White House, January 19, 1967. Fisher's wife, Realla, and their five sons were present for the ceremony.

The aircraft Fisher flew in the A Shau Valley later crashed and burned at Pleiku as it was returning from a mission. However, it was recovered and restored. In 1967, it was flown by none other than "Jump" Myers from California to the Air Force Museum in Dayton, OH, where it can be seen today.

Editor's Note. I have two connections to the Battle of A Shau. First, in March 1966, my father, Maj. Sydney Lester, was the USAF Public Information Officer at Pleiku. He broke the story of Maj. Fisher's daring rescue and coordinated the story with the national news agencies. For his work on the Fisher story at A Shau, Maj. Lester received the Orville Wright Award from the Aviation/Space Writer's Association in May 67.

Second, Capt. Jerry Meek was the navigator on Spooky 70, the AC-47 shot down on 9 Mar 66. Jerry was wounded at A Shau and spent two years in hospitals and rehab before he returned to active flying status. Jerry and I flew on the same C-130 crew for several years in the 7406th Support Squadron at Rhein-Main AB. I heard the story of the AC-47 shoot down, crash, and rescue many times, always accompanied by some serious drinking. Jerry had been an A-26 navigator flying out of Thailand before going to AC-47's. He had plenty of stories to tell.

Return To A Shau

May 1968

From *Caribou Airlines Vol. II*:

"In the second quarter of 1968, the geographical area of operation remained much the same as during the first quarter, with two notable exceptions.

During the extensive Khe Sanh siege, the 1st Cav, along with U.S. Marine and Vietnamese forces, proceeded to open Highway 9 into the Khe Sanh perimeter. Landing Zone Stud was established on Highway 9, approximately 12 miles northeast of Khe Sanh, in

order to supply the troops clearing the road. From March through April, the squadron flew daily supply sorties into this landing zone from the 1st Cav base camp at Camp Evans. During this time, the weather was often bad and ceilings low. Due to a lack of reliable radar, the aircraft were often forced to fly up the highway from Dong Ha at low levels, which exposed them to small arms ground fire. Thanks to a good job done by the 1st Cav, however, only minor ground fire was experienced as crews flew missions along the southern edge of the DMZ. As the siege of Khe Sanh was lifted, flights to this landing zone decreased to the point that only an occasional mission was flown during May. At this time, the 1st Cav was withdrawn from the Landing Zone, which was then supplied by truck and helicopter.

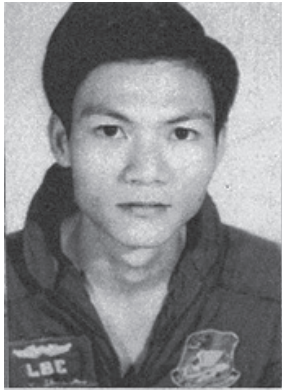
During Operation PEGASUS, the first fixed wing aircraft to land in the A Shau Valley since Medal of Honor winner, Maj. Bernard F. Fisher, landed there and rescued his fellow A-1 Skyraider pilot over a year before, was a C-7A piloted by the squadron Operations Officer, Lt. Col. Stogdill, and his copilot, 1/Lt. James E. Laney.

The actions of Lt. Col. Stogdill and his crew on 2 May 68 are reflected in the Air Medal citation for Lt. Laney:

'First Lieutenant James E. Laney, Jr. distinguished himself by meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight as a C-7A Copilot in Southeast Asia on 2 May 1968. On that date, Lieutenant Laney coordinated with ground controllers for a safe approach and departure through known hostile ground fire to resupply friendly forces at Landing Zone Stallion. While air strikes were being conducted against hostile positions one half mile from the airfield, Lieutenant Laney was a member of the first crew to safely land a fixed wing aircraft in the A Shau Valley in more than two years. The professional skill and airmanship displayed by Lieutenant Laney reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.'

My Caribou Flight Mechanic Training

by Be Van Le [VNAF 431 Sq, 71]



For one year, I took C-119 basic Flight Mechanic (FM) training, then I started working with the 415th Cargo Squadron (CS) stationed at the South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) 5th Air Division, Tan Son Nhut AB. I retrained in the C-47. One year, I flew 600 flight hours in the C-47.

In September 1971, half of the FM in the 415th CS (*Blue Dragon*) went to Phan Rang AB for training in the C-7A Caribou. MSgt. Howard was our Caribou FM ground training instructor for two months, then we started flight training in the Caribou.

Early one morning, I met my Instructor Flight Mechanic. He was not a very large person like most Americans. I was impressed with his smooth, shining, combed hair. He look smart, like rock singer Elvis Presley with a nice voice, a pistol swinging from a belt hanging around his waist. He looked like a Texas cowboy in movies I often watched in the theaters. He introduced himself as SSgt. Lott and asked my name. I answered, "Sgt. Le."

He shook my hand and said, "Le, on our first training mission today, we will fly to an outpost. Follow me to get your equipment. He talked as we walked to the Supply Shop like a pair of old friends. He chose a medium flight helmet from a rack. Handing it to me, he said, "Try this one." He guessed my helmet fit exactly. Standing in front of the Supply section, he asked: "What do

you like for your flight lunch?" Fried chicken was a favorite food for the Vietnamese. I answered without thinking, "Fried chicken, please." We got along with each other so well right from the first moment we met.

On my first two training flights, SSgt. Lott was very busy training me. At each step of the Exterior Inspection of the aircraft, he stood for a moment to explain how each part worked and the limits to fly safely. We walked slowly around the Exterior Inspection. I noted in my own Vietnamese notebook, not all, but a part of what he was saying.

In the same way, he taught me the Interior and Top Aircraft Inspections. He showed me what a Flight Mechanic does during flight. I tried hard to understand, but I received only a small part of his teaching due to my limited English. For many months I worked on my own. I fell in love with C-7A Caribou Technical Order -2. It became my pillow and I used an English-Vietnamese dictionary, noting the Vietnamese meaning of each English letter on all the -2 pages on systems, where I discovered all of the Caribou's secrets. It helped to save my life flying and my survival after the Vietnam War. It helped me be confident as I became a valuable Caribou Flight Mechanic. I thought I might become a VNAF C-7A Caribou FM instructor in the future, which was my bigger dream. If I had a chance to work for the civilian Air Vietnam, I would earn three times the salary that the VNAF paid me. My life would change for the better, like our senior, experienced FM who was working for Air Vietnam.

As we flew back to the base from the outpost, I was tired and lay on the passenger seat to take a little nap. SSgt. Lott did not allow me to take a nap. He sat on my belly to wake me up to study. He taught me to identify the aircraft radios on the right console behind the copilot seat. He pointed the VHF, the UHF, the HF, and the FM and told me to repeat after him. Then he explained the hydraulic reservoir on the left hand side, how to check and how to refill it.

"Better you remember them, okay?" he said. He was a very responsible FM Instructor. He did not allow me to take a nap, though, even when I was tired with nothing to do during the flight back to home base.

On a third training flight, SSgt. Lott told me, "Today is your turn; you do your own aircraft inspection like I showed you." He walked behind and watched my Exterior Inspection, starting from the left wing tip. I pointed my finger to the objects that we needed to inspect more than just talking. I tried to remember what he did, but I forgot many parts. He stopped and explained which parts were important and where we had to pay special attention. He pointed his flashlight to several landing gear parts. He said, "Le, look at the strut. If it shows less than 6 inches, it is not acceptable. Check all the landing gear hydraulic lines. The hydraulic line connecting nut must not be loose, no oil leaks. Look at the brake disk, too." SSgt. Lott was very thorough.

On my first training flight as the primary FM, our C-7A Caribou moved onto the Phan Rang runway to take off. Our crew was a USAF Major as Instructor Pilot (I don't remember his name), 1st Lieutenant. Do Cu Ba, VNAF (Copilot trainee), SSgt. Lott (Instructor Flight Mechanic), Sgt. Le (myself, as VNAF Flight Mechanic trainee), and Khu Hung as loadmaster.

The pilot requested takeoff permission from the Phan Rang tower and SSgt. Lott allowed me to do the Flight Mechanic job. He sat in a passenger seat next to me, filling out the daily in-flight information form. The pilot released the brakes, pushing the throttles to maximum power for takeoff. Our aircraft started rolling, gaining speed as it went down the runway. I carefully observed all the engine indicators at the center of the pilot's panel. Suddenly, I saw something wrong with the RPM indicator. The two RPM indicators

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FM Training (from Page 25)

showed different speeds. Number one RPM showed less than 2250 RPM, but number two showed 2700 RPM (maximum power for takeoff).

I quickly made up my mind to stop the airplane before it lifted off. I pressed the intercom button and called, "Abort! Abort! Abort!" just before we lifted off the ground.

SSgt. Lott looked at me strangely, shouting, "What was wrong? What was wrong?" as the pilot pulled the throttles back and turned the aircraft onto the taxiway. I took off my seat belt and explained to SSgt. Lott, "The left propeller RPM didn't reach 2700 RPM for takeoff."

The pilots parked the aircraft, set the parking brake, and rechecked the left RPM. They tested it twice, full throttle and propeller full increase. The RPM indicator showed less than 2300 RPM. The Pilot contacted Base Operations to change the airplane.

We took almost 45 minutes checking the new aircraft and we took off later. We made a safe landing at Plateau Gi, a remote Montagnard village with mountains and a beautiful waterfall.

When we got back to Phan Rang AB, before we returned our borrowed equipment to the Personal Equipment shop, SSgt. Lott said, "Come with me!" He led me to a large shop with several USAF maintenance personnel there. He shook hands with an older maintenance man and introduced me to him. SSgt. Lott told me the man was the USAF supervisor of the Propeller Shop and proudly talked a little about me and that I aborted the takeoff that morning on the runway and why. Then, we went to the Engine Shop and met another chief. We returned our equipment and we went back to the Caribou squadron where he talked with MSgt. Howard, our ground instructor trainer, about our abort.

It was a good day.

537th FAC Team Speeds Airlift

from *Caribou Courier*, 10 May 67

The 537th Troop Carrier Squadron in aid of the 1st Cavalry (Cav) Division has set up a radio control jeep that goes to the forward areas to set up the loads that will be airlifted into the airstrips and also program what will be taken out. This helps the crews coming in or going out in setting up the aircraft for a certain load and cuts ground time to a minimum.

This operation is headed by TSgt. Malloy, Operations NCOIC, and by the 1st Cav Movement Control. Since this operation has been in effect, this team has been praised by the aircrews and all personnel involved and letters of appreciation have been received by the team for their outstanding work. With this Forward Air Control (FAC) team, it has been possible for the C-7A aircraft to move, with the help of C-130 aircraft, an entire regiment back to its home base in record time.

Information Request

A C-7A Caribou crashed on July 25, 1968, killing my brother, Captain Kenneth James Hoffman 457th TAS. Only in the last few years, I learned that Ken was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for flight achievements on 22 Feb 1968.

I have been unable to learn many details of the missions he flew. I was just wondering if there is anyone who knew Kenneth or who flew with him that can tell me details about his missions, especially during Tet 1968. I would appreciate learning whatever I can about his time in Vietnam.

Thanks.

Lorie Leo

3510 Cumberland Ridge Rd NE

North Liberty, IA 52317

319.626.6144

lleo@southslope.net

Precise Navigation!



The passenger steamer *SS Warrimoo* was quietly knifing its way through the waters of the mid-Pacific on its way from Vancouver to Australia. The navigator had just finished working out a star fix and brought the Master, Captain John Phillips, the result.

The ship's position was latitude 0 S 31' N and longitude 179 S 30' W. The date was 31 December 1899.

"Know what this means?" First Mate Payton broke in, "We are only a few miles from the intersection of the Equator and the International Date Line."

Captain Phillips was prankish enough to take full advantage of the opportunity for achieving the navigational freak of a lifetime.

He called his navigators to the bridge to check and double check the ship's position. He changed course slightly so as to bear directly on his mark.

Then he adjusted the engine speed. The calm weather and clear night worked in his favor.

At midnight the Master ensured that the *Warrimoo* lay still on the equator at exactly the point where it crossed the International Date Line!

The consequences of this bizarre position were many:

The forward part (bow) of the ship was in the Southern Hemisphere at the middle of summer.

The rear (stern) was in the Northern Hemisphere and in the middle of winter.

The date in the port part of the ship was 31 December 1899.

To starboard, it was 1 January 1900.

This ship was therefore not only in two different days, two different months, two different years, and two different seasons, but in two different centuries, all at the same time!

Code of Conduct

President Dwight D. Eisenhower prescribed the Code of Conduct for members of the Armed Forces by Executive Order in 1955. During the Korean War, the Communists systematically tried to indoctrinate and exploit their prisoners. Their actions were new and unexpected, and U.S. troops were not prepared. The Code was developed because of the shameful conduct of a few U.S. prisoners of war in Korea. The Code provided critical guidance to those in Vietnam who faced possible capture and those who were captured.

Article I. I am an American fighting man. I serve in the forces that guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.

Article II. I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command, I will never surrender my men while they still have the means to resist.

Article III. If I am captured, I will continue to resist by all means available. I will make every effort to escape and aid others to escape. I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy.

Article IV. If I become a prisoner of war, I will keep faith with my fellow prisoners. I will give no information nor take part in any action which might be harmful to my comrades. If I am senior, I will take command. If not, I will obey the lawful orders of those appointed over me and will back them up in every way.

Article V. When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am bound only to give name, rank, service number, and date of birth. I will evade answering other questions to the utmost of my ability. I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and its allies or harmful to their cause.

Article VI. I will never forget that I am an American fighting man, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and the United States of America.

Plaque At USAFA

by Pat Hanavan [535, 68]

About a year ago, Bruce Buono [458, 70] and I were discussing the possibility of a memorial at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). Bruce is a USAFA graduate, Class of 1968 and I am a graduate of the United States Naval Academy, Class of 1958. We have seen many memorials and plaques at our respective *alma mater* institutions.

Bruce contacted the Association of Graduates (AOG) of the USAFA and learned that brass plaques about aircraft that have been part of the USAF inventory are being placed on a wall along the Heritage Trail. Currently, there are at least 16 plaques on the wall.

There were 100 USAFA graduates who flew the C-7A in Vietnam. Two were KIA in Vietnam, 43 are active members, 4 are inactive, 17 are deceased, and 34 are not members.

Bruce and Al Pichon (USAFA, '67) worked together to raise the \$5,000 necessary for design, casting, and placing of a C-7A plaque on the wall. Twenty-nine of the active members and the USAFA Class of 1961 raised the required funds.

Basic design elements and text have been given to the USAFA design team and work is going forward.

We hope to get a design approved, plaque cast and installed in next year so that we can consider having Reunion 2019 in Colorado Springs or Denver.



Reserve NOW!

Reunion 2017 is in Tucson, AZ from 13-17 September at the Doubletree Reid Park). Call 800-222-8733 to make reservation. Say that you with the C-7A Caribou Association.

Activities for the 2017 reunion:

- a. Wednesday: sign in and reception
- b. Thursday:
 - visit to the **Titan Missile Museum** <http://www.titanmissilemuseum.org/>
 - galleries/shopping (for the ladies)

c. Friday:

- guided tour of **Pima Air and Space Museum** (>300 historical aircraft, four hangars, numerous exhibits)

<http://www.pimaair.org/>

- tour **Davis-Monthan “boneyard”**

<http://www.dm.af.mil/Units>

[/309AMARG.aspx](http://www.dm.af.mil/Units/309AMARG.aspx)

d. Saturday:

- Caribou Bowl VI
- Business meeting
- Banquet

What Are the Odds

by Dave Wilson [537, 71]

I was preparing my boat for our annual Fourth of July weekend family affair in late June 2016. I noticed a boat had stopped with a problem. Despite many tries, it would not start. I got the skipper's attention and told him to paddle to my dock, which he did. We introduced ourselves. His name was JJ. My boat was undergoing maintenance so I couldn't offer him a tow. He called his neighbor who came to his rescue.

In the hour or so before his neighbor, Tom, showed up JJ and I talked about "stuff" including my USAF career, which included Vietnam. When Tom arrived, our conversation went something like this.

JJ, "Dave was in Vietnam also."

Tom, "What did you do in Vietnam?"

Me, "I was a Bou (C-7A Caribou) pilot."

Tom, "Where were you stationed?"

Me, "Phu Cat."

There was a slight pause.

Tom, "Did you ever hear about a place called Tra Bong?"

That surprised me. I'll wager that 99.9% of Vietnam vets never heard of it.

Me, "I've probably had more landings at Tra Bong than any other place in Vietnam. I know it well and could still find it without a map."

There was a longer pause, and then

Tom, "What year were you over there?"

Me, "1971, the quiet year."

Tom, "Did you hear about the ARVN (Army, Republic of Vietnam) Ranger that walked into the propeller at Tra Bong?"

This blew my socks-off!!

Me, "That was my crew (I was the 537th TAS Operations Officer) and I was on the ground within five minutes of the incident."

I had accomplished an informal accident investigation. The aircrew tried

to waive the Ranger off, but he just kept walking and waiving back. We assumed he had never seen a Bou with its engines not running and didn't realize there was a spinning prop in front of the engine. Tra Bong was one of many engines-running off load (ERO) sites. I took some photos for HHQs (Higher Headquarters), traded aircraft (mine was S/N 62-4172, theirs was S/N 63-9755) and had them fly directly back to Phu Cat. My copilot and I flew 755 back to Phu Cat where major cleanup (interior and exterior) was accomplished. Needless to say, this event is indelibly imprinted in my memory.

What are the odds? That event happened 45 years ago (29 July 71) and at Smith Mountain Lake, VA, I meet a fellow that shared the ramp with me on that day in Vietnam.

Tom Weston had been a Spec 4 assigned to 3/16 Artillery of the 23rd Infantry (Americal) Division. At the time, they had established an artillery site at Tra Bong, approximately 15 nautical miles southwest of Chu Lai. Tom was an Army truck driver and forklift operator. He transported whatever we dumped on the Tra Bong ramp back to the fire base.

Tra Bong was a C-7A only airstrip due to a runway length of only 1,000 feet with sharp drop-offs at either end. Crews were limited to six sorties per day due to the site's difficulties and cumulative fatigue.

Airfield Notes

537thTAS,69

Tra Bong (V-112) Hazards:

1. *Short Runway.* The runway's greatest hazard is its short length of 1,000 feet. Due to the physical location of the runway, extension is practically impossible.

2. *Steep Upslopes and Streams Immediately Prior to Thresholds.* The streams and steep upslopes (20 and 30 feet, respectively) at both ends of the runway cause turbulence on final and airspeed deterioration with a resulting

increase in sink rate immediately prior to crossing the threshold. The intensity of this phenomenon varies with surface winds and land/water temperature differences, respectively. Recommend that this phenomenon be emphasized during pilot qualification.

3. *Vehicle Traffic Across Runway.* Vehicle traffic from the District Headquarters to Artillery and Special Forces Camps very often crosses the runway. In the wet season, the result is a trail of mud across the runway which degrades braking action. In both the wet and dry seasons, this traffic contributes to more rapid surface deterioration. A new road has been built around the runway but some traffic still crosses the runway.

4. *Criticality of the Wind.* Because of the shortness of the runway and the criticality of wind conditions, smoke should be displayed in the touchdown vicinity.

5. *Thunderstorms in Vicinity.* The winds are generally calm in the early morning (prior to 1000 hours) and increase in magnitude through the rest of the day. Thunderstorms which build to the west after 1400 hours on occasion cause rapid shifting of the winds. Recommend that landings should not be made with thunderstorms in the vicinity of the camp.

6. *Embankment Aside Parking Area.* An embankment along the north edge of the parking ramp presents a wing tip hazard.

Words of Wisdom

You do what you can for as long as you can, and when you finally can't, you do the next best thing. You back up but you don't give up.

Chuck Yeager,
Brigadier General, USAF



USAF Museum Legacy Data Plates



The National Museum of the U.S. Air Force offers a way to preserve the legacy of individuals through the display of customized data plates on the Wall of Honor at the Museum, Wright-Patterson AFB, OH.

Members or their families may be interested in purchasing a Legacy Data Plate so their name will be seen and remembered at the Museum.

There are three lines with twenty letters per line available to create the customized data plate.

The cost of the data plate is \$250.00.

The Legacy Data Plate may be ordered online at:

www.legacydataplates.com.

You can also call 937-656-9615 for more information.

Which Is The Best?

A Soldier, a Sailor, an Airman and a Marine got into an argument about which branch of the service was "The Best." The arguing became so heated the four servicemen failed to see an oncoming truck. They were run over and killed instantly.

Soon, the four servicemen found themselves at the pearly gates of Heaven. There, they met Saint Peter and decided that only he could be the ultimate source of truth and honesty. So, the four servicemen asked him, "Saint Peter, which branch of the United States Armed Forces is the best?"

Saint Peter replied, "I can't answer that. However, I will ask God what He thinks the next time I see Him. Meanwhile, thank you for your service on earth and welcome to Heaven."

Some time later the four servicemen saw Saint Peter and remind him of the question they had asked when first entering Heaven. The four servicemen asked Saint Peter if he was able to find the answer. Suddenly, a sparkling white dove lands on Saint Peter's shoulder. In the dove's beak is a note glistening with gold dust. Saint Peter opens the note... trumpets blare, gold dust drifts into the air, harps play crescendos and Saint Peter begins to read the note aloud to the four servicemen:

MEMORANDUM FROM THE
DESK OF THE ALMIGHTY ONE

TO: All Former Soldiers, Sailors,
Airmen, and Marines

SUBJECT: Which Military Service
Is the Best

1. All branches of the United States Armed Forces are honorable and noble.
2. Each serves America well and with distinction.
3. Being a serviceman in the United States military represents a great honor warranting special respect, tribute, and dedication from your fellow man.
4. Always be proud of that.

Sincerely,

GOD

U.S. Air Force, Retired



Stories from the Cockpit

by John Tawes [537, 69]

In the 1970's, when I was still a commercial airline flight engineer, I was flying from Atlanta to Dallas on a Boeing 727. I had not flown with the Captain before, but I had been told he could be rather "difficult" to deal with. In those days, we did not have air-to-ground authority with our ramp personnel so we had to get our gate assignment after landing.

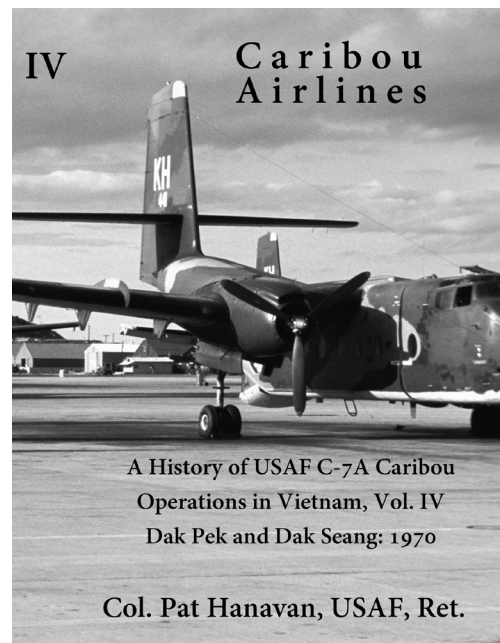
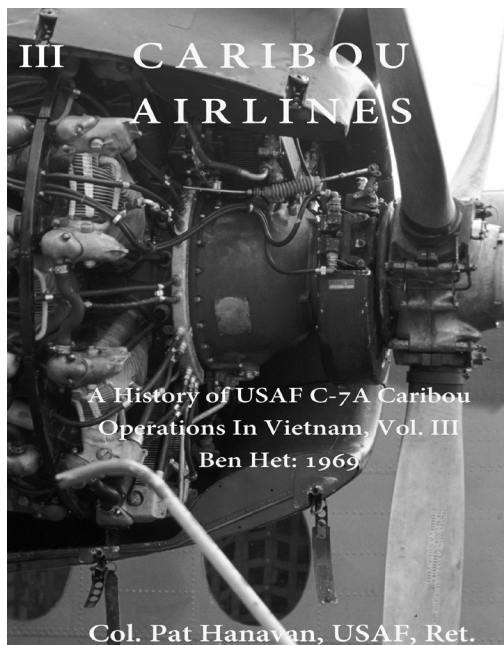
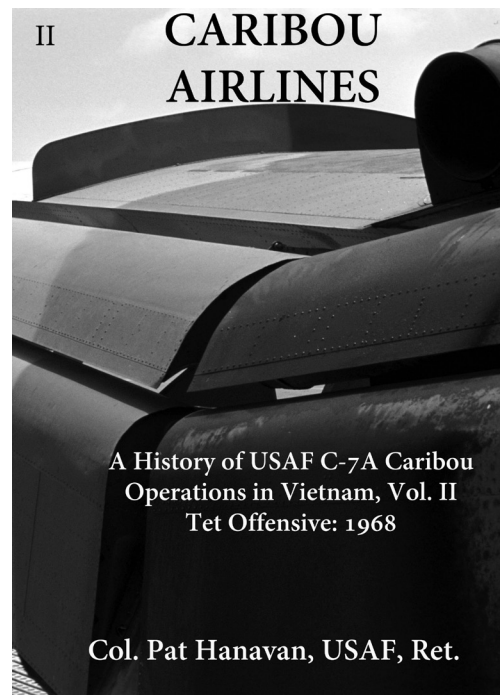
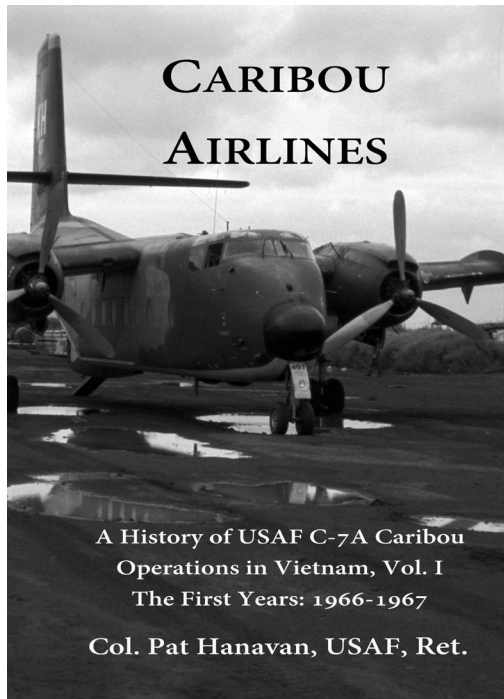
Just before departing, I checked the latest crew bulletins and there was one saying that we now had air-to-ground communications authority in Dallas and we should contact our station's personnel prior to landing for the gate assignment.

As we approached Dallas, I reached up and tuned the right radio to the appropriate frequency and called the ramp. At this point, the Captain (who had the physique and temperament of an aging, overweight Grizzly Bear) spun around in his seat and said "Who you talking to?" I replied that I was getting a gate assignment which drew the retort "You not supposed to talk to them in the air."

The copilot, who was up to speed on the bulletins, just squinted his eyes and said nothing. After we landed and taxied in to the gate I opened my manual and removed the bulletin in question.

As the Captain lurched out of his seat and started to leave the cockpit, I handed him the bulletin. He replied with a growl, waddled up the bulletin, threw it at me, and stomped out of the cockpit.

The copilot, who was familiar with this behavior, could barely contain himself until the Captain was out of sight. He said "Yes, he's like that all the time!" After that trip, I learned the tricks of bidding selectively to avoid Captain Grizzly Bear and several others with similar "personality defects."

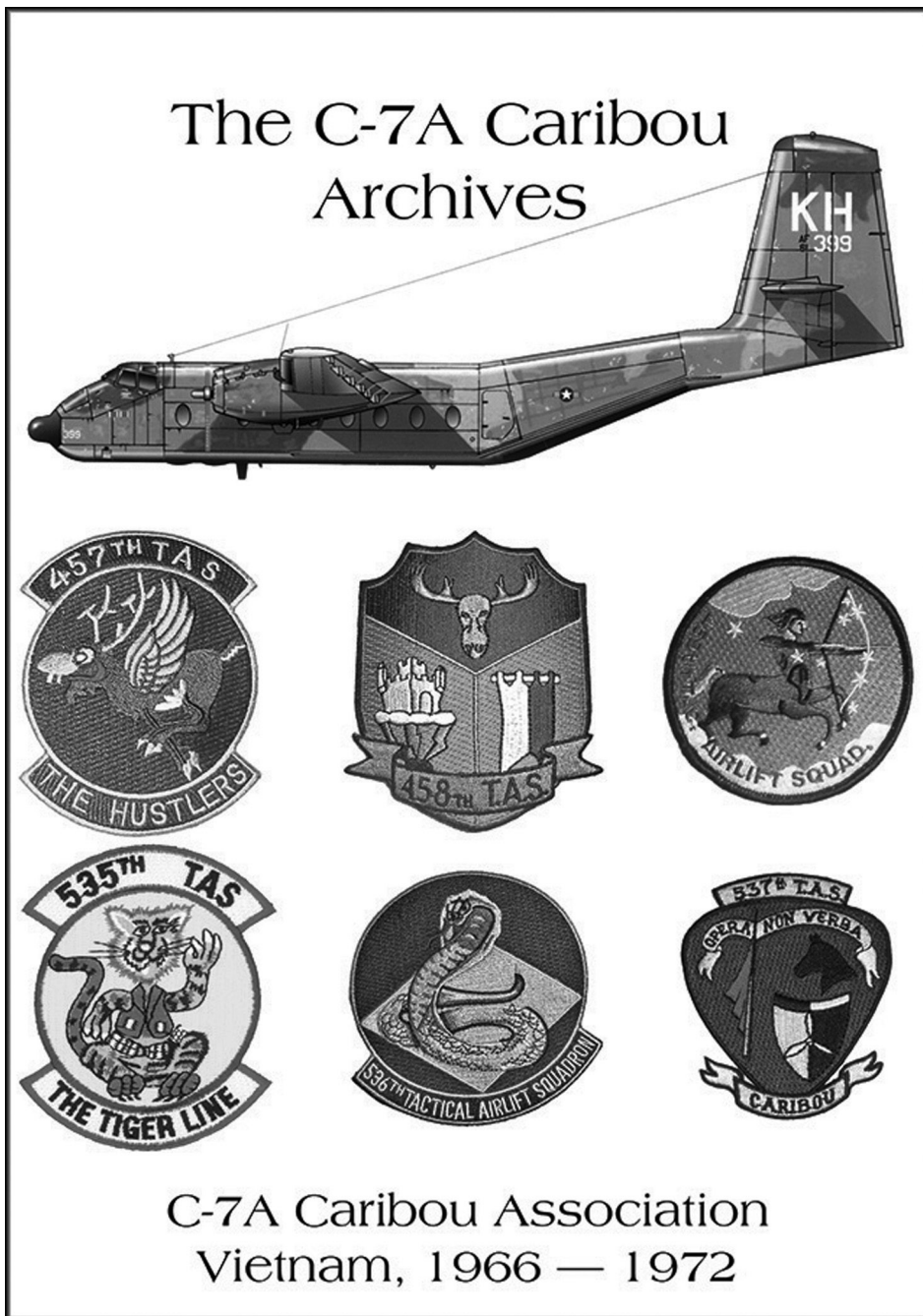


Caribou Airlines is a comprehensive history of USAF C-7A operations in Vietnam. It is about aircrews, crew chiefs, maintenance officers, line chiefs, maintainers, phase inspection personnel, specialty shop personnel, supply personnel, personal equipment specialists, administration and operations personnel, commanders, staff personnel, etc. They made it possible to deliver the troops, guns, ammunition, rations, beer, soda, equipment, animals, etc. to hundreds of bases on the battlefields of Vietnam. The 483rd Tactical Airlift Wing and its squadrons were not an airline, *per se*. They were tasked with supporting Army and Marine units and other customers with air landed and air dropped supplies using pre-defined, emergency, and opportune sorties to front line locations where the supplies were needed.

The history of the Military Advisory Command, Vietnam (MACV); C-7A Caribou Association newsletters; and personal stories of those involved in C-7A operations provide the context for the books.

Volumes I, II, III, and IV are available on Amazon.com. Signed copies of the books can be ordered from the author: Pat Hanavan, 12402 Winding Branch, San Antonio, TX 78230-2770. Any volume is \$20. The four signed volumes are available for \$65. Prices include shipping. The planned publication date for *Volume V: 1971-1972* is the fall of 2017.

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