

# 281st ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY ASSOCIATION

Volume 60

February 2016

## From your Prez – Don Budlong

Since our last Newsletter we lost a great intruder, Col. Bob Mitchell. Back in Vietnam, he was Bandit 24; an exceptional aviator and leader. After leaving active duty, Bob continued his flying career



with the Tennessee National Guard and rose to the rank of full bird colonel. He never forgot his Army roots though and became very active in the 281st

AHC Association; he served as the Association's second President and later was selected as Intruder of the Year. With all of his involvement with the military, Bob found time to be active in his community, run a successful auto body shop and rebuild many classic cars.

Following Bob's death the 281st community was shocked and devastated. Below is a sampling of what other intruders had to say about Bob:

*"With the loss of Bob Mitchell, a large chunk of heart has also been lost by the Association."* Joe Bilitzke

*"A true officer and gentleman, I have always been proud to call him my brother."* Jim Torbert

*"A great loss to us as an organization, me personally and the world. I pray for his family."* Jim Fisher

*"Bob was our leader, go to guy and a dear friend to all. I personally shall miss him every day of the rest of my life. May he rest in peace."* Jack Mayhew

To read more about Bob, please visit his memorial page on our Association's web site at:

<http://tinyurl.com/joo2nvq>

Bob's family has asked that if you would like to remember him, please make a donation in Bob's

name to the 281<sup>st</sup> Scholarship Fund, c/o Walt Pikul, Post Office Box 41035, Fayetteville, NC 28309.

## The Scholarship Program

The purpose of the 281st Assault Helicopter Company is to perpetuate the memory and to recognize the valor of those personnel who served in the 281st AHC. In particular, to memorialize those missing in action ("MIA"), those killed in action ("KIA"), and those who served honorably in the unit. To this end the 281st AHC Scholarship Fund annually awards scholarship Grants in memory of these individuals.

The 281st AHC Scholarship program is an IRS approved 501.C program and is administered by the 281st Memorial Scholarship Fund Inc., which is a separate non-profit corporation, staffed by volunteer members of the 281st AHC Association and funded by generous association members like you.

Eligibility for scholarship support is extended to all college age children, grand- children, nieces and / or nephews of former Intruders without regard to association membership. Priority is given to those children who are connected to an Intruder who is listed as MIA / KIA. All Scholarship support is awarded on a one-year basis and applicants awarded scholarships must submit their grades and proof of next year's attendance to continue in the program.

Eligible individuals may apply for scholarship support for attendance at an accredited college or an accredited technical school or training program. For complete scholarship details, please go to our Association website at <http://goo.gl/URU4tD>.

The following students are currently receiving scholarships from this program:

Sarah Lanning, the niece of Intruder Ken Smith, is an Art major at California State University Eastbay in

Hayward, CA. Sarah is an honor student and recently wrote to the Committee and said, "My sincerest thanks for the support provided to me by this very generous scholarship."

Jessica Barker is attending Concordia University in Wisconsin and will receive her Doctor of Pharmacy degree this May. She is very thankful and communicated to the Committee, "I very much appreciate all of the support that you have provided to me".

Jamie Kushner-Greiner is the son of Intruder Paul Greiner and is attending Buffalo State University in upstate New York. Jamie is in ROTC and is pursuing a criminal justice / military career. Jamie said of the Scholarship Committee, "I truly appreciate all you've done and am grateful for the gift you have given to me."

Morgan Torbert is attending Rice University in Houston and intends to major in Philosophy and Policy Studies. Morgan wrote to the Committee and said, "I want to express my gratitude and make sure all of the members know that this scholarship helps open up the future that means so much to me." Morgan is the niece of Intruder Jim Torbert.

If you would like to make a donation, please send your check made payable to the 281<sup>st</sup> Scholarship Fund, c/o Walt Pikul, Post Office Box 41035, Fayetteville, NC 28309.

## **Been to the Doctor Lately?**

**By Jeff Murray**

**A**s we grow older it is important that we ramp up our doctor visits. We have lost a few prominent Intruders in the past year. They are prominent only because they were visible 281st supporters, volunteering to do work when others didn't. Every Intruder death is important. Joel Ferguson died a few months ago and he never went to any 281st AHC Association events that I knew of but he and I flew together on my first Delta operation, in Phu Bai, March-April 1969. Joel Ferguson taught me a lot. If I mentioned his name at a reunion only a few would remember him; mention Bob Mitchell or Fred Mentzer's names and everybody would nod. So I visit the doctor regularly, not because it will make me live longer, I go because when I was in the Army for 20 years they made me go every year or so and they caught a few things. I had a good friend from

high school die of Prostate Cancer in 2008. His cancer was discovered after it was too advanced. I was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2006 early enough and I'm still here. I had a melanoma that to me looked like a pencil dot. My dermatologist caught it on a routine exam. Both of those probably would have done me in, had I not been in the habit of going to the doctor regularly. If you're on Medicare, they encourage you to get an annual physical and it is free. The VA also encourages annual exams and once you've had one, they almost always automatically schedule your next annual appointment. I have friends my age that haven't been to a doctor in years; I think that's a bad idea. Surprises are fun when you are young, not so much at our age; especially when you suddenly die. Do yourself a favor and get a checkup. I guarantee your wife and kids will appreciate it.

## **"Above The Best" & The US Army's First Special Operations Company by Jack Mayhew**

**S**everal years ago, four of us set to write a book that would tell the story of the 281<sup>st</sup> AHC and its magnificent aviation crews. At about the same time we launched a campaign to have the 281<sup>st</sup> formally recognized as the US Army's First Special Operations Helicopter Company. Over the time that it took to accomplish our mission we lost two of our key members and inherited others who picked up the slack. We have linked these two events as they are connected and as such, speaks to the soul and spirit of our unit. We are pleased to tell you that at our annual reunion in October, we will mark the successful completion of both missions.

First the book - "Above the Best". After several starts we realized that we were going nowhere. Someone once said that "it takes a village to raise a child". We now know that it takes a unit to write a good military book. From the day that Will McCollum stepped up to the plate and agreed to take on the task we realized that we had found the magic formula. What happened after that was amazing. You, the former members of the unit wrote the book. Will took your stories and skillfully placed them into the book adding the background and connecting materials required to establish a chronological history of the unit's development and accomplishments. Your stories span the life of the unit and those of us who have read the book have

gained a deep respect for all who served and especially those of you who set the stage for what was to become one of the best aviation units that served our country in war.

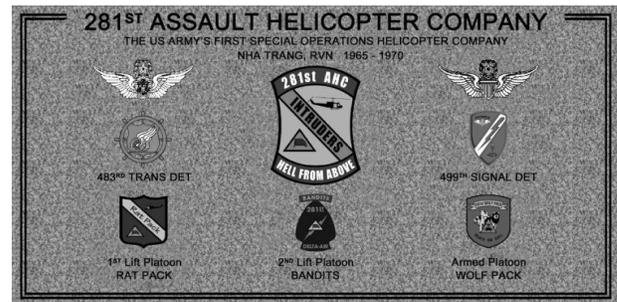
We had set backs in the book development process and soon learned that we needed help from many quarters and several folks came forward to assist. In this process, we discovered a group of folks to whom we will always be indebted. Several of our wives not only helped develop the book and its cover but helped pull us out of the fire when the editing process required additional attention. It is our intent to recognize each of these individuals at the reunion and let them know how much we owe them. We had hoped to have the book in the PX by Christmas 2015, but that was not to be. We will have it in your hands around Easter 2016.

Second the Recognition. The mission to establish the 281<sup>st</sup> AHC as the legacy unit for US Army Helicopter Special Operations took a bit longer and was started by Col. Bob Mitchell several years ago when he developed the history of the unit and presented it to the historian of the Special Operations Command, who, in turn published it under his, not Bob's name. Thanks to Bob's work we were on the way to achieving our goal. The first step was the memorial stone placed (see memorial stone below)



by the Airborne and Special Operations Museum in Fayetteville, NC. To date the 281<sup>st</sup> is the only company size unit to be so honored on their Walk of Heroes. When you attend the October reunion please visit the museum and have your picture taken by your stone.

The second phase of this project involved several more intruders and required that we get Department of the army approval for the marker (see marker below). Thanks to the hard work of



Walt Pikul, Jim Baker and Fred Mentzer, the Department of the Army accepted your gift of the marker and in turn the US Army Special Operations Command has scheduled a ceremony during our reunion in October at which time they will formally dedicate the stone maker in their memorial parade field. This action clearly recognizes and establishes your unit, the 281<sup>st</sup> AHC as the First US Army Special Operations Helicopter Company.

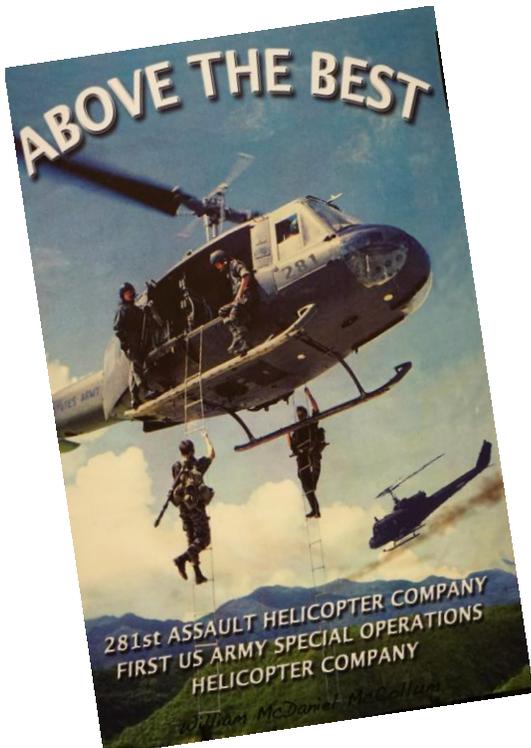
I speak for Jack Green, Bob Mitchell, Brian Paine, myself and all the many individuals that helped along the way, when I say that that these two projects have been a work of love for all of us and I only wish that Jack, Bob and Fred were here to share the honor that Brian and I feel for being allowed to be a part of these project which recognize one of the greatest band of brothers that ever served our country. Editor's Note: Jack Mayhew recently had heart surgery and is recovering. Please say a prayer for Jack and his family.

### **"Above the Best" Order Now and Receive it by the end of March!**

This book, about the men who made up the 281<sup>st</sup> AHC and its supporting units, may not make the NY Times best sellers list but I assure you that you and the members of your family will treasure it. The stories in the book were written by intruders and each one was vetted by the members of the book committee for authenticity. In one story, I was emotionally shaken by the recollections of an intruder wife who was left behind when her husband went to war.

Do you know where the 281st AHC platoon names came from? That the first Intruder Silver Star awardee was a platoon sergeant? That one of our members was recommended for the Medal of Honor? This is a book of stories and facts for everyone who served in the unit. Every man who served in the 281<sup>st</sup> was a hero without regard to his duty position or the time period he served in. There

are over 100 stories and just as many photos in the book.



I am confident that you will enjoy the results of Will McCollum's tireless efforts over the past two years of writing, compiling and editing "Above the Best". The book is also a great tribute to the work of our dearly departed brother, Colonel Bob Mitchell who provided technical and historical input for the book.

The book is in the hands of our publisher and is being printed. Jay Hays will be handling all book orders. To order copies for you and your family members, either call Jay (330-770-2278) or email him ([jhays@haysenterprises.com](mailto:jhays@haysenterprises.com)). You may also complete and mail to Jay a "Order Form" which can be found at the end of this Newsletter.

Remember the first 125 books received from our publisher will be specially numbered (X of 125). The first 125 Intruders to order and pay for their books, will receive one of them. **On or about March 1<sup>st</sup> go to our website <http://www.281st.com/> to see a You Tube video about "Above the Best"!!!!**

### **From your VP and 2016 Reunion Chairman – Will McCollum**

**E**ven at this early date, it appears that this year's reunion is shaping up to be one of the best we have had in years. Fayetteville and Fort Bragg North Carolina are expecting us on the 6th, 7th and 8th of October 2016. The Executive Board and the Reunion

Committee are now busy with planning this special event.

Already a number of our members, who have been missing over the years, have indicated that they, along with their families will be in attendance this year.

The release of our book "Above the Best" written by the men who served in our honored organization will be available in the PX for purchase.

Fort Bragg is honoring the 281st Assault Helicopter Company by placing a memorial stone in Meadows's Field; all our members, family and friends are invited to attend this special event. We will arrange transportation for everyone.

Our reunion will be held at the DoubleTree by Hilton, 1965 Cedar Creek Road, Fayetteville, North Carolina. The location is very easy to find and is just off I-95. The room cost is \$99.00 with a free breakfast and free shuttle to and from the airport. Call [910 323-8282](tel:9103238282) for reservations. **Please use the code "AHC" to get our special discount.** The DoubleTree also has its own bar, restaurant and a spa.

### **From your Treasurer & Membership Chairman – Fred Beck**

**A**t the last membership meeting in October one of our members requested a count of members and non-members, so here it is:

Total on 281 <sup>st</sup> Roster	1,038
<u>Association Members</u>	
Members Including died after tour	382
Members died after tour	63
Life Members	116
Annual Members	203
<u>Non-Members</u>	
Non-Members including died after tour	656
Non-Members known died after tour	178

Those of you that are on the Yahoo group HQ net are able to see the complete roster of members and non Members. To join the HQ net contact Brent Gourley at [bgrly@comcast.net](mailto:bgrly@comcast.net).

Reunion notices and newsletters are sent by email and/or snail mail and we rely on the accuracy of the roster. Quite a few are returned as undeliverable so it is important that you submit any changes. Please

email or call me at [jib@new.rr.com](mailto:jib@new.rr.com) or me at 920-558-4127

We have two new members that joined since the last reunion, Ralph Grigsby and Victor Rose. There are approximately 55 annual members who have not paid dues for three or more years and quite a few that are in arrears for 2015 and 2016.

## Where in the World can you find Intruders? By Joe Bilitzke

Every year since 2007 my wife, Darlene, and I have traveled from two to five consecutive months during the year, sometimes as tourists; but mostly as travelers. Of the 197 countries in the world (which varies depending on a local revolution), our goal is to spend time, at least one overnight in at least 100 countries by 2019. Since our last trip, we can claim to have visited 85 countries – so we're closing in our goal.

This past fall, we spent two months visiting the five countries within the "Stans" and the three countries of the Caucasus. The Central Asian "Stans" which comprised a portion of our 2015 itinerary are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. These five "Stans" embrace the countries famed for the "Silk Road." Actually comprised of many "roads" or camel caravan routes, the traders of the Silk Road connected lands and tribes of the five "Stans" with the people of Europe, India, and China for over two thousand years.

Once a part of the mighty Russian Federation and then the Soviet Union in the early 1920s, this area remained under Soviet control until the fall of the USSR in 1991. Since then the five countries have, to varying degrees, gained independence. We found Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have made the most progress with their emancipation. While Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan have retained more "features" of their old taskmaster, the Soviet Union.

The area we traversed is enormous, comprising over one and a half million square miles; a vast swathe between China and the Caspian Sea. The geography varies from immense deserts to rugged mountains. Some points were simply too far to travel by bus, so we took short flights to span the distance. (see map)

Concluding our three-week tour, we departed our group in Turkmenistan and crossed the Caspian Sea

for a five-week solo travel of the Caucasus: Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. Flying from the Caucasus, we made a quick overnight stop at Doha in Qatar and from there, flew to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for a three-day visit before heading home through Stockholm, Sweden.



A part of the world where tourism is just emerging, we wanted to learn more about the heirs to Genghis Khan and his descendent, Tamerlane, since the decline of the silk route in the 16th century. In these eight countries (within the "Stans" and the Caucasus), almost everyone we met over the age of thirty had been born and raised under the thumb of communism. During the two months of our excursion, we learned how these people dealt with their emerging independence in all eight countries.

This "Stan" trip was one of the very few that we have trekked as tourists instead of travelers. Busses and planes carried us on long days of exploration. Our group consisted of ten other seasoned travelers under the guidance of a very knowledgeable tour leader from Uzbekistan. In every country, we also boarded a local guide who remained with us while we motored through their native country. Crossing some borders within the "Stans" required the expertise of our local tour guides. Tough to do as an independent tourist.

For the next five weeks in the Caucasus, we explored



these three countries independently, hiring a car and driver to get us from place to place as needed. The borders were a lot easier to transit, although Azerbaijan and Armenia are still in a state of conflict. In order to cross into Armenia from Azerbaijan, we had to travel north to Georgia and then cross south into Armenia. But we managed. See photo at bottom of page 5 of Mt. Ararate, Armenia, which we didn't have to cross.

As we've found in all our travels around the world, people are generally the same. They are friendly, proud of their country, and beholden to their culture and customs. In both areas we visited last year, we found the same to be true. During our trip through the "Stans", our guides made arrangements for us to have daily lunches in the homes of local families. We were greeted by the man of the house and generally, his wife and daughters provided the meals (see photo of local Tajikistan woman below). Eggplant seemed to be the predominant favorite along with



chicken, lamb, homemade breads, and always a basket of the freshest fruits. Watermelon was like none I've ever had at home. Even the horsemeat tasted

like a fine cut of beef. Every meal was delicious and engaging. In the evening, a local entertainment followed a restaurant dinner. Fashion shows, dance troupes, and musical reviews all provided us with the local flavor of each country and area of our visit.

It was a great two-month excursion. We saw eight countries emerging from centuries old domination. We had an opportunity to meet and eat with its citizens. And we hope we left behind a feeling of sincere, mutual understanding and goodwill. I believe we did.

### **From your JM@L – Dennis Crowe**

**A**s the Junior Member-at-Large, (JM@L), I announce that nominations are now open for the offices to be filled at our next General Membership Meeting (GMM) in October. Article V of our Association By-laws declares that the election is to be conducted prior to the GMM.

We need members to serve as the "Nominations and Elections Committee". Any member desiring to

serve please make it known to the President ([donbudlong281@gmail.com](mailto:donbudlong281@gmail.com)) for his formal appointment to the said committee. Also please notify the JM@L ([denny@oldcrowe.com](mailto:denny@oldcrowe.com)) for purposes of coordination.

The positions to be elected are the Vice President, Junior Member-at-Large, Secretary and Treasurer.

Any member desiring to nominate himself or another member should make it known as soon as possible. Please contact me with nominations by email at [denny@oldcrowe.com](mailto:denny@oldcrowe.com) or by phone at 334-397-2021.

Thanks in advance for your interest, cooperation and participation in YOUR Association.

### **Aircraft 113 Restoration Update**

Intruder Ed Duke is in the final assembly stage of the restoration of A/C 113 and can always use a helping hand. If you will be in the area of the H.E.A.R.T.S. Museum in Huntsville, TX, please call Ed (936-291-9229 or 936-661-1516). Below is a photo of Doyle Creed (volunteer Intruder) along side of the ship. It looks like new; the aircraft, not Doyle Creed.



### **From the Editor ....**

What have you done and where have you been lately? Anyone that would like to write an article that may be of interest to other Intruders, just let me know by email [donbudlong281@gmail.com](mailto:donbudlong281@gmail.com). This is YOUR Newsletter and YOUR Association. Get active and become involved.



# “Above The Best”



## Book Order Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Assn. Member No. \_\_\_\_\_

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If you have any questions, please call or email Jay at 330-770-2278 or  
[jhays@haysenterprises.com](mailto:jhays@haysenterprises.com)

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