



# The Tiger Gazette

121st AVN Association

Volume Number 8

Issue Number 2

Date 31 October 2017

## From the Editor's Desk

Greetings! We have survived another summer and the holiday season is upon us. This is our time to visit family and friends and enjoy our lives. Just a few years ago, our organization had to plan it's reunions for June through August to allow for the schedule of those who still had jobs. Now that most of us are retired we have more flexibility in when we can schedule our reunions. This in turn allows us to shop for the "Off Season" rates on motels, food and etc. It seems that we always have to decide on a place that is easy to get to or one that is economical when we get there. This is no small consideration to many of us (your editor included) as we are now on fixed incomes and must watch our expenditures. Our reunion committee has worked to find us the best deal on rooms and food that can be had in Williamsburg. We feel that they have done well.

Speaking of doing well, flu shots are now available. We got ours at the VA Hospital but they can be had at your local pharmacy and Medicare will cover the cost.

## Secretary's Report

2018 Reunion – Williamsburg, Virginia

As voted upon during our 2017 annual membership meeting, our next reunion will be held on **April 24, 25, 26 2018** in Williamsburg, Virginia. Arrangements have been made with one of the top hotels to hold our reunion. The facilities will be great and they were willing to give us a great rate for rooms and reunion accommodations.

We are in the planning stages to have an optional visit to the 128th Aviation Brigade which is the latest incarnation of aircraft maintenance training organizations here at Ft Eustis that began with the Transportation School (1954-1985), Aviation Logistics School (1985-2012) and now the 128th Aviation Brigade. The visit to Ft. Eustis will be on Friday, April 27. These plans should be finalized by the time the information is mailed out to everyone on our address list in early January.

Many of us, me included, were sent to Ft. Eustis for training prior to joining the 121<sup>st</sup>. Information and registrations forms will be mailed out in early January. We ask that everyone who is planning to attend to please register as soon as possible. It makes the planning much easier when we know how many folks will be attending.

If any of your contact information has changed (address, email address, phone, etc.) please notify us as soon as possible. Every year we have the extra time and expense of re-mailing the reunion information because we are not aware of a new address. Keeping us up to date will save a lot of headaches and expense.

See you in Williamsburg in April.

John Schmied, Secretary

## **Historian's Report**

Early this year I received a box full of photographs from Lee Stuart (1967 – 1968). Inside I found a short note explaining that he had been given the photos by a “fellow” at a static display in Atlanta. Upon reviewing the photos I noted the name and image of Joe Levinson appeared frequently. I had heard that name before when Joe appeared at one of our reunions some time ago riding on an electric cart and was introduced as a former commander of the 121<sup>st</sup> who was quite a character and had done much to establish the 121<sup>st</sup> at Soc Trang in 1964. A couple of years ago I was notified that Joe had passed away and was being interred at Arlington National Cemetery. I attended the ceremony and had an opportunity to meet his wife and other family members. During that time no one made any mention of photographs and, frankly, I forget to ask. So now it appeared that I was in possession of a large number of photos (around 250 of different types) belonging to Joe. So I created a directory for Joe under 1964/ Photos and began scanning. Soon I noticed that several photos were taken at two separate events, so I created subdirectories for each. Many of the photos contained comments on the back, so, if they were short I incorporated them into the title; those that were longer became separate images.

In the last Gazette I mentioned that Jack Carey is now assisting my work on our history. As I'm getting a “little long in the tooth,” having someone younger like Jack seems a good idea. His first task was to complete a series of reports that organize your awards by date, type and sometimes location. He has now completed this task and has, hopefully, provided many of you a better presentation of awards information during your tour at Soc Trang. Thanks, Jack. I now cc Jack on all my historian communications and he will, in fact, have proofed this report before it goes into the Tiger Gazette.

There is still much to do. I have not yet posted the 6<sup>th</sup> Aviation Platoon photos and information. That will be done before the end of this year so that it will be in the next version. I also anxiously await the many more stories, photographs, and other memorabilia you all are going to send me to be included in the 121<sup>st</sup> Avn. Association Archive.

I had lunch with Father Jerry Daly a few weeks ago. He's perhaps not as tall as he once was, but he still is the same, straight-talking guy many of us know and respect. I'm hoping he will take me up on my offer of a ride to Williamsburg.

Finally, I am making a major push to gather, organize and ship to Texas Tech University all the materials I have gathered to date. I'll see you all at Williamsburg.

Bob Greene

## **2017 Awards for Educational Financial Assistance – Scholarship Program**

This year the association received numerous applications for financial assistance from our Financial Assistance Fund. The applications were reviewed by a panel of anonymous judges to decide those who would receive a scholarship from the Financial Assistance Program (aka Scholarship fund). The applications and supporting documents are scored by the judges and returned to the FAC (Financial Assistance

Committee Chairman) and the scores are tallied. The judges had a tough job making a decision on who should be awarded.

It has been our practice to award one scholarship of \$1,000 each year. Due to the generosity of those who purchased raffle tickets during our reunion in Tucson and individual donations, the fund was in a fairly healthy state this year. While all the applicants deserved a financial award, the funds were available to give only three \$1,000 awards for 2017. Please bear in mind that three awards this year shall not set a precedent, and the number awards is decided upon by the committee, based on the funds available.

The winners of the 2017 Financial Assistance Awards were:

Cody Wollin, Grandson of Member Warren Wollin

Caleb Straley, Grandson of Member Ronald Maisch

JoDee Powell, Granddaughter of Member Donnie Powell

The committee encourages our member to take advantage of the program and push your grandkids and great grandkids to apply for a scholarship from our Financial Assistance Program.

Also, thank you to all who purchased raffle tickets during the reunion and those who gave generous contributions to help support the fund.

John Kennedy, Financial Assistance Committee Chairman.

#### **BH-1?**

I received the following note and am publishing it here in the hope that someone can provide more information on what must have been a very interesting mission.

*In 1963-64 I was stationed at Soc Trang with the air force unit there. You have several of my photos here on your web site.*

*Early one morning at first light while on guard duty I was approached by an Army Capt. Huey pilot. He asked if the bomb mounts on my T-28's were similar to those beneath this guns mounted alongside the skids of his Huey .After investigation we discovered that they were a match. He asked if I would mount 2 napalm bombs to his Huey. I did so pushing our bomb loaded so as not make noise to his copter and loaded one on each side.*

*Several minutes before his mission was to start, he took off and headed some distance away so as not to be seen by his fellow pilots. When he returned he told we that the drop went okay.*

*I would like to know who he was and if he or anyone else ever told this story. So if you know who he is and if he is still alive please have him contact me.*

*Best wishes,*

*WelcomeHome.*

*Bill Verebely [bverb@cox.net](mailto:bverb@cox.net)*

## Five decades later, honor bestowed on veteran

By: John Schmied

(Portions of the following article and the photo have been reprinted with the permission of Jeff Bryan, a reporter with the Riverland News, who covered this event.)



*Gary Rowe, right, shakes hands with Col. Buddy Hopkins, the current commander of the First Aviation Brigade, the unit which the 121st Assault Helicopter Company is a part of, after receiving his Distinguished Flying Cross, almost 50 years after he was originally nominated for the honor.*

*I had the opportunity to attend an award ceremony on May 26 at which one of our Vikings finally received the Distinguished Flying Cross for actions in which he was involved on July 24, 1967. Viking Gunner Tom Goetter and I both attended the ceremony to witness Gary Rowe receive the DFC which was held at a local park in Dunnellon, Florida, Gary's home town.*

Almost 50 years after being nominated for his "heroic action" on July 24, 1967, the Dunnellon area resident and former specialist was finally honored for his actions while serving as a gunner on a UH-1 B armed helicopter in support of a "fire fly" mission at Can Tho, Phong Dinh Province, Republic of Vietnam.

In a small, simple ceremony on May 26 at Ernie Mills Park in Dunnellon, Rowe's family, close friends, former members of the 121st Assault Helicopter Company as well as others, watched with awe, respect and reverence as Col. Buddy Hopkins and Chief Warrant Officer Five Tony Reed formally presented Rowe with the Distinguished Flying Cross.

"It really is an honor for me to be here today," said Col. Hopkins, the current commander of the First Aviation Brigade, the unit the 121st Assault Helicopter Company is a part of, even today. "Even though it has taken nearly 50 years, I'm absolutely honored to be here."

What became of the initial nomination isn't known, but what is certain is the U.S. Army didn't hesitate to bestow the honor upon Rowe after a thorough records search revealed the recognition was long overdue. And for the former specialist, there was no ill will or bitter feeling. After all, he'd long forgotten about the eyewitness reports he discovered while awaiting his discharge more than 40 years ago from the U.S. Army.

"Given the recommendation, I thought it was pretty cool," he said, noting 10 to 12 years ago he made a records request with the U.S. Army. "All they came back with was what I already knew about."

But a happenstance conversation with Mike Miller one day over coffee and doughnuts forever changed the oversight. "We were sitting there having coffee and doughnuts," Rowe explained. "He's an old special ops guy, before they called them special ops, and we were just talking, swapping war stories. I had told him about the letters. He asked, 'Do you care if I send this to my son?' So I told him, 'I don't care. Do what you want.'"

Little did Rowe know, but Miller's son, Kevin, is an awards branch chief with the U.S. Army. He set out on a fact-finding mission. "Mike's son, Kevin, couldn't find anything electronically," Rowe said. "They had to physically go to the records room and do the search." And what the U.S. Army discovered is the paperwork for the Distinguished Flying Cross was there, it just never made its way to the Recommendation Board for approval. And without any prodding or pushing, both the U.S. Army and the Secretary of the Army signed off on the approval April 27, three months shy of the 50th anniversary of the original nomination date.

"It's kind of odd, kind of surreal," Rowe said about the honor. But when pointed out he was a "hero," Rowe laughed hysterically.

"My wife, Jean, says the same thing," he said. "That wasn't the first time we'd done stuff like that; it was part of the job we had."

According to U.S. Army commendation, then-Specialist Four Rowe, after 28 hours of duty, "demonstrated cool efficiency and sound judgment" enabling the crew and two passengers (seven in all) of a downed aircraft to be rescued out of a known Viet Cong-held area in a minimum amount of time with no casualties. "Specialist Four Rowe's actions were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, the 121st Assault Helicopter Company and the United States Army," the commendation states.

"Truly, truly remarkable achievements," Col. Hopkins said.

First of all, Rowe said, he thanked all of the veterans present for their service. "Now I've got to start with a handful of gunners, crew chiefs and officers who made it possible for me to be in this unit," he said, adding he was proud to accept the award partially on their behalf.

"We did this sort of thing because it was our job. We did them without thinking about them really," he said, noting he was 20 years old at the time. "You don't think a lot when you're 20. They did this and more; we all did this. That's why I accept it for them. They could have given this award out a dozen or more times and it would have been just as justified.

"I'm very thankful, very humbled. It's a little overwhelming."

While the ceremony wasn't a surprise, those in attendance were. The prior evening his son Nathan showed up unannounced for dinner at a Dunnellon restaurant while his sister drove in from Michigan. In addition, his wife Jean's sister, her husband, daughter and granddaughter were all present.

"There's absolutely no way in the world I would have missed this," Nathan Rowe said. "The first thing I did when Jeanie told me about it was I got online and bought a ticket. It's a beautiful thing for our family."

Thankful, Nathan Rowe said, about watching the ceremony: "I'm really thankful he's honored after all of this time. It means a lot, even though it's taken a while. It's a beautiful thing. It's really important to recognize all of those gentlemen, young and old, who served."

Growing up as a child, Nathan Rowe had heard his father's tales of serving in the Army and fighting in Vietnam, but it wasn't until he, too, read the eyewitness accounts about the date in question in which he fully understood what his father and many others had been through.

"I've heard Dad tell lots of stories about being over there, mainly about his love for aviation and being around the pilots and helicopters," Nathan said. "The words he spoke were genuine words; he was doing a job along with several other people and they tried to be as professional as they could. What he said there, those words were coming from his heart."

His wife, Jean, said she's always been proud of her husband but said it wasn't until she read the report about the actions that led to his accolade that things came into perspective. "When you read (the report), you really have to read it two or three times," she said. "There's a lot there that he did. You just don't realize it."

*Congratulations Gary!*

### **We regret the loss of these fellow tigers:**

Gary Dowler - DOD 9/24/2016 – 121<sup>st</sup> – Pilot – 66-67

Ronald Shefchik – DOD 5/14/2016 – 80<sup>th</sup> Trans & 93<sup>rd</sup> Trans – 1955

Earl Smith – DOD 5/14/2017 – 121<sup>st</sup> – Pilot – 67-68

Gene Turechek – DOD 4/23/2016 – 80<sup>th</sup> Trans & 93<sup>rd</sup> Trans – 1954

Francis J. Lebda – Died January 12, 2015 – Served with the 121<sup>st</sup> as a Pilot in '67.

Plummer Ricks, Jr. – Died November 22, 2015 – Served with the 121<sup>st</sup> as a Structure repairman in '69.

Clifford Mitchell – Died January 1, 2016 – Served with the 121<sup>st</sup> as a Viking Pilot in '65 – '66.

Joseph Ollar – Died January 9, 2016 – Served with the 121<sup>st</sup> as in Maintenance in '69 – '70.

Gary Heffner – Died February 6, 2016 – Served with the 93<sup>rd</sup>/121<sup>st</sup> as a CH-21 Pilot in '63 – '64.

Roy G. Amerson – Died February 21, 2016 – Served with the 121<sup>st</sup> as a Crew Chief in '66 – '67.

William Fonshell – Died May 15, 2016 – No other information available.

William H. Shaw – Died August 16, 2016 – No other information available.

Michael P. Quaintance – Died December 8, 2016 – Served with the 121<sup>st</sup> as a Pilot in '69

John Winsor – Died January 27, 2017 – Served with the 121<sup>st</sup> as a Door Gunner in '66 – '67.

Rest in peace, Brothers.



**Contact Us:**

Letters to the editor should be sent to:

**Donald Jackson, Editor**

**1155 Union Road**

**Greeneville, Tn. 37745**

Email: [Tiger129ts@aol.com](mailto:Tiger129ts@aol.com)

**Your Board of Trustees is:**

**Donald Jackson, Chairman**

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[cudzuekennedy@gmail.com](mailto:cudzuekennedy@gmail.com)

**Phil Olson, Trustee**

[philo5907@gmail.com](mailto:philo5907@gmail.com)

**Jack Carey, Trustee**

[jack.j.carey@gmail.com](mailto:jack.j.carey@gmail.com)

**Robert Greene, Vice Chairman & Historian**

[bojogreene@gmail.com](mailto:bojogreene@gmail.com)

**Dave Cunningham, Treasurer and Membership**

[Tigerlead67@aol.com](mailto:Tigerlead67@aol.com)

**Rick Weimar, Trustee &  
Membership Committee**

[rl194954@aol.com](mailto:rl194954@aol.com)

**Fred Lammers, Trustee &  
Membership Committee**

[fjlammers@msn.com](mailto:fjlammers@msn.com)