

CHPA Quarterly

Magazine of the Combat Helicopter Pilots Association

3Q

July 2019

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President's Message

Ladies and Gentlemen, this will be my last message as President of CHPA. I'll transition to Chairman of the Board of Directors following our annual conference in September. The election process for the incoming President begins in the near future.

It was a humbling experience being President when you consider who our membership is. Our membership has served in every conflict dating to the Korean War; has received every valorous award given by the Department of Defense including the Medal of Honor; and collectively has logged over 400,000 combat flight hours. I'm proud of this organization, you our membership and together what we represent.

CHPA is an organization that provides more than social interaction between veterans. CHPA was organized to remember and honor fallen aviation comrades lost during helicopter combat operations; and to conduct charitable activities related to the US military. I'm proud to say that CHPA has lived up to these expectations many times over.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve. Thank you to the exceptional Board of Directors for their hard work this past 2 years.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as I can at the annual conference this year.

-Dr. Jack Bailey, President

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Chairman's Message

Rich Miller, transitioned from his role as Chairman of the Board of Directors to Chairman Emeritus early, departing in July.

Rich's contributions to CHPA are too many to list here. There aren't enough words to thank him for that contribution either. On behalf of the entire Board of Directors, I speak for all of us when I wish him the very best.

In accordance with Article IX of the CHPA by-laws, the President assumed duties of the Chairman until his term as President is complete. At that point, he'll transition permanently to Chairman.



2019 Year in Review

Key Activities

This year, CHPA leadership represented the organization at a number of events including the Gulf War Memorial Dedication in Washington, DC and the Helicopter Association International (HAI) Annual Conference in Atlanta, Georgia.

CHPA is also actively engaged with leadership at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama, advocating for and to support the re-dedication for the Fallen Testers Memorial, recognizing test pilots killed in the line of duty, planned for October of this year. When the re-dedication date is confirmed, the date and location will be posted to the CHPA web site.

Once again, the Annual Goldie Fund Scholarship Committee has done an exceptional job of vetting candidates for this year's award. We are proud to announce Tony Amedeo is the CHPA scholarship recipient for 2019. Tony is an incoming Mechanical Engineering student at Northern Illinois University. There is detailed narrative on this year's scholarship activity later in this issue.

The new web site launched in January of this year. A significant change from the old site, we've received quite a bit of positive feedback on the new site.

Financial Position

CHPA maintains a healthy financial position as it moves into 2020. The increase in new membership over the past 2 years has been a significant contributor to our financial position. The increase in revenue tied to new membership has enabled CHPA to expand services, like membership accounts for the Together-We-Served veteran social media platform.

The closeout from the 2018 annual conference was positive and the forecast for this year's annual conference is similar. The 2018 Internal Revenue Service (IRS) filings and annual closeouts were without incident.

The Goldie Scholarship Fund is viable for the foreseeable future based on the scholarship applicant/award trends over the past 3 years. Moving forward however, we will need to focus on growing the fund in order to extend the life of this very worthwhile endeavor.

Membership

CHPA has officially crossed the 600 mark on membership. As of 6 August, CHPA has 603 members in



2019 Year in Review

total membership. This represents a 15% or more increase over the past 2 years. The percentage of increase is averaged because, like any organization, totals are changing from month to month.

CHPA's Facebook membership has also officially crossed the 4,000 mark. As of 22 May, there are 4,388 members of our page. This number reflects a 7% increase in just the past 3 months.

With the launch of our new web site in January, membership in Together-We-Served, our on going Gift Membership drive and a robust social media presence, we expect membership to increase moving into 2020.

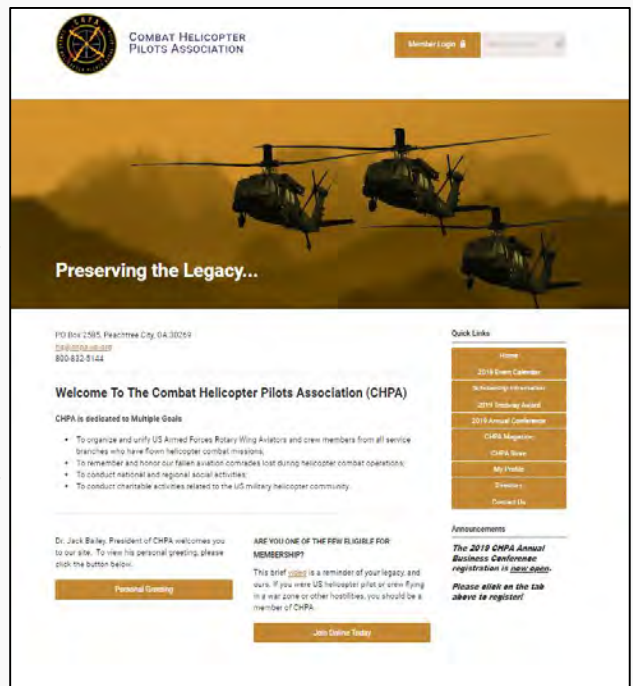
One initiative, approved by the Board of Directors and in planning now, is the creation of a Posthumous Membership category. The intent is to create a means for honoring the fallen. As part of this effort, a Wall of Honor will be added to our Together-We-Served social media page.

CHPA Web Site

The new CHPA web site, launched in January, reflects the culmination of almost a year of hard work on the part of many people. CHPA would like to especially thank Loren McAnally for his efforts. Loren is the administrator, database manager and web-master. Loren is also our interface to the Together-We-Served social media platform. Loren was absolutely invaluable during our transition to the new web site.

The new web site reflects the agnostic nature of CHPA, welcoming all combat aircrew, regardless of conflict and branch of service. It's streamlined, direct and more visually appealing.

One new feature we'll be adding in the future is a *News* tab. CHPA has been represented at many events, from the Vietnam Helicopter Pilot and Aircrew Monument dedication in Arlington Cemetery to the Gulf War Memorial dedication across from the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. All these events will be listed chronologically in our *News* tab for the general public to see.



2019 Year in Review

Magazine Renaming

The *Swash Plate* Newsletter was officially re-named the *CHPA Quarterly* in May. The re-naming was part of the organization's shift from a monthly newsletter to a quarterly magazine. The next step in the magazine's evolution is to standardize the format using a professional template.

The process for re-naming started last summer. The process was vetted during the 2018 annual conference business meeting and put to a vote electronically earlier this year.

There were sixteen recommendations for a new name during the recommendation process. There were 150 votes cast during the voting process, representing 26% of our membership at that time.

The CHPA Quarterly won with 31.33% of the votes for those responding. The voting was collected and tabulated using allcounted.com. The member who submitted the name has chosen to remain anonymous and not accept an award for his recommendation.

Member Incentives

CHPA's financial health has enabled us to increase the services we provide to members. CHPA has partnered with Together-We-Served, the largest online community of Veterans existing today. With over 1.8 million members whose service dates to World War II, Together-We-Served contains comprehensive military records of Military Veterans posted by the Veterans themselves including memories and photographs.

Together-We-Served enables Veterans to find those they served with by matching the service information they enter on their personal Military Service Page with the service information of all other Veterans within the Together-We-Served database. Together-We-Served is also a Veteran locator tool with a powerful military records search capability.

As part of this partnership, each member of CHPA received a free one year membership to Together-We-Served. This is accessible by signing into your CHPA account. Everyone is encouraged to enjoy, explore and re-connect.

TOGETHER WE SERVED
RECONNECTING VETERANS SINCE 1998

U.S. ARMY U.S. NAVY U.S. MARINE U.S. AIR FORCE U.S. COAST GUARD

Search Your Service Branch of Honor About TWS Log In Join Now

'TWS REUNITES MORE U.S. MILITARY VETERANS THAN ANY OTHER ORGANIZATION'

Join Now Watch Video
FREE TO JOIN

1,898,356 U.S. MILITARY VETERAN MEMBERS IN 5 SEPARATE SERVICE BRANCH WEBSITES

KEY BENEFITS OF BEING A TWS MEMBER
A SIGNIFICANT ARCHIVE OF MILITARY VETERAN SERVICE RECORDS
SEARCH FOR OLD SERVICE FRIENDS FROM YOUR MILITARY SERVICE

FIND PEOPLE YOU SERVED WITH
Simply enter your boot camp, unit or duty stations, with associated time frames, on your service profile, to view a list of all other members who served with you. READY for you to make contact.

ENGAGE WITH OTHER VETERANS
View the service histories of over 1,898,356 U.S. military service members, from WWII to present day, including their memories and photos. Participate in our forums and find new friends with similar interests.

REMEMBER YOUR SERVICE
Create an organized scrapbook of your own military service including all service history, insignia, badges, medals, ribbons, memories and photos you can share with your family as a web page or a poster you can frame.

COMPREHENSIVE MILITARY RECORDS SEARCH AND VETERAN LOCATOR POWERED BY TOGETHER WE SERVED



2019 Year in Review

Life Membership Certificates

This summer CHPA issued certificates to Life Members recognizing service in combat and life membership in the Combat Helicopter Pilots Association (CHPA). The certificate is long overdue recognition for the contribution made to our nation and the commitment made to CHPA.

Ultimately membership certificates will be issued to all members. As with anything, the process is iterative as we test several things: quality of print, content and shipping.

If you are a Life Member and didn't receive a certificate, or if there is an issue with the name on it, please contact CHPA for a replacement.



Chapter Events

Although CHPA doesn't have regional chapters, it does encourage members to engage locally when and where able. In May, CHPA attempted to create a VHPA-CHPA dual Chapter in the Colorado area. The measure wasn't successful when put to a vote with the VHPA, but given the shared purpose, we've developed some great relationships.

Bill Bates, a new member to CHPA and member of the Rocky Mountain Chapter of VHPA (Vietnam 1968-69, 7/17 Air Cavalry) is coordinating an August meet-and-greet for CHPA members in the Denver area. We're confident this will be a great event and the start of something long standing.

If you are interested in hosting a meet-and-greet in your area, please contact CHPA. We can help facilitate contact, coordination and to some extent, provide advertising and CHPA branded items like decals or literature.



2019 Year in Review

Board Elections

There are a number of positions on the Board of Directors coming vacant in 2019. Likewise, there a number of leadership positions within the Board of Directors whose term of office is ending.

In accordance with Article VIII of the CHPA by-laws, an Election Committee was established for 2019 with the Chairman of the Board of Directors leading the effort. In accordance with Article V and VII of the CHPA by-laws, a method for the elections was decided.

However, with the early departure of the Chairman of the Board of Directors, there is a delay in the election process for 2019. The Board of Directors addressed the issue in their 3rd Quarter meeting in July and a way forwarded decided.

The nomination process will commence in the August-September timeframe electronically. A call for nominations will be made by email. In accordance with Article V of the by-laws, voting for new members of the Board of Directors will take place during the annual conference. The voting process may also be electronic in order to maximize participation and is under review at this time.

For those interested in serving on the Board of Directors, there are two criteria for nomination:

In accordance with Article V of the by-laws, only those CHPA members in the Pilot or Flight Crewmember category, and in good standing, who have been Pilot or Flight Crewmembers for one or more years, whether or not consecutive, may serve on the Board of Directors. Good standing is defined in Article III as not delinquent in the payment of dues. If you qualify, please consider running for membership on the Board of Directors. CHPA's success is dependent upon the participation of the membership.



2019 Annual Conference



This year's event will take place at the Hilton Garden Inn Space Center in Huntsville, Alabama, from Thursday, September 12th to Sunday, September 15th.

Huntsville, called the Rocket City, is home to the US Space and Rocket Center and NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center. Huntsville is located in North Alabama, serviced by four major airports within a two and a half hour driving radius, including Huntsville International, Nashville International, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport.

This year's event is dynamic and evolving. The intent will be the most cost effective annual conference in recent memory, with the average cost for a couple (member and guest) to attend at less than \$600 including registration, hotel room, breakfast each morning, the annual dinner and attendance to all three evening receptions with complementary drinks for the first hour.

This year CHPA will be joined by the North Alabama Chapter of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA) at our reception on Friday, September 13th. The VHPA will be providing an on-site static display of BUC-3, a Vietnam era UH-1C gunship as part of their involvement. BUC-3 was the subject of an article Jack Bailey wrote for this magazine approximately 3 years ago. There is a tremendous history tied to the aircraft. We are grateful for their support and attendance.



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The agenda for the annual conference, including all the social and vacation options available to you is below.

Most social and vacation items are within 5 minutes of the hotel and the cost is negligible. As always, the first day, September 12th is for early registration and an informal reception is that evening; Friday, September 13th registration continues, the annual closed session President's Meeting takes place and the first formal reception, with the North Alabama VHPA in attendance is that evening. September 14th the annual business meeting and evening dinner are scheduled. Sunday morning, September 15th is hotel check-out for all travelers.

12 September

9AM – Early registration begins

11AM – Hotel check-in

6PM – CHPA evening reception (first round “on the house”)

Local events available:

- Space and Rocket Center, across the street from our hotel/conference center
- Huntsville Botanical Garden, 2 minute drive from the hotel/conference center
- Huntsville Veterans Memorial, downtown, 7 minute drive from the hotel/conference center
- Huntsville Museum of Art, downtown, 7 minutes from the hotel/conference center
- *City Lights and Stars Concert, 7.30PM at Burritt on the Mountain, 16 minute drive, \$10-\$15*

13 September

9AM – Registration open

9AM – VHPA UH-1C static display

11AM – Hotel check-in

3PM – President's Committee Closed session

4PM – CHPA organizational photo with static display (all members welcome!)

6PM – CHPA evening reception with VHPA in attendance (first round “on the house”)

Local events available:

- Space and Rocket Center, across the street from our hotel/conference center
- Huntsville Botanical Garden, 2 minute drive from the hotel/conference center
- Huntsville Veterans Memorial, downtown, 7 minute drive from the hotel/conference center
- Huntsville Museum of Art, downtown, 7 minutes from the hotel/conference center
- Huntsville Depot Museum, 6 minute drive from the hotel/conference center
- *Downtown Huntsville Outdoor Music Festival, 7 minutes drive, Northside Square downtown*
- *Redstone Arsenal MWR Octoberfest 2019, 5.00PM, Redstone Activity Field*



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14 September

9AM – Annual Business Meeting

6PM – Dinner (business attire)

- Awards
- Guest speaker
- Silent auction

8PM – CHPA evening reception



Local events available:

- Space and Rocket Center, across the street from our hotel/conference center
- Huntsville Botanical Garden, 2 minute drive from the hotel/conference center
- Huntsville Veterans Memorial, downtown, 7 minute drive from the hotel/conference center
- Huntsville Museum of Art, downtown, 7 minutes from the hotel/conference center
- Huntsville Depot Museum, 6 minute drive from the hotel/conference center
- *Redstone Arsenal MWR Oktoberfest 2019, 12.00PM, Redstone Activity Field*
- *Straight to Ale free brewery tour, 2.00PM, 5 minute drive from the hotel/conference center*

15 September

10AM – Hotel check-out

Registration for the annual conference can be made at:

<https://www.chpa-us.org/2019-annual-conference>

Hotel reservations can be made at:

https://hiltongardeninn.hilton.com/en/gi/groups/personalized/H/HSVSCGI-PILOT-20190912/index.jhtml?WT.mc_id=POG

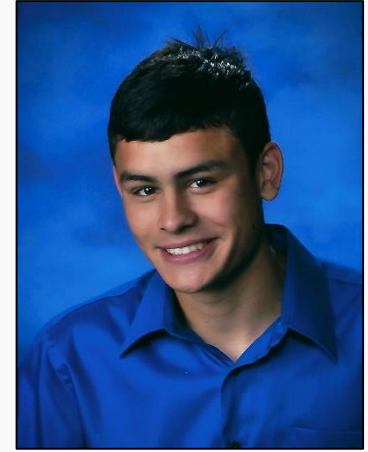
We very much look forward to seeing you in Huntsville!



Goldie Fund Scholarship

Anthony J. (Tony) Amedeo is 18 years old and resides in Naperville, Illinois with his Parents (Tony and Melissa). Tony has two younger brothers (Josh and Nick). Tony is the grandson of CHPA founding, charter, and life member Milan (Karen) Tesanovich.

Tony will be attending Northern Illinois University (NIU) full time beginning this fall to study Mechanical Engineering (ME). NIU is ranked tied for 45th in the country for its ME school by US News and World Report, along with California State - Fullerton. Tony is looking forward to this opportunity to pursue his passion at NIU. His hobbies include dirt biking, mountain biking, and skiing.



Throughout high school, Tony worked as a landscaper where he managed projects (sites, people, and machinery) his senior year. In this capacity, Tony developed the skills to evaluate and approach problems from different angles and apply various unique solutions. These skills have greatly benefited Tony as evidenced by his 3rd place finish in the 2019 State of Illinois for Automotive SkillsUSA competition.

Upon graduation from NIU, Tony plans to work in the automotive industry where he will be able to apply his knowledge and learned skills toward advancing automotive and perhaps aviation technology. By applying and refining cutting edge technology currently being created by companies such as Tesla in the automotive industry and Northrop-Grumman in the aviation industry, Tony hopes to be an integral part of the burgeoning autonomous (self-driving) automotive technology industry and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) technology industries. This would include strides toward reducing our reliance on fossil fuels by transitioning to electrical power and alternative fuels (hydrogen, etc.).

Tony hopes that his efforts will also result in advancements in the military's ability to provide support to our brave men and women who so selflessly serve our country and its citizens around the world.

Tony is grateful to the CHPA for investing in his future with an award from the Goldie Scholarship Fund.



Robert Tredway Award

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is our pleasure to announce that Julie Kink has been chosen as the 2019 Robert N. Tredway Award recipient. On behalf of all members of the Combat Helicopter Pilot Association (CHPA), we would like to congratulate her.

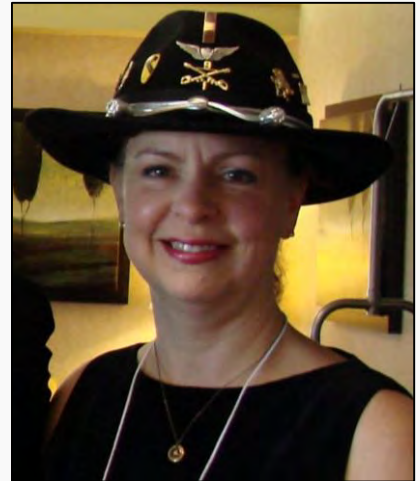
The Robert Tredway Award is a biennial award, presented by CHPA to an individual who has demonstrated significant accomplishments impacting the military helicopter community, veterans, CHPA or the community at large.

A Gold Star family member, Julie lost her brother WO1 David Kink, killed in action in Vietnam on August 3, 1969. Julie was 8 years old when she lost her brother in service to our country. Not wanting David's memory relegated to medals on a shelf and photographs on the wall, Julie began a personal journey of understanding the war, service as a combat aviator and how families heal. That journey realized a lifetime of veteran and family advocacy, for which she is honored.

A unanimous decision by the Tredway Award Committee, this extract from her nomination narrative best represents the collective opinion of her by the committee and the entire Combat Helicopter Pilot Association (CHPA):

Julie is a veterans' advocate who had the distinct honor of knowing Robert Tredway personally. She has organized, coordinated and facilitated information sharing for family members who've lost loved ones; spoken on behalf of veterans and their families at public events; traveled to Vietnam as part of her personal journey for understanding and healing, which she draws upon for educating and helping others to heal; been personally involved in establishing memorials on behalf of the fallen; and represented her brother, WO1 David Kink, with the honor and dignity deserved.

Julie will be honored at the CHPA Annual Conference in Huntsville, Alabama this September. Unable to attend, the award will be accepted on her behalf and then presented to her in an accommodating way. Julie has graciously accepted an invitation to attend the conference in 2020 to be recognized in person.



Julie Kink



Robert Tredway



Veterans Corner

The Veteran's Corner is a place to share with membership, issues, benefits and items of interest for veterans.

Periodically, CHPA provides updates to Veterans Administration (VA) policy, procedure or automated tools.

It is not uncommon for a veteran to be unaware of the full set of benefits that may be available to them. For this edition of the CHPA Quarterly, we'd like to reorient membership to the VA web site where you can find the full list of potential benefits available (see the figure to the right of the page).

There are two helpful web links that are a "must have" for researching benefits and understanding how to access them:

Explore VA is the "get started" function and helps you orient to the site and to specific things:

<https://explore.va.gov/>

The benefits navigator helps you drill down to specific benefits to see if you qualify and how to process for them:

<https://explore.va.gov/benefits-navigator>



Receive compensation for your service-connected disability. If you have a disability caused by or aggravated during active military service—no matter when or where you served—you may be eligible to receive tax-free monthly benefits. *Filing a Fully Developed Claim is the fastest way to get a claim decision.*



Invest in your education. VA provides education and training support for eligible Veterans and, in some cases, their spouses, dependents, and survivors. The Post-9/11 GI Bill®, Montgomery GI Bill®, and other programs help cover the cost of tuition, training, housing, books, and fees. *Use GI Bill benefits to attend college, go to trade school, learn a technical skill, or get on-the-job training.*



Jump-start your career. VA offers numerous benefits, resources, and services to help you transition from service to civilian employment and enhance your education, skills, and career. VA provides vocational and employment counseling, job-seeking tools, and other assistance. VA also offers services if you're unable to work due to a service-connected disability. *If you have a service-connected disability or are a transitioning Servicemember, you may receive assistance to overcome employment challenges and advance your career, including training, tuition, books, and fees.*



Care for your health. VA provides world-class health care to eligible Veterans. The Veterans Health Administration is America's largest integrated health care system, with more than 1,700 sites of care, and it is consistently ranked among the nation's top health care providers. Our goal is to provide Veterans and their families with personalized, proactive, and patient-centered care. *More than 6 million Veterans choose VA health care and meet the Affordable Care Act health coverage requirement.*



Finance or improve a home. With VA's home loan guaranty programs, eligible Veterans of any age may access a low-interest home loan, draw cash from their home equity by refinancing, or reduce their current interest rate. VA adaptive housing grants can also help Veterans with certain service-connected disabilities live more independently. *You can reuse VA home loan benefits multiple times.*



Secure your family's future. VA offers a variety of life insurance options that accommodate many circumstances. With Veterans Group Life Insurance (VGLI), you can get up to \$400,000 in coverage. You must apply for VGLI within 1 year and 120 days from separation from the military. You will not need to answer any health questions if you apply within 240 days after separation. Your spouse, if covered under Family Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance before you separated from service, may also obtain VA life insurance from participating private insurers by applying within 120 days after your separation. *Additional insurance is available to disabled Veterans with service-connected conditions, even those rated at 0 percent.*



Rest in peace. VA provides burial and memorial services to Veterans at no charge to honor their service to the nation. Spouses and children may receive these services, too. Benefits may include burial in one of VA's 131 national cemeteries, including the opening and closing of the gravesite, inscribed headstones or markers, a burial flag, and a Presidential Memorial Certificate. *VA provides burial and memorial services for eligible Veterans free of charge.*



Supplement your income. A VA pension can provide extra monthly income to help make life a little easier. It is tax-free, supplemental income for certain low-income disabled or elderly wartime Veterans or their surviving spouses. *More than 500,000 Veterans and survivors receive VA pensions.*



Protect your loved ones. Spouses, dependents, and survivors of Veterans and Servicemembers may be eligible for many types of VA benefits. Loved ones of those who have died or were seriously injured in the line of duty may also receive VA assistance. Benefits may be used to advance in a career, get an education, or provide supplementary income. Surviving spouses may benefit from VA-guaranteed home loans too. *In a recent one-year period, one-quarter of those receiving VA Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits were spouses and children of Veterans using transferred entitlement.*



Member Spotlight

CHPA Life Member Mike King

by Terry Garlock

I take credit for Mike King being a CHPA life member. We have coffee together several times a week, and one of those days a year or two ago I told him to get out his wallet. He asked why and I said, "Do what I tell you!" I took his credit card, told him I would charge it \$175 for life membership in CHPA if that was ok. He nodded yes and I signed him up in a couple minutes. Sometimes you have to drag the horse into the water.

If anyone asks Mike how he earned the Silver Star, or if you ask him about the personal cost involved, he may stare at you but he won't tell you crap and there is nothing you can say to convince him you deserve to know.

If you utter the word "hero" to Mike he will think you a damn fool and he just might say so because he's inclined to speak his mind without the inhibitions that encumber most of us.



Mike King

Too many Americans have no interest in or concept of serving our country under difficult conditions. Too many don't even know anyone in uniform and since these days virtue is measured in self-indulgent pastimes and cell phone acumen, I believe our youth would do well to pay attention, to measure themselves against examples of service such as Mike King in Peachtree City.

He retired from the US Army as Lieutenant Colonel, but I will tell you a little about his younger days as a Lt., serving as a helicopter pilot in the Vietnam War in 1972. The war was rapidly winding down and all American ground troops had been withdrawn from Vietnam. Our pilots remained to support South Vietnamese ground troops fighting to protect their country from North Vietnamese invaders seeking to impose Communism by force.



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Mike was a Scout pilot with Charlie Troop of the 16th Cavalry in the delta region in southern Vietnam near the equator, where the mighty Mekong river spreads out in many fingers to flow in ever-slower ebbs into the South China Sea, depositing its silt along the way to build more flat so-called land, where there are no foxholes because digging a few inches will strike water, where palm trees grow tall and the vegetation spreads thick and fast beside thousands of rice paddies separated by dikes in squares, where for years before the steamy heat and humidity had suffocated newcomer Americans while rotting the clothes off their back and distracting them from noticing trip wires and mines, where snakes abound and the bugs are so big they might conspire to carry you off for dinner, where ground transport was predominantly by boat on the countless canals under cover of darkness despite curfews. Civilians had been mostly relocated out of the areas designated as free fire zones due to relentless enemy activity.

Scout pilots were a special breed, kind of the “Airborne Ranger” among helicopter pilots, all volunteers for their dangerous mission. They flew the Hughes Cayuse OH-6 Light Observation Helicopter, LOH or “Loach” in our slang, a powerful little aircraft that suffered none of the power problems plaguing other helicopters in the lousy “density altitude,” a by-product of the heat. The Loach gave a quick, highly responsive low vibration ride, perfectly suited to the Scout mission of flying low, snooping around, blowing tall grass apart looking for footprints, campfires, weapons or food caches or any other sign of the expertly concealed enemy, always trying to draw their fire to expose their position.

Mike and his fellow Scouts flew missions in Loach pairs, darting around low and usually quite slow looking for trouble, flying a circular cap around a target 180 degrees apart to cover each other with the gunner’s M60 and the pilot-controlled minigun, a breathtaking weapon that fired 7.62mm rounds at the rate of 4,000 per minute on full speed.



Standard issue weapons weren’t enough for these cowboys, so they carried a pile of “bombs,” a concussion

grenade taped to three pounds of C4 plastic explosive. The gunner used them like bowling balls to roll on the fly into the door of enemy bunkers after pulling the pin. The longest four seconds of Mike’s life was when his gunner in the back seat was hit in his chest protector by an enemy round and knocked to the other side of the aircraft while he was holding the bomb, yanking the commo chord out of socket, leaving Mike to wonder whether the grenade was still in the back seat with the pin pulled, which would have turned them and the aircraft into a temporary cloud of shredded parts.



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The first time Mike was shot down he was flying the wing of Hugh Mills, a legendary Scout pilot and member of the US Army Aviation Hall of Fame. Intelligence had reported an NVA unit for an end of the day mission, which afforded the brass at Group Headquarters the opportunity to join the Cavalry package that was sent to check it out since this was thought to be a “milk run.” The brass would observe from the Command and Control Huey helicopter at a higher and safer altitude, so what could possibly go wrong?

Mike and Hugh flew their approach low, at about eight feet off the ground and 80 knots to surprise the enemy – if they were there. As they rounded a turn at a canal, suddenly the enemy unit was in close front, surprising all on both sides. Mike lost track of his fire team lead bird because there were lots of pretty twinkles out front - enemy muzzle flashes - and as the rounds zipped and whacked into his aircraft Mike was focused on the minigun to shoot back. He says after a minigun burst it all seemed like slow motion because everything went quiet since his turbine was dead and that low to the ground there was no time to do anything. When he hit the ground that tough little helicopter rolled right through the enemy camp, slinging off all kinds of parts as it rolled, and kept rolling beyond into a rice paddy. By the time that highly survivable cockpit stopped rolling, everything external had either fallen off or had been torn off, including the plexiglass bubble, and a dizzy, banged up and pissed off Mike unstrapped and climbed out, looking around for John Hazelwood, his door gunner in the back seat, but all he could see was John’s nose just above the dirty rice paddy water.

So Mike drew his knife, cut John’s safety belt, pulled him up by his shirt, threw him over his shoulder and proceeded to a nearby rice paddy dike for cover. Carrying Hazelwood through waist-deep foul water fertilized with animal and human dung, Mike noticed enemy troops, looking rather pissed off themselves, advancing from both sides of the dike. Hazelwood told Mike later that his legs worked fine but he decided if Mike was determined to carry him he would gladly go along for the ride, but as the enemy closed in he did hasten to remind Mike about his .38 pistol, their only remaining weapon. So Mike drew his pistol and fired all six rounds while still carrying Hazelwood, alternating his fire from one side to the other, hitting two of the enemy and slowing the others down. Mike doesn’t remember, but John swears that Mike threw the empty weapon at a nearby enemy soldier just before the C&C aircraft arrived to pick them up, first dispatching nearby enemy with the gunner’s M60. Mike’s John Wayne impersonation was over, at least for that day, February 20th, 1972.

But that is not the occasion for which Mike received the Silver Star.

Mike’s luck held through being shot down four more times in the Delta, including one day a very angry enemy soldier emptied his AK-47 into Mike’s helicopter from point-blank range as he



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flew by very low, putting one round in the middle of his chest protector. Mike still has that chest protector, or “chicken plate” in our lingo, with the 7.62mm bullet hole to remind him how much his bruised ribs hurt for days.

One day Mike zigged when his gunner expected him to zag, and unintentionally shot holes in the ends of each of the four rotor blades. Mike had to set it down before the extreme vibration tore the aircraft apart. If you want to call that a shoot down, then make it six in all, way too many tests of a young man’s courage and luck.

If you ask Mike he’ll tell you he just did his job in Vietnam like the other guys. Just like them, he didn’t really want to be there amidst all the misery, he didn’t hate anyone and he didn’t want to kill anybody, he was doing his duty. One of the reasons he won’t answer some questions is that he knows fancy medals that set one man apart don’t make a dime’s worth of difference among Vietnam veterans; we’re all brothers who were in it together.

As any combat veteran can tell you, war is a nasty business, the price of admission to a brotherhood of those who were there. I have known Mike now for 11 years and he and I will be brothers and friends until one of us draws a last breath. There is no other in this world I would rather have watch my back.

Young people, tear yourself away from your cell phone for a moment, take notice of people like Mike King, measure yourself and wonder: “How can I serve an interest that is greater than myself?”

Only you can answer the question.

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