

STINGER

AC-119 Gunships • Special Operations Squadrons



United States Air Force

SHADOW  W

1968 - 1973



DIVUM BELLATORS
(Sky Warriors)

The patch honors the squadrons that comprise the AC-119 Gunship Association:

71st Special Operations Squadron
17th Special Operations Squadron
18th Special Operations Squadron

Symbolically, the patch shows:

A gray background denoting darkness since missions were flown at night.

A moon in the dark sky with three stars -- one star for each squadron.

The salient features of the squadron patches with the Stinger patch higher in the heavens to denote majority membership. An AC-119 with four guns favoring Shadow; jet engines favoring Stinger and the hint of a smile on the AC-119 suggesting that it was the last mission before the crew returned home.

The patch was designed and initially provided by Charles "Chuck" James

Disclaimer

The AC-119 Gunship Association recognizes the fact that memories of events occurring over 35 - 40 years ago sometimes fade, thus causing historical inaccuracies when recalled; consequently, all biographies, memoirs and stories are the sole accounts of the individuals who submitted the information.

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Preface

The AC-119 Gunship Association was formed at the first-ever AC-119 Gunship Reunion in Fort Walton Beach, Florida on September 30, 2000. Here is our mission.

To perpetuate the existence and names of the three U.S. Air Force units that served in Southeast Asia (SEA) as effective combat forces during the Vietnam War, known as the 71st and 17th (Shadow) and 18th (Stinger) Special Operations Squadrons.

To revere the memories of our fellow military ground and aircrew members whose lives were sacrificed in service to the United States and to comfort their survivors.

To renew and promote camaraderie among individuals who served in SEA with Shadow and Stinger, and with other personnel who contributed to the establishment and support of gunship development and operations.

To promote reunions and to engage in other activities approved by the members that are consistent with the aim of promoting the general welfare and enjoyment of Association members and their families.

To record, maintain, and preserve the history and details of Shadow and Stinger contributions in support of our nation during the Vietnam War.

To help record, maintain, and preserve the history and details of Shadow and Stinger contributions during the Vietnam War, “Project History Book” was initiated at the AC-119 Gunship Association Reunion at Fort Walton Beach, Florida in 2005. Larry Fletcher volunteered to spearhead the project. Ralph Lefarth agreed to help collect data and photographs for the project and eventually became the book designer for this work.

Squadron coordinators: James Alvis (71st SOS), Charles “Chuck” James (17th SOS), Everett Sprou (18th SOS), and Jim Terry (Maintenance Troops) contacted Association members and nonmembers via e-mail, snail-mail or telephone about the project, requesting biographies, photographs and war stories for the project. Information about the project was published on the AC-119 Gunships Website and in the Association newsletter, “The Firing Circle.”

A “flying boxcar” size THANK YOU goes to those who participated in proofing and editing of submitted materials. Without their contributions, this work would not have been complete.

Let it be known that this work was proudly conceived, created and published by the AC-119 Gunship Association.



Acknowledgements

What is this “Firing Circle” on the Book Cover?

It is a 2.5 min. timed-lapsed photo of an AC-119G “Shadow” gunship flying in a standard firing circle, with four 7.62 mm GAU-11 mini-guns each firing 6000 rounds per minute. The sheets of red fire are tracer rounds which represent only one of every five bullets fired from the Shadow’s mini-guns.

The Story: Sept. 1970, Phan Rang AFB, RVN

As an Aerial Gunner (AG) and part of the Shadow 61 crew, I was upset, to say the least, that the Flight Surgeon grounded me DNIF (Duty Not Involving Flying) for 8 days after a really bad experience with the base DDS relative to an impacted wisdom tooth. On a stormy night, Shadow 61 launched without me as I played cards with alert crews in the hootch. “61’s” frag was cancelled and had to RTB(Return to Base) due to very bad weather. While Shadow 61 was returning, “Charlie” was attempting to infiltrate the base perimeter with sapper explosives. As the base alert siren motivated most in our hootch into a defensive posture, the phone rang and I learned from the Ops Officer that Shadow 61 would be firing on Phan Rang’s perimeter to repel the attack. Cool!! I ran for my Minolta 7s rangefinder camera freshly loaded with Ektachrome 160. Without a tri-pod of my own (yet), or other airmen in sight outside the hootch to borrow one from, I propped the camera on top of a Ford F100 pick-up truck. I took only two exposures: one about 40 seconds; the other 2.5 minutes.

I helped set up the Phan Rang Photo Hobby Shop to develop Ektachrome transparency film (slides). It was a wonderful place to get away on a “day-off”. In the fine print of the Kodak developing instructions, I learned you

can “push” the ASA160 to ASA400. A few days later, I spent some nervous time in the dark room, processing and pushing the film. While wiping off the final rinse solution from the developed film strip, I could feel other airmen peering over my shoulder to see what the images from the other night looked like. WOW was the mildest of adjectives used. Many reproductions were made for officers and enlisted, and flight and maintenance crews.

Michael Drzyzga (former SSgt, 17th SOS)

October 12, 2006

Stinger and Shadow on the Book Cover

The cover pictures of the AC-119K Stinger and the AC-119G Shadow are copied from oil paintings the AC-119 Gunship Association commissioned U. S. Air Force Reservist and Aviation Artist, Darby Perrin, to paint. The two warplanes were painted in combat action. Both original paintings are currently displayed in the Vietnam War Learning Center at the National Museum United States Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

Lithographs of the paintings are available through the AC-119 Gunship Website at www.ac-119gunships.com. To contact renowned aircraft artist, Darby Perrin, visit his website at www.planeart.com or write to:

Darby Perrin Aviation Art

P.O. Box 300233

Midwest City, Oklahoma 73140-0233

Book Cover Designed by Tracy Upschulte of The Design Cafe.



Dedication

This Book is dedicated to the following Shadow and Stinger Brothers Who Gave All in Southeast Asia.

17th Special Operations Squadron

Lieutenant Colonel Bernard Knapic

Captain John H. Hathaway

Major Moses L. Alves

Major Jerome J. Rice

Staff Sergeant Abraham L. Moore

Major Meridith G. Andersen

First Lieutenant Thomas L. Lubbers

First Lieutenant Charles M. Knowles

Master Sergeant Joseph C. Jeszeck

Staff Sergeant Robert F. Fage, Jr.

Sergeant Michael J. Vangelisti

18th Special Operations Squadron

Staff Sergeant Clyde D. Alloway

Captain Terence F. Courtney

Captain David R. Slagle

Staff Sergeant Kenneth R. Brown

Captain Thomas R. Hamman

Sergeant John O. Rucker

“All Gave Some; Some Gave All”







Lineages & Chronological Histories

AC-119 Gunship Squadrons

14th Special Operations Wing

The 14th Special Operations Wing (SOW) traces its lineage to the 14th Fighter Wing formed in 1947, flying the P-47 and P-84 which were later designated the F-47 and F-84. The Wing was inactivated in October 1949 and remained inactive until re-activated in February 1966 as the 14th Air Commando Wing (ACW) at Nha Trang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam (RVN) under Pacific Air Force (PACAF). In March 1966, the 14th ACW was assigned to the 2nd Air Division before re-assignment to 7th Air Force in April 1966. On 1 August 1968, the 14th ACW was re-designated the 14th Special Operations Wing.



Headquarters for the 14th SOW in South Vietnam were first located at Nha Trang Air Base from 8 March 1968 to 10 October 1969 and then at Phan Rang Air Base from 15 October 1969 to 30 September 1971. Special Operations Squadrons under command and control of the 14th SOW included the 71st SOS Shadows, 17th SOS Shadows, and the 18th SOS Stingers. The 14th Special Operations Wing was awarded the Presidential Outstanding Unit Citation on 1 January 1971 for highly successful and noteworthy accomplishment in the Vietnam War effort. The 14th SOW was inactivated on 30 September 1971.

71st Special Operations Squadron

The 71st Special Operations Squadron traces its lineage to the 71st Troop Carrier Squadron of the 434th Troop Carrier Group activated on 9 February 1943 at Alliance Army Air Base, Nebraska. The 434th Group's four squadrons of C-47s departed for overseas duty in the European Theater of Operations in September and arrived in England on 7 October 1943. On 16 October, the Group was assigned to the Ninth Air Force and the IX Troop Carrier Command. Shortly thereafter, the 50th Troop Carrier Wing arrived in England and the 434th was further assigned to the Wing and started training in paratroop drops and glider tows.



On 3 March 1944, the 434th was transferred to the 53rd Troop Carrier Wing that was tasked with transporting the 101st Airborne Division (AD) but the 434th still trained to tow gliders. On D-Day, 6 June 1944, the 434th towed Waco gliders to reinforce the 101st paratroops already on the ground in France. After D-Day and the breakout of St. Lo, the 434th transported equipment and supplies to troops in France while also conducting evacuation missions. To the end of war on 8 May 1945, the 434th continued its primary role in air supply of troops even though the Group did drop paratroops in Operation Market Garden. The 434th continued transporting supplies, primarily, gasoline to German airfields for

American troops while evacuating ex-prisoners of war to relocation centers in France and Holland until the middle of June when preparations for returning to the United States began. All squadrons of the 434th arrived home at various locations in early August 1945.

The 434th regrouped and moved to George Field in Lawrenceville, Illinois in October. In late January 1946, the 71st Squadron absorbed what little was left of personnel in the 72nd, 73rd, and 74th Squadrons and on 31 July, 1946, the 434th Troop Carrier Group was inactivated.

On 15 March 1947, the 434th Group was activated as an element of the Air Force Reserve. In October, the Group was assigned to the 323rd Troop Carrier Wing which was later designated the 323rd Air Division, Troop Carrier. In mid-1949, the 434th was relieved of assignment to the 323rd and was transferred to Atterbury AFB at Columbus, Indiana while re-designated the 434th Troop Carrier Group, Medium assigned to the 434th Troop Carrier Wing, Medium.

On 25 June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea and the U.S. responded two days later by committing American forces to defend South Korea. On 1 May 1951, the 434th Troop Carrier Group at Atterbury was called to active duty and sent to Lawson AFB, Georgia where they served until January 1953. On 1 February 1953, the 71st Troop Carrier Squadron as part of the 434th Group was inactivated and reactivated on the same day at Atterbury and was allotted to the Air Force Reserve for training of reservists. The name of Atterbury Air Force Base was changed to Bakalar Air Force Base on 13 November 1954. In the early 1960s, the 71st transitioned to the C-119 "Flying Boxcar."

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, the 434th was activated on 28 October 1962 for no more than twelve months. Upon resolution of the Crisis, activated Reserve units were

released from active duty on 28 November. On 11 February 1963, the 434th was reassigned to the 930th Tactical Carrier Group of the 434th Tactical Carrier Wing (TAC). On 1 July 1967, the 434th TAC was redesignated the 434th Tactical Airlift Wing thus making the 71st Tactical Airlift Squadron.

Chronology of the 71st SOS Forbearer To The 17th Special Operations Squadron

11 Apr 68

- 930th Tactical Airlift Group (TAG) of the Continental Air Command (CONAC) and 71st Tactical Airlift Squadron (TAS) received 30-day notice of call-up to active duty.

13 May 68

- 930th TAG/71st TAS reported for active duty at Bakalar AFB, Indiana. 18 C-119G Aircraft, 83 Officers, 254 Airmen affected.

11 Jun 68

- 71st TAS moved to Lockbourne AFB, Columbus, Ohio.

15 Jun 68

- 71st TAS designated 71st Air Commando Squadron (ACS).

8 Jul 68

- 71st ACS designated 71st Special Operations Squadron (SOS). Entire USAF Air Commando Command designated Special Operations.

Summer 1968

- Transition from C-119G cargo configuration to AC-119G Gunships. Flight crew augmentation, combat training, ground maintenance training at Lockbourne AFB.

27 Nov 68

- Deputy Defense Secretary Nitze approves deployment of the 71st SOS to South Vietnam.

5 Dec 68

- First two AC-119G Gunships depart Lockbourne for Nha Trang.

20 Dec 68

- 71st SOS assigned to 14th Special Operations Wing at Nha Trang.

5 Jan 69

- First combat mission flown out of Nha Trang, RVN.

29 Jan 69

- Last AC-119G gunship departs Lockbourne for South Vietnam.

Feb 69

- Forward Operation Locations (FOLs) established at Phan Rang AB and Tan Son Nhut AB (Saigon).

1 Mar 69

- All 18 AC-119G gunships safely in South Vietnam.

11 Mar 69

- 71st SOS declared C-1 “Combat Ready”.

1 Jun 69

- Activation of the 17th Special Operations Squadron, replacing the 71st SOS. The 17th SOS absorbed approximately 65% of the 71st SOS personnel.

5 Jun 69

- 71st SOS Reservists depart Nha Trang AB for Indiana, USA.

6 Jun 69

- 71st SOS Reservists arrive at Bakalar AFB; Columbus, Indiana.

18 Jun 69

- 71st SOS Reservist released from active duty.

17th Special Operations Squadron

The 17th Special Operations Squadron traces its lineage

to the 17th Reconnaissance Squadron (Bombardment),

activated as the 17th

Observation Squadron (Light)

in March 1942. Assigned to the

71st Observation Squadron, the squadron was later re-

designated 71st Reconnaissance Squadron (RS). The 71st

RS was re-designated the 17th Observation Squadron in

July 1942 and then the 17th Reconnaissance Squadron –

Bombardment (RS-B) in April 1943. The 17th RS-B was

then re-assigned to V Bomber Group as an attachment

to the 91st Reconnaissance Wing from October thru

November 1945. From November 1945 to 31 January

1946, the 17th was attached to the V Bomber Command

and then to Command in February 1946. The 17th

inactivated on 27 April 1946 at Yokota Air Base, Japan.



During World War II, the squadron conducted anti-

submarine patrols off the west coast of the United States

in 1942 and then saw combat in the Southwest and

Western Pacific in 1944 and 1945, operating from air

fields in New Guinea and the Philippine Islands of Leyte,

Mindoro, and Luzon. The squadron flew L-1, O-46,

O-47, and O-52 (1942); A-20, P-39, and P-40 (1942–

1943), and B-25 (1943–1946) aircraft.

The 17th Liaison Squadron was constituted on 19

September 1952 and activated on 20 October 1952 at

McChord AFB, Washington and assigned to Western Air

Defense Force. The squadron was not manned during that

period. It inactivated on 25 September 1953.

The 17th Special Operations Squadron was constituted on

11 April 1969 and activated on 1 June 1969 at Nha Trang

Air Base, Republic of Vietnam (RVN) to assume operational responsibilities of the 71st SOS on 30 June 1969.

After the Cambodia Invasion in May 1970, the 17th played a significant role in the support of Cambodian government armed forces. Early in 1971 the Government of Cambodia presented a statuette to the 17th Special Operations Squadron in gratitude for the air support provided by the AC-119 Shadow gunships.

Following inactivation on 30 September 1971, the 17th SOS turned over squadron assets to the 819th Attack Squadron (Black Dragons), 53rd Tactical Wing, 5th Division, Republic of Vietnam Air Force (VNAF). USAF combat training teams, consisting of a pilot, navigator, flight engineer, aerial gunner and illuminator operator continued to train VNAF crews on the AC-119G gunship until February 1972. The VNAF "Black Dragon" squadron continued the fight against Communist aggressors to the last day of the collapse of South Vietnam on 30 April 1975.

Chronology of the 17th Special Operations Squadron AC-119G Shadow Gunships

1 Jun 69

- Activation of 17th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) replacing 71st SOS which departed South Vietnam on 5 Jun 69 and deactivated on 18 June 69 at Bakalar AFB, Indiana. The 17th SOS absorbed approximately 65% of 71st SOS personnel.
- Eighteen AC-119G Shadow Gunships In-Country.
- 17th SOS Commander – Lt. Col. Richard E. Knie
- Commander of A-Flight at Nha Trang – Lt. Col. Russell A. O'Connell

30 Jun 69

- Deployment of AC-119G Shadow Gunships even though 14th Combat Support Group Special Order P103, dated 23 July 1969 shows that A-Flight was ordered to relocate from Nha Trang to Tuy Hoa with an effective relocation date of 3 August 1969. Forward Operations Locations:

- A-Flight, Tuy Hoa AB - 4 gunships
- B-Flight, Phan Rang AB - 7 gunships
- C-Flight, Tan Son Nhut AB - 5 gunships

11 Oct 69

First Shadow Loss

- AC-119G Aircraft Loss in the crash of Shadow 76 at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Five of eight crewmembers killed. An USAF photographer from the 600th Photo Squadron and a Vietnamese Interpreter were also onboard and killed.

13 Apr 70

- A-Flight at Tuy Hoa ordered to relocate to Phu Cat by a 35th Tactical Fighter Wing Special Order AB-2777. Effective date: 12 April 70. The move was made on the 12th. (SOP)

28 Apr 70

Second Shadow Loss

AC-119G Aircraft Loss in the crash of Shadow 78 at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Six crewmembers killed. Two crewmembers survived.

1 May 70

- Cambodia Incursion supported at night by AC-119 Gunships.

Jun 70

- Deployment of AC-119 Shadow Gunships:
 - A-Flight, Phu Cat AB - 5
 - B-Flight, Phan Rang AB - 6
 - C-Flight, Tan Son Nhut AB - 5

1 Aug 70

- Records show that Shadow gunships flew the first daylight missions over Cambodia on 11 August 1970. In fact, covert daylight and nighttime combat missions were started in early June 1970.

10 Oct 70

- 14th SOW relocated some Shadow and Stinger Gunships to Tan Son Nhut from Phu Cat and Phan Rang to meet operational demands in Cambodia.

29 Dec 70

- A-Flight at Phu Cat AB deactivated. Personnel and aircraft assigned to B Flight at Phan Rang AB and C Flight at Tan Son Nhut AB.

29 Dec 70

- Deployment of AC-119 Shadow Gunships:
 - B-Flight, Phan Rang AB - 7
 - C-Flight, Tan Son Nhut AB - 9

10 Sep 71

- Officially the last USAF combat mission was flown at Tan Son Nhut by Lt. Col. James James, C-Flight Commander and aircraft commander. C-Flight gunships and support at Tan Son Nhut turned over to the Republic of Vietnam Air Force (VNAF) 819th Combat Squadron. Black Dragon replaced Shadow as radio call sign.

24 Sep 71

- Inactivation of 17th Special Operations Squadron and the 14th Special Operations Wing at Phan Rang. Another recorded inactivation date for the 14th SOW is 30 September 1971.

The AC-119G Shadow Gunship served combat duty for the United States Air Force in Southeast Asia for two years, ten months starting with the 71st SOS in January 1969 and ending actually with the 17th Special Operations Squadron in October 1971. All AC-119G Shadow gunships were turned over to the Republic of Vietnam Air Force (VNAF).

18th Special Operations Squadron

The 18th Special Operations Squadron traces its lineage to the 18th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) that was constituted on 20 Nov 1940 and activated on 15 Jan 1941. Training in PT-17s, LB-30s, and B-18s until 7 December 1941, “The Day That Lives in Infamy”, the Squadron was transferred to western United States in January 1942, to reinforce defense forces and to serve as a replacement training unit until the end of 1943, when preparations for overseas duty began with training in B-24 Liberators.



In April 1944, the 18th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) was transferred to the Eighth Air Force, 34th Bombardment Group (Heavy) in England. After May, the 18th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) started combat operations by attacking German airfields in France and Germany. The 18th Squadron bombed enemy coastal defenses and communication lines in France in preparation for and support of “D-Day” and the Normandy Invasion on 6 June 1944. Thereafter, the 18th continued attacking enemy forces by supporting allied ground forces at St. Lo in July and by bombing strikes on V-weapons sites, gun emplacements, and supply lines throughout the summer of 1944.

Soon after, the 18th converted to B-17 “Flying Fortresses” and started bombing strategic targets such as oil refineries, war industry factories, marshalling areas and air fields in Germany in October 1944. In March 1945, the squadron started interdiction missions on enemy communication lines while supporting Allied ground forces until Victory in Europe (V-E) Day on May 8, 1945. After war’s end, the squadron was used to transport liberated Allied prisoners of war to recovery centers and to transport food to Holland flood victims. The 18th then came home to the United States and was inactivated on August 28, 1945 at Sioux Falls Army Air Field, South Dakota.

Chronology of the
18th Special Operations Squadron
AC-119K Stinger Gunships

18 Jan 69

The U.S. Air Force constituted the 18th Special Operations Squadron.

25 Jan 69

The 18th Special Operations Squadron activated under the 1st Special Operations Wing for training at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. The 4413th Combat Crew Training Squadron (CCTS) was responsible for training crews. The 4413th CCTS received its first AC-119K model gunship on 8 November 1968.

5 Mar 69

The 18th SOS received first aircraft for training at Lockbourne, AFB.

3 Jul 69

First crews reported for training with the 4413th CCTS while waiting for more K-model gunships from Fairchild-Hiller.

11 Oct 69

Advance elements of 18th Special Operations Squadron in place at Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam.

21 Oct 69

First six AC-119K gunships departed Lockbourne for Phan Rang, RVN.

3 Nov 69

First AC-119K gunship arrived at Phan Rang.

13 Nov 69

First combat mission conducted by AC-119K gunship.

29 Nov 69

First two AC-119K gunships departed Phan Rang AB, RVN for DaNang AB, RVN to man the 18th SOS's Forward Operations Location (FOL) at DaNang AB, RVN.

1 Dec 69

7th Air Force officially approved AC-119K gunship radio call sign of "Stinger". The primary mission for Stingers in SEA was interdiction of enemy supply lines on the Ho Chi Minh Trails and in Laos but also flying ground support and site defense missions as needed.

3 Dec 69

First AC-119K combat missions flown over Laos (Steel Tiger) from DaNang AB, RVN.

9 Dec 69

First three trucks destroyed on the Ho Chi Minh trail by 18th FOL's gunship.

31 Dec 69

Twelve AC-119K Stinger gunships stationed in-country RVN.

- A Flight, DaNang Air Base = 6
- B Flight, Phu Cat Air Base = 3
- C Flight, Phan Rang Air Base = 3

25 Jan 70

Last AC-119K arrived at Phan Rang Air Base, RVN.

4 Feb 70

All eighteen AC-119Ks based in RVN configured and available for combat missions.

17 Feb 70

First AC-119K Stinger gunship combat mission flown out of Udorn Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand.

19 Feb 70 *First Stinger Loss*

Crash short of runway at DaNang Air Base. All crewmembers survived.

1 Mar 70

Sixteen Stinger gunships based at DaNang and NKP. DaNang Stingers flew South Vietnam and Steel Tiger in Laos. NKP Stingers flew Barrel Roll in Northern Laos.

25 Apr 70

1,000th truck reported destroyed by Stingers

Apr/May 70

Gunships helped to raise the 45-day siege of Special

Forces Camps at Dak Seang and Dak Pek, RVN with close air support and illumination.

1 May 70

Cambodian Incursion

8 May 70

Miraculous Stinger combat mission over Laos that resulted in Captain Milacek and his crew receiving the McKay Trophy for the most meritorious flight of the year. Safely landed with one-third of the right wing (14 feet) shot away and one aileron along with it on Udon AC-119K

1 Jun 70

Mid-1970 Bases of Operation and Number of Stingers
DaNang AB = 9, Phan Rang AB = 4, Udon RTAB = 3

6 Jun 70 *Second Stinger Loss*

Runaway Propeller after take-off at DaNang. Crew of ten members bailed out. All but one crewmember rescued from South China Sea.

1 Aug 70

First daylight combat missions for Stinger Gunships in support of Cambodia operations.

26 Oct 70

D Flight moved from Udon RTAB to Nakhon Phanom RTAB.

31 Dec 70

End of 1970, Bases of Operation and Numbers of Stingers
DaNang = 7, Phan Rang = 3, Nakhon Phanom (NKP) = 6

26 Jan 71

DaNang Crew 10 achieves new single-mission Stinger record of 21 trucks - 190 rounds of AAA

18 Feb 71

DaNang Crew 10 achieves a record of 36 trucks

28 Feb 71

Famous Tank Kill Mission of DaNang Stinger. Eight Soviet PT-76 light tanks were destroyed at night near Hill 31 in Laos during Operation Lamson 719.

5 Mar 71

NKP Stinger controlled bailout of crew except

for pilot, co-pilot, and flight engineer due to critical fuel shortage. All crewmen rescued by helicopter within two hours of bailout. Pilot, co-pilot, and flight engineer remained onboard and nursed the gunship to base for a safe landing on fumes.

By Apr 71

All Stinger Gunships located at DaNang or NKP. Gunships at DaNang flew armed reconnaissance or "truck killing" missions mostly in the Steel Tiger region of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, with a secondary Combat Air Support mission in support of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in South Vietnam. Stingers assigned to NKP flew interdiction missions on the Ho Chi Minh Trails and Close Air Support for Allied Forces in the Plain of Jars "Barrell Roll" region of northern Laos.

10-11 Apr 71

Renowned back-to-back kill missions by DaNang Stinger Polish Bandit Combat Crew. Destroyed 19 enemy trucks the night of the 10th and destroyed 21 trucks on the night of the 11th. A record of 40 trucks destroyed by one Stinger gunship in two consecutive night missions.

Late Apr 1971

Renown Record of 39 truck kills on a single mission by Maj. Kiepe's DaNang Stinger crew. Crew was photographed and personally recognized by Secretary of the Air Force Seaman.

June 1971

4413th CCTS transferred from Lockbourne to Hurlburt Field and re-designated the 415th Special Operations Training Squadron. Eight AC-119Ks and six AC-130s were assigned to the squadron. Tail numbers for the AC-119s were: 52-5910, 52-5911, 52-5926, 52-5940, 53-3187, 53-3197, 53-7839, 53-8145.

25 Aug 71

7th Air Force transferred 18th SOS to the 56th Special Operations Wing at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand

with a detachment at DaNang (30 Sept '71 - 31 Dec '72) and an FOL at Bien Hoa. Stingers played key roles in Commando Hunt VII Campaign (Aug'71-Mar'72), the Spring Offensive by enemy troops launched 30 Mar '72, and Linebacker I Campaign (May'72-Oct'72).

2 May 72 *Third Stinger Loss*

Operating from FOL at Bien Hoa, Stinger 41 shot down near An Loc, RVN. Three of ten crewmembers killed. Last daylight mission for Stinger gunships.

Jun/Jul 72

Two AC-119s from the 415th Special Operations Training Squadron (SOTS) ferried to SEA.

13 Jul 72

Stinger 12 and 17 prevented a hostile rocket attack against DaNang Air Base north of Hill 55.

1 Oct 72

“Project Enhance”, directed by the Air Force Chief of Staff, transferred to the VNAF, sixteen PACAF-assigned AC-119K gunships and six 1st SOW AC-119K gunships, thus wiping out the entire 1st SOW AC-119K force

Oct 1972

Six AC-119s from the 415th SOTS at Hurlburt ferried to Phan Rang, RVN with stops at McChord, Elmendorf, Adak, Midway, Wake, Guam, and Clark Air Base, Philippines. Eight days from Hurlburt to Phan Rang.

2 Nov 72

18th SOS gunships transferred to South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) for 18th instructor crews to begin training VNAF aircrews.

18 Dec 72

First training flight for Vietnamese in AC-119K #53-7831 at DaNang under “Project Enhance”.

31 Dec 72

The 18th Special Operations Squadron Deactivated.

1 Jan 73

“Project Enhance” re-designated “Project Enhance Plus”.

27 Jan 73

Paris Peace Accords signed to end all military actions in Vietnam with U.S. and Allied troops to withdraw within 60 days and the recognition of people's right through free elections to determine the fate of South Vietnam.

27 Jan 73 - Last combat mission by a Stinger gunship crew, manned exclusively by Americans. 18th SOS Detachment at Bien Hoa. AC-119K Tail # 121 landed at 0559 hours, 45 seconds to beat required grounding time of 0600 hours for all armed aircraft.

24 Feb 73

18th SOS instructors received Vietnamese Air Service Medal and Vietnamese Aviation Wings at Tan Son Nhut Air Base for conducting 45-day Stinger gunship training course.

1 Mar 73 *Fourth Stinger loss*

Project Enhance Plus terminated due to aircraft loss. AC-119K #53-7839, flying out of DaNang Air Base, with five USAF Flight Instructors and eight South Vietnamese VNAF Training Personnel onboard was lost in the South China Sea when ground radar failure, extreme low visibility due to fog, and fuel starvation caused crew to bail-out. Everyone was rescued the next day by small boats, except for a South Vietnamese whose parachute caught in a boat propeller.

1 Mar 73

Last combat training mission for Detachment 1 DaNang AC-119K Stinger gunship (tail number 52-5911).

The 18th SOS AC-119K Stinger Gunships served combat duty for the United States Air Force in Southeast Asia for three years, three and one-half months starting 13 November 1969 and ending 1 March 1973.

NOTE: Squadron Lineages and Chronologies compiled from the following sources: USAF Unit Lineage and Honors History, Official Unit Records of the 14th SOW, 17th SOS, and 18th SOS at the U.S. Air Force Research Center at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, Websites: 71stos.com and ac-119gunships.com, Jack S. Ballard's book, Development and Employment of Fixed-Wing Gunships, and Veterans of the 14th SOW; 71st SOS, 17th SOS, and 18th SOS.



Brief History AC-119 Gunships

The purpose of fixed wing gunships was to deliver accurate ordnance at a target in the center of the circular flight path. The basic theory for fixed wing gunships is supposedly founded on aerial mail carriers (an airplane pilot) delivering and picking-up mail in remote locations of Australia. The pilot would enter a flying circle or orbit around a point on the ground and lower the mail pouch out his window on a pylon tether to the designated spot, the center of the flying circle. Thus, flying a gunship in a “pylon turn” with guns aimed perpendicular to the aircraft’s flight, like the air mail carrier’s tether, created a “firing circle” in which bullets fired from the aircraft would hit the spot targeted on the ground.

Under “Project Combat Hornet” (1968-69), Phase III of the United States Air Force Gunship Program, fifty-two C-119G model “Flying Boxcar” cargo/troop carrier aircraft were converted by Florida-based Fairchild-Hiller Aircraft Inc. into Attack Cargo (AC)-119 gunships, twenty-six as AC-119G “Shadow” gunships and twenty-six as AC-119K “Stinger” gunships.

The AC-119G “Shadow” gunship was designated “replacement” gunship for the AC-47 “Spooky” gunship, better known as “Puff the Magic Dragon” in the Vietnam War. AC-47 “Spooky” gunships were eventually turned-over to the South Vietnam Air Force (VNAF).

The AC-119K “Stinger” gunships were fitted with heavier ordnance and more sophisticated technology than the G model “Shadow” gunship in order to compliment the USAF Gunship Program II AC-130 Spectre gunships.

The activated USAF Reserve Unit 71st Tactical Airlift Squadron of Bakalar AFB, Indiana eventually became the 71st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) Shadows who led the way for AC-119 gunships to combat success and valor in the Vietnam War. By the end of 1969, the 14th Special Operations Wing had received 16 AC-119G “Shadow” gunships and 12 AC-119K “Stinger” gunships. Shadows and Stingers had already established impressive combat records and status by that time in the Southeast Asia War.

The 71st Squadron’s successor squadron, the 17th SOS proved themselves truly combat warriors in the battles of Dak Pek and Dak Seang in the A Shau Valley and during the Cambodia Invasion in which U.S. and South Vietnamese ground forces attacked North Vietnamese Army (NVA) base camps across the border. Thereafter, Shadow gunships flew day and night deep inside Cambodia to support government troops against the NVA and the communist Khmer Rouge ground forces. This highly classified gunship campaign necessitated fake flight plans and false mission reports showing mission operating locations within South Vietnam borders. Luckily, no Shadow gunships were shot down in Cambodia.

The 18th SOS Stinger gunships were equipped to interdict enemy troop and supply lines from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. The Stinger’s primary mission was to hunt and destroy enemy vehicular traffic on the Ho Chi Minh Trails. Commando Hunt Campaigns proved highly successful for the 18th SOS. The Stinger’s secondary mission, though imperative, was supporting

Our Lady of Night

*Alone she sits on ramps now bare,
Our lady of night, but who knows where?*

*Like a Phoenix she arose and was given new light,
From cargo to troops, a 119 that could fight.*

*A twin-tailed dragon she was cursed and mated,
With cannons and guns, a beast to be hated.*

*Ground troops below with a cry on their lips,
Please, God, over, send me a gunship.*

*From the dark she would come with a growl to the fight,
And the dragon would breathe and scream into the night.*

*Like a banshee she wailed at the enemy's might,
To those on the ground she was a terrible fright.*

*Her breath deadly hot as she boldly caressed,
The souls of men obscenely obsessed.*

*Scarred and tattered, bruised and battered,
Love for her crews were all that mattered.*

*One hell of a lady, though ugly as sin,
Like a lover scorned we left her again.*

*Alone she sits on ramps now bare,
Our lady of night, but who knows where?*

*Bill Petrie, CMSgt, USAF, Ret.
Copyright 2003*

friendly ground troops in contact with enemy troops and defending U.S. bases until war's end. During Lam Son 719 in Laos and the siege of An Loc in South Vietnam, Stingers demonstrated invaluable air support of South Vietnam troops fighting the enemy from the North.

Fortunately, aircraft and crewmember losses in AC-119 gunship squadrons during the Vietnam War were few, considering the high number of combat sorties flown and the extremely high risks of combat flying conditions. This fact directly reflects on the exceptional airmanship performed by AC-119 gunship aircrews and the superb job of aircraft maintenance performed by AC-119 gunship ground crews.

Gradually during "Vietnamization" of the War, USAF AC-119 gunships were turned over to the VNAF. In the Mutual Defense Assistance Program Summary for the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), a total of twenty-four AC-119G gunships and twenty-two AC-119K gunships were transferred to the VNAF. Unfortunately, not one of the fifty-two AC-119 gunships deployed to Southeast Asia, returned to the United States of America.



Stinger and Shadow in Formation



AC-119 “Shadow” Gunships

AC-119G Shadow fixed wing gunship

The Fairchild AC-119G gunship is a twin boom, high-wing, land monoplane of all metal construction, C-119G cargo/troop carrier aircraft modified to provide a side-firing weapons system for day and night combat operations during all-weather conditions.

Modifications include installation of the following:

1. Four SUU-11 Pod or four MXU-470/A Module 7.62 millimeter mini-guns (Gatling-type guns). Eventually all Shadow gunships were fitted with G.E. MXU-470 mini-gun modules specifically designed for gunship use.
2. Computerized Fire Control System with fully automatic, semi-auto, manual and offset fire modes with Lead Computing Optical Gun Sight and Fire Control Display.
3. LAU-74A Flare Launcher housing 24 Mark 24 flares.
4. AVZ-8 20-kilowatt 1.5 million candlelight Xenon “white spot light” Illuminator with a variable beam that could light up a football stadium during the darkest of nights.
5. Night Observation Scope (NOS) which magnified starlight and moonlight several thousand times to provide the NOS operator with a clean, though green, picture of the terrain below.
6. Auxiliary Power Unit (APU) 60 KVA.
7. Ceramic Armor for crew protection.
8. Updated Flight, Navigation, and Radio Equipment.

Number of C-119Gs converted to AC-119G gunships:

Twenty-six

Serial Numbers of C-119G aircraft converted to AC-

119G gunships: 52-5898, 52-5905, 52-5907, 52-5925, 52-5927, 52-5938, 52-5942, 53-3136, 53-3138, 53-

3145, 53-3170, 53-3178, 53-3189, 53-3192, 53-3205, 53-7833, 53-7848, 53-7851, 53-7852, 53-8069, 53-8089, 53-8114, 53-8115, 53-8123, 53-8131, 53-8155.

Gross Weight: 64,000 pounds

Dimensions: Wing Span: 109 ft. 3 ¼ in., Length: 86 ft. 5 ¾ in., Height: 26 ft. 7 ¾ in.

Engines: Two Wright R-3350 radial piston-driven engines at 3,500 horse-power per engine.

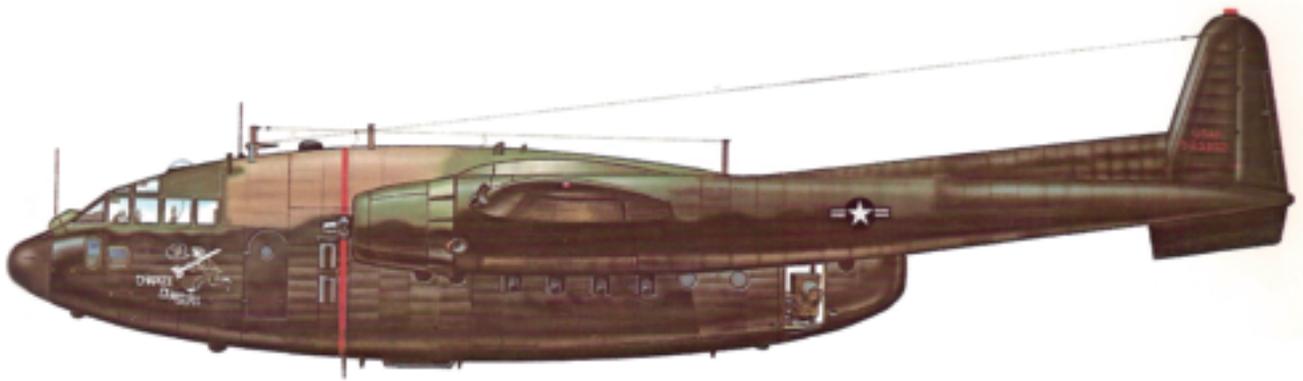
Performance: Cruising Speed: 180 knots, Combat Speed: 140 knots, Attack Altitudes above the Ground (AGL): Alpha - 1500 ft, Bravo - 2500 ft, Charlie – 3500 ft, Delta – 4500 ft., Sortie Duration: Maximum 6 hours with 30 minutes reserve fuel. Usually, combat sorties ranged from 4 to 5 hours in duration.

Crew (8): Pilot, Copilot, Navigator, NOS Operator, Flight Engineer, Illuminator Operator, Two Gunners.

Mission Priorities:

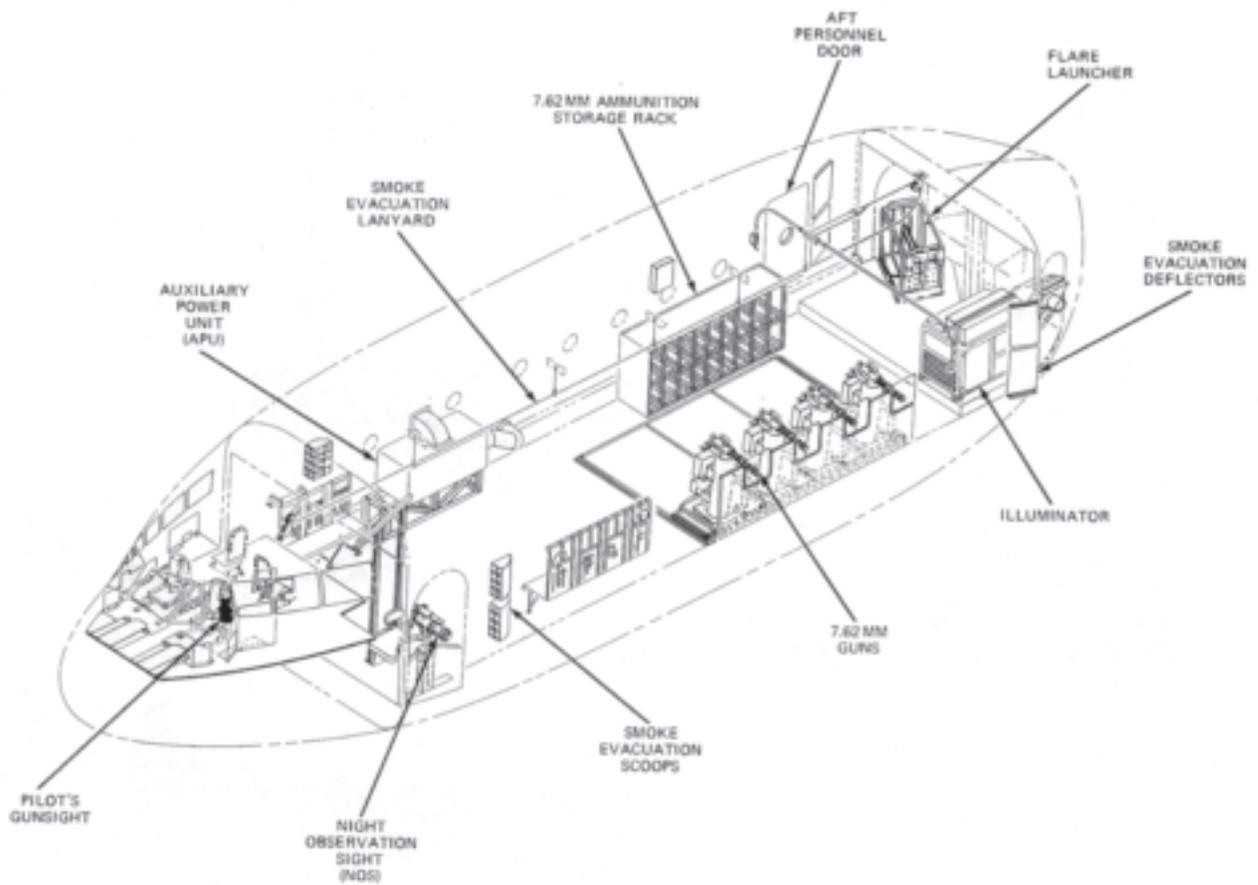
1. Close fire support of U.S. and friendly troops in contact with enemy forces.
2. Close fire support of U.S. and friendly military installations including artillery fire bases, forts, outposts, strategic hamlets, villages, and district towns.
3. Pre-planned armed reconnaissance and interdiction of hostile areas and infiltration routes.
4. Search, Rescue and MedEvac Support.
5. Night and day armed escort for road, river, and close off-shore convoys.
6. Illumination for night fighter strikes.
7. Harassment and Interdiction of enemy.

AC-119G Shadow Gunship from the 71st and 17th Special Operations Squadrons



“Charlie Chasers”

AC-119G Interior Arrangement





AC-119 “Stinger” Gunships

AC-119K Stinger fixed wing gunship

The Fairchild AC-119K aircraft is a twin-boom, high-wing monoplane, of all metal construction, C-119G cargo/troop carrier aircraft modified to provide a side-firing weapons system for day and night combat operations during all-weather conditions.

Including modifications made to the G model, the K model modifications include installation of the following:

1. Two single-rotors, axial-flow J-85 turbojet engines mounted on pylons out-board of the reciprocating engines. These were the same engines used on the C-123 Provider (and its Vietnam variants) and the T-38 Talon (minus the Talon's afterburners).
2. Initially fitted with four SUU-11 Pod or four MXU-470/A Module 7.62 millimeter (mm) multi-barrel mini-guns (Gatling-type guns), capable of 6,000 rounds per minute each gun, Stingers were soon refitted with four G.E. MXU-470 Module mini-guns with new flash suppressors, specifically designed for gunships. Tracer rounds were included which created the “dragonship” analogy as the tracers formed a circle of fire raining from above.
3. Two Vulcan M61 20 mm multi-barrel Gatling-type cannons, capable of a 4,000 rounds per minute each cannon, using High Explosive Incendiary, and occasionally, Armor Piercing Incendiary ammunition. Tracer rounds were again included, which also allowed some manual tweaking to “move” the tracers toward a target.
4. Computerized Fire Control System with fully automatic, semi-automatic, manual and offset firing modes with Lead Computing Optical Gun Sight and Fire Control Display.
5. Night Observation Scope (NOS) which magnified starlight and moonlight several thousand times to provide the NOS operator with a clean, though green, picture of the terrain below.
6. Forward-Looking Infra-Red (FLIR), state-of-the-art Texas Instruments AN/AAD-4 system used primarily for hunting and finding enemy vehicles. Human beings, campfires, and other “hot” targets were all visible as “hot spots” on the FLIR display scope.
7. AN/APN-147 Doppler Radar.
8. AN/APX-136 Multi-Mode Radar.
9. APQ-25/26 Electronic Countermeasures (ECM) Warning Device.
10. Motorola AN/APQ-135 Side-Looking Beacon Tracking Radar (removed in Dec. 1970).
11. AVZ-8 20-kilowatt 1.5 million candlelight Xenon “white spot light” Illuminator with a variable beam. In the darkest of nights, a person on the ground could easily read a newspaper with the light provided by this Illuminator which also had infra-red mode.
12. LAU-74A Flare Launcher holding 24 flares capable of air illumination or ground marking for targeting references. Later modifications included high infra-red signature flares that could be launched to ignite within seconds as defense against heat guided missile attacks.
13. Auxiliary Power Unit (APU) 60KVA
14. Updated Flight, Navigation, and Radio Equipment.

Number of C-119Gs converted to AC-119K gunships:
Twenty-six

Serial Numbers of C-119G aircraft converted to AC-119K gunships: 52-5864, 52-5889, 52-5910, 52-5911, 52-5926, 52-5935, 52-5940, 52-5945, 52-9982, 53-3154,

53-3156, 53-3187, 53-3197, 53-3211, 53-7826, 53-7830, 53-7831, 53-7839, 53-7850, 53-7854, 53-7877, 53-7879, 53-7883, 53-8121, 53-8145, 53-8148.

Gross Weight: 80,400 pounds, but almost every combat takeoff exceeded maximum gross weight limits.

Dimensions: Wing Span: 108 ft. 3 ¼ in., Length: 86 ft. 5 ¾ in., Height: 26 ft. 7 ¾ in.

Engines: Two Wright R-3350 piston-driven radial engines at 3,500 horse-power each and two General Electric J-85-GE-17 turbojets at 2,850 pounds of thrust each. The 3350s were initially fitted with a four-bladed propeller, the Stingers were all refitted with a three bladed Hamilton Standard propeller that almost completely eliminated runaway propeller problems that plagued the C-119 airframes.

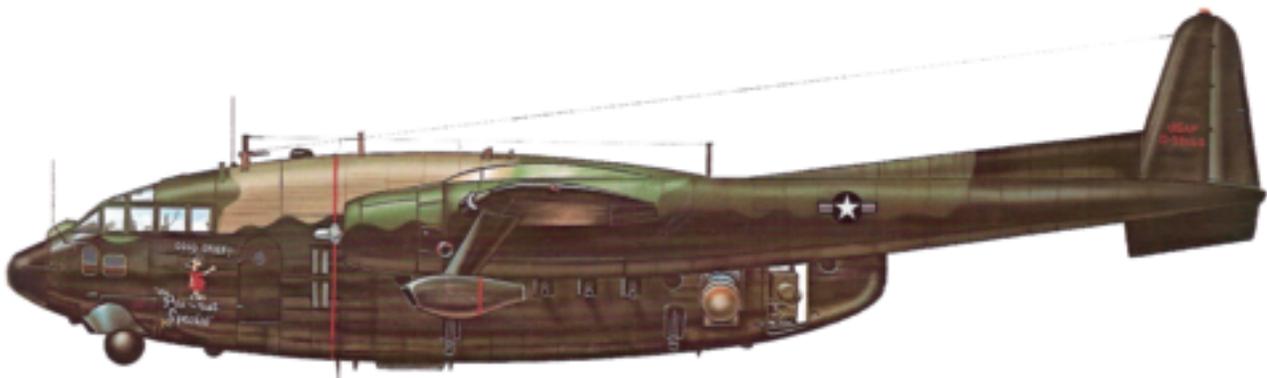
Performance: Cruising Speed: 180 knots, Combat Speed: 140 to 150 knots, Attack Altitudes: normally 2,500 to 3,500 feet above ground level (AGL) for close air support; 4,500 to 5,500 feet AGL in areas without AAA, and as high as 6,500 to 7,500 feet AGL when AAA became intense. Sortie Duration: Maximum 5 hours with 30 minutes reserve fuel. Usual combat sorties ranged from 3 to 4 hours in duration.

Crew (10): Pilot, Copilot, Navigator, FLIR Operator, NOS Operator, Flight Engineer, Illuminator Operator, Three Gunners.

Mission Priorities:

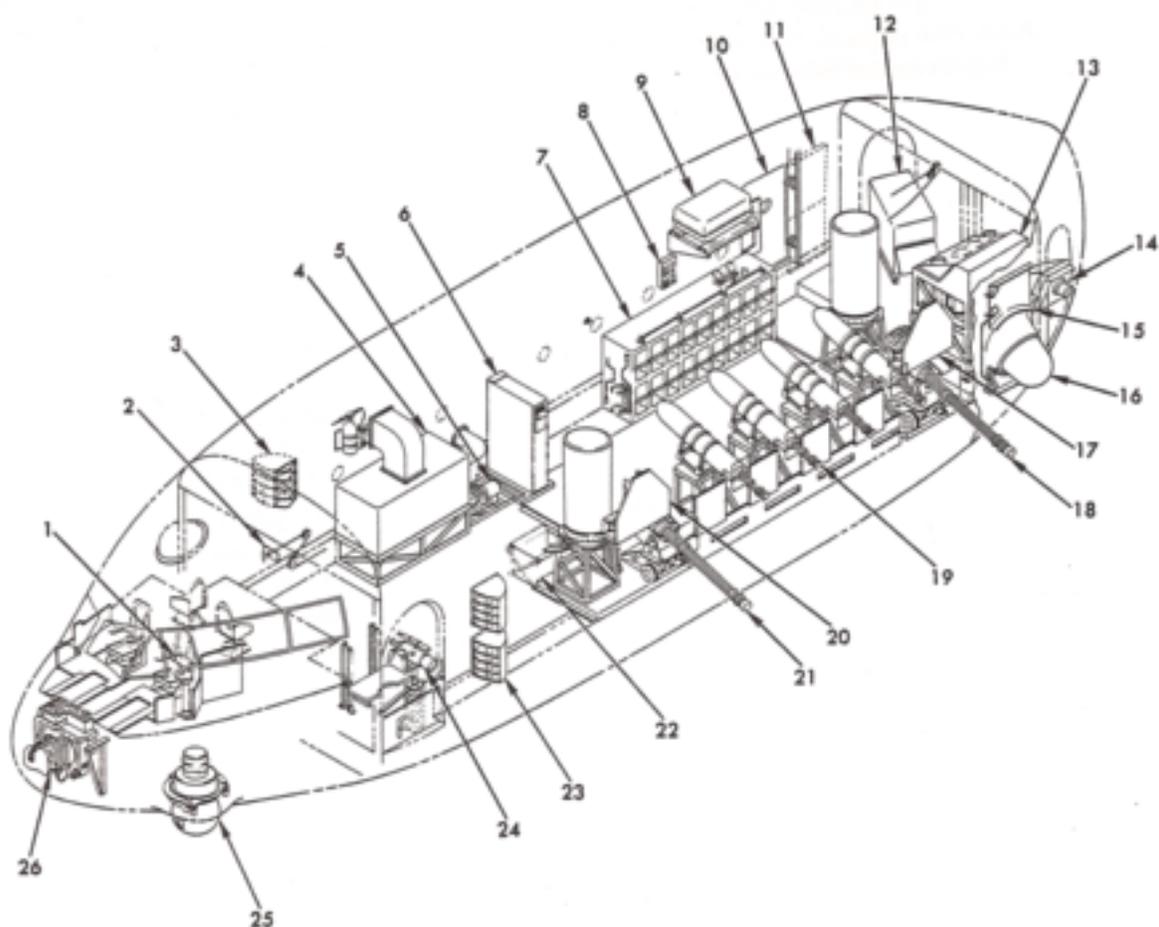
1. Pre-planned armed reconnaissance and interdiction of hostile areas and infiltration routes. Laotian Highway Patrol. Find and destroy enemy vehicles, particularly trucks, on the Ho Chi Minh Trails, in the Barrel Roll, and in the Steel Tiger areas of Laos.
2. Close fire support of friendly troops in contact with enemy forces.
3. Close fire support and night defense illumination of U.S. and friendly military installations including artillery fire bases, forts, outposts, strategic hamlets, villages, towns and cities.
4. Search and Rescue Support.
5. Armed escort for road convoys, especially during nighttime.
6. Forward Air Control of night fighter strikes, using 20mm “sparkle” or ground illumination flares to mark targets or provide roll-in references.
7. Harassment and Interdiction of enemy force concentrations.

AC-119K Stinger Gunship 18th Special Operations Squadron



“Peanut Special”

AC-119K Interior Arrangement



- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. GUN SIGHT | 15. SMOKE EVACUATION SPOILERS |
| 2. NAVIGATOR'S SMOKE EVACUATION "T" HANDLE | 16. AN/APQ-133 RADOME SIDE LOOKING RADAR |
| 3. SMOKE EVACUATION AIR SCOOP | 17. 20MM ELECTRICAL CONTROL PACKAGE |
| 4. AUXILIARY POWER UNIT (APU) | 18. M61 20MM GUN INSTALLATION |
| 5. AN/AAD-4 FLIR COMPRESSOR | 19. SUU-11A/A OR SUU-11B/A PODS |
| 6. 20MM AMMO CONTAINER | GAU-28/A 7.62MM GUNS OR |
| 7. 7.62MM AMMO STORAGE RACK | MXU-470/A MODULES (TYPICAL FOUR PLACES) |
| 8. GUN CONTROL PANEL | 20. 20MM ELECTRICAL CONTROL PACKAGE |
| 9. AN/APQ-133 SIDE LOOKING RADAR | 21. M61 20MM GUN INSTALLATION |
| 10. AFT PERSONNEL DOOR | 22. 20MM LINK RECEPTACLE |
| 11. SMOKE EVACUATION SPOILERS | 23. SMOKE EVACUATION AIR SCOOPS |
| 12. LAU-74/A FLARE LAUNCHER | 24. NIGHT OBSERVATION SIGHT (NOS) |
| 13. AIRBORNE ILLUMINATOR | 25. AN/AAD-4 FLIR |
| 14. AIRBORNE ILLUMINATOR LAMPHOUSE | 26. AN/APQ-136 TERRAIN AVOIDANCE RADAR |

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES AND STORIES
of
Some Shadow & Stinger Men

The AC-119 Gunship Association extends a heart-felt thanks to all the Shadows and Stingers who contributed to this History Book. Without their participation, this work would be lifeless.

“These Good Men”
Michael Norman

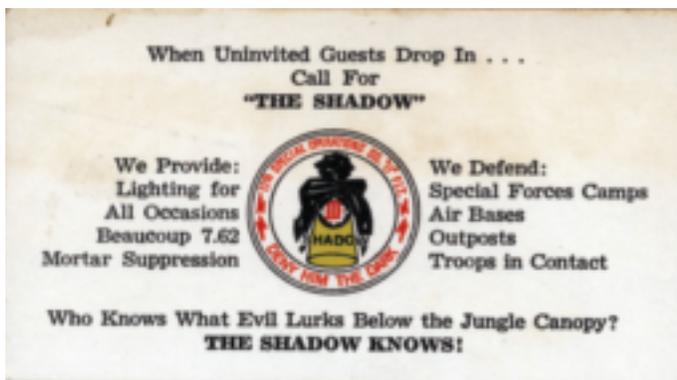
I now know why men who have been to war yearn to reunite.
Not to tell war stories or look at old pictures.
Not to laugh or weep.

Comrades gather because they long to be with the men who once acted their best,
men who suffered and sacrificed, who were stripped raw right down to their humanity.

I did not pick these men.
They were delivered by fate.

But I know them in a way, I know no other man.
I have never given anyone such trust.
They were willing to guard something more precious than my life..
They would have carried my reputation, the memory of me.
It was part of the bargain we all made,
The reason we were so willing to die for one another.

I cannot say where we are headed.
Ours are not perfect friendships, those are the province of legend and myth.
A few of my comrades drift far from me now, sending back only an occasional word.
I know that one day even these could fall to silence.
Some will stay close, a couple perhaps, always at hand.
As long as I have memory, I will think of them all, everyday.
I am sure that when I leave this world,
my last thought will be of my family and my comrades, such good men.





James Frededick Acquaviva, Pilot

18th SOS

Jim was born October 29th, 1944 and left us all too early in a fatal aircraft crash on April 8th, 2002 – doing what he loved, flying. Buried at Arlington with full honors, Jim ‘Viva’ is survived by daughters Pam and Cathy and son Jim Jr.

An ROTC graduate of the University of Georgia, and an Air Force brat to boot, here’s some of Viva’s thoughts about flying and AC-119s along with some memories from his friends and family.

Jim wrote a poem 4 days before his death that captures his passion for flight. Jim’s son gave it to Doug Wohlgamuth at Jim’s burial and we read it at the 2002 Reunion as a fitting tribute to our friend. Jim titled it ‘Leaving’

I should like to die in the hope of spring
when and where the robins race,
and clouds fly feathered in a clear blue sky.

It is then I should most unwillingly, reluctantly try to wave
and wonder a whole, happy farewell and forever goodbye,
amid the new garden and motherlode golden bounty of
dandelions aplenty.

And perchance if that time is kind, as so often time can be
there will be blooms and blossoms of fuchsia, pear, azalea,
and cherry trees.

And in those all too fleeting moments

I can be comforted too; my forever time among them is to be.

Another of Jim’s talents was this huge, booming baritone voice he said was a gift he’d been given, to share with others. He shared his voice with us at our 2001 Reunion, singing rousing songs that brought joy to our ears and puffed our chests with pride for our country and our service.

During Vietnam, Jim went to Lt Col Mathews, our 18th SOS Commander, with cartoons he had compiled “from gunner and pilot, navigator and engineer, IO and ACM alike.” Jim wanted to present departing crewmembers with the cartoons in a book as a memento. He called it Order of the Stinger, with a cover sheet formatted like a formal award ‘Issued In Remembrance of Those Who Gave Their All’, with John Gillespie Magee’s poem ‘High Flight’ emblazoned on the front. Each one was inscribed with the individual’s name and tour of duty, and many Stingers still have that treasured tome – all signed on the cover page by Col Mathews and presented before each of our ‘Sawadee’ flights back to the states. It was Jim’s tribute to the lessons we learned during our year there, and as he stated on the

book’s Forward, “A profound respect to the living and the ability to laugh are what we hope this book leaves you with. Or if not, you could always nail it to your john door.” You might correctly gather that Jim was a self-declared maverick and proud of it – to say he had integrity ‘no matter what’ is an understatement.



Bien Hoa April 1971 Crew #6

Capt Blair, P	Lt Acquaviva, CP
Capt Dadison, Nav	Capt Jackson, FLIR
Lt Ried, NOS	SSgt Graves FE
TSgt Gomez #1 Gun	SSgt Kelly #2 Gun
Sgt Lauf #3 Gun	Sgt Wohlgamuth IO

Jim is third from left, back row.



Flare Launcher



Troy G. Adams, Maintenance

14th FMS, Phan Rang, 1970

Reedley, California was my birthplace in 1940. I attended Pacific Grove High School where I received my diploma through GED. I also attended Bangor Community College, Bangor, Maine. I enlisted in USAF while living in Pacific Grove, CA because I wanted to travel the world (and I did). I was later assigned to the 14th Field Maintenance Squadron at Phan Rang from February through November 1970 as a Doppler and Forward Looking Radar Technician.

Although I was not a flight-crew member, there were still some rather “exciting” experiences on the ground. My squadron was housed in a group of Quonset huts situated between “Charlie Mountain” and the flight line at Phan Rang. The VC were always firing missiles toward the flight line but they usually ended up falling around our Quonset huts. My closest call was the day I was all alone, taking a shower in the outdoor latrine when a rocket just cleared the top of the latrine and landed about 50 feet behind me (my

back was to the wall). Hearing the explosion and the debris hitting the wall behind me caused me to be momentarily “numbed” by the concussion; I thought I had been hit. However, as my feelings returned I realized I had escaped injury. That was close enough for me.

The things I will always remember about my time with AC-119 gunships? Nothing really “exciting”, however, I did take my oath of “re-enlistment” on the flight line at Phan Rang with the gunships in the background, while a friend of mine captured the event on my movie camera.

Upon returning to the U.S. I was assigned to Shaw AFB where I worked on RF-4Cs. I later changed career fields and ended up working as a Site Developer with Civil Engineering and finally retired at Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota and moved to Ellsworth, Maine.



Henry “Hank” D. Kailianu Alau, Nav.

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1969-70



Jim Craig & Hank Alau

Wailuku, Maui Hawaii was my birthplace in 1942. My hometown was Kaneohe. I graduated from St. Anthony’s Boys’ School in 1960 and then I graduated from St. Mary’s College in 1964. I joined the Air Force to beat the draft. Flying sure beats walking. I retired from the USAF on 31 Mar

1986 at Hickam AFB, HI. I currently live at Kaneohe.

I was assigned to the 17th SOS C Flight at Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN as a Shadow navigator from October 1969 to

September 1970. My CCTS class was the first replacements for the initial cadre of Shadow crews. Fortunately, when I arrived at TSN I drew Billy Baker as my instructor. He was a little hard-nosed, but one of the best. Since he was on Sid Petty’s crew, I trained with that crew. It was a great crew and Sid was the type of pilot that if the plane were falling apart he’d find a way to keep it flying. At least, that is the perception he created.

Billy Baker taught me how to leapfrog fox mike (FM) radios from one artillery controller to the next and the whole new language called “Army.” (Down the redline; down the big blue; feet wet; firing illum my position max ord 5,000 feet, canister impact 3 clicks from my position; firing H&I fire from my position max ord 6,000 feet impact 12 clicks firing fan from 210 Tango Oscar 255 for the next three zero mikes).

I think the most valuable thing I learned from Billy, besides head-butting metal wall lockers, was to keep my eyes out the window. There were two reasons for this. First of all, the war and target area was outside that window and secondly, and more importantly, that window was your primary navigation aid. The AC-119G had TACAN for range and

bearing, but GNC and JNC charts were things of the past. Our greatest navigation aid was that window. When I asked Billy Baker how to know when we were crossing into Cambodia, he told me to look out the window. Cambodia was where the bomb craters stopped. (When I became an instructor I used that same bit of instructional advice). I learned to use the window and to talk in pictorial descriptions: angel's wing, parrots beak, and crows feet. In addition, I learned night map reading unlike anything covered in Nav School.

We navigated off an acetate-covered 1:250,000 map with 10-degree increment radials passed to us by the controlling agency Paddy or Paris. Once in the target area we used Army artillery charts that covered III, VI Corps, and a little of II Corps. It took two ammo cans to carry all of them. We dropped a marker in the target box, located the marker in the target box and then ran timing runs off of the marker. When we commenced firing, the navigator became the fire safety officer and kept track of ammo expended on a target. In addition to all of this, the nav was the escape-and-evasion-briefing officer for each target area. On top of that, we had to ensure compliance with the rules of engagement. After about a month of training, I passed my check ride.

The things I will always remember about my AC-119 gunship tour are the missions, the camaraderie, and the knowledge that our close air support for ground forces enabled them to do their mission and to make their DEROS dates. One of my most rewarding missions was in support of Long Khat, a small town just south of the Parrot's Beak. We were flying a routine mission in IV Corp. We were about 90 minutes into a routine mission when we received a request from Paddy to support a troops-in-contact situation. About a minute later, Paddy advised me that the situation had become a tactical emergency and that artillery could not be shut down because it was supporting the emergency. We decided to fly through the artillery.

I got a sitrep from the ground controller, Bingo Marvel 49, who assured me there were no 50 cal's in the area. We flew less than one-half of the first firing circle when the sky lit up with tracer fire and unmistakable popping of 50 cal. I called back to 49 who then acknowledged there were five guns in the area including one set up in the dispensary. We eventually managed to shutdown three of the gun positions. Meanwhile, 49 asked us to walk our bullets in towards his camp; we moved in to within 50 meters of his perimeter. We could see it was going to be a long night for 49 so I asked Paddy to scramble the Shadow alert bird. We pushed the on-station time to the limit. When I finally told 49 we were at bingo fuel you could detect the panic in his voice. I

then got a call from Major Rick Stoner, the nav on Lt Col Mac McCullough's crew. Rick reported they were only one minute out. You could hear the sigh of relief in his voice when I gave 49 the word.

On the approach to Tan Son Nhut our fuel gages read 400 pounds. The number one engine quit as we turned off the active. A couple of nights later I contacted 49 as we flew near his area of operation. He reported he was doing well and thanked us for making his DEROS good. He was catching the freedom bird in only ten more days.

Both Shadow crews were awarded the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. Since these are personal medals, they are worn without the metal bracket. The mission was written up in Readers Digest and in the Air Force History. As an aside, one of the hard-working gunners on the mission was Sgt Stephen Roper who was supposed to be leaving the country in five days, but who, in the face of a shortage of gunners, volunteered for the mission.

Battle Damage at Fire Support Base Brown

Fire Support Base Brown was under attack. The base was about 10 klicks inside Cambodia north of Song Be. When we arrived on station, a C-130 Blind Bat was overhead dropping illumination flares. Since we were near the Central Highlands, we were actually at 2,200 feet AGL instead of 3,500 feet. We had seen sporadic 50 cal fire, but just short bursts. Then, after about an hour on station, a flare went off above us. It illuminated us just as we passed over a 50 cal position. We knew we got hit, but the plane flew normally so we stayed on station until we reached bingo fuel. When we got back to Tan Son Nhut, we learned we'd taken a round in the left engine air cooler and that another round had passed through the right landing gear struts and severed the right elevator control wire.

First Daylight Mission into Cambodia

In April 1970 (date approximate), we started flying night missions into Cambodia to protect the province capitals. However, in May 1970 our crew flew the first Cambodia day mission. We had flown the early mission, pulled strip alert, and completed our duty at 0600. The ops officer called our aircraft commander, Denny Davis, and asked if our crew could fly another mission. There was actually another crew available and our squadron commander, Lt. Col. White, had tried to send them. It was a crew of flight evaluators and instructors who were scheduled to fly a daylight firepower demonstration for the Army. Thus,

TUOC declined to send the instructor crew after deciding there were too many valuable people on board. Lt. Col. White's response was "What the hell is this, a suicide mission?" This became the mission that caused our crew to adopt the name "The Expendables."

We broke ground at 1000 hours and headed for Kompong Thom for the first AC-119G daylight mission into Cambodia. The Crew was Denny Davis, A/C; Pat Moran, CP; Hank Alau, NAV, Rodney B. Sizemore, NAV, MSgt Bill Abels FE, TSgt Paden Gunner; SSgt Emmons IO (I cannot recall the name of the other gunner). About 15 minutes after arriving, we got instructions from a Rustic FAC directing us south to the town of Skoun. When we got there we found a column of Kompong Thom-bound relief forces pinned down by enemy fire. It was a relief column like I had never seen, consisting of civilian buses and trucks and no military vehicles. Cloud cover forced us down to 1,500 feet where we were easily able to provide significant support. MSgt Abels had those engines leaned out so well and milked for all they were worth. As a result, we were airborne an amazing six hours. When we landed at Tan Son Nhut, the number one engine quit as we turned off the runway onto the taxiway.

Lt. Col. White met us in the revetment and told us that they all thought we had crashed and were getting ready to launch a SAR effort. Once in C Flight Ops, we were met and debriefed by a MACV intelligence officer who was interested in the relief column progress, capability, and leadership. This was the first and only time we received this kind of a debriefing. When the intel officer left, he made a cryptic statement to the effect, "Yeah, these are the guys we trained and left, never to be heard from again." This led us to suspect that this was not your ordinary intelligence officer.

Jungle Survival Training

For the field exercise of evasion at jungle survival school in the Philippines, I teamed up with Lt. Woodrow (Woody) Bergeron, a Louisiana Cajun and an F-4 backseater. Except for having snakes and some strange animals, the jungle environment didn't seem that much different from Hawaii. The task was to spend the night in the jungle without being caught by the Negritos. We achieved this by first walking backward up a hill making sure that the grass continued pointing downhill. After about 100 yards of walking, we tunneled about 15 feet through the elephant grass, closed up the hole and flattened an area where we camped for the night. The area below had a banana patch. After eating our rations, I told Woody to throw the cans into the banana patch because that's where the rats lived. Sure enough, in the middle of the night we could hear the rats fighting over the scraps. I slept well, but Woody was restless. He woke me twice because he heard the Negritos searching for us and trying to make us break cover. He woke me again because the condensation on the banana tree leaves was making a loud, unfamiliar sound he did not recognize. The next day when the choppers came in we popped flares, rode the horse collar, and were taken back to the main encampment for the bus ride back to the base, having surrendered none of our chits.

About three months later I ran into Woody at the Tan Son Nhut officer's club. The first thing I asked him is why he had a cut on his nose and abrasions under his eyes. He said, "Remember that night we spent in the Philippine jungles? Well, that stuff really works."

Woody had been shot down in Laos and had spent three days evading. Over 300 sorties were flown to get him out. The Pathet Lao probably killed his pilot.



Larry Dean Alderson, Gunner
18th SOS. Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, 1970-71

Maryville, Missouri was my birthplace in 1948. I graduated from Worth County R-1 High School in my hometown Grant City, Missouri. I joined the U.S. Air Force at Kansas City, Missouri in 1968, because I didn't want to be an Army grunt.

I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron as a Stinger Gunship Aerial Gunner, originally stationed at Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand in October 1970 but later transferred to DaNang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam for the last five months of my tour.

The most noteworthy mission I flew was in late April 1971 when our AC-119K Stinger aircrew, piloted by Major Kiepe, destroyed 39 trucks while receiving heavy anti-aircraft fire. I think 39 was the record for trucks destroyed at the time, at least for Stingers. Later, our crew was visited and recognized by the Secretary of the Air Force Seaman for our accomplishment. Names of crewmembers that I remember are: Major Packard, Navigator; Major Rose, NOS; Major Helm, FLIR; Sergeant Payne, FE; Sergeant Taylor, Lead Gunner; Sergeant Coates, Gunner; and Sergeant Filipiak,

IO. I cannot remember the copilot's name. Our crew was photographed being congratulated for our accomplishment by Secretary Seaman.



The most exciting mission for me was a TIC (troops-in-contact) where we provided assistance to a fire base that was about to be overrun. I don't know when that was or where the fire base was located, but it made me feel like we were doing some real good for our troops on the ground.

The thing that I will always remember about my time with Stinger gunships is the crazy people who volunteer to fly around in a flying boxcar and shoot trucks.

After separating from the Air Force at McConnell AFB; Wichita, Kansas in May 1972, I entered college at Missouri Southern University at Joplin and graduated in 1976. I currently live in Jefferson City, Missouri.



Mario Alfaro, Maintenance

71st SOS, 17th SOS, Nha Trang, Phan Rang, 1969-70

I went into the military in 1953 because I was a very rowdy young man. The judge said, "Don't come here no more, Mario," so I joined the Air Force. I'm glad I did; it really straightened me out. In 1968 I was stationed in Panama awaiting new orders and when they came in, they said, "Going to Vietnam." I went to Hamilton AFB where I qualified with the guns. I had 30 days leave coming. I worked for Major Richardson and he received orders to Vietnam also and I said, "Well, we will probably never see each other." When I reported in at Nha Trang, they asked me what kind of plane and engines I worked with. They said, "You're going to this new outfit of one nineteen's."

I said, "Is that plane still flying?" and they said, "Yep, it's still flying." When I got there I was directed to a tent out by the runway. That's where the maintenance officer was."

When I entered the tent, who did I run into but Major Richardson! He left from Panama 30 days before me. He said, "I'm sure glad you're here. I need somebody to go to Phan Rang. Stick around here for two days and learn the system. Then catch a hop to Phan Rang." So that's what I did. That's how I wound up with the 71st SOS reserve outfit that ferried the planes over there.

I went to work at 7 PM starting that night and I worked until 7AM the following morning. I did that for a year.

When we got hit, we really got hit! I remember we were running away from this revetment. There was a plane in

it and we were thinking "if it gets hit, it is full of gas." We went running into the next revetment, tripped over a wire and went rolling. My buddy said to me, "Sgt Alfaro, are you scared?" I said, "Yes, I'm scared. Do you know how to pray?" He said "No." So I said, "Follow me," and we said our prayers. Were we scared, "really" scared.

But I have to tell you, while we were there I worked 6 months with the reserves and 6 months with the regulars. I had more fun with the reserves than the regulars. The reserves were like a close-knit family.

One night we were getting hit so bad Col Womb says, "Sgt. Alfaro, I need you and two single people to come launch us."

I said jokingly, "I'm married."

He said, "I don't care. You're coming"

So I turned around and said, "Two single people get in the truck with me."

I got in the truck. The whole crew was there. I said, "Get out. Only the single ones can go."

But they said, "Well, we're going with you."

We all launched that plane under fire! That crew was close. They knew what to do and they got in there and did it. No complaints-just got the job done. I retired as a Master Sgt. in 1975.

A few years ago, I'm was California. The phone rang and the voice said, "Are you MSgt Alfaro?"

I said, "Yes".

"You have a picture of aircraft 138?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're on one side and I'm on the other. We have a reunion once a year and I'd like you to come with us."

I said, "OK," and I've been going ever since. I enjoy it every time I go.



Robert J. Allen, Pilot

71st SOS, Nha Trang, Phan Rang, Tuy Hoa, 1968-69

Active Duty11 Feb 54 - 15 Feb 58
Reserved Duty15 Jan 59 - 28 Oct 62
Active Duty28 Oct 62 - 27 Oct 63
Reserved Duty27 Oct 63 - 8 Sep 68
Active Duty.....8 Sep 68 - 31 July 82
Retired31 Jul 82
Commissioned (Second Lieutenant)16 May 55
Promoted (First Lieutenant)16 Nov 56
Promoted (Captain)1 Jul 62
Promoted (Major)2 Dec 67
Promoted (Lieutenant Colonel)15 May 76

Graduate USAF Pilot Training Class 55-N (Flew PA-18, T-6G, T-28A and T-33A aircraft; flew B-29 in "advanced pilot training").

Flew KC-97E/G and C-45H Lake Charles AFB, Louisiana (1955 - 1958) (Co-pilot)

Flew C-119G/J Willow Grove Air Reserve Facility, Pennsylvania (1959 - 1968) (Aircraft Commander/ Instructor Pilot/ Chief, Standardization and Evaluation)

Flew AC-119G Lockbourne AFB, Ohio (1968) (Student) Nha Trang, Phan Rang and Tuy Hoa, Vietnam (1969) (Aircraft Commander/Instructor Pilot)

Flew AC-119G/K Lockbourne AFB, Ohio and Hurlburt Field, Florida (1969 - 1972) (Instructor Pilot/ Standardization and Evaluation Flight Examiner/Chief Pilot) Logged over 5,000 hours in various models of the C-119, 678 hours of which were in combat. Over 6,000 total hours of flying time.

After leaving the cockpit in 1972, served as Airfield Manager/Director, Operations and Training at Wiesbaden AB, Germany (1973 - 1976), Rickenbacker AFB, Ohio (1976 - 1980), and Grissom AFB, Indiana (1980 - 1982).

Completed Air Command and Staff College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

Between first and second active duty tours, attended and graduated from Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pennsylvania (1958 - 1962) with a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics and Education degree; while at Rickenbacker AFB, attended and was graduated from the Graduate School of Administration, Capital University, Bexley, Ohio (1978 - 1981) with a Master of Public Administration degree. After retirement from active duty, worked at the Defense Construction Supply Center (DCSC), Whitehall, Ohio (1983 - 1996) as a Logistics Management Specialist in charge of disaster and emergency planning and operation of the Center Command and Control facility. In June 1971, I married G. Georgianna Vorhies Bundy.

Stories

In the 210 missions that I flew throughout Southeast Asia, in South Vietnam, Laos, a small portion of North Vietnam when my navigator got a little "mixed up", and other places to the west, most were relatively routine, although my crew and I probably did not think so at the time!

I recall a mission early in my tour that took us to patrolling "the trail" in Laos. Because of where we were flying, our guns were to be loaded strictly with "ball" ammunition - no "tracers". We located several trucks moving along and we rolled in to "hit" the lead and tail vehicles, essentially stopping the convoy. With the front vehicle in the NOS and clearance to fire, we all were amazed when a steady stream of red tracers left the aircraft, headed for the target. Almost immediately, several weapons of varying sizes began returning fire.

On a mission near Dak To, troops on the ground reported taking fire from a hillside, but as soon as we entered the area all got quiet. After flying around for a little while, we

left the area, flew south for about 20 miles, turned out our lights, and reentered the target area. Thinking that we had left, the enemy resumed firing, and were doing so just in time for the sensor operator to pinpoint his position. We immediately fired upon the location and subsequently witnessed several large explosions.

Late in my tour, we were called in for a TIC (troops in contact) situation west of Chu Lai. As we entered the “firing geometry,” several enemy guns opened fire immediately below us. The aircraft took several small caliber “hits” and the DASC (Direct Air Support Center) directed that we depart the target area. Instead, a call was made for fighter support and we subsequently directed an attack on the gun locations. After the flight of F-4s did their thing, no resistance was experienced and the attack on the fire support base was broken.

On a mission in III Corps, we were called in to relieve another gunship that was just about “fired out.” A fire support base was under attack and all manner of air support was called in. A C-130 “Basketball” was overhead dropping flares, a young trooper on the ground was doing a superb job of directing where to put the ordnance, and a flight of four Army helicopters arrived on the scene. The flight lead (Blue Max Lead) gave the impression that he thought

he was going to single-handedly win the war, but first he needed to know the location of ALL friendly forces! The trooper, who had a propensity for vulgarity and who was busy with other transmissions, simply told Blue Max to “shut the Hell up, hold high and dry, and let Shadow do his job.” By the time that our ammunition supply was nearly expended, the attack was broken and all was quiet.

All this happened some 37 years ago. ‘Tis a little difficult to remember back some four decades.

The funniest thing about the last tale is that years later my wife and I were at a party and the host was proud to tell everybody in attendance that he had a tape he wanted to play. The tape was a recording of a mission in III Corps and of his crew and how they supported a TIC. He went to great lengths to build up “his crew’s” exploits. He played the tape and all were awestruck as they listened to how “Shadow 62,” his crew, had gone about its business. Then the tape was over and everybody was talking about the mission. I simply asked when he had been on a gunship, for “I was the aircraft commander on Shadow 62 that night, and I don’t remember you ever being on my crew!” Reluctantly, he had to admit that he had gotten the tape from a friend.



James Alvis, Crew Chief

71st, Nha Trang, Phan Rang, 1969



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.

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.



Phan Rang Maintenance

Front Row, L to R: A1c Phillips Wheatley, Sgt. Larry G. Meadors, A1c James R. Day, SMSgt Richard L. Ash, LtCol. William E. Long, Maj. William O'Brien, Maj. Robert Allen, SSgt. Charles J. Dobbs, A1c Sidney E. Fields, TSgt. Mario Alfaro. Second Row, L to R: SSgt. Earl W. Wall, Sgt. James R. Alvis, Sgt. Albert R. Gapuzan, Sgt. Leroy E. Frahm, A1c Larry D. Brooks, A1c Mark E. Brunton, A1c Patrick Conley, SSgt. Harry W. Bungard, A1c James D. Marshall, SSgt. Morris D. Campbell. Third Row, L to R: Sgt. Larry D. Middleton, Sgt. Ronald J. Kugel, MSgt. Glenn O. Smith, A1c Ernest N. Wyatt, A1c Marvin D. Rush, A1c Arnold M. Blair, Sgt David A. Antle, SSgt. James F. Stuckwisch, A1c Richard D. Hehman, SSgt. Steven M. Glidden.

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 bachelors 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.



Robert Andrews, Gunner

18th, Nakhon Phanom, Bien Hoa, DaNang, 1972-73

Robert Donald Andrews was born at San Luis Obispo, California in 1949. He graduated from San Luis Obispo High School in June 1967 and enrolled in Cuesta Junior College. To avoid getting drafted into the Army, Robert gladly joined the United States Air Force to do service to his country. He entered the Air Force in Los Angeles on February 11, 1969.

He completed Basic Training at Lackland AFB, Texas at the end of March 1969 and was assigned to Weapons Mechanic School at Lowry AFB Denver, Colorado from March through July 1969. From Weapons School, Robert was assigned to the 475th Munitions Maintenance Squadron; 475th Tactical Fighter Wing stationed at Misawa, Japan from September 1969 to March 1971. From March 1971 to January 1972, he was assigned to the 307th Munitions Maintenance Squadron of the 307th Strategic Wing stationed at U-Taphao Air Base, Thailand.

Andrews completed Survival Training at Fairchild AFB Spokane, Washington during January and February 1972 before reporting at the end of February to Hurlburt Field, Florida for AC-119K Gunship Training as an Aerial Gunner

(AG). Upon completion of gunship training in early May 1972, Robert departed the States for Southeast Asia and the AC-119K Stingers of the 18th Special Operations Squadron stationed at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand (known to American fliers as NKP). From May to December, NKP was home base for Robert with TDY's (temporary duty stations) at Bien Hoa Air Base, Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). In December 1972, he was assigned to Stinger gunships based at DaNang, Republic of Vietnam where he completed his tour of duty in January 1973.

One mission stands out

Of the many combat missions that Andrews flew, one Stinger mission flown from Ben Hoa stands out. For four consecutive nights, his Stinger was providing fire support for an Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) outpost located in the Mekong Delta. The Viet Cong (VC) were determined to overrun the outpost and kill everyone which included American Advisors. One night, the VC were on the verge of destroying the outpost, having made it through the wire to infiltrate the inner compound. The American Advisor radioed Stinger to rake the entire compound with

mini-guns, all friendly troops were in protected bunkers. The Stinger efficiently and effectively hosed the entire compound area with thousands of 7.62mm rounds, cutting down many attackers and causing the VC forces to retreat and ultimately to discontinue any further attacks on the outpost. Saving the lives of several Americans along with a few ARVN troops was most rewarding for Andrews and his fellow-Stinger crewmembers.

Another memorable event for Andrews occurred while stationed at DaNang. Just before the end of the Vietnam War, a flight of US Navy and Marine F-4s dropped several 500 lb. bombs on DaNang Air Base, destroying one AC-119K Stinger gunship and setting fire to a large fuel storage tank. The signing of the Paris Peace Agreement on January 27, 1973 brought about the end of war in the Republic of Vietnam for American combat forces.

Robert's memories of Stinger gunships and Southeast Asia focus on the people he served with and grew to know as brothers; the aircrews, aircraft maintenance troops, munitions troops, survival equipment personnel, and even intel and weather briefers. As Robert wrote, "I have not met a greater bunch of people before or since and I will always remember them all."

Upon returning stateside, Robert Donald Andrews separated from the Air Force on February 1, 1973. Andrews was awarded the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, National Defense Medal, Air Force Good Conduct Medal, Expert Marksmanship Medal and the Vietnamese Gallantry Cross with Palm Cluster.

Robert currently lives in Grover Beach, California.



Robert Lynn Aspinwall, Nav.

18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom, 1971-72

I was born in Greeley, Colorado in 1935. I graduated from Greeley High School in 1953 and from Colorado State University (CSU) in 1957. I joined Advanced Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) at CSU to avoid the Korean War draft and to finish my college degree. I was commissioned a second lieutenant in the USAF in 1957. I was then assigned to navigator school at Harlingen AFB, Texas in May 1958.

I served with the 18th Special Operations Squadron FOL (forward operation location) at DaNang from April to October 1971 and then at FOL Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Air Base, Thailand from October to my DEROS in April 1972. My most exciting AC-119 mission was in the Plain

of Jars (Northern Laos) at Ban Ban. Ban Ban is near the "fish's mouth" of North Vietnam. We dodged a lot of AAA. However, near the end of the mission, we were able to catch three trucks being refueled by a tanker. Boy, did they ever explode and burn!

I will always remember the closeness of all the people I served with while in the Stinger gunship squadron. We had a great group. I will always remember Terry Courtney who we lost a week after I returned home. The locals called him "Nit Noy" because he was so short.

I retired from the United States Air Force in July 1979 at Grissom AFB, Indiana. I currently live in Wichita, Kansas.



Harold Hoa Bach, Navigator

819th Sq. 5th Div. VNAF, Phan Rang in AC119G, 1971-73
18th SOS, DaNang, 1973 fled Vietnam 1975



VNAF CAPTAIN HAROLD HOA BACH: Born November 18, 1943 at Kien An, Haiphong, North Vietnam. Moved to South Vietnam during immigration in 1954 after Geneva Accords divided Vietnam into two parts at parallel 17. North was Communist

and South was Freedom. Graduated from high school in Saigon during 1963.

Drafted by government February 1968. Attended Reserve Officer Training at Dong De Training Base, Nha Trang. Graduated and served in the Army of Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) as platoon commander attending to daily



operations around the border of Saigon.

Volunteered for Vietnam Air Force (VNAF) July 1969. Sent to United States of America for helicopter pilot training at Fort

Wolters, Texas. Unsuccessful at pilot training, returned to Vietnam. Attended and successfully completed navigator training at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon. Assigned to 817th AC-47 "Spooky" Squadron at Tan Son Nhut for four months before being assigned to AC-119G "Shadow" Combat Aircrew Training Program with 14th Special Operations Wing at Phan Rang Air Base. Successfully completed navigator training on March 12, 1971 and assigned to 819th Squadron, 5th Division of VNAF. Flew many, many AC-119G combat missions in Vietnam and Cambodia.

Assigned to 18th Attached Special Operations Squadron at DaNang for Special Operations School AC-119K "Stinger". First Lieutenant Bach successfully completed AC-119K navigator training and instructor navigator training on February 15, 1973. Bach was also qualified as SEFE on the K-model by USAF Lt.Col. Philip A. Deering. Bach's last

rank in the VNAF was First Lieutenant but upon receipt of a memorandum, he ultimately attained the rank of Captain.

The Republic of Vietnam fell on April 30, 1975 and Bach fled from Saigon and returned to the United States of America as a refugee at Camp Pendleton, California. In 1983, Bach became an American citizen and changed his name from HOA NGOC BACH to HAROLD HOA BACH.

Bach retired September 20, 2004 after 28 years of service at Toyota Company as Press Operator (2 years), Quality Assurance (2 years), Production Planner (10 years),



CAD Specialist (14 years) for the Manufacturing Engineering Department. "See Gerick's story about Harold"

Top row: AC, Lt. Col. Tony Simon; FE, MSgt. Lee Kyser; Gunner, SSgt. Joe Goryl; IO, SSgt. Frank Zemanick; Nav., Capt. Norm Burger; Nav., 1st Lt. Han
Front Row; CP, 2nd Lt. Huong; Nav. 1st Lt. Hoq; Pilot, Capt. Gyunt; Nav., 2nd Lt. Diep; IO, MSgt., Chau; FE, Sgt., Cuong



Jeff Baker, Pilot

18th SOS, Danang, 1969-70



Standing: Capt. Jeff Baker; 1st Lt. Rich Hay; Maj. Tom Vandennack; Maj. Bob Sonnichsen; Maj. Don DeHart; Kneeling: Capt. Unknown; SSgt. Jerry Swain; Sgt. George Marsland; Sgt. Pete Mantel; MSgt. Bill Reffner

Jeffrey Paige Baker was born in Oakland, California on November 4, 1943. After the war, the family moved to the family citrus and cattle ranch near Woodlake, CA. Jeff's first airplane rides were in his grandfather's Bellanca.

After graduating from high school in 1961, Jeff attended the College of the Sequoias in Visalia, CA. After earning an Associate of Arts degree, Jeff transferred to the University of California at Berkeley.

Jeff graduated from Cal in 1965 with a degree in Marketing. With the Vietnam War cranking up and the draft board breathing down his neck, Jeff joined the Air Force. After commissioning and completing pilot training at Williams AFB, AZ, he was assigned to C-141s at Dover AFB, DE. During the presidential campaign of 1968, Jeff was assigned

to fly Hubert Humphrey's secret service men around on the campaign trail. Later that year, Jeff was assigned to AC-119K gunships as part of the initial cadre.

Jeff was an Aircraft Commander for the 18th SOS crew that ferried aircraft number 940 to Vietnam. The crew departed Lockbourne AFB, OH the day after Christmas 1969, on a route that took them to Malmstrom AFB, MT, McChord AFB, WA, Elemendorf AFB, AL, Adak, AL, Midway, Wake, Guam, Clark AB, PI, and then to Phan Rang AB.

In-country, Jeff was assigned to the 18th SOS at DaNang AB. While flying right-seat during one of his early missions, the airplane crashed short of the runway when two of the four engines quit while on final approach. Luckily, the 10-man crew walked away with only minor injuries. Jeff became an AC-119K instructor pilot and briefly worked as wing gunship officer. He flew over 145 combat missions for which he received two Distinguished Flying Crosses, Air Medals and other decorations.

After his combat tour, Jeff flew as C-141 aircraft commander at Travis AFB, CA. He left active duty in 1972 to fly as a DC-8 charter pilot with Trans International Airlines. In 1973 he was employed by Western Airlines and joined the Air Force Reserve C-5A unit at Travis AFB, CA.

Jeff retired in September 2003 as a Boeing 757/767 Captain based in Cincinnati. After retirement, he and his wife Mary Lou moved to Harrison, ID, near Coeur d'Alene where Jeff is pursuing his interest in art, welded metal sculpture, and philosophy.

DaNang AC-119K Crash - February 18/19, 1970

"Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! Stinger One-Five going down. Launch Rescue." With those words my life would never be the same. Connecting the dots would come later. Right then, I had other things on my mind. It was three in the morning, Stinger 15 was returning to base after an interdiction mission over the Ho Chi Minh Trail. DaNang Approach Control reported the weather as 1500 overcast, four miles visibility, light drizzle, mist, winds calm. Not bad weather, I thought, but it will require an instrument approach. Major Bill Hoover, the aircraft commander, used the aircraft's instrument



landing system to get below the solid cloud deck, which put the crew in visual contact with Runway 18-Left. Breaking out of the clouds, visibility as reported, confirming Major Hoover had a visual on the runway, I called, "Runway in sight." DaNang Tower responded, "Cleared to land, Runway One-Eight Left, winds calm." "Roger that, cleared to land."

"Just a few more miles to go and we'll be on the ground, then a cold beer," I thought. On short final, when everything looked good, I would often say on interphone, "Nothing can go wrong now." Tempting fate usually got a chuckle from the crew. This time, I guessed the dour aircraft commander would not see the humor in it.

I was on a checkout flight as an AC-119K gunship pilot assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at DaNang. I was flying copilot with Flight Examiner Bill Hoover in the left seat. Major Hoover, the most experienced pilot in the unit, flew 119's supporting the French back in the 1950's before their defeat at Dien Bien Phu.

I had been reassigned from a comfortable stateside job flying one of the newest airplanes in the USAF inventory to one of the oldest, and sent to fly combat missions in Vietnam. After a quick in-processing at Phan Rang, headquarters of the 14th Special Operations Wing, I was now one of the "new guys" at DaNang. How fast things change, I mused, as I prepared for my first mission. Goodness, Mamma's little boy is going into combat. Adrenalin flowed.

Tonight's mission had gone smoothly, I thought. Three trucks destroyed. "Triple-A", anti-aircraft artillery, fired at the crew had been light and inaccurate.

I felt energized. Learning the tricks of the trade over the Trail had been both challenging and stimulating. Getting shot at for the first time was like Winston Churchill had said. "There is nothing quite as exhilarating as getting shot at without effect." I now knew what he meant. Nevertheless, I wanted to get on the ground, debrief, join the crew for "refreshments," and hit the sack before daybreak.

The mission had gone smoothly, that is until the last 400 feet. "We're losing power on the right," shouted the Flight Engineer Bill Feezor, "Damn, we lost the right jet, too." I looked at the engine instruments. The gunship yawed to the right. Major Hoover jammed in left rudder and pushed the throttles up. "Engine failure on the right," someone shouted the obvious.

Dispensing with the formalities of the Engine Failure Checklist, Hoover grunted, "FEATHER," as he struggled to

maintain control. Both pilots knew the critical importance of reducing drag immediately as the right engine prop was aligned with the airflow. I looked outside—dangerously below normal glide path—looked at the flight instruments. “Sinking 1,000 feet per minute!” “Can’t make it—call the tower,” Hoover groaned, straining at the controls.

“Tower,” I said, surprising myself with a calm and



professional voice. “Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! Stinger 15 going down. Launch Rescue.” “Ohhhhh... F*___,” someone said, spitting out the last two words often heard on a cockpit voice recorder following disaster.

I knew death was imminent. I saw events in my life flash instantly into my awareness. No fear; another world... somehow familiar. News of my death... my family, Mom and Dad will be okay. Not Grandmother... Mom’s mother. She’ll be devastated... needs reassurance. She, the worry wart of the family, devoted to family, but seeming to live in a constant state of fear something terrible would happen. I knew I had to reassure her that I had been killed, but was all right. Dead, but not dead. No longer “here” but not “elsewhere”. All these impressions were synchronous with the crash, outside of time, but in time all at once.

In this timeless state, my consciousness found itself with my grandmother in California, 8,000 miles from Vietnam. I was above her, where the ceiling meets the wall, she, sitting in her rocker, reading the newspaper. “Grandmother, I’m here, I’m fine.” I felt myself say. “I’m dead but not gone. Don’t worry.” No response. “She can’t hear me.” I sensed. “We can’t communicate.” Frustration!

Back at the crash, simultaneously sparks flashed, thud, bounce, thud, spinning, splash, and then silence. Dead silence. The aircraft had come to rest. “Fire,” I thought! “This mess could blow at any second; I’ve got to get out of here!”

I looked up and saw an opening. Where the overhead panel had been was sky. The cockpit and windscreen had separated and twisted away from its top. Suddenly, it was like being in a convertible with the top down. I slapped open the latch securing my lap belt and shoulder harness, leaped over the cockpit rail where the side window had been, and splashed into waist-deep water below. Weighted down with parachute and combat survival gear, I slogged my way to dry ground in front of the airplane. Four other crewmembers from the cockpit followed, three others emerged from the gun bay. Reaching safety the crew gathered and looked back at the crumpled aircraft, expecting a fireball of high octane aviation gas. I saw a small flame coming from one of the severed fuel lines, but no explosion.

“Perhaps the water kept it from blowing,” I thought. “Take a head-count,” Major Hoover commanded. I quickly counted the gathering crew at eight. “Two are missing, sir.” The gathered crew determined the missing were Hans Wurfel and Ollie Merrill. Just then, out of the gloom, emerged two figures trudging through the muck around the crumpled right wing. “There they are,” someone shouted. “All accounted for, sir.” Ten men on the crew and all survived the crash. Relief and thankfulness swept over me as I joined the reunited crew in cheers, hi-fives...and disbelief.

Later investigation revealed a failure in the fuel system.



Two of the four engines ran out of gas. Subsequent flight tests demonstrated an aircraft at that weight, in a high-drag landing configuration, losing two engines one mile from the end of the runway, could not recover. Being too low, slow, and without enough power for a normal landing, Stinger 15 crashed through the perimeter of the base, severing a high-tension power line, smashing through a concertina wire fence, skidding between two guard towers manned by armed GI’s, and bouncing through a minefield.

During the crash-landing, the cockpit started to break away from the fuselage and roll under the rest of the airplane, as

the 119 is known to do in a straight-ahead crash, usually killing everyone. Just as the nose began to split, the left landing gear dropped into an abandoned bunker, spinning the aircraft to the left. The sideways skid stopped the cockpit separation and prevented its occupants from being mangled under a grinding mass of aluminum. The wreckage came to a stop in a marsh, right wing broken, left engine torn off, the cockpit listing to the right like a ripped-open pop can.

Later, I would think long and hard about the engine failure on an airplane already short on power; how the Air Force pulled these old cloud busters out of the bone yard and reserve units, loaded them down with so much equipment that they flew 16,000 pounds over the designed gross weight. The entire crew survived the crash. I thought of our luck. As a result of my experience during the crash, philosophical speculations have been a special interest of mine ever since.



Larry Barbee, Navigator

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, Bien Hoa, DaNang, 1972-73

Larry Barbee came to the 18th SOS as a navigator/sensor operator in his first operational assignment. Upon arrival at NKP in March of '72 he was checked out over Laos and then was assigned to Crew 13 to travel to and operate from the Bien Hoa FOL.

On May 2nd he was the NOS for the An Loc mission where three of our comrades were lost. Most of the remainder of the tour was spent flying from DaNang and Bien Hoa.

During the hectic late spring and early summer of '72 the Stingers at DaNang, fearing that their prized stereo equipment would be lost if the enemy overran the base, properly prioritized their actions and shipped their gear back to NKP on our own planes. The crews flew combat missions from DaNang and landed back in Thailand to rotate aircraft. Larry believes he had the only Sanyo mini-refrigerator to fly a combat mission.

In the summer, Debbie, his wife, came to live in Bangkok where she did substitute teaching at the American School for five months. She made three trips to NKP and Larry was able to go to Bangkok twice during that period. It was an odd fact that while Debbie made trips into Cambodia to renew her visa, the Stingers were going into Cambodia at night to search for targets.

Lt. Barbee left DaNang in February 73 to return to Mather AFB in California as an instructor navigator. He left Mather in 1976 to fly F-111s in Idaho and spent four years in England with the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing and the 494th TFS Panthers. The 48th was the only wing in the Air Force that had both a name and a number. They had been awarded the name "Statue of Liberty Wing" when they were stationed in France.

Larry and his family returned to Keesler AFB, MS in 1981 where he was a Battlestaff Operations Officer and then a Battlestaff Director on ABCCC (remember Moonbeam, Cricket, Hillsboro and Alleycat?). During his time with at Keesler and later as Chief of EC-130 Current Operations for the 28th Air Division at Tinker AFB, he was able to participate in Urgent Fury and some other obscure skirmishes.

Larry and Debbie retired in 1990 and returned to Texas. They have three children, one each born in California, Idaho, and England and they have three grand children

Larry and Debbie have been married more than 38 years and live near Buda, Texas, where Larry is a Loss Control Consultant for an insurance company and Debbie is a jewelry maker.



Leonard L. Barnett, Gunner

18th SOS, DaNang, Bien Hoa, 1972



I was an aerial gunner on the AC-119K Stinger gunship in 1972, flying combat in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. I flew missions that included troops-in-contact, interdiction, and fire-suppression support in hot areas such as the Barrel Roll, Plain of Jars, and An Loc.

All Stinger missions were exciting but I clearly remember blowing up barges on the Mekong River near Kampong Cham, Cambodia; fighting against an enemy ground gunner at An Loc, and flying under a gunner's moon while watching AAA fire red dots at us.

Some incidents that seem funny now weren't so funny when they happened. One of those incidents was when I was flying out of Bien Hoa and we had been launching flares during our mission. Several flares were launched with no problems, but then one flare stuck half way out of the launcher. The pilot tried several flying maneuvers to take the strain off the flare so we could knock it out with a wood stick we carried onboard for just that purpose. Everyone in the gun compartment had their turn at beating on the end of that flare. Finally, it was my turn to work the stick. As I was hitting it, I could see it move a little. I had tuned everything out and was totally focused on hitting that flare. I don't remember anyone saying anything or trying to stop me. Suddenly, the flare let go and started burning. The flare with its parachute open, floated down to an area near the BX where pallets of beer were stored. These flares burned at 2 million candle power; in other words, they were extremely HOT. Well, the flare landed on the beer and the beer got hot and exploded into a gigantic beer burst. When the Marines found out that a Stinger had burned up the beer, they came to our hootch to find out who was responsible. I'm glad nobody told on me.

We were around the Kontum area one night while flying out of Bien Hoa. I think we were curious as to why they would not turn on their TACAN. We were shooting at something and got a nice secondary explosion. We worked the area for a while until we were bingo fuel. Instead of going back to

Bien Hoa, we landed at Pleiku. There was only one round eye on the whole base and he was in the tower. It was a real spooky place. As we assembled to leave, the AC was talking to the Vietnamese ground crew. He told everyone to get on board and told the co-pilot and FE to get an engine started with the internal batteries because we were not connected to an MD-3 for external power. When the engine was starting, it was turning so slow that I thought it wouldn't start. We might have to spend the night there. I recall that the other engine was started while taxiing. Pleiku had a short runway, 6000 ft I think. As we were taking off, I was watching the 1000 ft markers go by. They were going by very fast and we still had not rotated. I knew we were going to slide down that mountainside when the nose lifted up and we jumped off the runway. We flew back to Kontum and picked up where we left off. It was the only time I ever flew 2 missions in 1 night. Later we found out that when we landed at Pleiku to refuel, they attempted to charge us for the gas.

We were flying daylight missions out of Bien Hoa in support of An Loc. It was also during that time that we were being introduced to the SA-7 Strella. The only defense we had was a handheld flare pistols. I think we also had to break into the missile so the wings could help shield the heat of the engines. We were flying straight and level and the left scanner wanted to be relieved so I took his position. Under normal situations the scanner that just hooked up would say, "Pilot, this is the left or right scanner. How do you read sir?" The pilot would answer to verify two-way communications. I guess I was too far out into the wind stream. Because when I checked in the aircraft broke hard left and I saw the flare the IO had just fired from his flare pistol. I just hung on. The aircraft leveled out and after a minute the normal conversations started up again and no one talked about what had just happened. When we got down the FE told me that when I checked in, it was like someone had thrown a snake in the cockpit. What everyone heard was "Missile, missile, missile" and that I was the left scanner. No one was hurt. Just a lot of pucker power.

Joliet was an Army Major who was working with the South Vietnamese as an advisor someplace down in the Delta.



Joliet called for gunship support while being overrun by the bad guys. When we got there Joliet and the rest of his people were inside an underground bunker. He told us to shoot his position. The bad guys were on top of his bunker trying to get in. After shooting thousands of minigun rounds, things got real quiet. Joliet opened the door after a

while and told us that all he could see were dead bodies and body parts. When Joliet was on his way from the Delta to a new assignment, he came through our base and discovered that it was home to the Stinger gunships that saved his life. I never personally met him, but he left a bunch of money at the Stinger hootch and we partied on his money for awhile.



Anton "Tony" Frank Bautz, Pilot

18th SOS, Phan Rang, DaNang, Tan Son Nhut, NKP, 1970-71



Novi Vrbas, Yugoslavia was my birthplace in 1931. I graduated from high school in Augustinerschule, Friedberg, Hessen, Germany in 1951. After arriving in the USA as a legal immigrant on September 5, 1951, I joined the USAF in January 1952 and eventually applied for Pilot Training. I became a U.S. Citizen in November 1953. After taking required aptitude and physical tests,

I started Aviation Cadet Pilot Training in February 1954. I graduated in May 1955 at Goodfellow AFB, Texas as Pilot (Class 55N) and as Second Lieutenant Bautz, USAF.

In 1970, I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron as an aircraft commander and instructor pilot. I flew 137 combat missions, most of them at night, as well as several day missions over Cambodia. On most combat missions, we encountered 37mm AAA over Cambodia and heavy ground machine gun fire. Our aircraft occasionally ended up with several bullet holes, but no major damage. We also participated in TIC (troops-in-contact) missions in support of the U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps Units. We supported ARVN and other allies (Cambodian units) as well. Most of our combat missions consisted of armed reconnaissance (truck hunting) missions over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. Basically, most missions were exciting in the context of finding and destroying enemy military positions, vehicles, and material.

The thing I remember most about my time with AC-119 gunships was that crew coordination and cooperation during combat missions was always outstanding. We developed close friendships based on mutual respect,

reliance, and expertise among fellow crewmembers; some friendships developed during those years have lasted until present times. In retrospect I shall always recall my exposure to Vietnamese and Thai customs, foods, and visits to shrines. At Nakhon Phanom, several among us also visited Thai Grade Schools, taking the children some treats, and introducing them to the sights and sounds of Americans. We also had some squadron parties and got to know many of our fellow-airmen, as well as our Detachment Commanders. I often think back to our maintenance men who did an outstanding job in keeping our AC-119K Stinger Gunships in excellent flying shape.

The hardest part of my combat tour was being away from my wife and sons. Especially sad was the loneliness on Christmas Eve 1970. I am proud of having been part of the USAF Gunship Operations during the Vietnam War.

I graduated from Colorado State University with a BS degree in Electrical Engineering in 1965 and I graduated from Texas A&M University at College Station with a Master of Science OCN in 1974. I retired as Major from the USAF with twenty years active duty service at Bergstrom AFB, Austin, Texas on January 31, 1972. During those years, I accumulated approximately 5,900 flying hours. My flying experience was mainly in C-119, C-123, C-47, C-124, U-3A, T-29, and AC-119 aircraft. However, during 1959, while flying test flights at Tinker AFB, I also got flying time in T-33, C-45, JC-97 and KC-135 aircraft. My wife, Renate, and I currently live in Willow Park, Texas.



"Nieu Ba Din" The Black Virgin Mt.



Arthur C. Bennett, Navigator

17th SOS, Phan Rang, 1969

Honolulu, Hawaii was my birthplace in 1932. I graduated from Hopewell High School in Hopewell, Virginia in 1950 and from Syracuse University at Syracuse, New York in 1954.

I joined the USAF to carry on a family tradition. My father, grandfather, great grandfather, and my brother all served in the U.S. Army and my son served in the U.S. Navy. We truly are a military family.

My most exciting AC-119 mission occurred when we were supporting ground troops. Ground fire hit the left engine, causing it to catch fire. When we tried to put the fire out, the wrong fire bottle was used. The one used was

supposed to be for the generators! We had to jettison all the superfluous equipment and flew very, very low to get back to Saigon. When we landed at Tan Son Nhut, all the tires on the left side blew. Believe me; I kissed the ground after we safely departed the aircraft!

The things that I will always remember about my time with AC-119 gunships are: Aussie steaks, kool-aid, the officers club, and of course, almost being shot down and flying home on one engine.

I separated from the Air Force in September 1978 at McGuire AFB, New Jersey. I currently live in Lake Grove, New Jersey.



Frank A. Bianco, Navigator

18th SOS, Phan Rang, DaNang, Tan Son Nhut, 1969-70



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

attended Navigator training at Mather AFB, California. I also attended the Air Force Institute of Technology studying aeronautics and astronautics.

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

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



AC-119K Cockpit Instrument



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.



John Cheney Bielstein, Pilot

18th SOS, DaNang, 1971

Beginning with my first flight from a grass strip at Bluffton, Ohio in August of 1953, I spent the next 53 years exclusively in aviation. During this time, I accumulated over 25,000 hours of flying time, in all phases of aviation. With my entry into Air Force Pilot Training as an Aviation Cadet, I accumulated over 10,000 hours of military flying time in a number of Transport Category Aircraft including the C-46, DC-3, DC-6, Boeing C-135 (Boeing 707), the Lockheed C-141 Starlifter and the C-119 Flying Boxcar.

During my military career, I accumulated over 1,100 hours of combat flying in Southeast Asia and was awarded the Bronze Star Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross with two Oak Leaf Clusters, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Medal with Eleven Oak Leaf Clusters, and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm. As a result of my Military Airlift Command service, I received the 10,000 hour Accident Free Award.

I served a lengthy period with the Military Airlift Command, some of which was with Special Air Missions, Presidential Wing, 89th Airlift Command, Andrews AFB, MD. I also served as an AC-119K Gunship Pilot. For five years, I served with the Ohio National Guard and, during that time, was stationed in France during the Berlin Wall Crisis.

My C-119 experience included a period from 1958-1960 with the Ohio Air National Guard. Then requalified in the 119 and AC-119K as a Gunship Pilot joining the 18th SOS at DaNang AB in January 1971. I was at DaNang until June 1971, and participated in almost nightly missions over the

Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. Among memorable incidents was a week in May that began with a direct hit by two 57MM rounds through the center of the aircraft. Shrapnel severed the hydraulic lines, the copilot's right rudder cable, and tore holes in the fuel cross-feed line across the top of the cargo compartment. The rupture caused more than 4,500 pounds of fuel to spray into the cargo compartment, saturating the five crew members with 115/145 octane AVGas during the 45 minute flight back to DaNang. Turning downwind for landing, the gear was extended manually, but then one small glitch. No green gear down lights. Bailout looked certain as a gear up landing with a belly full of AVGas was not an option. After what seemed like forever, but in reality was only 45 seconds or so, the green lights came on and a successful landing was accomplished.

Later in life, I once again, flew the C-119 as a Warbird from 1989 thru 1991, at various air shows in the Eastern US.

After retiring from the Air Force in 1980 with the rank of Major, I continued my civilian flying activities with various airlines. Following mandatory airline retirement at 60, I, my son Gary, and two others commenced operation of a full service Fixed Base Operation (FBO) at the Pickens County Airport, Greenville, South Carolina.

In May of 1960, I married the former Kay Rex and we recently celebrated 46 years of marriage. We have three children, Gary, Lee, & Traci, and 6 grandchildren. I graduated from George Washington University in Washington D.C. with a degree in Political Science.



Daniel Chaffin Biggs III, Pilot

17th SOS, Phan Rang, 1970

My home town is Odessa, Texas even though I was born in Ottumwa, Iowa in 1943. After graduating from Permian High School in 1961, I attended and graduated from Texas Tech University in 1966. Soon after graduation I joined the Air Force to fly upside down and cheat death.

From January to December 1970 I was assigned at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam as a pilot with the 17th SOS. The most exciting missions I flew were double shifts over Dak Seang and Dak Pek, RVN. I will always remember the great people I got to fly with. I will never forget having to trim

each bird of the fleet in a different configuration just to get it off the ground, then having to use the entire runway attempting to take off. Often takeoffs had to be aborted. Then we had to run the engines up to burn off the plugs and make another go of it. There was also the mission where I fired the guns for so long that they melted, resulting in shooting my own wing.

I separated from the Air Force at Dyess AFB, Texas in 1973. and I currently live in Irving, Texas.



Douglas Blair, Gunner

18th SOS, Phan Rang, Nakhon Phanom, 1970

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 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, 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 International 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 airframes, 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 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.

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 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 (NonCommissioned Office 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, 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 program 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.



Claude Mark Blum, Maint.

18th SOS, Phan Rang, Phu Cat, Udorn, Nakhon Phanom, 1969-71

My birthplace is Vernon, Texas and I was born in 1948. I graduated from El Dorado High School, Kansas in 1967 and joined the Air Force in March 1968 at Wichita, Kansas to keep from getting drafted into the Army. My basic training was completed at Amarillo AFB, Texas in 1968.

I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at

Lockbourne AFB in April 1968 and then was sent to Phan Rang AB, Vietnam in October 1969. From the end of December 1969 to March 1970, I was assigned to Phu Cat AB, Vietnam and then reassigned to Udorn AB, Thailand from March to October 1970. In November, 1970, I PCS'ed to Travis AFB, California, then returned TDY to the 18th SOS in February 1971 as a Crew Chief at NKP,

Thailand.

In all of my 27 years in the Air Force, I was never assigned to another unit that was as closely knit as the 18th SOS. The AC-119 Gunship units were like a family. I retired from the Air Force at McConnell AFB, Kansas in December 1995 as a Master Sergeant.

My most exciting events in Southeast Asia started after I left Phan Rang. On or about 29 December 1969, FOL B was formed and moved to Phu Cat. Our AC-119K's started flying missions from Phu Cat soon after New Years 1970. In mid January 1970, the night shift supervisor along with two other crew chiefs and I were in the flight line van, parked at the end of the Perforated Steel Planking (PSP) in front of the revetments. We were watching and waiting for the first aircraft to land. Sitting and looking out the van windshield, TSgt Cole suddenly yelled, "In coming!" A 122mm rocket hit a foot or two off the side of the PSP and 30 yards from the front of our van. Cole saw the rocket launch off the side of one of the mountains that overlooked Phu Cat.

Two weeks after the rocket hit the flight line, A1C Israel Bobe and I were working on a small oil leak on the outboard side of the #2 recip engine. After our first mission aircraft returned to base, at about 2300 hours, Bobe and I heard a loud crack pass over our heads. We jumped off the top of the B-5 maintenance stand and TSgt Cole drove up and told us to get under cover because Viet Cong snipers were near the F-4 trim pad, which was 400 yards straight to our revetments. Bobe and I headed for cover.

In mid-March at Phu Cat, five night shift crew chiefs and I were standing in front of the revetments. The first of three

mission aircraft had returned to base and was being readied for the next day. At about 0300 hours, we were talking and smoking with the security cops that walked our revetments when one of them got a radio call about movement along the base outer fence. As the security cop moved off the PSP toward the taxiway, he told us to get out of the light because some nasty "stuff" was coming down. A short time later, the VC started a fire fight on the north end of the runway. My fellow crew chiefs and I were still standing in front of the aircraft watching tracers fly back and forth across the runway. Then a trip-flare went off along the outer fence about 100 yards up and across from our revetments. The guard tower, located straight across from where we were standing, opened fire with a M60 on the fence line. The tracers from the guard tower gun started swinging around toward our position. That's when we all determined it was time to find cover because we couldn't defend ourselves, since we crew chiefs were not allowed to have weapons. The next morning, we found out that twenty-two VC sappers with explosive charges came through the wire where the trip flare went off. All but one of the sappers was killed. The captured VC told security that the sappers were to hit the gunships, our ops building, and our air and ground crew barracks.

I'll never forget when FOL B at Phu Cat was changed to FOL D and moved to Udorn, Thailand. Instead of going to Udorn with everyone else, crew chief Jim "Pick" Pickalshimer (Sp?) and I were sent to DaNang. When Pick and I arrived at DaNang, we found out that the FOL at DaNang not only didn't need us, but did not have a room for us in the barracks. We would have to "Hot Bunk" with two of the DaNang crew chiefs. So, CMSgt Texara called headquarters at Phan Rang to straighten-out the situation. The next morning, Pick and I hitched a ride on an AC-119K Stinger that was passing through DaNang on its way to Udorn. What Pick and I didn't know at the time was that one of the DaNang Stingers had experienced a runaway prop on a mission the night before and had landed at a remote U.S. Marine air strip, somewhere in South Vietnam not far from the Laos border. We were to land at the air strip and off load a prop sling and prop tools.



Claude Blum, first row, last person on the right with cap & glasses

During landing and roll out on the PSP runway, the aircrew and we passengers immediately noticed the burned-up carcasses of an F-100 and an F-4 Phantom, both lying on their sides along the runway. We also took

notice of the fact that all the buildings were underground except for a foot or so at top which had firing ports. Our aircraft commander told the IO and us over the intercom to get ready to 'kick-off' the prop sling and tools when he stopped the aircraft. He was not going to shut down engines

because he didn't want to get caught on the ground in case the air strip started taking enemy fire, mortars, or rockets. It was not a friendly place. With the prop sling and tools off-loaded in minimum time, we safely took off and flew to Udorn.



Robert F. Bokern, Navigator

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



Robert F. Bokern was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1929. Robert, better known as Bob, graduated from Christian Brothers College in 1947 and entered St. Louis University where he graduated in 1952. In 1970, Bob earned a Masters of Arts degree from Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut.

In January 1952, Second Lieutenant Robert Bokern entered active duty in the United States Air Force at Scott AFB, Illinois, having been commissioned through the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) at St. Louis University. His desire to fly motivated Bob to enlist in ROTC.

After completing navigator training school at Ellington AFB, Texas and Mather AFB, California in 1953, he was assigned to B-26 bomber training and then flew 28 B-26 missions in Korea during 1953. Upon returning from the Korean War, he was assigned as an instructor at the navigation training school in Harlingen, Texas from 1954 to 1955. From 1955 to 1957, Bob was physiological training officer (PTO) at Perrin AFB, Texas, the only navigator on an F-86 fighter base, where he got a lot of time in T-33's. From 1957 to 1963 Bob was assigned to Lowry AFB, Colorado as a PTO. His next assignment was PTO at Wiesbaden AB, Germany during 1963-1966.



Jose Cachuela and Bob Bokern

Returning stateside, Bob was assigned to Trinity College, Hartford Connecticut as Professor of Aerospace Science and simultaneously to the University of Connecticut, when the PAS there suddenly retired, from 1966-70.

Major Robert Bokern then received

orders assigning him to AC-119 gunships. Major Bokern was assigned to the 17th Special Operations Squadron, C Flight at Tan Son Nhut Air Base during 1970-71. As a Shadow gunship navigator/sensor operator, Bob again experienced the excitement and uncertainty of war and aerial combat. But nothing, during his Vietnam tour of duty or his entire Air Force career, compares to his experience in surviving the crash of Shadow 78 at Tan Son Nhut that took the lives of six fellow crewmen.

Major Bokern was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal w/OLC along with various unit citations and other awards for his service in Korea. All those who served with Bob at Tan Son Nhut remember him as an outstanding officer and genuine gentleman. Bob recalls the camaraderie and cooperation exhibited among flight crew members and ground crews of Fighting C Flight.

After his Vietnam tour, Bob was assigned to KC-135s at March AFB, California where he refueled BUFFs and fighters over the Gulf of Tonkin. Bob retired from the Air Force in January 1974.

Once again a civilian after 22 years on active duty, Bob and his wife, Joyce, settled in Torrance, California. He worked for Daniel Freeman Memorial Medical Center for 27.5 years as Vice President and Administrator of their Marina facility. He retired a second time in 2002; however, he was coaxed back to work for St. Mary Medical Center in Long Beach in 2003 where he currently works as a negotiator with their unions.

The Last Flight Of Shadow 78

The phone rang in Shadow operations, "C" Flight of the 17th SOS, at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. It was shortly after midnight on the morning of April 28, 1970. Jose Cachuela, Night Duty Officer, answered. A distant sounding voice informed Jose that an army helicopter pilot had just notified the base that an airplane had crashed and exploded in flames. It was the same plane that had just taken off from Tan Son Nhut.

Everyone on board had been killed, Jose was told.

Minutes earlier, Jose had heard the roar of the engines of Shadow 78 revving up. Then slowly they had faded after the AC-119 roared down the runway and into the night. As was their usual habit, the maintenance crew had watched as the Shadow lifted off. But this night was different. The gunship rose, faltered and did not gain altitude. Finally the maintenance crew could no longer see it.

Stunned by the phone call, Jose immediately initiated emergency procedures, which began by him notifying everyone on the emergency list. Then his thoughts turned to the few hours before that ill-fated flight.

The Shadow 78 crew had shown up about three hours before. They had gone through the routine briefings, weather, intelligence, equipment, etc. and pre-flighting of the airplane. Then, as usual, the crew assumed alert in Shadow Operations until their scheduled takeoff time at midnight.

What stunned Jose the most was that his Vietnam buddy, Bob Bokern was one of the Navigators on the flight. They had gone through gunship training together, flew to Vietnam together and at DaNang, asked to be stationed

This story and the one following by Allen Chandler were written by the only survivors of the crash of Shadow 78.

together, which had sent both of them to Saigon a few months before. He thought of the few hours they spent together, along with the rest of the crew, laughing and talking about old times while Shadow 78 was on alert.

Shadow 78 carried a normal crew of eight. The Aircraft Commander, Lt. Thomas L. Lubbers, Co-pilot, Lt. Charles M. Knowles, Navigator/NOS, Maj. Meredith "Andy" Anderson, Navigator/NOS, Maj. Robert "Bob" Bokern, Flight Engineer, MSgt. Joseph C. Jeszeck, Gunner, SSgt. Robert F. Fage Jr., Gunner, Sgt. Michael J. Vangelisti, Illuminator Operator, SSgt. Allen Chandler.

Two survived the crash of Shadow 78 that night, Maj. Bob Bokern and SSgt. Allen Chandler. This is the story of the last flight of Shadow 78 as recalled by one of the survivors, Bob Bokern.

As it is with most who served in Vietnam, some of my memories seem as fresh as yesterday and some have left long ago to rest in a deep fog. When we talk with others, some

memories are brought back to life. But for the most part we have put them behind us.

I have a difficult time remembering what happened before that ill-fated flight. Maybe it's because I don't want to. Mostly, I believe it's because everything we did was so routine. We did what we had to do without really thinking about it. What I do think about now is the sequence of events that made me a survivor rather than a name on the Vietnam Wall.

I was assigned to Shadow 78 a few weeks prior to April 28th. I was the "new" member to the crew. Before then, I flew with various crews, but Shadow 78 was to become my permanent assignment. It was a good crew, both professionally and personally. We worked well together and most importantly we all got along. I had flown about three or four missions with Shadow 78 before that night in April. Andy Anderson and I decided that we would trade off each mission as either table Navigator or NOS (Night Observation Sight Operator). This seemed to be fair to the both of us and we thought that it would work well, but it did have its problems.

This was the era prior to "C" Flight flying into Cambodia. We primarily flew in III Corps, which was the area just north of Saigon, and occasionally in IV Corps, which was the Delta region, just south of Saigon. The navigators, who flew in Southern Vietnam, know that there was a vast difference for the table Navigator flying in III Corps compared to flying in IV Corp. When we flew in III Corps we worked every second of the flight, with all of the FM radio artillery (Artie) calls, navigating, clearances, firing clearances, etc. We were really worn out after a mission. On the other hand, flying in IV Corps was a "piece of cake" compared to III Corps. Little or no Artie, very few radio calls, and clearances were easier to get. It was almost a "joy ride" compared to flying in III Corps.

On Shadow 78's previous flights it just so happened that Andy was assigned the Navigator's table when we went to III Corps, and when I was assigned the table we went to IV Corps. Needless to say, Andy began to think that this was completely unfair. He chidingly told me that I would have to take the table on the next III Corps flight whether it was my turn or not. I agreed and we shook hands on it.

Well, the next flight, I was scheduled to be the NOS, but, when we arrived at Shadow Ops., we were scheduled for III Corps, and so, in accordance with our "gentlemen's agreement" I said that I would take the table. I remember doing the normal things that night. During the preflight, I put all of my Navigation equipment on the table in the

airplane. Then after the routine briefings, we sat alert until our scheduled takeoff time. This was probably one of the most boring times for crew members, just waiting to take off or be scrambled for a TIC, "Troops In Contact", mission. Each of us had our own way of spending this time. I remember talking with the rest of the crew and to Jose Cachuela while sitting alert. Then the time for takeoff came.

The crew went to the airplane, took their positions and everything through engine start was normal. Then things began to happen. I was at the table and Andy was down below with the gunners and Illuminator Operator waiting to taxi and take off. It was normal for the NOS to sit in the forward area of the downstairs cargo compartment during takeoff. Then came a radio call. Our mission was changed from III Corps to IV Corps. I can hear Andy today, complaining to me "of all of the lucky guys, here you go again getting preferential treatment and not having to go to III Corps." I said something like, "Well if you want to, I'll trade with you and take the NOS and you can have the table and I'll take the next two III Corps missions". Much to my surprise, Andy said it was a deal and that he would take the table. So, just before taxiing out to the runway, I left all of my navigation equipment on the table and Andy and I traded seats. He sat at the table and I went down below and strapped in at the front of the cargo compartment. I remember looking at the gunners sitting up front and the IO sitting in the back.

Curiosity and a desire to be involved came over me. I never did like sitting down below as a "passenger," so at the last minute, as we were taxiing out and just before the takeoff roll, I decided to move to the jump seat to see what was going on in the cockpit.

In the cockpit of an AC-119G model, the Aircraft Commander sat in the left seat, the copilot in the right seat. The flight engineer sat in the middle and just behind the pilot and copilot. The table navigator was just slightly right and behind the copilot. The jump seat was a pull down seat in the companion way on the left side of the airplane which led from the cargo area to the cockpit area. From this seat I could see the pilot, copilot and the engineer. I couldn't see Andy as he was around on the right side of the cockpit.

The crew went through the normal checklist and engine run-up. Everything was normal. I remember that Tom really checked the engines thoroughly each time and made sure that we had full power since the airplane was known to be underpowered and overloaded. Before each takeoff, he made sure that we had full power before brake release. This night was no different. Tom was a very cautious pilot and

the crew respected him for it.

I remember receiving the usual clearances and finally taking the runway for the final takeoff clearance. The engines went to full power and we started our roll down the runway. Takeoff was normal and the airplane left the ground. Then after gaining about 100 to 150 feet, I heard someone say over the intercom that we had lost our right engine. I remember seeing the pilot and engineer pushing everything forward on the left engine and feathering the right engine. At about the same time we lost most of the electrical power. The lights, radios and intercom went out. I couldn't see the engine instrument lights anymore. The pilot, copilot and engineer were fighting to do everything to keep the airplane flying but being over weight, the AC-119G would just not maintain altitude, much less climb.

I remember sitting in the jump seat wearing a nomex (fire retardant) flying suit, helmet and gloves and saying to the plane, "Fly, fly, climb, climb, don't crash." Then we hit. You also do a little praying and use some other words. They say that "Oh shit" is often the last expression you hear from crew members during an emergency. I do have to say that I was no exception. Fortunately, they were not my last words.

Being a crew member and not being able to do anything but just sit is a terrible feeling. There is no doubt in my mind that the pilot, copilot and engineer did everything humanly possible to keep Shadow 78 flying. The time was about 22 minutes after midnight and it was very dark outside. From my seat I could see the head of the pilot, copilot and engineer silhouetted against the glass of the windshield. I could not see the table navigator.

When we hit, there was a horrible scraping, crunching sound from underneath and other noises I can't describe. I did not have shoulder straps, so my head went forward and between my legs. I literally kissed my butt. I must have lost my helmet at the same time. I was not aware of any fire. Yet.

All of the following happened in seconds, but it felt like a very long time. I remembered reading in the "Dash One", the AC119G Flight Manual, that upon a crash landing, the nose of the airplane tended to go forward and rotate under the fuselage. For some reason as we were sliding forward, I remembered this. I found out later that we had gone down in a dry rice paddy and that the right wing had hit a tree and that we were sliding forward at an angle.

As I sat there, with the airplane sliding forward at an angle, I started to see the cockpit roll under in a very slow dreamlike way. The right side started to go under first. If

you take your right hand and make a fist and then turn it slowly down and to the right, it would give you some idea of what I saw. I saw the copilot go over and down, then the pilot and then the flight engineer. It was just like riding a roller coaster over the top of a big hill. All I could do was hang on and wait my turn. There was no doubt in my mind that they were all killed and that I was next.

The next thing that happened seemed to occur in a split second. I felt myself turned and flung in a somersault head to toe and I thought that this was it. But suddenly everything stopped. I was just there. Silence. All the noise had stopped. Then I was aware that the plane was burning. I could hear the roar of the fire and feel heat, but it was completely dark where I was. I could hear the ammo “cooking off” in the fire. It was like being in the middle of a huge popcorn popper. All I could hear was: POP, POP, POP, POP, POP. My next thought was that I had survived the crash and now I was either going to burn to death or get shot by one of our own bullets flying around.

It was then that my training kicked in. I realized that I had to get out of there. What had happened was that the entire cockpit area had turned upside down and the top of the cockpit was now underneath the plane. I tried to move and couldn't, nor could I see anything. It was then that I realized that I was hanging upside down by my seat belt. I pushed back, released the belt and fell - about two inches. I took out a small flashlight that I always carried in the cigarette holder on the left sleeve of my flight suit. I found out that I was in a very small round area surrounded by crushed metal. I was upside down, in a fetal position, and thought that I was trapped in a snarl of twisted metal.

In fact I remember the accident investigators later asking me many times where I was. They had visited the crash area and they said that it was impossible for me to be where I said I was. The plane had completely disintegrated. To this day I don't think that they believed me. I must have gotten out just before the plane disintegrated. There was a picture of the burned out rubble in the Air Force Times.

But it was all true. I saw, just to my left and slightly on an angle, the astrodome, which normally is on the roof of the cockpit. I saw the escape handle and immediately pulled it and kicked at the dome. The whole thing went out. I started to climb out head first and got about half way out. But I couldn't go any further; I still had my parachute harness on and it was caught on the wreckage as I was trying to squeeze through the small opening. I immediately went back through my small hole, struggled to take off the harness and started out the hole again, head first. I was

climbing out and was trying to stand up but couldn't. I couldn't understand why. Then I discovered we had crashed against a dike on the right side, which had stopped the airplane and saved my life. The roof of the cockpit had crashed through the dike and the astro dome ended up just on the other side of it. When I was trying to stand up I was actually going downhill on the side of the dike, but it took me a few seconds to realize it. I ended up rolling down the side of the dike. When I looked around toward the back of the plane, it was blazing and the popping sounds filled the night. I could see the two booms sticking up and that was all. The rest was in flames. I didn't think that anyone was back there. There was no cockpit left that I could see.

We were taught to get away from a burning plane as fast as you can in case it blows up. I remember this going through my mind. The plane had come to rest at the intersection of two rice paddy dikes. For some reason I went around the front of the plane from the right to the left side. I couldn't see or hear anyone, just a burning piece of twisted steel. I went around to the top of the other dike and went to the left side of the airplane. It was then that I thought I heard a voice. I started toward the rear of the plane on the left side. Then I saw Allen Chandler, the IO, coming toward me. When he got closer I could see that he had severe hand and face burns. I asked him if there was anyone else back there and he said no, that they were all dead. I decided we had better get away from the plane. I remember grabbing at Allen and stumbling toward the dike. Later, Allen told me he had just walked out of the rear of the airplane. There had been no airplane around him. It had completely disintegrated.

For whatever reason, I decided to go to the top of the dike. I still had my survival radio. I took it out and tried to contact the Tan Son Nhut tower - or anyone. But I couldn't get the radio to work and Allen did not have a radio on him.

It was then I realized that we were on top of the dike and silhouetted by the fire of the aircraft. I was thinking that we survived the crash and now we were going to get shot by the bad guys. Instead I heard the distinct sound of a helicopter. I again took out my flashlight and began to send SOS signals in the direction of the sound. It was an army HU-1E coming toward us. I kept flashing the SOS. He made a low and fast pass to look us over and then he circled and came right at us. He never did touch down. He hovered a few feet above the ground and I found myself looking down the barrel of a 50 caliber machine gun. All I could remember was that during our training program they told us if we wanted to identify ourselves to each other, to cuss, because the bad guys could not cuss very well in English. So, here I was cussing up a storm at the guy behind



Inspecting the crash site.

the 50 caliber and he was cussing at me at the same time. I guess that my cussing won him over, because he swung the gun around and grabbed at Chandler to pull him aboard and then me. As soon as my feet left the ground, he took off. This whole thing took seconds. Those army guys don't play around, but I tell you I was never so happy to see them. I never did find out who they were so that I could thank them.

They took us to the 3rd Army Field Hospital in Saigon and



Shadow 78

another story starts.

Because Allen had severe burns, they put him on a stretcher in an outside area with many lights. I remember about six to eight medics working on him. I found a bench a short distance

away and sat down. Then, when I looked up all of the lights were off and all of the people were gone. I looked around and saw a small light about 50 yards away. I went there and found a corpsman sitting by a desk. He asked where I came from and I told him that I got off of the helicopter and wanted to call my squadron. He said, "Were you in that crash?" I said, "Yes" and the next thing I knew he was on the phone and some medics came out.

It was then that I got a chance to use the phone. I called the squadron and guess who answered? Of course, it was Jose,

who was still the duty officer. He answered in the usual manner and I said "Jose", he must have recognized my voice and immediately said in a quivering voice, "Who is this?" I said "Bob" and I'll never forget this, He said in a very quiet and strange voice, really stretching the words out, "Where.... are.... you?" I guessed he thought that he was getting a direct call from either heaven or hell, since he had been told that the plane exploded and that everyone was dead. I told him what happened.

They put me in "ICU" for observation; it looked like a large gym. They gave me pills to put me to sleep, but I was too excited to sleep. Finally some army nurse gave me a shot and I went out like a light. I woke up the next morning to go back to the base but couldn't move. That's when they found out that I had a compression fracture in my lower back.

When I finally left the hospital and returned to the squadron, I was shocked to see the door to my room completely sealed off with yellow tape. I pinched myself to see if I was really alive.

I went off flying duty for about three months and became a permanent duty officer during that time. I just could not sit around in my room for very long. Allen was sent to Japan and finally back to the States where they could care for his severe burns. Allen and I have contacted each other a few times over the years and I am happy to say that both of us are doing fine.

I had a few burn spots on my face and wrists. All of the Velcro on my nomex flying suit was melted and fused together. I honestly don't remember the fire being that hot. The suit was also torn around the seat area. I still have it.



Crash Site of Shadow 78

I remember that first flight after going back to flying duty. By that time we were Cambodian regulars. It wasn't the flight, but the takeoff that worried me. After the first takeoff it then became routine again.

I had put most of this out of my mind, although one never really forgets, and moved on with my life. That is, until I paid my first visit to the Vietnam Memorial Wall. It is another experience I will never forget. I have visited the Wall many times as my daughter lives in nearby Bethesda. But

I will never forget that first visit. Getting the information from the directory, walking down the path, finding panel 11W, lines 62 thru 66 and then seeing the names of my crew members permanently etched in stone. What a shock. It brings back old memories very vividly. I realized, that, but for a few twists of fate, my name could be up there. Believe me my eyes welled up, tears came, even though I tried to hold them back, and I just took a step back and stared at the wall. For a few moments there was no one around me, just me, my thoughts and those names on that wall.



Allen Chandler, IO

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1970



Allen & Barbara

I joined the Air Force on November 4, 1962 at the onset of the Cuban Missile Crisis. My first tour of duty in Vietnam was from 1967 to 1968 as a crew chief on C-123s with the 315th Air Commando Wing, 19th Air Commando Squadron, stationed at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon. On January 30, 1968, the Tet Offensive started and we, to say the least, were surprised by the Viet Cong attacks. I spent that

first night in a fox hole on the edge of the flight line with a security policeman. Immediately, I began thinking that my scheduled departure date to leave Vietnam on February 13, 1968 would be delayed until enemy hostilities were defeated. I might have to extend my tour! Within a few days, U.S. and South Vietnamese armies (with a lot of help from U.S. Army AH-1G Cobra Gunships that had only arrived in country a few months before) had the place under control and I caught my freedom bird as scheduled.

After taking some leave, I reported for duty at Offutt AFB near Omaha, Nebraska in late February 1968 and was assigned to the 55th Field Maintenance Squadron. I started as a washer in the Aircraft Washing Shop. When I made Staff Sergeant, I was moved up to the NCOIC (Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge) of the Aircraft Tire Shop, Aircraft Egress System Shop and Aircraft Corrosion Control Shop.

In 1969 when I heard the Air Force was recruiting men to become Illuminator Operators on AC-119 gunship crews, I decided to apply for flight status. I knew that it was probable I would eventually be sent back to Vietnam for a second tour, so I volunteered, thereby somewhat controlling my future while achieving flight status.

Before I could report for gunship training, I needed flight

gear. Offutt's supply section needed to know my flight classification so they could look up what gear to issue to me. As with a lot of things at that time, my assignment was "classified". My orders only specified that I would be flying on C-119G aircraft; no reference about gunships or my crew position. Because supply didn't know what to issue for "classified", they called up the chain of command. Someone in SAC headquarters told them to "issue one of everything" to me, which they did.

So here I was, going back to Vietnam to become a crewmember on a combat gunship, but not the type that saved me at Tan Son Nhut in 1968. This was a fixed wing AC-119G "Shadow" gunship, not a helicopter "Cobra" gunship. And this time, I would be flying onboard the gunship as a combat crewmember, helping fight the enemy. After flight training at Clinton County Air Force Reserve Base and combat crew training at Lockbourne AFB in Ohio, I attended survival schools at Fairchild AFB, Washington and Clark Air Base, Philippines.

While training in Ohio, I had driven back to Omaha and proposed to Barbara. The possibility that I might not survive was left unspoken, but we chose to do the sensible thing and have the wedding when I got back from Vietnam in February 1971. When I shipped out to Southeast Asia (SEA), I left the desert and arctic flight gear at home.

I arrived in Vietnam in February 1970 and spent a week or so at Phan Rang Air Base for in-country processing with the 17th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) and Shadow gunship flight duty check-outs. I was assigned to and reported for duty with C Flight of the 17th SOS at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in late February, almost two years to the day from the time I left Tan Son Nhut in 1968.

My first combat missions were flown with several different crews as I filled in where needed. By mid-March, I was permanently assigned to the crew of Aircraft Commander (AC) Pilot First Lieutenant Thomas L. Lubbers. Other crew members were Co-Pilot, First Lieutenant Charles M. Knowles; Navigator/NOS, Major Robert “Bob” Bokern; Navigator/NOS, Major Meredith “Andy” Anderson; Flight Engineer, Master Sergeant Joseph C. Jeszeck; Gunner, Staff Sergeant Robert F. Fage Jr.; and Gunner, Sergeant Michael J. Vangelisti.

Our work schedule was to fly combat missions five nights in a row (all flights were flown between sunset and sunrise), then pull one night on alert (even though we also flew most of those nights) and then get a night off. One night right after we went Winchester (out of ammo) and were heading home, we spotted a convoy of sampans; so, the pilot flew low and we dumped the empty brass on them. We thought at least we would scare them and it did work. Everybody on those sampans started jumping overboard into the river. However, when we got back to base; we got in trouble for not turning in the empty brass casings.

Another night, nothing was happening so Jeszeck flashed the gunship’s flight lights (wing tips and tail). Some fool shot at us and we identified his position. We did a steep turn and opened fire on his position. He must have been sitting on an ammo dump because there was one hell of an explosion.

Last Flight of Shadow 78

The day of April 27, 1970 started out with our usual routine. I got up around noon or 1 PM. Then Fage and I had a late lunch, checked out the BX and went by the post office to check mail. I sent Barbara a letter. We reported for duty around 6 or 7 PM. This flight would have been around my 60th combat mission, so after three months on this assignment, I was settling into a routine. We (Shadow 78) were scheduled for the latest take-off time that night, so we were designated the second alert crew. The gunship we were going to fly that night was Aircraft 53-8155. It had served with dozens of Air Force units from Alaska to Europe in its seventeen years of service and had been converted to an AC-119G in 1968.

After putting our flight gear on the aircraft and doing the preflight checks, we went back to Shadow Operations and started the alert duty. As the IO, it was my job to go get the in-flight meals. This involved driving the Shadow Ops crew-cab pickup all the way around the runway to the other side of the base. In the meantime, the aircraft commander, Lt. Lubbers and the assigned table navigator (either Maj. Anderson or Maj. Bokern) for that night’s mission would attend pre-mission

briefings on weather and the latest intelligence in the area of operations. I returned to Shadow Ops with our eight white boxes of in-flight lunches, and it wasn’t long before our crew was assembled by Lt. Lubbers for our mission briefing. We were given “the day’s codes” (to identify ourselves as friendly if something was to happen to us) and our call sign word which would be “Shadow 78” for that night’s flight.



Allen

As a side note, post-mission de-briefings were also standard for Lt. Lubbers and the table navigator, even though they had already completed a written mission report to submit to Shadow Operations. We all had long duty hours but they had even more.

Around 10:30 or 11:00 PM, our full crew of eight proceeded to our gunship located in one of the five concrete revetments just east of Shadow Ops to perform another pre-flight inspection. After we each completed our final ground checks, we had engines started about 11:45 PM. SSgt. Fage, Sgt. Vangelisti and I were strapped in on the gun deck. I was just forward of #1 gun and Fage was next to me. Van was on Fage’s other side nearest the cockpit. Maj. Bokern was in the NOS seat, a pull-down jump seat in the companion way on the left side of the airplane which led from the cargo area to just inside cockpit. Maj. Anderson was at the Navigator table, and the others were in their usual places, i.e. 1st Lt. Lubbers in the left seat, 1st Lt. Knowles in the right seat, and MSgt Jeszeck in the engineer’s jump seat. And so began April 28, 1970, the last day for Aircraft S/N 53-8155 and the last flight of Shadow 78.

It was five minutes after midnight on April 28, 1970 when we started our take-off roll. Just after we got airborne, less than a minute into the flight, something happened to the left engine. The cockpit chatter changed. With my headset, I could hear the intercom but not the radio. We were used to hearing things like “gear up”, “flaps up” and “engine RPM.” There was some “dead air” on the intercom and then they were calling off the EMERGENCY CHECKLIST. The left engine was feathered and someone asked if the nose gear was up. I responded that I would check and started to un-strap to go check. That was when we hit the ground and had our first “bounce”. I had never gotten all the way up or maybe I was pulled back down. It all happened so fast.

The total flight from lift off to full stop was way under two minutes (1 ½ miles at about 90 MPH). It takes a lot longer to tell about all of this than it took to happen.

With the second ground hit “bounce”, the mid-wing fuel tank broke open and sprayed fuel all over the cargo (gun) deck and the three of us strapped in on the gun deck. It

didn't fully sink in that we were crashing until the third "bounce". The bounces were just seconds apart so the first 3 bounces occurred in less than 15 seconds and in the first 30 seconds of the "crash". I think it was about then that the aircraft turned sideways and kept sliding through what I later learned were rice paddies and the "bounces" were the plane hitting the dikes.

Then the flare launcher, which weighed about 2500 lbs., broke loose and shot forward, pinning the three of us down and setting the fuel on fire. I could feel myself burning. I think Fage and Van were being burned, too. Then, just as we were coming to a stop, the left engine (the one they feathered), broke loose and came through the fuselage. The engine actually freed me by cutting my seatbelt loose and knocking the flare launcher off me. The engine flying through the cargo bay pulled me up and into the center of the cargo deck. It picked up Fage and Van and carried them across the cargo deck and into the GPU. This happened in less than a second, but I can still see them being picked up and slamming into that GPU, and then the right wall opened up and the engine carried both of them out of the plane.

About two months later (I was in the hospital at Offutt AFB), I told my fiancé about seeing them go out that wall; then I just stopped remembering that it happened. I didn't want to remember what I had seen, so I didn't. It was many years later that those moments returned to my conscious memory, but I haven't forgotten since. Even today, I remember seeing Fage and Van, my fellow crewmembers and my two best friends at that time being crushed by that engine.



One Engine

The plane came to a stop. It had been well under two minutes from lift off to total stop. I started to shout, "Everyone get out! The plane is on fire!" Even though I knew that anyone left in the plane would know we had crashed and the plane was on fire, I kept yelling. I

got out of the wreckage by going through the hole on the left side created by the engine that had broken loose. I was still on fire at this point. I raced away from the plane. I had lost my helmet and my head hurt, I knew my hands were burning and I think my head was too, but the adrenalin and pain somehow kept me moving.

Once I was outside the burning plane, I rolled around on the ground to put out the fire that was burning me. The plane's flames were behind me and lit up the area. The first thing I saw was a Vietnamese guy sort of crouched down running between two buildings. I was sure we had been shot down and he was coming to get us. I had my .38 revolver

but could not get it out because my hands were so burned. In reality, we had crashed into the man's yard and he was running to get away from the burning wreckage. I circled around to the front of what was left of our aircraft where I found Major Bokern. There we were, only the two of us. The plane was pretty much destroyed. I don't know if he told me, or if I just knew, the other crew members were gone! I told him to take my radio and call for help because I saw his radio had been smashed. He said, "Your radio isn't working." I looked down and saw that my radio had also been smashed. He got out his 29 cent penlight flashlight and started flashing what I assumed was Morse code to an aircraft coming towards us. The aircraft turned out to be a Huey helicopter coming to see what had happened and to help us if they could.

Having been on fire, I was pretty much a mess of burned flesh covered by a lot of rice paddy mud. Blood, mud and burned flesh -- I thought I was going to die. The crew got us into the helicopter and took off. I was laying there screaming at them and they were holding me down, trying to keep me from becoming hysterical. My screaming was making them think I was even worse than I looked and that was pretty bad. What I was trying to tell them while screaming above the helicopter noise was that there was a seat belt from the helicopter seat swinging around smashing me in the face. With the noise and excitement of getting us to the hospital, they didn't understand what I was trying to tell them and just kept holding me down.

According to the accident report and medical records, I was in surgery at the 3rd Field Hospital in Saigon ten minutes after the time of the crash. That is one reason they were able to do so much for me. Typically with the kinds of burns and other injuries I had, they didn't expect me to survive with all of my limbs. The corpsman came by and said, "We are going to have to cut your boots off to check your feet! Is that OK?" I said, "Do anything you want to; just keep me alive."

It turned out I was not as badly hurt as was originally thought and they put me back together pretty well. The first medical report at the 3rd Field Hospital on April 28 said I had 39% second and third degree burns of my body. I also had lacerations to the back of my head, lacerations above my eyes, hemorrhage of left eye and a lot of cuts to the exposed parts of my body. On the second report on May 12, 1970 they said I had 12% deep second degree burns on my face, both ears, back of head, both hands, and forearms. I also had lacerations on my head (the back of my scalp was torn loose), effusion (swelling) of my right knee, reason unknown, lacerations above left eye, hemorrhage of left eye and a lot of cuts and scratches. I also had an infection to my right ear that was not responding to treatment.

Major Bokern saw me into surgery. Then he called Shadow Operations and sat down to wait for me to come out of surgery. That night, he had been put to bed and when he woke in the morning, he couldn't move. They found out he had a compression fracture in his lower back.

He had been in the front of the plane as the nose rolled over on itself, crushing everybody in the cockpit except him because he was strapped into the jump seat the furthest back. He tried to climb out of the astrodome but couldn't. His seat belt was still on. When he released his seat belt, he fell out and landed on his head. At least he got out!

I did not know that Maj. Bokern had called the squadron and told them we were alive and in the hospital, so you can understand my surprise when I woke up to find my roommate and some of the other guys sitting beside my bed.

The next day (about 6 AM on April 29, less than 36 hours after the crash), I was air evacuated to the burn ward at Camp Zama in Japan. I was not able to move for the first several days. I laid in bed with a pile

of pillows on my chest and my hands resting on the top. This lowered the blood pressure and the pain in my hands. Two times a day I was taken for "treatment" in the "bath". I was lowered



The other Engine

into a warm whirlpool bath and as the water softened the bandages and skin, nurses debrided (picked off) the bandages and dead skin. Obviously, this was miserable, but it was nothing compared to the sulfamyelone that came after the bath -- now that hurt! The second day that I was in the burn ward, two people came to see me. One was the Red Cross lady who wrote some letters for me. The other was a hospital administrator, who brought me some reading material. It was the Social Security rules on "total disability". I was lying in bed 24 hours a day and all I had to do was listen as one of the guys read to me about the rules on total disability.

After I was ambulatory, they assigned me to assist others. The first person I was assigned to was the only other Air Force guy in the ward. This guy had been climbing down a rope to rescue someone when his Jolly Green helicopter was shot down. It landed on top of him. I sat by his bed and talked to him, trying to make him feel better. He had burns on 97% of his body. He didn't make it. That put things back in perspective for me. I was alive.

I spent about two weeks in Japan and on May 12 they flew me back to the States. I had been asked what base I wanted

to go to. When transferring to another base in the Air Force, you always get to request an assignment, but there are never promises that you'll get your first choice. This was one of the times when they really meant it. If the base had a hospital that could care for me, I could go there. I chose Offutt AFB because that was where Barbara was. I was in the hospital there for about 9 weeks, the first two in isolation because of the infection in my right ear. They treated it by removing the top ¼ inch of my ear and I was released as an outpatient. Barbara and I got married on July 12, 1970 and went on our honeymoon while I was still technically assigned to the hospital as a patient. When we returned, we were notified that my new assignment would be March AFB in California. We left Omaha in late July to start our new life together. I was one of the lucky ones. I was alive, fairly well healed and had a new loving wife.

What was the cause of the crash? The accident investigation board found that the bushing on the propeller shaft of the failed left engine was installed improperly. This was discovered because when the left engine broke away from the crash, it did not burn up.

We had two of the best Shadow pilots in the unit and no one on the crew could have prevented the crash. It was well known that the AC-119s had a lack of horsepower. We tried to cram in all the ammo we could on each flight so we almost always took off at or near maximum weight. Consequently, if an aircraft lost an engine on takeoff, it would result in a negative climb rate. When one engine failed at an altitude of just 120 feet, the other engine did not have enough power to bring the gear up and maintain flight. From the humor of the "Can we cut off your boots?" story to the tragedy of people needlessly dying, the whole thing was typical of Vietnam.

In December 1986, I went to the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington D.C. for the first time and I found my crewmates' names. It was already dark and the spotlights were the only illumination. I can't ever express how I felt. I think that was when my memory opened up and I started remembering what really happened, what I had seen,

I often go to the Wall and stand in front of Panel 11W, looking at lines 62 through 66, staring at crewmates' names permanently etched in stone. The names are at my eye level. I just stand there, and ask myself why. Shadow 78 and lost crew members live on in my memory. Especially its last, short flight.

I retired from the Air Force in 1981 after 21 years of active duty service.



Terrance (Terry) William Bott, Pilot 18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom, 1970-71

My hometown is Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where I was born November 15, 1946. I graduated from Bishop Canevin High School in 1964. I graduated from Duquesne University and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant through ROTC in January 1969. From pilot training at Williams AFB, AZ, I received an assignment to the AC-119K.

During my tour with the 18th SOS I flew as co-pilot and checked out as pilot. While at DaNang (Sep 70 - Apr 70) I served as additional duty Moral Officer and Billeting Officer. I was reassigned to NKP RTAFB, Thailand (Apr 71 - Sep 71) where I also served as Assistant Safety Officer.

From the AC-119, I completed training in the B-52F then flew the B-52H with the 524th Bomb Squadron, Wurtsmith AFB, MI. I retired in April 1996 with over 27 years of active service. My decorations and awards include the Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross w/1 device, Meritorious Service Medal w/3 devices, and the Air Medal w/8 devices.

Following retirement I worked with the Joint War Fighter Center as an Air Operations Instructor/Controller. I am currently Deputy Chief B-52 Weapons System Team (Chief, Modernization and Sustainmen).

One of my best memories from S.E.A. was getting to go home all three times I was there. One of my most memorable flights was when we engaged on target and took AAA from two sites. From both scanners we heard the ever calming, BREAK RIGHT! BREAK LEFT! While attempting to execute that particular maneuver, all hell broke loose. While in a rather interesting "right-left" break, and still in the middle of those colorful golf balls with tails, we heard a loud BANG and the roar of air coming in from somewhere it's not supposed to come in from. The airplane began to shake, rattle and roll. I can still see our panels vibrating so fast the flight instruments were a blur. The pilot (Ben Collins) rolled level and started a climb. Someone shouted "We're hit". Ben and I looked at each other across the cockpit and mouthed the word all pilots use to calm themselves in tight spots. Shit! It worked!! Suddenly, the vibration stopped. The roaring wind was stilled. And a meek voice from the rear reported, "We're OK, so-and-so (name removed to keep from being hunted the rest of my life)

grabbed the cable and activated the smoke ejector doors."

Once, while flying with a crew as stand-in copilot, we engaged a single truck. Soon we were getting hosed from all directions. We were on about our third or fourth break out of the orbit when I said to myself. "These people are nuts. Why are they trying to kill me over one lousy truck?" I decided to voice my learned opinion. I said something like, "Why are we trying to get ourselves killed over one truck. What did this guy ever do to you?" Since I was the highest ranking Lt. on the aircraft, the pilot opted to ignore me. A few minutes later, the FLIR operator discovered that the "single" truck was just one of many. We hacked a bunch of trucks that night. I remember being very quiet on the way home. For the record, I am no longer the youngest Lt. around and I still think they were nuts!

There are scores of things I remember about my tour in Stinger gunships. But the most significant are the memories of how much I learned from each one of the men I served with.

I arrived as the youngest officer in the DaNang Forward Operating Location. My first night there I was met and welcomed by a man I will always call Major Tom Wallbanger. He was remembered as the guy with a pair of Green Bay Packers season tickets and a moldy sausage hanging on the walls of his room. Back in a corner was a pair of low quarter shoes that had not been touched since the day he arrived in-country. From that evening on, I was befriended and mentored by some of the finest men I've ever met.

During that year, officers and enlisted alike taught me more about flying airplanes and what "airmanship" means than I learned in any three year period of my twenty-one years of active flying positions. Every student I ever flew with walked away from the airplane carrying something I learned while flying with those men. I took their examples of how to know when to follow and when to lead and applied them in every assignment I had. I can't count how many times after being congratulated for something I managed to do right that I used the phrase, "I learned that from a guy I was with in Vietnam."

I had a wonderful career as an Air Force pilot. I have the men of the 18th Special Operations Squadron to thank for setting that up for the lieutenant.



Claude "Brad" Bradshaw, Navigator 18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom, 1971

I flew the Stinger aircraft out of Nakhon Phanom as a navigator for 90 days. I came from AC-130 gunships out of Ubon. About a dozen of us, mostly navigators, were given the choice between a staff job in Saigon or flying out of NKP. All of us volunteered for NKP. It was quite different from Ubon.

One night we were 45-minutes late for a take-off because we could not locate our FLIR operator. When we finally found him, he was dead drunk. Our crew positions were right next to each other. I've been a lifelong teetotaler, but I've been tolerant of others drinking because it was the military. But the guy sitting next to me was utterly worthless on the mission. We ran into a little activity and he couldn't function in his position. He talked a lot, but wouldn't do anything. We got through the mission successfully and came back, and of course, being a "Band of Brothers," I never thought of telling the Commander about the episode because it might get the drunk in trouble, but it would also get the pilot in trouble.

The following night I flew the same mission with the same crew. The same thing happened, except this time we were prepared and started looking for the guy. We found him in the NCO Club, dead drunk. We grabbed him, got him on the aircraft, and made an on-time take-off. During the mission I had time to think about the situation. By not reporting the prior incident I had become part of the problem and could be court martialed, along with the FLIR operator and the pilot. In combat, things like that don't worry you, so much. Also, if you had a personality conflict, all you had to say was you didn't like somebody and psst, they'd take you off the crew. The Air Force long ago found out people who didn't like each other tend to kill each other because they spend too much time looking at the problem between them. So, I talked to our young pilot and told him we needed to do something, and explained how to do it so probably no one would get in trouble. I recommended going to the Commander and telling him I had a conflict with the guy, and one of us had to come off the crew. I figured he'd fight to keep me on and get the guy off, and that's what happened. The Major was taken off, for the conflict between us and not for being drunk.

On one mission we were in the Plain of Jars, and a MIG-21 was launched out of China, as we learned after the fact. There was a C-130, AC-130, our aircraft, and a small observation aircraft. Lion Control gave the warning, and used the Fishes Mouth as a reference. I didn't have a

map in front of me, but Fishes Mouth was a prominent navigation point. TheMiGwas coming up and he was going to clean house with somebody. I thought he was after the 130 because about that time it had shut down and gone to three engines. So now they were on three engines and I thought maybe that's why theMiGwas launched. We knew it, theMiGknew it, and I figured he could possibly outrun all of us. We were all heading south, but the pilot, I think his name was Brazil, in the C-130 overboosted his engines and came screaming down under us, and the scanner in the back saw it and said, "Hey, there's an aircraft coming up under us." Well, I knew theMiGwas about 75 to 100 miles from us. But the rest of the crew assumed it was the fighter and the guy next to me almost bailed out. Somebody had to calm him down. Anyway, it was really close, because we were trying to dive, getting as close to the ground as possible without crashing (you wanted to get kind of lost in the radar ground clutter). The Mig, for whatever reason, came very close. I can still remember the control screaming at us. They were the most excited ones in this whole activity, saying, "It's going to get you, Stinger! Get on the deck! Get on the deck! As low as you can!" TheMiGcame sweeping in under us but did not fire. To this day I do not know why he didn't fire. It was a MIG-21, and they can launch air-to-air missiles. I have not solved that mystery.

Finallyl, theMiGgot one of our fighters, an F-4, on his tail. By this time, were close to the Thai border. It may have been that I was so busy thinking about it. I can't say precisely when we went across the border into Thailand. The F-4 pilot said, in a very calm voice, "This is Gunsmoke. Request permission to shoot." I don't know why he asked. I don't know why he just didn't shoot him down, but maybe it was his rules of engagement. It was quiet for a nanosecond, and then we heard a bunch of guys using a lot of foul language, saying "Kill the SOB." About 30 seconds went by, then at 45 seconds the F-4 pilot said he had broken away. He had never gotten permission to fire.

I suspect it had something to do with the Thai border. We may have been over Thailand, and could have caused an international incident. So, it was probably a smart thing in retrospect, but we were perfectly willing to shoot him down at the time.



Robert Andrew Bright, Crew Chief

18th SOS, Phan Rang, Nakhon Phanom, 1970-71



I was born in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1950. I consider Fayetteville to be my home town but I graduated from Hope Mills High School in Hope Hills, North Carolina in 1968. I joined the Air Force at Fayetteville on 1 April 1969 before I got drafted by the Army.

I was assigned to the 4415 Training Squadron for training at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio from July thru October 1970. I served at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam in the 18th Special Operations

Squadron from November into December 1970 when I was transferred to Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai (NKP) Air Base, Thailand where I served until my DEROS in November 1971.

As a Stinger crew chief, I worked long hard hours; 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. It was our responsibility to keep the aircraft in top flight condition. We had to keep the aircraft flying. We maintenance troops had to beg, borrow, and steal to get parts to fix our aircraft. But it was worth it and very satisfying to get missions off on time in safe and sound aircraft that would bring our aircrews safely back to base. I will always remember the comradeship with my fellow crew chiefs and the maintenance troops.

I separated from the regular Air Force at Eglin AFB, Florida in August 1972. I was in the Air National Guard 13th Tactical Fighter Wing working on F-105s and F-4s from April 1978 to March 1984 at Andrews AFB, Maryland. Then from March 1984 to March 1987, I was assigned to the Air Force Reserves 403rd Weather Unit working on C-130s at Keesler AFB, Mississippi. I retired from the 145th Air National Guard Unit (C-130s) in North Carolina in October 1995. My entire military career was in maintenance. I currently live in Mount Pleasant, North Carolina.



Donald E. Brogan, IO

71st SOS, Phan Rang, 1968-69

I was born in Evansville, Indiana in 1940. After graduating from Bosse High School in 1958, I soon found out that good jobs were far and few between in the Evansville area, so I joined the United States Air Force in February 1960.

I served in the 71st SOS from April 1968 to July 1969 as a loadmaster/illuminator operator at Bakalar AFB, Indiana; Lockbourne AFB, Ohio; and Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam. We had many exciting and memorable missions in Vietnam. One evening mission turned into a true dusk to dawn marathon, as we fired 68,000 rounds and launched 12 flares in three sorties. Another mission, among many, that left our aircrew frustrated was flying for hours tracking lights on the ground, but we could not get clearance to fire. With no clearance, we broke off at dawn to RTB.

In Tay Ninh Province at Black Mountain (Nui Ba Dinh Mountain), we arrived to find Huey gunships flying low attacking enemy positions on the mountain. When they had to leave for fuel and ammo, we were tasked with attacking the mountain gun sites of 51mm AAA. During this attack, while working between guns 2 and 3, one of our gunners, Sgt Greg Terrell, was blown across the cargo bay to the

right side of the aircraft. I reached him and determined that he had been hit, but not too severely. The pilot was told what had happened, and being close to Winchester (out of ammo), we broke off our attack and flew to Tan Son Nhut for medical assistance. After landing and parking, an inspection of the aircraft showed 20 hits.

I will always remember the time I spent in gunships as most enjoyable. My training into a new aircraft system was a great experience. The times at Phan Rang when we got together with our Aussie friends will always be remembered. A fellow crewman getting hit will always be a memory both good and bad, good in that the injury was not severe. My time with the 71st Gunship Squadron was a part of a long association with this unit, both on C-119s and AC-119s.

After Vietnam, I flew on C-130s as a loadmaster, spent 3 years in the Army with an artillery battery, and after retraining for the 4th time, served as munitions maintenance supervisor with the 434th TFW, 930th Maintenance Squadron. After 26 years of service, I retired from the Air Force as a Master Sergeant at my last duty station, Grissom AFB, Indiana in December of 1986.



Bruce Lee Byrd, Gunner

18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom, 1971

I was born in Detroit, Michigan, but grew up in Richmond,



Virginia where I graduated from Hermitage High School in 1965. After high school I didn't know what I wanted to be or where I wanted to go. I had not traveled much and thought I wanted to fly, so one day I went down to the local recruiter, took a lot of tests and the next thing I knew I had no hair and was saying "Yes sir" to just about everybody. That was in December 1968.

In 1970, while stationed at George AFB, California, I volunteered for gunship duty along with a buddy (Dick Atkinson) and we both wound up flying on Stinger gunships. From January until September 1971, I was flying from DaNang AB, Vietnam before being reassigned to NKP, Thailand where I completed my tour in December 1971.

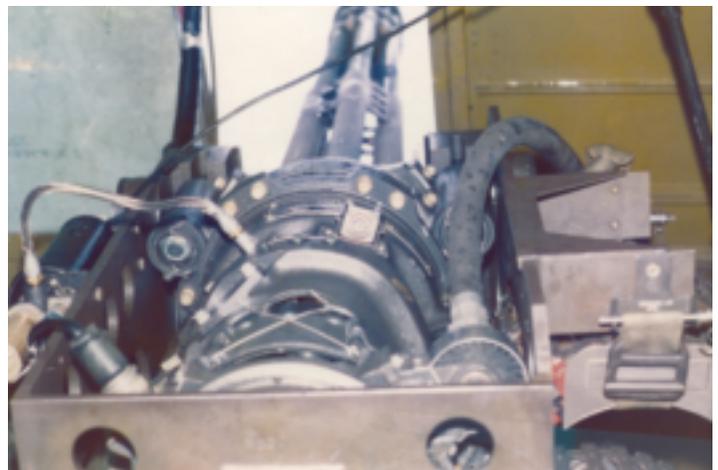
My most exciting AC-119 mission occurred on Halloween night 1971, near Ban Ban, Plain of Jars, Laos. I had a celebration planned that night after the mission since I had gotten a promotion and was sewing on Staff Sergeant Stripes after midnight. The moon was nearly full. It took almost an hour to fly to the target area - lots of time to think about what might be waiting for us. Bill Petrie was scanning that night from the right side of the aircraft and I was on the left. Unknown to us, the North Vietnamese had a little surprise planned for us. They had apparently wired a battery to some headlights on a damaged truck on one of the roads, and then placed a group of antiaircraft guns around it in a radius equal to our firing orbit. Just after we rolled into the firing circle, the entire sky opened up. It looked like every antiaircraft gun in Laos was firing at us. Streams of red and green tracers were flying at us from all directions; flack exploding above and below us. It seemed impossible that we could escape from that mess.

Bill was calling breaks to the left and at the same time I was also calling breaks to the right, but due to some malfunction in the intercom box, we could not hear each others calls. The AC could hear both of us and we were in a pretty miserable situation to say the least. After one

particularly hard break to the left, the airplane was almost at a 90-degree angle, and I was staring at the ground out the left door with a twin stream of tracers coming right up at us. All I could do was key my microphone - it was too late to move the airplane - but my loud yell certainly got everybody's attention. Somehow we all managed to maneuver through the barrage of AAA without getting hit. We finished the mission safely and returned to NKP. Everyone was completely exhausted from the ordeal - I drank half off a beer and went to bed.

I flew 141 combat missions on Stinger gunships, with pilots Don Main, Al Mokerski, Don Johnson, Earl Glass, and Al Bareras to mention a few. After my Southeast Asia tour I felt that a different calling in life beckoned, so I separated from the Air Force at Minot AFB, ND in September 1972. In 1974, I earned my BS at Virginia Tech and became a petroleum geophysicist working in the oil industry all over the U.S. and in quite a few foreign locales. In 1981, I earned a MBA from the University of Denver. Since 1991, I have operated an oil & gas consulting business based in Houston. I travel quite a bit and in 1995 I returned to Vietnam on business and revisited the old U.S. airbase at DaNang - a trip that brought back quite a few old memories.

You can't go through any kind of combat situation without being changed somehow. I will always remember the camaraderie and trust that each of us on the crew placed in the other and the amazing adventure we all shared. It was dangerous, terrifying, exciting, exhausting, and a thousand other things all rolled up in one. Most of all, I will always remember the sights and sounds and smells of that old airplane, and all of its quirks and rattles and dents.



20 MM Gatling Gun on the AC-119K



William Stratton Callaghan, Pilot

71st & 17th SOS, Nha Trang, Phan Rang, 1969

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.



Don Carlson, Pilot

17th SOS, 18th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, Nakhon Phanom, 1970-71

I graduated from Colorado State College (now University of Northern Colorado) in August 1968. I completed Undergraduate Pilot Training at Reese AFB, Lubbock, TX in October 1969. After training in C-A/C-119G



and Jungle Survival, I was assigned to the 17th SOS and stationed at Tan Son Nhut AB, Saigon, South Vietnam in May

1970. I completed my normal tour with R & R travels to Hong Kong for Christmas and later to Sydney for summer vacations. I extended my Southeast Asia tour six months, after a thirty-day leave in Europe and the USA. As of August 31, 1971, I completed 228 combat missions in the AC-119G Shadow gunship.

On September 9, 1971, I was assigned to the 18th SOS in AC-119K Stinger gunships at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand. I flew 25 missions in the 119K over Steel Tiger and Barrel Roll in Laos. I flew my last mission December 1, 1971; almost colliding with two F-4s who were flying AAA Cap.

I returned to the U.S. A. to a KC-135 assignment at Beale AFB, CA. After spending Christmas at home in Colorado, I returned to Beale to a Post-Christmas surprise assignment change; B-52Gs at Beale. I returned to the Southeast Asia Theater in September 1972 on the Island of Guam, Anderson AFB; spending another birthday overseas and losing only eight months of combat pay! I flew 50

Linebacker II combat missions in the B-52G from Guam over South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam. I took part in the 1972 Christmas Campaign over Hanoi flying two missions. On our way to our target on the first mission, we observed an AC-130 Spectre gunship firing on a target near Laos (small world!). We lost 10 B-52 aircraft during that short North Vietnam campaign. Many of our comrades did not return! I flew my last B-52 combat mission over the Mekong River in Cambodia just south of PP (Small World!).

I spent a little over three years in SAC. One of my crewmembers, an EWO, did a tour in AC-130 Spectre gunships (Small World!). I left Beale after receiving a T-38 assignment as an Instructor Pilot to UPT at Williams AFB, AZ. After spending a little over four years at Williams AFB, I flew my last USAF flight on October 18, 1979. I resigned my Regular Commission and separated from the AF, leaving behind eleven memorable years filled with many great and grand comrades and with stories which can and cannot be told. I was hired at Air California, a regional California Carrier, in May 1980. I flew for Air Cal for seven years while upgrading to Captain. In July of 1987, Air California was purchased by American Airlines. I flew the remaining eighteen years at American Airlines also upgrading to Captain. I flew B-737, MD-80, B-757, and B-767 aircraft as a co-pilot and Captain during my Airline career.

I married Dee on July 12, 1975 in Sacramento, CA. Shadow Marty Noonan came to the wedding. We were blessed with our first child, Autumn Brooks, on May 29, 1976. Our second blessing came on October 3, 1980; Matthew Micah. I retired on September 7, 2005 with my last flight to Honolulu, HI.

Dee and I are spending retirement in our beautiful home in Corona, CA.



Dale E. Cartee, Navigator.

18th SOS, DaNang, 14th SOW Phan Rang, 1970-71



I was born in 1933 in Baxter Springs, Kansas. I grew up in Buhl, Idaho and graduated from Buhl High School, June 1951. The Korean War started while I was in high school. I earned my B. S. Ag. Ed at the University of Idaho in June 1955 and was commissioned through

the ROTC program. I entered active duty in November 1955.

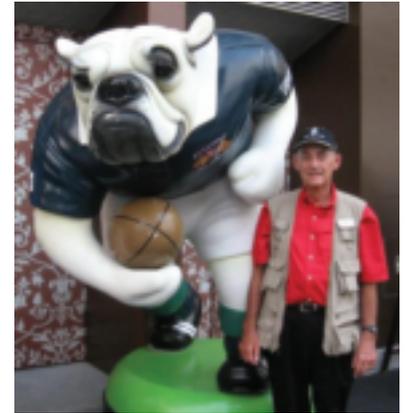
In 1969, after completing an MS at San Diego State College, I received orders to the 18th SOS at Phan Rang AB. From there I was sent PCA to DaNang AB where Larry Juday, Doug Frost, Mal Morrison and I joined Mike Newmeyer's crew. Jim Curran replaced Mike as A/C after Mike rotated home. I served as the Navigator on the crew until I was reassigned to the 14th SOW Headquarters Standardization Section at Phan Rang in October 1970. There, I had the honor of flying with the crews of both the 17th SOS and the 18th SOS at all the forward operating locations in Vietnam and Thailand. In the K model, the Nav and FLIR flew behind the blackout curtain. As an evaluator, I flew in the jump seat and got to see all of those tracers the rest of you called out over the trails.

We had an exciting moment one night with John Hodgson (Ops Officer) flying in the right seat as IP. We were coming in for landing at DaNang when John and I saw something moving on the approach end of the runway. As I was pushing the intercom button to say, "Go Around," John was pushing the throttles full forward. We cleared the tail of a Navy fighter by about 10 feet. The Navy plane had no landing or anti-collision lights on. He had taxied onto the active runway without tower clearance and obviously didn't look up final where we were coming with all lights on. We had a few heartfelt words with the Navy Ops Officer.

Things I will always remember about my time with AC-119 gunships include the coldest winter of my life while training at Lockbourne AFB, OH, the good friends I served with at DaNang, and the mission when we thought we were firing

at trucks only to discover they were actually elephants. I will also not forget the close support missions (3 the same night) for a Ranger company down by the Cambodia border when they had us firing within 10 meters of their perimeter.

After Vietnam, I was assigned as a Radar Navigator in B-52s with the 96th Bomb Wing (SAC) at Dyess AFB, TX. In February 1972, the Wing deployed to Guam and during the next 18 months I flew 143 combat missions over North and South Vietnam from Guam and U Tapao, Thailand. Upon returning to Dyess I became the Current Operations Officer for the 96th Bomb Wing, then Commanded the 96th Avionics Maintenance Squadron (the best job I ever had in the Air Force). A year later I became the Dyess AFB Mobility officer. I retired in July 1980, as a Lt. Col. with 25 years service and 4,935 hours of flying time in USAF aircraft.



I then went to work in the Trust Department of First National Bank of Abilene where I managed the real property held in trusts and estates as well as oil and gas properties. I retired as a Vice President and Trust Officer in June 1998. In retirement, I stay busy traveling, playing golf and serving non-profit organizations in Abilene as a volunteer. I am currently a member of the Board of Directors of the 12th Armored Division Memorial Museum Foundation, and the Board of Directors of the United Way of Abilene, where I will serve as the Chairman of the Board for the coming year.



Nav on NOS



George S. Carter Sr., Gunner

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, Bien Hoa, DaNang, 1972



Born George Samuel Carter in Chicago in 1951. My hometown is Pekin, Illinois. I graduated from Escambia High School in Pensacola, Florida and then graduated from Pensacola Junior College in 1971 and

rolled in on the target, over the very strong objection of the navigator. We poured it on and the enemy retreated into the jungle. The next morning, many enemy troops were found dead in the concertina wire and among the trees. Many blood trails lead from the fences to the jungle. There were no American casualties. Stinger saved the day!



Another mission involved moving a Vietnamese village to a new location. We were tasked to “shoot-up-the-area” along the planned evacuation route to hopefully scare away any VC. We started out at 4500’ altitude, then dropped to 3500’, and then down to 2500’ due to bad weather conditions. When the villagers started walking, we flew cover for them. Weather conditions would not allow the AC-130 gunships or helicopter gunships to provide cover. We provided cover as long as we could until we had to RTB due to low fuel. The next day, we found out from Intel that about one hour after we left the villagers, the VC attacked the villagers and killed almost everyone. The villagers were old men, women, and children. The massacre was a typical example of VC brutality that was never reported by the press.

again in 1978. Because I had a low draft lottery number and wanted to make the Air Force my career, I joined the USAF on 20 June 1971. I separated from the Air Force in June 1976 and then re-enlisted in December 1982. I graduated from Fairleigh Dickenson University in 2000. I retired from active duty Chief Master Sergeant at Little Rock AFB on 1 March 2005. I was the last enlisted AC-119 person to retire. Stinger Steve Mac Isaac moderated my retirement lunch and spoke at the ceremony. What an honor it was for me! Two months later, Major General Metcalf was the last AC-119 gunshipper to retire.

I was a Stinger gunner with the 18th SOS at NKP, Bien Hoa, and DaNang. The most exciting combat mission I experienced occurred on 3 November 1972. First Lieutenant Steve Mac Isaac was aircraft commander and we were working with Sun Dog Alpha at Nui Ba Dien Mountain. We were ready to RTB when a call came in for emergency support. The enemy had breached the outer perimeter and was about to breach the inner perimeter of a friendly outpost. The camp was on the side of the mountain with a cliff behind it. It was not a typical target. The ground commander was notified of the difficulty of shooting at the target but he said to go ahead and try. If we did nothing, the enemy would breach the perimeter fence, overrun the camp, and kill everyone. He wanted us to at least try. Lt. Mac Isaac

I’ll always remember the close camaraderie and sense of purpose among the Stinger men of the 18th SOS. We all wanted to make a difference in the war.



AC-119K Stinger nose wheel



Boris “Borey” C. Chaleff, Nav.

71st SOS, Nha Trang, 1969

I reside in Indianapolis, Indiana where I was born (1923). I graduated from Ben Davis High School in 1941 and was drafted. I served as a B-17 navigator in Europe with the 569th Bomb Squadron, 390th Bomb Group, Eighth Air Force. After the war I returned to Indianapolis, joined the Air Force Reserve, and attended Butler University where I earned my bachelors and masters degrees in Education. I began teaching but was recalled to active duty during Korea to fly B-29s with the 19th Bomb Wing, Guam.

I returned to teaching but was again called to active duty in June 1968 when the Air Force activated my reserve unit, the 930th Tactical Airlift Group, Bakalar AFB, Indiana and re-designated the unit as the 71st Special Operations Squadron. I served at Nha Trang AB until June 1969 when the 71st was deployed to Bakalar AFB and deactivated. Soon after returning to Indiana I was promoted to colonel. I accepted an opportunity to serve an active duty tour as a Section 265 officer with Headquarters Air Force Reserve assigned to Headquarters USAF at the Pentagon. I continued as a reservist on active duty at the Pentagon

for over 14 years, serving the last two years on the Reserve Forces Policy Board of the Secretary of Defense. I retired in April 1986 having accumulated 43 years of military service that included credit for 27 years of active duty.

My most exiting mission occurred while flying the late Shadow mission assigned to fire on four checkpoints to disrupt the attempted night time repair of bomb craters. While on CAP over the South China Sea we contacted the Shadow crew we were replacing and learned one of the four checkpoints was manned with two twin-barrel 50-caliber machine guns. We knew the gunners would expect us to enter the area by our standard route flying due West from Chu Li. Instead we altered our approach, arriving from the North with all four 7.62 mini-guns firing. We never heard a peep from that checkpoint the entire night.

The thing I will always remember most from my gunship experience is the satisfaction of talking to the troops on the ground who were always grateful that Shadow was there to protect them.



Peter Chamberlain, Navigator

18th SOS, DaNang, 1970-71

Pete Chamberlain was a FLIR operator at DaNang from Mar 70 through Mar 71. He came to the AC-119K program from the C-141. From DaNang he was assigned to Mather AFB, CA as a navigator instructor, then returned to MAC where he served with the 21st AF and as a Operational Maintenance (OMS) commander. He retired from the AF as a lieutenant colonel.

Pete retired a second time in 1999 after 15 years training others in computer systems and simulators for a number of defense contractors and as a private consultant. Pete and wife Lin are enjoying retirement in their seaside home in Rockport, Texas near Corpus Christi where they remain engaged in local projects and their 6 grandchildren.

DaNang AC-119K Stinger Bailout Call Sign “Lemon”

We had taken off routinely that pitch black night and headed toward the Laotian border where we flew most (not

all) of our missions intercepting and destroying Viet Cong/ North Vietnamese truck convoys heading south down the many trails of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. I was the FLIR sensor operator on the mission and was seated on the flight deck behind the pilots at the FLIR station.

Fifteen to twenty minutes after take-off, the left engine propeller became uncontrollable “a runaway” and began to drive the engine at excessive RPMs which threatened to cause serious engine damage with the possibility of explosion, structural failure and fire. In addition, the twelve foot, 4-bladed runaway propeller could separate or shear-off and slam full force into the aircraft’s fuselage.

Our Aircraft Commander (AC), Warren Kwiecinski turned the gunship to head back to DaNang at the first signs of trouble. He and Co-pilot, Richard Hay and the Flight Engineer attended to the emergency, trying everything to feather the prop. All emergency procedures for a runaway prop were performed including pulling abruptly upward to almost stall the aircraft to try slowing the prop speed but to no avail.

By now, the engine appeared to be on fire but I am almost certain the 50-foot trail of sparks was a result of the gigantic radial engine cylinders being consumed. The floor of the gunship was vibrating up and down in what seemed to be six inch cycles. Trying to walk felt really weird because when I put my foot down to take a step, I wasn't sure when my foot would touch the floor. The engine appeared to begin twisting off its engine mounts. At this point, the pilots had absolutely no control over the failed engine. It was pitch black outside the aircraft. All this time, despite the right reciprocating engine operating at METO (maximum power other than for take-off) power and the two J-85 jets operating in efforts to maintain airspeed and altitude, the aircraft was still losing altitude. But the pilots were maintaining control of the aircraft. (Keep in mind the AC-119K was operating at 180% over the original designed gross weight.)

We arrived at DaNang and headed out over the bay for a controlled bailout. A possible crash landing at DaNang or ditching the aircraft in the South China Sea was completely out of the question. AC Kwiecinski instructed the crew over the intercom to prepare for bailout, followed by three short rings on the bailout alarm bell. Everyone donned parachutes and survival gear. The IO, Sergeant Clyde Alloway was designate jumpmaster. In spite of tremendous vibrations and an occasional, unexpected violent maneuver by the airplane, Clyde led the way to the right rear paratroop door, the location of the flare launcher, and jettisoned the flare launcher overboard by blowing the explosive bolts that secured the launcher in the bailout doorway. I witnessed the preparations for bailout in the gun compartment because I had left the flight deck upon Kwiecinski's orders to prepare for bailout. The runaway propeller had already exceeded the flight manual's predicted time of failure by more than five minutes. The command to "Bailout, Bailout" came soon, immediately followed by the long ringing bailout bell. I didn't hesitate. I didn't want any part of that crazy aircraft to kill me. Alloway directed me to the door. I was the first man to jump because I was mentally and physically ready and had no doubts that it was way past time to abandon the gunship. I had thought taking that first step out that doorway into a pitch black night would be very hard for me and I thought I hesitated (my mind going warp speed) but later I was told by fellow-crewmembers that I flew right past everyone and jumped.

I was a good swimmer, consequently more afraid of the parachute than the water. In fact, I had swum that very morning in this body of water. Being a navigator and having had access to all the flight navigation information from my FLIR position on the flight deck, I knew the aircraft's position before bailout which was fairly close to the

shoreline. Moreover, I was young and dumb and thought I was immortal like many immature flyboys. To say the least, I was still not thinking all that rationally at the time.

I landed in the South China Sea and disconnected from my parachute. Luckily, I had no problems with the parachute. With my water-wings inflated, I started swimming for what I was sure, was the shore. After swimming for an hour or so with very short periodic rests to contemplate my location and situation, I was finally reassured of living when I felt sand under my feet. I walked ashore and immediately noticed a number of men looking out at the "light show" which the search and rescue effort had become. I wondered if the men were good guys or bad guys. I don't know who was more surprised at my appearance, me or them. They turned out to be good guys, Marines at a little recreational area that had been cobbled together. I explained to them who I was and where I came from. I don't believe I made any phone calls to DaNang but the Marine unit commander, I think a Captain, bought me a drink at their little beach bar before lending me his jeep and driver to transport me to the operations building at DaNang Air Base.

Upon our crew recovery and ensuing meetings, I learned that our IO, Clyde Alloway was missing. As time passed, it became evident that he was lost to the war like so many other patriotic and brave Americans.

For the record, I am certain to this day that had our aircraft commander tried to land that gunship, the moment we slowed at all or dropped the landing gear, we would have fallen out of the sky and there would have been nine additional deaths. This account, my story of the Stinger crew of ten Americans who had to bailout over the South China Sea is written with the best intentions and to the best of my recollection.

NOTE: I think Merle Williams was the Navigator on the crew that night.



Nav looking for targets using Gyro Stabilized Binoculars



George E. Chapman, Pilot

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, 1972



I was born in Terre Haute, Indiana and grew up in Casey, IL where I graduated from Casey High School in 1966. Upon completing my degree at the University of Illinois I was commissioned a 2nd Lt. and assigned to Reese AFB, TX for pilot training. The AC-119K was my first assignment

out of pilot training, reporting to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at Nakhon Phanom AB, Thailand in April 1972, before being sent PCA to DaNang, Vietnam in June. From S.E.A., I was assigned to KC-135s at Grissom AFB, IN. After three years in tankers I was reassigned to the 9th Airborne Command and Control Squadron, Hickam AFB, HI, flying the EC-135. I was later assigned to the 4th ACCS, Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota. I separated from the Air Force in May 1979 and began a career as a commercial airline pilot where I continue to fly for Continental.

One of my most memorable missions was a day-mission over An Loc while TDY to Bien Hoa. It was in May 1972, less than a week after AAA downed Stinger 41 on a day-mission near the same area. We were all a bit apprehensive. On a night mission during the same TDY, we were exiting the An Loc area at about midnight, flying over the city at 10,500 feet, when we noticed tracers in our flight path streaming down from above us. After taking evasive action, we concluded it was a VNAF AC-119G Shadow firing from above us. That might have been the closest one AC-119 came to shooting down another AC-119. Even though Stingers were well known by early 1972, we could still be misidentified. During April and May 1972 we were flying

missions from NKP to Plain of Jars, Laos. It was over an hour each way. When we later saw the news reports of our missions, we were described as Laotian gunships.

Rain and thunderstorms were often problematic, but two incidents remain prominent for me. One mission over the trail turned out to be nothing but unsuccessful attempts to avoid flying through thunderstorms. Approaching NKP I



noticed the pilot was not headed toward the well-lighted air base. He insisted he was; the engineer agreed with both of us. It turned out that water had filled the space between the double-pane windscreen on my side of the cockpit, completely shifting the view. In another incident, I was performing the pre-flight walk-around for an FCF on Aircraft 148, when I had oil drip on me from the end of the left tail boom. The mechanics discovered it was blowback oil on the surface of 50 to 70 gallons of water trapped in the ventral fin at the back of the boom caused by drain holes that were painted closed. The aircraft had been written up several times for control problems.

I remember most that in the AC-119K gunship the people were committed to getting the job done with as little military formality and protocol as possible; everyone making the most out of their life in difficult circumstances.



Junior "Jay" L. Chase, Maint.

18th SOS, Phan Rang, 1969

I was born in December 1918 in Chappell, Nebraska. I grew up in Lakeland, Florida and graduated from Lakeland High School in May 1937. I joined the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1942 to avoid the draft. I was discharged after WWII and was recalled to active duty in May 1951.

I served with the 18th SOS at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio as a maintenance line chief starting in May 1969. In October '69, I was serving at Phan Rang Air Base, Vietnam. I don't recall much excitement, however, I do have a couple of incidents to comment on. Shortly after my arrival at Phan

Rang (along with other personnel), we experienced our first mortar attack. The explosion was about fifteen feet from the Airman Quonset hut with shrapnel passing through the window. As I recall, it was a Sunday morning and guys were lounging and moving about. It was a miracle that no one was hit, except one man on a bunk. The shrapnel had hit a wood window and fell on the poor guy, breaking his skin just enough for a Purple Heart.

Later, as one of our first aircraft was arriving from the U.S., we had selected a revetment for it to park. As it was taxiing in, the Colonel interceded and led it to a different spot. Just moments after the crew had off-loaded, a mortar landed right where we had first planned to park the aircraft. Had the Colonel not made the change, we would have lost the aircraft. The Lord works in mysterious ways.

I remember while we were in Ohio, we were having trouble keeping a supply of tiny red bulbs that acted like a fuse in some of the systems. Base supply couldn't seem to get them and it was slowing our training. We learned that the bulbs were manufactured locally and we checked out our staff car, drove to the factory, and "scrounged" enough bulbs to get things going again.

Another thing that sticks in my mind was our maintenance office, a screened-in tea house near the runway at Phan

Rang. Needless to say, it was dusty and noisy. When our first aircraft arrived, our maintenance officer had a window air conditioner onboard. My next task was to board up and install the air conditioner (with the aid of our clerk). It was nice to have the cool air and less noise and dust.

I managed to find most of my work in the tea house. I spent most of my 51st year there. My other claim to fame was I was assigned to make the "Stinger" signs at the revetment entrance. Now at ninety years of age, I don't remember names very well, however, one always comes to my mind, Metcalf. Second Lieutenant Douglas Metcalf came right out of ROTC to the 18th SOS at Phan Rang as our Assistant Maintenance Officer. He was sharp and eager to learn, just a regular guy. He deployed to DaNang as Maintenance Officer and I didn't see him much after that. I always wondered what happened to that "shaved tail." Well, a few years back I got his e-mail address from a newsletter and contacted him. I learned he was a Brigadier General in the reserves and lived in Winter Park, Florida. Sometime later, I attended the pinning of his second star and we have enjoyed lunch on occasion. He is now retired.

I retired at McCoy AFB, Orlando, Florida in 1974 with twenty-seven years active service. The base was closing at the time and there were not enough people left for a ceremony. I currently live in Lake Placid, Florida.



John Robert Coates, Gunner.

18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom, 1971-72



Elkridge, Maryland is where I was born in 1944. I graduated from Howard County Senior High School at Ellico, Maryland in 1961. I joined the U.S. Navy in October 1963 and served in the Navy until I entered the U.S. Air Force in December 1969 at Burbank, California. I joined

the Air Force because I liked to travel, visit strange lands, and meet interesting people.

In 1970, I entered the Vietnam "pipeline" training in the AC-119K gunship at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. I was assigned to the 18th SOS at DaNang from March 1971 to September 1971. I was assigned to Crew #5 (aka Pollmann's Pirates) as a gunner and left scanner. Other members of Pollmann's Pirates were Terence Courtney, CP; Tad Berkebile, NOS; "Hack" G. Tremble, NAV; J. Lister, IO; N. Taylor, Frank Bartlett, and myself, Gunner. Our fearless leader was aircraft commander, "Dickie" Pollmann, I cannot remember the name of our FLIR. I was then reassigned to the 18th FOL at NKP, Thailand from September 1971 to March 1972.

My most exciting Stinger mission was one night in November 1971, somewhere



over Laos, flying truck round-up between 0200/0400 hours local time. We found some movers and made our first pass on the target with no anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) fire. On our second pass, there was light inaccurate triple A. On our third pass, the sky lit up with 23mm and 37mm fire. It seemed like every triple A site in Laos was firing at us. One enemy gunner scored a "field goal" as his rounds passed our left side. Hack Tremble called to me (the left scanner) asking how many rounds of triple A had been shot at us. I replied, using a WAG, 1500 rounds of 23 & 37mm, highly accurate. Hack then called AC Pollmann on interphone, "Okay, Dickie, screw the heroics; let's get the hell out of here!"

With those words of wisdom, we departed the area. Thank you, Hack, for my very long life.

These were the finest men I've ever served with. Thank you 18th SOS for bringing me home alive. I hold it in the highest honor to be associated with such men.

I separated from the USAF in February 1974 and three months later joined the United States Navy (Aviation). I retired from the Navy in March 1984 as a Senior Chief Petty Officer (E-8) at Christ Church, New Zealand. During my last ten years in the Navy, I flew on C-130s as a Loadmaster. My wife, Nancy Melinda and I currently live in Knoxville, TN.



I served as an AC-119G Gunship Flight Engineer with the 17th Special Operations Squadron, A Flight, Phu Cat AB from April 1970 to April 1971. Upon arriving at Phu Cat, I was assigned to Major Richard Rabinski's crew (Shadow 7). During my 12-month tour, I flew 125 combat missions, totaling over 500 combat

hours. I also served as First Sergeant for A Flight. Although the position required extra administrative duties, it was probably the easiest First Sergeant position I ever held. As First Sergeant, I was responsible for hiring the Mama Sons for the enlisted barracks.

My awards and decorations include the Bronze Star w/V device (1st Vietnam tour), Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal w/7 oak leaf clusters (2nd Vietnam tour), and the Meritorious Service Medal. I retired as Chief Master Sergeant.

Recovering With A Runaway Prop

While on a mission over Pleiku Province, our Shadow 7 crew received a call about a large group of North Vietnam troops moving through an area. As we approached the area, we could see ARVN troops moving among the trees. The forward controller gave us clearance to fire. After approximately one hour of firing on targets, ground actions

slowed. As we pulled off target, we took a .50 caliber hit through the right propeller oil line, severing the line and causing a runaway propeller. The aircraft immediately rolled and yawed left and began losing altitude. As every Shadow crewmember knows, the AC-119 isn't supposed to be flyable with a runaway prop. While the pilots struggled to gain control, I (as flight engineer) began running the emergency checklist. Needless to say, for a few minutes there was a lot of scrambling on the flight deck. After several long minutes, Major Rabinski gained directional control of the aircraft and arrested our descent. It was through skill, professionalism, and teamwork that we beat the odds, brought the aircraft back to a successful landing, and lived to fly another day.



Standing left to right, Co-Pilot 1st Lt. Bob Allen; Navigator, Maj. Jack Reilly; Navigator 1st Lt. Pete Conklin; Pilot, Major Richard Ribinski and IO SSgt Bob Mikolowski. Kneeling, left to right, is Flight Engineer TSgt Jay Collars; Gunner, SSgt Douglas Fisher and Gunner, Sgt Jerry Sipple



Jim Cooper, Navigator

17th SOS, Tuy Hoa, Phu Cat, 1969-70



L to R; FE- TSgt Bill Posey; Lt Col John Fear Nav; AC-Capt John Hope; CP-1st Lt Rick Stidson; Smitty, IO; Nav-1st Lt Jim Cooper; Jerry Sipple, AG; Sitting ??? AG

I was born in New Rochelle, NY, which I consider my home. In June 1961, I graduated from New Rochelle High School. I then earned a BA in History, Law, and Psychology at Birmingham Southern College, Birmingham, AL in 1966. I attended Cumberland Law School in Birmingham until December 1967 when I applied to OTS, as an alternative to the draft. After OTS, I earned my navigator flight training wings along with orders for the AC-119G Shadow program, along with UNT classmates Rusty Napier, Ken Shedd, and Chuck Williams. We were the first batch of active duty second lieutenants to arrive in Vietnam as replacements for members of the 71st SOS reserve unit.

I arrived in October 1969 and was assigned to A Flight flying out of Tuy Hoa. I was delighted to be flying as many as 5 missions a week in northern I Corps, allowing me to complete 100 combat missions, upgrade to instructor navigator and earn an Air Medal and DFC in my first 5 months of flying. In mid-April 1970, A Flight was transferred to Phu Cat AB, where I continued flying, mostly in Vietnam, with several out-country missions in Laos and Cambodia, until my DEROS in October 1970. I flew 185 night combat missions with AC-119G crews during my tour and I would have flown more if I could have.

I flew my most exciting and demanding mission April 12, 1970 as part of the first AC-119G Shadow crew to fly a night combat mission over Dak Seang, a small Army

outpost, during the major Dak Seang Campaign (April-May 1970). It was a unique, exciting, and rewarding experience. I was flying as the stand-in NOS on Lt. Col. Chuck Jame's crew. We responded to the most intense TIC situation I had encountered. Upon our arrival we discovered the outpost perimeter had been breached and the friendly forces were being overrun. To assure positive identification and his exact position, the ground controller (safely dug in and under cover) momentarily held up a strobe light on a pole and asked us to fire on and near the strobe. As soon as we opened fire, the sky erupted from heavy small arms automatic ground fire directed at our aircraft. The ground fire was easy to identify and track in the night observation scope and provided the pilot a steady reliable target.

The ground controller was ecstatic with our results. He encouraged us to keep it up and stay on station as long as possible.

We worked the area for about 4 hours until we expended all our rounds of ammo. The next morning, Army ground troops counted the bodies of over 200 uniformed NVA regulars inside the perimeter and in the barbed wire perimeter fencing,



and credited our crew with that KBA count. Our first Dak Seang mission began the campaign and a rewarding relationship between the 4th ID Army Headquarters and the AC-119G Shadow. Our demonstration of fire power was so great that over the next 3 months the 4th ID specifically requested the A Flight Shadow unit at Tuy Hoa to provide dedicated night close air support.

The teamwork, discipline and camaraderie I experienced as a Shadow crewmember was the foundation of my 26 year Air Force career. Before retiring in June 1993 as Lt. Col., I flew world-wide as a Navigator (2,000 hrs) in the C-141 and as Weapons Systems Officer (WSO) in the F-111A, D, E, (2,000 hrs) and completed 2 masters degrees and 4 senior service schools, and served in a variety of key Tactical Air Command staff and command positions, my last being Base Commander, Mountain Home AFB, Idaho. I am currently employed as the charter CEO/Executive Director for the Gasparilla Island Bridge Authority.

I currently live in Cape Haze, Florida.



Richard "Craig" Corbett, Gunner 18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, 1972



I was born in Decorah, Iowa on November 21, 1948.

In 1969, my draft number was 169, so being an Air Force brat, I joined the Air Force, never expecting to serve 28 years and retire as a Chief Master Sergeant.

After basic training and Armament Systems Technical School, I was assigned to the 57th Fighter Weapons Wing at Nellis AFB, NV as a weapons load crew member on F-111s. It was a boring job, so I volunteered for F-111s at Upper Heyford, England. Then I figured the Air Force would never give me England since I only had two years left on my enlistment. So, I volunteered for the AC-130 gunship program. To my surprise, I got orders to the AC-119K while my short-timer buddies received assignments to Upper Heyford.

The old heads in my squadron started teasing me about flying in the C-119 "widow maker". Soon after arriving at Hurlburt Field for crew training, I was on the flightline when the fire department deployed for an in-flight emergency. An AC-119 was coming in with an engine out. Just as the crash trucks were heading back to the firehouse, there was a second AC-119 landing with an engine out. Then, at the briefing for my first training mission, I learned the mission was being cancelled because our instructor crew was flying to Tyndall AFB to recover the crew from an AC-119 that landed there with an engine out. That was my introduction to the AC-119.

At Nakhom Phanom Royal Thai AB (NKP), I was assigned to Crew 13 which consisted of Aircraft Commander, Capt. Terence F. Courtney, Co-Pilot, 1/Lt. Jimmy Barkalow; Sensor Operators, Capt. David Slagle, Lt. Col. "Tash"

Taschioglou, and 1/Lt. Larry Barbee; Flight Engineer, SSgt. "Yogi" Bare; SSgt. "Ski" Sledzinski, SSgt. Dale Iman, and Illuminator Operator, SSgt. Ken Brown. The only ones I knew previously were Jim, Ski and Dale. We were immediately deployed TDY to Bien Hoa AB.

On one of our first missions, we refueled and reloaded twice and logged 8.5 hours of combat flying. It was my first experience as a scanner. We refueled at Pleiku, then flew to a firebase that was in danger of being attacked by four M41 tanks that had been captured by North Vietnamese troops. We were credited with 140-plus KBA, one tank destroyed and three damaged, and saving the firebase. We finally returned to Bien Hoa after being gone 14.5 hours. We were tired.

Later on, I returned to Bein Hoa for a second TDY. I was assigned a room with Bill Isham and had the top bunk, which needed to be made up. That was not easy because the bed was jacked up on some 4x4 wooden blocks, thereby reducing the space between the bed and ceiling. During dinner Bill mentioned that the intel folks reported the bad guys had captured some 105mm howitzers that were close enough to shell the base, and that Arc Light strikes had been occurring near enough to cause noise and vibration.

Later that night I awoke to use the latrine. I felt and heard some loud booms that I thought were thunder, then an Arc Light, and finally realized the base was under attack. I dived into the room and slid under the bed, where I found Bill and where I also realized the purpose of those wooden blocks. Our air conditioner was on, the floor was cold, and I was shaking. The attack went on for almost an hour. Because rocket attacks typically lasted about 20 minutes, I began thinking it was those howitzers that Bill told me about. At one point we could hear small arms fire. It seemed we might be getting overrun. When it was over, we learned that Bien Hoa was attacked with over 100 rockets and that the gunfire we heard was ammo cooking off in the Marine gun shop that took a direct hit and burned to the ground. After completing my gunship tour, I was assigned to the 81st Tactical Fighter Wing, Royal Air Force (RAF) Bentwaters, England. I retired at Ramstein AB, Germany in 1998. My decorations include the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, AF Meritorious Service Medal with three clusters, Air Medal with one oak leaf cluster, Air Force Commendation



The Gun Shop

Medal, Air Force Achievement Medal, Presidential Unit Citation, Outstanding Unit Award with V device and five oak leaf clusters, and the Air Force Organizational Excellence Award with three oak leaf clusters.

The things I value most from my 28 years in uniform are all the great people I met and worked with, the responsibility and sense of mission accomplishment, and the great opportunities. I have worked in the military, as a contractor, and as a civil servant. I am most proud of my time in the military. I would go back in a tick tock but I also know that it is a young man's game. I salute all those in uniform fighting against terrorism. I am married to the former Jan Dyer of London, England. We plan to eventually retire to a life of leisure on Orcas Island, Washington (Puget Sound).

Shoot Down of Stinger 41

My father spent three years flying and fighting in the skies over Southeast Asia as an Air Force pilot. In March 1972, it was my turn. Young and single, I volunteered to fly combat with the 18th Special Operations Squadron as a gunner on the AC-119K.

At Nakhon Phanom RTAB, Thailand the routine consisted of boring days, followed by exciting nights hunting trucks along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. As a gunner and scanner, the hard part of combat flying was the physical fatigue from the continual buffeting as the aircraft dodged anti-aircraft fire. I would be weightless one minute, then twice my weight the next.

Two days after being assigned to Crew 13, we were on our way to Bien Hoa, South Vietnam where North Vietnamese regular troops were making a major assault on An Loc, a provincial capital just 60 miles north of Saigon. If An Loc fell, Saigon would fall.

The An Loc area demanded so much support that we were

scheduled to fly our all-black gunship on daylight missions. On May 2, 1972, we were assigned to fly one of the dreaded daylight missions as Stinger 41. We were tasked to destroy some ammunition that a C-130 had dropped too close to the enemy. During our intelligence briefing, we were told of possible anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) positions and instructed on best areas for bailout. In his crew briefing, our AC, Capt. Courtney, reminded us again about the AAA threat and instructed the other two gunners to help me scan for AAA since it was extremely difficult to see AAA in daylight and they were more experienced.

We were all nervous about flying a daylight mission. Other Stinger aircraft flying daylight missions reported considerable difficulty seeing the AAA and the last Stinger day mission returned with expected battle damage. Ski, Ken, and I were talking about what each of us would do if we were shot down. We all knew we would not be shot down, however, because several aircraft had taken significant battle damage and made it back. We felt safe in knowing no Stinger had ever been lost in combat. We immediately flew to a nearby area to bore-site our guns. We did not know that those would be the last rounds fired by Stinger 41.

Fighting in the area was extremely heavy. An Loc was the busiest piece of sky in all of South Vietnam at that time. We joined up with an O-2 spotter aircraft that escorted us to our target. We were flying at 4700 feet, but the weather forced us down to a dangerously low 3500 feet. We made about two orbits when SSgt. Brown said, "I can't see it, but 37mm triple A is popping as it goes by, it's exploding above us". Capt. Courtney climbed to 4500 feet and asked Ken if he could spot the source of the AAA. I ran back to look over Ken's shoulder. Ken spotted the gun location when it fired the second time. Lt. Larry Barbee ran back and had Ken point out the gun position. While the NOS was describing the gun location to the pilot and the navigator, the AAA site fired a third time, then a fourth time, getting more accurate with each firing.

It was then I alerted the crew of a second AAA site firing at us. It was impossible to call any breaks as the tracers from the AAA were seen too late to react to them. Captain Courtney said he would make one more orbit and if we couldn't find our target we would exit the area. On what was to be our final orbit, we were hit in the right wing by three or four rounds of 37mm. Ken yelled, "We're hit! We're hit! We're on fire!" The entire wing from the right reciprocating engine to the jet engine was in flames that trailed all the

way back to the rear crew entrance door. The flames were so bright I could see them reflecting off the inside cabin's dark zinc chromate paint finish. The right main wheel well under the wing was blown open and we lost all the power on both right engines.

I put on my parachute. With only the two left engines running, the plane was quickly becoming uncontrollable and we were losing altitude. Capt. Courtney had full left rudder and full left aileron deflection trying to maintain directional control. Capt. David Slagle called MAYDAY and provided a safe bailout heading. Then the pilot yelled the words no one wanted to hear, "Abandon aircraft! Abandon aircraft!"

I remember looking aft and seeing Ken Brown acting as jump master. It was his job to ensure everyone was properly strapped in the parachute harness before bailing out. As jump master, he and the pilot would be the last two crewmen to leave the aircraft. Ski had already jumped. I made my way to the door, telling myself not to stop and not to look down. The next thing I knew I was on my back looking up at blue sky.

I pulled the ripcord and watched the parachute blossom above me. I could see Ski in front of me and I decided to turn myself toward the aircraft. Unknown to me, turning was the smart thing to do, because Ski was being shot at. After turning toward the aircraft, I saw Lt. Barbee below and in front of me. Further in front of me I saw Dale Iman in his chute, and beyond him, the aircraft which was losing altitude quickly. I looked down and prepared to meet the ground.

Jettisoning the parachute, I started to escape and evade, noticing that every sound I made seemed to be amplified 200 times. The area where we landed was flat and sparse; nothing like the jungle we trained in. I heard several helicopters overhead and thought we might be quickly rescued. I hid myself and turned on my survival radio. The O-2 pilot, Sundog, was talking to one of our guys. Waiting a few seconds after they finished, I too made contact with Sundog. He informed me that Sandy (the rescue aircraft call sign) was on the way. Suddenly, a helicopter flew over firing rockets and miniguns to the rear of my position. I ran toward the direction of his pass, wanting to put some distance between the target and me.

Once in my new hiding place, I began directing Sundog to my position, which was difficult because there were so

many aircraft on the scene that the noise made it difficult to hear. Just as I got Sundog over my position, I heard some rustling and saw someone running through the area. I drew my weapon and quickly realized that was a stupid thing to do. Just then, the Sandy arrived. I was elated. Sandy asked Stinger 41 Delta and India to flash them with mirrors. (Each crewmember used the aircraft call sign, followed by a letter for identification). But Stinger 41 Delta (Lt. Col. "Tash") reported the sun was too low and the light too poor to use mirrors. I then realized that time was getting short if we were to get out that day.

When Sandy called for Stinger 41 Alpha to report in, there was no reply. Sandy then called for the Stinger closest to the wreckage to report, and again there was no response. Sandy confirmed the negative responses and requested any Stinger to report. Chaos ensued as several Stingers came up simultaneously on the radio. Sandy reverted to the alphabet and called for Bravo to "pop smoke", which Lt. Barkalow did. All calls after that were for the next closest man to "pop smoke" until it was finally my turn. It took four-and-a-half hours from the time we were hit until I was picked up. I was the last crewmember picked up alive.

A Jolly Green helicopter crew flew me to the hospital at Tan Son Nhut. I wish we could have had a chance to thank those guys for coming to our rescue. We survivors made it through the ordeal with only a few injuries. Yogi Bare cut his head on tree branches while coming up on the jungle penetrator. By the time he was pulled into the helicopter he was covered in blood to his chest. Lt. Barkalow's face was also a bloody mess. He had crashed through the trees as his parachute was opening. The limbs snapped off so furiously that he thought he was being shot at. I helped clean him up; his face was a mass of scratches. Apparently, he was the last to exit the aircraft alive. Lt. Col. Tash straddled a tree branch as he descended leaving a gouge with some meat sticking out on the inside of his thigh. He said it didn't hurt until he saw it. Dale and I had a bunch of scratches and friction burns from the parachute raisers. We later found out that Ski, who was being shot at on his way down, was picked up almost immediately by an Army chopper crew who flew him, dangling from a rope, to a nearby fire base. They landed, got him inside the helicopter and flew him to Bien Hoa. He had a back injury.

We later learned that Capt. Terence Courtney, Capt. David Slagle, and SSgt Ken Brown were not recovered. We will never be sure why the last two didn't make it, but I can tell

you that none of us would have made it had it not been for Capt. Courtney's courageous efforts to control that crippled aircraft long enough for the rest of us to jump. This was the last daylight mission flown by Stingers.

Thirty-five years seems so long ago, yet at times it seems like only yesterday. I stopped by the Vietnam War Memorial last

year. It took a long time to find my friends' names among so many. You look and kind of hope they're not there. But there they were: KENNETH R. BROWN, TERENCE F. COURTNEY, and DAVID R. SLAGLE. I'll never know why the rest of Stinger 41 was not on that wall. I'll never know why there was a wall at all.



Donald A. Craig, Pilot

17th SOS, Phan Rang, Phu Cat, DaNang, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



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.

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



Shadow over Saigon

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 copilot'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.



James S. Craig, Navigator

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71

Louisiana, Missouri was my birthplace in December 1941. My family moved to Kansas City, Missouri where I attended elementary and secondary school, graduating from Paseo High School in Kansas City in 1960. I attended the University of Missouri at Kansas City from 1960 to 1962 and then transferred to Baker University; Baldwin, Kansas where I graduated with a B.S. in Biology in 1964.

I enlisted in the U.S. Air Force on October 21, 1966 and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant on January 4, 1967. After navigator training, I was assigned to the 17th Special Operations Squadron as a Shadow gunship navigator/NOS. I served in Vietnam from May 21, 1970 to May 21, 1971 (365 days on the nose). I flew 216 combat missions in the AC-119G during my tour of duty.

Some tid-bits from my tour: Angkor Wat, Cambodia – amazing place! Total number of 7.62mm rounds expended during my tour of 216 missions (an even 900 hours of gunship combat time) was approximately 2.5 million rounds. Many of them were in the very same hole every night while we were "not" in Cambodia according to "Tricky Dick".

I still have the maps that I used to navigate the entire southern half of Vietnam and the map for Cambodia with divert routes north to Thailand.

My two most memorable missions: I flew on the night the Phnom Penh Airport came under sapper attack and the airport and most of the airplanes were burned to the ground, including a brand new Caravel jet liner. We thought an entire company of enemy had attacked; however, it turned out to be less than a dozen sappers that did it.

The daytime mission to Cambodia's main seaport, Sihanoukville (Kompong Som) was wild when the fuel depot tanks were sabotaged and set ablaze. We experienced one of the largest fuel fires during the entire tour as flames rose to probably two thousand feet and the smoke was the real danger. We had to stay upwind of the fire to avoid choking to death.

Biggest mistake: On a night mission at Kompong Cham, Cambodia, I figured the wind and kicked out a flare that was a streamer. It went through the roof of a vacated Swedish Ambassador's (some high roller) summer home. Burned it to the ground. OOPS

Biggest Farce: Capt. Sandy Shaw, along with other Shadows, were scheduled to be presented medals by then U.S. Vice-President Agnew at Tan Son Nhut AB. Shaw were nowhere to be found (come to find out he was in Hong Kong having a "good time"). I cannot remember who it was (I think it was Capt. Parkinson), but the decision was made to substitute a "like size" body in Shaw's place with appropriate name tag for the ceremony and of course the medal was presented to Capt. Shaw as scheduled.

Biggest Downer: Christmas 1970 at DaNang AB. Taking up the slack for the Stingers that could not get off the ground (for some reason). DaNang "was alright by order of the base commander" stenciled on the exterior wall of one of the barracks in "Gunfighter Village". Compared to Saigon & Tan Son Nhut, DaNang was the "pits". I knew immediately I was in the wrong place!!! At DaNang, we flew over Laos every night, sometimes twice a night and sat alert for the "surprise raid at Son Tay".

From June 1971 to July 1975, I had a long tour in Germany with the F-4 Phantom Air Superiority Squadron. From July 1975 to January 1980, I was stationed at Homestead AFB, FL with the 31st TFW. In 1977, I earned a MA degree from the University of Northern Colorado at Greeley. In January 1980, I accepted a Reserve Officer Commission in the Kansas Air National Guard at McConnell AFB, Kansas. In

May 1982, I was promoted to Chief of Safety, 184th TFW, Kansas ANG at McConnell AFB.

On April 29, 1987, I retired from military service with the grade of Lieutenant Colonel. I was hired by Boeing Military Airplanes in 1987 and retired from Boeing in December 2003. My wife, Suzanne and I live in Derby, Kansas.



Leslie Dennis Davis, Pilot

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1969-70



Waco, TX was my birthplace in 1943. I graduated from Bellaire High School in 1961 and Sam Houston State University in 1968. I joined the United States Air Force in April 1968 in San Antonio to fly, fly, fly. I separated from the USAF on 9 March 1974 to enter commercial aviation.

As a First Lieutenant, I was assigned to C Flight of the 17th SOS at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, RVN from

December 1969 to November 1970. I flew my first combat mission on Christmas Eve 1969. We flew mostly in III Corps and the Mekong Delta the first five to six months of my tour and, thereafter, almost always in Cambodia. After serving my time in the right seat, I was upgraded to aircraft commander. I flew the first C Flight daylight mission

in Cambodia. That was very exciting after flying only night missions. We didn't know what to expect. One of the most exciting combat missions that I remember flying was an intense TIC (troops-in-contact) at Fire Base Brown in May 1970. I was co-pilot for aircraft commander Gary Weaver. The FE was Smolinski. Other supporting aircraft at the TIC included Army Cobra gunships and C-130 flare-ships. The large number of flares launched in the area created a localized overcast sky condition which got lower and lower throughout the mission. We ended up firing at somewhat below "A" altitude - 2500' AGL and received substantial enemy 50 caliber ground fire. We took a hit in the left engine oil cooler and a hit which severed the right elevator cable but remained on target. At sunrise, we assisted the FAC with target identification for F-100 air strikes. Fire Base Brown was not overrun and our Shadow was directly responsible for dozens of Regular NVA troops killed. Our crewmembers were awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses for this mission.

I'll always remember the outstanding crewmembers in C Flight and the uneasiness felt at liftoff after the loss of Shadow 78.



Michael E. Davis, IO

18th SOS, NKP, 1970-71



Staff Sergeant Michael Davis served with the 18th SOS from December 1970 to December 1971 as an Illuminator Operator (IO) on Stinger gunships. He was stationed his entire Vietnam tour of duty at NKP in Thailand except for a 30 day TDY with the 17th SOS at Tan Son Nhut Air Base at Saigon.

Awarded DFC & Air Medals for combat



Morgan's Marauders

Front Row L to R: Capt. Morgan, AC; Sgt. Andy Anderson, Gunner; Sgt. Felix Caballero, Gunner; Major Dan Burgdorf, FLIR; Back Row: Lt. Col. Balish, Nav.; Sgt. Don Gibson, Gunner; Sgt. Keith Webb, FE; Capt. Pat McGillis, CP; SSgt. Mike Davis, IO. Our NOS operator (Capt. Ray Galindo) took the photo since he did not want his picture taken saying he was going off to fly with Air America.



Michael J. Drzyzga Jr., Gunner

17th SOS, Phan Rang, DaNang, Phu Cat, 1970-71



Born in Irvington, NJ on May 13, 1948. In April 1968, I was working full-time in a pharmaceutical business in New Jersey while taking night classes at Seton Hall University, pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry. Unable to carry 12 credit hours in night courses, the dear draft board changed my draft status from 2-S (student deferment) to 1-A. Since I possessed a serious enthusiasm for flying and a

severe aversion to running through the jungle, I enlisted in the Air Force. On May 7, 1968, six days before my 20th birthday, I unhesitatingly headed to Amarillo Air Force Base (AFB), Texas for basic training.

With a high mechanical aptitude test score, I was assigned a 462 career (weapons mechanic) and subsequently reported to Lowry AFB, Denver, Colorado for Technical School. Any thoughts of ever flying vanished from my mind. My first permanent assignment was with the 33rd Tactical Fighter Wing at Eglin AFB, Florida. In late 1968, the 40th Tactical Fighter Squadron (TFS) received the first F-4E Phantoms fitted with a 20mm Vulcan nose gun. As the number three man on a weapons load crew, I loved the flight line work... being in and about the Phantoms was better than being a draftee in the Army and better than working in the dreaded hot, greasy, smelly Gun Shop.

Three occurrences would then change my course: First, a black-painted C-119 with jet-pods and guns appeared at Eglin's Armament Development Test Center. It would circle (later I learned the correct term – "orbit") over Eglin. I was awe-struck at this Korean War-era armed cargo plane. Second, I met an ex-Shadow Aerial Gunner (AG) who joined the 40th TFS after his tour of duty with the 17th SOS at Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam. And the AG was wearing Stripes and Wings! Third occurrence, which made my heart pound to high heaven, was reading the posted announcement in the weapons flight line hootch about Project "Palace Gun". Good Lord, I saw the chance to fly and the possibility of Stripes on my sleeves and Wings on my chest. I volunteered!!

I completed training at Lockbourne AFB from February to April 1970 and Physiological Training back at Eglin AFB. After a month's leave home in New Jersey, I headed for Survival School at Fairchild AFB, then jungle survival training at Clark AFB, Philippines.

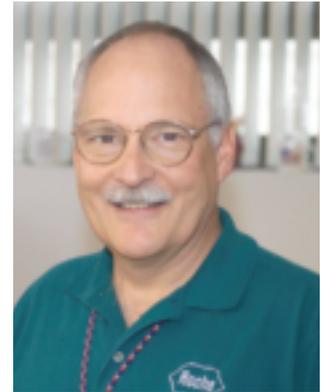
On June 7, 1970, I arrived at Phan Rang "Happy Valley" via Tan Son Nhut Airport, Saigon. Shadow 61 and Shadow 62 where what I usually considered my crews – although we did switch crews as needed, at what seemed a random manner.

Although stationed at Phan Rang, I experienced some interesting missions while TDY to DaNang in December '70 where we supported some I Corps fire camps, and while TDY to Phu Cat AB in February 1971 where I logged many combat missions over-the-fence. One mission was a back to back (double-shooter), or turn-around mission. Our Shadow was closer to Thailand than Vietnam, so we landed at Ubon Royal Thai AB for full regeneration of fuel and ammo before flying another mission back at the same target area.

During my tour of duty, I did get out of Vietnam twice other than by flying combat missions over-the-fence. I was able to enjoy a week of R&R in Taiwan and a three-day visit to Hong Kong thanks to and via a C-47 resupply mission.

In June 1971 when my DEROS arrived, I received orders for Hurlbert Field (Eglin Aux. 9) and the non-flying duty of the Gun Shop – ugh! My last of four years in the USAF would be swabbing gun barrels. I did write a letter to the Special Operations Wing commander, convincing him that my proficiency as an AC-130 gun mechanic would be improved with insight obtained from a gunfire mission. So one sunny day, I donned the flight gear and spent almost five hours aboard Spectre over a Florida water gunnery range. That brought back good memories.

Project Palace Chase provided me a last chance to fly again. I was accepted for development of the AU-24 Helio Stallion. Many ex-Nam ex-fliers were rejoined to make a single-engine, high-wing, tail-dragger into a multi-purpose attack aircraft. We were trained on Eglin's TAC area by EC-



121 crews on the techniques of dropping and listening to strings of sensors. We spent 4.5 hours on UH-1Ns learning the art of using a spindle mounted mini-gun. The Stallions were equipped with left-side mounted 20mm Vulcan cannons with three-barrels. Additionally, we dropped 500 lb. hard bombs. What a great experience! I almost extended my enlistment to deploy back to SEA, but the Project was to remain stateside for development and I separated from the USAF without much fanfare on May 7, 1972 (six days away from my 24th birthday).

I returned to New Jersey and the pharmacy business. I completed my B.S. in Chemistry at Seton Hall (Go Pirates!) and subsequently earned my Masters in Science degree in Radiation Science at Rutgers University. I worked as a Health Physicist (radiation protection), eventually becoming a Radiation Safety Officer (believe it or not, a US Navy term from the nuclear Navy). When people ask me if I am concerned about the risks of working with radioactive materials, I think back to my experiences in the Air Force and reply with a combat veteran's look, "Risk is all relative." Memories of Vietnam: The following three experiences have been retold so often that they have become war stories in their own right. Although the facts are as true as memory allows, the stories can be validated by fellow Shadows.

Cobra in the Hootch

One day in September or October 1970, the inside of the enlisted quarters were pretty normal for midday. It was dark and cool; only a few cubical lamps lit from those airmen awake and listening to their new hi-tech Japanese sound systems purchased either via PACEX or obtained from a Hong Kong resupply mission. There was the ever-present low rumble of the wall-mounted air conditioners. Outside was typical Phan Rang weather – cloudy, hot and humid like it could rain any minute. Most of the flying crews, me included, were sound asleep. Suddenly, one airman heading down the middle aisle (most likely returning from the Phan Rang Post Office to catch the day's mail) was "spit at" from something behind the metal personal lockers. With a very loud and somewhat high-pitch yell, he flipped on the very bright overhead fluorescent lights and alerted everyone to this still unclear situation. As we awoke and slipped on our combat boots, we realized that we were not armed and there was a snake in the hootch. What to do??? A short-timer, I believe AG Staff Sergeant Goodson, who after returning from an overnight stay in Thailand, owned a fully functional cross-bow and arrows that hung displayed on his cubical wall. He loaded up, as two other airmen pulled the lockers apart while I was still fumbling with one of my cameras, as

usual. The coiled Cobra raised its puffed head to strike, but within two seconds of striking out, the venomous serpent was impaled by one accurately aimed arrow against the cubical plywood wall. It was definitely a Kodak moment! The moral of the story is "Never Walk Barefoot in a Shadow Hootch."

Runaway Prop on Take-off

After flying for nearly ten months as a Shadow Gunship Aerial Gunner in 1971, "Vietnamization" of the war was accelerating. We learned at Phan Rang that some of the airmen ending their tours would not be replaced. I was chosen to be certified as an instructor and join a crew to begin training Vietnamese C-119 and/or AC-47 crews to fly Shadow gunships. I was very confident in my flying skills. I had experienced many interesting, awesome, tiring, funny and sad times during my tour of duty. I was extremely happy to have never experienced an engine failure on take-off because every Shadow crewmember knew about the fatal crashes that claimed the lives of Shadow crewmembers at Tan Son Nhut. At Lockbourne, I had picked-up on the riddle "What is black and green, smoldering in a rice paddy, and full of crispy critters?" Damn those riddles!! Our current crew training standards and lowered take-off weights should prevent such a recurrence. Nevertheless, I said a prayer from the moment of the Pilot's call for "gear-up" to the Copilot's reply "gear up...gear is up and locked."

Training the Vietnamese crews was challenging because the enlisted men spoke very little English. They fondly learned the expression, "Monkey see, Monkey do." We showed them all the tricks and shortcuts that made a great working Shadow crew. During pre-flight for a routine training mission, Shadow Operations called us with a request to "top-off" for support of a hot target area. Trusting the best weather service known to man at the time, we fueled and loaded ammo to the maximum safe limit. We expedited the taxi to the end of the runway, smoothly completed the engine run up tests, and set Shadow's nose on the runway centerline. We accelerated quickly and rotated normally as I, as usual, recited my prayer at "gear up". I learned to feel (in-the-seat of my Nomex flight suit) for the clunk of the landing gear locking in the wheel wells. At that moment, before the Vietnamese Copilot could



The Cobra

say, “greer up,” a stomach-sickening yaw of the gunship occurred as Shadow’s No. 2 propeller ran away, out of control. The unusual new sound was weird and instantly foreboding. Oh God, not with less than a month to DEROS, I thought.

The Vietnamese student pilot followed his reflex experience from the C-119 Flight Manual and dropped the nose a bit to maintain airspeed. I knew that the procedures for runaway props had been rewritten by Shadow gunship pilots and that the current procedure was to attain best air speed to control a runaway prop, which in our case we needed NO additional airspeed. With a slight struggle on the flight deck, instructor pilot, Captain Dick Howze took control of the gunship and managed to nurse the Shadow around the mountain just north of the runway to head back toward the air base. We slowly lost altitude pushing Shadow while circumventing the mountain in what seemed like an eternity. All the while, the IO prepped the flare launcher for ejection and I had the ammo cans ready to throw out the door if the call came to make Shadow lighter. I unconsciously calculated the weight loss if we ejected students onboard.

Captain Howze called for “gear down” at 250 feet over the threshold. The landing gear lowered with three green lights showing down and locked. We safely landed. After departing the gunship we Shadow instructors huddled together as Student crewmembers huddled to discuss our aborted mission. The instructor crew agreed to board another Shadow gunship and proceed to the target area while the students decided otherwise. So did we fly again that night? I cannot recall going back out, but Dick Howze says we convinced the students to fly, and we did fly. Such is my memory of 36 years ago.

A FNFLCP (Friendly New First Lt. Co-Pilot)

At the beginning of a routine Shadow 61 mission out of Phan Rang heading over the mountains to a near-border SEL (suspected enemy location), AC Major Golden told everyone that he intended to provide our new co-pilot, 1st Lt. Newell Lee, some “stick time” for his pilot’s log. As the intercom conversation waned and the ever-present roar of the two R-3350s, just a few feet away from me, became too melodic on the flight to the target area, “Goldie” as we called the Major, quite deliberately asked Lieutenant Lee if he would “take control of 61 for awhile.” Normally, a two-second transition, Goldie deliberately slowed the transition by making a few trim adjustments. That delay was more than enough for the Aerial Gunner #2, the IO

Bill Kitt and me to grab two full ammo boxes and “tip-toe” to the forward bulkhead. When Lee said, “I’ve got the aircraft”, the three of us pranksters slowly walked to the rear of the cargo deck. As a new flier, I was amazed that you can actually feel Shadow slump a bit and the increased drag reducing airspeed. Goldie calmly said, “I’ve got it back” and he retrimmed 61. “OK, you got it Copilot” and Lee replied “For sure.” The three Shadow pranksters slowly walked forward toward the front bulkhead. Shadow 61 began to pitch forward slightly and the airspeed and altitude picked-up. This time Goldie (fully aware of the cargo crew shenanigans) more sharply said, “I’ve got it!” Lee was beside himself. I think he tried a few weak explanations over the intercom. It was so hilarious, I almost pissed in my Nomex flight suit. I can image what it looked like if viewed from the outside as Shadow porpoised through the night sky. Even with the engines roaring, the four of us (NOS included) laughed so hard you could almost hear us. Lee finally figured out that it was not his inability to fly Shadow but it was his inability to see that he was the butt of a joke on new pilots just reporting for flight combat duty in-country. The fun abruptly ended when the Table NAV said, “We’re here; time to descend to firing altitude!” No Kodak moments on this one; only a sweet memory to carry with me for a very long time.



Runaway/over-speeding prop. Crew

TSgt. Gentry, FE; ???, IO; Major Jim Rash, Nav; Mike Drzyzga, Gunner; Capt. Dick Howze, AC

Bill Dudley



I was born on 12/24/1937 in Williamston, NC. I grew up there and graduated from Williamston High School in May 1954. I attended East Carolina University and

graduated in 1963, Babcock School of Management, Wake Forest Univ. 1976. I entered the USAF on Jan 1955 in Raleigh, N.C. I dropped out of College, preferring to join the Air Force as opposed to being drafted and was commissioned through OCS.

I was employed with Fairchild-Hiller when the C-119G was selected for conversion to the AC-119G/K Gunship. I was the manager for Flight Line/Flight Operations for the Gunship Program. The program was scheduled to be a two year program to convert 52 C-119 Aircraft to gunships comprised of 26 Gs and 26 Ks. The program had a combat emergency DOD rating and Fairchild was asked to shave 6 months off the schedule. We were able to do this and began deliveries to the USAF within approximately 12 months

after the program was awarded by working 24/7/365. One of my most memorable experiences during the gunship conversion program was being hit by a hurricane halfway through the program. We had all 52 aircraft on station and the hurricane hit during the middle of the night. We had everyone we could muster including office and clerical personnel, plant maintenance, security, management staff and any others that we could contact, helping to secure aircraft, move them to safe locations, and sandbag every aircraft that was exposed. None of the aircraft were flyable so we were unable to evacuate any to other bases. The hurricane hit around 4 am and lasted for approximately 6 hours before moving offshore. We suffered no damage to any of the aircraft and only incurred one day's interruption to the schedule. Unlike members of the 17th, 18th, and 71st, our enemy was the elements, the clock and the calendar. We constantly battled these forces, sometimes winning, sometimes losing, but ultimately coming out the winner by finishing the program on time and delivering a great fighting platform to the USAF that met the mission requirements for its role in SEA. There were many other challenges to complete this program, but in retrospect it was one of the most memorable programs I was involved with during my 25 years with Fairchild-Hiller.



Estel "Wade" Dunn, Gunner 71st & 17th SOS, Nha Trang, Phan Rang, 1968-69

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



Back Row: Lt.Col. Frank Rostkowski, AC; Capt. Mel Hayes, Nav/Nos; Maj. Robert Milheim, CP; Lt. William Dawson, Nav/Nos.
Front Row: Sgt. Keith Roberts, Gunner; Sgt. "X" Xanders, IO; Sgt. Wade Dunn, Gunner; Sgt. Ron Penrose, FE

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.



Feathered Prop



John Robert Dydo, Pilot

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, Bien Hoa, 1972

I was born in 1944 in Manchester, NH and raised there. I graduated from Memorial High School in June, 1962.

I attended the University of NH at Durham and graduated in June of 1966. I joined the USAF and started pilot training following graduation.

USAF Training: Craig AFB (Pilot Training) 66-67; Basic Survival 71; Water Survival 71; C-119 Training Lockbourne AFB, OH 1971; AC-I 19K Hurlbert Field, FL 1971; Jungle Survival 72; Keesler AFB (personnel), 1973; Castle AFB (B-52), AC Upgrade 1976; Armed Forces Staff College, Norfolk. VA 1979.

Units of USAF Assignments: Craig AFB, AL (pilot training 66-67); 3541 NTS, Mather AFB, CA 67-71; NKP, Thailand 1972; Randolph AFB 12 FTW/AFMPC 73-76, Barksdale AFB, LA 2 BW, 76-79; Pentagon Air Staff 79-81; Office of the Secretary of Defense, 81-87.

Assigned to AC 119K Special Operations Squadron(s):

18th SOS, Pilot, Chief Standboard, 1972; NKP, DaNang, Bien Hoa. Squadron Operations Officer at DaNang.

My most exciting events in S.E.A. included: Being chased by a MiG; saving General Vang Pao on Skyline Ridge; being shot at with 23, 37, 85 mm AAA and SA 3 and SA 7’s; flipping a 119 over on its back avoiding AAA; Shooting 36 sampans on the Mekong River; rocket attacks at DaNang and Bien Hoa, and giving Tommy Teal his check ride.

The things that I will always remember about my time with AC-119 gunships are the friends I made. What else is there!

Decorations and Awards: 2 DFC’s, 6 Air Medals, Defense Meritorious Service, AF Meritorious, 2 AF Commendation Medals, Expert Marksman, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with palm, Vietnam Campaign.

I retired from USAF on 1 February 1987 and I currently live in Bradenton, FL.



Robert Eckstein, FE

71st SOS, Nha Trang, 1968-69

My home town is Kokomo, Indiana. I was born in Batesville, Indiana in 1942 and graduated from Batesville High School in 1960. I joined the U.S. Navy in June 1960 and served on active duty until May 1964 when I joined the Reserves, serving to 1966. I still wanted to stay in the

aircraft career field so I joined the United States Air Force in July 1967 at Bakalar AFB, Columbus, Indiana. I retired from the USAF at Grissom AFB, Indiana in February 1997.

I was a flight engineer on the AC-119G gunship with the

71st Special Operations Squadron at Lockbourne (now Rickenbacker) AFB, Ohio in May 1968. I served in the 71st SOS at Nha Trang Air Base, RVN from December 1968 to June 1969.

The most exciting times in Vietnam were anytime we found a truck convoy or a herd of elephants on the trail. I loved to see those secondary explosions. I had only one engine failure during my tour in Vietnam and that was at Nha Trang upon

landing. I don't remember the pilot's name but the co-pilot was Col. Johnston.

My best buddy in Nam was Bernie Westendorf. I will always remember the full effort by everyone in our unit, but also the frustration of being held back from fully doing what we were trained to do.



Frederick William Eggert, FE

18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom, Bien Hoa, 1971-72

I am a native Nebraskan; born at Beatrice in 1935, grew up in Blue Springs where I graduated from high school, and joined the Air Force in Lincoln on 12 February 1953. My Uncle who served in World War II on B-25s, was my inspiration to enlist and serve my country in the USAF.

I will always remember one night combat mission that we were flying on the perimeter at An Loc, South Vietnam. Ernie Cole was our Stinger aircraft commander. We fired on and hit a North Vietnam Army T-34 Russian-built tank, causing secondary explosions from the tank. On the

same mission, an F-4 Phantom was making bomb runs on a target and was obviously concentrating on the target because he did not see our "blacked-out" gunship during his pull-out. The F-4 was headed directly for us. I immediately turned on our landing lights and went 100% on both J-85 jet engines as Ernie pulled into a climbing right break. Simultaneously, the F-4 pilot saw us, turned off his anti-collision light, went to after-burners, and turned on his landing lights as he shot by us, narrowly avoiding a mid-air collision. It was too close for comfort.



Frank J. Emma, Navigator

17th SOS, Nha Trang, 1969



The night before their first flight in Vietnam

Top Row: Major F. Emma Nav, Lt. Col. Brown IP, Major T. Peterson, Lt. Col. R. Knie,
Front Row: SSgt. Anderson, A1C Hall, MSgt. Vadovich, Sgt. Whitney

Born St. Louis Mo 28 October 1932. At age of 14, moved to San Pedro CA and graduated from St. Anthony's High School, Long Beach, in 1950. Attended Loyola University

of Los Angeles from 1950 to 1954 and graduated with a BS Degree. Active in ROTC and received an Air Force Reserve commission in August 1954. Augmented into the Regular Air Force in December 1954. Aircrew training consisted of navigator training at James Connelly AFB TX and bombardier training at Mather AFB CA. After completing all training by October 1956, was assigned as a navigator/bombardier to the Strategic Air Command(SAC) and flew primarily B-36 and B-52 aircraft. Primary duty stations with SAC were: Carswell AFB TX, Altus AFB OK and Wright-Patterson AFB OH.

Attended Squadron Officers School, Maxwell AFB AL, in 1961 and was designated as a Distinguished Graduate. Assigned to staff duties upon return to Wright-Patterson AFB thus ending my regular combat crew duty in SAC. Remained in staff assignments until selected for Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) in July 1965. While assigned to ACSC, and upon completion of the Computer Programmer Aptitude Test, was assigned upon graduation to Custer Air Force Station, Battle Creek MI at the SAGE

Air Defense Sector site. Served for two years as a computer programmer. After altercation with commander, took urgent action to be reassigned and was selected for gunship training.

Completed the usual gunship training at Clinton County AFB OH and Lockbourne AFB OH by the end of July 1968 and prepared for overseas deployment. Instead, was retained at Lockbourne AFB for further training. Selected to serve on aircrew of Lt Colonel Knie who, with partial aircrew, ferried their AC-119G from Florida to Nha Trang, Republic of Vietnam. Flew aboard a C-141 with other aircrew members to Nha Trang in January 1969. Aircrew was declared combat ready with the 71th Special Operations Squadron in February 1969. The 17th Special Operations Squadron, that succeeded the 71th SOS, moved from Nha Trang to Phan Rang in August 1969. In September 1969, returned to the States due to an emergency.

Reassigned, upon returning to the States in September 1969, to duty in the Pentagon as Assistant Chief of Staff, Studies and Analysis. Remained in such duties for five years the last three years as Chief, Computer Applications Group. With completion of Pentagon duty, assigned to the Electronic System Division, Air Force Systems Command, Hanscom AFB MA. In July 1974, promoted to Colonel and assigned as Director, Computer Systems Engineering. On 1 November 1977, I retired from the Air Force.

Decorations: Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal w/5 Oak Leaf Clusters (OLC) and eight lesser awards.

Aircraft flown as navigator: B-36, B-52, EB/B-57, KC-97, T-29, C-47. C-54, C-119/AC-119G, C-131, U-3, O-2 and a few hours in other aircraft.

War Stories

I was among the first active duty navigators to fly as an AC-119G Shadow crewmember in Vietnam. I was also the additional-duty awards and decoration officer for our squadron, and served as training officer and assistant operations officer. I retired after 23 years of service.

In between our flying at Lockbourne, we helped plan the deployment of the unit to Vietnam. The reservists accepted our efforts and before long we became a completely integrated Squadron. Part of my assigned crew ferried one of our aircraft to Nha Trang AB. However, I left in January by C-141 on which we began a bridge game that continued

through stops in Alaska, Japan, Nha Trang, and ended at Clark AB when we arrived for jungle survival school.

After jungle survival at Clark AB, I returned to Nha Trang and completed in-processing. I'll never forget my first night at Nha Trang. I was startled awake by the sound of explosions. I reacted by trying to roll out of bed and hitting the deck. However, my mosquito netting was tucked under the mattress and I was firmly cocooned. Fortunately, the netting saved me from a nasty four-foot fall to the floor; I was in a top bunk. As a new arrival, I couldn't yet distinguish incoming from outgoing rounds.

The time really dragged while waiting for the rest of my crew to arrive with the aircraft they were ferrying from the States. I busied myself preparing navigation charts. I wanted us to be ready to get checked out as soon as the crew arrived. While waiting, I was able to fly a mission with AC-47 crews and learned a great deal from them.

My crew arrived with the aircraft during the first week in February 1969. The first thing I noticed was the armor-plated fixture that protected the NOS operator was gone, as was the armor plating under the Navigator's seat. The armor made the aircraft too heavy to fly safely. The initial solution for protecting the NOS operator was body armor. I put the armor on during my first training mission. It was heavy, but tolerable. But when we entered the firing circle, that extra G-load from the 30-degree bank literally took me to my knees. There was no way I could wear that armor and efficiently operate the NOS. I never wore it again.

When flying the desk position, the navigator had to continuously monitor the UHF, HF, VHF, and FM radios. On my first training mission, I heard noises that sounded like defensive noises generated by the ECM operator in the B-52. I asked the instructor if we were being jammed; he laughed and informed me I was hearing an excited Vietnamese translator talking to a Vietnamese army unit. It took a couple of missions to learn how to filter out all the chatter.

On our second solo mission, I monitored a radio transmission that set the direction of my combat tour. An Army ground unit was in danger of being overrun and had asked the DASC for immediate support from a Spooky gunship. I contacted the DASC and informed them we were a Shadow gunship, that we were only five minutes from the unit and could we provide support. DASC replied that they could not task us because the ground unit requested a Spooky, not a Shadow gunship. DASC scrambled a Spooky and the ground unit had to wait nearly thirty minutes for

protection. I was totally frustrated knowing there were American GI's needing help, that we were immediately available, and weren't allowed to help them.

The next day, I located the Ground Liaison Officer (GLO), an Army Captain named Doug. When I told Doug what happened the previous evening, he agreed that ground soldiers only knew of Spooky since Shadow was a new gunship. He agreed to let me put together a briefing on how to use Shadow Gunships and their capabilities, and to take me around the country to brief the units. I told the aircraft commander, Lt. Col. Knie, of my desire to publicize Shadow. Our co-pilot, Tommy Peterson, asked to work with me; he would describe the aircraft characteristics and I would brief our capabilities and how to best use them. We presented the briefing to the Deputy Commander for Operations, Colonel Ginn, who granted permission to present the briefings to all the locations the GLO could schedule.

Within a week we gave our first presentation to the Army at Landing Zone (LZ) Bayonet. An Army Colonel at the briefing decided all company commanders should be briefed on Shadow capabilities and uses, and that his troop should simply request the most available gunship. On several occasions, I briefed solo. On one of those times, I was flown to the LZ in a psy-op O-2 aircraft. When we landed, the pilot noticed I got out of the aircraft without putting on my flak jacket. He stopped me and said that the last guy he brought to the LZ got out without his flak jacket and was killed by a sniper. I think I set a record for donning a jacket.

One night I was staying at Chu Lai, a Marine Air Base, so we could conduct a briefing at LZ Baldy the next day. During the night, a mortar round hit the nurses quarters just across the street from our BOQ. A nurse was killed, the first military woman killed in Vietnam. The next morning we went to the officer's club for breakfast. We sat outdoors overlooking a large hospital that had a very large helicopter-landing pad. As we began eating, a seemingly never-ending stream of helicopters began landing and off-loading ambulatory and stretcher cases. Later that day, we learned we were seeing the first casualties of the Tet Offensive. To this day, I cannot comfortably watch the beginning of the TV-series MASH. The helicopters arriving during the opening scene are too familiar.

It wasn't long after my crew arrived at Nha Trang that we moved to new quarters. We were barely settled when we learned the U.S. military would be evacuating Nha Trang and that our unit was relocating to Phan Rang AB. In response to the announcement, the Air Force cut back on supplying Nha Trang. The first casualty of the cutback was

toilet paper. Suddenly everyone was walking out of the BOQ, NCO Club or Officer's Clubs with a roll of toilet paper; the situation was getting desperate. I asked our flight surgeon, Doc. Fields, if there was anything he could do to alleviate the situation. Within 72 hours, we had a C-130 arrive full of toilet paper. The crisis had ended.

We arrived in Phan Rang near the end of August 1969. It was a huge base and there were problems with the water supply because of poor plumbing. For a while we could only get water a couple of hours a day, and there seemed to be no apparent schedule. Also, the initial surge of water after an outage included an abundance of sand. We placed a couple of barrels outside the latrine that caught rainwater that we then used to flush the toilets.

I flew over one hundred combat missions. On one mission, we were supplying support to a Vietnamese outpost, when I suddenly saw tracers coming from above the aircraft followed shortly by bombs exploding on the ground. It seems a Vietnamese fighter pilot in a T-28 decided to join the fray without getting permission from anyone. Fortunately, we didn't receive any of his fire. Another occasion that sticks in my mind was another troops-in-contact situation. I was on the desk, and when I looked out the window I saw we were flying in a valley, and we were at least one thousand feet below the top of the surrounding mountains. I was very glad we had excellent visibility and two skillful pilots.

It was amazing how quickly combat flying became routine. I grew concerned that we might be getting too confident, but fortunately all went very well. We took very limited gunfire. It was very difficult to get the proper lead to hit an aircraft flying in a circle. The most dangerous situations we encountered were on two or three occasions when we found ourselves in a flak trap, i.e. two or three antiaircraft guns firing in a zone and hoping we'd fly into their fire. On those occasions, we quickly departed the area and called the DASC and told them the situation. They quickly scrambled fighters who bombed and napalmed the sites.

On one of our missions, we were in a hot troops-in-contact situation and we started having our Gatling gun barrels fail. Our chief gunner, MSgt. Vadovich, disassembled the failed guns, cannibalized the good barrels, and kept one gun firing until we were replaced by another Shadow. Despite the asbestos gloves Vadovich wore in the process, his hands were badly burned, but he continued servicing the guns. We had an ambulance waiting to take him to the hospital. I immediately prepared a narrative supporting the Distinguished Flying Cross for MSgt. Vadovich. Sadly, 7th

Air Force approved it only as an Air Medal for the heroic act. I was furious. The Air Medal was something we all got for flying 20 combat missions.

My most frustrating mission was near the end of my tour when we found a VC convoy. We were given permission to fire and I could see puffs of dust rising from the canopies as our bullets hit them. We fired several thousand rounds of ammunition and never got a secondary explosion. The very next evening, we were briefed by intelligence about the new AC-130 gunships that had arrived in country. He showed the gun film of them firing their 20mm cannon at a VC truck and the huge explosions that followed.

One of the most humorous moments was at one intelligence briefing where the briefer went on and on about the significance of a number of Vietcong that had been killed on the Ho Chi Minh Trail wearing new pith helmets showing they were receiving new war material. Finally, our AC raised his hand, was recognized and said, "Captain, couldn't you simply say we shot the Pith out of them?" The briefing room roared with laughter.

In one memorable troops-in-contact situation, the friendlies were pinned down by incoming fire. The ground contact was really rattled. He was stuttering and unable to give clear directions. I tried putting him at ease by asking him where he was from. He responded, "I don't know, sir." I then asked him his name and he gave me the same reply. Finally he said, "Sir, I'm so scared I can hardly talk." We dropped a marker and he started settling down and give good direction and used his strobe so we could begin firing. Once we

opened up, he started shouting, "Great! Great! I can hear the bastards screaming." We stayed with him for another hour until he felt secure and no longer needed our help.

My finest moment came one afternoon when I was the acting Ops Officer and a very large Army Green Beret came into the office. He asked if I knew who flew Shadow 45 the previous night and supported their unit. It had been my crew. He immediately put his arms around me, lifted me off the ground and hugged me so tightly I thought my ribs would crack. He kept saying, "Thanks for saving our lives." He had tears in his eyes as he handed me a scrap piece of paper on which there was a note, written in pencil, that read: "Shadow 45 - Thanks for saving our lives. Without you guys, we would all have been killed." It was signed by the six soldiers that survived the firefight and had been air rescued by helicopter. That moment meant more to me than all the medals I received in my 23 years of military service.

My saddest day was when I was nearing the end of my glorious R & R in Hawaii and received word that Lt. Col. Bernie Knapic and several members of his crew, including his navigator, Maj. Jerry Rice, who had been with me since the days at Clinton County AFB, were killed when their aircraft went down after takeoff at Tan Son Nhut. Bernie was the second person I knew who died shortly after returning from their R&R. Our flight surgeon, Doc Fields, was killed when an aircraft he was flying in was shot down. Some very brave people lost their lives in that conflict. May they all Rest in Peace.



Norman J. Evans, Gunner

17th SOS, Phan Rang, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



I joined the Air Force in Monroe, Michigan on 29 December 1955. After various assignments and training schools, I volunteered and was assigned to the 4th Air Commando Squadron, flying AC-47 Spooky gunships in Vietnam. After flying combat

in "Puff", I was assigned to the 20th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) at Hurlburt Field, flying UH-1N helicopter gunships. At Hurlburt, I volunteered for AC-119 gunships.

Reporting in June 1970 to the 17th SOS at Phan Rang AB, I was assigned to Fighting C Flight at Tan Son Nhut (TSN) AB at Saigon. While stationed at TSN, I lived at the Merlin Hotel in Saigon along with other enlisted Shadow aircrew members. The hotel was located not far from the American Gate at Tan Son Nhut. A shuttle bus transported us back and forth to the base and flight line. My buddies were my fellow gunners and other Shadow crewmembers. I always remember the outstanding people we had in our flight and squadron. All combat missions were serious business but there were times for a little humor.

While watching F-4 Phantoms deploy



drag chutes after landing at TSN to slow them down during roll-out, it occurred to me that the Shadow gunship should also have a drag chute. Wheels started turning and next thing I knew, my gun compartment comrades (NOS excluded) and I had devised a drag chute from a flare parachute. Upon landing touchdown at TSN after our next mission, I threw the Shadow drag chute out the flare launcher door for deployment. To everyone's disappointment, it was a dud! The chute collapsed and dragged along behind the speeding gunship like a rag on a string. I pulled 'the dud' into the aircraft as we taxied off the runway. Even the pilot had no idea that we were trying to help him slow down the hot boxcar.

Once when I was flying on a normal combat mission, firing at a target when a 7.62mm high explosive incendiary shell exploded in a minigun chamber. Shrapnel shot everywhere. I was working close to the gun and caught a small sliver in my eye. We continued the mission until Bingo Fuel and returned to base at Saigon. After landing and upon engine shutdown, I departed the aircraft and immediately headed for the base infirmary. The flight surgeon extracted the sliver of metal from my eye and applied a bandage over the eye. I returned to Shadow Ops to inform the Ops Officer that I was DNIF. WELL, the Ops Officer was not at all sympathetic nor did he honor my DNIF status. I was already scheduled for the next mission because our Flight was short on gunners at the time. Injured or not I was going on the next mission which I flew as a one-eyed gunner.

Another time we were flying a daytime armed recon mission over Cambodia when all of a sudden a jet came out of nowhere and buzzes our Shadow. From our six o'clock

position, the jet shot very close to the top of our gunship. The sound and vibrations caused by the jet startled our crew. What in the hell was that?? Then the warplane was identified by a knowing pilot. It was a MiG 15, a bandit! We wondered if the MiG was only warning us that we were doomed and that he would soon turn to make his kill? Everyone scanned the skies for imminent aerial attack as time slowly passed. Thankfully, the MiG did not return. We gladly headed back to Saigon and landed. A few of us changed our flight suit before going to debrief. During debriefing, we learned that the Cambodian Air Force had MiG 15 fighter aircraft. The bandit was a friendly MIG!

In January 1971, I was transferred from TSN to Phan Rang as SEFE gunner to train the Vietnamese in the AC-119G. I departed Vietnam in June 1971, having completed my one year tour of duty. Stateside, I was assigned to the 415th SOTS, flying the AC-119G and AC-119K. In 1972, I, along with many other gunners from the 17th SOS, was selected for "Project Credible Chase" in which one pilot and one gunner flew single-engine Helio Stallion AU-24 and Pilatus Porter AU-23 gunship aircraft. Both gunships were equipped with one three-barrel 20mm Gatling cannon. From there, I went back to AC-130s and became the first enlisted sensor operator, position normally held by a navigator. In 1975, I transferred to Korat, Thailand as an AC-130 sensor operator.

In my five tours in Southeast Asia (4 in Vietnam, 1 in Thailand), I was awarded the Command Crew Wing, the Senior Jump Wing, one Bronze Star, the DFC with four Oak Leaf Clusters, 21 Air Medals, and a Purple Heart. I retired from the United States Air Force as a Chief Master Sergeant in December 1985.



I was born in Lawrence County, Indiana in 1940. In 1958, I graduated from Bedford High School in my hometown of Bedford, Indiana. In 1963, I graduated from Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana. Upon graduation from Butler, I joined the United States Air Force Reserves to avoid the Selective Service Draft.

I served with the 71st Special Operations Squadron in flight-line maintenance at Nha Trang Air Base, Vietnam in 1968-69. The most exciting AC-119 event for me was landing at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska in ice fog on the ferry mission to Vietnam. I'll always remember playing Euchre (card game) and the good times living in the hootch, only

steps away from the NCO Club, and closing the club nightly with Paul Goen.

On 19 June 1969, I separated from the Air Force at Bakalar AFB, Columbus, Indiana. I currently live in Zionsville, Indiana.





Robert D. Farmer, Maint.

17th SOS, Phan Rang, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



I was born in New London, Huron County, Ohio on May 1, 1950. I enlisted in the United States Air Force at Bangor, Maine in November 1968 and served until

my discharge in February 1972 as a Sergeant (E-4).

In 1968, the Draft was going strong and I thought it would be better to enlist than to be drafted. After boot camp, I went to Sheppard AFB, Texas for Aircraft Mechanic Technical School. My first duty assignment after tech school was to Lockbourne AFB, Ohio with the 4408th CCTS where I worked on C-123s. I decided to volunteer for a worldwide tour and was sent to Vietnam. I arrived in Vietnam February 1970 and was assigned to the 17th SOS at Phan Rang AB to work on AC-119G gunships. After five months at Phan Rang, I volunteered to go to the FOB at Tan Son Nhut AB, where I spent my last seven months in Vietnam.

While I was at Tan Son Nhut, I volunteered to return to Vietnam as a Flight Mechanic on the C-7A Caribou. So after my 30-day leave in the States, I went to Hurlbert Air Field where I worked on A-1E Sky Raiders for a short time before beginning training as a Flight Mechanic. I went to Tyndell AFB,

Florida for physiological training in the altitude chamber and ejection seat. From there, I went to Dyes AFB, Texas for air crew training, followed by survival training at Fairchild AFB, Washington. Jungle survival school at Clark AFB, Philippines was the final training before entering Vietnam for my second tour of duty in September 1971. I was assigned to the 457th TAS at Cam Ranh Bay AB. I flew as a flight mechanic/load master on the C-7A Caribou through 1972. U. S. Troop withdrawals sent me back to the States early. When I returned stateside, I was discharged from the Air Force at Travis AFB, California. Civilian again! I have many fond memories of my service and wouldn't change a thing, except for maybe staying in for twenty years.



Bob Farmer & Don Sanchez



Larry Elton Fletcher, Pilot

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



I was born in Moniteau County, Missouri on August 15, 1943.

After graduation from California High School, California, MO in 1961, I graduated from Missouri State University in Springfield with a B.S. in Education in 1965. To avoid getting drafted, I

enrolled as a graduate assistant at the University of Missouri in Columbia and graduated in 1966 with a Master of Education degree. I taught high school and coached at Kankakee Westview HS, Illinois during 1966-67 and St.

Charles HS, Missouri during 1967-68 before joining the U.S. Air Force in St. Louis in June 1968.

Upon commissioning from OTS at Medina '68 and graduation from UPT at Randolph Oct '69, I selected the AC-119 gunship because it had guns and immediately entered the Vietnam War "pipeline". Survival Training at Fairchild, C-119 Training at Clinton County AFB, AC-119 Training at Lockbourne AFB, and Jungle Survival School at Clark AB preceded my May 1970 war zone entry point at Cam Ranh Bay. From there, it was a mortar/rocket overnight at Phan Rang AB where I was assigned by 17th SOS HQ to C Flight at Tan Son Nhut AB, Saigon, RVN. From May 1970 to May 1971, I flew the majority of my 177 combat missions over Cambodia. I flew as co-pilot for just about everybody in Fighting C Flight until I was

checked out as aircraft commander - Shadow 27.

I was designated Outstanding Junior Officer of the 17th SOS and was nominated by the 14th SOW for Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) Outstanding Junior Officer of the Year. I was awarded the DFC with OLC and the Air Medal with eight OLCs for duty in SEA.

Upon completion of my Vietnam duty, I was assigned to "Dog Patch Airlines", 4650th Combat Support Squadron, Air Defense Command at Richards-Gabauer AFB, K.C., MO, flying C-119J "Boxcars" as line/instructor pilot in CONUS and Canada. I was promoted to Captain and accepted a commission in the Regular Air Force. The 4650th was deactivated and I reported for duty in August 1972 with the 2048th Communications Squadron, AFCS as Operations Officer for American Central NOTAM (Notice To Airmen) facility, concurrently flying Convair T-29s as a support pilot (Taxi Driver for SAC Generals) for SAC 7th Bomb Wing, Carswell AFB, Texas.

Upon learning that my AF future was SAC and B-52 bombers, I resigned my regular commission and was honorably discharged on August 15, 1973; subsequently I was assigned to the USAF Ready Reserve. On December 5, 1986, I was honorably discharged from the Air Force Reserves.

After leaving active duty in '73, I immediately returned to teaching and coaching at St. Charles, MO before entering school administration. Utilizing the GI Bill to further my education, I earned the Educational Specialist degree in 1981 and the Doctor of Education degree in 1984, both degrees from the University of Missouri at Columbia.



I retired from public school teaching and administration in 1997 to devote full time to writing which initially began with publishing Moniteau County Schools History 1810-1984. Since then, I have published two novels about AC-119 gunship combat in the Vietnam War. Shadows of Saigon – Air Commandos in Southeast Asia and its sequel The Shadow Spirit – Flying Stingers and BUFFs in S.E.A.

My wife, Sue and I reside at Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri. We have ten grandchildren.

 Don Foster, Gunner
18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, 1972

I was the NCOIC for the 18th Special Operations Squadron Stinger gunners at NKP, Thailand in 1972. The combat mission that I remember the most was over Laos. I was a gunner and scanner on the mission. Our squadron commander, Lt. Col. Mathews, was the aircraft commander for Stinger 23.

I was the forward scanner positioned in the open doorway of the NOS (night observation scope) and we were taking lots of Triple A. I called Triple A, 11 o'clock, Break Right, Break Right! All Colonel Mathews and the co-pilot heard over the intercom was Break – Break; therefore they automatically broke left. All other crewmembers heard my call to break right. The aft scanner (the IO located in the open doorway of the flare launcher) said we took a round close enough to the aircraft's belly that he could have reached out and touched it. To compound our situation, another enemy gun started firing at us as we broke left. If we had in fact broken to the right as I had called, it's very possible that I wouldn't be writing this account. After things

settled down and it got quiet on the intercom, someone blurted over the intercom, "Son of a Bitch." Colonel Mathews responded with, "Who said that?" The answer was, "It was me sir, the aft scanner. We just took a round between the booms." The Colonel's response was, "Well, okay, but son of a bitch is not the right call." There's no doubt in my mind that someone up there was watching out for Stinger 23 that night.



Minigun



LeRoy E. Frahm, Maintenance

71st SOS/17th SOS, Nha Trang, Phan Rang, Tan Son Nhut, 1969

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.



Donald D. Fraker, Pilot

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, Phan Rang, 1970-71

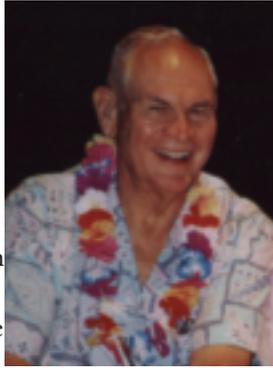


I was born in my Grandparent's home in Julesburg Sedgwick County Colorado May 30 1932. I graduated from the University of Northern Colorado at Greeley and was commissioned through the ROTC program on June 1 1954. Following Primary Pilot Training in T-34s and T-28s, I trained in B-25s at Vance AFB, Enid, OK, where I received the class award for obtaining the highest grade on my instrument flight check.

Upon completing B-29 heavy aircraft transition, I

accumulated 2400 hours in six years flying KC-97 tankers. I then left active duty and returned to Colorado for a position with the National Guard. There was little flying time in the Guard, so in May 1964, at my wife's suggestion, I went back on active duty. I flew C-124s out of Hill AFB, UT for three years, logging more than 2050 hours. The mission included monthly flights to SEA that counted for combat pay and Air Medals. In my follow-on assignment, I flew C-118 AirEvac missions from Clark AB, Philippines. We spent a week or two each month in Vietnam moving wounded people from the field hospitals to hospitals that could take them to bigger hospitals in Japan or return to the U.S. By the end of this tour I had another 1400 flying hours and lots of time in Vietnam. Even so, my next assignment was to Vietnam to fly AC119s.

Then I served as Chief of Military Training of the Student Group at Keesler AFB, MS. The Group included 37 squadrons and 13,000 students. After two years, I was assigned to Southern Command in Panama as the Chief of Plans for the Canal. They closed the Southern Command in 1976. Then I was sent to the C-141 Wing at McGuire AFB NJ. After learning I would not be flying, I took terminal leave and arranged my retirement.



I served on active duty for over 21 years, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel at Lowry AFB CO on September 29, 1976. My awards and decorations included the Distinguished Flying Cross, two Meritorious Service medals, sixteen Air Medals, and a Medal of Honor from the Vietnamese Air Force.

AC-119 Shadow Vietnam Tour July 4, 1970 - June 16, 1971

One of my closest friends, with whom I spent 6 1/2 years flying KC-97's, went to AC-119 Gunships when he left SAC. We talked on the phone about how that was. His response was "Moose, it is a great mission". Well after two years hauling our wounded troops in, around, and out of VN, I told him I wanted to defend our troops.

At that time I had 5900 hours flying time (all prop time). I was a "shoo in for Shadows." So I brought my family back to CONUS and went to Clinton County Air Patch and started the transition. I had no problem with any of the checkout process. After the transition, I was sent to Columbus AFB OH to learn to shoot, and to handle the eight man crew plus instructors.

On July 1, 1970, I was on my way back to Clark and the jungle survival school. The Negritos had no problem rounding up snakes for us to see and learn about. Of course we all remember you could not hide from them as they could smell us even buried under a foot of sh-___. From there we went to Tan Son Nhut and the 17th SOS where we all served some time. I was told they were hot for my body because of my multi engine experience.

After my in-country checkout, and a dozen missions, I was upgraded to IP. Six missions later I was given my Flight Examiner check ride. From then on all of you who were there had me looking over your shoulder at one time or another.

Col Teal was riding with me early on and we were down south, firing at canal movers. We were at 1500' as I recall and "pow" the canopy over the engineer's head shattered and Plexiglas spewed all over the cockpit. The engineer called out "I'm hit". Lo and behold he was wounded by the flying Plexiglas. A quick check was made to make sure everyone and everything was OK. I was ready to resume shooting but Col Teal states that if your aircraft was hit, you were to "return to base" RTB. After landing we found the AK-47 round that tumbled into the cockpit providing one Purple Heart for the engineer.

My first nickname was Cowkiller. I was giving a Wing Staff Colonel a firing ride and an opportunity to see how good we were. We were running canals in Cambodia. The NOS spotted a mover on the canal. Moonbeam was called and we were cleared to expend. The Col didn't do too badly. He didn't hurt anything and soon the NOS called out cease fire; it was a water buffalo.

I was grounded three different times for too many flying hours in a month or too many missions in a week. I loved being at Tan Son Nhut. You could fly all night, come back to the hooch and pile your sweaty flight suit and undies on the floor and wake up later and find them all washed and ready for the night's mission. Tough war.

When we were supporting Cambodia so heavily, we were flying around the clock. You all remember, we were not in Cambodia at that time; we were just "over it". I had 600 hours, just over it. On one mission, it was just getting light '0 dark 30' and the ground was dark which made it hard to make out targets. We got into a firefight. That was the morning I helped to train the Cong with their nine level 51 cal. capabilities. The tracers were coming up past the nose so close I felt like I could reach out and catch them. The crew was not happy with me as I always said, "If I got ammo, I fire out". It was getting pretty intense; the crew said "Let's break and run." They were so noisy that I turned off the intercom switch. Finally the Nav banged my head and told me we had taken a hit. Second time. I started listening to what was going on and they told me a fuel cell was leaking fuel. We watched it for a few minutes and it quit. I broke out of the firing circle and we RTB. I called in the hit and reported all was OK. The Wing CO wanted me in his office immediately on landing. We checked for a leak and found no evidence of a leak. We were on the ground for 1 1/2 hours before it started to leak again. After my telling the CO the story, he returned me to work. Sure do thank the people that put the tank sealer in.

There was another mission I would share. I was giving a

young Captain (AC) a check ride and we were called in by a Ground Commander (GC) to help him from being overrun by the VC. All was going OK until we got into a shootout and the AC could not push the trigger. The ground commander said to shoot on his position and kill everyone. He said he would rather we do it than be captured by the VC. We were getting a lot of ground fire and it was getting pretty hot. I ordered the pilot to shoot. He did not.

About that time “ka-pow”, the cockpit filled with smoke and in a quiet moment I asked if everyone was OK. The copilot did not answer. I could see he was turning white. Again I said “Copilot are you OK?” We could not hear him. Finally I reached over the console and grabbed his helmet and turned his head toward me. He was very green by this time and I repeated “Are you OK?” He just shook his head “Yes”. We found out after a bit the 51 cal. round that came into the cockpit severed his intercom wire. He could hear but he couldn’t talk or be heard. He was so relieved that he wasn’t dead. The round had come up through the nose wheel and glanced off the bell crank counter-weight that aided the nose wheel to move up and down. The 51 cal. projectile hit the inside of the armor plate and ricocheted back to the copilot’s knee, injuring him. Third hit and “Another purple heart”.

After the smoke cleared and we restored order in the cockpit, I told the Captain to fire out. He refused to shoot. I reached up from my jump seat and jerked his butt out of the seat. I got in and started firing two guns on line and hollering for more. We were being effective for the GC and then we went bingo bullets (all fired out) so we held for a few minutes until the next Shadow could come in and replace us. Bernie Smith fondly nicknamed me “Magnet Ass.” After we landed, we were walking around the airplane. I said, “I just wonder what would have happened if the round had not hit that bell crank.” After some eyeballing and estimating, we decided that round would have cut me in half.

Next, I was selected to go to Phan Rang to train the Vietnamese crews to fly our gunship. That was an experience. The VNAF were good pilots and crew. They had just never flown a gunship. There was lots of ground school and classroom work. The biggest challenge was they had never flown nights. Their air war was from dawn to dark for them.

My first student was the Squadron Commander. He was savvy. He had lots of flying time and know how. He picked up the tactics quickly and had a lot of training to do with his other people. His second-in-command was also good. The CO’s copilot was a brand new graduate of our flying schools in the U.S. Once again, a challenge one dark night we were near Pleiku. You know the spot, 280 radial 60

miles. We were called in to support the Vietnamese ground forces in trouble, (TIC) troops in contact. Major Duc was in the seat and it was under cast. He asked me to take the seat as he could not talk with the ground commander and shoot. I knew this was a hot spot from our Intel brief. I got in the seat and took charge of the situation. The French interpreter had been killed so we were working strictly with the South Vietnam forces. We were in the firing circle and “boom,” explosions were happening on the ground. I took a quick survey around the cockpit and the young copilot had turned off the guard channel and there was an air strike going on through us. We did not hear the “arty report on Guard”. I had a very deep and serious debrief with the copilot when we got home.

I mentioned before these people were good but had a lot of adjusting to do. They did not like to fly all night. One example was my young copilot who fell asleep while we were in a firefight and I was firing out. I was good and was able unknowingly to handle it all by myself.

Another highlight was the VNAF (friends) wanted to give us a party for helping them. We received an OK and made plans. The Wing CO was invited and Major Duc wanted me to get clearance from him to invite “The Air Marshall for Vietnam” as a guest; he was none other the Nguyen Cao Ky! We had a wonderful meal of the local fare and many other things as well.

Some 19 years later, I attended a guest speaker function at my alma mater (UNC) and guess who the feature speaker was? None other than Nguyen Cao Ky. He was still preaching that we deserted them and left them to be overrun by the Viet Cong. He appreciated me coming up and introducing myself. He remembered the party at Phan Rang and autographed the book the aircrews had given me over 19 years previously.

I kept a diary of all my missions, time and rounds expended during my tour. I had flown 239 missions, in 937.4 hours and expended or supervised the firing of 1,750,000 rounds of 7.62 ammo.

The question is always asked, “Were we effective?” One of the ways to answer that question was to explain it this way. We were taught that the miniguns were capable of putting an ammo round in every square inch in a football field in a two minute standard rate turn circle. Our mission was to destroy the enemy’s desire to fight. In doing that, many lives were destroyed. We always asked for the number of KBA (killed by air). Sometimes we were given estimates at the end of our time over target. During daylight hours

you could see what and who you were firing on. You could see bodies if the area was clear. On one mission we were cleared to sink a passenger boat on a river and we could see the river run red from the blood of those we shot. The bad guys would take over boats because they knew we would not shoot friendlies. Our orders were approved to shoot on that target. I would pray for God's forgiveness as I was shooting

or clearing the pilot to shoot. I'm happy that only God knows how many lives we took.

I was with Marty Noonan giving him a firing ride on my last mission (fini flight). As did we all, I got the hose down by the troops that were there. I have the fondest of memories of those days.



Robert P. Frederick, Pilot

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, 1971

Born in Medford, Massachusetts in 1944, I grew up in Wakefield and graduated from Wakefield Memorial High School in 1961. I graduated from Northeastern University located in Boston with a degree in Modern Languages in 1966. I then had a choice of enlisting or getting drafted. The recruiter said the Air Force paid an extra \$100.00 per month if I became a pilot, so I joined in October 1966 and graduated from Officers Training School in January 1967. Then I reported for pilot training at Craig AFB, Alabama. We got so far behind the training time line due to bad weather that all the bachelors in my class were reassigned; I ended up at Webb AFB, Texas to complete T-38 training. My first assignment prior to flying the AC-119 gunship was with SAC as a B-52 copilot at Kincheloe AFB, Michigan.

I served in the 18th SOS from January thru November 1971 at NKP. I was lucky enough to spend the entire tour at NKP, Thailand. On one occasion, I did ferry a Stinger to DaNang. One night in "Rocket City" was enough for me. I served as an instructor pilot during the last six months of my tour.



I'll always remember trying (usually unsuccessfully) to keep Ollie (Howard Reid) and sometimes Stanley (Gary Hitzeman) sober, or at least mobile enough to get to their hooch. For my noble service WELL above and beyond the call of duty, my buddies nicknamed me, "De Debil" as in "De Debil made me do it" (this was during Flip Wilson's era on TV).

Two missions stand out during my tour. First, my Stinger crew was sent to Saigon to provide security for the "Saigon Commandos" at Ton Son Nhut during the Republic of Vietnam elections and we flew a rare daylight mission on 29 September 1971 as escort for a river convoy on the Mekong. For once, it was nice to see what I was shooting at. The

convoy was the first successful one in several months.

The other mission that I remember was much more exciting. While flying over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the Barrel Roll area of Laos on 15 October 1971, we got "goal posted" by three rounds of triple-A. Goal posted means taking a triple-A round or rounds between the gunship's booms. We were fortunate to take no hits to the aircraft. In fact, I was lucky enough to NEVER take a hit.

After returning to "the world", I flew WB-57Fs at Kirtland AFB, New Mexico until mid-1974 when the planes were decommissioned. Then I went to Travis AFB, California and flew C-5s until I retired in 1987. I was fortunate enough to be hired by UPS in 1988 and flew right and left seats in the DC-8. Now I'm relegated to the back seat due to my advanced age (by decree of the FAA).

I currently live in Louisville, KY with my wife Janice and dog.



Mama-san didn't have all the flight suits washed so a roguish AC-119K crew makes do with what they have. A crew complete with its own live white Buddah and the notorious Air Pirate, Howie Reid.

Standing in back: TSgt. Ken "Lurch" Daniels, gunner; Capt. Pat McGillis, Pilot; Capt. Howie "The Air Pirate" Reid, Navigator; Capt. John "Mad Dog" Morgan, Pilot; Capt. Bob "De Debil" Fredericks, Pilot; and 1Lt. Larry "The Buddah" Oliver, Co-pilot.

Kneeling in front: Sgt Gary Lane, Gunner; Sgt Felix Caballero, Gunner; and the scourge of Natick High School, IO and scanner extraordinaire, SSgt Bill Petrie.

(Many thanks to the family of Col. James Chapman, Stinger navigator, for this photo.)



Dennis E. French, Gunner

17th SOS, Nha Trang, 1969



Sgt. Dennis French is kneeling on the right end of front row.

No Bio Submitted



Charles "Chick" Freund, III, Pilot

18th SOS, NKP, Bien Hoa, DaNang, 1972-73

I was born in Columbus, Georgia (Muscogee City) on January 16, 1947. I was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the United States Air Force through the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) upon graduation 13 June 1970 from Miami University (the REAL one – in Ohio). Keynote speaker was Neil Armstrong, 11 months after his historic moon landing and walk. He also administered our Commissioning Oath.

My active duty service started in August 1970 upon reporting to Laughlin AFB, Texas for Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT). After successful training in T-41, T-37, and T-38 aircraft, I graduated from UPT in October 1971. Assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron for AC-119 gunship training, I entered the "Vietnam Pipeline"; first attending Water Survival School at Homestead AFB, Florida in October 1971 followed by Basic Survival Training at Fairchild AFB, Washington, C-119 training at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio, AC-119K training at Hurlburt Field, Florida, and Jungle Survival School at Clark AB, Philippines. On 10 April 1972, I arrived in country and reported for Stinger gunship duty at Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand. During my tour, I experienced the usual side trips to Bien Hoa and DaNang including a 130 day rotation to DaNang.

I separated from Active Duty in January 1980 as a Captain while at Beale (Northern California was a tough assignment but we roughed it out. We had a DO there who had come

to Beale as a Captain and was still there as an O-6). We stayed in California five more years and then moved to the Atlanta area in 1985. We're still here.

Awards and Decorations from Southeast Asia duty include the Distinguished Flying Cross (for support of troops being overrun by Viet Cong) and 6 Air Medals (106 combat missions).

Assignments

- Aug 70 – Oct 71: UPT, Laughlin AFB, TX
- Apr 72 – Jan 73: AC-119K copilot, 18th SOS, NKP, Thailand, DaNang & Bien Hoa AB, RVN
- Feb 73 – Jul 75: KC-135A copilot, Wright-Patterson AFB, OH

Flight Info

2500 hours USAF total, 1900 hours KC-135A & Q
370 hours AC-119K, 40 hours a-119G

Promotion Dates

2Lt 13 Jun 1970, 1Lt 13 Jun 1972, Cpt 13 Feb 1975
Maj 01 Jan 1989, Ltc 01 Jan 1996, **Active Duty:** Aug 1970 – Jan 1980, **Reserves:** Jan 1988 – Jul 1998

Fully Retired: (i.e., retirement pay started) Jan 2007

Vietnam Recollections

I will remember details of my second day at DaNang and my first rocket attack. I had been issued a flack vest and helmet and was told to put them under my bed in case of attack. When I finally realized that we were under rocket attack, I went to get under my bed as previously instructed; however, there were lots of dust bunnies under there, so I pulled out my vest and helmet from under the bed, put them on, and went to a cleaner spot by a wall and covered up further with my laundry bag. As the saying goes, “What you can’t see won’t hurt you!” (The newly renovated swimming pool was hit, as well as the building next to mine. One of our aircraft commanders whom I had not yet met was just leaving that building on his way to fly a mission. I remember his left arm being torn horribly and another piece of rocket shrapnel had pierced his checklist, which was in a lower leg pocket. He subsequently died.)

On a more pleasant side I also remember that the local BX ran out of toothpaste but had a 20 year supply of Polygrip on hand. I don’t recall ever meeting anyone in SEA that wore dentures.... Go figure-. Also, the local “diner” in Gunfighter Village, the so-called “No Hab Kitchen” was an experience. I once tried to order a hamburger. “No hab hamburger; only hab cheeseburger.” “OK, give me cheeseburger, no cheese.” “OK, G.I.”

Breaking out a bag of RTB candy was a mini-tradition in the Stingers after a mission was over and we were flying back in “safe” territory. However, the BX at Bien Hoa had run out of M&Ms during one of my rotations there. Also, we ran out of chalk for the pool cues in the BOQ. Oh, the hardships we suffered!

Since Lieutenant Colonels outnumbered us First Lieutenants in our unit, I occasionally pulled duty as the Duty Officer (I was in charge of the Department of Redundancy). While on duty one time, I remember calling a local eatery for dinner, a hamburger and a Coke. The Coke came in a rubber banded sandwich bag with a straw sticking out.

I still remember, as I am sure all of us do, while I was a pilot in SEA, the picture on the front page of the Pacific Stars & Stripes of “The Bitch,” as she is known in our circle, in Hanoi looking up the barrel of a triple-A gun. ’Nuff said about that.

While at NKP, I discovered that some guys had their wives living in Bangkok, so my wife, Andrea, came over in early July 1972. I remember catching a hop on the C-130 shuttle to Bangkok to meet her when she arrived. Somehow my B4 bag had been left on the tarmac at NKP, so when my wife

arrived after a 3-month absence, all I had was the “green bag” that I had traveled in. I had a two-day beard and no clean clothing. Andrea had a bad case of food poisoning that she’d contracted on the last leg of her flight. What a romantic reunion! Fortunately, my B4 bag with shaving kit and clean underwear arrived at Bangkok International the next morning and my wife recovered quickly. We stayed in the Florida Hotel (w/o a “girl”) the first night and got a room at the Chaophya Hotel for the next few nights. We both remember being careful to honor Thai customs and not to do anything overtly sexual in public, like holding hands.

My wife subsequently got an apartment in Bangkok, complete with a maid, Som Roum, who did cleaning, laundry (by hand in a tin washtub on the back porch), shopping, fixing meals, etc. She was more expensive than some other maids because she spoke English. \$35 a month; such a deal! My wife got a job teaching at International School Bangkok (ISB). She was paid 13,600 baht per month (that was about \$680). ISB took care of visas for her, so it was no longer necessary for her to take a bus trip to Cambodia every thirty days to satisfy visa requirements.

My wife and I toured extensively in Bangkok and visited Pattaya Beach and Hong Kong. I was in Bien Hoa when Bob Hope made what was to be his final SEA Christmas tour. (Thanks for the memories – my father-in-law had seen Bob during WWII.) The powers-that-be managed to get a number of buses together to take those of us at Bien Hoa that wanted to go to Saigon to see his show. Intel reports said that we could expect a 100% chance of getting shot at either on the 12-mile trip over or back. We were never shot at; so much for intel. (and I’m not talking “chips”).

Most of my wife’s and my personal memories of the war in SEA are pleasant ones. Since she was in country, we talked on the phone daily when I was at NKP, so she was spared the agony of watching stateside news reports and wondering if I’d been on the receiving end of any of the action that day. I have been interviewed several times in past years, as I am sure many of my fellow servicemen have been, by students studying the war in Vietnam in school. I have given them the “War in Vietnam According to Chick Freund” view which, since it usually included some of the above stories, may perhaps have been slightly skewed from the version they learned in school.

My tour was due to end in April 1973, but since my wife was teaching and the school year was not over until June, I tried to extend my tour by a couple of months. However, Henry Kissinger (“Henry the K”) managed to “negotiate a cessation of hostilities” and, since I was in a combat unit,

I got sent home early. (As I tell people around here, the Vietnam saga had been going on for years until I got there. Then, within a few months, Henry the K was able to do his job, since (apparently) I had been doing mine so well; therefore, I take credit for ending the war in Vietnam! (Cause/effect logic works for me.) I had volunteered via the Form 90 "Dream Sheet" to extend in SEA, for assignment anywhere in Europe, or South America, anywhere but back to the U.S.A. So, in its infinite wisdom and accommodation, Personnel Center assigned me back to the States. Not only that, but I got Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. Let's see, now – went to school in Ohio, was stationed there for some interim training, and now on to Dayton. Join the Air Force and see the world!

Returning stateside, I reported in February 1973 to Castle AFB, California for KC-135A co-pilot training. Training was completed in May.

Many of the guys I knew from SEA wound up going thru Castle (SAC had major pilot needs, apparently) about the same time. We would be in a classroom, or a restaurant, or wherever, and hear the whoomp sound of closing doors, somebody dropping something heavy, or whatever would make that sound – the sound of a rocket impact. Each one of us would react by ducking under the desk or table before realizing where we were and that it was not another rocket attack. Then we would catch each others' eyes and smile knowingly as we regained our seats. Other students, perhaps just out of UPT or UNT, or other restaurant customers, including any wives or girlfriends, as the case might have been – who had not gone through the experience – would just stare at us, sometimes laughing – not derisively, just more out of curiosity. The experienced wives would smile compassionately, not knowing what it had been like to experience rocket attacks but realizing that we did.



Rod Friese, Illuminator Operator

17th SOS, Phan Rang, 1970-71



Murphysboro, Illinois was my birthplace in 1949. I graduated in 1967 from Unity High School near my home town of Sidney, Illinois. I joined the Air Force at Indianapolis, Indiana on 25 July 1968. The Draft was sneaking up on me and higher education at the time was not my 'bag'. So, I went to the Air Force recruiter, thinking somehow I could get a flying job in Vietnam even though

I had already lost two classmates to the war. One classmate was in the Army and the other in the Marine Corps.

Flying in Vietnam, one of the most memorable missions was a routine "Shadow Box" target, nothing specific even though Intel had numerous reports of enemy activity within the map coordinates. Box missions were usually boring, orbiting in the sky, looking for anything that moved. After an hour or so of boring holes in the sky, we came across a compound that our navigator had seen before on a previous search, but now they had what appeared to be a makeshift Red Cross on the roof of the building. We checked with Saigon control and they radioed back within minutes, saying the building had been reported as an enemy ammo

storage building, not a medical facility by reconnaissance that day. They gave us permission to fire and we let them have it, first with one mini-gun which caused secondary explosions. Then we fired with all four mini-guns at the same time and the ensuing explosions lit up the countryside for miles around. In thirty minutes time, we had wiped out a large stockpile of enemy munitions.

Soon after I had arrived in country, I experienced a highly intense mission at Dak Seang, South Vietnam where enemy forces were about to overrun American troops. Besides the Shadow gunship, there were many types of U.S. aircraft flying in support of our ground troops. C-123 and C-130 aircraft made supply drops while U.S. Army helicopters attacked enemy troops and Air Force fighter jets dropped bombs and napalm on enemy locations before strafing. It was a very, very congested airspace and we had to keep a sharp eye out for the other aircraft as well as enemy ground fire. It was hard work, keeping the flares going, helping gunners drag cans of brass, and watching for anti-aircraft fire. Amid the sounds of our guns firing and the rushing wind outside the gunship while scanning below for enemy fire, I had to listen very closely on the intercom headset for commands from the pilot to launch flares. It took about five days and nights to drive off the enemy but we did it.

Flying missions over the Bolovens Plateau in Southern Laos, out of Phu Cat Air Base, Vietnam for three weeks

in December 1970 was really exciting. There were lots of fireworks there. During those missions I experienced the most intense heat that I have ever felt from bomb explosions and napalm. We would hit the target areas in the Plateau, go Bingo Fuel and Winchester and have to land at Ubon, Thailand to regenerate. A couple of times we ended up staying overnight at Ubon. That was a nice break!

I remember the feelings I had and still have for every time we returned from a "Hot" mission. We accomplished exactly what we were tasked in a short amount of time; it always resulted in defeating "Charlie". We whooped their ass! And they knew it!

One of my most unpleasant memories of the AC-119 concerns the choice of Ohio for combat crew training. It still seems ludicrous that we were expected to train for Southeast Asia by flying in the frigid Ohio winter in an aircraft with all the cargo compartment doors removed. Consequently, we got about one-half of our required training accomplished before they sent us to Vietnam.

I'll always remember my 20th birthday at Phan Rang, getting rolled out of bed and trucked to the flight line Fire Department water tank for a dunk. Who at Phan Rang can forget nights at the outdoor theater? When someone had a 'fini' flight, we'd uncork the champagne, skip the chow hall, and go from there. On crew stand-by status or even a day off from flying, I'll always remember the card games, the pranks, taking the officers to the NCO Club, and going with the officers to the O' Club to see how long it took before we got kicked out of either.

The best friends I made while in Vietnam were gunners. I've kept up with these guys through our AC-119 Gunship website and finally made a reunion in Branson. Great friendships were bonded during my year in Vietnam and I'll never forget that!

After twenty-two years service, I retired from the United States Air Force in May 1990 with the rank of Master Sergeant at Yokota Air Base, Japan..



Douglas "Doug" Frost, Navigator

18th SOS, DaNang, 1970-71



I was born in Berkeley, California on June 14 (Flag Day), 1936. We moved to Salt Lake City, Utah in 1939 where I was raised. Upon entering the University of Utah, I joined the AFROTC. In 1958 I served as the Cadet Commander and was subsequently commissioned a second lieutenant. I

completed Navigation School, then flew out of Plattsburgh AFB, NY for 7 years as a B-47 Navigator/Bombardier before being reassigned to Mather AFB, CA as a Navigator/Bombardier Instructor. From Mather AFB, I was sent to Indiana University where I earned an MBA before being assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron in the AC-119K. I was stationed at DaNang AB from April 1970 to March 1971. As the additional-duty Admin Officer, I spent many hours typing all the Air Medal Citations with 4 carbon copies!

I remain impressed with the incredible coordination we had with ten crewmembers on one intercom. On target there was no rank; every crewmember was essential to a

successful attack and to our survival. Positioned in the cargo compartment, I remember the IO and Gunner hanging out the back of the aircraft reporting the AAA. We literally "fell out of the air" evading AAA. I can see a fighter doing that, but an old cargo aircraft? The AC-119 was a rugged aircraft.

Three missions stick in my memory. In January 1971 we took a 23mm shell in the right jet engine. The explosion blew the engine cowling through the wing causing a fuel leak that continued through our touchdown at DaNang. Fortunately the fuel never caught fire. In late February 1971 we caught eight NVA PT-76 light tanks setting up an ambush for a South Vietnamese supply column near Hill 31 in Laos. We destroyed all eight tanks. Then there was the night of incredible airspace congestion during a TIC in the Ashau Valley. The area simultaneously included a FAC, a flare ship, two F-4s, our gunship and who knows how many Army helicopters, most flying lights-out, and some at undisclosed altitude, and all of us trying to prevent the enemy from overrunning a U.S. ground position.

Upon leaving DaNang I finally got to apply my MBA as Base Comptroller at Hurlburt



Field FL, the home of the Special Operations Forces. From there I did a hard-luck tour at Aviano AB, Italy as the Base Comptroller and Deputy Commander for Resource Management. In 1978, I was assigned to SAC Headquarters, Offutt AFB, NE. I completed a joint assignment with the U.S. Army Comptroller at 8th Army Headquarters in Yongsan, Korea (1981 to 1983), then returned to SAC Headquarters. I retired in July 1986 as a Colonel and remained in the Omaha area where I began teaching at Bellevue, a small, private, local University.

During my 20 years at Bellevue I earned a Ph.D. while

advancing from professor to the Dean of the College of Business. As Dean, I originated the Center for Information Technology that includes the Online MBA Program. Today, the Online MBA Program is the largest in Nebraska, with over 300 online students from around the world. The program allowed me to teach students from Thailand, Nepal, China, Russia, and South America, among many others. I retired from BU in 2006, and have spent much of my time volunteering as a member of the Board of Directors for the \$340 million SAC Federal Credit Union, where I presently serve as Board Chairman.



Rollin Gentes, Pilot

18th SOS, DaNang, 1969-70



Captain Rollin Gentes



Rollin & Wife
No Bio Submitted



R-L TopRow; Capt Rollin Gentes, 1st Lt Tony Robertson, Maj Earl Ducote, Maj Tom Sullivan, Maj Jack Vollenwieder, Bottom Row, TSgt Bob Stough, TSgt bob Piercy, A1C Gary Gatewood, A1C Deroberts, SSgt Shelby Lucky, Taken late summer 1970





William Gericke, Navigator

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, Phan Rang, 1970-71



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.



I was born in College Point, New York City, NY, in November 1934. I completed a BS degree, Manhattan College, NYC, NY and was commissioned June 5, 1956, through the AFROTC program. I entered active duty in June 1957 after first completing my MA at the Teachers College, Columbia University.

After navigator training at Harlingen AFB, TX, I completed combat crew training in the KC-97. During my 13 years in the KC-97G I was assigned to squadrons at Forbes AFB, KS, Plattsburgh AFB, NY, and Westover AFB, MA, with TDY to forward operating locations in Japan, England, and Okinawa in support of the RB-47’s missions and forward-alert duty stations in Greenland and in Newfoundland, Canada.

In 1965 I was assigned to the United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO as an instructor of management, psychology, and anthropology in the Department of Leadership and Psychology. Two years later I was reassigned to the University of Oregon for work on a PhD in Educational Psychology. In 1969 I was reassigned to gunships with the 17th SOS at Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. From gunships I was assigned to a C-130E Tactical Airlift unit at Forbes AFB, KS, where I had been assigned in 1958 during my initial assignment as a navigator. It was at Forbes AFB in June 1972 that I left the Air Force with 3649 hours of flying time in over 10 aircraft, and numerous awards and decorations including the Distinguish Flying Cross and

Air Medal with 7 OLCs. A year later (June 1973), I was awarded my PhD.

Recollections

I arrived at Cam Ranh Bay in February 1970, during the TET celebrations. The officers on my first crew were Charles Meier (pilot), Steve Norgress (co-pilot) and Dale White (co-navigator). Dale and I trained together at Lockbourne and alternated positions as table navigator and Night Observation Scope operator on our gunship crew.

My most memorable missions were flown defending Special Forces at Dak Seang and Dak Pek in the Highlands Campaign during the North Vietnamese Spring Offensive in April 1970. Both camps were being overrun. Shadow and Stinger aircrews provided suppressive fire and assisted in night supply drops. We flew back-to-back sorties for more than two weeks. On one mission, our ground contact at Dak Seang asked us to fire directly on his position. We asked him to repeat the unusual request. He responded with, “Roger that. All are indoors and the shutters are down and shut!” They were in hand-to-hand combat. Daylight was breaking when we received the request to fire on their position. In the twilight it was possible to see the North Vietnamese Army as they attacked through the perimeter defenses. Major Meier, our pilot, gave the order to hose-down the compound and primary bunker. After several

minutes, we received a "well done" call from the ground commander. We had suppressed the threat.

An unusual situation occurred during a night flight over Cambodia. We were directed to fire on a suspected NVA position about eight or nine clicks from a friendly encampment. I was on the NOS. On the first pass at the target area I spotted a circle of armored vehicles with personnel moving about seemingly unconcerned with our presence. I asked if the target included tanks or any other

kind of heavy vehicles. They did not. So we flew back to the encampment where we were redirected to the same location. There I confirmed that the suspected NVA were actually "friendlies" that were feeling secure under the watchful eye of Shadow!

My last mission at Phan Rang on December 3, 1970 was a hair-raiser. We lost the number one engine on take-off just as we broke ground. Capt. Slagle, our pilot, aborted and got the aircraft safely stopped on the runway.



Ronald Lee Gilbert, Gunner

18th SOS, Phan Rang, DaNang, Udorn, 1969-70

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, DaNang 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.

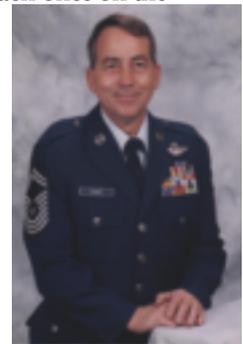
I vividly remember a Stinger interdiction mission in Steel Tiger East (Southern Laos), and flying across the border into the A Shau Valley of South Vietnam. We were firing on three trucks when a B-52 dropped its bomb load on OUR targets. Our flight engineer brought our jets to 100% power and our pilot, 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 DaNang, 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.



Paul K. Goen, Crew Chief

71st SOS, Nha Trang, 1969

I was born in 1936 at Indianapolis, Indiana where I grew up and attended school. I joined the U.S. Navy in 1955 and served on active duty until 1959. From 1959 to 1963, I was assigned to the Navy Reserves to complete my eight-year commitment to the Navy. I entered the U.S. Air Force at Bakalar AFB, Columbus, Indiana in October 1964. I joined

the Air Force because I liked to work on aircraft and to fly. Navy ships took too long to cross the Pacific at 16 knots; whereas, an Air Force gunship could fly the pond at 180 knots true air speed.

I was assigned to the 71st Special Operations Squadron in



4 Jan. 1969, March AFB, CA
 L-R: Maj. Dick Morgan, Copilot: Capt. Will R. Casey,
 Pilot: Lt. Col. Bill Woolen Nav.: Sgt. Squire Riley, Flight
 Engineer: Sgt. P. K. Goen, ground Crew Chief

May 1968. I helped ferry a AC-119G gunship from the States to Vietnam as a Staff Sergeant Ground Crew Chief. I even received flight pay! The flight crew consisted of Major Dick Morgan, Pilot; Captain Will R. Casey, Copilot; Lt. Colonel Bill Woolen, Navigator, and Staff Sergeant Squire Riley, Flight Engineer. We left March AFB, California on 4 January 1969 for the long trip to Nha Trang, Republic of Vietnam. I served at Nha Trang Air Base until returning to the States in June 1969.

The most exciting thing that happened to me in the 71st SOS “besides the flight to Vietnam” was a mortar attack at 0600 hours at Nha Trang.

After 29 years of military service, I retired from the USAF in February 1995 at Grissom AFB, Indiana. My wife Florence and I live in Southport (a suburb of Indianapolis), Indiana.



Garrettson “Garry” F. Gourley, FE

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



I was born in Lexington Massachusetts on 19 July 1933. Shortly after my birth, my folks moved to Wakefield, Massachusetts so my dad, an Electrical Engineer, could be closer to his job with General Electric. After graduating from Wakefield High School I realized there wasn't that much going for twenty-year olds so I joined the U.S. Army in 1954. After discharge in 1957 I enlisted in the Air Force because of my desire

to fly. Because of distance perception vision problems, I wasn't accepted into the Air Force Flight Training Program. I settled for Aircraft Maintenance/Flight Mechanic/Flight Engineer. I had USAF tours in Turkey; Andrews AFB, Azores; Dover AFB, Saudi Arabia, AFB, and the Military Advisory Group at Taipei, Taiwan.

I called Randolph in late 1969 to determine my status for assignment to Vietnam. The assignment NCO stated, “You'd better pack your bags.” He told me about “Palace Dragon” and AC-119G Gunships. I volunteered as a Flight Engineer. Upon arriving at Phan Rang AB in August 1970, I was offered an assignment to Tan Son Nhut. I had my FAA Airframe and Power Plant License and was hoping I might get a part-time job with either Air America or

Continental Air Services after flying AC-119G missions. With the Flight Commander's approval, I was hired part-time as an Airframe and Power Plant Mechanic by Continental Air Services (CAS). Fellow Shadow FE Sergeant Elliott Williamson also worked part-time for CAS. I worked approximately 25 hours a week for CAS while flying 220 AC-119G Shadow gunship combat missions during my year in Vietnam.



After leaving Vietnam in August 1971, I was assigned to Holloman AFB, New Mexico and then was accepted for FE duty on the MAAG Ethiopia C-54 Aircraft in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in August 1972. That was a fantastic assignment to finish my military career, leaving Ethiopia and retiring as a Master Sergeant in June 1975 with 23 years of service. Included among my awards and decorations are the Distinguish Flying Cross, Joint Service Commendation Medal (Ethiopia) and the Air Medal with 10 Oak Leaf Clusters.

After the U.S. Air Force, I held numerous aviation jobs in Malta, Egypt, Germany, Turkey and Chad. The highlight of my civilian career (having earned my Commercial Twin-Engine Pilot's License while in the USAF) was flying as Captain on DC-3s in Chad for Exxon Mobil Oil Company

in 1976. During the last few years, I have been working as Director of Quality Control on a part-time aviation contract for AirServ International, a Nonprofit Humanitarian Air Relief Organization. I periodically go into Africa to do site surveys or to relieve personnel. In 1991, I graduated (better late than never) from Embry Riddle Aeronautical University with a Bachelors of Science Degree. Currently, I have earned 30 hrs of college credit towards my Masters Degree in Aviation Maintenance and Safety.

I remember flying with lieutenant aircraft commanders who were primarily trained in jet aircraft. They looked to me as a father of reciprocating engines. I have fond memories of one lieutenant, good friend of mine, always asking me on take-off roll, "FE, explain torque to me. I still don't understand." We have had many laughs over that conversation over the years. On one of my many, many missions over Cambodia, I remember one morning I could see lines of black smoke rising up from the jungle and I made the statement to the pilot, "Sure looks like they are cooking their rice real early this morning." As we flew closer



17th SOS Flight Crew taken at TSN after a mission early 1971
L-R: Jim Keller, Copilot; John Morrow, Gunner; Jeff Henderson, Gunner; Daniel Wittershime, Illuminator; Larry Barber, Navigator; Bill Bottoms, Navigator; Victor Heiner, Pilot; Garry Gourley, Flight Engineer

to the line of smoke, we soon realized that the black smoke was not from cooking fires but trails of smoke from .57mm rockets being fired. The left turn we entered into was the sharpest and hardest turn that I ever experienced in an AC-119G gunship. We all had a good laugh after that one!



Jimmy Grant, IO

18th SOS, NKP, DaNang, 1970-71

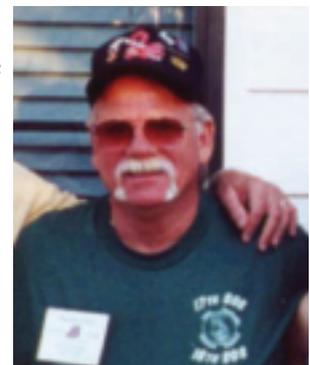


Jimmy Grant was born March 31, 1947 at Gainesville, Georgia. He was an Army brat from day one because his father, Charles Grant was career Army. Jimmy and his mother Alma, brother Charles, Jr. and sister Carolyn moved to wherever his father was

stationed, if allowed. Jimmy graduated from Fort Knox High School, Kentucky in 1967. Because of living around Army Posts all his life and not seeing any future in driving tanks or humping the bush, he enlisted in the United States

Air Force on June 26, 1967 at Louisville, Kentucky.

Grant immediately reported to Lackland AFB, Texas for three months basic training. His first assignment was to Barksdale AFB, Louisiana. While there in 1968, he received his first Vietnam Tour of Duty assignment with the 459th Tactical Air Squadron (TAS) based at Phu Cat Air Base, Republic of South Vietnam. As Loadmaster/Engineer/Flight Mechanic on the C-7A Caribou,



Jimmy served from 11 November 1968 to 22 November 1969.

Upon returning from Vietnam, Grant was stationed at Warner Robbins AFB, Georgia as a KC-135 mechanic. Still wanting to fly, he somewhat volunteered for Special Operations. Not long thereafter, he received orders for AC-119 Gunship Training and his second Tour of Duty in Vietnam on 30 April 1970.

Staff Sergeant Grant reported to 18th Special Operations Squadron Headquarters at Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam on 14 September 1970 and was assigned to Stinger Alpha Flight based at DaNang Air Base. Later in his tour, Grant was TDY to Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand for more Stinger combat missions in Steele Tiger (Southern Laos) and LamSon 719.

Jimmy Grant was the IO on the infamous Stinger “Polish Bandits” aircrew which made history in destroying 40 enemy trucks on the Ho Chi Minh Trail over a two-night period. The first night of that historic aerial combat feat will remain forever engrained in Grant’s mind because of intense concentrations of enemy anti-aircraft guns in the extremely hostile area of operations.

A lighter side to his second tour in Vietnam was one night when his buddy Ron Morrison had been out drinking wine and eating rice at a restaurant across the street from their barracks at DaNang. Ron returned to the barracks quite inebriated and while attempting to get on his top bunk, fell backward to the floor hitting his head on the dresser just as the lights in the barracks went out. Everyone thought the base was under attack. There was lots of blood on the floor from Ron’s cut head but the injury wasn’t too serious. Ron

consequently got sick and started throwing up wine and rice. Ugh, the sights, sounds, and smells of war zone living.

For his service in the United States Air Force and for his heroic efforts during his two Tours of Duty in Vietnam, Grant was awarded three Distinguished Flying Crosses, eight (8) Air Medals, USAF Commendation Medal, Presidential Unit Award, Outstanding Unit Award, American Defense Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, Good Conduct Medal, and Small Arms Expert.

Upon his second return from Vietnam, SSgt Jimmy Grant separated from the Air Force at his port of entry, Travis AFB, California. He returned to Georgia and worked in a Cotton Mill from 1971 to 1973. In March 1973, Jimmy went to work at General Motors Corporation in Doraville, Georgia where he worked the line until 1982 when he was elected to the position of Union Representative which he held for twenty years. He was also Chairman of the Local 10 Veterans Committee and Chairman of the Region 8 Veteran Council. He was Representative on the United Auto Workers (UAW) National Veterans Advisory Committee from Region 8. During the last two years he worked for GM, Jimmy was appointed by the Chairman of Local 10 to work with new car projects coming into the plant. After 30 years with GM, Jimmy retired and started a Mobile DJ Service in 1986 which he closed after 20 years running on January 1, 2007.

Jimmy Grant and his wife, Teresa will celebrate their 37th wedding anniversary on May 17, 2007. They are proud parents of two sons and extremely proud grandparents of three grandchildren, Wyatt, Austin and Phoenix. Jimmy and Teresa Grant live in Oakwood, Georgia.



Clayton L. Green, Maint.

71st SOS/17th SOS, Phan Rang, Nha Trang, 1969-70

I was assigned to the 4th SOS at Nha Trang and performed engine maintenance on Spooky, AC 47s and Shadow, AC-119s and was then transferred to 71st SOS, later becoming the 17th SOS. I moved to Phan Rang as an R-3350 engine mechanic on Shadows because of my prior experience on R-3350 engines and was run-up and taxi qualified. I was then designated as Taxi and Run-Up instructor for the 17th SOS and was placed on flying status as a flight mechanic. I spent the majority of the tour TDY recovering battle damaged aircraft or making mechanical repairs all over Vietnam and Thailand, often times under hostile ground fire.

On one occasion I was deployed to Bam Me Thout East

TDY to recover a Shadow that had made an emergency landing on a PSP runway due to #2 engine failure. A short time after I arrived, the base was under attack by “Charlie”. Charlie was trying to destroy Shadow and mortars were being launched at the airplane and small arms fire continued thru the night until the next morning. Fortunately, the Army was there to handle the ground assault. I proceeded to change the engine in record-setting time, flew the test flight with the crew, landed, performed the dash-6 inspection and flew home to Phan Rang with the crew. Upon returning to Phan Rang, the Squadron Commander awarded me a commendation. I was also nominated for the Bronze Star

for changing the engine in record time under hostile ground fire. In addition to Phan Rang and Nha Trang, I spent TDY time in Ben Hoa, Chu Lai, Tuy Hoa, Pleiku, Phu Cat, DaNang, Ban Me Thout, Cam Ranh Bay, Tan Son Nhut, Udorn, U Tapao, and NKP. I had opportunities to fly several missions and witness the magnificent firepower

and devastation of Shadow and the intense but exemplary performance of the flight crews and maintenance crews. "Deny him the Dark" was a very appropriate slogan for the mission objective.

I was discharged from the Air Force at Mather AFB, CA in 1972.



James Willis Green, Gunner

17th SOS, Phan Rang, Tuy Hoa, 1970-71

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.

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



Irvin Ernest Greenberg, Pilot

18th SOS, NKP, Tan Son Nhut, DaNang, Bien Hoa, 1972-73



Hope, Arkansas is where I was born in 1942. I graduated from Hot Springs High School at Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1960. I graduated from the University of Arkansas in 1964 and from Arkansas State University in 1988. I joined the Air Force on February 1967 at Little Rock, Arkansas to avoid being drafted.

I was assigned to the 18th SOS as a Stinger pilot in March 1972. From September '72 to January '73, I flew missions out of NKP, DaNang, and Bien Hoa. During

January '73 to March '73, I ferried VNAF C-119s from Tan

Son Nhut Air Base to Clark Air Base, Philippines.

I will always remember flying a mission out of DaNang on New Year's Eve 1972. On our midnight take-off, we had to dodge all the friendly fire of South Vietnamese troops celebrating the New Year by firing their weapons in the air. Another mission that sticks in my mind was flying in defense of Bien Hoa Air Base. The base came under rocket attack and we instantly located the rocket launching sites and requested permission to fire on the enemy locations. All of a sudden, streams of



red tracers shot down from above and just past our gunship. A VNAF AC-119G was firing miniguns at ground targets from 2,000 feet above us. We were lucky they didn't shoot us down. We never did get permission to fire on the rocket launching sites.

My most memorable AC-119K mission was when one of our gunships at Bien Hoa had been seriously damaged in a rocket attack. Maintenance did not have the capability to properly repair the aircraft at Bien Hoa. My crew had to ferry the aircraft to Nakhon Phanom Air Base, Thailand at night. We had to sign off over nineteen pages of red X's and

circled X items before we could take off.

The thing that I will always remember about my time with AC-119 Stinger gunships was the camaraderie of the crews which crossed all lines of rank and position. We spent all our time together both on and off duty. There was a feeling of mutual respect that applied to everyone. There was an amazing attitude of enthusiasm for the mission and for accomplishing the mission regardless of any obstacles.

I retired as a Major from the Air Force on March 1, 1987 at Little Rock AFB, Arkansas. I currently live in Hot Springs.



William B. Gregory Jr., Pilot

17th SOS Ops. Officer, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



Back Row: Maj. Schofield, Maj. Jack Nicol, Lt. Col. Bill Gregory, Unknown, Lt. Marty Noonan
Front Row: Unknown, Lt. Richard 'Buck' Marr, Unknown, Capt. Ken Walker

I was born in Dallas, TX, in 1932. I completed high school at The Webb School, Bell Buckle, Tennessee in 1950, then returned to Dallas where I attended Southern Methodist University (1950-1953). I earned my pilot wings through the Aviation Cadet program in February 1955.

My first Air Force assignments were as Air and Ground Transportation Officer at Nouasseur AB, Morocco, followed by Motor Pool Officer at Holloman AFB, NM. From 1958 until 1964 I flew the B-47. The B-47 was a pain, lumbering and under-powered, but the combat crews and crew chiefs made it an excellent experience. I was privileged to fly the B-58 for six years beginning in 1964. The B-58 was one hell-of-an aircraft to fly. We still have a reunion every two years at the Green Oaks in Fort Worth, and it is attended by over 400 people!

I completed AC-119G combat crew training in July 1970.

Upon arriving in Vietnam, I was appointed 17th SOS Operations Officer, at Tan Son Nhut AB. Between August 1970 and August 1971, I logged 608.8 combat hours in 155 missions, earning the Air Medal with 8 Oak Leaf Clusters. I also received the Distinguished Flying Cross for a mission flown 11 June 1971.

From the 17th SOS, I was assigned as Commander of the 67th Security Police Squadron, Bergstrom AFB, TX. It was a different, but rewarding assignment. The men were exceptional; I still have three of my closest friends from that tour. We took a unit that had not passed an ORI in 2½ years to the Number One in TAC by the time of my retirement in October 1973.

In 1976 I completed a B. S. in Health and Physical Education at Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, TX while also serving as Head Coach for the Women's Softball Team. In 1977 I completed a M. S. in Health and Physical Education, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX and in 1979 was awarded a Ph.D.

Flying the AC-119G gunship mission at Tan Son Nhut was an outstanding experience. The missions allowed our aircrews, maintenance personnel, and myself to show the rest of the Wing how to operate in combat. The professionalism and support of the 230+ members of the Saigon Shadows are the reason we lost no aircraft and lost no aircrew member during my year of combat duty.

I still see and visit with my co-pilot (who recently retired as a Captain with Continental) and Bernie, who I have an occasional tennis game with at Texas Christian University. To all of you who made my tour exceptional, I offer my humble thanks!



Walter Eugene Gunster III, Nav.

18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom, 1971/72



I was born an Army brat at Fort Sill, Oklahoma in 1942. Eighteen years later, I graduated from Fort Greeley High School at Fort Greeley, Alaska. I graduated from the University of North Carolina, Charlottesville in 1964 and entered the United States Air Force

the same year at James Connally AFB, Texas. I had to join; it was a family tradition.

I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron as a Navigator/Sensor Operator at DaNang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam from June 1971 until March 1972. I was then sent to Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Air Base, Thailand where I served until my DEROS in June 1972.

My most exciting AC-119 Mission in S.E.A. was when I was the NOS on the last big truck mission in Vietnam. We had been out over southern Laos and were returning to DaNang and the other sensors were doing paperwork as we neared the border. I saw a light on the ground and directed the pilot to the spot. The FLIR could not see anything and the pilots saw nothing but darkness. The pilot asked me to designate the target. He fired on the pip and the ground below lit up with secondary explosions. We stayed in the firing circle until we fired all the 20mm ammunition. We then called in two F-4s that were near the DMZ. Our pilot directed them to the target and they released their bombs,

getting more secondary explosions. We finally reached bingo fuel and returned to DaNang. The next night, we passed over the area and it was still burning. Daylight reconnaissance found the remains of a large truck park (I don't remember the exact number of trucks burning, but I think it was near 125).

I'll never forget when my wife was pregnant. The Red Cross said that it would be at least a week before I was notified of my daughter's birth, unless something went wrong. I was getting ready to go on a mission on December 4, 1971 and the Duty Officer

came to the aircraft and told me that my daughter was born on December 3. It worried me the whole mission. I found out the next day that everything was A-OK! My wife's



doctor knew the system. When he left the delivery room, he sent the notification by the fastest means possible, reducing the time to only 12 hours.

I will always remember my time with AC-119 gunships in Southeast Asia. It was noise and dust everywhere.

I retired from the USAF at Rhein Main Air Base, Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in 1984. My wife and I currently live in Christiana, Tennessee.



Jack L. Halsey, Navigator

71st & 17th SOS, Nha Trang, Phan Rang, 1969

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, 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.



71st SOS Shadow Crew

Back Row: Maj. Norm Reid, AC; Jack Halsey, Nav.; Brian Akers, Nav.; Unknown; Unknown
 Front Row: Vern Hoene(sp), CP; Glen Olmstead, FE; Unknown; Unknown



Vernon C. Hansen, Pilot

18th SOS, Phan Rang, DaNang, 1969-70



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

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

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 DaNang for his leadership, inspiration, and



Front Row L-R: Unk. Gunner; Capt. Al Brekenridge, FLIR; Capt. Capt. Rick Rime, Copilot; Capt. Al Meyer, Navigator; SSgt. Dick Havens, I.O.; Back Row: Amn Yesnetski, Gunner; Unk. Gunner; TSgt. Bill Bacon, Flight Engineer; Capt. Leon Miller, NOS; Capt. Vern Hansen

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 WVA. 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.

I remember the crash of an AC-119K at DaNang (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 DaNang 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 fraggged 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 DaNang 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.



William L. Hanson, Maint.

18th SOS, Lockbourne, 1969-70



I was born in Middleboro, Massachusetts in 1949 and graduated from high school June 1968. I joined the Air Force in July. I later learned, around October, that the draft board was looking for me. I guess you could say that I beat the draft board.

My first duty station after basic training was Kessler AFB MS where I was

assigned to the 338th Maintenance & Supply Group. I was

soon issued orders for Na Trang Air Base. Within a few weeks, those orders were cancelled and I was issued a new set of orders assigning me to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at Lockbourne AFB OH. I served in the 18th SOS from January 1969 until the unit departed for Vietnam in January 1970. I was told that I was no longer needed for Vietnam duty so I was transferred to the 317th Transportation Squadron at Lockbourne AFB.

While serving with the 18th SOS, my job was to transport maintenance specialists to and from the shops and aircraft. I really felt guilty when the AC-119K gunships departed Lockbourne AFB and I couldn't go with them. I remember packing up all the guns removed from the gunships so that fuel bladder tanks could be installed in the cargo

compartment for the long flight to Vietnam. I was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation w/OLC for my service with the 18th SOS.

Starting in April 1970, I was in succession, assigned to the 708th AC&W Squadron, a remote radar site on Indian Mountain AK; the 509th Bomb Wing at Pease AFB NH and the 90th Strategic Missile Wing at F. E. Warren AFB WY. After serving five and a half years at F. E. Warren AFB, I requested a return to Alaska and was given an assignment to the 21st Transportation Squadron at Elmendorf AFB AK. My next assignment was to the 380th Bomb Wing at

Plattsburg AFB NY where I spent nearly six years before being assigned to the 4th Fighter Wing at Seymour Johnson AFB NC. I retired from this last assignment as a Master Sergeant in August 1988.

Since retirement from the Air Force, I have made my home in Goldsboro, NC. I have driven fuel trucks for a gas distribution company in Goldsboro and worked as a mechanics helper and a part-time driver on tractor trailer tankers. I applied for a civil service job at Seymour Johnson AFB when it opened and, after 18-years, look forward to retiring again in 2009.



George E. Hardy, Pilot

18th SOS, Udorn, DaNang, 1970-71



Born June 8, 1925 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Military Service

Entered active duty in July 1943. He entered Aviation Cadet Training at Tuskegee Army Air Field, Alabama in December 1943, and graduated as a pilot in September 1944.

He received additional combat flying training at Walterboro AAF, SC and in March 1945, was assigned to the 99th Fighter Squadron, 332nd Fighter Group in Italy. He flew twenty-one combat missions over Germany. Following his return from overseas, in August 1945, he served at Tuskegee Army Air Field and at Lockbourne Army Air Field, Ohio, and was discharged in November 1946.

He was recalled to active duty at Lockbourne Air Force Base, Ohio, in June 1948, and was assigned to the 301st Fighter Squadron, 332nd Fighter Group. In September 1948 he was assigned as a student in the Airborne Electronics Maintenance Officers School at Keesler AFB, Mississippi, and in September 1949 he was transferred to the 28th Bomb Squadron, 19th Bomb Group (B-29s), on Guam, as a Maintenance Officer. In 1950, he flew 45 combat missions over Korea in B-29 aircraft. From 1951 through 1962 he served in various Armament & Electronics Maintenance Squadrons in the Strategic Air Command and in Japan as Maintenance Officer and as Squadron Commander. He received his Command Pilot Rating in 1959.

In 1964, following receipt of a graduate engineering degree, he was assigned to the Electronics Systems Division at Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts. In August 1966, he was assigned as Chief of Engineering and Program Manager for Development, Installation and Cutover of the 490L Overseas AUTOVON Communications System. It was the overseas portion of the Department of Defense's first worldwide direct-dial telephone system. The initial sites were successfully cutover in Europe, Panama and in the Pacific in 1969. In 1970, he was transferred to the 18th Special Operations Squadron in Vietnam as a pilot in AC-119K Gunships. He served as Operating Location Commander at Udorn Air Base, Thailand and also at DaNang Air Base, Vietnam and flew 70 combat missions. He returned from Vietnam in April 1971 and retired from the Air Force in November 1971.

Decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal w/11 Oak Leaf Clusters, and the Commendation Medal w/1 Oak Leaf Cluster.

Post-military

In December 1971, he accepted a position with GTE Communications Systems Division, Needham Heights, Massachusetts. He served in various areas of Program Management. Major tasks included management of the continuing development and related software upgrade of communications systems for the U. S. Army. He retired from GTE in July 1988.

Education

- Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering, Air Force Institute of Technology, Aug. 1955 to Aug. 1957
- Master of Science in Systems Engineering-Reliability, A.F. Institute of Technology, Feb. 1963 to Aug. 1964



Related Activities: Member of the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.: a past President of the New England Chapter.

Residence: Sarasota, FL 34240

Married

Wife: Katharine (Bonnie)

Children: Six

Grandchildren: Nine

George is kneeling on the left end of the first row.



 **Richard F. Hay, Pilot**
18th SOS, DaNang, 1969-70



I was born in Philadelphia, PA in 1945. My dad, 2nd Lt. Frank L. Hay, was flying C-47s overseas at the time. My dad worked for Coca-Cola and moved around a lot when I was young. I graduated from Haddon Heights High

School, Haddon Heights, NJ, in 1963. Then it was on to Penn State in the fall of 1963 where I graduated with a degree in Marketing in 1967 and, subsequently earned an MBA in 1976.

From college I was immediately eligible for the draft. The draft board continued to pursue me even though I had been selected to enter Air Force Officers Training School (OTS) in January of 1968. To assure my place at OTS and avoid being drafted by the Army, the Air Force recruiter enlisted me. I entered training at Lackland AFB, TX where, on the morning of graduation, after 29 days of basic training, I received orders to OTS.

After OTS, I completed pilot training at Williams AFB, AZ and in May 1968 reported to Hurlbert Field, FL for C-123 training. On the first day of class, three of us 2nd lieutenants were told of a classified message we needed to read. The message reassigned us to the AC-119K gunship program at Lockbourne AFB, OH via Clinton County AFB, as the first group of lieutenants and non-aircraft

commanders to enter the program.

After leaving the 18th SOS, I flew C-9s and the C-141. I ended my career as Chief of the Evaluation Division at 21AF, retiring from the Air Force in 1987 as a Major. I then flew for both Pan Am and United Airlines prior to medically retiring in 2004. Currently, I am an author whose work is, in large part, directly inspired by experiences that occurred during the June 6, 1970 emergency bailout that claimed the life of our Illuminator Operator, TSgt. Clyde D. Alloway.

To me, Stinger missions were much closer to an “art form” than the simple application of skill and technical know-how. Successful missions flown at vulnerable altitudes in hostile territory demanded an extremely high degree of crew coordination and dedication. As a crew, we acted as one, almost as if we were all of a “single mind.” As such, I have the greatest respect, admiration and gratitude for anyone who ever manned a Stinger crew position on a combat mission.

Even though I flew the last few months of combat as an aircraft commander, I treasure my time in the right seat as AC-119K copilot. I have to admit that this is true mostly because of the nature of the crew position. If the copilot did his job correctly everything else would pretty much fall into place. On the other hand, if the copilot wasn't up to speed, there was no way the AC could consistently put rounds on the trucks. In the firing-circle, with the AC's head glued to the gunsight, the copilot – who held altitude, called bank for the AC, rpm settings for the FE, and distance and DME for the Gunfighters' escorts flying cover – was

absolutely critical to mission success.

In all humility (though it certainly won't sound like it), I often said that I would likely never be able to say, "I am the best that ever lived" at anything. But I probably came as close as I ever will as an AC-119K gunship copilot. In this regard, I approached the job with a mentality of true apprenticeship. I wasn't just putting in time as a copilot until I became an AC. I gave it everything I had, not only as a matter of survival, but out of a deep sense of personal duty, pride and loyalty to fellow crewmembers. The proof of the pudding was that I could fly with different crews, or different aircraft commanders on our crew, and we would still manage to get trucks. In fact, this got to the point where I was sometimes used as a substitute on crews that were having trouble getting trucks to help them over the hump. This is why an upgrade to aircraft commander 3 months prior to DEROS, though in itself quite an honor, never made much sense to me from a purely operational standpoint. On that side of the ledger, and in the interests of restoring some degree of personal humility, I don't remember getting many trucks as an AC. On the other hand, I do remember flinching in the firing circle once or twice with the AAA coming out of the center of the gun-sight like some kind of deadly flower.



Stinger Bailout Over South China Sea

It was the night of June 6, 1970. We had taken off from DaNang AB, RVN on an AC-119K Stinger gunship mission to the Ho Chi Minh Trail. I had flown nearly 40 combat missions since arriving in Vietnam as a copilot with the 18th Special Operations Squadron.

As we leveled off at 10,000 feet, the propeller on the number one engine ran away and became uncontrollable. All attempts to slow down or feather the propeller failed. The aircraft began vibrating severely and was barely controllable. The propeller reached supersonic speed with a sound I have always described as a banshee out of hell. (Just take the highest pitch sound and vibration you can imagine, double it and you'll come close to what it both sounded and felt like). It quickly became obvious we would have to abandon the aircraft.

My initial perception was one of classic denial: This isn't happening to me. I must be dreaming. When am I going to wake up? Then I started observing to myself: Yep, there goes the first signal to prepare for bail-out, three short rings of the alarm bell. There goes the second signal, the

bail-out signal of one long ring of the alarm bell. Oh no! He's actually given the bailout command! This can't really be happening. Maybe I'm still dreaming. I was almost in a trance, highly alert and attentive, but pretty much mentally disengaged and disassociated.

Captain Warren Kwiecinski, the aircraft commander, then looked over at me with a quizzical look, as I was still strapped in my seat doing pretty much nothing. Then Warren, flashing a big grin shouted, "Get the F... out of here!" Well, that snapped me out of it.

My first obstacle was to get out of the seat, a cumbersome process at best, even with the seat released and pushed fully back from the control column, as pilots wore a parachute, survival vest and helmet while flying. In this regard, I distinctly remember getting out of the seat without moving it back or catching my parachute on any of the switches. It almost seemed as if I had dematerialized and then rematerialized behind the seat. Suffice it to say, I was operating at a level of focused, present-minded awareness I had not encountered before or since.

Although I considered using the Bailout Chute located behind the pilot's seat, I felt it more dangerous than going out the back. So I turned to the cockpit ladder several feet away, grabbed the top rung, swung out into the cargo compartment and landed a good distance back on the cargo deck 5 or so feet below.

After tripping over a "butt pack" (a clip-on survival kit and raft that I definitely should have picked up) and reaching the rear of the aircraft, I saw the IO had already jettisoned the flare launcher. I also noticed that seven crewmembers still remained in the vicinity of the bailout door and, as they still seemed to be deciding whether to jump, I stepped to the front of the line.

Not that I was any braver than my fellow crewmembers. I was just that as the copilot I knew how bad things were up front and that bailing out was far safer than staying on board with a runaway prop – a prop that could, at any moment, fail structurally, separate from the engine, fly into the cockpit and throw the aircraft into an uncontrollable spin. So there really wasn't any choice at all.

Stepping onto the jump platform, I experienced total life recall. Everything I associated with jumping out of airplanes immediately flashed into my mind. Stuff from survival school (seven months earlier), from pilot training (a year earlier) and childhood (wondering if I'd have the nerve to jump and shout "Geronimo" like they did in movies). It

was all instantly there, and a lot more. It was just like being in a mental grocery store in which the entire inventory of the store was spread out before me and I was free to choose whatever I needed, while events themselves unfolded in super-slow motion. All the while simultaneously wondering, What will jumping be like? Can I do it? Is it really safer out there than in here?

When the time came, however, I just jumped and found myself floating in space, flat on my back, watching my aircraft fly away -- a surreal sensation. I then started going through bailout procedures in my mind. At this point, that involved stabilizing my fall in a facedown position by spread-eagling my arms and pulling the ripcord.

Unfortunately, when I did get around to pulling the ripcord the "T-Handle" only came out about a foot and the chute failed to deploy. Well, if my life hadn't already flashed before my eyes before, it certainly would have at that point. Suddenly, chute deployment and not correct body position was of paramount concern.

I clawed at the cord with both hands and somehow got the "T-Handle" all the way out. Unfortunately, I was falling face-up at the time - the worst possible position - when the chute shot from the backpack. Both the drag chute and main chute bundles opened below me and smashed into the back of my head. Talk about seeing stars! I started to blackout. I have a definite recollection that the part of me that was watching me said, "If you pass out, you'll die!" With this I literally willed myself to stay conscious (something I had practiced while standing at attention in very hot Texas weather, after locking my knees, during Basic Training parades).

As the opening parachute shot past me, I found myself falling through the risers and tearing out several panels. In fact, the force of the risers was so great that I later found deep, black bruises on the outside of each arm from elbow to shoulder that looked like someone had painted them black. However, I had no time to contemplate the damage at the time and went back to reviewing that grocery store inventory of procedures necessary to prepare for water landing.

Once my parachute successfully opened the next task was to establish radio contact with other crewmen. The procedure required each of us to check-in using our radio call sign (can you believe it was Lemon?) and crew position number, then to maintain radio discipline and silence. I was Lemon 2. I turned my survival radio on and discovered all hell seemed to break loose. The emergency frequency was absolutely

jammed with chatter from U.S. Marine helicopters. In this regard, I later learned that the flare launcher we jettisoned landed somewhere on Marine Monkey Mountain NAS and caused a huge explosion. The explosion was interpreted to be a rocket attack and triggered the launching of all the helicopters on the base.

The next task was to prepare for a water landing: helmet secure, face-shield down, life-preserver unit (LPU) bladders inflated, parachute release latches open, thumbs in the release rings. When I finally hit the water (everything was still in super slow motion) it seemed like I was on my way to the bottom of the ocean, even though it was probably only 15 to 20 feet or so. Although I had tried to release my parachute upon entering the water, I found I was well below the surface before I was able to react. With the LPU bladders inflated I popped to the surface like a cork.

Once at the surface, I began surveying my surroundings. The sky seemed full of lights, primarily from the Marine helicopters. The sea was also full of lights from the numerous fishing boats that were typical for that time of year. My initial impulse was to hail one of the boats and get out of the water as soon as possible. I was not a particularly good swimmer and realized there could be sharks in the area. About that time I began going into shock, started shaking uncontrollably and experienced a deep sense of panic.

Well, with that, it became quite clear that if I didn't get a hold of myself I wasn't going to make it. There was a choice to make. I had pretty much lived my life with a rather bad attitude that might be summed something like: "life sucked and dying might not be such a bad deal." After all, if "life was a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing," as Shakespeare suggested, death might be the quickest way to minimize one's suffering and misery. However, at this point the little voice I spoke of earlier came back on-line for the last time and said something to the effect, "Okay, smart ass. You always said you don't care if you live or die, so choose!" Clearly, anything other than survival was out of the question. With that decision behind me, the shock, shakes, fear and panic all instantly and almost, miraculously ceased. I also experienced a strange sense of peace and calm come over me, as I came back to myself.

Twice, helicopters flew nearby and twice I popped signal flares trying to get their attention. Although procedure called for radio contact and flares only on the command of the Search and Rescue (SAR) aircraft, I was pretty excited and figured that they would be able to spot them with the

black backdrop of the open water. What I didn't realize, however, was that they weren't all rescue helicopters; some were the Marine helicopters that evacuated after our "flare launcher" attack. Shit, I pretty much wasted my flares.

Next I considered hailing one of the numerous boats I saw around me, but I quickly realized this was probably not a good idea as they might be hostile. After all, I was only two miles from my own base and ending up in the Hanoi Hilton because I was in too much of a hurry to get out of the water would not be smart. So I figured a helicopter was the only guaranteed friendly in this neighborhood. Luckily, I remembered I had a strobe light in my survival vest and pulled it out. Although the strobe had a directional blue filter to keep the flash from being mistaken for gunfire, under the circumstances and in the middle of the water, the brighter the better, so I turned it on. This turned out to be a great idea as another AC-119K was circling overhead as part of the rescue effort and the NOS operator detected the strobe almost immediately.

The gunship immediately vectored a Jolly Green Giant rescue helicopter right to my position. As the Jolly hovered 20' or 30' above me, a para-rescue jumper (PJ) dropped into the water nearby. His first action, however, was to take out the largest survival knife I had ever seen and punctured the LPU air bladder under my left arm. Knowing I would surely drown without them, I had formed a considerable fondness for those air bladders and was none too happy about losing one. The reason they do this is so the bladders won't get hung up on the doorway and impede helicopter boarding. Whether I convinced him not to puncture the second one or not, I don't remember, but I sure wasn't happy about his puncturing the first.

Anyway, the rescue team lowered a jungle penetrator with a floatation collar and the PJ helped me get on. Up I went with the rotor wash churning the sea below me. As I reached the top, a second PJ pulled me in the door. For the first time in nearly two or three hours I knew I was going to survive. The first thing the PJ asked me, after I sat down and pulled off my gear, was whether I wanted a cigarette. Having quit smoking only 3 days earlier, I knew I would never want one more and remembered thinking to myself (or was it that little voice again), "If you turn this one down, you will never have trouble turning one down again." I said no. From that point on I was little more than a passenger as the rescue crew continued searching for other crewmembers.

Within a half-hour, we picked up our navigator, Captain Merle Williams. The next hour or so was then spent attempting to locate and pick up our illuminator operator,

TSgt. Clyde D. Alloway, who was on the radio, having problems (probably a chute entanglement) and asking for help. After a half-hour or so, however, the radio transmissions stopped and we never heard from him again.

Although we all hoped and prayed for the best, we also felt it was likely that TSgt. Alloway had been pulled under as a result of parachute entanglement. As late as 1982, I was still under the impression that he was being carried as a MIA. During a POW/MIA rally on the 4th of July at which I was invited to speak, I asked a friend in the Veteran's Administration to check TSgt. Alloway's then current status. The response I received was that his status had been changed from KIA to MIA six months after the bailout. On the occasion of the aforementioned speaking engagement and in memory of TSgt. Alloway, whom I considered to be both a comrade in arms and friend, I wrote and dedicated the following poem:

To One Left Behind

To one left behind,
Who lives on in my mind;
To one I left there,
Beyond worry and care;
Who lives on in my heart,
And from whom I can't part.
Though not with me here,
He has nothing to fear,
His duty is done,
And mine only begun;
For though gone from my sight,
I'll still carry his light;
Nor forget what he's done,
As a true, faithful son.

Collectively, the trauma of the bailout, the loss of a valued crewmember, and the knowledge that I was responsible for killing who knows how many of the enemy, resulted in a significant emotional struggle for a number of years after Vietnam. However, with time, the books eventually balanced. I learned to live with the fact I was simply doing my duty, and that if I hadn't taken the actions I took, the people we were supporting might have died instead. Interestingly, it wasn't until 1984 or 1985, while watching a Vietnam Vets forum on TV, that I realized the emotions being expressed were the very same ones I had experienced in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In this regard, and with respect to TSgt. Alloway's sacrifice, I have to admit feeling a bit like Private Ryan felt at the end of "Saving Private Ryan" with respect to the life I have been blessed to live since that long ago night when our crew went down and one of us didn't make it home.



Richard D. Hehman, Maintenance

71st SOS, Nha Trang, Phan Rang, 1969

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 and was assigned to aircraft maintenance. There are a lot of memories, from the comradery 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.



Jerry Lee Hester, IO

18st SOS, Phan Rang, DaNang, NKP, Bien Hoa, 1970-72

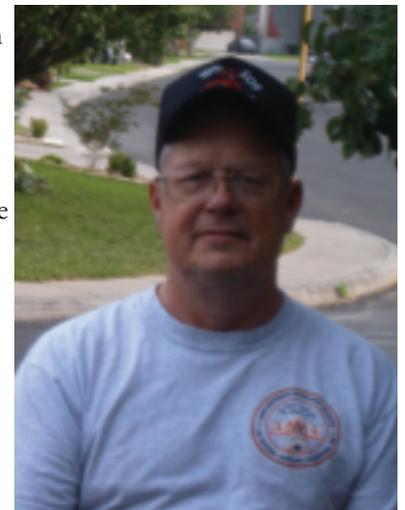
I was born in Louisville KY in 1948. In 1966, I graduated from Shepherdsville High School in my home town of Shepherdsville, KY. After entering the U. S. Air Force (29 Feb 68) in Louisville, I reported to Amarillo, TX for basic training. I volunteered for service because I had always wanted to be a part of the military. From Amarillo, my next stop was Shepherd AFB, Texas for training as a reciprocating aircraft mechanic. My first duty assignment was to the 375th Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron (MAC) at Scott AFB, IL. After a short 10 months, I headed for Vietnam and the 537th Tactical Airlift Squadron at Phu Cat AB. I returned to McChord AFB, WA (Feb 70) for only eight months. Again on the move, I left McChord (Oct 1970), stopped by Fairchild AFB, WA for a little survival training and reported to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at Lockbourne AFB, OH (Dec 70) as they were deploying the AC-119K.

I served with the 18th SOS as an Illuminator Operator (IO) from December 1970 to July 1972. Since we were short of IOs, my original tour was involuntarily extended the night before I was scheduled to return. I really didn't care because I loved the squadron and the job we were doing. I have always worn the flag on my chest. My tour was divided among the AC-119K Stinger bases at Phan Rang, DaNang, Bien Hoa, and Nakhon Phanom."

I remember two combat missions that could be called my most exciting. The first one was a mission in the Plaine de Jars (PDJ) near Ban Ban, Laos. We received a radio warning about an enemy plane coming in from the north. Our cap (F-4s) had just left us to refuel so we had no cover. We continued our mission because we were firing on some trucks while the crew in the flight deck continued to monitor the radios. Well... the enemy plane kept flying toward us. Our pilot decided to take us down to tree top level. It got quite hairy for awhile because our F-4 air cover

had not returned from refueling. I believe the enemy plane was about five miles away and searching for us. The pilot told the gunners to put the guns at "B" altitude setting - if need be, we were going to fight back! The North Vietnamese MiG continued flying towards us and I was starting to be very concerned. About the time we were thinking we would have to fight back, our F-4 cap returned, the MiG bugged out, and we returned to base safe and sound again.

Another mission that stands out was the Camp Fuller mission near the Demilitarized Zone. We were briefed that the camp, a forward fire base with 105 and 155 howitzers, had been overrun by the North Vietnamese Army. Our job was to destroy the camp so Charlie couldn't use the guns. Camp Fuller was up on top of a mountain. I don't know how many missions were flown against the target but I was the IO on the last mission that was scheduled. We had fired lots of mini-gun and 20 mm rounds against the ammo bunkers on the base. The engineer had called "bingo fuel" so the pilot finished the last pass and came back across the camp. Dawn had just started to show in the eastern sky and I was scanning out the right side of the aircraft. As we arrived over the top of the camp, the whole top of the mountain erupted. We must have gotten some rounds in the ammo dump and caused the explosion. When we arrived back at our base, we had the maintainers check the belly of our aircraft for shrapnel holes, but I didn't hear of any damage. Bottom line - another mission completed and we were home safe again.



My return home, another short one, was to the 380th Organizational Maintenance Squadron (OMS) (SAC) Plattsburgh AFB, NY (Jul 72-Feb 73). Once again, I packed up for Southeast Asia and Detachment 1 of the 56th SOWG, Udorn, Thailand (Feb 73-Jul 75). We were working with Laotian and Cambodian crews on how to fight with and to maintain the T-28 Trojans. The return assignment from Thailand sent me to the 438th OMS (MAC) McGuire AFB, NJ (Jul 75-Dec 78). This was one of my best assignments because I met my beautiful wife.

We were married at Ft. Dix in Wrightstown, NJ. On the move again, our next base was Osan AB, Korea (Dec 78-Jan 80). From Osan, we moved to the bitter cold of the 410th OMS (SAC) at K.I. Sawyer AFB, MI (Jan 80-Jan 85). My final assignment was to the Eighth Air Force (SAC) Barksdale AFB, LA (Jan 85-Oct 89). I retired in October 1989. We moved to Sacramento, CA and then to San Antonio, TX in 1991.



Herman "Al" Allan Heuss, Pilot

71st SOS, Nha Trang 1968-69

Darke County, Ohio was my birthplace in 1931. I graduated from Jackson Township High School in 1948 and Ball State University in 1952. As an alternative to the draft I entered the United States Air Force through AFROTC in August of 1952 at Atterbury AFB, Indiana. My current address is Union City, Indiana.

I was a pilot, instructor pilot (IP), and Standardization Evaluation Flight Examiner (SEFE) with the 71st Special Operations Squadron at Nha Trang Air Base, RVN. I became Chief of the 14th SOW Stan/Eval section in April 1969 and served in that capacity until our tour ended on 6 June 1969.

One of the most exciting missions I flew occurred in March 1969. The mission was scheduled for patrol in the whiskey box. Upon arrival at our position near the Cambodian border, we immediately tried to contact Silent 15, a LRP (Long Range Patrol) team on the ground. After several attempts at contact, Silent 15 came up on FM radio but was difficult to read. The team was being pursued by a hostile force and was on the move. The team took cover and we located their position. Silent 15 asked us to fire a short gun

burst to orient our fire. The burst was within 50 meters of their position. He advised us that the hostiles were within 20 meters of their position. He requested that the burst be moved closer. As the IP on the flight and the crew being inexperienced, I got into the left seat and continued the mission as the aircraft commander. Silent 15 moved again and after re-establishing their position, I continued firing and moving closer and closer to Silent 15. The fire was effective for an hour or so, but then he asked for more fire and announced that he needed bursts within 15 meters and then down to 5 meters. We were able to protect Silent 15 until the hostiles broke off the pursuit and Silent 15 was able to set up a protective perimeter. We left the area at first light with a hearty thank you from Silent 15.

One thing that I will always remember about my time with AC-119 gunships is that we were able to document the validity of the AC-119G gunship as a formidable weapon system. I will also remember the dedication of all the personnel of the 71st SOS. They performed with distinction and accomplished our mission in a truly outstanding fashion.

On 18 June 1969, the 71st SOS was released from active duty to the active reserves at Bakalar AFB, Indiana.



Johnny Mack Higgins, FCS Mechanic

14th FMS, Phan Rang, Udorn, DaNang, 1969-70

I was born in 1946 at Searcy, Arkansas. I graduated from Mabelvale High School in 1964 and joined the Air Force at Little Rock, Arkansas on 29 March 1965 to serve my country, get an education, and see the world.

After completing Basic Training at Lackland AFB, Texas and Tech School (ANSQ25-MA-1 Systems) at Lowry AFB, Colorado, I was assigned Permanent Change of Station (PCS) in April 1965 to the 343rd Consolidated Aircraft

Maintenance Squadron (ADC) at Duluth, Minnesota. At Duluth, I worked as an F-106 MA-1 Fire Control System Mechanic, System Mock-Up, Flight Line Maintenance, and Debriefing.

In June 1969, I was assigned PCS to the 18th Special Operations Squadron (TAC) at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio for AC-119 Fire Control System Training. In October 1969, I was assigned PCS to the (PACAF) 14th Field Maintenance



Squadron at Phan Rang AFB, RVN. In April 1970, I was assigned Temporary Duty (TDY) for 30 days with the 18th SOS Forward Operation Location (FOL) at Udorn AB, Thailand. I was assigned another 30-day TDY with the 18th SOS FOL at DaNang AB, RVN in September 1970. In October, I returned to Phan Rang Air Base and departed from Vietnam in November 1970.

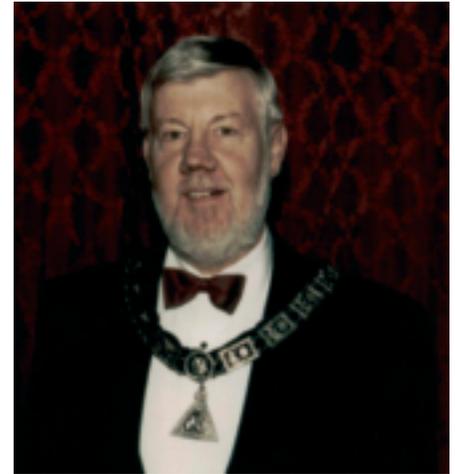
Stateside, I was assigned to the 49th Fighter Interceptor Squadron (FIS) at Griffiss AFB, New York until receiving PCS orders in December 1971 with an assignment to KI Sawyer AFB, Michigan where I served with the 87th FIS (90-day TDY to Tyndall AFB, Florida) until my discharge from the USAF at K I Sawyer on 2 August 1972.

My most exciting event in SEA would probably be the trip over. We were interrupted at the Ernest Tubb Show at the NCO Club at Lockbourne and told to get our equipment and head for the World Airways Jet on the flightline. When we left Ohio, it was dark, when we got to Alaska for a stop, it was still dark, and when we got to Guam, it was still early morning. I noticed the Marines that we picked up there had uniforms that smelled awful (now I know it was the rice starch from Nam). We continued our flight to Happy Valley and after landing, the crew left the engines running. As soon as the passengers got off the aircraft, they were off and gone!! But, that is when I noticed the workers were lying on the ground and sirens were going off. This was to be the first of many rocket and/or mortar attacks while I was in-country. I remember saying to myself, "This is going to be a long year!!"

The things I will always remember about my tour of duty in Vietnam are: 1) Playing my guitar in the band at the

NCO Club and trying to get back down the hill with a Sanyo flashlight. 2) Working in the Photo Hobby Shop and helping to get everyone's photo memories on paper. 3) Visiting the ROK Compound and seeing their version of a USO Show. 4) Playing cricket and singing "Walking Matila" at the Aussie area. I had my first oilcan (Fosters) there. 5) Card games in the Hut. 6) Feeling good when the aircraft came back with no big write-ups. 7) It seemed funny that TSN got Bob Hope, but Phan Rang could only get a Korean Floor Show.

After leaving my duty station in Michigan in August 1972, I returned to Little Rock and started over. I stopped by the VA to register and was basically laughed at for calling myself a war vet. I have never stepped foot in the VA since. By September, I found a job at the local Cessna dealer as an Avionics Technician. (I even turned down a job playing music with Charley Rich.) I joined the American Legion Post 344 in Little Rock and went thru the chairs to become Commander. I am still playing music part-time.



I live in Mabelvale, Arkansas and I am still married to my wonderful wife Anita (42 years). We have two grown sons. I am a 32nd Degree Mason, a Shriner and a Jester. I belong to the Scimitar Shrine Motor Patrol, riding a 2005 Harley Davidson Ultra Classic. I still work with corporate aircraft electronics. Anita and I both look forward to Gunship Reunions.

 Daniel Charles Hightshue, Maint.
71st SOS, Nha Trang, 1968-1969

I was born in Lebanon, Indiana in 1945. In 1963, I graduated from Mooresville High School in my home town of Mooresville, Indiana. I completed an Associates Degree with Pipe Trades Industry and Indiana University Extension. I joined the Air Force to beat the draft. I was assigned to the 71st Special Operations Squadron at Nha Trang Air Base, Vietnam in aircraft maintenance in 1968/69.

The most exciting event that happened to me during my

tour was heading home to see my first born baby, Melissa Marie. She was born six weeks prior to my arrival home. I'll always remember making some great friends during my tour of duty in Vietnam and being able to serve my wonderful country. This was a time when many people felt we had no business being in Vietnam. I am glad that I had the opportunity to participate even though it was difficult leaving my family. I separated from the United States Air Force in June 1969.



Ronald (Ron) Robert Hinton, FE

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, 1971-72

I was born on August 31, 1938 in Richmond, Virginia. During my youth, I worked for my grandfather and uncle in plastering contracting but I soon found out that plastering was not for me. Looking back, I should have learned more than I did about plastering. In 1955 at age 17, I joined the Army National Guard. When some of my friends joined the Air Force, I requested and was granted a transfer to the Air Force.

On 5 March 1956, I went to Lackland AFB, Texas for Basic Training. From Lackland, I went to Sheppard AFB, Texas to complete Basic and Aircraft Maintenance Tech School. I graduated from Tech School on my eighteenth birthday. My first assignment was in the C-54 Phase Docks at Brookley AFB followed by an assignment to McGuire AFB in C-131A air-evac aircraft.

Flying SA-16B "Albatross" seaplanes at Clark Air Base, Philippines for 18 months was my first overseas assignment. We had lots of practice water work and long hours of over-water flights while being on call to help with emergencies, if needed. I did get my name in the Stars and Stripes when our crew searched for some lost fishermen who later found their way home.

After my overseas duty, I returned to the Land of the Big PX and re-enlisted in July 1959. I was sent to Langley AFB to work in transient alert. We handled all types of prop and jet aircraft from all branches of service. During 1959, NASA did a lot of testing at Langley and we handled a lot of the Astronaut's aircraft. The astronaut who I remember the most was Captain White who was a 'down-to-earth' person.

In 1962, I was assigned to Hurlburt Field working with C-46 aircraft for a short time before being assigned to Eglin AFB and the T-29B aircraft that flew missions in support of Space Shots. In 1965, I was one of the 20,000 man build-up in Vietnam, so, I was off to Bien Hoa to support O1A/E FAC (forward air controller) aircraft. I didn't draw combat pay until later that year. In 1966, I returned to Hurlburt Field for assignment with A1E Sandy aircraft.

In 1968, I was sent to Sheppard AFB as an Instructor in Aircraft Maintenance School. Years later after my retirement, I found out that I actually worked with one of my former students and that several of my former students had served in the 17th SOS and the 18th SOS. That made me proud.

In 1971, I received orders for AC-119 gunships. I did what everybody else did, i.e. high altitude chamber training (Never could understand why; we flew low and slow in gunships), survival school at Fairchild AFB, and C-119 ground school and flight engineer (FE) training at Lockbourne AFB. Training flight crews consisted of a pilot, copilot and flight engineer. Then it was off to Hurlburt Field for AC-119K combat flight training with full crews consisting of pilots, navigators/sensor operators, gunners, illuminator operator and the FE. Shortly after completion of AC-119K Stinger gunship training, I was sent to Clark Air Base in the Philippines for Jungle Survival 'Snake' School.

I arrived at Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand on Christmas Day 1971 and started the normal in-processing. Five days later on 30 December, I flew on my first combat mission. Really not knowing what to expect on target, I asked the 'dumb question' of the night, "What is that red stuff down there?" Well, it was AAA fire!

The following Stinger combat missions have stuck in my brain ever since they happened. One night, we had departed the target area to RTB (return to base) and on the way home, one of the scanners called, "Triple A, Break Right Hard!" The pilot, Captain Donnie Williams broke right and when he did, the gunship stalled and rolled 180 degrees to inverted flight. I started to reach for the throttles and mixture levers to increase power. But I couldn't reach anything because the G-force was so great that I could not even move. I was sitting on an empty 20mm ammo can behind the pilot's console located between the pilot and copilot which was normal position for the flight engineer during flight. My bottom was plastered to that can and it felt like that can was trying to go up my butt. The copilot had his arm on his seat armrest and was able to get his fingers on the jet throttle switches and got them to 100% power. About this time, Captain Williams righted the aircraft but it stalled again and rolled 180 degrees the other way becoming inverted before the Captain again righted the aircraft for normal flight and RTB. Four engine aircraft and crews are not meant to do aerobatics.

One night, we were south of DaNang. Nothing was happening and we were kind of "laid back" boring holes in the sky. All of a sudden, I got shoved off my ammo can and landed face down onto the center console panel. The FLIR operator had shoved me down while reaching for the interphone panel switch to switch from the interphone



Ron Hinton in Col. Teal's office with a 122mm rocket

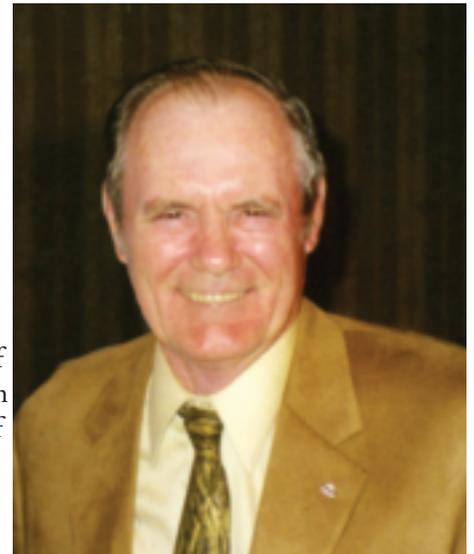
to the radio so he could warn DaNang that he just observed enemy rockets being launched at the base. The crew witnessed the rocket launches and the impact areas at DaNang. I got all involved in watching the war below instead of paying attention to my job. When I finally did check fuel, I had all four engines on the inboard fuel tanks and the fuel gauges read zero, that's "0." I quickly switched to the outboard fuel tanks hoping nobody noticed. Later, the pilot said to me, "I see you have been doing your burn down." I said, "Yes, sir." I never did tell anyone that we almost ran out of fuel which would have caused all four engines to shut down.

Another night, we were the last fragged mission on the schedule out of DaNang (Dawn Patrol). Completing our mission and having hit 'bingo fuel', we were RTB at DaNang for a landing from the east over the bay. We saw one hell of an explosion north of DaNang but didn't have enough fuel remaining to fly over and check out the explosion. So we landed and were taxiing to our parking ramp. I was up in the astrodome scanning the taxiway. BOOM!! A 122mm rocket hit the taxiway behind us. I started to drop back inside the cockpit but saw one rocket hit a Jolly Green H-53 helicopter in their parking ramp. I think I had my

hands on the mixture levers with both pilot's hands shutting down the engines. There was a lot of scrambling by Stinger crewmembers, especially in the cockpit, to evacuate the gunship. At the same time, BOOM – another rocket hit and exploded in front of us. I often wonder if the VC had actually targeted us. After the "all clear" signal was sounded, we started to board the gunship but discovered there was no boarding ladder because nobody had used the ladder to evacuate the aircraft.

I completed my tour of duty in Southeast Asia with 164 combat missions. In some ways, I miss the anticipation and excitement of combat flying. I left NKP for a SAC assignment at Robins AFB, Georgia where I was promoted to Master Sergeant and had a flight of KC-135 tankers to maintain. Before I retired from the Air Force, I was a night line chief. I retired 1 November 1978 with 23 years in service. I felt as if I was part of a dying breed of airmen who flew the last of combat recip aircraft.

Awards and Decorations earned include: Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with 8 Oak Leaf Clusters, AF Commendation Medal, Presidential Unit Citation, Outstanding Unit Citation with "V" and 2 Oak Leaf Clusters, AF Good Conduct Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters, Army Good Conduct Medal with Bar & 2 Loops, Vietnam Service Medal with one silver star and two bronze stars, Small Arms Expert Marksman, Philippines Presidential Unit Award, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm.



My wife, Carol, and I are both retired and currently live in the Warner Robins area of Georgia. We have a son, Brian and a daughter, Diane. We are proud grandparents of four grandchildren. I also have a son, David and two grandchildren, Laya and Ashia from a prior marriage.



Ralph MacDowell Hitchens, Pilot

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, 1971-72



I was born in Chicago, Illinois on October 31, 1945. I received my commission through the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) at Southern Illinois University in September 1967. From October 1967 to June 1970, I was Supply Officer at Luke AFB, Arizona. During that assignment, I was promoted to First Lieutenant in 1969. My promotion to Captain came in 1970. I attended Undergraduate

Pilot Training at Williams AFB in Arizona from June 1970 to June 1971. Upon graduation, I was assigned to AC-119 gunships and received K model training at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio and Hurlburt Field, Florida between July and November 1971. Upon successful completion of gunship training, I headed for Vietnam.

I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron as an AC-119K Stinger gunship pilot. My one year tour of duty in Southeast Asia started November 1971 and ended November 1972. During that time, I was stationed at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand (better know as NKP) with TDYs to DaNang, Saigon, and Bien Hoa, Republic of Vietnam. Upon returning stateside, I was assigned as a T-39 pilot at Andrews AFB, Maryland from December 1972 to May 1976 and then assigned as a T-39 pilot at Ramstein Air Base, Germany from May 1976 to November 1979. I resigned from active duty in 1979 and became a USAF Reserve Individual Mobilization Augmentee in 1986.

My Reserve assignment from November 1986 to June 1990 was Intelligence Reserve Detachment 56 at the National War College, Fort McNair, D.C. Then from June 1990 to October 1995, I was assigned to Long Range Plans Division, HQ USAF (Pentagon), Washington D.C. I retired from the USAF Reserve as a Lieutenant Colonel on October 30, 1995.

After leaving the USAF in 1979, I worked in the Washington DC area as a corporate pilot for Omni International Jet Sales and US Jet Aviation, flying several types of business jets. In 1983, I accepted a civil service job as an intelligence analyst with the Department of the Army. I continued to fly corporate jets part-time until 1988. In 1991, I transferred to the Intelligence Office of

the U.S. Department of Energy. I retired in 2004, and am now employed as a contractor – a “beltway bandit” – with Computer Sciences Corporation, working in the Office of Classification at the Department of Energy in Germantown, MD.

As a USAF pilot I logged about 450 hours in the AC-119K and over 3,000 hours in the T-39. I think I had about 4,700 total hours when I hung up my spurs.

I have a lot of vivid memories from my year in Thailand and Vietnam: the unbelievably graphic slide show on sexually-transmitted diseases upon arrival at NKP; ten guys stepping out of the crew bus and lining up at the edge of the PSP to take a collective leak before the preflight; tweaking the jet engine toggle switches and trim tabs on the yoke to maintain exact altitude and speed in the firing circle; the lazy glide of tracers reaching upward in the night; listening for the dreaded call “BREAK LEFT!” or “BREAK RIGHT!”; the awesome sight of a POL truck exploding on a Cambodian road (still visible halfway back to Bien Hoa); rockets exploding outside the barracks at DaNang as we crouched against a wall on the ground floor in our flak vests and helmets; Rod Slagle & Roy Lefebvre teaching me how to play bridge in the Stinger Hooch at NKP (Rod was KIA a few months later, when Terry Courtney’s gunship was shot down near An Loc); earnest debates in the hooch about what the lyrics to “American Pie” meant; drinking Singha with fellow crewmembers of “Pollman’s Pirates” on the terrace of a bar in downtown NKP overlooking the Mekong River, watching the triple-A over the Trail, far to the east; later that same night, drunk out of our minds, racing samlars through the streets beneath the famous Ho Chi Minh Clock; the nightly run to the “No Hab” snack bar at DaNang; the horrible wreckage of the DaNang BX the morning after it got hit by a rocket; the welcome appearance of cherry pie or chocolate cake to break the monotony of bread pudding in the DaNang chow hall; the spectacular view of Saigon and MR-III from the rooftop restaurant at the Caravelle Hotel; my hooch maid awarding me a wreath of plastic flowers on my DEROS; our “Freedom Bird” landing unexpectedly at Oakland International instead of Travis AFB, on account of the fog; my buddy & I crossing the Bay Bridge in our rental car to join his wife & my girlfriend in San Francisco, the fog lifting suddenly just as Johnny Nash came on the radio – “I can see clearly now.”

A war story has to begin with “This is no shit” – I was flying

with Dan Braun's crew out of DaNang early in the "Easter Offensive," sometime in late March 1972, and the DASC asked us to fly up to within a few miles of the DMZ, several miles inside the "SAM ring," to provide close air support to a beleaguered ARVN fire support base that had some US Army advisors. (Lord knows we wouldn't have done it just for the ARVN's.) The weather was solid IFR; we arrived over the firebase and began descending cautiously through the clouds. Suddenly I saw a bright three-ring strobe on the radar warning panel; seconds later we saw multiple flashes in the murk outside the cockpit windows, and my first thought was, "Oh hell, we're flying through an artillery barrage." But then we heard a frantic radio call: "This is DEEP SEA on Guard, multiple SAM launches DMZ!" We turned around and beat feet south, we must have pushed the old bird up to a blazing 180 knots or so. Later we found out there were at least 7 and possibly as many as 11 SAMs in the air. As I recall, the SA-2 was a "beam-riding" missile, but by 1972 the USAF & the Navy were getting a lot better at targeting SAM radars with anti-radiation missiles, so the NVA's new tactic was to do a quick sweep with the target acquisition radar to get an approximate azimuth on a target, then salvo multiple missiles at various altitudes in hopes that one of them would hit. We were very lucky that night.

What the Lord gives with one hand He takes away with the other. I lost a lot of flying time and missed my chance to upgrade from copilot to aircraft commander because I was "volunteered" to pull a two-month detail at MACV in Saigon in May of 1972. I worked in "Blue Chip," the Air Force command post at Tan Son Nhut. The upside was that I learned a great deal about how the USAF plans and conducts large-scale combat and support operations. A high point of that tour was ordering the Stinger detachment commander at DaNang, Lt. Col. Teal, to release one of his aircraft from perimeter patrol around the airfield and send it off to attack actual enemy targets in Laos. Teal was pretty upset with me. When my TDY was over, I had to let him

tear me a new one back at DaNang. I tuned him out and focused on the captured VC 122mm rocket leaning against the wall in the corner of his office. It was a gift from the ARVN that later, to everyone's great amusement, turned out to have never actually been disarmed.

Back in the saddle again, later in 1972 I had the opportunity to ferry a damaged AC-119K from Bien Hoa to NKP. This aircraft had been torn up pretty bad in a mortar attack, and a maintenance crew had done the best they could, but it still deserved its nickname, "Patches." The 18th SOS operations officer, who seldom flew combat missions, volunteered himself and me (because I was always pestering him for more flying time) to fly this milk run. We caught a C-130 down to Bien Hoa, looked at "Patches" and decided that yes, it looked like it might actually fly. We got airborne late the next afternoon and things were going fine until, somewhere over northern Cambodia with darkness falling, the electric trim failed and both of us had to apply increasing force against the yoke to keep the airplane straight and level. Not long afterward an engine failed and we experienced a more or less total electrical failure as well. We diverted into Ubon, with the navigator hanging out the forward door talking to the tower on his survival radio. Amazingly, they got some maintenance guys down from NKP and were able to fix "Patches" the next day, and we eventually made it home, but I don't think "Patches" ever flew another combat mission. As I recall, I experienced no fewer than five engine failures over hostile territory in the course of my 139 missions; wonder if that's a record?

On the personal side, I married the former Janet Smith in 1974. Janet's father was co-pilot on the very first presidential aircrew, flying Presidents Roosevelt and Truman. Janet and I adopted two girls from Russia in 1993 and 1994; Elizabeth is now 17 and Emily is 14 years old. I'm one of the older guys at PTA meetings.



Gary Hitzemann, Navigator

18th SOS, DaNang, NKP, 1970-71

I was born on September 28, 1945, in Austin, MN. I grew up in Brownsdale, MN and graduated from St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN in 1967 with a degree in psychology. I entered the Air Force on my birthday that same year. After my commissioning thorough OTS, I completed navigator training in January 1968, then went to Dover AFB, DE in the C-133A.

In 1970, I received orders to the AC-119K and trained as a

FLIR operator. I left for Vietnam on my birthday in 1970. I flew 125 combat missions, about half from DaNang and half from NKP. I completed my tour with three DFCs and nine Air Medals.

From NKP, I went to Pope AFB in C-130s and was part of the initial contingent that went to Howard to set up Central Command in 1972. I separated from the Air Force in September 1972 (on my birthday) and two years later

entered a Masters program in Architecture at the University of Minnesota. I have been a practicing architect since 1980.

I missed the military, so in 1975, I joined the Minnesota Air National Guard. I flew the C-130A with the Guard until retiring (on my birthday) in 1989 as a Lieutenant Colonel, having served my last three years as the 109 TAS commander.

I have been married to the same woman, Diane Demmer Hitzemann, for 41 years. We have two daughters and two grandchildren. My life has been blessed beyond all hope or expectation, and the crew I flew with in Southeast Asia was the finest group of people one could ever hope to work with or know. I am a patriot, and I love my country.



Nuoi Hoang, Pilot

821 Squadron, DaNang, 1972-73

My name is Nuoi "Henry" Hoang. I was born in Saigon, Vietnam in 1935. I graduated from high school in 1950 and from the College Technique (Saigon) in 1955. I was trained in AC-119 gunship tactics by Maj Albert Krueger and his 18th Special Operations Squadron crew in late 1972.

I joined the Vietnamese Air Force to defend South Vietnam against the aggression from the North Vietnamese Communists who were being backed up by the Chinese and the Soviet Union communists. As a member of the 821st Squadron (call sign – Tinh Long) in the Vietnam Air Force, I transitioned from a cargo pilot to an AC-119K Gunship pilot.

My most memorable event occurred one day before the government of the Republic of South Vietnam surrendered

to the North Vietnamese communist's Peoples Army. Then the capital (Saigon) was surrounded by many enemy divisions. We fought with them until we ran out of ammunition and had to land at U-Tapao Thailand.

I will always remember the transition flights from being a cargo pilot to being a gunship pilot. I shall never forget Major Albert (Bob) Krueger, MSgt Lee Kyser (flight engineer) and their teammates as they trained us at DaNang from December 1972 through February 1973.

I separated from the AC-119K gunship on a sorrowful afternoon on April 29, 1975 at U-Tapao Air Base in Thailand.



Kjell Lorang "Ole" Hoelstad, IO

71st & 17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1969-1970

I was born at Oslo, Norway in 1936. My family immigrated to the United States in 1950. We lived in Winnetka, IL and I graduated from New Trier High School in 1955. Because the U.S. Air Force was the best choice for me, I enlisted in March 1956.

Following are my USAF assignments by years: 1956-58, 36th Air Rescue Squadron at Johnson AB, Japan; 1503rd FLMS at Haneda & Tachikawa Air Bases in Japan; 1958-64, 90th Air Refueling Squadron, Forbes AFB KS, 97th Air Refueling Squadron, Malmstrom AFB MT; 1964-65, 34th CAMRON (Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron) at Bien Hoa AB, RVN where I maintained C-47s, including the original AC-47s "Puff the Magic Dragon" of the 1st Air Commando Squadron; 1965-66 C-47s at Malmstrom AFB MT; 1967-68, test flew EC-47s with R-2000 engines as flight mechanic at Grenier AFB NH and 1969-70, AC-119G Shadow IO at Tan Son Nhut AB RVN. From 1970 to 1974, I was assigned to units at Malmstrom AFB,

MT flying the C-47 and T-29. I was then assigned to the Strategic Missile Wing at Malmstrom as Launch Control Facility Manager, Branch Chief, 341st CAMS (Minuteman Missile Site Management) from 1974 (graduated from NCO Academy in 1976) until my retirement as Master Sergeant at Malmstrom in June 1978.

I was an Illuminator Operator in the 71st and 17th Special Operations Squadrons. I was assigned to the C Flight at Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN from June 1969 to May 1970. I flew on Lt. Col. Buckley's crew and then Capt. Griesnik's crew. I was airborne, flying missions, during the crashes of Shadow 76 and Shadow 78 at Tan Son Nhut. I knew both crews very well.

I lived at the Merlin Hotel in Saigon while assigned to C Flight at Tan Son Nhut along with all other Shadow enlisted aircrew members including my best buddies, Carl Vanderlaan, Abe Moore, John Bergin, and Virgil Zins. I was

awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with seven (7) Oak Leaf Clusters for aerial combat action in Southeast Asia.

I graduated from College of Great Falls, Montana in 1982



Thomas J. Honzik, Gunner

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, 1972-73

I was born and raised in Chicago, IL and graduated from Fenger High School in 1970. While in high school, I participated in ROTC and became interested in becoming a warrant officer. I entered the Air Force in September 1970, completed weapons mechanics school, and headed to England AFB, LA to maintain A-37 mini-guns. I volunteered for gunships. I reported to the 18th SOS at NKP in April 1971 and flew missions from NKP and during August and October from Bien Hoa, before being transferred to DaNang in November 1972. In February 1973, the Air Force was transferring the AC-119K to the Vietnamese Air Force. I was on the second to last military aircraft to land at DaNang before the war ended in January 1973. Because I was one of the last to leave DaNang, paperwork for my "End of Tour" Distinguished Flying Cross was never processed and was lost. Thus, I never received the DFC.

From gunships, I was assigned to B-52s in Michigan, but ended up loading bombs in Guam. I earned the Missileman Badge working on B52D and H models. I left active duty in February 1974, entered college and joined the Air National Guard. I graduated from Chicago State University and, in 1979, was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Guard, and retired a Major in January, 2000 after a variety of interesting assignments. In the Army, I served as a Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Warfare Specialist and Civil Affairs Officer. I was one of the first Army Reservists called to serve in Bosnia as a Civil Affairs Officer in 1995. I

with a BA degree in History and Political Science. My wife, Orpha Jo, and I have lived in Norway since 1983, but now have relocated to the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave. Glyndon, MN is the place to be.

also served in Germany, Croatia, and Latvia during my stay in the Army.

One of my most exciting AC-119 missions occurred in October 1972 while I was scanning for AAA. A SAM-7 was fired at us. I yelled "SAM! SAM!" and fired my Very pistol (flare gun) and the pilot broke hard in the direction of the SAM. I suddenly found myself staring straight down at the ground. I had never seen an AC-119K bank as fast or as far. I heard the explosion and thought we were hit, but the copilot reported the SAM had locked onto my flare. A similarly hair-raising incident occurred one night on the trail when basketball-sized fireballs of AAA passed extremely close to the aircraft.

There are several things that always come to mind when I think about my time as a gunner in the AC-119K. The first concerns my parachute. Shortly after I began flying, I inspected my parachute and discovered a tag that read "CONDEMNED." When I reported it to the equipment specialist, he looked at the tag and told me I was lucky because I had one of the newer chutes. I also remember mini-guns were difficult to maintain because the Air Force had few spare parts and they were hard to get. We were forced to swap parts from one gun to another and, on occasion, I went to downtown DaNang to a local merchant who always had parts. Mostly, I remember the people I met. I still keep in touch with several of them.



Richard S. Howze, Pilot

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, Phan Rang, 1971

I was born on Nov 21, 1944 in Tampa, Florida while my dad was based in England flying bombing missions over Germany as a B-17 navigator. My dad remained in the military and became a pilot. By age five I knew that I wanted to be an Air Force pilot and that desire never changed. In 1967 the Vietnam War was going full bore.

During my final year at the University of South Florida, I

was reclassified 1A, meaning I was eligible to be drafted. I had no problem going to Vietnam - I just wanted to do it as an Air Force pilot. I finally got a deferment and in August 1967, I was on my way to Air Force Officer Training School at Lackland AFB, TX.

My dad was in Vietnam while I was in pilot training and was severely wounded in June 1968. I visited him in the



hospital as often as I could. I think I might have set some kind of record as the only guy to take 30 days of leave during UPT and still graduate with his class.

From UPT I was assigned C-141s at Robins AFB, GA, my second choice after front-seat F-4s. At Robins I was immediately placed on the Palace Cobra list as eligible for an assignment to SEA.

As assignment time approached I was expecting to get a C-123, EC-47, C-7, or similar junk aircraft. Then I learned that since I did not have a DOS I would most likely get a helicopter. I also learned there might be an AC-119 gunship assignment coming down, so I volunteered for the gunship while also applying for a DOS. A guy in my squadron got the AC-119 slot, but was medically ineligible. I got my gunship.

After my tour with the 17th SOS, I returned to flying C-141s at Dover AFB, DE and Charleston AFB, SC. Then, from 1975 to 1979, I flew the VC-135 with the 89th MAW at Andrews AFB, MD in support of the Vice President, Presidential Cabinet, and other dignitaries worldwide. I separated from the AF in 1979, flew briefly with Western Airlines, then rejoined the Air Force and flew C-130s at Pope AFB, NC, before returning to Andrews AFB to fly the VC-137 (B-707) as aircraft commander on Special Air Missions.

My last assignment was a three-year tour in logistics. I separated from the Air Force in 1989 and flew as a Captain on the B-727 with Delta Air Lines until 2003. My awards and decorations included the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with eight devices. I've been married to Marti Floyd for 36 years. We have two daughters, Kristen and Kerrie.

Unforgettable Flight

In May 1971, I was an instructor pilot with the 17th SOS at Phan Rang AB. Our task was to train the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) to take over the gunship mission and operations. My instructor crew included: Major Jim Rash, navigator; TSgt. Gentry, flight engineer; SSgt. Mike

Drzyzga, gunner; and the illuminator operator whose name I can't remember.

There is one flight I will never forget because I lost an engine on the takeoff roll just as I rotated. The flight manual called for rotating at the minimum-control airspeed of 113 knots. Fortunately, I had accelerated to single-engine-climb speed (125 knots) before rotating. It was a technique I learned from the "old heads" that flew the C-119 in their younger days. The higher rotation speed provided a margin of safety and made good sense to me and a lot of other pilots.

At about ten feet above the runway, TSgt Gentry yelled, "There goes number two." We had the worst thing we could have on takeoff in the AC-119G - a runaway prop. That meant we lost all ability to control the propeller pitch. The prop was providing no power and was instead acting as a big speed brake. I quickly pulled the nose up a little more to get some altitude, pulled the number two throttle to idle, and let the airspeed settle at 115 knots, just above minimum-control airspeed. I was glad I rotated at that higher airspeed because we were able to climb to 300 feet on one engine. Had I rotated at 113, we never would have been able to climb and probably would have been trying to fly the plane from an altitude of 20 feet.

With the prop screaming at 3500 rpm, there was nothing we could do other than try landing as soon as possible. I started a slow right turn to get over the sea. I knew we had an 1100-foot hill to miss, but I couldn't see it. I missed it by making a wide, shallow turn. When we were on a downwind and safely over the water, I instructed the VNAF pilot to fly the plane so I could complete the emergency checklist.

At that point things started going sour. TSgt. Gentry had opened the cowl flaps to avoid overheating the engine cylinder heads. Overheating could cause the engine to lose power. However, opening the cowl flaps also put more drag on the plane, meaning we needed more power to maintain our 115-knot airspeed. However, the VNAF pilot had not advanced the throttle to overcome the increased drag. The airspeed had quickly dropped to 110 knots and we were descending at a rate of 50 feet per minute. In theory, we were three knots below controllable flying speed. Fortunately, we were carrying only a partial load of ammo. The lower weight gave us a slight safety pad. Nevertheless, I was close to simultaneously running out of the big three: airspeed, altitude, and ideas.

We were close to the runway, but low and slow as we turned

onto base leg. I thought about taking over flying the aircraft, but decided that trying to transfer aircraft control and having the VNAF pilot assume copilot duties would be too risky. I just had to remember to tell him what to do because he wasn't doing anything unless he was told to.

Gear-down timing was critical. Once we lowered the gear the aircraft was going in only one direction - down. I lowered the gear, hoping it would lock before we touched down. It did.

We turned off the runway onto the high-speed taxiway and stopped. A crazy thing then happened. The Pedro rescue chopper came down abruptly beside our left wing with a cloud of dust. He had been following us and we had turned directly in his flight path. He had to quickly drop his fire bottle and set the chopper down to avoid hitting us. I remember thinking how strange it would be to just make it back only to have a rescue chopper come through the wing. Then I heard, "Nice going Dick!" The chopper pilot was Mike Nelson, a good friend and next door neighbor from my last stateside assignment.

I had not said a word to the pilot because I was exhausted. When I finally caught my breath, I asked why he hadn't pushed the power up when the airspeed started decreasing. He replied that the book limited the use of run maximum power to five minutes. I replied, a bit sarcastically, that if we

were about to crash, it probably would be a real good idea to run max power longer than five minutes. The Vietnamese resisted deviating from the flight manual. If the manual said something, that's what they were going to do, no matter what.

We then went to another plane and flew the scheduled training mission. At the debriefing, we discussed what had happened. The guys in back said that they were ready to toss out the ammo and flare launcher if needed. We even had a laugh about some things, like the VNAF navigator getting up to preflight the NOS while the cockpit crew was struggling to keep the plane flying 300 feet above the ground. We had survived a severe emergency of the kind one would only expect to see in a flight simulator.

The following day was beautiful. At midmorning I got Buckwheat, our hooch dog, and walked up the hill located in the middle of the base. I looked down at the runway, retraced our flight path, and thought, "Damn Bucky, that was close." That's when I got scared. That night we were back at it, flying a training mission.

In my 35 years of flying, I never had an emergency as serious as the one on that dark night in May 1971. I owe my life to the older guys who flew the C-119 when they were lieutenants and shared their knowledge and techniques on flying that bird. Thanks guys.



Edwin "Ed" C. Humphreys III, Maint. 71st SOS, Nha Trang, 1968-69

I was born September 28, 1943, in Big Springs, Texas. My father was active-duty Air Force so we moved a great deal. I graduated from Bellevue High School, Bellevue, Nebraska, in 1961. I earned my Air Force commission through the AFROTC program upon completing my bachelor's degree at the University of Mississippi in 1966. In 1976 I earned a master's of science from Troy State University, Troy, Alabama.

Upon arriving in Vietnam during July 1968, I was initially assigned as Officer in Charge of the Fabrication Branch, 14th Field Maintenance Squadron, 14th Air Commando Wing at Nha Trang AB. I was subsequently reassigned to the 71st Special Operations Squadron as the first active duty Maintenance Officer for the AC-119G "Shadow" gunships. I flew several combat missions with the 71st SOS. As the main maintenance support base for the AC-119G, I also flew ferry and combat missions to the 71st SOS operating locations at Tan Son Nhut AB and Phan Rang AB.

In July 1969 I was reassigned to the 55th Organizational Maintenance Squadron (SAC), Offutt AFB, Nebraska and in 1971 was selected as an aircrew member on the SAC EC-135 Airborne Command Post ("Looking Glass") where I accumulated over 5,000 hours on the airborne battle staff. I served as 89th Organizational Maintenance Squadron Commander, 89th Military Airlift Wing (MAC), Andrews AFB, Maryland with responsibility for maintaining "Air Force One" as well as the rest of the presidential fleet and other special mission aircraft. In July 1983, I became Chief, Logistics Assignment Branch (Palace Log), Headquarters Air Force Military Personnel Center, and in 1987 became Deputy Commander for Maintenance for the 3246th Test Wing, Eglin AFB, Florida. I also served as Group Commander of the newly created 100th Regional Support Group at RAF Mildenhall AB, UK before retiring in January 1994.

After a year of retirement, I went to work in March 1995 for MTC Technologies, Inc, a defense contractor, moving through the corporate structure to become a Senior Vice President and officer before moving to General Dynamics

Information Technology in November 2007 where I am currently employed as a Senior Director working strategic business development opportunities. I am married to Sue and have three children - Cole, Jennifer, and Jeff.



Larry J. Hunter, Gunner

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, Bien Hoa, 1971-72



I was born in New Albany, Indiana in 1948. I grew up in Jacksonville, Florida and graduated from Wolfson High School in 1967. I entered the Air Force at Jacksonville on 3 September 1967. I had told my uncle that I could do anything he ever did and I did.

Two combat missions flown out of DaNang with Lt. Col. McGuire's crew stand out in my memory. On one mission, we took two (2) rounds of 37mm

through the right wing which left a Big Hole. We flew back and landed at DaNang, took another Stinger gunship and flew back to the same area. I was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for this mission.

On another mission, Col. McGuire rolled the AC-119K to inverted flight which they say can't be done. Well, we did it and lived to tell about it. Of course it was unintentional. Col. McGuire was taking evasive action to avoid anti-aircraft fire when the gunship rolled upside down. I was awarded another DFC for this mission.

My nickname "Baby Huey" was bestowed on me by a Stinger Navigator and I have flown with that nickname ever since. For those who don't know, Baby Huey was Donald Duck's little nephew.

I was the young know-it-all sergeant when I started my tour of duty in Southeast Asia. Old MSgt. Yowell and TSgt. Gravitte took me in as a roommate when I arrived at NKP. The reason they wanted me for a roommate was because I didn't drink beer.

They wanted my beer rations. They taught me how to play cribbage and other card games so they could take my money. But I was a fast learner and they ended up buying many steak dinners for me at the Thai Restaurant. Good ole Ray Gravitte checked me out as a SEFE gunner and then sent me to DaNang so he wouldn't have to go to DaNang. Nice guy? But he did have to fly to DaNang to give my check ride. We were a Band of Brothers in S.E.A. I hold each of them dear to my heart.

I retired from the United States Air Force on 4 September 1993 at Hurlburt Field, Florida as a Senior Master Sergeant. During my last 13 years on active duty, I was a gunner on MH-53J helicopters.



Jeff C. Illston, Pilot

18th SOS, DaNang, 1970-71

Flushing, New York was my birthplace in 1946. I grew up in Glen Head (Long Island) New York and graduated from North Shore High School in 1964. In 1968, I graduated from the University of Arizona and through the AFROTC program received my commission as second lieutenant in the United States Air Force. I joined the Air Force to serve

our country and also to learn to fly and get experience with jet aircraft. I attended pilot training at Laughlin AFB, Del Rio, Texas.

I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at DaNang from July 1970 to June 1971. During that time,

I had a 30-day TDY at Tan Son Nhut, Saigon for action in Cambodia. I flew 150 plus combat missions during my tour.

Although I experienced many “exciting” combat missions, one mission does stand out. On 16 February 1971 at about 0200 hours over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, our crew was approaching bingo fuel when we located several well defended truck convoys. I had never experienced such a “Team Effort” as what took place that night. As our ten-man crew proceeded to attack the first truck convoy, I recall an intense feeling of being a part of a very well-oiled professional team. Now in retrospect, and more importantly, we were an extremely blessed team. As we worked our way through the valley of death, the mountainside Triple A was intense. Interphone chatter was non-stop; at one point a scanner (I think it was IO Bill Petrie) yelled, “Field Goal!” We had taken a round between our booms. There had literally been nowhere to break out of the firing circle. Twenty-two trucks were destroyed and three damaged. What a night! Only by God’s grace and love did our ten-man team make it back to DaNang as He permitted us to do every night. Our AC (I believe it was Earl Glass) gave me the landing. What a guy! And what a plane; the AC-119K

Stinger was a deadly beast to say the least!

Separating from the Air Force in 1973, I was employed by American Airlines. Flying with the Rhode Island Air National Guard during an early furlough with American was a wonderful experience. From 1976 to 2005, I was an American Airlines pilot (B-727, DC-10, MD-80, and finished up as International Captain B-777). My wife, Charis and I currently live in Fort Worth, Texas.



Charis and Jeff



William “Bill” R. Isham, IO

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, Bien Hoa, 1972-1973



Lakewood, Ohio was my birthplace in 1950. I grew up in North Olmsted, Ohio where I graduated from North Olmsted High School in 1968. I joined the Air Force on 18 December 1969 in Cleveland, Ohio and subsequently reported for basic training at Lackland AFB, Texas. I joined the Air Force because my father flew B-17s in the U.S.

Army Air Corps during World War II and served thereafter in the USAF Reserves. He enjoyed it so much that I wanted to do the same.

I served with the 18th Special Operations Squadron in Southeast Asia, arriving at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand on 26 April 1972 and departing the Vietnam War at DaNang, Republic of Vietnam on 5 March 1973. I was a Stinger gunship illuminator operator (IO), flying out of air bases at NKP, DaNang, and Bien Hoa at various times.

My most exciting mission by far was my last AC-119K mission when I had to bailout of “Old 839” on 1 March 1973. That mission cannot be explained any better than the excellent account written by my aircraft commander, Lt. Col. Roy A. “Tony” Simon. His story of “The Bailout of Stinger Eight-Three-Nine” tells it like it was.

I will never forget the men I flew with during my tour of duty in Southeast Asia. And I have not forgotten the many stories and experiences I have been able to share with my family and friends.



I separated from the USAF at Langley AFB on 17 December 1974 as a Staff Sergeant. My wife of 39 years, Janet, and I live in Jacksonville, Florida where I retired on 1 February 2007 from CSX after a 38 year railroad career with the Penn Central, Conrail and CSX Railroads.



Dick Iverson, Pilot

18th SOS, Phan Rang, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, 1971-72



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 Phanom (NKP) Air Base in Thailand and six months at DaNang 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



Jon David "Jake" Jacobson, Gunner

17th SOS, Nha Trang, Tuy Hoa, Phu Cat, 1969



I was born on October 12, 1949 in Berkeley, Alameda County, California. My wife is Charlotte Marie Jacobson.

I was inducted into the USAF on June 14, 1968 (the day after I graduated from high

school) in Oakland, California. I felt then and still do feel that we, as Americans, have a duty to our country and that duty includes some type of service. I knew that I did not want to go to college after high school so I volunteered and enlisted.

I trained most of the time until I entered the Republic of Vietnam and was first assigned to a gun shop in Nha Trang in September of 1969. The Air Force had trained too many gunners for Spooky and this left a group of us in limbo. I finally got assigned to Shadow and the flying time began. I was 19 years old and starting to ask myself questions like: What the hell am I doing here? I had been stationed at McConnell AFB in Wichita, Kansas and I had been told I would be frozen there the rest of my enlistment. I had only been there three months and I decided that I would go nuts staying there for another 3 plus years. So, I ran down and put my name in for gunship duty as a gunner. I was from an area with pine trees, oceans, and mountains, so Wichita was not a place I wanted to spend the rest of my enlistment. Now, I was in a country without all those things and I could not wait to leave that place. You would think I was pretty finicky and you are right. I recently retired to the Big Island

of Hawaii and I feel like I am finally home. It's green, wet, wonderful and life is good.

After I returned from RVN I was stationed for one year at Luke AFB and one year at Davis-Monthan AFB in Arizona. I worked as a member of the Lead Team for weapons loading certification for A7 type aircraft at D.M. When I was discharged in Tucson, I had been promoted to a Sergeant (E-4) and the final promotion I was looking for was civilian. I made it! After Honorable Discharge on June 13, 1972, I went to school and received an A.S. at Solano Community College (1975) and a B.S. in Biology at California State University Chico (1976). I later attended Heald Business College and received a degree in Accounting in 1985.

One story that I later felt was funny but, at the time was scary as hell, was the first night that a group of us had come into Vietnam. We arrived at the transit quarters in Nha Trang, found our bunks and had just gotten to sleep when all hell broke loose. We thought it was a rocket attack on the base so we hit the deck. We listened and then we could hear laughter coming from an area not too far from us. It

had been an army artillery gun that a couple of G.I.'s had fired on a hill to the east of the base. We found out later that these guys did that every night for the FNGs (Friendly New Guys). Right. It was funny after it happened and we all knew we had been tagged.

I have tried pretty much to forget most of the events of that year. Things like runaway props, Alpha alert, Bravo alert, Charlie alert, and other times are not as focused as they once had been. But, I have enjoyed the last thirty-six years of life and thank the men of Shadow for the chance at living a good life. I talk to my brother-in-law, Tony, from time to time about Vietnam because he thanks me for his life- well, Shadow anyway. One night in April of 1970, Shadow 45 was in the air when we received a call for troops in contact. I do not know if I was on that mission, but I would like to think that I saved my future brother-in-law's life. He was in the U.S. Army and on the ground that night that Shadow 45 sent Charlie packing. We have always had the bond of brotherhood even prior to a formal introduction. Thanks for the opportunity to write a few words about me - Jake. Over and Out.



Alan "Jake" Jaeckle, Pilot

18th SOS, DaNang, Phan Rang, Tan Son Nhut, Nakhon Phanom, 1970



Chicago, Illinois was my birthplace on October 28, 1945. I grew up in Covina, California and graduated from Covina High School in 1963. I then entered the five-year program for architectural design and graduated in 1968 from Texas A&M University at

College Station. Being a member of the Corps of Cadets, Squadron 5 aka 'Filthy Fifth', I was commissioned a Second Lieutenant upon graduation. I always wanted to be an officer in the Air Force rather than being a drafted ground pounder.

Upon graduation from pilot training at Randolph AFB in October 1969, I entered the "pipeline" to Vietnam, having selected an AC-119 gunship. Training at Clinton County and Lockbourne AFB, and Survival Schools at Fairchild and Clark helped prepare me for my 12-month tour of duty in S.E.A. Assigned to the 18th SOS, I flew Stingers out of DaNang, Phan Rang, Tan Son Nhut (TDY), and NKP. My last assignment in the Air Force was flying the Air

Evac DC-9A (Frankfurt Germany) throughout Europe. I separated from the USAF as a Captain in January 1975. My wife, Beverly, and I currently live at Reunion Ranch (Picnic Ranch) in Terrell, Texas.

One truck hunting mission flown out of DaNang stands out as my most exciting. Major Tony Bautz was in the left seat, firing away at a truck on the Ho Chi Minh Trail when a scanner yelled, "Triple A, Break Right!" Bautz stopped firing and immediately tried to break right but could not turn right because of my resistance on the yoke. I resisted because of the upcoming stream of enemy ground fire I saw out my co-pilot window to our right. Simultaneously, the scanner yelled, "I mean Break Left! Break Left!" A barrage of bright 23mm ZPU yellow tracers instantly shot past the nose and right wing of the aircraft. If we had broken right, we would have taken a direct hit.

Scared to death is what I was at DaNang when I was headed to Hong Kong on leave from NKP. It was on the third night of my four night stay at DaNang while waiting for my orders. I was in the barracks with my old DaNang buddies, Dick Henderson and Jeff Ilston, when the VC launched a

rocket attack and ground assault on the base. Sirens went off and everybody in the barracks quickly left for battle stations at assigned Squadron locations, leaving me alone in the barracks. Automatic weapons were firing everywhere as rockets continued impacting the area. I had no place to go, so I got under the bunk and pulled the mattress over me. I felt utterly helpless with no weapon or survival equipment. Surviving the attack, I caught a Marine C-130 (strapped to the cargo compartment floor) to Tan Son Nhut for my flight to Hong Kong on Cathay Pacific Airlines. I'll never forget the wet wash cloths provided by the Cathay stewardess. After checking in at the R&R center in Hong Kong, the first thing I did was rent a motorcycle and tour the city which was high on the taboo list of things to do.

I will always remember owning a Honda 90 motorcycle at DaNang. I helped build five Honda 90s from parts kits ordered from Japan. I'll always remember my roommates at DaNang, Dick Henderson and Jeff Ilston. Dick was also my roommate at NKP.

My TDY to TSN from December '70 to January '71 was exciting. Flying missions in Cambodia, including daylight missions with Major Bautz were special. We didn't need an

interpreter onboard to speak to the French-speaking ground commanders. Bautz could speak French. I also flew with fellow-Aggie, Major Jerry Jones, on a number of missions.

My "Sa-wa-dee" (final) flight at NKP ended without taking off for Barrel Roll. After our original sortie was cancelled, the crew was put on ground hold and we sat alert for three hours. Daylight was fast approaching and the mission was finally scrubbed for good. Fire trucks showed up at the

aircraft. I departed the aircraft and took off like the trackman I once was. Nobody caught me to hose me down. And to this day, I regret that I didn't get hosed.



Charles Milton "Chuck" James, Pilot

17th SOS, Nha Trang, Tuy Hoa, Phu Cat, 1969-70



Born at Rantoul, Champaign County, Illinois June 2, 1925, as the fourth child of John William James (b. 09/28/1867) and Anna Elizabeth Wallen James (b. 05/27/1898). Graduated Rantoul Township High School in Class of 1943 on May 28, 1943.

On March 18, 1943, after successfully passing physical and written exams, enlisted as an aviation student for the Army Air Force Aviation Cadet Program. He entered active duty on June 17, 1943, received his pilot wings with Class 44-I on November 20, 1944, and served on continuous active duty until retiring on March 1, 1974. He retired as a Regular Lieutenant Colonel, Command Pilot, date of rank June 25, 1964, with 8,800 hours as pilot in military aircraft.

He flew a variety of aircraft during his military career,

namely training aircraft PT-19, BT-13 and AT-6; operational aircraft were the C-45, C-46, C-47, C-54, C-118, AC-119G, C-131A & B, T-29 all versions, B-25 and CG-4A Cargo Glider.

Chuck served ten of almost 31 years active duty in permanent overseas locations. The assignments included Japan (1946-1949), Asmara, Eritrea (Ethiopia) (1953-1955), Tripoli, Libya (1955-1956), Germany (1961-1964) and Vietnam (1969-1970). He also traveled extensively on TDY to many overseas locations and had visited, in one way or the other, 46 nations at the time he retired. His travels included Europe, the Mediterranean, Scandanavia, the Middle East, Africa, Southeast Asia, Far East, Southwest Asia, South Pacific, the Far North, Caribbean, and Central and South America. He also saw the islands of Guam, Wake, Kwajalien and Johnston Atoll.

Duties were generally in operations and involved training command, troop carrier, special activities, special air missions, medical air-evac, flight test and special operations. His experience with special operations was with AC-119G

aircraft in Vietnam where he flew 179 night gunship missions as aircraft commander and logged 650 pilot combat flying hours. In recognition for "being there" during his military career, he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal w/ 8 OLCs, Air Force Commendation Medal, Presidential Unit Citation, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award w/2 OLCs, Army Good Conduct Medal, World War II American Theater Medal, World War II Victory Medal, Armed Forces Occupation Medal (Japan), Defense Service Medal s/Star, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal s/4 Battle Stars, Air Force Longevity Ribbon w/ Clusters, Air Force Reserve Medal, Expert Marksmanship Medal, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry w/Palm and Vietnam Service Medal.

The assignment with special operations, though too late in his military career to be beneficial career-wise, was a challenging and rewarding experience. He served at Nha Trang, Tuy Hoa and Phu Cat. Night combat missions in the AC-119 were always most interesting. Serving additional duty as Operations Officer, "A" Flight during his tour of duty of June 1969-May 1970 filled in the time between missions. And how can a person not remember:

The night that Lieutenant Colonel Russ O'Connell, Flight Commander of "A" Flight, aborted a night take-off at Nha Trang after the aircraft actually became airborne. He put the aircraft back on the ground, stomped the brakes, and was the first one who bounded out of the aircraft to use a fire extinguisher on the brakes. In reenacting his action, he was at a loss as to how he exited the aircraft so quickly.

The incident of an AC-119G of "A" Flight hitting a pile of dirt on the overrun at Chu Lai that caused the collapse of the left landing gear. The story of the event is covered elsewhere in this document.

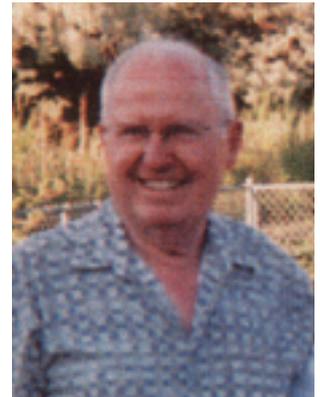
The night that Captain John Hope, as aircraft commander, after landing at Phu Cat, ended up blowing both main landing gear tires. The fighter jocks who operated the air patch were upset, to say the least, that the runway was closed to aircraft, and that they had to divert their returning fighters to other airfields. They had a valid complaint. I was assured at the scene of the aircraft that night that should another such incident occur, they would use a bulldozer to clear the runway.

The night mission in the Central Highlands that a flare hung up in the flare launcher. Major Guido Cimini, NOS, gunner Staff Sergeant Walter L. Hamm, the second gunner

and illuminator operator Bob Mikolowski struggled to eject the hung flare. They at last succeeded but the flare "blew" as it left the launcher slamming Walt Hamm's arm back against the aircraft. He lost his watch and injury to his arm grounded him for a short time.

The food provided to our Shadow aircrews when they regenerated at Chu Lai; until we could no longer regenerate at that location following the collapsed landing gear incident. Marine Sergeant Don Turner, Mess Sergeant, always saw to it that we were fed the best in his mess hall and, if we could not leave the aircraft, he provided us with fruit, sandwiches and the works to take with us on the follow-on mission.

And the tragic episode of our commander's son, Robert, an Army jungle fighter, being killed in action in an air strike. Lieutenant Colonel Russ O'Connell, very unsettled that his son had joined the Army, was able to talk to his son by radio occasionally when flying a mission in his area. His son, Robert, visited our "A" Flight not too long before he lost his life. Russ was devastated with the loss of his son. He escorted his son's body along with others back to the States and thus terminated his assignment in Vietnam.



"At the first gunship reunion in 2000, Chuck was elected as the first president of the soon-to-be designated AC-119 Gunship Association. He served as the driving force to establish a successful association including the writing of by-laws."

"He is a graduate of Command and Staff College, Class of 1961. He is also a member of The National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution through a great, great, great grandfather who served in the military during the conflict."



Article taken from the Air Force News May 20 1970

Shadow Crew Kills 100 NVA Troops

PHU CAT — An AC-119G Shadow gunship crew of the 17th Special Operations Squadron recently killed 100 North Vietnamese Army soldiers after being scrambled from alert here in support of the Republic of Vietnam Civilian Irregular Defense Group camp, Dak Pek.

Crewmembers on the mission were Lt. Col. Charles M. James; Maj. Phillip A. Diehl; 1st Lt. Stanley J. Cooper; 1st Lt Robert Allen; Technical Sergeants Robert H. Spencer, Robert E. Barham, John W. Newhouse and A1C Jon D. Jacobson were the remaining crewmen.

The mission was launched early in the morning to provide coverage for the Dak Seang area when it was diverted to a troops-in-contact mission at Dak Pek, 13 miles north of Dak Seang.

“As the action progressed, Lieutenant Cooper, using a night observation sensor, was able to pick up the enemy gun positions and aid the pilot in successfully silencing them,” reported Colonel James.

As the morning wore on, the Shadow Gunship also acted as a radio relay to obtain much-needed supplies and information for the ground troops. Illumination for the target had become a problem due to the smoke resulting from the incoming rounds the camp was taking. There were moments when the target was completely obscured, and the enemy could barely be detected in the blanket of ground smoke caused by the automatic weapons’ tracer fire.

“The sun was up before we departed the target,” said Major Diehl. Once again, the Shadow has effectively earned its motto, “Deny Him the Dark.”



C-119 Training Class 69-6, Clinton County Air Force Base, Wilmington, Ohio – 31 March 1969

Kneeling - *Captain John Hathaway (Pilot); Captain John F. Covert (Pilot); Captain Harman E. Fawcett (Pilot); Captain James M. Edwards (Pilot)

Middle Row – Major ? (Nav/Nos); Lt. Col. Charles M. James (Pilot); Major ? (Nav/Nos); Major Otis W. Jones (Nav/Nos); Major Francis A. Nealon (Nav/Nos); Captain ? (Nav/Nos); 1st Lt. ? (Nav/Nos); Captain Edwin W. Thompson (Nav/Nos); Captain ? (Nav/Nos);

Top Row – Sgt. ? (Flt Eng); TSgt. Robert E. Barham (Ill. Op.); Sgt. ? (Flt Eng); Sgt. ? (?); Sgt. ? (?); TSgt. Robert H Spencer (Flt Eng); Sgt. ? (?); SSgt. John D. Ketcherside (Flt Eng); Sgt. ? (?); Sgt. ? (?);

*Killed in take-off crash at Ton Son Nhut, AB. - October 1969



James William James, Pilot

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 819th Attack Squadron VNAF 1971-72



Prepared by Mike Bowman, son-in-law to Colonel James.

Place of Birth: McKenzie, Carroll County, Tennessee
 DOB: October 3, 1926, DOD: February 24, 1999

James William James was known as "Bill" to civilian friends and "Jim" to Air Force friends.

In 1944, he enlisted in the Tennessee Home Guard in his hometown of McKenzie, Tennessee. He was called to active duty with the Army Air Corps in March 1945. He entered the On Line Training Program to become a pilot. When it became clear there were already too many pilots in the pipeline, he entered B-29 aerial gunnery training. Jim was still in gunnery training when the war ended. He and fellow gunners were assigned to reconfigure the B-29 bomber to a cargo aircraft. He was discharged in November 1945 while still a private.

In 1947, Jim attended the Aeronautical University of Chicago with plans of becoming an aeronautical engineer. When the Aviation Cadet program reopened, Jim enlisted and completed AT-6 training at Randolph Field, Texas as part of Class 49-A.

Jim was part of a number of "firsts" for the C-119. He was flying C-82s with the 20th Troop Carrier Squadron, Sewart AFB, TN when the 20th TCS became the first operational unit to convert to the C-119 and Jim became one of the first to fly the new aircraft. He flew in the first C-119 formation test flights and was part of the testing that recommended adding ventral fins on the twin tail booms to improve aircraft control.

After a brief overseas assignment with the 7th Air Rescue Squadron at Wheelus AB, Tripoli, Libya, Jim returned to the C-119 as an instructor pilot for an Air Force Reserve Wing that was activated and relocated to Ardmore, Oklahoma as the 463rd Troop Carrier Wing. While with the Wing, he received the Commendation Medal for his work bringing the flight simulator program online.

From Ardmore, Jim was assigned to the 817th Troop Carrier Squadron, 483rd Troop Carrier Wing at Ashiya, Japan where he served as C-119 Aircraft Commander, Instructor Pilot, Squadron Operations Officer, Chief of Aircrew Standardization, and Wing Safety Officer. As a Captain, Jim flew C-119 Tail Number 52-5938 (The City of Addis Ababa) on an around-the-world mission that covered 19,800 miles, taking U.N. troops from Korea to their home in Ethiopia. Nearly 20 years later, aircraft 52-5938 was converted to an AC-119G Shadow gunship and deployed to the 17th Special Operations Squadron in Vietnam where Jim again flew the aircraft. In 1958, Jim's C-119 unit converted to the C-130. Jim became an instructor for USAF and Japanese pilots. One of Jim's students was the leading active duty Japanese ace of World War II.

In 1959, Jim was reassigned to SAC and flew the KC-97 tanker with the 98th Bombardment Wing at Lincoln AFB, Nebraska. After completing Air Command and Staff College, he was assigned to K. I. Sawyer AFB, Michigan where he flew the new KC-135 tankers with the 46th Air Refueling Squadron. In 1967, he was assigned to SAC Headquarters, Offut AFB, NE as a War Plans Officer. While at Offut, he discovered the Air Force was looking for pilots with C-119 experience to fly the newly developed AC-119 gunships. He had about as much C-119 time as anybody in the Air Force and wanted to join the gunship program. SAC did not support Jim's request, but through multiple applications, phone calls, and calling in favors, he was eventually released for AC-119G training.

After arriving at Tan Son Nhut AB in February 1971, Jim was quickly certified as combat ready in the AC-119G. In May 1971, he was appointed C Flight Commander, and served as commander until the 17th SOS was deactivated and the aircraft transferred to



Bill & Frances James

the Vietnamese Air Force. Jim flew C Flight's last Shadow mission on September 10, 1971. It was a night armed reconnaissance mission over Cambodia. The flight was diverted to a troops-in-contact mission to Kampong Thom, Cambodia in support of Hotel 40. Jim stayed in Vietnam as a Senior Advisor to the 819th Attack Squadron, VNAF (Black Dragons), until February 1972. From Saigon, he was assigned to duty at the Pentagon where he retired in March 1972.

During his 28 year Air Force career, Jim accumulated approximately 6,000 flying hours in numerous aircraft that included the AT-6, B-25, C-82, CG-4 glider, C-119, SA-16 (HU-16), SB-17, C-130, KC-97, U-3 (L-27), Cessna 310, U-4 (L-26), UC-64A, C-47, KC-135, T-39, AC-119G. He retired in March 1972 as a regular officer with a permanent rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

His awards and decorations included the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star, Air Medal with 4 Oak Leaf Clusters, Air Force Commendation Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Air Force Outstanding Unit Medal, and World War II Victory Medal.

Shadow In-Flight Humor

On one of his night check flights, Col. James remarked to the instructor pilot that the left engine seemed to be making an odd whining sound. The IP calmly replied that the engine was fine; he was just hearing bullets passing by. Flying gunships was a serious business.

On a daylight mission sometime later, the dry humor of gunship pilots again displayed itself. An O-2 pilot requested help with a TIC situation. The O-2 pilot instructed Shadow to turn right and follow the highway. Without missing a beat the Shadow co-pilot calmly replied that this would be impossible since the Shadow could only make left turns (the direction of the firing circle). After a long pause on the radio, the O-2 pilot could only respond, "Isn't that dangerous?" After the fun was over, Col. James and crew came to the aid of the FAC and took care of business.

During a daylight armed reconnaissance mission on Easter Sunday 1971, Col. James was flying over the Chup Rubber Plantation when they received a call from a Cambodian ground commander for TIC support. Col. James knew that the lower he flew the more effective he could be and came in as low as possible. What he didn't know was that there were three anti-aircraft positions around the target. While in the firing circle, the aircraft was targeted by all three guns. A round pierced the aircraft and exploded at

the back of the flight deck. There was a flash and loud bang, the airspeed dropped off dramatically, and the aircraft became hard to control. There were calls of "fire" over the intercom. Col. James was concerned the aircraft might have lost a tail boom. Just as Col. James and his co-pilot got the plane under control, everything suddenly smoothed out. The flight engineer, a senior master sergeant who had gone aft to check for battle damage, reappeared wearing a big smile. It seemed that a VNAF gunner had fallen asleep in the latrine area and was jolted awake by the sound of the exploding shell. As he jumped up, he unintentionally grabbed the emergency smoke evacuation cable activating the air scoops. The in-rushing air stirred up dust and debris in the cargo deck creating the impression of smoke from a fire. The opened air scoops created sudden and significant drag causing a sudden loss of airspeed. Even though the aircraft was hit, the inadvertent deployment of the smoke evacuation scoops gave the incident a humorous twist. Satisfied the situation was under control, Col. James returned to the target, silenced all three anti-aircraft positions and stopped the firefight on the ground. Col. James was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for the mission.

Engine Failure

As related by Pat Patterson, Lead Gunner

In May 1971 while actively engaging a target in Cambodia, an engine failed on Col. James's aircraft thus causing insufficient power to maintain altitude. The navigator reported the nearest emergency field was Phnom Penh, about 30 minutes away. The flight engineer quickly determined the aircraft could remain airborne only 15 minutes at the present rate of descent. Col. James instructed the gunners and IO to jettison any extra weight. They replied that they were already dumping ammo at that moment. Ten minutes later, with all excess weight jettisoned, the flight engineer declared that at their present rate of descent they would contact earth in about 25 minutes. As they approached Phnom Penh, Col. James told the crew that if he felt that he couldn't make the landing when they reached minimum bailout altitude, he would sound the bailout alarm and anyone who didn't beat him out of the aircraft would automatically become aircraft commander. Col. James made a one engine landing without incident. That night the Shadow crewmembers were guests of Cambodian Army Col. Olm (call sign, Hotel KPT or Hotel 303).

The Cost of Battle

There were other missions that Col. James talked less and less about over time. On one, the enemy was concentrated

under the jungle canopy on a point of land that jugged into the confluence of two rivers. The fire from the Shadow was so devastating and the size of the enemy force so great that the water in the river actually began to flow red. This story

was only told once or twice shortly after his return in 1972. The job needed to be done and many friendly lives were saved, but the image of the water bothered him a great deal.



Charles Victor Johnson, AMMO

377th Combat Support Gr., Tan Son Nhut, 1969-70

Bend, Oregon was my birthplace in 1948. I graduated from Newberg High School in 1977. I joined the Air Force to avoid the draft. I thought that I could serve my country while getting an education in the USAF, something that I could use when I got out. I would do it all over again in a heartbeat.

I was assigned to the 377 Combat Support Group 377th Supply Squadron (AMMO) and arrived at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon, RVN on October 24, 1969 and departed on October 23, 1970.

My most exciting event occurred at Tan Son Nhut one night. We had extra aircraft parked across the taxiway from the 17th Special Operations Squadron C Flight Ops Building and we had just finished loading a plane. Maintenance personnel were working in the flare launcher

when all of a sudden a flare was launched. The flare ejected out of the container and started burning on the ground in the revetment where the aircraft was parked. Someone got hold of the parachute and drugg the burning flare out onto the taxiway. When I finally looked up we were surrounded by fire trucks. Stuff happens.

Even though I was assigned to the 377th Supply Squadron (AMMO), I really enjoyed working with the guys at C Flight. They were a great bunch of guys. I really enjoyed being there. I always loved hearing the gunship's engines starting up and sitting there idling.

I was discharged from the Air Force on October 9, 1971 at George Air Force Base, California. I currently live in Newberg, Oregon.



Robert Johnson, FE/IO

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, 1971-72

Robert W. Johnson was born in South Carolina in 1939. He attended school and graduated from high school in Weldon, North Carolina in 1956. Robert joined the United States Air Force on November 29, 1956 at Raleigh, North Carolina to better himself. From November to December 1956, he completed basic training at Lackland AFB, Texas.

Johnson immediately reported to Aircraft Mechanic School at Shepard AFB, Texas which he successfully completed in May 1957. In June, he reported to his next assignment at Eglin AFB, Florida as QB-17 Mechanic with the 3205th Drone Squadron located at Duke Field #3. Upon completing his duty with the 3205th in June 1958, Johnson was assigned to the 421st ARS (KB-50-J Mechanic)/67th Field Maintenance Squadron based at Yokota AFB, Japan from June 1958 until May 1960.

From June 1960 to September 1962, Johnson was stationed at MacDill AFB, Florida as a KC-97 Crew Chief with the 306th Air Refueling Squadron. After MacDill, Johnson served KC-97 Crew Chief duty with the 380th Air Refuel-

ing Squadron at Plattsburg AFB, New York from September 1962 until June 1964 when he received orders to report to the 317th T.C.S. C-47/T-29 (Transient Maintenance) at Dyess AFB, Texas where he served until September 1965.

In September 1965, Johnson received orders for his first tour in Vietnam and reported for duty at Nha Trang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam (RVN) as a C-123 Flight Engineer with the 310th A.C.S. Returning stateside from Vietnam in October 1966, Johnson reported for duty at Peterson Field, Colorado as a T-29 Flight Engineer, serving as such until March 1968.

From March 1968 to January 1971, Johnson was assigned to the 4413th C.C.T.S. at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio as a Flight Engineer and Illuminator Operator in AC-119G/K gunships. In January 1971, he reported to the 18th Special Operations Squadron for his second tour of duty in Southeast Asia. He was assigned to the Stinger Flight stationed at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand as an Illuminator Operator from January to July 1971 when he was sent to

the Stinger Flight at DaNang Air Base, RVN where he continued flying combat missions until his DEROS of January 1972.

It was March 5, 1971, during his time at Nakhon Phnom Royal Thai Air Force Base in Thailand, that Johnson and his fellow crewmembers had to abandon ship and bail out of their stricken Stinger gunship. Johnson has never forgotten or ever will forget the friends that he made while flying AC-119 gunships.

Returning stateside in January 1972, Johnson reported to his next U.S. Air Force assignment as a T-29 Flight Engineer

with the 9th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron (SRS) at Beale AFB, California. It turned out to be his last assignment with the Air Force. On December 1, 1976 Robert W. Johnson separated from the Air Force at Beale AFB.

During his service in the USAF, Johnson was awarded, among many other awards and decorations, the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal w/ Oak Leaf Clusters and the Air Force Commendation Medal.

Robert graduated from Pikes Peak Community College in 1983. He currently lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico.
See story of bailout.



Gale "Pat" Jones, IO

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1969-70

The Crash of Shadow 76

Please understand that I am writing this account of the crash of Shadow 76 to the best of my memory and knowledge after thirty-nine years since the accident. It was the night of October 11, 1969 at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon and I was scheduled to fly a mission as Illuminator Operator on Shadow 76. Gunner John Lelle and I had completed our pre-flight inspections of the ammunition, flares, etc. in the gun deck and then performed our usual walk around the plane to check for anything unusual. When we met back in the gun deck, John and I agreed that everything looked ready to go. He and I looked at each other with the same expressions and I said, "John, I just feel something is terribly wrong tonight." John said exactly the same thing, but we shrugged it off and started for the briefing.

The mission briefing went as scheduled with the introduction of our new Aircraft Commander, Major Knapic. It was the first time we had met the Major. My impression of him was very good. He was a professional and the kind of officer everyone respected. As for the rest of our crew, we had been flying together for some time, so it was business as usual.

We loaded up and taxied to the end of the runway for engine run-up tests. Number one engine was torching badly and I called the flight deck to report it. The mission tape verifies my call. Engine run-up continued and I can still remember either the FE or someone else up front saying, "It's bare minimums, but we're going," so, we taxied onto the runway, lined-up and started take-off roll. I could tell the engine wasn't producing normal power and it felt as

though we were really rolling slowly down the runway. We finally broke ground and became airborne. I decided to unbuckle and check on #1 engine. The engine was torching badly and I reported such to the flight deck. Only a second or two later, a big bang came from #1 engine and it erupted into a blazing fire. The last time I looked, the engine was engulfed in flames and it seemed to me that the inboard P.R.T. (Power Recovery Turbine) had literally blown off. I tried getting back in my troop seat to strap-in, but the left wing dipped and I had trouble keeping my balance to get in the seat. When I finally got in the seat, I could not for some reason get the damned buckle to close and latch. While I was fighting the buckle, everything went very quiet. (I did not know at that time that the wrong engine fire extinguisher had been pulled. Someone had activated the fire extinguisher on the #2 engine which caused the good engine to immediately lock-up and fail.) For some reason, I thought we had made a successful closed pattern and were coming in for a landing. Then we dipped again and I can remember a loud bang and nothing more for a few minutes.

I was out cold. When I woke up, I was on my knees somewhere near the forward bulkhead. I remembered at the time that if you are disoriented to put your hands up in front of yourself, which I did. Both of my gloved hands were on fire and I did not know it at the time, but my left eyeball had been knocked out of socket and was lying on my cheek. I really had no idea what was what, other than to know we had crashed. I then yelled to John, hoping he was okay. For a couple of seconds I heard nothing and expected the worst. Then I felt a tug on the back of my chute harness. I was being pulled from the wreckage by John. John had safely gotten out, but came back for me, still in the burning

wreckage amid explosions from live ammo, flares, and fuel. He pulled me into a rice paddy or ditch away from the burning wreckage. At that point, I think the fire burning me had gone out. A few minutes later, I was thrown in the back of the rescue helicopter and whisked away to 3rd Field Hospital in Saigon.

I survived the crash of Shadow 76 as did John Lelle and Head Gunner, Bill Slater. AC Maj. Knapic, CP Capt.

Hathaway, NAV Maj. Alves, NOS Maj. Rice, and FE SSgt. Moore were crewmembers who perished in the crash along with SSgt. Bradford of the USAF 600th Photo Squadron and Vietnamese interpreter Lt. Biu Kien. Shadow 76 crashed into a house off the end of the runway, killing a Vietnamese civilian. May their souls rest in peace.



William L. Jowers, Pilot

18th SOS, Phu Cat, Nakhon Phanom, 14th SOW, Phan Rang 1969-70



William "Bill" Jowers was born at Middlesex, North Carolina in 1935. Pocomoke City, Maryland is where Bill lived and attended school, graduating from Pocomoke High School in 1953. Four years later in 1957, Bill graduated from the University of Maryland and was commissioned an officer in the USAF through the ROTC

program. Bill wanted to fly and that is the reason he selected the Air Force. He was in the first class of ROTC students who earned a Pilot's license through the Flight Instruction Program at Maryland. After college, he entered active duty at Lackland AFB, Texas.

First assigned to Spence Air Base, Georgia for Primary Flight Training in the T-34 and the T-28, Bill then received Advanced Flight Training (AFT) in the T-33 at Webb AFB, Texas. Following AFT, he was sent to Randolph AFB, Texas for KC-97 Orientation Training and was assigned to Malmstrom AFB. From Malmstrom, Bill was sent to Castle AFB, California for KC-135 training. He attended AF Survival School at Stead AFB, Nevada.

From 1959 to 1964 Bill was assigned to the 97th Air Refueling Squadron (ARS) at Malmstrom AFB as a KC-97 pilot. From 1964 to 1966, he flew KC-135 tankers with the 7th ARS at Carswell AFB. Bill was then assigned as a KC-135 pilot to Clinton-Sherman AFB, Oklahoma from 1966 through 1968.

Bill was then assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio for training in the

AC-119K gunship. After completion of training, he was selected to ferry a gunship from Lockbourne to Vietnam. Shortly after arriving in Vietnam, he was sent to Clark AFB in the Philippines for Jungle Survival Training. Bill served in Southeast Asia from November 1969 to November 1970. He was an AC-119K Stinger aircraft commander and instructor pilot at Phu Cat Air Base, RVN from 1969 to early 1970 when he was assigned to Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base (NKP), Thailand.

On February 5, 1970, Major Bill Jowers didn't duck soon enough and caught a 37 millimeter AAA shell in his Stinger gunship just below the co-pilot's seat. All communications and most of the engine and flight instruments were lost. Three crewmembers were wounded, the IP (Bill), the AC and the FE. Read details in the following War Storie. Sometime thereafter, Bill was assigned as Gunship Liaison Officer with the 14th Special Operations Wing at Phan Rang AB, RVN where he completed his Vietnam tour of duty.

Returning to the states, Bill was assigned to Griffiss AFB, New York, initially in the Flight Test Division of Rome Air Development Center (RADC), USAF Systems Command. He then became Flight Commander of Flight Test Division Jet Section, Chief of Plans, and finally Executive Officer to the Commander of RADC. During this time, Bill flew the NKC-135 as an IP and a Standardization Check Pilot. With twenty years military service to his country, Bill Jowers retired from the USAF at Griffiss in September 1977.

After retirement from the USAF, Bill worked for Midlands Technical College (MTC) in Columbia, South Carolina, becoming the Assistant Dean of Continuing Education. After 21 years with MTC, he retired again. He now enjoys playing golf, five wonderful grandchildren and most of all his lovely wife, Fran of nearly 50 years of marriage.

Bill's memories of his AC-119 Stinger gunship experience center on the super group of professionals that he encountered in the U.S.A. and in S.E.A. Bill was in the initial group to train in the AC-119K gunship that required much teamwork and patience from instructors and students alike. His experience in ferrying a "K" from Lockbourne to Vietnam was an unforgettable flying adventure.

His gunship crews in S.E.A. were the best he could ever hope for. They were dedicated to the mission and brave in combat. This was proven on the night when his Stinger was hit by enemy triple-A. Every crewmember performed exactly as trained to do with little or no direction.

Bill Jowers was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star, Air Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters and the Purple Heart for combat action in the Vietnam War.

Stinger Hit

On February 5, 1970 while flying a truck kill mission over the Ho Chi Min Trail, AC-119K #53-7826 with the call sign "Rose" took a 37mm shell just below the co-pilot's position which exploded inside the aircraft. The damage included, but was not limited to, loss of electrical control of both jet engines (both went to idle), loss of all radios and outside contact with anyone, and loss of almost all electrical instruments (both flight and engine indicators). Three of the crew members were wounded which included a foot wound to the pilot, glass in the eyes of the flight engineer, and numerous pieces of shrapnel, glass and plastic in the face and legs of the instructor pilot in the right seat. Using the only heading information available, the magnetic compass, a heading was determined for DaNang AB and a turn was made to this heading to try a landing at that location if possible. After the turn was made we received the only radio message of the return trip when our escort advised us that if our intention was to land at DaNang, we needed to turn almost 30 degrees south of our present heading. We made this correction and fortunately one of the persons in the aircraft with us that night was an F-4 pilot who had been stationed at DaNang before he began flying cover for us out of Phu Cat. His knowledge of the area around DaNang was instrumental in establishing our exact position and the location of terrain and other important landmarks near the base.

After flying out over the South China Sea east of DaNang, we jettisoned all items that we could throw out the door which might cause fire dangers on landing. This included all flares, ammunition and such. Fortunately, we didn't sink

any Navy ships that we know of, as we were in and out of rainstorms in the local area. After the jettison operation was completed, we turned back to DaNang and with the assistance and guidance of the on-board F-4 jock, we lined up with the runway at DaNang. As we had no radio contact with the base, we had to rely on the fact that someone had advised them we were in the area and intended to land. Since we had to lower the gear manually, it was lowered as we began our approach and visually checked. Using the minimal instruments and indicators we had available, Captain Boozer made an outstanding approach and landing.

After touchdown, we turned off the runway and shut down the aircraft and exited ASAP!!! I think that most of us were surprised at the size of the hole in the fuselage and the amount of internal damage that had been done behind the instrument panel and below the crew compartment. We were greeted on the taxiway by almost everyone in the 18th SOS detachment led by Major Fred Sternberg, the detachment commander, as we stopped on the taxiway. This was probably due to the fact that we were the first aircraft to receive significant AAA damage in the squadron. After a brief visit to the Flight Surgeon's office, a SMALL celebration was had by all before retiring for the evening. The next morning the crew went out and looked over the aircraft and it was then that the extent of the damage and the realization of how lucky we all were became evident to all concerned.

I later learned a few interesting facts that are almost uncanny. The crew number for this crew was 13. The Aircraft number was 826. I have been advised that the crew lost later in the tour was crew number 13 and was flying aircraft 826.

This Stinger War Story is submitted by the following members of Crew number 13 that were onboard aircraft number

826 on 5
Feb 1970:
William L.
Jowers (IP),
Gordon
Boozer (P),
Joe Taub
(Nav),
Bill Biden

(FLIR), Jim Brickle (NOS), Don Ebbeson (FE), and Jim Forney (IO). As of the printing of this book, the three gunners on Crew number 13 have not been identified.





Larry E. Juday, Pilot

18th SOS, DaNang, 1970-71

I grew up in Fort Wayne, Indiana where I attended Central High School. I wanted to be an Air Force pilot so I enrolled in the Air Force ROTC program at Purdue University and was commissioned second lieutenant upon graduating from Purdue in June 1968.

After pilot training at Williams AFB, Arizona, I completed AC-119K combat crew training, then reported to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang, Vietnam. I was reassigned to a Forward Operating Location (FOL) "A" at DaNang as a Stinger co-pilot.

My Vietnam service was from 31 March 1970 to 29 March 1971. During that time I flew 142 combat missions with 33 different aircraft commanders and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with three oak leaf clusters and the Air Medal with eleven oak leaf clusters.

My most memorable missions occurred in January and February 1971. On 4 January, while flying with the Operations Officer, we were struck in the right jet engine by a 23mm round that engulfed the engine in flames and riddled the wing with holes. We landed with the right jet and right recip shutdown and a full load of ammo. Only 12 days later, on 16 January, while flying with the FOL Commander, and with the Wing DO in the jump seat, we were struck in the belly with a 37mm round, continued the mission, and landed without hydraulics for the gear and flaps. On 18 February, we discovered a truck park with nearly 60 trucks. We attacked 46, destroying 25 and damaging 11 before running out of ammo.

The most gratifying event in my 18th SOS tour occurred in December 1970 when I learned my next assignment was to Moody AFB, Georgia as a T-37 instructor pilot. To the best of my knowledge, I was the first AC-119 pilot to get a UPT instructor assignment.

My 11-year active duty service included a staff tour at ATC Headquarters, a one-year internship at the Pentagon



and an AFROTC assignment at the University of Texas, Austin. After leaving active duty I earned a law degree from Northwest School of Law, Portland, Oregon, and practiced law until retiring in 2005. I also served nearly 19 years in the Air Force Reserve where I was promoted to Colonel in June 1995 and retired in April 2000. My wife Susan and I make our home in Vancouver, Washington.

Stories

Fire-Spouting 'Stinger' Rips Laos Jungle – 'Truck-Killers' Support ARVN

By Sgt. John Mueller, S&S Staff Correspondent
Pacific Stars & Stripes, Friday, March 19, 1971

OVER THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL IN LAOS – Capt. John Morris peered into his gunsight and squeezed the little red button on his stick. A burst of tracers spit from the lumbering gunship's side toward an unseen enemy on the ground. Morris kept the droning plane in an arc and pressed the button again. Cannon fire erupted from the ship's belly and streaked into the ground. Flashes popped on target. He fired again. Around and around the ship strained to keep on target.

An hour earlier Morris and Lt. Larry Juday had guided their converted "flying boxcar" plane "over the fence" into skies above Laos. Below them a South Vietnamese unit four miles inside Laos was surrounded and had called for help. The clumsy twin-engined gunship sank into the thin white, wispy clouds and emerged over an area speckled with fires. Bright moonlight outlined bomb craters and a river.

The AC-119K gunship carried 10 men and sophisticated sensing equipment and weapons designed for one purpose, "killing trucks," the crewmen call it, on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This night they were being diverted from that task to aid troops in contact. Ahead of them a forward air controller radioed instructions on the ARVN location. They were supposed to be flashing a strobe light, he said.

Two flashes appeared from the moon-bathed earth. The crew followed the strobes until they disappeared. The FAC dropped markers and the gunship launched "Lulus", red marking flares that would burn for 90 minutes on the ground – as they tried to mark the friendly position.

The Black Stinger – nickname of the gunship – droned through the moonlit sky. Morris dropped to a lower altitude (Alpha Altitude) – dangerously low – to get below the slight overcast.

Two hours earlier, the crewmen had stripped themselves of all identification that would be useful to the enemy if they were shot down and captured.

Antiaircraft fire – the crewmen call it “triple A” – burst in the distance like a Fourth of July celebration display. An F-4 Phantom escort streaked below the slower gunship. It was along to silence any antiaircraft fire that might pop up. There had been worse nights. Two weeks ago, they got 600 rounds of triple-A and two unguided missiles thrown at them near Tchepone, Sgt. Robert Rafferty recalled. He was one of the guys leaning out the side doors looking for the tell-tale streaks aimed for the ship.

“They can shoot at us all night long as long as they miss,” Juday had said before takeoff. “That means there’s less the next night.”

“You got that strobe, NOS?” Morris asked.

“Got ‘im,” the NOS (night observation scope) operator said.

Morris and Juday fought the 45-mile-an-hour east wind, trying to line up the ship and the gun sights.

“Lost ‘em. Just went under,” the NOS called out. The scope is one of two sensors on the ship connected to a sophisticated computer. In the cockpit another man operates an infrared unit.

In the back of the ship three gunners readied the “sting” – four 7.62 miniguns, capable of firing 6,000 rounds a minute, and two 20mm cannons.

To the west a B-52 strike ripped open the sky and turned the white clouds into wave after wave of reddish-orange fire. It looked like a string of volcanoes. The crew turned back toward the target.



“Still can’t find that strobe,” the NOS operator said.

The Stinger circled again. The moon glistened off the river and water-filled bomb craters. The friendly position was somewhere along the road leading north of the river and near a large clearing. Still no strobe.

Morris circled still again. The FAC reported that the ARVN troops had heard trucks and tanks, but the infrared sensor operator couldn’t locate them. He said if they were there, they had probably gone into caves.

But a target had been pinpointed, and the FAC gave the okay to fire. They turned the plane around and lined up the sights. Morris fired a few bursts at the target near one of the marker flares. There was no indication he had hit anything. It wasn’t like the night they had killed 36 trucks – a squadron record. Already they had more than 100 trucks to their credit.

“We usually fire a couple of bursts to give the guys on the ground confidence,” Morris said later. He didn’t necessarily like troops-in-contact missions, he said, especially when it took so long for the FAC to mark the target. They were truck killers.

After an hour and 20 minutes over the target, Morris headed for home base. He shut down the two jet assist engines to conserve fuel. It had not been a typical mission, Morris said later. No trucks. But there would be another night and another chance. And plenty of trucks.

Stinger Gunship Takes 37mm Belly Hit 16 January 1971

Shrapnel from the 37mm shell punctured the hydraulic fluid container on A deck; something we learned when we actuated the gear switch and fluid came running down on the crew strapped in on the left side of the aircraft. The FE had to hand pump the gear down and we did not get three-in-the-green until on 2 mile final. Shrapnel also destroyed one of the three M-16s we had standing up against the forward bulkhead. Even so, no one was injured.





Ronald Gary Julian, Gunner

18th SOS, Phan Rang, Phu Cat, Udorn, DaNang, 1969-70



I was born in 1947, the oldest of six children. I enlisted in the Air Force on December 16, 1966 at Indianapolis, IN. After basic training at Lackland, I was assigned to Lowry for formal training as an aircraft weapons mechanic. My first operational assignment

was to MacDill as a weapons release specialist on the F-4 "Phantom" and the T-33 "Shooting Star." In 1969, I entered the Air Force's gunship program where I logged over 500 hours as an aerial gunner on the AC-119K "Stinger" gunship with the 18th Special Operations Squadron. This association included assignments to Lockbourne AFB OH, Phan Rang, Phu Cat, Udorn Thailand, and DaNang.

In early 1971, I returned from Vietnam to Hurlburt Field, Eglin AFB FL, and worked as a weapons release mechanic on the A-1E "Sky Raider," OV-10 "Bronco," O-1E "Birdog," and A-37 "Dragonfly" with the 311th Munitions Maintenance Squadron. While at Eglin, I was selected to cross-train into the instrumentation career field. I moved back to Lowry AFB for additional training before being assigned as a nuclear instrumentation technician to the Air Force Weapons Laboratory at Kirtland AFB NM in 1972. In October 1973, I returned to Southeast Asia, where I was weapons loading standardization crew chief on the A-7 "Corsair," the F-111 "Aardvark," and the F-105 "Thunderchief" with the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing at Korat, AB Thailand. My 1974 return assignment was to Wilford Hall Medical Center, where I was a biomedical instrumentation technician in one of the Air Force's first hospital-based biomedical engineering departments. I was awarded the Academic Award and the Distinguished Graduate Award from the Air Force Systems Command's Non-Commissioned Officer Academy in 1976. I returned to the operational Air Force with my PCS to the 390th Strategic Missile Wing at Davis Monthan AFB AZ in 1978. I was assigned as the Field Maintenance Branch Superintendent overseeing a three-shop complex that maintained 18 Titan II strategic missiles.

My application to the Airman Education and Commissioning Program was accepted in 1979 and I began my electrical engineering program at the University of Arizona. I graduated in 1981, attended Officer Training

School at Lackland AFB, and was reassigned to the Air Force Weapons' Laboratory at Kirtland AFB as a nuclear instrumentation engineer. At Kirtland, I was involved in several projects directed toward the protection of aircraft and missile systems from the electromagnetic effects of a nuclear attack. In 1985, I was assigned to the Armstrong Laboratory at Wright-Patterson AFB, where I led the Human Sensory Feedback for Telepresence program. I was the 1987 Company Grade Officer of the Year for the Armstrong Laboratory and for the Human Systems Division in the Air Force Systems Command. I was also the 1987 Program Manager of the Year for the Armstrong Laboratory. In 1992, I was presented the Director's Award for the Crew Systems Directorate of the Armstrong Laboratory. I became the Chief of Operations for the Biodynamics and Biocommunication Division in 1992 and served in that capacity until my retirement on March 1, 1996. I essentially had two careers in the Air Force. My enlisted career (Dec 66 – Dec 81) and my officer career (Dec 81 – Feb 96).

Seems like I couldn't hold a job! I had 17 permanent change of station assignments and each one held new, exciting opportunities. I had radically different jobs in most of my new assignments. My duties included fixing knuckle busting bomb racks and weapons loading on the flight line, aerial gunner in combat, patient research in the hospital environment, missile maintenance supervision, nuclear protection R&D, and R&D management in human factors and telerobotics. What would you like your family members and future generations to know about your military service? Service to one's country and its citizens is the highest calling. I am privileged and honored to have had the opportunity.

My most meaningful assignment was supporting medical and clinical research at Wilford Hall Medical Center where I worked with a broad range of physicians (thoracic surgeons, orthopedic surgeons, neonatal physicians, biomedical engineers, cardiac physicians) and had direct interaction with patients while helping them get well and stay well.

My scariest moment was a mission where our flight path intersected with an Arc Light drop. I don't know if those two B-52s were lost or if we (Stinger) were out of position. One thing for sure – one of us shouldn't have been there!! However, it was quite exciting to see the bombs going off below us in the jungle as the tree trunks went flying. The inside of our cargo compartment looked like someone was

setting off flashbulbs – lots of flashbulbs.

(2 OLC), Air Medal (8 OLC), Air Force Commendation Medal (1 OLC).

Awards, Decorations, and Badges:

Distinguished Flying Cross, Meritorious Service Medal

My wife, Kathy, and I have two sons, Travis and Troy.



Manager for Maritime, CNATRA and Special Missions training programs.

During his career at NAVAIR Jim Keller has served a long-term detail in OPNAV working Modeling and Simulation policy issues. He has had extensive experience in training system acquisition, simulation software engineering processes, Distributed Interactive Simulation and successfully managing procurement/acquisition programs in an Integrated Program Team environment. He is a graduate of the Defense Systems Management College Program Managers Course, has completed Air Force Air Command and Staff College and is a member of the DOD Acquisition Professional Community and is designated a Level III Program Manager.

Jim Keller graduated from Davis and Elkins College with a degree in chemistry in January 1968. Thereafter he was commissioned in the Air Force and after receiving his wings, served active duty tours in Vietnam and Taiwan. During his tour of duty in Vietnam, First Lieutenant Keller served with the 17th Special Operations Squadron, C Flight at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon from May 1970 to May 1971 as an AC-119 “Shadow” gunship pilot.

Mr. Keller holds FAA certificates as a Flight Instructor and Airline Transport Pilot. He has participated in the Air Guard and Air Force Reserve flying programs, including

In 1975 after leaving the Air Force, he began work for the Navy as a General Engineer at the Naval Ordnance Station, Indian Head, MD. His work focused on research, design and production engineering projects for Naval gun ammunition and special purpose munitions. He came to the Naval Air Systems Command as the Training System Project Manager for the SH-60B in 1979 and went on to manage simulator engineering programs for a variety of platforms. In 1985 he became a section supervisor in the Aircrew Training Systems Engineering Branch for tactical aircraft. He has managed other platform training systems and technology programs such as software engineering process development and distributed simulation applications. Presently he is the PMA205 Deputy Program



Jim Keller, Col. Olm, Gen. Clay

serving a year on active duty during Desert Shield/Storm. He has an Air Force Command Pilot rating with over 5000 hours military flying time including 1650 hours of combat

time in Special Operations and Airlift.

Through the years he has received numerous civilian performance awards from the Navy including the Civilian Meritorious Service Award. Military decorations include three Distinguished Flying Crosses and 19 Air Medals.

He presently resides in Fairfax, Virginia with his wife Pam and has two sons in college. Outside interests include various outdoor pursuits and Boy Scout adult leader training activities.



Max C. Kennedy, Navigator

18th SOS, DaNang, Udorn, 1970



I was born in rural Nebraska on July 14, 1935. My family made several moves while I was growing up. We settled in Omaha, Nebraska long enough for me to complete high school and earn a BS in Business Administration & Engineering at Omaha University (later the University of Nebraska at Omaha). In college, I enrolled in

Air Force ROTC and was commissioned a second lieutenant upon graduating in 1958. I enjoyed a diverse 20-year Air Force career that permitted me to retire in 1978 as a Lieutenant Colonel.

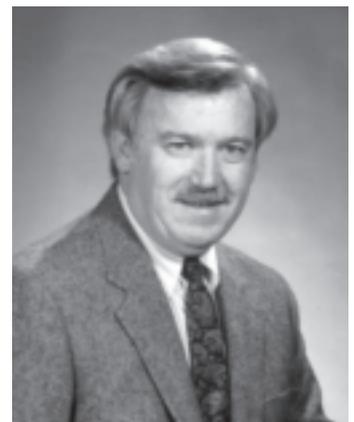
My first assignment was as a B-52 Navigator stationed at Carswell AFB, Fort Worth, Texas. While at Carswell, I upgraded to Radar Navigator Bombardier (RN) before deploying TDY to Anderson AFB, Guam where I participated in some of the first Arc Light bombing missions in S.E.A. At Carswell, I also completed the AF Procurement Officer and Production Management correspondence courses and began work on an MBA through Texas Christian University. In 1965, I was selected for the ten-month AFIT Education With Industry program. My assignment was to the General Dynamics (Convair) plant co-located at Carswell AFB. The assignment permitted me to continue my MBA courses. From Carswell, I was assigned to the Air Force Plant Representative Office at Lockheed Missile and Space Company in Sunnyvale, CA. While assigned to AFPRO, I was awarded the Missileman Badge, twice named a USAF Outstanding Procurement Officer, and selected for promotion to major.

I was one of the first crewmembers assigned to the AC-119K gunship program as a FLIR operator. AC-119K gunship conversion was slower than expected and the systems were not working properly. We reviewed the records of all our early crewmembers; many had come from Air Force Systems Command and most had

engineering degrees. We assigned the various systems to our crewmembers who began examining such things as the visual gun-sighting system and FLIR sighting system.

The FLIR was about one year behind schedule and we did not get our first ones installed until April of 1969. I traveled to Rome, New York, where Texas Instruments Corporation had developed the FLIR, and helped write our first procedures for in-flight operation. I also became a Stan/Eval FLIR Examiner and Instructor along with my friend Thomas D. Hill. Over the next year, working with the manufacturers and installers, our cadre solved all the system integration problems and came up with a very effective gunship. I was part of the crew that flew to Hurlburt AFB where we performed a live-fire demonstration for some visiting congressmen. The AC-119K was working and in November 1969, we began deploying with our aircraft to Phan Rang AB, Vietnam.

On January 30, 1970 I joined our forward operating location at DaNang. On February 19, 1970, we were returning from a night mission when we learned DaNang AB was under an artillery attack. We circled the base until getting clearance to land. About two miles from landing, we ran out of fuel and all the engines quit. We crashed in a mined rice paddy field. The aircraft was destroyed. Both wings and our engines were torn off, the floor of the cargo bay was torn out, and the cockpit ripped open right above the front window. Everyone survived the crash. I was thrown out of the aircraft and suffered a broken kneecap. I was flown to the hospital at Cam Ranh Bay, where, after a short stay, I was transferred back to 18th SOS headquarters at Phan Rang. I returned to flying in late May 1970 at FOL-D at Udorn AB, Thailand.



In June, I received orders for an in-country transfer from the 18 SOS to the Vietnam Procurement Center at Headquarters 7th Air Force in Saigon. From 7th AF, I was assigned to a B-52H wing at Kincheloe AFB, MI, where after two years of crew duty I was reassigned to SAC Headquarters. After two years at SAC, I finally returned to AF procurement work where I remained until my retirement in 1978.

For the next approximately 20 years I worked for three nationwide construction firms as a human resources executive at their corporate headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska; Houston, Texas; and Wichita, Kansas. In 1997, my wife, Janeen, and I returned to our hometown of Omaha where we are enjoying retirement.



William Joseph Kleinhenz, Pilot

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, 1971-72



William "Bill" Kleinhenz was born August 24, 1943 in Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Ohio to William Joseph Kleinhenz, born May 7, 1917 and Irene Kleinhenz, born January 16, 1921.

Bill entered the USAF through the AFROTC program at Kent State University. On June 16, 1967, he reported as a 2nd Lieutenant to Del Rio AFB, Texas for a "53 week" year of intense pilot training. The year in pilot training was the start to a 20 year career; retiring in September 1, 1987 with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. The following list details the assignments and positions he held.

- June 1968 - May 1971, Aircraft Commander, 75th MAS, Travis AFB, CA. Performed domestic, international, and combat operations in the C-141 aircraft.
- May 1971 - May 1972, Chief, Air Crew Standardization/Evaluation, 18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom AFB, Thailand. Chief pilot for AC-119K Stinger gunship operations during combat in Southeast Asia.
- May 1972 - Dec 1974, Simulator Instructor, 60th MAW, and Check Pilot, 22nd MAS, Travis, AFB, CA. Trained and evaluated C-5 pilots and air crews.
- Jan 1975 - Apr 1976, Attended the University of Tennessee to earn his MBA in Transportation Management through the Air Force Institute of Technology program.
- Apr 1976 - Feb 1980, Chief, Air Terminal Operations Center, 437th APS, Charleston AFB, SC, and Chief,

Operating Location N, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Managed the cargo and passenger loading operation at a major terminal, Charleston AFB, and an en route station, Dhahran AB. In 1979, Bill and his wife Marjorie divorced. During his tour of duty in Saudi Arabia, Bill met Linda, an English nurse on a two year contract with ARAMCO. On June 26, 1980 they married at the Charleston AFB Chapel.

- Feb 1980 - Jul 1983, Assistant Squadron Operations Officer, 41st MAS; Chief, Air Crew Standardization/Evaluation, 437th MAW; and Flight Examiner Aircraft Commander, 20th MAS, Charleston AFB, SC. Chief pilot for C-141 Wing and assisted in the flight operations at squadron level.
- Jul 1983 - Jul 1985, Commander, 60th Transportation Squadron, Travis AFB, CA. Responsible for over 180 people, and the operations and maintenance of over 860 vehicles and material handling equipment.
- Aug 1985 - Jul 1987, Chief, Resource Management



Division, Military Airlift Command, Scott AFB, IL. Managed Military Airlift Command's aircrew absorption, distribution, and experience standards for pilots and navigators.

During his career in the Air Force, Bill was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Meritorious Service Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, Air Medal with 10 Oak Leaf Clusters, Air Force Commendation Medal and other decorations.

In August 1987, Bill was employed by American Airlines

as a flight engineer on the Boeing 727 aircraft. Shortly after receiving his wings, Bill and Linda built their house in Raleigh, NC. In May 1990, Bill upgraded to copilot on the 727. In Feb 1995, he retrained as a copilot on the

McDonnell Douglas Super 80 aircraft and started flying out of Chicago O'Hare airport. In September 1999, he moved to Greenland, NH and upgraded to Captain on the Super 80 aircraft. Bill's last flight was flown on 2 Oct 2002.



James Knuckles, Crew Chief

71st SOS, Nha Trang, 1968-69



I was born in my hometown Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1948. After graduating from Westinghouse High School in 1967, I joined the United States Air Force at Pittsburgh to

further my education and training.

I served with the 71st Special Operations Squadron as an aircraft mechanic and crew chief during 1968-69 at Nha Trang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam. I was in the first group of fifteen active duty aircraft mechanics to arrive in Vietnam, ninety days before the 71st SOS reserves arrived in-country with the AC-119G gunships. The most exciting events for me in Southeast Asia were arriving in-country Vietnam at Cam Ranh Bay and departing Vietnam at Cam Ranh Bay.

I graduated from Rio Salado College in Mesa, Arizona in 1985 and retired from the Air Force at Williams AFB, Arizona in 1987. Currently, my wife and I live in Mesa.



John Waino Komula, Nav.

18th SOS, DaNang, 1972-73

John Waino Komula was born 11 December 1931 at Tomahawk, Lincoln county, Wisconsin. John Waino graduated from Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) at Superior State College in Superior, Wisconsin on 4 June 1953 and entered the Air Force on 23 August 1953 at Sampson Air Force Base, Syracuse, New York.

After graduating from Waco, Texas in February 1955 as a Radar Observer, he flew in the F89D at Duluth, Minnesota and Anchorage, Alaska to the end of 1958. In 1959, he completed Navigator Training at Mather AFB, Sacramento, California. From 1959 to 1964, John flew in the B-47 and KC-97 as a Navigator. During that time, John completed Squadron Officers School (SOS) in Residence 1959 and Air Command & Staff by Correspondence in 1964.

From 1964 to 1969, John was a Combat Crew Commander in the Minuteman Missile Squadron at F.E. Warren AFB, Cheyenne, Wyoming. In 1969 thru 1971, he attended NMSU and earned his Masters Degree in Electrical Engineering. In 1971-72, John received training as a Navigator, NOS Operator, and Infrared Sensor Operator in the AC-119K

Gunship Training Program. From 1972 to 1973, he was assigned to the 18th Special Operations at DaNang, flying AC119K Gunships out of Thailand and Vietnam as a Navigator/NOS/Infrared Operator. He flew 105 combat missions in Stinger gunships while accumulating 301 combat flying hours in Southeast Asia.

From 1973 to 1978, John was assigned to the Air Force Weapons Laboratory, Kirtland AFB as the 4900th Systems Safety Officer with a Title of X2816 - Staff Development Engineering Officer. During his career in the United States Air Force, he acquired 4,000+ total flying hours. John Waino Komula retired from service at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel on 31 October 1978 at Kirtland AFB, New Mexico.

His awards and decorations include Distinguished Flying Cross, Meritorious Service Medal and Air Medal w/6-OLC.



Sandy Escorts



Albert Robert “Bob” Krueger, Pilot

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, Bien Hoa, DaNang, 1972-73

My birthplace was Preston, MD in 1934. I graduated from Preston High School and attended John Hopkins University. On 28 July 1954, I joined the Air Force to escape the Army draft.

I received training at Lackland AFB, TX and Bainbridge Air Base GA in 1954, Vance AFB, OK in 1955, Randolph AFB, TX in 1956, and Castle AFB, CA in 1959. I flew the KC-97 at Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ, and the KC-135 at Mather AFB CA and Plattsburgh AFB, NY. I retired from the Air Force at Andrews AFB, MD on 31 July 1974.

I was a AC-119K Stinger gunship pilot with the 18th

Special Operations Squadron at NKP, Bien Hoa and DaNang, during my tour of duty 1972-1973, and also served as Operations Officer while at DaNang. My awards include the Distinguished Flying Cross w/OLC, and the Air Medal w/11-OLC for flying combat in Southeast Asia.

Following retirement from the Air Force, I became a purchasing agent for various mechanical and general contractors in the Washington DC area. I fully retired on my 65th birthday in 1999 and currently live in Bowie MD.

My most enjoyable and satisfying time as a Stinger has been with the AC-119 Gunship Association reunions.



David Kuhn, Pilot

18th SOS, DaNang, 1970

In 1968 I was selected as initial cadre to fly the AC-119K, went to Clinton County AFB in Wilmington, Ohio, and then to Lockbourne AFB, which was supposed to, in total, take about two to three months, but ended up taking thirteen months. The reason? In October 1969, we began what became known as the Great Trans-Pacific Air Race. I had Captain Phil Goodwin as aircraft commander, I was the co-pilot, Wayne Seguin Brechtel was the navigator, Ed Pinkham was our flight engineer. It took us quite a while to get over there. We finally made it after many, many

mishaps, and we were vindicated of any wrong doing, but they did send us right away to DaNang. And, shortly after that, in DaNang, I got my own crew, as aircraft commander, which included, initially, Don Main as co-pilot, David Stemhoffer as one of the navigators, Bill Feezor as the Flight Engineer, Gunners Hans Wurfel, Ollie Merrill, Merced, Samanski, and Martel. We had flown several missions, and had some pretty good success, when another young captain came in as the co-pilot, and that was Jeff Baker, who became my roommate, too.



Linvel Lee Kyser, FE

18th SOS, DaNang, 1972-73

In 1971, I was a MSgt performing duties in Launch Analysis on the Minuteman missile at Vandenberg AFB, California. Having over 20 years of active duty at the time, I was not eligible to be involuntarily retrained. However, I learned that there was a need for flight engineers in SEA. I volunteered for gunship duty and was on my way to CCTS in less than two weeks. I was immediately eligible because I served as a flight engineer on C-47s and had approximately 2500 hours of flight time and 6.5 years on flying status.

I arrived in SEA in June 1972. On June 25 I flew a mission that earned me my first Air Medal. We encountered a large group of hostile barges that were trying to infiltrate the Mekong Delta area; we destroyed seven and damaged

eighteen. I also received the Distinguished Flying Cross for a mission flown on November 2, 1972. On that night, a friendly outpost was being overrun. One Special Forces Tech Sergeant and 50 RVN were holed-up in a bunker. We were the first air support on site and prevented the overrun. It took three nights and four days for the friendlies to be rescued.

At the beginning of Vietnamization in December 1972, I was selected as NCOIC of the detachment designated to train the VNAF on the AC-119K Stinger gunship at DaNang. I had the privilege of being the instructor flight engineer on the first training flight. There were three other USAF instructors on the flight: Maj Bob Krueger (IP);

SSgt Bill Isham, (IO); and SSgt Chuck Leach (IG). The students were the VNAF commander, Maj Nuoi Hoang (P), their operations officer, Capt Son Nguyen (CP), MSgt Tuan (FE), and MSgt Dinh Nguyen (IO). The training program terminated prematurely following the March 1, 1973 loss of Stinger 839. All five USAF instructors and all eight VNAF students bailed out over the South China Sea. The VNAF flight engineer was MSgt Tuan. I had just signed him off and he was on his first solo flight. Many years later, I learned that MSgt Tuan was killed during the last airborne defense of Saigon when his Stinger was hit with a SAM.

I returned to Vandenberg AFB following my SEA tour and was eventually reassigned to Minot AFB where I served as a maintenance superintendent in a Minuteman missile maintenance squadron. I retired from the USAF in the rank of SMSgt on February 1, 1979, having

served 27 years, 2 months, and 17 days. I now reside near Vandenberg AFB.



Wayne Fred Laessig, Pilot

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, Bien Hoa, 1971-72

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was my birthplace in 1946. My home town was Magnolia, New Jersey. After graduation from Sterling High School in 1964, I attended and graduated from Western Maryland and Glassboro College in 1969. In 1980, I graduated from the University of Northern Colorado.

In January 1970, I entered the Air Force in Philadelphia, PA. 1970 was the first year the lottery was used to select for the draft. They randomly selected the 365 days in a year, and the order selected became the dates used to “call-up” draftees (the dates correlated to birth dates). My birthday of June 4th came up #13 and the Army recruiters told me I was “theirs” within 30 days. But I had already gone to the Marines, Navy, and Air Force (just in case) and the AF in its infinite wisdom told me they’d make me an officer and a pilot (and that seemed like a good thing).

I was an 18th SOS Co-Pilot from November 1971 till November 1972. When I got my orders (right out of pilot training) I actually thought there was an AF Base in San Francisco called “APO San Francisco”. Imagine my surprise when I learned I was not flying an old cargo bird in San Francisco, but would be flying a gunship in Vietnam! Obviously, Second Lieutenants can be a little stupid..... I spent equal time at Naked Fanny, Dang-Dang by the sea, and Bien Hoa.

There were many exciting missions that I experienced in Southeast Asia. One I remember well was Thursday night, 13 July 1972. I flew with Major Bill Lodge in AC-119K tail number 121 on a perimeter defense “Nighthawk” mission in the DaNang Rocket Belt. Gus Sininger was the FE and although that day’s frag sheet shows Lentini as co-pilot, I was the copilot even though I had just flown into DaNang on a C-130 from Bien Hoa earlier that day. The other crewmembers were NAV Bott, FLIR Rhodes, NOS Blum, AG1 Bartlett, AG2 McDuffie, AG3 Phillips, IO Wolf. To make the mission a little more stressful, Major Lodge told me he’d be giving me a no-notice check ride that night. Later in the mission, we worked with an Army Cavalry Chopper who ‘found’ a bunch of 122s right when they first started cooking off and heading toward DaNang. I immediately called DaNang Tower to warn everyone of the attack, sound the sirens, and give them a chance to hit their bunkers. Simultaneously, Major Lodge was rolling in and firing 20mm at the location of the rocket launches and blowing up a whole slew of them on the ground, before they even got airborne. My job was to notify Tower that rockets were inbound and I did so in an extraordinarily professional, calm radio call, “DaNang Tower. DaNang Tower. Stinger XX. Rockets, F---ing Rockets!!” The Tower crew thought about that for a split second, hit the warning sirens, and hit the deck themselves. Later I found out that the first rocket hit near the base of the Tower and imploded

the Tower windows.

After we finished our mission, DaNang Tower was still on high alert, so we made the left-turn to final for a VFR blacked-out landing from the right seat since it was my 'surprise' check ride. Later, Major Lodge's check ride comments included, "Landed slightly left of centerline and a little excessive interphone chatter." Not bad, considering that Stinger co-pilots were lucky to get a landing every 15 missions during normal conditions.

Later that night, the Tower crew found out who the guy was that called in "F---ing Rockets" and I ended up meeting them. They said they were all in one piece because of my radio call. After that, I never had to buy beer for the rest of my time in DaNang if I was near the NCO Club. The Tower guys set me up with a beer account titled, "Rockets, F---ing Rockets!" Cool.

The Pacific Stars and Stripes ran an article about our Nighthawk mission that night and an article about a 14-year old Vietnamese girl who was abducted by the VC along with a group of women porters forced to carry rockets that same night. She was part of the group we hit that night but survived to tell her story. Our Stinger crew was awarded the Gallantry Cross of the Republic of Vietnam for combat actions taken that night in 1972.

Things that I will always remember about my time with AC-119 gunships were making friendships that last forever and learning how to fly while relying on everyone on the crew – ground and air. After my Aircraft Commander got assigned to Headquarters, I flew with over 35 different crews as a "substitute" co-pilot. They were mostly great crews, and I learned a lot about what I liked and respected, and what I didn't. Learning about the local culture and people became

a passion for me. I was a bachelor, already in Vietnam, and I had a few bucks in my pocket. I learned enough Thai and Vietnamese to get in trouble regularly, as well as to enjoy teaching kids in the local school trying to improve their English while I practiced my Thai, or having a party at a "local's" home and eating some very strange (and delicious) foods....., and drinks....(!) I think I experienced a side of Southeast Asia that many didn't during their tours. The Thai people were extraordinarily gracious and I enjoyed learning from a beetle nut juice toothed (i.e. completely dark red) older lady how to barter in the market, cuss in the local slang, and where some unique sights were that I probably should not have gone, but again, I was a bachelor, already in Vietnam, had a few bucks.

Learning what it was like to fly with a "hard" crew (even if each was only a month or two) led by Tommy Hamman, Mac MacIsaac (the "all-Lieutenant" crew), Larry Blood, and Donnie Williams was the best. Losing Tommie (Captain Thomas R. Hamman) was the worst. But, meeting Tommie's daughter Kirsten (who had never met her dad) 35 years later helped.

Somehow, both I and my career survived. I like to think being in AC-119s, in SEA, in combat, with enough time to learn about the cultures over there helped me be a little more tolerant of others who are different only on the outside. The best part was learning how to recognize a really good woman when you find her and being able to be with Lynette for 35 years.

I retired after 23 years in February 1993 at Travis AFB as a Lieutenant Colonel, one of the few Lt Cols there who was still on flying status, and still flying up until retirement!



Robert (Bob) La Rosa, Gunner

!8th SOS, Phan Rang, DaNang, 1970-71



city. Every chance I got, I would escape from city life to a

I was born a "city boy" in Brooklyn, New York on March 12, 1940. My father, James La Rosa, was born in Siracusa, Sicily Italy. My mother, Blanche Fedorski- La Rosa, was born in East Orange, New Jersey. As a young boy growing up in an area called Flatbush in Brooklyn, I always yearned to be away from the

friend's home in the beautiful and scenic Catskill Mountains in upstate New York State. There I learned to hunt small game and deer. All that time, I had a longing to live in the Western United States.

I attended and graduated from Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn, NY. When I entered high school, I was placed on the high school Varsity Rifle Team because of my prior experiences with shooting firearms. Shooting .22 caliber target rifles, I competed in many rifle shooting competitions through my high school years, winning numerous awards.



I also accomplished all of the National Rifle Association's .22 caliber target rifle qualification steps up to and including The Distinguished Rifleman Award.

During High School, I joined the U.S. Navy Reserves. Later on, after a stint on active duty, I transferred from the U.S. Navy Reserves to the U.S. Air Force and

went on active duty with the Air Force (AF) on May 7, 1958. I first attended and graduated from the Air Force Aircraft Munitions and Weapons Technical Training School and then completed and graduated from the Aircraft Nuclear Weapons School. Both schools were at Lowry AFB outside Denver, Colorado. Because I graduated second in my class in these schools, I was given the choice of my next assignment. WOW! At that time, the Strategic Air Command (SAC) was considered the elite command! The best of the best. So I chose an assignment in SAC to McCoy AFB at Orlando, Florida where I worked on the Air Force's first all jet bombers, the B-47A and then the B-52. During my time in SAC, I was stationed in Okinawa and later in New Hampshire.

After four years in SAC, I changed commands. I was stationed in Germany, England, and Las Vegas, Nevada, assigned to the F-111 project. However, like many others who had joined the Air Force, I wanted to be an aircrew member and fly. My chance came at last in 1970. I volunteered and was accepted to the Air Force fixed-wing gunship program as an Aerial Gunner (AG). At last, I not only had a chance to fly in the Air Force, but a chance to fly in combat as well!

I completed the AF altitude chamber testing at George AFB in Victorville, California. Then, it was off to the USAF world-wide survival and POW training school in Fairchild AFB at Spokane, Washington. Then onto Lockbourne AFB in Columbus, Ohio for AC-119K Gunship training as an Aerial Gunner and my Air Force Wings at last. I was going to finally fly after years of waiting. After completing more than three months of Combat Crew Training at gunship flight school by early December 1970, I was off to the Philippines to Clark AFB to complete Jungle Survival training.

My first gunship assignment was at Phan Rang Air Base,

Vietnam as an AG on the AC-119K Stinger gunship. On my first night at Phan Rang, laughingly called "Happy Valley", I went to the outdoor theater to watch a movie. Shortly after I sat down, I heard a tremendously loud noise come screaming over my head. Just then, I heard someone loudly yell, "In-coming!" As we all dove to the ground and took cover, one thought immediately flashed through my mind, "Welcome to the war and combat!" Well, a Republic of Korea (ROK) Marine artillery unit was stationed somewhere at one end of the base and they had started shelling some Viet Cong troops located on the opposite outside perimeter of Phan Rang AB. However, they forgot to tell the American Air Force they were going to start firing artillery shells over the top of the base!

Not long after arriving at Phan Rang, I was transferred to a forward operating base further north in Vietnam called DaNang. It didn't take long for this place to heat up either.

DaNang Air Base was not only the home of our flight detachment of 18th SOS AC-119K Stingers; it was the home for many other combat forces of the USAF, US Army, US Marines and



Damaged Overhead Fuel Tank

South Vietnamese units. DaNang was strategically located on the South China Sea coast. Night and day, the base was almost constantly under attack by Viet Cong 122-millimeter (mm) rocket fire. These rockets did tremendous damage to aircraft and structures at DaNang while causing the loss of many lives of troops stationed at the base. Hence, DaNang was nicknamed "Rocket City." Stinger gunships at DaNang were predominately used to fly interdiction missions along the infamous and heavily defended Ho Chi Minh Trail, attacking North Vietnam Army (NVA) trucks hauling war materials southward to Viet Cong and NVA troops to use against American and South Vietnamese forces.

Our second and best-liked missions flown were called "TICs" for Troops-In-Contact. Supporting ground troops who were in dire straits, Stinger aircrews were known to squeeze every ounce of fuel from fuel tanks just to stay on target a few minutes longer so the troops on the ground might survive! Many Stinger gunship crews landed back at base after supporting a TIC with almost no remaining fuel.

I flew combat missions during four major campaigns in the Vietnam War. The first was called Commando Hunt V in which we flew in support of South Vietnamese ground forces severing the Ho Chi Minh Trail on Route 9 in Laos during Operation Lam Son 719. I'll never forget one mission on the night of February 19, 1971. The triple A (Anti-Aircraft Artillery) fire was so intense that you could almost walk on it! A convoy of trucks was spotted by one of our onboard sensor operators. Our gunship nosed over on



External Belly Damage

its left side and we started attacking the convoy, firing our 20mm cannons at the enemy truck convoy while weaving in and out of the intense ground fire. When it was all said and done, our Stinger crew had successfully destroyed sixteen enemy trucks! All of our crew members received the Distinguished Flying Cross, (my first DFC) and the Vietnamese Gallantry Cross with Palm; a Unit award for our crew's participation during Lam Son 719.

Many combat missions later, and on the first day of another campaign called Commando Hunt VI, I flew on the mission that almost cost me my life! On the evening of May 15, 1971 at DaNang AB, my crew and I readied our Stinger gunship for a mission over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. Our radio call sign was Stinger 03. Little did we know, this was to be the most memorable and dangerous mission we would ever fly together as a crew! Since Stinger gunships flew at a low altitude and in very heavily defended areas at slow speeds, Stingers usually flew nighttime missions, but not always. Our crew had already been briefed on the area and target locations that we would be attacking. We had also been advised during the weather briefing that there would be a full moon shining brightly over our Laotian target area. Not a good way to start a combat mission!

Flying a mission with a full moon on a cloudless night was the one thing all Stinger crews feared the most. Our gunship would be silhouetted against the moon as we made each firing orbit over the target area and enemy gunners would have no trouble seeing us.

Stinger 03 took off from DaNang heading towards Laos. We "Crossed the Fence", flying over the South Vietnam/Laos border. All crewmembers pulled down their face shields on their ballistic flight helmets to protect their faces and eyes from flying shrapnel should the aircraft take a hit. In the case of us three gunners, we also needed the visor protection in the event that one of the aircraft's six guns exploded while firing. Arriving over the target area, the pilot banked the gunship into a 30 degree left orbit. I switched on a 20mm Vulcan cannon to the firing mode. Another gunner and I both placed empty 20mm ammo cans on the floor behind the firing gun. Gunners always sat on overturned empty ammo cans behind the guns to fix the gun in case the gun jammed and to also reload the gun with ammo. Shortly after, we went into an orbit, firing the 20mm cannon. The gun jammed and the two of us were unable to fix it. I turned off the gun's firing switch and notified the pilot over intercom that we're moving to the rear 20 mm cannon. The two of us gunners carefully walked back to the rear gun and I switched it to firing mode. The gun worked fine and started blazing away at our target. Approximately twenty-five seconds later, exactly where my fellow-gunner and I had been seated behind the jammed 20mm gun, WHAM!, what seemed to be the loudest bang I ever heard in my life went off inside the compartment of the aircraft. The aircraft abruptly shook back and forth in the night sky. Shrapnel flew wildly throughout the gun compartment. The next thing I remember was gallons of volatile aviation fuel, spraying everyone in the compartment with the flammable fuel.

We'd been hit!! Our Gunship had just been struck by two very accurate .57mm Anti-Aircraft Artillery rounds. The first one exploded, blowing a hole in the outer skin of the belly of the gunship. The second round exploded as it passed through the floor of the cargo compartment (gun deck). Shrapnel from this round continued upwards severing the co-pilot's rudder cable and cutting open the aircraft's cross-feed fuel valve and hydraulic system line. Battle damaged and still flying over heavily defended enemy territory and targets that we had just attacked, Stinger 03 was in big trouble to say the least.

One good thing that we had going for us was an F-4 Phantom Fighter/Bomber flying along with us as an escort. If we had to bail out, the Phantom could provide some firing cover and would know where we went down.

Everybody onboard Stinger 03 started doing what they could to keep the badly damaged gunship in the air as the pilot tried to exit the target area without taking another hit. The pilot and co-pilot fire-walled the engines, trying to maintain altitude while heading eastward toward DaNang. In the cargo compartment, we three aerial gunners and the illuminator operator started throwing all live ammo, spent brass cartridges, empty ammo cans, and anything else we could throw overboard to lighten the weight of the crippled aircraft.

Ahead was a mountain range to cross over on the way to home base. By this time we had all strapped on our chest parachutes for what looked like a possible bailout. Past the mountains, our next problem was that the main landing gear and the nose gear would not come down and lock in place. Remember the hydraulic system was shot up. The Flight Engineer and I started hand pumping the nose gear first and then the one main landing gear down into place. The other main gear was down but not locked in place. Finally that gear locked in place as we flew out over the South China Sea towards DaNang. We made a straight-in approach to DaNang. The pilot used the air brakes to stop the aircraft. As soon as the plane came to a full stop, everyone aboard set a land speed record for exiting a gunship! For this mission I was awarded my second Distinguished Flying Cross.

I went on to fly many more combat missions out of DaNang. In September 1971, I was transferred to Nakhon Phanom (NKP) RTAFB, Thailand and again flew many more Stinger combat missions. While stationed at NKP,

I participated in a campaign called Commando Hunt VII. I rotated back to the states in January 1972. For my missions flown on Stinger Gunships, I was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses, Air Medal with seven Oak Leaf Clusters, Presidential Unit Citation, Outstanding Unit Award with combat V and two Oak Leaf Clusters, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm, Vietnam Service Medal with Four Campaign Stars and the Vietnam Campaign Ribbon.

After Vietnam, I was stationed in Idaho where I was selected and assigned to the Canadian Armed Forces Base at Chatham, New Brunswick, Canada as an advisor to the Canadian Armed Forces. After that, I went to Griffiss AFB, New York. At Griffiss, I attended Mohawk Valley Community College while completing courses from the University of Maryland. My last assignment was at Holloman AFB, New Mexico where I retired from the United States Air Force with rank of Master Sergeant on July 31, 1980.

Again, I achieved another childhood dream. At last, I was living in the western United States. I retired from my Air Force career to the Land of Enchantment. I then started a second career, as a Law Enforcement Officer in the State of New Mexico from which I retired in 2000.

I was married and have a son, Anthony, and three daughters, Viki, Misty, and Kristal, all of whom are now adults. I have three grandsons; Cody (who unfortunately passed away shortly after birth), Trenton, and the youngest boy, Lukas, and one granddaughter, Magen.



I was first stationed at Nha Trang with the 17th, and then we moved to Tuy Hoa Air Base, and then finally to Phu Cat. Things I'm going to share happened during our assignment at Tuy Hoa Air Base.

My first story might be called "A-Deck First". A-deck on the AC-119 gunship is a compartment where the hydraulic fluid is stored. I was an Airman First (E-3) crew chief and one of my buddies, Walter Brinkman, was also a crew chief, an E-4 Sergeant at the time. We decided to check A-deck first in our pre-flight even though the checklist had A-deck listed in the middle of the pre-flight checklist. The reason we started checking A-deck first was because by the time

we reached the checklist item, we'd be doing it in the hot sun. It was very uncomfortable checking A-deck in the hot sun. So, Walter and I would walk to the flight line before we were supposed to start working so we could check A-deck while it was still dark and cooler. That way we didn't sweat so much. So that's kind of a modification and a little creativity in productivity on how we did that job.

Another story might be called "No Fireguards Around". We crew chiefs had a real problem. We were required to run the engines on every pre-flight primarily to charge the props. And very often, we didn't have anybody to pull fireguard for engine start and run-up pre-flight checks. For safety reasons,

a fireguard was truly needed in case there was a fire, but you could wait forever for a fireguard because we only had six crew chiefs and one extra person, a “floater” who was usually assigned to the aircraft that required more work to be done.

So, once in a great while, my buddy, Bernie Brinkman, and I might do our engine run-up without a fireguard. We'd get permission from the base control tower by calling them on the radio for permission to crank-up and run the engine, but without a fireguard standing outside with a fire extinguisher unit. Worse than that, once in awhile, because of time constraints, we had to do some maintenance, such as adjusting the carburetor, and I'd adjust the carburetor with the engines running. I climbed out of the cockpit and walked on top of the airplane, over the wing, and over the engine to get to my work. Since the cowling was off the aircraft engine, I'd adjust that carburetor in the additional heat produced by the running engine while listening to the prop go “Woosh, Woosh...” The prop blew directly on me. The whole state of affairs could easily have resulted in a terrible situation had a problem occurred. I guarantee that we would have been given a court martial and put in jail if we had ever gotten caught doing this stateside. So, that's another story that Bernie and I were guilty of.

One more story on aircraft maintenance was what I call, “Engine Clean-up”. After we were done with our pre-flight and engine run-up checks, and the engine was cooling down, we would spray what's called PD-680, a solvent, to help remove the excess oil from the engine, which gives you a clean engine to see the oil leaks more clearly next time. Once in awhile, we'd clean our engine up the ‘extremely unsafe’ way. Fueling the tanks, the POL truck would pull up and we would fill up the tanks on both wings. After I'd get done fueling on the left wing, I would shoot the fuel from the hose into the engine and clean the engine that way. That's extremely unsafe, dangerous, and guaranteed to get you a court martial and jail time if you ever got caught doing that stateside. But every so often, we ran into time constraints, you understand. There was a war going on. In the States, there were three people assigned to one aircraft, but in Nam, you were all by yourself. So,...

Sometimes, we cleaned the engine up after the engine had cooled down from engine run by pumping a fire extinguisher can filled with the PD-680 solvent to clean the engine. We'd hold the can, standing underneath the engine and shoot all the oil off the engine. Now, when it came close to R & R time, Bernie did this one time and I did it twice to clean an engine. It was hard to focus on the job when you knew you' were getting ready to go spend one week on

leave after being in-country for nine or ten months. Well, we both made the mistake of not waiting long enough for the engine to cool down. We grabbed the can of 680 solvent on the side of the revetment and walked under the engine and started shooting, and “Wooooooff”, a big flame would knock us to the ground. And then, I had to run after the fire bottle, the CB fire bottle, and try to extinguish the fire on my own, while the fire truck was called. All of this was caused by not focusing on the job and thinking about R & R. You know things like this happen in war time.

In fact, another incident similar to the ‘engine clean-up’ problem and thinking about getting time off for R & R comes to mind. One time, I left a “SOAP” tube in the aircraft oil tank by mistake. SOAP (Spectrometric Oil Analysis Program) tests were scheduled after a certain number of flying hours on the engine. You had to run a tube into the oil tank over the wing and suck out a sample. Samples were put in two separate bottles. But again, this was getting close to R & R time and I had trouble focusing on the task at hand. This one time, I was taking the SOAP sample and after I got the oil samples out and dropped them into the two bottles, I inadvertently dropped the long plastic tube down into the oil tank. Without thinking about what had happened, I buttoned up the oil tank and made sure the lids on the test bottles were tight. I turned in the oil samples and the Flight Line Supervisor asked, “What did you do with the tube?” I said, “Oh, no, I put it in the oil tank.” Well, guess what? I had to drain the whole oil tank, 55 gallons of oil, which is a real dirty job. You go underneath the tank and you've got to remove the transmitter that measures the quantity. I had to drain that whole thing and then put it all back together and fill it all over again. And I had oil all over me after that half-day job was done.

I just wanted to share a few exploits of the maintenance people and some of my experiences as a Crew Chief. Being someone who has 130 plus combat missions, I could have shared my stories as an Illuminator Operator and as a Right Scanner, but I wanted to take time to honor the maintenance people.





Ralph R. Lefarth, Pilot

17th SOS, Phan Rang, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



I was born in St. Louis, Missouri on 9 October 1941. I earned a Bachelors 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.



Moores Hill, Indiana was my birthplace in 1918. I graduated from Moores Hill High School in 1936. I enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps in June 1942 during World War II because all my buddies were going. I flew 68 combat missions in the European Theater, flying B-25s. During the Korean War, I flew 50 combat missions in the A-26 Night Intruder.

I was an AC-119G Shadow gunship command pilot for the 71st Special Operations Squadron in 1969 at Nha Trang Air Base, Vietnam. I was involved in the only night attack by a major American force to keep enemy troops from escaping by boat while our troops attacked the Viet Cong. We supported our troops with searchlight and Gatling guns.

I supported an Air Evac C-130, replacing six choppers, one of which had been shot down while providing air cover for the C-130. The other five choppers were guarding their

buddies on the ground. We were dispatched to escort the '130' into the fire base to pick up wounded with female nurses on board. We were given the frequency of the '130' and he was holding at 20,000 feet. I told him to follow me over the field. I would have all my lights on. Then I would circle around and follow behind him. After a lot of persuasion and a dry run, he complied with my plan while I stood by overhead until after he took off. The downed chopper crew was rescued by a 'Jolly Green' and the mission was completed with nobody injured.

I retired as a Colonel from the United States Air Force in 1971 at Grissom AFB, Indiana. I currently live in Dillsboro, Indiana.





William "Bill" G.S. Lodge, Pilot

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, 1971-72

My birthplace was Washington, District of Columbia in 1932. I graduated from Kiski Prep School in Saltsburg, Pennsylvania. I graduated from the University of Nebraska, Omaha. I joined the USAF to avoid the draft and to go to pilot training.

I was a Stinger pilot and instructor pilot with the 18th SOS assigned to Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand from December 1971 to March 1972 and to DaNang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam from March 1972 thru September

1972. I flew 130 combat missions in the AC-119K gunship. All missions were exciting. I also flew many flights as Functional Check Flights (FCF) at both NKP and DaNang. I will always remember that I was the operation officer at DaNang. We had six complete crews, four aircraft, and were tasked with four combat missions per night.

I retired from the USAF at Vandenberg AFB, California on 1 February 1986 with 31 years and 5 months total active service.



Shelby D. Lucky, IO

18th SOS, Phan Rang, DaNang, 1969-70



The ferrying of the first wave of "K's" to Southeast Asia (SEA) is the one thing that really stands out in my memory as an AC119K gunship crew member. If memory serves me correctly, we departed Lockbourne AFB on the morning of 21 Oct 1969 in a cell of six aircraft. The send-off did not start well on our aircraft since I think every crew member (me

included) hit their heads on the fuel dump pipe during the walk around inspections. A young lady from Ohio (who is my wife today) had come out to see us off. Our aircraft was the last or next to last to depart. Upon our liftoff, my cousin (SSgt Clyde Alloway) took her to the NCO Mess for breakfast. While they were there, some of the early take off crews started to return. There were engine malfunctions out the ying yang on at least two, maybe three, of the departing aircraft. Our aircraft took off and flew like a slow, homesick angel. The first stop was Malmstrom AFB, Montana. Things were doing well up to that point until the Illuminator Operator (IO-yours truly) fell out of a taxi cab at a well known adult beverage establishment and ended up with a very painful twisted ankle.

Stop number two was McChord AFB, Washington. We landed on a late, cold, rainy afternoon. As I recall (someone help me – that was 39 years ago), we had to get more shots (immunizations) for SEA while we were there. Our departure the next morning was also cold and rainy.

We headed out for Elmendorf AFB, Alaska from McChord. One thing stands out about Elmendorf -- it was colder

than a mother-in-law's kiss on the morning that we were to leave. Our pilot, co-pilot, and flight engineer had very little time in reciprocating engines and with cold weather starting techniques, which led to an interesting situation. Once I explained bridge icing and a forbidden cold weather starting procedure, everything started to cook - along with a few good backfires. The folks who did the weight reduction engineering and procedures for the AC-119K ferry and combat weight loads may not have thought it all the way through because they took out the body/wing heaters for a cold weather ferry mission. I shivered all the way to our next stop, Adak AB/Naval Air Station in the Aleutian Islands.

During the time of Lord Nelson and the Battle of Trafalgar, the British navy was still using "press gangs" who lived in poor conditions and ate bad food. When we landed at Adak, I realized that our Navy's treatment of its enlisted personal was not too far removed from those days. It took many threats from our pilot to get the enlisted crew into better quarters. After some beans (and other things that we did not recognize) for breakfast, we were on our way south to Midway Island.

After departing Adak, we steadily flew through bad and icing weather. As IO, I kept a very good eye on the Benson fuel bladders in the cargo deck. After a while, I noticed that the fuel flow was a lot higher than it should be. I mentioned to the engineer that maybe he should manually lean the



engines a tad more. For this I received a nasty look from the pilot. I returned to the cargo section and started to fit a butt boat (small dingy) to my parachute harness. On returning to the cockpit, the flight engineer asked what he should do about the fuel flow. I said "Don't worry about it, Bobby. I will talk to you about it in the rescue boat." If I remember correctly, we landed with about twenty minutes of fuel at Midway.

Not much to say about Midway Island. If you are a bird watcher, you would have had a good time. I don't remember too much about our time there or our departure. It seems that we were there for only one or two days.

Our next stop was Wake Island. Inroute the engineer was leaning the port engine when it backfired once. My first thoughts were that he had pulled the mixture back too far and it got his attention. It was not long before it backfired again. The backfires began to occur about every ten to twenty minutes. We pulled the power off that engine and just let it carry its own weight. I remember telling the rest of the crew that it was acting like a rotating valve seat and would probably require a cylinder change at Wake Island. We arrived late in the evening and did not start to trouble shoot the aircraft until the next morning. The contract workers came out but did not have an S-1 compression tester or much of anything else. Someone finally found some old "lollypop" cylinder compression checkers that proved to be absolutely useless. We thought about going on to Guam and hope the problem did not return. I did not like the thought of that idea. After the third maintenance run on the engine, it seized up. Seizures always happen when the oil is shut off to an R-3350 engine. We were there for several more days while we waited for an engine change. Many "interesting" things happened to different crew members while we were there. Most of the happenings were influenced by spending too much time at Drifters Reef.

The next leg of the journey was to Anderson AFB, Guam Island. The new engine was holding up but that did not give me much comfort as it was overhauled by a company

that had produced some really bad engines. The Navy used the same engine on their P2Vs and they would not let their crews fly over water until the engine had at least twenty five hours on it. Inroute to Guam, there is a lot of long, dull ocean under you. This will cause some crew members to nod off. I had checked the Benson tanks and returned to the flight deck to find most of the crew checking their eyelids for leaks. I sat down in the jump seat, reached behind me to the aft side of the cockpit bulkhead, grabbed a handful of control cables, and gave a sharp pull. The aircraft shuddered all over and the autopilot automatically disengaged. When everyone "came to", their eyes were bugged out like a "stepped on" frog. A few minutes later, they reset the autopilot and continued on as if nothing had happened. In about twenty minutes, we were back to step one -- everyone doing the nod. I thought this would be a good time for a repeat performance and it worked successfully a second time. Since we were only about an hour out from Guam, they kept the autopilot turned off. Upon landing, the pilot wrote up the autopilot. I talked to the autopilot maintenance person and asked that he just CND (can not duplicate) the squawk (write-up). He said "NO" so I had to tell him the whole story. He thought it was a really good prank and signed off the squawk as some kind of adjustment.

Clark AB, Philippines was the next stop in our journey halfway around the world in the slowest and noisiest aircraft ever made. We were at Clark for several days for some radio installations before going on to Vietnam. I do not know how so many men survived all the combat tours between the Oasis, Pop's Place and the Nepa Hut. When the radio modifications were finished, we headed to Phan Rang AB, RVN. Even after all of the things that occurred along the way, I think we were the third AC119K to arrive in country.

I would not do that trip again for a million dollars, but the memories are worth more than a million bucks to me now. I flew with some of the greatest men in the world. Some are gone now and until the day I go, I shall remember them all.



I was commissioned in 1970 upon graduating from the U.S. Air Force Academy. I completed a Vietnam combat tour as an AC-119K copilot and aircraft commander. From the AC-119K, I flew the C-5A/B. During my Air Force career, I served as squadron commander, operations officer, systems program manager, flight test director, director of operations,

joint command air liaison, and joint command deputy air component commander. I also completed a Master of Science in International and Acquisition Logistics through the Air Force Institute of Technology. I retired in July 2000 as a Colonel, with 30 years military service and 4,800 flying hours. My significant awards and decorations included

Legion of Merit with 1 OLC, Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star Medal, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal with 1 OLC, and Air Medal with 2 Silver OLC's

I was assigned to the AC-119K directly from pilot training. I served with the 18th Special Operations Squadron from February 1972 – December 1972, where I flew 171 combat missions from NKP, Bien Hoa, and DaNang. I was also the assistant squadron administration officer, assistant squadron scheduling officer, and AC-119K Stinger gunship aircraft commander.

After Major “Wild Bill” Lodge, Captain John Robert “Bobby” Dydo was the best pilot I flew with in SEA. I was Bobby's Copilot for my first 70 combat missions. He was really good in combat and gave me every opportunity to grow as a pilot, while turning a blind eye to some of the rules. He gave me every other takeoff and landing. When the time came, he recommended me for upgrade to Aircraft Commander.

Wild Bill Lodge was the Squadron's Chief Pilot Tact Eval. He gave me my AC check-flight. I passed the check ride with flying colors, making me the only First Lieutenant AC in our unit at that time. I flew 71 combat missions as an AC. The experiences flying Stinger gunships motivated me for the remainder of my 30 year flying career.

Stinger 'Black Killer Duck' Takeoff At NKP

On November 4, 1972, I was scheduled as aircraft commander with an AC-119K crew I had not flown with. I was a first lieutenant with 156 combat missions, but the copilot was a captain who appeared to be about six to seven years older. It was a bit of an awkward situation for me.

Our aircraft that night was 53-7830, the best shooting Stinger at NKP, and known as the Black Killer Duck. The copilot performed an impressively thorough preflight. I pegged him as one of those by-the-book Flight Instructor-types from Air Training Command. He executed the checklist perfectly during engine-start and taxi. To break the ice, I suggested he make the takeoff and he acknowledged with an enthusiastic “Yes.”

Before taxiing onto the runway, I told him, “Around here we add five knots to rotate-speed for the Flight Engineer, and another five knots for my mother so I can see her again. So, when you have rotate-speed, plus 10 knots, slowly and smoothly rotate the Duck off the ground and let her gain

some speed and altitude, and then call for the gear. Got it?” “I got it,” he said.

When cleared for takeoff, the copilot took the flight controls and I took the throttles, with the engineer backing me up. Off we went, roaring down the runway, with everything in the green. The Captain's rudder inputs were good as we passed VR—the reject-speed at which it is still possible to abort the takeoff. We were committed to a takeoff for sure now, because there was not enough runway remaining to abort. At rotate-speed MINUS five knots the copilot yanked the yoke back into his stomach and the Duck leaped off the ground. The ground-effect left us hanging on the props, barely flying, and in grave danger.

Instantly, my mind shifted into emergency mode as I screamed, “PILOT'S AIRPLANE!” All the skill, experience and pilot's instinct took over as I fought to keep the aircraft flying. I couldn't put her back down— no runway left. I could see the 12-foot high fence at the end of the field and rows of trees 500 feet beyond. I was not climbing and the airspeed hadn't increased one knot! I yelled for gear-up. That would get us a few knots. I called to the engineer to close the cowl flaps; closing them could overheat the engines, but the drag reduction might get us another knot or two. Slowly - ever so slowly - the airspeed began creeping up. I was squeezing the yoke, trying to feel the difference between ground effect and a positive climb. At last, I felt the pressure changing; the Duck was finally flying! But it wasn't over.

I cleared the fence and had to zoom up to get over the trees, and then let the nose down to get back the speed I'd lost in the zoom. I headed for the river, which I knew was lower than the airfield. Cylinderhead temperatures were going up as expected, but we were safely flying again with enough airspeed. I made a left turn out of traffic at normal climb speed and called for the AFTER TAKEOFF/CLIMB CHECKLIST. I think everyone onboard knew how close we had come to buying-the-farm. The crew was quiet throughout the mission and on the way back to NKP. No one on this crew was going to forget this mission.

On the bus ride from the flightline, I was trying to figure out how this First Lieutenant was going to tear the Captain a new asshole. Then, from the back of the bus, the Captain said, “Sorry guys. I'm buying the beer.” After a beer or two, he blurted out, “I choked. In training I think they only let me takeoff once or twice, and none of those birds were half as heavy as we were tonight. I was so scared and trying so hard that I subtracted, rather than added, the speed to VR.” The rest of the story was that he was a maintenance officer for five years and had just completed pilot training

as a Captain; he had no flying experience. MY BAD! I was responsible. I never asked. I just assumed.

The November 4th mission was the last Stinger mission

flown into Laos from NKP. That mission put the fear of God back into me! In flying my remaining 15 missions, I was probably the sharpest pilot in Southeast Asia! Remember, "It ain't over 'till it's over"!



Don Main, Pilot

18th SOS, Phan Rang, DaNang, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



I was flying C-119s with the 914th Tactical Airlift Squadron out of Niagara Falls, NY as a Reserve pilot. I decided to come back on active duty in November 1969 when the call came down that they were looking for C-119 pilots to fly the Stinger gunship in Vietnam. So in December 1969, orders were cut sending me to Lockbourne AFB to check out in the AC-119K gunship. In April 1970, I departed Lockbourne

for Vietnam after completing my AC checkout. At that time I was a Captain and Senior Pilot and my orders were cut for Nha Trang AB. When I arrived at Nha Trang, I was told that the 18th SOS had moved to Phan Rang AB. Off I went to Phan Rang and although I can't recall how long I stayed there, it was long enough to get an in-country checkout and a couple of flights and then I was sent to DaNang AB where I spent the remainder of my tour in SEA. One of the things I remember while I was at Phan Rang was that the Operations Officer had to visit a Marine outfit that had one of their men killed by friendly fire from a Shadow which had fired on their location. Somehow the Shadow had acquired the target about 10 clicks from where they should have been. I remember he told me it was one of the toughest things he had to do, as those Marines had blood in their eyes, and although he felt really bad, he was glad to depart!

Upon arrival at DaNang, I went through the normal in-processing and checkout and flew as a copilot on Dave Kuhn's crew. I do remember that upon my arrival, one of the crews had a runaway prop and the AC bailed the crew out over the South China Sea just off the China Beach R&R Center. My good friend, that I went through training with, Pete Chamberlain, who was a navigator on the crew, told me what it was like for him. I believe the IO died but the other crew members all survived. When Dave Kuhn departed for the States in June, I got my AC checkout

and took over the same crew. Although I had various crew members, I do remember well Bill Feezor who was my FE and Bill Thurston who was my copilot and had also been my copilot through training at Lockbourne.

In September 1970, my crew was sent TDY for the month to Tan Son Nhut to fly missions into Cambodia. These were very interesting as they were the only daylight combat missions that I ever flew. The missions covered all types of targets including sampans, trucks, buildings, etc.

One of the missions that will always stick in my memory is when we spotted a number of single-axle wooden carts being pulled by water buffalo. The number I don't recall, probably around ten or twelve. It seemed strange that where there was supposed to be "no movement," there would be so many carts. Anyway, I called control and requested instructions as to a possible target. They came back and said to fire on the target. This convoy was just crossing a small stream and as I fired, the stream soon became red with the blood of dead water buffalos. I was hoping to see some kind of secondary explosion but it never happened. The table Nav didn't want me to fire, and at the conclusion of the mission told me he would never fly with me again. I was upset with myself and I still live with that one. War is Hell!

On another mission over Cambodia, we were requested to fire on a small village. There was absolutely no activity or movement in the area that I could see. Once in the firing pattern, with a little top rudder, you can walk the firing pattern in a straight line. This is what I did and I learned the ferocity of the 20mm cannon fire. I could see windows and doors and I mean the whole frame just blew outward. If there was anyone in those buildings, they were not in great shape by the time we departed.

In October, after returning to DaNang, we had one very eventful mission when we caught a convoy of trucks on the Trail. Our initial lock-on happened to be on the lead vehicle which just happened to be a gasoline tanker. I hit it directly and it exploded and literally lit up the night sky. It blocked

the 20 or so trucks behind it. I was afraid the light would illuminate my gunship and enemy guns would start firing at us, but I believe we caught the convoy in the open and there was no AAA in the vicinity. In the open and with all the light, I could just pick-off each truck visually. By the time we had completed, we had destroyed or damaged some 20 plus trucks without any AAA - a very good night's work.

On another mission that I remember well, we locked onto a truck and fired. The AAA came up so we pulled off target. The back end observers said they did see a secondary explosion so we called it a damaged truck. We were about 5 clicks away from the target when all of a sudden, the whole thing just blew and the sky lit up like the 4th of July - we had hit a truck carrying ammunition. We changed the results from damaged to destroyed. That one destroyed truck made us all feel very good because we had stopped ammo from getting to the Viet Cong. By the end of September, I started my IP checkout and in November was flying several missions as an IP. My crew was an instructor crew as the FLIR operator and the lead gunner were also instructors. Our crews normally flew three nights in a row and then had a night down, but they could fly us five nights in a row and then give us a night down. And as an instructor, that is normally what I flew. So after November, I really started logging the combat missions which got me to over 170 before the end of my tour. I was really glad to go on R&R at the end of November, as I looked forward to the rest and seeing my wife for her 30th birthday in Hawaii. I had bought her three rings in Thailand for her birthday and, unfortunately, I guess they thought I was smuggling in something and detained me for over an hour at the arrival facility. Everyone else had left and they finally released me and I had to ride in the baggage truck. All the other passengers had arrived at the meeting area but no one had told my wife what happened and she was worried to death. Another great way our government takes care of its service personnel. Anyway, I was there and we had a great R&R.

When I returned to DaNang, things got busy. I was a training officer working with Frank LeGrand to set up a training program for the new arrivals. This was never done in the past and it helped to establish some sort of structured program for in-country training. At the end of December, I was fortunate to get on a freedom bird for Christmas leave. This was my third trip and after that they started the lottery. I thought that was one of the toughest times-to go back home to the USA and then have to return to Vietnam. I was feeling dejected, so I really got immersed in my work. After the beginning of 1971, I was flying IP with a recent arrival and we had one of our best nights when we got 39 trucks

either destroyed or damaged. Things were fairly normal, as they can be in a combat zone, until the end of my tour. I never really got scared with incoming at DaNang because I felt if I was going to get it it would be on a mission. However, as the last two weeks approached before I was to depart, and the alert signal sounded for incoming, I put on my flack vest and got under my bed just to make sure! The Marines, who had been guarding the western perimeter of the base, had departed and turned the security over to the Vietnamese which was not a warm fuzzy feeling. During my tour, the Viet Cong had constantly lobbed mortar rounds into the base, but did not do much damage. They once hit a corner of a BOQ but no one was in it and another time they hit a runway and closed it but there was no major damage. At the end of March they made a direct hit on a POL storage tank which burned for at least two weeks.

One of the highlights of my tour was a trip to Yokota AB in Japan (I believe it took place in August) for a selective manning interview for my next assignment to the RB-57F which was a high altitude research and reconnaissance aircraft located only at Yokota and Kirtland AFB in New Mexico. I spent three days in Tokyo and spent one full day buying Honda motorcycles. I was going to buy one while I was there and four other crew personnel asked me to get them one also. So I ended up buying five motorcycles, which took all day to disassemble, pack (which the dealer gladly did) and then mail at the Yokota Post Office. Luckily, the Honda dealer was across the street from the main gate of Yokota, so that saved a little time. But each motorcycle took about six or seven boxes to ship. With some stroke of luck, all the boxes found their way to DaNang. Jeff Baker, who had put three other cycles together, helped me with mine. Thank God for Jeff as the assembly instructions were all in Japanese! We started at six o'clock one evening and nine hours later finished and it started on the first try. I now had transportation for the remainder of my tour. When April 1971 came, I was glad to be going home but it was a tour that I shall always remember, especially the good friendships that I still cherish. I had flown over 170 combat missions and was probably scheduled for close to 300, but the old bird took time to turn and so a lot of missions were cancelled or scrubbed. But she was a bird that I will always remember. Though I never took a hit, I was Duty Officer on two occasions when she returned from missions - once with a jet engine shot off and fuel pouring out of the right wing and the other with the whole radome shot off. The Stinger gunship was a hard bird to bring down. She left me with many fond memories of her and the men who flew her.



Peter Mangum, Navigator

18th SOS, DaNang



No Bio Submitted



Standing; Tommy Hammam, Pilot holding camera. Other end opposite Pete Mangum with hand on pistol



Richard C. "Buck" Marr, Pilot

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, Phan Rang, 1970-71



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 DaNang 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 DaNang 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.



Gerald "Mingo" E. Marsland Jr., Gunner

18th SOS, DaNang, 1969-71

I was born at Providence, Rhode Island in 1948. In 1967, I graduated from Mount Pleasant High School in Providence, my home town. On 2 February 1968, I entered the United States Air Force at Lackland AFB, Texas.

I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron from October to December 1969 at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. Departing Lockbourne in December, I was in the third wave of 18th SOS AC-119Ks ferried to Vietnam. I served as an aerial gunner on Stinger gunships stationed at DaNang AB from December 1969 to January 1971. Following my tour with Stingers, I served at Tahkli from November 1972 to March 1973 (Credible Chase), and at Udorn from January to August 1974. I was discharged from

the USAF at Luke AFB, Arizona in December 1982.

The most exciting Stinger mission that I experienced was the night we flew through a B-52 Arc Light strike. We flew straight into the bomb drop with MK 82s hitting the ground beneath us. Then there was a BIG "Break Left" called and we flew away from the area. Five minutes later, the Airborne Command and Control Center (ABCCC) "Moonbeam" put out a warning of the Arc Light over the radio. Moonbeam was late; the bombers were early. We were very lucky that we were not hit by one of the bombs.

I currently live in Presque Isle, Maine.



John B. Martin, Maintenance

17th SOS, Phan Rang, Phu Cat, Tuy Hoa, 1970-71

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was my birthplace in 1949. I graduated from high school in Coral Gables, Florida in 1968. I joined the U. S. Air Force in 1968 at Miami, Florida.

I served with the 17th Special Operations Squadron at Phan

Rang, Phu Cat, and Tuy Hoa. I was sent via helicopter to Phnom Penh, Cambodia for a week to change an engine on a Shadow gunship. After run-up tests were satisfactory, the aircraft was ready for the crew to fly. I separated from the Air Force on 19 August 1974. I currently live in Rydal, Georgia.



James Edward Mattison, Gunner

71st & 17th SOS, Nha Trang, Phan Rang, 1968-69



I was born on November 8, 1947 in Glens Falls, New York. I enlisted in the United States Air Force in January 1967 and reported for basic training at Lackland AFB, Texas. My first assignment was to the USAF Technical School at Lowry AFB, Colorado as an AF Specialty 462X0-04 Interceptor Weapons

Mechanic.

In September 1967, I was stationed at Logan Field in Billings, Montana with the 29th Fighter Interceptor Squadron (FIS). I served there until January 1968 when I was sent to Minot AFB, North Dakota for duty as a weapons mechanic with the 5th Fighter Interceptor Squadron.

I received orders in September 1968 for AC-119 gunship training with the 4413th Combat Crew Training Squadron at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio as an aerial gunner. Upon completion of gunship training in December, I departed CONUS for Southeast Asia and a oneyear Tour of Duty in Vietnam with the 71st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) at Nha Trang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam (RVN). When the 17th SOS assumed operational responsibilities for AC-119Gs from the 71st SOS in June 1969, I was officially transferred to the 17th SOS headquartered at Phan Rang AB.

While assigned to the 71st and 17th Special Operations Squadrons, I flew as an Aerial Gunner (AG). I was part of the initial deployment of the AC-



119G Shadow gunship. I was a member of Major Richard Morgan's crew until the 71st rotated back to the USA. The remainder of my tour was spent as part of the gunner pool, assigned to crews as needed. I trained with Sergeant Gregory Terral and we usually flew together until the latter part of my tour. At that time, we were split up and each of us had a "green-guy" to train.

I only performed aircrew duties in the AC-119G; however, while assigned to the 129th ARRS I was a certified as a search and rescue scanner. As an Aerial Gunner, I flew approximately 140 missions and 700+ combat hours. I was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses and eight Air Medals.

One of the more memorable missions with Major Morgan was flying three sorties in one night. We expended 88,000 rounds of 7.62mm and 72 flares. We did turnarounds at DaNang and Chu Lai. The results of our efforts were 80 secondary explosions and numerous sustained fires. It was truly a "dusk to dawn" mission.

A regularly scheduled mission out of Nha Trang was known as the 'UFO Box'; patrolling for suspected enemy aerial operations. One night, we were patrolling a UFO Box when our NOS detected four individual beacons. For hours the NOS tracked the beacons moving in distinct patterns up and down a ridgeline. We awaited clearance to fire on the targets but clearance was never given. The sun was starting to come up and we were directed to break engagement and RTB.

The most memorable mission that I flew was the night Major Morgan's crew supported a major engagement at the Black Virgin Mountain, Tay Ninh Province. The enemy surrounded the mountain. Huey gunships were attacking at low level. Artillery was firing all around the mountain. We were tasked with destroying the .51 cal AAA in the area. We had engaged and silenced a couple of the AAA sites and were rolling in on another target when we were hit by a burst of very accurate enemy fire. Just prior to being hit, I had put #1 gun online. The Aircraft Commander (AC) called back that he needed a gun. I leaned forward to check the gun's status, when at that moment I saw Terry (Sgt. Terral) fly backwards from the #3 gun. He struck the right (starboard) side of the cargo compartment and slumped to the floor. I came up on intercom and notified the AC that we must have had a gun blow up and Terry was down; condition unknown. Don (SSgt. Donald Brogan), our IO, rushed to Terry's aid and determined that he had been wounded, but not severely. Our AC elected to break

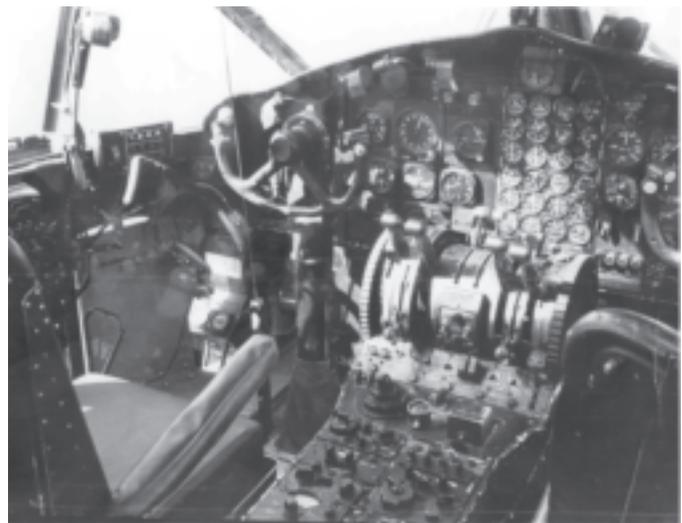
engagement and recover at Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon to seek medical attention for Terry.

While Terry was taken to the Medical Center at Tan Son Nhut, the remainder of the crew stayed with the aircraft and inspected her for damage. We counted at least 20 hits in the aircraft, starting just aft of the NOS position and ending at the vertical fin. SSgt. Squire Riley, our Flight Engineer, also inspected the wings and fuel tanks. At least one round had exited the aircraft through the top of the right wing. We also discovered that, had I not leaned forward to check the #1 gun, I would have been another casualty. One of the rounds had gone through my half of the gunner's station, exiting an inch above the gun control panel. Moments before, I had been standing upright at the gun control panel, switching #1 gun online. Sergeant Terral eventually recovered from his wounds. He was awarded the Purple Heart.

On the lighter side of things, during my stay at Phan Rang, enlisted aircrew quarters were Quonset huts out in nomans land. We had struck a close friendship with the Aussies who were part of an RAAF Canberra squadron. Whenever there was an Australian USO band playing the clubs, they always came to our Quonset hut after performances for a jam session. Our Quonset hut was so far from the rest of 'civilization' that the Aussies could party till the wee hours. I am still in contact with Jim Drever, one of our "Australian Brothers."

In December 1969, I was assigned to the 475th MMS at Misawa Air Base, Japan where I served until June 1971.

My wife, Lynn, and I currently live in Rohnert Park, California.



AC119G Cockpit



Richard A. Matzen, Pilot

18th SOS, 14th SOW, Phan Rang, 1969-70



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 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, FL and Lubbock, TX, I had my pilot wings and started flying C-124s at Travis. 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, DE 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 & 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 DaNang 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 wounded. 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 DaNang.

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.



Bruce Maxwell, Maintenance

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, 1972-73

I was born in 1942 at Cincinnati, Ohio. After attending Webster Hills High School, I earned my GED. I joined the Air Force to add to my other service tours in the USN & USANG. My original orders were for 18th SOS after reporting to NKP 56th Field Maintenance Squadron.

My most memorable events in Southeast Asia were trying to fix engines that were failing on start up, finding blower cases leaking and fixing planes at NKP instead of returning

them to depot. We saved a lot of time and engines. We did not have many spare engines. I was not authorized for field repair, but did it anyway, saving many hours of maintenance and down time.

I retired from the Air Force at Davis Monthan AFB, Arizona on 31 July 1994 as a Chief Master Sergeant. I currently live in Pace, Florida.



Bryan "By" Douglas Maynard, Nav.

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, Phan Rang, DaNang, 1971-72



San Jose, California was my birthplace in 1933. I graduated from Lincoln & James Lick High School at San Jose in 1951 and then graduated from San Jose State University in 1955. In 1956, I entered the U.S. Air Force at Lackland AFB.

I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron as a navigator/sensor operator on AC-

119K Stinger gunships. I flew out of Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam (RVN) during January 1971 and then out of Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand from February to July 1971. From July 7, 1971 to January 1972, I flew out of DaNang Air Base, RVN.

My most exciting combat mission was my first Stinger mission, flying out of NKP hunting trucks on the Ho Chi

Minh Trails in Laos. We had a big 'AAA' time and were lucky to get back to NKP without taking any hits. The next night, my longtime friend, Bob Bloomfield, went up with my crew and sustained a six-inch hole in one of the vertical tails for their effort, as well as many other close 23mm rounds. My first mission was the worst. Gladly, the rest were less stressful.

The things that I will always remember about flying Stinger gunships are: Bingo Points, which we learned had to be reconsidered for one engine returns! That we must not toss out miniguns to reduce weight!

I retired as a Lieutenant Colonel from the Air Force in February 1977 at Beale AFB, California. I currently live in Penn Valley, California.





Collier "Cash" F. McCall, Nav.

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, 1972

I was born in 1935 at St. Petersburg, Florida. After graduating from St. Petersburg High School in 1953, I enlisted in the United States Air Force on July 7, 1953 at St. Petersburg, even though I had planned to attend the University of Florida. At that time, the selective service was still drafting young men for the Korean War.

Upon completion of basic training at Lackland and tech school at Keesler AFB, I was assigned in early 1954 to the 99th Air Transport Squadron (C-54) at Haneda AB (Tokyo International Airport), Japan. I had been assigned to the squadron as a radio operator but was changed to the 1503rd ATW when all the Radio Operators were replaced by crystal controlled radios. While cross training, word came down that aircrew and Ops people might be interested in being detailed to retired General Claire Chennault's Civil Air Transport (CAT) for some "less than public" work in Southeast Asia. I guess CAT was the beginning of Air America. I was nineteen at the time, so of course, I was first in line.

We found out that we would be involved in the evacuation of the French Foreign Legion from a place called Dien Ben Phu. The operation called "Wounded Warrior" required that we set up airlift from Vietnam to Algeria. I did very little flying as a crewmember, usually helping out with the radios. The planes we flew were either C-46s or C-119s. So, you can see that C-119s, Vietnam and I go back a long way. It's always seemed odd to me that 18 years later, I came back to the same country, flying the same aircraft, fighting the same damned war.

In 1960, I was assigned to Donaldson AFB, South Carolina and then assigned to Harmon AFB, Canada in 1961. I applied for Officer Candidate School (OCS) at Lackland and was accepted in 1961. I was commissioned a second lieutenant and sent to James Connelly AFB, Texas for navigator school. Subsequent assignments as a navigator include: Dover AFB in 1962, Yokota Air Base, Japan as a controller, and lots of schools.

I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at NKP as a navigator/sensor operator in 1972 and thus began another adventure to Vietnam and SEA. Probably my most exciting AC-119 Stinger combat mission was the night we were trolling over the 'M' in the Mekong River. I had never seen so much AAA fire in my life. I am still indebted to our flight engineer who, in a moment of sheer brilliance, developed sufficient power from engine troubles to get us out of there.

The two years spent between NKP, DaNang, and Bien Hoa garnered several medals that, although much appreciated, do not define our mission or our efforts. A couple things learned: "Stingers" were much more effective on TIC missions than hunting trucks. The secondary explosions were exciting, but the calls from the guys on the ground about our accuracy meant much more. Also, don't get involved in a shooting war where the targets can run into a "shrine" where you are not supposed to shoot. And above all else, remember the quote of Hawkeye Pierce: "War is not Hell, Hell is Hell. There are no innocent bystanders in Hell."



Robert Walker McCreight, Pilot

18th SOS, Rhan Rang, Phu Cat, Udorn, Nakhon Phanom, 1969-70

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

Entered Clemson University in 1953, but dropped out after 3 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 Aug 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 RTAB, 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, O-2, C-124, C-141, and AC-119K. Total time: 6500 hours.

Awards and Decorations

DFC: Air Medal w/11 OLC

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.



Douglas D. McDaniel, Navigator
18th SOS, DaNang, 1969-70

I was born in Robinson, Illinois in October 1940 and claim Champaign, Illinois as my home town. I am a graduate of Champaign High School (1958), the University of Illinois (1963), and the University of Oregon (1972).

I joined the Air Force to fly airplanes and to travel the world. While associated with the 18th SOS, I was assigned to DaNang AB from 1969-70. My most exciting AC-119 mission was providing air support for a forward observation team on a hilltop on the Cambodian Border. We stopped the

“bad guys” advance literally yards away from overwhelming our ground team. I will never forget the fear in the voice of our ground contact when I expressed my worry about firing so close to his position. His answer was: “We will be dead either way, but at least if you fire, we have a chance of surviving!” His screams of joy as he encouraged us, “Keep firing. You are blowing them off the hill!” will always echo in my memory. Then, after the firefight was over, he didn't want to lose contact with his “angels in the sky” and tried to keep our conversation going well past our Bingo Fuel time.

Additionally, I'll always remember straining to get off the ground with a full load on a hot, muggy tropical night and being ordered to fly in the middle of a typhoon with no chance of helping anyone, even though it placed the plane and crew in danger. The folks in command wanted us to "burn up" allotted flying hours so we would not lose them in the next year's budget!! I have vivid memories of watching the tracers from enemy AAA arcing gracefully up at our circling plane. We could feel the concussion of the blasts dangerously close as the cries of our on-board scanners/observers came across the intercom: "BREAK RIGHT!" or "BREAK LEFT!" Sadly, another memory is watching helplessly as our F-4 cover plane exploded and burned on the ground after failing to pull up from a firing run in our defense!! I also recall trying to sleep while on night STANDBY, in case we needed to launch, and, failing that, getting launched just before dawn!!

I'll never forget watching the ground explosion patterns of the unannounced ARC LIGHT bombing raids tearing up the jungle. The real shock came when we realized in horror that those bombs exploding below us were being dropped from B-52s above us!! Another vivid recollection is the way

it all looked so different and "up close" when I accompanied the Marine patrols at night in DaNang and at Tan Son Nhut!!

From another perspective, I learned many memorable lessons from teaching English classes to the Vietnamese on base and the field trips they invited me on. Additional "lessons" came from helping at the Protestant Orphanage and the Catholic Orphanage in my spare time!! Still today, I recall listening to the men, who were close to completing their tour and returning stateside, on the bus after a mission. They solemnly pledged that "things would be different when they got home". They talked about how much time they planned to spend with their wives and families and "never take them for granted again!" Finally, I remember listening to our cleaning girls as they chattered in an unintelligible language. I wondered what they really thought and what their life was like when they left the base after their work.

I retired from the Air Force in 1985 at McChord AFB, Washington. I currently live in Sedona, Arizona.



Jerry Wayne McDonald, Maint.

71st & 17th SOS, Nha Trang, Phan Rang, 1968-69



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.



Robert F. McGarry, Gunner

17th SOS, Tuy Hoa, 1969-70



I was born January 17, 1947, Boston, Massachusetts and graduated from Boston Technical High School in June 1965. I volunteered for the Air Force in November 1965, and finally received orders for basic training in April 1966. After basic, I completed weapons specialist training at Lowry AFB, Colorado before being assigned as a weapons loader on B-52s with the 416th Bomb Wing (SAC), 56th Munitions

Maintenance Squadron, at Griffiss AFB, New York.

My load instructor at Griffiss AFB was William Scoville. Bill and I became instant friends. We both decided to volunteer for Vietnam duty. Bill received orders as Aerial Gunner with the 4th Air Commando Squadron at Nha Tang AB, RVN, while my orders were as an F-4C Phantom weapons loader with the 12th TAC Fighter Wing, 557th TAC Fighter Squadron at Cam Ranh Bay AB. In early October 1967, I caught a hop to Nha Trang to visit Bill. At Nha Tang I was informed Bill had been killed in action. That loss of a close friend was forever etched in my mind.

From Vietnam, I was assigned to the 96th Strategic Aerospace Wing (SAC), 42nd Munitions Weapons Squadron at Dyess AFB, Texas, where I immediately volunteered to return to Vietnam as an aerial gunner. Forty-five days later I had orders for AC-47 Aerial Gunner School. My brief return to SAC was just long enough to earn a promotion to Staff Sergeant.

It was as an AC-47 gunner that I eventually ended up in the AC-119G Shadow. In March 1969, I reported to the 14th SOW at Nha Trang AB, RVN, where I was assigned as a gunner with the 3rd SOS, "D" Flight, at Binh Tuy AB in the southern Delta region near Can Tho. After 10 missions, I was awarded the Aircrew Member Badge.

In July 1969, the 3rd SOS was deactivated. My fellow crewmembers were reassigned to Bien Hoa AB, but I was sent back to Nha Trang to await further orders. I had my choice of going to Bien Hoa or to DaNang; I chose DaNang. While still at Nha Trang awaiting my orders to DaNang, I learned that my former crewmembers at Bien Hoa were on an AC-47 that was shot down. There were no survivors. My mind flashed back to my good friend, Bill Scoville, who was shot down in 1967. If I had chosen to go to Bien Hoa instead of DaNang, I could have been on that gunship. It was the last USAF AC-47 Gunship shot down in the Vietnam War.

In October 1969, after two months at DaNang, I volunteered for a 75 day TDY flying out of Udorn RTAB, Thailand. At Udorn, I lived downtown in an air-conditioned hotel - pure luxury after DaNang. But, after only a month, all the AC-47 troops were ordered back to DaNang for reassignment. I flew my last mission on November 29, 1969 and was expecting a 90-day rollback of my DEROS and a reassignment back to the States. Everyone got the rollback except GUNNERS. With only 90 days left on my tour, I was reassigned to AC-119G Shadow Gunships, 17th Special Operations Squadron.

After a quick checkout at Phan Rang AB, my fellow gunner, Jack Doyle, was sent to Tan Son Nhut AB and I was reassigned to Tuy Hoa AB. At Tuy Hoa, I was surprised to discover that the Flight Commander was my former Flight Commander from the AC-47 unit at Binh Tuy. While at Binh Tuy, he had expressed concern about being assigned to the AC-47 gunships because he was a highly experienced C-119 pilot. Well, he got his wish; he was back in the 119, except it was the attack version.

My first AC-119G combat mission was on Christmas night, 25 December 1969. Flying on the AC-119s was a real experience, to say the least. I was always amazed at how the airplane could take-off and land without the tail boom



striking the runway. Not that it didn't, I just couldn't hear or feel it with all the rattling and vibration. I flew my last Shadow combat mission on 3 February 1970, recording 4.1 hours and 18,000 rounds of ammo. My Air Force flying career was cut short when I developed kidney stones and was no longer eligible to fly. I left Vietnam on 24 March 1970, and was discharged upon returning to the States.

I had the honor of flying as a gunner on both the AC-47D "Spooky" and the AC-119G "Shadow". On the AC-47, I flew out of four different air bases and in both the 3rd and 4th Special Operations Squadrons. I flew over 70 missions, more than 270 combat hours, dropping several hundred flares and expending over 867,000 rounds of 7.62mm ammunition on enemy targets. On the Shadow, I flew over 30 missions, more than 120 hours of combat and several hundred flares and expended over 170,000 rounds of 7.62mm ammunition. And, I got promoted to Tech Sergeant in minimum time. I loved flying as an aerial gunner and appreciated becoming a permanent flight crewmember and being classified as gunner for either fixed wing or helicopter. Awards and decorations received during my memorable time in the Air Force included the Combat Aircrew Wings, Missileman Badge, Vietnam Service Medal with 1 Silver Service Star, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry

Cross W/Palm, Presidential Unit Citation, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award w/"V" Device and 2 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters, Air Medal with 4 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters and Air Force Good Conduct Medal.

After being discharged, I attended Northeastern University, Boston, for Aviation Technology, while earning my private pilot's license. In 1973, I had surgery for my kidney stones and made a complete recovery. After some temporary jobs, I joined the Boston Police Department where I was promoted to Detective in 1985. I spent six years as a Boston Police Ballistics Expert, attended the FBI Academy at Quantico, Virginia for Bombing Crime Scene Investigation, and the ATF Academy at Glynco, Georgia, for Advanced Explosives Investigative Techniques. I received several citations and awards and retired on August 1, 1995.

Since retiring from the Police Department, I have devoted my time to Disabled Sports Programs, serving as a member of the Board of Directors for the New England Wheelchair Athletic Association (NEWAA), the American Amputee Hockey Association (AAHA), the New England Bruins Sled Hockey and the Boston Blades Sled Hockey. I reside in Canton, Massachusetts with my wife, Kathleen O'Connor.



Bobby Dean McLeod, Maint.

18th SOS, DaNang, 1972

I was born at Snyder, Texas in 1933 and graduated from Lockney High School in Lockney, Texas in 1951. I entered the USAF at Amarillo, Texas on 5 April 1952. The reason I joined the Air Force was to serve my country and avoid the Draft.

When not maintaining AC-119K Stinger gunships at DaNang AB, I ran a snack bar in a maintenance hangar in conjunction

with the U.S. Army. I remember watching our gunships in action at night from the roof of my barracks. It was quite a sight. I'll never forget running for cover during rocket attacks.

I attended Jefferson Davis Junior College in Mississippi from 1979 to 1980. I retired from the United States Air Force on 1 August 1980.



Ray Edward Meckstroth, IO

71st & 17th SOS, Nha Trang, Phan Rang, 1969

I was born in my home town, New Bremen, Ohio on April 5, 1941 and graduated from New Bremen High School in May 1958. I entered the USAF on 13 August 1958 at Columbus, Ohio because I wanted to make the Air Force a career, taking after a cousin, a career aircraft mechanic, who I always looked up to. I retired from the Air Force in 1981 at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska at the rank of Senior Master Sergeant.

I was first assigned to the 71st SOS, then the 17th SOS at Nha Trang, then Phan Rang as an Illuminator Operator Instructor, and then as IO Stan-Eval. All Shadow gunship missions were exciting but some were more rewarding than others, especially the ones in which we were able to help long range patrols from being overrun. When you know there are only 5 or 6 guys down there and they have to whisper when they transmit over the radio for your support

and you hear the next day that they all survived because of your firing around them; now, that makes you feel good.

On one mission we were firing around a platoon of Army guys who were in a night defense position. We required them to turn on strobe lights at each end of their position to verify they were in a straight line. Their leader wanted our fire brought closer, so we had them accept responsibility and to again confirm their formation. We fired where they requested and hit some friendlies. When they yelled for us to stop firing, they found out that they were actually in an arc formation rather than a straight line. The next morning

our aircraft commander and the navigators were called in to TOC and confronted by an Army Colonel, and he was hot! But when he was told that we had it on tape, he only had to hear a little and he said we were cleared. It still made us feel bad but when the guys on the ground say to shoot, what can you do?

The thing I remember about my time in AC-119 gunships is the great crewmembers that I flew with and the downright good and experienced people of the reserve unit. It was a long year, but a most rewarding year of combat duty.



Lawrence John Mersek, Gunner

18th SOS, DaNang, 1969-70, 1971-72

I was born in LaSalle, IL in April 1949. In July 1967, shortly after graduating from high school in Manteca, CA I joined the Air Force as an opportunity for a career in electronics along with working and perhaps even flying on planes. During basic training I was disappointed to learn my class was being directed to weapons mechanic technical training school.

Upon completing technical school I was assigned to the 305th BW, Bunker Hill AFB, IN loading nuclear weapons on B-58 aircraft. Less than a year later I had orders for a B-52 squadron in Utapao, Thailand. However, I learned there was a need for Airborne Weapons Mechanics in the AC-119 gunship program and promptly volunteered. Ten months after arriving at Bunker Hill AFB, I was training as a “gunner” with the newly created 18th Special Operations Squadron. My unit, C Flight, was the last to deploy to the new headquarters at Phan Rang AB, RVN. I arrived at Cam Rahn Bay AB by C-141 just in time to experience my first rocket attack.

After a couple of months at Phan Rang, I was permanently assigned to DaNang AB and truck hunting in the Steel Tiger region of southern Laos. I was assigned to Captain Dave Kuhn’s crew. Life at DaNang was harsh for all of us. That made our five-week TDY to Tan Son Nhut (Saigon) and our occasional landings at Thailand bases almost like R & R.

In December 1970, I completed my tour and was off to Hurlburt Field, FL to fly with the 20th SOS helicopter gunship squadron. However, the squadron was overmanned and as a new gunner I was assigned to a non-flying position. I volunteered for the AC-130 Spectre program, extending a 4-year commitment by an additional 7-months, but I was

assigned back to Stingers. By May 1971 I was back in jungle survival school and on my way to DaNang AB.

DaNang living conditions and the truck-hunting missions had not changed, although the AAA became more intense. My role had changed; with a year of combat experience as a former Stinger, I was promptly upgraded to instructor gunner. After 5 months I had the opportunity to transfer to NKP Thailand. I did not hesitate to leave rocket-city behind. The flying missions at NKP were much the same although now directed to the PDJ and Barrel Roll regions of Laos. Living conditions were much improved over DaNang; NKP was a nice place to complete a second SEA tour.

In my 560.6 combat hours and 193 missions, the most rewarding missions were troops-in-contact (TIC). The most unforgettable was an Army Ranger unit that was about to be overrun. Stinger crews covered them through the night; our crew laid down 7.62mm nearly on top of the Rangers and 20mm within meters. The reward came days later when the Rangers visited our unit expressing their gratitude.

Another memorable incident resulted from the flip of a



Larry Mersek & 6RV-home @ Calaveras Airport 2006

coin. On June 6, 1970, our crew was called upon to provide a replacement for a gunner from another crew. Pete Saman-zski (Sam) and I flipped a coin; I won the toss for the night off. After takeoff the aircraft developed a runaway propeller. Sam and the crewmembers bailed out over China Beach. Lucky me!

I had planned to make a career of the Air Force requesting to cross-train into the loadmaster career field. However, the Air Force would not approve my transfer because weapons mechanic was a critical field. I left the Air Force and continued my passion to fly as a private pilot. I enlisted in the Air Force Reserve, 708 MAS, at Travis AFB where I became a C-141 loadmaster, retraining later on the C-5A in the 312 MAS, and ultimately becoming an instructor. I eventually

left the Reserve to concentrate on my civil service position as a machinist/work leader at Mare Island Naval Shipyard and college classes, earning degrees in industrial management and industrial safety.

In 1994, I transferred to the Trident Nuclear Submarine Base, Bangor, WA, working as a numerical control programmer and in April 2004, retired after 35 years of service with the DOD and the Air Force. Since moving back to California, I'm enjoying retired life, living on a small ranch in the Sierra Mountains, operating my custom art/picture framing business, and indulging my flying passion in my Van's RV-6 aircraft. The RV-6 is fast, capable of mild aerobatics, and rates a "10" on the fun-factor scale!



John Charles Michels, Maint.

71st SOS, Nha Trang, 1968-69



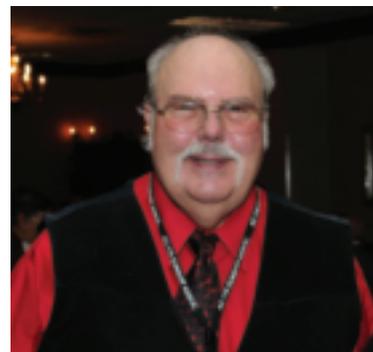
Melrose, Minnesota was my birthplace in Jan. 1944, but I consider Sauk Centre, Minnesota my home town as I pretty much grew up there. When I was 17, I joined the Navy and they stationed me in San Diego, California

after my boot camp in Great Lakes, Ill. I graduated from San Diego High School in 1964. I did my tour of duty in the Navy and returned to Minnesota. I went to the University of Minnesota and graduated in 1980 while I was employed there. I was separated from the USAF reserve at Minneapolis, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1984.

I joined the Air Force in August 1967 at Columbus, Indiana for the Air Reserve Technician Position (ART). At Bakalar Air Force Base as an aircraft mechanic for the 930th Tactical Airlift Group, we were called to active duty. I changed to the 71st SOS when we were activated, trained and refitted our aircraft, the C-119, to gunships in Lockbourne Air Force Base in Columbus, Ohio. Then we were sent to Nha Trang Air Base, Vietnam in 1968 -69.

One very exciting event that occurred on the Nha Trang flightline still sticks in my mind to this day. I was on the night shift and we were going out to service an aircraft in the line truck. Jack Studie was driving. All of a sudden the blacktop was exploding in front of us. Then came a big boom and there, a few feet further ahead, another explosion

erupted. We bailed out of the truck and ran to the revetment. There were some aircraft out, Spooky gunships I think, and they laid down fire on the enemy which took care of the mortar attack. The attack didn't cause any more damage other than a few holes in the roadway, but it sure scared the heck out of us flight line guys. Jack had crawled under one of the revetment structures and had a hard time getting back out.



Another time Steve Mikels and I were out on the flight line collecting live rounds out of the gunships. We were carrying the ammo can between us and it was about half full. Someone on the flight line hollered, "Incoming mortar!" We started running for a bunker carrying the can between us as we went. We looked at each other and said, "Why are we carrying this stupid can of live ammunition?" We dropped it and headed for the bunker. Come to find out, it wasn't our base but another one being fired on.

I'll always remember my service time at Nha Trang and the very close knit group of people that were more like family. Everyone was very dependable, a great group of men.



Larry D. Middleton, Weapons Maint.

71st & 17th SOS, Phan Rang, 1969



Renton, Washington was my birthplace in 1948. After graduating from Renton High School in 1966, I eventually received a draft board notice to report for my physical. Thereafter, I decided to join the Navy or the Air Force. The Navy recruiter irritated me so much with his negative attitude and statements about the U.S. Air Force that I knew the USAF was for me. I enlisted on 14 February 1967 at Seattle, Washington.

From January thru October 1969,

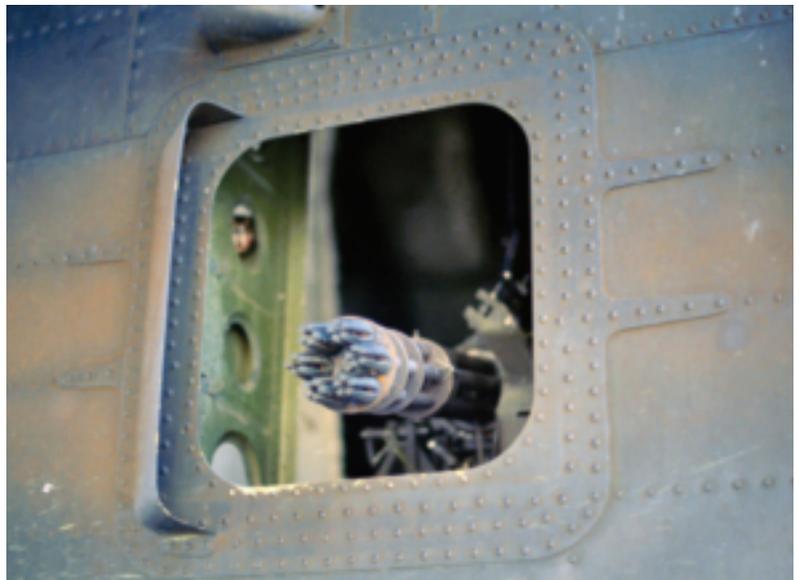
I was assigned to support the 71st and the 17th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang Air Base, RVN as a weapons specialist. One night in the spring or summer of 1969 at Phan Rang, we started receiving heavy rocket and mortar fire. This was not uncommon, except in this instance, the base siren blew in a series of blasts that indicated that we were under direct attack and to get our weapons. We knew that things were a lot more serious than usual. Our primary mission was to scramble our planes. As Airman Phillips Wheatley and I ran onto the flight line, a visibly scared young Air Policeman lowered his gun at us and yelled, "HALT, WHO GOES THERE?" After yelling back a few obscenities at him and reassuring him that we were not VC, he let us pass. We got our planes airborne as a rocket flew overhead and landed directly in the cockpit of an F-100 in an adjoining revetment. It was amazing and reassuring to see our planes firing and dropping flares while working the base perimeter. They quickly silenced the night.

I'll always remember the teamwork that was so automatic. Everybody knew how important our aircraft were and it was up to us to keep each plane working to its fullest potential. It didn't matter if you were the aircraft crew chief, electrician, or an engine or weapons specialist. Whatever your duty, you knew that with our planes in the air, lives were being saved on the ground. Even though I was not on a flight crew, part of me was on each mission when I loaded ammo, flares, or repaired and maintained the guns.

The memories of people and events have become lifelong, free time playing cards, music, and having a few beers while always thinking of our family back home; watching as the flares and tracers from our planes fired around the perimeter as our base was under attack by rockets and mortars. Watching the absolutely "crazy" Aussies playing their drinking games, one of which they called "faggot race;" the vision of these guys lining up and then racing with a flaming, rolled up piece of newspaper sticking out their rears---all to win a beer!

I remember the few times I got to go off base at Phan Rang, one time with the above mentioned tough, crazy Aussies. As we walked down a muddy road entering a nearby village, we noticed a small group of begging, muddy, naked kids about 4 to 5 years old. I will always remember the one, out of place, mixed race little blonde girl with her hands out. The sight immediately brought tears to the eyes of one of these "tough" Aussies as he hugged her and handed her some money. It just brought things into perspective how the effects of war has no boundaries.

I separated from the USAF on 15 December 1970 at Travis AFB, California. It was a privilege and honor to serve our great nation in the U.S. Air Force. My wife, Bonnie, and I currently live in Lincoln, Washington.



Minigun



John Earl Milam Jr., Gunner

18th SOS, Udorn, 1970-70

I was born in 1933 at Montcoal, West Virginia. My hometown was Arnett, WV. I attended Marsh Fork High but left school my junior year. I completed my GED in 1960. I graduated from Gulf Coast Community College in December 1977 and from the University of Northwest Florida in 1978. As a child during WWII, my heroes were my uncles and cousins who were in the military. As I grew, read, and learned, I realized that I was a citizen of the most wonderful country on earth. I knew that I wanted it kept that way and wanted to help. I loved airplanes, so when Korea came along, I enlisted in the USAF at Beckley, West Virginia on 10 May 1952.

When I enlisted I wanted to fly. I was turned down because of color blindness. The USAF assignment people then, in all their wisdom, trained me as a Weapons Mechanic, a field that required normal color vision. I worked in the field 18 years and served in Stan Eval at many different Air Force bases. In Korea I maintained and loaded my aircraft with many different weapons, but somehow felt that something was missing. When Vietnam and gunships came around I saw my chance to fly and fly as a gunner. This perhaps sounds like an enlistment poster, but I felt that this was something I had to do for my country. So, at age 37, I volunteered again and it satisfied my soul.

I was an AC-119K Stinger aerial gunner with the 18th SOS and in early May 1970 of my tour, I was appointed SEFE Gunner and served in that capacity until my DEROS of 20 December 1970.

In late January 1970, the Plain of Jars in Laos was a very hot spot. I was picked as a Gunner to help set up an operating location at Udorn, Thailand. On one of my first missions to the Plain of Jars, I was flying with Major Hoover. We were the first sortie of the night, supporting a TIC. We Winchestered, RTB'd and then pulled duty as the alert crew. That TIC raged all night; we scrambled three times that night in support of the TIC, Winchestering each time. We did some good work that night, even chased off two enemy tanks. Our ground controller was called "Red Arrow" and he loved Stinger that night.

My most enjoyable missions were TICs. We would go in with our ground controller whispering on the radio and leave with him loudly yelling about how great a job we had done. To know that we had possibly saved guys' lives was almost as good as sex.

Flying once from DaNang, we caught 10 trucks in a deep valley. We killed the lead truck and rear truck and worked out. It was almost like training; there was no visible return fire. The known cargo in the trucks was ordnance and fuel so we had a bird's eye view of what looked like 4th of July fireworks. We left to find other targets and at bingo fuel, our egress took us over the first target. A forest fire was burning up both sides of the valley with such intensity that the rising heat caused such air turbulence that we had a rough ride for a few moments. Being a wood worker and knowing that millions of board feet of teak and mahogany were burning caused a few mixed emotions.

One mission flying from Thailand, we were asked to cap a downed F-105 very near the North Vietnam border until Sandy and the Jolly Green could get there. Our missile warning light kept blinking, causing much puckering, but it turned out to be a malfunction. We later learned that this F-105 was part of the Son Tay Raid.

The daylight missions in Cambodia were exciting since we could see our targets. I remember shooting up a big boat and not really hurting them badly because our 20mm HEI did not penetrate the teak wood decks. When we received our rush-order delivery of 20mm API from the states, the outcome changed completely. When we shot the big boats then, we could see fresh mud coming up from beneath them. We left the boats dead then.

I saw and did so many unusual things during my gunship tour that I cannot pick out one thing as most remembered. During daylight flights, I saw beautiful sights, waterfalls in the mountains, rubber plantations so perfectly designed. I will always remember the people I met and served with in the air and on the ground. They were, and remain, very special in my life even though I have forgotten many names. We deeply cared about each other and relied on each other. Sometimes in life-threatening predicaments, we form bonds that will never be broken. I'm glad I went, but never want to go back.



Major General Hugo Peterson officiated my Air Force retirement ceremonies at Tyndall AFB, Florida on 1 August 1973.



James Edward Moore, FE

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, 1971-72

Born in 1936 at Glasgow, Pennsylvania, I grew up and attended public school in Portage, PA. I graduated from Portage Joint High School in May 1954. I enlisted in the United States Air Force in Pittsburg, PA on June 8, 1954. The reason I joined was the opportunity for adventure. As a child who grew up during WWII, I was instilled with a love of my country so I had a strong sense of patriotism.



I reported to Sampson AFB, NY for Basic Training. Then I was sent to Tech School at Sheppard AFB, TX for B-36 Heavy Bomber training.

I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron as a Flight Engineer (FE) at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base in Thailand from January to September 1971

and at DaNang Air Base in South Vietnam from September 1971 to January 1972.

I had two missions as a member of the 18th SOS that I'll never forget. The first and most demanding for me was on the night of March 5, 1971 when our Stinger gunship experienced failure of the #2 recip engine. The aircraft would not maintain altitude on the remaining three engines. All loose equipment was jettisoned and after crossing the Mekong River, all crewmembers except the pilot, copilot and me (the FE) bailed out. Upon landing, NOS Major Warner sustained a spine injury and IO SSgt Johnson broke his right pelvic bone. The pilot, copilot and flight engineer successfully landed the aircraft at NKP. Read the AC-119 gunship war story, "Bailout! Bailout! Bailout!" to learn more about the Stinger (tail #879) mission and the subsequent controlled bailout near NKP.

The second and perhaps the most rewarding mission was flown in late June or early July of 1971. Captain John Morgan was the Aircraft Commander of our Crew 6. We had completed our assigned mission (The Dawn Patrol Frag), Bingo'd, and were heading back to NKP when we heard a call from the Airborne Command Post that a Lima Site near our flight path was about to be overrun by a large enemy force, estimated to be in at least Battalion strength. Captain Morgan asked if we had enough fuel for one or two passes at the target. After my experience of March 5, I just

happened to have a few pounds of "reserve" fuel and advised the Aircraft Commander of that fact. All six guns were put online and two passes were made at the target. The Lima Site did not get overrun. I'm not sure of the Lima Site's radio call sign; it was either "Rose Bud" or "Poppy." I do know that very evening Captain Morgan had dinner with General Vang Pao, Commander of the Hmong Forces in Laos. Shortly thereafter, Captain Morgan became the Detachment Tactics Officer! We must have done something right!

The thing that I will always remember about my time flying AC-119 gunships is the Esprit de Corps and sense of common purpose and brotherhood among the crew. I arrived at NKP without a crew and was made to feel a vital part of a tight knit group. I particularly enjoyed my time with Crew #6, under the command of Captain John Morgan and Copilot Pat McGillis, later upgraded to Aircraft Commander.

Captain McGillis was AC on Dec. 24-25, 1971, the night I flew my last combat mission out of DaNang. The Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal with 11 OLCs are among the decorations I earned during my tour.

I graduated from Embry Riddle Aeronautical University with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1980 and a Masters degree in Aviation Management/Aeronautical Science in 1982.

I proudly retired from the USAF at the rank of Master Sergeant on 1 July 1982 at Pope AFB, NC. After retiring, I worked for Lockheed Support Systems as a Field Team Leader at Ft. Bragg, NC from 1984 to 1986 and then as Supervisor Over and Above Contracts Administration at Lockheed Aero Mod located in Greenville, SC from 1986 to 1991. From 1996-2004, I worked as a Day Care Licensing Inspector for South Carolina DSS until I retired in 2004.



Currently, I am the President of Shannon Lake, Inc., Greenville, SC and a volunteer for Meals on Wheels. My wonderful wife of 45 years, Catherine, and I currently live in Simpsonville, South Carolina. We have lots of fun with our 10 grandchildren here on the lake.



Harold Morgan, Life Support Sp.

71st SOS, Nha Trang, 1968-69



Hazard, Kentucky was my birthplace in 1932. I attended Hazard High School and enlisted in the United States Air Force at Ashland, KY in May of 1952. Since I already had four brothers serving in the U.S. Army, I thought it would be better for me to join the Air Force.

In April 1968, I was recalled to active duty at Bakalar AFB, Columbus, Indiana and transferred to Lockbourne AFB, Ohio for training and then to Nha Trang Air Base, Vietnam

where I served with the 71st Special Operations Squadron as a life support specialist. After 38 years of active and inactive service, I retired from the Air Force at Grissom AFB, Indiana in May 1992 as a Senior Master Sergeant.

I'll always remember the time that I caught a Shadow flight from Nha Trang to our Forward Operating Location (FOL) at Phan Rang Air Base to work on flight crew helmets by adding more padding to help cut down on hearing loss. After taking off from Nha Trang, we were flying over the South China Sea (feet wet) on the way to Phan Rang and I was leaning over the flare launcher, taking pictures of the coastline. All of a sudden, the Illuminator Operator (IO) tapped me on the shoulder and told me that we had an engine problem. I looked out the left side of the aircraft at the engine. Oil was streaming out the engine really bad. I climbed the ladder to the flight deck, got in the jump seat,

and put on the intercom head phones. I could hear the pilot and co-pilot trying to decide whether to continue on to Phan Rang or return to base at Nha Trang. They decided to turn back and land at Nha Trang, where we transferred to another Shadow aircraft and proceeded to takeoff and fly to Phan Rang without any problems.

At Phan Rang that evening around 2200 hours, the sirens sounded and we began taking incoming mortar rounds. The next morning, I went down to Shadow Operations and learned the building had taken a hit at the side of the wood building. Upon completion of modifying flight helmets, the flight back to Nha Trang was uneventful.



The thing that I remember most about serving in the 71st SOS was that we went on active duty as a unit, trained as a unit, deployed to Vietnam as a unit, and returned stateside as a unit. We worked well with active duty personnel assigned to the squadron. To be selected for the AC-119 Gunship program and then to take it into combat was something to be proud of. Thereafter as Reservists, we continued to work well together.

My wife, Jeanette, and I live in Versailles, Kentucky. I really enjoy the AC-119 reunions held each year, visiting with old friends and making new ones. I'm just proud to be a SHADOW!



Mal Morrison, Navigator

18th SOS, DaNang, 1970-71

I entered the Air Force in 1960 and completed a BS at North Carolina State in 1965, and an MBA at Indiana University in 1969. I served with the 18th Special Operations Squadron from March 1970 through March 1971. After in-country orientation, I relocated to FOL-A at DaNang AB where I became an Instructor Navigator (FLIR, NOS, Navigator) with the additional duty of Maintenance Officer, responsible for solving bore-sighting problems with the 20mm guns.

My next SEA tour was during Linebacker II. I was the radar-navigator on a B-52D making bombing runs on Hanoi and Haiphong. We flew during the second night of the raids on Hanoi and nearly every other night after that. Talk about pucker factor! In the first three days, nine B-52s were shot down. We called ourselves "Kissinger's Peace Corps" and our motto was "Fly us 'til we sweat". On Christmas Eve, we autographed a few of the 108 bombs we delivered to Hanoi as Christmas presents. My

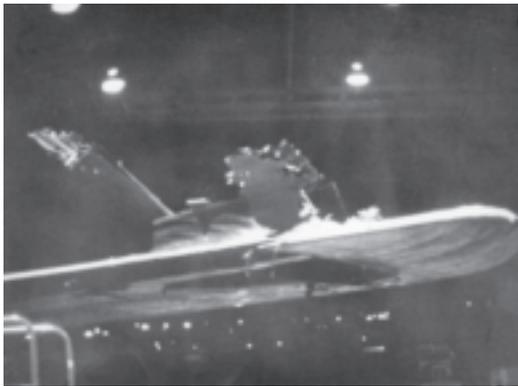
last assignment was with the Defense Nuclear Agency, Alexandria, VA. I retired from the Air Force in 1991 as a Colonel.

Lucky Hit

When truck hunting, we typically flew no higher than 6,000 to 7,000 feet AGL; flying much higher caused the 20mm rounds to begin tumbling. Even at those altitudes there was barely enough time to evade 23mm & 37mm AAA. The Soviet-made 23mm traveled at supersonic velocity. (Rounds had a muzzle velocity of 970 meters per second; the speed of sound at the surface is in the neighborhood of 343 m/s, depending on temperature, air density, etc.). I credit our survival in that environment directly to the outstanding coordination between our AAA scanners, hanging out the back of the plane in the slipstream, and to the superb airmanship of our pilots who trusted the scanners' calls and maneuvered among the tracers.

Our closest encounter with AAA was the night we were caught in the crossfire of three 23mm gun emplacements. The moon was nearly full - a "gunner's moon" - that silhouetted our aircraft. Moreover, the AAA sites were manned by what we called "nine-level" gunners because of their accuracy and persistence. They really gave us the business. A 23mm round creates a miniature shock wave that causes a crackling or popping sound that can be heard if the shell passes close to the aircraft. That night we managed

to escape without damage, but we heard plenty of popping and crackling. Ironically, the one night we did take a hit we were flying



above an overcast. We were RTB from an unproductive mission and just short of crossing the fence when a 23mm round zipped through the clouds and struck the left wing. That AAA operator must have fired at the sound of our aircraft and just got lucky. Of course, we frequently received machine gun fire during our many TICs in A Shau Valley where we flew at the lower altitude necessary for the effective use of our 7.62mm mini "Gatling" guns. We sometimes took hits on those missions that we only learned about the following day when the crew chief reported bullet holes in the aircraft.

Elephants

One of the most humorous mission situations happened one night while I was flying as the FLIR operator and had located 6 to 8 "hot spots" moving about on the trail. The congestion indicated the target was a road repair team or a trans-shipment point. As our 20mm HEI rounds began exploding in and around them, I expected to see the targets take off racing down the trail. Instead, they appeared to momentarily vacillate under fire as though not knowing which way to go. Then they suddenly burst out into the jungle in all directions. It may have been a construction crew, but if it were, they were using elephants to help them, because they were moving in directions that trucks couldn't take, and moving too quickly to be bulldozers. I could just envision a work crew on the backs of those elephants when the HEI started exploding. They must have been all [expletive deleted] and elbows getting out of there. In the interest of a "thorough BDA report", we called in four elephants damaged.

DaNang

DaNang was a great operational location, near the in-country R&R center at China Beach. As night flyers, we got more beach time than most. Our chow hall food was pretty bland, so we often caught the base bus to the Marine chow hall on the opposite side of the base. In addition to great food, with the right connections, you could trade bottles of booze for freeze-dried shrimp or frozen steak. After a few round-trips to the chow hall, we noticed that an old black dog was boarding the bus at one of the stops and would get off near the Marine chow hall. He went back and forth on his own. It was unbelievable! We nicknamed the dog Felix Knutsen.

DaNang AB, also known as "rocket city", had some really large, smelly sewage ditches (klongs) along the air base roads. One night after a mission we were heading back to our quarters when rockets started exploding near the flight line in the vicinity of our crew bus. We stopped and everybody piled out. We had an FNG with us that night. He "dove" into the klong while the rest of the crew hunkered down on the street around the bus. I don't think we let the poor kid back on the bus!

The things that I will always remember most about my time with AC-119 gunships are the great guys I flew and worked with and the thrill of the hunt.



Thomas L. Morrissey, Gunner

18th SOS, DaNang, 1969-70

I was born in Charlotte, Michigan in 1950. I claim Lansing, Michigan as my hometown. I was number 16 on the draft list in 1968 when I graduated from Everett High School, so I quickly joined the Air Force to avoid the alternative. At weapons tech school I learned about the AC-47 gunship program and decided to investigate. The AC-119K program was open and I volunteered, as did my classmate Mike Nobach.

I was part of the thirdwave of the 18th SOS deployment from Lockbourne AFB to Phan Rang. I left the states December 26, 1969, having said good-bye to my family and spent Christmas day traveling. I was reassigned to FOL-A (DaNang), where I was assigned to Crew 10, led by aircraft commander, Mike Newmeyer. Crew 10 included Larry Juday (CP), Dale Cartee (Nav), Doug Frost (NOS), Mal Morrison (FLIR), Barney Lowe (FE), Ted Nealy (IO), and gunners J. R. Davis, Ken Mohler, and myself.

I completed my tour in December 1970 and reported to a weapons shop at Shaw AFB, South Carolina. I took an early-out in March 1971 to return to school in Michigan. I went to work for Charter Township of Lansing in 1974 and was recently promoted to Director of Utilities providing water and sewer services to over 30,000 people.

My strongest memory of being a gunner is how physically demanding it was even as a fit 20 year old. On our "day off" we loaded 7.62mm and 20mm ammo onto the aircraft for the

next missions. It was often over 100 degrees on the ramp. The ammo cans weighed 60 pounds and had to be lifted and stacked into racks. We learned to sleep on the way to the target area, three of us taking turns laying under the 20mm guns. The big joke was not to wake the one sleeping, but to let the gun wake him when it fired. One of the hardest tasks was loading ammo while on target. We had to do this with no lighting except the small Sanyo flashlight we held in our mouth. (Still have it. It doesn't work, maybe too much spit in it). It was particularly difficult trying to move ammo cans and load weapons when the pilot was kicking the rudder or cranking the bank to 45 degrees, as many did.

When I was not busy with the guns I was positioned on the left side of the aircraft scanning for AAA. I recall one mission when we were caught in a nasty gun trap, guns firing at us from both sides of the aircraft and one up the nose. We thought we bought the farm that night. I will never know why nothing hit us. My closest encounter came when a mini-gun flew up in my face because of a short round. Thank goodness I had my face shield down; I got away with a bunch of cuts on my arms.

Stinger side





John William Morrow, Gunner

17thSOS, Phan Rang, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71

I was born in Hammond, Indiana in 1944. I attended Harrison High School in Chicago, but dropped out and earned my GED at age 17. Then I joined the Air Force on 13 March 1961 in Chicago because I needed a job.

In Vietnam, I served in the 17th Special Operations Squadron as an aerial gunner at Phan Rang in October and November, 1970 and then at Tan Son Nhut 'C' Flight from November 1970 to September 1971.

I'll never forget a Shadow mission over the Tonle Sap (Big Cambodian Lake) in which an OV-10 FAC very nearly hit our gunship. It was unbelievable how close we came to colliding in mid-air. I remember our pilot jerking the aircraft into a hard left bank, standing the gunship on its left wing tip to avoid getting hit. Immediately, we started a rapid loss in altitude and simultaneously we lost all communications aboard the aircraft. There was no intercom. As we're diving toward the lake, I put on my parachute not knowing what else to do. Finally, the pilot gained control and pulled the aircraft out of the dive about one thousand

feet above the lake. At level flight, Flight Engineer Garry Gourley came back to the gun compartment, motioning that things were going to be okay. It was a good thing that Garry showed up; I was ready to bailout.

What caused our communications to fail? When our pilot jerked the aircraft to avoid hitting the OV-10, an ammo link loosened and caught in the inverter box which caused the left generator to fail, thus causing loss of communication power. The whole incident was wild and scary.

I always remember the many Troops-in-Contact missions in Cambodia. The satisfaction of breaking up enemy attacks on friendly troops was well worth the risk.

In April 1980, I earned my Associate Degree from Community College of the Air Force at Lakesheath, England. I retired from the United States Air Force at Holloman AFB, New Mexico on 1 March 1992 as a Chief Master Sergeant. *(See Garry Gourley for crew photo)*



Robert W. Mundle, Pilot

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1970



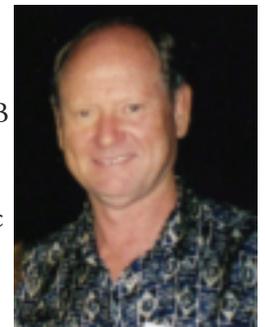
Front Row; Ed McCormick, FE; Larry Fletcher, CP; Jim Craig, Nav;
Back Row: Dale Emmons, IO; Richard Grimsley, AG; Bob Mundle, AC; Rodney Sizemore, NOS; Pat Paterson, AG.

Robert "Bob" William Mundle was born 12 December 1945 in Red Wing, Minnesota to the proud parents of Ernest (1906-1973) and Helen (1919-) Mundle. Bob

graduated from Red Wing Central High School in 1963. Subsequently, he graduated from Rochester Junior College in 1965 and Mankato State College in 1967 with a B.S. in Business Administration.

Bob entered military service in February 1968 at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas and became a commissioned officer in the United States Air Force upon graduation from Officer Training School on 27 June 1968. Second Lieutenant Mundle graduated from Undergraduate Pilot Training at Laredo AFB, Texas on 27 June 1969 and was selected to fly AC-119G gunships.

Completing C-119 training at Clinton County and AC-119 combat training at Lockbourne AFB in Ohio, Bob departed the states for duty in Vietnam. He arrived at Phan Rang Air Base in the Republic of Vietnam on 2 January 1970 and was assigned to C Flight at Tan Son Nhut, Saigon.



After flying 197 combat missions in Vietnam and Cambodia, First Lieutenant Mundle was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses and nine Air Medals. Upon receiving a 30-day “rollback”, Bob departed Vietnam on 2 December 1970.

Upon return stateside, Bob reported for duty at Vance AFB; Enid, Oklahoma as a Flight Instructor in T-37 aircraft from 1971 to 1979. While stationed in Oklahoma, he attended night school and received an MBA with honors from Oklahoma City University. He then was assigned to fly C-5s based at Travis AFB, California from 1979 to 1981.

In May 1981, Bob left active duty and transferred to the United States Air Force Reserves (USAFR) 326th MAS based at Dover AFB, serving as aircraft commander on C-5s until June 1989. He retired from the USAFR in 1989 at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

In February 1981, New York Air employed Bob as a pilot to fly DC-9s from LaGuardia Airport; New York, New York. Upon New York Air merger with Continental Airlines in 1987, Bob became a Continental Airlines pilot. He retired from Continental Airlines in December 2005.

Bob married his pretty and charming wife, Cheryl in October 1992. He has two daughters, Eliz (1971) and Emily (1976) from a previous marriage and a step-son, William (1969) and step-daughter, Tara (1974).

Bob and Cheryl reside in Vonore, Tennessee with a summer cottage in Amery, Wisconsin. Bob loves to play golf when not flying his Beechcraft N35 Bonanza.

War Stories

My first night in-country was spent at Phan Rang Air Base, where I reported for duty with the 17th SOS. There, we were in-processed and assigned to a flight. I remember being in the BOQ (I think I was doing my laundry) and we came under mortar attack. The sirens went off and there I was crouching behind a concrete wall thinking, “This is going to be a long year!” As I remember, that was the one and only mortar attack that I experienced during my tour of duty in Vietnam.

I was assigned to C Flight at Tan Son Nhut shortly thereafter and the only thing scary there were the C-123 spray birds. I remember they would very loudly zoom at extremely low altitudes directly over our barracks compound about mid-morning, not long after I had finally fallen sound

asleep (I flew only night missions at that time in my tour). Initially, I would roll out of bed sure of an impending heart attack, but after living at TSN for a month or so, I slept right through the C-123 bombing raids. I think they were spraying mosquito insecticide, not Agent Orange.

On one daylight mission during late summer 1970, we (Shadow 81 – my radio call sign) were providing direct air support for the Cambodian Army Garrison at the Province Capital City of Kampong Cham located on the Mekong River. All at once, our gunship started picking up .51 Caliber fire. We pinpointed the enemy gun site and attacked. I started “dueling” with the enemy gunner. I remember the concussion of the .51 caliber bullets sounding just like popcorn popping as the bullets flew by my windows. I must admit that my youth and adrenalin had some effect on my actions that day. I couldn’t believe the nerve-- that SOB was actually shooting at me!! We stayed on target and expended 36,000 rounds at the site and he kept shooting at us periodically throughout the mission. Finally, I decided that it wasn’t worth the risk - - no TIC, and I wasn’t making any headway shutting him down so we departed for TSN. We were not hit and apparently that guy went home to tell his story too.

I remember when we (Shadow 81) launched for a night mission and had to shut an engine down very shortly after takeoff at TSN. On normal missions, it was standard routine to depart on runway 25L and recover on 25R. Until that emergency, it never dawned on me that the emergency runway would be 25L because the fire department was located closer to 25L. Anyway, I robotically rattled-off the bold faced items and we got the engine shutdown, prop feathered, and ran all checklists in preparation for a closed pattern emergency landing. It just so happened that our Flight Commander, Lt. Col. Teal was strapped in the jump seat as a mission observer.

My copilot, 1/Lt. Larry Fletcher and my flight engineer, Tech Sergeant Ed “Mac” McCormick quickly completed all checklists as I called for them. Fletcher contacted Saigon Tower and received landing clearance on downwind leg of our closed pattern. While cleared by tower to land on runway 25L, I was concentrating on flying and trimming the gunship for single-engine flight and landing on 25R. With tunnel vision for landing on runway 25R, I eased the aircraft into a wide base turn to lineup on runway 25R and set up what felt like a perfect glide slope for that runway. Upon rolling out for final approach, Fletcher pointed out that tower had cleared us to land on the Left Runway (25L). I immediately adjusted the rollout and lined up on the much closer and fast approaching runway 25L. There would be

no single engine go-around with the fully-loaded gunship. I was bound and determined to get the plane on the ground. The only thing I could say was, "OH, F—K. FULL FLAPS NOW!" At idle power, the plane came down nicely and we landed just fine but my pride was hurt a little. Colonel

Teal was nice enough to not mention that little detail in the debriefing.



John Allen Murdock, III, Gunner

Written by Larry Fletcher & Norm Evans

His nickname was "Buddha." John Murdock was born on 21 July 1943. He departed this earth on 18 March 1997. John completed three tours of duty in Southeast Asia. His first tour of duty was in 1966-67 as an aerial gunner on AC-47 Spooky gunships. He then became a Weapons Release Technician for F-106 aircraft in 1967-68. Buddha's second Vietnam tour followed in 1968-69 as an Instructor Gunner on AC-119G/K gunships and AC-130A/E/H Spectre gunships. He also qualified as an Instructor/Sensor Operator on the AC-130H Spectre gunship. His third tour of duty in Vietnam was 1972-73.

A poet, John A. Murdock, III wrote the following tribute to his fellow Shadows who died in the crash of Shadow 78 at Tan Son Nhut on April 28, 1970:

The Shadow Men

*The shadow men fly by night,
In the land of vietnam.
They have many tales to tell,
Of battles they have won.
They fly on night patrols,
To help the friendlies out.
To give them some security*

*With the vc all about.
These crews of courageous men,
Fight the battles long,
But not always do these crews come home.
Some have made the sacrifice,
For a reason they believed.
The rest of us fight the war,
So they died not in vain.
Where do they go from here?
To heaven i believe.
They went there to be with god,
To wait for you and me.
Walk proud my friends who fly the shadow,
For a crew went down today.
Let us not let them down,
For the sacrifice that they made.
We'll take them with us in memories,
For great guys were they all!
Now let us go out and fight the battles
And bring an end to wars.*

by John A. Murdock, III
SSgt. USAF – 28 May 70

(Posted in Fighting C Flight's Operations Shack)



Billy B. "Rusty" Napier, Nav.

17th SOS, Tuy Hoa, Phu Cat, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



Colonel Billy B. "Rusty" Napier began his Air Force career in 1968 after earning his B.A. degree from the University of the South located at Sewanee, Tennessee and receiving his commission as a Second Lieutenant through the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFROTC) program. After completing navigator training at Mather AFB, California in

1969, he was assigned to the 17th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) at Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam (RVN) as an AC-119G Shadow gunship navigator on 6 March 1970.

Napier was first assigned to A Flight at Tuy Hoa and subsequently to Phu Cat Air Base, RVN. He was transferred midway in his tour of duty to Fighting C Flight at Tan Son Nhut Air Base during the Cambodian Incursion. During his tour of duty in Vietnam, First Lieutenant Napier flew 650 combat hours and 155 sorties with six of those sorties on AC-119K Stinger gunships. He participated in two major offensive operations; relieving the siege at Dak Seang and the invasion of Cambodia.

Upon completion of his tour of duty in Southeast Asia, he returned to Mather AFB as an instructor navigator. In 1974, Captain Napier was assigned to the 701st Military Airlift

Squadron at Charleston AFB, South Carolina, serving as a C-141 navigator, instructor navigator and flight examiner.

In 1979, Napier was assigned to the 16th SOS as a fire control officer on the AC-130H Spectre Gunship. In 1980, he was selected as Executive Officer to the 1st Special Operations Wing (SOW) Commander. He served in that position until 1982 when he assumed the Executive Officer position in the newly created 2nd Air Division. Having distinguished himself as a staff officer, Napier was assigned to United States Air Force Headquarters in Washington, D.C. While working at the Air Staff, he served as Program Element Monitor for all major Special Operations Forces (SOF) acquisitions . . . the MC-130H Combat Talon II, the MH-53 Pave Low Helicopter, and the AC-130U Gunship. He completed his Pentagon tour in the Air Force Secretariat, helping to implement the Air Forces' \$5 billion SOF revitalization effort.

In 1987, Napier returned to the 16th SOS as Operations Officer and became the Squadron Commander of the 16th on 20 June 1989. In December 1989, Colonel Napier led the squadron into combat against Panamanian Defense Forces in the Republic of Panama during "Operation Just Cause." The following year, Commander Napier led his AC-130 Spectre Gunships into combat in Kuwait and Iraq during "Operation Desert Storm."

In 1991, Colonel Napier was reassigned to United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) as Deputy Director of the Special Operations Research, Development and Acquisition Center at MacDill AFB; Tampa, Florida. In 1992, he became Director of Legislative Affairs for USSOCOM with offices in both Washington D.C. and MacDill Air Force Base.

Colonel Billy B. "Rusty" Napier retired from the United States Air Force in October 1994 and assumed a position with the Boeing Company as the SOF Business Development Manager in Tampa, Florida, specializing in the special operations market environment. He is currently assigned to Boeing's SOF Aerospace Support Center in Fort Walton Beach, Florida as the Business Development Manager for marketing the SOF C-130 aircraft and for development / production of SOF's latest aircraft such as the tilt-rotor CV-22 Osprey.

A Master Navigator, Colonel Napier has logged over 6,000 hours in T-29, AC-119, AC-47, C-141, and AC-130 aircraft. His military awards include the Distinguished Flying Cross with two oak leaf clusters, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal with two oak

leaf clusters, Air Medal with seven oak leaf clusters, Vietnam Service Medal, Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with palm, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal. He is also the recipient of the 1990 Mackay Trophy, awarded for the most meritorious flight of the year, for action in Panama.

Rusty is married to the former Shirley Ann Farmer. They have one son, Jonathan and one granddaughter, Ashley.

Shadow War Stories in S.E.A.

Nicknamed "Nap" and "Napalm" by his close Lieutenant buddies at Tan Son Nhut, Rusty Napier flew with just about every crew that served in the 17th SOS during his tour of duty in Vietnam between March 1970 and March 1971. Previously stationed at FOLs, Tuy Hoa and Phu Cat before reporting for duty with Fighting C Flight at Tan Son Nhut had taught him to pack light, make new friends, and not buy any stereo equipment from PACEX.

Rusty, like all Shadow navigators, was duly qualified as a table navigator and as a Night Observation Scope (NOS) operator. He enjoyed duties at both positions but usually took the NOS position because the majority of higher ranking navigators preferred table navigator duty.

While operating the NOS on one night mission, he found a solitary enemy truck traveling with lights out in a free fire zone. He targeted the truck and the aircraft commander opened fire with all four miniguns. In Rusty's night scope, the truck disappeared in clouds of dust while being peppered with thousands of rounds. After the crew patted themselves on the back for the "kill", they called home base about their accomplishment. No sooner than the radio call was completed, the truck started moving down the road and to add insult to the Shadow crew, turned on its headlights. So much for that "kill" and the power of 7.62mm ball ammunition.

Flying an armed reconnaissance mission over the Mekong River in Cambodia one sunny and hot day, Rusty was again at the NOS position. A couple of sampans were spotted on the river north of Kampong Cham, another free fire zone. The aircraft commander, one of Nap's Lieutenant buddies, could clearly see the sampans as he entered a firing circle. Before opening fire, the AC made sure Rusty was ready to record the "kills" on the AC's 8mm movie camera. The AC opened fire and movie-maker, Napalm Napier recorded the action, filming the "kills" out the NOS doorway. Bullets raked the sampans and the surrounding brown river water as the enemy abandoned ship and jumped overboard only to be pelted by more bullets. Kills confirmed on film.



Ronald E. Newberg, Gunner

17th SOS, Phan Rang, 1970

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.

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.



John B. "Jack" Nicol, Navigator

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



Nhut Air Base just outside Saigon. Shortly after my arrival,

I took my AC-119 gunship navigator training at Clinton County AFB in Wilmington, Ohio and Lockbourne AFB in Columbus, Ohio. Our class departed for Vietnam on August 10, 1970. Upon reporting for duty with the 17th Special Operations Squadron, I was assigned to Fighting C Flight at Tan Son

I successfully completed combat navigator orientations and check-rides. I was initially crewed-up with Aircraft Commander, Major Don Fraker. Flying combat missions with "Magnet-Ass" Fraker were to say the least, "Exciting and Productive." He attracted more enemy lead than any other AC at TSN.

To fly and fight became normal and routine for me until a shoulder injury caused me to have shoulder surgery at the US Army 3rd Field Hospital, Saigon in November 1970. After surgery and a few days in the hospital, I was assigned desk jockey duties at C Flight Shadow Op's for twelve (12) hours per day, tracking paperwork, air and ground crews,

and launches of gunships at scheduled times during my three-month recovery period.

Mostly recovered from shoulder surgery/rehabilitation, I was no longer designated DNIF by the Flight Surgeon and I re-qualified for flight duty in early February 1971. I was immediately upgraded to Instructor/Standardization Navigator at Tan Son Nhut. I checked-out newly arrived navigators and gave stand-evaluation checks to qualified navigators. I also certified all of the Vietnamese crew navigators in the VNAF Squadron. VNAV was scheduled to assume control of Shadow gunship operations from Fighting C Flight in late 1971 or early 1972. It turned-out that the VNAF assumed control of Shadow operations at TSN in September 1971.

I flew twice daily, two to three days per week beginning in March 1971. My extra duty was Awards and Decorations Officer. Captain Robert "Bob" Safreno, Navigator, performed typing duties. Between the two of us, we wrote, typed, and submitted volumes about combat heroics of Fighting C Flight's AC-119 Shadow crewmembers..

I happily boarded my freedom bird and left Vietnam with two DFCs, nine Air Medals, a new shoulder and a world of memories. Six months later, I was back over Southeast Asia as a KC-135 navigator in "Young Tiger". Young Tiger was the Southeast Asia deployment of KC-135s. Young Tiger missions were flown out of Thailand, Okinawa and Guam. The Tanker provided refueling support for B-52 Arc Light missions out of Guam and Thailand as well as fighter/bomber support over North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. After 20 years of dedicated service, I retired from the United States Air Force as a Major in February, 1976. My wife, Barbara and I currently live in Arizona at Sun City West, a suburb of Phoenix.

War Stories

On one of my night combat missions, we had a "hung" flare, a flare that stuck in the flare launcher when fired. I was the NOS (Night Observation Scope) operator located in the cargo deck and immediately realized that immediate action was required to rid the gunship of the armed flare or risk an airborne disaster. Therefore, I strapped myself to the inside of the aircraft fuselage and hung outside the gunship in the slip stream to poke a broom handle into the stuck flare tube while the Illuminator Operator (IO) pushed the flare forward from behind. It worked! The "hung" flare dislodged and fell outside the gunship. The whole episode was kind of dumb on my part after reflecting over the years.

During a night armed-reconnaissance mission over the

Mekong River and its tributaries in Cambodia, I spotted a large number of sampans through the NOS. It was a very dark night and the AC, Lt. Fletcher, took my guidance for target acquisition. I targeted one sampan at a time resulting in fifteen (15) sampans destroyed and many others damaged. Winchester, we headed back to Tan Son Nhut listening on the intercom to the table navigator, Major Earl Farney, bitch and gripe about all the mission report paperwork that we had created for him. A good night's work, if I have to say so myself.

A night or two before my DEROS, a party was planned for those going home. Fighting C Flight's Operations Officer, Lt. Col. Bill Gregory, who also had received his DEROS, decided to skip the party on base and celebrate with his Australian buddies in downtown Saigon. After our celebration on base, Don Schofield and I decided to show Bill how much we disapproved of his absence from our party. So, Don and I went to Bill's barracks room and proceeded to remove every stick of furniture and every article of clothing in his room and hid them in an adjacent barracks. Of course it was raining hard and we tracked water in the halls during the moving operation. The Cambodian Commander at Kampong Thom (KPT), Colonel Olm, was visiting TSN for a strategy conference at the time and was billeted in the "hideout" barracks. With a broad smile and without hesitation, Colonel Olm found a mop and mopped up the water in the hallway.

When our feisty boss returned to base that night before curfew and found his room completely empty, he immediately called the Shadow Party Hootch, looking for "innocent" me. Bill was really pissed and accused me of his room cleaning without knowing anything. He was ready to clean my plow. After cooling down somewhat, Bill came to the party hootch and we cheerfully greeted him by pouring beer all over him. Cooled down even more, Bill drank a beer or two with us rowdy rascals. You might say that's one way of showing appreciation to a superior officer.





Mike Maynard Nobach, Gunner

18th SOS, Phan Rang, DaNang, 1969-70



Lansing, Michigan is where I was born in 1949. I grew up in Fowler and graduated from Fowler High School in 1967. I attended Lansing Community College in 1967-68. I joined the Air Force on June 19, 1968 in Detroit to fly, see the world, and to beat the draft.

I served as an aerial gunner on AC-119K Stinger gunships at Phan Rang in October 1969, DaNang in November, Phan Rang in December, and at DaNang from January to October 1970. Lots of bag draggin' at the beginning of my tour!

When we started flying missions into Laos in 1969, it was very dark. When I left in October 1970, the whole country was on fire. Gunships worked the Ho Chi Minh Trail every night, shooting everything from fuel depots to elephants carrying supplies. I remember the F-4s supporting us with napalm drops and the B-52s dropping their payloads. We flew very low while providing close air support for friendly troops. I remember the large surface to air weapons fired at us and exploding outside our windows. I flew 150 combat

missions and each one had its own story.

From Lockbourne AFB, Ohio to Southeast Asia, there were many training flights. Once in Southeast Asia, especially flying out of DaNang, every mission was unique. Flying with the 18th SOS commander's crew was always eventful.

While at DaNang, we used the commander's jeep to drive to South China Beach on a regular basis and made trips to Freedom Hill to visit the marines. I remember the great food and comradeship through the entire program. The people involved in the gunship program always seemed to have an everlasting bond. There were many good times and plenty of hair-raising experiences.

I separated from the Air Force on June 18, 1972 at Grand Forks, North Dakota. I currently live at St. Johns, Michigan.



John Martin "Marty" Noonan, Pilot

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



My name is John Martin Noonan, "Marty". I was born in Long Beach, CA in Los Angeles County on 5 March 1946. I grew up in Downey, California, attending Our Lady of Perpetual Help Elementary, St. Vincent's Seminary, and graduated from Pius X High School in June, 1964.

I graduated from St. Mary's College, Moraga, CA in June 1968 and entered the USAF Officer Training School (OTS) on 8 November 1968 at Lackland AFB, San Antonio, TX. As a new 2nd Lt., I was assigned to Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT) at Reese AFB, in Lubbock, TX in Class 70-05, earning my USAF Wings on 28 February 1970. I chose the AC-119G "Shadow" Gunship as my first choice assignment as a volunteer for South East Asia. I arrived at Clinton County AFB, in Wilmington, OH in April 1970

for transition training on the C-119. Then was assigned to "Gunship" School at Lockbourne AFB, in Columbus, OH in July 1970.

I was assigned to the 14th SOW's 17th SOS at Phan Rang, RVN arriving in country on 10 August 1970. After initial processing I was transferred to the 17th SOS "Fighting C Flight" at Tan Son Nhut AB (TSN), Saigon, RVN. I flew 206 combat missions from 21 August 1970 to 10 August 1971 as a co-pilot, with an Aircraft Commander Check out in July 1971. I logged 1100 combat hours in the AC-119G Shadow Gunship. My crew all were awarded the Distinguish Flying Cross for a mission over the small village of Prey Tutung, Cambodia defending a Cambodian unit from



hostile fire from a large enemy force. We silenced 3 or 4 of the 6, 51 caliber Anti-Aircraft gun positions firing at us and successfully held the enemy at bay from the friendly forces with our accurate 7.62 minigun fire and Mark 24 flares. It was a fine example of the precision delivery of ordnance and support that a Shadow Gunship provided to our troops on the ground.

One incident I was famous for was delaying my R&R until the end of my tour in 1971. I traveled with Captain Tim Thompson to Australia to go skiing during the winter (July) in the Snowy Mountains between Sydney and Melbourne Australia. I broke my right leg skiing and returned to the 17th SOS on August 8th on crutches, only two days before I was scheduled to return to the States at the end of my tour. I never flew my "Fini" Flight in combat because of the broken leg.

I was assigned to the 7th MAS at Travis AFB, CA flying the C-141A for the Military Airlift Command. I transferred to the California Air National Guard flying the C-119G in June 1973. I transferred to the USAF Reserves at Travis AFB, CA in September, 1975 back to the C-141A. I separated as a Captain from the USAFR in February, 1979 with over 3200 hours of total flight time.

I met my wife, Sandy, in Aspen, Colorado in November, 1974 and we were married in Moraga, California in November, 1975. We have two children. Ryan Patrick Noonan, a USAF F-16 pilot with the 510th TFS, Aviano AB, Italy. Kelly Lang Noonan lives in California and is a successful model and actress.

I was hired by Continental Airlines in February, 1977 as a pilot and flew the B-727 and the DC-10 as a Second Officer and First Officer, until the Bankruptcy and Pilot Strike of 1983. I flew for Jet America Airlines, out of Long Beach, CA during the ALPA Strike. I returned to Continental in March, 1987 as part of the settlement with ALPA. I checked out as a Captain on the B737 in June, 1988. I spent the next 18 years as Captain on the DC-10, B757, and B777 flying Continental's international routes. My last years I was a Check Captain on the B757 and B777 until my retirement in March, 2006.

Sandy & I spend our time between our home in Long Beach, CA and lake cabin in Amery, WI. We fly our V35B Bonanza all over North America visiting the places I flew over in my USAF and Airline career.



Liegh Robert Norstrum, Maint.

17th SOS, Phan Rang, Phu Cat, 1970-71

I joined the Air Force on July 5, 1956 at Fargo, North Dakota to keep from getting drafted into the U.S. Army. I had already tasted Army life in the North Dakota National Guard for one year, three months, and 26 days. Born at my hometown Grand Forks, North Dakota in 1938, I graduated from Central High School on May 29, 1956.

I reported for duty with the 17th Special Operations Squadron at Phan Rang Air Base, Republic of Vietnam on 13 July 1970. On 2 August 1970, I was sent PCS to Phu Cat and served for a short time as Line Chief and then returned to Phan Rang PCS where I served until my DEROS date of 13 July 1971.

I was sent TDY along with AC-119G gunships and maintenance people to Phu Cat on 24 December 1970 where our Shadow gunships launched to interdict enemy supply convoys headed down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the South Vietnam border. On 24 December 1970, we launched a combat mission from Phu Cat to hunt targets on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. After strafing a target, the aircraft commander turned the aircraft 180 degrees back toward the target to witness what seemed to him like the whole

earth was on fire. I said to the AC, "You must have hit an underground ammo dump." We then flew back to Phan Rang that night and were greeted by Santa Claus with a bottle of whiskey for all to join in a short snort.

After twenty years, one month, and 26 days of military service, I retired an E-6 from the U. S. Air Force at Travis AFB, CA on 1 August 1976. I graduated with a B.S. in Business Administration from Northwood University in Texas on 6 June 1995. My wife Shirley and I live in Abilene, Tx.





Roger Carl Nyberg, FE

71st & 17th SOS, Nha Trang, Tuy Hoa, Phu Cat, 1969-70

I was born in Chicago, IL in 1941 and graduated from Manatee High School in Bradenton, FL in 1960. While in high school, I was a cadet in the Civil Air Patrol. I enjoyed it very much and my first airplane ride was in a Grumman U-16 Albatross. I had no plans for college, so I enlisted in the Air Force in 1960.

During 1960-1964, I served as a Crew Chief on C-124s. I served as a Flight Mechanic on VC-131s from 1964 to 1965, on C-47s from 1965 to 1967, and C-131s from 1967 to 1968. During 1968-69, I made the mistake of separating from the Air Force. I soon got homesick for the Air Force and reenlisted. I went to Homestead AFB to process in and found out I was going to Vietnam. They said I would be flying as a Flight Mechanic/Flight Engineer on C-47s, maybe AC-47s.

I was sent to Nha Trang and, because my AFSC was for a Flight Engineer on recips, they assigned me to the 71st SOS. (AC-47s were being assigned to the South Vietnamese Air Force.) Since I had not attended jungle school, I was sent to Clark AB for jungle survival training. I started basic AC-119G training on local flights with MSgt. Scott and TSgt. Thomas during daytime.

On April 6-7, 1970, we supported Dak Seang in the A Shau valley for night drops with our spot light to light up the drop point. One other night, we were called to defend a Special Forces camp west of DaNang AB that was being overrun. We got over the base and they were taking incoming fire and we could see the NVA troops breaking over the outer fence, so we were cleared to work the area. We had a C-130 flare ship at 10,000 feet dropping flares, and by the time they reached our altitude, they were burned out. Along with enemy gunfire to dodge, we had to watch out for the flares with their nice cable hanging down to crash into one of our props or windshield. Our relief aircraft was delayed due to maintenance and we were close to bingo fuel, so I leaned the fuel mixture more. If we departed the TIC, we knew the camp would be lost. Finally we heard the relief aircraft coming in. We briefed them and just made it back to DaNang.

From 1970-1974, I was assigned to C-130Es at Forbes AFB, Kansas, then Kadena AB, Okinawa on C-130Es, and from 1975 to 1978 to Hurlburt AFB on MC-130E/H. I retired from the Air Force in 1981 at Hurlburt while assigned to the 8th SOS on MC-130s. I live in Bradenton, Florida.



Brent C. O'Brien, Pilot

18th SOS, Phan Rang, Phu Cat, Udorn, 1969-70

I was born in Melrose, Massachusetts on February 23, 1943. I attended grade school and junior high school at Shoemaker Elementary and Pickering Jr. High in Lynn, Massachusetts and then attended E.C. Glass High School in Lynchburg, Virginia before graduating from Conestoga High School in Berwyn, Pennsylvania. I majored in sociology at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, PA and graduated with a BA degree in 1964. During my senior year, I was commander of the Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps through which I was commissioned upon graduation. I completed Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT) at Laredo AFB, Texas in October 1965 and, after Winter Survival Training, reported for training in the C-124. I flew all over Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East at 10,000 feet with an air speed of 180 knots (Okay, that was with a tail wind.)

In 1967, I trained as a C-141A pilot at McGuire AFB,

New Jersey. What a fun aircraft to fly for a large machine! We provided Med-Evac from Germany to Jordan, staging to Nam-North Pacific and Mid-Pacific, low level drops at Lakehurst, New Jersey and All Weather Landing System work.

After all the fun, Vietnam duty called in 1969 and I reported for C-119 and AC-119K gunship training. My gunship transition memories include: gunnery practice missions to Indiana during winter – great training environment for SEA; delay after delay in deploying to Vietnam; and PACAF Survival Training - HELL00000 Jolly Green!

We arrived at Phan Rang AB, RVN in November 1969, but relocated to Phu Cat AB in January 1970. Then in March we moved again; this time to Udorn AB in Thailand. Memories include: INCOMING!, Monsoon floods, Thai

kick boxing at the ring behind the hotel where we lived for a time in downtown, F-4s flying cap, and “Triple A.... BREAK RIGHT!” and “Triple A ...BREAK LEFT!”

My most memorable combat mission in SEA was the May 8, 1970 mission that resulted in our Stinger crew being awarded the MacKay Trophy. Our gunship was stuck by AAA over northeastern Laos; we lost 14-feet of the right wing, including the aileron. The old bird hung together and the splendid teamwork of the crew bought us safely home. What a fabulous Stinger gunship crew and what a great job done by each crewmember that included: Alan D. Milacek, pilot; Brent C. O’Brien, copilot; Roger E. Clancy, navigator; James A. Russell and Ronald C. Jones, sensor operators; flight engineer Albert A. Nash; illuminator operator Adolpho Lopez, Jr.; aerial gunner Donnell H. Cofer, and

crewmembers Ronald R. Wilson and Kenneth E. Firestone. I returned to the “real world” in September 1970 and separated from the Air Force at Travis AFB, CA. In the fall of 1971, I flew to Washington D.C. for the presentation of the MacKay Trophy. Because I had separated from the service, I was the only one from our Stinger crew dressed in civilian attire. The MacKay Trophy is displayed at the Smithsonian Air/Space Museum in Washington D.C.

During my service in the Air Force, I was awarded, among other decorations, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with six Oak Leaf Clusters. I currently live in Williamsburg, Virginia with my wife, Joan and son Greg and daughter Kendall. I also have a daughter from my previous marriage and two grandchildren that live in Dallas, Texas.



David E. O’Mara, Pilot

17th SOS, Phan Rang, 1969-70



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-119 on 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 first hand 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.



Anthony G. Pakutinski Jr., Gunner

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, Bien Hoa, DaNang, 1972-73



I was born in Northampton, MA, in 1952. For me, high school was from 67-70, and Vietnam was what I watched on television, for years! I decided in my sophomore year that I was going to join the Air Force and fly. In 1971, with one year of college under my belt, I enlisted into the USAF and was

proudly re-born as a Weapons Mechanic (46230). Just after getting to my first duty assignment (Myrtle Beach, S.C.) I volunteered for the Gunship Program. I started AC-119K Ariel Gunner Class at Hurlburt Field, FL in July 72. Lt Col Dick Ring was my class leader. After completion of the stateside schools, I completed Jungle Survival at Clark AB in October 72. Next stop, Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai AB, Thailand. The first words I heard were "What are you doing here"? As it turns out, the majority of my class was re-assigned en-route, because of the progressing peace talks and the inevitable end of the war.

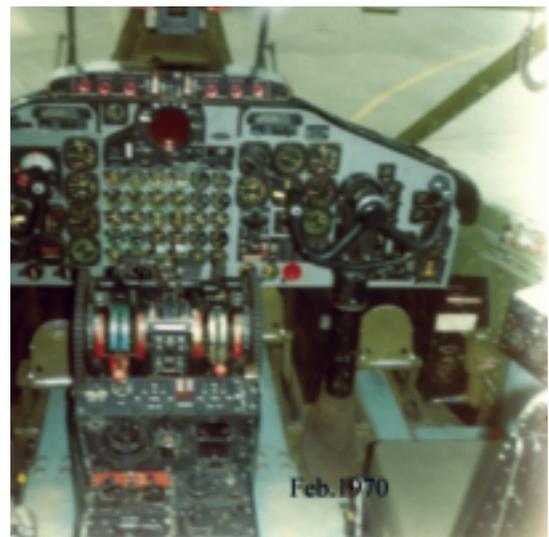
Words can't express what this 20 year old, Airman First Class felt like as he walked through the door at the 18th SOS hootch. I truly felt like the only virgin at the prom! Being new is tough, being new in the company of the distinguished combat veterans of the 18th was inspiring. At this point in time, most of the \$1.19s and personnel were in Bien Hoa. So I languished for a few days before going TDY to Vietnam. I just missed the opportunity to get qualified on the Trail, a few guys who got there earlier, had that experience. I was destined to fly AB defense at Bien Hoa through during Linebacker II. I quickly learned that a broken B-52 on the ramp meant rockets at night, that tomato juice and a PBR at 0815 is not bad, and somebody has to process/preload the ammo for the crews.

On 26 November 1972, I was the 'last in-country qualified gunner', during a 2.5 hour mission. God bless Leroy

Jackson! I was fortunate to experience some of the action, but not at the level of those that came before me. December 72 marked the inactivation of the 18th SOS. These were great times for me. Amazing people and the strongest of friendships were the norm.

In January 73, we PCS'd to DaNang and were re-assigned to the 6498th Base Defense Division, flying SPs, and proud of it! Something called 'Giant Voice'

thankfully gave us a heads up on incoming, which provided just a touch of rockets and mortars stories to tell the grand children about. Cleaning up the left behind sidearms in the 18th dorm was an adventure, funny that none of the weapons I found were issued? I left DaNang in February 73, a little older and somewhat wiser. Flying the Stinger Gunship, and experiencing a little of the \$1.19 legend has been with me for over 35 years, I appreciate every minute and all the memories.



AC-119K Cockpit



Steven Laird Pennington, Maint.

18th SOS, DaNang, 1971-72

After graduating from Edmonds High School in 1967, I was drafted but rejected for service. I went to a contract physician for AFEES in Seattle who marked me as fit for duty. The Air Force recruiter happened to have a cancellation when I was put back in the draft pool and asked if I was interested in enlisting. I had worked for Boeing as a structural mechanic and liked the job so I said, "Sure, I'll enlist." I took a bypass test at Lackland and went from there to the 11th ARS as a 3 level Airframe Repairman.

I served with the 366th Field Maintenance Squadron Structural Repair Shop supporting the 18th Special Operations Squadron at DaNang Air Base, Vietnam from December 1971 to June 1972.

I always enjoyed working on the A-1s and AC-119Ks. The guys always treated us "Gunfighters" well. Lt Col Ruzic gave me two letters of commendation for repairing battle damage to Stingers in April and May of 1972. They appreciated our help.

On 1 July 1997, I retired from the U. S. Air Force as a Chief Master Sergeant at McChord AFB, Washington. I earned my AA degree from Edmonds Community College in 1976 and attended Central Washington University for three years, finishing in 1983. My wife, Jean and I live in Edmonds, Washington.



William O. Petrie, IO

18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom, 1970-71



Bill Petrie was born in Roscrea, Co. Tipperary, Ireland. Chief Petrie is the web master for the AC-119 Gunship Association website.

Bill graduated from Natick High School in Natick, Massachusetts in 1963. He enlisted in the

Air Force immediately after high school, starting out as a reciprocating aircraft mechanic. He served in Air Rescue aircraft maintenance, Combat Crew Training, and drew special (TDY) maintenance assignments with Army Special Forces, AF Special Operations aviation, and Psychological Warfare aviation and maintenance.

After numerous special TDYs into Southeast Asia, he served in the Republic of Vietnam with the 360th Tactical Electrical Warfare Squadron (TEWS) as a crew chief/flight mechanic on EC-47 reconnaissance aircraft in 1967-1968 and again in 1970-1971 with the 18th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) as an Illuminator Operator/Scanner on AC-119K "Stinger" gunships.

Later in his career he served in the Aerospace Audiovisual

Service (AAVS) in key positions including NCOIC of a combat documentation unit, Superintendent of Public Affairs, Chief of Radio for the Air Force Home Town News Center, and Broadcaster and Detachment Chief of Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS) broadcast units.

The Chief's other tours have included various TDYs into Southeast Asia, DaNang AB, Vietnam; Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai AB, Thailand; Seoul & Osan AB, Republic of Korea; Lajes Field, Azores, Portugal; Hurlburt Field, FL; Eglin AFB, FL; Incirlik AB, Republic of Turkey; Malmstrom AFB, MT; Tinker AFB, OK; Lowry AFB, CO; Otis AFB, MA; and, Hollywood/Los Angeles, CA.



Chief Petrie's decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross with two Oak Leaf Clusters, Air Medal with eight Clusters, Meritorious Service Medal, Joint Services Commendation Medal, Air Force Commendation

Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, Air Force Achievement Medal and numerous other awards. Chief Petrie holds USAF enlisted aircrew member and senior parachutist qualifications and is a graduate of the Senior Noncommissioned Officers Academy. The Chief retired from active duty in 1988.

Bill is married to the former Karen Lynn Ellis of Midwest City, Oklahoma. They have two children, Brian and Stephen. Chief Petrie now serves as a public Information Officer for the Oklahoma Department of Libraries in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Stinger Gunship Blasts Eight Tanks

Disappointment and surprised are feelings I had when I read in more than one well known book that a Stinger gunship was ineffective against tanks, even light ones. I'm sure the authors would have welcomed the opportunity to flavor their book with a story about the night Stingers became tank busters.

On the night of February 28, 1971, I was the IO (Illuminator Operator) on an AC-119 Stinger gunship that notched a big kill when it struck an enemy tank convoy near Hill 31 in Laos, destroying all eight Soviet PT- 76 light amphibious tanks in the convoy. We touched off 15 secondary explosions, and three sustained fires.

I have to admit we were not too happy about our mission orders that night. We were truck hunters and didn't relish flying armed escort missions. During a major operation, Operation Lamson 719, we were assigned an armed reconnaissance mission for an ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) convoy moving towards Tchepone in the Republic of Laos. The Hill 31 area was major hot spot and our friendlies were about to enter. Hill 31 had been the scene of extremely heavy fighting for the ARVN.

If memory serves me right the mission started out pretty boring. So boring we decided to break the monotony by leaving our orbit above the convoy and exploring further down the highway. That's when the mission became real interesting.

As we made a few lazy orbits above the route structure our FLIR sensor operator picked up two hot spots moving slowly down the road. They were a few miles ahead of the allied convoy and moving in the same direction. We had no doubt that these were tanks, we just didn't know who they belonged to.

We checked in with the South Vietnamese convoy and as a far as they knew there were no friendlies ahead of them. According to our Navigator/FLIR operator, Maj. Doug Frost, if they were enemy, it looked as if they might be trying to find a better location to ambush the convoy. We had to be sure and we called for a FAC [Forward Air Controller] to identify whether they were friend or foe. The excitement and anticipation was unbearable and we just knew they were North Vietnamese. We wanted to take them out and we wanted to do it now before they turned their fury on the friendly convoy. We also knew that up to this point, no gunship had destroyed any tanks in the war. At least that's what I was told.

It seemed an eternity before the FAC arrived, and all the while we waited, we could hear a nearby AC-130 Spectre crew begging to replace us. Their claims that we didn't have the firepower to tackle tanks, and they did, fell on deaf ears. The AC-130 was held off and the AC-119K Stinger gunship was about to do what others thought it couldn't do, bust tanks.

As we followed them down the road, three more large hot spots rolled out from a tree line and joined them. Before long, three more hot spots were found waiting for them at a T -intersection in the road, making the total eight. Up to this point, they gave no indication they knew we were following them. I remember commenting to the crew on radio that they might pull off the road if they detected us. Tanks have been known to back into a ditch or crater to get better muzzle elevation. They just might be brave, or crazy, enough to take a pot shot at us. The words were barely out of my mouth when they all stopped and one of them pulled off the road into the bushes.

By this time the FAC had arrived and was zipping down the road at antennae top level making sure there were no Allied troops in the area. Our adrenaline soared as he screamed into our headsets, "Take them, take them, they're enemy." We had our long awaited clearance and the North Vietnamese tanks were about to feel our sting.

Setting our sites on the lead tank, our sensor operators acquired our target and the pilot jockeyed our aircraft into the strike position. Our pilot, Major Glass, called for a gun and in a heartbeat a minigun was on line and control given to the pilot who immediately fired a marking burst to see if we were on target. We were, and the gunners added a 20mm Vulcan cannon to the firepower of the minigun. As we continued to fly in our tight target orbit, our gunners were busily replenishing the guns as we hammered the tanks

with a searing mix of AP (armor piercing) and HEI (high explosive incendiaries) rounds and miniball tracers, observing a large secondary explosion on the lead tank. The enemy tank column stopped dead in its tracks.

During the entire strike our aircraft received intense ground fire from numerous enemy small arms and antiaircraft positions, but we continued our strike, rolling in and out of orbit in a deadly game of aerial dodge ball. We then set our sights on the trailing tank trying to box them in and did so with a direct hit. Brrrrrap! and wham! both ends of the column were now in flames. Unfortunately for the enemy they made no effort to scatter, and from that point on, it became a turkey shoot as we poured thousands of rounds of 20 mike-mike into them. One-by-one each tank experienced secondary explosions and all were left burning brightly in the dark Laotian night.

Having survived another night of intense antiaircraft and small arms fire, our mighty Stinger lumbered for home. As

we nervously, and somewhat giddily, celebrated our success and tallied up the rounds of antiaircraft fire we received, the realization set in that this Stinger crew had just prevented the possible annihilation of a South Vietnamese convoy, by methodically destroying an entire column of North Vietnamese tanks.

Crewmen on the mission were:

Maj. Earl R. Glass, pilot/aircraft commander
Maj. Edward J. Kroon, nav/sensor operator
Maj. Boyd E. Phillips, nav/sensor operator
Maj. Douglas A. Frost, nav/sensor operator
1st Lt. Charles T. Robertson Jr., co-pilot
TSgt Herbert S. Simons, flight engineer
SSgt. Raymond Garcia, gunner
SSgt. William O. Petrie, illuminator operator/scanner
Sgt. Thomas E. Nolan, gunner
A/1c Stephan B. McCloskey, gunner



Robert S. Piercy, Gunner

18th SOS, DaNang, 1969-70



I was born in 1934 in Omaha, Nebraska, and lived there until I was 12; then, we moved to Sioux City where I lived, until I entered the U.S. Air Force in Sioux City, Iowa on 28 April 1951.

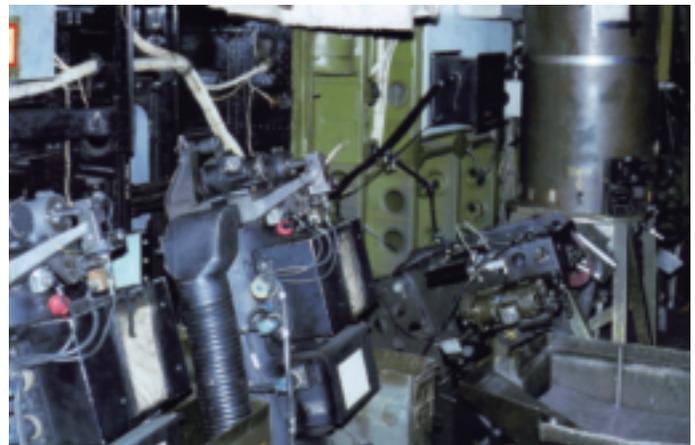
After basic training, I was sent to Lowry AFB to weapons school; from there I went to McChord AFB

Tacoma, WA as a weapons mechanic on F-94A aircraft, in February, 1952. I was assigned to the 319th FIS for shipment to Korea aboard the USS Sitkoh aircraft carrier along with 25 F-94B aircraft, we were stationed at K-13 Suwan, South Korea. In April of that year, I was sent to K-2 Korea where I worked on F-84 Fighter-bombers until I returned to the U S. I was at Eglin AFB from then until I reenlisted in 1955, and went back to McChord AFB. In 1959, I was sent to France at Chateauroux AB as a weapons mechanic for the security police. I left there in November 1959 to England AFB, Louisiana. In June 1960, I married and in August, I was sent to Lowry AFB as a weapons instructor. We left there in February 1963 back to McChord again as a weapons instructor in Field Training. We went from there to Bitburg AB, Germany in May 1965 until May 1968. We were assigned to FTD at Langley AFB, until I

went to AC- 119 Gunship School in July 1969.

I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio in September 1969 after combat crew training. From October 1969 to October 1970, I flew on AC-119K gunships as a gunner with the 18th SOS at DaNang Air Base, RVN. I returned to Lockbourne in December 1970 and served with the 4413th Combat Crew Training Squadron until June 1971.

On 1 July 1971, I retired as a TSgt from the Air Force. I currently live in Pineville, Louisiana.



7.62 mm & 20 mm Guns



William "Bill" Joseph Posey, FE

17th SOS, Phu Cat, 1970-71

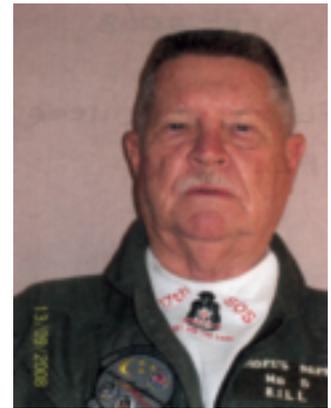


I currently live in Destin, Florida. Philadelphia, PA was my hometown and birthplace in 1938. I graduated from Wissahickon High School in 1955 and immediately joined the Air Force at Philadelphia on 24 July 1955 for a career.

I was a flight engineer on Shadow gunships stationed at Phu Cat Air Base, Republic of

Vietnam. My tour of duty was 1970-71. I feel that every combat mission was a special mission and I was fortunate to fly 140 missions in Southeast Asia. And all 140 missions were exciting.

I'll always remember all my comrades in S.E.A. and everything they did for our country. The Vietnam War Veterans were not recognized for their service for our country and in 2000, the AC-119 Gunship Association was formed and the Shadow and Stinger gunship vets finally got their deserved recognition.



I retired from the United States Air Force at Langley AFB in 1975.



Dean Quayle, Pilot

18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom, Bien Hoa, 1971-72

I began training to become a Stinger Pilot in late December 1970. My journey started at Clinton County AFB, Ohio where I learned about the venerable C-119 from the Air Guard group. The gunship training followed at Lockbourne AFB, Columbus, Ohio. Our class arrived in-country in May of 1971. I remember very little of our first stop – orientation at Phan Rang AB. From Phan Rang, we went to DaNang AB where we started training to become combat pilots. Since it was the monsoon season, the first few months were very slow. However, I distinctly remember seeing AAA for the first time and getting the very uncomfortable feeling about being shot at.

Rocket attacks on DaNang were an occasional event. A significant attack occurred on the 4 July 1971. A nearby barracks was hit and several airmen were killed in the attack. I remember walking to the squadron area the next day and encountering a partially dressed airman who had lost most of his personal stuff in the ensuing fire.

On one of our more memorable nights we lost a recip engine while starting to orbit Khe Sanh. Thank heavens for the jet engines! We ramped them up to full power and began dumping fuel and ammunition. Those actions got us back to DaNang safely where I managed to brake so hard that I started a brake fire on one of the main gear.

Four members of our class stayed together for the duration of the year's assignment: Dick Pollman (sp), Bill Kleinhenz, Al Barraras and myself. We started at DaNang and finished out our one year tour at NKP.

My scariest moment wasn't in combat but with the hijinks we played on each other. When we started looking for follow-on assignments, I took the opportunity to make up a fake one for Bill Kleinhenz. He was a former C-141 driver and was looking to return to MAC. In fact, all of us were former C-141 pilots and we had an intense desire to remain free of the clutches of SAC. I got a form from Base Personnel that was used to notify folks of their next assignment. I made up an assignment for Bill to the SAC Bomb Wing at Minot AFB, North Dakota as a B-52 pilot. After slipping the assignment into his mail box, I stood back as the stuff hit the fan. When he determined that the assignment was bogus and that I had made it up, he was so mad that he wanted to "hurt me bad". Well, I'm glad his anger eventually passed.

Maybe our toughest time came late in the tour. Several of us were sent to Bien Hoa in May 1972 to assist in the fight that was going on at An Loch. This was one of the first times that we flew daytime missions. My crew had one daytime mission over An Loch and I can still remember walking gun

fire down a row of homes with red tile roofs and watching the roofs shatter from the 20 mm bullets. Unfortunately, Terry Courtney got shot down the next day during a daytime flight. Apparently the Viet Cong had brought in a 37-mm antiaircraft gun to defend the area and Terry was in the wrong place at the wrong time. The three-crew members lost in the shoot down were the only members that the

squadron lost in its time in country.

We were again flying over An Loch on the next night and were directed to hold fire while an airdrop was scheduled. While holding overhead, we picked up the inbound C-130. To our horror, we saw it hit the trees, roll over on its back, and crash into the ground in a large fire ball.



Donald S. Radke, IO

17th SOS, TanSon Nhut, 1969

I was Illuminator Operator out of Tan Son Nhut, Saigon, Vietnam, 1969. And approximately New Year's Eve, 1969, I was launched on a different crew as an IO, because we were flying CAP for the Vice-President of the United States which was in country at that time. At that time, I was on a combat mission headed toward Cambodia and about one-half hour out, we heard a loud, popping noise in our right engine. Over our hot mics, we heard the flight engineer mention, "Everything looks OK." The pilot says, "Press on." Couple of minutes later, we heard a pop and bang from the right engine again. We got the response back, "Everything looks OK. Press on." As we pressed on, I had my flashlight and I was looking at number two engine out the side window, when number two engine started to go bad, and the upper inboard PRT (Power Recovery Turbin) disintegrated, and caused a shower of sparks. At the same time, there was sparks coming out of the power section, and I notified the pilot we could possibly have a serious engine fire. He needs to shut down the engine at that time. And, as he shut the engine down, he turned around and headed back to Tan Son Nhut, and at that time, we were at 3500 feet.

Because we'd only been airborne about one-half hour, we continued to lose altitude, and as we continued to head back to our home base, we were forced to go back and forth

on power to maintain altitude. And, at the same time, we were all on hot mics, and as we approached, we kept hearing the pilot and the co-pilot saying, "We're losing altitude." As we continued toward our home base, we heard the last call – "We're losing altitude. We're fixing to stall out. We're at 1500 feet, and we've got 19 miles to go." I and the gunners notified the flight crew, "We're gonna ditch our cargo." Then the navigator notified the base, our home station, that we were throwing our cargo out. The gunners slid all the ammo back to me, I grabbed the ammo cans, opened them and threw the ammo overboard. I notified the pilot, "I have a full load of flares on board – I need to get rid of the flares." And he said, "Jettison the flares." So I went back and I turned the flare launcher on, and as I armed the flare launcher, I watched for the lights to come on, and I fired all 24 flares on board, out of the flare launcher. As I looked outside, I could see all 24 flares lit, on the ground, and burning.

Shortly after that, I heard the response, "We are holding our altitude, and everything looks good." And a short while later, the only thing I heard was the "Ekkk-ekkkk!" of the wheels as we touched on the ground, and we came to a stop. And that was my one experience that I did sweat while I was in Vietnam.



James A. Rash, Navigator

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



I entered the U.S. Air Force in 1958 a recent graduate of AFROTC. After eight months of pilot training, I went to a year of navigator training and then a year of ECM training, then to SAC. This was when they were transitioning from B-47s which had two pilots and one navigator

to B-52s which had two pilots and three navigators. At the time, I didn't understand why I wasn't a pilot because of the "needs" of the service and even today,

I can't understand why navigators were (at least in SAC) treated as second-class citizens. This was in the heart of the "cold war" when "nuclear deterrence" was the BIG THING!

So, we spent two of six weeks and sometimes two out of every five weeks "On Alert" which meant



being locked up for a week with 64 other aircrew members in an Alert-Shack. After five years of this I was ready for anything different, so I volunteered for a Tour in Vietnam (wherever or whatever that was!) And in April 1966, I found myself in Nha Trang flying missions to drop supplies to Green Beret camps in II Corps. The base had two buildings when I arrived at Nha Trang, but by April 1967 when I left, a whole base had been built there, along with an entirely different operation. Not wanting to go back to SAC when my time was “short”, I did a lot of trying to find a different job. And I was very fortunate to find a tour as an instructor in AFROTC at the University of Kentucky (one of the two good jobs I had in my twenty years of active duty).

In the Spring of 1970, I learned my next assignment would be to SAC at Minot AFB. I begged them to send me back to Vietnam instead, and they did! (I am sure that Minot would have turned me into an Alcoholic and that would have gotten me kicked out of the Air Force, so my decision to volunteer for Vietnam duty turned out to be a good decision for me.) Thusly, I flew in AC-119G Shadow gunships from December 1970 to December 1971 out of Tan Son Nhut Airport in Saigon where our mission seemed to be to deny the “Cong” the use of the Mekong River. We flew up and down the river from the Lao border to the South China Sea, and usually shot up everything that moved, as well as being “on call” for shooting up anything “friendly” Cambodian or Vietnamese wanted shot.

Several memories of that year are still vivid in my mind. One which caused me recurring nightmares over the years, I’m not going to tell. But, others like the young AC who several navigators told the scheduler not to put them on “his” crew, I flew with and had several “experiences” – like the day we buzzed Angkor Watt ruins in Cambodia, flying lower than some of the temple tops. I got some great photos out of the NOS door. And, yes, we did take some small arms fire from enemy troops residing in the temples. Another time with the same pilot, we answered a call to help a Cambodian unit that was under attack. After assessing the

situation, we delivered devastating fire on the Khmer Rouge positions until we were out of ammo and then guided an AC-130 gunship onto the site. We took ground fire that time too, but the thing I remember most was on the way back to base, this same AC told me, the table navigator, to write up the pilots for a DFC and the rest of the crew (including myself, a Major at the time) for Air Medals. I submitted the required paperwork recommending everyone on the crew for a DFC and all four officers were awarded a DFC, whereas the enlisted men were only awarded Air Medals. This unnamed AC later told me I shouldn’t have done that and I told him the only thing that was unfair was that the enlisted men didn’t get DFCs too. But the good Captain didn’t see it that way! As far as ability to fly the airplane, he was a very good pilot, but he was an a..hole. Fortunately, we didn’t have to fly with the same crew all the time as we did in SAC!

About the time we’re getting pretty good at the gunship thing, we were made instructors and were sent to Phan Rang Air Base to teach the young VNAF how to fly and use the gunships as weapons for their air force. My last three months were spent working with and training four young VNAF officers to get them somewhat proficient in the navigator and NOS operator roles. I think I was pretty good in the role of instructor because I felt they (although young) were trying very hard and were learning well. They had some different ideas about a lot of things, but were respectful of our ideas at the same time.

After this, my second Vietnam tour of duty, I was unable to avoid SAC and spent most of the rest of my twenty-plus years there, retiring as a Major, some twenty-seven years ago. I did get back to SEA, flying B-52s out of Guam three months in late 1972 and early 1973 and then out of Utapao, Thailand for three months, doing bombing missions over both South and North Vietnam for 179 days (180 days would have counted as a SEA tour of duty and SAC didn’t do that).



Vernon Richard Raveling, FE & IO

17th SOS, 14th SOW, Phan Rang, 1969-70

Remsen, Iowa was my birthplace in 1930. I graduated from Central High School in my hometown of Le Mars, Iowa in 1948. I entered the Air Force in Sioux City, Iowa on October 2, 1950 because the Iowa National Guard (Infantry), of which I was a member, was due to be called to active duty for the Korean War.

During my first 18 years of active duty I served as a Crew Chief and Flight Engineer with the 1141st Special Activities Squadron, a little known organization that provided VIP services for General Officers throughout the World. My duty was to fly on and maintain aircraft for general officers assigned to American Embassies, NATO and United

Nations locations.

In late 1968, I was reassigned to the 4413 CCTS at Lockbourne AFB as an instructor Illuminator Operator for the AC-119G and AC-119K programs. I also completed the AC-119 Instructor Flight Engineer course, making me dual qualified as instructor IO and FE. I eventually received orders for the 17th SOS at Phan Rang. I flew a few combat missions as an IO before being reassigned to 14th SOW as the stan/eval. As stan/eval IO, I flew missions with 17th and 18th Special Operations Squadrons. I will always remember the brand new IO who, for some reason, ejected the flare launcher instead of launching a flare as ordered.

The wing commander was demanding. He said he only wanted to see the stan/eval people on Sunday mornings. That meant flying back to Phan Rang on Saturday, meeting on Sunday and flying out again Monday to the FOLs. The Sunday morning meetings with the wing commander were some of the most exciting events of my tour. The most I typically said was, "Yes sir" and "No sir." I found out very soon to never offer additional information that was not in

the report, to keep it short, and to remember to say how well the crew coordination was, as a whole, and to comment on the good work the crews were doing.

I flew at least three or four missions a week. There were many hair-raising missions (too many to list). I kept out of everyones way, kept a low profile, and submitted the reports the wing commander required. Even as a stan/eval member, there were times on some missions that I took the place of the assigned FE or IO because of crewmember grounding.

In November 1970, I returned to the U.S. on leave. While on leave I was reassigned to the 4413 CCTS as Instructor IO for the AC-119 and the AC-130. The following month (December 1970) I received orders to return to SEA as an AC-130 IO. It was time to retire.

I officially retired from the USAF on June 30, 1971 at Lockbourne AFB. I took a job with the Post Office where I worked for the next 20 years. I'll always remember the many friends made while assigned to the gunship program.



James "Jim" Eldon Ray, IO

18th SOS, Nakhom Phanom, DaNang, Bien Hoa, 1971-72



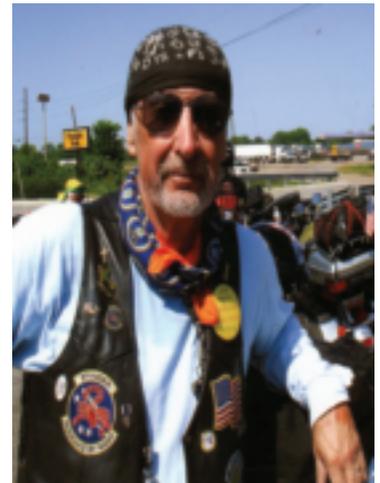
Miami Beach, Florida is where I was born in 1943. Palestine, Texas is where I make my home now, but I grew up all over the world, moving almost yearly with my father. I attended many public schools in the U.S. and Japan until dropping out to join the Air Force on 21 January 1963 at Waco, Texas. It just seemed like the thing to do when you're 19 years old, in the 10th grade, and going no where fast. My Dad spent 26 years in the Air Force during WWII,

Korea, and Vietnam and that fact greatly influenced me. Later, I completed my GED and completed two years of college. I retired as an E-7 from the Air Force in May 1987 at Carswell AFB, Texas.

I served with the 18th Special Operations Squadron as a Stinger gunship illuminator operator at NKP, DaNang, and Bien Hoa from November 1971 to November 1972. I flew a lot of exciting Stinger missions but none like the Stinger

mission I flew on 24 December 1971. On that mission, I flew with a crew that I had never flown with before. We found some bulldozers pulling trucks across a low water crossing in Laos.

The pilot was determined to destroy all the trucks and bulldozers despite very heavy AAA, much more than any other mission that I had flown during my entire tour. There was lots of 23mm and 37mm all around the clock, although most was inaccurate. The gunner/scanner on the left side even swore we had a "field goal" between the tail booms and the horizontal stabilizer! I was too busy with scanning out the right side and launching flares to see it, so I could not confirm or deny the "field goal".



All of a sudden there were three large explosions at the 2,

3, and 4 o'clock positions about 50 to 75 yards out from the aircraft. I was "asked" why I failed to call out the triple A coming up and I replied there weren't any f#+in' tracers to call! Someone said there must be something wrong with my eyes. About that time, the left scanner reported three explosions and no tracers at our 7 o'clock position. Then a very calm voice came over the intercom and said, "It must be 57mm or 85mm triple A. They don't have tracers."

We continued to fire on the targets, all the while, dropping lower and lower to get a better shot. The AAA kept increasing but remained mostly inaccurate, although we did call a couple of "breaks" that seemed to turn the aircraft up on its wing tip, and maybe a little more. We finally went "Winchester" on ammo and RTB'd (Return To Base). We had destroyed two bulldozers and several trucks and caused the 'gomers' to waste a heck of a lot of shells. Nothing I did for the next ten months of my tour held a candle to that one mission. I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for the mission.

During my time at DaNang Air Base, we endured several rocket attacks. On the night of one of these attacks, we had just arrived at the flight line to begin our preflight for the night's mission. We all scattered to find cover. A crew chief

and I found the "ideal" spot to hide. It was between the two aft axles of a flat bed trailer under which we took cover. Those big tires would give us a lot of protection! After the "All Clear" sounded, we crawled out and congratulated each other on finding the ideal cover. It was then that we noticed that the flat bed trailer we took cover under contained three (3) 15,000 pound "Daisy Cutter" bombs, strapped to the trailer bed. No wonder the truck driver and his helper took off running so fast!

I'll always remember flying nights and sleeping days, combat missions, hours of boredom and seconds of sheer terror, little red ping-pong balls floating up towards the aircraft from the dark ground, great shopping on and off base, waiting for "Mr. Zip" to be hoisted up the flag pole at the post office to tell us the mail was in, the free outdoor theater at NKP (and hoping it didn't rain), hamburgers at the NKP base cafeteria (especially after a deployment to DaNang), R&R in Hawaii, Thailand or any place away from the war, lazing around the hootch at NKP (think hammocks), tennis ball cannon fights, floating blackjack games in the hootch bar that seemed to never end, and the juke box in the hootch playing over and over, "I Want To Go Home" and "Leaving on a Jet Plane". Did the last man to leave turn off the juke box?



Howard Reid, Navigator

18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom, 1970-71

In late May 1970, I had my family ensconced in a mobile home park in Wilmington, Ohio. I was attending C-119 school to become qualified as a navigator in the C-119 aircraft. What an experience that was. After logging almost 2400 flight hours in the 440-knot C-141A at 30,000+ feet, I was now slogging along at under 10,000 at about 200 knots. I was partnered with John Gueirrerri, a fellow C-141 Nav who had been flying out of McChord AFB in Washington. As I recall, we had about four low-level flights and a long out-and-back to Patrick AFB in Florida. About two weeks later I reported to Lockbourne AFB (now Rickenbacker AFB) in Columbus, Ohio for an eight-week school to acquaint us with the AC-119K gunship that I would be navigating in Vietnam. It was there that I met, and teamed up with, Gary Hitzemann. I was the Navigator and Gary was the Forward Looking Infrared Sensor (FLIR) operator. That teaming turned into a lifelong friendship. After the requisite number of classroom instruction and flying hours, I was off to Vietnam via Travis AFB, CA. I still recall, with tears in my eyes, the view from the airplane window as I left the Macon, Georgia Airport - my wife

Carol holding our child.

On the flight to Southeast Asia, I sat with two other navigators from the class, Mike Salmon and Leonard Starling. As we were officers, we got to board first and snared an exit row so we had some legroom. It was a military charter, so no booze was served on the flight. There was a one or two hour refueling stop in Hawaii and Mike and I hit the airport lounge and downed a few beers before re-boarding the flight. Alas, the forward latrine had not been fixed so the leg to Guam was not too comfortable.

After great relief and refueling at Guam, it was off to Clark AB in the Philippines for Jungle Survival School where our class received field training behind the NCO Club instead of the jungles because of a typhoon threatening the islands. Jungle training completed, we caught our 727 flight to Cam Ranh and the war zone. At Cam Ranh, I caught a flight to Phan Rang AB, the squadron headquarters for the 18th SOS. I soon found

that people at 18th HQ were wossies, who were doing their best to avoid flying combat missions, i.e. fly just enough to get the “end of tour DFC.” After about three weeks putting up with their b-s stories, I was sent TDY to Tan Son Nhut AB in Saigon. Mike and Leonard received the same orders. We flew down together and roomed together the whole time I was there.

I flew 19 combat missions in Cambodia out of Tan Son Nhut. I was really nervous on the first ones; I didn't know how I would behave under fire. As it happened, the first time we were fired on, I was eating a chocolate cupcake from my flight lunch. I sort of said to myself, “So that's what its like. Damn, this is a good cupcake.” Ground fire never bothered me again.

By mid-October, I was back at Phan Rang where I spent about a week before being sent to DaNang, my permanent duty assignment. I was assigned to a room with Major Doug Frost. He was the detachment Administrative Officer and was liked by everyone. He was nicknamed “Uncle Doug.” He also flew as a NOS operator. He was a big man, probably 6'2” tall and weighed well over 200. He just knew he was going to be shot and ordered body armor that he wore on every flight. He also wore long underwear on each flight because as he said, “It's cold standing in the NOS door.” With all the survival gear that we carried, he probably weighed over 275 pounds when he climbed on the aircraft. I know personally, that my survival vest, parachute harness, and pistol with holster and ammo pouches weighed a total of 40 pounds.

I was assigned Major Bob Meals' crew. Behind his back, we called him “Major Megacycle”, as he could quote the specification sheets of all the stereo equipment that was available in the BX. He thought that he knew how all the equipment on the aircraft worked and was not hesitant in letting you know that he knew more than you did. I could not wait for him to be on leave or R&R, so I could get some relief. Relief came in an unexpected source. Higher headquarters came out with an edict that Captain or Major aircraft commanders could not be writing evaluations on officers that were senior in rank. I went to the Operations Officer, Lt. Col. Silver Chisum, and suggested that if he switched me, a Captain, with Major LeGrand, it would solve one of his crew realignment problems. Hallelujah! The next day he told me that I would be on Captain Mike Ryan's crew.

PACAF had a regulation stating that crews could only fly five nights in a row and then must be given a day/night without flying. In practice, we flew four nights in a row, but

on the fifth we did not fly because of aircraft maintenance problems. Since there was no actual flight on the fifth scheduled day, we were eligible to fly on the sixth day, even though we might have been up all night pre-fighting aircraft and aborting them. The fifth night was what one of our scheduling officers, Major Tom Vandenak, coined as our Polish Day Off. Because I had cross-trained as a NOS Operator, I could be used in two positions. There was a time in January/February 1971 when I flew 15 times in 17 days. After that 15th flight, I was off for the unheard of three consecutive days. As I recall, I did some serious alcohol consumption for two days and used the third day to sober up.

Alcohol was cheap. I remember buying Chivas Regal in 40 ounce bottles for \$4.70. Seagram's VO was the same. Beer worked out to about 25-cents a can. At DaNang, we pooled our ration cards and someone bought beer by the van load and stocked the refrigerators in the officer's barracks. Not sure what the enlisted did.

A lot of the days off, we were really just off the flight schedule and available for additional duties. The only extra duty that I remember having was Duty Officer. There were few Junior Captain Navigators as Duty Officers. In fact, I may have been the only one. As I recall, it was a 12-hour shift from 6 pm to 6 am.

Many troops called DaNang “Rocket City.” There were three rocket attacks while I was there. As soon as the rockets exploded, the “Giant Voice” told everyone to take shelter. We grabbed our steel pots and flak jackets and headed outside so we could maybe see the fires. There was no sense in taking cover: the attack was over. During one attack, a rocket hit a fuel tank on the west side of the base. I was making peanut butter sandwiches with Pete Chamberlain in his room. We banged our heads together as we both tried diving under the same bed. It may have been during that attack that the beer dump at China Beach was hit with a 122mm rocket. That's not playing fair in war.

The most memorable attack took place as two crews (minus the gunners) were returning to the Ops building from the Stinger flight line. Picture fourteen (14) passengers and a driver in a bread van. Walt Riebau, the AC-119 Gunship Association's first Secretary, suddenly called out, “What was that!” He had heard the first explosion. Now picture fifteen (15) people trying to step on the brakes of that bread van and then “bailing out” of it. The bailout point was right between a POL storage area and a Vietnamese housing area. The right side of the road was lined with a concrete drainage ditch, normally an ideal shelter. In this case however, the

ditch was awash with POL seepage and sewage from the housing area. Several men went into the ditch. Terry Bott and I were the last ones out of the bread truck. We both caught a whiff of the odor from the ditch at the same time. I looked at Terry and said "I'd rather die" and we both "hit the dirt" behind the van. Fortunately there were no injuries except for some soiled clothing from exposure to the "binjo ditch."

Many of the troops at DaNang had motorcycles. Mike Salmon and I bought a used Honda 90. He was riding it one day and got hit by a truck. The collision crushed his ankle and froze up one of the front forks on the Honda. Mike was air-evaced to the states and subsequently separated from the Air Force. He did, however, mail me a replacement fork for the Honda. I sold the Honda and bought another. Mike Ryan somehow became acquainted with a flight nurse who was stationed at Yokota AB, Japan. She agreed to mail us some Hondas. I wrote her a check for \$765 and we bought two Honda 100's and a Dax 70. A couple of weeks later, I got a wake-up call from our duty driver that he had 21 boxes addressed to me and what did I want him to do with them. Some how we got the boxes sorted out and SSgt. See, Mike, and I got our bike assembled. I was living on the second floor of a barracks and it was no mean feat getting a fully assembled motorcycle down the exterior stairs. Then I had to scrounge a quart of oil for the engine and figure a way to get gas for my green 100 cc 5-speed rocket. I think I siphoned enough gas from another bike to get to the motor pool. I later got a credit card from MWR that allowed me to purchase gas from the motor pool pumps at \$0.15 per gallon. I never got a bill for the gas. When I was transferred to NKP, I couldn't take the bike so I sold it to Larry Juday for what I paid for it. I later learned that Larry was a profiteer and sold it for more than he paid for it.

One of the nice things at DaNang was the BBQs that our First Shirt, MSgt. Von Leavitt organized. He solicited a bottle of wine or booze from the ration card of as many people as he could and then traded the alcohol with the mess sergeant at the Marine chow hall on the other side of the base. There was a BBQ for all hands every month that featured steaks, pork chops, chicken, and baked beans. Leavitt was formerly a Marine. "Well done, Gunny. R.I.P. You are missed."

In April 1971, nine members of my Stinger crew got PCA (permanent change in assignment) orders to Nakhon Phanom (NKP), Thailand: A/C Mike Ryan, C/P Dick Henderson, Nav Howard Reid, FLIR Gary Hitzemann, FE Bobby Holmes, Gunner Gerry "Duke" Snyder, Gunner Mike Traynor, Gunner Bill Tobias, and I/O John Griffin.

We became Crew #1 at NKP – The "Who Are Those Guys Crew". We left our NOS, Bud Donaldson, behind. At NKP, Neal Johnson became our NOS. Neal was a skeet shooter. As a crew, we spent several fun afternoons at the NKP Skeet Range. After life at DaNang, NKP was heaven. No more "No-Hab Kitchen" at the O' Club Annex in Gunfighter Village. I lived on ham, cheese and dill pickle sandwiches and personally cooked steaks for months. The chow at NKP was great. The O' Club "done good" there.

I had two scary missions in NKP; the first one and the last one. On the first one, I insisted on having a Nav along who was familiar with the area of operations - the PDJ (Plain of Jars) in northern Laos. Louis Gonzaliez rode the flight deck jump seat the entire mission. He never once came "behind the curtain" to see where we were. At bingo fuel, I announced the heading to NKP and confirmed it with a quick TACAN fix. While heading back, one of the scanners reported that the terrain was getting very close to the aircraft. We were at 9500 feet and headed nearly directly over Phou Bia peak, the highest terrain in Laos, at 9245 feet above MSL. Later I discovered I had miss-plotted the fix by 20 miles. Lou never knew how close he came to dying until I told him at the AC-119 Dayton Reunion.

The other mission that scared me was my last one, 24 August 1971. Most of my crew had rotated back to the States. I was flying on a different crew. I just knew that it would only take one of those strangers to screw up and I would be dead. As it was, the A/C, Major Dick Wargowski did a fine job and got us back to NKP safely. I think John Griffin from our crew was the IO on that flight and it was his last flight, too. The best feeling after the flight was when Bobby Holmes, our FE, emptied his water bottle down my back as I was packing up my maps for the final time. The subsequent hosing-down on the ramp was anti-climatic.

Ollie & Stanley

Gary Hitzemann and I were crewed together at Lockbourne, DaNang, and we got mass crewed together to NKP.

This little tactic is something that Gary and I used to pull on new guys on the crew. I was the table Nav, Gary was the FLIR, and the way a Stinger works out (particularly over the trail) we found most of our targets with the infrared set like Gary ran. So Gary was over there, stirring the pot, finding the target. We roll in. Mike Ryan, our AC, says, "I'm in the sight." We'd fire, and all the guys on the ground would start firing back at us. And, our boys in the back, Snyder, Tobias, Trainor and Griffin, they'd holler, "Break

right, break right, break right!” And off we’d go, from a 30 degree left bank to whatever it took on a right bank. And at that point, when we had a new guy on the crew, I’d look over at Gary and say, “Well! It’s a fine kettle of fish you’ve gotten us into this time, Stanley!” And Gary would respond, “Well, it wasn’t so much, Ollie, actually.” And it would usually break the crew up.

A lot of those situations got very tense. It was three guns and four guns of triple-A. Break right and break left. We found that this little tactic was very effective at kind of breaking the tension in the cockpit, and a lot of us tended to be a little more focused in our work, probably, when we got back to it. And the usual response from the new guy on the crew was, “You guys are freakin’ crazy!”

So that was 1970 and ‘71.

He is still Ollie and I’m still Stanley to that crew. In fact, we’ve had eight of our original ten crew members at a reunion. And seven of the ten transferred together from DaNang to NKP, giving us a crew that had the privilege of working together for an extended period of time. The entire dry season out of DaNang, we flew in southern Laos, and then, when we went to NKP, we flew up in the PDJ for another three or four months. And until people started rotating in June of ‘71, we flew together well over 100 missions, and we had the opportunity to use that tactic on a lot of people.



Alven Earl Reynolds, Gunner

71st & 17th SOS, Nha Trang, Tuy Hoa, 1969



I was born at Abilene, Texas in 1942. My hometown was Boise City, Oklahoma where I graduated from Boise City High School in 1960. I attended Oklahoma Panhandle State University in 1960-61. There were no career opportunities for me in a small Oklahoma town, so I joined the United States Air Force in Amarillo, Texas on 25 October 1963.

January to early June 1969 and then was assigned to the 17th SOS Shadow Flight at the same location. In early August 1969, I moved with the 17th to Tuy Hoa And remained there until I rotated to the states in December 1969. I will always remember the great friendships established with my fellow-crewmembers.

I retired from the USAF as a Chief Master Sergeant at Nellis AFB, Nevada on 29 February 1988.

I served in the 71st SOS and the 17th SOS as an aerial gunner. I was stationed at Nha Trang with the 71st from



Photo taken at Nha Trang, 17th SOS “A” Flight Shadow 45 getting ready for the early mission.

Front row L-R: Cpt Jim Edwards, CP; Capt. Tom Wood, Nav.; Capt. Jim Brauer, Nav.; Back Row: SSgt. Bill Welch, AG; A1C Bob Wojcik, IO; SSgt. Linmon ?, FE; SSgt. Al Reynolds, AG; Maj. Maurice Ray, AC



Eugene F. Ring, Pilot

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, Bien Hoa, 1972-73



I was born in Watertown, Codington County, South Dakota on 2 August 1928. I enlisted in the United States Air Force 30 June 1951 in St. Paul, Minnesota. I was attending Macalaster College and the draft board deferred my call-up until the semester was over. Not wanting to serve in the Army, I took flying lessons through the college at the cost of \$6/hour, including the instructor and Piper Cub. I soloed in 6 ½ hours and, knowing that I was able to fly, took the test for aviation cadets and passed.

I attended Basic Training at Lackland AFB, Texas where we lived in tents. In September 1951, I became PFC at \$78.00 a month. Then I went to Perrin AFB, Texas and was a crew chief (gas, oil and air the tires) until 16 January 1952. Then to Bainbridge, Georgia contract flying school to fly the T-6. While there, I was on a solo flight practicing acrobatics when I “blew a jug” and landed burning and smoking at Dale Mabry Field in Tallahassee. In July, I went to Laredo, Texas for advanced flight training in jet aircraft and received my pilot wings and commission on 2 February 1953. After \$55/mo in aviation credits, the 2nd Lt’s \$100/mo was really great. I married Mina Baker of Gallatin, Tennessee on 7 February 1953. I spent time at Tyndall AFB, Florida in gunnery training and was then assigned to Moody AFB, Georgia for jet instrument school.

In July 1953, I was sent to Bitburg AB, Germany to fly F-86s. There were only three Air Bases that had starting units for our aircraft. With winter weather, we were only averaging 8 - 12 flying hours per month. In October 1954, with Korean War pilots being assigned to Germany, we were offered the chance to transfer to other aircraft. Five of us who volunteered were assigned to fly C-119G aircraft at Neubiberg AB. We were not happy with the assignment but we flew all over Europe, logged lots of flying time, and gained lots of experience flying in weather. I qualified as first pilot in a few months and became an instructor pilot a few months later.

I rotated to the States in July 1956 and was assigned to Hunter AFB GA flying KC-97 tankers. In late 1957, I qualified as an instructor pilot. With the advent of the KC-135 tankers, I was assigned to Castle AFB CA for ground school and subsequently to Roswell AFB NM for flight

training in the KC-135. My new duty station in July 1961 was flying the KC-135 at KI Sawyer AFB MI.

In 1967, I was transferred to Castle AFB to serve as an instructor pilot in the KC 135. Castle AFB was referred to as the “Gateway to SAC” since that was the place for all KC-97, KC-135s and B-52s training. As the experience grew in SAC, the Castle crew members began to be selected for duty in Southeast Asia. I ultimately was assigned to fly AC-119K gunships.

I ended up going to AC-119K Stingers in September 1972. I spent about two months at NKP as Operations Officer, then six months at Bien Hoa as Commander. After giving the South Vietnamese Air Force our Stinger gunships, I returned to NKP to fill a multitude of jobs. I secured the sites of crashed aircraft, expedited the C-5s to get airborne during daylight, filled in for the Base Commander when he was not there, and hosted the families of our Asian Allies who arrived to consult with General Haag.

I was assigned as Commander, 46th Air Refueling Squadron at KI Sawyer AFB MI in September 1973 upon return to the States. I was promoted to Colonel in April 1975, became deputy to the wing operations officer, and then, in April 1976, became Director of Resources Management. I retired from the USAF 30 June 1978 and currently live in Gallatin TN.

I enjoyed flying the Stingers. Because of my background, the crew co-ordination came to me easily and after my



fourth flight, my instructor suggested that I could/should be checked out. I told him that I was satisfied but wanted him to poll the crew when I wasn’t present. If they were uneasy about that happening, I would fly the normal eleven flights. They all agreed with the instructor. On the last flight, we hit a target that caught fire and had 32 secondary explosions. About 2

kms down the road we spotted a truck, with the naked eye, hiding next to a bridge. That was made possible by the light of the first target. That was the second kill for the mission and we RTB’d.



David Perez Rios, IO

71th SOS, Nha Trang, 1968-69

I was born in 1948 in Sinajana, Guam. I graduated from Narbonne High School in Lomita, California and graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Aircraft Maintenance at Embry University via satellite at Norton AFB, CA. I currently live in Long Beach, CA with my wife, Maria, and my three children: Dave Michael, Princessa, and Melissa and her daughters, Joleen and Jocelyn. I enlisted in the Air Force in March 1967 because I was very interested in aircraft flight and maintenance. I always dreamed of becoming part of a flight crew. I did not want to join the Army or the Navy as I did not want to go to Vietnam or go swimming.

My first temporary duty assignment was in June 1968 with the 71st SOS commanded by Colonel James E. Pyle at Lockbourne AFB, OH. In January 1969, I was sent with the Indiana Reservists to Vietnam, the place I didn't want to go to. I was assigned to the 71st SOS, Shadow Crew 22 at Nha Trang AB as an Illuminator Operator. There were many life altering experiences on many combat missions, but September 3, 1969 was the most heroic, and memorable day. On that day, the crew of Shadow 76 helped prevent the 1st Army Squadron, 4th U.S. Calvary, from being overrun

by the Viet Cong. Following that great experience, each member of our crew was given a letter of appreciation and made an honorary member of the Army unit.

I separated from active service in March 1979 at Loring AFB, Maine. In March 1979, I re-enlisted with the 33rd Air Reserves of the C-130 Air Rescue Squadron at March AFB, CA. A year later, I separated from the 33rd Air Reserves. In October 1981, I re-enlisted in the 445th Wing/Aero Repair Shop where I worked on C-141 aircraft. I continued to work at the Norton AFB, CA for 12 years until my final retirement in July 1993.

I enjoyed every moment as an active duty Airman and reservist in the military. My years in the military have definitely added a lot to my experiences. It fulfilled my career choice of working with aircraft that I never dreamed would come true. It provided me many opportunities to travel and see many places of the world. Most of all, it has given me a real sense of pride that I have protected my country and that we are still enjoying its' freedom to this day.



James M. Roach, Pilot

17th SOS, Nha Trang, Phan Rang, 1969-70

He was born in Utah on October 1, 1924. He enlisted in the aviation cadet program upon reaching 18. James graduated from pilot training in April 1944 at 19. He then graduated from B-24 transition and proceeded to form a crew at Tonopah AAF, NV. He was a B-24 aircraft commander at age 19, flying combat missions with the 830th Bomb Squadron, 485th Bomb Group, 15th Air Force in Italy beginning in the fall of 1944. Jim flew a war-weary B-24 back to the States after the war.

James was discharged in November 1945 as a First Lieutenant. He entered college and graduated in 1950. He was recalled to active duty in March 1951 and served as a Finance Officer and pilot for 7 years in Germany, France, England, Wisconsin and California. He flew C-47s, C-119s, C-45s and T-33s during this period. In 1959, he was assigned to SAC as a KC-97 aircraft commander at Dow AFB ME. In 1963, he was transferred to SAC Headquarters to fly VC-97s around the country and many overseas destinations. In 1965, James was transferred to Wiesbaden, Germany to fly "Spooky" C-97s (Spy Missions) for 3 years.

Receiving orders for AC-119 gunship training, James attended C-119 transition at Clinton County and then gunnery school at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. He trained in the AC-119K model, but was sent to the 17th SOS as a G-pilot replacement, when the Reserve pilots were rotated back to the States. He served at Nha Trang and Phan Rang as an Aircraft Commander and Instructor Pilot in addition to serving as OL and Squadron operations officer. James rotated back to the states in April 1970 and reported to his next assignment as a C-141 pilot and instructor pilot and operations officer at McChord AFB.

James Roach retired from the Air Force in September 1975, having accumulated 10,000 flying hours in a variety of aircraft, and returned to college, earning a master's degree. He worked for the State of Washington for 6 years and then retired from all work. In 1987, he moved to Las Vegas where he and his wife of 47 years have since lived. James has one daughter.



Paul C. Robertson, Navigator

18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom, 1971-72



Paul C. Robertson grew up in Ste. Genevieve, Missouri and graduated from Southeast Missouri State University in 1967. He joined the Air Force to avoid being drafted and graduated from OTS in December 1967 and from Navigator training in September 1968. His first assignment was with the 1st Military Airlift Squadron at Dover AFB flying in C-133s. He was "selected" for

training in the AC-119K and was stationed at DaNang Air Base from September 1970 until May 1971 and then at Nakhon Phanom Air Base until September 1971 as a FLIR Operator. His next assignment was as an Navigator Instructor at Mather AFB until spring of 1976. After that, he was a C-5 Navigator at Dover AFB, where he also served in the Command Post. He was an ROTC Instructor at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas, from May 1979 until May 1982. His last duty assignment was at McGuire AFB where he was a 21st Air Force Flight Planner and then the Base Operations Officer until his retirement in September 1987. Major Robertson presently resides in Springfield, Missouri.

Stories

Close Air Support

In January 1971, the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) mounted an operation against North Vietnamese forces in Cambodia. The official reason given was that Cambodia had asked for their help in order to help retake Route 4, the only supply road between the capital of Phnom Penh and the vital port of Kampong Som. The operation included two ARVN armored cavalry regiments, three Ranger battalions, an artillery battalion, and an engineer group. In other words, it was a fairly big operation.

The 17th SOS "Shadow" C Flight was tasked to provide close air support, but because of the size of the operation, a few AC-119K "Stingers" were also dispatched from their home base at DaNang to Tan Son Nhut Air Base at Saigon to help. I was a member on one of those Stinger crews.

My log book from that period tells me that on at least two of the missions my FLIR was inoperable upon reaching the battle area, and so I was basically reduced to riding

along as an observer which was quite boring. On one of the missions, however, there was quite a bit of action. We were tasked to support ARVN troops who were engaged in a fight with the enemy. On these missions, we carried a South Vietnamese interpreter in the "jump seat" in order to communicate with the troops on the ground.

In this case, the ground troops reported that they had been taking fire from the area of a nearby village. They wanted us to put down some "suppression" to help them in their battle.

My first task on the FLIR was to figure out where the troops were in relation to the enemy. They may have put up a flare to help us because I remember that it did not take long to identify their position.

Next, I needed to find the village and its relationship to the ARVN troops. That turned out to be quite easy. It was a fishing village and the huts were built out over the water. I could easily see the outline of the huts and boats parked next to them on the FLIR. Remember that this was the middle of the night.

Through the interpreter, it seemed that the ARVN wanted us to fire directly into the village. They may have assured us that there were no "good guys" there. Nevertheless, it was quite clear that this was an active village not very long ago and may still be so. Sorry, perhaps someone else could have and would have fired into that village, but I was not going to because of the possibility that there might be indigenous people still in the village. Besides, it was several hundred yards from the South Vietnamese troops and the fire may have been coming from somewhere closer to them.

Still, the ARVN ground commander insisted they were taking fire from the village and we (Stinger) needed to do something. I picked a spot somewhere between the village and the friendly troops and we fired a burst. The ARVN troops were not happy. "Too far away!" Okay, I thought, let's provide them with some real CLOSE air support. So I picked a spot that was somewhat closer to their position but still a safe distance away.

As the pilot fired rounds on the spot, the extremely excited voice of the ground commander came over the radio. I could not speak Vietnamese, but I clearly understood what was being said. Our interpreter exclaimed, "TOO CLOSE, TOO CLOSE!"

Well, they said they wanted CLOSE air support and that's what they got! But we felt it prudent to back off a couple of hundred yards and spray the area. It must have worked because they later reported that incoming fire against them had died down, at least for the time being.

I don't think what I did was unsafe. In fact, targeting the areas which I did was indeed safe according to directives from the ground commander. But I will never forget that South Vietnamese voice packed with adrenalin and some fear that we were too close with our air support.

Roddy Slagle

I don't know where or when I heard that Roddy Slagle had been killed in the crash of Stinger 41 as a result of hostile action during a close air support mission in South Vietnam. I had last seen him in the Officer's Club at Nakhon Phanom Air Base just a few days before my return to the states for my assignment as a Navigator Instructor at Mather AFB. He had just arrived at NKP and was on a crew that was headed in a few days for an assignment at DaNang. I was shocked to see him at the club, because last I knew he was going to be a Civil Engineer, not an Air Force navigator.

You see, Roddy Slagle and I had crossed paths ever since childhood. We both grew up in the small town of Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, whose claim to fame is that it was "the first permanent settlement west of the Mississippi" by Europeans from the "Old World". It was originally settled by Spanish explorers in the 18th century, but the French later arrived in great numbers as a result of the various wars that were always being fought between European powers. Then in the late 19th Century, there was a large influx of German emigrants who purchased much of the land throughout Ste. Genevieve County. My great-grandfather emigrated from Germany and settled in Ste. Genevieve County during this time and that is where and why I was born and raised on a farm in Ste. Genevieve. As a result of the French and German influence, the town had a very high percentage of Catholic families.

Roddy, on the other hand, was a new kid in town. I don't know why his family moved to Ste. Genevieve, but it may have been because his father was employed as a professional by the local lime company that formed the foundation of the economy outside of farming. I did not know Roddy real well since he was a "townie" and I was a "country boy", living on a farm. He was protestant and attended the public school; whereas, I attended the Catholic Church and the

parish school. Still, while not exactly close friends, we did have at least a "passing acquaintance" with one another. And it was strange just how often we crossed paths with one another in coming years.

I decided to attend the University of Missouri at Rolla, an engineering school, upon graduation from high school. As I was walking on campus one day, there coming towards me was Roddy Slagle. He had also decided to attend the "School of Mines". We talked a while and went our ways. After that, we saw one another every so often.

A couple of years later, I decided to change schools because I had discovered that I had no great desire to become an engineer. Upon graduation in 1967 from my new school, Southeast Missouri State College in Cape Girardeau, the draft was staring me in the face just like most everyone else. My cousin had become a navigator in the Air Force and that sounded a whole lot better to me than going to grunt training at Fort Leonard Wood, so I applied and was accepted as an officer candidate at Officer Training School in Texas. And who should I run into at OTS but Roddy Slagle. Very often, engineers could find ways to avoid the draft by, for instance, going to work for a defense contractor. Roddy instead volunteered to become a Civil Engineer in the Air Force. He and I were assigned to the same officer training class.

Graduating from OTS with shiny gold bars, I headed for navigator school and Roddy headed for his assignment as a Civil Engineer. I lost track of him as I completed navigator training and was assigned to the 1st Military Airlift Squadron at Dover AFB flying in C-133s. "Newbies" in the squadron, like me, were often shipped to Vietnam well ahead of many navigators who had been there for awhile because they had accumulated "points" toward their Vietnam tour by flying cargo missions into the country. Thus, my fellow first lieutenant navigator Gary Hitzemann and I received orders to report to Lockbourne AFB for AC-119K training.

I was first assigned to DaNang and flew there until May 1971, at which time our crew was sent to NKP. And that's how, after four years since OTS graduation, I ended up sitting across the table in the NKP Officer's Club from Roddy Slagle in early September 1971. My first questions to Roddy were, "What are you doing here? I thought you were a Civil Engineer?" Well, he had decided that sitting behind a desk was not his "cup of tea" and had become a navigator. And now he, like me, was an AC-119K Stinger gunship navigator. I wondered when I would run across Roddy again

in the days and years ahead. The answer, of course, is never again.

To the best of my knowledge, Roddy was the only AC-119K Stinger navigator lost to hostile action in Vietnam. I was absolutely stunned to hear of his death then and I am still so to this day.

Truck Busting Stinger Navigator & Sensor Operator

The truth about “truck-busting” missions over the Ho Chi Minh trail is that they all carried a sameness about them. Take-off and fly to the designated target area. Search for trucks. Find truck. Shoot at truck. Get shot at by triple-A site. Break right or left. FLIR or NOS recapture truck in sights. Pilot shoots again. Gunners reload when they are not hanging out the back doors looking for triple-A. Truck blows up (sometimes) or is otherwise incapacitated. Look for more trucks. Do more shooting and more breaking due to triple-A. Fly back to DaNang. Try to find something to eat in the wee hours of the morning. Try to get some sleep during the day in order to fly again that night. It became a routine.

And so the night of January 4, 1971 was not any different from the others except that the regular aircraft commander of our crew was replaced by the 18th SOS DaNang FOL Commander, Colonel Silver C. Chisum. Otherwise, our crew followed the same routine with a 0235 takeoff time. Quite frankly, as the FLIR operator I never knew where we were. I was too busy looking for trucks and trusted the navigator to put us in the correct area (which he always did!)

But something was different this night. The picture on the FLIR looked strange. Instead of a “trail”, what appeared on my FLIR looked like some sort of truck park. There were bunkers, probably of dirt, in each of which a single truck was parked. We had evidently come across a staging and repair area. I may have relayed that information to the crew, but at the same time I locked onto a particular truck and requested the pilot to select the FLIR for his gunsight.

The mission was still “every-night” routine, except for what I saw below. The pilot selected FLIR and rolled into a bank for a shot. Before he could even “squeeze one off”, I heard co-pilot Larry Juday come up on radio intercom and say “triple-A, one o’clock” followed VERY quickly by an almost shout: “WE’RE HIT!”

Damage assessment quickly followed. There were some

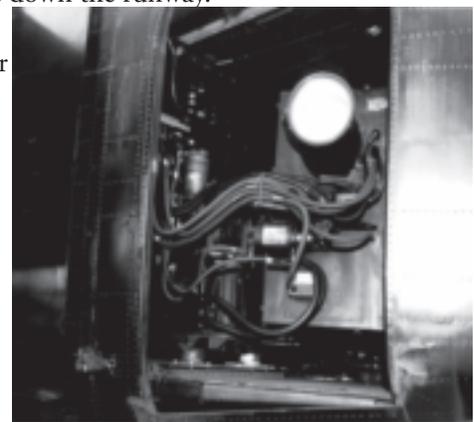
flames from the outer portion of the right wing, but they died down in seconds. The pilot, Colonel Chisum, promptly asked the navigator for a heading out of the area. The gunners (scanners) in the back reported over intercom, “They are really opening up on us.” Triple-A was following us as we departed the area. The enemy gunners had evidently seen the flames and had decided to try to finish the job.

As a side note, I firmly believe to this day that the North Vietnamese had placed some of their best gunners in that area because of its importance as a truck staging and repair area. That is the only reason that I can think of as to why they were so accurate in their very first salvo. I was and still am amazed at the thousands upon thousands of triple-A rounds that were shot at us Stingers night after night with so little damage. Were enemy gunners really that bad?

Once out of the area and clear of triple A, the pilots and flight engineer calmly and accurately assessed the damage. The right jet had taken a direct hit and was no longer operable. That evidently was where brief flames had occurred. It was hard for the crew to assess any other damage at night on a black wing. The aircraft was stable and there were no significant problems with its handling at the present time. The crew donned their parachutes (just in case) as the pilots and flight engineer talked over the situation.

Colonel Chisum determined that the aircraft flew stable enough to do a straight-in approach and landing at DaNang. Given the fact that potential fuel leaks on the damaged right wing could not be ruled out, he also decided to shutdown the right propeller engine on final approach as a precautionary measure against any possible fire that might result in a fuel “blowback” when the props were reversed after landing. The landing was uneventful and the fire truck parade followed us down the runway.

And that is my war story of perhaps the only time that an AC-119K Stinger Gunship was purposely landed with both right engines shut down. It was certainly not routine.



White Light



Dominick Romandetta, FE

18th SOS, Phu Cat, Udorn, DaNang, 1969-70, 1972-73



I was born April Fool's Day, 1931 in New York, New York. I grew up in the Bronx where I attended Christopher Columbus High School. In September 1951, I joined the Air Force and trained as a mechanic. I was part of the AC-119 gunship program in three capacities: first, as a 4413 CCTS Instructor Flight engineer, then as an AC-119K FE and, lastly, as a Crew Chief. I flew 220 combat missions (728 hours) in the AC-119K. As a Stinger I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross twice and earned 10-OLC to the Air Medal.

My association with the AC-119K began in June 1968 when I was assigned to the 4413th CCTS, Lockbourne AFB, OH where I upgraded to Instructor FE in the AC-119G/K. Once the 4413th trained a full complement of gunship crews, I was assigned to Captain Maxheimer's crew as part of the newly formed 18th Special Operations Squadron. On November 20, 1969, we departed for Vietnam as part of the AC-119K initial deployment.

Our crew was deployed from Phan Rang AB to Phu Cat AB. In February 1970, we relocated 3 aircraft, 4 crews and 30 maintenance people to Udorn AB, Thailand where we established Forward Operating Location Delta (FOL-D). Then in May 1970, our crew was sent PCA to DaNang AB (FOL-A). Ours was the first Stinger crew to have an F-4 escort shot down during a mission. On June 9, we cleared Seafox 02 to attack a target. As the aircraft rolled in, AAA struck it. Both crewmen successfully ejected. We established radio contact and remained in the area until replaced by another Stinger crew. Both crewmen were rescued early the next morning.

I concluded my tour in November 1970 and reported to K.I. Sawyer AFB, MI as a Flight Line Supervisor on B-52s and KC-135s. However, there was a critical shortage of AC-119K flight line mechanics. In April 1971, I was ordered TDY to DaNang AB where I served 122 days as a Crew Chief. My most significant recollections from the

DaNang TDY were the heat, humidity, long hours, and frequent rocket attacks.

I enjoyed the sense of teamwork and cooperation that came from flying with the same 10 people on a gunship crew. I learned there was still a need for AC-119K Flight Engineers. After returning to K.I. Sawyer I volunteered for a second combat tour. By July 1972 I was again back at DaNang AB where I flew regularly as a substitute FE on many crews. During that second combat tour I was also promoted to Master Sergeant. Toward the end of 1972 we began training the VNAF in the AC-119K. I flew numerous missions under the VNAF flag until March 1973 when we delivered the last K model to the VNAF and I left DaNang AB for the third and final time.

One of my most exciting missions was the night of June 22, 1970. We located a large truck convoy, destroyed 12 and damaged many more while taking heavy and accurate AAA. Another memorable mission, was the night of November 3, 1972 when we destroyed seven boats loaded with oil and ammo, resulting in huge explosions and fires. Some of my most rewarding missions, however, were those flown in support of ground troops, often under heavy enemy attack. On one mission we landed with our fuel gauges reading zero.



I concluded my final three years in the Air Force at March AFB, CA where I was OMS Supervisor for the B-52 and KC-135. Upon retiring in 1976, I worked for Lockheed Aircraft as a flight line mechanic for their C-130 program and retired a final time in 1994.





Roger M. Rose, Engine Mech.

71st SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1969

Crothersville, Indiana was my birthplace in August 1943. I graduated from Crothersville High School in 1961 and attended some college. In September 1962, I had just been laid off and was looking for work. I was in a local restaurant telling a friend, home on leave from the Air Force, about my search for employment. He said, "Why don't you join the Air Force!" I said, "Sounds like a good idea to me." I went to Indianapolis the next day to enlist.

I was a reservist assigned to the 71st Tactical Airlift Group at Bakalar AFB when the unit was activated on 13 May 1968. The unit transferred to Lockbourne AFB, Ohio on 11 June 1968 where we began the transition from cargo C-119Gs to AC-119G gunships. After arriving in-country in December 1968, I was later assigned to Tan Son Nhut AB. I returned home to Bakalar AFB with the other reservists on 6 June 1969.

As maintenance techs, we didn't fly on the gunships very often. I do remember one mission on which I was able to fly. When the crew found out they had a passenger they had to take off a can of ammo. They would have been over the maximum takeoff weight if they hadn't. I was riding in the jump seat behind the pilot (I think it was Major Tippy). When we got to the target, I moved up behind the pilot and was kneeling on the floor looking out the window. We began circling and opened fire. I was having a blast until all of a sudden I could see tracers coming up at us. It seemed to me that they were coming up between the wing tip and the nose just missing us, but I'm not sure how close they were. I remember thinking that I was sure thankful for the armor plating on the sides of the cockpit. Flight Engineer Mailen Thomas then called for me from the cargo area and told me to come back and help them crank ammo. It was an exciting flight that I will always remember.

The flight I just described is one of the things I will always remember. Another is a story about Lt Col Don Beyl. As you all remember, we had a difficult time gaining any respect from the active duty. We were just "Reserves." I was working a 12 hour night shift at Tan Son Nhut. Our maintenance shack was at the east end of the runway. We tried to keep things clean but it was very dusty. We usually had cleanup an hour or so before shift change. One of the active duty MSgts came in early one night and we hadn't cleaned up yet. He shouted out, "This place is a mess.

You're nothing but a bunch of draft dodging Indiana pigs," and kicked a full trash can down the hall. Of course I, being a young mouthy TSgt, couldn't let that statement go unchallenged. The MSgt took me into an office and began giving me a royal butt chewing. He threatened everything from busting me back to airman to jail. When he was finished I opened the door and there stood almost all of the maintenance crew trying to hear what was going on. About that time Lt Col Beyl walked in the door and asked what was going on. I said, "This *!##*+#! just called us a bunch of draft dodging Indiana pigs. He looked at the MSgt and said, "Is that true?" Of course with so many witnesses standing there he had to say yes. Lt Col Beyl glared at him and said, "Follow me!" They went into an office and we could hear him "educating him on the Reserve program" all the way down the hall. I never heard another word about it.

One night SSgt John Burks and I had been in Saigon most of the day and reported for the night shift very "tired" and "sleepy". CMSgt Ray Bridges was fit to be tied! He said that if he caught either one of us with our eyes closed that night we would both get an Article 15. Of course we both knew that this would be very difficult. John got a roll of one inch Scotch tape and taped his eyelids open by running the tape up across his forehead and sat down in a corner. I think he must have been asleep because all you could see were the whites of his eyes but his eyes weren't closed.

There is another story about Lt Col Beyl. We got a call one night asking that we go to downtown Saigon to pick up an aircrew at their hotel. Ray Bridges told me to grab a six-pack and go get them. It was Lt Col Beyl's crew. On our way back, the guard at the gate stopped us for a routine check. He asked for my military driver licenses and I told him that I didn't have one. He wrote me a ticket and told me to give it to my commander the next day. (Lt Col Beyl was sitting right beside me.) I said, "I'll do better than that. I'll give it to him right now" and handed it to Lt Col Beyl. He said, "Remind me to smack your wrist when we get to the flight line." The guard just looked at us wondering what to do. He let us go and I never heard another word about it.

I retired from the Air Force as a CMSgt on Aug. 26, 1998 with over 36 years of Reserve and Active Duty time.



Gary Eugene Rubingh, Gunner

18th SOS, Phan Rang, Phu Cat, Nha Trang, Udorn, NKP, 1969-70

Charlevoix, Michigan was my birthplace in 1948. In 1966, I graduated from Ellsworth High School in my hometown of Ellsworth, Michigan. I joined the Air Force at the recruiting office at Traverse City, Michigan in February 1968. I joined because of my interest in airplanes. I graduated with an Associate Degree in avionics from Ferris State University at Big Rapids, Michigan in April 1974.

My most exciting mission while flying on a Stinger gunship as an aerial gunner was the time we flew into a flak trap. The North Vietnamese turned a vehicle's lights on and surrounded it with anti-aircraft guns. The NOS and FLIR operators said we had found the world's dumbest truck driver; however, when we fired our guns, twenty-five to thirty anti-aircraft guns shot at us. The IO was shouting "Break left." The gunner scanner was shouting "Break right." The pilot was ignoring both while trying to avoid the tracers

in front of the aircraft. The FLIR operator, who could not see the tracers, was saying, "Fly straight up!" When filling out the after-action report, anti-aircraft rounds fired at us simply said 'several thousand'. We never called a NVA truck driver dumb after that!

I remember flying combat missions out of three different air bases (Phan Rang, Phu Cat, Nha Trang) located in Vietnam and two different air bases (Udorn and Nakhon Phanom) located in Thailand. The thing I remember most about my time with AC-119K Stinger gunships was the world class men I served with. I served with the best of the best in fixed wing gunships.

I separated from the Air Force in 1972 at McConnell Air Force Base at Wichita, Kansas. I currently live at Ellsworth, Michigan.



Robert R. Safreno, Navigator

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



I was born in Fremont, California in 1936. In 1954 I graduated from Fremont High School in my hometown of Oakland. I was commissioned a second lieutenant through the AFROTC program in June 1958 upon

graduating from San Francisco State University and received orders for navigator training.

In 1971, I received orders for the 17th Special Operations Squadron, Fighting C Flight, at Tan Son Nhut AB at Saigon where I served from August 1970 until August 1971. My additional duty was working on Awards and Decorations. I typed many submissions for C Flight crews, particularly following the four-day battle at Prey Totung, Cambodia, a town which controlled the communications and supplies for the friendly forces and the cities of the region. It was under attack by a large hostile force. Eleven crews from the 17th SOS and two crews from the 18th SOS flew continuous sorties until the hostile forces withdrew.

On 12 December 1970, we supported Prey Totung as Shadow 26. We could clearly see the ground activity. The ground commander informed us that they were in the southwest corner of the town and that the VC controlled the rest of the town. A machine-gun was firing into the friendly positions. I located the site, but when Captain Cunningham started firing, all hell broke loose. We immediately took .51 caliber fire from six machine gun sites in our firing circle. They had us in what we called a "Shadow Trap". Looking into the NOS, I saw streaks of light coming up the barrel. I jumped back just as bullets flew past the left wing. The explosions sounded like popping corn. I backed up to the opposite side of the aircraft to rethink my situation, then forced myself back to the NOS. I had extreme problems holding on to the NOS while trying to reacquire the target because I kept seeing those red streaks from tracer bullets coming up the barrel straight at my eye. Suddenly the NOS went completely blank -



something that happens only if exposed to bright light. A big rocket had just exploded near the aircraft. I immediately recommended that we get the hell out of there. We broke the firing circle, regrouped, and called for reinforcements. We returned three more times during that siege. The town was secured on 15 December 1970, but it was virtually destroyed, with the exception of the friendly troops' location.

On one mission, I heard a sudden ZAPPING noise from the cargo (gun) deck. The clamp securing the barrels on the end of a minigun had broken. When the clamp broke, the barrels started flopping around and shot holes in the left engine nacelle. The young pilot we had was worried that we may have shot holes in our hydraulic lines. So he lowered the landing gear to make certain it worked. After the gear was down he realized that if the hydraulic lines were damaged the gear might not retract. Fortunately the gear retracted, otherwise we probably could not have made it back to our base.

Late one afternoon we were near Highway 1 in Cambodia when we discovered the wreckage of an Air Force jet fighter. We asked the nearby friendlies to check the wreckage for survivors. They were unable to locate the wreckage in the dense foliage. I was a B-52 Navigator/Bombardier in my prior life so the pilot asked me if I could put a marker on the aircraft. On my mark, the IO dropped a log that landed about 50 feet from the aircraft and generated a big cheer from the crew! It was getting dark, so at the ground commander's request we turned on the "Big Flashlight" and

kept it on the target area. By then the first log was burning out so we went through the same procedure to drop a second one. My luck held - it hit about 25 feet from the aircraft. The friendlies found the aircraft but nothing else.

Another memorable mission was our support of a road-watch team near the Tri-Border area. They were completely surrounded by VC. They were whispering so softly that we could hardly hear their radio transmissions. They asked us to shoot all around them, but we had no visual contact, so they pointed a blue strobe light at our aircraft. As NOS operator, I was the only one who could see the light. We established an offset of a couple hundred meters and started firing. The team got on their radios and said, "That's it; keep it up." His voice was now getting louder. He then asked us to move our shooting in a certain direction. As we were shooting and moving as he indicated, he kept saying, "That's it; great shooting. Keep it up; keep it coming." We could hear the sounds of gunfire and bullets over their radio and asked him what it was. He answered, "That's your bullets hitting in front of us. Keep shooting; you're blowing a hole for us to escape." We finished up and left the area. Unfortunately we never did find out what happened to the road watch-team.

Our crew flew a gunship to Formosa for an IRAN and returned to Saigon with another. When we stopped for fuel at Clark AB, the pilot had the copilot calculate single-engine takeoff weight. The difference between that weight and our maximum load determined the amount of San Miguel beer we carried back to Vietnam.



John Daniel Santivasci Jr, Logistics

18th SOS, Bien Hoa, Nakhon Phanom, 1972-73

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was my birthplace in 1952. I grew up in Virginia Beach, Virginia and graduated from Great Mills High School in 1970. I joined the U.S. Air Force in 1970 for family stability and I wanted to serve in Vietnam.

I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Royal Thai Air Base and Bien Hoa as Logistics/Intelligence during 1972-73. One exciting AC-119 event in S.E.A. for me was when I was assisting the aircraft mechanic with engines run-up and the gunship jumped the blocks and we starting taxiing. Here I was a Sergeant seeing my whole career going out the window. Another time I was helping to refuel an aircraft when a rocket attack occurred. I was blown off the wing, damaging

my sternum. Consequently, I was recommended for and awarded the Purple Heart.

At Bien Hoa, a rocket hit between the tails of a gunship being backed into a revetment. The damage to the gunship was so extensive that a crew from the States came over to make repairs. I worked with that crew for 42 hours straight, getting the massive damage repaired. Eventually, we finished and the aircraft flew several more missions. I will always remember the friendship and closeness of the crews. I had never been exposed to that before.

I retired as a Master Sergeant from the Air Force in June 1990 at Andrews AFB, Maryland. I currently live in St. Leonard, Maryland.



Ramon A. Saveria, Navigator

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71

My name has been a source of confusion since December 28, 1930, when I was born in Ironwood, Michigan. The confusion was partly because I have three birth certificates, each containing a slightly different version of my given name, partly because I am Italian and people assume I am Spanish, and partly because, while growing up, I was initially called Sonny, and later called Ray.

Although an honor student in high school, I was a dismal failure when I went away to college. After two-and-a-half years as a student, I joined the Air Force. During Basic Training, the Air Force legal office discovered my three birth certificates and chose the one listing my name as "August Ramon." So, in May 1952, as Airman August Ramon, I completed Basic Training and was bussed off to James Connelly AFB, Texas where I waited for assignment to an Aviation Cadet class.

The first 18 months after earning my gold bars and navigator wings was pure turmoil. I arrived in Japan only to have my assignment changed to Clark AB, PI, where I remained only nine months before being reassigned. I finally ended up with the 27th Fighter Interceptor Squadron in Rome, NY. While there, I was sent to Personnel Officer School to satisfy a squadron quota. That training, however, led to a fulfilling dual-track career in personnel and aviation that provided invaluable contacts, training, and leadership experience.

By 1967, I was serving my eighth Air Force assignment - this one was with the 963rd Airborne Early Warning & Control Squadron at McClellan AFB, CA. The duty included a three-month tour to Korat AB, Thailand where we flew early warning missions over Laos and North Vietnam. It was gratifying warning the F-105 fighter pilots flying bombing missions of the MiG activities. However, it was very disheartening watching the downtrodden F-105 pilots drowning their sorrows at the Officers Club following the loss of aircrews.

While at McClellan AFB, I was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and received orders for the 17th Special Operations Squadron. In early 1970, soon after arriving at Tan Son Nhut AB, I was assigned primary duties as head navigator, C Flight Executive Officer. My missions were routine until the night we took a small-arms round through the aircraft windscreen, injuring our flight engineer. But the most devastating occurrence during my gunship tour was

the crash of one of our aircraft during take-off. We lost six of the eight crewmembers in the crash. The disaster still remains fresh in the minds of the fellow aviators and ground personnel.

We flew many missions where we had confirmed kills up to 200. It was great relieving the grunts of the Viet Cong threats. We were always welcome! The first daylight mission over Cambodia was memorable; flying in daylight, our targets were clearly visible. On one mission we sank a barge, as confirmed by the flight that replaced us in the target area. Upon returning to the United States, I received a joyous reception at the Ironwood, Michigan airport. Such reunions were not too common in those days of anti-war activists. How wonderful to be home again in this great United States of America!

Following my tour as a Shadow, I was assigned to Charleston AFB, SC as part of the Air Force's first C-5A squadron. I was the first non C-141 crewmember to be assigned to the C-5. Soon after arriving, I became the head navigator and, again, squadron executive officer. It was interesting flying all over the globe, even exciting at times. Some great memories: getting to shake hands with His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie of Ethiopia; talking to senior staff members of the Iranian Air Force; dining with top-level Air Force leaders in Argentina; and visiting with high level civilian leaders in Taiwan.

After two years in C-5s, I was selected as Director of Personnel at Altus AFB, Oklahoma. It was the best job ever in my career. Altus was a friendly military community where I was elected vice president of the American Red Cross. I also spent much time as president of the Officers' Club Board of Directors. Then one day, I received a call informing me that I was being reassigned to Headquarters MAC. I decided to retire and within a few months, Cathy and I were off to Dallas where I worked the next five-and-a-half years as a personnel manager at the McDonald's Regional Headquarters. I retired from McDonald's and life was absolutely great, but then in 2000, Cathy passed away.

My four kids (Pam, Jeff, Shawn and Greg), and now my significant other, Kathy Miller, remain a close knit family, all living in the Dallas/Ft Worth area, where we enjoy frequent get-togethers. Life has been good to me and, if I had it to do again, it would be the USAF!



Eugene D. Schaltenbrand, Pilot

71st SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1969

I was born in Amityville, NY in 1932, but consider Louisville, KY my home. I graduated from Babylon High School in 1950, and then attended the University of Louisville where I graduated in 1958.

I was a pilot with the 930th Tactical Airlift Group, Bakalar AFB, Indiana when the unit was activated in May 1968. We relocated to Lockbourne AFB, Ohio in June 1968 where we were redesignated the 71st Special Operations Squadron. Our unit comprised the bulk of the first AC-119G training class of the 4413th Combat Crew Training Squadron. I arrived at Nha Trang AB on Christmas Eve 1968, but flew most of my missions from Tan Son Nhut AB. I redeployed to Bakalar AFB in June 1969 when the 17th SOS replaced the 71st SOS.

My most exciting AC-119 mission was an un-happening. I was flying right seat for Sid Petty that day. We were supporting a firebase in close contact for better than four hours when the NOS (Dick Hamilton, I think) reported

sparks coming from the left engine. I looked across the cockpit, saw a ring of sparks just behind the prop, and recognized the need for immediate action to avoid the engine seizing. I pulled the prop lever to feather. Darn engine froze before the prop was all the way in feather. Sid, who had been absorbed with the target looked over at me and asked why I feathered his engine. My comment was, "Let's go home." Luck was with us. The good (right) engine was a little tired and couldn't quite make METO power and I figured anything above METO was asking for a long walk.

The thing I will always remember about my time with AC-119 gunships is the people! The 71st people were dedicated. We had a job to do and we did it without the complaining and bickering I observed in other units.

I served as commander of the Reserve Airlift unit at Pittsburgh where I was promoted to full colonel. My final position was as a staff officer at Robins AFB where I retired on 30 July 1988.



Terry "Bus" Blaine Schuler, Maint.

18th SOS, Bien Hoa, Nakhon Phanom, 1971-72

Fort Mitchell, Kentucky is where I was born in 1952. Plantation, Florida is where I grew up and graduated from Plantation High School in 1970. To avoid getting drafted into the Army or the Marines, I joined the Air Force. Later in life, I completed two years of college at Broward Community College.

I served with the 18th Special Operations Squadron at NKP and Bien Hoa from November 1971 to November 1972 in aircraft maintenance. I'll never forget the one morning that we were pushing the gunships back into their respective revetments when suddenly we came under attack by 122mm rockets. I remember feeling a warm sensation in my back and before I realized what was happening, I woke up under the Coleman tug that was being used to push the aircraft into the revetment. The tug operator, I don't remember his name, asked me, "How did you get here so fast?" Without even knowing what to say, I automatically responded, "I Flew!!" As the rocket fire subsided, everyone started coming to their senses. After seeing me under the tug, Sergeant Dunbar happily said to me, "Good to see you Schuler, I thought you were dead!" As I glanced over my shoulder and looked where I had been wing walking the Stinger, I began

to understand why the Sarge said what he did. There where I once stood was a crater formed from a rocket hit!

I will always remember the friendships made during my tour of duty with the AC-119 Stinger gunships. The camaraderie between us all was simply super. Age, color of skin, or ethnic background could not separate us during the tough times; times that I will always cherish. We were like brothers!

I separated from the United States Air Force on 17 December 1977. I currently live in Plantation, Florida; still proud to be a Stinger!





John E. Schumann, Pilot

18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom, 1971-72

I was born in Madison, Wisconsin (my hometown) in 1945. I graduated from Madison West High School (1963) and the University of Wisconsin (1967). I have been married to my wife, Candace, since 1967 and we have one son, Eric.

I graduated from college, was married, and was drafted into the Army in a three day period in June 1967. I didn't want anything to do with going to Vietnam as an Army lieutenant. Fortunately, I bumped into a college fraternity brother who worked for the Wisconsin Attorney General's office. He told me that he might be able to connect me with a pilot training slot. I figured that would be a very good deal since the war was supposed to be over soon and the pilot training was a year-long program. I wish I could tell you that I had dreamed of being a pilot from age of 6 and couldn't wait to fly in combat but that would be a real whopper. Considering my circumstances, pilot training was a much better alternative than being the lead ground grunt. I had no idea at the time that the coincidence (there are no coincidences?) of running into my fraternity brother in the supermarket would lead to one of the most interesting and meaningful periods of my life.

I was assigned to Southeast Asia on April 29, 1971. I rotated from Nakhon Phanom (NKP) to DaNang and then back to NKP for the remainder of my tour.

One night during the dry season the F-4s were bombing the North. It seemed whenever we bombed the North, they would retaliate by transporting radar control 57mm anti-aircraft guns or an occasional surface to air missile (SAM) into the Plain of Jars. One night my APN 25/26 went off while we were working a target. The APN 25/26 was a round gauge that would "light up" when the radar system of a SAM or radar controlled gun began to track the airplane. The sequence was very fast from that point to a "lock on" (i.e., the SAM being locked on to the airplane) and then to "launch". At this point a cursor would display in the gauge and show the direction and the distance, decreasing as the SAM came toward you. As pilots, we were trained to watch the cursor decrease in length to the point that the SAM was about to impact the airplane. At that point, we would quickly dive the airplane. If you did the maneuver too early, the SAM would be able to adjust its track and hit the airplane. If you did it too late, you would get nailed. Timing was everything. That night I was lucky; the SAM went over our heads.

I also remember night flights when my gunners would pour empty beer cans out of huge plastic bags over the target areas. It was our little private, psychological war. We wanted the enemy on the ground to think that we were up in our comfortable airplanes having fun and drinking beer.

My most memorable mission occurred in January of 1972. At home, the news reported that the war was "winding down". It wasn't "winding down" for us. Someone back home in the Ivory Towers thought it would be good publicity to put a reporter on board one of our missions. This was a very rare event. My crew was called the "Arse Rippers" and our scarves and name badges were all "Arse Ripper" red. Our moniker resulted from the fact that we were all flight examiners in our respective positions. When we weren't scheduled to fly together as a crew, we had the "privilege" of flying with other crews giving check flights. Our crew was selected to host the reporter for a view of the war from the night skies.

Larry Green, a reporter for the Chicago Daily News, was our guest. We took off about 1:00 AM for another routine mission over the trail. I was in the left seat and Larry had the seat behind me that was used for giving check rides. It took about an hour to get into the Ho Chi Minh trail network in the Plain of Jars to begin our search for trucks. It was dead quiet. We couldn't find anything – no trucks, no targets. I was thinking: here we are with a reporter and he's going to conclude from his experience that we had a really dull mission. His story will read like we were flying a training mission over the Arizona desert. Almost immediately after this thought, the Night Scope Operator, Maj. Bob Johnson reported, "I just spotted a small revolving red light" and asked the forward looking infrared operator (FLIR) to take a look at it.

The FLIR located a truck park with six trucks and they all had hot engines. I rolled into the firing circle, lined up the sites, and put a one-second burst of 20mm down. Then all hell broke loose. One of my favorite scanners, Bob Basset, called the first break. We had six 37mm guns hosing us simultaneously. We had flown into a trap. The bad guys had recovered trucks that we had "killed", parked them together and lit fires under their engines to make it look like they were running. They then set up their guns and a small rotating red light. We were suckered right in.

It is hard to describe a "break". The entire time I was an

instructor pilot and flight examiner I never saw anyone demonstrate a “break” to another pilot. Well, when Bob Basset screamed “Break right! Break right!” we went from being in a 30 degree left turn to getting the aircraft 90 degrees vertical to the horizon as quickly as possible to avoid getting the s*** shot out of us. For a right break, the pilot snaps the yoke to the right as far as it will go and simultaneously floorboards the right rudder. My Flight Engineer, Charlie White lit the jets and applied full power. My copilot, Dick Baldwin, pulled his hands free from the yoke to avoid a broken finger and to be ready to assist in getting the aircraft back in control.

As our “break” approached 70-80 degrees, we were being hosed down by a barrage from below. One round went off directly on our nose. The 37mm round wasn’t more than 40-50 feet in front of the aircraft. When it exploded, there was a huge white flash. We could see the shrapnel come off the round as we flew into it. After what seemed like a very long time, we were clear and trying to level the aircraft. I will always remember looking at Dick. All I saw was the

whites of his eyes. I suspect that my face reflected Dick’s look of shock. Simultaneously, we shouted “Holy S***!”

I never experienced so much accurate triple A attacking us in such short order. When we got back on the ground, I tried to tell the reporter with a straight face that this was a relatively boring mission but I wasn’t very successful. I remember Larry (the reporter) telling us that he had been in a lot of very serious situations but that he had never been through anything close to this experience.

There are so many memories. Nothing compares to flying in combat with a crew. Each crewmember is dependent on everyone else. I am so proud to have served with so many competent warriors. It was a humbling experience.

I separated from the Air Force on 4 May 1972 on my return from the Vietnam tour. However, I never separated from the memories and lifelong friendships that were built during a very stressful time. They have left an indelible mark.



Roy (Tony) A. Simon, Pilot
18th SOS, Bien Hoa, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, 1972-73

I was born in Meredosia, Illinois in 1935. After graduating from Meredosia Community High School, I earned a Bachelors Degree at the University of Nebraska in 1970. Years later in 1977, I earned a Masters Degree at Webster University in St. Louis County. My desire to fly aircraft and to contribute in some way to serve and protect my country were the reason that I entered the USAF in March 1954 at St. Louis, Missouri. I retired from the Air Force at Scott AFB, Illinois in 1978.

During my 1972-73 Southeast Asia tour, I was an aircraft commander, instructor pilot, and flight examiner in the 18th Special Operations Squadron at Bien Hoa, NKP, and DaNang. My most exciting AC-119K mission was bailing out of aircraft 839 on March 1, 1973. The complete story is published on the AC-119 Gunship website.

Two other combat missions involving enemy shoulder-fired, heat-seeking Strella-7 missiles rank high on my “pucker factor” scale. On both missions, the missile fired at our Stinger gunship came way too close to hitting us. With the introduction of enemy S-7 missiles to the battlegrounds of South Vietnam, our combat tactics were adjusted.

As a gunship volunteer, I wanted to do my part to serve my country during a wartime situation; also to test myself in a combat situation. I’m glad I experienced the many diversified missions. Each mission was different in some way. Flying the grand old AC119K gunship was a real challenge, especially when being fired upon, which was almost a nightly occurrence. I’m proud to have been a member of the elite 18th SOS, a squadron of highly trained and professional individuals and some of the best flyers that I’ve ever flown with during my 10,000 hours flying career. They proved to be rock steady during emergencies and were true icons of combat flying. My year in Vietnam with the 18th SOS was truly one of my most memorable and I will always be proud of the AC-119K Stinger Gunship and the men who flew her.

The Bailout of Stinger Eight-Three-Nine

It was a routine training mission when we departed DaNang with a crew of 13 in AC-119K No. 53-7839. It was just after midnight on March 1, 1973. The pre-mission weather briefing contained nothing regarding adverse weather at DaNang for the time of our planned return. The war was over and most of the American Stinger crews had been sent home. We were one of a few crews of the 18th SOS selected

to remain at DaNang for approximately six months to train the VNAF.

There were five U.S. crewmembers on board the Stinger 839 flight: Lt Col Ray Wolf, Instructor Navigator; Captain Norm Burger, Instructor FLIR/NOS (Forward Looking Infrared Radar/Night Observation Sight), TSgt Leroy Jackson, Instructor Gunner; SSgt Bill Isham, Instructor Illuminator Operator; and myself. This was the first Stinger mission to be flown without a USAF Flight Engineer. MSgt Kyser had just certified the VNAF Flight Engineer, MSgt Tuan, as a qualified Flight Engineer and this was MSgt Tuan's first solo flight.

We flew a dry-fire mission, south and southwest of DaNang for approximately two hours. I decided to return to DaNang to have the pilot practice his landings. I was in the copilot seat so I called the tower for landing instructions. Tower approved my request for a visual approach and landing, and to remain in the traffic pattern for practice landings. There was no sign of adverse weather as we approached the field except for some scattered to broken low clouds moving toward the base. However, as I reported on downwind, the VNAF tower controller reported that the weather on the field was then below visual approach minimums. I requested clearance for a TACAN (non-precision) approach. I received clearance to the TACAN initial approach fix (IAF), approximately 10 miles north of the base, and was told I could expect immediate clearance for the approach.

Enroute to the fix, we switched to the Approach Control radio frequency and got another surprise. The controller advised us the airfield was below minimums for all approaches, including precision approaches. The next few minutes were a blur of action with many things happening simultaneously. I was not overly concerned about fuel until the controller added that the whole coastline was socked in with fog. There was no alternate airport available within our limited range. I declared an emergency and requested an immediate Ground Controlled Approach (GCA).

I knew the weather was reported below GCA landing minimums and that the runway was technically closed, but I had no practical alternative. The approach controller then advised me GCA was closed. At that point, I demanded a U.S. GCA controller. I switched to the left (pilot) seat and advised approach control that I was flying a TACAN approach to the south, hoping precision radar would be available by the time I reached the final approach fix. I felt I had no choice but to try an approach before the weather got any worse - if that was possible.

Never before had I started a non-precision approach with the intention of severely busting minimum descent altitude. I was just hoping to catch a small enough break in the fog to get the bird on the ground. I estimated we had enough fuel to fly the TACAN approach, fly a missed approach to a precision approach, and, if necessary (it appeared this was a strong possibility) fly another missed approach to a safe bailout area.

The TACAN approach went well; Ray Wolf backed me up on the airborne radar. Somewhere on final approach, the unmistakable voice of a G.I. broke the silence. My hopes soared. He said he'd stay with us, but he didn't yet have his precision radar operational. I descended to 150 feet, but we could not see the runway to land.

The approach controller acknowledged our missed approach and said he was still trying to bring up the precision radar. The controller suggested flying a precision approach to the north using the ILS. He then vectored me into position for the approach. Enroute to the final approach fix, I advised the crew that if we could not land out of the ILS, we would need to bailout. I ordered the USAF crew to prepare themselves and the VNAF crew for bailout. I then contacted the approach controller who advised me that an eastbound heading to a point three to four miles off the coast would give us the best chance for a water rescue.

As I flew the ILS, I called on my 10,000 hours and 18 years of flying experience in making it the finest approach of my career, because I realized it could be my last. The ILS needles seemed not to budge from center, but the possibility of having to bailout kept flashing into my mind. All was silent except for the drone of those beautiful 3350s, occasionally interrupted by small power adjustment. Everything seemed perfect. The controller continued his reassuring words - 'and approach proceeding smoothly'. All we had to do was keep everything centered, nail the airspeed, ease old 839 down to 200 feet, find the runway, and not run out of fuel.

The ILS needles were centered when the controller reported we were approaching the runway threshold, but the copilot saw nothing. I descended below 200 feet, the minimum altitude for the approach. Suddenly, through the thick fog was the faint light of the strobes passing directly below us. I forced myself to look up from the instrument panel hoping to identify a set of runway lights. The faint strobes disappeared and there was only blackness. Back on instruments, I tried to maintain what I hoped was the runway centerline. The copilot again reported, "No lights in sight!" I allowed 839 to settle through 100 feet, prepared to land in the blind, lights or no lights. I eased off the

throttles, searching for the runway. My eyes darted from the instrument panel to outside the aircraft and back to the instrument panel, but - no runway lights. I had a split-second vision of the aircraft in a not-so-controlled crash, scattering crew and aircraft all over the field. I screamed to myself, "This is no way to go!" I crammed the throttles to the stops. At the same time, calling out, "Go Around!" The copilot immediately toggled the jet engines to maximum power. Thank God the recipis didn't falter!

I was told later by those on the ground that we were about 50 feet above, and tracking pretty well down the runway centerline when I initiated the missed approach. Some said they could barely see the underside of the aircraft. I'm not sure how we remained airborne. The flight controls were mushy; we had to be dangerously close to stall speed. I fully expected to touch down. Even in my desperation to establish a climbing attitude, I knew I would have to be extremely smooth on the controls and make sure I didn't overcorrect. We sucked up the gear as soon as I thought we were not going to settle anymore and prayed her into a climb. The approach controller excitedly asked if we were on the ground. Being a little busy, I replied, "Stand by" and continued nursing the aircraft into a climb.

As soon as I had the aircraft safely climbing, I told the controller we were heading for the bailout area. He wanted - almost begged me - to crank the airplane around for another attempt. But we needed fuel to climb to 3,500 feet and position ourselves over water for a safe bailout. Approach control advised us that all agencies were notified of our intentions and requested I let him know when we started bailing out.

Approaching the bailout area, I instructed the copilot to get out of his seat, strap on his life raft, then return and monitor the controls so I could do the same. For some reason, the copilot left and did not return. I was too busy to give it much thought.

At the bailout point, Sgt Isham reported that everyone was assembled in the cargo compartment preparing to leave the aircraft. Our fuel tanks were at or near empty. I set up an orbit, shut down the jets, confirmed that the crew was ready, then informed the controller we were leaving the aircraft. A few minutes later a crewmember reported the VNAF were unwilling to jump and that one of them apparently had no parachute. They located a parachute for the man, but they were still opposed to bailing out. (None of us were really crazy about it, but we had pretty much run out of choices). After a brief discussion, we decided that a U. S. crewmember would jump first. I believe it was Lt Col Ray

Wolf who went first. Even so, the VNAF had to be literally dragged to the exit and forced out in some fashion.

Finally, Sgt Isham reported everyone was out and it was just the two of us. I wished him luck, told him to get out. I realized I couldn't bail out while orbiting and that I needed to have the aircraft headed east, out to sea, before I jumped. I contacted the controller, advised him of my intentions, and told him everyone was out of the aircraft. Suddenly, both engines began losing power. I quickly repositioned some fuel switches and both engines returned to normal power.

I returned to the coast headed west, then reversed course and pointed 839 out to sea. With the aircraft on autopilot and steady on course, I set up a shallow descent, and informed the controller I was leaving. The engines were still churning but the fuel gauges were at zero. I couldn't find my life raft, but time was running out. I made one last search without success. I vaguely remember ripping off my helmet and giving it a sling somewhere in the cabin. I hate hats!

I reached the right side door, quickly checked my parachute and other equipment, stepped to the threshold and looked outside. It was pitch black. For an instant I thought, "What the hell am I doing here?" I grabbed the sides of the door to shove myself out, then hesitated. I stepped to the other side of the cabin, turned around and headed for the right side opening in a dead run. No turning back! I dived out the doorway.

As I was trying to count to ten I felt as though I was tumbling and falling too fast. I decided, "to hell with ten" and jerked the D-ring as hard as I could. "Opening shock" is too mild of a term to describe the instant my parachute popped open. It hurt and I yelled loud enough to wake up half of the coastal population. (I separated two ribs that required a couple of weeks of bandaging). When I examined the deployed parachute I thought some panels were missing. But I was wrong; all the panels were intact.

At last I looked around for Stinger 839. There she was, lights flashing and engines humming faintly - a perfectly good airplane descending gently to a watery doom. I felt I had let her down. If ever there was an aircraft to which I had a special attachment, it was that one. She had done all that could be expected of her. Silently, I thanked 839 for running just long enough.

As I descended to the water I began readying my equipment, inflating the chambers of my life vest, and searching for the water. All I could see was blackness.

I grabbed and held the harness quick-release latches in anticipation of splashing down. I was suddenly engulfed in fog and realized I would not have any warning before hitting the water. Just as I thought I caught a glimpse of a swell, I hit the water. I managed to release my canopy and grab a breath of air just as I hit. I seemed to plunge downward for a long time even though I was desperately flailing my arms and legs to reverse course. Finally, I began making my way to the surface, but I thought I would not have the breath to make it. I broke to the surface and sucked in a ton of atmosphere. It felt great to be alive!

It was about 4:30 a.m. and very dark. I checked myself over and took inventory of my equipment. I immediately took out my survival radio and tried to keep it out of the water. I had no idea where I was in relation to the other crewmembers. I tried to get my bearings but all I could see was water and fog. Since I had no raft I had to rely on my life vest to stay afloat. Suddenly, I felt sick and started vomiting. It might have been from shock, but bobbing in the gentle swells didn't help.

Because of the thick fog, I figured there would be no rescue attempts for a while, but I was anxious to try to contact my guys. I finally fired up the radio. After a few attempts, Ray Wolf answered. Thank God! There's no way to describe the relief I felt at that moment. Ray reported making contact with Burger, Jackson and Isham, and that all U.S. crewmembers were okay. He had made no contact with any of the VNAF; they either didn't have radios, or were just not using them. I could hear Ray but not the others, so I decided I was farther away from shore than the rest. We talked for a little while, then decided to save our batteries for later.

After about an hour, I was leaning to one side. One chamber of my life vest was low on air. I located the manual filler tube and re-inflated the chamber. There was obviously leaking because I had to manually re-inflate that chamber every 20 or 30 minutes for the remainder of the time I was in the water. I'm not sure how much time went by, but suddenly I noticed a light flickering through the fog, possibly 50 to 75 yards away. It was coming closer and I concluded I was seeing some type of searchlight because it was making a side-to-side sweeping motion along the surface. Finally I could see it was some kind of a small motor-powered johnboat with a couple of people in it.

The boat headed directly toward me with the light still searching side to side. I quickly decided these folks might not be friendly. It took all the will power I could muster to keep from yelling and waving my arms. As they eased closer

and closer, I decided it was time to do something. They were about 10 yards away, when I ducked under the water as far as I could and headed in a lateral direction away from them. When I couldn't hold my breath any longer, I inched my head out of the water and started looking for the boat, but luckily I had moved away from them. They were now on the opposite side of me a few yards, still searching mostly in front of them. I froze my position, ready to dunk myself again if necessary. Soon they were out of sight and I think I got sick again. About 30 minutes later they reappeared, moving directly toward me, so I went through the same drill again. After that, I never saw them again.

While writing this story, I learned that my experience was consistent with the operation of authentic water rescue teams stationed at DaNang. Specifically, the teams employed a two-man crew in a johnboat powered by a small Evinrude motor. I cannot understand why we were never briefed on the availability of such a water rescue team. I must admit their ability to home in on my transmitter was flawless. They were good!

Time passed very slowly - plenty of time to think about what had just happened and how I could have done things differently. I thought it was just a matter of time before we would be located and picked up. It barely entered my mind that we wouldn't be rescued. Eventually my arms got tired from trying to keep the radio out of the water. It may have been watertight, but I didn't want to take any chances. I was also weary of re-inflating the leaking chamber of my life vest. It occurred to me many times that I should have made one more sweep of the flight deck for that raft.

Eventually the fog appeared to be thinning and I thought I could detect small patches of sky. Then, for the first time, I could hear that things were happening. I was certain I was hearing the faint sound of a chopper in the distance - that unique combination of engine and rotor you never forget once you've heard it. All of a sudden, my radio came to life! At first, I couldn't make out the broken chatter, but it was an encouraging sign that someone out there might be trying to locate us. Finally, I distinctly heard the sound of a helicopter. I started calling on the radio, trying not to sound too panicky. What a relief when they responded.

I couldn't see the chopper, but I was able to direct them to my position by listening to the sound. Then, there they were! What a beautiful sight! They were less than a mile away, heading in my general direction. I gave them a couple minor corrections and told them they were about to fly right over my head. They acknowledged having me in sight and directed a boat to me. Shortly a boat appeared, pulled

up beside me and within minutes I was safely aboard. It's difficult to describe my feelings at that time. I was hoping the other twelve crewmembers had been picked up safely and felt great concern for them. I was extremely tired and seemingly drained of emotion, yet elated and thankful to be alive and out of the water with my feet on a solid surface. I looked for a friendly face and found it. Ray Wolf was right there to help me aboard. What a sight! He looked ragged, just as I'm sure I looked to him, but he also looked in good shape and that's what counted.

Ray reported that everyone had been picked up safely except for one of the VNAF navigators. Apparently he had failed to release his parachute when he hit the water on bailout and still had it connected to his harness when he got into his dinghy. When the boat arrived to pick him up, his parachute got tangled in the boat engine's propeller. He was dragged under the water and drowned. My heart still aches that I was unable to bring all 13 to shore safely.

We were apparently aboard a fishing boat. The smell made me sick again. (I'm not real crazy about deep-sea fishing for that reason). The gentle swells rocking and heaving the boat on the way in were of no help. I don't remember a lot about the trip back to DaNang AB. I think a helicopter picked us up from the boat.

I was surprised to see a large welcoming group waiting for us at DaNang. Everyone had questions, but we were rushed off to the hospital for a checkup. There was an accident investigation in which the crew was separated and questioned individually. I'm not sure about the others, but the VNAF commander asked me just a few simple questions, then thanked me for saving seven of his eight people. He also said he had expected a much higher casualty rate. The U. S. investigation team was not so easy; there were many, many questions.

U. S. investigators told me that the VNAF would not release the control tower tape recordings to the investigation team. The tapes would have explained our circumstances. I also learned there were sharks in the area where we bailed out. We were probably briefed on that at one time, but it didn't come to me while my feet were dangling in the water for about four hours. The investigation never revealed why we were not advised of the changing weather conditions. When the investigation was over, we were all allowed to leave DaNang for home, thus cutting short and

officially ending the AC-119K training program for the VNAF.

One of my concerns was how this incident was going to be entered in the books, especially in my military records. The investigating team never mentioned pilot error. I checked with wing headquarters before I departed and was assured the investigation revealed no pilot error. I checked my records later and found no mention of the incident.

Bailing out of 839 was the most harrowing experience of my flying career. I would not want to go through it again, but one always wonders how he would react in such a situation. Now I know. I thank God that twelve survived, but the fate of the thirteenth will forever haunt me. There is no doubt in my mind that my four U. S. crewmembers Ray Wolf, Norm Burger, Leroy Jackson and Bill Isham were directly responsible for a successful bailout that night. Without their courage, experience, knowledge and professionalism, some of us would not have survived. And finally, this story would probably not have been told without the encouragement of SMSgt Lee Kyser. It is to my four fellow-crewmembers and to Lee Kyser, my instructor Flight Engineer, that I dedicate this story.

Some of the crew from eight-three-nine - USAF Crewmembers are top row, (L-R) LTC Ray Wolf, Instructor Navigator (IN); MSgt Lee Kyser, Instructor Flight Engineer (IFE); Capt. Norm Burger, Instructor FLIR/NOS; TSgt Leroy Jackson, Instructor Gunner (IG); Unknown Instructor Gunner (IG). The two Vietnamese crewmembers, top right, wearing the parachute harness, are student pilots. Kneeling behind the other VNAF students, at bottom left, is Lt. Colonel Roy (Tony) Simon. Kneeling bottom right is SSgt Bill Isham, Instructor IO (IIO). (Student VNAF flight engineer, MSGT Tuan, took the photo with Lee Kyser's camera).





Augustis "Gus" D. Sininger, FE

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, Bien Hoa, 1971-72



Cincinnati, Ohio was my birthplace in 1942. I grew up across the Ohio River in Elsmere, Kentucky where I attended Lloyd High School. Immediately after watching the movie "Psycho" at the local theater, my high school buddies and I walked across the street to the Air Force Recruiter and joined up, saying that it was better to join than having our draft numbers come up.

Shortly thereafter, I entered the United States Air Force at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

I served with the 18th Special Operations Squadron as a Stinger Flight Engineer during 1971-72 at Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand, DaNang AB and Bien Hoa AB in the Republic of Vietnam.

There are two missions during my Vietnam tour that come to mind as the most exciting. On one mission, we found 24 trucks coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and proceeded to destroy all 24 trucks while dodging heavy triple A. We actually went past Bingo Fuel during the attack, but we accomplished the mission and safely made it back to base. I received a Distinguished Flying Cross for that mission.

The other mission was defending DaNang Air Base during a rocket attack in which our Stinger gunship warned the base of rocket launches and then spotted and attacked rocket launch sites. The rocket attack on DaNang was stopped, thanks in a large part to our Stinger. Later, our crew was called to the VNAF Headquarters and presented with the

Award of the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Bronze Star. We were also given a captured 122mm rocket to give to our commander Colonel Tom Teal. Col. Teal got a little upset about the rocket because it was still a live rocket. He had our building evacuated and called in the EOD squad.

I will always remember one party in particular at NKP. We had just returned to base because of aircraft malfunctions that I couldn't repair and we were hungry! At the party, the main dish was a roasted pig that wasn't done all the way, but we couldn't wait; we were hungry! So, we ate the meat anyway. Well, at least three of us got food poisoning. I was the worst case. I had to be taken to the hospital for IVs and observation. I was in the hospital for four days! I remember that Rick Ward, Jerry Brightman, Wayne Laessig, and Ron Hinton were among those who attended that party.

Another NKP story that I will always remember is about Fred Graves. Fred and I were sitting on the walkway, talking about things when he asked me if my name was German. I said my last name was German and my first name was Italian. Fred thought for a minute before saying, "Then that makes you a Goose Stepping Ginny!" I chased Fred all around the compound until I was out of breath.

The thing that I will always remember about my time with AC-119 gunships was, believe it or not, having good times with everyone including the flight officers. When we flew together, we worked together as a team to get the job done and accomplish the mission. I also remember good times spent at the hootch, drinking and playing cards.

I retired as Senior Master Sergeant from the USAF at Hurlburt Field, Florida in June 1983. I currently live in Fort Walton Beach, Florida.



Bernie William Smith, Nav.

17th SOS, Phan Rang, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71

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.



Michael Patrick Smith, Gunner

17th SOS, Phan Rang, 1969-70

I was born in Groton, New York in 1948. I graduated from Goose Bay Dependent High School at Goose Bay AFB, Labrador in 1966. Being an Air Force Brat, I attended three different colleges earning an Associate Degree. I joined the Air Force to continue a family tradition. From my father on down, my family has over 200 years total in military service to our country.

I entered the Air Force in 1967 in upstate New York and received basic training at Amarillo, TX. After crew combat training at Lockbourne AFB, OH, I served with the 17th SOS at Phan Rang AB, RVN from Dec. 1969 to Dec. 1970. Upon my return to the States, I served at Lockbourne AFB as an instructor gunner for AC-119G crew combat training from Jan. to Aug. 1971. Then I was assigned to Hurlburt Field 9 at Eglin AFB, FL as an instructor gunner on AC-

119G/K gunships and eventually as an instructor on AC-130A, E, and H model gunships between Aug. 1971 and Aug. 1975. From 1975 to 1983, I was a USAF para-rescue man.

My most memorable missions were those flown in Cambodia. I will never forget missions flown in providing fire support for the Siege of Duc Lap, Dak Seang and Dak Pek in South Vietnam. The TIC missions in the Bolovens Plateau in southern Laos were unforgettable.

Receiving a medical retirement from the USAF, I retired as a Senior Master Sergeant in 1987. I currently live in Alamogordo, NM.



Jerry (Duke) Snyder, Gunner

18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom, 1970-71

I entered the USAF in Jan 1969 and was trained as a Weapons Technician. Arriving at my first base of Homestead, Florida, I began training on F-4's when a bulletin came out in Jan 1970 asking for Weapon Technicians to become gunners for AC-119's. By July 1970 I found myself heading to Vietnam to fly on AC-119Ks. I flew 134 combat missions over Cambodia and Laos during the next year and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) and 9 Air Medals.

Upon return to Shaw AFB, South Carolina, I again volunteered to fly on AU-24s and AU-25s, short takeoff and landing (STOL) aircraft comprised of Helio-Stallions and Pilatus Porters, that were being outfitted with a three barrel 20mm gattling gun and being tested at Hulbert Field, Florida for deployment to Vietnam and Thailand.

I was discharged in Jan 1973 obtaining the rank of Staff Sergeant.

The Bra

Many missions flown seem to blend as one but, the one that sticks out was just a "ferry" mission made on Christmas Day 1970. I was stationed at DaNang when on Christmas morning I was notified that I would be going to Nakhon Phanom (NKP), Thailand for a week or so of TDY due to a shortage of gunners at NKP. The crew that was going to take us was a crew that had been stationed at NKP and was coming back from Phan Rang after picking up an AC-119K that had come back from corrosion control. During the

briefing the navigator had mentioned that he would have to check with local flyover rules when I mentioned to him that it was a heading of 270 degrees for 30 miles. I figured that since it was a daytime flight we would want to head towards the Bolovens Plateau area of Laos which meant taking up an additional heading of 290 degrees. The Plateau area was not as heavily defended as the rest of "Steel Tiger," the area where the Ho Chi Minh Trail traversed through central Laos.

On board was an Instructor Pilot (IP) who was giving the Pilot a "check-ride". As we approached the 30 mile mark, the navigator came over the intercom and asked "Navigator to Gunner, what is that heading?" When I replied, "290", the IP interrupted and asked "Who's navigating this plane?" They decided to take the more direct route to NKP. I was sitting in the NOS door located in the rear when I saw the area known as "The Bra" come into view. It got its name from where the Mekong River made two bulges. This was always a heavily defended area and before I could say anything several 37mm anti-aircraft guns started firing at us.

We were flying at 10,000 feet at 175 knots when the rounds came up. Several rounds actually passed between the booms in the rear and exploded overhead. I quickly advised the pilot that we were over "The Bra" and taking rounds. Their first question was, "What's The Bra?" I quickly advised them and the pilots immediately put full power to the engines and headed south away from "The Bra". After landing at NKP, the IP came up to me and said "I guess we should have listened to you!"



Roy W. Snyder, Logistics

18th SOS, Bien Hoa, 1972

I was born in Elysburg, Pennsylvania in 1939. In 1957, I graduated from Central Columbia High in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania. I graduated from Wayland Baptist University in 1977. I joined the Air Force to see the world and learn new job skills.

I served TDY (July-September 1972) with the 18th SOS at Bien Hoa AB, Vietnam. The most exciting times at Bien Hoa for me were the nights we were hit by rockets. One of our aircraft sustained several hundred holes and some of our fly-away kits were damaged during a rocket attack. I will

always remember how gratifying it was for me to contribute to an organization that did so much to save the lives of men in combat. The rapid response of the 18th SOS to calls of troops in life threatening situations is something that every member can be proud of. It will remain in my memory forever.

I retired from the Air Force in October 1977 at Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls, Texas. I currently live in San Antonio, Texas.



Everett Dale Sprou, Gunner

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, Bien Hoa, 1971-72



I was born April 18, 1946 in St. Louis County, Missouri and attended public schools in DeSoto and Festus, Missouri. In April 1963, I joined the Air Force and trained as a security policeman. I returned to civilian life in April 1967, then reenlisted in June 1968 and trained as a weapons mechanic.

I served three overseas assignments in the weapons specialty: weapons mechanic on the F-100 at Bien Hoa AB, RVN, 1969-1970;

gunner with the 18th SOS AC-119K Stinger Gunship at Nakhon Phanom RTAB; and weapons load monitor with F-105 aircraft in 1972-1974 at Ghedi AB, Italy. My last reenlistment was in 1972 and was conducted under the wing of an AC-119K Stinger Gunship at NKP. After completing my gunship tour, I cross-trained into the computer field. I separated from the Air Force as a Staff Sergeant in July 1976. My significant awards and decorations included the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with three oak leaf clusters.

One of my most memorable Stinger missions occurred while flying over Laos. We began receiving AAA while orbiting a potential target. Without our gunship firing a shot, the AAA gun blew up, creating a huge ball of fire. Another mission I will always remember was the one on which the IO punched off a flare and it landed in the back of a truck blowing it up.

I presently live in the St. Louis area where I am employed at Washington University in St. Louis as a Protective Services Officer. I hope to retire soon, do some traveling, and continue enjoying my four children and seven grandchildren.



To Be A Gunner

AC-119K Stinger Gunner 1971 to 1972

When I was in the 6th or 7th grade, I remember standing in front of my class and stating I wanted to be in the Air Force and I wanted to fly. Some of the other boys laughed and said, "You will never be able to fly because you have to be a college graduate and then become a pilot." I knew I would never go to college due to finances and my academic ability. I was never a great student. I still wanted to join the Air Force because of my fascination with airplanes. I joined at the earliest opportunity, which was on my 17th birthday in April 1963. I went through Basic and then to Security Police School, and then was assigned four years guarding missile sites in Nebraska. I never even flew on a commercial airliner let alone military aircraft during the four years.

I separated from the Air Force in 1967, then reenlisted in 1968. The recruiter was anxious to get a prior service person and said I could choose whatever career field that I wanted. I chose Aerial Photography. The field was closed. My next choice was Weapons Mechanic since at least I could work around airplanes. So it was off to Lowry AFB, CO to learn how to load bombs and fix guns on F-100 Super Sabers. It was an interesting field and I really enjoyed my work. I was sent to Luke AFB, AZ and then to Bien Hoa Air Base, Vietnam to work in the specialty.

My assignment following Vietnam was Travis AFB, CA as a Fuel Specialist. After I was there for about four months, I learned that the Air Force was looking for former weapons troops to volunteer as aerial gunners. I zipped up to Headquarters and signed up. I didn't know or care what aircraft I flew on; I just knew that I was really going to fly. The program was Project Palace Gun. I started my training by going to the altitude chamber at Castle AFB, CA, followed by flight training at Hurlburt Field, FL. It was then that I learned that I would be doing as a gunner. I would be an inflight weapons mechanic on AC-119K Stinger Gunships. Now most folk picture a gunner as manning a gun and firing at attacking enemy aircraft. Not so with this "modern" flying, fighting machine. Our job was to load and repair two 20mm Vulcan cannons and four 7.62mm mini-guns during flight. The guns were actually fired by the Aircraft Commander. What a thrill it was to walk out on the flight line and see the AC-119K gunship, an old converted boxcar with a black coat and six guns hanging out

the left side. I soon learned why it was painted black.

Enroute to Southeast Asia, I attended Survival Training in Washington State and Jungle Survival Training in the Philippines. My initial assignment was to Phan Rang Air Base but, while at Clark Air Base, it was changed to Nakhon Phanom RTAB, Thailand. Well, praise the Lord, I did not have to go to Vietnam. We flew most of our missions in Laos on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a country that I had never heard of, and a country in which it was officially denied that we were flying missions. We did go TDY to Vietnam a few times.

I was finally flying and I loved it. The word got around how much I liked to fly and some of the other gunners would ask me to fly their missions. Some people asked if it was scary flying combat. I said there wasn't time to be afraid.

What was it like in the gun bay? There were three enlisted Gunners, an enlisted Illuminator Operator (IO) and an officer Night Observation Sight Operator (NOS) in the cargo area. The NOS stood at his station which was located in the original entry door immediately forward of the left engine. The IO operated the flare launcher and the 1.5 million candle power light (white light and infra-red) at the rear of the aircraft. He also served as jumpmaster in case of bailout. Imagine two 20mm cannon firing 2,500 round per minute and four 7.62mm mini-guns firing at 6,000 rounds per minute. The gunship was shaking so hard that you believed at any second the aircraft would come apart. The noise and smoke were so intense that it would take a couple hours after a mission to clear your brain. Gun barrels would turn red, then white, from bullets being fired at such high rates. For the most part, we used only the 20mm cannons over the trail against trucks and tanks.

Reloading the guns, especially the 20mm's, was always an adventure. We used a big drill-like device to reload and it must have weighted 30 to 40 pounds. Once inserted into the gun, we squeezed a trigger to feed the ammo belts from the ammo can into the drum. Gunners found that they first must disconnect their intercom microphone/headset cord

before feeding the ammo belt into the drum or risk the chance of the their headset cord getting caught and pulled along with the ammo. Without communication with the rest of the crew, a gunner could not hear "break" calls to evade AAA. So, there you were with this heavy loader in both hands, the gunship flying in a left-hand orbit, guns firing, and all of a sudden the gunship breaks a hard right turn or left turn. Needless to say, we quickly learned to stay braced and ready when not wearing our headsets.

Gunners had another job other than maintaining the guns on combat missions. Along with the IO who hung out the right side of the plane, one of the three gunners would hang out the left side of the plane scanning enemy territory below for AAA fire. If we could see a round that we thought might hit our plane, we would call the pilot over intercom to "break right" or "break left", depending on which side of the plane the round was headed. In heavy AAA, the gunner scanner and the IO scanner might call out "break right" and "break left" at the same time which caused the pilot to decide which way to break. We did take a lot of hits, but thank God, there was only one Stinger lost due to enemy ground fire.

After we pulled off targets and were bingo fuel (enough fuel to fly back to base with reserves) gunners would clean up the gun bay/cargo compartment. There were expended shell casings to be policed and empty ammo cans to secure. On one mission, during this clean up, I pulled an empty ammo can out of the rack, and noticed a nasty gash through the bottom of the can. I showed the can to the IO who turned a few different colors as he thought about the direction of the enemy round which was headed toward his position in the back of the gunship. When we landed, we found that we had also taken another round, very close to the battery compartment. Of course, it took us a few rounds of our own at the club to get over the enemy rounds.

Even with the hazards of flying in combat in an aircraft that had a bad record of staying in the air, it was the best year and a half in my Air Force career. I would most certainly do it again.



Peter St. Jean, Navigator

18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom, 1971-72

Peter St. Jean was born on September 16, 1932 in New Rochelle, Westchester County, New York. Peter enlisted in the USAF after graduating from Brooklyn Technical High School on May 14, 1952. He could not afford to go on

to college and was classified 1A, so the USAF opportunity looked great!

Basic Training was at Sampson AFB, New York. He was



accepted for Aviation Cadet Pilot Training with an interim assignment as Airman 3rd Class at Reese AFB, Texas, thence to Lackland AFB, Texas. From Lackland, Peter was sent to Malden AFB, Missouri for Primary Pilot Training and then to Greenville AFB, Mississippi for Basic Pilot Training. At Greenville, Peter “washed-out”

of pilot training and was sent to Ellington AFB, Texas for Navigator Training. He earned his Navigator Wings and Second Lieutenant Bars there in December 1954.

Peter’s first operational assignment was in the RC-121 Lockheed Super Constellation in the Air Defense Command, DC 551st AEW&C at Otis AFB, Massachusetts. In 1958, he was sent off to SAC for training and a B-47 assignment to Chenault AFB, Louisiana, then to B-52s at Carswell AFB, Texas. Peter earned a “spot promotion” and was an Instructor Navigator/Bombardier in B-47s and a Radar Navigator in B-52s. He was promoted to Major in 1968 and earned Master Navigator Wings in 1969. While flying B-52s, Peter served several 179-day TDYs to Anderson AFB, Guam to participate in ARC LIGHT missions in Southeast Asia before becoming the 7th Bomb Wing Air Weapons Officer at Carswell AFB.

In 1970, he was sent off to Lockbourne AFB, Ohio for AC-119K gunship training as a FLIR sensor operator, thence to DaNang Air Base, Vietnam. From 1971 to 1972, Peter served on the 18th Special Operations Squadron Stinger flight crews as an Instructor FLIR & NOS (a few times as Table Navigator) at DaNang and Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Air Base, Thailand. He was awarded the Air Medal with eight Oak Leaf Clusters and the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for combat service in Southeast Asia. His DFC was awarded as a result of heroic actions taken when his Stinger gunship was hit by enemy anti-aircraft fire and subsequent actions taken to help make a safe emergency landing at DaNang on 14 May 1971.

Major Peter St. Jean returned to Carswell AFB from Vietnam in February 1972 and retired 31 May 1972, having flown approximately 6,000 hours during his twenty continuous years of service in the United States Air Force.

While still on active duty, Peter earned all FAA Pilot/Instructor Ratings and opened a Flying School in Fort Worth, Texas that continued operations after his retirement. Peter moved to Ohio and stayed in aviation, where he is currently a Corporate Pilot/CFII-A. He has logged approximately 18,000 flying hours as a pilot and still attends reunions with his Pilot Training Class 54-G classmates of which few have logged as many “pilot” flying hours as Peter St. Jean, the “NAV”.



Kenneth Paul Stearn, IO

17th & 18th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, DaNang, Phan Rang, 1970-71

I was born in 1943 at Fort Smith, Arkansas, but grew up in Red Lion, Pennsylvania where I graduated from Red Lion Senior High School in 1962. To stay out of the Army and to sleep on white sheets, I joined the Air Force on 13 July 1967 at York, Pennsylvania.

In Vietnam, I was assigned as an Illuminator Operator (IO) to the 17th SOS, C Flight at Tan Son Nhut, Saigon from August to November 1970. Then I was temporarily assigned to the 18th SOS Flight at DaNang. In December, I returned to the 17th SOS C Flight at Tan Son Nhut to fly missions until April 1971. I was transferred to the 17th SOS at Phan Rang to train Vietnamese Illuminator Operators until my return to the states on 10 August 1971.

There were so many exciting and dangerous combat missions that I flew in Southeast Asia, it is hard to pick out

just one. The first time we were fired on by enemy 50 caliber guns still sticks out in my mind as a bonafide reality check. I mean we were flying in Cambodia and there were not supposed to be any 50 cal gun sites there. Then it happened, I really did not know what was going on. All of a sudden all I could see were white streaks coming up between the booms and a noise that I thought sounded like popcorn popping. It did not take me long to realize what was going on when I heard someone yell, “Break Right!” That was the first time I realized that the guys on the ground were trying to kill us. After that I became more aware of my surroundings in the air and on the ground. You really start paying attention when you realize that you could be killed at any time. I think I will always remember the people, Vietnamese and Americans. There were good times and bad times but we managed to make it through.

My awards and decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross with an Oak Leaf Cluster, Meritorious Service Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters, and the Air Medal with a Silver Oak Leaf and three Oak Leaves.

I retired from the USAF at Langley AFB, Virginia on 1 Aug 1993 with 26 years and 19 days of service.

After retirement, I went to work for a copier company where I was in charge of the parts room. The organizational and management skills that I had learned in the Air Force started paying off. I worked there for eight years before

they promoted me to warehouse manager and moved me to Richmond. It was a round trip commute of 156 miles. I stayed about four months and decided that was enough. For the next four years, I began working with substance abusers in Newport News. This was a real eye opener for me, seeing talented individuals throwing their lives away for drugs and alcohol. It was the greatest learning experience since Vietnam. I retired again in June 2005 and found retired life boring. I now work part-time as a Park Aide at one of our county parks while serving as administrator for our Moose Lodge.



Russell E. Steffensmeier, Gunner

17th SOS, Nha Trang, Tan Son Nhut, 1968-69



I was born on August 30, 1948 at Redwood Falls, Minnesota. I graduated from Morgan High School in May 1966. I was 17 when I enlisted in the Air Force.

Upon completing basic training, I attended weapons school at Lowry AFB, CO, then reported to Homestead AFB, FL to work on F-104s with the 319th Fighter Interceptor Squadron. That job

involved considerable TDY.

In August 1968, I received orders to Lockbourne AFB, OH where I trained as an aerial gunner assigned to the 71st SOS at Nha Trang AB, RVN. I reported to the 71st on December 21, 1968. Then on January 17, I transferred to Tan Son Nhut AB as a gunner on Major Thomas Cougill's crew. Lt Col Paul Maxwell was the co-pilot. Navigators on the crew were Captains William McGary and James Davis. The Flight Engineer was SSgt Thomas Newbold.

I was reassigned to the 17th SOS in June 1969 when the 71st SOS was released from active duty. Lt Col Buckley became my new aircraft commander. I flew 124 combat missions in the AC-119G Shadow gunship and had a total of 469.3 flight hours.



L-R; Major Thomas Cougill; Lt. Col. Paul Maxwell; Capt. William McGary; Capt. Paul Davis; TSgt. Bart Dye; SSgt. Robert Branscomb; SSgt. Thomas Newbold; Sgt. Russell Steffensmeier

After completing my tour in gunships I reported to the 33rd TAC Fighter Wing at Eglin AFB, FL. Two weeks later, I was reassigned to the 16th TAC Fighter Wing at Eglin. Both squadrons had F-4s. On August 24, 1970, I was released from active duty having attained the rank of Sergeant. I currently live in Morgan, Minnesota. My awards and decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross with one oak leaf cluster and the Air Medal with six oak leaf clusters.

Landing Zone Jamie

One of my most memorable combat missions occurred 12 May 1969. We were scrambled for a TIC near Tay Ninh City, RVN, where the enemy was overrunning Landing Zone Jamie.

The controller was White Scalp 2 Mike. We were using flares to illuminate the landing zone. With only twelve flares remaining, the aircraft commander decided to illuminate the target area using our white light. When the light went on we immediately starting taking ground fire from two .51 caliber anti-aircraft positions. The aircraft commander had me put more guns on the line; we were firing multiple guns at high speed. It was demanding work keeping the guns loaded and operating.

We experienced several gun malfunctions, including rounds jammed in the pod partitions and broken feeder pins. We silenced the gun sites, but the enemy ground forces had advanced to the landing zone perimeter fence. We redirected our fire to the perimeter in an effort to hold them back. White Scalp 2 Mike then redirected us to two bunkers

inside the landing zone that were occupied by enemy forces. We again came under heavy ground fire - this time from small arms and automatic weapons. Even so, I was able to keep four guns on the line at all times, providing 90 minutes of continuous firepower.

We kept the enemy pinned down and prevented their further advance. We ran out of ammo, so I helped the illuminator operator launch flares until daybreak when we were forced to leave due to low fuel. I was exhausted, but satisfied that our crew did everything we could to help the team. As a result of our work at Landing Zone Jamie, each member of my Shadow 78 was recommended for the Distinguished Flying Cross.



Roy Michael Stein, Inventory aka Ferlin

71st SOS, Nha Trang, 1968-69

I was born on 28 June 1947 at Scottsburg, Scott County Indiana and enlisted in the USAF Reserve on 8 January 1967 at Bakalar AFB, Columbus, Indiana. On 18 June 1969, I was released from active duty. Attaining the grade of Airman First Class, I earned the Vietnam Service Medal and the National Defense Service Medal. I was released from military service on 30 November 1970.

I lived in Seymour, Indiana and graduated from Seymour High School in 1965. At the time of enlistment, my wife and I were expecting our first son (Jay was born 16 June 1967). I was employed as a master barber with Don's Barber Shop in Seymour. Several of my high school classmates were in the military at this time. I joined the Air Force Reserves thinking I could do my small part to serve our country. The barber shop was open every Saturday which was our busiest day of the week. Saturdays provided a large portion of my income. Joining the Reserves at Airman's pay was not a good financial move.

My Basic Training was completed 7 May 1967 at Lackland AFB, Texas. My specialty title was Inventory Materials. I was called to active duty at Bakalar AFB on May 1968 and assigned to Lockbourne AFB, Ohio in June 1968.

There were many weekends that we carpoled and burned up the highway between home (Seymour/Columbus) and Lockbourne AFB for training. As I recall, we went to Vietnam in three different groups departing from

Lockbourne. I was in the last group to depart on 9 December 1968. I was assigned to Nha Trang Beach Front Property.

Those of us who were assigned AF jobs on the base had it made. We had barracks to live in. We had a dry bed. We had mosquito nets over our beds. We had music. We had Mamma Sans to clean our clothes for a small fee. We had (cold) showers. We had beer. We could relax on the beach when we had time off. We had thick sand-bagged walls to protect us.

We would spend evenings sitting under a parachute canopy talking and debating. We had friendships. Compared to those guys that were out in the boonies and battlefields, we were on vacation. I think the Rangers came to Nha Trang for R&R. The only threat that I was aware of was our daily bus trips to the base and back which took us through town.

Occasionally I drove a two-ton truck filled with scrap aircraft parts to an Army depot. The dirt road that led to the depot was mostly pot holes and I was forced to drive slowly. During these trips, I would encounter a group of kids that would jump on the back of my truck and throw off parts. I would stop and they would run away. I would continue and they would jump back on the truck and resume the game.

There was a regular AF military guy assigned to the barracks next door to us that was from Brownstown, Indiana. He

couldn't believe that he had traveled all the way to Southeast Asia to find an entire barrack next door filled with Southern Indiana boys from Columbus, Seymour, North Vernon, Greensburg, Henryville, etc. This blew his mind. I think his last name was White.

Since my occupation prior to active duty was 'barbering', several of the guys convinced me to cut their hair during our Vietnam tour of duty. This service was handy for them at a low cost and I could always use the extra cash as an Airman. I started cutting hair in Ohio for \$1 per head. After arriving in Nha Trang, my 'buddies' convinced me that I should charge them the local hair cutting rate of 25 cents. I guess I was easy because I lowered my rate. One day, one of the guys from another barrack came by complaining about the hair cut he had received in town. It was without a doubt the worst hair cut that I had ever witnessed in my life, even on

the first day at barber school. From that day forward I said, "If it ain't worth a buck to you, just go to town."

The guys in my barracks were practical jokers. They entertained themselves by burning cigarette holes in my mosquito net while I slept, just to see me get up the next morning with numerous large red bumps all over my extremities. They also liked short-sheeting and putting salt between the sheets. Dale Fleetwood was the ringleader and a full-time participant. His brother-in-law, Jerry Engle, participated a lot of the time, and Wendy Higdon took part when he drank - which was a lot of the time. With friends like that, I didn't need Charlie! In June 1969, the 71st Special Operations Squadron was released from active duty and we returned to the real world of Hoosiers at Bakalar AFB, Indiana.



Donald Paul Stevens, Elect. Maint.

17th SOS, Phan Rang, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



I was born in Houston, Texas in 1949. I graduated from Richfield High School at Waco, Texas in 1967. I joined the Air Force in 1969 because I was young and not ready for college and because of the Vietnam War. After I separated from the Air Force in July 1973 at Carswell AFB, Texas in Fort Worth, I entered college and

graduated from Tyler Jr. College at Tyler, Texas in 1975 and McLennan College in Waco, Texas in 1978. My wife, Chris, and I currently live in Waco.

My most memorable event while I was with AC-119 gunships was when I got a chance to fly on an AC-119G Shadow gunship with the crew. Although it was not a combat mission, it gave me some insight of what it was like to be aboard one of the planes with the crew. I am pretty sure it was a hop from Phan Rang to Tan Son Nhut at Saigon. The trip gave me an above the ground perspective of Vietnam and its natural beauty. It also reminded me of how serious our mission in Vietnam was and how dangerous it was for our AC-119 crews. I had so much respect for them.

I will always remember the closeness of our 17th SOS unit (C Flight) at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. I had many really close pals among the young and older enlisted men as well as officers. I loved the time I was there, yet hated it! I missed my wife, Chris (we are still married now for forty years). I was proud to serve with the 17th SOS in Vietnam for 364 days. I am still proud of our group of guys.



Rogers Craig Stevens, Jr., Pilot

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, 1971-72

I was born September 7, 1940, in Washington D.C. My hometown is Bethesda, Maryland where I graduated from Walter Johnson Senior High School in 1958. I was commissioned through the AFROTC program at the University of Maryland in 1965. Six years later, I earned an advanced degree from Phillips University.

After pilot training at Vance AFB, Enid, OK, I was selected to return to Vance as a T-37 instructor pilot with the 3575th Flying Wing. Oh, how undergraduate student pilots can enliven and terrorize one's life at the same time. I eventually became an Academic Instructor and taught UPT classroom academics.

I was a volunteer for Vietnam, so in the fall of 1970, I was shocked to learn I was being processed for a Vietnam assignment as a non-volunteer. The aircraft selection for non-volunteers consisted mostly of helicopters and trash haulers - no F-105s or A-37s. I successfully convinced MPC to process me as a volunteer and was delighted with my assignment to the AC-119K.

After learning the intricacies of flying an aircraft with twin piston-driven radial engines with variable speed propellers, I reported to the 4413th CCTS for combat crew training. I was proud to become a multi-engine pilot. I arrived at 18th SOS Headquarters at Phan Rang AB in June 1970, only to discover that all the aircraft were deployed to NKP and DaNang. I was reassigned to NKP where I initially flew as a co-pilot before checking out as aircraft commander.

I flew 56 combat missions. Of those 56 combat missions, one stands out. My Stinger gunship was stalked, hunted, and then chased by a Soviet-made North Vietnam Air Force MiG fighter in the Barrel Roll of Northern Laos. We rapidly descended to dangerously low altitudes, hiding in the jungle mountain valleys, hoping to get lost in ground clutter on the MiG's radar. I had a plan to defend us if the MiG attacked.

In December 1971, I was selected to become an Air Operations Officer at 7th Air Force Headquarters at Tan Son Nhut AB, Saigon, RVN. My specific duties were to schedule (frag) AC-119K Stinger Gunships, AC-130 Spectre Gunships, Fighter Escorts (two escorts for Stingers, three escorts for Spectres), and KC-135 Tankers for refueling the

escorts. Additionally, I scheduled EB-66 ECM (electronic counter-measures) aircraft, EC-47 propaganda leaflet aircraft, Commando Vault missions (15,000 pound bomb instant landing zone mission on the Ho Chi Minh Trail), and helicopter escort missions for ship convoys transporting supplies to Phnom Penh, Cambodia via the Mekong River. It was also my daily duty to change all the authentication codes in Southeast Asia to ensure we were working with the "good guys". I also gave the General Staff a daily briefing on the battle damage assessments for all gunship missions flown the previous night. The job was very demanding, but I relished every task assigned to me. I learned to fully respect and appreciate efficient and effective Air Force level leadership in the command and control of assets.

From gunships I was assigned duty as an AFROTC Instructor at Davis and Elkins College in Elkins, West Virginia. During my annual flight physical the flight surgeon determined I had a condition that resulted in my automatic grounding from flying and that subsequently rendered me 100% disabled. Consequently, I was medically retired and separated from the Air Force on January 24, 1974.

My awards and decorations include the Bronze Star, Air Force Commendation Medal, and the Air Medal with five Oak Leaf Clusters. I have never forgotten, nor will I forget, the friendships I made during my years in the Air Force and the excitement and challenge of my assignments, especially in Southeast Asia.



James Stewart, Navigator

17th SOS, Phu Cat, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71

Chicago, Illinois is my hometown. I graduated from Purdue University (BS- Aero-Engr) and the University of Chicago (MBA). I joined the Air Force to experience "one big adventure and the large salaries."

The thing I remember most about my time with AC-119 gunships was that I just flew each mission – one day at a time. I had been at Bien Hoa in 1965 and NKP in 1967, so everyday was just one more of the same. After leaving the 17th SOS, I was assigned to the 63rd Military Airlift Wing and flew many missions to Southeast Asia. I couldn't get away from that damn part of the world, returning many times to Phu Cat and Saigon. I was involved in the evacuation of Saigon in late April 1975...one of the last

aircraft to depart Tan Son Nhut...gut wrenching. I also participated in "Operation Homecoming", bringing the POWs home from Hanoi. Again, I just flew my missions one day at a time... getting paid twice a month. For all my years in Southeast Asia: God Bless those lost along the way.

The things I remember the most about my time with AC-119 gunships are that there was a good bunch of men, flight crews and maintenance. Maintenance did a great job with those old crates!

I retired from the Air Force in 1978 with my next stop Chiang Mai, Thailand.



John Stubbe, Flight Engineer

71st SOS, Nha Trang, 1969

Versailles, Indiana was my birthplace in May 1946. I graduated from Versailles High School and attended the University of Cincinnati at Cincinnati, Ohio. I joined the Air Force to have some war stories to tell when I got older.

I was a reservist assigned to the 71st Tactical Airlift Group at Bakalar AFB, Indiana when the unit was activated on 13 May 1968. The unit transferred to Lockbourne AFB,

Ohio on 11 June 1968 where we began the transition from cargo C-119Gs to AC-119G gunships. I was assigned to aircraft ferry crew #3 piloted by Lt. Col. Larry Shinnick. We departed St. Augustine, Florida on 29 January 1969 and arrived at Nha Trang Air Base, Vietnam on 2 March 1969. After arriving in country I was assigned to crew #24 at Nha Trang, Loman Miller's crew. I returned home to Bakalar AFB with the other reservists on 6 June 1969.



Jack R. Study, Maintenance

71st SOS at Nha Trang from 1968-69

Isabella County, Michigan was where I was born in 1926. I grew up in Portland, Indiana and dropped out of high school in 1944 to enlist in the U.S. Navy during World War II. I was discharged from the Navy in 1946. I completed my GED while in the Navy. I enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in Chico, California on 1 September 1949 because I was in need of a "meal ticket".

I served with the 71st Special Operations Squadron at Nha Trang Air Base, Vietnam from December 1968 to June 1969. The most memorable events while serving with the 71st SOS at Nha Trang occurred on three different nights in

1969. We had incoming mortars on 'Victor' row (revetment compound for planes). It would have been quite a fireworks display if one of the mortars had hit one of the gunships fully loaded with fuel, ammo, and flares. I remember the dispatcher's voice over the radio checking on us during the mortar attacks, "ALPHA 8. Where are you?"

I later transferred from the Air Force to the Indiana Army National Guard from which I retired in 1986. Having served in and survived four wars, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and the Cold War, I now reside in Ozark, Missouri.



Paul R. Stumbaugh, Jr., Crew Chief

18th SOS, DaNang, 1971-72

Lenox Dale, Massachusetts was my birthplace in 1939. I grew up in Lee, Massachusetts, graduating from Lee High School. I entered the Air Force on 15 January 1960 to get out of a small town.

I was a maintenance crew chief for AC-119K Stinger gunships of the 18th Special Operations Squadron. I'll

always remember the long hot days and the long hard hours that I spent in Southeast Asia working on an old and outdated aircraft.

I retired from the United States Air Force at Minot AFB, North Dakota as a Senior Master Sergeant.



Donald J. Swanson, Maintenance

18th SOS, DaNang, 1970-71

Forman, North Dakota was my birthplace in 1930. I graduated from Forman High School in 1948 and then joined the U.S. Air Force at Fargo to beat the draft. I served with the 18th Special Operations Squadron at DaNang Air Base in aircraft maintenance.

I retired from the Air Force in November 1973 at Mather AFB, California. I attended American River College in Sacramento, California. My wife, Lee, and I currently live in Sacramento.



Tom A. Teal, Pilot

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71; 18th SOS, DaNang, Nakhon Phanom 1971-73



Colonel Tom A. Teal was born April 13, 1925 in Chesterfield, South Carolina. After graduating from Carlisle Military School in 1942 and completing his freshman year at The Citadel, he entered the Aviation Cadet Program. He graduated in Pilot Class 44-G as a

Second Lieutenant at Douglas, Arizona. Following B-17 transition and Combat Crew Training (CCT), he flew weather reconnaissance missions out of England (500 hours). After a five month tour flying C-47s out of Paris, France; he was released from active duty in April 1946.

From 1946 to 1953, Tom was self-employed in commercial photography in South Carolina. He graduated from the University of South Carolina in 1949 with a degree in Journalism and married Mary "Booty" Wall, also a South Carolina University graduate in 1950.

Following recall to active duty as a Captain in January 1953, Tom flew C-124s worldwide out of Hill AFB, Utah until 1955 when he became Aide to Major General Tillery and Chief of Base and Area Information Services.

In 1956, he was assigned to B-36s in the 7th Bomb Wing, 492nd Bomb Squadron at Carswell AFB in Fort Worth, Texas. After flying B-36s approximately 650 hours, he transitioned to B-52s as copilot, instructor copilot, pilot, instructor pilot and Standboard instructor pilot. During this time period, he attended and completed the USAF 14-week Instrument Pilot Instructor School at Randolph AFB, Texas. His last B-52 Crew was S-20 whereby all six crewmembers were given spot promotions to the next higher rank. Then in 1965, Tom became Chief, Wing Command Post, and went TDY for four months to Guam.

After Guam, Lieutenant Colonel Tom Teal started his three Southeast Asia tours in USAF Special Operations. From May 1970 to May 1971, Tom was assigned to the 14th Special Operations Wing, 17th Special Operations Squadron, C Flight at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon, Vietnam. He became Commander of Fighting C Flight and with the radio call sign of Shadow One, flew 55 combat missions in AC-119G Shadow gunships as pilot. He also

flew other missions such as Forward Air Controller (FAC) and Psy-Warfare, dropping leaflets, etc.

Upon completion of his first tour of duty in Vietnam, Tom was assigned to Kinchloe AFB as Director of Operations and Training. After five months at Kinchloe, he returned to Vietnam as Commander, Detachment 1, DaNang Air Base. His unit flew AC-119K Stinger Gunships, defending bases under attack and destroying trucks on the Ho Chi Minh Trail with considerable success. He flew 98 gunship missions from DaNang with the radio call sign of Stinger 10. In March 1973, he was the last USAF Commander at DaNang and turned the base over to the South Vietnamese Air Force Commander. Tom then headed west for his next assignment with the 56th Special Operations Wing at Nakhon Phanom (NKP), Thailand where he was assigned to the 56th Special Operations Wing. While at NKP from March 1973 to December 1973, he was Assistant DCO, Deputy Group Commander and Commander, 56th Combat Support Group.

After the Southeast Asia tours, Tom was assigned to Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio as Assistant Deputy Commander for Maintenance for the 17th Bomb Wing (SAC). Upon the Wing closure one year later, he was assigned to the SAC Bomb Wing at Seymour Johnson AFB, N.C. There he served as Deputy Commander for Maintenance until his retirement from active duty.

After serving 33 years in the United States Air Force at bases in England, France, Germany, Guam, Vietnam, Thailand, the USA and Texas, Colonel Tom A. Teal retired from active duty in March 1976 and rejoined his family in Fort Worth, Texas.

Teal includes among his military awards and decorations the Legion of Merit, Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star, Air Medal with twelve Oak Leaf Clusters, Air Force Meritorious Service Medal, Air Force Commendation Medal with four Oak Leaf Clusters and three Vietnamese Crosses of Gallantry.

Tom lives on Angus Drive in the Ridglea area of Fort Worth. He has two daughters, Pamela Teal Dunbar and Cynthia Ann Teal. He has two grandchildren, Hillary Teal Dunbar and Carter Dunbar.



Jimmy L. (Jim) Terry, Maintenance

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, Phan Rang, 1970-71



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

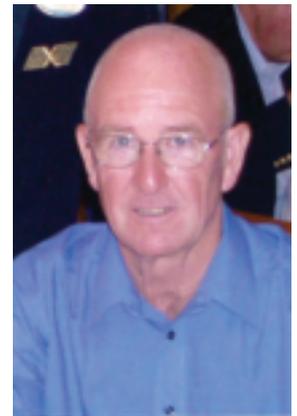
Dallas, Texas. The reason I enlisted was that I was coming up on draft age and I wanted to have a choice in what branch of service I went into. I always wanted to be in the service so I enlisted at the earliest opportunity.

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



Danny B. Thompson, Gunner

17th SOS, Phu Cat, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71

I grew up in Independence, Kansas where I was born on March 4, 1948. We moved to Fredonia, Kansas in 1962, where I finished junior high and high school, graduating in 1966. I then moved to Wichita where I worked for Boeing Aircraft Company on the B-52 Modification Project. Since the job was a government job, I had a military deferment.

When the job was finished and I no longer had a draft deferment, I went to Independence Junior College. In the summer of 1968, I moved to Kansas City and worked for the Ford Motor Company. I got a call from home, telling me that I had draft papers in the mail. I said my goodbyes to Ford and thanked them for the job. Crunch Time had arrived. Some old guy was sitting behind the desk at the

Navy recruiting office and a good looking WAF welcomed me to Air Force office. I joined the Air Force!

From Basic at Lackland, I was sent to Tech School at Denver, Colorado to learn the correct way to load five-hundred pound bombs on a B-52 jet bomber. From Chanute, Kansas, I started my journey around the world to a place called U-Tapao, Thailand for my first overseas duty station.

I returned from U-Tapao to learn about loading nukes on B-52s at Wright-Patterson AFB. It was during this duty that I met my hero, a sergeant just back from Vietnam and a gunner. WOW! This guy had stories about gunships that blew my mind; stories of how they would fly in and hose the area down to save our boys on the ground and stories of how they would fly two or three missions a night, only getting rest to and from the target areas. I knew then that was what I wanted to do. After some checking and a lot of leg work, I found the right people and signed up for the AC-119 gunship program. It wasn't long before I was off for Lockbourne.

I can remember the first time I climbed onboard an AC-119. I couldn't believe how big it really was. My first flight was one I'll never forget, nervous from all the hype, getting to see the guns fire from the air, the smell, the motion, the air sick bags. Yep, I sold Buicks to Ralph most of the way home. (I got sick). Later, I found these little white pills that took care of all that motion sickness. Life was good again.

From Lockbourne, it was back to Wright-Patterson to check out and get ready for my trip to Vietnam. I flew out of Kansas City Airport to San Francisco where they made sure we had all of our shots, and sure enough, I needed a couple.

From Travis AFB, we flew to Clark AFB, Philippines where I attended Jungle Survival School. To see a man walk out into the jungle and just disappear was really cool. We were taught how to find drinking water, identification of edible foods and cooking techniques in addition to skills in evasion of the enemy. After I personally learned that big rats live in the jungle, I was ready to board a plane to Vietnam.

Our plane landed in Saigon in early evening. The next morning we were on a C-130 heading for Phan Rang. Being new to the country, we didn't know all the customs yet. We were about to get a crash course in combat readiness. The guys in the barracks had a little fun at our expense by setting up a fake fire fight. They came running in, grabbing us out of our beds, and told us to get to the top of a huge hill outside the barracks. We would be told up there what to do.

All we had on were our skivvies and a smile. On the way up, I told one of the guys, "I think I smell a rat"; there was too much laughing going on in the distance which made me believe that we had just been had. They had strobe lights going off, tape recorded gun shots, smoke; they had the works. After all was said and over, they popped a top and we all laughed.

The next day half of us got back on the C-130 and headed to the Shadow Fight at Phu Cat, my home base for the next nine months. Upon seeing the Operations Center for the first time, I thought to myself, "I'm going to be seeing a lot of this place in the next year." Boy was I right.

After we got all settled in and our crews assigned, we started flying. We flew a lot of day missions out of Phu Cat. After four or five missions, we were checked-out to fly as regular crewmembers. There were a lot of jitters and a lot of gun jams that took us longer to clear than the old timers, but we caught on quickly and it just became second nature. I carried a set of extra barrels, slides, and bolts just to make sure my guns stayed online.

The missions kind of ran all together after a while. I think we were becoming numb from the lack of sleep. There were some missions that were better than others, but we were doing what we were supposed to do to save our boys from being killed. There were too many nights we would just fly around letting the bad guys know that we were in the area and would really like for them to meet us. I know that being on the guns all that time, I didn't get to hear everything that was going on, but there were times that we just knew. We could tell by the long bursts from the guns that we were doing some good. The return to base and the debriefing was another way we could tell if we were doing any good.

Phu Cat was one of the best bases that I had been assigned to so far. We had a house girl to clean our rooms, shine our shoes, and do some cooking. We had a swimming pool just behind our barracks, a miniature golf course just to the front, an NCO club, a movie theater, tennis courts, hand ball courts, and an awesome view of the mountains. Time passed fast and my short-timer calendar was getting shorter.

Orders came down that we were being pulled out of Phu Cat and being reassigned to Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon for the remainder of our tour. After packing all our things and moving, we found out that we would be living off base at the three-story Merlin Hotel in Saigon. A shuttle-bus took us to and from the base every day. The hotel was located behind a bar named "The Blue Bird." I spent many an evening there!

The missions out of Saigon were mostly into Cambodia, around the river system. The ancient ruins of Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom were awesome! Something else that was awesome was the fact that I had an R & R due me and I could take it any time now. I took my week to Sydney, Australia, a once-in-a-lifetime chance to go down under.

Back to the war after seven days in Aussieland, my time in Vietnam was really getting short. Combat missions were becoming more intense, our bus was being fire-bombed, and we were told to move back on base. When I finally climbed aboard that big "Freedom Bird" to fly home, I had mixed feelings. I was leaving behind a lot of good buddies, but my tour was up and it was time for me to return to the real world.

When our plane finally touched down in California, there was a feeling in the plane that I just can't explain, the stillness in the air, not a sound. When the wheels stopped rolling and the doors opened, we knew we were really home again!

From San Francisco, I flew into Los Angeles where we were

met by some really angry people who spit on us and called us Baby Killers. They really made us feel at home! I did inform one young man that I had been protecting our boys on the ground in Vietnam just 24 hours earlier, so he could have the right to stand there and do what he was doing. I think I kind of got to him, because he just hung his head and walked away. Later as I was getting on my plane to Kansas City, the same guy came up to me and shook my hand and said, "Sorry, Man. I was out of line." I didn't get his name, but I remember his face to this day.

My next duty assignment was Eglin AFB, Florida and that is where I decided to separate from the Air Force. I graduated with an Associates of Arts degree in Business Administration at Chanute Junior College and then enrolled at Pittsburg State Teachers College in Pittsburg, Kansas. I was working on my B.S. degree when I met a pretty girl who was after her Mrs. Degree and that ended my college career. Today, I live on a small lake outside Chanute, Kansas. It's been a good life with all the memories, and the gunship years were probably the most exciting ones of all.



I entered Air Force OTS in January of 1966 and finished flight school at Williams AFB, Arizona in March 1967. My first assignment was flying C-141s at Travis AFB, California after 141 training at Tinker AFB in Oklahoma for three months. I logged 1800 hours of flying time in 18 months at Travis and became an aircraft commander pilot in 1968. In spite of many round-trips to Southeast Asia, in February 1969, I was involuntarily reassigned from the C-141 to the AC-119 gunship program through Palace Cobra.

I reported to the Air Force Reserve unit at Clinton County AFB, Wilmington, Ohio for training in the C-119. The training was really quite good in spite of feeling that I was taking an antique course in ancient aircraft. Throughout the course I was asking myself how they could make a gunship out of such an old flying relic. I learned the answer at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio, as part of the newly formed 18th Special Operations Squadron.

At Lockbourne, I roomed at the Wyandotte Apartments in Columbus with my new buddy from Clinton County, Jim Caughey. In addition to combat crew training, we received the newly modified aircraft, tested the aircraft and its systems, practiced tactics, and eventually ferried the AC-

119K to Vietnam.

I flew combat in both the AC-119K and the AC-119G. I spent the first five months with the 18th Special Operations Squadron FOL A at DaNang, flying Stingers over Laos, shooting trucks and dodging triple A. Being a junior Captain, I was assigned to copilot duties. After five months, I was sent to the 17th SOS, C Flight at Tan Son Nhut at Saigon where I upgraded to aircraft commander and later to instructor pilot. I flew only two missions in Vietnam (RVN). All my other missions were in Cambodia, mostly assisting Cambodian troops that were under attack. I received the Air Medal with five Oak Leaf clusters and the Distinguished Flying Cross for my work in Southeast Asia.

Upon returning stateside, I was assigned to the 44th MAS at Travis Air Force Base with only six months left on my service commitment. I separated from USAF active duty in May 1971 and promptly joined the Air Force Reserve unit where I continued flying the C-141. Flying as a Reservist I was able to complete my Masters degree in Finance at Golden Gate University in San Francisco. In August 1972, I was hired as a pilot for Western Airlines and spent a wonderful 30 years with Western and, in 1987, Delta Airlines.

Deploying the AC-119K to Vietnam

At Lockbourne we trained and tested new AC-119K aircraft until December 1969 when it was time to begin ferrying them to Phan Rang AB, Vietnam. I ferried one of six aircraft in the second wave to deploy. We were supposed to depart Lockbourne on Christmas Eve. However, several crewmembers and I reported we were too ill to fly and we were able to leave on December 26th.

Our first stop was Malstrom AFB, Montana where we encountered a minimum visibility approach. My attitude indicator was rolling over in its case, so I had to fly the instrument approach using the co-pilot attitude indicator. There were no avionics maintenance or parts available at Malstrom so we kept quiet about the faulty indicator and flew the aircraft to our next stop, McChord AFB, Washington.

The trip to McChord AFB was uneventful, but I told my flight engineer, CMSgt. Bill Ables, that we had to get the attitude indicator fixed before we left for Elmendorf AFB, Alaska. We needed to leave CONUS by December 31, 1969 (the next day) in order to remain eligible to return from Vietnam the following December, rather than January. Chief Ables assured me I need not worry about it; he would take care of it. The next morning, the attitude indicator was rock solid; it worked perfectly. During climb-out, I overheard a transmission from a crewmember of another AC-119K reporting his attitude indicator had rolled over in its case. I looked at Chief Ables and he just looked up at the ceiling.

We stayed at Elmendorf for seven days, getting things fixed on the aircraft. That gave us a chance to go skiing and relax. Then we flew to Adak in the Aleutian chain. When we left Adak, it was so icy that we couldn't run the engines up because the aircraft would move even with the brakes locked. Once we started rolling, we had to get airborne or we would be in the ocean.

On the leg to Midway Island our radar was out causing us to inadvertently fly head-on into a severe thunderstorm. The aircraft bounced and banked 80 degrees left and right and twice the aircraft was stuck by lightning. When we finally flew out of the storm, I looked at the crew and discovered the aircraft mechanic was fully dressed in his survival suit and ready for bailout. During a five-day stay at Midway Island, some artistic Navy men painted nose art on our aircraft. My bird (ducks) was christened "Fly United" with "Captain Twaddle, AC" and "CMSgt Ables, FE" stenciled under the pilot's windows.

Our next stop was Wake Island where I had made many landings in the C-141. From Wake, we flew to Guam. While there, we met some of the B-52 pilots who were flying Arc Light missions in SEA. Months later, I was flying an AC-119 gunship near the tri-border area when an Arc Light got under way sixty minutes before the scheduled time. The first warning we had was when bombs started exploding below our aircraft. I rolled the aircraft into a steep turn and got the hell out of there. That was scary!

From Wake we stopped at Clark AB, Philippine Islands, then on to Phan Rang AB, RVN (Republic of Vietnam). The commander greeted us, shook my hand and said, "Captain, welcome to Vietnam and get those damn ducks off my airplane." Those ducks stayed on that airplane for almost a year. That first night VC rockets hit the base. I spent several hours under my bunk in the Visiting Officers Quarters with my flak jacket and helmet on. Not far from the VOQ was the Officers Club, which sustained considerable damage from a rocket hit. I began thinking it was going to be a mighty long year.

Jungle Survival Conclusions

Those of us who ferried the AC-119s to Phan Rang had not attended the required jungle survival-training course. So, soon after arriving in Vietnam I was on my way back to the Philippines. The high point of jungle training was the E & E (escape & evasion). We were given three metal chits to be surrendered to any Negrito tribesman who found our hiding spot during our night in the jungle. I looked at the jungle forest and then a high plain with one tree; I chose the latter. Strangely, only one Negrito found me. But it wasn't the Negrito that kept me awake that night. At about 3 am I awoke to find a large rat on my chest trying to extract a candy bar from my survival vest pocket. Needless to say, I got no more sleep.

The survival school was useful, but the idea of bailing out of the AC-119 changed after I learned more about the emergency bailout hatch/chute on the flight deck. The emergency bailout chute was a hatch in the floor behind the pilot seat. A test was made in which a dummy was dropped through the hatch of an AC-119. The dummy was cut to ribbons by the numerous antennas attached to the underside of the AC-119. The alternate bailout procedure was to climb down the ladder to the gun deck (cargo deck) and run to the bailout door at the rear of the aircraft. As a pilot, I concluded that I would probably not be able to successfully bailout of an uncontrollable aircraft. Moreover,

the prospect of parachuting into Laos at night and being successfully rescued seemed pretty slim. It seemed like a better idea to make every effort to fly the aircraft.

Flying the Stinger Mission

My initial assignment was to the 18th SOS at DaNang. Aircraft commander positions were being assigned by date-of-rank. As a junior Captain, I was assigned to fly as a copilot. I flew with Jim Edwards for most of my five months at DaNang. The typical Stinger mission lasted a total of four hours of which approximately two hours was spent on target. At Lockbourne we practiced missions at D altitude, but in Laos we were driven to E and E+1/2 due to the intensity and accuracy of 23mm and 37mm anti-aircraft artillery (AAA). Flying at E altitude gave us a few extra seconds to interpret and take evasive action.

We had F-4 Gunfighters flying top cover to silence and knock out AAA sites. To aid the F-4s in keeping track of us, we illuminated the formation lights on the top of our wings. Sometimes, however, enemy gunners could see the lights and could also track us. It was a very sporting exchange of gunfire that made for many exciting nights over the trail.

The most effective weapon against the AAA sites was napalm, but napalm delivery required a shallow dive angle that the F-4 pilots could not safely perform at night in the steep mountainous terrain. So instead of napalm the F-4s carried cluster bombs (CBU). We would often see the enemy fire hosing down the F-4s right after a CBU burst.

Bill Reffner was lead gunner on our Stinger crew and it was usually Bill who we heard over the intercom warning of AAA and breakout direction. Typically, enemy gunners would fire a burst at us, followed by another burst to an area where we might be if we tried to evade the first burst. Sometimes the AAA was so close, or the AAA warning call sufficiently delayed, that we had to roll to 90 to 100 degrees of bank and pull hard to avoid being hit. Reffner did his job well, as we never got hit.

Flying the Shadow Mission

Having received transfer orders from the 18th SOS to the 17th SOS, I reported for duty with C Flight at Tan Son Nhut (TSN) Air Base, Saigon on May 28, 1970. Before I arrived at TSN, C Flight had lost two Shadow gunships due to single engine failures at or shortly after takeoff. The recommended takeoff weight had been just too high to support

flight following an engine failure at low altitude and airspeed.

I was immediately checked-out as aircraft commander by Major Olsen, Squadron Stan Eval. The Major was sharp in giving me a full check ride because several months later, I was signed off as an instructor pilot due to the earlier check ride. Most of our missions involved troops-in-contact (TIC). Shadows became the lifeline both night and day for the Cambodian Army fighting the Khmer Rouge and North Vietnamese troops.

Right after I arrived at TSN, one of the Shadows received a request to check out reports of 50-cal fire on an island. The flight engineer was hit by flying glass when the aircraft took a round in the cockpit. The C Flight Commander, Lt. Colonel Teal, knew I had experience flying against ground fire in Laos and asked me if I wanted to give the island a shot. I flew to the island with the same crew and with Lt. Colonel Teal onboard. Upon spotting the island, I decided to fly outside the firing circle, which was also outside the limited range of the 50-cal machine gun. Sure enough, the enemy gunner came up firing and all his rounds were low and no threat to us. I put two guns on high rate of fire and hosed him down. We saw lots of flashes on and around the gun site, but since he was located among the rocks, we couldn't tell if they were secondary explosions or ricochets. The gunner, if alive, wisely did not fire again. Lt. Colonel Teal was impressed with the whole scenario. Maybe that was why he cut me some slack when I got stuck in Japan on my week of authorized leave and couldn't find a single flight back to Vietnam for three days.

The only incident that really bothered me was on a daylight mission over the Mekong River near Kampong Thom. We discovered three large steamboats coming down the river and radioed the Cambodians who reported there were no friendlies on the river. I also checked with the closest FAC in the area and finally checked with Saigon. The FAC and Saigon replied there were no friendlies on the river. Reluctantly, I rolled in on the lead boat and opened up with two guns. After several bursts, I went to the last boat and shot it. Our bullets must have hit the boiler because the boat blew up and sank. The middle boat was heading for shore and we hit it enough that it sank as it reached the bank. By that time, we went back to the first boat; it had already sunk. These boats were 80 to 100 feet long. The 7.62mm miniguns had proven quite lethal from B altitude, 2500 feet AGL. I never heard another word about that strike, but I still wonder.



William Leonidus Tyler, Maint.

71st SOS, Nha Trang, 1969

Born in my hometown of Harrodsburg, Mercer County, Kentucky in 1932, I graduated from Harrodsburg High School in 1952 and immediately joined the United States Air Force. There was no work available and I had decided to fulfill my military obligation to America and learn a trade I could use in civilian life after my service was completed.

I was assigned to the 71st SOS Aircraft Maintenance at Bakalar AFB, Columbus, Indiana and served continuously until the 71st returned from Vietnam on 6 June 1969. When we landed at Nha Trang, RVN, we were told to mesh in with the regular Air Force units. They really did not want us and many of us were told there was no room for us on base. We were sent to a so-called hotel in downtown Nha Trang. The hot water tank on the hotel's roof meant first in line got a hot shower.

We were living among the local Vietnamese, which was a very dangerous situation in 1969, because we could not tell who was friendly or hostile. Their Buddha statue was so high that it could be seen from anywhere in Nha Trang. For transportation to and from the hotel, we had an old bus with chicken wire in place of glass windows. The ride to and from the air base was scary! Daily entertainment was provided by motor pool 'Evil Keneval' drivers.

Floyd Fields and Maynard Martine, from the metal shop, were concerned about my safety living offbase. If they had not seen me for 2 or 3 days, they would commandeer one of the old trucks to drive downtown to make sure I was okay.

I remember one G.I. who borrowed a container truck (a truck we used to tow the aircraft) to get offbase and drove it downtown. That did not turn out well for him. Also in downtown Nha Trang, there were many motorcycles with two Vietnamese onboard. One drove and the other one carried explosives in a satchel. While waiting in groups for our 'chicken wired' bus, we were prime targets for the 'cowboy' bombers; therefore, we didn't gather in big groups waiting for our bus to base. Viet Cong children were used to steal from us. The children, aged 8 to 10 years, would surround us and start beating us with rolled up newspapers while searching our pockets.

The Viet Cong would strap grenades and/or bombs on children from 6 to 10 years of age and send them to sell newspapers at G.I. chow halls. The children would detonate the grenade or bomb, killing themselves and as many of us

as possible.

I was in charge of bench stock. I pulled anything off the aircraft that was not needed after they arrived in Vietnam from the United States. We were running out of storage space, so I contacted the U.S. Army and got 22 metal CONUS shipping boxes. We put one box with each aircraft and stored the unnecessary equipment for return flights to the United States if needed.

I was assigned to the aircraft maintenance section as a Shadow Crew Chief for repairing gunships after our "Jet Jockey" pilots flew night missions and tore them up. We spent the next day repairing the aircraft. The whole aircraft had to be washed, inspected for damage from triple A or mortars, repaired, refueled and rearmed for night missions and to pass phase dock inspections. We washed gunships to get rid of Agent Orange residue at night while dodging enemy mortars from the Viet Cong.

I will always remember our humanitarian effort for war orphans. We assisted them by providing clothing, food, schools and supplies. We wrote home about the orphanage and our families sent clothing and supplies for the children. I remember the 'extended family' I met and got to be friends with while serving in Vietnam. I especially enjoy sharing these good memories at our AC-119 gunship reunions.

Memories of our brothers who did not return from the war are ever-present. The exodus of the 71st SOS lives on in my mind. My most precious memory is of my wife and children waving American flags at my return home. The reception given to us by the people and City Mayor of Columbus and the State Governor of Indiana upon our return from Vietnam was overwhelming.

I retired with 32 years of service in the United States Air Force at Grissom AFB, Indiana in 1992.





Leonard Eugene "Gene" Van Over, Pilot

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



I was born in McPherson, Kansas on August 25, 1944. I was an Air Force brat. My father was in the Army Air Corps when I was born, stationed in England fighting the Nazi's. He was a Nose Gunner and Bombardier on a B-17 "Flying

Fortress". I started college at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas. At the advice of my father, I signed up for ROTC. Little did I know that this would be a rewarding decision in my future. I received a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration with a major in Marketing and a minor in Management from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas in 1966.

Upon graduation, I was immediately commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the USAF and assigned to Laredo AFB, Texas for pilot training. One year later, I earned my silver wings and was assigned to fly KC -135s at Altus AFB, OK. But first, I attended advanced pilot training at Castle AFB, California to learn to fly the KC-135. Then, I was sent to Altus, flying co-pilot and promoted to 1st Lt. I spent three years at Altus, but was gone from home almost 9 months every year. I had two TDY assignments to Thailand, pulled alert at Altus and Goose Bay Labrador about 10 days every month, and was able to travel to Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, Spain, and numerous stateside bases. After 3 years, I was promoted to Captain and received my regular commission.

I spent six months in Ohio (Wilmington and Columbus) training to fly the AC-119G gunship prior to departing for Vietnam. During my tour of duty in Vietnam from November 1970 to September 1971, I was stationed at Tan Son Nhut AB, Saigon with Fighting C Flight of the 17th SOS. I flew 187 combat missions and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and 10 Air medals as well as other decorations. Following are some of my combat missions and experiences in SEA that I vividly recall:

Near-Miss:

We were on a night mission out of Tan Son Nhut heading toward Cambodia; we had all lights blacked out except for the top beacon. I noticed a red light at 12 o'clock. I immediately flipped on the landing lights to see a Vietnamese-piloted C-47 coming straight toward us. The Vietnamese and I both broke left. They were so close I could see the pilot's slanted eyes as he flew by us.

A Shooting Story:

I remember one night mission when we were named C Flight Shadow Shooter of the Week! During this mission, I was taking my instructor check ride from Col Strickland. The NOS located multiple campfires in an area known to be occupied by the enemy. We pulled off of the target and made multiple radio transmissions to ensure there were no friendlies in the area. Once this was confirmed, we returned to the target area and opened fire with all four guns at high rate. The next day, we received confirmation from friendly ground forces that we had 600 confirmed kills.

A Lucky Day

On a late afternoon mission out of Tan Son Nhut, I had a substitute co-pilot (my regular co-pilot was Ralph Lefarth at that time). Our Flight Commander, Col. Teal was in the jump seat for this mission. We had a normal preflight and engine run up but immediately after calling for gear up, the right engine failed. We tried to lighten our weight by launching some of the flares, but that proved too slow and we didn't want to start any fires on the ground (too much paper work). We flew out about 4 miles, never reaching an altitude of more than 150 feet. The left engine was starting to overheat so we slowly turned back toward the base, managing to obtain an altitude of 200 feet prior to final approach. We were able to land safely. They gave us the night off; we were pretty shook up.

Distinguished Flying Cross:

On another afternoon mission, we were called by a Cambodian ground commander that his location and his village were being overrun by a large number of enemy forces. We confirmed the location of the friendlies and bad

guys and drove the enemy back from the village, causing a high number of enemy casualties. During this mission, we took three fifty-caliber hits during the firefight but we were credited with saving the village and our Cambodian friends. We were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for our efforts.



Gene Van Over and Vietnamese Students

I was one of the Instructor Pilots chosen to train the Vietnamese to fly our mission and prior to my departure from Southeast Asia, was awarded a Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry medal for my efforts.

The AC-119G was the most enjoyable airplane that I ever flew. This aircraft was truly a 'fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants' airplane. No auto-pilot, no high altitude airways. The Espirit de Corps we shared with our crew throughout our tour cannot be duplicated ever! One person, in particular, that I always remember is fellow Shadow pilot, Bill Carter. Bill passed away about 17 years ago after fighting what we assume was the effects of Agent Orange that he was exposed to in SEA. Bill left a loving wife, son and daughter.

After my Vietnam tour, I resigned from the Air Force to seek my fortune in the civilian world. Unfortunately, the airlines were not hiring in late 1971. Since I couldn't find a job flying, I tried my hand at the beer business. For the next 33 years, I worked in the beverage industry. I eventually retired from the beer business and worked as a general manager for a furniture company in 2003. In 2006, I decided to call it quits and I retired permanently. This is definitely the best job I have ever had.

I was married twice before and have a son, Cory and a daughter, Debbie; both are now adults. I have 2 grandchildren, Miranda and Collin and one great grandson, Jeremy. Today, I am happily married to my third wife, Cindy, and we reside in Rutledge, Tennessee. I enjoy working in the yard, touring the Smoky Mountains National Park and looking outside at the view from our Tennessee Mountain home.



David G. Vaux, Gunner

18th SOS, DaNang, 1971-72

I spent a year overseas in Thailand loading bombs and weapons as a 46250 at Takli, Korat, Ubon, NKP, and Udorn, Thailand. While there, I was impressed with aerial gunners I met and soon discovered I wanted to be flying like them. For my follow-on assignment, I requested Paine Field or McChord AFB, Washington so I could be close to home. I got orders to Langley AFB, Virginia. Consequently, I did some work and got myself selected for the Palace Gun Program. Within weeks I was packing my bags for AC-119K aerial gunner training at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio.

My assignment was to the Stinger forward operating location at DaNang AB, RVN. I arrived in May 1971 and

lived in the "Cave" - a bottom floor room in the Gunfighter Village barracks. My roommates were Denny Chamberlin, Lloyd Kilgore, and Dan Jensen.

I flew as an AC-119K Stinger Gunship Aerial Gunner on Captain Shuman's crew and many others during my 12-month tour. Squadron Headquarters was at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai AFB. We got to fly an aircraft to NKP every fifteenth mission for aircraft servicing.

I separated from the service at Travis AFB, California on May 22, 1971, as an E-5. I am retired after thirty years as a heavy equipment mechanic, and make my home with my wife and two daughters in Silverdale, Washington.



Xaiver "Cook" Villarreal, Nav. 18th SOS, DaNang, Bien Hoa, Nakhon Phanom, 1972-73

I graduated from the Air Force Academy in June 1970. My first assignment after navigator training was to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand. I spent the rest of my Air Force career in SAC tankers. I retired from the Air Force in 1990. I live in Englewood, Colorado and work as an Aircraft System Instructor for United Airlines.

I arrived at NKP in May 1972 as a lieutenant NOS operator. NKP was an interesting air base with a fleet of airplanes that were almost all World War II vintages - lots of propellers and hardly any jets. Troops in contact missions were my most memorable missions. On one occasion, we supported American Special Forces working with "Jack 512". After working for them three nights in a row during heavy, intense fighting, with three gunships on station each night, those folks were able to get out, even though they were overrun, taking a lot of casualties.

I remember a particular take-off from 27L out of Bien Hoa. I was riding in the jump seat. Larry Barbee was also on the flight. At about 70 knots there was a huge roar. Unexpectedly, my head slapped the right side of the fuselage and then the left side and the airplane suddenly stopped. It turned out that the left engine had gone into full reverse thrust and the left jet shut down. Our pilot Buck McCants, who was also a Check Pilot, was evaluating the co-pilot, and Buck apparently recognized the malfunction immediately, but in that split second between the time he caught the malfunction and threw the right engine into full reverse, we had already skidded about 150 feet and the left main gear took out all the runway lights. Upon stopping, nobody said anything as we sat there for 30 seconds until we called the tower and told them we aborted the take-off and were leaving the airplane on the runway with all the lights on. Then we walked straight to the bar and kind of recovered there. It turned out the fleet had about 18 propellers that had a malfunctioning reverse mechanism. They grounded the fleet for a day to fix the problem.

On another take-off at Bien Hoa, it felt like we hit something with the left main landing tire on the take-off roll. We checked everything out and things worked fine. We were orbiting over Bien Hoa, checking our computer

systems and bore sighting the guns, when we got a call from tower asking if we noticed a bump on the take-off roll. Tower explained that a VNAF A-1 had just called them to report dropping a bomb on the runway about 20 minutes earlier. It was then that we realized we had run right over a 500 pound bomb on take-off roll. Fortunately, the bomb was not fused to explode. We led a charmed life, mostly with Gary Hokenson, Bruce Waylon, Gordy Pollock and some other good folks.

I remember fellow-FLIR/NOS, "Bunker" Bill Robinson. Bill was terrified of rocket attacks, so he constructed an elaborate bunker around his bed in an 'L' shape with empty 30-caliber ammo cans filled with sand and stacked about 5 feet high. Every time we had a rocket attack, we would sprint to Bill's room, but there was no way all six of us could get into Bunker Bill's Bunker. That reminds me of Rollie Clardy. Rollie was also terrified of rocket attacks, so he was notorious for wearing not one, but two flak vests; one faced forward zipped up, and one faced backwards. Rollie would sprint from bunker to bunker to the briefings. He never rode the 'bread truck' because he was afraid of getting caught in the van.

Every Sunday afternoon, we would barter our 20mm brass to the local Vietnamese military for boxes of Iowa rib-eye steaks, 120 steaks, 100 pounds to each box. Those steaks were great! We got charcoal from the Vietnamese, and we'd get French bread. I was tasked to cook the pinto beans, so I'd start the night before. We invited our mechanics to share in the feast of steaks, beans, bread and beer.



AC-119K with 3 Bladed Props



David L. Voisey, Gunner

17th SOS, Phan Rang, Tan Son Nhut, Phu Cat, DaNang, 1970-71



I was born in my hometown St. Louis, Missouri in 1949. After graduation from McClure Senior High School in 1967, I was faced with the reality of the Selective Service Draft in early 1968, so I enlisted in the U. S. Air Force at St. Louis. The main reason I selected the USAF was because my favorite uncle was career Air Force.

In November 1968, I was flown via commercial airliner from St. Louis Lambert International Airport to San Antonio, Texas for basic training at Lackland AFB. After completing basic, I was sent to Tech School at Lowry AFB, Colorado for weapons specialist training. While in class one day, I, along with some other trainees, were taken from class to view a "Classified" program on gunships and afterward, asked to volunteer. I volunteered! That was the beginning of many TDYs for me.

From Lowry, I reported to England AFB, Louisiana as a weapons specialist, 46230, until I received orders to become an aerial gunner assigned to the 17th Special Operations Squadron in Vietnam. Then I was sent TDY to Sheppard AFB, Texas for physiological training which included the Altitude Chamber and from Sheppard, I was sent to Fairchild AFB, Washington for survival training. After survival school, I reported for AC-119 gunship training at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. Then it was off to the Philippines for jungle survival training at Clark AFB. In June 1970, I reported for duty with the 17th SOS at Phan Rang, Republic of Vietnam.

I served as an aerial gunner on AC-119G Shadow gunships, flying out of Phan Rang, Tan Son Nhut, Phu Cat, and DaNang. My most exciting missions were flown out of DaNang when we were flying two missions per night into Laos. We'd refuel and reload at Ubon, Thailand. They were vital missions of long hours and hard work supporting friendly ground troops under enemy attack. All the missions I flew over Cambodia were exciting for one reason or another. There were a few missions that made me wonder, especially when we landed with only one engine. While always remembering the thrill of flying combat missions, I will never forget the importance of those

missions in supporting friendly ground forces. I earned the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with eight Oak Leaf Clusters during my tour of Vietnam.

I departed Vietnam in June 1971 and was assigned to Hurlburt Field, Florida until May 1973 when I decided to separate from the service to re-enter civilian life.

From 1973 to 1987, I worked for the St. Louis County Police Department, attaining the rank of Sergeant before taking an early retirement to change careers. During my career as a police officer, I served in the Patrol Division, Tactical Unit, and 911 Call Center. During my time in the Patrol Division, I was a helicopter pilot and held a Commercial Rating, accumulating approximately 1500 hours. From 1974 to 1980, I attended classes through Northeast Missouri State University, graduating with a BS Degree. From 1987 to present, I have been employed by various companies as a HR & Safety Director /Manager in the trucking industry. My area of specialization is motor carrier safety and hazardous materials transportation by highway. My current employer is AIRGAS Southwest located in Houston, Texas where my wonderful wife, Mary and I call home.



Gunner Story

Upon entering Vietnam in June 1970, I was teamed up with Michael Smith, an experienced gunner. Michael had six months flight experience as "Bravo" gunner. I came on board as his "Bravo" gunner and he was a great mentor. He taught me, among other things, that the pilot should never have to be without a loaded operational gun. He taught me fast loading techniques. This was important as our pilot, Major Charlie Meier, could fire extremely long bursts. According to Mike, he had witnessed Major Meier go through four guns, one at a time, in one bursts. Therefore, it was important to load fast and keep the guns online.

Mike also taught me to carry spare parts on missions, including barrels. During several missions with Mike, guns broke and even exploded. He showed me how to remove, repair, reinstall and get the gun back online.

On one mission, my #1 gun blew up. It necessitated removing the gun from the pod, tearing it down, and

replacing the bolts. We were reportedly taking ground fire so all the interior lights were off. I grabbed an empty 7.62 ammo can and used it as a make-shift workbench. After placing the gun on top of an “open” ammo can, I started to rebuild the gun.

During the process, I grabbed the drive motor and started to turn the gun over. The motor slipped out of my grease covered glove and pinned the tip of my right hand ring finger between the open lip of the ammo can and the drive motor. That REALLY hurt! I completed the repairs and reinstalled the gun and put it back in service.

On the flight back to Phan Rang, the injured finger started to throb. My pilot advised me to go to the dispensary. At the dispensary, there was an enlisted medic on duty, no doctors were on duty at that early hour. He examined the

finger and said I’d probably lose the nail if he didn’t relieve the pressure. Even then, I’d probably lose the nail anyway. Up until now, the injured finger just throbbed with pain.

So the medic said, “Do you have a cigarette lighter?” I responded, “Yes”, and handed him my cigarette lighter. He picked up a paperclip, unfolded it and heated the paperclip with the flame from the lighter. Then he grabbed my hand and laid it flat on the table and with the hot end of the paperclip, bored a hole through my fingernail until blood shot out of the nail. The cure was worse than the injury on this one! Then, to add insult to injury, he removed me from flight status, (DNIF), for an indefinite time. I remember I had to return to the dispensary several times to plead with the flight surgeon to put me back on flight status. I did get an earlier than expected release to get back to flying combat missions.



Maintaining the AC-119K Gunship During Deployment to Vietnam

It was dark and cold in Columbus, Ohio, the coldest winter the locals could remember in many years. The C-130E crew was going through their preflight checks in preparation for taking off. The pitch of the big four-blade propellers changed and the noise level rose. The portly transport lumbered onto the runway and began gathering speed.

The vibration increased and everything in the cargo compartment that was not solidly tied down began bouncing around, including us. The aircraft slowly gained flying speed and began the steady climb to cruising altitude for the flight to Malmstrom AFB, Montana. It was a couple of minutes after midnight on December 26, 1969.

On board the C-130 was an Enroute Support Team (EST) consisting of 12 aircraft maintenance technicians: an electrician, a hydraulic repairman, two engine mechanics, (one jet mechanic and one piston engine mechanic), a fuel systems technician, an instrument repairman, several avionics types, like radio and navigation equipment technicians, a supply technician, and me, the aircraft maintenance officer. It was our collective responsibility to provide maintenance support for six AC-119K gunships deploying from the 18th Special Operations Squadron at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio to Phan Rang AB, Republic of

Vietnam. In addition to our luggage and personal effects, we carried a huge War Readiness Spares Kit (WRSK), consisting of aircraft spare parts.

Once at cruise altitude, some team members rigged litters in the rear of the aircraft. The litters were designed to carry wounded and sick, but made excellent cots for resting and sleeping. The cargo compartment was noisy so there was little conversation. The drone of the engines, along with the late hour, left everyone drowsy, so most everyone dozed or read.

Background

The 18th SOS was formed at Lockbourne in early 1969 and immediately began AC-119K flight-crew training in the newly modified C-119. Those of us in maintenance began supporting the aircraft and gained valuable experience while helping solve some of the unanticipated anomalies. One of the earliest problem areas concerned the two J-85 auxiliary jet engines. (The K in AC-119K refers to the addition of the jet engines).

Although the pod mounted J-85 engine was already in use on the C-123K, we quickly discovered a problem with them on the AC-119K. During start-up the jet engines drew more electric current than the piston engine generators could supply. We partially solved the problem by supplementing

the original carbon-stack voltage regulators with new solid state units. However, on occasion the newer regulators would still overload and burn out. It looked like we had a bad batch of new regulators until one of our sharp aircraft electricians found the real problem. The new regulators were so fast that they immediately sensed and picked up the entire electrical load before the old carbon stack regulators could come on line. We solved the problem by replacing all the old carbon stack regulators with solid-state ones.

During early summer of 1969, we began reconfiguring the AC-119K for deployment. We reduced the aircraft weight as much as possible by removing the guns and most of the other combat equipment. We then installed three 500-gallon fuel tanks in each of six aircraft and had the aircrew test fly each modified aircraft. It was on one of these functional flight tests (FCF) that I experienced an AC-119 flying only on the jet engines.

After completing the FCF, the pilot entered a shallow dive to increase airspeed. He then calmly shut down both reciprocating engines, feathered both propellers, leaving only the two J-85s running. Boy, did it ever get quiet! The jets alone were not powerful enough to maintain level flight so the pilot flew a shallow descent. He flew over the base in the jets-only configuration. We could see people pointing at the aircraft and speculating that it was about to crash! As we crossed the base boundary, still descending, the pilot restarted the piston engines, and landed with all four running. As it turned out, we had created quite a stir on the ground. Needless to say, our Squadron Commander shared a few choice words with the pilot.

In the meantime, I was appointed Squadron Material Officer. I was selected over my good friend Phil McAtee who entered the Air Force on the same day and same base as me, and who attended Aircraft Maintenance Officer School with me. The reason I was appointed? I out-ranked him by one day!

We had our first six aircraft modified and ready to deploy to Vietnam by the end of October 1969. The actual launch went well and all six took off on time. However, upon landing at Malmstrom AFB, one of the aircraft experienced a landing gear strut problem, overstressed the gear, and blew the tires, nearly tearing the landing gear strut from the attachment point on the wing. It took about three weeks to replace the main landing gear strut assembly.

The second group of six aircraft left Lockbourne in mid-November 1969. We spent the rest of November and all of December preparing the last six aircraft for the

trip across the Pacific. The planned flight route for the final deployment was from Lockbourne AFB, Ohio to Malmstrom AFB, Montana. Then on to McClellan AFB, California; Elmendorf AFB, Alaska; Adak Naval Air Station Adak Island; Wake Island; Midway island; Anderson AFB, Guam; Clark AB, Philippines; and finally into Phan Rang. Island-hopping route was necessary because the AC-119K had very limited range, even with the installation of three 500-gallon auxiliary fuel tanks.

Game Day at Malmstrom

Our Enroute Support Team (EST) was scheduled to provide the support at every-other destination: Malmstrom, Elmendorf, Wake Island, and Guam, then fly on to Phan Rang to drop off nine Team members who were not returning with us to the United States. A second EST was scheduled to provide maintenance at the four other enroute locations.

The flight to Malmstrom AFB during the third (and final) deployment was uneventful. Our maintenance operating plan for enroute support and maintenance was simple and informal. The host base furnished us with a pickup and a step van. We used the van as our flight line control vehicle that stayed on the flight line with the aircraft until they were all in commission and ready for the next day's launch. We used the pickup to get parts, take people to chow and all other tasks. Our spares kit remained on board the C-130, which served as a portable warehouse.

The National Football Conference (NFC) divisional playoff game was being broadcast at noon, so most of us settled in to watch the game, reluctantly realizing that all six gunships would probably be arriving before halftime. Sure enough, about halfway through the first quarter, Base Operations called with the arrival times.

Only one aircraft required any significant maintenance; it needed a jet engine replaced. The jet engine being the only major problem, we refueled all the aircraft and began our through-flight inspections. The through-flight inspection is designed to identify problems the aircrew might not have detected and prepare the ship for the next leg of the journey. Typical inspection items are fluid levels, tires, obvious fuel, oil or hydraulic leaks, and internal and exterior inspection of the airframe for any damage or missing parts. In a matter of a couple of hours, we had all the aircraft fueled and all the through-flight inspections completed.

Fortunately, we had a J-85 onboard the C-130 as part of

the WRSK. We used our jet engine technician and two crew chiefs to make the jet engine change. It was difficult working in the open air on a cold Montana winter night. By 8:00 p.m. the temperature was below freezing. But, everyone pitched in and worked hard. Even the local supply guy helped out by holding the flashlight for our mechanics. (There were no portable lighting-carts available.) Everyone took turns warming up in the pickup and I made a couple of coffee runs for the guys. By midnight they had the engine installed, running, and signed off for flight.

On-Time Takeoffs

I awoke around 5:00 a.m., packed my gear and headed for the flight line. The van with the troops arrived about 6:00 a.m. The immediate task was to get the aircraft ready to go. This process required removing engine covers, pulling props through by hand to recirculate any oil that might have dripped into the lower cylinders, setting up portable heaters in the cockpit in advance of checking flight controls, and turning on electrical systems and lighting. With the whole team working, we had all six aircraft ready in 40 minutes.

Takeoff was scheduled for 10:00 a.m. Takeoff time was important during the deployment because the flights had to be coordinated with other agencies such as air-sea rescue and air-traffic control. To assure an on-time takeoff, our aircrew usually started engines about 30 minutes before the scheduled takeoff time. One of our team stood by a fire extinguisher as fireguard, while two others stood by to pull the wheel chocks. The other team members stood by in the van in case of a problem. During the deployment, a Crew Chief flew with each gunship. During engine start, the Crew Chief was on the ramp with a headset communicating with the cockpit crew. His function was to monitor the engine start, keep the aircraft clear, and signal the ground crew to pull the wheel chocks.

At 9:30 the whine of the engine starter broke the morning quiet. The propeller blades of the left engine on the first ship began slowly turning. A cough followed by a puff of smoke from the exhaust port indicated the engine was going to start. The propellers began to pick up speed and in a matter of seconds the engine was chugging along at idle speed. The sequence was repeated 11 more times as all six aircraft came alive. It was a deafening, but rewarding, noise.

The chocks came out, the Crew Chief leaped aboard, and with a burst of power, followed by a quick check of the brakes, the lead gunship began a lumbering taxi to the runway. After checking the engines at the Takeoff

Power setting, the pilot obtained clearance from the tower controller, visually checked the final approach for landing aircraft, and rolled onto the runway.

During engine start and taxi, the team's task was to immediately dispatch a specialist directly to the aircraft - engines running - in case an aircraft experienced failure of some system or component. We referred to this as being "Red Balled". Takeoffs were equally tense because a fully fueled AC-119 gunship had a long takeoff roll and a slow initial rate of climb. On this day, everything went as planned and our six charges were safely off to McClellan AFB with no problems.

Off to Elmendorf AFB, Alaska

We waited about an hour and a half to make sure none of the aircraft returned, then loaded our gear back into our C-130, bid farewell to the Malmstrom support team, and took off in our C-130 for Elmendorf AFB near Anchorage, Alaska. We were airborne early in the afternoon. The plan called for the gunships to spend at least one night at McClellan AFB, so that gave our Team a free night. Some folks from the Aircraft Delivery Group met us. Their job was to help us, and indeed they did. A pickup and a van were waiting and quarters were all arranged. We checked in and agreed to meet at the NCO Quarters at 6:30 p.m. to head downtown for dinner and some local nightlife.

All six gunships arrived at about 2:45 p.m. the next day. We had them all inspected and refueled by 6:00 p.m. However, that was the end of the good news for the day. The team at McClellan AFB had a mechanical problem with their C-130 and needed to wait for a part. This meant that my team would have to take the next stop - Adak NAS, Alaska at the far west end of the Aleutian chain.

By the following morning we had an additional couple of inches of snow. I drove to the aircraft and soon found myself stuck in a snowdrift under the wing of one of the gunships. It was nearly an hour before a crew chief dug me out. The aircraft required de-icing, a messy, smelly operation performed from a truck-mounted boom using an alcohol-based anti-freeze sprayed on the aircraft through a hose and high pressure nozzle. De-icing takes about 30 minutes for an aircraft the size of the C-119, so with one truck, the process required nearly three hours. After launching the gunships, we again waited to make sure that none would be returning with mechanical problems. Once the gunships were halfway there, we took off for Adak NAS.

Isolated at Adak

Adak Island has no runway ice removal system. The runway is open when the ice was rough enough to land and closed when the ice is too smooth for safe ground operations. The parking ramp was also frozen over. To make matters even more challenging, the ramp sloped down and away from the Base Operations building.

We got our quarters arranged, dropped off our personal gear and returned to the flight line. The gunships were already parked. We completed our work in the dark and bitter cold. We were all too tired to want to go into town, had there been a town to go to.

I had just stepped into the warm, inviting shower when the phone rang. "Sorry to disturb you sir, but this is the Operations Duty Officer. We've had a little problem on the ramp." A C-54 had just landed with a bunch of USO folks on board and while trying to park, the C-54 slid sideways clipping the wing of one of our gunships. I thought, "Holy shit" and began imagining the accident investigation, major repairs, 400 pounds of paper work, being stuck in Adak, Alaska. When I got to the ramp, the C-54 pilot explained, "Damnedest thing that ever happened to me. As we taxied in, I realized that we were sliding sideways as fast as we were going ahead. I cut the engines and pumped the brakes, but we still slid into your 119."

The low wing C-54 had hit the top of the high wing gunship. I climbed through the top hatch of the 119 with the aircraft crew chief and carefully made my way to the end of the wing. Then the good news the chief reported, "You're not going to believe this, Captain. I can fix this with a little paint." We were lucky. There was just a small dent in the upper wing skin, no immediate repair required. I'm confident the C-54 pilot was even more relieved. The collision would be reported as a minor, non-career threatening accident.

The next morning's weather predicted an ice storm, so much for leaving Adak that day. The crew checked the aircraft and buttoned them up as well as possible to protect them from the coming storm. Sure enough, right before noon, it began sleeting. It wasn't long before the sleet was almost solid sheets of ice blowing in sideways. I had never seen anything like it. It was fascinating and beautiful, but I could not help wondering how people put up with it.

Once the storm began, I wandered over to the O'Club and found most of our aircrews and the crew from our support

C-130 ready to start a round of "21". Later we all had dinner and retired early. It was a pleasant way to spend a really lousy afternoon and evening.

The next morning the weather was clear at Adak, but it was still unacceptable on the planned flight route. We prepared the aircraft just in case the weather changed, and then had the afternoon free. The next day the weather south of Adak was again lousy. Once again, we preflighted the aircraft in case the weather cleared; we then toured the base. The next day was a go. The weather was clear and the runway ice was rough enough for takeoffs. We were a go for Midway Island and happily anticipated the warmer weather.

U.S. Navy Nose Art

The flight to Midway was like all over water flights-boring. The island was a speck of land in the middle of the Pacific. Midway's claim to fame is the WWII battle that turned the tide against the Japanese advance across the Pacific. The next day was an absolutely beautiful day. The temperature was about 84 with white puffy clouds in the sky and a light breeze on the flight line. A Navy Chief stopped by and told us to make certain we tied the aircraft securely because a squall was coming. We found it difficult to believe, but he explained, "Look at the birds." To our surprise, every bird in sight was facing the same direction. The Chief continued, "They weathervane (turn into the wind) every time we get a storm. You watch; it will rain and blow in less than an hour." Sure enough, it did. After the storm passed and the sun came back out, the birds rearranged themselves, facing in every direction of the compass.

Midway was the place where our aircraft acquired "nose art". Aircraft 53-7864 was the first in our group. A yellow outhouse appeared on the left forward fuselage with large red letters spelling "Montezuma's Revenge." The other crews immediately asked me if this was legal. I answered, "No, but what could they do, send us to Vietnam?" It didn't take long to find a Navy Chief with artistic talent. 52-5982 was next. She became the "Super Sow," a pink gunship with a pig snout. Her guns were depicted as blazing away and a little curly pigtail was added for effect. There was a bit of attitude in some of the names, like 53-3154 which became "The Peanut Special" and displayed a very pregnant Lucy shaking her fist at an unseen Charlie Brown and saying "Good Grief ." A small United Airlines crest appeared on 53-7830, with large yellow geese flying in very, very close formation and captioned "Fly United." I failed to record the tail number or photograph the "Polish Cannon" which depicted an elephant, a tree stump, and two huge blue ones.

Wake Island

Midway was a great stop for us, but on our third morning we launched the gunships for Wake Island. The other team was still waiting for C-130 parts, so we also went to Wake Island. The gunships arrived in good shape, so after our post-flight work we were able to relax on the beautiful beach beside the crystal clear water. A few of the guys thought it would be great fun to toss someone into the lagoon. The idea gained momentum in direct proportion to the quantity of beer consumed. Soon it became a great idea. The victim went in with a huge splash and came out with a huge gash. No one knew about the coral and how sharp the bottom was. A six-inch cut can do a lot of bleeding and remain sore for several days.

Wake was so small that it only had one chow hall that was divided into an officer and an enlisted section; the food and service were the same. Rather than a cafeteria line, waiters brought food to the table just like a real restaurant. There was also a combined Officer/NCO Club called Drifter's Reef. The Reef was nothing more than an improved grass roofed hut, right on the beach. The beer was cold, the weather great and the water clear. What more could one ask for? Well, okay, wives and girlfriends would have completed the picture, but we were fresh out of them.

Later that evening, I drove back to the flight line with the C-130 pilot to check the aircraft. On the way back to our quarters, we noticed a couple of military police milling about. As we pulled into a parking place, one of them walked over to the truck and said, "Would you mind removing the keys and locking the vehicle, Sir?" This was not standard procedure on a place as small as Wake, so we asked why. "Well sir, it seems like some guy got all boozed up at the Reef and went wandering off down the beach. He decided to take a joyride on a construction company's bulldozer. It took six of us to chase him down and get him off the damn thing before he drove it into the ocean." I visualized a scene from the Keystone Cops and one of my guys going to jail. I fully expected to find a message waiting in my room, but much to my surprise, it was the C-130 pilot who got the message. Our support ship co-pilot was the infamous bulldozer driver!

By nine o'clock the next morning all six aircraft were on the way to Anderson AFB, Guam. About an hour before our C-130 departure time, an Air Police vehicle pulled up in front of the aircraft and deposited a very humbled co-pilot. He had been allowed to sleep it off in the local lock-up.

They weren't about to let him loose until they were sure he would leave the island. They really did the guy a favor, no formal report sent on to higher headquarters, no damage done to the bulldozer, the beach, or the co-pilot's career.

The team (EST) at McClellan AFB had received the part they needed and was leaving for Hawaii, then on to Guam. So, once again we followed the gunships to their destination; it was becoming a matter of pride for my team to hit every stop.

Guam

Guam was a large island and landing there was like returning to civilization after the slower pace at Midway and Wake. Anderson AFB was a huge facility and a major staging facility for the Strategic Air Command B-52 strikes on Vietnam.

The morning after arriving we completed all the usual preflight preparation. The weather was fine, but there was no air-sea rescue support available for the flight route to Clark AB. The Aircraft Delivery Group and our mission commander elected to delay until we had air-sea rescue coverage. That meant we had the day off. Two crew chiefs volunteered to baby-sit the gunships and the rest of the team set off to do some sight seeing.

The other Enroute Support Team arrived later that same day. My team naturally jumped all over their squadron mates about their "vacation" while we had done all the work. It was all in good fun, except that the Maintenance Officer for the other team, who was not a member of our squadron, took it all too seriously and became defensive. He let me know that "his" troops were not vacationing. He was a Major; I was a Captain. I listened; he talked.

The next morning one of the gunships had a serious problem with its left piston engine. The engine needed replacing. Our Team elected to fly to Clark AB to support the remaining gunships while the other team remained behind to change the engine. Our C-130 flew a lot faster than the gunships, so we arrived at Clark in time to grab a late lunch at the flight line snack bar before the gunships landed.

On the way to Clark AB, the gunships flew through some thunderstorms and a bolt of lightning struck the nose of one of the gunships. Lightning strikes on aircraft are common and usually cause little damage. Static discharge devices are installed and electrical equipment is grounded to the

airframe to help prevent damage. A lightning strike can, as in this case, provide a very impressive display of static electricity. The lightning ball rolled through the cockpit and down the crew ladder into the cargo bay. It then rolled across one of the long-range fuel tanks in the cargo bay, out the side of the fuselage, down the left tail boom and exited the aircraft by blowing off one of the three static discharge wicks on the left rudder. A discharge wick is a bolt-on piece that is easy to replace.

The crew chief was riding in the cargo bay and watched in horror as the “ball of fire” rolled down the cockpit steps and across the fuel tank. He put on his parachute and was poised by the door, ready to jump, when he realized that the excitement was over and that the aircraft was not going to blow up. The rest of the crew swore he wore his parachute the rest of the trip and never got more than ten feet away from the door. They remain convinced that the crew chief came within seconds of activating the air-sea rescue service.

Clark Air Base: Snatching a Spy

Clark AB was a huge facility with a tremendous amount of activity. It was the primary base for staging in and out of Vietnam. Several men on our team were previously stationed at Clark, so we did not lack for guides to Angles City, the closest town to the base.

After completing the through-flight inspections and securing the aircraft, we headed downtown for dinner. Angles City was the first real downtown we had seen in a month. We enjoyed a great meal at a small restaurant and washed it down with San Miguel beer. It was the local brew, stouter than the export version found in the States. Thus fortified, we set out to check out the local nightlife.

A couple of the guys spent the night downtown, but everybody showed up for work the next morning to preflight the gunships for the flight to Vietnam. As the morning wore on, our supply man walked over and started a conversation. “You remember that girl I was with last night? Well, she was asking some really strange questions about the gunships.” He went on to tell me she wanted to know things like the number of guns and the kind of radar. After some further discussion, I agreed it was a suspicious situation. We hopped in the truck, drove to the local Office of Special Investigations (OSI), and had the supply man file a report with an investigator. I figured that was the last we’d hear about it.

As it happened, unfavorable enroute weather delayed the

gunship departure from Clark for two days. That gave us time to shop the many on-base vendors and to purchase the Monkey Pod wood lazy susan and large wooden spoons and forks that were popular at that time.

On the third morning at Clark, I was sitting in my truck watching the gunships start engines when the OSI investigator drove up. He came over to the truck and thanked me for the report and explained that they had picked up the girl earlier that morning. Our supply man saw the car and joined the conversation. The agent said Philippine government officials did not allow OSI action unless there were three complaints on an individual, and that the supply man’s complaint was number three in the case. He reported the girl was off the street. He also explained that the girl’s parents were living in China and that the Red Chinese were using threats against the parents to force the girl to provide them with information.

Of all the guys on the team, our supply man knew the least about the aircraft systems and was the least likely to disclose sensitive information. Essentially, if it didn’t have a part number, he had no idea what it was. Best of all, he had the good sense to tell someone about the incident. Well, needless to say, being courted by a real spy was exciting for our supply guy, and just about all he could talk about for the rest of the trip. I have to admit, it was rather exciting, and way out of the ordinary.

Launching that last day was not without incident. As the right engine of one of the gunships fired up, a spectacular 3-foot flame shot out the exhaust. An exhaust stack fire is a common incident with a piston engine aircraft and usually causes no damage. It happens when excess fuel flows into the exhaust pipes or stacks where it can catch fire. Procedure calls for cutting off the ignition and allowing the airflow from the propeller to blow out the fire, usually with no damage done. The aircrew had already cut the ignition and the crew chief was in the process of rolling a portable fire bottle closer, just in case the fire continued, when the base fire truck rolled up, lights flashing, siren blowing and eager to douse the offending engine with highly corrosive fire-retardant foam. The fire was out, but our biggest problem was convincing the fire crew we didn’t require their services. They had seen a fire and, by God, they were going to do something about it. By talking really fast for several minutes, I finally convinced their team chief that the situation was under control. It would have taken the better part of the day to clean and flush the engine nacelle had I not been able to stop them.

End of the Journey

At Phan Rang AB, we off-loaded the aircraft. For the first time on the trip, we had no through-flight and no refueling. Our job was done. I said goodbye to the guys I had worked with for almost a year and then joined the other three guys who were also returning to Lockbourne AFB. The next morning the four of us were back on the C-130 starting our long trip home.

The whole ferry trip had taken 32 days. It was one of those experiences that one never forgets. In retrospect, it would have been good if we maintenance officers had been reassigned into the theater along with the aircraft. The guys on the ground at Phan Rang, with one exception, were not familiar with the aircraft and had to learn what we already knew. I wound up returning to Vietnam on a regular tour several months later, on a different aircraft. But then, that's another story.



Earl W. Wall, Crew Chief

71st SOS, Nha Trang, Phan Rang, 1969

I was born on April 26, 1942 in Indianapolis, IN where I was raised and educated. While working at U.S. Naval Avionics Facility in Indianapolis, I joined the Air Force Reserve at Bakalar AFB, Columbus, IN in 1963.

On April 11, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced the activation of our C-119G Reserve unit at Bakalar AFB, where I reported for active duty on May 13, 1968. The unit was redesignated from 930th to 71st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) on July 8, 1968 and tasked to fly the AC-119G Gunship III. On November 27, 1968, the Deputy Defense Secretary approved our deployment to Southeast Asia as an active duty AC-119G Gunship unit.

I was assigned as crew chief to Ferry Crew #3. Our task was to deliver Aircraft #52-5892 to Nha Trang AB, Vietnam. The crew included two pilots, Lt. Col. Lawrence Shinnick and Lt. Col. Loman Miller, a navigator, Maj. Spencer Nichols, and a flight engineer, SSgt John Strubbe. On January 29, 1969, we departed Lockbourne AFB, Ohio for Vietnam. Our flight route included stops in Florida, Arizona, California, Washington, Alaska, Adak Island, Midway Island, Wake Island, Guam, and the Philippines. We arrived at Nha Trang AB on March 2, 1969.

Pucker Flight to Adak

The most frustrating and troubling segments of our delivering the AC-119G to Nha Trang AB, Vietnam occurred between Anchorage and Adak Island, Alaska. We had spent seven days snow bound at Anchorage. On the day we finally left, the air temperature was 34 degrees below zero. We had to preheat engine nacelles for four hours just to get the engines to crank over. The aircraft had low power during takeoff and we had to abort. We slid off the end of the runway into a snow bank and had to be pulled out by a

tug. Our second takeoff was good; we were on our way to Adak.

Just after passing the point-of-no-return to Anchorage, we ran into an ice/sleet storm. Ice started accumulating on the aircraft and our airspeed started dropping off. We put all available heat into the propellers and leading edge of the wings, but ice continued building. The accumulation on the propeller dome would build straight forward to approximately two or three feet, then break off and slam into the side of the cockpit fuselage with the sound of a 12-gauge shotgun! The ice dented the sides of the aircraft.

The airspeed continued dropping. We began descending and the pilot instructed me to get the survival gear ready for ditching. On the pilot's command, it was my task to kick survival rafts/gear out of the aircraft. The pilot would then circle back around and we would all bail-out over the survival gear. We had only 2 minutes to get into the rafts and zip inside before being overcome by hypothermia. Less than a minute before the planned ditching, we flew out of the storm and were able to maintain enough air speed to continue the flight to Adak. We had lost a lot of altitude, though, and as we passed close to some Russian Naval ships we could clearly see soldiers on the deck.

When we landed at Adak Island, the wind was blowing so hard that the aircraft had to be immediately anchored to the tarmac to keep the aircraft from being damaged or flipped over. This was when I acknowledged that Adak Island was truly the "Birthplace of Wind on Earth".

As we entered the transient barracks we saw a soldier sitting on the floor with ankles shackled to the wall. I knew then that Adak was an interesting place to be. Indeed, the next morning I got a view of the Adak National Forest. The "forest" consisted of an area approximately 12 feet square

lined with railroad ties stacked four high and filled with dirt. There was one lonely pine tree in the center and a sign that read Adak National Forest. Adak Island is a volcanic rock!

After arriving at Nha Trang, I was assigned to the Flight Line Maintenance Crew. On February 13, 1969, I was reassigned to FOL Phan Rang where I spent the remainder

of my tour of duty. I will always remember the very close friendships developed during my tour. One in particular was with SSgt Jim Alvis. We are still best friends to this day. Following our return home to Indiana on June 6, 1969, I returned to the civilian workforce at Allison Engine Company/GM. My wife, Dixie, and I started our family and the rest is history.



Frank Clarence Watson, Nav.

17th SOS, Tuy Hoa, Phu Cat, 1970



I graduated from Blue Springs High School in Blue Springs, Missouri in 1960. Upon graduation from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, I was commissioned as an officer in the United States Air Force in July 1964. I joined the Air Force because I had injured my knee playing college football and the Army wouldn't allow me to go to Ranger or Jump School. Thus, I decided to be commissioned in the Air Force

and sleep on clean sheets. My class was the last class to have a choice of service.

In Vietnam, I was an AC-119G Shadow navigator in the 17th Special Operations Squadron stationed at Tuy Hoa and Phu Cat in 1970. My most exciting missions were

flown in the Parrot's Beak and Angel Wing Operations of the Cambodian Incursion in 1970. I was flying with aircraft commander, Captain Bert Blanton and we sustained battle damage to the left aileron but Bert flew us safely back to Saigon. The Dak Seng and Dak Pek Operations were also very memorable.

I will always remember Chuck James, Carmine Stolla, Mike Mankin, Phil Diehl, Don Craig, and Sonny Siebert to name just a few of the dedicated Shadows who I lived, worked, and flew combat missions with.

I was Base Commander of Minot AFB, North Dakota when I retired from the Air Force in 1986 at the rank of Colonel with 22 years active service.



Phillips H. Wheatley, Gun Maint.

71st & 17th SOS, Nha Trang, Tuy Hoa, 1969



I was born in Salisbury, MD in August 1948. I grew up in Seaford, DE and graduated from Seaford High School in 1966 and it is still my hometown. I attended High Point College, High Point N.C. for one year. I learned about the G.I. Bill and realized the only way to finish four years of college was to join the military. One day my

father got a phone call from a friend who was on the county draft board, informing my father that I would be getting my

draft notice within a month. The Army, Marines, and Navy were taking anyone as long as they were breathing, while the Air Force had a quota and a waiting list. The Air Force recruiter found me a slot and I was off to Amarillo AFB for Basic Training. I was in the last flight to graduate from Amarillo before Basic was moved to Lackland AFB.

During Basic, I was "encouraged" to be a weapons mechanic. After weapons school in Denver, CO, I was assigned to loading weapons on the B-58s at Little Rock AFB, AR. On Christmas Eve a two-star general walked into our barracks. He noticed the unauthorized beverages, but

surprisingly ignored them and instead called my name. I thought something had happened to one of my parents. Instead, he told me he had a flash message containing PCS orders for me. I was expecting orders for a three-year tour to Germany. He informed me that “someone wants you for something else and you have five days to be in Vietnam.” His secretary was already booking me a flight to get me home to see my family because I had only five days to get to Seattle for my Port Call.

I arrived in Nha Trang, Vietnam on 5 January 1969, where I lived in “Tent City” and worked on AC-47 gunships. I was soon sent to Phan Rang where they were expecting the arrival of the AC-119s. Two other weapons mechanics were also sent there, Larry Middleton and Barry Mohan. Larry and I are still good friends (we both went to Misawa, Japan after Vietnam). Larry and I set up a small gun shop. Larry outranked me so he took the day shift (7am-7pm). I got nights (7pm-7am), which was the only time anything exciting happened with the gunships. During the morning and afternoon Larry loaded all of the ammo and flares, while at night I took care of repairing all of the post-flight mechanical breakdowns and reload the mission bird for alert duty.

We did not go off base very much because it was dangerous. I only recall one short trip off base to a clothing store. We were out only an hour and stayed within sight of the gate the entire time and “beat feet” back to the gate. We were not allowed to carry weapons off base. On occasion we went to the so-called beach, which was infested with creatures a bit like jellyfish.

Jerry MacDonald (engine mechanic) and I went on R&R together to Taiepa. It seemed like there was nothing to do,

so we hopped on a train and went for a ride in the beautiful mountains. The week was uneventful, but it was enjoyable being away from the Vietnam madness.

I was transferred from Phan Rang to Tuy Hoa late in 1969, where I was told to start up a new gun shop to support a few AC-119s and the pending arrival of the new AC-130. As a two-striper it was difficult getting the workspace I needed. I explained that the gunships would be flying CAP over the base, but the only commitment I got was that they would look into it. Finally, I called the GE tech rep in Saigon (GE built the minigun); he made some calls and suddenly I had my gun shop. The tech rep even sent the parts I needed to get the shop started. Money may talk, but so does mortar suppression. The shop was up and running when I left in December 1969.

While in Vietnam I also did some work on helos that were flying in some kind of classified black program. The crews would not talk and had no names or ranks on their tiger striped fatigues. I fixed the guns and asked no questions.

After gunships I bounced around to Japan and Korea for another two years, and was finally sent to Okinawa where I was placed on the Lead Load Crew (F-4s) for 5th Air Force. We certified the crews that traveled around PACAF re-certifying the F-4 load crews.

Vietnam and the whole four-year experience was something I am proud of and will never forget. It was an eye-opening experience and I know I matured greatly in those years. On 5 Jan 1971, with five years of service, I turned down the pay raise and promotion to Tech Sergeant and left the Air Force.



Herbert Weise, Pilot

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1970-71



I was born in New Jersey November 18, 1941. After graduating from Branford High School I went to Rutgers University, graduating in 1964 with a BA & BS in Ceramic Engineering. I remained at Rutgers and completed a Masters Degree and PhD in Ceramic Sciences and Engineering before entering the Air Force in 1967. I

served as Class Commander of Pilot Training Class 69-02 at Laughlin AFB, TX. I completed C-141 training at Tinker AFB and flew with the 4th Military Airlift Squadron at McChord AFB, Tacoma WA.

I completed C-119 school at Clinton County AFB and AC-119G combat crew training at Lockbourne AFB, Columbus, OH. My combat tour with



the 17th Special Operations Squadron began November 24, 1970 (Thanksgiving Day) and continued until we transferred the aircraft to the Vietnamese and I returned to the States. My awards include included the DFC and the Air Medal with seven Oak Leaf Clusters.

I started flying with Delta Airlines in November 1972 and

loved every minute of it! I was a Second Officer on the CV-880 and flew the DC-9, B-727, B-757, B-767 and retired as Captain on the MD-11 on December 1, 2001. I am still married to my lovely wife Dawn (36 years) and reside in Kildeer, IL.



Donald Ray Williams, Pilot

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, 1972-73



Donald Ray Williams was born in St. Louis, Missouri on September 24, 1946.

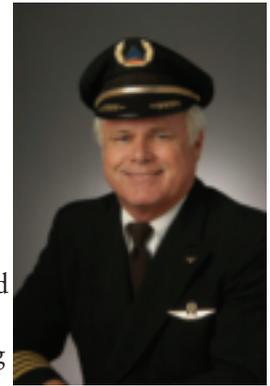
Don grew up in the farming community near Mexico, Missouri. He graduated from Community R-6 High School in Laddonia, Missouri in 1964 and entered Parks College, St. Louis University where he graduated with a B.S. in Aeronautics and an Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) commission in 1968.

Second Lieutenant Williams entered active duty in October 1968 and was assigned to Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT) Class 70-C (Cobra Class) of the 3516th Pilot Training Squadron at Randolph AFB, Texas. Upon completion of flight training in T-41, T-37, and T-38 aircraft without one pink slip, Lieutenant Williams earned his silver wings on November 11, 1969.

From Randolph, Williams hit the road to Travis AFB, California to fly C-133s until the end of 1971 when he was selected to fly AC-119K Stinger gunships in SEA. With C-119 training at Clinton County AFB, Ohio, Don completed AC-119K gunship training at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. Within weeks, Captain Williams shipped out for Vietnam on a Travis "flying cattle car" via Clark AFB, Philippines for Jungle Survival "Snake" School. After arriving at the 18th SOS Forward Operations Location (FOL) Nakhon Phnom Royal Thai Air Base (NKP), Thailand in January 1972, he was almost immediately checked-out as aircraft commander. Williams logged 850 hours flying time on 128 combat missions flown in the Barrel Roll of northern Laos, over the Ho Chi Minh Trail, in the Steel Tiger of southern Laos and in South Vietnam, specifically at An Loc.

William's most exciting mission was on a dark night in the Barrel Roll while attacking enemy supply columns. Williams and his crew suddenly found themselves flying inverted when their Stinger rolled on her back, not once but twice, during evasive maneuvering to avoid being hit by heavy triple-A fire. Williams flew the gunship back to level flight both times to continue attacking enemy trucks without taking any hits, causing any crew injuries, or damaging the aircraft.

Don was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal with seven oak leaf clusters for combat action in Southeast Asia. He returned stateside in December 1972 for his next assignment at Travis AFB, flying the C-5A from January 1973 to October 1976. Captain Williams separated from the USAF on January 10, 1976, having served eight years, one month, and one day.



Williams was employed by Delta Air Lines on January 12, 1977. During his 26 ½ years with Delta, Don flew the following passenger aircraft: B727, B737, DC-8, L1011, B757 and B767. Delta Captain Don R. Williams retired on September 1, 2003.

Fascinated since childhood with trains, Don has traveled the rails all over the world including Russia and China. As a hobby, he owns and rents vintage passenger railcars while farming on-the-side at the family farm near Mexico, Missouri. Don currently lives in Conyers, Georgia.

War Stories

On my way to fly AC-119K Stinger gunships in Southeast Asia, I attended Jungle Survival Training, better known as "Snake School," in the jungles of the Philippine Islands.

My “survival” partner and I had successfully completed all the Boy Scout exercises for the day including construction of our overnight shelters which were about 30 feet apart. We were ready to spend our first night in the jungle. It was getting dark so we turned in early, since there was nothing much to do in the jungle at night. We were lying in our shelters, looking up at the jungle canopy as darkness erased the last tint of light, and the place became alive (much like Daktari). After a while, my partner John said, “There is something over here. I can see its eyes.” I said, “Don’t worry; it will probably go away in a little while.” A few minutes later, John said, “I can’t sleep with something looking at me. I have to do something about it.” So, he took his survival axe and started chopping the heck out of the “thing” right through his mosquito net and all. After John was satisfied that the “thing” had departed the area or better yet killed, he settled down and went to sleep. And I was laying there wide awake, thinking whatever that “thing” was, it must really be pissed-off now. I was glad John had taken care of the “thing” but still wondered if it was still around. At least John was relieved of the problem because he was sound asleep. The “thing”, whatever it was, was now my responsibility. Finally, I put the “thing” out of my mind and went to sleep. The next morning, I walked over to see what John had killed. He was standing there with his chopped-up Seiko watch in his hands. He had seen the luminous dial. John said, “I can’t believe I did this, don’t tell anyone.” So, I told and still tell everyone that we were attacked by the dreaded killer jungle Seiko and my trusty partner, John, saved us.

After landing at DaNang one night, I was taxiing the Stinger at my usual 50 mph to the parking area to avoid the possibility of getting caught by a rocket attack. Sitting in the plane was not the safest place to be when attacked. The enemy liked to target the flight line. Well, I didn’t quite make it this time. Rockets started flying in, exploding everywhere. I immediately stopped and shutdown the aircraft and was out of my seat like a flash, way before my copilot. I raced toward the back exit to get out of the gunship. In the darkness, I stepped for the exit ladder which was not there. The crew in the back had not put it out in their haste to evacuate the aircraft. I fell on the ground face down with my parachute still on my back and it knocked the wind out of me. My copilot, Lt. Barry (a big fellow) was close behind me. I knew he would land on top of me so I was trying to crawl out of the way when his boots hit the ground beside my face. He stooped down, took one look at me and left. I wasn’t able to talk with the breath knocked out of me and I could barely move a muscle. After the rocket attack was over, I had recovered and the crew regrouped. I asked Lt. Barry, “Why didn’t you at least drag me away from the airplane?” He answered, “Your face

looked like it was covered with blood. I thought you were dead.”

During one night mission over An Loc, I was shooting for an American ground trooper. He was dug in across the street from a Chinese school house. He confirmed over the radio, “The bad guys are in the school house.” I fired a short burst and he said, “That’s it, pulverize the place!” We started laying down the rounds and he radioed, “Keep it coming. They are yelling and screaming.” I could hear our rounds hitting the target through his microphone. At one point in the orbit, I hit my own wake and threw some rounds over him. I quickly called to him, “Are you OK?” He answered, “Oh, yeah, I don’t sweat the 20 mike mike. An F-4 dropped a 500-pounder (bomb) on me this afternoon, my ears are still ringing.”

At Bien Hoa Air Base one night, I was asleep in my room dreaming that I was in a metal box and someone was beating on it with a hammer. I endured it for awhile (I can take a joke) but enough is enough. I woke up and to my surprise, we were under a rocket attack. (That’s what the noise was all about.) I dove out of the top bunk and got under the bottom bunk. I saw my roommate, Pete Mangum, hiding under the bottom bunk across the room. I shouted, “Damn Pete, why didn’t you wake me up?” Pete answered, “What, you slept through that, I thought you were dead!” Now that’s the second time someone thought I was dead.

After completing a predawn mission over An Loc, my crew and I were walking up the hill to our barracks at Bien Hoa. The Operations Officer came running up the hill to catch me and stated, “They are turning you around for an early morning flight back to An Loc.” I said, “What about this letter that says no more day flights up there?” He said, “Oh, that’s been rescinded.” I kept walking up the hill and he said, “General Clay is ordering you to takeoff. You will be court-marshaled if you don’t.” I got the crew together and we launched. It was about 0900 hours and the morning was clear with An Loc in sight 30 miles ahead. We could see Stella missiles (shoulder-fired) flying up around the city. An F-4 was shot down on our way up. My navigator reported to the airborne command and control center (ACCC) that we were inbound. After receiving directives from ACCC, the Nav reported over intercom, “They want us to sneak up on two AAA guns (37mm) west of the city and knock them out, because they are giving the fast movers a hard time.” I told the Nav, “Tell them to send the fast movers in on the guns and we’ll take their target.” The Nav reported their answer, “No, they want us on the guns.” So I said to the Nav, “Tell them we have to go bore-sight our guns,” which he did. I flew the gunship about 40 miles northeast of An

Loc and started shooting at a road sign. Then I announced over intercom, "If anyone wants to shoot the guns, go to the NOS station and he will show you how to track the target and use the consent button as the trigger. I will let you know when I am ready for you to shoot." Everyone that wanted shot the guns. It wasn't long until the Lead Gunner reported that we were out of ammo. I said, "Well Nav, radio

command and tell them we are Winchester and RTB." The Nav made the call and we headed back to Bien Hoa. I knew then, and still know, that the General and his commanders had no idea what I had done. They didn't have a clue as to the capabilities of the gunship or the vulnerability of the Stinger dueling with 37mm anti-aircraft guns while flying in circles above enemy missiles in broad daylight.



John C. "Chuck" Williams, Nav.

17th SOS, Tuy Hoa, Phu Cat, 1969-70

A native of San Diego, Chuck Williams was raised in California's "Inland Empire" and on the deserts of Southern California. Assigned to the 17th Special Operations Squadron, 14th Special Operations Wing in the Republic of Vietnam from December 1969 to November 1970, Williams earned the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) and six Air Medals while flying 150 aerial combat missions in AC-119G "Shadow" gunships stationed at Tuy Hoa and Phu Cat Air Bases. His training from January 1968 to November 1969 included Officer Training School at Lackland AFB Medina Annex, Texas; Navigator Training at Mather AFB, California; C-119 Gunship Combat Crew Training at Clinton County and Lockbourne AFBs in Ohio; and Survival Schools at Fairchild AFB, Washington and Clark AFB, Philippines.



Upon returning stateside from Vietnam, Williams was assigned to the 313th Tactical Airlift Wing at Forbes AFB, Kansas as Base Chief of Administration from Dec 1970 to Sep 1973.

Williams served as Chief of Project Support, USAF "Project Forecast II", AFSC from April '85 to June '86 after which he was assigned as Chief, Information Systems Division, Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Programs, HQ AFSC. From December 1986 to April 1988, Williams was detailed from the USAF as Special Assistant to the Deputy Staff Director for the President's Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution at the White House in Washington D.C.

Following his tour of active duty, Chuck joined the 1988 Republican National Convention Staff in New Orleans, Louisiana, and after the election, he served on the Presidential Inaugural Committee Staff in Washington,

D.C. In 1989, he received a Presidential appointment to the National Park Service, and was sent on special assignment to California to manage the base closure and transfer of the Army's Presidio of San Francisco to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

In November 2001 following the September 11th Attack on America, Williams became project director for Freedom's Flame, a 9-11 memorial foundation to raise money and build two memorials, one in New York City & the other in Southern California.. He was personally responsible for procuring and transporting eighteen tons of World Trade Center steel, plus a damaged FDNY 9-11 fire truck, from Ground Zero in NYC to Southern California, across eighteen states, through twenty-two cities, ten state capitals, and the nation's capital, in eleven days.

In October 2003, Chuck was asked to return to government service with the Department of Defense and became the Director of Personnel for the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Baghdad, Iraq. Following Iraq's Transition to Sovereignty in June 2004, he became the Regional Programs Coordinator, NE, for DOD's Projects & Contracting Office. He was responsible for over two billion dollars in reconstruction projects in four of Iraq's eighteen governorates. Chuck returned from Iraq in mid-November 2004 and worked as a special consultant to the Office of the Secretary of Defense at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

John C. 'Chuck' Williams was sworn in August 2005 as the Principal Assistant Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Installations (PADUSD-I&E) and member of the Senior Executive Service. He serves in the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Installations and Environment (I&E). He is the lead Pentagon official responsible for all US military installations world-wide.

Until October 2003, Chuck operated Williams Associates,

a logistics-consulting firm in Rancho Cucamonga and San Bernardino County, California. He is a Reserve Deputy in the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. Chuck is married to the former Stefani Ann Stone, of Provo, Utah. They have two daughters, Katherine Elizabeth (KateE) and Hannah Marie. They currently reside in Washington D.C. Chuck has a married daughter, Elesa Noele, a former USAF Captain

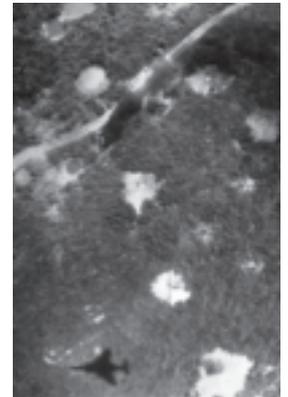


 **Burke Lester Wilson, Navigator**
18th SOS, DaNang, 1969-70



I was born in 1933 at Washington, District of Columbia. My hometown was Bladensburg, Maryland even though I graduated from McKinley Tech located in Washington D. C. in 1951. I graduated from the University of Maryland in 1955. I took Air Force ROTC at Maryland so I could graduate before being drafted. I entered the USAF in October 1955 at Lackland AFB, Texas.

that were climbing a hill and had no place to hide. We attacked the first and last trucks to trap the remaining 10 trucks. After we had expended all our 20mm ammunition,



Destroyed Trucks burning on the trail in Steel Tiger

I was assigned to the 18th SOS at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio from April to October in 1969. I was the navigator on Major Sternenberg's crew that ferried the first AC119K from Lockbourne to Phan Rang AB, RVN. After arriving at Phan Rang, I was assigned to the 18th's Forward Operations Location (FOL) at DaNang AB, RVN from November 29, 1969 to September 18, 1970 when I returned to the states. Of the 151 combat missions that I flew on Stinger, 126 were flown over Steel Tiger (Laos).



seven trucks had been destroyed and three were damaged. Ground fire was light since we only received AAA fire from one heavy machine gun.

My most exciting mission that I recall was when 7th Air Force received reports from our ground units in the A Shau Valley that they could hear trucks at night. 7th AF decided that the 18th FOL would be assigned the mission of working the A Shau Valley the first night the moon was too full to work Steel Tiger. Since the moon was too full to operate in Steel Tiger on the night of March 5, 1970, Major Sternenberg's crew was directed to go truck hunting in the A Shau Valley. Soon after we started looking for trucks in the A Shau Valley, we located 12 trucks



AC-119K Ready to Taxi for Takeoff



John F. Windsor Jr., Pilot

17th SOS, 14th SOW, Phu Cat, TanSon Nhut, 1970-71



I was raised three blocks east of Chicago Midway Airport. By the age of 13, I had a student pilots' license and in the ensuing years I flew all sorts of aircraft from the small, light Mooney Mite to the huge, heavy B-52. Prior to my Vietnam tour, I flew B-47s with the Strategic Air Command, then flew WB-47s for Air Weather Service as a Typhoon Chaser/

Hurricane Hunter. I flew as Aircraft Commander, Instructor Pilot and Flight Evaluator while assigned to the 54th Weather Recon Squadron on Guam and the 57th Weather Recon Squadron at Clark Air Base in the Philippines.

In mid-1969, we were advised that the WB-47 was being phased out and that all aircrew members and their families at Clark AB were being reassigned to the States. My stateside orders were to Clinton County AFB, Wilmington, Ohio for C-119 transition training. Transitioning from a craft with six engines to a twin engine piston driven aircraft was a tough adjustment for me. On one of our training flights an engine began backfiring, forcing us to abort the mission and land immediately. By contrast, in the B-47, I literally lost an engine (the engine and pod fell off into the ocean) and continued flying.

After combat crew training at Lockbourne AFB, I was off to Vietnam. On 10 May 1970, I reported to the 17th Special Operations Squadron FOL at Phu Cat Air Base, Vietnam to fly the AC-119G Shadow. We flew interdiction missions and CAP (combat air patrol) missions all over Vietnam and into Cambodia and Laos even though our government insisted that we were restricted to flying in South Vietnam.

While at Phu Cat, I was temporarily assigned to Tan Son Nhut Air Base at Saigon, where we basically operated into Cambodia near the towns of Kampong Cham on the Mekong River, Kampong Chanang on a tributary of Lake Tonle Sap and Siem Reap, a town near the ancient ruins of Angkor Wat just north of Lake Tonle Sap. We also flew interdiction missions over Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia and armed recon missions up and down the Mekong River. We communicated with the ground commanders mostly in French. As a result, we sometimes carried a French interpreter along on missions where we had

to deal with friendly Cambodians on the ground by FM radio. Most civilian or military folks on the ground spoke French even though some also spoke English. (Remember, Cambodia was once known as French Indo China).

After six months of combat I realized I was getting too old for shooting and being shot at. As luck would have it, as a field grade officer with in-country experience, I was qualified for an immediate opening at the 14th Special Operations Wing Headquarters at Phan Rang AB. The job entailed scheduling and controlling all 14 SOW fixed-wing gunships in Southeast Asia based on operational requirements and emergency situations. In addition, I was required to brief the Command Staff every morning concerning the previous night's activities and the schedule for the upcoming day. So I spent the rest of my tour controlling or "fragging" the firepower out there with an occasional flight of my own just to keep up to speed on what was happening out in the jungle. When my tour was over I was presented with a plaque on which was inscribed:

Fastest Friggin Fragger In SEA
Major John F. Windsor, Jr.
14th Special Operations Wing
10 Nov 1970—10 May 1971

During my tour I was submitted for a Bronze Star medal but apparently the nomination got lost in the shuffle. Many records got shredded and burned to keep them from falling into unfriendly hands as we abandoned Vietnam. I figure that's what happened to my approved medal application. It didn't matter because all I wanted out of Vietnam was me, and I accomplished that.

When I left Vietnam, I had orders assigning me back into the Strategic Air Command with a stop enroute to Castle AFB near Merced, California to attend B-52 upgrade training. During B-52 training, SAC headquarters changed my assignment from SAC Headquarters to McCoy AFB in Orlando, Florida where they wanted me to be Wing Standardization Section Chief. However, the Wing was heavily engaged in bombing Vietnam and the plan was to assign me to Standboard detachment and send me back to Vietnam for an indefinite period. THAT DID IT! Right then and there I told the Operations Officer I wasn't about to go back to Vietnam! I just came from there where those folks were seriously trying day and night to kill my ass.

He thought I was kidding until I took off my wings and told him, "I quit!" They didn't know what to do with me. That's how I ended up spending my final assignment in the Wing command post and flying the T-29. One result of my mutiny, however, was that I didn't get promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and eventually retired as a Major. But, I remain alive!

On 1 January 1976, I retired in Orlando, Florida and still live in the same house. I am proud of my military service and I would do it all again in a heart beat. A bitchin' outfit is a happy outfit!

Engine Fire on Takeoff

On one nighttime takeoff as I broke ground and called for gear up, the tower called me and said my right engine was on fire. I knew a fully loaded AC-119G would not fly on one engine. I decided to leave the engine running. I declared an emergency and stated my intention to return and land. Right then and there I earned my flight pay.

In the meantime my flight engineer was attempting to shut down the burning engine - just like the good book says. I kept slapping his hands away from the controls. (I would like to be able to apologize to this young man some day if possible.) When I got things under control, I asked the engineer if the engine was still producing power and he confirmed it was producing about 70 percent. I told him to let it run; we were going to need every bit of power to make the runway.

The burning engine was sitting in the middle of a wing that contained a fuel tank full of aviation gasoline. As I proceeded with the flight pattern the engine continued burning to beat hell and getting closer and closer to the fuel tank. When I knew I had the runway made, and that the landing gear was down and locked, I told the engineer to shut down the engine and hit the fire extinguisher. He did and the fire went out. The engine was shot. Lots of melted pieces and parts. We landed, went to the backup gunship and flew our mission.

Technical Order 1C-119G-1 states that the proper action for an engine fire is to shut down the engine. However, the T.O. also states that "Instructions in this manual are for a crew inexperienced in the operation of this aircraft. This manual provides the best possible operating instructions under most circumstances, but is a poor substitute for sound

judgment. Multiple emergencies, adverse weather, terrain, etc., may require modification of the procedures." In other words there is no substitute for common sense. Blindly following printed procedures can kill you! There is no substitute for sound judgment and experience.

Life-Changing Near Miss

On one of my last missions flying out of Tan Son Nhut, we were on station near Kampong Cham, Cambodia talking to a FAC who claimed he was working about 10 miles north of us. Suddenly an OV-10 filled our windscreen. He crossed directly in front of us from left to right, and at our same altitude. He was flying with his exterior light off and was so close I could actually read his instrument panel, which was lit up with red lights. To this day, I don't know how we didn't hit him with our right propeller. We were flying toward him at 180 mph. This clown drove right across our nose at our altitude. My co-pilot Lt. Don Craig also saw him; we just looked at each other without saying a word.

We reported this near miss after landing. It turned out that this Forward Air Controller was illegally flying in an area and at an altitude that was reserved for us. I learned later the FAC got zapped by the powers that be and was shipped out. I believe no one has ever come that close to a mid-air collision and lived to tell about it. More than anything else, this near miss really scared me and has haunted me to this day. We were over the most hostile territory in the world, flying in a country that our President claimed we were not in. Had we collided and survived, nobody would have come looking for us. Add to that, the North Vietnamese had classified us "air pirates" and had a price on our heads. Bad Karma!





Douglas Wohlgamuth, IO

18th SOS, DaNang, Bien Hoa, Nakhon Phanom, 1972

Wooster, Ohio is where I was born in 1950. I graduated from Cloverleaf High School at Lodi, Ohio in 1969. I joined the Air Force because I had a middle of the road lottery number and I just knew that I was prime to get drafted. I figured I would not have to carry a gun in the Air Force. I joined the Air Force in May 1970 in Cleveland, Ohio.

My most exciting mission involved an early morning hour takeoff from DaNang. It was pretty much a normal mission and I don't recall much about it. On the return flight to DaNang, we were advised that the DaNang runway was fogged in and we were diverted to Hue. I can remember a couple of Army guys coming up to the aircraft at Hue to ask why we had landed there. We explained why and told them when the fog lifted at DaNang, we were out of there.

They said that was good because they were also getting ready to do the same. When we were told the fog had lifted at DaNang, we climbed onboard the gunship and got ready for takeoff for the short trip to DaNang. But the left side jet failed to start. DaNang was contacted and we were told

that they would send a mechanic to Hue on a helicopter to fix the thing so we could get home. Sure enough a short time later a Chinook landed, but there was no mechanic on board. Everyone on our crew loaded on the helicopter except the pilot, flight engineer and me.

We were to stay with the aircraft. As the day wore on, we saw very little activity anywhere. A small child walked towards us and then turned and walked away. Not long after, the pilot asked if we were in favor of taking off on three engines instead of four, which the FE and I agreed to do. It was a long takeoff roll, but we made it back to DaNang on three engines. We never did hear why they didn't send a mechanic.

I remember the good times as well as the bad at DaNang and the friendships that were formed. I will never forget those we lost to SEA.

I separated from the Air Force in 1974 at Little Rock AFB, Arkansas. I currently live in Sun City Center, Florida.



Teddy G. Wood, Navigator

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, Bien Hoa, 1972-73

Even though Yuma, Arizona was my birthplace in 1948, I grew up in Bellevue, Nebraska where I graduated from Bellevue High School in 1966. I graduated from Bellevue University in 1970 and entered the United States Air Force in January 1971. I completed Officer Training School at Lackland AFB, Medina Annex. The reason I joined the Air Force was because my father served in the Air Force for twenty years and being around airplanes all those years, I wanted to fly.

I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base (NKP) in Thailand on 5 August 1972 as a sensor operator. I spent some time at DaNang, Republic of Vietnam (RVN), but most of my time was spent at Bien Hoa, RVN. My detachment commander at Bien Hoa was Lt. Col. Dick Ring. I departed Southeast Asia on 6 February 1973.

My most exciting mission was in the fall of 1972 while flying out of Bien Hoa. We got a distress call over the radio

from some American troops stationed on top of Monkey Mountain located very close to DaNang Air Base. They were about to be overrun by the Viet Cong (VC). We flew to their location at full speed using our jets and spent over one hour shooting up and down the side of the mountain, killing hundreds of VC. We expended our complete load of ammunition. I was on the NOS that night and I looked over at the gun barrels; they were so red it almost seemed like you could see right through them. I also remember the pilot asking the ground commander where he wanted us to lay down the fire and he responded with, "Just spray the whole mountain side because they are coming up all around the mountain on all sides and we are just about to be completely overrun." So, as the NOS Operator, I became the primary sensor and I put my scope on the side of the mountain, rotating it up and down as we flew around the mountain on all sides. I could see the VC running in and out of the rocks, shrubs and etc. I could also see our shells hitting the rocks and of course a "lot" of VC getting hit with our stream of bullets. For about 45 to 60 minutes, it

was nothing but a steady stream of fire from our aircraft straight down to the ground. I had never seen anything like this during my entire tour over there. As we departed, in the illumination provided by our gunship and ground troop flares, we could see that every GI on that mountain top was yelling and screaming with big smiles on their faces while giving us a big “Thumbs Up.” The sight was very rewarding and heart warming to us Stingers.

I will always remember the LAST COMBAT MISSION FLOWN BY AN ALL AMERICAN AC-119K STINGER GUNSHIP CREW IN THE VIETNAM WAR. The mission was flown on 27 January 1973 out of Bien Hoa Air Base. All armed U.S. aircraft were required to be on the ground by 0600 hours on that date. The tail number of the AC-119K gunship ended with three numbers 121 and we landed at 0559 hours and 45 seconds. The reason I remember is that I was one of the two sensor operators on that flight. The press and journalist were on the Bien Hoa ramp and they took pictures of our Stinger crew, standing in front of the gunship. It was a glorious occasion for all of us and I even had one of the photographers take a picture of us with my camera. I cannot remember any crewmember names, but I do remember their faces and crew positions.



Last Stinger Mission Crew in Vietnam

I retired from the Air Force as a Major at Sheppard AFB, Wichita Falls, Texas in February 1991. My wife, Linda, and I (married 35 years now) live in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. My 8x11 photograph of the last Stinger crew to fly a combat mission in Vietnam is proudly displayed on a wall in our home. Proud to be a Stinger!!



William “Bill” H. Woolard, Nav.

71st/17th SOS, Nha Trang, DaNang, Phan Rang, 1968-69



William Haynie “Bill” Woolard - Navigator, born on September 6, 1928 in Newnan, Cowetta County, Georgia, I started school in Miami, Florida in 1933, continuing elementary education in West Palm Beach and graduating from Sylvester High School, Georgia

in May 1945. After attending North Georgia College in Dahlonega for 3 quarters, I joined the U.S. Army Infantry reporting at Fort Bragg, North Carolina in July 1946 and then volunteered for the U.S. Army Air Corps. I was on active duty when the Air Corps became a separate branch of service, the U.S. Air Force in 1947.

After separating from the USAF with an honorable discharge in 1949, I entered the University of Georgia and attended graduation ceremonies in June 1952. I had

completed graduation requirements in March and entered active duty as a second lieutenant in April at Robins AFB, GA with the 1005th IG SIG. I had already received my officer’s commission in the USAF Reserve in 1951.

With no foreseeable openings available for pilot training, I applied for navigator school and attended Navigator training with the 3605th AOTG at Ellington AFB, TX, Class 56-16C from August 1955 to October 1956 and then Radar/Bombardier Navigator training at the Mather, AFB, CA from October ’56 to May ’57. My first assigned was to Pincastle AFB, FL (later named McCoy AFB) as a B-47 crewmember. In 1959, I completed B-52 CCTS at Castle AFB, CA and was assigned to the 336th BOMRON (SAC) at Turner AFB, GA as a B-52 Radar/Bombardier Navigator.



In 1962, I was transferred to the 28th BOMRON and a later model B-52 at Homestead AFB, FL. In August 1966, I was assigned to the 636th CSG HQ, 13th AF (PACAF) at Clark AB, Philippine Islands as Group Chief Navigator C-47s, C-54s, C-118s, T-39s and Asst Ft. Ops Officer. The 636th provided R&R flights from Vietnam and operated Base Operations. It was a very interesting and fulfilling assignment, especially being instrumental in helping U.S. troops in Vietnam get a break and some R & R.

When my tour was up at Clark, P.I., I thought I was going to War College at Maxwell AFB, AL. Boy, was I wrong! I received orders to the 71st Special Operations Squadron, Nha Trang, RVN, flying AC-119s. I reported to Clinton County AF; Wilmington, Ohio to learn how to use the E-10 computer, sextant, and loran set, all of which I had been using extensively for the past two years. Then I went to Lockbourne AFB in Columbus for combat crew flight training in the AC-119G. I volunteered to ferry one of the airplanes from St. Augustine, FL to Nha Trang, RVN. I, the Navigator, was crewed with Maj. Richard E. Morgan, Pilot; Capt. William R. Casey, Co-Pilot; SSgt. Squires Riley, Flight Engineer, and SSgt. Paul Goen, Crew Chief. We departed on December 26, 1968 in aircraft number 52-5942 and arrived at Nha Trang on January 20, 1969. We kept breaking down all along the way and sometimes had to wait for parts. Upon arrival, I was sent to Jungle Survival School (my second time) at Clark AB, P.I.

I served as Chief Navigator of the 71st SOS (later re-designated the 17th SOS) from Feb. '69 to Oct. '69. Most of the reserve troops of the 71st SOS (formerly 434th TAW) departed RVN for the states in June '69. I left RVN in October '69 due to my time in country while stationed at Clark. I was assigned to the 58th MAS at Robins AFB, GA flying C-141s. I retired from the USAF on December 1, 1970.

The following are some stories about flying AC-119 Shadow gunships in Southeast Asia. After my return to Nha Trang from a week at "Snake School" in the Philippines, I flew a couple of flights out of Nha Trang and DaNang into Laos along the border of North Vietnam. I was then assigned to Crew #7 and we were sent to Phan Rang AB, RVN. The crew consisted of Lt. Col. William E. Long, Pilot and Detachment Commander; Lt. Col. Mathew (Mat) A. Boonstra, Co-Pilot; Lt. Col. William (Bill) H. Woolard (me), Navigator; Capt Michael R. Kiely, Navigator; SSgt Richard L. Hupp, FE; SSgt Leonard Swallow, IO; SSgt Richard Williams, AG; and Sgt James Tringle, AB.

Some of the most rewarding memories from flying Shadows was the association with the men from the original 71st SOS

(434th TAW) troops. There were lots of really good men in the 71st and 17th and I thought very highly of all of them. Also, the "Thank You Shadow" and "God Bless You Shadow" radio calls that we received from the ground troops who we supported. I certainly did not envy our ground forces in the least.

On one occasion, an American and South Vietnamese patrol had gotten shot up pretty badly and had no water. We managed to stop the VC from attacking them and then we took all the water bottles (baby bottles) we had on board and dropped them to the patrols. We received the following message from them: "We don't know what you look like or where you're from, but we surely hope God will bless you."

Another time, we were scrambled to defend an artillery outpost north of Saigon near Tay Ninh City. We encountered five enemy .51 caliber machine gun positions surrounding the outpost and numerous VC in the area. I asked Col Long to drop down to a lower altitude and had the illuminator (white light) turned on momentarily to draw fire so I could get an exact pin point position on the VC .51 calibers. Even though we drew tremendous small arms fire and fire from the .51 caliber, we were able to pin point all five VC gun positions and destroy them and many of the VC foot soldiers. This saved the artillery outpost to continue their mission.

I also remember several occasions when our air base at Phan Rang came under attack from mortars and rockets. We Shadows would scramble to get in the air to attack those attacking us. Sometimes, Col Long got the airplane engines started and was taxiing down the taxiway before me and other crewmembers were onboard the gunship. We had to run to catch up to the aircraft to be pulled onboard by fellow crewmembers. We were successful in breaking up mortar and rocket attacks on Phan Rang.

Before I left Vietnam and the 17th SOS, we had lost only one aircraft. I am not sure of all the names of the crewmembers, but my good friend and standout basketball player from Duke University, Major Bernard Knopic, was the pilot on that ill-fated flight. He had been sent from Phan Rang to Tan Son Nhut AB to help out with C Flight. His gunship crashed shortly after takeoff and he and most of his crew were killed.





Burton David Zeiler, Pilot

18th SOS, 14th SOW, Phan Rang, 1970-71

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 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.



Kampong Thom Cambodia



William "Bill" Joseph Zito, Gunner

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, DaNang, Phan Rang, Phu Cat, 1970-71

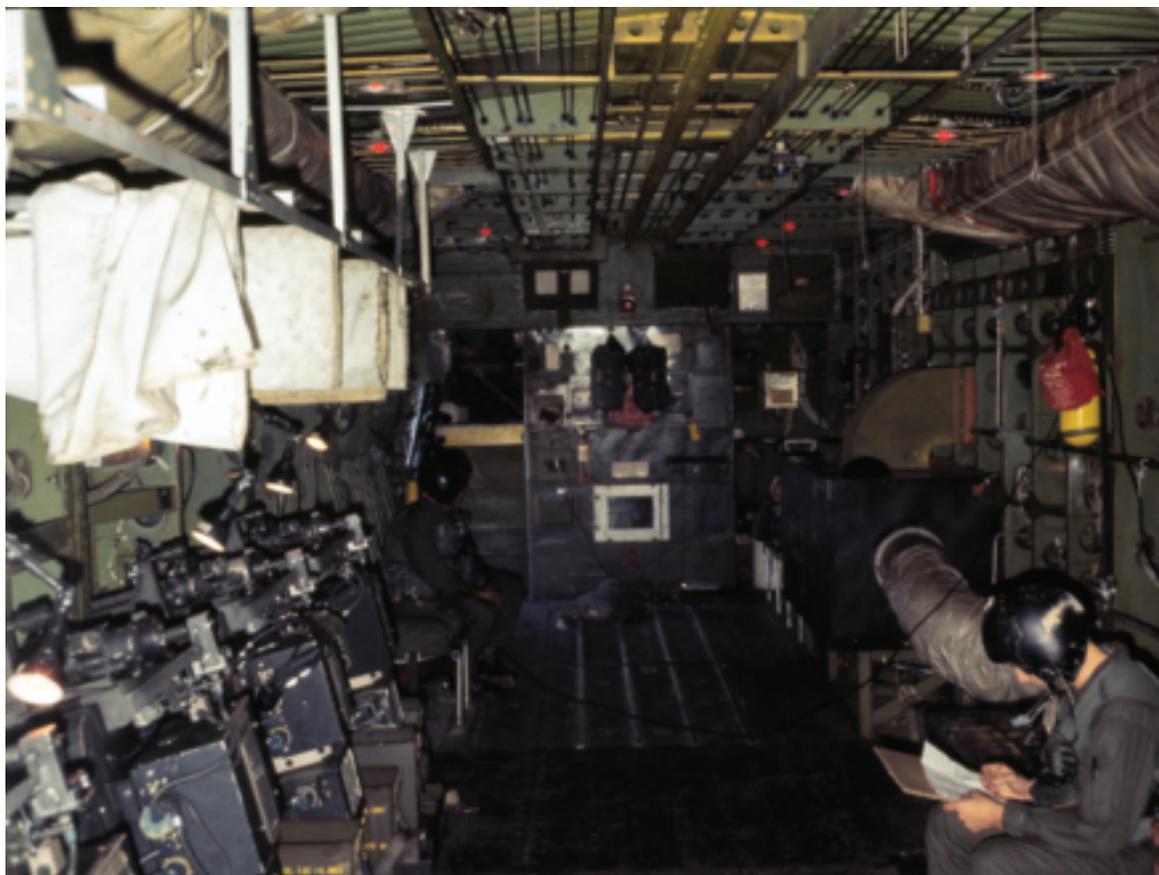
Although I was born in Providence, Rhode Island in October 1950, my hometown was really East Providence. I graduated from East Providence High School on 10 June 68 and was sworn in at the Providence induction center eleven days later on 21 July 1968. I joined the Air Force because I was a member of the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



AC-119G Gun Bay

Other War Stories

We Were Proud To Be Scanners

By Gunners Frank L. Bartlett – Daniel R. McDuffie – Everett D. Sprou

Many are familiar with the gunships “Spooky” and “Spectre” but few know the role “Stingers” played in Vietnam. The Stinger was an aerial direct interdiction weapons platform designed to engage enemy transports, tanks, anti-aircraft artillery emplacements, troops and waterborne craft. Even fewer have knowledge of the stressful and physical dangers associated in being a “Scanner”. It is for this reason, I along with two former gunner/scanners have compiled this essay.

The Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) as recorded on my DD-214 indicates a 46250 Weapons Mechanic. Military records should reflect a code change during our tour in Southeast Asia to A-46250, the prefix “A” representing aerial gunner which involved the additional duty of “scanning”.

Scanning required a gunner to position himself in a door opening of approximately 3’ by 5’ located on the left (port) side, aft end of the gunship. A scanner would lean out of the aircraft into the cold air stream for the purpose of obtaining a grand view of the area surrounding the gunship while visually searching for anti-aircraft artillery (AAA), other aircraft, and any other abnormalities that might affect the mission.

Climbing over equipment and standing in a narrow clearing next to the doorway bulkhead, the scanner attached a 2 ½” to 3” gray-green nylon tie-down strap to his parachute harness. The opposite end was tied to a structural portion of the aircraft and knotted to the individual’s size requirement to reduce the chances of falling from the gunship during violent combat flight maneuvers. A second tie-down strap, used to lean against, was tied and knotted waist high across the door opening, allowing the best view possible. There was no protective shielding between the scanner and the outside world or a specially designed fleece-lined scanning chair to sit in as there are in today’s gunships.

A parachute could not be worn like other crewmembers for fear of accidental deployment into the air stream jeopardizing the aircraft and crew, with personal injury a certainty. Therefore, the scanner hopefully had his parachute secured well enough to remain in place during evasive

maneuvers yet easily retrievable in an emergency.

One hand was used to maintain balance in the doorway while keeping track of the flare gun. The other hand was “always” on the intercom transmit button ready to command the pilot to the type of evasive maneuver needed to avoid enemy fire.

It was not uncommon to be unexpectedly and rapidly boxed-in by severe weather while on a mission. At ground level, the air temperature may be in the 80 degree range, but at combat flying altitude, outside temperatures could be in the 30 degree range. Factoring in 160 knot air streams, the wind chill factor became deadly. The moisture from the clouds, combined with sweat in the wind and cold became another enemy by reducing the scanner’s ability to mentally concentrate while making physical tasks more difficult. There was no specialized clothing or safety equipment available to fight off these elements.

Air turbulence during many missions buffeted the gunship vigorously (sometimes violently) in all directions. A channel of upward moving air would cause the aircraft to rise as though it were an express elevator. For hundreds of feet, a sinking feeling in your stomach emphasized the power of nature. A sudden downdraft and the gunship would reverse direction into a semi-freefall state, along with your stomach. Partial penetration into either of these vertical channels of air caused the aircraft wings to respond in kind. Constant corrective action was required by the pilots to maintain aircraft control while the scanner was experiencing an unpredictably terrifying ride through space.

The moist vapor of the clouds obscured the scanner’s vision by clouding his visor and caused footing to be tenuous at best. AAA in these conditions was almost impossible to call. A scanner could only see increasing glows as enemy tracers penetrated the cloud base. Determining the type of flight maneuver the gunship should take to avoid the upcoming rounds would be a guess.

There were few commands the scanner would ever give to the aircraft commander but all were important and obeyed without question. At the sight of threatening AAA such as 12.7mm, 23mm, 37mm, 57mm or heat seeking shoulder launched surface to air missiles (SAMS), a scanner would bark the evasive action needed to avoid impact. The call

“Break Right, Break Right” caused the pilot to put the gunship, which was most likely in a 30-degree left banked turn for firing, into a hard and sudden 60 to 90 degree right turn. The terrifying seconds of helplessness crawled as the scanner watched the explosive armament approach the aircraft, hoping it would pass by and not hit the gunship.

The scanner, formerly facing down at the earth from a 30-degree left turn, was now in a prone position with his back against equipment and his eyes filled with sky. The aircraft would shudder and groan as the strain of combat are placed upon it.

A call of “Break Left, Break Left” from the scanner, the IO, on the right side of the gunship causes the pilot to quickly increase the standard 30-degree left turn orbit into a 90-degree banked left turn for life. The standard 30-degree left orbit downward view for the gunner/scanner was now filled with nothing but hostile enemy-held territory.

There were less frequently used commands of “Rollout” and “Stall” and the most feared call was “Rocket, Rocket!” “Rocket, Rocket” was in reality an informative statement of the current combat situation. It indicated a heat-seeking missile had been fired, prompting the pilot, co-pilot, and flight engineer to put the aircraft into the least heat signature attitude possible while telling the scanners to launch two defensive flares. Unlike later gunships with automatic launching capabilities of 30 flares or more at one time, the scanners manually fired a single shot flare-gun and launched a modified parachute flare as heat detractors.

There was no “good” time to fly a combat mission. On a clear moonless night, the ground with its many fires and reflective rice paddies looked the same as the star-filled sky. There was no separation of horizon where the two met. Disorientation and confusion as to which way was up was literally unavoidable and at times sickening. Nights with a full or prominent moon and a thin cloud layer above made the gunship appear to enemy gunners much like a fly on a lighted lampshade.

Nothing was written of the added anxiety, fear and helplessness associated with daytime missions. Nor was there mention of the battle damaged aircraft or those lost in battle. This writing is but a brief snapshot of a portion of one crewmember’s duties and does not express the sorrow we feel for our lost comrades.

It is critical that one recognize and understand the unique perspective the scanner had of the inside and outside of

the gunship and the target area below. This perspective allowed events to only be seen by a single crewmember of a warring plane.

We hereby certify that the information we have given is true to the best of our knowledge and belief.

Bad Night on the Trail
by Peter St. Jean and Bob La Rosa
With Notes from John Bielstein

“PANAMA, PANAMA, Stinger zero three on Guard!”
“Go, Stinger three.”

“PANAMA, Stinger three is squawking 7700, making a dash for the fence and channel 69. We took a severe triple-A hit and are leaking fuel badly - request you have PAMPER shut down all Arty on the 270 of channel 77.”

What you just read are actual radio transmissions as recorded on cassette tape by Major Peter St. Jean on a Stinger combat mission out of DaNang on 15 May 1971. Following are the crewmembers of Stinger 03 (zero three) that moonlit night:

- AC - Captain John Bielstein
- CP - Captain John McCartney
- FE - T/Sgt Tommy Scoggin (now deceased)
- FLIR - Major Peter St. Jean
- NOS - Major Jack Deal
- NAV - Lt. Col. Brubaker
- Lead Gunner - S/Sgt Bob La Rosa
- Gunner - A/1C J.D. Hughes
- Gunner - A/1C Joe Alvarez
- IO - unknown

It all started out as a routine mission for this “seasoned combat crew” into the Hotel Route of the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos, searching for VC trucks headed south.

Triple-A was especially intense, as was the truck traffic that night. We were glad to have been “acclimated” to the combat environment by now as the scanners called only close breaks, and the two sensors coordinated smoothly in locating and verifying valid targets before giving the pilot “consent” to blow them away!

We did not appreciate the sizeable moon and haze in the

air that night, as it silhouetted our AC-119K gunship for enemy AAA gunners on the ground, especially while flying in firing orbits over targets.

When BOTH scanners called, “break right” and “break left” at the same instant enemy anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) rounds came streaking up under Stinger 03, we puckered because we knew the ‘you-know-what’ was about to hit the fan!

Lead Gunner Bob La Rosa and Aerial Gunner J.D. Hughes were both seated on empty ammo cans behind the forward-most number one twenty 20mm Vulcan cannon, insuring the cannon fired properly. The aircraft commander, pilot Captain John Bielstein had Stinger 03 banked in a left turn firing orbit. The 20mm gun was blazing away at the target on the ground when suddenly it jammed. Gunners La Rosa and Hughes feverishly worked at clearing the jammed weapon while the aircraft winged its way through waves of AAA ground fire coming up at it.

La Rosa informed Captain Bielstein over the intercom that the #1 20mm cannon could not be fixed and that he was shutting the gun down to be replaced online with the rear 20mm cannon (gun #6). La Rosa and Hughes immediately picked up the empty ammo cans they had been sitting on and carefully walked to the rear of the plane and checked the cannon. La Rosa then turned on the arming switch for #6 gun (the rear 20mm Vulcan cannon) and informed Captain Bielstein that the gun was armed and ready to fire.

Approximately, 25 seconds later.... and exactly where Gunners La Rosa and Hughes had been sitting behind the # 1 cannon, two rounds of AAA ground fire ripped through the belly of Stinger 03. The first round of AAA ripped open the belly of the gunship just below where the gunners La Rosa and Hughes had been seated. The round exploded as it passed through the aircraft’s fuselage, sending pieces of shrapnel flying everywhere in the gun compartment. Shrapnel tore into a nearby fully loaded 20mm ammo storage can called the “609 can”; so named because the can held six hundred nine rounds of spare twenty millimeter ammunition.

The two AAA rounds were later determined to be Soviet made/supplied .57 mm shells that smashed through the outer skin and detonated in the gun compartment before exiting through the top of the fuselage.

In so doing, the enemy rounds took out the co-pilot’s rudder control cables, a primary hydraulic line that all but

emptied the main reservoir, and a FUEL CROSS-FEED LINE that started spraying 115/145 octane aviation fuel all over the lower crew (gun) compartment and its occupants... first one tank, then another. Miraculously, not one crew member was hit by the flying shrapnel!

Note: PANAMA Control came up on “Guard” to warn us that our escort “Gunfighter 44,” an F-4 Phantom fighter/bomber jet flying out of Udorn Air Base, Thailand was circling high above us, watching an ever-growing white cloud of fuel vapor trailing behind us, just looking for any spark to ignite it!”

The onboard APU (auxiliary power unit) was shut down by the crew to help eliminate the chance of an electrical spark igniting the fuel that was now pouring down on crewmembers in the cargo/gun compartment. Gunners La Rosa, Hughes, and Alvarez started dumping all live ammunition and spent brass cartridges overboard to lighten the aircraft. Everything that wasn’t needed or tied down was thrown overboard from the battle damaged Stinger Gunship.

All of the crewmembers in the cargo compartment had by this time strapped-on their chest parachutes and were readying themselves for what looked like a good chance of having to bailout! Up in the cockpit on the flight deck, Captain Bielstein and his co-pilot, Captain McCartney, were hard at work attempting to keep the badly damaged gunship in the air while flying it out of hostile enemy territory toward home base.

The 45 minute dash for DaNang seemed like 45 hours. Worried about the loss of fuel with continued fuel leaks and the danger of a fuel explosion, the flight back to DaNang did give Captain Bielstein and the crew time to formulate plans for approach and landing if we actually made good on our “RTB”(Return to Base).

At about 12 miles out of DaNang, Flight Engineer (FE) Scoggin and Gunner La Rosa started manually hand-pumping the left main landing wheel and the nose gear down because of hydraulic pressure loss. We would have to do without landing flaps for the same reason. It would be a no-flaps landing!

The nose gear and left main landing gear indicated “Down and Locked” with two green lights on the pilot’s panel; but no amount of pumping could do the same for the right main landing gear. A bailout into the South China Sea started to look like a better alternative than landing with

a collapsed gear, showering sparks on a fuel trailing slide down the runway!

When FE Tech Sergeant Tommy Scoggin was sure we were all convinced that our efforts for landing were in vain, he had our full attention when he suddenly called out, "Hey! We've got 3 in the green." "Let's land," John said, as we turned final for 27. One hurdle remained as the brake disks got white hot from one continuous application of the emergency air bottle brake pressure. Emergency fire trucks zoomed in around us and the firemen considered hitting the brake disks with cold water! Thank goodness, the firemen didn't and we taxied off the runway and stopped with ten guys setting a new world record for aircraft egress with no step-down ladder, lights or anything but adrenaline! Maintenance was glad to get the bird back, but it was soon determined that our bird was no longer flyable as field repairs for that much damage were impossible. It was decided that our Stinger gunship would be cannibalized for parts to repair operational AC-119 gunships in the Squadron.

Our aircraft commander, Captain John Bielstein, was most deservedly put in for the Air Force Cross while the rest of the crewmembers were nominated for Distinguished Flying Crosses. For Major Peter St. Jean, 15 May 1971 was the first day of his 20th and final year in the United States Air Force. Peter only hoped that all his fellow-crewmembers realized that their safe recovery and landing was living proof that God had something else planned for each of them in the furtherance of His Kingdom and that each of them stay as close to Him as they did on that Bad Night on the Trail. (Pete St. Jean 9/11/06)

Notes from John Bielstein: The flight back to DaNang was indeed forty-five minutes while losing 4,500 lbs. of 115/145 Avgas on the return flight. (115/145 Avgas was the most potent fuel made back then.) We turned final and landed on runway 18 at DaNang. I called for Scoggins to shut down the Jets on short final, no reverse power after touchdown, just airbrakes for stopping. I was able to turn off the runway at mid-field using the airbrakes. After we stopped the engines and everybody bailed out, the aircraft dripped gas on the taxiway for nearly another 45 minutes.

Crewmembers in the cargo department were saturated with 115/145 Avgas. What a king-size shower! Needless to say, we all headed to the barracks for a real shower and then we all met at the O' Club for some much needed beer. I did receive the Distinguished Flying Cross for that "Bad Night", thanks to my crew and the outstanding support they gave to me.

Harry Dunn Story

Col, USAF, Ret.

Having spent 3 years flying the C-119G out of (and all over) Europe I you might enjoy hearing where/how the AC-119 came into being.

Before I was shipped to Vietnam, we received a note from USAF Headquarters that the old Navy twin engine Grumman (not the greatest idea!!) was to follow up the C-47 Gunship which was developed by a friend of mine a test pilot at Wribht-Patterson. After visiting Grumman, my boss wanted to know what we thought about it. We would have had to pay Grumman to take them out of the desert and pay for them. I suggested that since we had more than enough 119G models in storage, which were far more solid and really steady birds for the job, we could have AFLC do the cleanup and conversion and save a bunch of money. My friends at W-Pat fully agreed with me because of the stability and flight performance. My boss, Col. Geo Kirsh (former director of Edwards AFB), concurred, talked to Gen Schiever, who in turn told USAF that we had a much better solution which could be accomplished in-house.

The result was an aircraft with the equipment which had been designed by the guys at W-Patt - with improvements and more powerful guns. At the same time they were working on similar C-130 conversions.

I was in RVN first during the 1968 "TET" Offensive and again a few months later, May I think, for 2-3 weeks to help 7th AF generate a ROC for a new FAC aircraft. The AC-119G and later Ks started arriving in Vietnam about the time I was heading back to AFSC, That is a short story of how and when the AC-119 was born!

Hope this fills in a little of its history.

Shadow Incident at Chu Lai 1969

by

Al Reynolds and Chuck James

Shadow gunner, Al Reynolds, remembers that the incident at Chu Lai must have happened in late October or early November of 1969. He is sure that it occurred after the Saigon crash of Shadow 76. The crew that Al flew with was Major Maurice Ray & Company, who landed at Chu Lai

for fuel and ammo within a few days after the accident. The old \$1.19 was still sitting on the grass off the edge of the runway. Al is positive that Major George Pollack was the AC on the flight and pretty sure that SSgt John Stewart was one of the gunners on the mission.

Al Reynolds is correct that AC-119 remained a derelict beside the Chu Lai runway for several days before it was jacked up and flown to Phan Rang by way of Tuy Hoa. According to Lieutenant Colonel Charles “Chuck” James, Tuy Hoa FOL ‘A’ Flight Operations Officer at the time, the pilot crew members were aircraft commander Major George Pollock and Captain Harmon E. “Skip” Fawcett. The latter was flying in the left seat when the landing was made at Chu Lai. There was a light rain and that didn’t help with visibility outside the aircraft in the night landing.

As the aircraft came in over the runway overrun, the crew noticed a slight “bump” before touching down for landing. As the aircraft slowed after landing, the left landing gear collapsed causing the aircraft to veer off toward the left and just barely off the runway. Chuck believes that it was a broken drag link on the left gear that caused the gear to collapse. There were no injuries to crewmembers in the incident. Within a few days of the incident, AC-119 gunships could no longer regenerate at Chu Lai, but could use Chu Lai as an emergency airfield.

What caused the “bump” as the aircraft came in over the overrun? It was a pile of dirt in the overrun. The left landing gear had hit the pile of dirt. Chuck states, “In Air Force operations, we were always very meticulous in keeping runway overruns sanitized so there would be little jeopardy to aircraft. Chu Lai was a U.S. Marine base and they operated at different standards, at least at that location.”

The AC-119G was ultimately jacked up and the left landing gear bolted in the down position. Major Frank Walls, maintenance officer with the 14th SOW, was the officer in charge of the recovery operation. The aircraft was flown with gear down to Tuy Hoa and then to Phan Rang. The aircraft landed at Tuy Hoa to pick up some aircraft tires, among other items. “Frank expected and needed help loading tires on the aircraft and could not seem to find anyone to help him. Frank rattled my chain since as operations officer, I was the senior officer of our flight on the ground that night. The tires were ultimately loaded and the crippled aircraft took off into the night.”

Chuck is unsure of the date of the Chu Lai accident. “I also don’t remember any action taken against George Pollock since, he was the aircraft commander. Skip Fawcett was

reassigned and placed on my aircrew as co-pilot. He was a fine officer and pilot. I did not rush him to fly in the left seat until he expressed the desire to do so. Our Commander of ‘A’ Flight was Lieutenant Colonel Russ O’Connell, who ran the show at Tuy Hoa.”

Bail Out! Bail Out! Bail Out! *Recollections of Jim Moore*

On the fifth of March, 1971, our AC-119K Stinger gunship (tail number 879) crew of ten launched from Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base (NKP) located in northeastern Thailand on an armed reconnaissance mission to an area known as the “Barrel Roll” in Central Laos. Lieutenant Colonel Botbyl was the Aircraft Commander (AC).

Our preflight inspections, takeoff, climb-out, and ensuing mission were routine until we were accomplishing the post-strike checklist after firing on enemy targets. Our Illuminator Operator (IO), Staff Sergeant Robert Johnson, advised the Flight Engineer (FE), Staff Sergeant James Moore that there was a massive oil leak on the #2 reciprocating (recip) engine. A cross check of the oil quantity indicator of #2 engine confirmed his report. Most of the eighty-five gallons of oil contained in the engine’s oil tank had been pumped overboard. The oil pressure and oil temperature gauges on #2 engine were still reading in the green, but an emergency engine shutdown was quickly accomplished before oil pressure and oil temperature were affected. We were located over enemy territory approximately 108 miles northeast of NKP when the engine was shutdown, a very long distance from home base for the aircraft and its crew!

During our mission, there had been unusual flight characteristics of our gunship tail # 879 when we entered a firing circle to attack enemy targets. Upon rolling left into a 30-degree banked turn to fire, the aircraft would buffet or shake mildly to moderately to a point where it appeared we were approaching an aileron stall. These same flight characteristics had previously been experienced and reported to ground maintenance by previous crews who flew 879. Maintenance had performed numerous visual inspections and flight control adjustments to keep the aircraft status at operational ready. With all four engines (two reciprocating and two jets) operating normally, the flight characteristic was not deemed critical enough to ground the aircraft.

However, on the mission of March 5, 1971, our Stinger gunship 879 seemed to have a mind of its own. With the #2 reciprocating engine on the right wing shut down, the

aircraft was not performing well at all. Trying to remedy the situation, we first shutdown the jet engine on the left wing in order to conserve fuel. It quickly became evident that this setup would not work because the aircraft could not maintain altitude even with METO (maximum power except for takeoff) power on the good recip and 100% power on the right wing jet engine. We then restarted the left wing jet engine. Even with the increased power from the jet, we were still losing altitude and there was still imposing and treacherous mountainous terrain between us and home base.

Realizing that running #1 recip engine at METO power could only be maintained for thirty minute intervals without risking the danger of severe overheating and possible engine failure, its power was reduced to 2250 RPM (revolutions per minute), and we continued our gradual fall from the sky!

There was only one choice left at this point in descending flight, reduce aircraft weight. Lt Col Botbyl ordered the jettison of everything that wasn't bolted down. The order was carried out quickly but to no avail. We still descended! We were getting closer to Thailand but it was still doubtful if we had sufficient altitude to clear the high Karst, the limestone projections which shot up a thousand or more feet in some places and it was questionable if we had enough fuel to make landing at NKP.

Even though several thousand pounds had been tossed overboard, the aircraft was still descending but at a much slower rate. At least we were now in friendly airspace on the Thailand side of the Mekong River. That much was in our favor!

But with fuel gauges lurking near zero and the aircraft still descending, Lt Col Botbyl made a very difficult decision to abandon ship and ordered the crew to prepare for bailout. A night bailout, even in the best conditions, is very dangerous, especially when jumping into a dark black Thai jungle.

Crewmembers heard the command every airman fears from Lt Col Botbyl, "Bail Out! Bail Out! Bail Out!" The "controlled" bailout went smoothly considering the circumstances. Most crewmen landed in good condition with the exception of the last two, Major Warner and Staff Sergeant Johnson; one sustained a compacted spine and the other a split pelvis upon landing.

Following the bailout command, only the pilot, copilot and I (the flight engineer) remained onboard the aircraft. Circumstances made it doubtful we could reach the rear of the aircraft if we needed to abandon the aircraft. Lt Col

Botbyl ordered me to deploy the flight-deck bailout escape hatch. The flight deck escape hatch consists of two doors, the upper door located on the flight deck floor and the lower door located on the outside of the aircraft fuselage. Between the doors is a small chute big enough for a man with a parachute backpack to dive through head first. When the upper door is opened, the lower door is supposed to open and fall away from the aircraft. Well, that didn't happen. The lower door did not open! We had nearly run out of options to save our own lives. We were well aware that the C-119 had a very poor record for successful crash landing. Upon impact the aircraft cockpit typically rolled under, nose to tail, like the lid on a sardine can.

Lt Col Botbyl had one last trick left. The jet engine on the left wing, the side with the good recip engine #1 was shut down and our descent slowed somewhat. The lights of NKP Air Base were now in sight and with the longest heartbeats you could imagine and a good deal of prayer, Stinger gunship 879 made it to the runway and landed. As we rolled down the runway, the right jet engine flamed out and the left recip engine quit. We had run out of fuel.

Later investigations by our maintenance crews discovered there were thirty gallons of fuel remaining in the fuel tanks, but not useable. During heavy ground maintenance, crews discovered that the left wing spar was cracked, causing deformation of the left wing that impaired lift production from the wing.

As the old saying goes, "Any landing you can walk away from is a good one." For many years, this particular landing has stayed with me as I am sure it has with the rest of the crew.

Recollections of Robert Johnson, IO

When the order was given to jettison everything, I attempted to jettison the flare launcher, which was loaded with flares. I broke the safety wire that held the emergency launch switch cover and stepped back. I turned the switch to "Launch" and nothing happened! I checked to make sure the air bottle was open and it had 3,000psi of air pressure. The ground safety pin was still in the rack beside the launcher. This pin was removed and stowed before takeoff and then replaced in the launcher on the 'Before Landing Checklist'.

After several attempts to jettison the flare launcher, I asked a gunner, who I believe was Staff Sergeant John Rice, to help me push the launcher out of the aircraft. This was accom-

plished successfully. After we jettisoned the flare launcher, we threw out everything that we could. This included ammo, life rafts, ammo cans, and anything else that was loose.

When the order came to bailout, the NOS (night observation scope) operator, Major Warner, and two gunners bailed out. The last gunner, SSgt. Rice, helped me with my chest pack parachute. The last thing he said to me before he bailed out was, "Don't forget to pull your rip cord!" I then exited the aircraft and pulled the "D" ring. The chute opened without any problems. On the way down, I realized I still had the "D" ring in my hand. I don't remember ever being told in training what to do with it, so I put it in the leg pocket of my flight suit. (I still have it today.)

I anticipated hitting the ground but hit a large rock. This resulted in breaking my pelvic bone on the right side. I didn't know this at the time but I knew that it really hurt.

After getting my bearing, I released my chute by pulling the "J" hooks on the chute harness. I crawled to a ditch and got on my survival radio. I don't remember how much time passed, but a "Pedro" helicopter from NKP picked me up and a P.J. Sgt. Parker helped me get onboard for the flight home to NKP. I spent several weeks in the hospital at NKP while my bones healed. On approximately 15 June 1971, I reported to the FOL Commander as being fit for duty.

Shadow Destroys Bunker Complex In Support Of Dak Pek Article from the Phu Cat Air Base, RVN "Cobra Courier" Vol. 2, No. 20 May 18, 1970 (Unofficial Air Force News Bulletin published weekly on Mondays)

An Air Force AC-119 Shadow gunship crew of the 17th Special Operations Squadron at this base (Phu Cat) was recently credited with destroying a large bunker and munitions complex near the Dak Pek Republic of Vietnam Civilian Irregular Defense Group camp, 65 miles west of DaNang.

The Shadow was target bound at sunset on a recent evening to support the CIDG camp at Dak Seang when it was diverted to respond to a troops-in-contact call in the Dak Pek area.

Crewmen on the flight were Lieutenant Colonels Charles M. James of Rantoul, IL. and Stanley J Merrick of Atwater, Calif.; and 1st Lt. Michael W. Mankin of Golden CO.

TSgt. Robert H. Spencer of East Freetown, MA.; SSgt. David M. Hammerlund of Puyallup, WA.; Sgt. John R. Weave of Manaffey, PA.; and A1C Jon D. Jacobson of Moraga, CA. were the remaining crewmen.

"The camp was taking automatic weapons fire from several positions about 250 meters to the north and west of the camp," stated Colonel James, aircraft commander, "We began pouring our minigun firepower on these positions under the direction of the ground commander, and almost immediately he commented that he had heard a large secondary explosion."

The ground controller asked the Shadow crew to hit a location where an enemy 75mm recoilless rifle had been sighted. The rifle was located on the opposite side of the hill from which the camp was taking automatic weapons fire.

The AC-119 hit the target and touched off a secondary explosion. The ground contact working with the Shadow relayed his thanks to the crew and said that the explosions resulting from the last hit on the target continued for the next six hours. He credited the crew with destroying a large enemy complex of bunkers and munitions.



Angkor Wat, Cambodia

The Story of 883

It began as a routine mission; but before the night was over, people would learn of the incredible flight, the flight that became.....THE STORY OF 883

There was no doubt that the men of 883 were an experienced crew. If they hadn't been, there's no telling what might have happened when their . . . but before getting to that part of the story, we should tell it from the beginning. It is May 8, 1970. An AC-119K, an Air Force gunship, tail number 883, sits outside waiting for its crew, waiting for tonight's mission — an armed reconnaissance mission over one of the most heavily defended road sections in SEA.

In one of the briefing rooms, a group of men are gathering around in that special closeness that only an air-combat crew knows so well. Captains Alan D. Milacek, pilot; Brent C. O'Brien, copilot; Roger E. Clancy, navigator; James A. Russell and Ronald C. Jones, sensor operators; flight engineer TSgt Albert A. Nash; illuminator operator SSgt Adolpho Lopez, Jr.; aerial gunner A1C Donnell H. Cofer, and crewmembers SSgt Ronald R. Wilson and Sgt Kenneth E. Firestone. The crewmen didn't know that the mission they were about to fly, their 100th together, was going to be just a little bit different from the rest.

Weather, targets, coordinates, rescue procedures. A normal briefing. Soon, the engines are warming up, taxi is underway, and 883 and crew are airborne. For awhile all is "routine." The crew has already discovered and destroyed two trucks when Sensor Operators Russell and Jones spot three more trucks on the road below. Pilot Milacek begins maneuvering the aircraft, placing it in a firing orbit. The crew is alert, each man at his post. Ready for action. Suddenly, the equilibrium of the night, such as it is, is gone. All at once the odds have turned against the crew of 883. Bursts of antiaircraft fire begin cracking, and 883 is now engaged in the classic air battle. Co-pilot O'Brien clears two F-4 escorts in on the six-gun positions and they respond immediately. Again and again the F-4s are called in as 883 maneuvers through the deadly circle of fire. Seconds and minutes. They remain on target. After 17 minutes of the deadly duel, guns firing away at the trucks below, 37 mm rounds whizzing by 883 from the positions below, the crew feels that a "tenuous balance" might best describe the situation. One more truck has been hit and the fire from it lights the area.

At exactly 1 a.m., everything changes and makes the previous few minutes seem as though they had been spent in Disneyland. "The whole cargo compartment lit up and I felt

the aircraft go into a right bank dive," recalls Airman Cofer, aerial gunner. No one knew exactly where they had been hit, the gunners didn't answer right away. All they knew is that the nice steady left bank that 883 had been flying had been violently wrenched into a violent right-bank dive. Milacek called out, "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, we're going in." He gave instructions for jettisoning the flare launcher to the Illumination Operator, Sergeant Lopez, and told the crew to prepare for an immediate bailout. If they were going to go in, they had picked a mighty bad spot to do it.

Things became a bit more complicated for the pilot. The plane was coming down fast, having already lost about 1,000 feet in altitude, while the crew struggled with the worsening problem. Milacek and O'Brien put in everything they had to try to pull out of that dive. Finally, with full left rudder and full left aileron, along with maximum power on the two right engines, they regained 'stabilized flight.' They pulled out of the dive. It wasn't the easiest thing in the world to do. Navigator Clancy said later, "When you go on these missions, you brief for rescue procedures, where to head for and so forth. But this plane was going where it wanted to!" On top of that there was an additional problem. With the right engines at full power, they began to glow, providing an easier target for gunners below. That wasn't all the crew had to worry about. After a quick evaluation, they discovered that they were headed away from their home base. Even worse, there was a range of mountains between them and home base, and they were too low to go over in their present condition.

There wasn't much they could do about their existence as a bright target in the sky. They had to remain in a stable flying attitude. But Milacek, with guidance from the navigator, Clancy, edged 883 around to the correct heading. Slowly, slowly, like a trickle of sand in an hour glass, 883 strained around until she was pointed in the right direction. Now there were the mountains to overfly. The entire crew began throwing out everything they could to lighten the load. Adrenalin working at full bore, like the engines on the right wing, Sergeants Wilson and Firestone found that they could rather easily throw out the cans of ammunition with only one hand. It was working. The aircraft began a slow climb to get over the mountains. Once over the peaks, Milacek began a slow descent. Sergeant Nash recomputed the expected dry-tank time and discovered that the fuel consumption had been reduced considerably. For the first time since they had been hit, the crew could think realistically of landing the stricken bird instead of bailing out. It looked like the emergency might be ending.

Approaching the landing area, Milacek carefully performed a controllability check on 883. He found, after some

experimentation that, at reduced speeds and with gear extended, control could be maintained with almost full left rudder and aileron. Since flap damage couldn't be assessed, he decided to do a no-flap approach at 150 knots, somewhat faster than the usual landing technique.

Down they came, each crewmember wondering what the dark night held for them as they came closer to touchdown. Finally, the first bump, then wheel roll, then finally, taxi up. They had made it. They were down, after their 80-minute ordeal. It was over, and no one was hurt. Perhaps, though, no one was more relieved than Milacek, who was heard clearly over the intercom, saying as they went onto the taxiway at the end of the runway: "Thank you, Lord, thank you."



It wasn't until the crew got out of the aircraft that they saw for themselves, for the first time, just what damage had been done. One-third of the right wing had been shot away and one aileron along with it. Technically, the aircraft was almost unflyable. Fourteen feet of the wing and one aileron on Stinger 883 was shot off. The plane should not have stayed airborne.

A year later, the crew of 883 was together again, this time to receive the coveted Mackay Trophy for the most Meritorious Flight of the Year. The citation reads, in part: "Working as a team and displaying the highest degree of airmanship and courage in the face of extreme danger, they managed to successfully return to their home base,



thereby saving a valuable aircraft. The exceptional distinctive accomplishments of Captain Milacek and his crew reflect great credit upon themselves and the United States Air Force."

Washington D.C - Captain Alan Milacek, to the right of the trophy, and his crew pose proudly with the Mackay Trophy.



Missing 14' of Wing Tip and it Flew Back

In Memoriam - Final Flight

This section of the AC-119 Gunship History Book remembers, honors, and celebrates the lives of our brothers lost in South East Asia



AC-119 Gunship Memorial Plaque at Hurlburt Air Park, dedicated on October 5, 2003 to the men of the AC-119 Special Operations Squadrons who gave their lives in Southeast Asia

and the brothers we've lost since then.



Fred Graves, one of our AC-119 Reunions founding fathers, at our first ever AC-119 Reunion

Many families and friends helped write the stories in this section, sharing memories from letters, phone calls, and the lives of their loved one and friend.

Thank You.

DaNang Air Base Airman Memorial Park

On March 3rd, 1973, the United States Air Force and Republic of Vietnam dedicated the DaNang Air Base Airman Memorial Park to all United States warriors who gave lives for freedom. It also included a Memorial marker placed near the rocket attack site where Sergeant John Rucker, 18th SOS Maintenance, became one of our last Air Force casualties of the Vietnam War and the last American enlisted man to die by hostile fire at DaNang Air Base. Sgt Rucker's death occurred little more than 24 hours before the Vietnam Cease Fire Agreement was to go into effect.

Almost none of us were aware of this park or memorial.

That was part of the way it was then.

This book and this page remedy that.

John Rucker and all our brothers lost in South East Asia are not forgotten

Proclamation (transcribed from the DaNang Air Base Airman Memorial Park Dedication Pamphlet)

Many persons, throughout time and the world, and for various reasons, have ingrained their beneficial presence in history. It is not through chance that they have done so, but through their deeds and upon their own merit. In such a mold fit those individuals who have served the cause of peace and freedom at DaNang Airfield. Faced with the hardships inherent to armed conflict; they rallied as one, despite their diversity of background and nationality, to successfully accomplish their appointed mission.

Mere words could not be authored nor monuments carved to successfully convey the full remembrance and appreciation of their valorous acts, many of which led to the ultimate sacrifice. Such recognition can only be felt in the hearts of men or laid in the hands of supreme beings. We who are present now, however, in order to best preserve in a worldly manner the memory of those who have served here have taken action to establish this plot of earth as a dedication to their memory, to be known as the "DaNang Air Base Airman Memorial Park".

Accordingly, it is hereby declared and proclaimed that this park and its attendant marker shall for all time be devoted to the recognition of those who have so unselfishly and honorably given of themselves while in service at DaNang Airfield, to be remembered by fitting ceremony at appropriate times in the years to come lest the memory be dimmed by time. Within our authority, witness our hands

and seals this 3rd day of March 1973, DaNang Airfield, Republic of Vietnam.

Signed

COLONEL WILLIAM W. HOOVER
NGUYEN DUC KHANH



DaNang Memorial, dedicated to all Americans who lost their lives in Vietnam

FREEDOM HAS A PRICE

This memorial park is dedicated to the memory of all Americans who served here, and consecrated to the valorous men who gave their lives in the defense of freedom. For them, the price has been the supreme one which any nation can ask of its people. Especially do we wish to recognize one American, who will represent for us the thousands of Americans who will never return -- Sgt John Rucker -- who lost his life here at DaNang on 27 January 1973.

His death, on the eve of peace, was a tragic ending to a long and costly war. Costly in terms of those slain, the homeless, orphaned, and the widowed. For those of us who have survived, and for whom the price of freedom will not be measured in terms of supreme sacrifices, we offer a prayer of thanks to God, adding a profound hope that this peace will continue.

This memorial park has been created in order to serve as a symbol of freedom and peace amid the ravages of war. And especially, it will serve as a reminder to us that the price of freedom demands vigilance and a personal commitment to the ideals of freedom. We who served faithfully in defense of those ideals here at DaNang, and throughout Southeast Asia, can be justly proud, knowing that those who have died did not do so in vain.

CAPTAIN KENNETH F SMITH



Memorial Plaque dedicated to Sergeant O'Neal Rucker,
1 March 1973 at DaNang Air Base, Vietnam

Destroyed Barracks



Memorial Construction



Final Flight - In Memoriam Honored Crewmembers Lost in SEA



Clyde D. Alloway, IO 18th SOS, DaNang, 1969-70



Clyde Alloway was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, attended Chandler High School in Arizona, entered the Air Force in 1953 at Phoenix, and called his home town Portsmouth, New Hampshire (Pease AFB).

Technical Sergeant Alloway was in Vietnam 1965-66 as a flight line crew member on A-1 Douglas Skyraiders, and was again in Southeast Asia when

he volunteered as an Illuminator Operator with the 18th Special Operations Squadron in 1969. He died after bailing out over the China Sea off the South Vietnam coast, on June 7, 1970 when his crew's aircraft was unable to control a runaway propeller on their AC-119.

He was 32 years old.

The mission where Clyde bailed out began as a routine mission to intercept and destroy Viet Cong convoys heading south down the many trails called the Ho Chi Minh trail. However, about 20 minutes into the mission, a runaway propeller occurred and the pilots turned around and headed back to DaNang Airbase, trying every way to feather the prop. This included all the emergency procedures, including pulling abruptly upward to almost stall the aircraft to try to slow the prop speed, but to no avail. As the crew related their story, the engine appeared to be on fire with a 50 foot trail of sparks as if the gigantic radial engine cylinders were being consumed. The floor was vibrating up and down and trying to walk felt really weird as if they didn't know when their foot was going to touch. The engine appeared to begin to twist off its engine mounts and all control over the engine was lost. The other reciprocating engine was at max power all this time as were the two small jets but they were still losing altitude (remember the AC-119k was operating at 180 percent over the original designed gross weight) and the pilots

struggled to maintain control for a bailout. When Aircraft Commander Warren Kwiecinski gave the signal for bailout, Clyde was prepared and went into action as jumpmaster, clearing the path for crewmembers to get to the rear of the aircraft, and jettisoning the flare launcher.

Pete Chamberlain was on the mission where Clyde was lost and he told this story of their aircraft's runaway prop and decision to bailout to Clyde's son, Jeff: "It has been said that 'Courage is when you are afraid but do it anyway'. Your Dad exemplifies that to me. He knew what was going on and he knew what faced him. He wanted to get back home as much as any man and more than most. But he gathered himself together for every mission and did what had to be done. My last glimpse of him was of him motioning me out the bailout door as I ran by him. I was told he waited for every other crewmember to get out until the pilot got back there and told him to go.

Taking that step out that doorway into a pitch black night was very hard for me and I thought I hesitated (my mind was going warp speed) - later I was told that I flew past everyone. I was a strong swimmer, had swum that



2006 L-R: The Pappas: Travis (Grandson), John (Son in law), Lynn (Daughter), Brianna (Granddaughter), Cameron (Grandson), Jeff Alloway (Son)

morning in that body of water, knew where I was (fairly close to shore) because I was a navigator and had access

to all the nav info at my position. Moreover, I was dumb and thought I was immortal like many immature flyboys. I was still not thinking all that rationally at this time. I was LUCKY. I don't know what your Dad's thoughts were but I don't believe he was a swimmer and it was the blackest night I can ever remember. It took a strong and courageous man to perform as your Dad did under those circumstances."

Ron Merino, copilot on one of the CH-53 Jolly Green Rescue helicopters trying to recover the bailed out crew, was the last person to talk with Clyde as he was trying to get

himself free from the parachute after the bailout. Rich Hay, Copilot on the Mission, tells his story of that bailout in his entry in this book. We may never know everything about Clyde's death, but Clyde was one of the more senior NCOs on our AC-119s, and his Stinger crewmates remember him as one of our more mature NCOs.

Clyde's marker is in the San Bruno Military Cemetery just outside San Francisco.

He is survived by his daughter Lynn Pappa, son Jeff Alloway, and brother Jeff.



Moses "Mo" Alves, Navigator.

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1969

Major Moses "Mo" L Alves was born November 23, 1934 in Papizios, Portugal and died October 11, 1969 when his AC-119G Shadow crashed during takeoff on a combat mission after losing one of the recip engines immediately after lift off near Gia Dinh at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, South Vietnam.



Known by his friends as "Mo" or "Major Mo", he was a 12 year Air Force careerist who was commissioned and entered the Air Force through the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute ROTC program on October 18, 1957, graduating with a degree in Aeronautical Engineering. Later in his career, he graduated from the Air Force Institute of Technology as an Aeronautical and Mechanical Engineer that began his assignment as an Air Force Development Engineer and the Minuteman Program Director for Re-Entry Systems, and he was to be reassigned in that role upon completion of that tour in Vietnam. Mo's career also included assignments as a B-47 Navigator / Bombardier. He went to Vietnam and the 17th SOS as an AC-119G Shadow Navigator / Night Observation Scope (NOS) Operator on May 12, 1969.

When Major Mo was appointed as "Squadron Funding Officer" by Lt Col Buckley, he joked that he wanted to be called the "fun officer." In this extra duty role, Mo was responsible for scrounging up both required and nice to have things for us, since we were a "tenant" organization on our bases and getting those was a challenge. His family remembers Mo's pride and pleasure in being able to "secure" amenities like TVs, furniture, food, and beverages for our

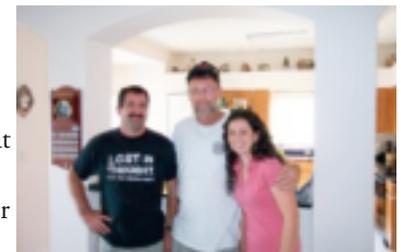
daily use in the Squadron Hootch as well as party supplies for our monthly informal gatherings. All of us gunshippers remember how important it was to have a place to let off steam, relax, enjoy some good food and drinks.



Coming from a family whose heritage includes emigrating from Portugal at age 3, and an older brother who was a World War II POW for five years, Major Mo's legacy lives

on in his children and grandchildren. In 2006, his grand daughter Taryn contacted several of us AC-119 guys to help on her senior year high school project. In her own words, "I attended the reunion in Florida a couple of years ago where I was introduced to a lot of wonderful, intriguing men and women who openly told me stories of my grandfather, Major Moses L Alves. This association helped me to know a little about the grandfather I regretfully never got to meet and I am now hoping that this association will help me in my endeavor to learn more about the men and women who served in Vietnam. If you are willing to share your experience with me please let me know via e-mail. Thank you to those men and women who opened their arms to me and my family at the reunion, it was a weekend that I will treasure and remember always."

Doug Wohlgamuth was at that Reunion and visited Taryn and Kevin Alves for her project.





Meredith G. Anderson, Navigator

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1969-70



Major Meredith G (Andy)

Anderson was the Nav/NOS on Shadow 78 that crashed at Tan Son Nhut on April 28,

1970. He was 37 when he died. Others who we lost in that crash were 1st Lt Thomas Lubbers, 1st Lt Charles Knowles, MSgt Joseph Jeszeck, SSgt Robert Fage, and Sgt Michael Vangelisti.

Andy was born in 1932 in Elmira Township, Illinois. After graduating from Viola Community High School in 1950, he attended Northern Michigan College and Mississippi State before volunteering as an Aviation Cadet in November 1952. His family remembers him telling them the reason he joined was that the Air Force was a new branch of the service and a great way to travel and see the world.

Andy's family remember several stories he wrote or told them about that were among his most exciting:

One of those was the night he flew in III Corps in January, 1970 where they went north of Saigon to support the 1st Cav Division. The ground troops heard some noise around their camp, so their Shadow fired their mini-guns all around the friendly's camp. Next day, patrols discovered the bodies of 24 enemy soldiers. Andy wrote of another January mission, "A pretty good firefight in Kien Giang province. We fired 30,000 rounds and were fired at by 500 rounds of 30 cal. Quite heavy. But we caused damage to sampans and antiaircraft gun emplacements."

A third mission that Andy identified as one of his more exciting ones involved his Shadow 78 crew at Firebase Chan Lang that was under mortar attack. In his own words, "Quite exciting. Saw the camp start firing out, then incoming start coming in. We mixed it up with 50 cal – I looked right down a gun barrel on one of our turns – got a good position on it."

Andy told his family that the two things he would remember most about his time in AC-119s were that "It always felt good to know we were helping the guys on the ground, that we were making a difference." and his Hawaii R&R with his wife Betty.

Lee Jordan (Anderson) and Dale Anderson, Andy's children, remember their time together with some of his crew during

AC-119 training: The summer before our Dad went to Vietnam (summer 1969), he was training to crew on the AC-119G. We as a family got to travel with him and spent most of that summer living in various hotels in Ohio. It was that summer that my brother and I perfected our jackknife dives as we spent most of our time playing in the hotel pools. Dad occasionally would bring home one of the guys so that they could spend some time away from the barracks, and with a family. My mother would always try to put something together, and this usually meant working with limited resources.

One day Dad brought home a young guy, we believe his name was either Tom Lubbers or Charles Knowles (crewmembers from Shadow 78). He was a nice guy and was spending time with my brother and I in the swimming pool. I never forgot him because he taught my brother and I how to do the "swan splash". This is one of those fun splashes designed to make a big splash as you enter the water. We had lots of fun that day and years later I would teach my children that same splash. Whenever I do it, I always think back to that day and that guy who taught it to me.

We had lots of fun that summer and I have some great memories of our time together as a family, and I am so very glad we had that opportunity. It would be our last time together as a family because as fall approached, my brother and I were back in school and quite soon after that, Dad left for Vietnam. He would not return home as he was one of those killed in a plane crash at Ton Son Nhut Air Base on April 28, 1970.

Major Anderson's career started as an Aviation Cadet, with assignments as an Aircraft Observer Radar Bombardier and on KC-135s, followed by AC-119s. His decorations included the Distinguished Flying Cross (Posthumous) and Air Medal (1st through 5th Oak Leaf Clusters).



Andy and Betty on R&R in Hawaii



Kenneth Ray Brown, IO

18th SOS, Bien Hoa, 1972



Staff Sergeant Kenneth R. Brown was the IO on Stinger 41 when it was shot down by anti-aircraft fire while defending An Loc on May 2, 1972.

Sergeant Brown, Captain David (Rod) Slagle, and Captain Terrence (Terry) Courtney were lost when the aircraft crashed. Lt Col "Tash" Taschioglu, Lieutenants Jimmy Barkalow and Larry Barbee, and Sergeants Allen "Yogi" Bare, Francis "Ski" Sledzinski, Craig Corbett, and Dale Inman were able to bail out and were rescued.

Sergeant Brown was the jumpmaster for bailouts, and that primary role was to assure every crewmember's equipment was on correctly, and that they made it out safely. As one survivor later wrote on the Vietnam Wall website, "It was you that made sure all the rest of us made it safely out of our AC-119K that day. Words cannot express the debt we owe you. You were there for us. You are a true hero. I shall never forget."

Ken Brown was born in Las Cruces, New Mexico in 1947. AC-119s were his second tour in Vietnam, and his brother, Mike, remembers the time before Ken went to Vietnam for that first tour. "It was the summer of 69 and Kenny was going to Vietnam in September. School was out for the summer and freshman year was behind me and looking forward to high school. Kenny came home on leave from Davis Monthan AB in Tucson. He usually would hang out with his buddies. But one day, Kenny just wanted to hangout with me and go for a ride in his VW Bug, it was awesome. This was the first time we actually just hung out and talked and goofed off. He asked if I'd like to take a road trip to see our sister, Anna, near Sacramento. He had to be in Washington state in a week for survival school. We left the next day for Anna's and stayed for a couple days; then off he went to Washington while I stayed behind. A few weeks later he returned and stayed a couple days then off to Las Cruces. Kenny didn't like any drugs and talked about that and girls, friends, school, brother to brother stuff. I was just 15 and he just wanted to watch out for me and let me know he loved me and cared about my future. Ken is 8 years older than me, so we didn't really ever hang out together

because of the age difference. About a week after we had returned Kenny and I were invited on a backpacking trip in the Gila wilderness. Kenny also liked the outdoors, hunting and fishing. We spent the next 4 days in the perfect setting. He taught me how to survive in the wild, fish for food and cook it with pots and pans.

I guess you could say that "we roughed it" for the 4 days ... it is the best and clearest memory of him I have. I loved every minute. A week later he left for Travis and would stay with Anna for a few days before leaving for Vietnam. When he returned the next year he was stationed at McGuire AFB and didn't much like it in New Jersey. He signed up for another tour so he could get stationed closer to Las Cruces when he returned. I miss my brother and miss having him around. I love Kenny and will never forget the lessons I learned from him in the summer of 69."

Ken's cousin, Randy Holbrook wrote, "We always thought Kenny flew cargo aircraft, dropping supplies. I knew the aircraft had a different design, but I did not know the aircraft type. Nobody mentioned gunship; dropping supplies is what Kenny did, flew a cargo plane. But once I found your website I learned a whole different perspective! We had not understood that Kenny flew with this type of aircraft or in such an extremely hazardous environment. Somehow we believed Kenny was flying a cargo plane, not an attack aircraft; we had heard loadmaster and illuminator operator, and we assumed the plane was delivering cargo or supplies. Kenny also said he was in Thailand, so we felt he was away from harms way. I did not want to add any stress to any of my aunts, Mike or my Mother, but the information I shared was very important to them. They are so PROUD of their brother, Kenny, and still miss him so very much. I want to let you know how important it is to be able to have a great site like the AC-119 Gunship Association site available."





Terence F. Courtney, Pilot

18th SOS, Nha Trang, 1973



Terence F. Courtney Awarded Air Force Cross May 12, 1972



Capt. Terence F.
Courtney
18th
Special Operations
Squadron

Captain Courtney was the
only aviator from the 71st,
17th, or 18th Special
Operations Squadrons to
be awarded the Air Force
Cross.

Citation to Accompany the Award of the Air Force Cross (Posthumous) to Terence F. Courtney

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Section 8742, Title 10, United States Code, awards the Air Force Cross to Captain Terence F. Courtney for extraordinary heroism in military operations against an opposing armed force as an AC-119K Aircraft Commander at An Loc, Republic of Vietnam, on May 12, 1972. On that date, while supporting friendly forces under intense enemy fire, Captain Courtney's aircraft was struck in the right wing by antiaircraft artillery fire. Both right engines began to burn profusely, with flames trailing from the wing to the tail of the aircraft. Control of the aircraft had become so difficult that Captain Courtney had to use all his strength to maintain control. He wrapped his arms around the yoke to keep the aircraft's nose from pitching down. When he could no longer control the aircraft, he ordered his crew to bail out. Immediately after the last man bailed out, the aircraft crashed and burst into flames. As a result of Captain Courtney's conscious and deliberate decision to sacrifice his own life by remaining at the controls of his doomed aircraft, seven of his crew were recovered with only minor injuries. His courage, gallantry, intrepidity, and sense of responsibility toward his fellowmen overrode any desire or instinctive reaction for his own self-preservation. Through his extraordinary heroism, superb airmanship and aggressiveness in the face of the enemy, and in the dedication of his service to his country, Captain Courtney reflected the highest credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.



Thomas Ralph Hamman, Pilot

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, 1971-72

Captain Thomas R “Tom” Hamman was born in Walter Reed Army Hospital on August 9, 1945 in Washington, DC, on the day the bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. At the time, his father Ralph was stationed at the Pentagon in the Signal Corps. Tom’s parents celebrated the birth of their first child and the end to a terrible war on that day.

Tom died of injuries from a DaNang rocket attack on June 15, 1972. The rocket that took Tom’s life was the first to hit the base, so he had no warning or chance to find safety in a bunker. Wayne Laessig, Tom’s Co-pilot, remembers the night well. Normally, he and Tom went to midnight chow together before their mission. But that night was different, because Wayne had flown on more than 30 missions in a row and earlier that day he was told he had to take 5 days of “combat time off” (CTO was used to reduce combat fatigue) and that a replacement Co-pilot would take his place on Tom’s crew. Wayne decided to use the CTO to “rest and recuperate (R&R) in Australia, leaving the next day. Later that night, Tom came by to tell him to have a good time down under. Tom went on to midnight chow by himself and the rocket attack that took his life occurred as he was returning to his barracks area.

Tom was 26 years old and readying for a new life outside the Air Force. Vietnam was his last tour of duty and he was scheduled to separate from the Air Force upon completion of that assignment. He had made some contacts with Eastern Airlines and had hoped to make flying his life’s career. Tom is survived by his mother Janet Sue Hamman, sister Christine Schnell, wife Susan, and their children Kirstin and Chad, as well as Kirstin’s children, Joy and Jacob.



Janet Sue Hamman, Tom’s mother, tells us, “My son, Tom, had many endearing characteristics, but the one that stands out among my many memories is his protectiveness. He was the oldest of the children and always was aware of “watching out” for his brother and sister. At a very young age, he was asked by his teacher to tell his “greatest wish.” His answer was “to make my sister well.” She had been very

ill. Later in life, by writing to several authorities, he fought to have his brother assigned to duty other than Viet Nam. He succeeded in this effort but shortly after lost his own life in Da Nang. Our family will never forget this protective love, and how much his love changed our lives. We are grateful for the unforgettable 26 years that he was with us.”



Tom, Chris (sister), Sue (Mom), Jeff (Brother), & Ralph (Dad)

Over 30 years after Vietnam, Wayne met Tom’s daughter Kirstin at an AC-119 Gunship Association Reunion. He told her how her father helped a green, young 1st Lieutenant understand about flying with a crew and relying on each other. Others at the reunion, like Gus Sininger, Don Williams, and Larry Barbee talked with her about flying with Tom, spending time after flights trying to relax, or rooming with him. Everyone tried to help Kirstin understand a little more about the father she never knew - his easy going attitude, his sense of humor, his common sense, and how the natural leadership he exhibited made it easy to follow and trust him, no matter what. That reunion had plenty of tears as well as plenty of hugs and smiles as we learned about Kirstin, her kids Jacob and Joy (Tom’s grand children), and Kirstin learned about us, and our all too short time with Tom. Tom was the rare man and officer who no one disliked, and much more than that, enjoyed being around or flying with him. We all miss him still and will forever.



Kirstin(daughter) with (grand) children Jacob and Joy



Bernard "Bernie" R. Knapic, Pilot

17th SOS, Nha Trang, Tan Son Nhut, 1969

Bernie Knapic was born June 2 1930 and died October 11, 1969 when his AC-119G Shadow crashed during takeoff on a combat mission after losing one of the recipis right after lift off near Gia Dinh at Ton Son Nhut Air Base, South Vietnam.

Bernie grew up in Youngstown, Ohio, graduating from Chaney High School, followed by Northwestern University under a Basketball Scholarship for one year, then a transfer to Ohio State University under a Football Scholarship, graduating in 1953.



Bernie was commissioned and entered the Air Force on 9 June 1954 through the ROTC program at Ohio State University, where he earned his degree in personnel management. After pilot training, he flew as a C-124 aircraft commander, with follow on SAC assignments in Germany. He entered AFIT and earned his Master's Degree in Industrial Administration in 1963. Bernie was then assigned to Systems Command as a systems programming staff officer in Los Angeles, South Carolina, and the Pentagon until he entered the AC-119G "Shadow" program in November, 1968. He went to Vietnam and the 17th SOS on January, 1969.

Bernie's family clearly remember that he joined because he was a person with a strong sense of right and wrong who had an enormous patriotic need to serve his country. That commitment rings true after reading Major General Richard Dent's personal note congratulating then Lieutenant Knapic



on his selection for a Regular Commission – not many Lts got that kind of personal attaboy from a Major General, one of those who recognized

Bernie's service commitment early in his career.

Happy Times (a Vietnam weekly) quoted Bernie on one of his most memorable missions: SHADOW AID GROUND FORCES; MORNING SWEEP GIVES RESULTS.

An AC-119 Shadow gunship of "B" Flight, 71st SOS part of the 14th SOW at Nha Trang AB, came to the aid of allied ground forces near Ban Me Thuot recently. Shadow, commanded by Maj. Bernard R. Knapic, brought her 7.62mm "miniguns" to bear against enemy forces about 29 miles from Ban Me Thuot in response to a call from an Army ground controller.

"The ground fire we saw from the cockpit ranged from light to moderate automatic weapons fire", commented Major Knapic. "The ground controller said that our fire had caused six secondary explosions, and we saw two of them from the cockpit, they had reddish-yellow flames about 50 feet high. He also reported four other secondaries, but we didn't see those. The ground controller also remarked that it was a fairly good-sized enemy force, probably about 40 or 50 of them, but that our fire was having 'positive results'. After a while the enemy fire died off, but we saw more flare up and fired into the area and silenced that as well. Our fire was extremely accurate, especially considering the fact that we had to hit four different targets in the area. The ground controller said that a ground sweep of the area would be conducted the next day and he was really pleased with our firepower and accuracy." concluded Knapic.

The ground sweep the following morning found seven NVA bodies riddled with 7.62mm rounds, 19 bunkers damaged, two bamboo structures damaged, and an ammo and food cache destroyed. Other members of the crew included Maj Gene Sue, the navigator; and Sgt. Thomas Perkins, one of the gunners.

Then came the tragic night of October 11, 1969. As reported by an official spokesman, Six US airmen and a Vietnamese civilian were killed that Saturday night when an Air Force AC-119 "Shadow" gunship crashed shortly after takeoff from Tan Son Nhut Airbase and hit a house. Eight crewmen and two passengers, one a member of the Vietnamese Air Force, were aboard the twin-engined aircraft when it crashed. The four survivors were in good condition at 3rd Field Hospital. The aircraft went down barely 350 yards outside the airbase after clearing the runway at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, It crashed into a rice paddie and a Vietnamese home, killing the civilian. Transcribed from Stars & Stripes article, Oct 12, 1969.

Bernie Knapic is buried in Arlington Cemetery and is survived by his sons, Bob and Richard, daughter Karen, and wife Glenna.



Thomas L Lubbers, Pilot

17th SOS, Tan Son Nhut, 1969-1970

First Lieutenant Thomas “Tom” Lubbers was the Aircraft Commander on Shadow 78 that crashed at Tan Son Nhut on April 28, 1970; he was 24 when he died. Others who we lost in that crash were Maj Meredith Anderson, 1st Lt Charles Knowles, MSgt Joseph Jeszeck, SSgt Robert Fage, and Sgt Michael Vangelisti.

Tom was born on September 20th, 1945 in St Louis, Missouri. After graduating from St Louis Preparatory Seminary in 1963, he graduated from Kenrick Seminary in 1967 before volunteering for the Air Force. Tom joined because he wanted to be a pilot, even though flying to Officer Training School at Lackland was the first time he had ever flown.



In many of Tom’s letters to his family, he talked about the hazards faced by the Shadow Company in flying all-night flights and the depression of dealing with the war and the losses he and others faced. Tom’s sister Pam (Seiford) Lubbers shared a letter where he says that he was often sought out by fellow airmen, some of them much older and experienced, as a sounding board for their sadness and for their complaints against the hierarchy at the base. Tom surmised that his audacity in appearing before the Wing Commander to champion these causes would result in his receiving an unsatisfactory OER. Instead, he was shocked to learn he had been named “Junior Officer of the Year by the Commander” In other letters he describes his compassion for the Vietnamese people, particularly the children, that they had never in all their lifetimes experienced peace. He felt that, regardless of how the war was viewed at home, this was reason enough for being there.

Larry “Fletch” Fletcher shared his memories with Tom’s sisters, “When I arrived at Tan Son Nhut in early May 1970, C Flight was still reeling in shock from the crash of Shadow 78. My friend, Major Robert Bokern was a survivor of the crash along with Allen Chandler. Bob’s story of the crash “The Last Flight of Shadow 78” is in the history book. Everyone in C Flight knew and respected Tom Lubbers and had nothing but praise for him. . even those of us Fighting C Flight Shadows of Saigon, who were not at TSN at the time of the crash, still feel the sadness and emptiness of that tragic loss of life.” Tom and Fletch both upgraded at Tan Son Nhut from copilot to aircraft commander, both as their first AF assignment after UPT.

Tom’s sister JoAnn (Lorek) Lubbers remembers visiting him when he was in pilot training in Selma and hung out with him and some of his fellow pilots, “Tom’s and their energy and absolute love of flying was infectious; he, and they were clearly born to be AF pilots. Tom truly represented the best in all of us. Thanks again to Larry Fletcher for his kind words; it’s been so long since I’ve allowed myself the luxury of grieving Tom’s loss, and it feels good to do so and to remind myself of the incredible valor and service of you men who were willing to sacrifice everything for us.”



Major Earl Farney was Executive Officer for C Flight at TSN. Later, as a Lieutenant Colonel Farney, he wrote a book called “The Shadow in Southeast Asia” about the Shadows for the Air University’s Southeast Asia Monograph Series and dedicated it to Tom. In Lt Col Earl’s words, “Tom Lubbers ran a good crew. He was young but mature, competent, and dedicated. Always thinking of others - a fine sense of humor.....even during his seminary years, he was characterized by most as the campus clown, wearing rolled up pajamas and sneakers under his cassock. He was one of those “natural” leaders – all 6’ 4” of him.” After Tom’s death, his parents, Lambert and Elvira Lubbers wrote a letter to the men of the 17th SOS with a poignancy Maj Farney has never forgotten, “.....Perhaps we can take our turn now to offer you the kind of consolation that is helping us live through these times. Tom loathed bitterness and sadness, and his exuberance and joy of living often helped us and others get over bad times. He had a supply of jokes and antics to get us all through. We are sure he, being the example of selflessness he was, must have offered you the same kind of assistance.....he made us proud. Many acquaintances have remarked about the necessity of you... Shadow operations in particular, and asked us to pass the thanks to Tom. We still receive those comments and now we pass them to you.....Although our memories are tender, they are all wonderful and remarkably lacking in regret for so much as one wasted minute of his life. Thank you for taking the time to remember those of us who wait for you all to return safely. You are all in our thoughts and prayers.”

Not everyone hated those of us fighting in Vietnam. Tom Lubbers exemplified the best in us. Fly high, brother.



John O'Neal Rucker, Crew Chief

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, Danang, 1972-73



On January 27, 1973, 11 hours before the cease fire took effect, Sergeant John "O'Neal" Rucker became the last American who died at DaNang during the Vietnam War, and that war's last enlisted casualty. O'Neal was assigned to aircraft maintenance for the 18th Special Operations Squadron's Stinger aircraft. Several of his friends and crewmates told

his parents that they'd had rocket attacks a week earlier and that this one occurred when O'Neal was off-duty, sleeping in the barracks. O'Neal was 21 years old.

John "O'Neal" Rucker was born March 17, 1951 in Kilgore Texas and shortly thereafter moved to Linden Texas, his home town. After graduating from Linden-Kildare High School, even though he had a high draft number, he volunteered for the Air Force in February 1971. O'Neal told his parents and friends he wanted to serve, and make the Air Force a career. When the Air Force asked him for his assignment preference during basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, he volunteered for service in South East Asia. O'Neal was initially assigned to NKP, Thailand in April, 1972. In July he went TDY to DaNang with the 18th SOS, and was PCS'd to DaNang two days before the fatal rocket attack. O'Neal was scheduled to return to Thailand before coming home.

Mae Rucker, O'Neal's mother, told us they called him O'Neal because he was named after his father and they couldn't have two Johnny's in the house. O'Neal's sisters Marsha and Margie, and his brother Frank remembered his R&R in Linden for Christmas 1972. He told Marsha to be careful waking him since he couldn't guarantee he wouldn't jump pretty high. Margie remembers he really liked what he was doing there on the flight line, and Frank knew he was proud to be in the Air Force.

Shortly after the cease fire took effect, the Department of the Air Force and the Republic of South Vietnam joined together to erect and dedicate a memorial at DaNang Air Base to recognize all Americans who lost their life protecting freedom. The memorial park included a plaque honoring Sgt Rucker. Colonel Hoover, DaNang's Commander, sent this letter to O'Neal's parents:

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Rucker,

Today is the 34th day into the cease fire agreement and phase down of United States Air Force activities in the Republic of Vietnam. The particular significance of this day is the fact that at 9:30 this morning, a group of USAF and Vietnamese personnel paused to dedicate the DaNang Air Base Memorial Park.

This dedication, attended by approximately 400 people, while recognizing the overall contributions of all Air Force personnel here at DaNang and those who died in the cause of freedom, gave special recognition to your son, Sgt John Rucker.

The Park contains an engraved marble plaque in his honor; and I want to assure you that his memory and supreme sacrifice will not be forgotten.

The attached Memorial Brochure will help you better sense the spirit of today's activity. I was extremely proud to have your son under my command.

Sincerely, WILLIAM W. HOOVER, Colonel, USAF
Commander

Linden, Texas is a small town of several thousand with traditional values – patriotic, family and friends as cornerstones of life, obedience, being an individual, and foremost of all, belief in God and country. On November 11, 1973 the people of Linden erected and dedicated a monument in the courthouse square in memory of Sgt. John O'Neal Rucker. We can say it no better than Paul Rowan, who interviewed dozens of Linden's folks shortly after O'Neal died in Vietnam, and wrote an article for the Fort-Worth Star-Telegram. He said, "Sgt Rucker will be worth remembering because he died in the service of his country and with a firm trust in God. In Linden, a man can make no higher marks in history."



left to right: Frank (brother) John (father), Mae (mother), Marsha (sister), Margie (sister) and O'Neal



David "Rod" Slagle, Navigator

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, Danang, Bien Hoa, 1971-72

Captain David Roddy "Rod" Slagle was the table Navigator on Stinger 41 when it was shot down by anti-aircraft fire while defending An Loc on May 2, 1972. Sergeant Brown and Captain Terry Courtney were also lost. Lt Col "Tash" Taschioglu, Lieutenants Jimmy Barkalow and Larry Barbee, and Sergeants Allen Bare, Francis Sledzinski, Craig Corbett, and Dale Inman were able to bail out and were rescued.

Rod Slagle was born October 26, 1945 in Longview, Washington, but was raised in Roseville, Missouri. He graduated from Flat River High School in 1962, and the Missouri School of Mines at Rolla, Missouri in 1966. Rod met his wife Barbara on a blind date arranged by his cousins when Rod was in OTS at Lackland. They were married less than a year when they were transferred to Mather AFB in Sacramento, CA for navigator training. Rod graduated third in his class, chose TAC C-130s at Little Rock. During that tour, Rod was sent TDY in England at Mildenhall and promised he'd be home before their first child's due date but nature and children don't wait for anyone. In Barbara's own words, "I went into labor early, and Trayce was born, woke in post-op where



one of the nurses told me that my husband was there, and did I want to see him? I said I knew he wasn't there because he was still in England and went back to sleep, figuring they had the wrong girl. But, the Red Cross had tracked Rod down and got him on a MAC flight back to the states. He was there when our daughter was born."

Not too long after that Rod got orders to 119 school in Columbus, Ohio followed by orders for DaNang. Barbara said, "The few calls he made while he was there were



Rod and Barbara on R&R in Hawaii

conversations about Trayce and his folks and stuff like that. Rod told me it really bothered him to fly the Ho Chi Minh trail and shooting up the trucks, knowing that the drivers were handcuffed to the truck and not able to escape. He said he did love the idea of swooping down to support ground troops that were in trouble." Rod rotated between DaNang and NKP for most of his tour. He met Barbara in Hawaii for R&R the end of March and when he got back to Thailand he was sent TDY DaNang. Barbara tells, "I got a letter from

him after he died telling me that he was going back. He said he didn't really want to but someone had to do it." One story Rod told Barbara was that during one of their missions they were called in to help a small contingent of Marines that were surrounded. They went in and took care of the problem but the really cool part was about a month later they got to meet some of those Marines when they were back in DaNang. "Rod thought that was great."

Barbara tells us, "I was first told that Rod was missing. Although 7 of the 10 men on the plane had been rescued, they said that Rod was ready to jump when they bailed out. Rod had not picked up by the time they were all back at base. I was given numbers to call at Randolph to check on the search effort trying to find the plane. I was contacted several days later to advise me that he had been killed. He was found a hundred feet or so from the plane and had not been burned in the plane; however he had died instantly. When Rod's body was returned to the States, at San Francisco, I was able to choose a military officer to travel with him to San Antonio to be buried at Ft Sam Houston. I selected his cousin who was stationed at Ft. Hood in Texas. His cousin carried three flags with him on the flight, making sure all three of the flags were on the casket during the flight. One flag for me, one flag for him, and one flag for Rod's parents. As it turns out, I have three grandchildren so they will each be able to have a flag from their grandfather. Several months after his funeral I got a call from Lackland AFB casualty assistance, they wanted to arrange a parade to present his medals to the family. They said to let them know when his parents would be in town and they would set everything up. When we had the parade in late August, they presented the medals in a shadow box with his name and the name of the medal. They had made one for me and one for Rods parents which was really touching.

"Our daughter, Trayce, was not quite two when Rod got killed so he had not had the opportunity to spend much time with her. She has since met some other children who lost their fathers in Viet Nam. We have also been to The Wall and to a couple of the Traveling Walls. Trayce is now married and has three children of her own. They have been to the Traveling Wall, but don't totally understand. They are proud to have a grandfather who served and died for his country. Every Veterans Day their school shows family pictures of service members. They get to see the picture of their grandfather up on the screen. We will continue to tell them what it is all about as they grow up. One of these days we will all go to Washington to see The Wall."

Final Flight

Several of our members passed away since Vietnam and the following stories are from their friends and families to commemorate their lives with us.



Willard "Bill" Collins, Sr, Flight Engineer 18th SOS, DaNang



Bill Collins

Willard "Bill" Collins was born September 18, 1932 in Santa Barbara, California. He graduated from Camas High School in Camas, Washington in 1952, the University of Washington in 1956, and finally settled down in Marshall, Texas, calling it home.

on their take-off roll the pilot saw the bomb on the runway and was barely able to avoid hitting the bomb. Dad said they thought were going to hit it with the landing gear.

Another time I heard Dad and a friend talking about some of his missions. I don't know when or where this took place but they were talking about a mission to provide support for a small SF camp. He talked about how they had done several orbits around the camp, and the radio operator called to tell they had many dead VC all around the camp and to thank them for there help.

On several occasions I heard Dad talk about this mission. While they were getting ready for take off they were parked on the runway when the pilot came over the intercom and called out rockets, rockets, rockets. The rockets were being walked down the runway and headed toward their aircraft. Everyone had to stop what they were doing and get out of the plane. He said when he got out of the plane he ran for a ditch on the side of the runway and dove in. Dad said the ditch was full of water and he couldn't put his head down. So he said he had to get down as low as possible and just watch the rockets keep coming. He said he started praying that the rockets would stop because when he looked up he saw he was under the wing of the aircraft and it was full of fuel and ammo. The rockets did finally stop."



FE Bill on a mission



Bill at NKP by a QU-22 Pave Eagle

As told by Bill's son, Bill Collins, Jr, "Dad liked to fly, and had his private pilot license by the time he was age 15. He had been in the Marines as a crewman on a C-54, and when he got out of the Marines, the Air Force was a good choice for him to keep flying. Dad didn't talk a lot about his missions, but I do remember him telling me about several.

On one of their mission they were in line to take off behind some F-4s. They didn't know it at the time but a 500 pound bomb had come off the wing of one of the F-4s and had skidded to a stop on the runway. While they were

Bill was also a Baptist minister, and worked with many orphanages around the areas he lived.



Michael Neil Friel, IO

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang 1971-72

Michael “Mike” Friel was born in 1938 at Glasgow, Scotland and grew up in Gorey, County Wexford, Republic of Ireland. He attended schools in Belfast, Donegal, and London. After moving to the states, he graduated from Glendale Community College, studying Theatre, and joined the Air Force at Georgia in May 1958. On why he joined the Air Force, Mike’s son says, “I’m sure my Dad would say to get out of Ireland and for the adventure and travel.” Mike retired from the Air Force in April 1978 at Luke AFB, Arizona and his awards and decorations included the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC), multiple Air Medals, the Purple Heart, and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry for a May 1972 mission out of DaNang with Steve Meleen.



Mike ready to fly at NKP

Mike was an 18th SOS Gunner/Scanner and both Steve Meleen, his aircraft commander, and his son agree on what may have been one of his most exciting missions, “My Dad might have said the time he saw a handheld SA7 missile coming at the gunship.” Steve Meleen said they thought they might ‘buy the farm.’ On another August 18, 1972 mission that Mike received the DFC for, the DFC citation reads (in part), “On that date, while partially extended outside the aircraft, directing the pilot through extremely accurate antiaircraft fire, Technical Sergeant Friel corrected maneuvers, called by other crewmembers, which saved the aircraft from taking direct hits. Later, while engaging hostile forces, and despite antiaircraft fire, Sergeant Friel, although injured by an exploding gun inside the aircraft, made electrical repairs which allowed the remaining guns to be reloaded and directed at the hostile forces, resulting in the stopping of an attack on a friendly firebase.”

Mike’s sons Mike Jr and Sean provided their thoughts on what their Dad remembered most about his time in AC-119s, and those thoughts are right in line with what many

of us remember about Mike, “My Dad cannot speak about this since the cancers got him October 2001, but I know camaraderie must be up there at number one. Later in life I could tell he valued his time in SEA not so much for what he did but for the bonds he had made with his fellow airmen.

As his eldest son maybe I can put in a few words here. We traveled the wonderful world while Dad was in SEA from 1967-1973. I remember when we talked to Dad on the phone we had to say ‘over’ and ‘out’ - seemed pretty neat at the time. I remember Dad would always bring us gifts from the far off places he had been, coins, lamps made from howitzer shells (still have ‘em), gorgeous plates and flatware, paintings, gold rings with our names on them, and once he had flight suits made for us; exact replicas of his Stinger ‘party suit.’ That was the neatest! My brother Sean and I loved those suits; we wore them out. I also remember



Sean and Mike Friel Jr in their Stinger Party Suits

Dad sending me an audio tape of the multiplication tables because Mom said he had to help me with my math no matter how far away he was. As Dad was reciting the math you could hear explosions in the background, then someone telling him to get under the bed and a big boom. After a brief quiet spell he picked up right where he left off; that’s one bad hombre! I remember Dad showed us some pictures of the base he was on and how one white building had spots on it. I asked Dad what that was, and he said that was what remained of a close friend who had been blown up by a missile attack. I don’t think I was supposed to see that photo. After all those years in SEA, only then did I realize that what he did was dangerous, and I began to worry for him. We were in England then, and shortly thereafter Dad came home for good, it was great, but he was a little edgy

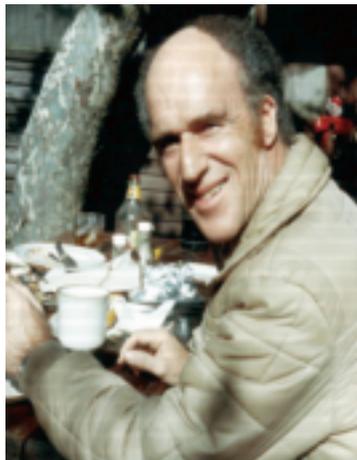
for a good long time after that. Many years later when I asked him what he went through he wouldn't say, just that he met some nice 'blokes.' Dad was also in the Spectre squadron and when I hear those C-130s fly over our home I always look up and say 'Howdy Pa!' I know they're not AC-119s or 130s but close enough!

After Vietnam we went to Dad's hometown of Gorey in Ireland where everyone always called him 'Sonny' or 'There goes the Gorey Cowboy!' But whenever they finished talking to him, whoever it was would always bend down to my ear and whisper...'You know yer Da' is a hero.' I knew it all along, and he always will be!"

Mike was also one of the 18th SOS Awards and Decorations NCOs. In that role, he solicited inputs on missions that warranted recognition and helped package those to best show the correlations to exceptional bravery, courage, and a cool head while under fire. Most of us from 1971 through 1972 owe many of the medals we received to Mike's professional and personal interest in doing his job right. He often resubmitted nominations with additional information

or corroborating documentation and testimonies to assure our guys got what they deserved.

After his Air Force career Mike took up acting and you can see him in "Murphy's Romance" and "Desert Bloom!" Wayne Laessig, his wife Lynette, and Karen Graves remember a walk on the beach with Fred Graves and Mike toward the end of our first AC-119 Gunship Reunion. Mike reminisced about those we'd lost, the friendships we'd made, and the public legacy we had not yet achieved. Mike lost his battle with cancer the next year in October 2001. This history book and Mike Friel's stories help remedy the legacy of our AC-119s and those who flew and supported them.



Mike enjoying what his titled Cabin Meal - Ymmuy



Fred Graves, Flight Engineer

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, Bien Hoa 1971-72

Fred Graves was born on October 12, 1945 in Atascadero, California and moved to Utah where he grew up before joining the Air Force in 1965. He retired after 22 years, including two Vietnam tours. Fred died from cancer on December 12, 2001 in his home at Mountain Home, Idaho. He was 57 years young.

Fred can be best described as a man of honor; honest; true to his family and friends; (proudly) not always the model of Air Force protocol and decorum; definitely an individual with a little bit of maverick thrown in (again, proudly), and with a wonderful sense of humor.

In 1991 Fred became a heart transplant recipient, and he enjoyed telling about his visits to the local high school to let the kids meet and ask questions of a real heart transplant recipient. Invariably, someone would ask if he knew whose heart he received, "No, but I know it was a young woman." This was again invariably followed by a question about whether the "medical legend" (like an urban legend) was true, that recipients could "feel" the spirit of the person they'd received their heart from. Fred's response, "Not..... really.....but I have noticed I get a little grumpy once a month or so." ALL with a totally serious face, and followed by a grin.

For four years Fred focused his energy on reuniting AC-119 Gunship friends, culminating in the first AC-119 Gunship Reunion and the formation of our AC-119 Gunship Association. Fred, Jim Bennes, Bill Petrie, and Norm Evans are known as the Founding Fathers of our Association and all us AC-119ers would not be rekindling old friendships, making new friends, and getting our AC-119 and our impact into the history books (including this one) without the dream those four men fulfilled. Thank you.



Fred and Karen at the first AC-119 Reunion

If it seems Fred's calling card might be his sense of humor, one more story nails it. Fred was flying with Colonel Teal and in the midst of multiple break calls from triple A, the good Col broke the opposite direction from one of the calls. With a little extra pulling on the yoke and a few extra "g's" all was safe, but Fred and another fellow crewmember felt some kind of action was needed. So, despite their deep respect for rank and position, they snuck into Col Teal's room and marked a large dark "L" on one of his flight gloves and an "R" on the other. Ask Doug Wohlgamuth.....



Fred with a 122 rocket at DaNang

On another occasion, Fred "procured" a rather large piece of a 122mm rocket.....intact. It didn't take long before he became "inclined" to turn it in. But, that lesson was short-lived. Shortly after the 122, Fred inherited an AK-47 (a Russian field rifle), and after a beer or two one evening,

took it outside the enlisted hootch at NKP and let off a few rounds. Fred rapidly learned that the distinctive sound an AK-47 makes when fired late at night draws all kinds of attention. Although the MPs swarmed the area, they did not locate the AK-47, or Fred. The next day, Col Mathews put out a short note that (paraphrased) said, "If anyone has an AK-47 they want to turn in without repercussion, doing it before tomorrow morning would be good." Informally, Col Mathews sent another message, "If it's not on my desk in the morning, your ass will be mine" (noteworthy because Col Mathews did not often swear). No one said Fred was dumb. The AK-47 appeared on the Col's desk, no repercussions occurred, and quiet returned to the enlisted barracks – at least until the beer can bazooka appeared..... Fred did enjoy life, and he was also an exceptional Flight Engineer, Instructor Flight Engineer, and NCO. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and 7 Air Medals while in AC-119s. He knew his job well and did it extremely well.

Fred later demonstrated his abilities by enrolling and graduating from a Culinary School as a Master Chef in 1991! Fred's wife Karen Graves has been to every Reunion since the first one, honoring Fred's memory and dream, and continuing the friendships forged there. A friend always, Fred is missed.



Richard "Rick" Lee Ward, IO

18th SOS, Nakhon Phanom, DaNang, Bien Hoa 1971-72

Rick Ward was born June 6, 1949, in Aurora, Illinois and graduated from West Aurora High School in 1968. Rick died in a C-130 crash on March 12, 1985 while TDY at Ft. Hood, Texas doing what he loved best – flying as an Instructor Flight Engineer. According to the Air Force, it was pilot error. The crew was doing drop training in a goose formation. It was thought that the pressure between the wings of his C-130 and another C-130 caused his aircraft to lose altitude and the wing hit a tree. The two crewmen that were pushing loads out of the back were blown from the aircraft and somehow, survived. Rick was a Master Sergeant at the time, assigned to the Blue Barons, on a C-130 crew out of Little Rock AFB, Arkansas.

Rick's mother said that a recruiter came to his High School Senior year, and that he signed up for the Air Force at school. He graduated June 6, 1968 and left for basic

training at Lackland AFB, San Antonio, TX on August, 28, 1968. Rick's parents were very surprised at his decision to join up, and his daughter, Theresa said he never really told them why he volunteered.



Rick at DaNang Ops

Before his tour as an AC-119K Stinger Illuminator Operator, Rick's assignments included 3380th Civil Engineering Squadron at Keesler AFB, C-130s at Little Rock, MacDill AFB, and two other tours in Southeast Asia.

One of Rick's most exciting AC-119 missions was when he distinguished himself by extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as an AC-119K Illuminator Operator in Southeast Asia on 2 May 1972. As his citation for the Distinguished Flying Cross reads, "On that night, Sergeant Ward's crew was providing close air support for a friendly position being overrun by enemy troops. When six SA-7 heat seeking missiles were fired at his aircraft, Sergeant Ward immediately launched two flares which drew the missiles off target. Due to Sergeant Ward's quick thinking and superior knowledge his aircraft and crew of ten were saved. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Sergeant Ward reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force." This is from Rick's Distinguished Flying Cross, First Oak Leaf Cluster.

Theresa remembers that her Dad never talked about Vietnam, ever. If they ever asked he would point to a small plaque on his library wall that said, "War is hell, but peace is a pain in the ass." Theresa said she never understood that until she was an adult and in the Air Force herself.

Gus Sininger remembers many 'Oh-dark-thirty' phone calls from Rick after Vietnam. Seems Rick enjoyed a shot or two of tequila with his Stinger Gunship buddies when he went on



Rick, Jason, and Theresa

TDYs, and invariably that usually led to some memories of the great camaraderie we all shared in SEA, followed rapidly by a phone call to say 'Hi' to one of those friends. Rick visited Wayne Laessig several times and after some tequila, both would say "Let's call Gus (Sininger)", followed (sometimes) by "What time is it there", and ALWAYS followed by, "Gus won't mind, we're Stinger buddies!" Wayne recalls Gus's wife's sleepy, "It's for you" at many at 2 a.m. followed by an occasionally grumpy (but always glad to hear from us) "Are you two drunk....again", from Gus.

Wayne told Theresa about the time their crew had flown 32 nights in a row and was replaced at the last minute on the 33rd night with the explanation that they'd exceeded safe combat fatigue limits and had the next 5 days as "Combat Time Off" or CTO. The whole crew headed downtown, rented a hotel, and unwound playing poker, etc..... all night long. As soon as the 12 am - 6 am curfew was lifted, they en masse headed to Jimmy Wong's tattoo parlor around the corner, where about half the crew got tattoos. Wayne was last to get his and had imbibed a little more Mekong and Mekong (said to be Mekong brand whiskey plus Mekong river water) than is healthy and ended up with a Gemini tattoo on his butt. Later in life, Rick (who was a Gemini as well and stationed at Travis AFB with Wayne as a good friend) decided he needed one just like that too. The results included a fair number of unique double moons, with matching (almost) tattoos, at several bases as Rick and Wayne's paths crossed over the years. True friendship has no bounds.

Rick's awards included two Distinguished Flying Crosses and 11 Air Medals. He is survived by his daughter Theresa Ward-Cockhill and granddaughter Addison, and son Richard Jason.

Howard Emerson "Em" Wright Aircraft Commander 18th SOS, DaNang, Phan Rang 1969-70

Howard "Em" Wright was born June 4, 1929 in Fort Madison, Iowa and passed away April 2, 2009. Em attended Fort Madison Public High in 1947, then on to Coe College, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa graduating June 1951 and commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant from their Air Force ROTC program. Em also received a Masters Degree from Boston University. Em was Detachment Commander at DaNang from the fall of 1969 through Jan 1970, then Wing Gunship Officer at Phan Rang until fall 1970.

When asked Em about his most memorable missions, Em's reply was, "One mission I remember was one night working the "trail" and we had truck traffic in our sights and were firing when the gunner in our left clamshell door came on the intercom and said "tracers break right" and almost simultaneously the gunner in the right clamshell door said "tracers break left". I put the ship almost up



on a wing and dropped about 500 feet. The tracers crossed above us. We decided that some radar had been brought further south than intel was aware of and left the area.”

Em retired as a Colonel in 1981 at Wright-Patterson AFB after a full career with assignments in Missouri, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Germany, France, and Boston including several bases such as Griffis AFB, Rome, NY; Pentagon; Kirtland AFB, New Mexico; Vietnam; Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio; and Andrews AFB, MD. His final position was Commander of the Foreign Technology Division at Wright-Patterson, retiring in 1981. He taught AF Junior ROTC at Edmond High School

Em’s awards include the Distinguished Flying Cross, Legion of Merit, and Bronze Star.

Jeremy sent us word that his time was short, and Jeff Baker got the chance to talk with Em and reminisce a bit about their time in Stingers before he died. Em, known as (and fondly called) “Grumps” by his kids, grandson and

nephews, is survived by his wife Carol (Cay), daughters Debbie (Jeremy’s mother) and Becky, sons David and Paul, and twelve grand children, including Jeremy Westby.



Em and Cay Wright with Em’s oldest son, on the right who retired from the Navy with 30 years and his youngest son, who retired from the Air Force Reserves with 27 years. This picture was at the local Oklahoma City Navy Birthday ball which Em’s oldest son always had them get dressed up and go to.

Aircraft Battle Damage

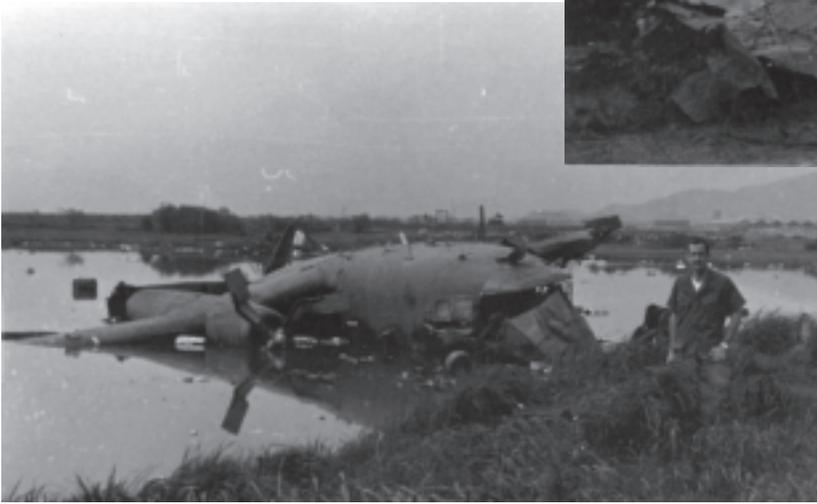


37 MM Damage



Stinger Flap - AAA Damage

Stinger Crash at DaNang Feb. 1970



R3350



A/C 826 23mm Hit 4 Jan 1971



Rescue workers search the wreckage of the U.S. Air Force AC119 "Shadow" gunship which crashed shortly after takeoff at Tan Son Nhut AB Saturday night, killing six crewmen and a naive civilian whose house was hit. (AP)

Crash of Shadow 78

Battle Damage Aircraft



AAADamage to Stinger Tail Number 826



J85 - 23MM Ouch

Shadow 78



Aircraft Nose Art



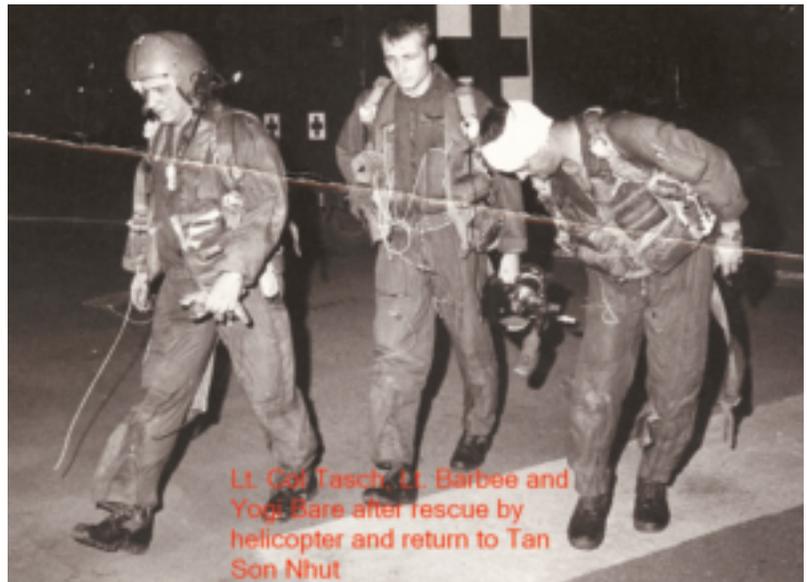
Aircraft Nose Art



Aircraft Nose Art & Survivors



Survivors of Stinger 41



Lt. Col. Tasch, Lt. Barbee and
Yogi Bare after rescue by
helicopter and return to Tan
Son Nhut

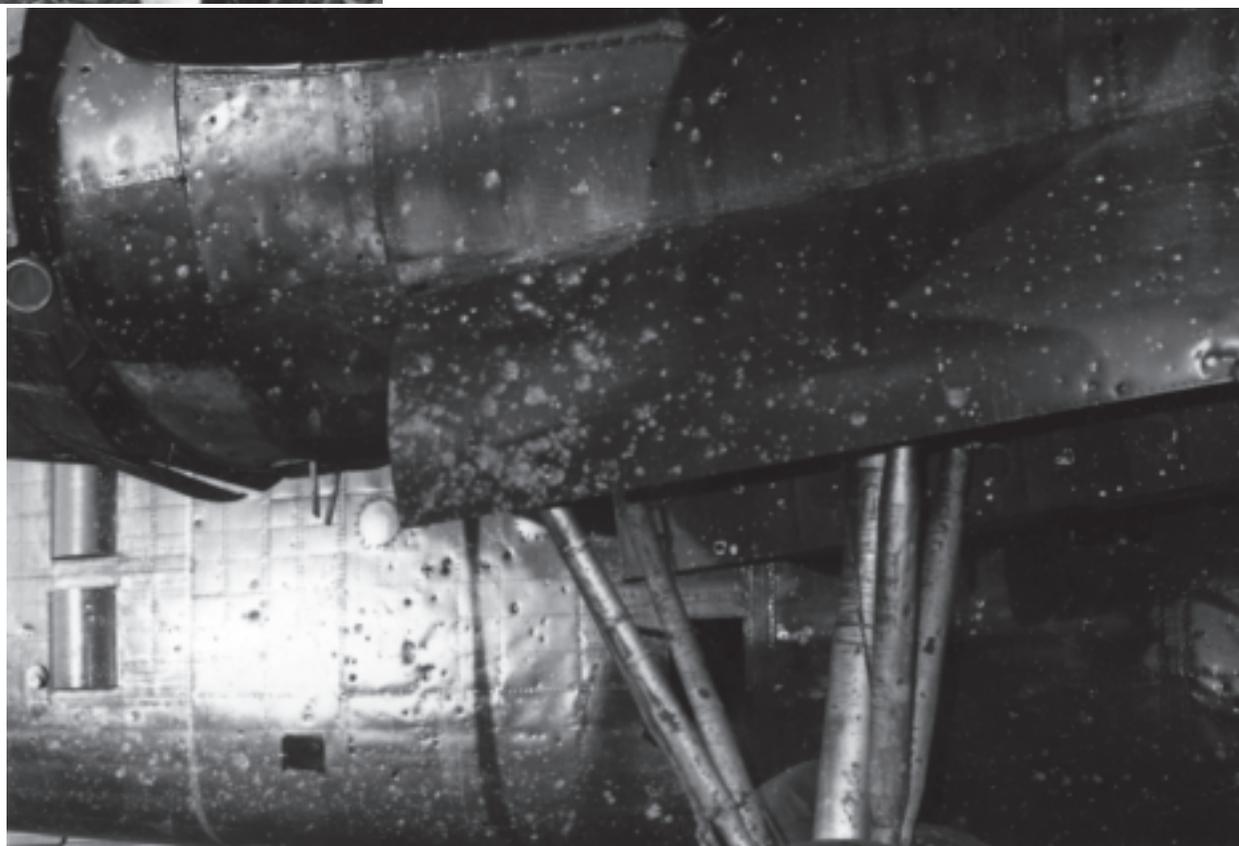


Aircraft Battle Damage



Rocket Damage

122MM Rocket



DaNang & Phan Rang



DaNang



Phan Rang

Rocket Damage



BX after the rocket attack (Rod Carbone)

Survival School or Snake School

Jolly Green



Popping Smoke for Locating Pickup

Waiting for Jolly Green Ride out of Jungle

Index of Bios

Acquaviva, Jim	22	Drzyzga, Mike	72	Hoelstad, Kjell	118
Adams, Troy	23	Dudley, Bill	75	Honzik, Tom	119
Alau, Henry	23	Dunn, Harry	262	Howze, Dick	119
Alderson, Larry	25	Dunn, Wade	75	Humphreys, Ed	121
Alfaro, Mario	26	Dydo, John	76	Hunter, Larry	122
Allen, Robert	27	Eckstein, Bob	76	Illston, Jeff	122
Alloway, Clyde	272	Eggert, Fred	77	Isham, Bill	123
Alves, Moses	273	Emma, Frank	77	Iverson, Dick	124
Alvis, James	28	Evans, Norm	80	Jacobson, Jake	124
Anderson, Meredith	274	Evans, William	81	Jaackle, Allan	125
Andrews, Robert	30	Farmer, Richard	82	James, Charles	126
Aspinwell, Robert	31	Fletcher, Larry	82	James, James	129
Bach, Harold	31	Foster, Don	83	Johnson, Charles	131
Baker, Jeff	32	Frahm, LeRoy	84	Johnson, Robert	131
Barbee, Larry	35	Fraker, Don	85	Jones, Gail	132
Barnett, Leonard	36	Frederick, Bob	88	Jowers, William	133
Bautz, Anton	37	French, Denis	89	Juday, Larry	135
Bennett, Aurthur	38	Freund, Charles	89	Julian, Ronald	137
Bianco, Frank	38	Friel, Michael	283	Keller, James	138
Bielstein, John	39	Friese, Rod	91	Kennedy, Max	139
Biggs, Danial	39	Frost, Douglas	92	Kleinhenz, William	140
Blair, Doug	40	Gentes, Rollin	93	Knapic, Bernie	278
Blum, Claude	41	Gericke, Bill	94	Knuckles, James	141
Bokern, Bob	43	Gerner, Frank	95	Komula, John	141
Bott, Terry	52	Gilbert, Ronald	96	Krueger, Albert	142
Bradshaw, Claude	53	Goen, Paul	96	Kuhn, David	142
Bright, Andy	54	Gourley, Garry	97	Kyser, Lee	142
Brogan, Donald	54	Grant, Jimmy	98	Laessig, Wayne	143
Brown, Kenneth	275	Graves, Fred	284	La Rosa, Robert	144
Byrd, Bruce	55	Green, Clayton	99	Lau, Jessie	147
Callaghan, Bill	56	Green, James	100	Lefarth, Ralph	149
Carlson, Don	56	Greenberg, Irvin	100	Lewis, John	151
Cartee, Dale	57	Gregory, William	101	Lodge, William	152
Carter, George	58	Gunster, Walt	102	Lubbers, Thomas	279
Chaleff, Borey	59	Halsey, Jack L	102	Lucky, Shelby	152
Chamberland, Pete	59	Hamman, Tommy	277	MacIsaac, Mac	153
Chandler, Allen	48	Hansen, Vernon	103	Main, Don	155
Chapman, George	61	Hanson, William	105	Mangum, Pete	157
Chase, Jay	61	Hardy, George	106	Marr, Richard	157
Coates, John	62	Hay, Richard	107	Marsland, Gerald	159
Collars, Jay	63	Hehman, Richard	111	Martin, John	159
Collins, Willard Sr.	282	Hester, Jerry	111	Mattison, James	159
Cooper, Jim	64	Heuss, Herman	112	Matzen, Dick	161
Corbett, Richard	65	Higgins, Johnny	112	Maxwell, Bruce	163
Courtney, Terry	276	Hightshue, Daniel	113	Maynard, Bryon	163
Craig, Donald	68	Hinton, Ronald	114	McCall, Collier	164
Craig, Jim	70	Hitchens, Ralph	116	McCreight, Robert	164
Davis, Dennis	71	Hitzeman, Gary	117	McDaniel, Douglas	165
Davis, Michael	71	Hoang, Nuie "Henry"	118	McDonald, Jerry	166

