



The Tiger Gazette

121st AVN Association Volume Number 8 Issue Number 1 Date 1 June 2017

From the Editor's Desk

Our reunion in Tucson was a resounding success. We had a great turnout and several West Coast members attended a reunion for the first time. They assured us that they enjoyed it, and we hope to see them at future events.

We also had some guests from the Active Army. We were joined at dinner by:

COL Woodard B. "Buddy" Hopkins, 1st Avn BDE Commander
CSM Michael D. Suttterfield, 1st Avn BDE
LTC Daniel L. Isabel, 2nd Bn -13th Avn Regt, Commander
CSM John A. Keller, 2nd Bn – 13th Avn Regt.
LTC Kevin E. McHugh, 1st Bn – 13th Avn Regt.
CSM George S. Webster, 1st Bn – 13th Avn Regt.
CPT Justin L Litvinas, UAV Flight Co. Commander
SFC Daniel Driskell, UAV Flight Co. Standardization Operator

We also received a briefing on UAS (Unmanned Aerial Systems) which was presented by:

CW4 Stephen Mestas
SFC Daniel Driskell
SGT Michael Varvil

A big THANK YOU to these gentlemen for telling us how Army Aviation is moving into the 21st Century. We have come so very far from O-1s and H-23s.

This was in addition to Friday's tour of their facilities. By the way, please do not refer to the Army's unmanned aircraft as Drones. They prefer Unmanned Aerial Vehicles for the individual aircraft in their systems.

Don Jackson

Scholarship Program

The Scholarship Chairman has received three envelopes containing transcripts. One also included ACT test results. None of these included other required documents. The Scholarship Chairman must receive all required info NLT 30 June for the application to be considered for an award. Please refer to the requirements on the 121 AVN Association website.

Historian's Report

Our latest reunion at Tucson is now history. It is now time for your historian to get to work and capture the information gathered and insert it into our Archive. Jerry McBee laid out a whole table of photos and other memorabilia and indicated he would get some of it to me in the not too distant future. I also talked with Curtis Dassonville who

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explained that he was a part of the 6th Aviation Platoon (Airlift), “Fangs” who were attached to the 121st in September 1964 for initial train up. They were with the 121st until December 1964 when they were declared combat ready and moved up to support the IV Corps and the 5th SFG. In early 1965 they were then moved to the I Corps Tactical Zone. We were also made aware of the legacy relationship the 121st has with the 13th Aviation Regiment. Since we were assigned to the 13th Combat Aviation Battalion (CAB) in Vietnam and this battalion became the basis for the 13th Aviation Regiment, we are considered a legacy unit to this regiment. Today the role of the 13th Aviation Regiment is to support the training of aviation assets for the US Army. The Regiment has two battalions: 1/13 at Fort Rucker and the 2/13 at Ft Huachuca. Both of these battalions are commanded by the 1st Aviation Brigade also located at Fort Rucker. We were filled with pride when the commander of the 1st Avn. Bde. and his Sgt.Maj. joined by both battalion commanders and their Sgt.Majs. attended our banquet formally attired in their mess blues. It was nice to know that the Tigers are still considered a legacy unit by the current aviation community. This was further reinforced by the invitation we received on Friday to visit Fort Huachuca and tour the 2/13th training facilities and activities.

During our board meeting a decision was made to reinforce the Historian with a new board member. Jack Carey was offered the position and accepted. He will assist with improving the automated capabilities of the 121st Avn. Assoc. Archive.

Now with the reunion behind us, your historian has already made contact with Jack and is at work loading photos into the Archive, so until my next report please keep your Soc Trang info flowing.

Bob Greene

TREASURER/MEMBERSHIP DESK

Gents,

The recent reunion in Tucson was not only well attended and enjoyed by all but also produced substantial monies for the scholarship fund. The amount sequestered for that purpose now stands at \$7,695.76. The uptick was the result of the multiple raffles and also direct contribution to the fund. Many thanks to those who donated prizes, bought tickets, and also those that handled the sales. Well done!

The treasury continues to remain in good shape with all invoices for the reunion now paid for in full. A \$500.00 contribution to the Aviation Heritage Park in Bowling Green, Kentucky has been handled for the purpose of assisting in the restoration of the UH-1 aircraft now in their possession.

The recent PX sales at the reunion and prior to the event has depleted some of the items and we are in the process of restocking and hope to have that accomplished in the near term. The long bumper sticker and Viking ball cap are now sold out and will not be reordered. A new Tiger sticker will be available shortly. Please keep an eye on the web site for when it comes on line.

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Membership continues to be strong and several of our annual members have opted to step up to LIFE membership over the past six months. Much of this is due to the efforts of the membership committee to locate long lost brethren and encourage them to join up and participate. Rick and Linda Weimar have spent countless hours on the internet and on the telephone in that effort. Version 6 of the archive produced by our historian, Bob Greene, have been very instrumental in locating people otherwise unknown to us. There are now nearly 700 veterans in the database that includes their personal contact information. Not bad for an organization that started with four people late in 2006. This is a product of continued effort and the spirit of the Tigers and Vikings, still evident now half a century after their service. I encourage all who have contact information on old friends to notify the members of the membership committee or the Association secretary of their whereabouts. Please know that the information is closely held and no one's information is released to anyone else without their permission. Having said that please understand that we will make every effort to reconnect you with old buddies if we have their location known, but only after contacting them and obtaining their permission. There are a few folks that have requested to not be contacted and we certainly respect that.

Regards to all.
Dave Cunningham

Secretary's Report

2017 Reunion – A good time in Tucson

Tucson is probably back to normal after the Tigers and Vikings spent a few days enjoying all that city has to offer. We had a total of 132, including spouses and family members who attended. The Radisson Suites Hotel provided the lodging and catering and everyone seemed to be very pleased.

The icing on the cake was made possible by the 2nd Battalion of the 13th Aviation Regiment, who provided a presentation on the Unmanned Aerial Systems (drones) that are in use by the Army today. When arranging this presentation, the CO of the 2-13th told me he felt the 121st was part of the heritage of the modern day Army Aviation. Several members of the Command Team from Ft. Huachuca joined us for dinner that evening. In addition, we had the honor of hosting the 1st Aviation Brigade Commander, COL Buddy Hopkins, who made sure his schedule between Fort Rucker and Fort Huachuca would be timed to be able to visit with us. On Friday, the day after the reunion, a tour of the training facilities for the Grey Eagle and Shadow UAS systems was the highlight of this year's reunion. We were welcomed for lunch at the community center at Ft. Huachuca by LTC Dan Isabel, the CO of the 2nd Bn. -13th Regt. Bob Greene, our Vice Chairman and Historian provided a little insight of the way things were done back in our day, for the troops that were able to attend.

When our membership voted to go to Tucson, I was not too sure what to expect. I consulted with "Visit Tucson" their Convention and Visitors Center to arrange for

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proposals from some of the hotels and found out that Tucson has a lot to offer. The list of hotels from which we received proposals was endless. Of course, as you may expect, we received proposals from the many exclusive resorts in the area, which were entirely beyond most folk's budget. But the number of realistic proposals made the choices difficult. From that point, it was many phone calls and emails to get the list narrowed down. It all boiled down to hotel room rates, catering menus and prices and the availability of a hospitality room.

I made a trip to Tucson in early October, 2016 and visited four hotel possibilities. My sidekicks, Ernie Miller and Jim and Julie Ellis toured the hotels with my wife and me and we somewhat narrowed the list a little more. In the end, the Radisson won out because of their facilities and costs. I have to say, the Visit Tucson folks and the hotel staff made it a pleasant experience for all of us who attended.

During our annual membership meeting on April 20, several locations were discussed for next year. It was decided to hold the next reunion in Williamsburg, Virginia in April, 2018. Work has already begun to gather proposals from hotels in the Williamsburg area. As of this time, I have proposals from two hotels and expect more within the next few days. I hope to have a few hotels to choose from and make a trip to Williamsburg in September or October. As soon as we can select a hotel and negotiate a contract for our reunion, the dates and location will be announced.

See you in Williamsburg!

John Schmied

My Experience with IED's (in 1966)

When I experienced the effects of an IED (improvised explosive device) the term had not yet been invented. However, as I reflect upon it, the term most clearly describes what happened to us on that dark and dreary morning in Ca Mau, RVN.

It was another of those super early missions. I had been selected to be AC (Aircraft Commander) in the last of four ships to depart Soc Trang at "oh dark hundred" and proceed to Bac Lieu to pick up the command group for the operation that was going to kick off at first light out of "new Ca Mau" airfield. It was a relatively new airfield and was several kilometers out of town, but in the briefing we had been told that an RF/PF battalion (Regional or Provence forces) had been put there to provide security. The trip to Bac Lieu was uneventful although it was dark as hell and there were scattered scud clouds on the way. The command group was already at the airfield at Bac Lieu so the loading there went smoothly and in no time we were on our way to Ca Mau. I don't remember who was leading our flight that morning, but his actions clearly saved us from total destruction.

Our destination airfield was built on a bed of laterite (clay). The runway itself was constructed of pierced steel planking (PSP) staked to the laterite base. As best I

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remember the runway was oriented east and west. To the south of the center portion of the runway was a parking area which also contained a small terminal building. The highway from Ca Mau city ran parallel to the runway just south of the terminal building. The north side of the runway consisted of a laterite apron approximately 50 – 60 feet wide and running the full length of the runway. We had done several operations out of here and this was where we normally parked our helicopters in trail. Beyond the laterite apron were many flooded rice paddies. The flight leader called the advisor's group located in the town of Ca Mau and informed them that we were approaching new Ca Mau from the northeast and would be entering the traffic pattern on an extended base leg for landing to the east. They acknowledged and said they were on the way down the highway to the airfield.

It was still dark as we turned final. Fortunately, the flight leader chose to land directly on the runway just opposite the parking area and terminal probably because it facilitated the command group's exit from the aircraft. The aircraft were cleared of passengers and just before we were ready to depart a series of four powerful explosions occurred along the north side of the runway. Fifty years later I can still see the progress of these explosions as they came towards my aircraft. I believe the shock and violence of them was so great that my visual perception was almost stroboscopic. Since I was at the controls and was already light on the skids the aircraft slid to the right. Next I heard lead say, "Tigers let's get out of here!" So amongst the pounding noise of laterite falling into our rotor system we pulled pitch. As we departed gunships orbiting the airfield opened with machinegun fire. With the explosions and tracers from the gunships, the scene was a cacophony of sound and confusion. As soon as we cleared the airfield, I looked at my instruments to check the status of the ship, but I was barely able to see the instruments because a high frequency vibration made reading them difficult – a sure indication that we had a tail rotor problem. I was able to tell that my airspeed indicator and altimeter were not working. I got on the horn and told lead that I needed to get on the ground as soon as possible. Fortunately, there was a short strip right in the town of Ca Mau and we headed for it.

Within ten minutes we were on the ground and shut down. Immediately our crew chief said, "Look here!" There was a 20 inch PSP fastener wrapped around his gun mount. If the mount had not been there he would have been cut in half. Both the crew chief and I on the left side of the ship had ringing ears for several days. The leading edges of the main rotor blades were rippled from striking chunks of laterite as we took off. We were fortunate that, although a piece of laterite had struck the leading edge of one tail rotor blade, it did not stick to the blade. If it had, we would have had an out of balance condition that would have caused a failure of the tail rotor. After a careful inspection of the aircraft our maintenance supervisor declared our brand new UH-1D unflyable and marked the log book with a red X. It was then rigged for transport by one of the Muleskinner's Chinooks (CH-47). Our crew returned to Soc Trang on our maintenance aircraft (Wrecker).

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Upon reflection, if our flight leader had landed on the north apron where we normally landed, I don't believe any of us would have survived. The VC had planted the explosives (probably four salvaged 250 lbs. bombs) just under the PSP on the north edge of the runway running from the east to the west. The force of the explosions lifted the north edge of the PSP runway and deflected the force of the explosions into the area where we normally would have landed and away from where we were on the runway. Assuming the charges were command detonated, probably by a VC in a sampan in one of the many flooded rice paddies to the north of the field, he probably would have been unable to judge where on the airfield we landed. The next part of the story was how did the VC manage to plant these explosives while the RF/PF battalion was guarding the place? Being very charitable, one could conclude that the bombs were planted some time in advance of the operation; however, who knew..? Clearly the VC had superior intelligence.

Bob Greene

Editor's Note

I remember this incident quite well. I was not on flight status at the time, but was working on a PE crew in the hangar. We spent the next few days repairing damaged helicopters, in addition to our scheduled work load. One of these birds required new main rotor blades as well as new tail rotor blades. We spent all day replacing and tracking them. That evening it was test flown and parked in its revetment. At about 0200 hours Charlie lobbed a few recoilless rifle rounds (we always called them mortars, but Charlie used recoilless rifles due to their greater range) into the flight line. Both main rotor blades and both tail rotor blades were damaged and had to be replaced again!

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Appology

I should have published an edition of The Tiger Gazette prior to our reunion. I had to have extensive spinal surgery on February 8th, and my medical condition made compiling an issue more work than I felt capable of doing.

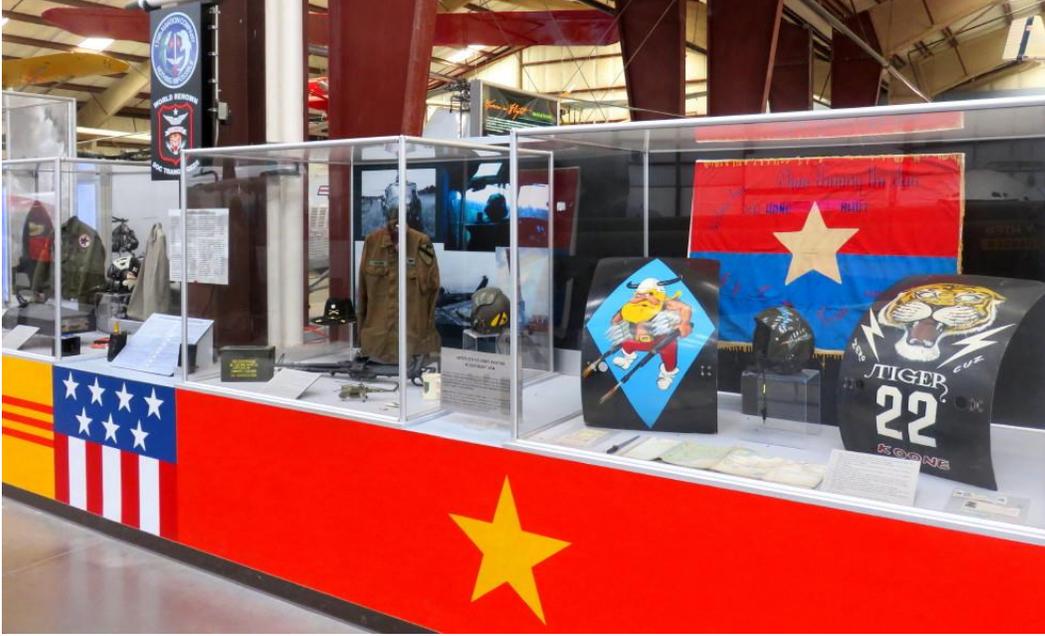
Don Jackson, editor

PHOTOS FROM TUCSON:



Our distinguished visitors

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Display at the Pima Aerospace Museum featuring the 121st AHC



Entertainment at the Banquet - sponsored by the Vikings.

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