



281st AHC 'Intruders' Newsletter

494 Woodcliff Drive, Redding, CA 96003

Volume 4, Winter 1990

PRE-FLIGHT

After writing the first three newsletters, Wes Schuster has requested a break. I have agreed to write a couple of issues and commend Wes for his excellent substance and style in setting a format for this newsletter.

Our next issue will contain the official 281st Unit History for 1969. If it jogs your memory with a story, please send it to the newsletter for future publication. Even if you only have a correction or an elaboration on a brief fact, please respond. Fred Phillips "The Wild Bunch" and Duane "Tubby" Brudvig's story on AC are prime examples of what we would like to have. Unfortunately, they are also the last. So, if you would like to have future issues, we will need stories.

REUNION '88

In July, 1988 we held our second reunion in San Francisco. Congratulations are in order to Joe Bilitzke for a super job of promoting and organizing the event of three days. We all had a great time sightseeing around San Francisco and enjoying sights which no longer are the same since the earthquake. He even had ordered back issues of National Geographic from 1967 with an excellent large, full color map of Vietnam which contains names of probably every small village in existence. If you ever wondered where you were (crew members) or would like to show someone where you flew (pilots) this is the map. Again, thanks a lot, Joe.



(Picture I.D. - Left to right, top to bottom) Jim Bailey, Joe Bilitzke, John Bolas, Jim Brown, Duane Brudvig, Dean Byrne, David Dolstein, Daryl Evangelho, Bob George, Ken Hamilton, Marshall Hawkins, Paul Hull, John King, Bill Machiang, Paul Maledy, Joe Mason, Ken Miller, Doug Powell, Larry Proper, Al Rampone, Earl Roark, Dean Roesner, Wes Schuster, Walt Stobe, Paul Swol

SUBSCRIBERS

As discussed previously, we need contributions to keep this newsletter going. There is not enough money left in the newsletter account to pay for the printing and mailing of this issue, so the short fall is being made up by a one time donation. If you wish this newsletter to continue, please send a \$10.00 donation to:

The 281st Intruders Newsletter
494 Woodcliff Drive
Redding, CA 96003

We send out approximately 100 newsletters, so if even half of the recipients sent in their \$10, we would have more than enough money to keep the newsletter alive at the rate of one issue a year. Please help! This is the only way we will keep in touch and expand our roster for future reunions.

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.

281st AHC COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

C.O. - Wes Schuster Editor - Dean Roesner
Membership - Duane Brudvig Reunion - Joe Bilitzke
Historian - Dean Roesner Printing - Bob George/4 Maples Press

THE WILD BUNCH

by Fred Phillips

When I arrived in-country in November '65, I was a 2nd Lieutenant fresh out of flight school. I was assigned to the 6th Airlift Platoon (the "Fangs"), an orphaned unit left over from the early days of the war. For a few years the Fangs had operated as a separate gunship platoon out of Danang, having the only Huey gunships in I Corps. When the Marines arrived to take over the war in I Corps, the Army didn't seem to know what to do with the Fangs, so the unit was moved to Saigon and attached to the 145th Combat Aviation Battalion. They had been there a few weeks when I arrived, but had already managed to piss off just about everyone in town above the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. The Fangs were combat flyers who let everyone know that they didn't care for straphangers or, for that matter, anyone else who flew VIPs or pushed paper. Saigon, of course, was full of those guys.

About two days after I arrived, the 145th had an officers party at the 120th Aviation Company's villa in Saigon. After a few rounds of drinks, some of the Fangs took over the microphone and announced that the 145th pilots, and particularly those in the 120th, were a bunch of pansies. Although that was probably true, quite a few of the pansies were offended and a memorable brawl ensued. By the time the MPs arrived to break things up, one Major was sitting unconscious in a corner with the remains of a guitar broken over his head. When he came to, he swore that he would get revenge.



The "neighbors" got a little wild last night.

An official investigation failed to reveal the culprit and, naturally, no one confessed. Still, the staff puked suspected (probably correctly) that one of the 6th Platoon pilots had laid the Major low and decided to get even by sending the entire unit to some place outside of Saigon where, they thought, we would all be promptly killed by the VC. A week later we moved to Bien Hoa which, if anything, was actually safer and more comfortable than Saigon.

Before long, the word got back that we actually liked Bien Hoa, so the Battalion started to look for some other way to get rid of us. When the 5th Special Forces Group started looking for aviation support, the 145th staff were only too happy to tell them that they happened to have an entire platoon to spare. In February '66, we moved to Nha Trang.



Nha Trang from the east with the Co. Area in the center

Please don't think that the 6th Platoon's pilots were the only ones who were causing problems. The enlisted Fangs had as much unit pride as anyone, and did their best to uphold our reputation. At about 0500 on the morning that we were going to leave Bien Hoa, the CO2 woke up to take a phone call from some MP Captain. He was looking for several guys who had terrorized most of the commercial establishments in the town the night before by entering with loaded M-16s, chasing off all of the other customers, having the girls disrobe, and then painting FANG on strategic parts of their bodies with some sort of indelible ink that wouldn't wash off. Each time, however, they had paid the mama-san handsomely before moving on. I told the Captain that I would check into it and that he could meet me at the airfield in an hour.

I borrowed a jeep and headed for the EM hooch. When I arrived, I found several of our crew chiefs and gunners passed out in and around the premises. The platoon sergeant, Mahlon Buckalew, was slumped over the wheel of his jeep. It over a while to wake him up but when he finally came to his first words were, "You should a been with us last night, sir." Sergeant Buck confirmed that the MP's version of the evening's activities was more or less accurate, so we rounded up everybody that had been involved and loaded them on a Huey that pulled pitch just as the MP's drove up. I assured the Captain that I would bring everyone in to see him as soon as they returned from the mission. I didn't bother to tell him that we were leaving town for good. We never heard about it after that.

So far, I haven't really mentioned the 281st, but the unit wasn't formed by assigning individuals as was usually done and the two platoons that made up the original core of the company brought long and colorful combat histories with them.

The 145th Aviation Platoon was another unit that had been around for several years and had originally been part of the 145th Battalion. They had been stationed in Nha Trang for about a year when we arrived, and had spent most of that time flying for Project Delta. They had a lot of war stories to tell and more than their share of purple hearts. The Fangs and the 145th, (callsign "Iroquois") were happy to be together. Shortly afterward, the 281st was formally activated although about 200 more guys were still en route from the states to give us a full complement of officers and EM.



Part of the very extensive pre WWII harbor defenses for Cam Ranh Bay. Probably replaced by Soviet SAM missiles now.

Naturally, the platoons needed to be reorganized somewhat, since we had something like 13 gunships and only seven slicks, which wasn't exactly what Special Forces had in mind. We formed a gun platoon and a slick platoon to fly for Project Delta, and another slick platoon which flew mostly ash-and-trash for Special Forces camps all over the country, as well as spook missions for the CIA.

I was assigned to the gun platoon, starting out as the copilot for the platoon leader, Captain Joe Thurston. The other original 281st gunnies were Lt. Vic Donnell from the 145th and WO Ron Palascak from the Fangs. Sgt. Buckalew was the platoon sergeant and some of the original crew members were Don Perrin, Goff, Agnew and Bittle, who claimed to be the world's ugliest man and was probably right. At first, we used the 145th gunship callsign, "Husky", which Ron and I thought was a piece of crap. Of course, we wanted Fang, but most of the guys from the 6th Platoon were flying spook missions and still using their individual Fang numbers. Within a few weeks, Donnell and Thurston both DEROSed and we had picked up some new pilots, including Ed Carty and Jim Leach from the 1st Cav, Gary O'Connor from the 145th, and Captain Lynn Coleman from the states, who was the new platoon leader. At last, it was time to pick a new callsign.



A crew member's view of Vietnam

The pilots gathered in the bar at the Special Forces officer's club, knowing that it would not be possible to select the suitable callsign if we were anywhere near sober. I don't remember what the suggestions were (in fact, I don't remember much at all about that night after the first few rounds) but I do know that we failed to come up with anything we liked. When we woke up the following afternoon, one of the Majors was complaining that an enlisted man had painted something on the side of a gunship and he wanted it removed right away, since we were supposed to be a covert and sneaky kind of unit that didn't have identifying pictures on the helicopters. A few of us walked over to the flight line where we found one of the crewchiefs (I think it was Bittle, but I'm not sure) admiring his artwork. He had painted a great cartoon wolf, smoking a cigar, on one of the doors and had written "WOLFPACK" above it. The rest is history.

A couple of months passed, and the company still didn't have a callsign. During that time, the non-Fangs slicks actually used those ridiculous callsigns that the Army published in the SOI, which had lots of Ls and Rs because the VC weren't supposed to be able to pronounce those very well. Believe it or not, they actually used "Level Chisel" for one entire operation. The slick drivers hated those callsigns, and weren't too



Shadow on the sand, as transitory as we were.

happy about being snickered at by the Wolfpack either. Naturally, the Majors came up with a solution. They told the Wolfpack to start using Army callsigns, also. We just ignored that fine piece of advice and after awhile they quit trying to enforce it. Finally, the CO asked everyone to submit suggestions for a callsign in writing and, in the grand tradition of field grade officers everywhere, formed a committee to pick a name for the unit. I don't know who was on that committee, but it must have had some WOs and EM, because they picked "Intruders" and, as we all know, it was a good one.

So what happened to Fang? As near as anyone could tell, when Captain Jack Dahill (Fang 6) DEROSed in November '66, the callsign went home with him. How about Iroquois? That was the original name the Army gave to the UH-1 and the 145th Platoon had been the first unit in country to get them, sometime in '62 or '63, I think. But let's face it. A UH-1 is a Huey, not an "Iroquois". After we arrived in Nha Trang, no one, not even the 145th guys, wanted to keep that callsign.

I don't know how "Bandit" and "Rat Pack" got started. That was after my time.

AC

By DUANE BRUDVIG

In October of 1969 we were working with Project Delta at My Loc. We were staying at a Marine base in Quang Tri and flying out every morning to the AO.

One morning we were just landing when Charlie dropped mortars on us. We saw explosions near our operations tent and along the strip!

We were a flight of two gunships and we decided to get out of there quick. Just as we started down the strip, AC, one of our dogs, came running toward 004. She jumped in and we took off!

After flying around and looking for the tubes, we decided it was a waste of time, so we headed back. I looked down at AC and she was sleeping peacefully on the floor of the ship. She knew it was safer in the air than on the ground.

UNIT PATCHES

Bob George would like to have an Intruder and Wolfpack patch. Does anyone have extras? You can contact him at:

**Rd. #4, Box 4020
East Stroudsburg, PA 18301
1-717-421-2981**

If there is enough interest in the patches, maybe we could have a batch of new ones made. Does anyone have contacts who could do this? Is anyone interested in new patches? Let me know.

REUNION #3

We have used St. Louis and San Francisco for our 1st and 2nd reunions. How about the East for the third? Possibly Washington D.C.? Both the Smithsonian and Vietnam Memorial are there. Or how about Boston? A lot of history started there. Send me a line if you have a preference for a place and date. Also, we will need volunteers in the area to help organize like Joe Bilitzke did at the last one. Please step forward. Remember no volunteers, no reunion!

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

All of you who volunteered at the last reunion to help Tubby (Duane Brudvig) locate people for our roster, please contact him at:

**8208 Sumter Avenue N
Brooklyn Park, MN 55445
1-612-425-0759**

Mini - Reunion 1990!!

When: July 20, 21, 22
Where: Washington, D.C.
The Compri Hotel (703) 960-9300
Interested: Contact ...
Jim Bailey
9502 Rolling Oaks
Tomball, TX 77375
Phone: (713) 255-2288



An "out of fuel" autorotation into the jungle that was successful (everyone walked away!)

**The 281st Intruders Newsletter
c/o Dean Roesner
494 Woodcliff Dr.
Redding, CA., 96003**

TO: