

# Hang Loose

By [Mark O. Hayes](#)

188th AHC, Blackwidow 14

Just a personal note. I had an experience in Nam the VHPA renewal card reminded me of.

I flew for the 188th AHC out of Dau Tieng in 1967 and they were a bit confused about the infusion of experienced pilots to assist in training of the new in country pilots. They put their pilots who came over in the AC position with little or no knowledge of appropriate flying habits in Nam.

I was infused from the 155th AHC in Ban Me Thout to the 188th as an AC and as infused pilots we were placed in the junior pilot positions. One day we had a very low cloud cover and had to take a mission at Li Kae. Just after take off, lead a Captain called for flight to stay trail and he maintained close proximity to the clouds base about 500 feet up. The first 3 choppers were flying the best text book formation I had seen since I left Rucker, having gone straight to Nam and BMT. I was flying chalk 4 and just naturally slipped in to old habits of staying loose when flying low level even though they wanted a formation 500 feet up. Chalk 5 flown by a 1st Lt. called me over the radio and angrily said, "Chalk 4 get back in formation and stay there". I was a low life W-1 to him and not supposed to talk back to big brother. I replied, "That's a negative. You keep this formation like this you are going to get them all shot down!" There was no further response from him. Chalk lead thought for a few minutes and came on the air, "Chalk flight come up stagger trail left". All appropriate movement took place and I continued my hanging loose. The first 3 birds were still in beautiful formation - perfect for an automatic weapon to hit them all without excessive finger strain. Just a few minutes later lead dropped down to a true low level and drug his flight across a large opening. While I was just entering the opening I started taking fire from the left and called lead to inform him. His reply, "I got it from there to." Rather than diverting to keep his flight from taking hits and possibly worse he flew us all through the automatic weapons fire. Four of the 5 aircraft were hit, 3 were unserviceable, mine wasn't hit.

The moral of the story, I hang loose in any formation and don't like being told to "... get back in formation..." I choose which formation I am in now and plan on doing so in the future.