Young Hookers in Vietnam

Memories of a 101st Airborne Division Chinook Pilot
And a Band of Hooker Brothers

Frank Buzzard

December 2020

Chapter 1—A Combat Emergency on LZ Neville

Our 101st Chinook crew had been flying resupply missions all day in support of the 3rd Marine Division conducting Operation Dewey Canyon in northern I Corps. It is nearly dusk on 28 February 1969 and time to refuel our CH-47B in preparation for the next day's missions. I hover over to the refueling area at Vandergrift Combat Base—Vandy—and our crew starts pumping JP4 into our fuel tanks. I call our company operations on the radio and tell them our status, "Varsity 434 refueling at Vandy POL"—an acronym for Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants, but source of much needed Jet Fuel for our thirsty Chinooks. Varsity Ops replies, "Varsity 434, we have an immediate Combat Emergency resupply at LZ (Landing Zone) Neville. They are under attack by NVA and require food, water, ammo, and medical evacuation of wounded. You and Streid (CW2 Gary "Strange" Streid) meet at the Log (Logistics) pad and take two slings loads to Neville. You will be escorted by two Marine Huey gunships. Do you copy, over?" I reply, "Varsity 434 copies, over."

I look at my fellow pilot, CW3 Frank Bonn, who puts his finger on the map at the far northwest corner of South Vietnam and says, "LZ Neville."

I call Gary Streid on the radio who is also refueling nearby and tell him I will meet him at the Log pad. The weather is low cloud ceiling at Vandy, but we had been flying sling loads of supplies west of the abandoned Khe Sanh airstrip and knew the cloud layer ended near the Laotian border about 25 miles west of Vandy and we could climb above the clouds and turn north to LZ Neville. I contacted the Marine gun ships and explained our plan. Our Marine gun team leader concurred and said he would meet us at the logistics pad.

Frank Bonn and I alternated flying duties and it was my turn to fly this one. A short hop over to the Vandy Log Pad and I hover over a 'water buffalo' trailer holding 400 gallons of water with a second sling of food boxes of C rations attached below the trailer. The ground crew hooks it up and I lift it off the ground, power check, and all good, so I take off to the west. Gary Streid comes in behind me in his Chinook and hooks up a ten thousand pound sling load of mostly ammo—Class Five—and medical supplies. We meet the two Marine gun ships and climb up just under the base of the clouds as a flight of four heading west along old Highway 9 that runs from the coast at Quang Tri to Khe Sanh, and on west into Laos. We follow the Song Thach Han river and Highway 9 west from Vandy toward Khe Sanh where the river turns south with Khe Sanh and the old air strip sitting on the west side of the river valley high above the river valley floor. We pass over the abandoned Marine base that figured so prominently in the hard fought siege of Khe Sanh a year earlier and the country wide Tet Offensive of February 1968. Khe Sanh looks so lonely and desolate as we pass over it at about five hundred feet AGL (Above Ground Level). I think why do we fight so hard for territory and abandon it later? Little did I know then how that thought would come back to me during the 101st costly battle for Hamburger Hill in the Ashau Valley later in May 1969.

About 5 miles west of Khe Sanh the low cloud bank ends and our combat emergency flight of 4 choppers climb together above the cloud deck and turn north to LZ Neville. LZ Neville is a Marine artillery base with 105 mm howitzers to provide fire support to Marines fighting an NVA regiment attacking them from the west. LZ Neville sits 1 klick (a klick is one kilometer or 1000 meters on our tactical maps) south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating South and North Vietnam and 2 klicks East of the border with Laos. All of us are well aware of the fact that this is real "Injun Country"! About ten miles south of LZ Neville we contact the Marines and ask for a situation report and tell them we are inbound—flight of two Army Chinooks. The Marine air controller tells us to approach from the northwest and that they are taking mortar fire and small arms fire from the ridgeline due west of the LZ. He gives the Marine Huey gunships enemy coordinates so that they can provide suppressive fire on this ridgeline as we delivery the supplies.

This is my first time to land at LZ Neville. I now see a very narrow ridgeline running south to north with 2/3rds of the LZ having a 1000 foot vertical cliff on three sides, the west, north and east side. There are howitzers, bunkers, and fighting holes everywhere we look. The narrow ridge is not large enough to land our Chinook so we begin our approach to land the food and water trailer on the small logistics pad where the Marines have popped smoke. The Marine Huey gunships have broken off and start their rocket and machine gun strafing run on the suspected enemy positions. I glance at them doing their first run, but now concentrate on my approach and landing. Our Chinook is first in and Gary Streid and crew orbit above the LZ in his Chinook until we clear the LZ. I come to a hover above the smoke and set the food down first and move to the right to set down the water trailer. Our Flight Engineer (FE) is my eyes on the sling load. He lies on the floor looking out the two foot by two foot "hell hole" opening in the floor above the cargo hook in the center of all of our Chinooks. I lower the Chinook a little more and the FE releases the sling doughnut from our cargo hook.

I have told the Marine air controller that I would medivac the wounded so I hover a little further to the right of the sling load. The LZ is so small that I can only put the rear wheels on the ground with most of the Chinook hanging over the 1000 foot drop off. We have a five person crew—two pilots, our crew chief and door gunner manning the two M-60 machine guns in the windows behind the cockpit, and our FE watching the load. The FE lowers the rear ramp and the entire crew helps the scrambling Marines load the wounded aboard. Suddenly the FE alerts all of us that we are taking incoming mortar fire. I see one explode on top of a bunker to my left about 30 meters away. I tell the FE over our intercom that all five of us hear, "Tell me when all the wounded are loaded and the ramp is up!" I concentrate on flying the Chinook with both aft wheels still on the ground. All of us know that if a mortar hits our rotors or Chinook fuselage it is game over as we crash over the side of the 1000 foot cliff into the jungle below.

About 45 seconds later that seemed like a lifetime, and several more mortar round explosions, the FE yells, "RAMP UP"! I add power, drop the nose, and accelerate NW quickly away from Neville. Climbing north, I ask, "How many wounded are aboard, chief?" He answers about 10-

12 wounded and several body bags with dead Marines. I am in a climbing right hand turn to orbit the LZ while Gary Streid takes in his load of ammo. I call Gary on the radio and tell him to approach from the East to avoid ground fire from the west of the LZ. I tell him, "I have all the wounded. We took mortar fire dropping the load and picking up the wounded. Don't dilly-dally in the LZ!" Gary replies, "Copy". I watch his Chinook approach from the east. He flares slightly, the load swings forward touching down right on the smoke, his FE instantly releases the load, and without a pause the Chinook noses down climbing away from LZ Neville in a climbing right turn. It was a thing of beauty! Streid and his crew had not spent more than five seconds in the LZ.

We climbed about 1500 feet above the LZ. It is getting dark now a few minutes after sunset. The Marine gunships head back to Vandy and we thank them for their support. The Marines on LZ Neville thanked us profusely. They had not had a chopper resupply for 5-6 days as their LZ had been in the clouds. They had been under constant attack from the NVA. Low on food, water, ammo with their wounded needing medivac, our 101st Army Chinooks were a welcome sight indeed. I tell the Marine air controller that we were glad to help our Marine brothers and would be back tomorrow.

I call Gary in the other ship and ask him to come up on our 101st Varsity radio frequency. I then tell him I need to get our wounded to major medical support and I needed to head to Quang Tri hospital instead of going back to Vandy. He concurs and we both turn east flying above the clouds for our 20 minute flight to Quang Tri. Frank Bonn takes over the flying to give me a break. I look back toward our crew in the back and give them a thumbs up—well done. I feel chills down my spine as I look at the body bags on the floor holding our dead Marines and stretchers holding wounded Marines.

We call Quang Tri for a weather report. It is not good. 500 foot ceiling and light to moderate rain at the airfield. It means a night instrument approach to the airport. I call Quang Tri hospital which is at the north end of the runway and ask for assistance offloading the wounded immediately after landing. I tell them we will be there in about 20 minutes. Frank Bonn and I exchange a nod and an unspoken well done thought.

A young Marine holding his IV bottle up in one hand comes into the short hallway into the cockpit. He looks at both of us with teary eyes and mouths "Thank You" above the noise of the forward transmission and forward rotor directly above his head. I mouth back with tears in my eyes thinking about dead and wounded Marines in the back, "You are welcome. Glad we could help."

As Frank Bonn heads due east, 090 heading on our gyrocompass, I realize that I don't see Gary Streid and his Chinook above the clouds anymore. We press on toward Quang Tri flying above the cloud deck about 5000 feet AGL. I call Quang Tri approach control and request a GCA (Ground Controlled Approach) to Quang Tri. The GCA ground controller has two radar antennae at the end of the runway at Quang Tri. One tells him our vertical flight path and the

other tells him our horizontal flight path. He can then relay to us whether we are above or below the vertical flight path and left or right of the horizontal flight path on final approach. We adjust our descent rate and heading to line up on the runway and land when we break out of the clouds. I tell them I am about 20 miles west of Quang Tri at 5000 feet and VFR (Visual Flight Rules) above the clouds. I request radar contact confirmation.

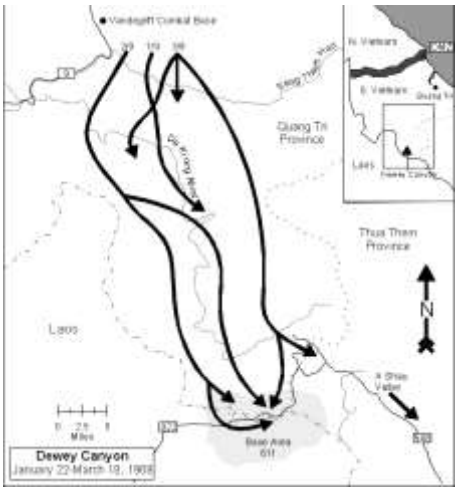
Quang Tri approach says they don't see us on radar west of them. I take over flying from Frank. Quang Tri approach asks me to turn left for radar identification. I do it. He does not see me yet and requests a right turn for identification. I turn to the right. I am wondering why he doesn't see me when I hear, "Varsity 434 radar contact. Turn to 180 degree heading and expedite!" I do so and increase speed to 150 knots heading due south. I am suspicious of the ground controller's concerned response so I look up at our back up magnetic compass to compare its reading to our gyrocompass heading. Yikes!! I see the magnetic compass reading 140 deg while the gyrocompass reads 180. The gyrocompass had drifted during our flight and was reading 40 degrees further North than my real heading. It happens sometimes. Combat flying in helicopters in Vietnam creates a lot of dust. Dust in the gyrocompass can cause the gyro to precess and give an erroneous heading. That means during our flight from LZ Neville just a little south of the DMZ toward Quang Tri that I was flying NE instead of due east and had drifted over the border into North Vietnam! Of course we did not know this since we could not see the ground because of the clouds. Thankfully, in a few minutes we had returned to South Vietnamese airspace without incident. Whew!

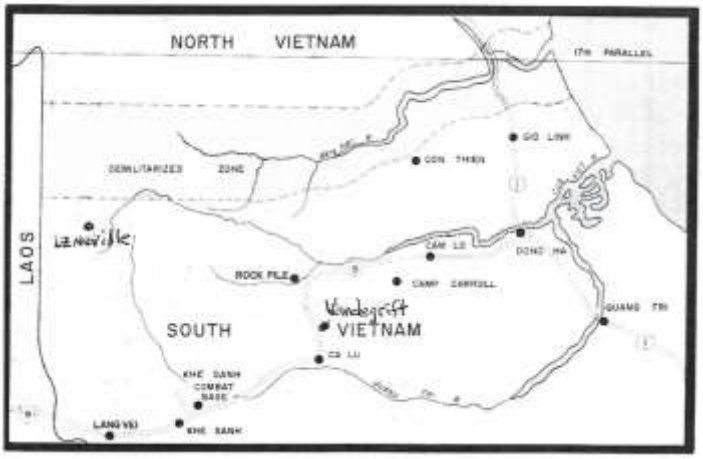
Quang Tri GCA brings us around and I start our instrument approach landing to the north. My fellow pilot, Frank Bonn, handles the radios and monitors my heading and descent rate. I fly the flight instruments and Frank will take over when we break out of the clouds and land. We quickly enter the clouds and rain during descent. GCA does a great job guiding me down. GCA is very calm and patient while telling me that I am well above glide slope about 2/3rds of the way out from the runway. I increase rate of descent and carefully converge back to the glide slope. About 300 feet above the ground Frank sees the runway and says, "I have the aircraft". He takes control, lands us, and taxis to the hospital area. The hospital team is waiting and offloads our Marines quickly into the hospital.

Gary Streid had landed about 10 minutes ahead of us and we get our Chinooks refueled, find a place to spend the night, and both crews fall exhausted onto Army cots. Next morning we are all up at daylight, fire up our two Varsity Chinooks, and head back to Vandergrift Combat Base. We spend the next two weeks flying and living with our Marines at Vandy fighting a major offensive battle all over the area. All three of our 101st Chinook companies—A Company "Pachyderms", B Company "Varsity", and C Company "Playtex"—rotated four Chinooks and crews to Vandergrift Combat Base with continuous 101st Army Aviation support to the 3rd Marine Division during operation Dewey Canyon, January 22-March 18, 1969. A fine example of Army and Marine cooperation in Vietnam. We did good and had a real feeling of

accomplishment. Tough flying in difficult weather, but rewarding with our well trained Chinook crews excelling.

Chapter One photos and maps





LZ Neville from Marine mortar crew view

Frank Buzzard receives DFC from 101st CG Melvin Zais for LZ Neville CE

LZ Neville from the cockpit

Varsity pilots at Vandy

Chapter 2—A WOC goes to Fort Wolters, TX

I wanted to be a pilot. I always wanted to be a pilot. I built model airplanes of WW2 aircraft and jet fighters and bombers growing up. I had them hanging from the ceiling all over my bedroom. My favorite show on TV was Sky King. I built U-control model airplanes and flew them in Roosevelt Park near our home in Longmont, Colorado. I joined the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) and will never forget the thrill of summer camp at Lowery Air Force Base in Denver in 1962. We learned close order drill, military marching, and chain of command. We studied mountain search and rescue principles. We had classes on aeronautics and flying.

I got my first ride in a helicopter with ten other CAP cadets in an Air Force CH-21 Shawnee nicknamed 'the flying banana'. This was helicopter innovator, Frank Piasecki, first really successful tandem rotor helicopter which served early in the Vietnam War. Piasecki then developed the heavy lift, tandem rotor CH-47 Chinook which first flew in September 1961 and is still in production today by Boeing Vertol in Philadelphia, PA. We did not know it then, but the Chinook became the B-52 of helicopters with current upgraded models having twice the lift capability of our first Vietnam era Chinooks. Many of the CH-47B and C models that we flew in Vietnam went thru CH-47D conversion and are flying to this day in Afghanistan and other theaters. What a remarkable record of helicopter design excellence and longevity.

I was in my sophomore year in 1967 studying Mechanical Engineering at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, but my heart and desire were elsewhere. Did I say that I wanted to be a pilot? Vietnam quickly became a helicopter war and the Army needed a lot of helicopter pilots. I drove to Denver and took the Army flight school aptitude test and flight physical passing both with flying colors. I joined the Army on April 17, 1967 and was sent to Ft Polk, Louisiana for Army basic training. I left Ft Polk the end of May 1967 on a bus to Dallas and then Fort Wolters near Mineral Wells, TX for primary helicopter training as a Warrant Officer Candidate—WOC. I can't tell you how excited I was to be dropped off at the main gate of Ft Wolters with its two iconic training helicopters, OH-23 and TH-55, on stone pillars. I was going to be a pilot!

All WOCs started with four weeks of Preflight training focusing on Physical Training (PT), map reading, weather basics, helicopter aerodynamics, and basics of flight. After this we moved up on the "Hill" for five months of half day classes and half day flight training. I was assigned to 8th WOC Company, grey hats, class 68-3. I loved both academic classes and flight training at the main heliport and my first introduction to the OH-23 trainer. My instructor taught me how to preflight the aircraft. My first time at a hover was a thrilling feeling. I felt like a hummingbird must feel. The instructor started us slowly giving us control of only one thing at a time. Cyclic for pitch and roll, collective for up and down, and rudder pedals for left and right yaw. Hovering was hard at first! But we learned quickly.

Our large groups were broken down into smaller groups called flights. We would leave the large main heliport and disperse to stage fields scattered all over this part of central Texas. Our

first hours of flight training concentrated on just learning to hover, take off and land, fly the traffic pattern, and control the helicopter leading to first solo. First Solo! Oh the memories as the instructor unbuckled his seat belt, jumped out, and said take her around yourself. I had 10 hours of instruction, but felt confident and off I go—by myself! I did it! And on the bus ride home we stopped at the Holiday Inn and my classmates threw me in the swimming pool, flight suit and all. It was a first solo tradition to celebrate a milestone of flight and who was I to change such a meaningful tradition. Besides it felt good because Texas gets hot in June!

Our training built our flying skills in stages. We learned attention to detail in keeping our rooms neat and preflighting the aircraft looking for any mechanical problems. We learned air traffic control and radio procedures. We practiced forced landing autorotation simulating an engine failure and landing without power. We learned to land in confined areas and calculate how much room we needed to safely leave the confined area. We learned to navigate cross country using topographical maps that we would use in Vietnam. We learned to land on mountain tops called pinnacle landings. We learned basic instrument flying skills in Link trainers simulating not being able to see outside the aircraft. We were really becoming Army Aviators. I graduated primary training in December 1967 and received the academic achievement award with the highest test scores in my class. Now it was on to Fort Rucker, Alabama for another 6 months of advanced flight training and tactics.

We learned advance flying skills at Fort Rucker that we would need to become effective Army Aviators in Vietnam. First came advanced instrument training in the OH-13T with many flying hours under the hood where we could not see outside the helicopter. Next came our transition to the Huey—UH1 Iroquois. Every one of us were awed by our first flight in the venerable Huey which was a turbine powered helicopter considered the DC-3 of helicopters. I still love the Huey to this day and still fly her in my dreams—good dreams.

We learned formation flying and combat assault tactics. We learned how to sling load cargo. We had an orientation flight in Huey gunships to see how to use the machine guns and rockets as close air support for our ground troops. Our last two weeks we lived in the field simulating how we would operate in Vietnam. This training included a cross country formation flight to Ranger School in the Florida Panhandle and carrying Ranger students in a simulated combat assault. “Rangers lead the way”, but Army Aviators fly “Above the Best” to the Ranger jump off point.

Our training was over and graduation in a couple of days. On the way back to Ft Rucker and Hanchey Army Airfield our class conducted a missing man formation flyby because our class lost four students and two Hueys in a midair collision during our last two weeks of tactics training. It was a sobering reminder of the realities we would face in Vietnam combat flying. The missing man formation was a very sad future reminder I lived thru again at the Johnson Space Center memorial for our Challenger crew in 1986. But that is a different story.

I graduated as a Warrant Officer 1 (WO1) on June 4, 1968 and earned my Army Aviator wings. I was a real pilot now! But in retrospect, I now realize that I had much more to learn about how to work effectively in an integrated team of ground support and flight crews before I could call myself an Army Aviator. The teamwork lessons I learned with my Varsity "Band of Brothers" served me very well later as a NASA leader on the Space Shuttle and International Space Station (ISS) Programs.

As Distinguished Graduate of my class, I was awarded Chinook transition right after graduation. Classmate and friend, WO1 Onofrie "Nonie" Orosco, Jr graduated second in our class and also was awarded Chinook transition. Nonie and I both completed Chinook transition with orders to the 1st Calvary Division (Airmobile) Chinook unit. We headed for Vietnam.

Chapter two photos

Frank Buzzard at entrance to Ft Wolters, TX years later

Frank Buzzard Ft Wolters Graduation December 1967

Chapter 3—The 272nd Aviation Company becomes Varsity in the 101st

Airmobility was a new concept conceived in the early 1960s and tested by the 11th Air Assault Division (Test) at Fort Benning Georgia which became the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). The concept involved the large scale use of helicopters as troop carriers, cargo lift ships, medivacs, and aerial rocket artillery. Vertical envelopment and mobility was the key allowing the infantry to bypass difficult terrain and attack the enemy at the time and place of its choosing. The Airmobile concept was dramatically proven by the 1st Cav in Vietnam in the battle of the Ia Drang Valley November 1965 when the 7th Cavalry Regiment engaged and defeated a much larger NVA Division. A must read book of this battle by Lt Gen Hal Moore and Joe Galloway called "We were soldiers once—and young" was published in 1992. It was also made into a movie called "We were soldiers". Hal Moore commanded the 1st Battalion of the 7th Cavalry Regiment at the Chu Pong Massif in this heroic and costly battle. Hal later commanded the 1st Calvary Division (Airmobile) and retired as a Lt. General.

So the Army realized the great advantage of Airmobility and created a second airmobile division—the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile). An Airmobile Division has 454 helicopters including light observation helicopter (LOHs or Loaches), Huey troop carriers (Slicks), Huey and Cobra gunships (Guns), Chinooks (three companies of 16 for a total of 48 Chinooks), and CH-54 Skycranes. The Chinooks and Skycranes are assigned to the 159th Assault Support Helicopter Battalion (ASHB) under the 160th Aviation Group.

The 159th Assault Support Helicopter Battalion was formed on 1 July 1968 from the 308th Combat Aviation Battalion and organized as the medium and heavy lift Assault Support Helicopter Battalion of the 101st Airborne Division. The 159th ASHB was eventually composed of three CH-47 companies: Pachyderms - A Company, formerly the 200th Medium Lift Helicopter Company; Varsity - B Company, formerly the 272nd Medium Lift Helicopter Company; Playtex - C Company, formerly 293rd Medium Lift Helicopter Company; and CH-54 Skycrane company based in DaNang, Hurricanes - 478th Heavy Lift Company.

Varsity was the first Chinook Company to the 101st starting as the 272nd Aviation Company at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Chinook maintenance was provided by the 362nd Transportation Corps Detachment. The 272nd/362nd was equipped with sixteen of the latest version of the Chinook CH-47B models and deployed to Vietnam on a carrier from San Francisco May 1, 1968 arriving in Vung Tau on 21 May 1968. The 272nd/362nd was initially assigned to the 222nd Aviation Battalion at Camp Bear Cat.

In June 1968 the 272nd sent four CH-47B Chinooks TDY to Camp Eagle near Phu Bai, Vietnam in support of the 101st Airborne Division. They set up the company in a small valley using tents called General Purpose (GP) Mediums. The entire 272nd/362nd was then permanently assigned to the 101st and redesignated as Company B, 159th ASH Battalion. The new Chinook Company for the 101st was nicknamed VARSITY, because it was the 1st team, second to none.

It was a huge effort to set up the maintenance area, living quarters, mess hall, helicopter parking spots, and provide power and clean water for the company. Under the leadership of Varsity commander LTC Charles Simms, Captains Roy Lowery and Gary Jones, maintenance officer Captain James Crabtree, and SFC Evans. This dedicated team of Officers, NCOs, flight crews, and maintenance specialists of Varsity became the first operational Chinook unit in the 101st to provide medium lift helicopter support to the rapidly growing 101st Division at Camp Eagle.

The next 101st Chinook Company was Pachyderms, A Company, which came from the 200th Assault Support Company at Bear Cat, Vietnam and moved north to Phu Bai in July 1968 with the 159th ASHB. The 200th was also previously formed at Fort Benning and had deployed to Vietnam months prior to the 272nd which became Varsity. **Dennis Wilson was an original member of the 200th and shares this story of the formation of the 200th and Pachyderms:** "I was with the 200th from the beginning at Ft. Benning and deployed to Vietnam with the Company in March 67. The troops stayed in a French Villa in Bien Hoa for a few weeks while we set up our own Company area at Bearcat. We had to build everything, taxiway PSP, revetments, mess hall, clubs, tent floors and wooden sidewalks. We had A model Chinooks when we deployed and got at least one B model that I remember before I left the 200th in September 67 to go to Cu Chi with the 242nd."

The third and final 101st Chinook company was Playtex. Playtex was originally the 293rd Aviation Medium Helicopter Company which was formed at Fort Sill, Oklahoma on May 14, 1968 commanded by Maj. Merrill T. Adamcik with executive officer, Major Samuel E Kaiser. The 293rd was supported by the 327th Maintenance Detachment commanded by Major Frank Shaver. The 293rd/327th became Playtex, Company C on July 24, 1968 assigned to the 159th ASHB, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile). Playtex deployed to Vietnam landing in Da Nang on two Air Force C-141s on New Year's Eve, Dec 31 1968. They then were ferried to Hue Phu Bai Airport and the 159th Liftmaster Pad on New Year's Day 1969.

Sam Kaiser, who deployed as Executive Officer and later commanded Playtex, shared this story: "Shortly after Merrill and I were assigned to the 293d Assault Support Helicopter Company, the Fort Sill US Army Aviation Command Commander, Colonel F. C. Goodwin, called us into his office for our initial meeting. We had hardly finished reporting to him when he began to chew our butts about things that we were not aware of. We finally figured out that he was warning us not to follow in the footsteps of the 272d Assault Support Helicopter Company (which became Varsity in Vietnam) that formed and deployed before the 293d. One example he gave was, the 272d supposedly procured a 100 KW generator from the Tinker Air Force Base Salvage Yard in Oklahoma City and brought it back to Fort Sill. What perturbed him was the fact that they turned it in to the Fort Sill Maintenance facility for repair/over-hall."

Thanks Sam! I remember that 100 KW generator with great fondness. This scrounged generator became the Varsity primary power source at Camp Eagle. The generator failed a couple times a month, but was valiantly maintained by CW2 Harold Lee Eckert, Jr from Hershey,

PA. More on “Weird Harold” later and his Varsity roommate CW2 Gary “Strange” Streid who you met in Chapter 1.

I arrive in Vietnam in early August 1968 from Seattle, WA on a World Airways stretch DC-8 charter flight landing at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. My initial orders to the 1st Calvary Division are changed to the 101st. I am sent to Bien Hoa near Saigon for in processing at the 101st division rear headquarters. CW3 Frank Bonn and I arrive at the same time. We are sent in a few days to Phu Bai airport and join B Company, 159th ASHB at Camp Eagle in Varsity Valley. We are assigned to tents and cots and meet the Varsity pilots and team. Next we find the mess tent—an important priority—and scout the company area. It looks just like our tents and accommodations for my last two weeks of tactical flight training at Fort Rucker. We are issued our flight gear and weapons and settle in. All seems well.

I get a Check Ride and area orientation flying with CW3 Delfo Ferranti, Varsity Chinook Instructor Pilot IP. Not only was Delfo a fine IP and Army Aviator, but he was indefatigable in helping get the early Varsity infrastructure set up. He supervised the laying of the first maintenance area Pierced Steel Planking (PSP) landing area for our Chinooks because he knew how to interlock the panels. He helped the crews build sandbag filled revetments around the Chinook parking spots to protect them from shrapnel damage due to incoming rockets and mortars. CW2 Gary Streid noted that our flight line was unique. Most are at airports in straight lines. Our flight line had Chinook parking pads curving back and forth on both sides of the small, winding steam in Varsity Valley.

I spent the next couple of weeks flying with experienced Varsity aircraft commanders and flight crews carrying cargo sling loads to various artillery fire support bases in the 101st Area of Operations (AO). Ninety percent of our Chinook flying is with external sling loads because it is so much faster and more efficient than loading and unloading cargo internally. Sling loads of the correct weight are prepared at the logistics areas. We hover over them, hook them up, and deliver them to the intended site. We land the sling load, release the sling, and return for another.

Close coordination by all five of our flight crew is vital, builds teamwork, trust, and efficiency. Every person on our flight crew has an important role to play to fly and operate a Chinook. Our Flight Engineers FEs were our eyes when hooking up a load. We Guys in Front (GIFs) could not see the cargo hook. So the FEs guided us over the load for hook up and setting it down. They even learned to adjust their directions of distance for each pilot. “Right two feet and forward three feet” meant different things to different pilots. Our Crew Chief (CC) and Door Gunner (DG) kept blades clear of obstacles in tight places while manning their M-60 machine guns at both open windows just behind the cockpit hallway. Thus the Guys in Back (GIBs) were just as important as the GIFs! Rinse and repeat over and over!

Our CH-47Bs held about two hours of fuel. We often refueled with the rotors turning at designated refueling sites. We shut down the Chinook after the second refueling and the flight

crew inspects our bird checking oil levels and critical areas. This also gives us time for a quick meal break—C rations in the field or the mess hall at our company area. There is so much to learn, but experienced leaders and a committed Varsity "Band of Brother" that we are becoming helps make it happen!

In September 1968 a typhoon approaches the coast of Vietnam. We go from low clouds and constant rain to high winds and horizontal rain. Several tents blow down during the night and height of storm intensity. A dry pair of socks and dry underwear became a highly valued black market item! No flying for days. And not a dry spot anywhere in the Varsity Valley. The eye of the storm comes ashore between Hue and Da Nang about 30 miles south of Camp Eagle.

As we dry out after the storm it becomes clear to all that we have to have more permanent living and working quarters. We check with the Navy Seabees when they might be able to build wooden hootches and maintenance buildings. They tell us 6-9 months. We all learned that "necessity is the mother of Invention" and our creative scroungers figure out ways to beg, borrow, and steal building materials. Captain Gary Jones who rooms with Captain Roy Lowrey is a gifted scrounger. He previously flew helicopters in Vietnam and knows lots of folks and ways to trade things. Gary arranges and helps fly Chinook cargo missions for Marines and Army Special Forces west of Da Nang and the A Shau Valley in exchange for loads of building supplies and flies them from Red Beach in Da Nang and Phu Bai to Camp Eagle.

One day Gary comes in above our 160th group aviation headquarters above the Varsity Valley with a heavy load of sixteen foot long two by sixes. His approach into the wind and desire to place the lumber next to our building site brings him right over 160th group commander Colonel Ted Crozier's tent on the hill above us. The terrific down blast from the heavily loaded Chinook's rotors blows Col Ted's tent down. OPPS! Sorry Col Ted. We all laugh about that story at the 2003 101st reunion in Reno, NV.

My friend and fellow "Young Hooker in Vietnam", Lon 'Sgt Rock' Busch shares his story of the 272nd at Ft Sill and formation of Varsity at Camp Eagle:

"My MOS (Military Occupational Speciality) never should have allowed me to be in Aviation or at Camp Eagle. I went to refrigeration and A/C school in Ft. Belvoir, VA. But, when I went to Ft. Sill, things changed. However, I have never since met such a great group of boys, who became men, who stuck together and still love each other.

<u>August 1967 - Lawton, Ft. Sill, OK</u>

I arrived on a Sunday night, the cab driver didn't know where the 272nd Aviation was, as he had never heard of it, and he took me to the 154th Aviation. At the hotel - Monday I went to formation to find the 272nd Aviation Company and SSG Algie Campbell said, "SP4 Busch, I have no MOS for you - what in the hell are you doing here?" I was the 16th man to sign in and he listed me in the OTHER category.

August and September rolled along so slowly. I picked up cigarette butts, and spent a lot of time in Lawton during the day. I met David "Pops" Steele there. He had already been there for a while, and that's where I first learned about the 67U MOS and Chinooks. I said to myself - What am I doing here in Aviation? I went from 154th to Old School Korean War era barracks to Old School Company area 272nd-362nd. They don't have any refrigerators in them. I later learned that we were waiting for A Company to leave a barracks area - we finally moved and became 272nd-362nd.

Mess Hall, Formations, Real Army...still no real purpose. I was sent to Aviation Fire Department to work on the Flight Line as OJT CRASH RESCUE. I went there every day. We even had a fire truck in Vietnam. Someone blew up the engine washing Chinooks. I think it was traded over there for something. Took the E-5 test, expecting to be a SP/5, but to my surprise I was promoted to SGT E-5. I was totally out of my peer group after this advancement. I had to move in with the lifers, and I really didn't fit in with this crowd.

April 1968

I finally completed training - I got to ride in a Chinook. We headed to California, and then by boat to Vietnam. We leave San Francisco and 18-20 days later we are in Subic Bay, Philippines - and 3-4 days later arrive in Vung Tau Harbor, Vietnam.

I was the low man Sgt, so I had to get off the ship, and rope ladder off the side. I was positive I would be dead by morning. I went up the river in a boat to a huge storage area. It was my job, along with 5 others to guard our Conexs until they could be moved to our new area. We went to Long Bien. I later understood why "unguarded" supplies ended up with the 159th.

Finally, Long Bien to Bear Cat. Bear Cat wasn't bad….hard shell hootches, electricity. But, we didn't stay there long, only 20-30 days.

June 1968

We were going North in mid-June near Hue - home of the Tet Offensive. I was told, "Sgt. Busch, pack your shit, you're an advanced party to a Camp Eagle near the DMZ." I was 20 years old, a Sargent, and nervous as can be. I thought to myself, "I should have gone to college." I get on a C-130 - here we go to Phu Bai. Phu Bai didn't look much different than Bear Cat, but that wasn't Camp Eagle, so I threw my gear in a duce and a half, and away I went.

Camp Eagle

My first few days were WOW...this is bad - pup tents - like Boy Scout Camp. Make shift lean-tos off a Conex, camping beds, or air mattresses. Lots of C rations and lurps - it was a "real" college experience. Somehow, I got attached to the motor pool because of the Fire Truck that never fought a fire! And then, somewhere a big tent shows up, and 10-12 guys stay in there with sandbags all around. At least it was "my area."

Mail call was an important part of each day. I had told my mother, when I was at Bear Cat, that I was moving north to the Phu Bai area. I didn't know that I would be at Camp Eagle then. So about 20 days later, I get a letter from my mom that says my cousin is stationed at Phu Bai with the Seabees. My cousin, TC, was a Master Chief, and was kind of in charge down there. I asked LTC Simms if I could go visit him on a Saturday or Sunday. I was given the okay, so I asked Pat Morris and another guy to go with me to Phu Bai from Camp Eagle.

We drove down there in the morning and found TC. As a kid, my cousin was always gone, but I remember seeing his picture at my Aunt Ruth's house. I recognized him immediately when I saw him in Vietnam. He didn't know I was coming, but through our mothers, he knew I was at Camp Eagle and I said it would be easier for me to find him.

Upon our arrival, I was in awe. They had hard shell hootches with electricity. TC even had a sink in his hootch with running water. This was nothing like where we were living at Camp Eagle. They even had A/C in their hootches. In their NCO club, they had A/C, steaks and eggs, a grill to cook on, you name it, and they had it. I couldn't believe it. That day was the ONLY day I wanted to be a Seabee.

My cousin told me that he was getting his boys killed while moving supplies up Highway One to the A Shau Valley. He wanted to know if I had any pull getting a chopper to move men and supplies over the mountain. I said no, but that I would talk to LTC Simms and see what I could do. In return, the Seabee's would bring us plywood and a crew and show/build us our wood hootches. When I returned to Camp Eagle that afternoon, I told all of this to LTC Simms.

Within a week, LTC Simms and I head back to Phu Bai. Master Chief TC Yates and LTC Simms made a deal - trade lumber and supplies for air assistance. I later learned that the 159th ASHB at Camp Eagle had 16 Chinooks in our unit, and that 12 had to be operable each day, which left 4 for loan. While TC and Simms talked, I drank beer and had a steak for lunch with a Marine Gunny Sergeant. I only went back a few more times to see my cousin. His tour was up, and mine had only begun.

That's how and why the 159th B Company went from Tent City to permanent hard shell hootches. After we had hard hootches, morale changed in a huge way. I am not entirely sure what the arrangement was that TC and Simms made, but the Chinooks were bringing in plywood, hard beds, mattresses, and all kinds of things that we didn't have before. Officer quarters were built first, NCO next, and then the enlisted got their hard hootches. If I remember correctly, the cement floor in our new mess hall was poured and formed by the Seabees.

I lost contact with all the connections because my cousin went home, and LTC Simms rotated out. Major Boles and Captain Macintosh showed up, but I thought it was too much West Point formation BS. They were not well liked. Thank God Col. Ted Crozier showed up and took over. Morale got much better.

I am not sure where the wood came from that blew Col. Crozier's tent over, but living at the 159th B Company was pretty good, compared to the 160th group up the hill and all the others around us. They were all still in tents.

I have wondered many times after Vietnam if we would have made those giant strides at Camp Eagle had it not been for my mom and my great Aunt Ruth sharing stories about their sons in Vietnam - sharing addresses and the 159th and the Seabees doing business.

I am not sure if all or most of our hootch material came from Phu Bai. I only remember I found the Ice Plant in the village between Phu Bai and the main gate into Camp Eagle. The village was off limits, but we had a jeep. We followed a little truck into the Ice Plant - and I could not believe what I was seeing, I had found an Ice Factory. Looking back on it all today, I was 20 years old, fearless and I didn't consider going into the village as dangerous. I only saw ice cold drinks! I never got in trouble for going in there, and I am not sure how the payment went down, but after that, ice was almost a daily delivery. The Vietnamese villagers began to deliver ice to the main gate and the 159th and other units picked it up there. Thus, cold beer and cold pop were created!

We then built the Club on the Hill, a place for EM only. Somehow, it became my job to make sure we didn't run out of any beverage. And thus, I took many trips to DaNang on a Chinook to the Main PX. It was not uncommon for me to have $500 to $1000 of military pay currency (MPC) on those trips. Our ration cards were kept in the company orderly room. I was able to buy items needed for us to live and function at Varsity. I could buy pallets of beer and soda, cases of hard liquor, anything we needed. There were many items along that flight line that were delivered to Varsity that had no formal paperwork nor authorization, but led to many extra items loaded in those Chinooks that made life at the 159th a little more pleasant.

That's it….Sgt. Rock, Company Scrounge" Thanks Rock!! Great Story!

Gary Eccles was also an original member of the 272nd ASHC that became Varsity in Vietnam. Gary tells his story of early Ft Sill, deployment to Vietnam on a ship, and setting up Varsity:

"Guards, Pup (2-Man) tents, More Guard Duty, Deuce and a Half Drivers, More Guard Duty, Scroungers, Patrols, Maintenance Tech. That summarizes Michael Gardner's and my (Gary Eccles) first three months in-country. But before Vietnam we served in the 272nd at Fort Sill, OK. We did flight line guard duty for a few months; minor maintenance at Tinker AFB; removal of heaters from our helicopters, unloading a plane filled with new blades and shortly later that wonderful ride on a ship to the South China Seas via Subic Bay in the Philippines.

I believe that is when Michael Gardner and I became friends. We did guard duty at Bear Cat for about two weeks until one morning while returning from the perimeter Mike and I were told we had thirty minutes to get our gear packed. C-130's was the normal mode of transportation in Vietnam, helicopters if you knew someone that could get you on one or you could find a chopper that was going where you needed to be. It was a C-130 that dropped us off in Da Nang

but we were too early, the ship with our company vehicles wasn't due for another week. That night we 'slept' on the landing pad and the following morning we caught a ride on a Huey to Phu Bai. We pulled guard duty in the bunkers on the East perimeter.

We get to Camp Eagle and begin to build our facilities in Varsity Valley. We are given a Pup tent that we set up adjacent to a stream (later is the site of our pool) and stow our duffle bags in a Conex. After the second day trying to sleep in hundred-degree heat, we leave the tent behind and move into the bunker for the next few days. I still remember that it reminded me of an 1850's mining town.

Da Nang is an impressive site from the air. But like so many large areas of Vietnam it is ugly when you land in the heat and the dust. Hue, the saddest, reminded me of pictures I had seen of London after the Blitz and Germany after the war. Tet in February 68 had devastated the historic imperial capital on the Perfume River.

Four others, Mike and I find our assigned truck which is loaded with boxes. We perform an inspection and gather with other drivers for the convoy briefing. This is repeated two more times until we had all our equipment in Camp Eagle.

Sargent Evans is not at all pleased when he finds us a few days later as we are supposed to be in our tent; It has taken him most of the day to track us down. I still remember the change in his attitude when Mike offered him a cold soda. The ice and soda? Well, Mike was a good trader and wouldn't go to sleep in the morning until he returned with our breakfast, sodas and ice. And, he let me know what the trade was, generally we had to do something for somebody. Occasionally the routine was interrupted and we got little or no sleep to help with some big project (laying the PSP in the maintenance area, building revetments, erecting poles for the electrical lines, etc.) but most days we were awake all night and slept most of the day.

It has been mentioned before that the Hooks are thirsty beasts. The Camp Eagle POL was not built with servicing more than one Hook at a time. Sgt. Evans was there that morning to let us know Sims had offered Mike and me to Headquarters Company as guards while the POL was expanded. That guard duty turned out to be a patrol, three days out and one day back in Camp Eagle which lasted for approximately a month. I never counted, but Mike once said we had gone on ten patrols.

Have I mentioned how the Army was one surprise after another, guess that was the same for most?

Spec-6 Lynch was the next surprise. Mike and I found him waiting for us one morning after a patrol. The Specialist grade is not something you see much of in an Infantry Company so he stood out like a sore thumb (besides the fact that he was 6' 4" and about 220lbs.) As he put it 'You two are assigned to my crew and you'll be working on helicopters from now on, not a vacation like you've been doing.' He had us grab our gear, escorted us over to our assigned quarters which at the time were plywood bottoms with a tent roof. On our cots we found our duffle bags that we hadn't seen in three months.

Right away Mike and I knew we were going to like Spec-6 Lynch when he told us we had the rest of the day to get a shower and shave, get a haircut, and get our gear squared away. Sometime later we found out that after Sims had left, Sgt. Evans told Spec-6 Lynch to go bring Mike and I back. What else he told him I don't know but those two would often laugh and suggest we might need more guard duty if we didn't work harder. We never pulled another day of guard duty and shortly after returning were promoted to E-5, the last of the original 362nd group from Ft. Sill. Sgt. Evans was the Ol' Salt - Master Chief, like my Grandfather. Sgt. Evans expected a lot and got it because he earned our respect. Both he and Spec-6 Lynch taught us how to do the work when we needed help, and never a derogatory word because we didn't know how."

Thanks Gary for your great story!

Varsity could not have built our wooden hootches, mess hall, and maintenance buildings without all the great Varsity scroungers finding needed materials everywhere and anyhow! My father, Frank Alexander Buzzard, was a carpenter and taught me how to lay out framing of buildings and cut rafters (Rest in peace and thanks Dad, WW2 Marine, and I am a fine carpenter to this day because of you.)

I spent most of October laying out and supervising the building of the officer quarters as my primary job with occasional flying. Every officer who wasn't flying pitched in to build our two parallel buildings 120 feet long and 16 feet wide. Each 12 foot by 16 foot room held two officers. Each group built their own closets and desk in their own room. Our officer's club was at the end of one building. I named our 'O Club' the Hue Inn on the entrance door and Hue Out on the inside of the door. It made sense at the time!

Our great enlisted personnel built their own hootches, mess hall, maintenance buildings, and NCO/EM clubs. I lead a team of five great EM to build Gork Amphitheater—named after our pet pig Gork—for USO shows and evening movies for the company. In April 1969 the third or fourth 122 mm rocket comes right over the Officer's hootches, just clears our bunker full of officers, and hits the PSP walkway right behind Gork Amphitheater. It destroyed the theater's two dressing rooms and blew out plywood on the front, white theater screen, and wrecked the roof. CW2 Gary Streid was running from Varsity Ops to our bunker when the rocket hit and was struck in the cheek with shrapnel. We repaired the damage in several weeks and put our theater back in service. We loved our USO shows and movies!

Varsity Crew Chief and Flight Engineer, Patrick Grosh, shares his remembrance of the rocket attack that damaged Gork Amphitheater and wounded CW2 Gary Streid:

"Gary Streid was the officer that was hit in the cheek with shrapnel. I was the one that grabbed him and led him back to the bunker. There were three of us coming back from the ship in a jeep towards the officer's barracks when the first rocket hit. There was Sergeant Tillis, me, and can't remember his name, but he was driving the jeep. Shrapnel hit the Jeep we were in. So we

unassed it and headed between the barracks towards the theater. Tillis went to the right the Jeep driver went to the officer bunker to his left and I stood there for a second trying to figure out which way I wanted to go. Glad I did not go behind the theater cuz that's when the rocket hit. Knocked me down but did not hurt me. Got up heard somebody say I'm hit. Seeing Gary Streid holding his face so I grabbed him and took him to the officer bunker. Stepped in a bunch of paint cans I believe. Things calm down and then I headed to my bunker in the enlisted men's area. I believe there was a person that used to sleep in the back of the theater. Lucky he was not there that night. Maintenance Sergeant I believe. Just a little tidbit I remember!"

Thanks Patrick! Great Story. And I remember you and Streid knocking over the paint cans in the bunker!

Building our home with our own hands was a rewarding and great team effort by all members of Varsity. But now the NVA know where our Chinooks are in Varsity Valley and we start getting persistent barrages of 122 mm rockets and mortars. Crew Chief Gary Eccles shared that Oct 17 was the worst night with many mortars and rockets including one that hit the trash cans by the mess tent.

The 1st Cav and 101st shared the same AO for my first few months with the 101st at Camp Eagle. I was flying one day and heard "Mayday" on guard channel (243.0 UHF and 121.5 VHF). A 1st Cav Chinook had a midair collision on October 3, 1968 with a C7A Caribou fixed wing aircraft leaving Camp Evans north of Hue. Both aircraft crashed with no survivors. The pilot of the Chinook was my flight school friend WO1 Ron Conroy. A sad day for sure. During October 1968 the 1st Cav Division moved south to III Corps around Saigon and left I Corps to the 101st and 3rd Marine Division. We assisted with that move and I flew a non-flyable 1st Cav Huey slung beneath us to Da Nang and put it on a small carrier. The 101st 3rd Brigade moved to Camp Evans and LZ Sally north of Hue. Varsity Chinooks and crews rotated and operated out of Camp Evans living in the former 1st Cav buildings for much of the rest of 1968 to save flying time between Camp Eagle and Camp Evans.

In early February I fly to Saigon then Hawaii for Rest and Recuperation (R&R). I return to Bien Hoa airbase a week later on the night that Tet Offensive in February 1969 started. I was spending the night with a flight school buddy, WO1 Wayne Bates, who was assigned to an Aerial Rocket Artillery (ARA) unit at Bien Hoa flying Huey C model gunship loaded with rockets. All C-130 flights to Phu Bai airport are canceled so next morning all flyable gunships were launched and I flew copilot for the day NW of Saigon near the Parrot's Peak. An unexpected end to R&R, but it was all hands on deck!

I also got to visit my sister's husband, Captain Dale Jones who was stationed at Bien Hoa with the Second Field Force. The next day I caught a ride back north to the 101st and rejoined Varsity.

Chapter 3 photos

Early Varsity Valley tents July 1968 Jim Voss photo

Early Varsity tent days July 68 Jim Voss photo

Early Varsity tent days July 68 Jim Voss photo

Gary Eccles and Doug Farmer leaving Ft Sill, OK with 272nd

Bo Brawley pic of Bettencourt, Woronowski, Busch, Eccles, Detweilter, Masselli, Curington, and Stearns

Morning Formation Hank Cunningham photo

Laying PSP for Maintenance Pad

Blade Change at Camp Eagle

Lynch, Woronowski, Herbert

The Hue Inn, Spring 1969. Bob Morris, Tom German, Francis McConnell, Delfo Ferranti, Onofrie Orosco Jr, Gil Goodman

Frank Buzzard at Varsity Officer Quarters we built

Lon 'Rock' Busch and Gary Eccles

Frank Buzzard, Col Ted Crozier, Lon Busch 101st reunion Reno 2003

Just Built Gork Amphitheater

Gork Back after rocket hit

Gork Front after rocket hit

CPT Roy Lowery
room after rocket hit

Varsity Maintenance area
1968

Streid and Buzzard
with Snoopy

Someone forgot
to set the brakes!

Hue Out O'Club

159 Liftmaster and
Playtex at Phu Bai

1Lt Brandon Blackwell

1Lt Dan Murphy

Nonie and Buzz-Classmates
and Roommates

Preflighting our Chinook

CW3 Frank Bonn

Pilots before awards

Classmate Wayne Bates that I flew copilot with in a UH-1C Hog gunship.

Jim Voss at work in Varsity Valley

Guys in Front—GIFs—in our Varsity Chinook

CW2 Gary 'Twitch' Thewlis

Blade Change with forklift

Chinook Hell Hole and Guys in Back GIBs work station

Ollie, Zednick, and Boyles

Varsity Valley revetments

Hue Citadel on Perfume River

Chapter 4—learning to land a Chinook on a Navy hospital ship

Varsity is supporting the 3rd Marine Division in Northern I Corps in February and March 1969 during Operation Dewey Canyon. I am flying with Flight Engineer (FE) David 'Pop' Steele, Crew Chief (CC) John 'Gump' Maddocks, and our door gunner. Pop Steele is not only a fine FE, but he is a leader of men and mentor to future Chinook flight crew members. A great American was Pop Steele who sadly passed away in 2012.

We are carrying a much needed sling load of supplies to a Marine unit attacked and in need of resupply and medivac of wounded. The Landing Zone is in the coastal foothills southwest of Quang Tri. We find the LZ, deliver the supplies, and land to pick up the wounded. Marines and our crew quickly load several stretchers and walking wounded. Gump tells me, one of the wounded needs immediate, major medical right now. We get on the radio to find the closest and fastest major medical. It was the USS Sanctuary naval hospital ship in the South China Sea a few miles east of us. We contact them and get their homing signal frequency and head for the ship post haste.

It is dusk turning to night and we see the Sanctuary's helipad designed for much smaller helicopters than our Chinook. It is pitching up and down about ten to twelve feet in the stormy seas and waves. The other pilot is flying this leg and tries to land. He tries to line up but he is looking at the stern of the ship and ocean from the left seat. He does not have a good reference and says he can't land it. I said, "Let me try. I can see the entire length of the ship out the right window and have a better view." Our crew keeps me lined up vertically because the Chinooks wheels can just barely fit on the helipad. I watch the ship pitching up and down and the helipad below me. I try to gauge the highest position of the helipad on its upswing. Our crew looking out both side windows give me constant updates on the alignment of the wheels and helipad. I slowly lower our Chinook. When I feel the deck kiss the wheels, I slam the thrust lever full down and plant us on the deck! Most difficult Chinook landing I ever made. I could not have done it without the teamwork of our fine crew.

The Sanctuary's medical team off loads the wounded and takes them immediately to the ER. We pilots are sitting ten feet over the edge of the ship's helipad in the cockpit pitching up and down like a bobbing cork in a storm. I hear the Stability Augmentation System (SAS) hydraulic actuators chattering like crazy behind me trying to keep the Chinooks attitude constant as the deck pitches up and down. I reach down and turn the SAS system off. The flight controls calm down and so do we. I contact the Sanctuary's flight ops controller and ask for departure. He tells us to wait until they turn the ship into the wind. I am feeling signs of sea sickness and say, "Sir, an empty Chinook does not care what direction the wind is from. Request immediate departure!" He says, "Varsity 134 cleared for takeoff". I turn the SAS back on and grab a big handful of thrust lever collective. Up and away we go leaping vertically with a pedal turn for home!" Sanctuary comes back with, "Thanks Varsity." I respond, "Glad to help. All in a day's work."

Both John "Gump" Maddocks and I have shared memories of that mission this year. It was over fifty years ago. Gump shares his remembrance that night:

"The fire base was in an odd location as I recall, more on the ocean side of the mountains than the Ashau Valley. We picked up 2 or 3 stretchers and a couple walking wounded. One of the stretchers had a kid whose head was so wrapped in bloody gauze that only one eye and his mouth were visible. The other was a torso wound and the medics taped the blood bags to a 105 artillery casing. They were all pretty banged up. There was some radio conversation about taking the wounded to Quang Tri or elsewhere when it was decided the hospital ship was either closer or faster, maybe both?

There was not much room on the pad, but enough clearance to get the aft wheels and ramp on the deck. I do remember the flight closet making noises I had never heard before. The ship's crew had those guys off in no time at all but it seemed like an eternity. It was truly one of those 'slow motion' moments.

I have over the years given some thought to that particular mission and hoped and prayed those boys came out OK. And I swear this....after the drop off there was radio conversation from the cockpit to the hospital ship and one of you said "No problem, all in a day's work". I have relied on that quote more than once to get thru some tuff times."

Thanks brother Gump. Love ya' bro.

In 2002 I was working at NASA HQ in Washington DC. I took a weekend trip to Baltimore and toured Fort McHenry and the Baltimore harbor by tour boat. There on display in the harbor was the USS Sanctuary hospital ship as a museum piece. Darn leaky eyes clouded my vision for a few minutes. But then I was glad to see her again. Well done to all the wonderful medical and support personnel on the USS Sanctuary. Well done to all the wartime medical teams. You saved so many lives at great emotional cost to many of you.

Chapter 4 Photos

USS Sanctuary Da Nang Bay

David 'Pop' Steele
photo Lon Busch

101st Reunion 2019 CO Springs--Buzz, Gump standing. Hendrickson, Colin Helms, Paul Sparrell sitting.

Chapter 5—An aviation technology that saves five lives

A Chinook is a mass of complex mechanical parts that are subject to high stresses and failure. Five transmissions are needed to change the speed and direction of the forces the output shafts our gas turbine engines provide. One transmission from each engine turns the power output at the front of the engine ninety degrees toward the center of the Chinook. The engine power from each engine goes into a combining transmission that then sends the engine power forward to the front transmission and aft to the rear transmission via two drive shafts. The forward drive shaft is the longest and requires vibration isolation and support as it flexes due to power changes. This drive shaft support is provided by two side mounted metal and rubber lord mounts on both sides of the drive shaft every several feet. We open the tunnel cover doors and inspect these drive shaft mounts every morning and evening before and after flight. We also check them after the second refueling when we shut the Chinook down to verify all fluid levels, flight control connections, and lord mounts. Our Flight Engineer (FE) and Crew Chief (CC) carry several extra lord mounts which fail from the stresses and must be replaced fairly often.

The front and rear transmissions turn the engine power vertical and drive the tandem rotors. The combining transmission which sees the highest stress combines the engine power of both engines to both rotors which must stay in synchronized rotation because the front and rear rotor systems overlap and intermesh like an egg beater. If either of the massive three in line transmissions or the drive shaft fails, rotor synchronization is lost, the blades collide, and the aircraft disintegrates. A Chinook can still fly on one engine at half the power if the other engine or an engine transmission fails.

Because of the high stresses and wear on gears each transmission and each engine is equipped with a chip detector in the lubricating oil systems. This clever technology has a powered wire attached to a center magnet that attracts ferromagnetic particles or chips in the oil. The center magnet is electrically isolated from the outer threaded metal case by a rubber insulator. If a chip or sliver of metal from a transmission or engine bearing gear lodges across the center magnet and touches the outer case of the chip detector in the oil, it completes the circuit and lights a yellow warning light on the caution and warning panel in the cockpit. There are two separate chip detector warning lights—Engine Chip Detector and Transmission (XSMN) Chip detector—because the emergency procedure is different depending on which warning light comes on. For an engine Chip Detector Warning we keep going and monitor engine performance and temperatures carefully. For a XMSN Chip Detector we immediately make a precautionary landing, shut the Chinook down, and pull the Chip Detector to inspect for dangerous chips indicating excessive gear wear. If real chips are found the aircraft is grounded and the transmission must be replaced. If it is just carbon build up, which is a conductor of electricity, the crew wipes the carbon off, reinstalls the Chip Detector in the transmission, and we continue the mission. Why do I tell you this complicated, "inside Chinook baseball", technical story if you got this far? Because this clever sensor saved me and four crewmembers lives!!

I was flying a sling load of large rubber fresh water bladders to Firebase Birmingham about 10 klicks SW of Camp Eagle and the first major artillery LZ on the road from Camp Eagle to the Ashau Valley far off in the mountains. CW3 Miles Becker, one of our other fine Varsity Chinook IPs, is in the left seat. A few minutes before I start the approach to Birmingham the XMSN chip detector light comes on. I would write down each of the five transmissions pressure and temperature at the start of the day in grease pencil on a console plastic cover. I quickly flipped thru all five transmissions and note the combining transmission pressure was normal, but the temperature was 10 degrees higher than the morning number. All other pressures and temperatures matched OK. I start my approach to Birmingham with the intent of landing the sling load, shutting down the Chinook, and inspecting the chip detectors of the three main transmissions.

On short final about 700 feet in the air and 70 knots airspeed, we hear a terrible grinding noise in the rear. I see the combining transmission temperature gauge skyrocket off scale high. The Flight Engineer yells, "C-Box" on the intercom. Our precautionary landing has now become a full scale emergency landing! I reduce power and make a hard left, descending turn to make a running landing onto the dirt road that connects Camp Eagle to LZ Birmingham. No way I am going to add any more power and try to hover and land. I keep the sling load to increase our rate of descent. I move the cargo hook switch to arm at 100 feet off the ground and the load is immediately jettisoned. Miles calls Mayday on Guard and reports our position. He instinctively knows exactly what I am doing and I am lined up on the dirt road like it is a runway for a running landing. Miles says, "I have the aircraft". He flares the aircraft trading airspeed to stop the descent without adding any power and we bump down on the rear wheels at about 30

knots nose high and decelerating. We roll down the road with aft wheels on the ground and me on the toe brakes digging two trenches in the dirt! Miles steers around the curves to keep us in the center of the road as we roll out. Front wheels come down as the aircraft stops. We pull power off both engines and the rotors go from a normal 225 RPM to zero in about 2 or 3 revolutions coming to a bone jarring stop! It normally takes 20 to 30 revolutions for the rotors to stop when the engines are shut down. We were seconds from complete combining transmission failure and aircraft disintegration in the air. The chip detector did its job and we got to the ground safely-barely!

We two pilots get out of our seats and inspect the C-Box with our crew on the way out of the aircraft. The C-Box got so hot that it scorched the normally yellow paint to black. All of us realize what a close call we just had. CW3 Delfo Ferranti heard our emergency radio call and lands and picks our crew up to go back to Varsity Valley. Birmingham ground troops guarded our disabled Chinook overnight on the road until our maintenance team came out from Varsity the next day. They towed the Chinook back up the road to Birmingham. Then with a huge truck and crane and parts, they replaced all three main transmissions in a heroic effort before it could be flown back to Varsity Valley.

Patrick Grosh was our door gunner on this flight. He had just been selected as door gunner and was on one of his first Varsity Chinook flights. Patrick **shares his memory of our dramatic forced landing from his 2012 book, "Now and Then":**

"We were carrying water to a fire base and not flying too high. Maybe two to three thousand feet. All the instruments in the cockpit went crazy! Temperature gauges, oil pressures, and chip detector warning light. Something was wrong and it wasn't good. Gears were grinding, alarms going off, and temperatures maxed out on the gauges. It sounded like when you were speed shifting that old car or truck back home without a clutch.

The pilots cut power and down we went. My heart was in my throat. We were in the foot hills of a small mountain range which had some small roads leading into them. The pilots started what is called autorotation mode and headed for the road. We were about 50 feet or less off the road and in line to land. We dropped the load! The pilot cut the power back and set it down with a thump! I released my M-60 from its door mount and jumped out the window. I threw out the tri-pods and watched the surrounding area on the left side. The crew chief did the same on the right. The pilots and flight engineer covered the front and rear.

It was late afternoon and starting to get dark. I was scared and could only imagine that we would be out there all night. It seemed to me like forever, but I think it was only 15 to 30 minutes before we were surrounded by two Huey gunships. We had radio contact and were assured that another CH-47 was on the way to pick us up. Thank God! It wasn't long after that a deuce and a half came up the road with a squad of infantry to protect the ship through the night.

Our company sent us a mother ship and it landed nearby to pick us up. We grabbed our stuff, loaded up, and went back to our company area. The next day they sent one of our maintenance crews back to the ship to see what could be done to repair it. With the help of the ground forces, the ship was pulled up the road to a fire base and placed between two hills. It took about a month, but they repaired it and flew it back to our company area. The transmissions had to be replaced and all sorts of other stuff.

We were later told how lucky we were to have made it down safely. I thank God for the quick thinking of the pilots that got us down safely."

Yes, Patrick, we were indeed lucky. And I thank God to this day for watching out for us that day and the excellent training we pilots and crews received to react to emergencies as a team.

Chapter 6—It takes a team to build a dream

The outstanding job the Varsity ground maintenance specialists did to repair our damaged Chinook on the road between Camp Eagle and Birmingham was an extraordinary effort. They made it look easy. Our ground maintenance personnel were not flight crews, but we could have not accomplished what we did without their absolutely outstanding support. They did not get the attention we flight crews got. Yet, they worked day and night to make our Chinooks safe to fly. And never a complaint that I heard from any of them. They just did their jobs and 'took care of business', 24/7. I have to tell how important they were by letting them tell their stories.

Varsity maintenance specialist, Tom Valenti, shares his remembrance:

"As for my experiences keeping those Chinooks flying, they were very benign. Being there, at that rear area base, was like having a job in a hot dirty workplace while wearing funny clothes, while occasionally having the crap scared out of me. I went on every check ride I could and on every trip into DaNang for supplies. I loved flying, still do. While I was at Fort Sill I applied for flight school. My eyes squashed that dream.

There were a few anecdotal things that happened to me personally as a maintenance NCO. Usually involving screw-ups. Nothing catastrophic, but there was some cost to the Army's budget. I was nearby, about 25 yards from that ship that had the SAS system plumbed in wrong and went squirrely when it lifted off. I really thought I might have gotten caught up in the crash of that Chinook. Fortunately one of our quick thinking pilots figured out how to get it back on the ground safely."

Thanks Tom for your great story!

Maj Sam Kaiser and commander of our sister company, Playtex, shared this daring recovery of a crashed Playtex Chinook on LZ Tiger mountain at the north end of the A Shau Valley.

This dramatic repair and recovery was performed by the Playtex ground maintenance team at LZ Tiger. They repaired a crashed Chinook on top of a 105 howitzer impaled in the Chinook's

belly with part of the Chinook hanging over the hilltop cliff. Talk about innovative maintenance techniques? This story so demonstrates the vital team effort of the all members of a Chinook company.

PLAYTEX 67-18509 AT LZ Tiger

"On 10 May 1969, Playtex 67-18509 along with other Playtex helicopters were on a mission to move a 105 mm Howitzer battery to establish an Artillery Fire Support Base on LZ Tiger. The aircraft commander was CW2 Eric A. Van Opstal and the Pilot was LTC Billy L. Odneal (the 159th Battalion Commander). The two Playtex Hooks preceding 509 had both reported enemy ground fire but received no rounds. Playtex 509 set up what was to be her final approach into the LZ. With about 50 yards to go, the enemy opened-up on 509 with a 50 Caliber and the rounds hit their mark. Taking a round through the number one engine, the helicopter immediately lost power and the pilots were forced to initiate a controlled crash onto the fire base. As the helicopter impacted on the ground the 105mm Howitzer sling load rammed the howitzer tube into 509s belly. The calmness of the pilot in keeping control of the helicopter as the howitzer tube rammed through 509's belly kept Playtex 509 from rolling off the one-thousand-foot cliff it was teetering on. They found out later that the Howitzer brakes were locked which aided in preventing the helicopter from sliding off the cliff.

Major Lawrence "Larry" Karjala, The Maintenance Officer/Commander of the 327th Maintenance Detachment and a maintenance crew proceeded to go to FSB on LZ Tiger to recover the helicopter. CW3 Dorsey "Bud" Sherril and his team of mechanics began the recovery work. They initially secured the helicopter to the up-slope ground with two chains attached to dead-men anchors dug into the ground. Fortunately, the helicopter had landed in an old bomb crater. When the crew shut down the good engine and vacated the helicopter, the front blades struck the ground and were damaged. The maintenance crew changed the number one engine using the davit crane that bolts to the top of the airframe. Since they were located on the edge of a one-thousand-foot cliff, the maintenance personnel were all strapped to the helicopter to catch them if they slipped or fell. While working on the helicopter they received random enemy small arms fire, but fortunately no one was injured. The crew dug out enough soil in front of the helicopter so that the rotor blades could rotate without touching the ground and then the front rotor blades were replaced.

When this was all completed, Major Karjala decided that he would fly the helicopter to the FSB Landing zone. He would not allow anyone else to be in the helicopter while he tried to fly it off the crash site. He would be flying from the right (up-hill) side of the helicopter. He removed the right cockpit windows/door so that he could exit the helicopter if the need arose. He did not fasten his seatbelt, so he could "jump out", nor did he turn on the Stabilization Augmentation System (SAS). He started the engines and moved the levers to ground idle. The helicopter shifted position slightly when he went to flight mode at full rotor RPM. When they unhooked the chains from the dead man anchor it shifted a little more. They said Larry looked like he was going to vacate the premises but changed his mind and pulled pitch. When the helicopter lifted

off, the howitzer fell loose from the belly of the helicopter but did not fall off the cliff. Larry flew 509 to the FSB LZ where the maintenance team gave it a thorough inspection and then they flew it, SAS off, back to Phu Bai for evacuation. Awards were submitted for the maintenance crew enlisted men for their work and bravery while under enemy fire."

Great Story, Sam. And thanks for being a lifelong friend and fellow "Hooker".

Gary Eccles shares his remembrances of our fine Varsity maintenance team:

CH-47 Maintenance Every 25 Hours.

"It has been mentioned that a good deal of the maintenance was performed by the crew, Flight Engineer and Crew Chief. How that came about I don't know, but almost all the 25-hour and 75-hour maintenance, mostly filter and visual inspections, were completed by the crews. The 50 and 100 are more detailed inspections. We had to replace components, remove floor panels for stress fracture inspections, replace engines, etc. Then there are the blades, minor work would be required if they passed a visual. This would be to check for cracks or gaps in the adhesion and their alignment to ensure the three forward blades were horizontally in line and the same for the three aft blades.

Seals, Quick Disconnects, Lord Mounts, Blades and APU's are items our crew worked on most. Greg Nelson has a picture of a crane lifting the aft rotor, blades and all. Someone in authority decided that instead of removing the entire aft transmission, we could lift the rotor and shaft, change the upper seal and set it back down. If we set it back incorrectly, one gear-tooth off, all the work would be a waste of time and the transmission would require removal. That 'someone in authority' had to be the proudest bastard in B Company that day because it all went together like a Swiss watch! There was one minor problem to lock wire bolts together that could not be seen and there was room for only one very skinny arm reaching in from each side of the pylon, i.e., two people required, one hand each from either side of the pylon. The inspector rejected a number of attempts until we got it right.

In my opinion, the order of worst jobs:

1.) Lord Mounts – "If the design was good, how come we change out so many?" I don't remember Sgt. Evans complaining, but when it came to the Lord Mounts, he did. For us it was easy but time consuming and redundant.

2.) Rotor Blades – If they were not magnetic, why did more bullets find them than any other part of the ship? I drove the 5-Ton forklift we used after we got it and after Sgt. Scott built the "Birdcage" to hold the blade in position. I'm sure it wasn't every day, but it sure seems like I helped change at least a blade a day.

3.) Pulling up the floor panels for the Inspector to look for stress fractures in the frame. This was just a nasty job, no knee pads, the slots in the screw heads required cleaning (no vacuums) and worst of all there were hundreds of screws to be removed.

One more job of note that I worked on was the replacement of a forward transmission. After returning from my ’69 New Year R&R I volunteered for Crew Chief. My first assignment was with FE Jose Sarmiento whose ship was pulled off line because of a transmission with worn and degrading gears. If I remember correctly it took some time to get the Hook back to Eagle as they had to stop at least twice; once because the chip detector signaled a problem (mostly carbon but there was a chip) and the second time at the Phu Bai airport (no chip but high temperature.)

Performing maintenance on any major equipment requires one of two things. Either the equipment is built with future maintenance in mind or it is expected that there will be an abundance of time to do the required maintenance. Falling into the first category for a Chinook are the engines, the Lord Mounts and drive shafts, the Mix or C-Box transmission along with many more components. What is not considered an “easy fix” are the forward and aft transmissions. These are major components of the ship and not easily replaced, taking a day or two for removal and up to three days to reinstall because of the verification/inspection process.”

Great reminder, Gary, of what it took and the great Varsity Maintenance team to keep us flying safely. Thanks my friend.

I often tell my Engineering Management graduate students at University of Colorado, CU Boulder, that “It takes a team to build a dream.” That is a life’s lesson that began for me at Varsity in Vietnam. I built on that lesson working in the mission control center in Houston on the Space Shuttle. That lesson burst into truth while integrating the engineering teams of sixteen nations who built the International Space Station. I was blessed to be a part of that effort.

Chapter 7—Recovering CHICOM trucks during Operation Delaware 19 April-6 May 1969

A large 101st operation was begun to clear out the coastal plain from north of Da Nang to Hue. We moved multiple artillery bases into the coastal plain north of the Hai Van pass to provide fire support to our troops. The Navy used hovercraft and Patrol Boat River (PBRs) ships to interdict the enemy in the waters of the coastal plain.

The main transportation artery between the two famous Vietnamese cities was Highway 1 and a railroad. Both climbed out of Da Nang bay over Hai Van pass then dropping back down to the coastal plain heading north. The Hai Van Pass crosses over a spur of the Annamite mountain range that emerges from the west and juts into the South China just north of Da Nang. All road or rail traffic north from Da Nang must climb the winding and dangerous Hai Van Pass and face potential enemy ambushes. We never flew over the pass, but rather bypassed it by going ‘feet wet’ over the ocean around the pass into or out of Da Nang bay.

Varsity and our sister Chinook companies conduct a combat assault landing of massed 101st Troopers and the Army of Viet Nam (ARVN) in the coastal plain SE of Phu Bai. We fly into the citadel airstrip in the center of the historic city of Hue just at daybreak to pick up 45 American troops in each Chinook. Our flight of six Chinooks with 101st Huey Cobra gunship escort on both sides land at dawn and disgorge all our troopers at the same time to push the Viet Cong south toward a blocking force supported by the artillery we had moved south of the assault area a few days before. It was quite a sight and an unusual tactic to use Chinooks in a troop carrying combat assault which was normally conducted by Huey slicks each carrying eight or so combat loaded troopers.

The 101st was also conducting major operations in the southern Ashau Valley to interdict the NVA supply route from Laos thru the Ashau and into the coastal lowlands and Da Nang via the Yellow Brick Road. It was called Operation Massachusetts Striker lasting from 28 Feb-8May 69. The weather with low clouds and rain is our real enemy and complicates our resupply of firebases on top of mountains overlooking the lowlands. Many of them remain in the clouds for many days and we are unable to resupply them with our Chinooks. About half way between Hue and Da Nang sat LZ Whip on top of the mountain several thousand feet above the lowlands. It was a major artillery firebase supporting troops below conducting the search and destroy operation.

After a week without resupply LZ Whip is desperate for food, water, and ammunition. The only way to get needed supplies was via helicopter and no one could fly in or out because of the clouds covering the mountain. Our two senior Varsity IP's, CW3 Delfo Ferranti and CW3 Miles Becker try a difficult Instrument flight flying in the clouds above the mountain with a sling load of supplies. They are directed by radar from Da Nang used to assist B-52s bombing the enemy to the west. The radar directs them over the mountain and tells them when to release their sling load of supplies. The troops on top of the mountain hunker down in the bunkers to avoid injury. Boxes of C-rations rain down on top of and down the side of the mountain as our Varsity Chinook 'bombs' the mountain top. A partial success, but the troops still need lots more supplies. All three companies of 101st Chinooks are put on alert for emergency resupply of LZ Whip.

A couple days later, LZ Whip radios that the clouds have lifted and are only about 50-100 feet below the top of the mountain. Can we get in they ask? Varsity and Pachyderm send two ships with sling loads of supplies. I am flying the Varsity Chinook and Earl Doty is flying the Pachyderm Chinook. I carefully approach the LZ from below the clouds. I hover with the sling load at the base of the clouds and can see the ground and start to hover slowly up to the top of the mountain staying very close to the trees as I climb up. This is a risky way to approach the LZ because if I lose sight of the ground I must avoid crashing into the mountain that I won't be able to see. Dicey, but it works! I am able to sneak up the side of the mountain the last 100 feet and release the sling load of supplies at the top right where they need it. I sneak back off the top the same way and get back under the clouds and head back for another load of supplies.

The other Chinook does the same maneuver. We are able to carry four or five critical sling loads of supplies into the LZ and the emergency is abated.

Mike Kelley, Pachyderm FE, tells his story of evacuating the final load from an LZ during this operation:

"Frank, I think I remember this FB, it was definitely in the clouds, but my activity was when we went in to bring out the last loads; this would have been May '69. I had only been flying about a month then and was assigned to 18541 as a gunner. Joe Jacino was CC and Danny Osborne was FE. Danny made SSG and then reupped and came back to the world to enter WOC School. Later came back as Cobra pilot.

Anyhooo, this extraction sticks in my mind as it was the first dicey situation I'd been in, not so much any enemy activity as the place was pretty well deserted when we arrived but rather the ballsy decision of the GIFs. There were a couple of Pathfinders and I guess a squad providing security on the mountain top. There were 2 loads left; a 105mm howitzer and an empty Conex. Somehow there was a Marine Sea Stallion coming up on the POS, I guess there was the thought that they'd take one load and we'd the other. Like I said I was a newbie.

So the AC keys the mike and queries Ozzy "Chief, is this a strong bird?" Ozzy came back with "Affirmative." So the pilot tells the Marine Adios (is there some natural competitiveness twixt Army and Marine aviators?) and instructs the pathfinders to rig the load such that we pick up the 105 first, then hover over and hook the Conex. Pulls in thrust, 105 clears the ground, and AC moves to the starboard to hook the Conex. That's when the dicey part comes in; at least as a newbie the events were pretty extraordinary, it seemed at the time.

Bird is grunting and we're not getting much in the vertical development; just kinda dragging the load across the dirt. So the AC keys the mike, "We'll drag this over to the edge and then in the drop we'll get some forward air speed and we'll be flying." Great in theory and like all genius ideas (thin line twixt genius and lunacy) sure enough, bottom drops outta my tummy, blades are making tremendous whopping sound but we're flying. Only, in retrospect I realize now that the GIFs weren't thinking of the amount of lift @ 2000' vis-à-vis same lift @ sea level (Camp Eagle). I'm monitoring the radios now and I hear pilot talking to ground at Camp Eagle and he gives 'em a heads up that they might want to clear the pad area as we'd be coming in pretty hot.

Ozzie's on his belly over the hell hole, I'm looking out the port window giving the 'Clear left and below'. JoJo is doing the same on the starboard gun and BAM the Conex strikes, Ozzie punches the load and the 105 skids across the pad. I realize now that at that time all souls aboard were cognizant how badly this could have turned out. Pilot sets down and some guy runs out with a case of beer (I guess somewhere along the way there was some bet) and we head back to the mountain top. We hover over the pathfinders and drop the case of beer through the hell hole; beer was hot but I learned after a while that even a hot beer could be pleasing.

As to “LZ Whip”, I couldn’t say, for it seems I have forgotten more than I remember about that 18 month block of time in my life. But I do remember the proximity and that this was (or had been) a pretty major FB with 101st.”

Great Story, Mike! Glad you all made it, my friend!

The Yellow Brick Road

On 20 April Company C, 1/502nd located a huge cache in the southeastern A Shau valley containing 10 vehicles, 638 weapons and 80 cases of medical supplies. These Chinese manufactured, two and one half ton class trucks are hidden along the ‘Yellow Brick Road’ in a camouflaged truck park. Multiple Chinook loads of captured weapons, ammunition and enemy trucks are hauled back to Camp Eagle. I have the privilege of delivering one of the trucks back to Camp Eagle to be presented to the division commander and ARVN dignitaries in a ceremony at the 101st Headquarters VIP pad. We contact headquarters on the radio and they pop smoke on the VIP pad.

I see that there are buildings very close to the pad and advise on the radio that our heavily loaded Chinook will create a very strong rotor wash and potentially damage the buildings. I advise them to let me put it at another location further from the buildings. I hear a senior officer come on the radio and say, “Varsity put the damn truck right on the smoke!” “Yes sir”, I say and continue my approach. I put the damn truck right on the smoke! As the truck just touches down, I see the roof blow off the building just out my window and then the concrete block wall partially blows down. Thankfully no one is injured, but I hear later that we had severely damaged the brand new E8 and E9 club. I guess that the masonry cement was still green. I am thinking, “I told you so”, but had the good sense to just stay silent. I hope the “VIPs” enjoyed their new Chicom truck and had a fun ceremony! ‘All in a day’s work’, but I am still chuckling as I think of it 50 years later!

Chapter 7 Photos

Pick up troops at Hue Citadel

Chinook Combat Assault

Troops disembarking

Da Nang Harbor

Da Nang Harbor

Hai Van Pass between Da Nang and Hue

Coastal Village and water buffalo

Vietnamese village children

USS Newport News firing 8 inch guns in support of 101st

Varsity Chinook in formation during the Combat Assault

Chapter 8—Hamburger Hill and Apache Snow 9 May-21 May 1969

The 25 mile long and 1 mile wide A Shau Valley runs northeast to southwest about 30 miles SW of Hue and touches Laos on the west side. The A Shau valley bottom is flat, covered with tall elephant grass, and with tall mountains on the east and west sides of the valley. A primitive dirt road-route 548-runs the length of the valley. The strategically located A Shau valley was a natural sanctuary and major supply and infiltration route that connected the Ho Chi Minh trail from Hanoi thru Laos to the populated coastal towns and major cities of Da Nang and Hue in the Thua Thien province. Three small villages with dirt airstrips were located in the Ashau from north to south called A Loui, Ta Bat, and A Shau. The South Vietnamese military had camps at A Loui and Ta Bat. A small team of US 5th Special Forces and South Vietnamese army were located at A Shau. In March 1966 four battalions of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) 325th Division attacked and overran the A Shau camp with heavy casualties on both sides. The battle was a strategic victory for the PAVN in that they were able to take permanent control of the A Shau Valley and use it as a base area for the rest of the war.

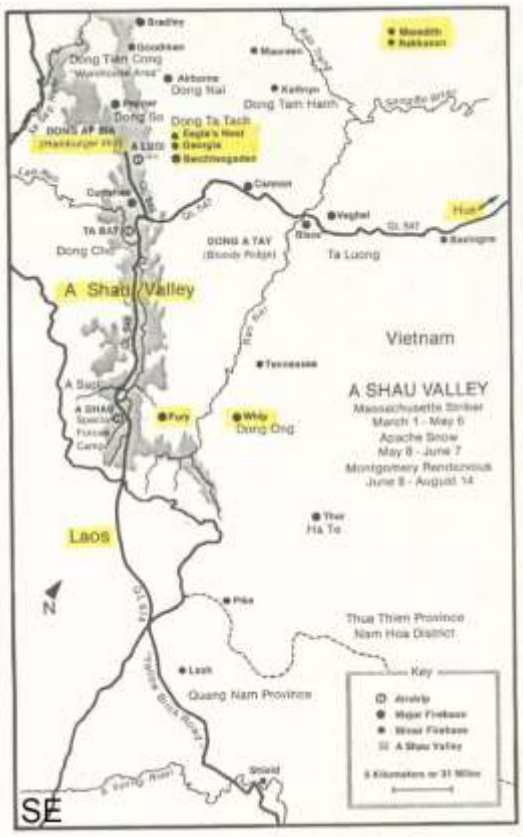
Because the A Shau Valley was such a major supply and infiltration route for the NVA and PAVN, the American and South Vietnamese armies conducted major raids into the valley in April 1968 (Operation Delaware), August 1968 (Operation Somerset Plain), March 1969 (Operation Dewey Canyon) and May 1969 (Operation Apache Snow). I participated in the last three operations flying Chinook cargo loads into and out of the valley. We called the A Shau "Injun Country" and it was. On May 10-20, 1969 the 101st 3rd Brigade and Army of Vietnam (ARVN) air assaulted the A Shau Valley in Operation Apache Snow.

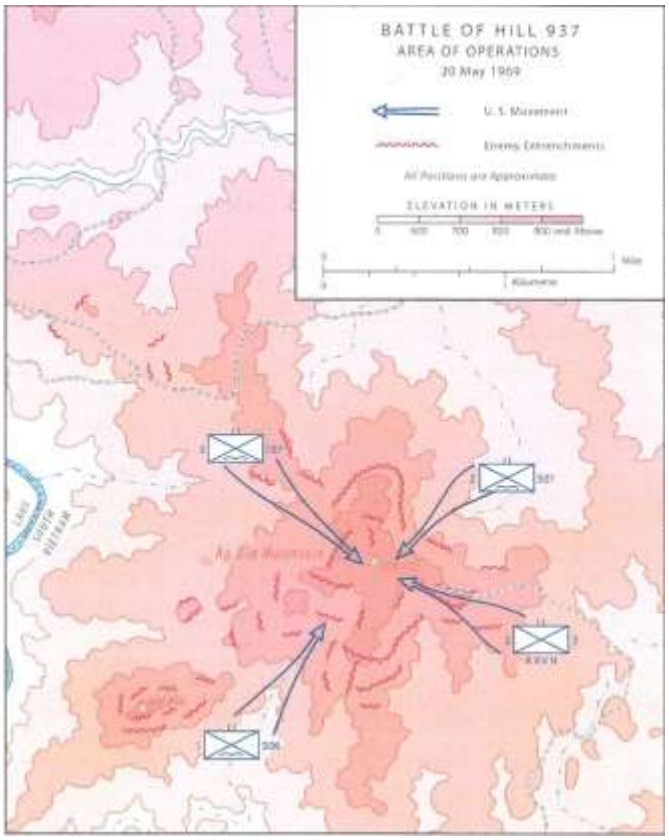
Dong Ap Bia (Hill 937) is a solitary massif dominating the northern A Shau Valley rising over 3000 feet or 937 meters above sea level. It was heavily fortified and occupied in deep bunkers with interconnecting tunnels by the PAVN/NVA 29th regiment-nicknamed 'pride of Ho Chi Minh regiment'. Unlike previous engagements with fierce firefights then retreat, the PAVN/NVA troops in the valley decided to stand and fight in a series of well-prepared concentric bunker positions on Hill 937. The 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry under the command of LTC Weldon Honeycutt directly assaulted Hill 937 between 13-20 May. Dong Ap Bia became known as 'Hamburger Hill', perhaps a reference to the casualty meat grinder of Pork Chop Hill in Korea. The 3/187 losses were severe with approximately 320 killed and wounded of the 450 troops who assaulted into the valley. A combined assault of three Battalions of the third brigade drove the 29th regiment off of Hamburger hill with survivors retreating into Laos. On June 5th the 101st abandoned the hill. Enemy troops reoccupied the hill in a few days.

During this battle all aviation assets of the 101st flew continuous support. I had been flying 12 hours and at dusk was refueling at Eagle POL thinking the day was over. Varsity Operations called and said we have a Combat Emergency resupply of food and ammunition to a new LZ on the eastern edge of the A Shau near Hamburger Hill that had been under constant attack all day. Ops said come by Varsity valley and pick up our Executive Officer, Captain Macintosh, who would relieve my pilot for this one mission. After picking up Capt Macintosh, I flew to the

logistics pad and picked up the load and we headed for the A Shau. It is dark now, but I am very familiar with the geography and terrain of the A Shau. The mountains on the east side of the Valley rise to 5000 feet above sea level before descending abruptly to the valley floor. I clear the mountains on the east side and descend into the valley knowing I have to approach the LZ from west to east because the LZ sits right at the base of the rapidly rising mountains on the east side of the valley. It is a moonless night and getting really dark. I contact the LZ on the radio. They tell me to land the sling load where a trooper is holding a strobe light which I can barely see blinking about a half mile ahead of me. We turn the landing light on and see a crashed Huey shot down in the LZ slightly below us. I carefully hover to the strobe light and drop the sling load. A quick 180 degree pedal turn and we quickly depart to the west back the way we had come in. I turn to the southeast along the long axis of the valley and climb to a safe altitude and head back to Camp Eagle. I reflect momentarily on the blood and treasure America spent in the A Shau Valley and then left, but I am too young and inexperienced to really understand the mystery of human conflict over the last 6000 years of written history. Truth is that I still don't understand it.

Chapter 8 Photos





Ta Bat Airstrip in A Shau Valley. Note the B-52 bomb craters everywhere in this once beautiful and remote valley

Hamburger Hill in A Shau Valley

Chapter 9—Chinook Phu Gas Bombing in the Ashau

1Lt John Hendrickson joins Varsity in May 1969. I am an experienced Aircraft Commander (AC) and all new Chinook pilots fly with the IP first and senior ACs for several weeks to learn about flying Chinooks in Vietnam. John and I are assigned a mission to pick up ten thousand pounds of barrels in a sling load called phu gas. No idea why this 50-50 mixture of napalm and jet fuel in 55 gallon drums is called phu gas—perhaps because it went PHU or PHEW big time when ignited after we dropped it on a bunker complex. Not sure, but this we did know. This mission using a Chinook as a bomber was not a happy time to take to the Ashau Valley or like a milk run to Da Nang to pick up supplies. The purpose of this mission was to fly low and slow over an enemy bunker complex and drop the load on them and burn them out. An ordinance officer would then drop a thermite grenade out the hell hole and ignite the bursting barrels. The NVA quickly figured out that a low and slow flying Chinook with a huge sling load of red barrels headed for them required a response of concentrated AK-47 return fire. No dummies them!

But we soldiers followed orders. So John and I hover over the load of phu gas, hook it up, check power, and take off. It is my turn to fly this leg. We are about 600 feet off the ground climbing away at 80 knots when we both hear a loud bang. I mean really loud bang. That sound can never be good. I glance at the instrument panel and see number two engine power output go to zero and the exhaust gas temperature (EGT) go off scale high. Number two engine has failed. We learned in flight school and practiced many times to make it rote memory the proper engine out emergency procedure.

First is fly the aircraft. I request max power from the remaining engine and make sure we are flying and stable at best rate of climb airspeed even though we are in a 600 minute rate of descent with the sling load still attached. Next comes, “Crew Chief check for fire in number 2”. He responds, “No fire, sir”. So I don’t have to discharge the fire suppression system on number 2 engine. Good so far. This is all happening in seconds that seem like minutes. Next I tell John, “Number 2 to ground and stop”. John takes the engine condition lever from flight power to stop. Now comes, “Turn off the fuel valves to number 2” to prevent feeding the dead engine any fuel and creating a fire. These emergency procedures are a darn good reason why we always flew with two pilots.

I start a left turn knowing I am going to have to make an emergency running landing at Phu Bai airport a few miles away. But you can’t do that with a sling load under you. I see that we are just coming up on the Perfume River that runs by Hue. I tell the FE to punch the load in the river. Not being a trained bombardier, but a darn fine Chinook FE, he punches the sling load. Half of the barrels fall in the river and half on the river bank. We now can maintain altitude on one engine, but we still have one end of the empty sling hanging from the cargo hook and must get it back in the ship to make a fixed wing like running landing. The crew struggles to pull the sling in and finally get it in the ship up through the hell hole as I slow the ship to help reduce the drag on the sling. I head for Phu Bai airport.

I declare an emergency and fly around the south edge of Camp Eagle heading for a landing to the southeast at the Phu Bai airport runway. The tower asks me to circle until an inbound Vietnamese airline DC-4 lands to the northwest. I reply firmly, "We have an engine out emergency, sir! Please ask the DC-4 to circle". He replies "Clear to land Varsity".

Nice and easy I approach at 70 knots engine out speed, flare, and touch down at about 30 knots just like they taught us in flight school. Flight emergency stress causes all pilots to go to their best high gain piloting mode. Time slows. We fly at our highest skill level without even thinking about it. I touch down with ZERO rate of descent. The aft wheels make the sweetest extended squeal as they kiss the runway and spin up. Every pilot has heard this sound at some time or other and know that on a scale of one to ten, that landing was a twelve! We taxi to our sister company, Pachyderm maintenance area, and shut it down. We climb up on our Chinook and inspect the tail cone of the number 2 engine. The exit cone is twisted like an aluminum beer can we would twist and crush. The turbine is missing many blades. We are thinking what a great crew teamwork effort to deal with the emergency and we hitch a vehicle ride back to Camp Eagle. It was a great example of excellent teamwork—'all in a day's work'.

Sling load cargo nets

Phu gas dump in Perfume River

Blown engine rear

Chapter 10—101st helps Americal Div in Chu Lai

Shortly after midnight on May 12, 1969 two regiments of the 2nd NVA Division launched an offensive west of Chu Lai which is a coastal seaport about 68 miles south of Da Nang. Defense of this region was the responsibility of the Army's 23rd Infantry Division called the Americal Division. The NVA and supporting troops numbering about 2500 quickly overran the region including threatening the provincial headquarters at Tam Ky about ten miles north of Chu Lai. On May 14th the Americal leaders declared a Combat Emergency and the 101st quickly planned for a brigade sized task force to send south to Tam Ky. Infantry, artillery, support elements, and helicopters of the 101st First Brigade including the 1/501 and 1/502 infantry headed south to assist the Americal Division. So while the 101st is fighting a desperate battle for Hamburger Hill in the A Shau Valley, the Americal Division is also fighting a major offensive by the NVA in southern I Corps. We move to help the Americal.

The 159th ASHB sent four Varsity Chinooks south to Chu Lai and we stayed with the 178th ASH Company—the Boxcars—just east of Chu Lai airport on the South China Sea beach. The next two days we Varsity pilots flew with the Boxcar pilots in their Chinooks to get oriented to their Area of Operation (AO) while our Varsity ground maintenance and flight crews got our four Chinooks ready to support.

LZ Professional was due west of Chu Lai providing the Americal ground troops artillery support. It sat in a valley surrounded on three sides by high hills to the east, south and west. Not big hills, but close enough to threaten helicopter traffic in and out of LZ Professional. The NVA was also lobbing mortar fire into LZ Professional at the Americal and 101st troops who had added additional artillery to the LZ. The NVA had occupied these hills during their initial attacks. I was flying with a Boxcar pilot carrying a load of 105 mm ammunition into Professional on the second day. Another boxcar Chinook had a sling load of supplies to Professional a few minutes behind us. We dropped our load on the logistics pad. We climbed out and headed back to Chu Lai for another load of supplies. Shortly after our departure the other Boxcar Chinook landed and was shot down at a hover by NVA 51 caliber machine gun fire from the surrounding hills. It crashed on top of the load they had just delivered. Fortunately all five crew members escaped, while the Boxcar Chinook burned on the logistics pad.

Now we start flying our Varsity 101st Chinooks and crews supporting the Americal Division for the next several weeks. One day I am carrying a small bulldozer into an artillery LZ a couple clicks NE of LZ Professional. About 500 feet above the ground we take ground fire and multiple hits that disables our utility hydraulic systems. I hear the supersonic snap of one round that missed out my left window. Another round comes thru the floor and between the legs of our door gunner at the left window. Too close for comfort!

I scan the instruments for any other problem and not seeing another issue, I continue the approach to drop off the bull dozer. The damaged hydraulic system opens and closes the cargo hook, but we can manually open the cargo hook after landing by the FE pulling a “D” handle above the hook. Think parachute release “D” handle. I tell the FE that if we have another problem and he has to release the load manually before we land to keep his face back because the sling will rebound if he has to release it.

I gently land the bulldozer, lower the Chinook slightly, and put slack in the cargo sling. The Flight Engineer (FE) manually releases the load. I move over, land the Chinook, and shut it down so that we can inspect for any other battle damage where the bullets hit us. First we verify that the drive shaft has not been damaged. Big relief! If the drive shaft had been hit by a bullet we would have to leave our Chinook right where it was. No flying with a bullet hole in the drive shaft! We find the hydraulic line that one bullet had damaged, remove it, and I catch a ride back to Chu Lai in a visiting Light Observation Helicopter (LOH OH6) to get a replacement line from one of our birds at Chu Lai so that we can fix our Chinook in the field. A quick hitchhiked ride back to the LZ and our FE and crew chief repair the hydraulic system damage and we fly back to Chu Lai and continue to fly more cargo loads. Our flight crews are just the

best! Innovative, capable, flexible, creative, and committed to completing the mission no matter what.

One day we are on the Boxcar beach relaxing and swimming in the South China Sea. A much needed day off after many 12-14 hour flying days in a row. One of our Varsity Chinooks flies by the beach with a Huey slung load beneath it. I am thinking he seems to be going pretty fast with a Huey sling load. Just then the Huey goes unstable and violently swings underneath them. The crew punches the Huey away to prevent it from hitting the bottom of the Chinook. The Huey drops nose down in a perfect 'swan dive' straight into the South China Sea. Small explosion as its hits nose first and sinks out of sight! I look at the fellow next to me with an "Oh My" look on my face. We go back to drinking our beer on the beach.

FE Paul Sparrel shares his memory of this mission:

"I remember the Chu Lai Huey drop into the South China Sea. CC Ole Oleson was in the hell hole and aided in punching the load. I was in the right door and watched the Huey come up under the nose and then swing back and disappear. I think he and the pilots punched at the same time!"

I remember it well, Paul! You had no choice but punch the Huey. I saw it from the beach swing violently back with the Huey tail almost touching the bottom of the Chinook! Then like a pendulum it came violently forward level with the nose of the Chinook. It started back the second time. Then you all punched it! WOW!

1Lt John Hendricks is our Varsity lead at Chu Lai. He has the duty to brief the 101st senior officers of our four Chinook Varsity status each night. John **shares the following story of his Chinook crew's harrowing story supporting the Americal Division:**

Our "Lucky" Day

"Late May 1969, the 101st Airborne had sent an infantry brigade down from Camp Eagle (Hue – Phu Bia, I Corps), to Chu Lai, to assist the Americal Division. The 101st sent their own aircraft, primarily Huey's (and some Cobra's) to support the brigade, as well as four Chinooks. I was a 'peter pilot', quite new 'in country', and as the only Commissioned Officer (1LT), I was the assigned Section Leader for the flight of our four CH-47 Chinook's along with 7 Warrant Officer pilots, and three crew per aircraft, from B/159th Aviation Battalion (Assault Support) – Call Sign: Varsity.

The four aircraft and crew were hosted by the same Chinook Company that supported the Americal Division. Our aircraft were maintained and kept on the tarmac at the Chu Lai airbase while the crew members were housed at the 178th ASH Co – the Boxcars—with quarters in the sand dunes overlooking the South China Sea. With a fleet of four aircraft, that meant that we needed to have one of them "down" every day, in order to perform routine maintenance. I

provided the flight operations the tail numbers of the three we had available, on daily basis, and from that we received our missions for the day.

About a week after arriving at Chu Lai, I was the right seat, pilot of A/C 143, flying to a firebase (Professional?) that was some miles West of Chu Lai, where, when we had flown into that fire base for the first time during Area of Operations (AO) orientation flight with a Boxcar pilot, we Varsity pilots couldn't help but notice the outline of a burned up Chinook, near the landing pad. A Boxcar Chinook had been shot down there. I believe the entire crew had gotten out, OK. This particular fire base was surrounded by higher terrain / elevation, at all four sides. The preferred, "lessons learned" technique, therefore, passed onto us by the Boxcars pilots, to getting into and out of this particular fire base to avoid anti-aircraft fire (primarily dual .51Cal's), required steep spiral approaches and ascents.

We used the "spiral" pedal decent to get down, dropped off our load (internal, passengers and gear as I recall) and performed an almost vertical climb out, as we had been coached, uneventfully. We proceeded to head on a more Northerly route which kept us parallel to and further from Chu Lai. At altitude (~3,000AGL) our right engine, the engine that turned out to be the newer, stronger engine of the two, began losing power. We "beeped up" the left "good" engine as far as we could, without going over red line, yet we were descending at about 100' per minute. As post analysis of the engine would reveal, we had taken a single round (AK-47?) in the bleed band of that right engine, causing it to lose power (compression). Believing we could not make it all the way back to Chu Lai at that time, and that it was "Indian territory" and thus a bad place to set down, we began looking for alternatives. Continuing more Northerly, I found the nearest "friendly" location on our map and that is where we headed; a Special Forces "A" compound, located right on a river bank (Tra Bong River?).

A Special Forces Captain, quite surprised and excited about our unannounced visit, was very insistent that we get the hell out of his compound. After explaining our situation, he was somewhat sympathetic but we had to be out before dark or he'd "blow us up in place"! He felt a Chinook would be a very attractive target come sun down and he didn't want to be subjected to rocket (122MM) fire all night. Reluctantly, he had some of his soldiers set up a defensive perimeter outside of us / the Chinook and the compound. How's that for luck?

Upon landing at the Special Forces compound we made contact with one of the other of our four Chinooks and told them of our predicament. It just so happened that this particular aircraft had a high frequency radio and antenna (operational) so they climbed to higher altitude, and made a call. They were able to reach another Varsity aircraft flying back in the 101st's AO and that aircraft made a call back to our company maintenance. Monitoring our radios, we received a call back that a Chinook was on its way from Varsity Valley with a replacement engine for us. How's that for luck?

From having had to inventory and sign for it and the other three Chinooks before we left Varsity Valley, I knew we happened to have all that extra "Billie" gear, as originally supplied from the

factory, to include the manual engine "hoist", on board A/C 143. The other three did not have any of that type of gear. How's that for luck.

Paul Sparrell (Spec 5) who has urged me to write and share this story, was the flight engineer and probably Ole Olson (Spec 4) the crew chief on that flight, but we cannot remember for sure. Nor do we remember the door gunner no less the CWO / AC (Aircraft Commander).

We, primarily in the form of Sparrell, Olson and the door gunner, had the engine completely disconnected and literally dangling on the hoist when the replacement engine arrived. The new engine was rolled off the back ramp of the maintenance Chinook, one of the pilots was CPT Bob Ellis, our unit maintenance support lead, and swapped for the downed one. The crew made good time in putting the replacement engine in and re-attaching all the hoses and controls.

Meanwhile, that Special Forces Captain had become more and more insistent that we get the hell out of his compound, to prevent their having to endure those perceived incoming rockets. We did not need too much convincing as it were, so we by-passed a few required maintenance and pre-flight run up procedures, especially for a new engine. We cranked up the new engine as well as the other one, lifted to a hover, didn't see any leaks (significant ones at least) all gauges normal and flew back to Chu Lai and the Boxcars hanger. How's that for luck?

John Hendrickson
LTC, Aviation
U S Army (Retired)

Epithet / Epilogue:

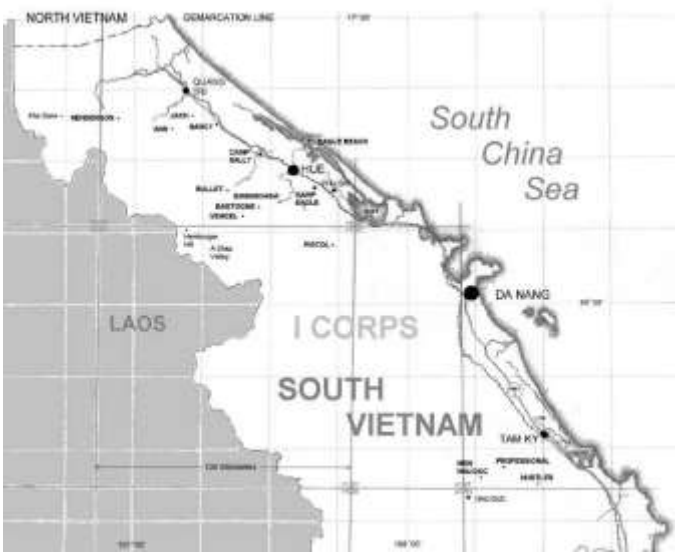
We were lucky in deed that day.
Unfortunately, a year later, and within in weeks of my DEROS, Varsity lost two Chinooks and all ten crew members, while operating in Northern I Corps, close to the DMZ. I've often reflected back on us and them, these past 48 years."

Another great story, and thanks John. It amazed me that our flight crew could change and entire engine in the field! I was there with you helping the Boxcars and the Americal Division for those weeks, but not flying with you that day.

After a few weeks at Chu Lai, I rotated back to Camp Eagle and flew a damaged 101st Huey Cobra back for repair. The Cobra was a very difficult sling load to carry because the curved tail made the Cobra try to turn sideways and go unstable if we flew any faster than 60 knots. At this slow speed I had to stop at Da Nang to refuel in order to have enough fuel to make it back to Camp Eagle!

The 101st troops, artillery, and aviation assets continued to support the Americal Division for the next three months on a rotating basis as our 159th Chinooks did supporting the Marines out of Vandergrift Combat Base earlier in the year.

Chapter 10 Photos



1Lt John Hendrickson

Hot Refueling at Tam Ky

Boxcar Beach and Living quarters

Boxcar Beach and South China Sea

Beach Day for Buzz

Boxcar Beach in distance from the air looking south

LZ Professional in center—
Americal Division Injun country

Special Forces camp and airstrip NW of LZ Professional probably where Lt Hendrickson and Varsity 143 crew replaced the engine.

Chapter 11—Odds and Ends

O & E story one—Welcome Home for Vietnam Vets

I came home from Vietnam in August 1969 landing at San Francisco International (SFO) on the big Freedom Bird. I was in uniform. CW2 with a chest full of hero and service ribbons I thought were important at the time. Turns out now 50 years later, I realize that weren't really that important after all. But I will never forget my welcome home from SFO airport protestors. "Baby Killer". "Traitor". Wow. I had risked my life for my country. I had lost friends who paid the ultimate price for America when called. I am thinking WTF? I had orders to Germany and suppressed the emotional baggage that I did not even know had been laid on me then.

So fast forward 17 years. April 12, 1981 and first flight of Space Shuttle. Exactly 20 years to the day after Yuri Gagarin's first human flight in Earth orbit. How is that for coincidence? Maybe not. I was Guidance Support in the Mission Control Center (MCC) in Houston and we had been doing training and simulations getting ready for first Shuttle Launch for six years prior to first flight. Shuttle was the most complex Aerospace vehicle ever created by man. It takes some time to train the crew and MCC team for all the thousands of failures we might see. I had helped develop the Shuttle Guidance equations used in the computer for optimum performance into and out of orbit when the engines were running. I had helped develop many of the Shuttle Computer guidance procedures and crew monitoring displays for powered flight with Shuttle's first flight astronauts John Young and Bob Crippen with hours and hours in the early Shuttle Procedures Simulator.

I had a dear friend and a mentor who was the MCC Entry guidance officer for Shuttle. His name was Jim I'Anson. Jim was a WW2 Pacific B-17 bomber pilot and veteran of early human spaceflight and the Apollo Moon Landings. Jim also flew converted AT-6 Texan trainers modified and painted to look like Jap Zeros in the Confederate Air Show reenactments of Pearl Harbor. A pilot's pilot for sure. Even though Jim told me that helicopters can't fly, no matter what I thought, he took me under his wing in so many ways and helped lead me into the new era of human spaceflight at NASA—the Space Shuttle. After the first successful landing of the Space Shuttle and my first participation in a space launch, Jim and I came out of the Houston MCC elevator and gave each other a big hug. I was still at a 20 foot hover for sure!

A week or so later Jim called me and said I need to talk to you. Can you come over to my office? I said sure. I walk into his office. Jim said, "I watched a show about Vietnam Vets last night. When I came home from the Pacific after VJ day, there was a big sign on the Golden Gate Bridge that said, 'Welcome Home Boys. Job Well Done!' I realized that you never had the welcome home that we got, and I needed to thank you, personally." He hugged me. I broke down and cried like a baby. I didn't realize the baggage I was still dragging from my welcome home in San Francisco in 1969. It was a pivotal and powerful start to a much needed healing process that I did not even know I so desperately needed. Rest in peace my dear friend, Jim I'Anson. I will see you when our Lord returns.

Jim and Pert I'Anson circa 1995.
WW2 B-17 pilot and NASA MCC flight controller.

O & E story two—Coincidence or Destiny?

On May 21, 1969 we were flying supplies into the Ashau Valley in support of Operation Apache Snow. The Chinook I was flying that day—one of two of our sixteen aircraft—was equipped with a High Frequency (HF) or short wave radio that could communicate long distances. The HF radio equipped Chinooks had a very long antenna on both sides separated from the fuselage with insulators mounted up and down on both sides looking like an accordion bellows. We never used the HF radio in Vietnam. But being the curious person that I am, I turned it on and randomly flipped thru channels. My copilot is flying this segment and all is well. I first hear pilots talking to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. I give Clarke tower a Vietnam weather Pilot Report (PIREP) during a break in the talk.

I keep flipping thru channels intrigued that I can talk to Clark AFB tower in the Philippines over 900 miles away. Suddenly I hear, "Apollo 10 this is Houston. You are go for TLI". "Houston, Apollo 10 copies, go for TLI". Now I am hooked! I listen for about 15 minutes knowing this is a NASA moon mission happening right that moment. I did not know what TLI meant or most of the acronyms being used in the transmission—that would come later. But I figure out Houston is talking to astronauts Tom Stafford, John Young, and Gene Cernan in Earth orbit getting ready to depart for the moon. Apollo 10 was the dress rehearsal for the July 69 Apollo 11 attempt to land on the moon. I am mesmerized. It is so cool! I would love to do that! Later I realize it was an epiphany moment that had changed my life's direction. Spoiler Alert—TLI means Trans Lunar Injection and was the burn of the 3rd stage (S-IVB) of the mighty Saturn V rocket boosting the Apollo 10 crew out of Earth orbit and on a trajectory to the moon.

We did not have television at Camp Eagle, but I knew a flight school classmate in Da Nang that did. I called him and asked if I could come down and watch the Moon Landing with him? No problem he says. I talk to Operations who allow me to fly one of our Chinooks to Da Nang, Marble Mountain airfield and pick up supplies. The two of us watched the moon landing on TV and Neil Armstrong take the first steps on the moon along with 650 million other Earthlings around the world. Yeah America!!! I left Vietnam and then spent 2 ½ years in Germany as an Army pilot. I left the Army in December 1971, returned to University of Colorado, completed

my BS degree in Aerospace Engineering, and had a wonderful 30 year career with NASA working on the Space Shuttle and International Space Station programs.

Was playing with a radio we never used that day in May 1969 and listening to Apollo 10 communications an accident or destiny? You tell me…

O & E story three—Varsity Valley gets a name-The Locker Room

All of our 101st aviation units had a company call sign and many had a name for their company area. For example, A Company, 101st Assault Helicopter Battalion (AHB) was called "Comancheros" and their company area was called "The Hideout". A Company, 158th AHB was called "Ghost Riders" and their company area was called "The Haunted House". So when these units called the tower for departure or landing, they would say, "Eagle Tower, Comanchero 213 departing the Hideout". Or, "Evans tower, Ghost Rider 368 departing the Haunted House".

So I am getting ready to leave the Varsity Valley for the day's missions in early 1969. I called for departure clearance and said, "Eagle tower, Varsity 134 departing the Locker Room". You know, Varsity was the first team. Locker Room just seemed like a perfect name at the time because we did not have a company area name other than Varsity Valley. Eagle tower comes back with, "Varsity 134 cleared for takeoff from the Locker Room." And the name stuck!

O & E story four—USO comes to Camp Eagle

I have never met a veteran that did not love and appreciate the United Service Organization (USO) support to serve and lift the morale of troops around the world. There has been no greater commitment to America's veterans than Bob Hope who loved America and made it a mission to make us forget for a few hours the stress and horror of war. Bob Hope and his troop would go on to entertain the military for nearly 50 years through World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Lebanon Civil War, the Iran-Iraq War, and the Persian Gulf War. To every American service man and woman, Bob Hope is a saint.

Bob Hope could not make it to Camp Eagle with his Christmas Show in 1968, but he did send Joey Bishop, Tippi Hedren, and some lovely American 'round eyed' ladies to Camp Eagle and Varsity in late November 1968. **Greg Nelson** was our flight operations specialist assigning Varsity missions and talking to us often on the radio as the missions changed. Greg **shared this story:**

"Tippi Hedren was being shuffled around with Joey Bishop. Miles Becker got me on the radio and said that he was ahead of schedule so he made up some reason to stop at Camp Eagle for a few minutes. I didn't have time to alert many people, but I made sure that the CO was one of them. I got her to sign the flight card. Tippi had filmed 'The Birds' about 4 years earlier, which was her first real role, and then did 'Marnie'. She owns a wildlife preserve in the hills between Los Angeles and Edwards AFB."

Tippi and Joey got off the Chinook saying hi and thanks to some of our Varsity team. I had the privilege of flying them back to Phu Bai airport and the 159th Liftmaster pad after their visit to Camp Eagle and Varsity. One of the lovely American ladies came up in the cockpit to watch our approach and landing out the front window. I asked her for a kiss on the cheek. She leaned down, turned my head, and planted a 'big one' right on my lips! I stayed at a ten foot hover for two weeks!

O & E story five—Signal Hill off Camp Evans runway

The first tall hill off the western end of Camp Evans runway had an important communications relay station on top for the 101st. One day we picked up a two and one half ton truck from the top of the hill to return it to Camp Evans. The 'deuce and a half' truck was the Army's main cargo carrier and a heavy load for a Chinook to sling load. I hover over the truck and the young fellow in the bed of the truck hooks it up. I lift it up, check power, and take off over the edge of the hill heading for Camp Evans. Our Flight Engineer yells, "The young trooper is climbing up the sling into the Chinook!" Wow scary stuff, I think as I look down at the ground a thousand feet below us! Fortunately, our crew pulls the guy into the Chinook thru the hell hole. I land the deuce and a half at Camp Evans and give the sling some slack so our FE could release it. All of a sudden the deuce and a half drives out from under me and heads off ahead of us! A second trooper had ridden down in the cab of the truck, started it on short final, and drove out from under us! You must be kidding me! I, like Tom Hirschler, did not want people riding a sling load under a Chinook. I guess it never occurred to them how dangerous this was and that Chinooks dropped loads if the slings broke or we had an emergency and had to get rid of it. I had both situations happen to me during my tour.

In winter months we often had low clouds that prevented us from flying cargo to mountain tops. And helicopter is the only way to get needed supplies to the top of the mountain bases. Normally we did not carry sling loads in instrument flight rule (IFR) conditions or fly in the clouds. But a high density sling load rides well below the Chinook and is stable. So I know that the top of Signal Mountain is above the clouds because we have talked to them on the radio. I

also know that I have plenty of room to climb thru the clouds from the coastal plain before reaching the mountain. So I hook up a load, take off to the west, and climb up thru the cloud deck on instruments. We break out into bright sunshine and see the top of Signal Hill off in the distance. A nice easy visual approach to the logistics pad, drop the sling load, and we head back to Camp Evans above the cloud deck. I call Evans Ground Control Approach (GCA) and we get an instrument approach back down thru the cloud deck and land on the Camp Evans runway. Easy Peasy! That worked so well that we hook up three more cargo loads needed by the troops on top of the mountain. Three GCAs back down to Camp Evans. All in a day's work!

Signal Hill from Camp Evans

Buzz and flight school best bud, WO1 Bill "Chemist" Parsons, at Camp Evans. Bill flew Hueys for the Ghostriders and earned two Silver Stars. He retired as an Army LTC.

O & E Story Six—Boeing Rescue Award of two injured Marines

Flying in support of the Marines during Operation Dewey Canyon in February 1969 was powerfully rewarding and incredibly challenging flying. The challenges included difficult weather, terrain, enemy action, and situations we had never encountered before. One of these involved two Marines on patrol that had slipped and fallen over a cliff into the trees below. Both were seriously injured. Fellow Marines made the tortuous descent down to assist them and render first aid. We had landed a sling load of supplies on the LZ at the top of the hill. The Hill was a 'klick' or so NE of the abandoned Khe Sanh airbase on the plateau below. The Marines at the LZ asked us on the radio if we could assist by lifting the injured Marines from the canyon below them and medivac then to Vandergrift Combat Base. I replied that we would sure try!

Our flight crew was me as AC; Pilot, Jim Leonard; FE Edward Saylor; CC Rodney Pettis; DG Raymond Haylotte. I asked the GIBs to rig up the rescue hoist that went from a winch in the heater closet out the starboard window with an attach point and strong arm above the window and several pulleys that had to be attached and changed the cable direction every place the

direction needed to be changed. It was the first and only time I had ever used the rescue hoist. And we were blessed to somehow have it aboard. And so were the injured Marines that lay below us. Ed, Rodney, and Ray rigged the hoist while we sat at the LZ with blades turning at flight idle. And in just a few minutes they had it ready. Damn fine job GIBs, I thought, since gas guzzling Chinook fuel was precious.

We take both engines and rotors to flight mode. I hover up and out of the LZ and over the cliff to the rescue site. It sits in a very tight canyon below us, so I carefully descend still at a hover into the tight canyon with both CC and DG watching our blade clearance on both sides. Pilot Jim Leonard has the radios and coordinates the rescue hoist pickup with the Marines on the ground. He makes sure that the stretcher with the injured Marines are secured in the stretcher and that the hoist hook can pick it up in the middle of the stretcher. FE Ed Saylor looks out the hell hole and helps me line up directly above the stretcher below the trees. Ed also has the winch control for the rescue cable.

I hover as low as I can into the canyon just above the trees. The turbulent Chinook rotor wash bouncing off both sides of the canyon makes the piloting task to keep us at a stable hover the worst I have ever experienced. FE Ed Saylor lowers the cable to the rescue team below. They hook up the stretcher with both Marines strapped down on it. I carefully lift the stretcher straight up out of the tiny clearing with all three GIBs helping keep the stretcher clear of the trees as we ascend back to the LZ. Any Chinook pilot will tell you how important the eyes of the GIBs are—and they were. The stretcher is rotating slowly, but we hover up to the LZ and carefully set it down. Marines unhook the hoist. Ed retracts the hoist and I move over and land. Marines load the injured on board, Ed calls “ramp up”, we take off for Vandergrift and the medivac pad. The GIBs and medical team unload the injured at Vandy. Our three GIBs are all recommended for the Air Medal with Valor (V) device by the Commanding General of the 3rd Marine Division for the rescue.

Our Boeing tech rep, Brian Schofield, hears Jim and my story back at Varsity in the Hue Inn a couple of weeks later as we celebrate over a couple beers. He quietly submits our story to Boeing Vertol. Our entire flight crew is later awarded the Boeing Rescue award. It was a gesture from Boeing that we all appreciated. And the best part was that we helped our fellow soldiers in need. All in a day’s work!

Rescue Citation

in recognition of Meritorious Service The BOEING COMPANY presents this certificate to

AWARD

THE BOEING COMPANY

19 May 1969

Dear Mr. Buzgard,

It is an honor for me to present the Boeing Rescue Award to you and the following members of your crew:

Chief Warrant Officer James A. Leonard, Pilot
Specialist Fourth Class Edward C. Gaylor, Flight Engineer
Specialist Fourth Class Rodney Pettle, Crew Chief
Specialist Fourth Class Raymond Haylotte, Gunner

This award recognizes your rescue of two Marines who had been injured on 27 February 1969, when they fell from a cliff while on patrol from Vandegrift Combat Base, South Vietnam. The use of a CH-47 "Chinook" helicopter crewed by members of the United States Army on a mission of mercy for two United States Marines is a fine example of the inter-service support and cooperation. The thought that you contributed so much to the relief of pain and suffering of a fellow Serviceman should be a source of pride to you and, on behalf of The Boeing Company, I extend congratulations for this distinguished accomplishment.

Rescue Award Certificates, Wallet Cards, and Lapel Pins are enclosed for each of you.

O & E Story seven— A really heavy Chinook load

Our CH-47B Chinooks were a significant improvement over the first CH-47A in terms of lift capability. More engine power and more efficient blade design. We could regularly lift ten or twelve thousand pound (5 or 6 ton) sling loads without worrying too much about how high or how hot the destination was. Anything above that load we paid careful attention to the density altitude (DA). A helicopters lift (and an airplanes lift for that matter) are dependent on the atmospheric pressure and temperature. So high altitude and high temperature reduces the DA of the air. Both the engine power and lift generated by the rotors are reduced at high altitude and high temperature. So at sea level and low temperatures we could lift a lot more than 5 or 6 tons. The way we would check was to hook up the load and check our power with the sling load ten feet off the ground. If we had adequate power we would take off with the load.

My heaviest load was on a beer and soda run to Da Nang. We sometimes took a Jeep on the way to Da Nang for running around town. We always landed at Marble Mountain airstrip which is just south and parallel to the big, long runways of Da Nang main airbase. This keep us out of the traffic pattern of the Air Force jets and passenger jets landing at the main airport. Our crew loads up five pallets of beer and soda with a forklift inside our Chinook. Each pallet weighs about 2500 lbs, so 10,000 lbs so far. Then they load the jeep which is another 2500 lbs. The FE calls me on the intercom and says we have a couple of people who need a ride to Camp Eagle. I said sure. I pick our Chinook up to a hover and check power. I am at max power and can only hover at 2-3 feet above the ground. Hmmm, I think, that is a heavy load! But I know I will burn 1500 lbs of fuel or so on the way back to Camp Eagle. A Chinook has wheels so we can make a runway takeoff like an airplane called a running takeoff. Once a helicopter goes thru translational lift around 15-17 knots the rotor system gets clean air, generates more lift, and it will climb at 500 feet per minute with the same power it takes to hover. No problem, I think, I

will just make a running takeoff and normal landing at Camp Eagle after burning off fuel. So off we go.

We climb slowly away from Da Nang and head for Varsity Valley. Just for fun, I ask the FE how many people got onboard at Da Nang. He counts and says 23! They are sitting all over the beer and soda pallets and in the jeep. I said, "I thought you said a couple of passengers for Camp Eagle"??? I do the math. 12,500 lbs of beer, soda, and jeep, plus 23 people times 180 lbs gives at least 16,500 lbs in the back!! I am really going to have to be careful to land in the revetment at Camp Eagle because we don't have a runway to make a running landing. I mentally plan for a straight landing to the ground without coming to a hover. That takes great precision by the pilot. And I don't have the option of dumping passengers or especially beer on the way home! Just sayin'!

I carefully set up the approach to the revetment at Varsity. I am lined up. Speed looks good. Touchdown point looks right in the middle of the revetment. I am pulling max power by ten feet off the ground and I can tell she isn't going to hover. Fortunately my precision is dead on. The aft wheels bump down right at the opening of the revetment! I dump the thrust lever and the front wheels settle on the ground. No harm, no foul, thank God!!! My copilot looks up at me with fear still in his eyes. I grin and say, "All in a day's work!" Confession. I had several beers in the club that night and vowed to NEVER do that again!

O & E story eight—Tom Hirschler Varsity Stories

CW2 Tom Hirschler came to Varsity after I left in August 1969. Tom put together a great website for the 101st Chinook unit members called Geronimos. It has roster pages, stories, and photos for each of the three 159th Chinook companies in the 101st that served during Vietnam. You can find the webpage here: http://www.geronimos.org/varsity/Varsityx.htm

Click on the Varsity, Pachyderms, Playtex, Liftmaster names at the top and navigate around.

Tom adds these Varsity stories:

Varsity Standbys

Tom Hirschler

In I Corps, the three 101st Chinook companies rotated all-night flare-ship standby missions. The primary standby Chinook was located at Camp Evans. The other two companies' standby Chinooks remained in their company areas with progressive reaction times if the primary launched from Camp Evans and Basket Ball, an Air Force C-47 flare ship stationed at DaNang, was not available.

The standby Chinooks carried 48 high-intensity flares like eggs in a carton in a large open-top wooden box. When needed, the crew members would remove a flare from the box, set the drop altitude on the flare's bottom, and launch it through a tube mounted in the open cargo-hook hatch. The flare was activated by its lanyard which was attached to a cargo deck tie-down

ring. The flare would illuminate, and its parachute would deploy when it reached the programmed drop altitude.

On one of those standby nights at Camp Evans, my crew was launched to drop flares over an infantry outfit in contact. Artillery max-ord in the area was around 7,000 feet, so we dropped our flares from 8,000 while maintaining our position with radar vectors from Quang Tri approach control. I was glad to have a flight jacket with me; it was chilly at that altitude with the OAT in the low 30s. The cloud tops were at about 2,000, so the crew set the flares for a 6,000 foot drop, thus starting the illumination at the cloud tops for maximum effect.

With a sky full of stars, we circled for about an hour, watching our dropped flares glow through the clouds. At the end of the hour, we were relieved by Basket Ball which could stay up much longer.

One morning after being released from a quiet, overnight flare-ship standby, we were surprised by what we saw when we returned to Camp Eagle. When we were close enough to see our parking area, the Locker Room, we spotted one of our Chinooks on the ramp, upside-down; lying cross-wise on top of one side of its revetment.

During the evening before, a lone maintenance pilot was doing a test run-up following routine maintenance. The Chinook lifted nose-up and flipped out of control, slinging rotor blade parts around the company area, and sending movie-goers in the maintenance hangar running for cover. The Chinook's only crew member was standing on the ground to the rear, and escaped without injury. The lone pilot twisted an ankle when he dropped from the upside-down aircraft after parts stopped flying.

The cause was unclear; it was either improper maintenance or the pilot's lack of positional awareness allowing the thrust control to creep up.

The following incident occurred a few months into my year with Varsity.

Each morning, when the first mission of the day launched, we had a standby Chinook run-up in case a mission aircraft was not able to get off.

That day I was the standby pilot and Dale Petersen was the Aircraft Commander. The mission launched, and we went back to our hootches and standby-mode with our eyes closed.

Later in the morning, Dale came to tell me we had a mission to the city of Hue, about 8 miles away, and he wanted me to get our aircraft started. A truck had overturned; GIs were trapped and needed our help. Dale went to Operations to be briefed, while I hurried to the flight line and our Chinook.

Our procedure with T-55 L-11 engines was to start the left engine, get it to flight RPM, shut down the APU, and then start the right engine. This was always done with both pilots in their seats. Not waiting for Dale; I was starting the right engine when he arrived. We finished the start, and I made the takeoff for Hue, flying while Dale made the radio calls.

Dale gave me the details in the few minutes it took to get to the site. A 5-ton truck had swerved to avoid hitting a Vietnamese civilian on a bicycle who cut the truck off. When the truck swerved, it missed the bridge it was approaching, then rolled upside-down and ended up front first, almost in the river below.

During the short flight, the SP6 Flight Engineer (FE) connected six slings and attached them to the cargo hook. Next to the river were trees some 100 feet tall, so we hovered with the Chinook's nose in the trees while the FE dropped the elongated sling. We were to lift the truck cab, so rescuers could pull out the trapped GIs.

If we lifted the cab too much, the truck would slide into the river. If we let it back down, the truck cab would crush the rescuers. After several minutes hovering at 100 feet with nothing to reference but the limbs of the trees blowing around in our rotor-wash and the FE's instructions over the intercom, the rescuers pulled both GIs from the truck's cab. Unfortunately, one was killed when the truck went off the road.

We found out later it was only eleven minutes from the time of the first call to our operations until we were hovering over the truck.

It was September 1970. T55-L11 engine power turbines were coming apart in flight, so the aircraft with those engines were grounded. Varsity had 12 out of 16 CH-47s parked, and the 196th Flippers came to the rescue with their A models. Flipper and Varsity ACs flew together on Flipper A models and Varsity's four T55-L7C C models. Flipper Dale Tate and I had been friends in the CH-47 course and were able to fly together on his A model on several missions.

On one of those missions, we had an off-shore pickup from hospital ship USS Sanctuary. The 101st Division band had been entertaining wounded soldiers recuperating on the Sanctuary, and needed a ride home. It was late afternoon when we made the pickup, with a 20 minute or

so return flight. The first leg of the flight was about 20 miles along the coast, a very short distance from land; we then turned south toward Hue-Phu Bai. (Varsity was no longer at Camp Eagle). Soon after crossing the shoreline, we lost a hydraulic system causing us to make a precautionary landing in a sandy area.

After shutting down, the crew found we had blown a hydraulic line in the C box area. This would be difficult to repair even if we had a replacement line. Darkness was not far away; we had the division band armed with their musical instruments. That left us with two M-60s for protection. Dale and I reasoned if we flew low, and not too fast, we could land in the very open area we had yet to fly over should we have another problem. Another 10 minutes of flying saw us on the Hue-Phu Bai ramp without incident. I don't recall our ever reporting to anyone the circumstances of the return flight's precautionary landing.*

*CW4 Dale Tate was killed making an NVG sling-load landing at Ft Campbell, July 24, 1990.

Sometime mid-1970, we were making a routine single-ship sling-load drop off at FSB Rifle. Normally, the pilot flying turned off the radio switches on his intercom/radio control panel when making a sling-load pick up or drop off. This is done to lessen the distractions to the pilot while listening to the directions of the crew-member in the cabin.

This was the last time I followed this practice. While listening to the crew-members directions, I noticed a cloud of dark smoke on the opposite side of the FSB. When I asked the other pilot what was going on, he didn't have a clue. I turned the radio switches back on in time to hear the Pathfinder yelling at us to depart; we were drawing incoming mortar fire.

Another incident occurred around the same time. On a rotating schedule, the exchange system sent a conex to the various FSBs in our area. This was so the FSB soldiers had access to the usual necessities, such as toothpaste, soap, etc. Accompanying the conex was a young soldier to act as its sales clerk. The conex was delivered/retrieved by CH-47, and its accompanying soldier sometimes rode in the Chinook or went by Huey. Someone else delivered the conex that day, and we were given the mission to return it to the Camp Evans log pad. When the mission was passed to us, we were told the soldier would return by Huey; there was no good place for a Chinook to set down to pick him up.

For those not familiar with external load operations, there are three types of loads: high density, low density, and aerodynamic. An example of a high density load would be an artillery piece; a conex is a good example of a low density load; of course, an aerodynamic load would be something such as another aircraft. Each has its flight characteristics, but that day the load of interest was low density.

A low density load has a large surface area relative to its weight. A low-density load has horrible flight characteristics when there is only a single point of attachment between it and the carrying aircraft. This means at airspeeds above 30-40 knots, the load can start swinging. If allowed to swing too much, it can endanger the carrying aircraft to the point where the load

would need to be jettisoned, or as was more commonly referred to by Chinook crews "air-mailed."

We picked up the conex, and departed the FSB. Knowing its characteristics, we held our airspeed during the climb to 20 to 30 knots. As it neared the appropriate time to change the radio frequency, I had my hand on the radio frequency selector. Just before I made the frequency change, the Pathfinder made an urgent call telling us there was someone riding on top of the conex.

I immediately asked the Flight Engineer monitoring the load, and he confirmed there was someone on the conex. We slowed to a high hover, and turned to return to the FSB at about 10 knots. After setting the load back on the ground, we hovered down enough for the conex passenger to crawl into the cabin. When asked what in the... was he doing riding on the conex, the sales clerk said he had been told to not let the conex out of his sight. Since his Huey hadn't yet arrived, the only way to follow that order, he thought, was to ride it back to Camp Evans.

The Flight Engineer swore he did not see the soldier on the conex. I found that hard to believe, but had no way to contradict him. It would be difficult to exaggerate how lucky the soldier was, or how lucky we the crew were to return to the FSB without a serious incident to explain.

For the rest of my 18 years and 5,400 hours flying Chinooks, every time a mission included an external load, my preflight crew briefing included the words "and I don't want any passengers riding on the load."

Chapter 12—Grieving our 101st Chinook Losses

We are mortal humans and combat helicopter operations includes stark and painful reminders of that fact. The 159th ASHB lost friends, soldiers, and five Chinooks in crashes while I was there. Here is a brief summary with riveting stories from our crews:

1. Varsity, B Company, February 1969, Quang Tri Province, CH47B. CW2 Gary "Strange" Streid and his crew were carrying a sling load of supplies supporting Marines out of Vandergrift Combat Base. The weather was very low ceilings, rain, and overcast sky. Gary was flying under the clouds down the Song Thach Han river valley where the river turns south at Khe Sanh and leaves Highway 9 from Vandy to Khe Sanh and on into Laos. Their Chinook is hit by a Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) near the engine on the left side. It starts a fire that the crew valiantly fights with fire extinguishers. They are unable to put the fire out and Gary makes an emergency landing on a sand bar in the river valley with the Chinook on fire. All five Varsity crew members safely make it out of the aircraft and watch it burn—a complete combat loss. A Marine helicopter lands and brings the crew back to Vandy. Gary tells me later that he is mad at himself for leaving his prized Minolta 101 35mm camera hanging by its strap on his cockpit seat, but he did

make sure he grabbed his rifle hanging on the seat by the sling. Good priority choice, Gary! Funny the memories that combat stress burn into your brain.

2. Pachyderms, A Company, 2 April 1969, Quang Tri Province, CH47C 67-18523. The Chinook lost power, touching down on the side of a ravine. It then rolled to the bottom of the ravine, coming to rest on its left side and exploded. Pilot lost and listed as Missing In Action (MIA) was WO1 Lowell S. Powers. There were 23 ARVN soldiers killed and 26 passengers injured.
3. Pachyderms, A Company, 18 April 1969, Thua Thien Province, CH47C 67-18536. On a resupply mission near LZ Thor when Chinook took AK-47 30 caliber hits and an RPG in the left main fuel cell. CW2 Harold Lee Eckert, Jr desperately tried to find a place to land in the heavy jungle and steep terrain as the aircraft lost rotor RPM and started to settle in. The #2 engine was not able to recover and the rotor RPM dropped below stability level, and the blades folded. The aircraft fell the last 30 to 50 feet and rolled into a ravine full of Punji stakes and burned. The five crew members killed were CW2 Harold L. Eckert Jr [AC], CW2 Thomas A. Davis [P], SP4 Robert J. Nevel [FE], SP4 John B. Combs [CE], SP4 John C. Shellum [G]. Harold Eckert, Jr was a founding member of the 292nd at Fort Sill, OK which became Varsity. He was an outstanding pilot and a hard worker appreciated by all. The three 159th Chinook Companies had a big infusion—swap of people between companies—in February 1969 to smooth out the loss of experienced personnel at the same time when their tour in Vietnam was over. Harold went from Varsity to Pachyderms. My flight school buddy, WO1 Nonie Orosco came from Pachyderms and became my Varsity roommate. WO1 Earl Doty came from Pachyderms to Varsity. Harold was one week from completing his tour of duty and returning home to Hershey, PA when he was tragically killed. Many of us were flying that day supporting the huge 101st operation Kentucky Striker at the very southern end of the Ashau Valley to stop the flow of NVA supplies coming down the "Yellow Brick Road" from Laos thru the Ashau. Our hearts were broken and silent prayers were offered as we heard on the radio that Harold and his crew were shot down and killed. More than one tear was shed that day.
4. Varsity, B Company, 20 June 1969, LZ Airborne, CH47C 67-18544. The aircraft lost power on approach to LZ Airborne and crashes in the LZ. **Crew Chief Gary Eccles shares the following story of the crash:** "Going back about an hour before the crash, we had refueled and picked up the Hot Meal and a few passengers going to LZ Airborne. All was good as we circled around Eagles Nest and came to Airborne from the West. I don't remember the ship flaring-up, but what I do remember first was one of the engines shutting down. Next was the feeling of weightlessness and then the impact, which drove me to my knees. I remember looking out the door as we hit and began sliding into the LZ, but that didn't last long. We hadn't made it onto the LZ far enough to prevent us from falling backward and down the ridge, but that didn't last long either. The trees and our rotating aft rotor blades pushed and pulled us back up onto the LZ so that the nose of the aircraft was now out over the ridge and the tail rested up on the LZ. And, finally,

we were violently rolled over onto our right side. Next thing I remember was someone kicked me in the back and stepped on me going out the door. I got up, removed the monkey-harness and looked around. I was alone, my M-60 was bent in half and flames were now coming through the open door. Flames completely blocked passage to the rear and filled my door opening. I looked over to the window where our gunner would have sat when suddenly FE Colin Helms appeared in the aft flames. When I asked him how we were going to get out he said 'The same way the pilots did' and pointed to the cabin. Colin and I jumped, landing outside the LZ. Shortly thereafter we met a squad of men coming down a path heading for the aircraft. I told their sergeant that he should be careful as we had just refueled. He told us to follow the path up and around onto the firebase. From there I was evacuated in a LOH. FE Paul Sparrell greeted me upon my return to Eagle, got me to the showers and back to my tent where I got dressed just before we got word that I was wanted so I could give my statement of what happened. I was fortunate that day, a few minor burns on my hand and both shins; Colin appearing exactly when I needed somebody; Paul being there for me when I needed a friend. And, most of all to the Man Upstairs who I can only guess didn't have room for me that day!"

5. Playtex, C Company, 2 August 1969, Quang Nam Province, CH47C 67-18513. The Chinook was being flown on a logistical support mission and was climbing through approximately 3000 feet altitude when it was struck from the left rear by a USAF O-2A that was in process of making a left turn. Both aircraft partially disintegrated in mid-air and fell to the ground. Playtex crewmembers lost were CW2 Albert A. Vaquera [AC], WO1 Thomas L. Dives Jr [P], SP4 Thomas K. Ryan [CE], SP4 James S. Stacey [CE], SP4 Daniel A. Irelan [G]

Varsity lost twelve brave crewmembers in 1970 after I left. In Memory we honor our fallen.

SGT Roy Andrew Petty Jr.
Akron, Ohio
October 7, 1948 - May 17, 1970

SSG Sammie C. Alexander
Milton, Texas
February 4, 1938 - May 17, 1970

Sp4 David W. Smith
Everett, Washington
February 23, 1949 - May 17, 1970

CW2 George C. Schultz, Jr.
Stoneham, Massachusetts
August 13, 1938 - May 17, 1970

WO-1 Phillip F. Arnold
Columbus, Georgia

September 3, 1946 - May 17, 1970

PFC Steven E. Wasson
Eau Claire, Wisconsin
November 11, 1950 - May 5, 1970

Sp4 Gary W. Brown
Treasure Island, Florida
February 28, 1950 - May 5, 1970

Sp4 Larry D. Buffington
St. Louis, Missouri
July 4, 1940 - May 5, 1970

WO-1 George A. Mason
Ringwood, Oklahoma
September 26, 1949 - May 5, 1970

WO-1 Richard L. Van De Warker
Eau Claire, Wisconsin
June 3, 1943 - May 5, 1970

SGT Robert Lee Pendergast
Norwich, Connecticut
April 1, 1950 - April 13, 1970

SGT David Paul Evans
Lincoln, Rhode Island
December 28, 1947 - April 9, 1970

Here is a website with a list of Chinook crewmembers lost in all of Vietnam

http://www.armyaircrews.com/chinook_nam.html

LZ Airborne after Varsity 544 crash.
photo John Hendrickson

Epilogue

We humans have a mystical duality in our nature and lives that I cannot explain, nor do I understand. We have an unlimited capacity to love and hate, triumph and fail, laugh and cry, help and hurt, build and destroy, praise and criticize, worship and blaspheme, make war and peace, and live and die. We can build eternal and unbreakable bonds based on our shared experiences. This is a story of such a bond forged in the crucible of war and dependence on each other. "We were soldiers once and young", to borrow Joe Galloway's phrase. We were a "Band of Brothers" like Dick Winters and Easy Company in the WW2 2/506 Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 101st. We flew together, worked together, and played together when America called. We came home to a divided America because our war did not have the clarity or agreed purpose understood by all Americans during WW 2. We were not welcomed home by a banner on the Golden Gate Bridge saying, "Welcome home boys—Job well done!" But we did our best. We put our lives back together and continued to serve America the Beautiful and home of the brave. We were young Hookers in Vietnam. And our Vietnam veteran service together made us what we are today. I am thankful for that experience. I stood on the shoulders of giants.

Acknowledgements

This work has been a group effort of a great Band of Brothers that I served with in Vietnam. Thanks to John "Gump" Maddocks for encouraging me to write down our memories after we both attended our 101st reunion at Colorado Springs, CO in August 2019. Gump also added greatly to our mission story landing wounded Marines on the USS Sanctuary. The following Varsity and other 159th crewmembers contributed many photographs and helped with stories. These include Sam Kaiser, Gary Eccles, Greg Nelson, John Hendrickson, Gary Streid, Lon "Rock" Busch, John "Gump" Maddocks, Colin Helms, Paul Sparrell, Jim Voss, Patrick Grosh, Michael Kelly, Dennis Wilson, Tom Valenti, and Tom Hirschler. Thanks to all of you, my Band of Brothers, for your support and your service. It was my great honor and privilege to have served with you.

About the Author

Frank Buzzard spent a distinguished 30 year career with NASA at the Johnson Space Center retiring in 2003 after leading the NASA Columbia Accident Investigation Task Force. He then served as Barrios Technology, Inc Program Manager for the International Space Station (ISS) Mission Integration Contract from 2003-2005. During his NASA career Mr. Buzzard served as Chief Engineer of the Space Shuttle, Chief Engineer of the ISS, and ISS Program Director/Senior System Integration Manager at NASA HQ. NASA awards include the Distinguished Service and Exceptional Service (2) Medals. Mr. Buzzard was born in Wilkinsburg, PA in 1947 and grew up in Longmont, CO--a 1965 graduate of Longmont High School. He served as a US Army helicopter pilot for 5 years including a Vietnam combat tour as a Chinook pilot in the 101st Airborne Division. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in Aerospace Engineering with special honors from the University of Colorado in 1974 as the top engineering graduate. Mr. Buzzard received the University of Colorado Distinguished Engineering Alumni Award in 2016. He received a Master of Science degree in Physical Science from the University of Houston in 1981. He attended Harvard Kennedy School, Senior Managers in Government in 1993. Mr. Buzzard lives in Edward, CO, is a part time professor at University of Colorado, Boulder and has an aerospace consulting business, Frank Buzzard Consulting, Inc.