

The Ugly Angel

Memorial Foundation

History Newsletter

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Editor's Note: When Tom was the editor, there were two Newsletters a year in the odd years and six or so in the years leading up to a reunion. This is one of those years but so was last year. In other words, we'll have more than two but six might be a bit much. I'm thinking of trying to get one out about every six weeks and the remainder will all be dedicated to getting as many of us to the reunion as possible. If you haven't heard, that will be in Reno, July 8-11. If you aren't currently a member of Pop A Smoke, you'd better sign up now.

You'll notice that this particular issue is called a History Newsletter. You will also notice that of the two main stories, one is actual a prehistory, even of Archie's Angels and the second is a post-history or almost a story leading to future history of 362, both tied, of course, to our real history: The Legend Lives On!

In Memoriam ~ January and February

On January 7, 1967, **John Mooney** was killed while flying off the Iwo Jima in Deckhouse V.

On January 8, 1968, **Bob Cramer** and **Denny Colburn** died while attempting a night medevac.

A week later, **Jim Post** was killed on January 17, 1968 near Khe Sahn.

Thirty five years ago on February 4th, 1969 HMM-362 suffered its worst disaster, only 6 months before standing down. Stopping at Hill 10 to visit a squadron pilot serving as a FAC, the two birds lifted off and collided. Eight Ugly Angels died.

Crew - BuNo 143965]	Crew - BuNo 150212]
Lawrence E. Houck II , 1LT AircraftCommander	James D. Opsahl , 1stLT AircraftCommander
Roger D. Knudtson , 1stLT Copilot	Andrew M. Haglage , 1stLT Copilot
Joseph H. Brubaker Jr. , CPL CrewChief	John D. Harrington , LCPL CrewChief
Gregory J. Niccoli , LCPL Gunner	Otis Green , LCPL Gunner

February 27th will be the 37th anniversary of the death of **Mike Carley** in 67.

The Air America Detail

By **Burt Palmer**

When first asked to write this I declined lest I offend or demean any of my fellow Marines who were with me on what we refereed to as "The Air America Detail." After more pressure from Bob, I relented. However, bear in mind that this is the recall of a 72year old. Also, no names are mentioned in order to protect the privacy of others. Some of the events that I participated in might not seem politically or socially correct and some terms may offend; so suck it up or sue me.

The story begins when I was a crew chief in an HMR(L) Squadron at MCAF Futema in 1960 -1961. Life was good; I was single, "libbo" was great and Ashai, 25 cents a quart in the "Ville." However, all was about to change. Previously we had transferred a couple of HU5-1 and HUS-1 to Bangkok, Thailand. The latter became the UH34D we all know and love and the HMR(L) became the HMM Squadrons of our Corps.

One day my section leader told me to get in starched utilities and report to the MAG. This worried me as I quickly deduced that with my lifestyle I was not going to a Meritorious Mast. I was joined by other crew chiefs from the squadron. We were asked if we would volunteer to perform flight duties in a small country that needed our help to

fight communism. All replied in the affirmative.

The pace really picked up then. Some civilian types appeared. We were to pack all our gear at the barracks, say nothing and return to a certain room at the BOQ, with our gear. . That done, we were given money, told to buy new civvies, no gear with name tags or our names in it, and report back. . When that was done, we were individually briefed, given a passport, a cover story of our so called civilian employment, very thorough dates, names, times etc. We were told to stay in the room and food was brought in. We were separated from the pilots. Later they joined up with us. Like all good Marines we managed to procure a couple of bottles to help us while the time away. The conversation between us was primarily "What do you think?"

Late the next night, the door opened and the civilians ushered us out to taxis and on to Kadena AFB. Out on the ramp beyond the lights sat a C46 Curtis Commando fixed wing aircraft without a marking on it! No "N" number; no bureau number; no nothing. The door opened, the ramp dropped, and a Chinese pilot and co-pilot said, "welcome!" After we were airborne we were told our destination, Bangkok.

We arrived in the early morning hours and taken to a hotel best described as "early hovel." The security guard was something out of Gunga Din; turban, beard, etc. Before turning in, some of us talked seriously of posting a "cobra watch". Our logic was that anything this sleazy had to have a cobra in one of the rooms! It was also our introduction to the incredible heat and humidity we were to live in for the next year. Early reveille, another C46 ride with a different crew, still Asians. As power was reduced to land, looking out the window we spied a new concrete runway next to a small town. The only thing close to the runway was an old squad tent on each end of the runway, but one end had 20 or so neatly folded HUS 1 helos. Other than the rescue markings the only other were the letters H-A, H-B, H-C, and so on, was on each tail. This was to be our new call sign, "Hotel Aircraft".

As we deplaned at the helo end of strip, a body emerged from the tent. This person appeared not to have slept, bathed, shaved or eaten in about two weeks. He then introduced himself as Chief Pilot and Ops Chief. His first command was right to the point, "get 'em spread. We've got a strike going..." Five crews left right then. The rest of us pedi-cabbed into the town that turned out to be Udorn and checked in to the hotel. The crews that launched didn't return for four or five days.

We returned to the airport the next day and the picture began to unfold. We were 40 or so kilometers from Laos, of which The Mekong River was the border between the countries. Udorn was, in effect, a Heavy Maintenance Station.. The other tent on the runway belonged to USAF Photo Recon outfit. We didn't go down on their end, but understood that they were busy making maps and charts for the area. We would see jets land and depart almost daily. If you had a desire to walk down the runway after dark, it was not a good idea. The snakes came out to keep warm on the concrete.

Our aircraft crews consisted of one pilot and one flight mechanic, my new title. When you left Udorn you went to Vientiane (American pronunciation, "VIN CHIN"), Laos for dispersion on your mission. The fixed wing section of Air America "Civil Air Transport" also was based there flying Curtis Commandos and "Gooney Birds." The pilots and crew had a big house there aptly named the "Cat House." Our helo crews RON'd there frequently; though interplay between the fixed wing guys and helo types was cool, but civil, in my opinion.. In our briefings, before arriving, we were told that we would see a lot of Americans there and that most were agricultural advisors to the Laotians. About three months or so later, these same advisors one day had on utilities and a funny looking "Green Beret." We however remained in civvies. There were other civilians who seemed to be in charge and worked for other "Agencies," I'm sure. No one asked a lot of questions. Also in these briefings we were told we'd be contacted by someone so most of us Marines referred to them as the "contact man." When we left Vientiane and headed north to the mountains things got rural and hairy quickly. Flying wise, much like I Corps almost all of our fuel and oil at these remote sites was dropped by parachutes in 55gal drums. The locals would roll them to the zones and each a/c had a rotary hand pump and chamois, and we refueled by hand. The crews were on first name basis and grew close. When we shut down to refuel, the pilot had the choice of greasing the rotor head or pumping gas., This got taken out of context once when in a disagreement one shot the other in the upper thigh; resulting in the shooter being returned to CONUS and discharged. The "shotee" was flown down to Bangkok to the hospital and a well deserved R&R.

You never knew where you would end up at nightfall so most crews rented a hotel room in local hotels scattered across Laos, for about \$1.00 per night. Who ever rented would rent for a week and leave the unused portion for the

next crew in. The next crew would do the same, so it seemed like we always had a paid-up room somewhere. These weren't always the lap of luxury. Many of us spent some cold wet nights with Special Forces in the boondocks. As I said, the crews grew close and we mechs got a lot of "stick time" flying left seat between landings. . Also, shortly after our arrival we were joined by other "new civilian pilots and crew" from other Marine units. This made it truly inter-service with the arrival of Army, Navy and Air Force newly minted crews!

I will take a moment here to express my opinion about inter-service proficiency. .Upon arrival of the inter-service gang, it became apparent to anyone who had been in a line shack more than three times, that there was a wide gap in the proficiency of other services as far as helo maintenance. And flying went. It therefore became prudent whenever possible to fly with our type of pilots, and our pilots seemed to want a flight mech who could more than gas and oil. Some of the Army pilot types were good but most weren't instrument rated and were short on skills such as max-gross take offs, "RALS" and mountain flying in general. We had one Air Force type who was a good driver, but unfortunately lost an engine and was captured and spent about three years as a prisoner of the Pathet Lao along with his navy flight-mech.

Let me back up here and try to explain the Geographical, governmental, and military situation upon our arrival. Laos is much like Vietnam , a delta region with mountainous areas, bordered on the south by Thailand, to the East by Vietnam and to the north by Burma and China. There are two capitals in Laos, the Administrative one located in Vientiane, seat of all political power and up north, the "Royal" capitol of Luang Prabang where the royal palace is located. A cultural figurehead type of government existed in the late 50's. Two brothers, both princes, were split over which way the country would be ruled, communist or democratic. The third party was a US trained Parachute Battalion commander, Capt. K. L. who was a fence setter waffling between the two princes and offering his Battalion, who were real fighters, unlike the regular Lao Forces to whichever Prince he thought would win all the marbles. Lastly, up in the northern mountains was the leader of the Meo Tribes; the hill people who were almost the same as the Montgnards in RVN. These people are nomadic, tough, loyal, and will fight! Their leader was a General Van P. The bad guys, the communists, were called the Pathet Lao, an offshoot of the forces that overran Dien Ben Phu in 1954, called the Viet Minh. These folks were trying to turn the whole country communist and our government was aiding pro-democratic factions, hence our involvement. The Meo forces were located in a high valley called Padong. General Van P's headquarters and troops were here. Much of our work was in this area since the Meo were the only ones inclined to fight for their country. They have extreme distrust of "Delta People" who centuries ago took their land and forced them to the mountains. Padong was flying at it's worst; clouds would move in instantly and crew have been socked in as long as 10 days, unable to move and relief crews unable to penetrate. . These Meo people hunted bears and tigers with small cross bows, and several crews have shared smoked bear meat with them and the Special Forces team that was there also. The joke was if you screwed up, Ops would send you to work resupply at Padong.. General V P ruled with an iron hand but was fair over the Meo people. There was a tent under guard 24/7. It was full of currency. Each month the money arrived via helo to pay the troops. The General stored it in the tent and acted as paymaster to his various unit commanders. There was one theft attempt, followed by an instant execution by the General.

The Meo people prized silver and wore colorful dress with huge silver necklaces and attached to them heavy silver ornate breastplates. They are very honest and childlike. One of our sister-service's crew made a bad decision to try to fly in the soup and crashed in Padong., The pilot was decapitated, the flight mech. Survived uninjured though in deep shock. When our rescue crew arrived, the Meo had gotten there and cut all the wiring bundles from the plane, stripping the sheathing from it and draping it around their bodies. They thought they had hit the mother lode with all the wiring that was silver-colored! The pilot's body was untouched; his watch, rings and money were all intact.

We weren't in country too long before most of us realized that we were in the company of some "Heavy Duty Legends." We operated our resupply to outposts out from Padong, and it wasn't uncommon to hit a small zone and out of the jungle would come a short Squat American wearing Meo garb, speaking the language fluently, leading the troops. This Was a guy named "Tough Tony," who had been there since 1954. He later married a Meo Princess and is retired last that I heard. His feats were legendary in the jungle.

Once, entering the line shack at Vientiane I noticed a lanky American holding a pole up and thought he was homeless, wearing Khakis, a tee shirt, and shower shoes, with his trousers rolled halfway up his shins. We spoke and I later found out this was Art "Showershoe" W, one of the original WWII Flying Tigers. He had also flown resupply at Dien Ben Phu during the French loss. Prior to our arrival, Air America purchased a HRS3 and decided Art would

fly it. He got a total of 12 hours instruction and was signed off. On his first flight he had engine failure and auto'd into the trees. As he put it, "I like things that land on runways." In 1960 he quit making logbook entries, and had in excess of 17,000 hours. At the "CAT house" in the evening, after dinner Art's lady friend's sole duty was to monitor the level of his after din-din drink. If it fell to a certain level, and she didn't notice, he pushed to glass to the floor. Needless to say his glass was always full! Art passed in the 1980's in Hong Kong.

Shortly after our arrival, Air America began bringing in "Real Civilian" crews. One of these was a former- Marine aviator named Bob H. He was a real pro. I later talked to him at Ky Ha when he stopped in to refuel a Silver Air America Huey. He had a spare engine in the back seat and gin poles on the skids. He had been "WAY" up north to rescue a downed pilot. This was 1966, The next sighting of Bob was the photo of the silver Huey sitting on the American Embassy during the fall of Saigon. This was the last flight out of Saigon. He retired and then couldn't stand it and returned to flying, He was killed flying drug interdiction missions in Peru in the 80's.

Another addition was a former Army Aviator named Dan . After a flight mech, down in the cabin noticed the a/c appeared to be in a slight climb, he looked at the altimeter that read almost 9000 ft. He came up into the left seat to find Dan asleep! His new nick name was Dangerous Dan. He pulled this caper one or two more times and was finally released.

One of the strips we supplied was at Yang Vieng, This was the first hospital started by the Famous "Jungle Doctor," Tom Dooley. It was also a Special Forces camp. Among other occurrences there, it was also the home of "The Phantom of Laos" A Special Forces Major who walked the Jungles at night armed with a 12ga. Shot gun and shoulder bag with ammo. He would leave for days at a time, returning with ears as trophies! It wasn't healthy for the Pathet Lao to have nighttime cookouts! He was captured, escaped, recaptured and executed. The camp was later overrun, and crews were hauling refugee's out to safety, when one of the Marine Pilots on a rolling takeoff carried 34 Laotians to safety, women and kids. I don't know if it's record or not but that's a lot of gross weight, Folks. During this period, just as one of the last a/c was departing, Special Forces blew the fuel dump a mite early and dammed near blew the a/c and crew out of the sky!

During this period also they were bringing in Filipino and Chinese mechanics for maintenance at Udorn but more help was needed so one day a Marine Sub Unit showed up with what resembled a H&MS squadron. These guys were in uniform, started doing sheet metal work, electrical checks, etc and were welcome. It was funny. Most of us knew these guys and vice versa, but they pretended we were civilians and we all played the role. It was also during this time that a little security and secrecy boo-boo showed up. One of the guys crawled under the tail cone for repairs and there was a stars and bars still painted on the aircraft! We checked and found two of them. We had flown these planes all over Laos, and Thailand and never knew.

Meanwhile, I had moved up north to the Royal Capital, Luang Prabang, with one pilot and started an outstation. Crews and planes came up and worked till they were down or due for a check and then would rotate back to Udorn. We had a house across the street from the Royal Palace main gate and life got better. We had a maid, a cook and a handy man. Remember earlier when I said all of us were single? Our maid was a lovely young honey, and immediately every young pilot that came to L-P lusted after her, but to no avail! One in particular, a short Marine with an ego as big as the crystal on his watch, who had become a real civilian and was determined to rise up the corporate ladder quickly at others expense was relentless in his pursuit. Just about when he thought he'd tag her, a crew rotated in with an ex-navy pilot whose last name rhymed with maid and first name was Charlie. You can guess the rest! Charlie scored! After that, as payback whenever this ego driven guy was within earshot someone would say "Who laid the maid?" someone would answer, "Why Charlie ___ laid the maid!" Revenge was sweet!

While going in and out of zones, lots of times, the fixed wings would be dropping supplies via chutes. We lost one aircraft in this manner. It was on the ground turning when 220 kilos of rice hit the turtle back. No injuries; just one lost aircraft., Another incident happened at a strip 15ks out from L-P but it just got the rotor head and blades. This strip was dozed across the top of a mountain and was hairy going in and out. You had an embankment on one side and wide open space about 2000feet down on the other , where the local Meo had scattered mines with no map or drawing where they were planted. There was a Special Forces team there who had told us if you go down on the mountain don't try to leave the a/c if you are alive. "We will try to get down to you. If we can't, the choice is up to you, but you'll never walk back to the strip alive." The Pathet Lao were on another hill, a couple of thousand meters away; neither side shot at each other and we flew in and out regularly with no problem; a Mexican standoff if you

will. We went in to fix the bird that had been hit with the resupply, and the big problem was that there was no way to pickup the new rotor head to slip it on or take the old one off. At one time there was a road up to this strip and before it was mined they had driven a tank up there. Bingo! We got the tank started and then cut down a long tree the right size on the reverse slope and stuck it in the cannon muzzle. Next, we pushed the helo close to the embankment drove the tank onto the embankment; depressed the muzzle and hooked up the rotor head and lifted! All hell immediately broke loose; arty, mortars, you name it; it all came. We adjourned to the reverse slope to talk this over. The Special Forces sergeant figured that since each side looked at each other with binoculars, the Pathet Lao probably thought we had brought up a special weapon of some sort with the tree in the muzzle. He was right. We let things get settled down, and ventured out again., No problem; we got her up and running. I can't say enough about the ingenuity that was used to keep these birds flying during our tour. I saw a 34 tracked with a tracking flag made of a web belt nailed to a wooden frame made in the shape of a reverse "C. " The tracker was standing on two 55gal drums and two guys were behind him on two more drums holding on to his waist to keep him steady and from getting into the blades. The job got done; the stories are endless. What I have attempted to write could never explain the dedication these crews had.

Things were changing. A lot of real civilians were on board and a lot of our group were being phased out and returning to CONUS. It finally dawned on me what we had really accomplished. We had started Air America's helicopter program from the ground up plus helped a country try to avoid the communist way of life. Finally, I was with the last group to depart for CONUS. We launched out on "The Mandarin Jet" a 707, there were about 7 or 8 of us. Upon arrival in Washington DC we were met by the "Contact Man. " On the way to our quarters for a debriefing, he explained that the previous group had included one of our fun loving corporals who went on liberty and forgot to report for de-brief and it took 3 days for the Agency's best to find this fun loving guy in the gin mills of DC. He requested or suggested that under harsh penalties, none of us try to duplicate that feat! I now know why the agency hasn't located Bin Laden..., just a joke folks. During de-brief one of the most upsetting things of this whole experience occurred, at least for me. We found out that some of the first group to return had requested an early rotation and the reason cited was shoddy maintenance, on the aircraft! I took exception with that reason then and so noted in my de-brief and to this very day I still TAKE EXCEPTION TO IT! I'll get off my soap box by noting that each and every Marine that was on the detail came home alive; a couple wounded, none seriously, and none wounded by shoddy maintenance!

Prior to being released, we were asked if we would like to remain with Air America. If so, we'd be processed out of the Corps and continue our jobs. I mulled this over and decided to return to the Corps. I had over ten years in then, and didn't know how much demand there would be for flight mechanics in later years. The highlight of the debriefing for me was the last stop at the office of General Keith B. McCutcheon, Deputy Chief of Aviation for the Corps. The General was the father of the doctrine that became "The Vertical Envelopment Concept" of our Corps, a man of small stature, but enormous presence. He thanked us for our efforts, and dedication, and told us we would receive our choice of duty stations if possible. I believe that General McCutcheon, had his life not been shortened by cancer would have been the first Aviation Commandant of the Marine Corps.

THE LAST CHAPTER

What I have attempted to write happened 43 years ago. One year later, our original Skipper, Col Clapp carried Archie's Angels into Soc Trang and most of us know what followed. Our original group dispersed, some into civilian life; some, like me, retired. Some followed helo flying into the international scene, and several lost their lives in that endeavor. One is doing life in prison for murder. Many have passed on due to natural causes and some can't be located. This story was classified for many years. Only 15 years ago, I learned the code name, "Project Mad River." Shortly after our return, one of us changed his mind about the job offer, and tried to contact Air America through regular channels. At his new duty station, he received a "visit" from the "Contact Man" who strongly hinted that anymore efforts to make contact could result in a drastic change of life style! Should I disappear off the radar screen, we can assume that this operation has not been completely de-classified!

Footnote... Later most of us at our new duty stations received an additional bonus from General McCutcheon, a single air Medal given for Exceptional Airmanship, Quote, Un Quote and a meritorious promotion to the next pay grade. During our tour, our pay scale was kicked up several notches to equal our civilian counterparts so most of us had a few bucks in the bank.

Uglies, my fingers are cramped, mind numb, and in the words of my old friend, “The Swami of the Saloon,” Archie Fleming, “The bar is closed”

Taps

Lt. Col. Pat Bray

Pat was in the HMR(L)-362 (Dunne’s Derelicts) 1958-1960 at Santa Ana and Japan. Pat later was the operations officer in **HMM-362, Ugly Angels** in RVN, late 1966-early 1967. He later was the CO of HMM-363 at Santa Ana. Pat, 72, served in Korea with 2nd Bn 5th Marines (two purple hearts). He died of a sudden stroke.

Rick Cassidy (66-67)

Archie Fleming attended the Service of Remembrance for Rick Cassidy. He reported that it was a nice service and I guess we can be pretty sure that he spoke to pretty much everyone there being the shy type that he is. He said Rick had done another 5 years in the Army as a WO pilot and after that worked at numerous flying jobs including the pipeline in Alaska and oil based jobs in Louisiana and Saudi Arabia. His last job was fighting forest fires in California. He apparently was sick for a relatively short period before passing away. Archie brought a card with an Angel patch and signed it from His Ugly Angel brothers.

Lynda Johns

On December 11th, Bobby Johns lost his loving wife, Lynda, after a long struggle with cancer. Lynda always supported Bobby’s work in all squadron endeavors. In October, she seemed more worried about them missing the Okie II Reunion than with her illness. Sayonara, Lynda. You were a winner.

Books Read

1369 by Harvey Lee Bell

If you have ever received the Pop A Smoke Newsletter, you are probably familiar with their motto, “A live man’s smile is the best medal.” That came right out of this book and I finally got the chance to read the whole thing. I have to tell you that this is an enormously peculiar book and I really look forward to meeting Harvey one day and finding out just where he is coming from.

First the book is nothing like any war book that I have ever read. As an English major, I took a seminar on the experimental novel in my last year and that is where this novel actually belongs. It is not the “we went flying and someone shot at us” school of writing. I think what Harvey has done is capture the feeling that many of us share that our time in Vietnam and the Corps was the most profound event of our lives but someone who wasn’t there was really pulling the strings and didn’t care one whit if any of us ever came back. I don’t suppose that it helped that I was reading the Pentagon Papers at the same time that I was reading 1369.

Anyway to get back to 1369, I need to tell you a few things about it and why it is peculiar. First of all it is written in a comic style and biblical style but the author is not making light of the Bible. He is just writing one to preach to us, the members of a somewhat different church. The Book is in 12 chapters, each according to one of the 12 pilots who make up Snow White’s flight, all of who were handpicked for this elite group. Each story is so similar to the one before it that it is almost repetitious—but not quite.

How you will react to the book depends entirely on your take on our little war. If you think it was a fine and valiant effort, you probably won’t care much for the book. However, if you think that there is a political force (or a military-industrial complex) that is not exactly aligned with the actual fighters of wars- and if you really liked the M-1 or M-14 a whole lot better than the mattel-a-matic, then you might really like this book a lot. Harvey pays great tribute to the real pilots and to the real UH-34.

The one area where I think he really came up short was in his treatment of the enlisted guys, mainly the crew chiefs. They weren’t badly treated. It was more like they simply didn’t exist. I feel sort of sorry for him about that. Anyone who read Catch 22 knows the enlisted guys led far more interesting lives. It’s still a good book and you can’t beat the price.

I also feel I need to tell you that 1369 is the only book that I know of that one of, or all of my dogs ate. It looked like confetti—and these girls know their books. Keep it up high!!

Send \$16.95 for the hard cover or \$13.95 for the soft to Frenchy at UltraMarine. Call 850-957-9069 or comprisevt3@aol.com He also has all kinds of squadron stuff. If you don't have one of his belt buckles, pilot or aircrew, you are practically dressed naked—and that won't do.

Across the Fence: The Secret War in Vietnam by John Stryker Meyer

I met Tilt Meyer at a web conference Jim Moriarty hosted a few years ago down in Texas. As it happened, we rode out to the ranch together and then wound up being the last two to leave. As guys will, stories got told. My stories of course were the best because I was a tin bender and there were lots of station 101 stories, exciting Plexiglas stories and of course the one where some blockhead outside the bird ran a #30 drill through my finger. When folks started to yawn from the sheer excitement of my stories, John was sometimes willing to share some of his. For those of you who were at Phu Bai, John was one of the SOG guys down the street. He started his first tour in May of 68.

I enjoyed this book because I knew John and had heard some of his stories or at least parts of them. In this book, he tells them in pretty much the same, understated way he told them to us in Texas. They are mostly pretty amazing stories but he is so calm in the way he traces out the events. In most cases, the stories are about him or one of his buddies out for a stroll with two other Americans and their Vietnamese counterparts. In many of the stories they are the same folks so you start to get a feeling for all of them. In fact, when you read the book, you might enjoy knowing that the little guy on the cover, with the shades, runs a pet store in Houston and all three of his kids have graduated from college in the states.

John happens to be an editor of a newspaper out in Oceanside, The North Country Times, so he really writes well, but like I said, in a very understated way. He certainly dispels any glamour that you might have associated with these guys. I found the book to be a gripper. I read it right after *1369* which might have been a little too much war for me all at once. I have gone back to Hemming's Auto News lately.

I did tell Tilt that the one flaw that I did find with the book was it was never clear what their mission was. He told me that the information was originally included but edited out. It's a pretty small flaw, all in all.

You can order it at <http://www.realwarstories.com>

The USS Princeton Assn is selling films of helicopters flying off their boat. If you want one or want to join up, contact them at PO Box 1564, Cypress TX 77410, Tel 281-256-1221

You Need Three T's to Spell Marine Corps
By Rusty Sachs

When First Lieutenant Nick Turner's name was called, summoning him to the stage to receive the gold wings of a Naval Aviator, most of the guests seated in Whiting Field's base theater thought the ceremony was almost over. But although Turner was the next-to-last name on the schedule, the fun was just beginning. Captain David Jones, USN, Commanding Officer of Training Wing Five at NASWF, later said he'd never seen anything like it. "Marines never cease to amaze me!" The Commodore opined that it was some sort of record for the number of folks on stage with an officer receiving his wings: in addition to his wife and daughter, Nick was surrounded by his two parents, sister, brother-in-law, three brothers, two guests of honor, Bobby Johns, Jack Lodge, Butch Gorman, and a partridge in a pear tree.

As Turner and his parents began their walk to the stage, one of the guests shouted "Ugly Angels! Front and center!" and nearly a dozen Vietnam veterans of Marine Helicopter Squadron 362 jumped from their seats and joined the Turner family. Why? Because Nick's father, former Captain Larry Turner, had made each of them a part of his son's life, and wanted to share with them the pride he felt as Nick followed the proud tradition of Marine Aviation. This rite, however, was but one event in an exciting week of military education that featured two seminars on Combat Leadership by former Marine officers with extensive battlefield experience, static display of a meticulously restored Sikorsky H-34 with service in Vietnam, and flights of that same aircraft in the Pensacola training area. 1/Lt Turner had arranged the week's events "to honor my Dad and the men he fought with. It's because of them

that I've wanted to fly Marine Corps helicopters since I was in grammar school."

Tradition

In April, 1962 LtCol Archie Clapp had led HMM-362 to Vietnam as the first Marine helicopter unit to participate in that conflict. Archie's Angels participated in Operation Shufly, developed the first rudimentary techniques of helicopter airborne assault and vertical envelopment, and rotated back to California later that year. In the summer of 1965 the squadron -- now known as the Ugly Angels -- returned its colors to Vietnam at Ky Ha, two kilometers north of Chu Lai in central I Corps. Larry Turner was a squadron pilot, maintenance test pilot, and skilled aviator when the unit went ashore. He remained with 362 for thirteen months before returning to CONUS. During his tour in the combat theatre, Turner flew more than 400 missions and was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds suffered.

He was discharged in 1967 and returned to the family farm in southwest Iowa; he also established a successful helicopter operation, focusing on external lift and pesticide missions. Turner maintained contact with his friends from the squadron, and invited them regularly to visit the farm, often in early November for a simultaneous observation of the Marine Corps Birthday and opening of pheasant season.

Training

Nick grew up with the stories his father and other Marines shared at the kitchen table. There was never a question of his chosen profession; Nick learned helicopter lore from his father; he and his brothers served as ground crew and copilots as Larry installed air-conditioning systems throughout the Midwest. By the time he entered OCS at Quantico the summer of 2001, Nick had nearly a thousand hours of experience at the stick of a helicopter.

Among his mentors, four of his father's comrades-at-arms stand out: Roger Cook, a cowboy who had flown for Air America after discharge from the Marine Corps, then spent a career with the airlines; Jack Lodge, the soft-spoken former company-grade officer known to fire his sidearm at the enemy while loading or unloading troops; Ben Cascio; and Rusty "Gunny" Sachs. Cook, a legendary storyteller, devoted hours to discussing aviation with Nick. Childless himself, he always viewed Turner as a son he'd never had. Cook died in 2003, the victim of cancer, a few months before Nick received his wings. At Cook's request, a set of his wings was presented to Nick Turner in December.

Countless aviators believe *years* of flight experience equally valuable as *hours* of experience, simply because each year includes twelve months of hanging around with other pilots, learning from their stories, analyzing every hairy incident. Nick's experience had begun before his voice had changed.

Gunny Sachs had flown with Larry Turner in RVN. After Larry had rotated, Ben Cascio joined the Ugly Angels, and flew with Gunny Sachs. Around 1997 Cascio and Sachs began a series of Professional Military Education seminars at Marine Corps installations around the country. Their seminars, titled "It Takes Three T's to Spell Marine Corps," focusing on combat leadership for young officers and NCOs, recount -- among other events -- the Battle of Dai Do in 1968. Captain Cascio was awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart during that battle, when he suffered a bullet wound to the face and managed to evacuate eight incapacitated Marines while totally blind. As part of a project at The Basic School in 2001 Nick Turner arranged that these two former officers present their dog-and-pony show to his TBS company.

Gerald the Historian

While Nick was learning the ins and outs of helicopters, a civilian pilot named Gerald Hail had purchased a surplus Sikorsky from the government. His curiosity piqued by the bizarre color scheme on the airframe, he pored over the maintenance records and got more material from the Pentagon. It turns out that the aircraft he kept hangared in Inola, Oklahoma, had served in HMM-362 from 1966 to 1968. Searching the Web for information, he located former Ugly Angel crewmen Gary Doss, Ed Tatman, and Larry Pringle. Inspired by their wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm, and awed by the devotion they had for their fellow Marines, Hail assembled a traveling museum of USMC-Vietnam lore and began traveling the country. Motivated by his patriotism and admiration for Marines, and funding the project himself, Hail wrote a book (YL-37 Flies Again!) and has made historical presentations as far east as Washington, and west as Las Vegas. Gerald, an Honorary Ugly for all he has done for the squadron, agreed to truck his helo top Pensacola for the festivities, and fly demo hops with deserving Marines.

The one glitch Gerald Hail had to deal with came as his caravan of vehicles crossed the state line into Florida after the 700 mile trek from Tulsa. Some DOT cop decided to stop the flatbed bearing YL-37, and must have been

suffering a bad hair day. He declared that the cargo was two inches higher than permissible, and ordered the caravan to cease movement immediately at a Shell station about ten miles from Whiting Field. Mercifully, Frenchy LaFountain and his Pensacola Mafia leaped into action. Within an hour, two deputies (one a former jarhead himself) arrived in cruisers to escort the convoy to the air station. Gary Doss and Elmo Pringle, who worked so hard through the week that they ended up missing the ceremonies completely, smoothed ruffled feathers and enabled hundreds of folks to see and appreciate this piece of living history. They deserve one hell of an ATTABOY.

Gary, Elmo, and the Turner kids treated that bird like a family friend. Phil Turner, one of the Aldworth crew that went over ob the Princeton in '65, trained his kids right. Anyone who's seen Marines work together under stress would appreciate watching young Nick Turner work with his three older brothers -- Tim, Jim, and Philip Luke -- as they assembled Gerald's '34 for flight ops. These kids, who were weaned on torque wrenches and valve pullers, blew us away as they mounted the bird on its landing gear, then installed the main and tail rotor blades in less time than it takes to read a yellow sheet.

Teamwork

One of the themes Cascio and Sachs highlight to young Marines is "the three T's of combat leadership; Tradition, Training, and Teamwork." As he organized the special events to enhance the week his class would complete its training, 1/Lt Turner took the lessons to heart. He emphasized tradition by displaying a helicopter with more combat hours than most active Marines, the grandfather of today's workhorse H-46 and H-53. He simultaneously celebrated the training he and his friends had lived for the last eighteen months by expanding it to include the missions and know-how of an earlier generation of Marines.

He also created a team of young Marine officers to host in a rich and dignified manner the families of those receiving their wings. Major Mike Brown, senior Marine in Training Squadron Eight, said "I try to expand the molding of these students beyond merely teaching them to fly. It's crucial that they develop the ability to lead Marines; after all, they are officers first, and aviators second."

Great Reasons for not going to the '04 Reunion

1. We went to an all-services get together when I got home and it was a bunch of drunks and crazies. We're not. Give it a try.
2. I went to a squadron reunion and it was all crying and hugging. Naw, that's not us; well, maybe a skosh bit but mostly we're really glad to see each other again.
3. I'm a recovering alcoholic and don't know if I'm up to the impact of a reunion. You ain't the Lone Ranger. Friends of Bill meet every morning and you'll get plenty of support.
4. I don't drink or socialize easily. There's a place for everyone who ever was in 362. Some people are loud and others are very quiet.
5. I'm enormously successful and wouldn't want others to feel inferior. Don't worry about it. Marines don't know the meaning of the word.
6. I've been an enormous failure and am too embarrassed to see the old gang. No one keeps score; trust me.
7. I've put on quite a few pounds. Speaking of that Lone Ranger.....
8. I've been out of work and can't afford it. Let me know. Sometimes we can find someone willing to share a ride, a room or whatever.
9. I was never really the Marine type. There are counselors available to get you through this.
10. Someone might let on to my wife what a crude idiot I used to be. That is a lot less likely than you'd imagine.

See you there—and bring a buddy!!
I'll talk to you in a few weeks. Got any news; let me have it.

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If you got this in the mail, but have e-mail and a computer, let us know.