



281st Assault Helicopter Company Association

***"INTRUDERS"***

NHA TRANG  
1965 - 1970

NEWSLETTER  
NUMBER 46

Summer  
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2011

# **The 281<sup>st</sup> Family Gathers Again**



**at St Louis in August 2011  
and has a  
Wonderful Time!**

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## ***The Prez speaks reunion ....***

This year's Intruders came from all corners of the country. Art Balcomb and Phyllis drove in from Maine and joined up with Richard and Susan Houston from New Mexico to give Don Torrini and Jim Fisher a break from the registration desk so they could do some "real Reunionizing" for the first time in five years. Jerry Stanfield finally had some competition for the "longest trip" this year but I think Jerry Johnston's journey from St. Croix still came up a few miles short. While it was great having Jerry Johnston at the Reunion for the first time, he kind of put us in legal trouble. It seems there is a little known Missouri law that prohibits any gathering in a public building of more than three (3) Wolfpack 36's and Johnston put us over the "legal limit" (Al Cartwright, Fred Mentzer, Bain Black, and Jerry).

The Thursday night excursion this year was a backstage tour, dinner, and a musical at the famous St. Louis Municipal Summer Theater. Frank Becker, our own Senior Member at Large coordinated every facet of our trip without a flaw. I think he drove the bus, set the tables, and even danced the role of "the seventh brother" in the musical – amazingly agile for a big man is our Frank Becker.

Two guys from the 4th Infantry Division LRRP's whom we trained and supported back in February, 1968 dropped by to see if they could put a face to a call sign (Wolfpack 39). He was the Leader of the Fire Team that was instrumental in securing the extraction under fire of their five-man Recon Team, all of whom were suffering from multiple wounds. Jim Fisher received a DFC for leading his Fire Team on his birthday in February 1968, and meeting Oscar Caraway and Bob Stein made Jim's 2011 Intruder Reunion well worth the trip.

Karen and Fred Mentzer's decorations for Friday's FOB St. Louis buffet were so good that I kept getting lost trying to get back to my table. Jeff Murray's table was so far back in the "chow line" that they had to heat up some of the MRE's to tide them over until it was their turn.

Once again the focal point of our Reunion was the Memorial Service where Jim Torbert's program has started some "new Intruder traditions". Jim's and Lee Brewer's memories of their friend Fred Funk who died this year were particularly moving. Fred's sons (Hugh and Chris)

and their families joined us to receive the flag case we provide the families of our Intruder DAT's to store their casket flags. Hugh and Chris joined us for both banquets and to receive their Association Honorary Memberships.

The Saturday Banquet, though marred by a shortage of Chicken Cordon Bleu and an Awards Presentation segment by Ken Smith and myself that many thought was actually this year's Ohmes Family skit less skillfully acted, was still a success. Marshall Hawkins filled in admirably for the Crowne Plaza waiters while they hustled to find those missing dinners, and the rest of us managed to keep Fred Lewis from going home before he received this year's well deserved Intruder of the Year Award. Our personable young guest speaker, Mr. Quang Nguyen, topped off the evening by giving us all a different perspective on our service in Vietnam.

On a more personal note, it was good to see Will McCollum after 43 years. Will was the 281st Ops Sergeant who was tasked with keeping a green lieutenant aviator from stepping on a critical appendage after having been thrown into the breach as the Unit Ops Officer. Ellen enjoyed herself again this year going on every shopping or casino trip there was. She was even seen enlightening a rather large group of Intruders and their wives on the fine points of the "Filipino Haircut".

Lest I forget the Reunion wasn't all about "Reunionizing". There was some Association business conducted at the annual General Membership Meeting. The aforementioned 2013 Reunion Planning Committee was formed. The membership approved an expenditure of \$4000 for the purchase and placement of a 281<sup>st</sup> AHC memorial in the plaza in front of the Special Operations Command Headquarters on Fort Bragg. The Troop Support Committee is gearing up to welcome back from Afghanistan our G Company Intruders and the quest for a 281<sup>st</sup> AHC Presidential Unit Citation and Book are both back on track.

Ed Hass  
President

## ***And now the VP ....***

It's now September and we're looking back on another great 281st AHC Association reunion,

yet already looking forward to next year. This past reunion was noteworthy for several reasons. Among them, a Broadway style musical at the outdoor St. Louis Muny, another visit to the Missouri wine country, a great buffet dinner Friday night for the "FOB St. Louis" theme, with really creative decorations arranged for by Karen (Mrs. Fred) Mentzer, the attendance of the family of the late Fred Funk, and a very interesting after dinner speaker Saturday night. Fred Funk was a Rat Pack pilot who passed away in May. His two sons, their wives, and all but one of their children attended to receive the flag case that is now presented to surviving family members from the Association. It was presented at the Memorial Service Saturday afternoon, and at the banquet Saturday night, his sons were made honorary members. The families were with us for the weekend and signaled their desire to return each year. The Saturday night speaker was Mr. Quang Nguyen, a young California businessman, who was a child in Vietnam during the war, and gave us a very interesting perspective of life for people there during the conflict.

As the new Association Vice President, I was appointed the reunion chairman for next year. Ed Haas has already noted in his article that we will again convene in St. Louis at the Crowne Plaza Airport Hotel. The dates, as he also noted, are July 31 through August 5, and not the October dates that were announced after dinner Saturday night at this year's reunion. We are going to have a great reunion team this year, and our focus is going to be on making it interesting enough for you to come if you have never attended or come again if you have skipped it for a while. We are going to be looking to change things around a little. What can we do as a group that is fun and entertaining for an evening? Give us any thoughts you may have, and get your wives and families involved; there could be some great ideas out there that we might never think of, and we need to hear them.

A new ownership group has purchased the Crowne Plaza, and they are refurbishing the hotel before next year to the tune of about 12 million dollars. After being at \$60 for the last two years, our room rate will be increased next year to \$63 per night. This is the last year of our current contract with the hotel, and we are already looking at ideas for future reunions. I'm not saying we are leaving St. Louis, but before stepping down as

President, Ken Smith set up a committee to study ideas for reunion 2013 and beyond. You can help here also. If you would like to join the committee looking at this, let us know. In the meantime, if you have ideas on things you would like to see for our reunions, pass them to us. Be thinking about things such as: another city you might like; how much would you be willing to pay for your hotel room before saying "that is just too much"; would you prefer a different time of the year to hold the reunion; or anything at all. No matter how it sounds, we need to know what you are thinking. Also, get your wives involved here; many already help out at the reunion now (for which we are always grateful), and they and others may have some useful thoughts for us going forward. I'm on the east coast and I'm available almost anytime. My contact info is: jimbaker@triad.rr.com, 336-337-6254 (C) 336-288-6659 (H).

Jim Baker

Vice President and Reunion Committee Chairman

### ***From the desk of SML ....***

**T**he reunion is in the history books with a good time had by all. New officers are in place for the next year. The Jr. Member at large is to take the Senior Member at Large position. Well Jim Baker moved on to the V.P. job and I was asked to serve another year at the SML.

One of the duties of the SML is to get any awards together, the prime one being the Intruder of the Year (IOY) award. This is any Intruder who has gone above the call of duty to promote the 281st Association in its goals and mission. Anyone can nominate a person through the EB board. It is the job of the SML, last IOY, and the President to pick the Intruder of the Year.

This year we had several good people suggested and the winner was a hard choice.

The man chosen has been one of those people you never see around in front of the group, but is in the background with a GET-ER-DONE attitude. He was in the Hospitality room the first couple years in St Louis, and has been our in-house carpenter, building the box we store our stuff in year to year at the Crowne Plaza, and has made several frames for pictures, and guideons we have given to the hotel people. He has also organized the history of our unit and placed it in book form for everyone to enjoy.

I am talking about none other than our own FRED LEWIS. Thanks, Fred, for all the hard work! It is your kind of dedication that made the 281st what it was in Nam and what makes it today, something we are proud to be a part of.

Be thinking of a person for next year's award, any time, just call an EB member and they will pass it on to one of the committee members.

In keeping with our FOB St Louis, the Thursday night event was billed as a recon mission to the Muny. I was asked to head up this mission as my small part of the reunion.

And now my after action report about the recon mission on Thursday Night to the St Louis Muny.

On Aug. 4 2011 at 1715hrs. our ship, from the Vandalia Bus Lines, arrived at the pickup point the Crowne Plaza St Louis, In true 281st fashion we departed at 1735hrs.(5 min. late) with thirty 281st souls and one pilot on board. We arrived at Forest Park and hovered over Muny Hill, our LZ, while Fred Mentzer and the rest of the Wolf Pack softened up the area. At 1815hrs. the first of two teams were inserted for a recon patrol of the Muny back stage area and the history of the 93 years of the St Louis Muny. The leader of the first team was our then CO Ken Smith. At 1820 hrs the remaining members were inserted and followed the lead team down the hill through the area. After a very enjoyable hike through the area we regrouped at the NVA mess (Culver Pavilion), that our CO and XO Ed Haas had secured.

An enjoyable meal of many cold salads, BBQ Pork Steak, Fried Chicken, Mash Potatoes, and Mack and Cheese, with a cake that was delicious. Our leaders were not quick enough in the raid on the mess so the Fish heads and rice with Nuco Mam Sauce got dumped... much to Jim Christensen's dismay.

A very enjoyable musical production of Seven Brides for Seven Brothers followed in the open air summer stock theater. One of our 281st brothers from the Northeast said we didn't need to try and get the weather like Nah Trang, as it was on the hot and muggy side for the evening.

A side note... we had some tickets that were paid for by people who were unable to attend for various reasons. At the Muny in the back there are free seats that are there on a first come basis. The Muny holds about 11,000 people and the free seats are about 700 or 800. I gave our extra tickets to an usher who helped us on the tour to give to someone in the free seat area. Shortly

after the show started they brought a young couple down to our extra seats. He had a Air Force t-shirt on. At intermission Jay Hays and some others got to talking with them and found he was in the Air Force Reserve, and he and his fiancé were to be married soon. After his duty on Saturday he stopped by our banquet, and a look around the PX and talked shop for a little while.

A quick call to our pilot during the last song and our ship was hovering right in the LZ when we came out of the show. After leaving the LZ any of our pilots would be proud as our driver weaved his way out of the LZ traffic and got us back to the FOB in fine shape at 1045 hrs. with no MIA, KIA or walking wounded.

Frank Becker  
Senior Member @ Large

### ***The Chaplains Corner***

One time each college semester I am asked to be a guest professor at a College here in the Atlanta area. The class I present to is a class on Viet Nam history. The first couple of times I presented I just went in and showed the class my slides on Viet Nam.

Over the last couple of years I have studied up on the country and I am now able to talk about the history of the country and the history of how the USA got involved and how we stayed on, even when the war was not popular back here in the states. I have to say that this keeps me on my toes and has turned into more work preparing than I thought I would have to do. It has given me a whole new appreciation for teachers and professors and what they accomplish.

Next week my class is at 8 am. Not a great time for college students and most of them have one or two part time jobs to help with their expenses. So, when we turn the lights out to start my slide show I usually lose about 10 % to "resting their eyes" while I present. No matter what I show or say during the class, all the students come awake during the question and answer part at the last of the class. They really like when one of the question leads me into telling "war stories".

I have to thank each and every one of you at the reunion of help me with new story material. Our reunions offer such a great time for each of us to reconnect, reflect, and remember those times and stories from now, decades ago. I cannot wait till

next week's class to tell a couple of new stories that I heard in St. Louis last month.

I hope and pray that everyone remains healthy and in good spirits till we meet again.

Welcome Home My Brothers.

Jim "MOM" Torbert  
Chaplain

### ***From the Immediate Past Prez....***

It has been a challenge and a pleasure to serve as the President of the Association for the past year. I feel that we accomplished a lot, and that I left a tidy ship for my able successor, Ed Haas. I want to compliment President Haas and his Reunion Committee Supporters, especially the St. Louis boots-on-the-ground like Don Torrini and Paul Maledy, on the excellent job they did in reviving and leading a very successful return to the stand-alone Intruder Reunion of 2011. Breaking the 100-attendee mark was truly a great accomplishment.

Thanks for the support that all of you gave to me in my Presidency. I look forward to seeing all of you again at Intruder Reunion 2012.

146 Restoration Project (UH-1H 67-17146)  
Chairman: Ken Smith

Solano Community College (SCC) in Vacaville, CA (about 40 miles NW of San Francisco on Interstate 80) owns a former 281st AHC Helicopter: UH-1H 67-17146 (hereafter: 146). An SCC student contacted me last year to ask our assistance in learning the history of the 281st AHC, as well as, to ask about our interest in restoring the aircraft to airworthy status. I discussed the project with the Executive Board (EB) and as President at the time established the 146 Restoration Committee to work on this as a part of Association sanctioned activities. No 281st AHC Association funds have been asked for or otherwise expended on the project. Additionally, no funds will be requested from existing Association money.

That said, one of our North Carolina members, Walt Pikul, approached President Ed Haas with an offer to contribute \$2,500.00. This money would be given to the 281st AHC Association with the specific intent of that money being spent in support of the restoration of 146. This was discussed at the August 2011 EB meeting, and I have followed up that discussion with a request

for our Treasurer, Fred Beck, to review IRS rules to see if money can be donated for a designated purpose without jeopardizing our non-profit status. I will update this on the website as soon as we have made a determination regarding such a donation.

The project has been on hold for the past few months because I have not been active on it myself. I will be taking up an active role in the project again as the SCC returns for the fall semester. As a reminder, the class and the students are in an FAA approved and credentialed program for aircraft mechanics (A&P for Airframe & Powerplant). I will also be engaging my former associates at the CAL FIRE (California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection) Aviation Unit for their voluntary help based on their expertise in depot level maintenance for former US Army UH-1H's, which CAL FIRE Aviation still operate as fire fighting aircraft.

Any 281st AHCA Members are welcome to join in this effort. If you are interested, please contact me directly by phone (916-201-6965) or email (ksmith9146@sbcglobal.net).

Ken Smith  
Immediate Past President

### ***And now the JML....***

To those of you who missed this year's reunion a great time was had by all. As Jr. Member at Large, my primary assignment this year is to get the election done by our next reunion. The number of ballots returned this year was shameful. With an organization the size of ours the number of ballots should have been much greater. For next year's election I will ask the candidates to submit a short bio of themselves the years they were in country and any other information they would like to pass along. If anyone has any suggestions as to how to increase the "turn out" Please pass them along.

My email address is: jimc281@bellsouth.net

Jim Christensen  
Junior Member @ Large



## ***The Remembrance Committee Chairman....***

I don't know where remembrance starts and stops in an association like ours? Who do we remember? Those who were MIA / KIA / DAT? Do we remember the families that suffered these losses and, simply put how can we best do we do all this?

The Executive Board of our association is charged with holding a reunion each year and that is about it in that everything it does has for the most part some connection to the reunion and almost everything we all do has a direct connection to remembrance. When Gary Stagman locates a missing member, it is remembrance. When we work on him and get him to commit to the reunion his biggest fear is that he will not remember anyone, thus the large nametags. Most of them come back, thus we need a good reunion so that folks can remember and celebrate our successes and feel good about themselves and their buddies.

Like a lot of our members, I belong to two much larger aviation associations and have watched them develop their remembrance programs, which for the most part were nonexistent and thus their foundation and connection was based, and basically due to the fact that they flew aircraft of some type in combat. I believe that we have a stronger connection in that we were all part of something bigger and that fact has now been recognized and we have been remembered for it. When we started the association we had a strong effort on the part of lots of folks to find and bring in former members of the unit without regard to their duty position in the unit. At some point we got comfortable with the numbers we had and for the most part left the job of finding the rest of our lost brothers up to one person who has done more that could be expected of anyone. I suggest that the time has come to remember every person who served in the unit and to renew our efforts to bring them into the fold. To do that, each member and non-member needs to reach out to these folks and let them know that this is their association and we want them to be a part of it. At the same time we need to do a better job of looking to our wives and now grown children for help. We have a great pool of talent out there just waiting to be tapped. To paraphrase President Kennedy; *Don't ask what your association can do for you, ask what you can do for the association.*

Let's find these missing Intruders and make them real, not email or Facebook contacts and tell them the story of the US Army's First Special Operations Helicopter Company Association. We need them, but in many cases they also need us, so let's remember them, and our foundation goals.

Jack Mayhew  
Chairman, Remembrance Committee

## ***SCHOLARSHIP UPDATE by Jack Mayhew....***

This is my last communication for the scholarship program. (This is what happens when you fail to show up at the reunion, you loose your high paying job.) So, my dear friend Dr. Karen Heintz-Forcht has replaced me as your new Secretary and as such she will be your main point of contact for information, applications and submitting your grades and registration documents. Dr. Karen has been a member of the board from the beginning and brings her vast experience in higher education to the board. She is a very active honorary member of the association and we are indebted to her for her continued service. You may contact her at: **Dr, Karen Heintz-Forcht, 1715 Dunleith Way, Greensboro, NC 27455, kfortch@dlon.edu, 336-638-7544.**

At the annual meeting of the scholarship board the members approved two new scholarships for 2011/12 and renewed scholarship support for the four ongoing students. We are pleased to tell you that the ongoing students are all honor students with GPAs that range from 3.5 to 4.0. The awardees for 2011/12 are:

1. Kaitlyn Schleher, daughter of Richard & Barbara Schleher. Katie will be working toward her nursing degree in a four-year program. As many of you know Katie has attended the majority of our reunions and has been very helpful to the reunion staff.



Kaitlyn Schlerer



Caleb Brown

2. Caleb Brown, nephew of Brian Paine is moving back east from Texas to attend college. Caleb has been accepted in a four-year program leading to his bachelors' degree in business.

We wish both of these individuals the very best and remind them of the high standards that the ongoing students have set for them.

This years contributions to the fund by the membership exceeded \$7,000. Added to the corporate donations we have added \$12,000 to the fund this year. If you missed the reunion and wish to make a tax deferrable donation to the Scholarship Fund please send your donations to: **Treasurer, 281<sup>st</sup>, Scholarship Fund, Attention Brian Paine, CPA, 22407 Rippling Court, Katy, TX 77494.**

So far, the program has supported nine students and all have been outstanding individuals. Our last year's graduate, Jeremiah Barker not only graduated with honors but also passed the CPA exam in his first try, which in itself is an outstanding accomplishment. Grace Becker graduated this year and was chosen as a graduate assistant starting this fall. Two more of our students will graduate this year. Two dropped out for medical or personal reasons but all have been outstanding individuals. If you have children, grandchildren or nieces and nephews who are planning on attending college, or a qualified technical school please give them Dr. Forcht's contact information and she will assist them with the very simple application. - Jack

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***"Sure the LZ is secure, I'm whispering because I have a cold. Trust me."***

**281ST AHC ASSOCIATION, INC.**  
Established 4 July 1999



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