

The Ugly Angel

Memorial Foundation

History Newsletter

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April 15, 1962:

HMR(L)-362 Deploys to Soc Trang, RVN

There's a little game I play with myself sometimes. It goes like this; when you were in Vietnam, did it ever occur to you that "such and such" would ever happen in 2002. Well, it never, ever occurred to me, until a year or so ago, that I would ever be writing anything regarding the 40th anniversary of anything, never mind the anniversary of our own squadron being the first USMC tactical unit to deploy to Vietnam.

But here it is, brothers. Forty years ago Archie and his Angels lifted off the deck of the USS Princeton and for all practical purposes began the USMC/Vietnam Helicopter experience. The Marine Corps was deeply involved in that conflict for another 11 years, as each of us well know. For most of us, the defining event of our lives occurred during those years. For some, it presented an opportunity to improve our lives and do things we had never imagined. For others, it ruined the life that we had dreamed of, and for some, it simply ended our lives.

We all handle our involvement in different ways and that no doubt is how we will react to this important anniversary. The History Project presents this special issue to offer some focus to our thoughts. Within these pages are 3 articles written by 3 of the original "Archie's Angels." One is by Archie himself written shortly after his return for the U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings. Tyler Bush who worked in the S-2 shop wrote another 15 years ago on the 25th anniversary. This article originally appeared in the August, 1987 Leatherneck and we are grateful for it. To prove that Intel really had it together we have another article written by Larry Shirley who worked with Tyler. Larry redid an article that was originally published in "The INTSUM", the Newsletter of the Marine Corps Intelligence Association's Quarterly Newsletter (Vol VI Issue 2 - Summer 1998). Although I have yet to see the actual Pop A Smoke Newsletter, I have reason to hope that the Marine of the Quarter interview will be one that Archie and I worked on a few months back. A tribute to all of the squadrons who participated in Operation Shu-Fly should also be included in the same issue. Lastly, it is my intention to add as many pictures of the initial invasion as I can to the "Visions of Vietnam" section of the USMC / Vietnam Helicopter Association pages as I can as fast as I can as soon as I get this issue in the mail.

The articles will follow. I can only hope that you will enjoy them and give some time to contemplate how the events of 40 years ago impacted all of our lives. Many thanks to our 3 authors and brothers.

Major Media Merger. A short while ago you received notice from Tom Hewes that he no longer will be the apparent editor-publisher. My intention is that the regular newsletter and the history newsletter will “merge seamlessly” and that you will continue to receive an interesting, informative and useful publication. How interesting, informative and useful depends on you, the readers, as I have been forbidden to make things up.

Reprinted from Leatherneck, August, 1987

**Vietnam- 25 Years Ago
By Tyler Bush**

The deployment of a Marine helicopter squadron and supporting units to Soc Trang was an historic event. The Marine presence in Vietnam would eventually grow into the Third Marine Amphibious Force.

Tension hung in the air as USS *Princeton* (LPH-5) sailed through the South China Sea. The Marines of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 362 (HMM-362), Marine Aircraft Group 16 could sense something was about to happen. The squadron commanding officer, LtCol Archie J. Clapp, had just called the men together for a briefing.

It was announced that before daybreak the following morning, April 15, 1962 the darkened ship would pull to within 20 miles of Vietnam. We would make a landing via helicopter. We were to establish a base camp at the village of Soc Trang, Ba Xuyen Province. Our unit was to be the first Marine operational organization committed to South Vietnam. Our mission was to provide air mobility for Vietnamese Civil Guard units and ARVN Ranger assault units. We would return fire only if fired upon.

The following morning we awakened to the humming of the ship's elevators lifting helicopters, blades folded back, topside. We left the stifling heat below deck, clutching rifles with sweaty palms. As soon as we stepped out topside we knew we were in a different world. Even at this early hour, the heat was so intense and muggy it felt like trying to breathe through a pillow.

“Archie's Angels,” named after our CO, boarded HUS choppers and shuddered off toward the Mekong Delta, wondering if we were going to get shot in the next hour or two. Soon the choppers were hopscotching over lush green foliage and skipping over water-filled rice paddies. In a few minutes we slid into an old Japanese airstrip three miles from the tiny village of Soc Trang. Operation Shufly had commenced!

The airstrip had an old hangar into which we could pull our aircraft to work on. There were a few rooms that became offices for operations, administration, etc. Tents were erected for the troops in what was to become known as “Tent City.” Fresh water had to be trucked in from Soc Trang. Rubber tanks soon held chopper fuel, also trucked in. In less than 24 hours we were operational, although the first combat troop lift was not requested for a week. We had 24 HUS helicopters, three OE-1 observation planes and eventually 250 men available for duty.

A Vietnamese mortar battalion and infantry battalion provided perimeter security. Inner defense and internal security was provided by our own men. Language was a major problem—both sides had to make decisions more than once whether a man would not obey a “halt” command because he could not understand, or if he was really an enemy. There was also a language barrier between our helo pilots and Vietnamese support pilots—very dangerous when you need “moment's notice” help.

We received mail twice a week when the C-130F transport plane supplied us. Usually we also got enough warm soda pop on those flights to last a day or so. To many of us, that warm pop was almost as rewarding as mail call.

Dust blew so thickly around the base area that at times it was hard to see 20 feet. One minute it would be dry; then thick sheets of rain would come down, and in a few minutes we would be up to our ankles in water and mud. Tents often were blown down, soaking everything and everyone. At night we slept, rifles at the ready, under mosquito nets that barely slowed down the swarm of bugs that left our skin sore and itching with red welts. Rats that seemed as big as cats had a fondness for crawling into the sack with us.

The operations provided us with additional on-the-job training and helped polish our expertise in helicopter support. We learned to never make the same approach to a target area, thus setting up a pattern. Viet Cong set up long, sharpened poles at some sites, trying to herd our helicopters into certain fields of fire when dropping oil assault troops. We also had to make sure troops headed in the right direction after leaving the chopper. It was easy for them to become disoriented.

Dummy troop landings were made to drive enemy troops into ambush. At times it proved beneficial

for the flight leader to stay “high in the sky.” giving directions to his helicopters swooping in at low level on a mission. Also the use of ‘Eagle flights.’ (airborne troop reserves) were made. They stayed in the air until needed somewhere, then landed at a moment’s notice.

Many supply runs were made to the village of Father Hoa (the “fighting priest”), located on the southern tip of the Vung Mao Peninsula. There were no supply roads leading to his village of Binh Hung. Once a much appreciated religious statue was helo-lifted in. R&R flights were made to Saigon for a few hours, where one might have a terrific meal. such as cows’ brains and fine wine, or other exotic food. There was nothing better than their French bread. Back at Soc Trang we did not lack good food, either. We had steak for many, many meals. The only thing missed at base was *cold* drinks!

On the first of August 1962, HMM-362 was relieved by another Marine helicopter squadron which eventually transferred to Da Nang, in the northern part of South Vietnam. Da Nang became “home” for most Marines throughout the remainder of the war.

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Triplets Doing Fine

This historian knows his job. Within months of hearing about Jim and Kitty Aldworth’s amazing feat, I drove down to Hilton Head to see the proud grandparents. They appeared remarkably fit, I’m pleased to report. We also had a real nice visit and I regret that it took me so long to drive down and meet the first actual “Ugly” CO. Jim shared a lot of his personal history as well as that of the 1965 deployment. I will probably get in trouble saying this but the lovely Miz Kitty put out a lunch that would embarrass a lot of restaurants in Charleston or Savannah. I shall return!!

April 15, 2002 will mark the 40th anniversary of the first Marine Corps operational unit to land in Vietnam. HMM-362, known as “Archie’s Angels”, landed at Soc Trang, Republic of Vietnam on that date. I was a young Corporal and had just joined the squadron April 10th on Okinawa. Following are a few things I recall around this time.

Operation Shu-Fly

By Cpl. Larry D. Shirley, (USMC 1959-1963)

Reveille aboard the *USS PRINCETON* sounded early on the morning of April 15, 1962. Well before daybreak the ship’s piper came blaring over the PA system with his morning wake-up call. However, much activity was already in progress inside the old navy flat top as she cut her way through the darkness of the South China Sea. Most of the members of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 362 (HMM-362) were already up and making final preparations to take their leave of the WW II Aircraft Carrier, now designated LPH-5. Our destination was a WW II Japanese airfield at Soc Trang, Ba Xien Province, Republic of Vietnam, which was located about 90 miles south-southwest of Saigon in the Mekong Delta. We were part of “Operation Shu-Fly” which had the mission of supporting the South Vietnamese government against the communist backed Viet Cong. HMM-362 would become the first Marine Corps operational unit to be committed to the Vietnam War.

Marine Aircraft Group 16 was involved in planning for a large South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) training exercise in the Philippines early in 1962. This exercise was called “Operation Tulungan”. It was around this time period we received word that one of the Group’s helicopter squadrons would be sent to Vietnam. Everyone in the section deployed from Futema to the Philippines to participate in Operation Tulungan except myself. I stayed behind to keep the S-2 office open and to gather information for my boss, Lt. East, who had given me a checklist of things to do before the squadron’s deployment to Vietnam. When they returned I requested permission to transfer to HMM-362. L/Cpl. Tyler K. Bush would be the other member of the S-2 section to be transferred to HMM-362.

On April 10, 1962 we, along with others, joined HMM-362. We immediately boarded the *USS Princeton* on that day and set sail for Vietnam. Tyler Bush and I joined Cpl. Joseph W. Eke who was the only enlisted person in the squadron S-2 section. Joe and I previously served together in the Group S-2 Section at MCAF, Santa Ana.

When we arrived aboard ship, Cpl. Eke had already been preparing for deployment to Vietnam. There were at least 50 maps to be prepared, one for each pilot and co-pilot. The only maps available at the time were old French maps that apparently were not too accurate. We did receive better maps after several weeks. Joe had also been maintaining an enemy order of battle map, which during the five-day trip to Vietnam was kept updated with the latest information from the Ship's Intelligence Section. One interesting rumor floating around was that a Russian ship had started following the *Princeton* several days out to sea.

Two Army helicopter companies were stationed in Vietnam during the spring of 1962. One was at Da Nang and the other at Saigon. Before the final decision was made to send a Marine Squadron to Vietnam there were discussions among top Army, Navy and Marine Corps commands as to whether a Marine Squadron or another Army Helicopter Company should be committed. Basically the discussions boiled down to this: the Army's position was that they had a helicopter company stationed in Hawaii, which they argued, was specially trained in jungle operations and that it would make more sense to employ this unit. The Army suggested that a contingent of Marine pilots could be integrated into the Army helicopter units for training and familiarization with operations/terrain, etc. On the other hand, the Marines' position was that the Army flew different types of helicopters- Marines with their Sikorski UH-34D's vs. the Army's H-21's (flying bananas, as some called them). After some debate, the Commander-In-Chief, Pacific Fleet made the final decision to send a Marine Squadron to Vietnam. HMM-362 would be the squadron selected to go to Soc Trang after its participation in "Operation Tulungan".

We were told the plan was that within 30 days our Marine Squadron at Soc Trang and the Army Helicopter Company up north at Da Nang would switch places. This, I assume, was because if North Vietnam carried out a large-scale invasion of South Vietnam, contingency plans called for Marine forces to land in the northern part of the country. Therefore, I assume, it made sense to have the Marine Squadron already up north to be in a position to support the Marine landing force. However, this transfer never occurred during the time HMM-362 was at Soc Trang. The word was the Army Helicopter Company did not have the capability to billet their men in tents, as we were doing. Therefore a construction project was started on base to build barracks for the Army personnel. The Marine Squadron that replaced HMM-362 did move to Da Nang later in 1962.

Back on board the *Princeton* the squadron had mustered on the hangar deck during the early morning hours of April 15, 1962 to receive final briefing before departing the *Princeton*. It was very warm and muggy and all the hatches were closed on the ship since it was running at "darken ship". A lot of things flashed through my mind as we neared the time to depart. When the final briefing was over, we were ready to proceed to our assigned helicopters sitting on the flight deck loaded and ready. One order given that remained in effect during the Squadron's tour in Vietnam was, "do not fire your weapons unless fired on first".

We went topside to the flight deck and into our assigned helicopters that would carry us ashore to Soc Trang. The S-2 group's helicopter was positioned at the very front of the flight deck and was the first helicopter to lift off the deck. The Squadron consisted of 59 officers and 196 enlisted men with a compliment of 24 helicopters and a couple of fixed-winged single engine OE (observation) aircraft. There was also a twin-engine aircraft that was stationed at the base.

As soon as the Squadron landed at Soc Trang, the old base became a beehive of activity. A sub-unit of MABS-16 had already started setting up the base for operations. The only buildings on the base were an old hangar and a few other small buildings. Tents were set up to sleep in, shop equipment organized, and office space allocated and arranged. The S-2 group set up operations in a small office on one side of the old hangar that we shared with the Operations Group.

Soc Trang was located in the Mekong Delta. Rice paddies were everywhere, trees lined the riverbanks, and villages were scattered throughout the region. There was water everywhere. However, when we arrived and for several weeks thereafter it was hot, dry and dusty. Then came the monsoon. Just about every afternoon you could count on a downpour. Many times we would step outside of our tents in the rain to take a shower rather than walking across the base to where the outside showers were located. The torrential rains were most often accompanied by very strong winds. Twice the tent I slept in was blown down by strong winds, once even

breaking the heavy timber center posts. Another time the top of a building blew off and the debris hit a Marine, knocking him out cold for a while.

At the time President Ngo Dinh Diem was in power in South Vietnam. President Diem was not married and his brother's wife, Madame Ngo Dinh Nu, acted as the first lady of the country. She also had considerable authority and was reported to have made several unpopular decrees. President Diem was killed a few years later during a bloody coup d'état.

Capt. R. J. Conlon was the Intelligence Officer-In-Charge and his Assistant Intelligence Officers were Capt. W. D. Gould and 1stLt. T. R. Hammack, all three were pilots, and a short time after the squadron landed, 1stLt. J. L. Mullen, a ground officer, was assigned to the S-2 section. Capt. Conlon enabled the enlisted personnel in the S-2 section to fly on several combat missions with the squadron, as someone once put it, as the first "non-crew" helicopter gunners. I would position myself looking out the window on the opposite side of the crew chief, with my M-1 rifle at the ready. As the ARVN troops disembarked from the helicopter and we gained altitude I usually tried to take a few photographs of the landing zones with a K-20 camera we had in the office, or my personal camera. My boss on Okinawa, MSgt. Kniles, asked me to take plenty of pictures. On one of the operations I went on, our helicopter landed near a tree line and as the ARVN troops were disembarking, I noticed something moving through the brush. I raised my M-1 and followed the movement through the thick brush and trees until finally it passed a small opening and I noticed that it was a water buffalo galloping through the brush.

Another interesting thing was to visit Father Hoa's fortified village, which was located in the extreme southern part of the country. I hitched a ride on one of three helicopters taking an Air Force General there for a visit and to also fly in munitions. As we landed at Father Hoa's village, troops were in formation near the landing zone, accompanied by a small band. The band included a collection of miscellaneous instruments. Father Hoa (pronounced "Wah") greeted the General and pilots, and then the troops and band marched by in review with flags flying. The crew chiefs and myself stood at attention and saluted as their colors went past.

Father Hoa was a former colonel in the Chinese Army who fled his country when the communists took over China. They roamed around for a while then finally settled in Cambodia. Later, they moved to Vietnam after that government gave them land to settle on. I have read that his people cried when they saw how poor the land was that the government had given them.

Father Hoa's Army was known as "The Sea Swallow Troops". The story goes that one year their rice crop was overrun by an infestation of bugs (locusts, I believe). Although everyone was fighting the hordes of insects, they were losing the battle and it appeared their crop would be lost. Then, from nowhere, came a huge flight of sea swallows that swooped down and attacked the swarm of insects, thus saving their crops. They wore shoulder patches with a Sea Swallow on it.

The crew chiefs, a few of Father Hoa's troops and I unloaded the cases of grenades, mortar shells, etc. After we finished, one of his men brought us orange drinks that were in old glass bottles. We were told they produced the drinks themselves. The four of us walked into the village and started walking around sightseeing. At one point we walked past a long hut with a couple dozen bunks inside. There were several Chinese soldiers dressed in new camouflaged trousers, white T-shirts, with short crew cut type haircuts that looked a cut above the troops that initially greeted us. They were very sharp looking troops and I wondered if they might have been from Taiwan.

As we meandered around the village we finally became aware that someone was following us. We walked back to the guy and asked what he wanted. Although we could not understand what he said, through hand gestures we finally realized he wanted the glass bottles back when we finished our drinks. Later we came upon an open hut with a wire cage inside. Sitting in the cage was a young Vietnamese woman. She looked very frightened and sort of defiant at the same time. We were told she was a Viet Cong they had captured.

The order-of-battle maps the S-2 section maintained were updated with the latest intelligence reports concerning Viet Cong positions. They indicated several VC battalions were operating in the Soc Trang area. After landing and setting up operations, we started receiving Intelligence Reports from MAAG G-2 (Military Advisory & Assistance Group), located in Saigon. These reports indicated that after we arrived, every VC Battalion they were tracking had started moving 180 degrees away from the base in a big hurry. I was amazed at the VC activity in the country. It became apparent that our enemy had very good intelligence information. Time after time the VC would attack a hamlet, usually at night. A relief column from another village would march out to help, and would be ambushed on the way. This happened time after time. Sometimes it appeared to me that the relief column might be the main target. Other activity reported by the Intelligence Reports included blockades of canals, the VC going into small villages and cutting off the head of the village chief and sticking it on a pole, then gathering all the people around to indoctrinate them as to why they should be loyal to them and not the government in Saigon.

The Squadron provided much needed mobility for ARVN Rangers and Civil Guard units. It also helped set up better communications capabilities in the region. In order to carry more troops the helicopters were stripped of non-essential items to make them lighter, including the side window, all the seats except for the crew's, and anything else that was not welded down. The helicopters could carry 15 ARVN combat troops during assault missions. When approaching the landing zone, the pilots would drop down close to the ground, traveling at 100 MPH, climbing only when necessary to clear the tree line that edged the canals. They would flare in, disembark the ARVN or CG troops then take off in a hurry. Most likely the assault would include U.S. Army personnel with the unit. Initially, the crew chiefs were armed with the old 45 caliber grease guns. These were soon replaced with WW II German 9 mm automatics. Later, 30 cal machine guns were mounted on swivels for use by the crew chief.

HMM-362 operated roughly in the southern one-third of South Vietnam. While the squadron was stationed in Vietnam, "Archie's Angels" would fly some 120 combat missions. Although the helicopters and observation planes received many hits from enemy ground fire, no pilot or crewmembers were seriously hurt. I believe this is due to the training, the professional job done by the pilots, crews and support technicians and the leadership and experience of Lt.Col. Clapp. The Squadron operated in Vietnam until August of 1962, when another Marine Corps squadron replaced it. Shortly thereafter, that squadron moved to Da Nang.

"Archie's Angels" made one night assault, presumed to be the first helicopter combat-assault at night. It was a big operation west, northwest of Saigon as I recall. The operation also included the use of Army helicopters, but they apparently had some problems (fuel shortages or something like that) and were not able to take off and land their troops until after daybreak.

Below are 1962 newspaper headlines during the time HMM-362 was at Soc Trang:

"1st Marine Unit in Vietnam has Copters Ready To Go"
"To The Shores Of Dusty Vietnam"
"U.S. Copters Move Viets Into Battle"
"Vietnam Troops Kill 300 Reds; 2 U.S. Copters Downed in Clash"
"Air Attack Kills 8 Viet Cong"
"57 Viet Cong Killed in Mop-Up"
"Archie's Angels Keep Viet Watch"
"Copters Deliver the Goods in Vietnam"
"Americans in Vietnam: What Price Victory in the Jungle?"
"Vietnam: Tragedy, Sorrow- A War in Deadly Earnest"
"76 Viet Reds Die in 2 Battles"
"Archie's Angels' Delivery: Making May Day a Black One For Reds"
"3 Hit, 1 Downed: Viet Reds Rake 24 U.S. Copters"

“U.S.-Supported Viets Overrun Red Village”

“Viets, With Copter Help, Rout Reds”

“Record Airlift Held: Viet Rebels Fire On U.S. Copters”

National Geographic published a very good article “Helicopters Over South Vietnam” in their November, 1962 issue. The picture on the cover page was taken out the door of one of the squadron’s helicopters. Dickey Chapelle, who visited our base in 1962, wrote the article. I prepared a map for her before she flew on a mission with the squadron. Ms. Chapelle was no stranger around Marines; she had covered the battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa during World War II. Unfortunately, she lost her life in Vietnam years later while she was out on patrol with a Marine Corps unit. I’ll always remember the first time I saw her walking around the base wearing her utility type cloths, that appeared just a little too large for her, and with three cameras criss-crossed around her neck.

On July 4, 1962, around midnight, the VC attacked a village to the west of our base. The VC was using mortars and you could vaguely see flashes in the distance when they exploded. The local Army Special Forces advisor, a Major, assembled his troops and brought them on base. Our CO sent up an OE observation plane to scout the situation. Also, two or three fixed wing aircraft were scrambled from Saigon to provide air support for the village. I recall hearing the OE pilot describe the situation over the radio, especially when he spotted the aircraft from Saigon approaching the area..... “I see the planes from Saigon- they are headed directly toward me..... They are still headed toward me.... They are coming directly toward me”. Eventually one of the flights changed course. Meantime, the Army Major wanted to load his troops in the helicopters and take off as soon as possible for the village. Lt.Col. Clapp, on the other hand, did not want to since the VC was using mortars in the area. The Major was pressing the issue and asked the CO if the Squadron was not capable of landing his troops near the village. LtCol. Clapp, getting a little perturbed by this time I’m sure, told the Major in no uncertain terms that, hell yes he can take them in but he certainly was not going to fly his squadron into a landing zone while mortars were being used. Looking back, I sincerely believe the CO made the correct decision. I believe he used a lot of wisdom that night.

Generators provided our only electricity supply. When the lights were on large swarms of bugs would collect around them. Everyone had mosquito nets on their cots for protection. One night while sleeping in the office something woke me up running against my mosquito net. It took only a second or two to realize something was in bed with me. I came straight up off the cot and of course the mosquito net was over my head and it took a while to get all untangled. Somehow a large rat had gotten in the sack with me and could not get out.

The rats were gigantic. Some looked to be the size of rabbits. Matter of fact, Cpl Eke built a rabbit trap that we caught some of the huge monsters in. We also had a large rat-trap set up. On another occasion (I hesitate to tell this story, but it is true) I was sound asleep in the Intelligence Office and was awakened by a noise early one morning. I slowly reached one hand under the pillow for a 45 cal. pistol while going for a flashlight with the other. The noise was coming from within the office and I tried to pinpoint exactly where it was. It was slowly moving around, and making a clanging noise. I decided that the large rat trap we had set must have sprung shut on a rat’s tail and it was dragging the trap around the office. Finally I turned on the flashlight and started looking for the scoundrel, still in the safety of my cot. Finally I got a glimpse of him, but instead of catching his tail, the rat trap had caught him exactly where it should have- across his neck. This Goliath was walking around with his head in the trap, banging it against the floor, walls, desks, etc., trying to free himself. I decided I was going to just stay in the cot and go back to sleep. The door that led from our office out into the hangar had an old worn-out spring on it and the wind would often blow it open. To correct this we had a small piece of rope that we wedged the door closed with. Well, in a few minutes the rusty spring squeaked as the rat pushed open the door and went out into the hangar, clanging the trap all the way. The next morning I found the empty trap lying outside in the hangar. The rat was nowhere to be seen.

When the squadron left Vietnam in August 1962 after completing their 13 months overseas tour, L/Cpl Bush and myself transferred back to the Group Intelligence Office on Okinawa. Cpl Charles R. Butcher and PFC

Borsch from that office replaced us. Other members of our squadron transferred to the new squadron that replaced us at Soc Trang. The new squadron finally transferred to Da Nang a few weeks later. Several former members of HMM-362 were lost when the helicopter they were in crashed into heavy terrain killing all seven on board. (Ed. Names matching the HMM-362 roster and the KIA list include S/Sgt Richard E. Hamilton and L/Cpl Miguel A. Valentin Jr.) We were told it took about three days for rescuers to get to the crash site and that a Navy doctor had initially survived. He was found sitting, leaning up against a tree but later died. Other members of Archie's Angels would be killed years later in Vietnam. Last year I had the opportunity to pay my respects to them and to thank them for their sacrifices when the Vietnam Memorial Traveling Wall visited Mountain Home, Arkansas. Members of "Archie's Angels" were some of the earlier names listed on the Wall and some were part of the latest names listed.

I returned to the States in May 1963, started to college in June of that year, and received a BS Degree in Business Administration from Arkansas State University in January 1966. I have since retired from the DuPont Company as the Area Manager of Business Services at one of their large manufacturing plants. I do not know how many Americans served in Vietnam during the years leading up to the Gulf Of Tonkin incident. My guess would be in the tens of thousands but to my surprise when I returned to the States in 1963 it seemed that no one knew anything about Vietnam, the extent of the U.S. involvement or even where the country was located. This, of course, would change in the latter part of the 1960's. I believe for political reasons everyone who served in Vietnam in the early part of the 1960's were called "advisors". Even today I hear people say, "Oh they were just advisors back then." I have racked my brain and for the life of me can't remember one Marine in our squadron "advising" any Vietnamese. The squadron did, however, transport a hell of a lot of them into combat situations. I remember when Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara visited Vietnam in 1962. Newspaper accounts of his visit quoted him as saying that the situation was improving and getting better all the time. I thought to myself at the time that he must not be reading the Intelligence Reports that MAAG G-2 was sending out. Or, someone had been lying to him. I believe he recently admitted not telling the truth. For decades those who served in Vietnam in the early 1960's were not even considered by our government to be "Vietnam Era Veterans". This was finally changed decades later.

We should pause for a moment on April 15, 2002, the 40th anniversary of the landing in Vietnam of HMM-362, and remember all the Marines who took part in Operation Shu-Fly that are no longer with us. May God bless them, their families, sweethearts, and friends. They served their country well. They did their duty well. May they rest in eternal peace and know that they are not forgotten.

Semper Fidelis, Cpl. Larry D. Shirley Email: lshirlev@centurvtel.net

Are you a member of Pop A Smoke?

October 3-6, 2002 are the dates for our USMC/Vietnam Helicopter Association reunion. To go, however, you need to be a member of the Association. You can join on the Internet at www.popasmoke.com. They will have information posted there and we will publish what we get on a monthly basis, now through October. If you don't have Internet access, let me know and I will get them to send you the forms to join up.

Editors note: the following is probably the document most of you have seen but I can imagine no better way to commemorate the event than words from Archie, himself.

U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, October 1963

Early in 1962, a Marine helicopter squadron was ordered to Vietnam. Its mission was to support the Vietnamese in their struggle against the Communist Viet Cong insurgents. This is an account of Operation Shu-Fly as seen through the eyes of the helicopter squadron commander.

Shu-Fly Diary

by Archie J.Clapp, Lieutenant Colonel, U. S. Marine Corps

The Commander, First Marine Aircraft Wing, received the execute order in the latter part of March while engaged in SEATO Exercise TULUNGAN in the Philippines. This was fortunate, in a way, because he had the affected elements of his normally far-flung command close at hand. Planning was accomplished in his command post on Mindoro, where all essential details were nailed down in a few days, with no appreciable disruption to TULUNGAN.

The commitment called for the unit to be in place by 15 April 1962. Vietnam was divided into three Corps areas of responsibility, with I Corps in the extreme north, II Corps in the center, and III Corps, which the squadron would support, in the south. This meant that the Marines would be working in the Mekong Delta region, which comprises most of the III Corps area. The former Japanese fighter strip at Soc Trang in Ba Xuyen Province was designated as the Marine base of operations.

Soc Trang lies about 85 miles south-southwest of Saigon, in the heart of what is commonly referred to as “Indian Country.” The government has control of a few population centers in that area, but the countryside is dominated by the Viet Cong. Thus, the Marine base would be, in effect, an island in a hostile sea. To discourage the VC from “coming ashore on the island,” a Vietnamese infantry battalion, supported by a 4.2 mortar battalion was detailed for perimeter security. Close-in and internal security would be handled by our own cooks, mechanics, and clerks.

Because of the “island” nature of the base, the entire deployment would be executed by air—we would go ashore by air and continue to be supported by air. The only items not air-delivered were fuel and water. A civilian contractor risked ambush to deliver aviation fuel by truck and Marine water trucks bustled between the base and the town of Soc Trang, a distance of about three miles.

Our task unit consisted of an operational element and a base-keeping element. The former was my outfit.

The normal 200-man Tb of my unit was augmented by about 50 maintenance personnel. In addition to our H-34D helicopters, we were given OIB observation aircraft and C-117D transport aircraft, the latter were utilized for liaison and ration runs between Soc Trang and Saigon.

The base-keeping element was given about the same number of personnel as the helicopter squadron. In addition to usual camp facilities, it was assigned a TAFDS and a MATCU, the latter equipped with TACAN and GCA. The primary reason these navigation and landing aids were included on the equipment list was so the C-130F transports could get into Soc Trang with essential supplies and gear, regardless of weather conditions. Secondly, of course, the helicopters would make use of them at night and in foul weather.

Exercise TULUNGAN ended on 1 April, and the squadron immediately backloaded to the USS *Princeton* (LPH-5), which had been its home for the preceding six months. The ship then steamed north, stopping first at Subic Bay. There, we went through an around-the-clock process of swapping aircraft with our sister squadron so that we would take the aircraft ashore that had the longest time to run before scheduled overhaul. This completed, the *Princeton* headed still farther north to Okinawa to pick up the remainder of our personnel and gear.

Meanwhile, the task unit headquarters and MABS were making their last minute preparations at Okinawa. Then, on 8 April, they began flying into Soc Trang to start erecting the camp and establishing liaison with the Commander, U. S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, (COMUSMACV) and the Vietnamese III Corps Headquarters.

The *Princeton* departed Okinawa on the evening of 10 April and arrived at a position about 20 miles off the mouth of the Mekong River at dawn on 15 April. All personnel and gear were helicopter-lifted ashore by mid-afternoon. The only difficulty encountered was when one O1-B made an unscheduled landing back aboard ship because of a rough-running engine; however, it was able to fly ashore later. The helicopter squadron portion of the camp was erected by dark, and the task unit could have started accepting missions the next day. It was a week, though, before III Corps requested the first combat troop lift. The intervening time was spent with briefings, area familiarization flights, and in making the camp more habitable. A few minor missions were also flown.

Our activities in Vietnam can best be viewed in chronological order. Examination of a relatively small number of our missions will be sufficient to determine what lessons were learned on this deployment and to pinpoint procedures that we considered either effective or ineffective.

Wednesday, 18 April: Two helicopters were requested to haul priority supplies from Ca Mau to Binh Hung. Ca Mau is the southernmost town in Vietnam that is under control of the Vietnamese government; Binh Hung is Father Hoa’s famed “village that refuses to die.” No roads lead to Binh Hung. The tree-lined canals and streams, which are the only surface routes of transportation, are ideal for ambush, and the VC control the surrounding countryside. Therefore, helicopters are the safest means of transportation between Binh Hung and the “outside world.” For this reason, Marine helicopters, being based farther south than any other helicopter unit, would fly the Ca Mau-Binh Hung route many times.

Upon their arrival at Binh Hung, the pilots received their first taste of just one of the operational hazards in the area: unpredictable terrain. They landed and shut-down on what appeared to be hard, dry ground. In a couple of minutes, though, they noticed that the landing gear was slowly but steadily sinking. Timbers were quickly shoved under the axles, yet the axles were solid on the timbers before the helicopters could be started and rotors engaged for take-off. After that experience, the helicopters always carried a short length of marston-matting to be placed under the wheels by

the crew chief before the helicopters were shut down in the field.

Friday, 20 April: A practice troop lift was flown with the 21st Division. A problem was highlighted that had not occurred to us before. The small size of the Vietnamese troops (they are about five-footers) made it difficult for them to embark in the helicopters when they were on solid ground, and impossible when they were in mud. The squadron metal-smiths built large jury-rig steps from wood and angle iron to solve the problem.

Sunday, 22 April: The squadron made its first troop lift against opposition today (Easter Sunday). "Operation Lockjaw," as it was called, consisted of landing approximately 340 troops of the Vietnamese 7th Division on one side of a stream-divided village while a U. S. Army helicopter company (from Saigon) landed a like number on the other side. Opposition was light and no aircraft were hit, so the Corps gained some "combat veterans" for a very reasonable price.

Tuesday, 24 April: "Operation Nightingale" entailed landing troops of the 21st Division in eight separate landing sites. Enemy small arms fire was received upon landing in several of the sites, and one helicopter was hit in an oil line. The pilot was able to take off and fly about a mile from the objective before landing in a rice paddy near a Self Defense Corps outpost. We were then able to make use of the "down-bird" procedure we had formulated, but had not yet tried.

A wingman landed and retrieved the crew, while a division of four helicopters proceeded to the forward loading site where it picked up the repair crew and troops from the reserve to form perimeter security. The repair crew determined what was needed to fix our downed bird; the part was flown in from Soc Trang, immediately installed, and the helicopter was then flown out and returned to base—all within two hours of the time it was hit. The reserve troops were then lifted out of the area.

The ground action went quite well also. The Viet Cong lost 52 troops killed and two captured, against three Vietnamese troops killed and six wounded.

Thursday, 26 April: The squadron went on its first "short-order" mission today. The III Corps briefing officer arrived at Soc Trang shortly after 0700. The crews were briefed, helicopters proceeded to the troop pick-up point, and landing was executed at 0900. Very light opposition was encountered upon landing, and the Vietnamese troops rounded up over 100 vc suspects for questioning. This indicated to us not only that quick-reaction type missions are feasible, but also that the results are more than satisfactory.

Tuesday, 1 May: Twenty-four helicopters and two observation aircraft launched to help the 21st Division "crash" the Communist May Day festivities. Mission successful.

Saturday, 5 May: The Ba Xuyen Province Chief requested helicopter support to help his civil guards raid a VC "fortified village" located about 12 miles southwest of Soc Trang. Because of the proximity of the target, and the obvious problem of maintaining an element of surprise, a tactic new to us was utilized. The helicopter flight rendezvoused over Soc Trang at treetop-level and proceeded to the objective at the same altitude. The flight leader climbed to 1,500 feet and flew slightly to the rear of the flight so that he could keep it in sight. He was thus able to give "steers" to each element of the flight so that they were able to land precisely as planned on sites that encircled the village.

This procedure of "calling the plays from the top of the grandstand" is quite effective when a low-level approach is required and low-oblique checkpoints are limited, as was the case here. Surprise apparently was maintained, too, because the troops reported 60 VC killed, 15 wounded, and 24 captured, with no friendly losses.

Wednesday, 9 May: The village of Cai Ngay h located about 20 miles south of Ca Mau, and is situated in a heavily wooded area where two sizable streams cross. The Viet Song had made Cai Ngay a well fortified village. We received a mission request to pick up troops from the 21st Division at Ca Mau and then at Cai Ngay as soon as a preparatory air strike had lifted. According to plan, the Vietnamese "Able Dog" pilot broke off his attack as we came in sight. He had been working the village over for about 20 minutes and several columns of rising smoke indicated that he had done his job well.

The helicopter flight split into six smaller lights to land troops in their encircling positions, and the individual flights commenced their landing approaches simultaneously. Half the flights received small arms fire while they were still in their approaches, and it continued until after they had discharged their troops and departed the area.

Eight of the 22 helicopters, plus the only participating O1-B, were hit at least once. One Vietnamese Army man was killed and another wounded while they were airborne. Some automatic rifle fire was observed. All except one of the damaged aircraft were able get back to Ca Mao before repairs were made. The damaged aircraft had to make an emergency landing a few miles from Cai Ngay for repairs before it could be returned to Ca Mau. The "down-bird" procedure got another workout.

Why, we wanted to know, were we subjected to this heavy opposition when we were landing on the heels of an air strike? We concluded that it was not in spite of, but because of the air strike. When the air strike started, the VC grabbed their guns and headed out of town. They must have made it as far as the ditches and dikes running through the fields that were the intended helicopter landing sites. There the VC took up firing positions.

The VC were doubly lucky in this instance. because they apparently found themselves outside the ring of troops the helicopters placed around the village. When the troops closed on the village, their bag was zero.

We began to have serious reservations about preparatory air strikes in this type operation. Besides the possibility of inflicting casualties on current

or potential friends, forfeiture of the element of surprise is a certainty. There did not seem to be enough favorable results to offset these drawbacks.

That is not to say, however, that there is *no* place for air support in counter-guerrilla operations. Some *on-call* support would have been most welcome that day, and would probably have caused some VC casualties. But the language barrier between the attack pilots and helicopter flight leader precluded calling the strike in on target. This mission precipitated our insistence upon being covered by support fighter aircraft flown by English-speaking pilots.

Thursday, 10 May. The squadron returned to the scene of its first combat troop lift today, and the general scheme of maneuver was just about the same as before. This time, however, there was a welcoming committee.

As the flight approached the village, armed men could be seen scurrying out into the fields where they dove into tall weeds and literally disappeared. A few of them, who happened to land in a sparse spot, could be seen lying on their backs firing upward at the helicopters as they passed only a few feet above them. The rest of them were presumably doing the same thing. One helicopter was hit, but was able to make it back to the forward loading site before repairs were made.

This mission pointed up a cardinal principle of counter-guerrilla work: never repeat a previous maneuver. It is a tremendous temptation to repeat something that workswell the first time, but there are few tactics more dangerous (or less effective) when operating helicopters against irregulars.

By the very nature of their doctrine, the Viet Cong is an army of shadows.” They *must* remain dispersed among the population, mass only when they intend to deliver a blow, then very rapidly disperse again. As long as the struggle is classified as an insurgency, they will always be “outweighed” by the government troops. Therefore, if they allow themselves to become cornered, they are dead.

While the government troops are “heavier” and pack more punch, there is no reason why they cannot be just as nimble as the VC, if the helicopters are employed to maximum advantage. There is no point in “telegraphing punches” with elaborate preparations for a massive mission; quick-reaction missions give better results anyway. And it isn’t that difficult to vary ground tactics, constantly change flight procedures and routes, and employ various means of deception.

In the instant case, the VC apparently were so sure that the previous successful operation would be duplicated some time in the future that they formulated a counter plan and waited nearly a month to put it into effect. And it paid off for them. Also, when five helicopters were shot down on a single mission early in 1963, it is reported that they were making their *third* landing in the same place.

Saturday, 19 May: The Ba Xuyen Province Chief received intelligence to the effect that a meeting of some Viet Cong leaders would take place in a village about 12 miles southeast of Soc Trang. Troops were brought to Soc Trang for loading and they were landed in “typical” formation (i.e., in four groups at the four corners of the objective village).

The Viet Cong, as usual, started slipping through the thin line of government troops, and headed for a river that lay about a mile away across open rice paddies. Their getaway seemed to be certain.

About the time they reached the mid-point between the village and the river, however, four helicopters that had been circling out of sight came in and landed their troops in a column between the VC and the river. Not all the fleeing VC were captured, but the tactic was successful enough to convince us that we were on the right track by employing an airborne reserve concept.

The principal reason the effort was not more successful was that some of the troops didn’t know which way to advance when they debarked from the helicopters. We remedied this situation for future operations by preparing a debarkation diagram. A simple sketch was made of the plan view of the helicopter cabin. The legend, “Direction of Attack,” was put on it in both English and Vietnamese. A quantity of them were reproduced and distributed to the pilots. Just before landing, the copilot marked an arrow on a diagram and handed it to the crew chief, who in turn gave it to the heli-team leader.

Wednesday, 23 May: A message was received about 2000 stating that two Vietnamese officers had received severe head wounds in an engagement about 30 miles southwest of Saigon and needed immediate evacuation. The weather was quite poor at the time. A ragged ceiling hung at about 300 feet and rain-hampered visibility was limited to no more than a couple of miles.

Two helicopters launched and navigated the 50 miles to the pick-up point by a combination of dead reckoning and occasional visual checks on larger towns en route. When they reached the vicinity of the site, they were guided to a landing by a bonfire. The casualties were picked up rapidly and taken to a hospital in Saigon.

Judging by the reaction of the 7th Division Commander, in whose sector it took place, this was as important as any mission we flew. He indicated that this was the first night helicopter evacuation they had had, and the effect it would have on the morale and fighting spirit of his troops was immeasurable. Daytime casualty evacuation missions were numerous and routine.

Sunday, 27 May. We were “spending a quiet Sunday at home” when a message was received that a fortified village located about 85 miles north of Soc Trang was under attack. Aircraft were manned and launched immediately and proceeded to a troop pick-up site about 15 miles from the besieged village. The VC broke contact immediately and slipped away into the nearby woods just before the troops were landed.

While the mission produced no scalps, we heard later that this rapid response to a call for help from the villagers did much toward selling the

fortified village concept to the people in that vicinity.

We heard of more than one instance where the VC broke off an attack simply because helicopters appeared overhead, even though the 'copters were headed on another mission and the crews were unaware that the attack was in progress. So the mere presence of airborne helicopters in an area would appear to limit the insurgents' freedom of action.

Saturday, 2 June: An American advisor in an observation aircraft spotted what appeared to be a VC camp on a hilltop in the vicinity of Rach Gia. He reported the sighting to the 21st Division Commander, who immediately requested and received helicopter and fixed-wing air support.

The helicopters were launched from Soc Trang as soon as they could be manned, picked up troops at Can Tho, and proceeded to táe o⁶ject:ve. c~4ien tley arrived a B-26 Vietnamese bomber had the hilltop under rocket attack. The troops were landed in an encircling disposition around the base of the hill. They contracted around its sides and scaled the hill without making VC contact.

This seemed to us to be another case of an air strike serving the purpose of warning the vc, if this had indeed been one of their camps. It strengthened our previously stated conviction that uncontrolled air strikes are of questionable value at best in counter-guerrilla work and probably do more harm than good.

Monday, 4 June: The day started as a routine lift of 7th Division troops in the Plain of Reeds area to the west of Saigon. But it turned out to be our "Longest Day."

When the troops landed on their first objective, a village situated at a stream junction, many armed and uniformed Viet Cong soldiers were flushed from the village. They headed north in the direction of the Cambodian border. This signalled the beginning of a huge checker game all over that sector.

When the helicopters returned to the pick-up point for the second scheduled load, the flight leader hurriedly briefed the Division Commander as to what he had observed. The Division Commander decided to carry through with the second scheduled landing in approximately the same place as the first. He indicated that this was to give him a substantial holding force and he would start hitting from the other direction (i.e., this was to be his "anvil" and he intended to make other "hammer landings" and catch the Vc in between).

Five more landings were made with troops from the reserve and from various garrisons in the area, and with security troops "borrowed" from the local province chief. On one of the landings, the VC got the jump on the government troops and slipped outside the net." The helicopters swung around and made a dummy landing approach to the far side of them, so they turned and ran back into the face of the government troops (an example of deception, as previously mentioned).

On the last landing, we confirmed something we had suspected right along: the aviator's hard hat is not bullet-proof. The flight leader's copilot, was leaning out the window using a submachine gun to s~pray a group of vC troops who were firing at the flight as it was lifting off. The flight leader heard a bullet hit the aircraft and looked around the cockpit to see if everything was still functioning. He saw a large hole in the back of the copilot's helmet and informed him that the back of his helmet had been nicked. The copilot turned around to face the flight leader, who then spotted a small clean hole in the front of the helmet. The bullet had gone in the front of the helmet and out the back, passing through the half-inch-thick padding between the helmet and his head.

The main lesson gained from this day's flight was the importance of remaining flexible. It is a good idea to plan meticulously for this type combat, just as much so as with any other type. Since targets are nearly always fleeting, however, and unexpected opportunities present themselves and then nearly always evaporate immediately, the commander must be prepared to alter his plans much more rapidly than with most other types of combat. Ideally, an officer with power of decision over commitment or non-commitment of the troops should be airborne over the scene of action.

"Meanwhile back at the fort," (Soc Trang) things were somewhat less than quiet for the few aircraft and crews left there. The Ba Xuyen Province Chief came to the base seeking assistance. He had been unable to gain communication with his garrison at Vinh Quoi, about 25 miles west of Soc Trang.

Troops were loaded into the only four 7helicopters remaining at the base, and they roceeded to Vinh Quoi. When they arrived, :hey found the village in flames, with several 7tundred pillaging VC still on the scene. The VC decided to flee instead of finishing their oh of destruction—probably because they md no way of knowing that the bulk of the zhoppers were up north and they outnumbered by far any force that could be landed right away.

As the VC scurried away from Vinh Quoi in all directions, by boat and on foot, the four helicopters shuttled troops into the ransacked village to set up a defense before dark. On outbound trips, they evacuated the widows, orphans, wounded, and dead.

Thursday, 7 June: On a landing with 21st Division troops today, many people flushed from the objective village while the helicopters were on final approach. There were so many, in fact, that they posed somewhat of a traffic problem in the landing sites. As no weapons were in evidence, it was out of the question to use suppressive fire, both because of the don't-shoot-first policy and the likelihood of hitting innocent people. Nevertheless, two of our helicopters were hit by small arms fire.

This was by no means the only time we were faced with this situation—the VC intermingling with the local population while they fired at us. If there is an answer to this problem, we didn't find it. This is one of the inherent characteristics of counter-guerrilla work that merely has got to be accepted

as part of the job.

Friday 8 June: Today we experienced good results with the Eagle Flight (the name given to the airborne reserve). A system of ground-to-air signals was worked out so that the same troops could be retrieved and used over and over again. As usual, many people started streaming out of the objective village while the main flight of helicopters was landing. The reserve troops were then placed where they could intercept and check a group of them. When they were satisfied that they were "clean," they would signal for pick-up. In the meantime, the helicopter flight cruised around keeping the area under surveillance, and would have another suspicious group spotted by the time the troops were picked up again.

This evolution was repeated several times before they hit pay dirt. A lone, black-clad figure was seen making his way from dike to dike toward a tree-lined canal, his apparent escape route. The troops landed and picked him up, and he was identified as a VC leader. He was carrying a suitcase filled with money and documents.

Thursday, 14 June: The squadron participated in its first jungle mission today, supporting the 5th Division in a landing in Viet Cong "D-Zone." The landing site was a pear-shaped clearing about 35 miles north of Saigon, in which the VC had emplaced sharpened bamboo poles as an anti-helicopter device. While the helicopters could probably have landed among the poles without too much difficulty, it would have been pretty hard on the troops when they debarked. Therefore, the landing was made around the perimeter of the clearing between the poles and the trees.

By restricting us to a landing in this narrow perimeter, the VC had an ideal set-up for a mine or machinegun defense. Fortunately, though, they chose not to defend the site.

We noted several differences between jungle and delta helicopter operations. Whereas we had some degree of selectivity of landing sites for a particular objective in the delta area, there are likely to be no more than a couple, and perhaps only one clearing in the jungle that is usable for a certain objective. This, of course, favors the defender.

Also, it is more difficult to remain oriented over a "sea of trees" than over a patchwork of streams and canals. Generally speaking, though, the degree of accuracy in navigation is greater than in the delta area. Dead reckoning can be employed over the jungle, and when it leads to a clearing, that undoubtedly is the right spot. In the delta, however, most villages are similar enough in appearance that the objective could be any one of several in the immediate vicinity unless pinpoint navigation and accurate map reading is used to single out the proper one.

Although it fortunately did not apply on this mission, the matter of making forced landings and retrieving crews from downed aircraft is considerably more difficult in a jungle area than on the delta.

Saturday, 16 June. The VC ambushed a convoy to the north of Saigon, killed two American officers and several Vietnamese soldiers, and captured a quantity of weapons. The squadron was diverted from another mission to land troops in an attempt to head them off.

The helicopters received small arms fire while landing. As soon as they had discharged their troops and cleared the area, a radio call was received that requested them to land again and move some troops that had been placed in the wrong spot by another outfit. The request was denied.

The only reason this is noted here is to bring out a principle. Although we considered it feasible to land and discharge troops while receiving moderate small arms fire, it is *not* feasible to land and sit on the ground long enough to load troops within range of opposing small arms. Troops can debark in a few seconds, but loading is another matter. Either the troops must group into heli-teams for rapid loading and be vulnerable themselves, or the helicopters must make sitting ducks of themselves while they wait for the troops to get organized and loaded. Therefore, loading must be done in a "secure" area, unless likely loss of troops and or helicopters is an acceptable risk under the prevailing situation.

Monday, 18 June: Today was the only time we had to delay a mission because of weather. Between the pick-up point and the landing site, rain got so heavy that we could no longer keep visual contact with the ground and the flight elements lost sight of one another. A preconceived plan for such a situation was executed without difficulty. On signal of the flight leader, each flight element reversed course in turn, starting from the rear. After breaking into clear weather, the flight rendezvoused and proceeded to the pick-up point to wait for the squall to pass, then proceeded with the operation again.

Friday, 6 July: We made a second trip to Cai Ngav today. The helicopters received no opposing fire and the troops found the town completely deserted. The state of the refuse and garbage indicated that the mass evacuation had probably taken place the day before, 21/21/21 fore. The most logical explanation was that a security leak alerted the villagers.

Wednesday, 18 July: The largest helicopter lift in Vietnam to date took place today in a landing with 5th Division troops north of Saigon. The Marines led with 18 helicopters, the U. S. Army came next with 12, and the Vietnamese Air Force followed with 11.

In a joint operation like this, with helicopters flown by pilots who do not speak the same language, detailed planning is obviously a must. The foremost drawback, even if the operation is well-planned, is the lack of flexibility brought about by a virtual communication blackout. This particular operation was relatively uneventful and opposition was moderate, so it worked out reasonably well. That is not to say, however, that this should become a commonplace occurrence until some procedure is worked out to overcome the communication barrier.

Friday, 20 July: The first helicopter night troop landing in Vietnam was made today. The helicopters departed Soc Trang at 0425, departed the pick-up point at 0515, and landed the 7th Division troops on their objective in the Plain of Reeds at 0600, which was ten minutes before first light. The reasoning which dictated this selection of time was the desirability of an approach and landing in darkness for surprise, offset by the considera-

tion that while the VC are slippery enough in daylight, in darkness they are even more so. Therefore, it was arranged that the government troops set up their encircling positions in darkness and close with the VC as soon as it was light enough to see.

All navigation would have to be visual, so the route was selected accordingly. The half moon would give enough light to reflect from bodies of water, which decided the checkpoints. Distinctive river/shore contours, lakes, and stream junctions provided the navigation fixes. Helicopter running lights were extinguished before reaching the Initial Point, and thereafter the engine exhaust was used to hold formation. The landing was made with the aid of the exhaust reflecting in the flooded rice paddies to show where the ground was.

The landing was completed without incident. It should be noted, though, that the success of this landing does not automatically make all types of night landings without landing aids a routine matter. The terrain was flat, the moon gave some degree of illumination, and the squadron at this time had been flying together for two years. The conditions were therefore nearly ideal.

Wednesday, 1 August: My squadron was officially relieved by another Marine helicopter squadron at 0001 this morning. All aircraft and gear changed hands at this point, although the actual work involved in the transfer had been going on for over a week. Also, the incoming pilots had been flying on missions in increasing numbers over the same period, while my pilots were slowly phased back to Okinawa for return to the States. This created a minimum break in continuity because of the squadron exchange.

All told, my squadron had made some 50 combat troop-lift missions which entailed about 130 landings by flights of helicopters against Viet Cong opposition. Seventeen of our helicopters and two of the O1-Bs sustained gunfire damage, most of them more than once. While the VC created considerable work for the metalsmiths and mechs, they fortunately did not manage to do any damage that came under the cognizance of the doctor.

Crew Protection

Before we landed in Vietnam, we exchanged our orange flight suits for tan ones so as not to present quite as attractive a target in the cockpit. We wore standard ground-type body armor over the suits. This type protective gear is not ideal but was all we had. In the high heat and humidity, many of the crewmen developed fairly serious cases of rash from wearing the armor for extended periods of time. Also, the armor leaves too much exposed area and would not stop a direct hit anyway. A camouflaged, fire-retardant flight suit is needed in case the crew has to walk out following a crash landing. And built-in armor plate is needed in the helicopter. Ideally, it should be easily removable so that the additional weight would not have to be carried when it was not needed.

Armament

We decided not to install machine guns on the helicopters as the Army had done. There were several reasons behind this decision, the principal one being that it would tend to block the cabin door. We figured that our best defense was to hold our time on the ground in the landing zone to a bare minimum. The best way to accomplish this is to have the cabin exit door clear and to have the crew chief help the troops debark rather than handle a machine gun. We did, however, carry two "Greasegun" submachine guns in each helicopter. The copilot covered the left side of the helicopter while the crew chief covered the right when we were close to, or on the ground. They, of course, fired only when they could see a VC soldier firing at us.

Maps

We used 1:250,000 maps for en route navigation and 1:100,000 for terminal guidance in the objective area. This was found to be an adequate system as long as the crew remained oriented. There is no opportunity for reorientation, though, when flying at 100 knots a few feet above the ground.

Vulnerability

The question of helicopter vulnerability seems to be a perennial one, so we will examine our experience in this regard. We had nearly every part of a helicopter hit at one time or another—main rotor blades, tail rotor blades and shaft, engine, transmission housing, tires, structural spars, etc. The only hits that made an immediate landing essential was when an engine oil tank or line was damaged, and the oil was subsequently pumped overboard. Granted, most of the hits were from single-fire weapons; and heavy automatic fire would probably have made it an entirely different ball game. Still, the helicopter does not seem to be as fragile as some people think.

It would be foolhardy in the extreme to try to storm a fortified position in helicopters, or attempt to operate in the vicinity of a machine gun concentration. Likewise, some losses will likely occur when operating in an environment somewhat less formidable than either of those described here. Still, it is not necessary to "sanitize" an area completely before helicopters can operate in it, if moderate losses are an acceptable factor. Surprise, deception, sound tactics, and a variety of "plays" will go a long way toward keeping losses at a minimum level in the counter-insurgency environment.

Crew Escape

Although relatively slow-flying, helicopters are undoubtedly more vulnerable than high-performance, fixed-wing aircraft, when subjected to the same pattern of fire, the helicopters do have an advantageous characteristic. In a counter-insurgency situation, the countryside is "no-man's land" at best, if not totally hostile. If a fixed-wing aircraft goes down, the crew must either evade and walk out, or defend themselves while a helicopter is summoned for pick-up. On the other hand, since helicopters do not normally travel singly over hostile territory, they have inherent escape means in the form of an accompanying helicopter. Also, they are more likely to have a repairable machine after landing, one that can be flown out again.

Escort Aircraft

Helicopters need escort aircraft to call on for suppressive fire. The escorting aircraft must have flight characteristics that permit them to stay close

to the helicopters and constantly in a position to initiate an attack. A target is not going to be seen until it is firing at the helicopters, and when this happens, even a short delay is too long.

The armament of the escort aircraft should be anti-personnel in nature. Their sole mission is to make someone stop shooting at the helicopters, and make them stop immediately. When an enemy gunner is no longer a threat to the helicopters, he ceases to be a valid target for the escort aircraft. When the helicopters get out of his range, he should be forgotten unless there are aircraft in the vicinity that are not assigned to the escort that can take him under fire.

It is realized that this is a rather loose and indefinite treatment of the important subject of helicopter escort, but it is purposely so. It is intended merely to give a sketch of the *results* the helicopter flight leader needs in order for him to get his work done (i.e., keep the opposition off his back while he places troops where they are supposed to be). Much work is still needed in developing hardware and doctrine before this result is achieved.

Conclusion

What did Operation Shu-Fly add to the store of knowledge for this type combat? It certainly didn't produce a group of anti-guerrilla experts who have all the answers. It is believed, however, that most of the participants did come away with a keen awareness of the unique characteristics of this type combat. Along with a very few answers, they undoubtedly have many more questions to which they will try to find solutions. And if an appreciation of the problems inherent in this facet of military operations is all that was gained, then the deployment can still be considered productive.

Reunion News

Hotel information is located here:

<http://www.popasmoke.com/reunions/2002/reunionhotels2002.pdf>

Check USMC/Vietnam Helicopter Association membership status here:

<http://www.popasmoke.com/members>

HMM-362 History Project photos accessed here:

<http://www.popasmoke.com/visions/index.php?page=view&category=114>

To Join, go here:

<http://www.popasmoke.com/fng.html>

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WebCon II

I, along with some other squadron historians and webmasters recently had the chance to attend a conference sponsored and set up by Jim Moriarty, the owner and operator of YL 42. The conference was held at the Diamond K Ranch, deep in the heart of Texas. It was quite a treat, I can tell you and really great to see some old friends and meet new ones. There were a few agenda items. One, obviously was to see how others do what they do so that we can all improve the way that we operate. The other agenda item, Project Vietnam, is listed immediately below. It is very much related to one of the underlying purposes of this History Project, which was to identify the specific way in which each of our Fallen Angels was killed. For the most part, that has been accomplished. We are now going into another dimension.

Project Vietnam

For those of you familiar with it, Al Barbour, former Pop A Smoke President, has completed a monumental work, a listing of all Marines, Navy personnel and others killed in Marine Helicopters. These include pertinent data on each incident and person, usually from official records. Where he has been able to do so, Al also has connected information from pages like ours to include photographs of the deceased and the information that so many of you have supplied to this project. We are now going to go further and provide personal information on each of our lost ones. This will include your input about your buddy or Bunkie. Maybe when you were in school together. We will also attempt to contact families who can add words, photos, etc. The point is that our brothers died for us and with us, but their death is only a part of the story. Their lives are the story. The plan is to operate at the squadron level first and then to the Association level. From there it is hoped that we can either create a national project or blend with the other organizations that already have major sites where this more personal information can be added. I urge all of you to think of how you can best contribute. Those of you who are family members are certainly urged to do the same as well as provide guidance on how you would like to see this project progress. I will keep you updated.

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Classifieds

Ugly Patches and 66-67 cruise books. Please contact Bobby Johns bjjohns@ev1.net Very good prices, just like new.

Finally, “*A True Helicopter Story—YL 37 Flies Again*” available from the author and savior of the original YL 37, Gerald Hail. Prices are \$8.something for softcover and \$14.75 for hard cover. I am sorry to say that I am not sure if the price includes postage. There is also a bulk price for ten copies of either version should you have many grandchildren or feel like benefitting the local library or school system or even Toys for Tots. Contact Gerald at YL37@aol.com or YL 37 Group, 14157 E. 580 Rd., Inola, OK 74036.

Nominated for 9 Academy Awards and still only about \$20.00 is the Ugly Angel Memorial Dedication Film. This is absolutely a GREAT film. Get it from Rusty Sachs, PO Box 1360, Norwich, VT 05055 or ClipClop6@aol.com

Reunion apparel. No one wants to look like a FNG and no one wants to stand in line hoping you can get a hat or a shirt with just the right markings. Contact Frenchy now for caps, shirts belt buckles (now aircrew and pilots.) The prices are more than reasonable. If you served pre-1965 you get to decide if you want your gear to be HMM-362 with the words Ugly Angel, Archie’s Angels or no words. Frenchy is also willing to talk about 40th Anniversary Commemorative designs. Just ask him

Contact Frenchy at comprisetv3@aol.com for a complete line of Ugly Finery for just that right look in the boardroom or country club.

HOT Off the Press

Earlier in this issue, we saw a Leatherneck article commemorating the 25th Anniversary. Well I hear that this brand new April issue has a special article commemorating the 40th. I understand Dave Hugel, an old Shu-Fly Marine had a hand in this. Thanks, Dave!!

Last Word

I began this issue with remarks regarding what I would never have imagined 30 or 40 years ago. Just before I left WebCon II, Jason one of Jim Moriarty’s star employees showed me an emblem for their new softball team, the UGLY ANGELS. The logo is jist like ours except the circle is white with, of course, stitching in the appropriate places. Now admit it, who of you ever dreamed we’d ever have a ball team named after us, with presumably, a bunch of lawyers, taking us to the Houston series?? If you live in Houston, Catch the Fever!!

Please send all information, materials, comments and questions to:

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