

Inexperience at work

By [Ted Jenkins](#)

When I got out of flight school in May 63, I skipped Vietnam for almost 18 months. I was sent to Ft. Carson and all they had were OH-23Ds. I made two month long maneuvers, Swift Strike 3 in the Carolinas in 1963, and later Desert Strike in 1964 on the Arizona/California border. I flew the OH-23D from Carson to the Carolinas and back and from Carson to Desert Strike and back to Ft. Worth where we traded in our OH-23s for OH-13Ss. Out of flight school for almost 18 months and I had flown nothing but 23s and 13s. I did get to go to Ft. Sill for gunnery training in OH-13E, I believe.

Well, when it came my turn for Vietnam, I received orders for CH-37 transition enroute. Right out of observation to the Army's biggest. However, the 54th Trans(I think) at Sill was on Air Assault maneuvers in South Carolina and I had to drive and locate them in the field to start my transition. I drove all over South Carolina in my 1964 Corvair trying to find them. Finally did and I was the only one who had a POV.

When I finally got up next to the Mojave, I just thought, what am I doing here with no flight time other than observation. Anyway, they welcomed me there. They were a few pilots short and my transition started immediately on the job. They did not have a ground school set up, that was at Sill, so everything I learned was in the cockpit and I learned very little about flight control systems, hydraulic systems, auxiliary systems, and everything else.

With all that experience, I went to Vietnam and was assigned to the 339th TC (DS), in Nha Trang. When I arrived in Nha Trang, they were supporting the Air Force on a classified mission and needed someone up in Danang NOW. I didn't even get a unit check ride by the IP. They just sent me on up and I met CW2 Gerald Meador, who was the pilot I would be flying with. Meador is still one of my best friends and we talk often about how we scared each other and would fly 20 miles out of the way to avoid a cloud. Neither of us had instrument tickets. Jerry (Budda) had just finished 37 transition the class before me, so you can imagine the experience in that cockpit.

If you have ever flown a 37 for a year, you will have stories to last you for the rest of your life. Oddly, for me, I remember all the good times and the fun times and, even though there were some rough times, I never thought much about them.

But, after all that lead-in, this is what I am finally trying to say.

After Budda went back to Nha Trang, he was replaced by another W2, and now it was I who was the experienced pilot. Heaven forbid!! We worked for the Air Force and had to get permission from them to take another mission while we were just waiting, sometimes a week, for the Air Force mission. We took a mission hauling some civilians and a couple of military down to the Tam Ky area. The H37 had two R-2800 radial engines and were subject to little things going wrong. About three-fourths of the way down, the Nr1 engine chip detector light came on. With the 37, you never knew if it was the real thing or not, but with all those people aboard we weren't going to go on, land and then maybe have a problem where we couldn't leave.

So, we notified the passengers, and turned back toward Danang, with the chip light shining like a big red star. We had about 40 miles to go back to Danang and we kept our eyes on the instruments. As we neared Danang, we notified the tower that we did have a light on and would like to land on the main runway. I lined up on that long runway at about 70 knots and told everyone we would be making a running landing to keep from putting too much stress on the engine. We put the gear down, crossed over the threshold, and planted that tail wheel. Now here is where it gets interesting. I told the co-pilot to cut number 1 engine!!! WE WERE ON THE RUNWAY. WHY? Well, as I said, inexperience had reared its ugly head and we were now going down the runway about 70 knots and NO BRAKES!!! The brakes were run off the utility system which was powered by number 1 engine. I estimate we used as much runway as an F-105.

All we could do was look at each other and start laughing. What were we thinking? I still laugh.

I survived many episodes in the 37, went back to Eustis and was assigned to the Cargo section and got my Crane transition there before my next tour of excitement.