Phan Rang AB Newsletter
The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.
"Keeping the memories alive" Newsletter 212

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AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF PHAN RANG AIR BASE PERSONNEL

In these twenty six autobiographies, we get a glimpse into the life of war time air crew members with amazing stories of heroism that actually happened, more thrilling than fiction.

James Alvis
71st Tactical Airlift Sq.

James Alvis, Crew Chief, 71st Tactical Airlift Sq.

I was born, raised and educated in Indianapolis, Indiana. While working and attending Purdue University in the mid 60s, I was faced with the dilemma of staying in college or being drafted. To avoid being drafted, I enlisted in the Air Force Reserve unit at Bakalar AFB, Columbus, Indiana on 2 December 1964. This seemed to be the logical thing to do in order to reduce or eliminate my chances of possibly going to Vietnam, so I thought. Following basic training in January and February 1965, I completed Reciprocating Engine Aircraft Maintenance School at Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls, TX.

Upon reporting to my reserve unit in June 1965 I was assigned to the flight line to assist other Crew Chiefs with the inspection, maintenance, and pre-flighting of C-119G aircraft. After completing a series of correspondence courses I was promoted to Sergeant and assigned to a Crew Chief position in 1967.

The biggest military shock of my life occurred on 11 April 1968. While at work someone mentioned they heard on the local radio station that an Air Force Reserve unit from Columbus, Indiana had been called to active duty. Panic and disbelief set in. After gathering more information from subsequent newscasts, I realized it was true. As it turned out, a total of 24,500 reservists and guardsmen across the country were activated that day, not just the unit I was assigned to. I'm sure most other reservists were asking the same question, "Why me?" At the time, I had no idea why the 71st Tactical Airlift Squadron was selected from about 14 other C-119 reserve squadrons across the country. I would later learn the 71st and its sister squadron the 72nd were two of the best prepared and trained C-119 squadrons in the country. Following the recall notice we had 30 days to get our personal affairs in order prior to our report date of 13 May 1968 at Bakalar AFB.

Shortly after reporting for active duty on 13 May we learned of the squadron's new mission. The 71st Tactical Airlift Squadron would be transferring to Lockbourne AFB, Ohio to transition from the normal cargo aircraft configuration to a new gunship platform. Nearly 400 officers and enlisted personnel, 18 C-119G aircraft and maintenance equipment completed the move by 11 June 1968. On 15 June the squadron was redesignated 71st Air Commando Squadron, and redesignated a second time to 71st Special Operations Squadron on 8 July 1968.

During the summer and fall of 1968, the 71st SOS received AC- 119G gunships from the Fairchild-Hiller facility in St. Augustine, FL. Air crew and maintenance training increased at a rapid pace as everyone had to become familiar with the new gunship platform. On 27 November 1968, Deputy Defense Secretary Nitze approved the deployment of the 71st SOS to Southeast Asia.

Flight crews were selected to ferry the 18 AC-119G aircraft to Vietnam. The ferry crews were composed of a Pilot, Co-pilot, Navigator, Flight Engineer, and Crew Chief. Being a Crew Chief, I was assigned to ferry crew #17 with Pilots Major **Don Horak** and Major **Bill O'Brien**, Navigator Capt. **John Martin**, and Flight Engineer SSgt. **Henry Young** to ferry aircraft #52-5925 to Vietnam. We departed Lockbourne AFB on 6 January 1969 to pick up our ferry aircraft at the Fairchild-Hiller facility. Following a thorough acceptance flight of aircraft #925, we began the ferry mission on 7 January 1969. Our ferry route was along the southern United States to California, Alaska, Midway Island, Wake Island, Guam, Philippines, and finally arriving at Nha Trang, Vietnam on 22 January 1969. Total flying time was about 72 hours. (**Note**: *Phan Rang Newsletter 205 contains a very good account of ferrying aircraft to SEA by Capt. Roy Davis as well as Roy Davis's autobiography in this issue*.)

After arriving at Nha Trang, I was assigned to the flight line night shift. After three or four days of shift work, I decided if the war did not kill me, the night shift work would.

That finally changed on 13 February 1969 when 15 of us maintainers were assigned to the FOL (Forward Operating Location) at Phan Rang where I had the opportunity to work the day shift. I spent the remainder of my time in Vietnam with B Flight at Happy Valley (Phan Rang). My biggest scare at Phan Rang came at 0130 hours on 22 February; the base came under a mortar attack. The air-raid siren was just outside our barracks, about 50 feet from my window. I was sound asleep when it went off and I literally rolled from the top bunk to the floor. It scared the

hell out of me. There were many more mortar attacks but we became used to them (complacent) after a while. To this day, every time I hear the severe weather sirens go off, I still recall those moments at Phan Rang.

Following the reservists return home to Indiana on 6 June 1969, I returned to Purdue University and completed my bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering Technology and worked in the natural gas industry for over 40 years. During the 1970s and 80s, my main interest was auto racing photography. I photographed seventeen Indianapolis 500 mile races and numerous road racing events. My most recent interests include learning about and presenting the history of the 434th and 71st from WW II to the present. I volunteer at the Atterbury/Bakalar Air Museum on the grounds of the former Bakalar AFB, now the Columbus Municipal Airport. The museum contains many historical artifacts pertaining to the 434th Troop Carrier Group (WW II) and the 71st SOS. I am also a member of the Columbus/ Bakalar Chapter #288 of the Air Force Association.

Not until the mid-to-late 1990s did I take an interest in the 71st SOS from a historical standpoint. I started attending 71st SOS reunions and meeting many of my reservist and regular Air Force friends. I have learned through maturity the importance of the common bond we share and have made many new lifelong friendships from casual acquaintances of many years ago. I value these friendships very highly. That is the whole purpose of attending reunions.

Frank A. Bianco
18th Special Operations Sq.

Frank A. Bianco, Navigator, 18th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in Garfield, New Jersey. I graduated from New Jersey Institute of Technology with a BS in Mechanical Engineering and a minor in Engineering Management. I entered the Air Force in June 1956 as a Second Lieutenant. I was in the advance party of AC-119Ks to set up the squadron at Phan Rang. I was Assistant Operations Officer for Colonel Mathison. I also served as

instructor for new crews as they arrived in country.

During my career I served as Chief Engineer at the Air Force Office of United Technology. I was assigned to B-47s at Davis Monthan AFB, Arizona. Additionally, I flew B-52s at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio and was assigned to SAC Headquarters as Division Chief of Offensive Threat Analysis.

I retired in January 1976 as a Lieutenant Colonel and retired from my civilian job in August 2007. I currently live in Omaha, Nebraska.

James Willis Green
17th Special Operations Sq.

James Willis Green, Gunner, 17th Special Operations Squadron

James was born 21 Feb 1941 at Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. He enlisted in the USAF 4 Jan 1960 at Indianapolis, Indiana which he planned on doing after graduating from high school. After 23 years 1 month of service, James retired at the grade of Chief Master Sergeant.

James volunteered for flight duty as an aerial gunner and was placed on flight orders in February 1970 when he entered AC-119G training at Lockbourne AFB, OH. He completed aircrew survival training courses at Fairchild AFB and Clark AFB enroute to his assignment with the 17th Special Operations Squadron, Phan Rang AB, RVN.

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James served with the 17th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang AB, May 1970 - August 1970 where he flew 26 combat missions and accumulated 134.9 hours as an AC- 119G Gunner. In August 1970 he responded to a higher headquarters request for volunteers to fly as helicopter crewmembers with the 20th SOS. He was selected and completed Gunner/SEFE training on the UH-1P/N at Tuy Hoa AB.

He served at Minot AFB, North Dakota, 5th Munitions Maintenance Squadron, Maintenance Superintendent, B-52H, Oct '80- Jan '83, and retired in January 1983 as Chief Master Sergeant.

Awards and Decorations: Distinguished Flying Cross, 2 OLC, Air Medal, 9th OLC.

LeRoy E. Frahm
71st Special Operations Sq.

LeRoy E. Frahm, Maintenance, 71st Special Operations Squadron

LeRoy E. Frahm was born in Appleton, Wisconsin, on 4 June 1948, the fourth child in a family of six. LeRoy grew up on a small dairy farm in Outagamie County, where his parents operated the Frahm family farm into the 1960s.

LeRoy entered Divine Word Seminary, Techny, IL. Approaching high school graduation, LeRoy decided to change his career path, immediately losing his draft deferment. He knew the Army was not his calling!

Scoring well on the Air Force AQE opened new career opportunities. He avoided the draft! His new career began 16 August 1966, completed basic training at Lackland AFB, TX and was then assigned to Tech school at Lowry AFB, CO for Avionic Fire Control Systems Training for the F-4D Phantom jet. After nearly a year, LeRoy was assigned to his first PCS duty at Homestead AFB FL with the 4531st Tactical Fighter Wing. Among his memories there were the Pueblo incident, preparing aircraft for deployment to Korea, and living with and training Iranian airmen on F-4 avionic systems. At Homestead AFB he earned a 5 level and promotion to E4.

Early the Monday after Thanksgiving 1968, LeRoy was awakened with the message to report to CBPO, ASAP. "You're going to be off this base tonight!" That evening he was TDY to Lockbourne AFB, OH for AC-119 Fire Control systems training. There was no Tech Order Publication, only hand-drawn schematics from the factory. LeRoy graduated at Christmas, got a few days leave for Wisconsin, and returned to Homestead to out-process for Vietnam. Two weeks later, LeRoy arrived in Cam Ranh Bay AB and proceeded to the 71st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) at Nha Trang AB, to work on AC-119Gs, still in culture shock having gone from the F-4D Phantom

jet to a reciprocating engine aircraft in a few short weeks. "What is a reciprocating engine? They have pistons?"

After a few months an avionics specialist was needed in Phan Rang AB, a Forward Operating Location (FOL), and LeRoy proceeded there with a group of Vietnamese Rangers on a C-130. That was his first C-130 experience--no seats just pallets and cargo straps-- arriving at midnight, with flares lighting the sky! Phan Rang AB was taking the "most hit air base" record away from DaNang that year! Incoming 122mm rockets hit sometimes as often as four times a night. This was LeRoy's first experience with Reservists, as he was just one of a few Active Duty blended with Reservists. A few months later, when the 71st departed for home, Leroy remained, and with new folks on board, they became the 17th SOS. LeRoy's most memorable experiences were flying on wet fires to check bore sighting, accompanying a night mission to try to duplicate a malfunction they were not able to reproduce on the ground, and being commissioned to paint the "Charlie Chasers" image on all of the B Flight aircraft after a night they were told, "We were chasing Charlies everywhere!"

In the fall of 1969, Nha Trang closed and the 14th Special Operations Wing was relocated to Phan Rang, and the AC-119K Stinger aircraft arrived. LeRoy's FOL experience was needed elsewhere, and now on his second tour, he was assigned by the 17th to C Flight at Tan Son Nhut AB, Saigon. He remembers most the international city of Saigon with its French culture, working with Vietnamese flying C-119s, the invasion into the Parrot's Beak, and the loss of one of the aircraft and crew 28 April 1970. At Tan Son Nhut, LeRoy was awarded an AF Commendation Medal for his first tour, working the FOL. Returning home, LeRoy was discharged, but after a few years he missed working with people who worked on aircraft. While going to school on the GI Bill, he joined the 440th TAW, Milwaukee, WI, January 1974. The Air Force Reserve unit had just transitioned to C-130A aircraft. LeRoy cross-trained into radar-navigation, learning all eleven different systems, all communications systems and the doppler system. By the late '70s, deployments to Panama were frequent, and LeRoy began discovering South America and Central America. By the late '80s LeRoy was looking for a career move and became the unit's Career Advisor. In 1992 he was selected as the First Sergeant for the 440th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, starting a 13-year tenure. Also during this time frame, SMS Frahm worked for the Air Force Reserve Command, facilitating leadership courses for enlisted personnel, instructing Total Quality Management (TQM), Covey's 'Seven Habits of Highly Effective People', and taught at the First Sergeant Academy. During his career he taught

approximately 2500 personnel.

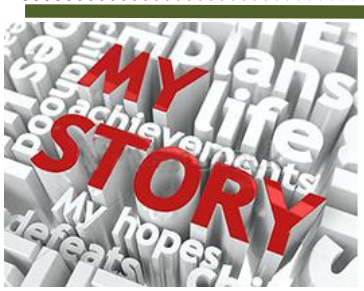
In April 2002, LeRoy was deployed on a mission for Operation Fundamental Justice, providing First Sergeant support to 200 personnel performing high level missions in Afghanistan.

Thanksgiving 2003 was cut short, having received a call the day before at 9 AM: Presidential Activation for Operation Iraqi Freedom, report for duty the day after Thanksgiving. After only a few days, LeRoy departed for overseas as ADVON to begin setting up and receiving the deploying 440th and other Reserve and Guard units to become the lead C-130 Expeditionary Wing in the Area of Responsibility (AOR). As First Sergeant, he was suddenly responsible for about 500 maintainers and flyers, launching 28 missions around the clock, from Iraq to Afghanistan. They even flew relief missions into Iran in December 2003, after an earthquake.

Decorations and Awards earned include Meritorious Service Medal 3 Oak Leaf, AF Commendation Medal 2 Oak Leaf, AF Achievement Medal 2 Oak Leaf, Presidential Unit Citation w/V, AF Outstanding Unit Award w/V 3 Oak Leaf, AF Organizational Excellence Award, AF Good Conduct 1 Oak Leaf, Air Reserve Forces Meritorious Service Medal 9 Oak Leaf, National Defense Service Medal 2 Oak Leaf, Vietnam Service Medal 4 Star, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal, AF Expeditionary Service Medal with Gold Border, AF Longevity Service Award 6 Oak Leaf, Armed Forces Reserve Medal with Gold Hourglass and M device, USAF NCO PME Ribbon, and Small Arms Expert Marksmanship Ribbon, AF Training Ribbon, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

LeRoy was honorably discharged 1 February 2005, after 14 months on active duty, culminating 35 years of active and reserve duty in the United States Air Force, spanning Vietnam to Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

LeRoy and his wife Rose were married 29 June 1974 and continue to reside in Appleton, WI. They have a son, Ellery, daughter, Erika, and daughter-in-law, Penny. LeRoy and Rose also lovingly cared for thirteen foster children. LeRoy has been employed at Lawrence University since 1975.



Ralph R. Lefarth
17th Special Operations Sq.

Ralph R. Lefarth, Pilot, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in St. Louis, Missouri on 9 October 1941. I earned a Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Missouri School of Mines and Metallurgy at Rolla (Now Missouri University of Science & Technology) in January 1964. I married Joyce Welling on February 8, 1964.

In the fall of 1965, the draft board came after me. Not wanting to be drafted, I checked out the Air Force recruiters. With the possibility of becoming a pilot, I decided I would rather die in an orange fireball of glory than die from a poisonous snakebite in the jungle. I entered Officers Training School on 9 August 1966 and was commissioned on 21 October 1966. Assigned to Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT) Class 68D at Laredo AFB, TX, I earned my wings in December 1967. After Survival School at Fairchild AFB, WA in January 1968, I reported for KC-135 training at Castle AFB, CA. From tanker training, I was assigned to the 904 Air Refueling Squadron (ARS) at Mather AFB, CA.

I completed C-119 qualification training at Clinton County AFB, OH during July and August 1970, followed by combat crew training in the AC-119G gunship at Lockbourne AFB, OH, before departing for SEA on 28 November 1970.

After Jungle Survival School in the Philippines, I reported for duty in mid-December with the 17th SOS headquartered at Phan Rang Air Base, where I was immediately assigned to C Flight at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon, Vietnam. On 28 January 1971, I returned to Phan Rang until 18 February, when I returned to Tan Son Nhut where I remained for the rest of my tour.

Fighting "C" Flight's primary mission was to provide 24-7 close air support for Cambodian troops. I became an Instructor Pilot on 27 May and instructed VNAF aircrews. My radio call sign was Shadow 28. My fini-flight was on 9 October 1971, my birthday. That night I flew with

Vietnamese Crew #18, in a Vietnamese marked aircraft. It was a very quiet cap mission over Saigon again. Why we were flying cap over Saigon at that time, I don't know. The 17th SOS was deactivated and their last official flights were flown back in September. The country was very quiet, I thought, and I was only thinking about going home! Having flown 204 combat missions and earning the DFC and the Air Medal with 8 OLC, I returned stateside to an assignment with the 920th Air Refueling Squadron. I separated from the USAF on 22 Dec 1971.

From the Air Force, I returned to engineering work in various industries as a Project Engineer, and then moved into management as Plant Engineer. I remained in the St. Louis area managing facilities for a Hospital, a Medical School, and a School District. I retired in May of 2000. My wife, Joyce, and I currently live in St. Louis County, Missouri. I've written these stories for my grandsons, Ryan and Evan Stamm, and future generations.

Phnom Penh Emergency Landing On the afternoon of August 23, 1971, I was flying out of Tan Son Nhut AB in an AC-119G with Vietnamese markings. I was monitoring the Vietnamese crew from the jump seat as the Instructor Pilot (IP). Things were quiet for over two hours, then a FAC radioed us asking, "Shadow 28, do you normally trail smoke off your left engine?" The Vietnamese copilot answered, "Roger that," before going back to sleep. The engine instruments showed no sign of a problem. I raced down the ladder to the gun compartment and saw a ribbon of blue-black smoke trailing us as far as I could see.

I ran back to the cockpit and started trying to identify a cause for the problem. The Instructor Navigator confirmed that the nearest emergency airport was Phnom Penh, approximately 30 minutes away. At our request, the FAC radioed our situation and intentions to our unit at Tan Son Nhut. We figured the left engine was using oil at a rate of one gallon per minute and that we still had 30 gallons of oil remaining. The oil quantity gauge acted like Distance Measuring Equipment (DME) to "PP (Phnom Penh).

Upon landing, the left engine oil quantity gauge read zero. After landing rollout, we turned the aircraft around on the runway to taxi back to the parking area, but the smoke was too thick. We could not see to taxi. Fearing a possible fire, we shut down the engines, evacuated the aircraft, and waited for the emergency vehicles. After several minutes, a wooden-wheeled fire truck, 1930 vintage, arrived. While we waited for the tug to tow the aircraft off the runway, an Air France DC-stretch-8 circled overhead, waiting to land.

The smoke cleared, but we still had no tug. After 15 minutes, and with no sign of fire, we elected to start the good engine and taxied to the graveled and pothole-filled parking area. I contacted C Flight Operations and after several hours a C-130 finally arrived to pick us up. We had no way to secure the aircraft, so we removed the pilots' back-pack parachutes, our personal gear, and the safing- sector off the guns, and took them with us back to Tan Son Nhut. We left the chest-pack parachutes and everything else on the aircraft. Amazingly, when the aircraft was recovered three weeks later, the only thing missing was one chest-pack parachute!

The Pucker-Factor: A Heavyweight, Single Engine, Night Landing Without Instrument Lights
On 4 September 1971, at about 0200 hours, we took off from Tan Son Nhut, the world's busiest airport at that time. As Instructor Pilot (IP) to a Vietnamese crew, I was in the right seat. The takeoff and climb-out were normal for our AC-119G gunship. The Vietnamese pilots were excellent flyers, and I, therefore, had complete confidence in the pilot flying the aircraft. The copilots, however, were relearning to fly the airplane.

The pilot leveled the aircraft at 3500 feet, reduced power, and trimmed the aircraft for the 40-minute flight to our OA in Cambodia. Suddenly there was a very loud bang, followed by an abrupt left yaw. It was one hell of a left engine backfire.

Following procedure, we immediately reduced power on the left engine. The engine appeared to be running okay, but it again backfired, shaking the whole aircraft when the Instructor Flight Engineer tried returning the left engine to cruise power. At that point, we declared an emergency and turned back toward Tan Son Nhut. On downwind, the IFE informed me we had a left engine exhaust-stack fire. Following the emergency procedure, I immediately feathered the left propeller and shut down the engine. The IFE commented that it was the first time he saw a propeller actually feather the way it should. Then things started going wrong. Proceeding with the Engine Shutdown Checklist, the IFE read, "Start APU (Auxiliary Power Unit)." My response, "Do we need to?" The IFE responded, "It is on the checklist." I said, "Start the APU." The Vietnamese pilot called for gear down as we turned onto final approach. I reached up and flipped the gear switch. All of our lights went out; we lost all electrical power on the aircraft. Using my flashlight, I quickly located the battery disconnect switch. Activating this switch disconnects all electrical equipment from the batteries except the critical flight instruments, saving the batteries from being quickly drained. But nothing happened. No flight instruments.

No lights. No intercom to talk to the crew. No indication that our landing gear was down and locked. Flying at night with no instrument lighting, and only one engine operating, there are a couple of things that make the AC-119G aircraft very dangerous:

1. You can only maintain level flight on one engine if you are perfect with your flight controls. There is no room for sloppy flying; no go-a-round on one engine!
2. The landing gear is electrically actuated and hydraulically operated.
3. On crash landing without the landing gear down, the high wing crushes the fuselage and the cockpit rolls under the wreckage, carrying the cockpit crew with it.

I leaned over and yelled to the IFE, "Get the gear down because we're going down," knowing there would be no missed approach. At the same time, the pilot was speaking very excitedly in Vietnamese. I didn't understand Vietnamese, but I quickly realized he needed light to see the airspeed and altitude instruments. The flight instruments work on air pressure from the Pitot tube and do not require electricity. I shined my flashlight on the flight instruments. The airspeed was right where it should be. I looked up at the runway directly ahead of us and wondered if I would be alive in two minutes. I was very surprised at the thought because there was no emotion, no adrenaline in it.

The pilot was doing an excellent job flying the approach. I again tried finding some electrical power. I confirmed the battery disconnect switch was correctly set; there should have been battery power for flight instrument and panel lights. Again the pilot reverted to using Vietnamese, instructing me to shine my flashlight back on the instrument panel. I continued lighting the panel and monitoring the flight path; there was little else to do. As we crossed over the runway threshold, the IFE shouted that the landing gear appeared to be down and locked. The aircraft settled gently onto the runway and the gear held.

After turning onto the taxiway, we stopped the aircraft to have the IFE install the landing gear safety pins before I shut down our one good engine. As the IFE was installing the gear pins, the landing gear down-and-locked lights started to illuminate. The batteries were starting to recover some charge. Our total flight time was .5 hours.

We proceeded to another aircraft and flew an uneventful mission. The maintenance staff later informed me that they had to start the engine three times to find the problem. The engine had

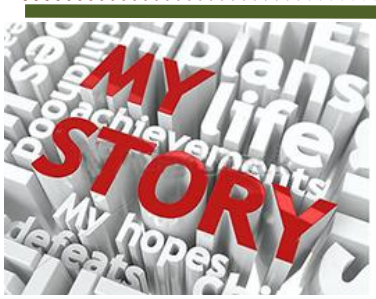
swallowed a valve and could have run for hours at a lower power setting. The electrical problem was caused by a meltdown of the generator in the good engine. The meltdown shorted the batteries causing them to discharge before I could disconnect them from the system. Apparently the additional electrical load of starting the APU caused the weak generator to fail. *So much for doing things strictly by the book*. If it is working okay, don't mess with it.

Hardover Rudder

It was October 8, 1971, the day before my birthdate and my next to last flight in Vietnam. As instructor to the Vietnamese Crew #23, I was flying in the left seat. As we were leveling off, I was trimming the aircraft for level flight, when suddenly the rudder deflected full left. The rudder trim stuck for a moment. As I stood on the right rudder pedal and played with the trim switch, it came back and trimmed out nicely. The maintenance records had shown some minor rudder problems the day before, so I didn't think too much about it.

We had a momentary problem and my curiosity, as a mechanical engineer, was to find the extent of the problem. As we settled into level flight I tried the trim again, and again, the rudder pedal deflected full left. But, this time it would not return to neutral. Declaring an emergency, we headed back to the field. After a very few minutes my right leg began shaking and I had the copilot stand on the right rudder too. It took the two of us to keep the aircraft reasonably straight while returning for a landing. We landed, grabbed another aircraft, and finished our mission, flying cap over Saigon.

The following night, my 30th birthday, I was assigned the same aircraft. Being my last flight, I was a little uptight. I had a serious discussion with the maintenance chief. He assured me that he personally supervised the Vietnamese crew replacing the trim control unit. I think I made some threats about having somebody's ass that night if it didn't work. Having spent many years as an engineer working with maintenance, I have a lot of respect and admiration for the maintenance crews over there. **They did one hell of a job keeping us in the air**.



William S. Callaghan
17th Special Operations Sq.

William Stratton Callaghan, Pilot, 17th Special Operations Squardron

Brooklyn, New York was my birthplace in December 1936. I graduated from Fishburne Military School at Waynesboro, Virginia in June 1954 and graduated from the United States Military Academy in June 1959. I joined the Air Force to fly.

I was assigned to the 71st and 17th SOS as a pilot and served at Clinton County AFB, Ohio; Lockbourne AFB, Ohio; Nha Trang AB, RVN; and Phan Rang AB, RVN. I retired from the Air Force with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel on June 30, 1987 at England AFB, Louisiana. I currently live in Dallas, Texas.

Vernon C. Hansen
18th Special Operations Sq.

Vernon C. Hansen, Pilot, 18th Special Operations Squadron

Bucyrus, Ohio was my birthplace in 1941. I grew up in Bowling Green, Ohio, and graduated from Bowling Green High School in 1959. Graduating from Bowling Green State University with a B.S. in Education in 1964, I was commissioned an officer in the United States Air Force through the Reserve Officer Training Corps program and entered active duty on 30 May 1964. Later in life, I graduated with a Masters degree from Webster University in 1979.

I volunteered for military service because my friends did (I was the only one who joined the USAF). I wanted to defend the United States, fight communism, and help keep the world at peace. Also, I wanted to fly airplanes, see the world, and perhaps prepare for an airline job. I

hope I was able to accomplish some of those goals.

Before I write about things that I will always remember about my time with AC-119 Gunships, I first want to acknowledge and thank Lt. Col. Emerson Wright, FOL commander at Da Nang for his leadership, inspiration, and guidance during my tour of duty.

Basic C-119G Training at Clinton County AFB, Ohio was fun. The base was a National Guard/Reserve base which was fully manned twice a month on UTA weekends. I arrived on a Sunday. The main gate was not manned, but there was a note posted on the gate to tell us where to find billeting for Combat Crew Training. My first training flight included a low-level route and airdrop for a Reserve navigator. Each of the pilots, our C-119 instructor, my Lt Col partner (former B-58 pilot) and myself, had an opportunity to fly a drop pattern. My drop was closest to target--none of it had anything to do with our transition training.

Conducting AC-119K training missions out of Lockbourne AFB, Ohio, we flew simulated road recons in West Virginia. One of my mother's fellow workers at Bowling Green State University told her of reported UFOs and cones of light at night in the hills of West Virginia. My mother said she thought it was her son or other USAF AC-119Ks. She was rebuffed; the cones of light were definitely UFOs!

I'll always remember ferrying one of the first six AC-119K Stinger gunships from Lockbourne AFB to Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam (RVN) during the months of October and November 1969. It took us 22 days! We departed Lockbourne on 18 October 1969. Our first leg from Lockbourne to Malmstrom AFB, Montana was eleven and one-half hours--near the absolute range limits of the aircraft with three Benson tanks full of fuel in the cargo bay. Of the six aircraft that departed Lockbourne on the 18th, one fell out of order due to failed main landing gear on landing at Malmstrom; the aircraft had to be towed off the runway. Next day, the five remaining aircraft departed Malmstrom for McChord AFB, Washington. All five made it to McChord successfully.

On the following day, one aircraft experienced a severe main landing gear (MLG) shimmy on takeoff and subsequently aborted. Fuel was leaking (actually pouring from a main fuel tank) on taxi back. We took off but had an unsafe indication on a main landing gear, causing us to air abort. A MLG micro-switch replacement fixed the problem and we departed the next day for

Elmendorf MB, Alaska; whereupon, our SEA tour of duty began. The following day we departed Elmendorf for Adak Naval Air Station (NAS), Alaska and arrived without incident. The next leg, Adak to Midway NAS, was conducted by piggy-backing (following) another AC-119K. Our Loran A was inoperative and the forecasted eight-hour flight plan was surprisingly completed in about six hours (flight plan winds were very old, maybe a week). The AC-119K crew that we were piggybacking with to Midway believed the flight plan and was about to fly past Midway. I was monitoring the ADF needle as it was passing our left wingtip, so I dialed in Midway's TACAN which confirmed the ADF. I quickly suggested over the radio that both aircraft turn left to land at Midway.

We spent nine days at Midway due to a Power Recovery Turbine failure. While there, we played horseshoes and learned to sail. We beat the Navy on their own shuffleboard table, watched The Boston Strangler on 16mm, one reel at a time, and ate the worst breakfasts in the Ward Room (you only knew what you were eating by reading the menu). The part to fix our LORAN and Power Recovery Turbine finally arrived. The biggest disappointment of our stay was that there were no Gooney birds to watch until the last few days.

We flew to Wake Island, and then Guam (Andersen AFB), and then to Clark AB, Philippine Islands. All flights were uneventful until Clark. Upon landing, we experienced our first MLG shimmy. By this time, Major Sternenberg's AC- 119K had already arrived at Phan Rang AB, RVN. Four AC-119K gunships were parked at Clark, waiting for MLG fine-tuning. The maintenance support bird (C-130) finally abandoned the sick AC-119K at Elmendorf and proceeded to Clark to repair the landing gear on all four aircraft. Now the race was on between the four AC-119K crews to be the second gunship to arrive at Phan Rang. That's when I found out that Majors trump Captains for service from the transient ground crews, and we ended up third by an eyelash. (**Note**: Phan Rang News 205 features a pictorial story titled "Ferrying C-119's from Ohio to Phan Rang" by Capt. Roy Davis as well as his autobiography in this issue.)

I remember the crash of an AC-119K at Da Nang (my assigned aircraft, our crew night off). The gunship ran out of fuel on short final, the left main fuel tank went dry. The aircraft was too slow and low to fly with power only on the right side to make the runway; unable to control direction it subsequently crashed in the base dump. The aircraft was totally destroyed, but miraculously the crew survived without major injuries except for one broken kneecap and one broken foot. It was truly a miracle!

I remember experiencing an engine fire on a night mission out of Da Nang in which we were diverted to an area south of Chu Lai AB, RVN to provide illumination for an attempt to extract a two-star U.S. Army General who was stranded on the ground.

Probably, my most exciting AC-119K Stinger mission was when we were fragged to patrol a section of the Ho Chi Minh Trail that we were unfamiliar with near Tehepone, Laos. Our Intel briefing was not very informative, as this was the first AC-119 mission in the area. The normal anti- aircraft artillery (AAA) threat level was expected. When we fired our 20mm guns to check for alignment, we found the aft gun seemed to be loose (whipping) and very inaccurate. The forward gun seemed okay with the usual Kentucky windage applied. So, we proceeded toward our assigned area and met up with our F-4 escorts in the target area. As we entered the area, it was determined that our egress heading would be to the East. During our patrol, the FLIR operator located what appeared to be a large fuel truck moving south on the trail. I rolled in on the truck and fired a half-second burst and missed badly; a second burst of fire was also nowhere near the target. Apparently, the forward gun was loose and whipping as well. Now the BIG mistake and taken out of frustration, I fired two 5-second bursts and walked the fire first horizontally and then vertically through the movable reticule (truck) on the gun sight. The last round struck right in front of the truck. Then the whole world erupted with 23mm and 37 mm AAA fire, more guns than we had ever encountered at one time. It was everywhere and was forcing us deeper into the route structure. Scanners were calling for us to break in opposite directions at the same time. Rounds of AAA were flying between the fuselage and the engine cowlings and through the area between the fuselage and the booms. The navigator was calling for us to "Go East" as we were driven further west by the wall of AAA. I suggested that the navigator come out from behind his security curtain and tell me how in the world I was to go to the East in this massive wall of AAA. The actual words were a bit stronger. During all this the F-4 escort made three passes and called "WINCHESTER", which of course TOLD THE WHOLE WORLD he was out of ordnance, which resulted in a greater concentration of AAA to include some 57mm and two unguided rockets. As we finally left the area unscathed, we did not have any good thoughts toward our escort's radio discipline. We all thanked the Lord for taking care of us fools that night.

I most certainly remember my Stinger crew who always worked together and got the mission done. Without them, missions could not have been accomplished. I served with the 18th SOS at

Phan Rang during orientation training and then was assigned to Alpha Flight at Da Nang where I was an aircraft commander and safety officer between December 1969 and April 1970. During April I was assigned to 7th Air Force Headquarters at Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN as Gunship Expert for Out-Country Operations "Steel Tiger Night" (Laos) for AC-119/AC-130/AC-123/B-57G warplanes. My duties included building the scheduled sortie deployment of all aircraft for each night's (1800-0600hr) activities based on intelligence reports. I scheduled every sortie to include all FAC, Gunship and fighter (to include Marine and Navy aircraft) activity. During my tenure I redesigned the areas within Steel Tiger to make road recon easier, established procedures that gave the assigned gunship control of the route segment (area) in which the gunship crew was working. No other aircraft could enter without the gunship aircrew's knowledge and permission. It was also my responsibility to select the ordnance each aircraft carried, once again based on intelligence. I spent many hours establishing procedures to computerize the building of the schedule. The proper use of the gunships to achieve the greatest results and survive, were topics of many one-on- one discussions with the out-country Director of Operation, a Brigadier General, on a daily, or sometimes more frequent basis. This was not my favorite part of my job. I served in that capacity until my DEROS in October 1970.

After 27 years of active duty service, I retired from the USAF as a Colonel on 1 August 1991 at Charleston AFB, South Carolina. From 1992 to 2004, I flew for American Trans Air as a line Captain and Instructor in the simulator. I proudly served as President of the AC-119 Gunship Association from 2006 to 2008. My wife, Becky, and I live in Bowling Green, Ohio.

Ronald Lee Gilbert
18th Special Operations Sq.

Ronald Lee Gilbert, Gunner, 18th Special Operations Squadron

Neosho, Missouri was my birthplace in 1946 and my home town. I graduated from Neosho High School in 1964. On 9 June 1964, I entered the USAF at San Antonio, Texas, thus getting off the family farm and out of small town Neosho.

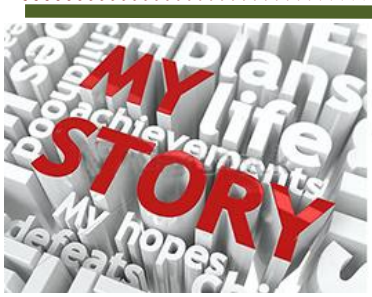
I served with the 18th Special Operations Squadron from March 1969 to December 1970 at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio, Da Nang Air Base and Phan Rang Air Base in the Republic of Vietnam, and at Udorn Air Base, Thailand. I also served with the 415th Special Operations Training Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Florida.

I vividly remember a Stinger interdiction mission in Steel Tiger East (Southern Laos), and flying across the border into the A Shau Valley of South Vietnam. We were firing on three trucks when a B-52 dropped its bomb load on OUR targets. Our flight engineer brought our jets to 100% power and our pilot, Captain Ron Dean, pulled right away from the target area while screaming at our "new" navigator, who was waiting for Guard Channel to announce the B-52 strike. Target coordinates for the B-52 strike were briefed at the Squadron Intel pre-mission briefing because the target area was in-county Vietnam; therefore, the strike warning was not to be sent over Guard Channel.

I can just imagine the VC on the ground hearing our AC- 119K tooling around, firing our 20mm cannons and then all of a sudden the earth is shaking around them from the impact of 105 (750 lb.) bombs. Captain Dean would not let us pull the mission tape for fear that Stinger Operations would find out what a screw-up we had made.

Things I remember about my tour of duty in Southeast Asia were that my crew ate together, lived together, and fought together. There was just no time to relax. At Da Nang, we would fly a hot mission, taking anti-aircraft fire and RTB, only to be hit by a mortar or rocket attack once on the ground. We lived with enemy fire in the air and on the ground.

Well, I obviously survived that most unforgettable tour of war and made the Air Force my career. In June 1994, I retired from the USAF at Nellis AFB, Nevada , after 30 years, 21 days of military service.



Bernie William Smith
17th Special Operations Sq.

Bernie William Smith, Navigator, 17th Special Operations Squadron

Bernard William Smith was born in Indianapolis, Indiana in 1935. He graduated from Rockport High School in his hometown of Rockport, Indiana in 1953. After graduation from University of Evansville in 1958, Bernard entered the Air Force that fall at Lackland AFB, Texas. He joined the Air Force because it was a family tradition to serve in the military.

Bernard, better known as Bernie, attended advanced training at Harlingen, Texas in 1959 followed by navigator training at Mather AFB, California and Survival Training at Stead AFB, Nevada in 1960. Places of assignments include Fairchild AFB in 1960, Castle AFB in 1961, and March AFB from 1962 through 1965. From 1966 to 1970, Bernie served at Malmstrom AFB. From June 1970 to June 1971, Major Bernie Smith served in the Republic of Vietnam at Phan Rang and Tan Son Nhut as a Shadow navigator and C Flight scheduling officer.

Vivid are his memories of the first night in-country at Cam Ranh Bay when the windows of the VOQ were blown out by enemy mortar rounds and then his third morning in-country at Phan Rang when he approached the O' Club for breakfast to find the stairs into the club blown away. Such was his welcome to Vietnam.

Flying combat missions, both night and day became routine in August 1970 when Fighting C Flight Shadows provided 24-7 support for the Cambodian Army. Bernie loved talking to and supporting Australian ground troops. But there were times when he had difficulty communicating with Cambodian ground commanders who requested fire support. On one mission, the Cambodian could not understand why the Shadow would not fire at the enemy. Finally, a frustrated Bernie radioed the commander in Cowboy/Indian movie fashion, "TOO MANY CLOUDS IN SKY, CANNOT SEE." Bernie wondered many times if he would live to see the next day when his Shadow gunship sustained damage from enemy ground fire.

For his service in Southeast Asia, Major Smith was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with nine clusters. The Republic of Vietnam awarded Smith with the Vietnamese Air Medal, his most revered award.

Things remembered most about his tour of duty in Vietnam were the close relationships with his fellow warriors; the humor used by men to manage fears and doubts, especially while dealing with tragic events; the poverty of a war-torn country; the beauty and loving character of the Cambodian people; and returning home to the land of the big B-X, to a country that had lost its moral rudder.

Major Smith was assigned to SAC at Carswell AFB, Fort Worth Texas, upon returning stateside. In September 1978, Lieutenant Colonel Bernard Smith ended his career with the United States Air Force when he retired at Carswell having served his country for twenty years.

After retiring from the Air Force, he became a Commercial Real Estate Broker from 1983 to 1990. He then became a Simulator and Ground School Instructor for American Air Lines 757/767 aircraft from 1991 to 1996. Upon his retirement from American, Bernie thankfully declared, "What a great country and what a great life!"
Bernie currently lives in Fort Worth with his lovely wife, Judy.

Burton Davis Zeiler
18th Special Operations Sq.

Burton Davis Zeiler, Pilot, 18th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in St. Louis, MO in 1932. In June 1950, I graduated from Miami Edison Senior High School and consider Miami, Florida my hometown. The Korean War had just started when I entered the University of Miami in 1950. I was determined to learn how to fly, rather than become a ground-pounder, so I enrolled in the AFROTC program. I earned my degree in June 1954 and along with it, an Air Force commission as an ROTC Distinguished Military Graduate.

After getting my silver wings at Goodfellow AFB, TX, I was assigned to the Strategic Air Command. I served as a KC-97G co-pilot at Homestead AFB, FL. I transitioned to KC-135s and was assigned to Carswell AFB, TX (the first operational KC-135 squadron in SAC). I was later assigned to Operation Chrome Dome (*it's a coincidence that I'm bald*) at Eielson AFB, AK. In 1965, I returned to the lower states for an AFROTC assignment at the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) and flew the Gooney Bird to maintain proficiency. This was a huge change after accumulating about 3,500 hours of tanker time.

In 1969, I received an assignment to the AC-47D gunship program. The program was cancelled before I completed my last training flight at the CCTS. I was delighted to be reassigned to the AC-119K as a pilot in the first class of replacement crews. In March 1970 I reported to the 18th SOS, Phan Rang AB, as the unit's first replacement AC-119K aircraft commander. Shortly after reporting, I was assigned to the 14th Special Operations Wing Headquarters as the AC- 119K standardization pilot, where I served throughout my tour of duty.

As a Wing standardization pilot I traveled to all of the forward operating locations. There I had the privilege of getting to know most of the aircrews and their specific mission requirements. In the AC-119K, there was always the excitement of the attack and plenty of AAA to go around. It was an eye opener to do most of my flying from the right seat.

After Nam, I was assigned to Hickam AFB, HI and served this hardship tour for six years. I was fortunate to command the 15th Operations Squadron supporting the flying personnel assigned to the various headquarters at Hawaii. This was really a one-time good deal! With Hickam being the crossroads to the Pacific Basin, I had many exciting experiences. They ranged from the return of our prisoners of war, coordinating support of the astronauts returning from space, operation babylift and the evacuation of many civilians from Vietnam. Finally, personnel blasted me away from the island paradise and I was again assigned to SAC at Grissom AFB, IN. After two years as a Wing Weenie, I retired with 26 years of service and about 4,500 flight hours. There were some sad times, but there were many more good times. Thank you all.

My memory of the AC-119 gunship program is that, for its time (1967 – 1972), the AC-119K was at the cutting edge of the sensor technology necessary to hunt and kill NVA vehicles resupplying their forces in South Vietnam. We were essential to fill the time gap while the AC-130s were being developed and refined. I am proud to have served within the 18th Special Operations; it

was a distinct mission executed by dedicated people. I think we K guys are proud that the new gunships will be called Stingers.

Douglas Blair
18th Special Operations Sq.

Douglas Blair, Gunner, 18th Special Operations Squadron

I volunteered for a gunship assignment in Vietnam and got selected for the AC-119. I qualified at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio and left for Phan Rang in December 1970. After in-processing, I was further assigned to the AC- 119K Stinger detachment at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai AB (NKP). I quickly became combat qualified, but discovered the process had changed considerably from when I first started gunship work in the AC-47.

In late 1964, I was a technical sergeant assigned to Hurlburt Field, Florida in the Armament Section of the Special Air Warfare Center (SAWC). One day I was pulled out of the shop and immediately reassigned to a newly created staff position in the Maintenance Directorate of SAWC at Eglin AFB. A few days later I was on my way to Bien Hoa AB to help solve some training problems with A-1E load crews. While at Bien Hoa, a former acquaintance invited me to look at a C-47 that had an SUU-11 7.62mm machine gun pod and MK 20 Mod 4 gunsight installed. It was an AC-47 test bird.

After returning to Eglin AFB, Florida it wasn't long before a formal side-firing aircraft program got underway. The program included a request to modify 26 C-47 with the SUU-11 and to establish an Air Commando gunship squadron. As the resident "Gun Plumber", all of the gunship material came across my desk. My first hands-on involvement was a trip to Miami Inter-national Airport where the modifications were being made and where I helped design a bore-site fixture to harmonize the guns and gunsight, and started work on the MXU/470, a General Electric module that better suited the aircraft.

As word of the side-firing gunship spread, combat units began demanding them. The Air Force

had the air-frames, but did not yet have a suitable gun. As a temporary fix the Air Force acquired a fairly large quantity of Browning 30 caliber M-2 and 26 additional C-47 airframes. I traveled to Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio to help with the modifications needed to mount the M-2. I then returned to Hurlburt Field to take part in the testing. As soon as we had three completed installation kits, we loaded the kits and all of the M-2s on a C-130 and headed off to Clark AB, PI to begin modifying the C-47s as they were flown in from Bien Hoa AB, Republic of Vietnam.

We flew test flights to bore-site the guns to make sure that all were headspaced and timed properly. Some of the ammunition we fired at Clark AB, PI was made back in the 1930s. The ammo had been stored at Clark during WWII and the Japanese had not discovered it. After the war, it was repacked, and we used it up. The tracer would burn very dim and burn out a couple hundred feet from the gun. We also had hard primers where the firing pin would strike, but the primer would not fire and the gun stopped. We finished the last M-2 modification in August 1965. I tagged along to Bien Hoa AB to train crews on the M-2 while the rest of my team returned to the States. Bien Hoa was a very crowded place that summer. I slept in a different bunk every night.

The first crews to fly with our 30-caliber gun had been using the 7.62mm. No one liked the .30 cal. They were old. They jammed easily. They broke. There were no spare parts. The 7.62mm mini-gun was a much better weapon. By the time the 4th Air Commando Squadron arrived with the SUU-11 and MXU/470 modifications, the 30s were about used up.

While working on the M-2, I was also involved in verifying the maintenance manual and doing the acceptance testing for the GAU/2 gun and MXU/470 module. In October 1965, we received the first three gun kits. We installed the guns on the new feeder system and began acceptance testing. We fired 190,000 rounds on the ground and another 90,000 rounds during flight-testing. All of the ammo had to be broken out of ammo cans containing 100 rounds each, then linked into belts of 2,000 rounds each. I did all the linking of those 280,000 rounds with only one person helping me. Those were long days.

In mid-1966, I had an assignment to Greece. I learned that another tech sergeant at Hurlburt had orders to the gunship program and didn't want the assignment. We arranged a trade and I was soon back at Bien Hoa AB. Even though I had more mini-gun experience than nearly anyone

in the Air Force, I was still required to attend the training course. Most of the students were surplus B-52 gunners who had no preparation for the maintenance required to keep the guns firing in the cargo compartment of a gunship.

We finally got the new Module Guns late in my tour and I helped train the guys in our detachment. Near the end of my tour, our AC-47 was hit by enemy ground fire and we crash landed. With only one engine running, we hit the ground hard. The right engine tore out of the wing and the aircraft tail was twisted 45 degrees. We got out of the aircraft before the exploding ammunition and flares destroyed it. Only the pilots suffered serious injuries. I lost all of my flying gear in the crash, but as soon as the Flight Surgeon cleared me for flight, I borrowed equipment and returned to flying missions.

My tour in the AC-119K was less traumatic. I was NCOIC (Non-Commissioned Officer In Charge) of the Gunners at NKP. I worked in the Operations Section during the mornings and flew at night. One Sunday afternoon in August 1970, I received a call asking me to volunteer for a special project to help install three .50 caliber machine guns in two C-47s for the Cambodian Air Force. I agreed and was told to pack because I was being flown to Udorn by helicopter at 1300 that same day. I had a Stinger mission scheduled for that night, but the caller said he would take care of that. It was then I realized I had been picked for the project and that everything was prearranged.

Upon reporting to Base Ops, I was surprised to be met by Major Gregory S. Perino, whom I had known in the AC-47 program at Nha Trang. When we arrived at Udorn, Thailand Major George Jenkins, 1st Air Commando Wing Mobile Training Team, met us and explained he was ready for us to start work. Major Jenkins had arranged some sheet metal and electric help. It did not take long to have one aircraft ready. Then, out came two full crews of Cambodian Airmen ready to fly. The pilots and navigators spoke English, but the flight engineers, loadmasters and gunners spoke none. We did a ground school covering the guns and personal equipment (parachutes). I wrote a checklist (in English), and we were off flying the first training mission. The guys in the back tried very hard and learned quickly. I showed them once and they had it. Major Perino had me play the FAC (forward air controller) with the commander and pilots and we dry ran several exercises with them clearing the target area for the FAC and other strike aircraft. We had to reposition all our own ammunition before each flight and again some of it was pretty old but worked really well. We stayed with them until they were fairly proficient, and then I went back

to NKP and the AC-119K to finish my tour.

At the end of my AC-119K tour, I left gunships for the final time. Now, when I read of the successes of the AC-130 H's and U's, my mind goes back to when we first started. The experts thought we would not last long. They expected we would be killed and the pro- gram cancelled. Well, the experts were out in left field. The side-firing gunships are doing excellent work. I am proud to have been able to say that I had a small part in developing the program. It goes without saying how much I admire the men and women who are operating the gunships of today. I am very proud of them all and their combat successes.

Richard A. Matzen
18th Special Operations Sq.

Richard A. Matzen, Pilot. 18th Special Operations Squadron

I was born March 25, 1933 in Farmingdale, Long Island, New York. I really had no interest in flying when I graduated from high school. The draft for the Korean War was on, so I tried to join the Army to get military service behind me and get on with my education upon discharge. After I aced the aptitude test, the Army recruiter pointed to the AF recruiter office and told me the AF had schools, advancement, and career opportunities better suited for me, although it was a four- year commitment. After USAF basic training, I ended up at Keesler AFB, Mississippi at a 10-month electronics school. One day our Squadron Commander announced the AF needed pilots, navigators, and radar operators and that the college degree requirement was waved for those who could pass the college equivalency test. I tested but heard nothing until one day the First Sergeant announced, "Matzen, I see they have lowered the requirements for officers!"

I was transferred to Ellington AFB in Houston for Single Observer School, which included navigator, bombardier and radar operator training in a single course. I thought I was in the wrong program when I learned that some of my classmates were graduates of Harvard, the Maritime Academy, CCNY and similar schools. But everything changed on the first day of class. The course was the same electronics course I had completed at Keesler; some of the instructors

were even the same. After advanced flight training at Mather AFB, California, I was commissioned and got my wings. **I was 20 years old**!

My initial assignment was to SAC B-36s as a second observer who also handled the 20mm gun in the nose. Even though I was promoted to navigator and then to radar bombardier, I grew bored and applied for pilot training. After training at Bartow AB, Florida and Lubbock, Texas, I had my pilot wings and started flying C-124s at Travis AFB, California. Then, after assignments in WB-50s and the new C-141, I got orders for AC-119K gunships.

I was a senior major in the initial group flying the AC-119K to Vietnam. I was stationed at Phan Rang AB, first with the 18th SOS and the last six months with the 14th SOW. I was promoted to lieutenant colonel about halfway through my tour. After Vietnam, I returned to C-141s where I flew around Europe from Dover AFB, Delaware until my retirement, having flown over 10,000 flying hours. Upon retirement, I bought a real estate company and kept up my running. I actually won a 26.2-mile marathon at age 44. I did some development and am now a happy, fully RETARDED guy!

Bad Weather and Intel

When I got to Phan Rang, I wondered about those 20 foot trenches around the runway until one night when it rained. That night lasted for two weeks and the trenches overflowed---great time for a mission---a TIC. Hey, that was our job! Soaking wet we got into the airplane and got airborne. It was then that I relished pressurized aircraft. I think it was raining harder inside than out. We bore on. We hand flew the airplane. It didn't matter; it went where it wanted in that turbulence. It was night, but it could have been noon. The rain was so heavy I was surprised the carburetors could get enough air to ignite the fuel. But, THIS WAS A TIC!!!!! We kept going. I asked the navigator for a position. He said, "Ask radar." Radar said, "Beats the C P out of me!" Finally we got in radio contact with the ground troops. In a, 'We're ready to save your butt voice,' I asked, "What's your problem?" He answered, "Hey, everybody's at chow or in bed." And I said, "What about the VC attack?" And he said, "Hell, that was a week ago!!" **They say that military intelligence is an oxymoron and I believed it that night.**

Friendly Fire

I was at Da Nang when I got a call from Colonel Brown, Operations Officer for the 14th SOW (and the finest officer I have ever served with). He asked me to help investigate a friendly-fire incident at an Army artillery outpost near Da- Nang. No one was killed, but several friendlies were wound- ed. The Stinger pilot was Captain Warren Dorau, which created a conflict for me because Warren was my best friend at Clinton County. We had flown to Vietnam together and we were both dedicated gym rats, working out a minimum of two hours a day. Warren was also my co-pilot on my first dozen or so combat missions. He was an excellent pilot and had been quickly upgraded to Aircraft Commander.

The night of the friendly-fire incident, Warren was diverted from a truck-hunting mission to support an Army outpost under intense enemy fire. The Army team briefed that they would launch a Willie Pete (white phosphorus rocket or grenade) to identify the target. Warren followed instructions, but ended up firing on the good guys. To investigate, I flew to the outpost with an Army Lt. Col. in one of those midget helicopters that goes "WHIRL, WHIRL on top and "WHOP, WHOP" in the back, flying barely above the coconuts. Enroute, I was trying to figure out how Warren could have fired on the good guys. Was the bore-site off? Maybe the guns were set for "A" and should have been at "C"? I was amazed at how close the outpost was to Da Nang. Once inside the sandbagged enclosure, we met with a fuzzy- faced captain and finally learned what happened. Warren was asked to fire on the Willy Pete, but the launcher had malfunctioned. At the same time, as part of their defense against the bad guys, someone tipped over one of the 55-gallon barrels of fuel that were set up all around the edge of the hill, and lit it on fire with a grenade. Unaware Murphy's Law was working, Warren followed instructions and began firing. Case closed.

My Last Stinger Combat Mission

It was my last combat mission out of Ubon AB, Thailand as Aircraft Commander. We were in the Personal Equipment Section getting our chutes, survival packets, hand guns, radios, rafts, and all that stuff, when a three-striper from that Section approached me about flying on the mission with us. He explained that he was rotating to the states in a week, had worked 12-hour shifts for almost a year, checking out parachutes and repairing equipment. He wanted, above all else, to go on a combat mission so when he got home he would at least have a story to tell. I could

understand his plight, but he had no flight experience, emergency training nor survival training. If we took him and something happened, as pilot in command, I could get hung by my toenails.

I began weighing the situation. As a reserve officer, I had mandatory retirement in less than a year, and I wasn't going to be promoted to Colonel, so what did I have to lose? Moreover, the flight was over Laos and things had been quiet during the prior two nights. I called together the three-striper and my IO (the senior NCO on my crew) and set the rules-keep out of the way and whatever the IO says is the law. We all agreed.

After about an hour in the target area the FLIR operator picked up a bright spot on his screen. It was a possible target, but at 4,000 feet, he felt the triple-canopy below might be obstructing the sensor. I descended to 3,000 feet, got a better look and opened fire. All hell broke loose! Explosions went so high, my instinct was to shield my face to protect myself from the fire. We opened up with the four miniguns and the two 20mm cannons. They all seemed effective, but in the excitement I used poor judgment - too many trips around the circles. I didn't need the scanners to instruct me to break out. The AAA rounds were accurate. Tracers came across the windshield, over and below the tail. I used my adrenaline inspired muscles to "Schwarzenegger" us out of there. We were out of ammo (Winchester), so I called operations for another gunship to finish the job while we returned to Ubon. When we exited the gunship, the PE three-striper approached me saying, "Gee, Colonel, that was great! Did you do that just for me?" Yeah, sure kid!

TIC

After I escaped from SAC, I got into MAC. What a pleasure to actually get to FLY. I had 1,500 hours in five years in SAC and in 15 months in MAC, I equaled that. I flew out of Travis and the route was typically the same in C-124s. Travis to Hickam, 12-15 hours, then to Wake Island 10 hours. Japan was usually next, another 10 hours and then return home. The route took a week to ten days and then three days off. I had two young sons and would spend that time off with them. First thing in the morning, we'd watch Sesame Street with our cold cereal. One episode I remember was, "How to tell a story". First the beginning, then the middle and then the end.

The TIC (Troops in Contact) I remember most had the first two parts. I was diverted out of DaNang and given very little information. I got a discrete VHF frequency and made a call. A

hushed voice responded. I asked him to speak louder, and he said, "If I do, THEY can hear me!" After a few minutes of this, it was determined that he was an Army Captain, on top of a hill, and the VC were advancing on his position on all sides. He asked for fire on his position. I told him I could kill him. He said, "If you don't, THEY will!!!"

I tried as best I could to focus on where he was from the fires he vectored. I put all six guns on the line and fired and fired and fired. Still in the firing circle, I called our Control and asked for a backup gunship. I called down--No answer!! Again!! Finally, he came through: "Shit Hot!! I can hear them screaming!! Keep it going!!" I fired until we ran out of ammo. He didn't want a flare as we departed, and another Stinger took over. Unlike that Sesame Street story, I wish I had the end of that story. The other Stinger had the same story. In some ways, I guess I really don't want to know.

Unfriendly Fire

We Stingers flew with lights out and often there was no moonlight. Still, the VC AAA gunners seemed able to accurately locate our aircraft. We wondered if they were using the sound of our engines. So we decided to check it out. One moonless night, we sent up an AC-119 at Phan Rang. The pilot flew a firing-circle around the barracks with his lights off. Some of us on the ground closed our eyes and pointed to where we thought the aircraft was while others monitored us for accuracy. We didn't come close; we consistently pointed behind the aircraft.

After some adult refreshments we came up with a solution. (It is amazing how gin and tonic can make a person smarter.) We concluded the gunners were not using the Stingers to aim their weapons, but the F-4 escorts. The escorts flew high above us in the same pattern, but with their light on! The AAA gunners could be firing at the F-4s! After that, we directed the F-4s to fly lights out. It might have helped, but I still think the VC just ate lots of carrots.

Donald A. Craig
17th Special Operations Sq.

Donald A. Craig, Pilot, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in Troy, Ohio in April 1946. I graduated from Ohio University with a BA in Psychology, and received my commission through the Ohio University AFROTC program. I served on active duty for over 20 years, retiring as a command pilot at the rank of Major.

I was assigned to the 17th SOS directly from undergraduate pilot training at Laredo, Texas. I flew the AC-119G gunship as a co-pilot assigned to Phan Rang, Phu Cat, and Tan Son Nhut. I flew the completed spectrum of Shadow missions including those supporting special forces camps at Dak Seang and Dak Pek, armed reconnaissance, recondo team support, med-evac cover, air base support, and base perimeter illumination.

After completing my combat tour in the AC-119G, I flew the B-52 with the 7th Bomb Wing, Carswell AFB, Texas. From February 1972 through November 1973, I flew back-to-back Arc Light missions over South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam. Our crew was one of only four selected to perform operational testing of an advanced navigation system for alternate bombing guidance. We were also selected as the Tactical Evaluation Crew for the 307th Strategic Wing, U-Tapao, Thailand providing expertise for the Wing Staff and crews.

I retired from the Air Force in April 1989, with 1,510 combat hours and 5,500 total flying hours in seven types of military aircraft. My awards and decorations included the Distinguished Flying Cross with three OLCs, Purple Heart, Meritorious Service Medal with OLC, and Air Medal with 14 OLCs.

After retiring from the military, I initially flew as B-727 Flight Engineer with the Pan Am Reserve Air Fleet where my flights included White House Press charters. In 1994, I was hired as a First Officer by American Trans Air (ATA), another CRAF carrier. I flew the L-1011 TriStar on scheduled- service routes and also flew civilian- worldwide charters, including military charter flights in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, along with Patriot Express, R & R flights and "freedom bird flights." I retired from ATA in April 2006.

The Lost Battalion

The Cambodian town we supported on 6 December 1970 was on the banks of the Mekong River west of Kampong Cham. It was a daylight mission. The North Vietnam Army and the

Khmer Rouge were attacking as we arrived and the town was on the verge of being overrun.

The Cambodian battalion defending the town lacked training, manpower and equipment to succeed. The small arms they possessed were World War I vintage. The only tactical aircraft they had were a handful of T-28s and a couple of French jet trainers. The jets could only carry a few very small bomblets. Of course, good communication was crucial to effective air support; the battalion had no one competent in English or French.

We were at 2500 feet AGL and could see people being slaughtered by the attackers. The attackers scrambled for cover as soon as we began firing. As a large black aircraft, we were an easy target. Our aircraft was hit by ground fire almost immediately. The cockpit filled with a toxic smell, my intercom didn't work, and I discovered my leg was bleeding.

We were still a viable gunship

Circumstances dictated we terminate the mission and return to Tan Son Nhut AB. We pulled out of the firing circle, called for a replacement Shadow and assessed the situation. For the town and the defending battalion it was a life-or-death situation. We had battle damage and I was injured, but I was alert and could still maintain our firing circle altitude for the pilot. We were still a viable gunship. We climbed to a higher altitude, reset our guns, and went back to work. We located the enemy mortar tubes and gun positions and fired all of our 19,500 rounds of 7.62 in about 15 minutes, then headed back to Tan Son Nhut. Our replacement Shadow arrived and continued supporting the battalion while the Cambodian Army attempted to send reinforcements.

The Flight Surgeon bandaged my leg and released me to fly the following day. My injury was caused by a .50 caliber armor-piercing round that came through the nose gear well, severing wiring/cables and apparently deflected to some extent before penetrating the floor in front of my co-pilot seat. The round hit my leg and continued on to the ceramic armor plating on my side window. It shattered the armor plate and then ricocheted around my legs and feet before hitting a rudder pedal and falling to the floor. Luckily, I had repositioned my leg just prior to the hit or my leg could have been shattered. To this day, I don't know whether the blue smoke and toxic smell that surrounded me at the time was from the shattered armor plate or from the intercom wiring.

A day or so later, all contact with the battalion was lost. On subsequent missions our crew, and the crew that replaced us the day of the battle, returned to the area and monitored the battalion's radio frequency. Days later I saw a small article in the Stars and Stripes describing a Cambodian battalion that seemed to have just disappeared. I learned the town had been overrun and everyone killed. The North Vietnamese caught the battalion commander and tortured him. Those who survived the battle were buried alive or beheaded and their heads put on stakes. I later received the Purple Heart for my wounding.

THE PURPLE HEART For SHADOW PILOT, DON CRAIG
by Major Bernie Smith, Shadow Navigator

On 6 December 1970, our AC-119G Shadow Gunship took off from Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon, RVN on a daytime mission into Cambodia to support Cambodian troops who were fighting the Viet Cong, the North Vietnam Army, and the Khmer Rouge (Communist Cambodians). Once inside Cambodian airspace, we received a request for air support from a small town located on the Mekong River. The town was under attack and on the verge of being overrun by enemy ground troops.

We flew as fast as possible to the town and quickly sized-up the situation on the ground with the Cambodian garrison commander. Enemy troops were attacking the town from the north as the Mekong bordered the town to the south; visibility was good and flying at 2500' AGL, enemy positions could be pinpointed by naked eye. We could see the town's people being slaughtered by the attackers. Flying a slow-moving, large black airplane in daylight over known enemy positions presented a major problem. The enemy could see us as well as we saw them.

*We started firing on enemy troops and literally stopped the attack as enemy troops scrambled for cover. But then enemy gunners started firing at us. We flew around and around in a firing circle, exchanging gunfire. Then the cockpit suddenly filled with a toxic smell of smoke. Our co-pilot, First Lieutenant Don Craig, sustained a wound to his lower right leg. Our aircraft commander pilot, Major Don Fraker was screaming into the interphone, giving the crew instructions. Lt. Craig was not responding to orders being "barked out" by Major Fraker. In desperation, Fraker reached over and grabbed Lt. Craig's helmet and jerked it toward him and yelled something like, "**ARE YOU DEAF**?" I saw Lt. Craig's lips moving rapidly, talking, trying to*

*respond, but nobody could hear him. His interphone cord had been shot away by the enemy bullet. He could not hear anything nor transmit while Major Fraker was pleading for acknowledgement. I was the table Navigator on this mission, seated directly behind Lt. Craig and witnessed this wild scenario. Once the terror subsided, I stated over the interphone, "**Heading back to TSN is 071 degrees. We are cleared of all arty sectors; let's get the hell out of here.**" Much to my surprise, Major Fraker had returned to the firing circle and requested four guns, high rate of fire. When I inquired, "What the hell are you doing?" Major Fraker responded, "People are getting killed down there and we are staying. So……" Fortunately, Lt. Craig's wound was not bleeding badly. He was still alert and could still maintain altitude in the firing circle, so we went back to work, attacking the enemy. Upon going Winchester (out of bullets) while driving the enemy farther away from the town, Major Fraker called for Post Strike Checklist and we headed for Saigon.*

Further analysis on the ground at TSN proved that the enemy round had penetrated the armor plating under the co- pilot's seat creating the dust and toxic smell in the cockpit. The same Shadow crew, including Lt. Craig, flew the next day. All was fairly quiet in the Area of Operations (AO), so we flew back to the small town we had defended on the Mekong. All was quiet there, but the river ran red with blood.

It is now 2008 as I write my recollections of this story with tears in my eyes. First Lieutenant Don Craig was awarded the Purple Heart for his wound sustained in combat.

Jerry Wayne McDonald
17th Special Operations Sq.

Jerry Wayne McDonald, Maintenance, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in Carthage, Missouri in 1947. My family moved to my home town Sarcoxie, Missouri where I graduated from Sarcoxie High School in May 1966. Faced with being drafted into the Army, I joined the Air Force and entered service for basic training at Lackland AFB, Texas in February 1967.

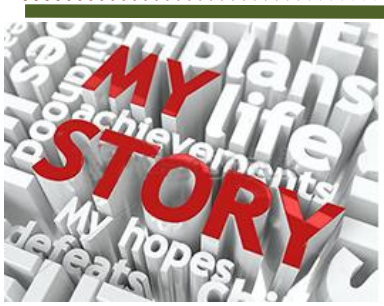
In April '67, I trained in C-130 aircraft maintenance at Wichita Falls, Texas. In July '67, I was assigned to C-47 aircraft maintenance at McConnell AFB, Kansas. One year later in July '68, I reported to Lockbourne AFB, Ohio for AC-119 gunship maintenance training. I reported to the 71st Special Operations Squadron at Nha Trang Air Base, Vietnam in October 1968. I was stationed at Nha Trang until March 1969 when I was transferred to Phan Rang Air Base and eventually to the 17th SOS, where I served to the end of my tour of duty in October 1969.

At Nha Trang, our squadron commander Lt. Colonel Pyle came back from a night mission and when he came off the aircraft, we started talking. He asked me when I was getting my third stripe. I told him I didn't know; the paper work was all messed up. He said he would take care of that and three weeks later, I had orders in hand for my third stripe. Col. Pyle was a great commander.

I was working the night shift at Phan Rang on 6 June 1969 when the base came under enemy fire with mortars and rockets. Now an Airman First Class, I was driving a Ford tractor to bring ammo to my aircraft when the mortars and rockets hit the flight line. I dove off the tractor and laid down flat on the flight line tarmac. I then crawled on my belly to the sand-bagged bunker and dove in. To my surprise, the bunker was full of men. After a few minutes, I ran to my aircraft, fired-up the engines, checked the magnetos and props, and taxied the gunship out of the revetment. The flight crew boarded the aircraft and I got off. The Shadow was airborne in minimum time to attack enemy positions and to eventually stop the attack on the base. For the things I did that night during the enemy attack, I received the Air Force Commendation Medal.

I remember the great cook-outs and the blackjack tables at the party hootch at Phan Rang. When the Australians came to visit us, they were a nut gang.

In February 1971, I separated from the Air Force at Altus AFB. Since my marriage to Karen in November '71, I have lived in Carthage, Missouri where I have worked at various jobs, the latest being with the Carthage Special Road District.



Jack L. Halsey
17th Special Operations Sq.

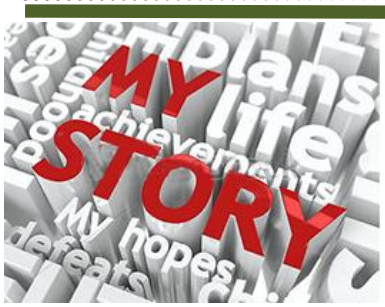
Jack L. Halsey, Navigator, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in Yakima, Washington, 29 October 1935. Upon graduating from the United States Military Academy (West Point), on 4 June 1958, I was commissioned in the Air Force. I retired in June 1978 as a Lieutenant Colonel and Master Navigator with 815 combat hours and 4763 hours of flying time that included the C-118, AC-119G, and C-141. My awards and decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross, Meritorious Service Medal, and the Air Medal with 9 Oak Leaf Clusters.

I was assigned to the AC-119G in June 1968 as one of the first active duty navigators. I served as a Squadron Navigator with the 71st SOS at Nha Trang and the 17th SOS at Phan Rang AB, RVN.

First Shadows to Vietnam

Two pilots, a flight engineer, a crew chief, and I ferried one of the first AC-119Gs from the plant in St. Augustine, FL to Vietnam. We left St. Augustine December 18th and arrived at Nha Trang on January 11th. Our route was St. Augustine, England AFB, McClellan AFB, McChord AFB, Elmendorf AFB, Adak NAS, Midway, Wake, Anderson AB, Clark AB, and Nha Trang. Grumman had not calculated new fuel consumption curves for the newly modified aircraft, so we flew one extended leg over land to see whether the AC-119's fuel consumption would be reasonably approximated by existing C-119G estimates. The test leg began at England AFB, LA and followed the CONUS border to McClellan AFB, CA. As far as I know, ours was the only AC-119G to use a 360 overhead pattern for landing at Nha Trang.



Jimmy L. Terry
17th Special Operations Sq.

Jimmy L. Terry, Maintenance, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico on August 28, 1943 to Mary and Henry Terry. At an early age I moved to East Texas with my family where I resided until I enlisted in the Air Force on November 28, 1960 in Dallas, Texas. The reason I enlisted was that I was coming up on draft age and I wanted to have a choice in what branch of service I went into. I always wanted to be in the service so I enlisted at the earliest opportunity.

After Basic Training at Lackland AFB, Texas, I had the following assignments: Offutt AFB, Nebraska; Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico; Grand Forks AFB, North Dakota; McChord AFB, Washington; Phan Rang AB, Republic of Vietnam (RVN); Tan Son Nhut AB, Republic of Vietnam.

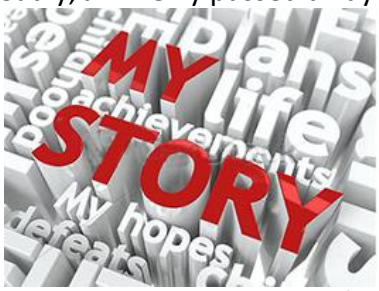
I was assigned to the 14th Special Operations Wing at Phan Rang, RVN, on July 18, 1970. When I reported in, I was assigned to the 17th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) and the AC-119G Gunships. The 17th SOS had two Forward Operating Locations, one at Phu Cat AB, RVN and the other at Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN. I was sent to Tan Son Nhut for my first six months. I was assigned to Flight Line Maintenance as Flight Chief. The AC-119G gunship was a unique type of aircraft. It was not only old but it was hard to obtain parts needed to clear the aircraft for flight. We would beg, borrow and sometime steal the parts. When we were getting a plane ready for flight we would tighten any oil leaks on the engines and run the engines to pressurize the Prop Regulators so they weren't leaking.

I went back to Phan Rang AB for the second half of my tour where I was assigned as Assistant Phase Dock Chief. While working nights there, we had a couple of times we were sent to the bunkers on the run. One incident, I remember, we had just parked a plane on the wash rack and the Giant Voice sounded and some rockets and mortars came in. After I got to the bunker, I took a head count of my troops and I found a couple of them missing. After the all clear, I located them and I asked what had happened to them. The story is that Jessie (Duck) Laing said

I had run over him and knocked him down on my way to the bunker. To tell the truth, I don't remember seeing or touching anyone. The other one, I can't remember his name, said he crawled under the plane for cover and I informed him that the planes were the targets. So, I guess when we are afraid, we do all kinds of things without realizing it. On the more relaxed side, Leigh Norstrum and I used to go to the Bamboo Viper Non- Commissioned Officers (NCO) Club and challenge anyone to play Pinochle, while watching the firefights on the perimeter of the base. The losers would have to buy chow for the winners and Leigh and I very seldom had to buy chow.

After my return to the States on July 18, 1971, I was assigned to Travis AFB, California where I remained until I retired as a Master Sergeant after 21 years in the Air Force. My decorations include the following: Air Force Meritorious Service Medal, Air Force Commendation Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, and the Vietnam Campaign Medal.

Sadly, Jim Terry passed away on June 13, 2009.



Roy A. Davis
17th Special Operations Sq.

Roy A. Davis, Pilot, 17th Special Operations Squadron

THE BEGINNING

I was born in Queens, New York, in 1942. I went on to get my degree in Meteorology at Florida State University. In 1966 I got my commission through Officer Training School. My first assignment was pilot training at Craig AFB, Alabama. After graduating from UPT as the top pilot in the class, I went to the 8th Military Airlift Squadron (MAS) at McChord AFB, Washington, to fly the C-141.

AC-119G AND AC-119K

In January 1969 I was assigned to fly the AC-119K gunship at Phan Rang AB in Vietnam. Training

was to be three months long. Initial training was in the C-119 at Clinton County Airport, Ohio, by reserve pilots. After completing this training, gunship training was started at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. I can remember my first live fire mission over Lake Erie. I was in the cargo compartment waiting my turn sit in the left seat. I swore that I could hear the guns firing—wrong. When the minis started to fire the noise was startling and deafening. Training was completed around the end of June. The only problem was the crews were ready but the 18 aircraft we were supposed to ferry to Vietnam were not. Departure was rescheduled for October, November, and December 1969. My aircraft was scheduled along with five others for December. From July to December there was not much to do other than remain current in the aircraft. We departed in late December and spent the first two nights at Malmstrom AFB, Montana, and McChord AFB, Washington. At Malmstrom we had to have our right J-85 jet engine replaced. We had to take the longer northern route through Alaska because the aircraft did not have enough fuel to make it from California to Hawaii. This 11,500 mile journey took almost a month.

On Dec 31, 1969 we left McChord for Alaska. Our one- year tour started as soon as we left the CONUS. I spent the first day of my Vietnam tour snow skiing at the Alyeska ski area in Anchorage, Alaska.

Our next stop was at the naval station on Adak Island in the Aleutian chain. Alaska king crabs were in season and we got to visit a commercial crab boat and left with a large green plastic bag filled with pure crab meat—delicious.

Next, we headed south to Midway Island. The weather on this route was terrible—low clouds and huge thunderstorms in freezing temperatures. The other aircraft in our flight, commanded by Capt Dick Twaddle, called and said they lost their weather radar and could they use their FM homing radio to home in on us and thereby avoid the thunderstorms. A short time later they called asked us what the f*** were we doing. They said they were flying into every thunderstorm on the route and were icing up to the point where they could no longer maintain altitude. We finally figured out that the FM homing device preferred thunderstorms to our FM radio—close call for them.

We arrived at Midway at the height of black albatross mating season. Quite a sight to see these large birds doing their mating dance. It was on Midway that a Navy Chief offered to paint nose

art on our airplanes. He did an awesome job painting the following on our aircraft: "The Pea-Nut Special" (my aircraft), "Fly United" (Twaddle), "The Polish Cannon" (Kwiecinski), and "The Super Sow". Unfortunately, this artwork was removed after arriving in-country (Vietnam). The next stops after Midway was Wake Island, followed by Guam, Clark AB and finally Phan Rang AB. The trip took almost a month. The first thing we did was head right back to Clark AB to attend Jungle Survival school. This was not a fun course. We were let loose in the jungle and had to escape, evade and survive. The area we were in was infested with rats. During the night you could feel them running across your body.

Upon returning to Phan Rang I received my in-country flight check and began to fly combat missions. Upgrade to aircraft commander was based on date of rank, so in order to upgrade more quickly I transferred from the 18th SOS to the 17th SOS. Shortly after the move I upgraded to aircraft commander.

Most of the missions we flew were in support of our ground troops in contact with the enemy (TICs). In addition, we periodically sat alert in the event we needed to respond rapidly. Most of the combat missions we flew were at night.

During the day we had time for some recreation after getting some sleep. I was interested in photography and the base conveniently had a photo lab. I also played handball and tennis with Dan Eramo and Joe Crocco.

Flying TIC missions was less stressful and dangerous than truck hunting over the Ho Chi Minh trail. I had only one in flight emergency. On a mission over Cambodia we had a runaway prop. The RPM was controllable and the prop blades ran away against the stops. We turned around and headed towards our emergency airfield, Pleiku AB. The only issue was a discussion I had with the copilot and engineer on what the proper procedure was for our emergency. They wanted to shut the engine down when I knew the proper procedure was to increase the RPM to 3100 to be able to provide some torque from that engine. Weather was not great at Pleiku but we made a successful emergency landing.

AFTER GUNSHIPS

In late September 1970 I was given a compassionate reassignment to McChord AFB to fly C-

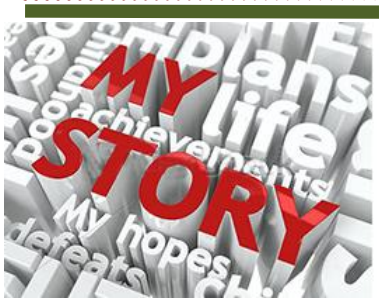
141s. This reassignment was due to a serious illness in my wife's family. I was assigned to my old squadron, the 8th MAS. I upgraded to flight examiner and then reassigned to the 62nd Military Airlift Wing (MAW) as a stan. eval. flight examiner. In 1977 I applied for and was selected to fly the VC-137 for the 89th MAW at Andrews AFB (Presidential Airlift). Due to a reduction in Presidential airlift by President Carter, my assignment was changed to the VC-135 at Ramstein AB, Germany. After two years of flying Gen Alexander Haig, I was reassigned to Det 1, 89th MAW at Hickam AFB to fly the VC-135 and be the Det Operations Officer. We were responsible for flying the Commander in Chief Pacific Forces (CINPAC) and the Commander in Chief of Pacific Air Forces (CINCPACAF). This assignment was followed by a year at CINPAC protocol, then three years as commander of the AFROTC unit at Montana State University in Bozeman, MT, then one year as Chief of Staff HQ AFROTC, followed by Air War College, and finally, the commander of the AFROTC NW Region. I retired as a Colonel in 1992 and became a firefighter for the City of Tacoma. Now, retired for a second time, I live with my wife, Paula, in Peoria, Arizona.

Richard D. Hehman
71st Special Operations Sq.

Richard D. Hehman, Maintenance, 71st Special Operations Squadron

Seymour, Indiana was my birthplace in October 1947. I graduated from Brownstown High School in my hometown of Brownstown, Indiana. In 1972, I graduated from Indiana State University.

I joined the 930th Tactical Airlift Group and the 71st Tactical Airlift Squadron at Bakalar AFB, Indiana and was assigned to aircraft maintenance. There are a lot of memories, from the camaraderie of the people I served with, the country of Vietnam itself, and the times we were under attack at Phan Rang. I was discharged at Columbus, Indiana in 1969. I currently live in Columbus, Indiana.



Robert Walker McCreight
18th Special Operations Sq.

Robert Walker McCreight, Pilot, 18th Special Operations Squadron

Born on 6 September 1935 in Ninety Six, Greenwood County, South Carolina.

Entered Clemson University in 1953, but dropped out after three semesters to pursue lifelong goal of becoming a pilot. Enlisted in the USAF on 18 Apr 1955 as an Aviation Cadet. Awarded commission and navigator rating in August 1956. Served as a radar intercept officer (RIO) in F-94 and F-89 interceptor aircraft until 1960. Entered pilot training in April 1960 and awarded pilot rating in May 1961. Retired as a Major on 1 May 1975.

Assignments/Duties

1957-58: Radar Intercept Officer, F-94C, New Castle 1958-60: RIO, F-89J, ft Commander, C-124, Donaldson AFB, and Hunter AFB, 1965-68: Aircraft Commander/Instructor Pilot/Flight Examiner, C-141, Dover AFB, DE.

1969: C-119/AC-119K training, Clinton County AB, OH, and Lockbourne AFB, OH.
1969: (November) Ferried AC-119K to Phan Rang AB, 1969-70: Aircraft Commander/Flight Examiner/ FOL Ops Officer/Interim FOL Commander, AC-119K, Phu Cat AB, RVN, Udorn, Royal Thai Air Base, Nakhon Phanom
1971-74: Gunship Operations Officer, HQ PACAF, Hickam AFB, HI Note: During this period I earned a degree from Chaminade University under the Operation Bootstrap program
1974-75: Assistant Airfield Manager, Bergstrom AFB, TX 1975: Retired on 1 May

After retiring from the United States Air Force, I attended Texas A&M University and graduated in December 1978. In March 1979, I was hired by Texas A&M University as a pilot. I flew Beechcraft King Air aircraft for the university for over 28 years, serving as Chief Pilot for the last 23 years. I retired from Texas A&M University on 4 May 2007.

Flight Information

Navigator/Radar Intercept Officer: T-29, B-25, F-94, and F-89. Total time: 1100 hours. Pilot/Aircraft Commander/Instructor Pilot/Pilot Flight Examiner: T-34, T-37, T-33, 0-2, C-124, C-141, and AC-119K. Total time: 6500 hours.

Awards and Decorations

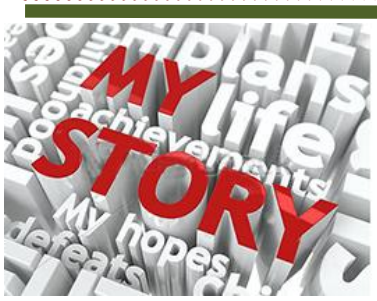
Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal with 11 Oak Leaf Clusters

Dates of Promotion

2/Lieutenant - 7 AUG 56; 1/Lieutenant - 7 FEB 58; Captain - 3 AUG 62; Major - 4 DEC 66

Explosive Bore-Sighting

March of '70 – it was Easter Sunday. As a matter of fact, we had a mission that took off late at night, but it had been raining a lot at Udorn and up in Laos where we were headed. So, we really didn't expect to see much action. There'd been very little going on for several nights. But, about half an hour to forty-five minutes after we got up there and started working the trails, we spotted one truck, all by himself. We decided we'd go ahead and get in firing position and shoot, to see where it hit, so we could correct it. So we targeted this one truck, there all by himself on a rainy night, and the first time we shot, it looked like everything hit right on the truck, and it was probably the biggest explosion I've ever seen. It was so bright, it lit up the cockpit and actually moved the airplane. We were up about 5,000 feet. This truck continued to blow up – every minute or so there'd be another huge explosion. He obviously was loaded with some kind of ammunition – we don't know what – but it was a tremendous explosion, and more explosions to follow. After about a half an hour, we decided to move on down the road with this truck still burning and blowing up. And probably just four or five miles down the road, we found one more lone truck, all by himself. He was just parked, sitting still, probably watching the explosions just down the road. So, after we shot at him a few times, we hit him, and he turned out to be a fuel truck. And we had another huge fireball. Didn't see another truck on the road that night – the weather was bad, roads were muddy – but these two trucks just happened to be out there on a night when we didn't really expect to see anything. After leaving the area, probably an hour later, that first ammo truck was still blowing up. And of course, we never found out exactly what he had, but it was really a potent cargo that he was carrying. It turned out to be a bad night for him, and a good one for us.



Richard C. Marr
17th Special Operations Sq.

Richard C. "Buck" Marr, Pilot, 17th Special Operations Squadron

Having been born into a military family, there was never any doubt about what I wanted to do. I have no interesting stories about avoiding the draft or making a deal with recruiters. My father flew with the Army Air Corps during World War II and with the newly minted Air Force until 1966. He and my mother loved the military life and the Air Force family. He used to say that "flying beat the heck out of work." That sounded good to me so from very early in my life, I set a course to commissioning and earning my Air Force pilot wings. I achieved the commissioning through the Reserve Officer Training Course at the University of Arkansas in 1969 and later won the pilot wings as a member of Laughlin's 70-05 class. I wanted to emulate my father's wartime experience, so I volunteered for any aircraft participating in the Vietnam conflict. With only a fair class ranking, that turned out to be the AC-119. Following the obligatory survival and flying training, I naively arrived at Phan Rang in August, 1970. During in-processing, the base came under a rocket attack which clearly indicated that this was going to be an exciting year.

Everything about the tour was a tremendous experience. From a flying standpoint, it exceeded my expectations for excitement. As with any military activity, the people were the best part. I met aviators who have remained lifelong friends. Three fellow pilots, Craig French, Marty Noonan and Lanny Letterman, even participated in my wedding 18 days after we DEROS'd. **Despite their influence, Sherry and I have remained married for the past 38 years**.

The flying from Phan Rang was terrific. My favorite part was the last comment from the intelligence officer's mouth during the pre-mission briefing. It went something like, "The U.S. government may disavow all knowledge of you and your whereabouts should your aircraft be lost."

Our missions took us TDY to garden spots like Da Nang and Phu Cat which enabled us to more adequately provide firepower to targets in Laos. As a newly minted pilot, accumulating flying

time was important. The "double bang" missions from Da Nang and Phu Cat with a refueling at Ubon, Thailand and then back to the targets gave us great opportunities to build time and experience…and air medal points. The targets were inevitably hot and full of opportunities to thwart an enemy initiative.

Late in our tour the Cambodia AOR heated up causing the coalition leadership to decide to close the Phan Rang operation. This permitted us to move to Saigon's Tan Son Nhut AB to expand Shadow gunship coverage in Cambodia. We joined our 17th SOS mates who had been originally assigned there in what turned out to be an expansion into 24 hour coverage in Cambodia. Daylight flying posed significant challenges and increased threats and risks. Fortunately, our tactics shop was up to the task and while we took many hits, we did not lose any aircraft or aircrew. Hats off to then Major Don Fraker and his tactics 'smarts.' I am also grateful to Don for passing me on my pilot upgrade check ride. I flew as a lieutenant pilot in command for a couple of months before DEROSing which scared the holy heck out of the salty senior navigators and flight engineers assigned to my crew. The young IOs and Gunners had steely nerves and endured quietly. However, the fini-flight was loaded with close friends and the party following the flight still remains in the lore of the 17th SOS.

I remained in the Air Force for almost 32 years, retiring as a Major General in late 2000. Until 2008, I worked as a Senior Director for General Dynamics and a Vice President with Lockheed Martin. Currently, I operate my own defense consulting business, Marr & Associates. Sherry and I split our time between homes in Kila, Montana and Vancouver, Washington for the sole purpose of "playing" with our sons, their wives and four world-class grandchildren.

Divert to Phnom Penh Airport

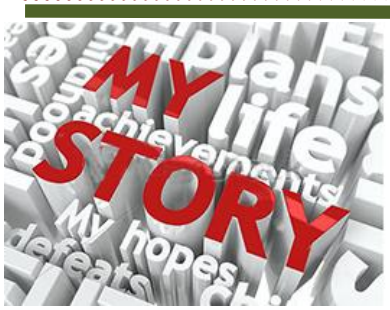
Sometime in the late spring, early summer of 1971, my crew was flying a "seek and destroy" mission on the Mekong River when we experienced the typical .50 caliber hostile ground fire. As this was normal for this section of the river, we hardly gave it a second thought. However, an interphone communication from the IO a few seconds later caught our collective attention. "Pilot, IO." "Yes IO, this is the Pilot" (good interphone discipline so far). "Pilot, it looks like we took a hit in #2…it looks like oil streaming from the cowling." Following that call, the FE went into a high speed scan of the engine instruments. Oil quantity was dropping with other indications of impending engine loss. Quickly, the pilot and flight engineer decided to feather

the engine before it seized. Good decision, but now what? Since it was early in the mission, we were heavy. A quick review of the distance and terrain by the Navigator indicated that returning to Saigon would be impossible. We set our course for an emergency landing at Phnom Penh. What quickly became obvious to the two of us sitting in the pilots' seats was the fact that we were losing altitude…. slowly, very slowly, but also very surely. Apparently, we were too heavy to maintain level flight at the current pressure altitude. As the co-pilot, I whipped out the charts and calculated that at the present rate of descent, we should impact the ground about 13 miles short of the Phnom Penh runway. The only variable we could control was the weight. Enter IO and Gunners. In the next few minutes, they performed in a superhuman mode. They pushed, shoved and carried all the ammunition cans to the doors and threw them out. Some of the cans weighed almost as much as the gunners. Gradually, ever so gradually, we returned to level flight. We made the field and the pilot executed a flawless single engine landing. The Cambodian security forces set up a cordon around the airplane while the pilot went to their small airport operations center to attempt to reach Tan Son Nhut for follow on planning. After a couple hours of inconsistent communication, it was decided that we should stay the night in Phnom Penh to await the arrival of a C-130 the next day loaded with an engine and maintenance personnel to change our engine.

That was one interesting night. Each of us on the crew was assigned a bodyguard and we were whisked to a hotel. We had private rooms with a security person located outside the door throughout the night. We were invited to a dinner at the home of the Chief of the Cambodian Air Force.

The spread of food was spectacular and the whiskey flowed freely. All of us ate and drank in abundance and in reward, we all subsequently caught dysentery. For most of the next month, I flew with a bottle of 'liquid cork" in my helmet bag.

The C-130 flew into Phnom Penh airport under the cover of darkness. The hero maintenance guys changed our engine in record time and we flew our bird out by midday…. completely unarmed. Before leaving the airport, we were allowed to purchase one souvenir each. I bought a temple carving for $2.00 US. Upon returning to the states, my wife had it framed and it has hung in every one of our homes since then as a reminder of a very memorable flight.



William Joseph Zito
17th Special Operations Sq.

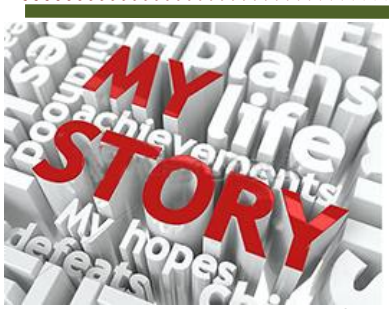
William "Bill" Joseph Zito, Gunner, 17th Special Operations Squadron

Although I was born in Providence, Rhode Island in October 1950, my hometown was really East Providence. I graduated from East Providence High School on 10 June 68 and was sworn in at the Providence induction center eleven days later on 21 July 1968. I joined the Air Force because I was a member of the Civil Air Patrol as a teenager and was therefore already Air Force oriented.

I served in the 17th Special Operations Squadron as a gunner on Shadow gunships from June 1970 to June 1971. My home base was Phan Rang but I did a month at Tan Son Nhut and a couple of short stints at Da Nang and Phu Cat.

The most exciting mission I remember is defending an Army outpost that was being overrun by the Viet Cong. I will always remember all the friends made during my Vietnam tour of duty, our mascot dog, Shadow, and all the card games in the hootch. Dave Voisey, Norm Evans, Mike Drzyzga, and Rodney Friese were some of my friends. Our mascot, Shadow, was airlifted home (to Massachusetts, I think) when the last Shadow aircrews returned. Pinochle & spades were the most popular card games but a good poker game was known to have happened on some evenings and weekends.

I separated from the Air Force at Travis AFB, California in January 1973 and returned home to Rhode Island. My wife, Paula, and I were married July 5, 1975. We have 2 sons - Adam and Joshua. We lived in Rhode Island until 1988 when we moved to Vacaville, CA where we still reside. Adam served 4 years in the US Marine Corps. Joshua is in the Air Force Reserves and has deployed twice to the desert - Iraq and United Arab Emirates.



Dick Iverson
18th Special Operations Sq.

Dick Iverson, Pilot, 18th Special Operations Squadron

I entered the United States Air Force in March 1967 and served through September 1987. My one year Vietnam tour of duty was from February 1971 to February 1972. I reported for duty with the 18th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang Air Base, RVN. After two weeks there, I spent six months at Nakhon Phnom (NKP) Air Base in Thailand and six months at Da Nang as an Instructor Pilot (IP). I have 600 hours in AC-119s and a total of 7,000 hours in all the following aircraft: AC-119, KC/EC/RC-135, FB-111, T-39, B-52, T-37/38, and B-1B.

Military Grades/Dates

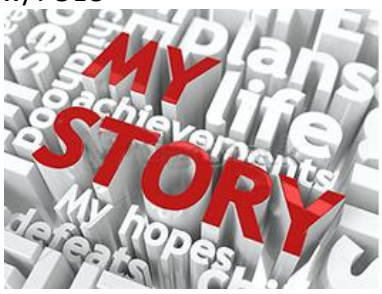
Mar 1967: 2nd Lieutenant
Sep 1968: 1st Lieutenant
Jan 1971: Captain
Apr 1974: Major
Jun 1979: Lieutenant Colonel
Jun 1984: Colonel

Assignments

1967: Graduate Air Intelligence Training - Lowry AFB
1969: Graduate Undergrad Pilot Training - Moody AFB
1969-71: KC-135 IP
1971-72: AC-119K SEA (NKP/DaNang)
1972-74: KC/EC-135 IP - KI Sawyer AFB
1974-76: T-39/KC-135 IP (Aide to 8AF Comdr)
1974-76: FB-111/A P/IP -Plattsburgh AFB
1987-87: 28th Bomb Wing Commander - Ellsworth AFB
Sept 1987: Retired with 20 years and 6 months of active duty service.

Awards & Decorations

Distinguished Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross w/1OLC, Air Medal w/7OLC



William Gericke
17th Special Operations Sq.

William Gericke, Navigator, 17 Special Operations Squadron

Bill "Gunship" Gericke was born May 9, 1935 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He earned a B.S. in Forestry from Penn State University in 1957. He received a regular commission in the Air Force as Distinguished Graduate of the PSU ROTC program.

Bill earned his Navigator Wings, completed Electronic Warfare Officer Training, and was assigned to B-52D crew duty at Turner AFB. He was among the first navigators selected to crew the B-58A that he flew from Bunker Hill AFB, IN. In 1965, he was chosen for a Special Duty Assignment as instructor navigator at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

From the Academy, Bill initially reported for training in the RB-66. However, the program was cancelled and Bill was eventually reassigned to the AC-119G program where, from May 1970 to May 1971, he flew 148 combat missions and 692.6 combat hours from Tan Son Nhut AB and Phan Rang AB. His duties included training the initial cadre of VNAF students including Hoa Ngoc Bach (Harold Bach), who is now an American citizen and a Lifetime Member of the AC-119 Gunship Association.

Bill was reassigned to the AC-130 replacement combat training unit as Defensive Systems Operator Instructor. From March 1972 to June 1972, Bill was back in Vietnam as Special Operations Liaison Officer to Headquarters Seventh Air Force. He returned to the AC-130 training program where, by his retirement in December 1985, he had accumulated 2,300 hours in the AC-130 A/E/H and a total of 16 years in gunships.

Following retirement, Bill purchased an Airstream trailer and traveled almost continuously for

five years, visiting 49 states, and eastern and western Canada. He now lives in St. Petersburg FL where he plays softball three times a week as he has for the past 22 years.

Bill's awards and decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross, two Meritorious Service Medals, nine Air Medals, three Air Force Commendation Medals, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with "V" device, three Combat Readiness Medals, Republic of Vietnam Service Medal Honor Class, Vietnam Service Medal with four Bronze Service Stars, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm, and Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

The Americanization of Harold Bach

In spring 1971, the 17th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang began training Vietnamese Air Force members in the AC-119G aircraft and the Shadow mission. I was the instructor navigator assigned to one of the first VNAF crews to undergo training. One of my students was Lt. Hoa Ngoc Bach. Hoa spoke good English and had completed the VNAF navigator training course, so I trained him as the crew navigator.

Hoa was a bright student and was quick to exhibit leadership and initiative. On our third or fourth training mission, we received an urgent request from an ARVN unit that was being harassed by a VC unit. The unit was nearby and we were on the scene almost immediately. However, we quickly discovered that our ground contact spoke no English, or at least not enough to rely on him for target identification. Hoa instantly became the translator/ communicator/coordinator. Through Hoa we located the friendly forces, got clearance to fire, and surprised the VC with our quick reaction.

I returned to RVN in the spring of 1972 during the VC/Chi Com invasion across the DMZ. I was delighted to reconnect with Hoa's crew and fly a couple of missions with them. They were mostly the same folks we trained the previous spring. It was evident we did a good job training them. They flew the mission well and displayed good basic procedures. The most unusual part of those flights was the intercom communication. All conversation was in Vietnamese except for the Check List. I heard lots of Vietnamese chatter, then "Gear up!" or "Cruise Power."

I returned to the U.S. not expecting to see Hoa again. However, after the fall of Saigon in April 1975, I received a telegram from Hoa. He and his new wife, Thu, were at the refugee camp in Ontario, California. I too was newly married. My new bride and I decided not only to sponsor

Hoa and Thu, but have them come to Fort Walton Beach and live with us until they could get settled.

They arrived without any luggage; it was either lost or stolen while at the camp. Hoa could only find menial jobs, but after six months they were able to rent an apartment. We bought them a VW bug and I found myself again being Hoa's instructor as he learned to drive the VW. Fortunately, Hoa was a fast learner (he had been a teacher before entering the Vietnamese Air Force).

After nine months, Hoa, Thu, and two other couples relocated to "Little Saigon" - the Los Angeles area, where both Hoa and Thu found work. Hoa began as a laborer with Long Beach Fabricators, a company that assembled Toyota trucks. For two years he worked from about 0600 to 1400, went home, ate, napped, and then attended evening computer classes until 2200 hours. After completing his course work, his employer placed him in charge of inventory control. Hoa worked for the same company for 28 years. While working, the couple purchased a house in Long Beach and, over the years, served as sponsors to 21 family members coming to the U.S. It was my pleasure to welcome Hoa to America and my privilege to provide him a Lifetime Membership in the AC- 119 Gunship Association.

Estel Dunn
17th Special Operations Sq.

Estel "Wade" Dunn, Gunner, 17th Special Operations Squadron

Kentucky was my birthplace in 1945. My family moved from Middlesboro, KY to St. Louis, Missouri when I was eight years old. I graduated from John O'Fallon Technical High School in St. Louis in 1963. On 5 May 1966, I entered USAF Basic Training at Amarillo, Texas. I worked at McDonnell-Douglas Aircraft prior to enlisting in St. Louis. I wanted to travel and see the world; not in my wildest dreams did I ever think that I would see some of the world from the cargo bay of an AC-119 gunship.

When I volunteered for gunship duty, I was assigned to the 29th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Malmstrom AFB, Great Falls, Montana. I was in the original mix with all of you; combat crew training at Lockbourne, jungle survival at Clark, in-country Vietnam at Nha Trang and Phan Rang.

To be perfectly honest, after all these years, the Shadow missions I flew have pretty much blended together. One mission that remains clear occurred on 14 May and 15 May 1969 near Chu Lai. We had an Army patrol pinned down and taking murderous incoming fire. When we got into the firing circle, Sgt. Roberts and I put down the entire ammo load in just under 20 minutes! To the best of my knowledge, we hold the record for most ammo fired in the shortest period of time. But more importantly, we saved the Army patrol.

Some of the "special" memories that I have are: My first mission over the "Trail" and first time to see 23mm and 37mm fire coming up too close for comfort; flying at 2 o'clock in the morning with beautiful white fog in the valleys and millions of stars in the sky; touching down on the runway tarmac at sunrise, feeling dog-tired after flying a double sortie defending a Special Forces camp; watching a B-52 "arc light" strike in the distance while on a mission over Laos; looking down on the sampan fishing fleet off the coast of Phan Rang as my crew heads out on a 6-1 mission; and finally, feeling the wheels touch the runway at Phan Rang on my last combat mission with some of the finest and bravest men that I have ever known.

I separated from the United States Air Force in December 1969. I graduated from St. Louis Community College in 1984 and attended Washington University in St. Louis. I live in St. Louis suburb, St. Ann, Missouri.

David E. O'Mara
17th Special Operations Sq.

David E. O'Mara, Pilot, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I completed my degree at Memphis State University and was commissioned on 20 August 1965

through the AFROTC program. Upon completing pilot training at Del Rio, Texas in December 1966, I was assigned to duty as a B-52G copilot at Seymour Johnson AFB, NC.

Beginning in 1968, I flew 45 B-52 Arc Light missions over Vietnam from Guam, Okinawa, and Thailand.

Within days of returning to Seymour Johnson, I received orders to Vietnam in the C-123. I grew up as the son of a U. S. Navy Officer, so I knew not to whine or complain over what the military wanted of me. However, as a Captain, I realized almost everyone was negotiating for favors. So I told the assignments officer I had just returned from six months of flying Arc Light missions, that I considered myself a combatant, and I would gladly take any combat aircraft assignment the USAF had. A few weeks later I received orders for the AC-119G gunship. I did not then know I was embarking on the most meaningful year of my life.

Shadow Hijacking

I believe we were scheduled this night for a nine or ten o'clock departure for the second scheduled sortie of the evening. We had accomplished all preflight checks and procedures and were presently taxiing to the north end of the airfield for a south departure from Phan Rang. Tonight's mission was a planned search and destroy sortie to somewhere in Corps II or Corps III of South Vietnam (Republic of Vietnam). South Vietnam was divided into four Corps or subdivisions, each denoted by Roman numerals, I – II – III – IV by the U.S. Army. I Corps started at the DMZ with II and III Corps sort of evenly divided in the middle of South Vietnam and finally, IV Corps, from Saigon south to the southern tip of the Mekong Delta.

At the end of most large runways there is a fairly large concrete paddock used for various purposes, such as, for propeller driven aircraft, engine and prop operating checks, or for jet fighters ordnance arming etc. For the AC-119on a TIC or scramble, these checks were accomplished while taxiing to the far end of the runway for takeoff. Even though I had many alert takeoffs in the B-52 jet bomber, the relative complexity of large piston engine prop driven aircraft was an adventure in itself the first couple of times around. Running each engine up to check magnetos and cycle the props would cause the aircraft, due to asymmetrical thrust, to try to veer to one side or the other.

This night mission was a scheduled sortie. We arrived at the paddock and turned our AC-119G into the wind. Locking the parking brakes, we started checking the engines and props. After completing the checks on the left engine, I was smoothly pushing the throttle of the right engine forward when our ever-alert IO reported he had seen a tall American man in USAF fatigues, walking around the rear of aircraft. Bringing the throttle back to idle, I immediately told him to keep me advised of where the man was located at all times. I had barely released the intercom button when our IO stated the man was heading forward on the right side of the aircraft near the fuselage. The fact that every crew member carried a loaded Combat Masterpiece .38 Special revolver or had an AR-15 immediately available, ran through my mind, as I pulled the right prop lever to feather, instantly stopping the right engine. If this was some kind of weird diversion, I knew we could get the aircraft moving quickly with only the left engine running while starting the other. I am thankful to this day, I have never seen the aftermath of a man meeting a turning eleven-foot diameter prop. I continued the emergency shutdown process while our copilot called the tower and reported the incident. The tower scrambled the Air Police, fire trucks and the flight surgeon, apparently part of any aircraft related drill.

Unlike the movies, it would be difficult to outrun an aircraft on foot. Apparently, seeing the huge prop and engine come to a sudden stop, the unknown man turned around and walked back to the aft of the aircraft where the IO was shining his GI flashlight. At sometime during this confusion, the IO had taken his headset off to talk to this obviously confused man. By now, the NOS was giving us a blow-by-blow description of the ensuing events. I kept asking what he wanted. Who knows, although I doubted it, he may have seen something unsafe with the aircraft. By now I could see the red flashing lights of the emergency vehicles coming toward us in the distance. I was debating whether to shut down the left engine for fear of chopping someone up in the prop, when the NOS reported the man wanted to go back home to the USA. Well we all did. I had just said over the intercom, "Whatever you do don't let him aboard", when the NOS stated "everything is all right we have him in the aircraft".

As all the emergency forces arrived, I informed the tower I was shutting down the remaining engine. Of course, with the generator still running, the flight deck crew could barely hear anything that was said over the intercom. My copilot and I unbuckled our seatbelts and parachute harnesses for a quick exit if necessary. In addition, I unfastened the retaining strap on my revolver while checking the availability of my survival knife. As I had not been in many

fights in my youth, I wanted every advantage at hand.

While in the USAF, I never qualified less than expert in all Air Force small arms courses and tied for first place in hand to hand combat training in survival school.

Meanwhile, in the back of the airplane, our capable crew comprised of our NOS, IO, and GUNNERS, had calmed our new "passenger" down. As much as we all wanted to see firsthand what was going on in back, the flight deck crew had to stay ready in our positions. While communicating with the tower, who was in contact with all the ground forces, we sat ready to do anything we might be called to do. Reports from the back started coming in when six large, as they usually seem to be, Air Police, climbed onboard. At first they talked to the now obviously disturbed man. When he refused to get off his "airliner to freedom," the Air Police decided to forcibly remove the intruder. After all, we were late for our departure. Later on I pondered what I would have done if we were scrambled for a TIC. I suppose the USAF would have had to give the young airman flight pay. One report from the back claimed the intruder, who was desperately clinging to a minigun, was tossing the Air Police around like small children.

Damn, why was he aboard. No procedure to cover this one. As fast as the melee started, it stopped when the aft crew intervened, again calming down the situation. Things were tense but the flight surgeon had just arrived. Looking back on it, I thought, so what!

All knowledgeable pilots are wary and suspicious of doctors. And flight surgeons in particular will put the fear in a pilot's heart faster than an inverted spin in a T-37. A stroke of the pen of one of these men can end or give wings to a pilot's career.

The flight surgeon on duty this night earned his pay like a real trooper. Keep in mind; I never left my seat, so most of the story emanating from the aft of the airplane comes from what I heard over the intercom and what was later related to me by my fellow crew members.

The flight surgeon entered the aircraft and proceeded to talk to this distressed man. As our "passenger" had recently received a "Dear John" letter, like many men in this situation, he felt compelled to go home and rectify the situation. The flight surgeon talked the man into getting a shot to help calm him down. According to my crew the offender slumped into a stupor as the plunger on the syringe was pushed down. Now you know why pilots fear doctors. All kidding

aside, I never found out who this brave doctor was, but the Air Police, my crew and I owe him everything for saving at least one American life that night. If I ever meet this physician, I will make sure he knows how much I appreciate what he did that night.

I know a man cannot see a spinning prop in the dark of night. Experienced men have died from spinning aircraft props. Even though I showed compassion by shutting down the right engine, I know any one of us would have stopped this man dead in his tracks if he threatened one of our fellow crewmembers during a combat situation. I am sure he thought our AC-119 was just another vintage cargo plane, hopefully flying to the nearest Vietnam departure base for the States.

After the excitement, we cranked up and flew our assigned mission. At least a hundred years later when flying for the airlines, I realized my crew and I had an attempted hijacking that night.

Art Perry
18th Special Operations Sq.

Art Perry, Flight Engineer, 18th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in 1939 at Flint, Michigan and moved to my home town of Fenton, Michigan early in life. I graduated from Mandeville High School in Flint, and the Community College of the Air Force as an Aircraft & Power Plant Mechanic in 1975.

I joined the Air Force to stay out of the General Motor automobile factories in my hometown area.

After AC-119K training at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio in 1970, I was assigned to the 18th SOS at Phan Rang in May of 1970, then Nakhon Phanom until June, 1971. My job was Stan Eval (Standards and Evaluations) Flight Engineer.

My most exciting AC-119 mission was flying over the Plain of Jars (PDJ) in January, 1971, which

resulted in over 200 holes in our horizontal stabilizer and booms from 37mm antiaircraft artillery fire (AAA). We also had some exciting nights flying over Cambodia in June 1970 and December 1970.

The main things I will always remember about my time with AC-119 gunships are the people and crews I flew with, and lots of check rides as a Stan Eval Flight Engineer. Also, my time spent "on the ammo can" with fellow professionals on Lt Col Paluso's crew and others (the Flight Engineer got to sit on an empty 20mm ammo can behind the center console, right between the two pilots).

I retired at Hickam AFB, Hawaii in 1975 and now make Simpsonville, South Carolina my home.

Ronald E. Newberg
17th Special Operations Sq.

Ronald E. Newberg, Gunner, 17th Special Operations Squadron

I was born in 1934 at Sioux Falls, South Dakota. In June 1952, I graduated from San Jose Technical High School and then attended San Jose State College in California. I had joined the California Air National Guard in 1951 and applied for and was accepted for the Aviation Cadet Program. Then I joined the U.S. Air Force and entered active duty in 1954 prior to my Cadet Class starting date in 1954.

I applied for and completed Airborne Radio Operator Technical School at Keesler AFB, Mississippi. I was then assigned to the 601 Communication Group at Gifu Air Station, Japan. I decided I liked it and upon returning to CONUS, I reenlisted and attended Weapons School at Lowry AFB, Colorado. After a couple of short duty assignments at Oxnard AFB, California and Larson AFB at Moses Lake, Washington, I served another tour in Japan, this time, with 3rd Bomb Wing at Yakota AB Upon returning to CONUS, I applied for and was assigned as a Weapons Instructor at Lowry AFB. Then I was sent to Vietnam for my first tour of duty and upon completion, sent back to Lowry AFB, Colorado.

While serving as instructor at Lowry, I became acquainted with TSgt. Morrison, Airman Assignment Branch at Randolph AFB, Texas. I worked with him on filling requirements for The Palace Gun Program that specifically recruited and screened applicants for aerial gunners. Many of the gunners selected for the program came with my recommendation. Then BINGO, I was ripe for SEA once more and gave Morrison a call and told him I was ready for my turn. I went the traditional route: AC-119G training at Lockbourne AFB, Columbus, Ohio in the dead of winter, ice storms and all, Survival School in Washington with ice and snow, Jungle Survival in the Philippines, and on to the 17th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang.

Upon arriving at Phan Rang, I was rapidly upgraded to Instructor Gunner in July 1970, then to SEFE in the same month. I was able to fly with most of the aircrews in the 17th SOS at one time or another. My primary crew was commanded by Major David T. Olson.

In October 1970, I was transferred to HQ 14th SOW as SEFE for AC-119G/Ks. I had the pleasure of flying with most of the aircrews in both the 17th SOS and 18th SOS while certifying instructors and flight examiners in both Squadrons. I can proudly state that every mission, some 150 plus that I flew and every crew I had the fortune to fly with during 500 hours plus, was "most exciting". It was always a pleasure to work with true professionals.

I became involved in the gunship program again in 1975 when I served as NCOIC of the AC-130 gunshop, NCOIC Stan Eval, and First Sergeant of the 388 Munitions Maintenance Squadron , Korat AB, Thailand. I retired as a Senior Master Sergeant from the U.S. Air Force in February 1979 at Lowry AFB, Colorado. I currently live in Aurora, Colorado.

Doug's Comments: I hope that you enjoyed this newsletter with some of the most fascinating stories coming out of Vietnam. There are so many wonderful and memorable stories here and I'm so happy to help preserve them for future generations. If you have a story to tell, please write it down and send to me so that your unique experiences can be saved for posterity. This newsletter was composed and all graphics by Douglas Severt unless otherwise stated. To see a list of all previous newsletters click here. To unsubscribe to Phan Rang News, mailto:mailto:mailto:dougsevert@cox.net and put 'unsubscribe' in subject line.