



281st AHC 'Intruders' Newsletter

38 Pleasant Street, Wenham, Massachusetts 01984

Volume 3, Winter 1988

PRE-FLIGHT

This flight (issue) covers many subjects. It is the result of many informative letters. In fact there was enough information to help fill future issues. If your story did not make this issue, be assured that it will make the next one.

In this issue is an excerpt from Al Rampone's book "Silent Birdmen" which he hopes will go to the publisher this year. Our hats off to Al!

Look for Fred Phillip's "The Wild Bunch" in the next issue. Also our thanks to John E. Bolas of the Veterans Services for sending an article on the origin of the 281st. Look for this as well.

SUBSCRIBERS

If you have not subscribed yet, please do it now so you will be kept on the mailing list. Send your donation of \$10.00 to:

The 281st Intruders Newsletter,
c/o Wesley Schuster, 38 Pleasant St., Wenham, MA 01984

For those of you who have sent donations in 1987 since the first newsletter — thank you. We will probably start an annual subscription, beginning in 1989. Look for this to be updated in future issues.

Past issues will be sent upon request.

281st AHC Committee Chairmen

President/Treasurer
Wes Schuster

Vice President Communications
Duane (Tubby) Brudvig

Rollcall/Reunion
Joe Bilitzke

Historian
Dean Roesner

Newsletter Printer - Charles Althouse
4 Maples Press

The 281st Intruders Newsletter is published by the past members of the 281st.

Material published in the 281st Intruders Newsletter is contributed by past members of the 281st and other interested persons.

The Newsletter does not endorse any organization or person mentioned in this publication.

The 281st Intruders Newsletter welcomes letters to the editor.

REUNION '88

Joe Billitzke, Wolfpack 34, sent out a great S.O.P. on our second reunion. He has reported a strong response and the operation is a go! Watch for registration forms from Joe soon. This will reserve your room for late July. See you there!

ARMAMENT



XM-21 System

This photo, dated April 1967, shows the first XM-21 system installed on a Wolfpack ship. The caption on the back of the photo reads "Lots of problems." It was taken at Phu Bai by Francis Boisseau.

My own recollection of this system was that in 1969 it was the best we had. It was dependable and deadly accurate. The stream of tracers from the mini-guns could be laid in exact patterns. You also knew, much to Charlie's regret, that you were cutting through the jungle canopy and getting to him. Our rockets, while noisy, hit the top of the canopy and did little to penetrate the thick foliage.

The grenade launcher (M-5, 40mm) system however, was particularly finicky. Often the grenades got hung up in the chute and proved inoperable. My memory tells me that by late 1969 we only had one ship left with this system. All the rest had XM-21s.

While I am sure refinements were made between 1967 and 1969, what always impressed me was the dedication our gunners had in cleaning the mini-guns. Whenever we were on the ground, "Tubby" Brudvig, Larry Elam, Jim Bailey, Paul Hull, and the others had the guns stripped, cleaned and repeatedly checked and rechecked.

What were your experiences with these systems? We would like to hear. How about some stories from you guys sitting back there in the "hell holes" with the mini-guns buzzing at your toes or you free handing your craft with M-60's on the slicks? Or you S.F., what was it like to receive cover during an extraction?

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Are you moving soon? If so let us know so we can mail you future newsletters. Among those we have lost contact with recently are:

Chuck Allen (Fayetteville, NC)

E. John Capo (Cantonment, FL)

Charles E. Smith (Newport News, VA)

Does anyone have their new addresses?

"IN MEMORY"

An anonymous donation to the Intruder's Newsletter was received in memory of Spec 5 Patrick Ronan. Thank you for your kind donation, and especially for remembering a buddy.

MAN'S BEST FRIENDS

Yes, we had many friends. Do you remember them all? This photo was taken of "Grumpy" the Company mascot in May of 1967. Grumpy was obviously company clerk material, his spectacles were for his farsightedness.

The Wolfpack had a dog for each ship. Some of the names come to mind from 1969; remember Fang, Susle, A.C., Ditch, Beatrice and Ugly?

When we made camp for a month or two at places like An Hoa, Phu Bai, Dong Hoa, the mascots were part of the crew.

How many dogs did the 281st have? We have a pretty complete roster of everyone, but now let us test your memory of our "best friends." Send in the names and dates of the dogs which served in the 281st so a roster can be put together. It will be posted at the reunion.



"Grumpy", Company Mascot, 1969

LEON DARVIN FLANDERS

An excerpt from "Silent Birdmen"
by Al Rampone, Wolfpack

There were a lot of warrant officers. Stevens, Channey, Art Kopp, Jackson, Dick Lubic, Frank Shipes, Jerry Montoya, Phill English. They seemed to be the center of the party. They told stories on one another that were funny. Some of the tales were "You had to have been there to find the humor." Then, as more liquor flowed, the stories became more somber.

Prop asked, "What was the story on the guy they named the Don Ba Thin airfield after?"

"Flanders." Fred Phillips stepped forward. "You ask about Leon Flanders. Well here it is!"

"Darvin and I worked together as 'blackbirds' at Tac-1 at Mother Rucker for awhile before we went to Vietnam. We shipped over at the same time, and he was assigned to the 145th Airlift Platoon at Nha Trang. That platoon was actually the predecessor of the 281st, our primary mission Project Delta. By the time my platoon arrived a few months later, Darvin was an experienced slick AC and, unfortunately, a damn good one. Of course, the best slick pilot was always assigned to fly the primary pickup aircraft on the hot extractions and Darvin got stuck with that job for a couple of months. After a few weeks, he started to burn out. Hell, he knew that there was no way he could survive the six months or so left in his tour doing that job. The rest of us started to worry about him."

"Then we went to Tay Ninh. I started to suspect that the operation wouldn't be much fun when I got shot down on our first area recon, but that's another story. Two days later, one of the recon teams parked in the remains of an abandoned village in C-zone called Bo Tuc. A few minutes later, an entire NVA battalion marched into the area and camped all around the team. The team couldn't move and the NVA appeared to be setting up to stay awhile, so they called for extraction. Darvin and Pete Frazier got the job."

"We planned to use our usual tactics — gunships spraying the area while the slick comes in over the trees, pops up and lands amid the confusion, grabs the team and gets out of Dodge, all in a few seconds. This time, there were just too many bad guys and it didn't work at all. On short final, Darvin got hit in the foot, the aircraft spun a couple of turns, but Pete recovered it and flew it out. On the way back to Tay Ninh, Darvin reported that his leg hurt, but that he didn't want to look at it since he thought his foot was gone."

"He finally looked at it when we landed and his foot was still there. In fact, an AK round had come in through the right chin bubble, hit the FM radio, tumbled, and knocked Darvin's left foot off the pedal. The whole bullet was stuck in the leather of his boot. It hadn't even broken the skin. Left a helluva bruise, though. By then, Darvin had had enough, used up his chances, and the rest of us knew it. A few of us went to the CO and asked him to give Darvin another job. A few days later, he started flying ash and trash for one of the Special Forces 'C' detachments. I saw him a time or two after that and he was back to normal, feeling good. He told me that he was glad he didn't have to fly for Project Delta anymore, and that he figured he could survive a couple of tours flying ash and trash."

Fred paused, took a sip of his drink, then continued.

"Then one day he was eating breakfast in the team shack at some Special Forces camp when a mortar round came through the roof and blew him away. Nobody else got hurt. We all heard about it the same day, and somebody said it was a short round, fired by the friendlies. I can't remember the name of the camp. It doesn't matter."

"By the way, he didn't like to be called Leon. His middle name was Darvin, spelled with a 'v'.

There was a short period of silence after Fred's story.

281 - AHC LIVES ON



How many license plates have you seen with 281-AHC? This one was not found by accident. It belongs to Bob George, Wolfpack 38, 69-70. Now that is loyalty!

"INCOMING"

RPG damage during February 1967 was heavy in Nha Trang. A number of ships were damaged. This one (tall number ?) obviously "bought the farm." Note the lack of revetments. Later on the revetments got so high only old hands parked their ships. Once in a while, for a little sport, it was always fun to watch a FNG bobbing up and down trying to drop it in the revetment.



DE-BRIEFING

After reporting the "Rotor Blade Ripoff" in Vol. 2, Fall 1987, Doug Powell reported that he went through Nha Trang from the 48th on December 13, 1970 and the rotor blade was still there.

Duane "Tubby" Brudvig, our communications brain trust, reports a roll call of 222 names with 10 more names recently added. Keep up the good work, Tubby!

Interestingly enough, in Al Rampone's work on his book *Silent Birdmen*, he put together his own "Morning Report." We are matching it with our own data bank so ably handled by Joe Billtzke.

Recently Walt Stobe, Paul Hull and Bob George visited the "Wall." I am glad they made it. It is everything you have read and heard about. Visit it.

NAVY CROSS INCORRECTLY LISTED

In the second issue of the "Intruders" newsletter, in the unit awards section, the Navy Cross was listed. The Navy Cross is awarded for individual heroism. This then would not be awarded to a unit. Those in the know spotted this and were good enough to clarify it.

Francis Bolsseau, Wolfpack 39, Oct. 66-Nov. 67, sent along a copy of the citation. The citation for the navy Commendation Ribbon from the Secretary of the Navy reads:

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in commending
PROJECT DELTA

for service as set forth in the following CITATION:

For exceptionally meritorious service in action against enemy Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces during the conduct of long-range reconnaissance missions in the I Corps Tactical Zone, Republic of Vietnam, from 17 April to 17 June 1967 and from 15 July to 16 August 1967. Project Delta, attached to the III Marine Amphibious Force, was assigned the task of locating and interdicting an enemy route of infiltration by which the enemy was moving large quantities of men and munitions through the remote western regions of the I Corps Zone. Operating in an enemy-controlled, extremely rugged jungle area, encompassing a total of 7,000 square miles, Project Delta utilized highly-skilled,

combined United States and republic of Vietnam Special Forces teams, together with assault helicopter and tactical air support, to effectively penetrate the objective area. The small Delta reconnaissance teams outmaneuvered the enemy's aggressive counter-reconnaissance operations and located and recorded major enemy trail systems, food and supply caches, and base areas. Acting on this information, Delta's Tactical Air Control party planned and controlled devastating air strikes against these lucrative targets with significant results. In addition, Project Delta conducted reconnaissance in force operations, resulting in 57 confirmed enemy killed, 13 enemy personnel captured, and large quantities of food and munitions destroyed. The aggressiveness, skillful planning, and heroic conduct displayed by the officers and men of Project Delta were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

All personnel attached to and serving with Project Delta during the period designated above, or any part thereof, are hereby authorized to wear the Navy Unit Commendation Ribbon.

Secretary of the Navy
Acting

Our thanks to Francis for sending along the citation.

**The 281st Intruders Newsletter
c/o Wesley Schuster
38 Pleasant St.
Wenham, MA 01984**

TO: