C-7A Caribou Association

Volume 33, Issue 1

483rd Tactical Airlift Wing Inactivated May 1972

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Direct U.S. combat roles and missions in South Vietnam ground to a halt in 1972. Public support for the war and direct U.S. involvement had become minimal to non-existent. "Vietnamization" was the policy and the cover for U.S. withdrawal. By the end of March 1972, U.S. head count in South Vietnam was 95,500.

On 24 January the 535th Tactical Airlift Squadron (TAS) was inactivated and its personnel and equipment were reassigned to the remaining C-7A units at Cam Rahn Bay (CRB). On 25 January 1972, the 483rd Tactical Airlift Wing (TAW) Forward Operating Location (FOL) moved from Phan Rang to Phu Cat AB. The 458th TAS was deactivated on 1 March 1972 and the 457th TAS was deactivated on 31 March 1972, which ended C-7A operations from CRB. Caribou personnel were reassigned to either the 310th Composite TAS at Tan Son Nhut AB or the Combat Crew Training Squadron (CCTS).

The final 483rd TAW C-7A mission was flown on 25 March and the 483rd TAW was inactivated on 31 May 1972.

USAF C-7A missions continued with the 310th Composite TAS until it was deactivated on 15 November 72. The last operational USAF C-7A mission in Vietnam was flown by the 310th Composite TAS on 28 October 1972.

Fifty-eight C-7A's were transferred to the South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF). These aircraft were organized into three Transport Squadrons, the 427th at Da Nang and the 429th and the 431st at Phu Cat.

The U.S. was not the only South Vietnamese ally departing the fray. The last Thai combat troops left on 4 February 1972. The 5th Republic of Korea Battalion redeployed to South Korea on 24 February. On 1 March 1972 the 1st Australian Task Force stood down, ending their combat role in Vietnam.

The war did not end in 1972, but for all intents and purposes the South Vietnamese forces were essentially on their own. (from *Caribou Airlines, Vol. V)*

The C-7A Caribou Association Newsletter is the official publication of the C-7A Caribou Association.

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Chairman of the Board's Corner

Although Punxsutawney Phil seems to have been accurate in his forecast of six more weeks of winter and it has snowed here twice in the past week, winter is on the run and it will soon be spring. The days are getting longer and the sun is getting higher every day. I have to admit that the older I get, the less I enjoy the snow.

The COVID-19 pandemic is still with us, but it seems to be on the decline. With that in mind, we are going to attempt to have a reunion this coming fall. We have not yet settled on a location or a hotel, but Atlanta, Georgia is high on the list, with a side trip to the Museum of Aviation at Robins AFB.

We finally got the R-2000 engine we purchased shipped from Edwards AFB to Robins and the Museum is hard at work bringing the engine to a suitable condition for display. I consider myself very fortunate to have had the opportunity to fly with radial engines, as they are rapidly becoming a historical artifact. I even had the experience of ferrying a C-7A from Cam Ranh to Kadena AB, Okinawa, for corrosion control. For a guy who's only previous over-water experience was in a C-141A, that sure is a big ocean as seen from the cockpit of a Caribou at 10,000 feet and 105 knots.

I hope we can pull the reunion together, but we are late this year and COVID-19 is still out there and not well understood. Four members of my family, who had all been fully vaccinated, managed to get it, although they were all mild cases.

September 18th of this year is also the 75th anniversary of the U.S. Air Force. I hope we can acknowledge that during the reunion.

I hope everyone has a nice summer and keep your fingers crossed on the reunion.

Reunion 2022 in Atlanta Tentative Dates
September 21-25

The *C-7A Caribou Association* is planning to hold the 2022 Reunion in Atlanta, GA. The reunion is *tentatively* scheduled for September 21-25. A hotel contract has not yet been finalized, so the dates could change.

Activities and details of Reunion 2022 are still being discussed. One of the major activities will be a visit to the Museum of Aviation at Warner Robins. Other possible activities being considered include a tour of the Lockheed assembly plant at Dobbins AFRB and a tour of the Atlanta History Museum.

Details will be posted on the *C-7A Caribou Association* website when they are finalized and will be also included in the June 2022 edition of the *C-7A Caribou Association Reunion Flyer*.

C-7A Display Dedication in 2022

The C-7A Caribou display at the Museum of Aviation, Robins AFB, GA, should be completed sometime this summer. The display will be dedicated this year, but a date has not been set.

The display will include the Museum of Aviation's C-7A, the R-2000 engine purchased by the C-7A Caribou Association and restored by the museum, the C-7A Caribou painting, and C-7A Vietnam artifacts provided by Association members.

It will not be possible for the museum to display all the artifacts they have – there simply will not be enough space.

Several distinguished individuals associated with the Caribou are expected to attend the dedication. Ceremony information will be provided when the date is finalized and Association members are encouraged to attend.

Maintenance at Phan Rang

by Kenneth Bryant [458, 71]
from *Caribou Airlines, Vol. V*

After my orientation and OJT (On the Job Training) sign-off was completed, I was "volunteered" to work at the FOL (Forward Operating Location) at Phan Rang AB. Actually, it was the proverbial "Briar Patch" and I loved every minute of working in the FOL environment. I stepped off the Bou in the shimmering heat and looked around. I believe there were 13 or 14 C-7A aircraft parked together and about two or more men from each shop assigned to launch morning sorties.

There were two guys from radar, two guys from radio, two or three from instruments, etc. There were four or five turn-arounds for each aircraft every day. Recovery was each afternoon about dark, followed by whatever it took to get them ready for the morning launch. Heaven forbid if an aircraft did not fly in the 30 days that it was at the FOL.

I only saw the day shift guy twice while I was on my FOL tour. He was there before dawn for launch and gone when I came in for the night shift. Since I was the FNG (F***ing New Guy), I volunteered, of course, for all night shifts. There were NO days off and many nights we worked 16 or more hours until all aircraft, except the "Hangar Queen," were ready for missions.

Operations might shut down for an hour or two before the launch teams started for the day. I was very appreciative of my launch guy, but the night radio guy and I made a pact to work together and help each other, as a "gofer," until all our write-ups were signed off. That made our job a lot easier.

A funny thing happened with the new Bou that I flew in on! It was rolled over, parked next to the Hangar Queen and every available man was sent to work on it cannibalizing parts. Both day and night shift worked every spare minute on making the new bird into the "Queen for a Month" and getting the retired Queen ready to be the first launch of the morning. I was told that if the restored to life bird didn't fly, we had to answer to Headquarters in Hawaii (PACAF) as to why NOT!!! That was a very interesting night of work.

I hope the statute of limitations has run out on what I'm saying. It's just that you had to do what you had to do.

On the Bou that I came in on, there was a pallet of "repaired" aircraft parts that came from the shop at Cam Ranh Bay (CRB). Next to it was a pallet of "replaced" parts. Sometimes we had to take both "repaired" and "replaced" parts apart and try to get one of the two to work.

The CRB shop did a good job with what they had to work with, but after the first day [at Phan Rang] the "new parts" pallet was just about depleted and you were almost defied to pull parts off of a good Bou, because there were so many turn-arounds during the day.

Thank goodness there weren't many missions after dark.

Note. "Hangar Queen" is a disparaging term for any grounded plane, which is being systematically cannibalized (stripped of its parts) so that other airplanes may fly.

National Vietnam War Veterans Day

March 29 became National Vietnam War Veterans Day in 2017, when President Trump signed the Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act into law.

President Trump was not the first commander-in-chief to designate a Vietnam Veterans Day. President Nixon declared March 29, 1974, as Vietnam Veterans Day to mark the one-year anniversary of the withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Vietnam. President Obama declared March 29, 2012, as Vietnam Veterans Day, with a proclamation marking the 50th anniversary.

Phan Rang Vietnamization Flight

by Larry Stuppy [536 & 483, 71]

VNAF Class at Phu Cat
USAF Photo

Near the end of 1971 and into 1972, I was reassigned from Cam Ranh Bay to Phan Rang AB to train Vietnamese pilots to fly the C-7A Caribou.

The Vietnamese pilots, for the most part, were given a course in English followed by basic flight training in the United States. They then returned to Phan Rang to upgrade to the C-7A in anticipation for the turn over of C-7A operations to the Vietnamese.

In December 1971 or January 1972, I had a flight with Lt. Lap. He was an excellent student with excellent English. We were flying up from the Delta to Saigon and Lt. Lap had the flight controls.

I could see clouds ahead. Lt. Lap glanced up with nervous eyes. He stated that we had weather ahead, which I acknowledged, "Yes, it looks like you are going to get some weather time." The Vietnamese pilots were not given much instrument flying time, so Lt. Lap was a little uneasy about flying into weather.

Into the clouds we flew, encountering lots of rain and turbulence. You may remember how the C-7A would leak in heavy rain. We had rainwater entering the overhead hatch and I could feel water going down my back. Lt. Lap had his hands full maintaining altitude and airspeed.

We exited the opposite side of the weather on altitude, airspeed, and track. Lt. Lap was beaming with pride exclaiming, "I did it!!!" – or other words expressing that sentiment.

It was another successful training day.

Tong 405 Under Fire

from *Caribou Airlines, Vol. V*

The "Tong 405" mission on 14 February 1971 received incoming enemy fire while the Aircraft Commander was doing his walk around prior to departure. The Aircraft Commander is not known and Sgt. Elkins is deceased.

In his mission report, the Aircraft Commander wrote:

"After landing at Dalat Cam Ly airfield (V-8), I was completing my walk around when I heard a heavy round land. My Flight Mechanic, SSgt. [Fred G.] Elkins, yelled 'incoming.' Everyone began running for shelter. After approximately 15 minutes (I estimate) and 40 heavy incoming rounds later, I heard my Flight Mechanic yelling for Capt. [Kirk T.] Dunker (my Copilot) and myself.

He yelled (after the three of us were reunited) that the U.S. Army advisors told him we should evacuate as at least a platoon size of enemy was advancing up the hill and Dalat was [about] to be overrun. Neither my Copilot nor myself took our weapons off the aircraft and we were unarmed.

Without discussing, all three of us ran to the aircraft. I was surprised to see it still in one piece. To my greater surprise, two young Air Force enlisted personnel were loading our scheduled pallet. I yelled at the forklift driver to take it off, but he appeared frozen with fear and did not acknowledge that he heard anything. The other already had a strap on the load so, as each second was so important, we went ahead with engine start.

SSgt. Elkins pulled a walk around of the aircraft to check [for] structural and battle damage and got in to further secure the load. The engine started and gave normal instrument indications.

I immediately began to taxi. As I did, a round went off on my left. I set boost pumps, mixtures, props, and asked for 25° flaps. A rapid taxi to a rolling takeoff was accomplished using the remaining runway from [the] intersection to the east. During taxi, a quick flight control check was performed.

As we approached lift off, a shell went off on the copilot's side. What we believe now to be mortars, machine gun fire, and small arms fire appeared still very heavy. I continued a straight out climb to 9.5 thousand feet and flew to Cam Ranh Bay AB.

We brought several Vietnamese, including a mother and her nursing infant, a U.S. Air Force Major, an Army Major, and an Army enlisted man.

Although we all felt fear, I believe Capt. Dunker and SSgt. Elkins performed their duties in an admirable manner."

We Have a Problem!

by Dudley "Lee" Waters [535, 67]

To the best of my recollection, the following event happened sometime during the summer of 1971. I was flying C-141's out of McGuire AFB, NJ, at the time.

The airdrop mission began just like many personnel airdrops I had flown previously. At the squadron, the three crews involved in the formation flight received the standard pre-mission briefing.

My crew and I would be flying position number two of a three-ship formation flying from McGuire to a target drop zone within Ft. Bragg, NC, making a personnel airdrop without

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C-141 Problem (from Page 4)

landing, and then flying back to McGuire for mission termination. Each of the three aircraft would be dropping a relatively small group of Army Reserve paratroopers who needed the parachute drop to retain their currency and not lose their jump pay.

Preflight inspections were normal as was our flight planning at Base Operations. Fortunately, the weather would be "severe clear" all the way around the flight-planned route with light and variable winds at McGuire and at the drop zone. Piece of cake…

Once at the aircraft I met with the Army paratroops we would be dropping. There were an even dozen of them. The Jumpmaster was very experienced with many jumps under his belt, but most of the others were less experienced.

I gave the combined aircrew and paratroops the normal briefing after which the Jumpmaster took me aside and told me that they really needed to complete the airdrop in order to continue to receive their jump pay. It seemed to me that they had put off scheduling the time away from their civilian jobs to do the jump until they were close to the last days of their eligibility. I said I would do everything I could to ensure they got their drop.

Start, taxi, and takeoff were uneventful and, following takeoff, our three aircraft joined up during the initial stages of the climb out. My aircraft was in the number two position as planned. Our three C-141's had taken off to the south from McGuire, so we made a gentle left turn to fly over Atlantic City's VOR to pick up the airway for our continued climb to cruise altitude and the flight down to Ft. Bragg for our airdrop.

Passing over the Atlantic City airport's VOR and climbing through about 19,000 feet altitude, I was shocked to hear the number three engine begin to compressor stall severely! It was booming and banging so hard I had a real concern that the engine would either start throwing out turbine or compressor blades, or fly off the pylon since there were only two big bolts attaching the engine to the pylon mounts.

The whole aircraft was shuddering and vibrating! Following each loud "BANG!" that reverberated throughout the aircraft, the vertical scale engine instruments for number three would drop to zero. Then the engine would re-light from the continuous ignition and begin spooling up to match the throttle's climb power position. Then, "BANG!" and the whole sequence would repeat itself.

I rapidly performed the emergency procedure, which directed the throttle to be retarded toward the idle position until the engine settled down, then to advance the throttle back to power. I retarded the throttle, but the only time number three would settle down was at idle. The minute I began inching the throttle out of idle the severe banging would begin again.

Remembering the Jumpmaster's predicament, I rapidly reviewed my options and the regulatory constraints that applied. I basically had two choices: (1) return to base and scrub the mission and hope the troops could get another drop in a hurry (which was a remote possibility) or (2) continue the drop mission with three engines at normal power and number three engine operating at idle. Technically, I decided, I did have all four engines running and the airdrop was important to complete.

However, it would be safer for me to swap positions with the number three aircraft. If anything further happened during the drop at low altitude and airspeed, I wouldn't have my options limited by an aircraft immediately behind me, nor have the possibility of flying right behind a steam of parachutists jumping out of both sides of the number one airplane. I surely didn't want to fly through the troopers in their 'chutes if the worse happened and I couldn't hold altitude. Flying in number three position would also give me a choice of dropping back to get more spacing to handle the emergency. So I advised Lead of my predicament and suggested that number three and my aircraft exchange positions. I would then continue as "Tail-end Charlie."

When Lead asked, I told him I had about 3,000 hours in the aircraft and that I held an Instructor Pilot qualification. Lead was somewhat hesitant to allow it, but my plan did reduce the risks and I would technically be within the regulations, so he agreed.

The three aircraft commanders quickly devised a plan. In changing positions, I would slide out to the right until well clear of the formation, then number three would move up to the number two position. I would then drift back to the vacated number three position and subsequently slide left into position. It seemed like a solid plan to all of us and our navigators had enough time remaining en route to adjust their lead point and drop timings, so Lead directed us to begin. I briefed my crew on intercom and no one had a problem with it. The Loadmaster would bring the Jumpmaster up to date on what was happening.

Just as I was beginning my slight right turn out of position, number one and two engines started to boom and bang just as number three had done not more than three minutes before! "BOOM!" "BANG!" "SHUDDER!" The aircraft felt like it was going to come apart any second! I pulled those two engine throttles back to idle, checked my altitude (passing 21,000 feet) and directed the Flight Engineer to change feeding the engines out of different fuel tanks (in case of bad

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C-141 Problem (from Page 5)

fuel) and yelled (I am embarrassed to remember) over the inter-plane radio that two additional engines were doing the same thing! I said I was returning to McGuire or executing a power-idle glide into nearby Atlantic City's airport if number four also began doing the same thing!!!

I quickly informed the Loadmaster what was happening and, as I was telling him, he informed me that the Jumpmaster was running up front to talk with me. I turned back to look at the cockpit entry door and as I did, I saw that the cockpit seemed to be about five times bigger than it actually was! Adrenalin? Yep, bet on it!

The Jumpmaster hurried up to me and yelled that his men wanted to jump out of the airplane! (They didn't care if we would have been 20 miles out over the ocean; they just wanted to depart the sick aircraft, which sounded like it was going to shake to pieces!) I quickly thought that request through. I was confident that with the altitude I had, the fact Atlantic City's airport was almost under us, and that McGuire wasn't too far away, I could get them back without them having to walk a long way back to civilization for rescue.

I also wasn't about to compound my control problems by increasing drag on the aircraft that slowing down to drop speed and opening a door for them to jump out of would have caused. Nor were they equipped or, I believed, trained for a high-altitude bail out. So I promised the Jumpmaster I would get them back to a safe landing either at Atlantic City's airport or McGuire, and told him to return to his seat.

After leveling off and declaring an emergency with Departure Control, I told the Controller of my intentions to attempt to return directly to McGuire essentially under a powered glide. We were cleared direct, given a heading to pick up, and an altitude to descend to. I told the Controller I would prefer to keep as much altitude as I could until I was sure of the landing at McGuire.

With the three ailing engines at idle, number four at climb power and the aircraft trimmed up, I still couldn't maintain altitude. The best I could do was a 300-feet-per-minute slow descent. I didn't want to retry any of the three bad engines because the compressor stalls had been so severe my crew and I believed serious or catastrophic damage would happen if I tried once again to increase the power. I planned to use the sick engines only if it became evident that we wouldn't make the field safely. Thank God the weather was clear with about 10 miles visibility.

The Controller handed us off to the McGuire Approach Controller who must not have been briefed very well because he immediately told us to descend and maintain 1,500 feet altitude. I told him what the situation was and to just give us headings to the runway. I requested a reverse direction landing to the north so we wouldn't have to maneuver for a landing to the south. He told me the winds would allow for a landing to the north and would set it up.

During the descent, I made a radio call to advise our Command Post (CP) of what had happened and our intentions. The CP officer said they'd all go outside and watch our (hopefully) successful landing. I didn't appreciate the levity, I can tell you.

Since the engines were still rotating with enough RPMs to allow for a normal approach and landing configuration, I briefed the crew that I would delay configuring the aircraft for landing until we had the field made and then do a hurried gear lowering and performing an approach flap landing so as to reduce the drag on the aircraft until the final moments. We would perform as much of the applicable checklists as possible but keep the gear and flaps up until we were assured of making the field. I told them I was planning to execute a higher than normal VFR final approach to runway 36. I briefed each crew member what I wanted him to do in addition to his normal checklists. I asked the Scanner, who had very few duties during the final approach, to be my flaps and gear monitor and to call out if we had omitted lowering them within five miles from the runway. The Navigator was to be the gear-monitoring backup.

Final approach to the field was, just barely, uneventful. In spite of the higher than normal approach altitude, the C-141 ran out of altitude just a little beyond the threshold. Roll out and taxi to parking procedures were normal with no further problems being encountered. My flight suit was drenched with sweat by the time we shut down the engines.

The Jumpmaster and his entire group made a special effort to thank my crew and me for the successful landing before they departed the aircraft. I never did find out if they got another jump before their currency period expired.

I also never found out exactly why those engines failed, although an Aircraft Commander friend of mine experienced the same problem about two weeks later with all four engines when they were at cruise altitude and about half-an-hour past the eastern Canadian coastline on an Atlantic Ocean crossing. He said that if he had been five minutes further along the route he didn't believe he could have made it back to Goose Bay Royal Canadian Air Base.

Based on these two incidents happening so close together, when the Command Post at Goose Bay informed the MAC (Military Airlift Command) Command Post of what was happening, the MAC Deputy Commander for Operations (DCO) immediately directed that all McGuire C-141 crews in the air worldwide be contacted and issued an order to find the nearest airfield and land immediately until the cause could be determined.

The cause was determined a few days later. Algae had been able to survive and grow in the JP-4 fuel storage tanks at McGuire. No one could believe that

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C-141 Problem (from Page 6)

anything alive could survive in such an extreme environment, but it so happened that the algae could and did. As I heard it, when the fuel pumps within the aircraft's tanks got somewhat clogged they would begin cavitating and starve the engines of fuel, which would cause compressor stalls. Since we had ten fuel tanks on the C-141, not all engines would experience the problem at the same time unless all engines were fed out of the same tank at the same time, which was a rarity.

The fuels folks at McGuire and on all MAC bases throughout the world had their work cut out for them. Before any aircraft out of McGuire could resume flying, fuel personnel had to drain, inspect, and clean all fuel tanks (both storage and aircraft), plus verify all their tanker trucks and fueling hoses were free of contaminants.

Fortunately, I heard that a fuel additive was available that would kill the algae and ensure a stop to the algae problem once all the fuels were passed through some big filters. The fuels personnel also had to back-track where the fuel had come from and inform the officials there of the situation and recommend that they check their tanks and transport systems.

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Help with the Changes!

Check your e-mail on the Association website by searching your name on the Roster.

If your Newsletter arrives with a **yellow postal address covering the printed address**, the Association does not have your correct address.

Please keep us updated.

Send any changes to:

pathanavan@aol.com

Tribute to Red Dog

by Barden Revelle [536, 67]

My squadron, the 536th TAS, kept two Caribous at Can Tho airfield in the Delta that were dedicated to support of the 5th Special Forces. The first time I landed at Can Tho I was flying with an instructor and learning the "in-country" ropes. Our Operations (Ops) was a hole-in-the-wall at the foot of the tower.

As I entered Ops that day, I was ordered to stop. Next I was scrutinized and thoroughly inspected – by a redbone hound. After this inspection I was allowed to enter. This checkout was good for my entire tour. The pooch was known as "Red" or, more formally, as "Red Dog" when you were serious. Nobody seemed to know how long Red had been there. Red was particular about who he would let into Ops or into the barracks. The maids were allowed in the barracks. I think Red gave them special permission. No other Vietnamese were allowed in any of our facilities, except for a couple of mercenaries from Cambodia who worked for the Special Forces.

(A few years ago one of those Cambodian mercenaries was camped next to me on a Georgia deer hunt. We recognized each other, started chatting, and had a reunion. Small world.)

Red slept in the hootch with us at night. He would greet the crews when they taxied in, but only OUR Caribou crews. He knew the tail numbers, I guess, or recognized the yellow stripe or KL on the tail. You got me. He would trot up to the back of the Bou after it taxied in and shutdown and put his paws on the ramp to do an inspection.

Red took a flight or two, always properly manifested. Why not? Hey, rumor had it that a Bou once flew a platoon of Viet Cong somewhere. Why not Red?

Red was the father of more pups than the U.S. Census Bureau could ever count. There were redbone pups all over the place. We used to playfully annoy the maid by bringing the pups into the hootch. She would shoo them out one end of the hootch while somebody else would bring another arm full in the opposite end.

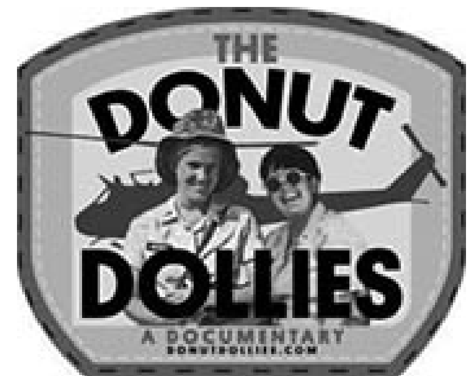
Alas, Red`s tour of duty ended tragically. A certain leader ordered us to "get rid" of Red after he bit one-too-many Vietnamese. At his "trial," I was a character witness and one of Red`s attorneys. I testified that every person Red bit needed biting. Don`t ever hire me to be your attorney. Red was condemned.

Mysteriously, Red arrived via Caribou at Vung Tau. There were some people there that needed biting. Red lasted about two weeks, then he was hit by a vehicle. An MP had to euthanize him. Our beloved mascot was no longer with us.

It was not a fitting end for a bundle of loyal, loving fur. I was not at Vung Tau that day. There was no flag folded, no bugle, no TAPS – just a lonely grave.

Red Dog`s name should be on The Wall. I will never forget him.

Donut Dollies Documentary



The untold story, 50 years in the making, of the American women who volunteered to go to Vietnam on an extremely difficult mission.

Each download and DVD includes the 87-minute award-winning documentary plus 35 minutes of featurettes,

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***The Donut Dollies* (from Page 7)**

and a 14-minute photo album of the women who served in Korea and Vietnam.

The Donut Dollies documents the little known story of the small group of American women who volunteered to serve in the Vietnam War through a Red Cross program called Supplemental Recreation Activities Overseas (SRAO). These women were better known to the brave military men as *The Donut Dollies* (a nickname from World War II and Korean War).

Armed only with smiles and handmade games, the Donut Dollies risked their lives every day to achieve their mission of cheering up and bringing a sense of home to the U.S. troops. The documentary can be purchased on the website: **www.donutdollies.com**

Birthday Cake to Khe Sanh

by Paul Peoples [459, 67]
from *Caribou Airlines, Vol. II*

During the siege of Khe Sanh in January-February 1968, the strip was largely destroyed, preventing the C-130's and C-123's from landing. Most of the resupply of the 26th Marines was made by parachute drop and low-level extraction from C-130's. Only the C-7A could land. Crews of the 459th TAS were shuttling from the Marine base at Hue Phu Bai to Khe Sanh taking in troops and essential parts and taking out KIA and wounded. Since the airdrops were consuming large numbers of parachutes, we also hauled back the chutes – usually wet and of unknown weight.

As a sideline, we often took in a case or two of beer, cooled enroute. These were traded for 50-pound cases of steaks [that had been] air dropped to the Marines. Their reefers had been destroyed early in the siege and they had no way of keeping the large quantities of prime beef raining down upon them. The trade was satisfactory to all concerned.

On one such mission, I was moving troops from Hue Phu Bai to Khe Sanh. Gunnery Sergeant Mayo supervised the engines running on-load of the troops at Hue Phu Bai with a command voice unlike anything I have ever heard!!

On the second shuttle, he came up to the cockpit with a fiberboard box. It was about 20 inches square and 10 inches deep, covered with transparent plastic. Inside, visible from the top, was a birthday cake addressed to a Lance Corporal and a few inscriptions such as "Kill the Cong." As Gunny Mayo explained to me, the cake made it all the way from the States to Phu Bai and he expected me to get it to Khe Sanh.

After landing at Khe Sanh, I personally delivered the cake to the Aerial Port guys with a request to try to find the birthday boy. The Caribous were "mortar magnets" while on the ground at Khe Sanh, so we got off as the first ranging rounds were coming in. To this day I often wonder if that Lance Corporal got his birthday cake.

A Different Cake Perspective

by Ron Lester [459, 67]

I was the Copilot on the birthday cake mission Maj. Peoples described. My memory is a little different than his. I am not saying that Maj. Peoples did not remember correctly, only that our memories are different. It **has** been a long time. My advantage is that I kept a detailed Vietnam Log Book I can reference.

For those who did not know him, Maj. Paul Peoples was the most decent, kindest gentleman who ever wore a flight suit. Unfortunately, he is no longer with us.

The date was 27 January 1968. It was our second shuttle from Hue Phu Bai for the Marines, but it was our only run to Khe Sanh that day. Besides the "Kill the Cong" inscription on the large sheet cake's white frosting, there was a large caricature of a Marine going "over the top" with his rifle raised in one hand.

Khe Sanh was taking sporadic mortar fire that day. None were hitting in the vicinity of the ramp area, but that could have changed at any second.

The Flight Mechanic was young, new, and inexperienced. If it wasn't his first operational mission "on his own," it was certainly one of his firsts. We taxied into the ramp area and kept both engines running. Maj. Peoples stayed in the pilot's seat and I went to the back to help the FM unload and load. Minimum ground time was desired.

Besides the birthday cake, our inbound load was 24 Marines and their gear. Our outbound load was one lone Marine and about 300 pounds of baggage. I got the Marine strapped in and gave him a quick passenger briefing.

Before heading back to the cockpit, I looked around for the FM. He wasn't in the airplane! I stuck my head out the side door and looked up and down the ramp. He was nowhere in sight! I went looking for him.

The few Marines around the ramp area were all hunkered down because of the "in-coming" threat. I found the FM. With the cake box in his hands, he was going to every Marine he could find asking if they knew the Lance Corporal. His intent was to deliver the cake directly to the birthday boy or at least give it to someone who knew him.

Yelling to make myself heard over the prop noise, I told the FM that the Aircraft Commander was waiting for us and we had to go. He just needed to give the cake to one of the Marines and they would see that it got to the Lance Corporal. The FM gave the cake to the next Marine we saw and we ran back to the airplane. When asked, I told Maj. Peoples the cake had been given to the Marines.

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Birthday Cake (from Page 8)

I never told Maj. Peoples or anyone else about the FM and the cake. I thought it was best to keep it to myself in order to spare the new FM the likelihood of endless kidding if his squadron mates heard about his efforts to deliver the Khe Sanh cake.

There was something else I never told Maj. Peoples about that Khe Sanh run. Our outbound passenger was a young Marine whose father, also a Marine, had been killed in action. He had come to Khe Sanh to collect his father's personal effects – our outbound baggage.

It was typical Vietnam – the humorous and the ridiculous coexisting in the same space and time with the tragic and the life threatening.

VNAF Pilot Saves Family

by Paul X. Rutz
HistoryNet, June 2019

On the last full day of his country's existence, South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) Maj. Buang-Ly stole a tiny two-seat airplane. He helped his wife and their five children, ages 14 months to 6 years, into the backseat and storage area before climbing into the pilot's seat. They took off and headed out to sea while enemy ground fire zipped past them.

It was April 29, 1975, and chaos had enveloped the nation. Two years earlier, the 1973 Paris peace agreement had theoretically ended the war, but after American combat forces left the country, the North Vietnamese took the opportunity to press their new strategic advantage. The long war between North and South Vietnam paused only briefly before ferocious fighting resumed.

In early 1975, the North Vietnamese Army seized key bases in the Central Highlands, and, by the end of March, had captured areas along the coast. The remaining American advisers and many South Vietnamese families began frenzied evacuations on American military aircraft and civilian transport planes.

Those large, fixed-wing aircraft flew thousands of people to hastily constructed camps in the Philippines, Guam, and Wake Island. The last plane out of Da Nang, a civilian Boeing 727 on March 29, was unable to retract its landing gear in flight because at least seven evacuees had climbed into its wheel wells. Soon North Vietnamese forces were shelling Saigon.

Buang and his family were stationed on Con Son Island, about 50 miles off the southern coast and home to one of the last bases still under South Vietnamese control. Used mainly as the site of a prison camp by the South Vietnamese government, the island had a small airfield. When Buang and his wife learned that North Vietnamese forces were closing in, they loaded their family into the plane and got airborne – with no plan for what to do next.

Their tiny aircraft was an O-1 Bird Dog, a modified Cessna 170. Ruggedly built and highly maneuverable, the plane could take off and land on a dime, but its range was limited to just over 500 miles when fully fueled, and the fuel tank of Buang's O-1 was not.

As Buang coaxed the overloaded plane airborne, he faced enormous challenges. The Bird Dog was not designed to operate over water. It lacked sophisticated navigation equipment, life vests, and the ability to safely ditch in an emergency. Buang had never seen, much less landed on, an aircraft carrier and, to make matters worse, this Bird Dog had no working radio. Still, he knew that his family was more likely to find safety out at sea, where the U.S. Navy was in control, than on the land controlled by Communist forces.

After flying for a half-hour, Buang spotted a gaggle of helicopters in the distance heading east. He had no idea they were loaded with friendly evacuees, but it seemed like a good idea to follow them. "I was searching for a safe place," Buang recalled. "It made me think there was something out there they could depend on."

On April 19, 10 days before the Buang family departed Con Son Island, the aircraft carrier *USS Midway* had received orders to leave Naval Station Subic Bay in the Philippines and make best speed toward Saigon to help evacuate the roughly 5,000 Americans remaining there, including diplomats, CIA agents, contractors, and a handful of Marines. *Midway* and the rest of the 7th Fleet would also evacuate as many friendly Vietnamese as possible.

The old ship had been in service since September 1945 and was just starting a pier side repair period. Its engineering plant, which had been taken offline for maintenance, needed to be hastily restored to operation, and the ship got underway with fewer sailors than normal. At Subic Bay, *Midway* off-loaded half of the fixed-wing jets in its combat air wing.

When the ship reached the South China Sea, it received 10 large Sikorsky H-53 helicopters, two U.S. Air Force HH-53's from the 40th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, and eight CH-53's from the Air Force's 21st Special Operations Squadron. Each of these choppers could comfortably transport 55 passengers at a time.

The mission, dubbed Operation Frequent Wind, employed an ad-hoc fleet of helicopters and several elements of the 7th Fleet to conduct a massive humanitarian operation, transporting and caring for thousands of refugees.

On the morning of April 29, former South Vietnamese Prime Minister and Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, accompanied by Lt. Gen. Ngo Quang Truong, requested permission to land on the *Midway*, after making a more than one-hour helicopter flight from the mainland.

About 11 AM that morning Secretary of State Henry Kissinger finally gave American diplomats the order to

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VNAF Pilot (from Page 9)

evacuate. An American radio station broadcast the secret signal: "The temperature in Saigon is 105 degrees and rising," followed by Tennessee Ernie Ford's *White Christmas*, because the DJ couldn't find the more well-known Bing Crosby version. The signal told evacuees in Saigon to move to pre-assigned extraction locations, board buses there, and head to the airport.

As the official evacuation commenced, many resourceful Vietnamese commandeered whatever aircraft they could to fly to safety. "At least 74 planes of the South Vietnamese Air Force, including about 30 F-5 fighters, streamed into the Utapao air base in southern Thailand from South Vietnam without warning," *The New York Times* reported the next day. "The pilots and passengers, about 2,000 people, requested asylum," and more planes kept arriving.

More choppers began arriving on *Midway*'s flight deck. The ship's contingent of Marines and the sergeant at arms searched the new arrivals for contraband and weapons, confiscating pistols, and wads of worthless South Vietnamese cash that they threw over the side. Then they helped passengers into the ship's command structure on the starboard side, known as "the island," where crew members gave them food and basic medical care. All but 80 or so of the direst cases were transferred by helicopter to other ships to be distributed across the whole fleet, a process that went on well into the next day.

Young, tough sailors who were used to handling bombs, chains, and fuel lines amid the roar of jet engines now devoted themselves to caring for bewildered parents, frightened children, the elderly, and the sick. The flight deck was choked with choppers and lines of men and women carrying suitcases and children. The hangar bay below decks ran out of room for more aircraft as efforts to aid hundreds of refugees continued there.

The *Midway* was commanded by Capt. Lawrence Chambers, the first African-American carrier captain and just the second to graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy when he earned his degree in 1952. Chambers had reported aboard the carrier in January 1975 and been in command for only a few weeks. Chambers recalled the scene as he watched from his chair on the bridge, just above the action, "A flight deck is a hazardous operation under normal conditions. And when you see little kids and mothers holding little babies, and helicopters are taking off and landing, you just kind of hold your breath."

Weather conditions were not ideal, observed the ship's air boss, Cmdr. Vern Jumper, from his perch five stories above the flight deck in the Primary Flight Control room. Jumper was responsible for all aspects of flight operations, including any aircraft flying near the ship, all the action on the flight deck, and the work happening down in the hangar bay. He noted rain falling from a 500 foot cloud ceiling, 15 knots of wind over the deck and 5 miles visibility. But the seas remained relatively calm, so the deck, though sometimes slick with water, wasn't pitching.

Air traffic controllers inside the ship and landing signals crew on deck used whatever means necessary to keep helicopters in order as they approached. Communication went smoothly with the 10 H-53 helicopters that were part of the operation. They would land, unload, refuel and make repeated trips to Saigon.

By mid-afternoon, 45 UH-1 VNAF "Huey" helicopters had arrived from the mainland. Most had no ability to communicate with the ship via radio. "We were using hand signals to the pilots to control where they landed on the flight deck," Jumper recalled. Sailors and aircrews also communicated via signal flags and colored signal lamps – red, Don't Land; green, Okay to Land.

Every pilot managed his fuel and waited patiently for his turn. At one point, Jumper, counted 26 helicopters circling the carrier while sailors assisted waves of arriving passengers. As soon as a chopper's rotors stopped twirling, sailors pushed it away from the action, using small rectangular tractors or brute manpower. By packing the incoming aircraft close together, they were able to recover them all. None had to ditch next to the carrier, but the flight deck soon filled to capacity.

Toward the end of that wild afternoon, spotters on the carrier saw a tiny two-seat Cessna come into view. Through binoculars they counted at least four people in the plane, which had South Vietnamese markings. The Bird Dog began circling overhead with its landing lights switched on. Periodically the pilot rocked the plane's wings. A Vietnamese translator was rushed to Primary Flight Control to join Jumper in the ship's tower, but attempts to radio the plane were met with static. From the bridge, Chambers quickly consulted task force commander Adm. William Harris [USNA, 1947], who was at his battle station below deck.

"The admiral ordered me to tell the Bird Dog to ditch," Chambers said. A helicopter could be dispatched to drop swimmers in the water and rescue the occupants. Other pilots flying choppers near the rest of the 7th Fleet were putting their aircraft into the sea. They hovered to drop passengers onto the fleet's smaller ships, including destroyers and supply craft. When all passengers had safely left a chopper, the pilot would maneuver away and steer the machine on a course to safely ditch into open water. At the last moment he would jump clear of the rotors and drop into the sea, then swim toward the nearest vessel.

However, the fixed-wing Bird Dog couldn't hover to drop off its passengers, and its fixed landing gear would cause the plane to flip onto its back as soon as the wheels touched the water. Only a well-trained crewmember, prop-

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VNAF Pilot (from Page 10)

erly strapped in, would get out alive. If the plane was ditched, the rest of its occupants had almost no chance.

"My judgment told me, if I didn't give him a chance to land that he was going to crash it on the deck," Chambers said.

As the Bird Dog circled, the pilot dropped three paper notes from the plane, but they blew over the side before the ship's crew could snatch them. On the next pass he stuffed a fourth note into his pistol's leather holster to weigh it down, and sailors rushed to grab the little package after it hit the deck. They read a scribbled message written on a crumpled chart of South Vietnam: "Can you mouve [sic] these Helicopter to the other side, I can land on your runway, I can fly 1 hour more, we have enough time to mouve. Please rescue me. Major Buang wife and 5 child."

The message was quickly relayed to the bridge where Chambers was discussing the situation with Jumper over the phone. Ignoring pressure from the admiral, Chambers decided to do whatever was necessary to let the Bird Dog land, even if that meant throwing millions of dollars worth of equipment over the side and possibly being relieved of his command.

"Vern," Chambers said into the phone, "give me a ready deck." Jumper called for all available crewmen and volunteers to help prepare the angled flight deck for the Cessna. Meanwhile, with six boilers offline for maintenance, Chambers ordered his chief engineer to transfer the ship's electric load to the emergency diesel engines and make steam for 25 knots.

The captain turned his ship into the wind to prepare for a fixed-wing landing. Fire crews readied their hoses and donned fire-retardant suits. Since the Bird Dog had no tail hook, sailors removed the four landing cables that normally spanned the runway. Other crew members leaned in together to heave three Hueys and one Chinook over the side. When their skids went over the flight deck's edge, the empty choppers nosed up, twisted, and then fell backward into the sea with big splashes.

Immediately, five more airborne VNAF Huey pilots took advantage of the cleared runway to land and disembark their passengers. Assuming he would be court-martialed, Chambers ordered those helicopters thrown overboard as well.

The old ship rattled and groaned as its speed increased. Jumper gave the green lamp signal to land. Buang made two practice passes over the ship to get a feel for the approach while translators, in English and Vietnamese, tried to warn him about the dangerous downdrafts that naturally occur behind the ship's fantail. The crew could only watch, hoping that he would carry enough power to fly through that turbulence.

Buang lowered the O-1's flaps and approached in a shallow descent at a speed of 60 knots. With the ship providing an estimated 40 knots of headwind to aid the landing, the light plane slowly caught up. It seemed to flutter for a moment just above the deck, then bounced once in the landing area and rolled to a smooth stop in the middle of the runway.

Dozens of sailors ran toward the plane to grab it in case the aircraft's momentum was enough to send it over the side, but the Bird Dog stayed where it had stopped. A hodgepodge of squadron crew and ship's company weighed the plane down with their bodies while Buang and his wife, carrying their youngest child, climbed out of the cockpit. He pulled forward the seat and out tumbled the other four children. Cheers rang out and sailors clapped while the family walked into the ship's island.

Altogether, 71 American helicopters flew a total of 662 sorties from Saigon to the 7th Fleet's ships, rescuing more than 7,800 people. The 10 Air Force H-53's flew four round trips from the *Midway* to Saigon, evacuating more than 1,400 personnel from the start of the operation on the morning of April 29 until its end at 9 AM on April 30.

Three hours later, South Vietnamese Gen. Duong Van Minh surrendered Saigon to North Vietnamese Col. Bui Tin, effectively ending the war and the nation of South Vietnam.

Maj. Buang-Ly lands on the "USS Midway"

The O-1 that Maj. Buang-Ly flew now hangs at the National Naval Aviation Museum, Pensacola, FL. Chambers kept his job as the aircraft carrier's Captain and was later promoted to Rear Admiral; he retired in 1984. Nobody was prosecuted for the estimated $10 million loss of the helicopters that Chambers ordered overboard.

The *Midway*'s crew collected money to help ease the transition for the Buang family, who became seven of the estimated 130,000 refugees from the Vietnam War to eventually resettle in the United States. All seven are now naturalized American citizens.

Friendship

by Tom Smith [458 & 310, 71]

Friendship. As the years pass and memories dim, one thing I will never forget is a friendship. Friendship can mean many things and manifest itself in different ways – from the chow hall cook that always had a smile and remembered just how you liked your omelet, to the roomie that helped you through the aftermath of a "Dear John" letter, to beer drinking buddies.

Looking back, I remember just how special those friendships were and are. I am sure all of us had special friendships during our tour(s) in Southeast Asia. Perhaps I can rekindle some of those memories of friendship.

The U.S. began "Vietnamization" of the war in 1969. The South Vietnamese knew we were leaving and I think they knew how it was going to end. The Vietnamese were nothing if not pragmatic. All were tired of war and the continuous fighting that had started before the beginning of World War II. Many were ambivalent. Most were just trying to find a way to survive and to divine which side was most likely to win.

By 1971, there was little support for the war at home in the U.S. All of us "in-country" knew that, other than close family members, only those we served with really cared about us – not our South Vietnamese allies, focused on their own tenuous future, and not most of our own country.

All we had was each other. The situation cemented our bonds of friendship. We had each other's back, regardless of position, rank, or duties.

In Vietnam, friendship appeared in unexpected places from surprising individuals.

Phu Quoc is a small island In the Gulf of Thailand just west of Vietnam and south of Cambodia. While there was an active Viet Cong (VC) presence on the north end of the island, on the south end was a huge Prisoner of War camp for VC and North Vietnamese prisoners.

Also on the south end, close to the village of An Thoi, was a large Navy Seebee detachment where they built and maintained a major Swift Boat base. Established in 1942, Navy Construction Battalions, or "CBs," were armed personnel responsible for military construction – frequently working while under fire. In addition to standard "prisoner runs" to An Thoi airfield, we would also deliver supplies to the Seebees.

The Navy is famous for a lot of things, but, as far as we were concerned, their food was the best "in-country." If a day's flight included a stop at An Thoi, we tried to make sure it happened around lunchtime. There was a Chief Petty Officer there who took special care of the Caribou crews. He was always waiting at the airfield in his weapons carrier vehicle to drive us to the chow hall. Always.

After off-loading our cargo, he would load us up and we would go bouncing over the sandy track to the base. He made sure we went to the head of the chow line for T-bone steaks, baked potatoes, fresh green salad, ice cream, and cold Cokes or iced tea. Beat the hell out of whatever we usually had for lunch, which was sometimes nothing! After we ate, he was right there to drive us back to the aircraft. He always stayed until we taxied out, in case we needed anything. All of us loved that guy!

One day when we landed at An Thoi, things were different. Rather than the normal leisurely turn-around, we had to minimize our ground time. A badly wounded South Vietnamese soldier had a raging case of gangrene. If we didn't get him to the mainland and serious medical aid, he was probably not going to make it. Any thoughts of lunch went out the window. We quickly unloaded our cargo and then loaded the wounded soldier's stretcher on board while trying to make him as comfortable as possible.

We had seen the Chief waiting when we taxied in, but when he saw what was going on, he disappeared. "Where's the Chief?" "Dunno', but let's get going!" As we were starting engines, the Flight Mechanic (FM) shouted, "Here comes the Chief!"

I looked out the cockpit window and the Chief's weapons carrier was literally flying over the sand dunes. While the aircraft engines were running, he ran up to the back ramp and handed a plastic bag to the FM. Then he went back to his vehicle, as always, and waited for us to takeoff.

Once airborne in cruise flight, we looked into the bag. There were stacks of steak sandwiches with ketchup and steak sauce and a cold six-pack of Coke. We were stunned. He had driven all the way back to camp, had the food made up, and raced back to get it to us before we left. This was obviously a guy who gave a s**t about us! A friend.

Not long after that, we found out the Chief was rotating back to the U.S., or "The World," as we called it. As part of Out Processing, everyone had to pass through Tan Son Nhut airport in Saigon where we were based. We were ready when he arrived.

Everyone, and I mean EVERYONE who was not flying that day was waiting to meet him when he got off the plane. We quickly got him through Out Processing and then downtown for a night he would never forget (or maybe never remember). We made sure he got safely on the "Freedom Bird" home the next day. Then we waited for it to take off, just as he had for us. Always.

Friends.

Afghanistan Lessons Learned

by Greg Hadley
Air Force Magazine
September 28, 2021

The following has been excerpted from the original article. Some of it may sound familiar.

Constantly shifting strategies, an Afghan military built in the "mirror image" of U.S. forces, and poor intelligence are lessons that American military leaders can take from 20 years of the Afghanistan War, top Pentagon officials said September 28, 2021.

Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen. Mark A. Milley, and U.S. Central Command boss Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. appeared together before the Senate Armed Services Committee for the first time since the end of the Afghanistan War and faced more than five hours of questioning on the conflict.

In his opening testimony, Milley said there were "many lessons to be learned" from the war, not all of them related to the military. But for the DOD in particular, Milley said there were already some takeaways to consider and more fully explore.

"One of them, for example, is the mirror-imaging of the building of the Afghan National Army based on American doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures. And that made a military that…may have been overly dependent upon us, our presence, contractors, and higher tech systems in order to fight a counterinsurgency war."

Over two decades, the U.S. spent some $83 billion to train and outfit the Afghan armed forces. In particular, the Afghan Air Force was considered to be the military's main advantage over the Taliban. But as U.S. troops and contractors withdrew, that air force quickly lost readiness. Plans to conduct remote advising from over the horizon were ambitious at best, especially in a society with extremely limited access to technology.

"You're talking to people who are coming out of rule by the Taliban, who imposed Sharia law, a Stone Age approach to these things," McKenzie said. "You cannot impose technological literacy quickly. So that's why it took a long time. There's a lot of contract maintenance done for a lot of air forces around the world. The Afghan Air Force is not unique in that regard. Although in this case, it was particularly telling because they were so dependent on it."

Not all of the mistakes lay with the Afghan military, though. Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI) pressed Austin on American military leaders who repeatedly shifted strategy year after year, unable to break a stalemate, noting that one observer called the result "20 one-year wars," not one 20-year war.

Austin, for his part, said leaders "have to ask ourselves some tough questions," among them: "Did we have the right strategy? Did we have too many strategies? If you're reshaping that strategy, every year, one year at a time, then that has consequences."

Toward the end of the war, as the Taliban made rapid advances across the country, estimates of how long the Afghan government would survive repeatedly shrank. Milley, however, has repeatedly said those estimates from the Intelligence Community never predicted the stunning final collapse of the Afghan armed forces and government in a span of less than two weeks.

Senators pressed Milley as to how the intelligence erred so badly, which he tied back to another military lesson: a lack of understanding of the Afghan Army's morale and willingness to keep fighting without the U.S.

"We pulled our [military] advisers off three years ago," Milley said. "And when you pull the advisers out of the units, you no longer can assess things like leadership. And we can count all the planes, trucks, and automobiles, and cars, and machine guns, and everything else, but you can't measure the human heart with a machine. You've got to be there."

The importance of military advisers was key in other conflicts, Milley added, such as in El Salvador and Colombia, when the U.S. offered technical support to governments fighting insurgencies but let their armies take on "the burden of all the fighting." By contrast, the Afghanistan War became "Americanized," Milley said.

Beyond the lessons cited by Austin, Milley, and McKenzie, Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) said she would introduce legislation to create an independent commission to study the full scope of the Afghanistan War, starting from its background and looking ahead to the future, an approach Austin endorsed.

Time to Renew!

Check the mailing label on this newsletter. If it does not show "**2022**" or later, then it is **TIME TO PAY** your Bou Tax or this will be the **last** newsletter you will receive.

If the year is before 2022, you may have changed your address and the last newsletter went to an old address, or you just sent in your check, or forgot to send your check.

DO IT TODAY!

Make your $10 check to the **C-7A Caribou Association** and send it to:

Tom Snodgrass
2515 S. White Cliff Lane
Wichita, KS 67210-1924

We Will Never Forget

On 25 July 1968, Caribou S/N 63-9761, 457th TAS, was flying a resupply mission from Nha Trang to Polei Kleng. Flying in marginal weather in the vicinity of Dragon Mountain, near Pleiku, the left wing of the aircraft struck a tree and the C-7A crashed, killing **Capt. James Hoffman** and **A1C Raymond McKendrick**.

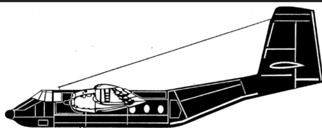
On 26 August 1968, Caribou S/N 62-4177, 457th TAS, was hit by ground fire in the right wing as it was flying an airlift flight about 10 miles southwest of An Loc, close to the Cambodian border. The aircraft crashed and exploded killing **Capt. Robert George Bull, 1/Lt. Ralph William Manners,** and **A1C David Frederick Sleeper.**

USAF C-7A Oral History Project

One of the primary missions of the C-7A Caribou Association, specified in the By Laws, is to "remember [our] service to the United States of America." We have a unique opportunity to partner with the Museum of Aviation at Warner Robins to develop an oral history project.

The initial objective of the project will be to create an oral history for use as part of the C-7A display at the Museum of Aviation. Depending on the level of interest and the number of interviews, there are many possible uses and formats for the Caribou oral history. The response of our members will determine if this concept becomes a reality and what it ultimately becomes.

If you are willing to be interviewed by phone for this project, please contact our historian (pathanavan@aol.com or 210-861-9353).



Wall of Faces

Vietnam Veterans
Memorial Fund

In 2009 the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) launched its Wall of Faces Project to create a searchable database of the U.S. service members who made the ultimate sacrifice.

The virtual Wall of Faces features a page dedicated to honoring and remembering every person whose name is inscribed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

VVMF is committed to finding a photo to go with each of the more than 58,000 names on The Wall.

If you have a picture of a veteran whose name is on The Wall, you can help honor these individuals by putting a face with a name. Whether or not VVMF has a photo of the individual already, we encourage you to submit it anyway. We are collecting as many photos of each individual as possible.

Collected pictures can be found on The Wall of Faces at:

www.vvmf.org/wall-of-faces

Photos can be submitted either online or by mail. Instructions for photo submission can be found at:

www.vvmf.org/about-the-wall-of-faces

World War II Poster

The Wish

Maj. Stephen Morrell, USAF

Up in the sky, a bird does soar,
High and swift
Asking no more
Its wings lift
And then fall
With majestic beauty
It sings a call
It is so free
And I am not
I wish I were he
and he were not.

Maj. Steve Morrell died in a skydiving accident in 1996.

Living the Code

Jerry Coffee, Captain USN (Ret.)
1934-2021

C-7A Caribou Association Newsletter 32-2 included the poem *One More Roll* by Jerry Coffee, who passed away in November 2021.

The following is Jerry Coffee's story, excerpted from the Fairfax Memorial Funeral Home obituary:

In the early morning hours of November 13, 2021, Captain Gerald L. "Jerry" Coffee, USN (Ret.) received final PCS orders from his Almighty God-in-Chief.

Fifty years after the severe concussion from his shoot down and high speed ejection over North Vietnam in 1966, he was diagnosed with a rare neuro condition requiring him to travel between his beloved Hawaii, home for 45 years, and Johns Hopkins Medical Center. Jerry Coffee believed in the invincibility of the human spirit.

After graduating from UCLA in 1957, Jerry got his draft notice just days after his diploma. He often explained that "naval aviation looked exciting, and having been a beach volleyball player in California, the white sand beaches of Pensacola looked good. I had no idea I was making a commitment that would last for the next 28 years. But when I got to Pensacola, I loved everything about it and graduated as one of the top two students in my class. Not bad for an art major."

After returning from flying reconnaissance missions in the Middle East, Jerry was tapped to be one of 12 Navy photo reconnaissance pilots assigned to fly out of Key West in October of 1962 during the Cuban Missile Crisis to covertly record suspected Soviet missile sites in Cuba. During the missions his supersonic RF-8 flew literally "under the radar" of the Cubans and Soviets.

At the end of one of those missions, Jerry was supposed to turn back to Key West but instead banked suddenly and detoured from his flight path. "Something just caught my eye off to one side. It looked like a big parking lot or motor pool, full of equipment and I thought I'd better check it out. I had no idea what it meant, but I flew over it with all cameras running." The pictures proved to be of short-range Soviet nuclear-tipped FROG missiles, intended to take aim at the U.S. Naval Fleet.

On November 10, Marine Corps Commandant David M. Shoup wrote Lt. Gerald L. Coffee in a letter, "Your reconnaissance flight over Cuba provided the most important and most timely information for the Amphibious Forces which has ever been acquired during the history of this famous Navy-Marine fighting team."

Jerry's other flights discovered more evidence of Soviet nuclear capabilities on Cuba that helped President John F. Kennedy and his military leaders during the negotiations with the Soviets.

In 1966 Jerry received orders to Vietnam. On February 3, 1966, flying reconnaissance missions off the aircraft carrier *USS Kittyhawk*, his RA5-C Vigilante was shot by anti-aircraft fire causing him to have to eject. Severely injured, floating in the Tonkin Gulf, he was almost immediately captured. Despite injuries sustained during that high speed ejection, his captors put him before a firing squad, tortured him, and dragged him through hamlets and villages on his way to Hanoi and Hoa Lo prison beginning what was to be seven years and nine days as a Prisoner of War (POW).

During those years of brutality and torture, when the communist Northern Vietnamese jailers continually defied the Geneva Conventions and tried to kill Jerry's spirit, he resisted. He worked within the prisoners' chain of command to learn the tap code used to communicate between cell blocks. He risked torture encouraging fellow prisoners through tapping on the walls and showed incredible fortitude and leadership, as evidenced by the commendations and fitness reports from senior officer Admiral James Stockdale and other senior leaders. As Jerry would delineate in his book about his POW experience, *Beyond Survival*, the perseverance and even growth he experienced in those unspeakable circumstances were attributable to faith in God, faith in his country, faith in his fellow prisoners, and faith in himself.

After returning from Vietnam in 1973, he spent two years at UC Berkeley earning a Masters Degree in political science. He then returned to operational duties with VC-1, an A-4 squadron at NAS Barber's Point, HI, and later became the squadron commander. He attended the National War College in 1977 and then became the Air Operations Officer at CINCPAC Fleet Headquarters in 1978.

It was obvious that Jerry was eager and willing to speak about his experiences in Vietnam, so the Navy gave him a role as a public relations officer, during which he gave hundreds of speeches a year to military units and civilian groups alike on behalf of the Navy until his retirement in 1985.

Upon retirement, Jerry continued to speak about his experiences. His message focused on the "invincibility of the human spirit" and the importance of faith when faced with adversity. Over the years, he inspired 20 consecutive Plebe Classes at the United States Naval Academy, speaking on Honor.

Jerry believed his mission was to impart to every audience member that they were tougher and stronger than they believed. "Have faith, be tough, hang in there and you will emerge tougher and stronger that you would've otherwise been without the adversity." He had learned so many lessons in Hanoi, he deemed it his sacred mission to spread those lessons to encourage people to embrace their circumstances with belief in themselves.

Jerry always signed off his tapping on the walls in prison to his fellow POWs, GB and GBA, God Bless and God Bless America. That says everything about who he was.

Unsung Hero: Eugene James Bullard

by John Lawery
Daedalus Flyer
Summer 2018

Few people know the saga of America's first black military fighter pilot, with the nom-de guerre of "The Black Swallow of Death." To say that Eugene James Bullard, America's first black military pilot, was an amazing individual would be a gross understatement. First, as a teenager during the opening weeks of World War I he became an award winning infantryman in the French Foreign Legion. After being severely wounded and found unfit for the infantry, to stay in the fight he volunteered as an aerial gunner. It was while attending aerial gunnery school he managed to get reassigned to pilot training – subsequently becoming a fighter pilot flying the French SPAD VII and scoring two probable kills against a German Fokker Dr.1 and Pfalz D III.

Background

Eugene was born on October 6, 1895, in Columbus, GA, the seventh of 10 children of William (Octave) Bullard, a former slave of Stewart County planter Wiley Bullard, and a Creek Indian mother, Josephine (Yokalee) Thomas. The references vary, but apparently his father's ancestors had been enslaved on the French island of Martinique and had fled to the United States in the early 1800's during the Haitian Revolution.

His education consisted of five years of grade school, 1901 to 1906, at the Columbus Twenty-eighth Street (elementary) School. Although he dropped out, he had learned to read, which was one of the keys to his later success.

It was during this period the small boy suffered the trauma of watching a drunken white mob attempt to lynch his father over a workplace dispute. However, his father continued to voice the conviction that African-Americans had to maintain their dignity and self-

respect in the face of the white prejudice they encountered. Meanwhile, young Eugene had become obsessed with his father's stories of a faraway place called France where slavery had been abolished and blacks were treated the same as whites.

Thus, as he reached his eleventh birthday the precocious child ran away from home with the determined intent of getting to France. Stopping in Atlanta, he joined an English clan of gypsies known by the surname of Stanley. Ultimately, he traveled throughout Georgia tending their horses and learning to race. It was the Stanleys who told him how the racial color line did not exist in England. This reset his determination to somehow get to England.

Disheartened that the Stanleys were not soon returning to England, he moved on and found work with the Turner family in Dawson, GA. Because he was hardworking as a stable boy, young Bullard won the Turners' affection and they allowed the teenager to ride as their jockey in the 1911 County Fair races.

Still inspired by what he learned with the Stanleys, in an effort to get to England he stowed away on a German merchant ship, the *Marta Russ*, which departed on March 4, 1912, for Aberdeen, Scotland. Once in Scotland he supported himself by performing in a vaudeville troupe. Blessed with his father's tall, muscular body, he learned to box at a local gym and earned money as a prizefighter in Great Britain and elsewhere in Europe. It was during a 1913 boxing match in Paris that he decided to settle there, changing his middle name from James to Jacques.

World War I began in August 1914 and 19-year-old Bullard immediately enlisted in the Third Marching Regiment of the French Foreign Legion. He participated in several major campaigns as a machine gunner, with his unit suffering over 50 percent casualties. On March 5, 1916, he was severely wounded for the second time at the Battle of Verdun. During his convalescence Bullard was awarded France's prestigious Croix de Guerre.

After recovering from his wounds Bullard was found unfit for the infantry. Yet, still wanting to get back in the fight, he volunteered for the French Aeronautique Militaire as an aerial gunner. It was while training as an aerial gunner that he learned he could become a pilot, and soon was accepted for pilot training.

He graduated from pilot training on May 5, 1917, and was sent to the advanced flying school at Chateauroux; followed by advanced fighter training at the Avord School of Military Aviation. Upon finishing at Avord, Bullard joined 269 American aviators in the Lafayette Flying Corps.

On June 28, 1917, he was promoted to Corporal, yet again he began to sense racial prejudice by consistently being overlooked for assignment to a front-line combat unit. The problem turned out to be a commissioned American doctor Edmund Gros, who had been instrumental in forming the Lafayette Escadrille. He was vice president of a committee overseeing the selection and affairs of all American pilots flying for France. Unfortunately, Gros attempted to make life difficult for Bullard.

After complaining to his commander, Bullard finally received orders on August 8, 1917, to Le Plessis Bellville

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Bullard (from Page 16)

for additional combat training, whereupon he was reassigned to Spa-93, one of France's top fighter squadrons equipped with the fast, maneuverable SPAD VII and Nieuports. The SPAD VII to which Bullard was assigned was powered by the Hispano-Suiza 8-Aa, 180 horsepower in-line engine, giving it a top speed in level flight of 127 MPH. Its armament consisted of a Vickers .303 caliber machine gun, synchronized to fire through the propeller.

Aerial Combat

In mid-September 1917 Bullard was one of 14 pilots scheduled to fly two combat sorties. Those two missions went routinely with no enemy aircraft sighted. However, the next day was different, as he experienced his first fighter-versus-fighter aerial combat.

It was an early morning mission led by his commander Victor Menard. Their armada was flying their classic V-formation when they spotted a large German formation consisting of four bombers protected by sixteen Fokker Dr. 1 Dreideker tri-planes headed towards Bar-le-Duc, a French industrial center about halfway to Paris.

The forthcoming dogfight was what fighter pilots would later term a "fur-ball," a sky full of fighters each maneuvering aggressively trying to shoot down the other. The dogfight ended with the explosion of the four German bombers that had been intercepted by other squadron members. Later he learned that two of his squadron's SPADS had been shot down, and because parachutes were not yet available the pilots were lost.

Following six days of flying combat Bullard was transferred to Spa-85, another squadron of the Lafayette Flying Corps. Their mission was to patrol in the region of Valdalaincourt and Bar-le-Duc, where he encountered the brightly painted Fokkers of the famed "von Richthofen Flying Circus."

On the day he scored his first aerial victory, his squadron was patrolling near the German front lines when the tri-planes appeared, flying straight towards his squadron and obviously looking for a fight. The French SPADs and Nieuports quickly engaged, with the aerial battle becoming a classic fur-ball of airplanes. After a hard-rolling break to avoid a head-on attack, Bullard latched onto one of the Fokkers and began firing short bursts.

The German pilot maneuvered violently, but after a long burst from Bullard's machine gun, pieces of fabric began fluttering in the slipstream, the tri-plane's engine belched smoke and the aircraft began losing altitude. In an effort to finish-off his victim, Bullard followed the crippled plane down and back across German lines. Suddenly he was startled by the whitish smoke from a stream of tracers fired by ground-based German machine gun crews that were attempting to save the Fokker pilot.

Suddenly he heard the "whop-whop" as bullets punched holes in his aircraft's taut fabric followed by the metallic twang as bullets hit parts of his SPAD's engine, which began backfiring and belching black smoke. In the distance he could see the smoking Fokker still descending, but he had no time to watch its ground impact. In desperation he turned to get back across French lines while frantically searching for a place to land. Then his engine quit which forced him to set down in a muddy field in no-man's land.

With the German's continuing to randomly shoot, Bullard quickly clambered over the side and fell into a muddy shell hole. As darkness fell Bullard, soaked and shivering from the cold, suddenly heard French voices in the inky blackness. His aircraft mechanic, accompanied by a group of soldiers, emerged from the forest behind him leading horses with which they planned to drag Bullard's badly damaged airplane back to the airfield for repair.

As for Bullard's adversary, the Fokker's smoking engine and the loss of power that forced it to descend should have made it a confirmed victory. But he had not seen it crash-land, so it could only be classified as an unconfirmed victory.

Confirmed Victory

One cold, cloudy and turbulent late November morning the squadron's V-formation of SPAD VII's was cruising at 12,000 feet in the Verdun battlefield area. As they flew through the edge of a particularly large cloud, Bullard lost sight of his squadron's formation. As he searched for his squadron he spotted a seven-plane formation down below flying in the opposite direction. Suddenly he realized it was a formation of the agile German Pfalz D.III bi-wing fighters.

Quickly he slipped into the edge of a large cloud and waited for the Pfalzs to fly past him. Then he dove behind the last airplane in the formation and opened fire with his Vickers machine gun. The surprised Pfalz pilot, in an attempt to outmaneuver the attacking SPAD, pulled up hard into a loop and left Bullard lagging behind. Bullard countered by making a quick diving right bank into the edge of a nearby cloud formation, which effectively hid him.

Upon emerging from the clouds Bullard spotted the Pfalz above him and slowly climbed up behind the enemy aircraft. His opening volley stitched through the Pfalz's cockpit, and the aircraft pitched up then spiraled earthward and crashed in French territory. With his first aerial victory confirmed, Bullard quickly reentered the edge of the clouds for protection and headed

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Bullard (from Page 17)

for home base.

On April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. Bullard promptly asked to be transferred with his fellow "American Flying Corps" pilots to the "American Flying Service." But with only 29 selected, he was rejected as "unsuited for promotion to second lieutenant."

Terribly dejected, and since the weather had turned bad, he requested a 24 hour leave with his mechanic to visit friends in Paris. After completing their Paris visit they checked in at the Café du Commerce, a small inn where they could catch the morning train back to their airfield. As they descended the stairs to the inn's restaurant an unknown French Captain motioned Bullard to come over and speak with him. The Captain had been commanding French colonial troops in Africa and was newly returned to France. For no reason he viciously attacked Bullard verbally, until finally stopped by a French Army Major who was seated nearby. The Major apologized to Bullard and promised to support him if anything more occurred.

Four days after returning to home base Bullard received a letter from Dr. Gros who accused Bullard of arguing with an officer. On November 11, 1917, Bullard was discharged from the French Flying Service and transferred back to his old unit, the 170th French Infantry. Because of his previous wounds, he was transferred to a military camp at Fontaine du Berger 300 miles south of Paris, where he performed menial tasks in a service battalion until the end of the war.

Post War Activity

After being discharged from military service he went in a variety of directions, first as a boxer, then in a band playing drums. Shortly, he was promoted to manager of a nightclub called Zelli's, which he helped make a financial success. He soon bought his own nightclub, "Le Grand Duc," on the north side of Paris. Thanks to his musician friends and a lot of hard work his customers soon included movie stars such as Edward G. Robinson, Charlie Chaplin, and writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway.

In 1923, he married Marcelle Eugenie Henrietta Straumann, the daughter of a wealthy French family. Unfortunately, their differences in background and social status were too much for their marriage, and they divorced in December 1935. Bullard was given custody of their two daughters who received the best education the private schools in Paris could provide.

In 1939, with Germany's Hitler threatening France and because Bullard was also fluent in German, he was recruited by the French counter-intelligence network to report what he heard from his German guests at his nightclub. They would talk freely about sensitive subjects since they couldn't conceive of a black American fluent in three languages – English, French, and German.

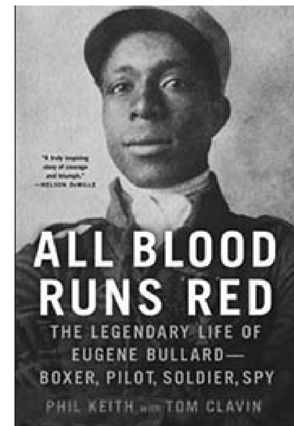
When the Nazis took over France, Bullard escaped to Spain leaving his daughters in their Parisian boarding school. Thanks to the Red Cross, he boarded a train to Lisbon, Portugal, where the American steamship *Manhattan* took him along with hundreds of Americans to New York. Sometime later his teenage daughters were able to follow him there.

In New York, Bullard worked a variety of jobs, including as a security guard and as a longshoreman. He eventually returned to Paris but was unable to resume his previous life there. In 1954 he, along with two other French veterans, was invited to Paris by French President Charles de Gaulle to re-light the everlasting flame at the Arc of Triumph's tomb of the unknown soldier. In October 1959 he was made a knight of the Legion of Honor, the highest-ranking order bestowed by France. On December 22, 1959, while dressed in his Rockefeller Center elevator operator's uniform, he was interviewed on NBC's *TODAY* show by Dave Garroway.

On October 12, 1961, Eugene Bullard died of stomach cancer. The gallant warrior was buried with full military honors in the French War Veterans section of Flushing Cemetery, in the New York City borough of Queens. In 1992 the McDonnell Douglas Corporation donated a bronze portrait head of Bullard to the National Air and Space Museum, which is currently displayed in the museum's Legend, Memory and the Great War in the Air gallery.

On September 14, 1994, the U. S. Air Force posthumously commissioned Eugene James Bullard a Second Lieutenant. He is further honored by the display of his French flying license, issued in 1917, at Gunter Annex-Maxwell AFB, AL, and a larger display case in The National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, in Dayton, OH.

Despite all his honors, our first black military pilot and highly decorated warrior remains an unsung hero to most Americans.



The 2019 biography of Eugene Bullard "All Blood Runs Red: The Legendary Life of Eugene Bullard – Boxer, Pilot, Soldier, Spy" by Phil Keith and Tom Clavin is included on the latest U.S. Air Force CSAF Reading List.

The complete reading list can be found in the CSAF Leadership Library at: **https://www.af.mil/About-Us/CSAF-Leadership-Library**

Terrifying Flight Tet 1974

by Thanh Giang & McBlain Lee
as told by Lt. Nguyen Ngoc-Tan
March 3, 2020

Originally published only in Vietnamese, English translations of the complete text are available online. U.S. copyright 2020 by Thanh Giang. This English version was edited by Ron Lester.

On January 21, 1974, three days after the Battle of the Paracel Islands between South Vietnamese and Chinese naval forces, the Commander of the Republic of Vietnam (ROV) Navy, Admiral Tran Van Chon, and a Navy delegation went to Da Nang to review the military situation and discuss courses of action for the war in the East Sea.

On the third day of Tet, January 23, 1974, The Navy delegation had finished their meeting in Da Nang and needed to return to Saigon. They had an important meeting with President of the Republic of Vietnam Nguyen Van Thieu the next day.

A South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) C-7A Caribou and aircrew from the *Than-Long* (*Sacred Dragon*) 427th Transport Squadron of the 1st Airborne Division, based in Da Nang, was given the mission to fly Admiral Tran Van Chon's delegation to Saigon.

The crew consisted of the Aircraft Commander, Capt. Nguyen Van-Kim, the Copilot, Lt. Nguyen Ngoc-Tan, and the Flight Mechanic, Sgt. Tu-Phi-Dung. Corporal (Cpl.) Phat and Cpl. Phan were assigned as a two-man Air-Convoy escort. Capt. Kim was also the squadron Safety Officer.

Capt. Kim's C-7A Caribou, call sign *Yankee Uniform*, was about 62 miles from Saigon flying at an altitude of 11,000 feet when the aircraft was wracked by a loud explosion. The plane had been hit by a SA-7b heat-seeking missile.

On the copilot's side, red flames were spewing from what was left of the engine's two augmentor tubes that carried exhaust gases from the engine's cylinders. The SA-7b had found the hot exhaust of the tubes and exploded, making a hole more than three feet wide in the wing and seriously damaging the engine.

VNAF flight crew and ROV Navy delegation on the C-7A wing behind the augmentor tubes destroyed by a SA-7b. Navy Commander Adm. Tran Van Chon, is in the middle of the front row; to his left is Navy Capt. Quynh Hai; behind Capt. Hai and to his left are the other six members of the Navy delegation (unidentified). A smiling Capt. Kim (Pilot) is standing stooped behind and to the Admiral's right. Sgt. Dung (FM) is immediately to the Admiral's right on the front row. Lt. Tan (Copilot) is on Sgt. Dung's right with his arm on Dung's shoulder. Cpl. Phan is directly behind Sgt. Dung with his arm raised. Cpl. Phat is directly behind Phan. The other two individuals are not identified. Photo by ROV Navy Photographer Sgt. Truong So Phuoc.

The explosion caused the aircraft to shake violently. The wind howling through the large hole in the wing made a terrifying cry. Immediately after the explosion, the plane wobbled and then fell off to the right. Despite Capt. Kim's best efforts, the plane entered into free fall, twisting, and spinning.

During those moments of terror after the explosion, all appeared hopeless. With the plane spinning out of control, the passengers became weightless, gently hovering in the air with no support from gravity or the floor of the plane. Thankfully, the fastened seat belts kept them from serious injury or death.

Heaven and earth were reversed. The green trees were spinning, upside down, around the plane's windows. The passengers closed their eyes, made a sign of farewell, and recited Buddha's name repeatedly as they prepared for the last moment of life. The plane continued to tumble. The floor of the plane was tilted and sometimes it reversed into the sky. Death seemed to be at hand.

The airplane fell from 11,000 feet to 5,000 feet in approximately four minutes before Capt. Kim and Lt. Tan were able to recover from the spin and bring the aircraft to stable flight. Having regained control of the airplane, Capt. Kim was able to gradually climb to 7,000 feet. Regaining his own composure, Capt. Kim calmly reassured the passengers and crew.

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Terrifying Flight (from Page 19)

Mo Buddha! What a wonderful, unexpected salvation! Everyone on the plane breathed a sigh of relief. The passengers slowly returned to normal and chanted a "thank you" mantra for miraculously being given a chance to survive.

Capt. Kim's primary worry was the damaged wing. He did not know if the wing was structurally sound and worried that it might separate from the plane at any time. It was impossible to feather the propeller on the damaged engine, which increased the airplane's drag and made it more difficult to control the airplane's attitude and maintain a straight, stable flight path.

Not knowing if the wing was going to hold up, Capt. Kim wanted to land as soon as possible. Duc Phong was the closest airfield but, when contacted by radio, officials at Duc Phong said they were under attack. Capt. Kim next considered landing in an open field, but decided the risk of death or capture by enemy forces was too great.

Soon, the plane was back in safe airspace and the crew could see the runway of Bien Hoa Air Base looming far to the left. Since they had already been flying for more than half an hour on one engine, Capt. Kim decided to continue flying for another ten minutes to Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

Capt. Kim executed a successful single engine landing at Tan Son Nhut and the harrowing flight was over. Despite their unlucky number of 13, the five crew members and their eight VIP passengers were safe and unharmed because of the skill of Capt. Kim and his crew.

SA-7 in Vietnam

by Carl O. Schuster
Vietnam
February 2010

The Soviet-built Strela-2 Man Portable Air Defense (MANPAD) system was based heavily on intelligence gleaned by the KGB about the American FIM-43 Redeye surface-to-air missile.

The Strela-2 had an impact on the battlefield far beyond its technical capabilities in virtually all the world's late twentieth-century conflicts. The Strela (Arrow), code-named the SA-7 Grail by NATO, was introduced in 1968 and holds the distinction of being the first MANPAD successfully employed in combat in Egypt in 1969. Vietnam was the second conflict to see its use.

While early models suffered from slow acceleration, the Grail proved very effective against low-flying, slow-moving aircraft, such as helicopters and the A-1E. Since few pilots were warned of its arrival in Vietnam, the missile's early engagements enjoyed the advantage of surprise and its targets' lack of infrared countermeasures, such as flares.

The first known use of SA-7's in South Vietnam came in May 1972 when one downed an O-2A observation plane and then several of the helicopters involved in the pilot's recovery. Grails were reportedly responsible for downing 16 aircraft in the May-June 1972 Battle for Quang Tri, where their deadly reputation grew.

As American aircrews learned the missile's altitude limitations and its tendency to lock onto any heat source, they moved their tactical air missions to higher altitudes. Wariness of the SA-7 also drove attack jets to higher ingress and egress speeds and higher drop altitudes.

While the Strela-2 (SA-7a) was fired from behind the target, the Strela-2M (SA-7b), introduced [to Vietnam] in 1972, could home in on an aircraft engine cowling to engage incoming targets. [The SA-7b had an increased slant range of 4.2 kilometers compared to 3.7 kilometers for the SA-7a and an increased speed.]

The SA-7 is the reason all of today's military helicopters have infrared warning and countermeasures equipment. Although long obsolete, the SA-7 Grail and its successors remain a threat to helicopters and tactical aircraft to this day.

Editor's note. U.S. helicopter losses to the SA-7 Grail in Vietnam included one CH-53, one CH-47, and many AH-1 Cobras and UH-1 Hueys. U.S. fixed-wing losses included one TA-4F, one AC-130, one F-4, one A-37, several A-1E's, and many observation aircraft (O-1's, O-2's, and OV-10's).

While many of the aircraft shot down by SA-7's were documented, a reliable record does not exist of the total number of aircraft downed or damaged by SA-7 hits in Vietnam. Regardless, the losses were significant. From April 1972 to January 1973, SA-7's shot down approximately 40 U.S. aircraft and from January 1973 to April 1975 they downed approximately 60 VNAF aircraft. The South Vietnamese estimated that 500 crew members and passengers were killed by SA-7's.

What Is a Veteran?

A "Veteran," whether active duty, discharged, retired, or reserve, is someone who, at one point in their life, wrote a blank check made payable to "The United States of America" for an amount of up to, and including, their life.

This is an honor, and there are way too many people in this country today, who no longer understand that fact.

Flying in III Corps

by Thomas R. Hansen [535, 71]
Newsletter Vol. 19, Issue 2
November 2008

The C-7A was a workhorse, but it was an ugly duckling, a noisy crate, slow, did not have a great payload, but it was able to slow-fly almost like a Helio Courier and get into and out of some ridiculous places mistakenly called airfields. It was a real bush aircraft!

[It was] simple, like the Beaver and Otter [airplanes]. Taking off empty, she would zoom climb like you wouldn't believe until the airspeed bled off to a normal figure. I once saw, momentarily, a 3,800 foot per minute climb.

The most exciting routine missions were hauling ammo into fire bases near the border, since these hot areas ruled out the use of truck convoys. We hauled 105 mm, 155 mm, 175 mm, and 8-inch howitzer projectiles into places such as Katum, Bu Dop, Djamap, and Thien Ngon. Four or five birds flew these missions, flying four shuttles each from the hot cargo ramp at Bien Hoa.

We took one or two pallets, depending on the projectile size, the maximum being about 4,200 pounds per pallet. The grunts unloaded each plane with a forklift, if a usable one was available. More often than not, the forklift was broken so we did a speed off-load by dumping the ammo out the back onto the ramp while the bird was moving (the famous Ground LAPES without a chute).

Although the grunts didn't like it that way, it was our fastest way to unload. When you're hauling 175's or 8-inch "howies" into a place like Katum, minimum ground time is the name of the game.

Because it usually didn't work, the least desirable method to off-load was to have the grunts back a truck up to the back end of the bird. Then we were supposed to push the pallet (two tons, mind you) off the plane onto the truck.

Pushing a pallet of shells into the aircraft was no problem – pushing it into the truck was! For most cargo sorties, the C-7A was configured with two cabin-length roller conveyors, enabling us to quickly load, unload, position a pallet (a half-size C-130 type 463L pallet) or most importantly, jettison a load in case of engine failure.

One man could move a pallet load of up to two tons. We strapped down loads to allow us to remove all the tie-downs, except the last one, in the event of a speed off-load at a hot fire base or emergency in-flight jettison. The last strap was released or cut at the critical moment allowing the load to roll out.

My squadron lost a plane on a single engine go-around at Dalat for lack of a good sheath knife when the Fight Mechanic (FM) undid the last strap and tossed it over the load. The load rolled aft as planned, but hung up on the ramp when the tie-down ratchet snagged in the rollers. They couldn't climb single-engine with the center of gravity drastically out of limits, so the Caribou "mushed" in two-thirds of the way down the runway and slid down a hill. Luckily, the crew escaped serious injury.

As we approached fire bases with an ammo load, the Pilot flew the bird, watched for other traffic and ground fire, while the Copilot worked the radio, flaps, and gear. The FM opened the rear cargo door and undid all the tie downs, except for the last one, and ensured that nothing would foul the load. When the aircraft was on the ground, the props were reversed and the ramp trailed level with the floor.

Meanwhile, the pilots changed trim and flap settings for takeoff. At the unloading area (usually located mid-field), we stopped with the nose pointed toward the active runway and reversed props, taxiing in reverse at five to ten knots while the FM undid the last strap. The Pilot went to forward pitch to pull forward and the load slid to the rear. Being on rollers, it dumped out the back onto the ramp while we did a fast taxi to the runway with the Copilot calling for clearance. When the approach end was clear, we would scram. Total ground time from touchdown to liftoff was six to eight minutes.

The oddest cargo I ever carried (on three separate missions) consisted of 3,600 pounds of teletype paper to an ARVN base I doubt even had a teletype; one GI helmet strapped to a pallet; and an ice-filled garbage can with three of the largest lobsters I've ever seen. It really was a STRANGE war!"

Strange Cargo

by Ron Lester [459, 67]

Tom Hansen's story reminded me that the Caribou loads sometimes were odd, strange, and unusual. Most of the loads we carried were common, standard items: weapons, ammunition, fuel, vehicle and aircraft parts, construction materials, mail, medical supplies, rice and other foods, as well as beer, booze, and soft drinks.

Sometimes, non-standard, out of the ordinary items required transportation.

Following are some of the non-standard cargo I helped haul:

Twelve large natural Christmas trees for the Marines, four to Hue Phu Bai and eight to Dong Ha on 22 December 1967

One large birthday cake to Khe Sanh on 27 January 1968

Eight O-1 wings, one O-1 fuselage, one O-1 tail section, and two O-1 flaps, in two sorties, from Hue Citadel to Da Nang on 13 March 1968 after Hue Citadel was recaptured

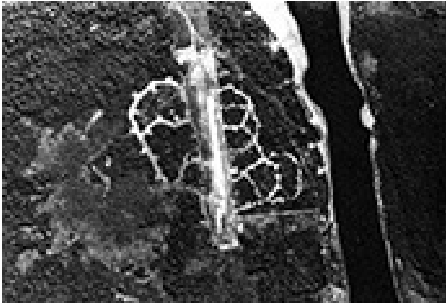
One-half of a Quonset hut, 4,600 pounds, to the Special Forces camp at Minh Long on 25 May 1968

What items did you haul that were not the standard, expected cargo you normally saw? Please send your list of strange, out of the ordinary cargo to me at:

ron.lester43@verizon.net

Most-Honored Photograph

by Roger Cicla
Lensrentals.com
October 29, 2013



Buka Airfield, June 1943

Doesn't look like much, does it? But, depending upon your definition, this photograph, a team effort by nine men, is the most-honored picture in U.S. history.

It's an interesting tale about how people sometimes rise beyond all expectations that takes place in the early days of World War II in the South Pacific.

The Screwed Up Pilot

First, let's get this out of the way. Jay Zeamer wasn't a photographer by trade. He was mostly a wanna-be pilot. He looked good on paper, having graduated with a degree in civil engineering from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), joining the Army Air Corps, and receiving his wings in March 1941. He was a B-26 bomber copilot when World War II started.

His classmates all rapidly became lead pilots and squadron leaders, but not Jay Zeamer. He couldn't pass the pilot check tests despite trying numerous times.

He was a good pilot but just couldn't seem to land the B-26. Landing, from what I've read, was considered one of the more important qualifications for a pilot. Stuck as a copilot while his classmates and then those from the classes behind him were promoted, he got bored and lost all motivation.

Things came to a head when Copilot Zeamer fell asleep while his plane was in flight. Not just in flight, but in flight through heavy anti-aircraft fire during a bombing run. He only woke when the Pilot beat him on the chest because he needed help.

His squadron commander had him transferred to a B-17 squadron in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, where he was allowed to fly as a fill-in navigator and occasionally as a copilot. He was well liked and popular – on the ground. But no one wanted to fly with him.

Zeamer finally managed to get into the pilot's seat by volunteering for a photo reconnaissance mission when the scheduled pilot became ill. The mission, an extremely dangerous one over the Japanese stronghold at Rabaul, won Zeamer a Silver Star – despite the fact that he still hadn't qualified to pilot a B-17.

The Eager Beavers

Somehow, Zeamer becomes the Operations Officer (a ground position) at the 43rd Air Group. Despite his lack of qualification, he still managed to fly as a B-17 fill-in pilot fairly often.

He had discovered that he loved to fly B-17's on photo reconnaissance missions, and he wanted to do it full-time. There were only three things standing in his way: he didn't have a crew, he didn't have an airplane, and oh, yeah, he still wasn't a qualified pilot.

He solved the first problem by gravitating to every misfit and ne'er-do-well in the 43rd Air Group. As another pilot, Walt Krell, recalled, "He recruited a crew of renegades and screw-offs. They were the worst – men nobody else wanted. But they gravitated toward one another and made a hell of a team."

The plane came later. An old, beat-up B-17E, S/N 41-2666, that had seen better days was flown into their field to be scavenged for spare parts. Capt. Zeamer had other ideas. He and his crew decided to rebuild the plane in their spare time since they weren't going to get to fly any other way. Exactly how they managed to accomplish their task is the subject of some debate. Remember, there were so few spare parts available that their "plane" was actually brought in originally to be a parts donor.

But rebuild it they did. Once it was in flying shape the Base Commander congratulated them and said he'd find a new crew to fly it. Not surprisingly, Zeamer and his crew took exception to this idea. According to Walt Krell, the crew slept in their airplane, having loudly announced that the .50 caliber machine guns were kept loaded in case anyone came around to "borrow" it. There was a severe shortage of planes, so the Base Commander ignored the mutiny and let the crew fly, but generally expected them to take on missions that no one else wanted.

The misfit crew thrived on it. They hung around the base operations center, volunteering for every mission no one else wanted. That earned them the nickname "The Eager Beavers," and their patched up B-17 was called *Old 666*.

Once they started flying their plane on difficult photo reconnaissance missions, they made some modifications. Even among the men of a combat air station, the Eager Beavers became known as "gun nuts."

They replaced all of the light .30 caliber machine guns in the plane with heavier .50 caliber weapons. Then the .50 caliber machine guns were replaced with double .50 caliber guns. Zeamer had another pair of machine guns mounted to the front of the plane so he could remotely fire them like a fighter pilot. And the crew kept extra machine guns stored in the plane, just in case one of their other guns jammed or malfunctioned.

As odd as all of this sounds, the South Pacific theater in the early days of World War II was a chaotic area scattered over thousands of miles with very little equipment. Having a plane with an apparently nutty crew who volunteered for every awful mission

Continued on Page 23

Honored Photo (from Page 22)

not surprisingly made the commanding officers look the other way.

Buka

In June 1943, the U. S. had secured Guadalcanal in the southern Solomon Islands. They knew the Japanese had a huge base at Rabaul, but were certain there were other airfields being built in the Northern Solomon Islands. They asked for a volunteer crew to take photographs of Bougainville Island to plan for an eventual invasion, and of Buka airfield on the north side of the island to assess for increased activity there.

It was considered a near-suicide mission – flying hundreds of miles over enemy airspace in a single, slow bomber. Not to mention photo reconnaissance meant staying in level flight and taking no evasive action even if they were attacked.

The only crew that volunteered, of course, was Jay Zeamer and the Eager Beavers. One of the crew, bombardier Joseph Sarnovski, had absolutely no reason to volunteer. He'd already been in combat for 18 months and was scheduled to go home in three days. Being a photo mission, there was no need for a bombardier. But if his friends were going, he wanted to go, and one of the bombardier's battle stations was to man the forward machine guns. They might need him, so he went.

They suspected the airstrip at Buka had been expanded and reinforced but weren't sure until they got close. As soon as the airfield came in sight, they saw numerous fighters taking off and heading their way. The logical thing to do would have been to turn right and head for home. They would be able to tell the intelligence officers about the increased number of planes at Buka even if they didn't get photos.

But Zeamer and photographer William Kendrick knew that photos would be invaluable for subsequent planes attacking the base, and for Marines who were planning to invade the island later. Zeamer held the plane level (tilting the wings even one degree at that altitude could put the photograph half a mile off target) and Kendrick took his photos, which gave plenty of time for over 20 enemy fighters to get up to the altitude *Old 666* was flying at.

"Old 666" probably at 14-Mile Strip near Port Moresby

The fighter group, commanded by Chief Petty Officer Yoshio Ooki, was experienced and professional. They carefully set up their attack, forming a semi-circle all around the B-17 and then attacking from all directions at once. Ooki didn't know about the extra weapons the Eager Beavers had mounted to their plane, but it wouldn't matter if he had; there was no way for a single B-17 to survive those odds.

During the first fighter pass, the plane was hit by hundreds of machine-gun bullets and cannon shells. Five crewmen of the B-17 were wounded and the plane badly damaged. All of the wounded men stayed at their stations and were still firing when the fighters came in for a second pass, which caused just as much damage as the first. Hydraulic cables were cut, holes the size of footballs appeared in the wings, and the front Plexiglas canopy of the plane was shattered.

Zeamer was wounded during the second fighter pass, but kept the plane flying level and took no evasive action until Kendrick called over the intercom that the photography was completed. Only then did he begin to move the plane from side-to-side allowing his gunners better shots, just as the fighters came in for the third wave of attacks. The third pass blew out the oxygen system of the plane, which was flying at 28,000 feet.

Despite the obvious structural damage, Zeamer put the plane in an emergency dive to get down to a level where there was enough oxygen for them to survive.

During the dive, a 20 mm cannon shell exploded in the navigator's compartment. Sarnoski, who was already wounded, was blown out of his compartment and beneath the cockpit. Another crewman reached him and saw there was a huge wound in his side. Despite his obviously mortal wound, Sarnoski said, "Don't worry about me, I'm all right" and crawled back to his gun which was now exposed to 300 miles an hour winds since the Plexiglas front of the plane was now gone. He shot down one more fighter before he died a minute or two later.

The battle continued for over 40 minutes. The Eager Beavers shot down several fighters and heavily damaged several others. The B-17 was so heavily damaged, however, that they didn't expect to make the several hundred miles long flight back home. Sarnoski had already died from his wounds. Zeamer had continued piloting the plane despite multiple wounds. Five other men were seriously wounded.

Flight Officer Ooki's squadron returned to Buka out of ammunition and fuel. They understandably reported the B-17 was destroyed and about to crash in the ocean when they last saw it.

The B-17 didn't quite crash, though. Zeamer had lost consciousness from loss of blood but regained it when he was removed from the pilot seat and lay on the floor of the plane. The Copilot, Lt. J. T. Britton, was the most qualified to care for the wounded and was needed in the back of the plane. One of the gunners, Sgt. Johnnie Able, had liked to sit in the cockpit behind the pilots and watch them fly. That made him the most qualified of the crewman, so he flew the plane with Zeamer advising him from the floor while Britton cared for the wounded.

Continued on Page 24

Honored Photo (from Page 23)

The plane made it back to base. (Britton did return to the cockpit for the landing.) After the landing, the medical triage team had Zeamer removed from the plane last, because they considered his wounds mortal. Amazingly, the one thing on the plane not damaged was the cameras and the photos in them were considered invaluable in planning the invasion of Bougainville.

Epilogue

All of the wounded men recovered, although it was a close thing for Capt. Zeamer. In fact, a death notification was sent to his parents somewhat prematurely. He spent the next year in hospitals recovering from his wounds, but lived a long and happy life, passing away at age 88.

Both Jay Zeamer and Joseph Sarnovski were awarded the Medal of Honor for the mission, the only time in World War II that two men from one plane ever received America's highest medal for valor in combat.

The other members of the crew were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, second only to the Medal of Honor as an award for bravery.

So, somewhat surprisingly, the most decorated combat flight in U. S. history didn't take place in a major battle. It was a photo-reconnaissance flight; the flight of *Old 666* in June of 1943.

Tan Son Nhut Turn-Around

by Tom Smith [458 & 310, 71]

It was late afternoon and we were hot, sweaty, and tired. We had been flying in the Central Highlands all day and were covered with that fine, red, laterite clay dust. Trickling sweat left little white streaks down our faces, making us look like weird tigers. Because it was the time of year when Vietnamese rice farmers burned off their fields for planting, smoke hung in the air everywhere. We all smelled like we had been standing too close to a campfire. The sun hung low above the horizon like a huge orange basketball and, with the haze and smoke, visibility looking west toward the sun was virtually nil.

We were headed back to our base at Tan Son Nhut (TSN), which was also Saigon's (now Ho Chi Minh City's) main airport. TSN was the biggest airport in the country, by far, and at the time was one of the world's busiest.

To provide an appreciation of the traffic congestion, a partial list of aircraft operating in and out of TSN on a regular basis included: O-1 Bird Dogs, O-2 Skymasters, OV-1 Mohawks, C-7A Caribous, AC-47 Spooky and AC-119 Stinger and Shadow gunships, C-123 Providers, C-130 Hercules, C-119 Flying Boxcars, A-1 Spads, A-37 Dragonflys, C-141 Starlifters, QU-22B manned radio relay drones, and commercial airline Boeing 747's, Douglas DC-8's, and Boeing 707's. Oh yes, we can't forget the UH-1 Huey and the CH-47 Chinook helicopters. The mix of military aircraft were flown by U.S. and South Vietnamese pilots and aircrews.

Besides normal traffic, there were also frequent emergency landings by aircraft with equipment malfunctions or battle damage. It was also not unusual for South Vietnamese F-5 Skoshi Tigers and other fighters from nearby Bien Hoa, also known as "Rocket City," to land at TSN when they were short on fuel.

TSN air traffic was always chaotic, but it usually functioned fairly well. The two parallel runways at TSN were 10,000 feet of concrete and were roughly aligned east-west (runways 07 left and right and runways 25 left and right). The truly amazing thing about this whole operation was that about 95% of the air traffic was operating VFR – using Visual Flight Rules.

There was no one in Approach Control or Tower getting everyone lined up and separated. We just did it ourselves.

All of the sorting out was done on the "outside downwind." The outside downwind was a pattern flow parallel to the landing runway, but "downwind" some distance from the runway. Depending on speed and aircraft type, it was flown at 2,000 feet, 1,500 feet, or 1,000 feet above the ground. From the outside downwind the pilot turned 90 degrees toward the runway for an extended base leg, and then made another descending 90 degree turn onto final for landing into the wind.

Patience. There is a purpose behind this long-winded explanation. TSN always, and I do mean always, landed to the west (runways 25) regardless of the surface winds.

On our way in that afternoon, I asked the Copilot to monitor the recorded radio frequency to get local TSN weather and landing information. He did and, after a moment, he turned to me and said, "They are landing 07!" WHAT? I listened myself. Runway 07. Huh? The winds, as usual, were light and variable. Why were they landing that direction?

We all have points in our life when we are required to make important decisions based on little information. Vietnamese air traffic controllers were, well, inconsistent. Some were excellent. Some were not. Could they have made a mistake? Controller mistakes had happened before.

All pilots flying into TSN at that time had to make the same decision – which runway were they really using? Runway 25 or 07?

As it turned out, pilots fell into one of two camps. Camp One: "Huh, that's weird. They are landing 07 today." Camp Two: "This can't be right. They never land 07. It must be a mistake." I won't tell you which Camp I fell into, because it really didn't matter. As near as I could tell, 50 per cent of the pilots fell into each Camp.

If you have ever watched the Thunderbird Aerial Demonstration Team perform, at the end of their show they do their famous "Bomb Burst." That is what outside downwind looked like,

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Turn-Around (from Page 24)

as two large groups of dissimilar aircraft met head on. As we rolled out on downwind, our cockpit looked like a tree full of owls as the Flight Mechanic stood between the pilot seats and helped scan for traffic.

Copilot, "C-130, 12 o'clock head-on!" Damn! Hard left climbing turn.

"Two-ship A-37's above us!" Jesus! Push the nose over and check left.

"O-1 left, 11 o'clock!" from me. Make a hard turn back to the right.

"Watch out for the Huey!" Heard from the Flight Mechanic.

"707 behind us!" That was EVERYBODY!

All around us, similar scenarios were playing out. We finally got out of there and put some distance between us and the airfield, which now looked like flies on, well – you know. We circled for a while and let our breathing and pulses slow.

We checked the recorded airfield information broadcast again. What do you know? It was a new recording. TSN was now landing 25.

As near as I could tell, runway 07 operations that day lasted only a few minutes until they could "turn the runways around" and get everything back to normal. All I can say for sure is that for the rest of my tour at Tan Son Nhut, they never attempted runway 07 operation again.

Ever.

Home Schooled

Source Unknown

1. Why do men's clothes have buttons on the right while women's clothes have buttons on the left?

Because: When buttons were invented, they were very expensive and worn primarily by the rich. Since most people are right-handed, it is easier to push buttons on the right through holes on the left. Because wealthy women were dressed by maids, the dressmakers put the buttons on the maid's right! And that's where women's buttons have remained since.

2. Why do ships and aircraft use "Mayday" as their call for help?

Because: This comes from the French word *m'aidez*, that means "help me," that is pronounced, approximately, "Mayday."

3. Why are zero scores in tennis called "love?"

Because: In France, where tennis became popular, the round zero on the scoreboard looked like an egg and was called *l'oeuf*, which is French for "the egg." When tennis was introduced in the U.S., Americans (naturally) mispronounced it "love."

4. Why do X's at the end of a letter signify kisses?

Because: In the Middle Ages, when many people were unable to read or write, documents were often signed using an X. Kissing the X represented an oath to fulfill obligations specified in the document. The X and the kiss eventually became synonymous.

5. Why is shifting responsibility to someone else called "passing the buck?"

Because: In card games, it was once customary to pass an item, called a "buck," from player to player to indicate whose turn it was to deal. If a player did not wish to assume the responsibility of dealing, he would "pass the buck" to the next player.

6. Why do people clink their glasses before drinking a toast?

Because: In earlier times it used to be common for someone to try to kill an enemy by offering him a poisoned drink. To prove to a guest that a drink was safe, it became customary for a guest to pour a small amount of his drink into the glass of the host. Both men would then drink it simultaneously. When a guest trusted his host, he would only touch or clink the host's glass with his own.

7. Why are people in the public eye said to be "in the limelight?"

Because: Invented in 1825, limelight was used in lighthouses and theatres by burning a cylinder of lime, which produced a brilliant light. In the theater, a performer "in the limelight" was the center of attention.

8. Why is someone who is feeling great "on cloud nine"?

Because: Types of clouds are numbered according to the altitudes they attain, with nine being the highest cloud. If someone is said to be on cloud nine, that person is floating well above worldly cares.

9. In golf, where did the term "caddie" come from?

Because: When Mary Queen of Scots went to France as a young girl, Louis, King of France, learned that she loved the Scots game "golf." He had the first course outside of Scotland built for her enjoyment. To make sure she was properly chaperoned (and guarded) while she played, Louis hired cadets from a military school to accompany her.

Mary liked this a lot and when she returned to Scotland (not a very good idea in the long run), she took the practice with her. In French, the word cadet is pronounced "ca-day" and the Scots changed it into caddie.

10. Why are many coin collection jar banks shaped like pigs?

Because: Long ago, dishes and cookware in Europe were made of dense orange clay called "pygg." When people saved coins in jars made of this clay, the jars became known as "pygg banks." When an English potter misunderstood the word, he made a container that resembled a pig – and it caught on.

11. Do you know this musician?

A grandson of slaves was born in a poor neighborhood of New Orleans known as the "Back of Town."

His father abandoned the family when the child was an infant His mother became a prostitute and the boy and his sister had to live with their grandmother.

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Home Schooled (from Page 25)

Early in life he proved to be musically gifted and with three other kids he sang on the streets of New Orleans. His first earnings were coins that were thrown to them.

A poor Jewish family, named Karnofsky, who had emigrated from Lithuania to the U.S., had pity for the 7-year-old boy and brought him into their home. Initially giving him "work" in the house, to feed the hungry child. There he remained and he slept in this Jewish family's home where, for the first time in his life, he was treated with kindness and tenderness.

When he went to bed, Mrs. Karnovsky sang him a Russian lullaby that he would sing with her. Later, he learned to sing and play several Russian and Jewish songs.

Over time, this boy became the adopted son of this family. The Karnofskys advanced him the money to buy his first musical instrument, which he paid back while living with them. The Karnofsky family sincerely admired his musical talent.

Later, when the boy became a professional musician and composer, he used Jewish melodies in compositions, such as *St. James Infirmary* and *Go Down Moses.*

When the little black boy grew up, he wrote in a book about this Jewish family who had adopted him in 1907. He said that in this Jewish family, he had learned "how to live real life and determination" and he proudly spoke Yiddish. In memory of this family, and until the end of his life, he wore a Star of David.

You might recognize his name. The little boy was the world-famous jazz trumpet player Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong.

Seven Women Who Received the DFC

by James Elphick
wearethemighty.com
March, 4, 2021

Amidst the ongoing debate about whether female troops should be allowed to serve in combat positions, there [have been seven women who proved their valor] by earning the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC).

No. 1 Amelia Earhart

Amelia Earhart, 1928

Amelia Earhart was an early pioneer for women in aviation. She became famous for her numerous achievements in flight, and, unfortunately, for her mysterious disappearance in 1937 while attempting a circumnavigation of the Earth.

In 1932, she gained notoriety when she became the first woman, and only the second person, to fly solo nonstop across the Atlantic. The flight garnered her a Distinguished Flying Cross from Congress – the first for a woman and the first for a civilian.

Her many other flight achievements include: 1931, first woman to fly an autogiro; 1932, first woman to fly solo nonstop across the U.S.; 1935, first person to fly solo from Hawaii to the U.S. mainland.

No. 2 1/Lt. Aleda E. Lutz

Aleda Lutz served as an Army flight nurse aboard C-47 Medevac aircraft during World War II.

In 196 combat missions flown over

20 months in Tunisia, Italy, and France, Lutz evacuated and treated some 3,500 casualties. She was awarded the Air Medal with four Oak Leaf Clusters for her service.

On November 1, 1944, Lutz flew on her last mission, evacuating wounded soldiers from France, when her plane crashed in a storm. Lutz was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for "outstanding proficiency and selfless devotion to duty."

She is believed to have been the first U.S. servicewoman killed in action in World War II.

No. 3 1/Lt. Roberta S. Ross

Roberta Ross also served as a an Army flight nurse in World War II. Her service took her to Asia where she completed over 100 missions flying "the Hump," the brutal, unforgiving air route over the eastern Himalayas. For her "extraordinary achievement," she was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster.

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Seven Women (from Page 26)

No. 4 Col. Jacqueline Cochran

Jacqueline Cochran was a pioneer for women's military aviation. Cochran had numerous accomplishments and firsts throughout her illustrious career.

During World War II, she flew aircraft between America and Europe and later directed the Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs).

She was the first woman to break the speed of sound, the first woman to take off and land from an aircraft carrier, and the first woman to exceed Mach 2.

For her exceptional skills and record-breaking flying Jacqueline Cochran was awarded three Distinguished Flying Crosses during her career.

No. 5 CWO 3 Lori Hill

Vice President Richard Cheney presents the DFC to CWO 3 Lori Hill at Fort Campbell, KY. U.S. Army photo

In March 2006, Chief Warrant Officer Lori Hill was flying Kiowa helicopters with the 101st Airborne Division in Iraq. She would become the first woman to ever receive the Distinguished Flying Cross for Valor when she provided close air support to American troops engaged with the enemy.

Despite heavy fire, Hill made multiple gun runs against insurgents. On her final pass the helicopter was hit by an RPG (Rifle Propelled Grenade) that damaged the Kiowa's instruments.

As she banked away, machine gun fire riddled the bottom of her aircraft and struck her in the foot. She managed to fly the damaged aircraft back to a nearby FOB (Forward Operating Base), saving her aircraft and crew.

No. 6 Maj. Mary Jennings Hegar

Maj. Hegar in cockpit.
Photo courtesy of MJHegard.com

Maj. Mary J. Hegar would become the second woman to ever receive the Distinguished Flying Cross for valor during a deployment to Afghanistan in 2009.

While flying a Medevac mission, Hegar's Blackhawk helicopter was shot down by insurgents and she was wounded. According to an interview with NPR (National Public Radio), she climbed on the skids of a Kiowa helicopter that landed to extract her and, despite her wounds, provided cover fire with her M4 carbine while the aircraft flew off. For her efforts under fire, she received the Distinguished Flying Cross with valor and the Purple Heart.

No. 7 Sgt. Julia Bringloe

Julia Bringloe was serving as a Flight Medic on a Medevac crew when U.S. and Afghan forces launched Operation Hammer Down in the Pech River Valley. Almost immediately, the units involved started taking casualties, and Bringloe and the rest of her *Dustoff* crew were flying into fierce enemy fire.

Flight Medic Julia Bringloe
U.S. Army Photo

While ascending a 150-foot lift on a cable with a wounded soldier, she had swung into a tree and broke a leg. She refused to quit, however, and over the next 60 hours rescued fourteen soldiers from the battlefield.

Bringloe was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, as were both pilots of her helicopter.

Share Your Story

by Ron Lester [459, 67]

The *C-7A Caribou Association Newsletter* is a forum to share your stories and enjoy the stories of others. Each of you has stories. I know you do. Please share your stories; others are interested and want to read them.

The stories do not have to be about Caribous or Vietnam. We want to hear stories about your career, the airplanes you flew or supported; the experiences you had that hold a place in your memory; the people you served with who made a lasting impression.

I am asking each of you to submit a story. If you need assistance or have questions, call me at 703-851-6892.

Please send your stories to:

ron.lester43@verizon.net

903rd Aeromedical Evacuation Flight in Vietnam

by Stacey Geiger
88th Air Base Wing Public Affairs
Wright-Patterson AFB, OH
February 27, 2017

Wright-Patterson AFB, OH (*Air Force News Service*). Original members of the 903rd Aeromedical Evacuation Flight (AEF) will gather at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, OH, in May 2017, to celebrate the unit's 50th anniversary.

Established in February 1967, the 903rd AEF was the first Air Force tactical aeromedical unit used in a combat area.

Initially operating out of the 21st Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron (AES) at Pope AFB, NC, and the 22nd AES at Sewart AFB, TN, personnel and equipment from the two squadrons were combined and deployed to Phu Cat Air Base (AB), Republic of Vietnam, in March 1967 as the 903rd AEF assigned to the 903rd Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, headquartered at Tan Son Nhut AB.

The 903rd Flight was a self-contained unit of mobile teams to provide patient care at forward airstrips. The unit's personnel had diverse flight and ground medical skills and sufficient equipment for four 25-bed forward facilities. Teams were sent to Khe Sanh in April 1967, to Dong Ha in May 1967, and again to Khe Sanh in early 1968.

During the battle at Dak To during the fall of 1967, a mobile close support force from the 903rd Flight received patients brought to the fixed- wing airstrip by Army helicopters. The group worked with Army personnel to schedule patient transfers out and coordinated numerous C-130 evacuations.

Although the joint service concept advanced no further after 1968, the existence of the mobile forces indicated the Air Force's willingness to undertake

greater aeromedical roles in the blurred area left by existing agreements with the Army.

During Tet 1968, the 903rd AES treated and moved over ten thousand patients during the first thirty days.

This first-of-its kind unit was comprised of a 12-person emergency medical care team that included a medical service corps officer, an NCO in charge, eight aeromedical evacuation technicians, a radio operator, and an administrative specialist.

The 903rd AEF's role was to assist the Army and Marines by administering medical care and evacuating casualties to in-country surgical hospitals and naval hospital ships. C-130 Hercules, C-7A Caribou, C-123 Providers, and various [types of] helicopters were used for the evacuations.

"A battle casualty would be airlifted from the point of injury by helicopter and brought to a forward combat medical facility for emergency treatment of battle injuries. The more serious injured patients would be stabilized and brought to us for evacuation by fixed wing aircraft," said retired Chief Master Sgt. Charles Fox, an original team member who served as an aeromedical evacuation technician.

"It is important to note that this schedule of operations could change anytime based on the numbers and conditions of patients," Fox said. "At Khe Sanh, during the 1968 Tet Offensive, some casualties were brought directly from the field to our casualty staging facilities for evacuation."

Staged at various combat bases with airstrips located in Vietnam where heavy casualties were anticipated, these teams mobilized and operated out of self-contained medical care units called casualty staging facilities.

The unit provided care for combat casualties awaiting airlift and in-flight care during the evacuation flight. However, the technicians were limited to the type of care they could provide.

"Sadly, very minimum equipment, such as Ambu bags for resuscitation, Ambu foot suction pumps, and assorted medical bandages and supplies were provided," Fox said.

During the Vietnam conflict, the 903rd AEF was responsible for assisting with initial care and providing in-flight medical care to thousands of wounded service members. The unit was awarded the Air Force Presidential Citation, the Navy Presidential Unit Citation, and the Air Force Outstanding Unit Citation.

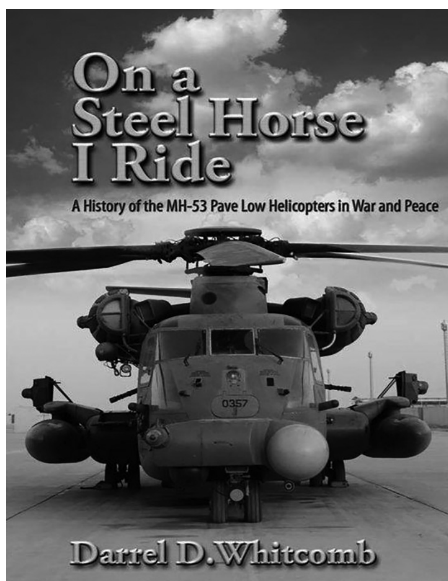
Editor's note. An Ambu bag is the proprietary name for a bag valve mask, also known generically as a manual resuscitator or "self-inflating bag." It is a hand-held device commonly used to provide positive pressure ventilation to patients who are not breathing or not breathing adequately. A foot suction pump is used for pharyngeal or tracheal aspiration in emergency situations that is operated by foot.

Charles Fox at Duc Pho in 1967
Both photos from af.mil

On a Steel Horse I Ride

A History of the MH-53 Pave Low Helicopters in War and Peace

by Darrel Whitcomb, [537, 70]



The "Steel Horses" were born of necessity in the long war in Southeast Asia to fly search and rescue and special operations missions. In order to meet the requirement the USAF fleet of 52 HH-53's and 20 CH-53's were modified with state-of-the-art precision navigation capability under a program called Pave Low and re-designated as MH-53J/M's.

Fielded by the Air Force Special Operations Command, the Pave Low was used by the 1st Special Operations Wing. They were also flown by the 58th SOW and the 352nd and 353rd Special Operations groups in actions around the world. Pave Low flew in every major U.S. military action until their inactivation in Iraq in September 2008.

The story is not just about the helicopters. It is also about the Airmen who conceptualized, created, operated, maintained, loved, and sometimes cursed their Steel Horses. They and their great aircraft were the reality of the motto: "Any Time, Any Place."

Call Sign Dustoff:

A History of U.S. Army Aeromedical Evacuation from Conception to Hurricane Katrina

by Darrel Whitcomb, [537, 70]

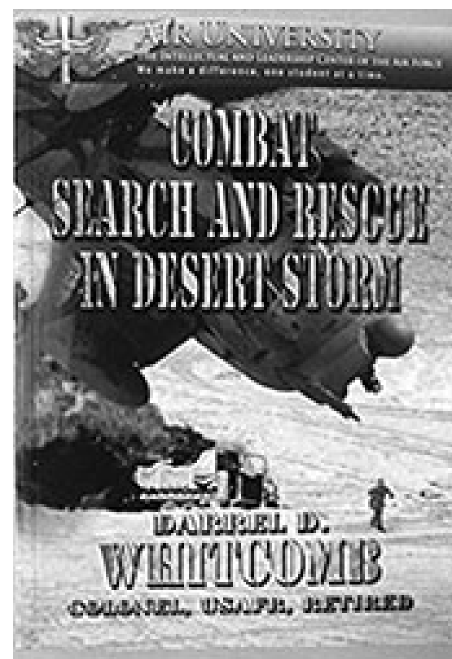
This book captures the story of *Dust off* from its conception. It explores the initial attempts to use aircraft for evacuation, reviews development and maturity of aircraft evacuation use through conflicts, and focuses on the history of the Medevac post-Vietnam through Hurricane Katrina.

While the book reviews *Dustoff'*s development and use in Korea and Vietnam, it focuses on the post–Vietnam years that saw almost constant transformation of unit structure, doctrine and structural command and control, and the development and adaptation of new aircraft and lifesaving equipment

The book focuses on the ambiguity of belonging to both medical and aviation organizations, asking the fundamental question, "is aeromedical aviation an aviation mission that entails the movement of people, or is it a medical operation that entails the use of aircraft?" This question is paramount to understanding Medevac, because the answer places Medevac responsibilities under either medical or aviation command.

Combat Search and Rescue in Desert Storm

by Darrel Whitcomb, [537, 70]



Budgetary, political, and organizational changes left the USAF unprepared for the combat search and rescue (CSAR) mission going into Desert Storm.

Colonel Whitcomb relates his and others' experiences from CSAR in Southeast Asia and examines the organization that was established to provide CSAR services in the Iraq-Kuwait theater of operations.

He traces each incident from beginning to end along with the tactical and sometimes strategic implications. Scores of interviews, e-mails, and published works provide a compendium of lessons learned and recommendations gleaned from those who flew the missions and made the decisions in Iraq.

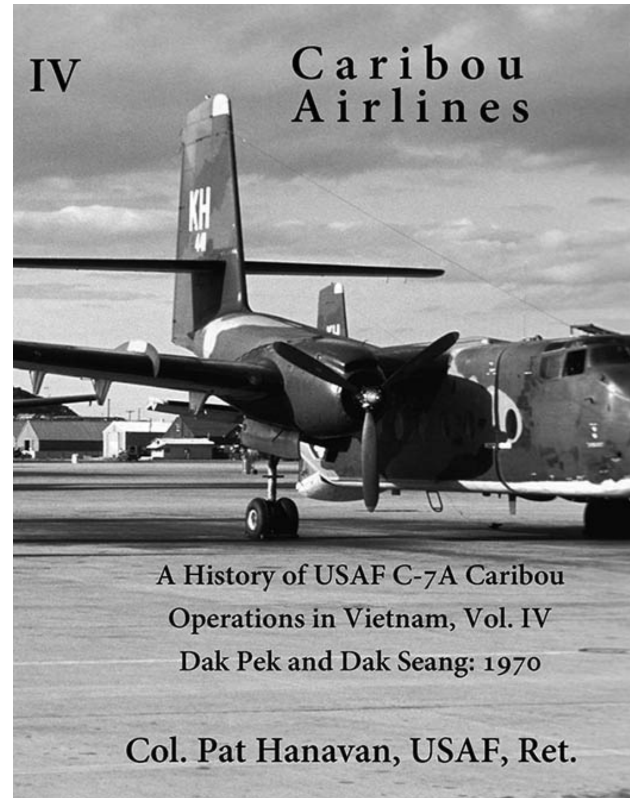
Air University

Caribou Airlines
Volumes I - V
by Pat Hanavan [535, 68]

Caribou Airlines, Volumes I - V, is a comprehensive history of USAF C-7A operations in Vietnam. These five volumes are 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. Together, 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.

Signed individual copies of the book can be ordered from the author for $20 and a set of all five signed for $80, shipping included: **Pat Hanavan, 12402 Winding Branch, San Antonio, TX 78230-2770**. The books are also available from Amazon.



Vietnam to Western Airlines
Volumes 1 - 4
Edited by Bruce Cowee [458, 68]

The four books in this series are an oral history of the air war in Vietnam, including stories and photographs, of pilots who all had one thing in common. After returning from Southeast Asia, and separating from military service, they were hired by Western Airlines.

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Vietnam to Western Airlines volumes can be ordered from:
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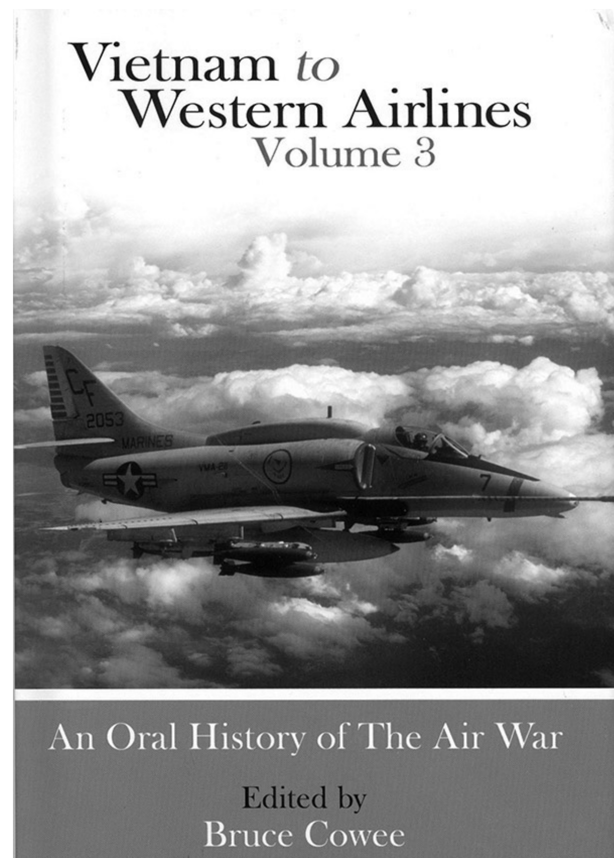

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