

The Tiger Gazette



121st AVN Association Volume Number 11 Issue Number 2 Date 07 May 2021

From Your Editor:

Spring is here, and it looks like we are FINALLY going to have our reunion. YEA! The COVID situation is slowly getting under control. We have had our vaccines, Jeanie had the Pfizer and I had the Moderna. Neither of us had a reaction and neither of us show any signs of genetic modification, so I am optimistic about our future health. My sister and my uncle were not so fortunate, both succumbing before the vaccines were developed. I hope that we soon have enough immunized people that the virus will not be able to find a new host to spread to, and thus die out. Meanwhile, we continue to move toward resuming normal lives. Part of which is our reunion in September. Some of the events planned were canceled. We are working to see whether they can be rescheduled, but we will have a good reunion in any event. Below are some of the things that we are planning. I look forward to seeing you in Georgia.

Don Jackson

A Reunion? Finally!!

The pandemic of 2020 caused us to postpone our reunion – TWICE and once again in early 2021. We finally will be holding another reunion of the 121st Aviation Association – Tigers and Vikings.

The new reunion dates are September 16, 17, 18, 2021. We're still going to gather in Columbus GA. The hotel, the Hilton Garden Inn – Columbus still is our reunion hotel. Nearly everything will be exactly as it was originally planned. The hotel has agreed to keep our costs (room rates and catering charges) the same as 2020. The folks at the HGI Columbus have been great to work with through this whole mess.

Our reunion was originally scheduled include a tour of Fort Benning and an outing for the ladies. COVID has put the skids on both of those ventures. At the present time it is not known if they will be available, but we hope to have more information by the time the reunion information is mailed out. Our plan is to mail the reunion information on around June 1.

We will try to have as much information as possible about Fort Benning Tours, The National Infantry Museum and for those who would like to make the trip over to Fort Rucker. (Fort Rucker is where the 121 Avn Association erected a monument honoring those who were killed in the line of duty while serving with the 121st.) Please watch your mailbox in early June and check out the information that we will provide. As usual, please make your reunion reservations and send in your registration as soon as possible. This helps the committee with the planning and arrangements for a successful and enjoyable reunion for all.

We are working with the Friends of Army Aviation and the National Infantry Museum to provide a UH-1D, so anyone who would like take a flight on a Huey during our reunion can do so. We will need a minimum of 50 people to participate in order to make this happen. Specific details about signing up will be provided with the reunion announcement and registration forms which will be mailed on June 1. We ask that anyone wanting to take a nostalgic trip back in time PLEASE send in your reunion registration form as soon as possible so we can make this happen. Given the fact that COVID will still be around (although hopefully not as vigilant as it was early on) we will still be taking necessary precautions, such as face masks and social distancing, as

much as possible. This is not only a requirement of the association, but the hotel, City of Columbus and the State of Georgia, may still have restrictions in place at the time of our reunion. These restrictions are not just for you, but everyone who will be attending. By all means we want to keep everyone safe while at our reunion.

Looking forward to seeing you in September!

A Message from the Membership Committee

The Membership Committee would like to remind everyone to be sure to contact us if you happen to move, change your phone number or email address.

When the Association sends out our annual reunion information, we usually get several notices returned with address corrections and some that simply are returned because the recipient has moved and no forwarding address is provided. When that happens, the committee has to start searching for that person, which can take an enormous amount of time to relocate someone. Re-mailing the reunion information is costly and again takes a considerable amount of time.

Likewise, when the Tiger Gazette is sent out (by email to most people on our address list) and it “bounces back”, the committee has to track down that person to see if they have a new email address or they have moved.

Keeping the Association updated with your contact information will be appreciated and save a lot of time for the Volunteers who are on the committee. It will also insure that you get the latest information about the Association which is published in the Tiger Gazette and the annual mailing of the reunion notices.

You can update your information by sending an e-mail to Dave Cunningham

Tigerlead67@aol.com or Rick Weimar rl194954@aol.com. You can also call Rick at 610-948-9450.

Thank You!

Application Now Being Accepted For Our Scholarship Program

Time is near for the scholarship applications to be submitted. The applications MUST be received *no later than June 30*. Applications may be downloaded from the 121st website:

<http://121avn.org/>

If you have a problem accessing the applications, feel free to contact John Schmied – johndschmied@yahoo.com or call him at 352-633-0541.

Although our fund has not had income this past year, due to postponed reunions, there are still some funds available for this year. Our Educational Financial Assistance Program (scholarship fund) is made available through the generosity of those who attend reunions, by purchasing raffle tickets and making donations. We have been fortunate to be able to offer 3 or 4 scholarships the past 2 years. The amount available for this year will be depending on the funds available and the number of applicants. The amount available will be determined at a later date.

Encourage your grandchildren and great grandchildren to act quickly to complete the application and gather the necessary documents and mail them as soon as possible.

If there any questions, please contact John Schmied, the Educational Financial Assistance Program Coordinator, at the above email or phone number.

Bill Schmidt Achieves a Rare Accomplishment

Harry “Bill” Schmidt recently reached a very rare milestone. He became a Member of a very elite group of individuals who have donated 100 gallons of lifesaving blood.

Bill was a pilot, Blue Tiger Platoon Leader, with the 121st in 1968-69. He later flew Chinooks during a second tour in 1971-72. After 10 years in the Army, Bill joined a reserve unit in the Houston area. It was during this time he unknowingly embarked on this journey. He started donating blood in 1976 at the Gulf Coast Regional Blood Center. The Blood Mobile would make regular stops to visit the reserve center and Bill was always in line to donate.

Later, when he was a self-proclaimed “drug pusher” aka pharmaceutical representative, Bill continued to donate at the Gulf Coast Blood Center. When he was assigned to Austin and Bill would make regular visits to the Central Texas Regional Blood Center. His job took him back to Houston and he realized that the 100 gallon level was obtainable. It became a passion, so he put it on his bucket list. It was a 45 year project, but with perseverance and sheer determination Bill has achieved this monumental feat.

Congratulations Bill!



Give 'em the Bayonet (Story contributed by Robert "Buck" Wade)

The 121st Soc Trang Tigers were the southernmost Assault Helicopter Company in Vietnam. Deep in the Delta their mission was to support the 3 ARVN divisions stationed there. They consisted of two slick platoons of five ships each and the Viking armed helicopter platoon of four B model gunships equipped with a flex kit of four hydraulically operated 7.62 machine guns and two 7 round rocket pods, the fifth B model was the lead ship and armed with 24 rockets on each side and known as "the hog". The Tigers averaged around twenty combat assaults per month.

When not on the assault mission the slicks would perform single ship "ash and trash" jobs throughout the Delta. The gun platoon never operated with less than two ships (light fire team) and were used to hunt and aggressively seek out the Viet Cong enemy.

In June 1966 the Viking platoon was conducting a search and kill mission in a flat rice patty area northeast of Soc Trang. Per SOP the two fire teams were on the deck in parallel searches while Viking lead remained at altitude where he could see both teams and provide rocket support should they become engaged.

I was in the lead ship in the left seat (copilot seat on helicopters) with the gunsight trigger that operated the 4 gun flex kit ready to spray massive firepower to any target anywhere to our front. The right seater flying the bird controlled the rockets and was ready to place a round on anything worthy of a sixteen pound warhead. The second ship was in trail behind us and prepared to cover us if ambushed. We were comfortable being at eye level with Charlie because of airspeed, we were doing 96 Knots (100 mph) and while you can hear helicopters a mile away if you can't see them the sound vibrates through the air making it difficult to determine the direction it is coming from.

We were following a large dike wide enough to be used as an oxcart road. VC frequently dug their sleeping and storage tunnels under these large dykes. As we sped along the mud road I noticed what appeared to be a man standing on the dyke about a hundred yards away. As we got closer I could see he had no shirt but black pajama pants and he just stood there with his feet apart. As we swiftly closed with him I saw he had a CHICOM bolt action rifle with the long triangular bayonet fully extended. He was on my side and in the brief part of a second as we closed on him I could see he was old and wrinkled with clenched teeth. As we passed within inches he performed an overhead thrust of the bayonet at the helicopter and my left leg. My reaction was to twist in the seat and jerk my leg out of the way taking my foot off the left pedal. We were prepared for AK-47s, RPGs and 51 cal. machine guns but never expected a bayonet attack. The pilot followed protocol and swiftly turned while keying the mike "receiving fire, breaking right". The trail ship did his job and poured fire from 4 machine guns into the space the lead ship just vacated. What caused the old man to attack a low level gunship with just a bayonet? Were the VC holding his family until he killed an American, was he the battalion commander trying to lead by example, was he on drugs?

I'll never forget the look on that man's face and the thrusting tip of that bayonet. I made sure to include the same type CHICOM rifle as a souvenir when I rotated home.

Dear Friends and Family,

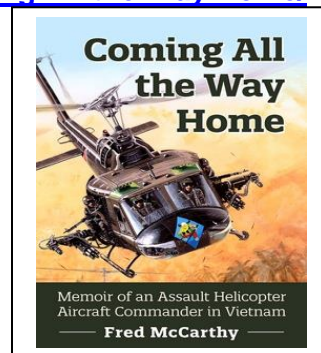
Some of you know that I have been working on a memoir about my adventures during the Vietnam War as an Army Warrant Officer helicopter pilot in 1967-68. I decided in retirement to focus some time finishing this and it was accepted by a publisher of military memoirs. Over the last three years I have been working with the publisher on the details and now it appears that the book will be published this spring. McFarland Publishing Company has included it in their Spring 2021 prepublication release announcements. Attached is a link to the publisher's release.

My goal in writing the book was to share some exciting combat aviation stories, poems, reflections, letters home, and the effect this experience had on the rest of my life. In writing the book I wanted to appeal to a wide audience of people with interests in military history, veterans, families and friends of veterans, people considering military service, educators, people of faith, and people interested in how a person deals with the challenges of serving in a combat environment and "coming all the way home". I invite you to consider reading the book and recommending it to anyone who you think might be interested in the subject matter.

Sincerely,
Fred

<https://mcfarlandbooks.com/product/Coming-All-the-Way-Home/>

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greenlake3@comcast.net



Preface

Coming All the Way Home Memoir of an Assault Helicopter Aircraft Commander in Vietnam

This is a true story about a twenty-one-year-old Vietnam veteran who transitions in one year from a monastic type of life in a seminary to becoming a US Army helicopter gunship aircraft commander in the Vietnam War in 1968.

He is motivated by a family tradition of combat service, a strong sense of patriotism, a love for aviation, and a desire for adventure. He gets far more than he bargained for. He shares some exciting flying missions, reflects on the nature of being a combat pilot, and processes the experience through his poetry, letters home, and reflective analysis.

He takes the reader through the history and morality of this war and the role of the combat soldier. This is partially a war story, but more than that, it straps the reader in the armored seat in the cockpit of a helicopter gunship and lets them have a first-person experience in how this adventure defined his life.

His hope in writing this memoir is to share with others the intensely personal legacy of war that comes with the experience. Writing the book involved 50 years of discernment, reading, and study. In some small way he hopes to help the reader understand a war experience and perhaps help other Vietnam veterans and their families also come all the way home.

Did anyone know that Al Watson received an Air Medal for meritorious Service AND an Army Commendation Medal with a "V" Device for Heroism.....

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APO San Francisco 96384

GENERAL ORDERS
NUMBER 9932

"REGUY HIEB"

20 June 1968

AWARD OF THE AIR MEDAL


1. TO 220. The following AWARDS are announced.

Awarded: Air Medal
Date action: As indicated in Standard Name Line
Theater: Republic of Vietnam
Reason: For meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight.
Authority: By direction of the President under the provisions of Executive Order 9158, 11 May 1942, as amended by Executive Order 9242-A, 11 September 1942 and United States Army Vietnam Message 16695 dated 1 July 1966.

WATSON, ALVIN B. RA [REDACTED] SERA: [REDACTED] SPECIALIST FOUR E4 USA
721st Av Co, APO 96296, 23 February 1968 to 29 February 1968
WEBSTER, DONALD D. RA [REDACTED] SERA: [REDACTED] PRIVATE FIRST CLASS E3 USA
71st Av Co, APO 96325, 17 February 1968 to 25 February 1968
WINGERS, WILSON R. RA [REDACTED] SERA: [REDACTED] SERGEANT FIRST CLASS E7 USA
121st Av Co, APO 96296, 10 August 1967 to 3 January 1968

FOR THE COMMANDER:

OFFICIAL:


LER S. PETERSON
1LT, MG
Asst Adjutant General

EUGENE F. CROCK
1LT, INFANTRY
Acting Chief of Staff

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 1ST AVIATION BRIGADE
APO San Francisco 96384

GENERAL ORDERS
NUMBER 847

"HOUY HIEM"

27 December 1968

AWARD OF THE ARMY COMMENDATION MEDAL FOR MERIT

1. TO 320. The following AWARDS are announced.

Awarded: As indicated in Standard Name Line
Date Action: 25 July 1968

Theater: Republic of Vietnam

Reason: For heroism in connection with military operations against a hostile force. These men distinguished themselves by exceptionally valorous actions while serving as crew members aboard armed helicopters providing fire support for the tactical evacuation of two seriously wounded forward observers. These men covered the unarmed helicopter which descended to evacuate the wounded. On the numerous landing passes, they expertly suppressed the enemy, despite being under relentless hostile fire. Their accurate fire played a significant role in the rescue of two fellow soldiers. Their actions were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon themselves, their unit, and the United States Army.

Authority: By direction of the Secretary of the Army under the provisions of AR 672-5-2 and USARV Reg 672-1 dated 21 February 1968.

PENNINGTON, ROBERT W. RA [REDACTED] SSAN: [REDACTED] SPECIALIST FIVE USA

Awarded: Army Commendation Medal with "V" Device

121st Aslt Hel Co, APO 96296

SCALISE, FRANK C. RA [REDACTED] SSAN: [REDACTED] SPECIALIST FOUR USA

Awarded: Army Commendation Medal with "V" Device

121st Aslt Hel Co, APO 96296

SMITH, JOHN H. JR. RA [REDACTED] SSAN: [REDACTED] SPECIALIST FOUR USA

Awarded: Army Commendation Medal with "V" Device

121st Aslt Hel Co, APO 96296

WATSON, ALTON B. RA [REDACTED] SSAN: [REDACTED] SPECIALIST FOUR USA

Awarded: Army Commendation Medal with "V" Device

121st Aslt Hel Co, APO 96296

MARTIN, JEFF D. RA [REDACTED] SSAN: [REDACTED] SPECIALIST FOUR USA

Awarded: Army Commendation Medal (First Oak Leaf Cluster) with "V" Device

121st Aslt Hel Co, APO 96296

FOR THE COMMANDER:

OFFICIAL:

JOHN A. FROST
LTC, USARV
Asst. Adjutant General

JAY B. WILLIAMS
Colonel, Infantry
Chief of Staff

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