

## Bill Jackson

By Walter W Gutsche

I was hoping to run into Bill again, maybe at one of the reunions, but alas it's too late. I read in the VHPA Directory that he is attending the REALLY BIG REUNION with all our comrades who have departed. Bill did not meet his fate in a helicopter, but it's not because he and events didn't conspire to come as close as possible to this end.

Bill was my wingman, and I his. We flew scouts in OH-13S for B Troop 1/9 Cav during 66-67. We first met in flight school, graduating from Class 66-1, and as with most of our class, we went to the 1st Cav. So Bill and I did a lot of flying together. Remember that this was PT (Pre-Turbine) days, and our thoroughly deadly scout team consisted of two "armed" Bell 47s. Some had two 7.62s and some had eight 2.75s, mine was a rocket ship and Bill's had guns. Anyway I wanted to tell you about the weird things that happened to my wingman during our first tour.

I was flying lead. We were headed back from the AO for fuel. There was a rain shower ahead, even though it wasn't severe enough to fly around, Bill called me and stated that he wanted to avoid the shower. Two items about his radio call puzzled me, the first was how different his radio sounded (it was like he was in a wind tunnel) and second was his request, he was always the adventurous type. When I punched left pedal, to get a look behind me, I discovered that his entire bubble was missing and the only things remaining were the flapping doorframes. If you've ever ridden a motorcycle in the rain than you can appreciate Bill's predicament. He was also averse to getting the instrument panel drenched. Needless to say, we went around the storm and Bill got to give maintenance their first of many headaches. Apparently there was this single spire of vegetation that went unnoticed by Bill and removed his plastic shield.

A few months later, Bill was flying with an FNG, they were hot refueling from some blivets. Bill had landed first and his wingman landed next to him. Bill's Observer started to refuel aircraft, when Bill noticed that his cyclic wasn't centered, so he repositioned it. Unfortunately, the new guy had landed a little too close and when Bill moved his cyclic, their rotor blades smashed together causing the wingman's entire transmission and rotor system to depart their mounts, drive forward, go through the top of the bubble and hit the FNG in the back of the head. Fortunately he still had his helmet on. The impact left him unconscious for two weeks and walking with a constant left list for months afterwards. This was much more agreeable to him than being classified as a KIA. The FNG's machine having lost its dynamic components gave up the ghost and unceremoniously settled into the dust. However, Bill's helicopter was not so willing to roll over and die. The partially severed rotor blade chopped off the tail boom, thereby putting the aircraft into a severely out of balance condition. This resulted in Bill bouncing all around the POL point. So there was Bill being slammed around inside his helicopter trying to get it shutdown. Incredibly, he escaped again unscathed, but now there was not one, but two machines for maintenance for to glue back together.

Bill's next adventure also involved the transmission and rotor system leaving the aircraft. This occurred while we were reconning in the plains west of Pleiku near the border. Bill was flying lead, and since we had been in this area before, he thought he noticed something different. The trails in the area showed a great increase in activity. Bill was so intent on discovering the extent of the new movement that he swooped in lower and lower, spiraling in closer and closer to get a better look when one of his rotor blades actually HIT the ground. The impact caused the separation of the transmission and rotor system from the aircraft, (leaving Bill without any visible means of support and susceptible to being arrested for vagrancy). The centrifugal force of the dynamic components leaving the airframe caused his H-13 to recover from the spiral and level off right before impact. He, his Observer and the aircraft skidded to a stop without any further damage. However, the engine was still running, but with nothing to drive, it was in a screaming over speed, so Bill again shutdown the engine, unbuckled, climbed out and calmly dusted himself off. I scrambled the Blues and maintenance recovery team. We were able to sling it out with a Huey, since half it's weight was decorating the surrounding area. Thanks to Bill's efforts our maintenance team was well on its way to becoming extremely proficient in the fine art of reinstalling transmissions and rotor systems.

Please don't get the wrong impression. Bill was an excellent pilot. These events were just a few things that can happen while amassing over a thousand hours of low level, real low level, flying during a 12-month Scout tour.

I will miss him.

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