

281st ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Volume 62

August 2016

From your President – Don Budlong

Later this year I will be attending my 50th high school reunion. Some of you have already celebrated yours and a few still have them coming up in the next few years. In 1966 my high school graduated 142 very young men. Today probably 40% of them are still alive and maybe 20% will show up for that reunion. Of my high school class mates, 3 or 4 of us went to Vietnam.

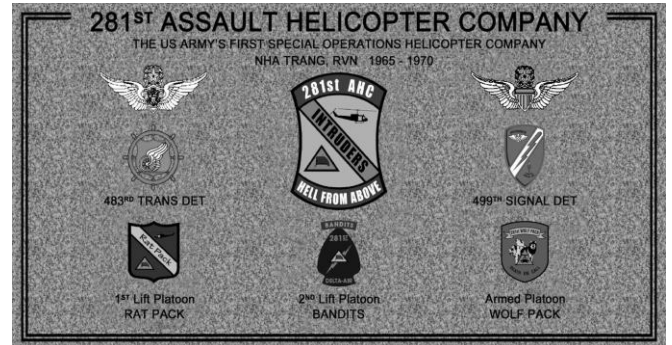
The mortality rate for Vietnam veterans is much higher than that of our high school peers for reasons that we are all very aware of. We are also aware of our fellow Intruders that we remember from Vietnam or saw at last year's Reunion, but are no longer with us. Folks that we see at this year's Reunion might not be with us next year.

If you have been thinking of going to a 281st Reunion and keep putting it off, think about coming this year. We are expecting the largest turnout ever for our Reunion.

What's attracting so many Intruders this year is the ceremony on October 7th at Ft. Bragg at which time the U.S. Army Special Operations Command will dedicate a plaque honoring the 281st Assault Helicopter Company as the Army's First Special Operations Helicopter Company. Everyone who served in the 281st should make every attempt to attend this dedication ceremony. This honor, this acknowledgement by the Army is for every single member of the 281st, regardless of rank or job description.

If you are saying to yourself, "oh I won't know anybody and nobody will remember me" – That's nonsense! We're all so old, no one can remember anything.

At the end of this Newsletter you will find the Reunion Registration Form. Complete the form as instructed and return it to Fred Beck, our treasurer, at the address on the form. Or you can go to our website www.281st.com and click on the Reunion link on the home page and download the form.



From Past President Frank Becker

Summer is almost over and I hope you have your Reunion Registration, hotel reservation and plane tickets for Fayetteville, NC in line. Cheryl and I are looking forward to the time to be with our friends we have made over these past years. It was only 12 years ago when we attended our first reunion in St. Louis. We didn't know what we were getting into but it was only 80 miles from home so what the heck, give it a try. We arrived late Friday afternoon and after the Friday evening meal, we sat and talked with the Bob Ohmes family. After the membership meeting the next day, I thought that the Association's officers seemed to have it all together and were running the Association like a well oiled machine! Never thinking I would eventually serve on the Executive Board (EB) some day. Well, as Immediate Past President this is my last year on the EB, although I will continue to gladly help the Association whenever and wherever possible.

At 281st Reunions, we have made true friends across the USA. The funny part is that Cheryl was the one who didn't know if she wanted to go to a Reunion; now I think she would go even if I stayed at home. She looks forward to getting together with the wives, catching up on things, going out shopping and just doing the girl thing. For the second year in a row, she is helping to plan the ladies Saturday morning brunch along with other activities for the ladies.

So if you think this Reunion is about a bunch of old army guys sitting around, drinking beer and telling war stories

– well it is, but there is also plenty for wives, girl friends and daughters to do as well.

The **499th Signal Detachment** was an integral part of the 281st AHC. Avionics / Radios were there specialty; without them our aircraft crews could not communicate. Frank Becker, our Immediate Past President was a member of the 499th. To read about the 499th and what they were all about, click on this link <http://goo.gl/TVcsd5> to our website for their story as told by Wavne Sellers.

From your VP and Reunion Chairman – Will McCollum

The 2016 reunion is coming together pretty darn good. We have a full house at the Doubletree Hotel in Fayetteville. The Holiday Inn just across the road has agreed to take the overflow. You will be very satisfied with the Holiday Inn's accommodations. At this early date, it looks like we could have close to 200 people with us this year. The reunion committee is working overtime for you to make this one of the best ever. We have a full schedule for both Friday and Saturday.

Need a Room

Call the Holiday Inn, 1944 Cedar Creek Road at Exit 49 (Hwy 53) just off I-95. King or Queen \$82.00 / Suite \$99.00. Call **910-323-1600** and use code AHC for the best rate.

Friday morning we will attend the dedication ceremony at Fort Bragg, followed by lunch at the Big Apple restaurant, then downtown to the Airborne Special Operations Museum. For our Friday evening buffet dinner, we will have three speakers. **Lou Lerda**, Colonel U.S. Army retired, the first maintenance officer for the 281st. **Tom Ross**, Major U.S. Army Special Forces Retired, has been our friend for nearly fifty years. **Ed Boyington**, Rear Admiral Upper, U. S. Navy retired, former 281st gunship pilot and attending his first reunion with us. Each one has a special message that I think everyone will enjoy. Brian Paine will be raffling off a number of special items with all profits going to the scholarship fund. The evening will end with music provided by a local Disk Jockey for everyone to dance the night away.

The plaque dedication ceremony at Fort Bragg is going to be the main attractions for this year's reunion. A lot of work has been put forth to make this historic event happen. What an honor it is for all of us to be

recognized by the U.S. Army for our service with the Special Operations Group.

On Saturday we have our General Membership meeting, Ladies Fun Time and Memorial service. At our Saturday evening banquet and awards ceremony, our special guest speaker will be **Joe Galloway**, a war correspondent for more than 20 years with UPI, serving 4 tours in Vietnam. In 1998, Joe Galloway was awarded a Bronze Star with V for Valor. He was the only civilian to receive a combat medal from the U. S. Army during the Vietnam War.

A North Carolina National Guard UH-1C Huey gunship will be on static display to look at and crawl all over for photo ops and selfies.

Dean Roesner is organizing a side trip to see a hanger full of Army aircraft including the UH-60 Blackhawk. So far at least 25 have indicated that they are interested. We need a bus load (55) to make this work.

Cheryl Becker continues to do a great job organizing activities for our ladies.

Please don't wait until the last minute to send in your Reunion Registration Form with meal selections, so that the food service folks at the hotel can plan accordingly. Send them in no later than September 20th. If you wait until the last minute, you might have to call in-room pizza delivery.

Satisfying everyone is a challenge; if I miss something please don't yell at me, just send a gentle reminder (willdanmac@yahoo.com) and I will take care of it.

Your Association Scribe - Jeff Murray

Why I Go To Reunions, Part II

As we've reached the 60-day countdown to our Fayetteville Reunion, I have been perusing the reunion rosters to see who is and is not coming. If my memory was not fading as fast as my waistline was expanding I could conjure up a few more names to call, as it is, I worked on two and succeeded on one, a 50% success rate which equates fairly closely to my on-target rocket firing expertise.

The photo on the next page was taken on a Delta operation at An Hoa in 1969. You'll see a few Wolf Pack pilots standing, appropriately enough, in front of a slick. Which slick platoon I have no idea unless someone can

identify the photo of someone waving in the background. I can't remember his name but I am pretty sure he is the guy I flew around hanging on a monkey strap while I was a Bandit (it's in the book, *Above The Best*, which I'm sure everyone has read by now). The guys in the photo are CW2 Jim Murphy, WO1's Wes Schuster, Ken Miller, Steve Watson, Walt Stobe and Larry Humphreys. Half of them are attending the reunion, Wes, Ken & Walt. I made a few phone calls, aided greatly by Don Budlong's assistance, and Walt is coming as well. Of all the guys I met in Wolf Pack it was Walt who kept me laughing, and sane. Wes was the quiet reserved type who usually thought before doing something most of us just did before asking ourselves a bit later why we did that. Ken Miller was ex-Special Forces; I always told myself that if I ever got shot down he'd be the guy I'd want to wander thru the jungle with.



L-R Murphy, Schuster, Miller, Watson, Stobe & Humphreys. Photo by Jeff Murray, An Hoa mid-1969

The other three aren't coming to the reunion. Jim Murphy is nowhere to be found, I did run into him in a barbershop at Fort Rucker once, he was piloting a U-21 and we talked a while but that was it. Larry Humphreys was a good guy, also quiet and reserved, also does not answer correspondence. Steve Watson died way too young. I remember a time at Mai Loc on a Delta operation when he flew because I was doing something else, maybe packing up to go on R&R, when he came back from that mission, he had a bullet hole in his windscreen.

I wish those guys were coming and a few others as well. Bob Gardner, Fred Mentzer and Bob Mitchell, whom have all passed away. My old platoon leader, Paul Esser is another guy I worked on getting to come to the Reunion without success.

Every year the list of folks we expect to see again but who don't arrive will grow longer. A few of us have gone through various medical treatments and are glad to be here, or anywhere, period. Walt is about as familiar with the inside of hospitals as anyone who will be with us at Fayetteville. Shooting the bull with him again will be worth the price of admission. I can't forget the crewmembers who sat behind us, and are a big reason that most of us are able to come. Beetle Bailey, Daryl Evangelho, Larry Elam, Jim Jacobelli, John Ware and Tubby Brudvig. Daryl, Beetle and Larry will be there, Jim, probably not. I keep hoping those guys searching the jungles of Vietnam will find the remains of John Ware and his crew someday. I'm thankful I got to talk to Tubby in St. Louis. I owe each of them something, of that I'm certain.

Registration for the Hotel is NOT Registration for Reunion

Remember, just because you registered for a room at the hotel, does NOT mean you are registered for the Reunion. Likewise, just because you registered for the Reunion, does NOT mean you have a room

Just for the Ladies

A 281st Reunion has never been held in Fayetteville NC so this is all new and uncharted territory. With the dedication ceremony on Friday morning followed by other activities, that day is very busy. However, Saturday morning while the men have their membership meeting, we girls can kick up our heels and enjoy ourselves at brunch in the hotel. The Doubletree will be providing us with fruits, wine, lemonade, coffee and tea while our own Theresa Petrevich will entertain us with her very special New Jersey style karaoke. We will also have some very cool prizes to give away. Please let me know in advance if you will be attending this Ladies Only Fun Time.

For the early arrivals on Thursday afternoon, we are planning a trip to the Lu Mil Vineyard in nearby Elizabethtown for a wine tasting adventure (<http://lumilvineyard.com/index.html>). Anyone who may be interested, please contact me ahead of time via email cherylbecker38@yahoo.com or call me at 573-470-0734. There will also be sign-up sheets at the Registration Table in the hotel lobby.

The hotel will also be providing us with a couple of spa certificates which will be given away on Thursday so you

have the rest of your stay to take advantage of a free spa treatment.

Other places to see and things to do in Fayetteville include the Botanical Gardens, the 1897 Poe House and the Cross Creek Mall. Sign-up sheets for these places will also be at the Registration Table

Cheryl Becker, "Lookin out 4 the Ladies"

CORRECTION

In Volume 61 of our Newsletter there was a photo of the Vietnam Memorial Wall. The photo was credited to Frank Little. The photo was actually taken by Angela B. Pan abpan.com.

The Scholarship Program Update

Over the years we have provided scholarship funds to a number of young men and women. Two of them have received Masters degrees and another is a CPA. Just this year Jessica Barker became a Pharmacist. Congratulations to Dr. Barker.

The 281st. AHC provides scholarship support to individuals who are blood relatives of an individual who served in the unit in Vietnam. This includes children, grand children, nieces and nephews. Support is provided under an non-profit IRS approved plan which also provides for donations to be claimed as tax deductions. Consider making a Scholarship contribution. Send checks made payable to the 281st Scholarship Fund directly to: Walt Pikul, Treasurer, Post Office Box 41035, Fayetteville, NC 28304.

The scholarship board meets annually and makes its decisions based on the individual's scholastic achievements and contributions to their community.

For complete scholarship details, please go to our Association website at <http://goo.gl/URU4tD>.

Senior Member at Large – Bain Black

Well, sure enough the wonderful days of spring yielded to the dog-daze of summer. Now we can look forward to cooler temperatures and crisp fall breezes, not to mention what should be a wonderful Intruder Reunion. Many of us were stationed at Fort Bragg (FBG) during active duty, so we are familiar with Fayetteville. Well, things have changed somewhat in "FayetteNam" as we used to call it. The raunchy bars on

Hay Street have given way to beautiful renovation that features a number of upscale restaurants and tree-lined sidewalks. Architecturally, the downtown Fayetteville of today does not resemble the former "military town".

One of the most impressive structures in the city is the "Airborne and Special Operations Museum" located on Hay Street not far from the train station. This museum tells the history of the early days of these elite military units. The promenade from the parking lot to the museum is lined with memorial stones dedicated to the most well recognized military units, and there on the left is the 281st Memorial Stone. It really is impressive and it speaks to our cumulative accomplishments. This is one of the best military museums I have visited and you are guaranteed to enjoy it. Time is available to visit after the Friday morning ceremony at FBG.

Your reunion committee has been hard at work searching for the best venue for our 2017 Reunion. That's right, before one reunion has even concluded, work starts for the following year. There are many considerations for picking a successful reunion site: cost, convenience and expense of travel, selecting an area that is interesting to visit, and finding accommodations that are reasonably upscale yet affordable for most. Your reunion committee soon will give the EB its recommendation for their approval and it will be presented to the general membership in Fayetteville.

October 7th will be here before you know it. I look forward to seeing everyone at the Intruder Reunion!

From Fred Beck – Treasurer, Reunion Committee, and Membership Chairman

I thought I would provide an insight as to how the Reunion Committee arrived at the fees for the upcoming and past reunions. The Association By-Laws require that the reunion be self-sustaining i. e. not a burden on the treasury. We also strive to insure that the cost is affordable for our members.

We first meet with hotel personnel for the cost of meals, ballrooms, hospitality rooms, meeting rooms, equipment rental, bartenders, etc in addition to guest room costs. Depending on the hotel and negotiations, some of these costs may be free or reduced based on the number of guaranteed guest rooms.

In addition to the hotel costs we estimate the cost of hospitality room supplies (beverages and food),

entertainment (e.g. speakers and DJ, etc), printing costs (e.g. nametags and brochures), transportation (e.g. buses for Fort Bragg) and other incidentals.

Some of the costs are fixed and have to be spread equally over the number of attendees, which we have to estimate. If we estimate 150 or 200 but only have 100 actually register, we could end up at a loss.

After identifying all of the above costs we compute the costs on a per person basis. If the total appears too high we look at areas that we can cut back or eliminate.

In Summary, this year's \$125 fee covers Friday and Saturday meals, hospitality food and beverages, bus cost etc. Such a deal!!! 😊

In Memoriam

Our Intruder family will always remember them

Robert Dolen

Robert Dolen who served as a Bandit door gunner with the 281st from January 1967 to January 1968, passed away July 24, 2016 in Moundsville, WV.

Bob's Bandit crew chief, Dan Franco had this to say about him. "Bob was a great guy with a tremendous sense of humor and also a perfectionist when it came to



accomplishing his primary duties. Bob was very conscientious, honorable and hard-working individual and it was my sincerest pleasure to have served with him. He would spend hours ensuring our weapons were always in tip-top

shape and ready to go on a moment's notice. He would also spend numerous hours helping me maintain our aircraft."

Bob leaves behind his wife Jill and other family members.

Robert Kath



Robert Kath, who served in the 281st in 1970 as a Wolf Pack Pilot, passed away on January 10, 2015. At the time of his death Bob was a resident of Willmar, Minnesota. In the 281st Bob was a skilled aviator and respected by all. Full military honors for Robert Lee Kath where

held at Arlington National cemetery in Washington DC. Bob was survived by his four children.

James Saladin

James Saladin served in the 281st in 1969-1970 as a door gunner. James passed away on July 11, 2016. At the time of his death, James was residing in Buckner, MO. He leaves behind his wife of 23 years, Brenda and their two children Angela Cox and Trevor Mann.

Carol Ellen Hyatt

Carol Ellen Hyatt, the wife of Intruder John Hyatt, passed away on July 31, 2016 in Denton, TX. Carol and John were high school sweethearts and had just celebrated their 51st wedding anniversary in June. John served with the 6th Aviation Platoon and 281st AHC from October 1965 to October 1966. Our thoughts and prayer go out to John and his family.

From Fred Mentzer's Lil Sister

My name is Terri and I am Fred Mentzer's youngest sister. I was so very surprised to receive a copy of *Above the Best*. Of course, just seeing the book made me cry. I have quickly searched the pages, but will take time to read it completely when I can. I saw a mention of Fred on page 218. I got a good laugh out of it when Fred's lack of talking was mentioned. Karen and Fred picked me up in Arizona and we drove to San Francisco for their wedding. I had plans to talk to Karen in the car since it was the first time we met, but I quickly learned that no one talks in the car. I ended up sleeping most of the way! The only time Fred would really talk was when he had a lot of beer in him.

Fred was eight years older than me and was always my hero. When he went to Vietnam, I was busy having my first baby and had no idea what he was going through. My mom prayed for him all the way and he told her that her prayers must have gotten him through his tour.

Thanks so much for the book and I appreciate all the people who contributed to it. It's a wonderful book and I will always cherish it. - Terri Mentzer Gargis

Bring 'Em to the Reunion

BP Scanning Your Photos and Slides

Bring your slides, pix etc. to the Reunion for me to scan for our next book project...should be no limit on the photos but they've got to be good quality. Thanks, Brian Paine

Sick Call

Robin Hicks (Bandit 11/67-9/68) was recently involved in a serious crash on his bike and suffered multiple injuries to include a broken leg, arm, ribs and numerous cuts and bruises. Robin has been transferred to a rehab facility where he will probably be for a while. He is a real trooper and said he will see everyone at the Reunion in October. Say an extra prayer for his speedy recovery.

Don Jutz, a/k/a Zorro suffered a stroke earlier this year and is now recuperating in Wisconsin. Don, who just turned 87 years old, was a pilot in the 281st from 11/66 to 9/67. I'm sure a card or call would lift his spirits. His contact information is:

Room 112 Saint Andrews
3800 North 92nd Street, Milwaukee, WI 53222
Room [414 935 4941](tel:4149354941) / Cell [850 387 4610](tel:8503874610)

Any Ham Radio Operators Out There?

One of our 281st members is looking for other members to converse with via ham radio. Craig Szwed is on the air now, mobile of course on 20 or 40 meters, day or night, no regular times yet. Look for him in the General class section of the bands ... **KC1ELZ**.

From Jay Hays, the PX Grunt

The EB has doubled our budget this year and the PX committee has added several new items (see photos) at great prices. Thanks to a couple of donations to cover development costs, the PX will offer crew and aviator wings for only \$5. Intruder license plate brackets are 2 for \$5.00. Gold helicopter pin with "281st" in black on the pilot door for only \$5. Vietnam campaign ribbon decals with "281st AHC" in two sizes, mix or match 2 for \$5.00. We also have a good inventory of patches, pins and window decals (outside and inside). Most decals are outside vinyl that will hold up for years. With tinted windows the inside decals don't show up as well. Go to our website at <http://goo.gl/tP87Jc> to see these new items and many more PX items for sale.



Wear your 281st Intruder ball cap to the dedication ceremony at Ft. Bragg. If you need a cap or need to replace a worn out cap, they are available for \$15.00. We have over 100 in inventory. Our black t-shirts will nicely match your black ball cap. We still have some yellow 50th anniversary t-shirts available. At the Reunion we will only be able to accept cash or check. So bring your checkbook and greenbacks to Fayetteville.



Our book, *Above the Best* is selling well. Over 1,180 sold to date. Save postage and buy a few at the reunion; we'll have at least 150 on hand. The S.O.A. has also requested 50 copies to sell at their reunion October 17-21 in Las Vegas.



Book #001 is for the Association archives and we would like everyone to sign it at the time of registration check-in. There will also be tables for signing books near the PX/hospitality area. An alphabetical listing of the authors and page number(s) will make it easy to find the pages to sign. Additionally there are several blank pages in the front and back of the book. The S.O.A. has requested that their archive copy also be signed. We will present it to them on Oct 17th in Las Vegas.