Combat Helicopter Pilots Association

2020 Annual Conference in Houston TX Nov 5-8, see pages 8-10

Member Spotlight

The Night Ring-Route

by Margaret "Maggie" Kurtts

That night was just another ring-route in Iraq.

We met in the hangar as the sun was setting to get our gear and our aircraft assignment. I was happy about this flight because it was with one of my best friends, another pilot named Jennifer. Jennifer and I rarely got to fly together because we both had primary jobs that kept us on different schedules.

I was a maintenance test pilot (MTP) and my primary job was to determine if a bird was safe to return to the fleet after it had undergone maintenance. I put aircraft through tests on the ground and in the air using specialized equipment and procedures to make sure they were safe and operating within limits. Flying missions was always a welcomed break from the hours spent watching the rotor smoothing screen chase a bad vibration or checking the indications of yet another T701C engine that refused to start because it was choked by sand.

Jennifer was a commissioned officer in the flight company. In theory, flying missions in Iraq should have been her main job. But, the Army used RLOs ("real live officers", which is another name for the commissioned officers) for a variety of tasks other than flying. In the US Army, Warrant Officers do most of the flying and RLOs handle the management of the organization. Flying missions rather than slogging through the mundane tasks of management was something RLOs jumped on when they got the chance.

Every Warrant Officer reading this story is saying something like "I

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CHPA
PO Box 2585
Peachtree City, GA 30269
www.chpa-us.org
hq@chpa-us.org
800.832.5144

Terry Garlock
CHPA Newsletter Editor
editor@chpa-us.org
770-630-6064 Eastern time

James Wilhite, President
president@chpa-us.org

Jack Bailey, Chairman
chairman@chpa-us.org

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can see a problem – two RLOs in the cockpit!" At this point in the deployment we'd been there for nearly a year.

We were familiar with the area, the mission, the enemy, and environment. We both were pilots-in-command (PICs) and had racked up hundreds of hours on missions. We knew all the LZs, all the FARPs, and even where the porta-potties with the best "art" could be found (Q-West).

Anyone and everyone who flies knows that sometimes, things just go wrong. If you give a pilot a drink or two, they will inevitably tell you about flight that ended with a shake of the head and the words, "It was a close one."

Living knowing I could die was just part of being a helicopter pilot. Every time I did a final walk-around of the bird, patted the stabilator, and strapped that bird on, I was making a contract with my mortality. Tonight, could be *the night*. This bird could be *the bird*. Every single mission could be *our last*. Then, I'd take a deep breath and climb into the cockpit. With training as my guide, I accept that this could be the last time I leave the ground.

It was just the night ring-route.

As usual, the crew chiefs beat us in and already had the M240 machine guns, ammo, and equipment at the aircraft. Jennifer and I grabbed our gear and walked out to the bird to do the pre-flight. We split the pre-flight checks between us, with one pilot checking the systems on "top" while the other did the "bottom." The crew chiefs mounted their weapons, organized the ammunition so it would be easier to feed into the guns, and did their own pre-flight checks. Once all was complete, Jennifer and I sent the crew chiefs to chow and we walked to the tactical operations center (TOC) to get the specifics of our mission.

Like we suspected, the normal night ring-route.

We were part of a two-ship mission that would depart for Mosul shortly after dark to pick up pax. We would then fly to a dozen or more FOBs, taking personnel and equipment from place to place. Our last stop of the night would be Mosul, where we would drop off all pax and equipment, before flying home empty. This was the night ring-route. Aircrews a thousand times before us and probably a thousand times after us flew the night ring route.

Ramp space at Mosul was tight. During the 2006-2008 surge of Iraq, thousands of extra military personnel were either crammed into existing FOBs or pushed out expanding the US presence in Iraq. In Northern Iraq, those extra people and their equipment staged out of Mosul. The enemy frequently targeted the FOB with rockets and mortars. Any shot that fell within the perimeter was almost certainly going to hit something given the crowding. Stuff was everywhere.

As we taxied up to the Pax Terminal, people were semi-organized in lines waiting to get on rotary wing flights or C130s. End up in the wrong line, and you might find yourself on the wrong flight and at the wrong FOB. To provide a little protection for pax and aircraft, 20-foot-high concrete T-walls surrounded the ramps at the Pax Terminal. Taxiing by the high walls, especially under NVGs, was like trying to parallel park a F250 in downtown DC, while looking through binoculars. More than one helicopter crew

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smashed a helicopter tail rotor into a concrete T-wall on that ramp.

Our two-ship mission flew from FOB to FOB, dropping off pax and picking them up. Nothing really stands out to me from the mission. Given that the mission was all night, we probably got fuel somewhere that night and landed at most of major FOBs in Northern Iraq, including my favorite, Irbil. Irbil was in the Kurdish region of Iraq and was the only place that seemed to be untouched by the war. The Irbil Airport looked like a modern US airport with a sleek passenger terminal and gangways for unloading commercial airplanes. The only visual hint that that the Irbil airport wasn't exactly as peaceful as it seemed was the giant X on the runway indicating it was closed. We landed at a dusty pad nearby. I have no idea if anyone ever used the runway or fancy terminal while I was there.

Our last stop before going home was always Mosul. We'd drop off our last group of paxs and hit the FARP before our 15-minute flight back home. Topping off would give the next guys to fly our bird a full bag of gas. The aviation TOC at Mosul didn't have any last-minute missions but the weather guys had some news for us.

"Dust event starting to form to the Southwest," said the Air Force weather officer in the TOC.

"What time will it be here and how bad is it?" Jennifer asked.

"Ma'am – this looks to be a pretty bad one. Likely to shutdown the whole region for the next few days."

Jennifer and I looked at each other under our NVGs.

The weather officer continued, *"The main part of the storm is still well to the South, somewhere in Syria. But the winds are picking up across the region, so I would guess they are gathering dust too. We are still clear here and your FOB is reporting that vis is going down but still above 3 miles. No telling how long that will last as the winds continue to pick up."*

Jennifer clicked the radio, *"Thanks TOC, Blackhawk 23 needs a minute to talk and we will get back to you."* Then she flipped to ICS and we began talking as a crew. Chalk 2 was probably having a similar conversation.

"You heard him," Jennifer said, *"What does everyone think?"*

I replied first, *"Weather is still good for us to fly, here and home so we are legal. It is coming in but doesn't seem to be here yet. If we stay to the north, we are likely to avoid the leading edges of the storm as it rolls in."*

One of the crew chiefs chimed in, *"It sounds like if we stay here tonight, we will be here for a few days while we wait for the storm to clear. They've got no extra beds here so, for those days we wait, we'd be sleeping in some tent and stuck. No showers, dust, tents - No way."*

"If we are going to go – we need to go now to beat the storm," Jennifer said. She turned awkwardly in her seat to look behind her at the crew chiefs asking, *"Is everyone comfortable with that? We can stay here if needed."*

"Let's get the fuck out of here," said the door gunner *"I hate the crowded terrible FOB."*

The crew chief affirmed, *"Let's go."*

Jennifer turned back to face me. I said, *"I am good. I know the terrain and there are not a lot of big obstacles between here and home. If you navigate with the map, I'll fly and we can follow our*

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visual cues pretty easily back. If it gets bad, we can climb up and do the approach."

The "approach" was the emergency GPS recovery we had set up for nights just like this. Our unit required that we practice the recovery at the end of every single mission to make sure we stayed proficient. We had all done it hundreds of times – but no one had done it for real yet – in the clouds.

"Is everyone sure?" I asked. *"No one wants to be on tomorrow morning's news."* This was our half-joking/half-serious way of acknowledging that we could die. The finality of decision we were about to make, weighed heavily on each of us. We were legal to fly but the risk had gone up.

Sitting on that crowded ramp, in the heat and the dust, we had to make a choice. We could be wrong. We could die. The decision was ours and ours alone.

Jennifer had a quick chat with Chalk 2, who also endorsed heading home. Clicking back to ICS, Jennifer said, *"Alright, we are heading home."* With one last radio call to the TOC, and a full bag of gas, we took off from Mosul.

Finding our way home from Mosul was pretty easy most nights thanks to a big set of high-tension power lines. These wires provided a good visual que to get us out of the city. We took off from Mosul, found the wires, and paralleled them until the wires took an abrupt turn North up to Mosul Dam.

Once off the wires however, we saw the hallmark of night flying in Iraq – deep, dark, open desert. Between us and home were a number of small villages with their lights on which helped guide us. A single road, appearing like a slightly lighter line in the dark abyss of the desert, connected the villages between Mosul and our FOB. This faded line would soon become our life line.

We all noticed that the sky was a little hazier than normal. Dust is really hard to see at night. You can tell it's getting dustier by how the lights appear – they start to look less crisp. The image in the NVGs got grainer and our eyes strained to capture the details of the image.

We peeled off our power line highway and started a slow climb as we approached a ridgeline. Lights of small villages sparkled in the dusty night and got dimmer the higher we climbed. We chatted a bit but there was noticeably less chatter than at Mosul. Each of us was questioning in silence the diminishing visibility and wondering if it was the dust, our change in altitude, or just our tired eyes.

Quiet cockpits are dangerous cockpits.

After crossing the ridge, we slowed down and descended in order to see the contrast between the villages and desert better. The road connecting the villages was clear now as it twisted and turned. There was a lot more dust in the air than the weather guys realized. We were 10 minutes from parking and visibility was dropping – fast.

Our crew chief cursed the dust saying, *"This weather is shit."*

Which was echoed by the door gunner who said, *"Damn dust!"*

Jennifer, who was navigating and working the

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radios asked, *"Can you still see the ground?"*

Both back seaters replied, *"I can still see the ground"* and *"Yep, me too."*

"Good," said Jennifer, "*I got the road, so we will keep following that. It leads straight into the front door of base"*

"God I hate this place," someone muttered over the radio. A sentiment echoed by all of us at nearly 300 days into our 455-day deployment.

I was flying and focused on my instruments and my guidance system. In the old UH60L, guidance was pretty simple. Follow a needle which pointed to home. Keep the needle on the same heading and we will get home the fastest. I pulled in a couple percent torque, to start a slow climb over yet another small ridge. With every 50 feet we climbed, the visibility got worse and worse. Losing sight of the ground was a real possibility.

Jennifer began talking. *"Everyone remembers the emergency GPS recovery. First thing – climb. There isn't much to hit out here and we might even break out above this crap if we are lucky. You guys in the back keep us honest."*

"I'll keep my heading steady, with airspeed at about 100 knots and pull in a gentle 500 ft/min rate of climb until we hit 3500 feet," I said – verbalizing the inadvertent IMC procedure. Talking through our actions beforehand helped calm everyone down as the visibility continued to drop.

Even though we practiced inadvertent IMC on nearly every mission, executing the procedure would still be dangerous. There wasn't air traffic control like in the States to help guide a pilot with radar. The shift from flying with visual ques to instruments is jarring on the senses. We had a full bag of gas, so we could also make it back to Mosul if needed.

"Do you think we should turn back for Mosul?" I asked Jennifer.

"It looks just as bad behind us," the crew chief said.

"No, if we turn back, we'd have to cross that big ridge outside Mosul again and likely would pop in there," Jennifer said. "*I can see the road still pretty clearly and I've got us on the map. Let's see if that road can get us home. If it gets too bad, we will climb up and fly instruments."*

"Sounds good." I replied. *"Keep your eyes on the ground"* I said to the crew chiefs. *"Let us know if you lose it."*

Up front, I focused on the road, searched for hazards. Jennifer called out villages using the smallest details to identify our position on the map. *"This one is pretty small. The road goes right down middle and then it looks like it bends around a small hill, to our next village. There should be a 4-way intersection in the middle of town…yep there it is."*

"What do you think the vis is?" I asked Jennifer.

"Based on when I saw the lights of that last village, maybe a mile," she replied.

We rounded the hill, still following the road and the lights of the village. My GPS needled swung a bit as we turned, keeping its head pointing toward home. We'd crossed all terrain at this point, so the only hazards now were antennas actually at the FOB. The road was still clearly visible as it weaved between a few compounds, but we could not see the lights of the FOB yet.

Jennifer asked how everyone was doing and immediate replies came from the crew.

"Fine ma'am. I still see the ground."

"Same here."

Jennifer said. *"If you lose the ground let us know. Then we are coming inside to start the climb.* She kept talking to the back seaters. *"You help us. Keep us honest up here. You know what it looks like when we fly these approaches. Check the gauges in case we miss something."*

"Yes. Ma'am. I still have the ground," said the crew chief.

I strained to see and follow the road. I could feel the pressure of the dust closing in around us. I had to keep on the road. That road leads right to the front gate of the FOB. From there, we could follow the fence line around the threshold of the runway.

I called out, *"I see the road and I am following it."*

We were IFR (I follow road…)

And this is how it went – Jennifer and I verbally telegraphing the actions we planned to do if things went to shit. Jennifer and I started to talk more because talking was better than silence.

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Jennifer - "Don't worry guys. If we have to commit and climb up - there is nothing up there to hit. We have a full bag of gas and can fly to Syria and back before we get fuel critical."

Me - "We will get steady at 3500 feet and 100 knots before we start setting up the approach. Nice and steady."

Jennifer - "I will tune the GPS to the first point on the approach once you are steady."

Me - "Double check me when I go inside – make sure I keep a level climb. Not too steep. No turns. Watch the pitch"

Our verbal rehearsal of the plan helped us prepare mentally, go over the steps, get everyone on the same page, and take the first step toward being ready to actually commit to IFR – instrument flight rules.

My GPS needle suddenly swung rapidly to the left and I realized that it was now pointing at the final point in the flight plan – the threshold of runway 05 – *our runway*! I had just crossed the release point and was 1 km from home. The road, which had been our visual que, friend, and lifeline, peeled off to the right toward the gate. We turned left and Jennifer made a radio call.

"Tower – this is Blackhawk 23 – flight of 2, 1 km to the west, inbound with Kilo, for runway 05 full stop."

Tower answered immediately. "*Blackhawk 23 – roger. Be advised the field is IFR with visibility half a mile. We can't see you guys at all."* There was concern in his voice.

Jennifer didn't hesitate. *"Tower – Blackhawk 23 requests special VFR to land."*

"Blackhawk 23 – special VFR approved. We will be looking for you guys." Again, he sounded concerned. I could almost feel his eyeballs turn East as he strained to see our Blackhawks.

I should have been able to see the living area at this point. We lived in CHUs (containerized housing units – 20 -foot shipping containers we called home) and each one had a "porch light." The living area, with hundreds of lights on at night, was super bright at night and usually I had to look away.

All I could see was a bright hazy spot where the CHUs should be. I was 400 meters from the runway and still couldn't see anything. *"Hell."* I thought, "*We might go inadvertent at the FOB!"* I started to que the cyclic mike to say I was going to pull in a climb for inadvertent IMC…

"I see the wire! The Fence! I see the fence of the FOB. Turn left now!" Jennifer said.

"Roger coming left," I replied.

"I see the fence too" said the crew chief. *"Ma'am you are following the fence line now. And there are the CHUs. We are abeam the approach end of the runway."* Jennifer said, *"I see the hangars. Turn right now. You are on a base leg."*

At the top of each hangar was one single light. Those lights lined us up for the end of the runway. I crossed over the hangars, probably a little lower than the night shift mechanics appreciated and eased the aircraft into a right turn for final.

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The runway materialized under our wheels and our crew chief said *"Runway in sight. Clear down at any time."*

"Blackhawk 23 – this is tower – I think we have you guys landing at the end of the runway. Y'all okay? Hell of a night for flying."

Jennifer took the call saying, *"Tower – Blackhawk 23, wheels down. Request permission to taxi to parking. It's good to be home and down."*

"23 – permission granted. Welcome home."

And it got quiet again.

I swung the tail into parking, pushed the pedals, and Jennifer set the brakes. While sitting on the APU, waiting for the systems to cool down, Jennifer and I did not look at each other. Then, with a click, the whine of the APU died, and we turned off battery power. The cockpit went dark.

A flood of tension left my body.

I still avoided eye contact with Jennifer as I unbuckled my helmet and hung it in the cockpit. My hand shook as I tried to twist my seatbelt buckle clockwise to unlock my 5-point harness. It took a few tries and then it came off. I turned around and stepped back out of the cockpit. My left foot hit the ground first.

Solid ground. Tonight was one of those nights I appreciated the reassurance of the ground.

"Got a smoke?" I heard Jennifer say.

"Yeah."

I dropped my gear and walked outside the rotor disk to the far edge of the taxiway. Jennifer and the crew chiefs had also dropped their gear and walked over to join me. With quiet groans, we lowered our bodies to the warm pavement. Each of us took a smoke or two or three and sat silently reflecting on our mortality. We didn't talk except to ask for another smoke or a light. The pavement was always warm at night – retaining the heat from the day and reminding us of the heat yet to come. The aircraft, weighted down with fuel and covered in dust, sagging tiredly against the hydraulic struts of the main landing gear.

It's a funny thing when you almost die. In the movies, people look over their lives. They see their families, loved ones, or dreams of a life not yet lived. They think about their choices made and those yet to be made. That is not what happens.

Nothing. I thought of nothing. I just sat. Smoking. Empty. Looking up into the dusty, dark night.

To touch your own mortality truly is to touch the nothingness of death. The finality of it. The end of light and dark. It is nothing. It is empty. With each drag on the cigarette, I pulled myself back from the empty.

Then it was done. I ground out the butt, started to stand, and said, *"Let's get the bird buttoned up. That sucked."*

We loaded our gear into our bags, put the covers on the pitot tubes and tied down the bird. The crew chiefs took the M240s and ammo back the armory and dropped off the log book with the night maintenance team. Jennifer and I went back to the TOC to drop off our mission report. We noted weather was bad and the weather guys told us the airspace was now IFR for the whole of Northern Iraq.

It was just the night ring-route. And it was done.

About the Author

Maggie Kurtts graduated from the United States Military Academy in 2004 with a degree in physics. Maggie deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan serving as an aviation officer, company commander, and Blackhawk helicopter maintenance test pilot. After leaving the military, Maggie flew helicopters as a defense contractor for 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. She later returned to graduate school and competed a doctorate in nuclear engineering. Today, Maggie continues to serve as a military spouse, a parent, and a writer, focusing on stories of leadership and growth from both her time in the service and as a military family.

Photos provided by Maggie Kurtts.

CHPA 2020 Annual Conference - Nov 5-8

Robert Frost
Past President/Chairman

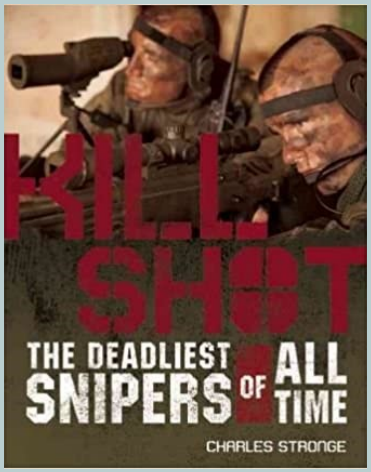
Dr. Jack Bailey
Chairman

James M. Wilhite
President

The 2020 CHPA Annual Conference is confirmed for Nov 5-8 in the Houston, Texas area, adjacent to the NASA Space Center.

Formal announcements were delayed due to COVID 19 planning and mitigation. This is the organization's priority. CHPA and our hotel will have COVID protective measures in place.

We are honored to have Timothy Kellner as our guest speaker at the Sat evening banquet. Mr. Kellner is a decorated US Army sniper featured in the book *Kill Shot: The 15 Deadliest Snipers of All Time*, written by Charles Stronge.



REGISTRATION

1. **Register with CHPA** by signing into the website www.chpa-us.org and follow your nose to the 2020 Annual Conference page, select REGISTER, $25 per person, Sat banquet $35.

2. **Register with the hotel** as follows.

   Courtyard Houston NASA/Clear Lake.
   Nassau Bay Town Square
   18100 Saturn Ln, Nassau Bay, TX 77058
   (281) 333-0220—Tell them CHPA Group
   Room rate $89 + tax for King or 2 Queens
   Early days prior or late days after OK
   Reserve before Oct 22, please
   Hotel has strong COVID protection measures

   No cost hotel parking
   Hotel DOES NOT have airport shuttle
   Hobby airport about 25 min away
   George Bush Intercontinental airport about 45 min away
   Flight reservations—consider rush hour traffic
   Concerns about airport-hotel travel contact:
   Robert Frost
   robertfrost75@yahoo.com
   903-245-2359

3. **RV Info**
   Jetstream RV Resort at NASA
   14450 Ellington Park Drive, Houston, 77598
   713-609-1019
   Jetstream@NewbyManagement.com
   www.jetsteamrvresortatnasa.com
   $65 per night
   10% military discount
   50% Passport America members

4. Fri. evening—Robert Frost has ideas for a local dinner adventure, discuss upon arrival.

5. Sat. AM business meeting, details upon arrival.

CHPA 2020 Annual Conference - Nov 5-8

Hotel pics

Kemah Boardwalk

A couple miles from the hotel, seaside entertainment and restaurants. Fri night dinner outing?

Lone Star Flight Museum

Tickets $14 per person over 65 and slightly more for younger. Discount for active and retired military. www.lonestarflight.org

CHPA 2020 Annual Conference - Nov 5-8

NASA Space Center—1/2 day or more
Tickets $27, less if group arranged in advance
2 blocks from hotel www.spacecenter.org

A story of US Coast Guard Rescue pilots, volunteers in combat

Always Ready

That Others May Live

Golden Flashes:
Two Days in the Life of an American Hero

by LCDR (Ret.) James Loomis, USCG

PART ONE
HOMECOMING
OCTOBER 30, 1954

Autumn begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio
by James Wright

In the Shreve High School football stadium,
I think of men nursing long beers in Tiltonsville.
And gray faces of steelworkers
in the blast furnace of Benwood,
And the ruptured night watchman of Wheeling Steel,
Dreaming of heroes.
All the proud fathers are ashamed to go home,
Their women clucked like starved pullets,
Dying for love.
Therefore, their sons grew suicidally beautiful
at the beginning of October,
And gallop terribly against each other's bodies.

Jack Rittichier's formative years were in Coventry, Ohio, an Akron bedroom community where lived many tire industry workers, including both of his parents. He was a star athlete at Coventry High School, in track where he claimed two team all-time records, and in football where he made the Akron All City team. He was well liked and played well with others. Coventry was located in the Portage Lakes District, so named for it's series of lakes connected by portage trails stretching northward to Cleveland where indigenous native Americans would paddle their canoes to trade.

Jack was a good student and was accepted at Princeton which he had to decline because Ivy League Schools did not offer athletic scholarships, accepting instead a football scholarship to the University of Kentucky, coached by future coaching legend, Paul "Bear" Bryant, who would go on to fame as head coach of the University of Alabama, "Crimson Tide." The players in the Southeastern Conference (SEC) were of a size Jack had rarely seen. Not seeing much of a future for himself in the SEC he returned home to attend Kent State University (KSU) on a full athletic scholarship. Jack did well there, academically, athletically and socially. His best year athletically was 1954, his junior year when his team, the "Golden Flashes," enjoyed one of its best seasons ever.

October 30th was homecoming day for KSU and there was something for everyone, be it catching up with former classmates, roommates, teammates, and professors, a judging of the best decorated dorms, sorority and frat houses, the day culminating with an SRO soiree, dancing the night away to the music of the great Jazz band of the day, "Woody Herman and his Herd." Oh, and did I tell you there was a football game

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to be played?

Jack, whose teammates called him "Cornell" because he was "polite enough to be an Ivy Leaguer," loved the campus scene and was normally a more than willing participant in the revelry, but make no mistake; this day was first and foremost about football! He knew this wasn't just any game; it was one of the biggest games in the school's history with a post season bowl game at stake which would be a first in KSU history! What also made homecoming special for the team was the opportunity to play before thousands of friends, family and alumni.

This, the leading KSU rushing team of all time, was special. The running game was still in vogue in much of Ohio, or as legendary Ohio State coach Woody Hayes called it, "three yards and a cloud of dust." As a starting running back, Jack was an integral part of this offense, averaging a sensational 8.9 yards per carry, good enough to gain him all MAC second team honors, this in a conference loaded with running backs, several of whom went on to play professional football.

The problem KSU faced is that no one told their forty year arch rival, Bowling Green State University (BGSU) Falcons who defied that playing style, not buying into the concept, that as one wag described it, "the forward pass is illegal in the state of Ohio." They had a wrinkle in their game plan. In keeping with their nickname, the Falcons featured a formidable passing game, a contrast virtually guaranteeing an interesting matchup. All that was left was to play the game and play it they did!

The game was a real nail biter as the lead seesawed throughout most of the game, with Jack scoring one of the team's two first half touchdowns. The Flashes went into the halftime locker room holding a 14-0 advantage, but BGSU fought back using that vaunted aerial attack to close the gap. Things looked grim when the Falcons scored on a touchdown pass to go up by four with only minutes left on the clock.

The BGSU kicker, who was the nation's leading punter for two consecutive seasons, showed why when he kicked a booming punt that pinned the Flashes back on their own 10 yard line with the clock winding down. But lightning struck on KSU's first play from scrimmage. Jack took a pitchout, circled right end, then followed two crushing blocks to break into the open and race the length of the field for a game winning 90-yard touchdown run.

This story would have had a perfect ending had the Flashes won their bowl game. Although they acquitted themselves well, victory was not to be as they fell to the University of Delaware's strong passing game led by gifted quarterback, Don Miller. Miller would go on to become the winningest coach in New England college history as the head coach for Trinity University in Hartford, later the longtime quarterback coach at the Coast Guard Academy. Here's another interesting tidbit - Miller threw only two interceptions in 1954, one of them by Jack Rittichier!

PART TWO
JUNE 9, 1968
SCRAMBLE THE JOLLYS!

Jack graduated from KSU in 1956 with an Air Force ROTC commission and his new bride, Carol, also a former Kent State student. So, it was off to basic pilot training and qualification in the B-47, the Strategic Air Command (SAC) long range six jet engine bomber. This was during the height of the Cold War with its ever present threat of nuclear war with the Soviet Union. It would be understatement to say that he didn't enjoy his ensuing six years with SAC. The thought of someday having to deliver his deadly nuclear arsenal was anathema to him, but as he told his brother on more than one occasion that if ordered to do so he would comply, even though he wasn't sure he would be able to live with himself had he done so.

Fortunately, neither he nor the countless number of fellow SAC crews ever received those orders.

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But the B-47 was a "widow maker" in it's own right with one of the worst safety records of any military aircraft ever flown, with 203 crashes taking the lives of 450 pilots and bombardiers, all this carnage occurring in peacetime.

After Jack left the Air Force in 1962, he tried his hand at civilian flying, first as a crop duster that ended abruptly when he lost a battle with some power lines, escaping unharmed but totaling his aircraft. Next, his father-in-law helped him purchase a small helicopter which proved to be a bad investment. Giving rides at county fairs was not what he had in mind. While considering other job options, he heard about the United States Coast Guard's Direct Commission Aviator (DCA) program for prior service pilots.

The thought of saving lives, such a contrast to his USAF experience, greatly appealed to him. He wanted to fly rescue helicopters but his interview board had other thoughts; his 5,000 hour B-47 "heavy iron" time made him a prime candidate for its burgeoning C-130 fleet, but Jack was adamant and convincing. And so he was selected for helicopters, probably the lowest time helo pilot ever accepted in the DCA program. Being a neophyte helicopter pilot, now USCG LT Junior Grade Rittichier was dispatched to Pensacola, FL to complete basic helicopter training; then it was off to Elizabeth City, NC for his first USCG duty assignment.

By all accounts, Jack loved the Coast Guard and its lifesaving mission. He quickly accumulated a lot of precious helicopter flying time, much of it during a temporary assignment to CGAS New Orleans for flood relief in the wake of hurricane Betsy. His next tour was AIRSTA Detroit, an assignment he enjoyed, it being close to his hometown in Ohio. He was awarded his first Air Medal there for a night flight through heavy snow to assist a sinking tanker on Lake Huron.

In 1967, Jack got wind of a pilot exchange program with USAF in which USCG aviators would fly HH-3E "Jolly Green" combat rescue helicopters in Vietnam and returning USAF pilots would be assigned to CG Air Stations. He requested this assignment and was among the first group of three of ten total volunteers selected. A year of intensive training followed, including CH-3 qualification, HH -3E combat crew training, and combat and jungle survival and POW schools. Then it was off to the 37th ARRS in Danang, Vietnam where in short order they were designated Rescue Crew Commanders (RCCs) and put to work, their primary mission the recovery of downed U. S. airmen anywhere in the southeast Asia theater.

LT Rittichier made an immediate impact, participating in several demanding rescues, earning the Distinguished Flying Cross three times in barely over a month of flying.

Jack, Lance Eagan, Lonnie Mixon
1st 3 of 11 USCG volunteers

June 9, 1968 was hot in Vietnam in more ways than one. Following North Vietnam's (NVA) bloody spring Tet offensive, the ground and air fighting was intense. This day marked a signal event in CG aviation history. The crews of Jolly Green 23 (JG23) with Rittichier the assigned RCC, as "Hi Bird," whose primary responsibility would

continued

be to come to the assistance of JG22, the "Lo Bird," or primary rescue aircraft, should it be required. The crews were the designated alert crews. After an O-dark-hundred wakeup, they proceeded to carry out the ritual duties of aircraft pre-flights, followed by crew, weather and intel briefings. On a routine day, JG23 would have an easier day, but this was hardly going to be the case on this one.

Meanwhile, at the Chu Lai USMC airbase 55 miles south of Danang, two USMC aviators got similar early wakeups for a fragged mission in their A-4 attack jets, Hellborne 215 and 216, to provide close air support for ground forces operating in the A Shau Valley, 45 miles west of Danang, one of the most heavily North Vietnamese Army (NVA) defended pieces of real estate along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the critical supply line stretching from North Vietnam, through the mountains of Laos, into South Vietnam and Cambodia.

The assigned flight leader, a USMC Captain with 200 combat missions under his belt, ceded his flight leader position to his wingman, a decision that would prove critical, but within his authority. Walter Roy Schmidt, the young 1st/Lt, had recently flown his 100th combat mission, qualifying him to assume the flight leader position.

Marine A-4

Their brief flight that took them north overhead Danang then westward to A Shau was uneventful. Upon arriving on scene, Hellborne 215 prepared for his bombing run as Hellborne 216 orbited at altitude. 215 commenced his bombing run, but upon reaching his target his bombs failed to release, leaving him with two options - try another bombing run or RTB to Chu Lai, no questions asked. He opted for the former.

This time his bombs released but he received extremely intense groundfire and was forced to eject at low altitude and high airspeed directly above his target, hardly a recipe for a successful rescue. He hadn't been able to exit the immediate area, nor climb to a safer altitude to eject and suffered severe injuries, including a badly broken leg and arm, along with heavy bleeding. His rescue would require the deployment of a pararescueman (PJ), compounding the difficulty of the rescue.

The HC-130P airborne command post, and helicopter re-fueler was alerted and the command to "SCRAMBLE THE JOLLYS!" was radioed to the Joint Rescue Coordination Center in Saigon which was quickly passed on to the operations desk at the 37th ARRS, and so they were. A PJ was on the ramp helping Jack load his parachute and survival gear. He later said that he would always remember Jack's big grin as he went off to do what he loved doing best. JG22 made several rescue attempts but was driven off by heavy ground fire ~~artillery~~. After additional sanitizing strikes were put in by the fast movers and USMC gunship helicopters, it was decided to make a third attempt, but having removed his drop tanks for his previous attempts, JG22 no longer had sufficient fuel.

The survivor was either unconscious or dead but the NVA made no move to capture him, setting a classic helicopter trap. Rittichier, aware of the trap, agreed to make an attempt, despite having no Hi

continued

Bird protection. He made his way to the survivor but was also driven off by intense groundfire. He retreated to a safe area while fighter jets pounded the rescue site area.

Rittichier agreed to make another attempt, led in by USMC gunships. This time he was calling out incoming fire coming at him from all quadrants. He arrived in a hover over the survivor. His PJ had attached himself to the rescue hoist and was out the door just as a Forward Air Controller (FAC) yelled to Jack that his aircraft was on fire and attempted to direct him to a nearby clearing. Jack announced that he was headed for the clearing. The rotor on his crippled helicopter slowed to a near stop and JG23 crashed in a huge ball of flame, killing all four crewmen instantly.

In 2002, a combined team from the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting and the U.S. Army's Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii located the crash site of Jolly Green 23. Remains of all four crewman, LT Jack Rittichier, USCG, Copilot Cpt Richard Yeend, Flight Engineer SSGT Elmer Holden and PJ James Locker, were recovered in February 2003. Remains of the USMC downed pilot, 1st/Lt Walter Roy Schmidt, were never located by U. S. forces.

LT Jack Rittichier is the only USCG aviator to make the ultimate sacrifice in combat. He was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery on October 6, 2003.

PART THREE
MEMORIAL TO LT JACK RITTICHIER

To memorialize LT Jack Rittichier's service, his courage and unique contribution in USCG history, a bronze bust has been commissioned and fundraising is in process to pay for it. The following photo was taken about a week before his death attempting that very hot rescue.

Renowned sculptor Benjamin Victor is using that photo as the basis for the bust, and Jack's family is quite pleased how the clay model that will be used to cast the bust looks so much like him.

When complete, the bronze bust and memorial plaque will be on display at the new National Coast Guard Museum in New London, CT when it is opened, now scheduled for 2024. Meanwhile,

Jack's memorial bust and plaque will be located at the Coast Guard Academy (CGA). The Memorial Committee is looking for the best placement spot where OCS cadets and DCAs (Direct Commissioned Officers in training) can't miss it.

The estimated cost of the memorial is $15,000, fundraising is in process and you are invited to contribute if you are inclined to do so. Here is how to contribute:

- Go to the Coast Guard Aviation Association website **https://aoptero.org**
- Under the menu item Support the CGAA drop down list, select Corporate and Individual donations.
- Look for the Rittichier Hero Fund and check the box to the right.
- Enter your donation amount ($25 minimum), and follow your nose completing info required to use credit card or ask for an invoice.

About the Author

This article was written by LCDR (Ret.) James Loomis, USCG. He served in the USCG from 1960 to 1980. He was one of the 2nd group of 3 USCG pilots who volunteered to fly Jolly Green SAR missions in Vietnam and served there during 1969.

After retiring from the USCG, LCDR Loomis flew rotary wing and jets for the Rockerfellers, Time, Inc., Chase Manhatten Bank and ABC News.

James Loomis landing HH-52 on CGC Gallatin with LT Thad Allen as our LSO

James Loomis, 1970
Now a CHPA member

Member Spotlight

Courage, Nerves and Begging Dogs

As told to Terry Garlock by Edward "Skip" Ragan

Skip Ragan

My wake-up call in Vietnam came on the side of a mountain in the Trung Son range west of Hue, on a March, 1968, day that started out to be routine. I was a brand new helicopter pilot, bursting proud of my wings, a W01 Warrant Officer. We were called *Wobbly Ones* by more experienced pilots, I guess because they knew better than anyone how much we had to learn.

I flew with the Kingsman, the 17th Assault Helicopter Company attached to the 101st Airborne at Camp Eagle in Northern I Corps, near the DMZ. I was confident and reveled in having become an aviator, which of course is why I needed my bell rung to wake me up.

The day was a normal ash & trash re-supply mission flying as peter pilot for the aircraft commander, Lt. "Wild Bill" Meacham, between Camp Eagle and several artillery fire support bases to the west. Load, take off, climb to altitude, call for artillery clearances so we didn't fly through a gun target line, call for smoke at the LZ, identify the smoke color, land and unload, back haul and repeat. I figured I could do this in my sleep, which sounded good because it was boring.

About mid-afternoon, as we landed at Fire Support Base Birmingham a young Lt. ran up pleading that we hold tight while they loaded us with ammo crates and two passengers. He gave us an estimated location for one of their ground units in trouble, in heavy contact with the enemy, down to less than a full squad and rapidly running out of ammo. The rest of their company was on the way to help but were more than a klick away on the ground, moving slowly through thick jungle. The Lt. wanted us to carry the ammo out to the desperate unit and let the two passengers kick it out the door through the trees.

The unit in trouble was in a dangerous zone restricted as a no-fly without gun cover. Our gun platoon, the Lancers, were 20 miles away at Camp Eagle while we were 10 minutes from the ground unit. Wild Bill called to scramble a Lancer gun team even though we knew they would never get there before we were on station. Bill told me that he called for the guns to CYA, but we were going in with or without them because we were *not* leaving US ground troops holding an empty sack!

We flew about six miles southwest of Birmingham to a mountainous area that would later become FSB Vehgel. As we approached I called the unit on the radio and asked them to pop smoke. I identified yellow smoke, they confirmed and we came to a hover over the steep incline of triple canopy jungle. As our passengers started to toss the ammo crates through the trees, the RTO on the ground started raising hell on the radio screaming, "Move left, move left! You're kicking it out over the gooks!" In the background as he was transmitting I heard constant gunfire, grenades and RPGs. Did I mention we were hovering facing the side of a mountain? While we were moving left as instructed I glanced up to see a uniformed enemy soldier in a tree uphill from us just as he fired at us.

My wake-up call area, later when FSB Vehgel was under construction

The windshield blew out, the radio console blew up between Wild Bill and me, something hit me in the left foot and leg and in less than a heartbeat I fouled

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my shorts. The ammo was unloaded and we scampered back to FSB Birmingham, fingers crossed all the way that the aircraft would hold together. We made it, landed and shut down to check the aircraft for damage. There was plenty of damage. The windshield and radios were gone and there were over 40 holes in the aircraft. None of us was hit.

While everyone else checked damage, I slipped off behind an ammo bunker to clean out my shorts. I was going to use my T-shirt to clean myself, but found that I had not fouled my shorts at all; instead, I was soaking wet with sweat from my ear lobes to my toes. Funny what a sudden surge of fear can do to a person. That evening we got word that the ammo and grenades we kicked out to the ground troops helped them hold on until the reaction force and the Lancer gun team arrived to save the day. Score one for the good guys, plus a wake-up call for me.

The 17th was tasked to fly FOB and SOG missions for the Special Forces, and LRRP missions for the 101st LRRPs, in addition to the normal combat assault and other support for the division.

The guys who undertook these missions were very special people, and I was privileged to be accepted by them. The teams we flew were the *tip of the spear*, and for a little while we were going with them.

While the 101st LRRPs (Long Range Recon Patrol) operated within the 101st area, sneaking around the jungle far away from secured areas, FOB and SOG missions were a different matter altogether, often involving trips to exotic places with my knowledge limited to what I had to know as a pilot. Even the little I did know was never declassified, which means since I swore an oath there are some really good stories I just can't tell you.

In the Kingsman, flying FOB, SOG and LRRP missions was strictly voluntary. If a pilot was interested in these higher-risk missions and the AC thought he was good enough, the pilot would be asked to join that small circle of crazy pilots. Every one of these pilots had to prove himself under stress, be accepted by the other pilots, and be accepted by the FOB, SOG and LRRP teams as well. If any of them said no, you were out. Small special teams on the ground had to be confident their air assets would not leave them hanging; there had to be a strong bond of trust between the air crews and the teams who put their life on the line every time they ventured into Indian territory. The flip side was that any time a pilot wanted out, he got out with no questions asked. Flying on the razor's edge tended to burn people out, and every man had his own point of burnout.

Once I proved myself, once I was accepted after being tested under pressure, most of the rest of my tour was flying for either FOB, SOG or LRRP teams.

A LRRP team in Vietnam

We inserted these teams usually at first light, with the team in one helicopter and a second aircraft serving as a decoy, in a game of helicopter leap-frog from one false LZ to another, and we continued the game after actually dropping them off so an observant enemy wouldn't know their position. LRRP teams were heavily camouflaged but lightly armed, with intel missions of confirming enemy strength, enemy unit ID and position, a prisoner snatch for interrogation or even targeted assassination. LRRPs might be concealed off an enemy "trotter" or trail so close they could reach out and touch their enemy as they walked or trotted by. When the enemy discovered one of these special teams, they were compromised and extraction was urgent because they were few in number, and since they were very effective the enemy pulled out all the stops to kill them. When the teams were compromised and called for extraction, they depended on us and we better be fast, we better be good.

LRRP mission plans included one or more PZs

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(pickup zones) with room for landing a slick, but those plans often changed on the fly, especially if the team was compromised and on the run. Improvising to get the team out often meant tight spots, so rotors whacking small tree branches on the way down while the crew hung out the side calling tail rotor clearance, well, that was not unusual.

But I would rather whack small tree branches than bamboo, because tree branches would cut and fly off or fall while the very tough strands of bamboo would slice the rotor blade skin until the aluminum stuffing would emerge to sunlight where it is definitely not supposed to show itself!

We sometimes made a hot extraction *on the strings*. That meant hovering over the jungle, under fire, and dropping McGuire rig ropes down to the team. When they were ready we pulled pitch to pull them up. On one hot extraction under fire, on the way up the crew, hanging out to watch the team, yelled on the radio that about 20 feet up one of the guys had his line severed by an enemy round. The instinct of any sane pilot being shot at while hovering is to get the hell out of there pronto, but we lowered the aircraft again, waited for the severed guy to hook up on a buddy's rig, and start pulling them up slowly again while the enemy shot at us. Flying LRRPs elevated the Pucker Factor.

When we picked up our LRRP teams, sometimes they reached around our seat from behind to give us an unexpected hug, or even a bad-breath kiss on the cheek, a sure sign of their relief after running for their lives. Some are still my friends after more than 50 years.

Some spots, like the Roung Roung Valley, were sufficiently hot we considered them a no-fly zone. But we did put LRRP teams in there to see what they could find. We knew, for example, the enemy had radar-controlled anti-aircraft guns in the area because we heard through our radio the first hum of painting our aircraft with radar, the second hum of lock-on, and we better already have taken evasive action before the third hum because it meant we were fired on with the big guns aimed by electronics. We knew that, but 101st Commanding General Bersoni declared there were no enemy radar-controlled guns south of the DMZ. That was official policy, sort of like a state religion requiring allegiance.

LRRP team on a McGuire Rig

Sometimes an opportunity arises that is too good to pass up, no matter how far we had to color outside the lines. A LRRP ambush killed some enemy, and among them was an Asian around six feet tall, almost surely Chinese. When they reported by radio they were reminded there were no Chinese fighting with the NVA, as if to ask, "Who are you going to believe, HQ or your lying eyes?" So Gary Linderer, a LRRP six feet tall, laid down on the ground next to the enemy body for a photo, and the LRRP team sent the photo in to G2. The photo promptly disappeared and was never seen or mentioned by HQ.

LRRPs and their helicopter pilot co-conspirators were not to be deterred when it comes to poking a finger in the eye of authority. The LRRP team found a .50 caliber radar-controlled gun in the Roung Roung Valley, killed the enemy guarding it, and enlisted the help of their helicopter pilot, W.T. Grant. They rigged a slingload and he picked up the radar fan. I was standing near HQ when Grant flew the load in from the field, slowed down enough to drop it squarely on General Bersoni's personal pad, and kept going to land at the LRRP compound. Nothing more was ever said about where the radar-controlled guns were not, and the general kept his

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souvenir.

When we inserted a LRRP team, we were on standby for hot extraction in case they were compromised. We waited with radios on, ready to scramble.

One day "Wild Bill" Meacham and W.T. Grant had inserted a team and were on standby. The Battalion CO, needing aircraft, assigned them to fly a Charlie Alpha (CA, Combat Assault, inserting infantry into an LZ in formation). Wild Bill told the CO, "Sir, if my LRRP team calls in trouble and needs extraction, I'm going, no matter what you do to me." Such was our commitment to our LRRP teams. When they got the call, scrambled to make the extraction and approached the LRRP team position, the radio came alive with a call from the Brigade CO, also in flight in a slick, announcing that he was taking command of the situation. Meacham responded, "Colonel, if you don't get the hell out of my AO, I'll tell my gunners to shoot you down!" Then he proceeded to extract his LRRP team.

That may sound like a hot air story, but I heard it on the radio myself. And that's why we called him "Wild Bill!"

That 1968 summer I got word my Dad's Merchant Marine ship, the American Chieftain from US Lines, would be in DaNang harbor a few days. How cool is that? I could catch a ride to DaNang and talk the Navy into running me out to the ship. My Dad was the Chief Engineer, and we could have a short visit.

That's just what I did, except that the Navy was not amused and seemed to be immune to my begging like a dog. So like any good Army man I schemed and improvised and talked another Army helicopter pilot into flying me out to the ship. He had to stay low, on the deck, under the DaNang tower radar to escape the tight control of DaNang airspace. At the ship he hovered above the fantail and I slid down a rope, landing on my feet. The things we do when we're young! He flew away while the crewman who walked out to meet me asked, "Who the hell are you?"

I explained and he told me there was a mistake, my Dad was on the ship in Cam Rahn Bay, a long way south. It was time to improvise and enjoy. I met the captain and other officers who welcomed me to join their fine dining. They even presented me with a few gifts to take back to the boys including a prized box of steaks, and they called the Navy authorities who responded to their request far differently than mine. As the Navy boat approached to pick me up, I spotted two old toilet seats sitting in a pile of junk on the ship and asked what they were going to do with them. They told me that was a pile of trash to be taken ashore. When I asked if I could have the two toilet seats they wondered why I would want them since the lids were broken off. I explained that we crapped on a rough-sawed hole in plywood, and those lidless rings would be very welcome.

When I arrived back at my unit I installed one of the toilet seats in the officers' latrine, and gave one to my crew chief to install in the enlisted men's latrine. There was just one rule. If the seat was occupied when I or my crew chief entered our respective latrines, the occupier had to immediately move to a rough hole out of respect for our . . . um . . . squatter's rights.

When I got short, I got nervous. I guess when the escape door gets close and you think you really are going to make it out of there alive, you get scared of getting killed in the narrow little window of the last few days. And so I got nervous and I was more careful. In our aggressive missions, the paradox is that being careful made me less safe, more dangerous.

About March 3, I was sent to Mai Loc just south of the DMZ to fly an FOB mission, but the mission was tabled for the day due to weather at the FOB site. I was edgy. I decided I wanted out. I talked to Rick Haines, our assistant operations officer and a classmate from flight school, trying to be relieved from this mission. No dice, I was the only Special Ops AC available. They would try to relieve me the next morning.

Day after day, the weather was so bad we could not fly to the FOB, and I grew more edgy and distracted by the day. Whether to fly in marginal weather was a crucial decision because if the weather was lousy when we inserted a team, it could easily turn worse and prevent us from flying to get the team out if they were compromised and threatened.

Day after day I contacted operations begging like a dog to get relieved. I knew I was getting way too nervous to fly this type of mission. Thoughts of going home were clouding my thinking and that was dangerous. It was time for me to get out.

On the afternoon of March 8, flight operations reported that Kingsman 18, Dave Poley, had re-

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turned to the unit from a state-side leave and was on his way to Mai Loc to relieve me. Dave arrived and I departed as soon as I said my goodbyes, back to Camp Eagle to start out-processing.

The next morning, March 9, 1969, Dave Poley and the crew I had flown with to survive a number of tight spots, were tasked to re-supply a radio relay station we used to communicate with the teams in the field. The FM radios ground troops used were battery powered line-of-sight only and had a limited range. Radio relay stations were placed on mountain tops whenever possible to maintain radio communications with remote teams. Because of the lousy weather the relay station, northeast of Khe Sanh, was critically low on everything and badly needed this re-supply.

The aircraft was loaded and the crew made several attempts to get to the relay station. The relay station reported a blue sky and unlimited ceiling, but they were on top of the mountain, *above* the clouds.

Dave circled looking for a hole in the clouds above him, or an area less densely blanketed with clouds that would allow them access to the mountain top. The radio conversation between the AC and the radio operator at the station ended with Dave saying he was trying one more time. I suspect he put the nose of the aircraft to the mountainside and hovered up the side toward the top, clouds be damned! I had done such a crazy thing a few times myself.

The relay station reported they heard heavy automatic weapons fire followed by a loud explosion below their position on the mountain.

The crashed helicopter's burned wreckage was located a few days later. All on board were dead, Dave and the crew that had flown with me the better part of a year. All four crewmembers' remains were recovered. The supposition was that they came under hostile fire and while returning the fire crashed into the mountain side.

It could have been me. In a 30-year severe case of survivor's guilt, I thought every day "*It should have been me!"* I assumed Dave's wingman and close friend, Ken Roach, thought the same thing. At a unit reunion in 2000 I ran into Ken and stumbled over my words trying to make amends. When I told him how bad I felt, that I always knew he blamed me for Dave's death and that I blamed myself, too, he said, "For the love of God, why would you think that? We were all scared and the shorter we got the more nervous we got. Every one of those guys knew what the risks were and they volunteered to fly those missions. Dave was doing exactly what he wanted to do, nothing more, nothing less."

Finally, I let it go. A wise older man once told me that no one is ever really dead as long as they are remembered. Rest in peace, guys. You are remembered. Since then, you have always been part of me, and you will be until my last breath.

I had a second tour in Vietnam and survived to come home. Over the years I had some challenges how the war had changed me. I think I am still working on it, a lifelong work in progress.

At least here at home, I found comfort and peace.

Skip Ragan retired from a career as a Drug and Alcohol Rehab Officer with the Norfolk Southern Railroad. He lives in Peachtree City, GA, where he trades barbs over coffee with Terry Garlock, Mike King and Wayne King, all CHPA members.

KIA March 9, 1969

AC, CW2 David A. Poley, 22, Philadelphia, PA.

Pilot, 1st Lt. Daniel J. O'Neill, 24, Butte, MT.

Crewchief , SP-5 Charles P. Girard, 19 , Pasadena, CA.

Gunner, SP-4 Dennis A. Ormand, 19, Downers Grove, IL.

Gary Linderer was one of the LRRPs Skip frequently inserted and picked up, still buddies. Gary wrote at least four books about the adventures of LRRPs in Vietnam, recommended reading to appreciate the courage and accomplishment of the young men on these teams:

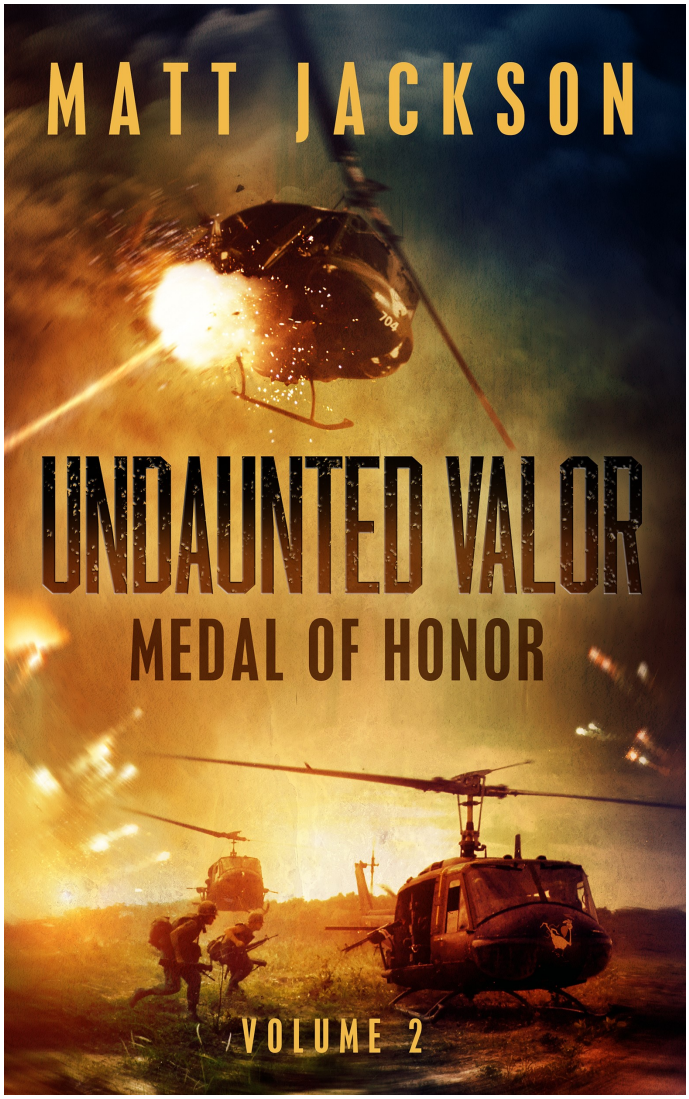
Six Silent Men
Phantom Warriors
The Eyes of the Eagle
Eyes Behind the Lines

Book Review by Mike King

Undaunted Valor: Medal of Honor

by Matt Jackson

Note: the author is a CHPA member, using the pen name Matt Jackson and anonymity for his own personal reasons



The author once again takes the reader back to the days when those of us now bonded by our experiences in combat during the Viet Nam War. He vividly portrays the background of life and death consequences of decisions made both in the air and on the ground that are certain to bring back memories shared by so many Vietnam Veterans. Especially so for those slick jockeys that so many of us relied upon for our survival.

He mixes just the right amount of detail dealing with in-processing once we arrived in country so that readers reflect on their own experience. He then details the intricacies of everyday flight operations, life as advisors to our Vietnamese allies, the background behind why some decisions were made, the effect of prolonged combat on aircrews and those on the ground, and how one simple day off can make such a difference in combat. In short, the author allows the reader to live or relive life in Vietnam.

Lastly, he portrays the principle that combat veterans of my generation held dear, that we never leave a comrade behind. I leave to the individual reader to decide for themselves whether a decision to "go back in" was the right thing to do.

Another great read highly recommended.

Mike King
Darkhorse 14
1971-1972

Book Review by Loren McAnally

Taking Fire:
Memoir of an Aerial Scout in Vietnam

By David L. Porter

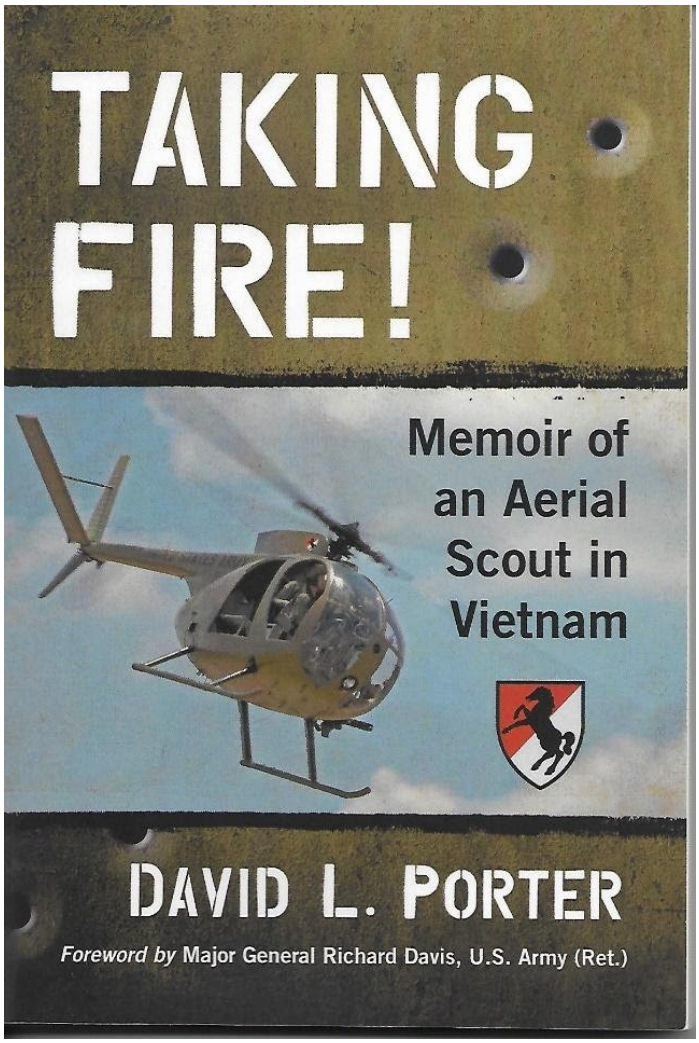
In the first chapter of the book the author takes us through his steps at becoming an Army Aviator, something all Army Aviators experience but is unique to each.

Porter's sub-head, Memoir of an Aerial Scout in Vietnam, is what the book is all about. We get to experience his tour in Vietnam through the multiple missions flown by Porter. He takes us through joining the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment with his time going out with a tank company to becoming a scout pilot.

The book gives an inside look into the operations and missions of an Air Cavalry Troop which has its highs and lows. Porter inserts enough humor to make you laugh but mostly deals with serious business of being an aerial scout. The stories are well written and allow readers not familiar with the Air Cav to get a look and feel of what it was like. The occasional pictures included add a visual aspect to the book.

Well written and a good read

Loren McAnally
CHPA Membership Manager, Life Member



Our Legacy . . .

. . . we few, who know the skills, thrills, service to country, commitment to each other and mortal risks of rotary wing combat. Best job we ever had!

Take care of yourself and those you love.

End