



December 2022

281<sup>ST</sup> ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

No. 82

IN THE MIDST OF OUR HOLIDAYS, WE PAUSE TO REMEMBER The first name I remember of the 281st was Sulander. Not that I heard it at 10th Battalion HQ where a group of us endured the XO asking why we would want to go there after he secured our raised volunteer hands for the 281st. Looking back on that day, he had to have known of the loss of Sulander and crew. I had arrived in country on the 6th of December, 1966 and rode an old "Boo" to Dong Ba Thin the same day. A day or two later, I headed on to Nha Trang. The grief and shock of the losses still hung over everything like the wet season. So having arrived, there were thoughts of "what on earth have I gotten myself into?" Thank you, Will, and the founders of the Association, who knew we should remember because we cannot forget. Brent Gourley

FROM THE PREZ by Jeff Murray One thing that hasn't been discussed is the division of duties following the loss of a key member, as in our Treasurer. Fred Beck did a lot of work as treasurer and the membership guru. He had no backup. If anyone has experience in that field and feels a calling, let me know. Failing that those duties will fall to me as default, despite my having zero accounting training. I did work in a bank for 28 years so I know how to manipulate the system to get bills paid and I know just about every Bank of American branch manager in town so I can keep us out of trouble. Now if someone can tell me how to file our tax return we should be good. FYI my goal is to get us thru the next reunion then turn the remaining money over to the scholarship folks. The NOLA reunion turned out great and I was feeling good about it until I got the Beetle Bailey news. Keep your friends and relatives close, get your affairs in order and most importantly of all, if you don't

have any medical directives, get some. Most states have an online resource so you can do this without paying a lawyer. Take it from someone with experience, your kids may not wish to go along with your directives so get them in writing and keep them handy. Your reunion team is working on the next reunion but it looks like it may not be Cleveland. See Bain's comments below.

FROM REUNION COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON: Bain Black Hello Again Intruders, Family and Friends, Wow, what a wonderful reunion we had in New Orleans. The turnout surpassed our projections; about 125 attendees was the final number. The WWII Museum was spectacular, and the Higgins Hotel was splendid in every regard, accommodations, service, food and drink!! Now on to our 2023 reunion. Our plans had been to meet in Cleveland, but finding a hotel that meets our needs, has been difficult. Price and minimum expenditures at the hotels seem to be our stumbling blocks. So, our tentative plans are to have the next reunion in Dayton, OH. Hotels seem willing to work with us and there is plenty to see in the area...the AF Museum and Wright Bros. history, among others. Jeff Murray and I plan to make a recon visit to Dayton in January. You know we are dedicated...two southern boys going to Ohio in the middle of winter!!!! Brrrr! Our goal is to find the best hotel deal, check out the AF Museum, and to work on numerous other details. We are aiming for the reunion to be in the October or November time frame to avoid the cold. In closing, we have lost many Intruders, spouses and friends during the last several years. I read something that makes our losses a little more bearable...it went something like this: Don't be sad because it's over; rejoice that it was. We miss all of you!

### MEMORIES FROM A RAT PACKER by Ron Turner, Pilot, 1970

One of the flight lines in Nha Trang faced a large, open rice paddy with a mountain range behind it. As our new quarters were being built, we had great seats to watch C-123s, C-130s and DC-3s coming in over the mountains and rice paddies to land. We always assumed that the mountain, road and rice paddies might be a good area to be attacked from. For the next few weeks, we spent a lot of time flying SF team insertions and extractions all along the Cambodian border. We had two young Vietnamese girls, maybe late teens, who seemed to be everywhere on base and spoke pretty good conversational English. They helped us with the Mama-sans who did our laundry and cleaned our rooms. They had both been born in Nha Trang, had never left the city to see another part of Vietnam and were very anxious to understand English and Americans better...not individual stuff but why we left our homes and families to fight for a country and people we didn't know or understand. In return, they wanted to tell us more and more about the history of Vietnam so that we could understand more and more about the people and tribal relationships that had existed for years. On the surface they seemed like really nice kids.

One night, we took a bunch of 81mm mortars all along the flight line. We ran out of our rooms ready in case we were under a sapper attack, but it became obvious that the VC had our flight line pegged. I forget how many aircraft received damage that night. Not as many as we originally expected. The next day in the club we found out that both of the girls had been arrested. Someone said they and a few other Mama-sans had been seen walking along the flight line, pacing the distance from the fence that separated the road from the flight line...places they shouldn't have been. We were told that they both confessed to being VC. It's sad. They were very smart young kids and we learned a lot about Vietnam from them. During one of our history lessons, they had argued that we (young Americans) would probably act just like the VC if some other country put soldiers into their country and a political puppet in charge of the United States.

It didn't take too long for us to learn that our CO, Major Wolf, wanted to confiscate unauthorized weapons, war souvenirs, etc. I'd become pretty close friends with Hardeman, Welch, Mike Phipps, Bill James, Tony Amanzio, Kevin Farrington, Jim Smith,

Pete Sarris and a few other guys. Sarris was from New Jersey and he turned everyone on to a new group called the Jackson 5 and their lead singer, Michael Jackson. He played their music constantly. Music and drinking were the main distractions we all had in Vietnam. It wasn't uncommon for there to be a mad rush to the PX on pay day to either pick up records or cassette tapes or stereo equipment if you needed some. James was a seasoned pilot but came across as kind of a stand-offish guy. He was on his second tour and loved collecting guns and other memorabilia. His prized collectable was a Swedish K 9mm machine gun...small, light, and compact. I told him I really liked the folding stock ChiCom AK-54 machine gun. During one of my flights with him picking up an A-Team that had been inserted out in the field for five days or so, one of the Team members jumped into our helo and the crew chief came on the intercom and asked me to turn around. A camouflaged face handed me an AK-54 and two 30 round banana clips with a smile. I gave him a shocked look & thumbs-up and thanked Bill. I loved that weapon and had it with me up until the day I left Vietnam. I thought long and hard about taking it apart and shipping it home but was finally convinced that wouldn't be a good idea.

### TO BE CONTINUED NEXT NEWSLETTER



**INCIDENTS I REMEMBER** Vietnam was a time of experimentation, in weapons, machines, tactics, and devices. So, not to be outdone by anyone else, the wizards in some laboratory invented a device that could smell the enemy. Well, specifically, it could detect the people (and probably all other mammals) hiding in the jungle by detecting the odor of ammonia rising up through the vegetation into the air above. I don't know how the machine worked but one story was that inside the machine were body lice or some other form of mite that liked being on mammals, and

when they got a whiff of ammonia, or whatever, they got all excited and the activity reading was displayed on the machine. The other story was that the machine worked by chemical analysis. I doubt the lice story, just keeping lice alive to perform their dance seems a very unlikely scenario, but it is an interesting concept to think about. These flights were called Sniffer Missions, for obvious reasons.

The Special Forces operator inside our ship sat with the sniffer unit which had an inlet hose that was mounted outside the ship facing forward, and he would announce something to the effect of mark, or strong mark over the radio as we flew, and it was recorded by someone with a map in another ship flying higher up, or sometimes by another SF guy on our ship, trying to follow our path on a map and record as we flew. We always had gunships above and behind us for covering fire or supposedly to fire up a location if the reading was strong enough. On all of the several sniffer flights I was on, the gunships never fired up an area, no matter how strong the reading. Oh, did I mention that we, in the sniffer ship, flew at treetop level and below, at less than 60 knots, in order to get accurate readings. In other words, we were a low, slow, and easy target for anyone so inclined to shoot, and believe me, many were so inclined. I think the only reason we didn't get fired on more than we did was because of the threat of the accompanying gunships with us, which were listening on the radio and always positioned to immediately return fire. I always had the M60 safety off, my finger on the trigger, and the gun pointed straight out to be able to fire immediately. But, things happen fast down low, even at below 60 knots, so getting off an accurate return fire burst was almost impossible.

As an example, one time we were flying up a creek, below tree top level, and as we rounded a bend of the creek, there, sitting on a large rock in the creek, was a single enemy soldier on KP duty with a bunch of aluminum pots and pans that he was diligently cleaning. Why he didn't hear us coming I'll never know, maybe the mountain stream made too much noise when he was that close and the jungle downstream muffled the aircraft noise. Anyway, I looked directly at him and him at me as we flashed by each other, but even at our reduced speed, we were past him before I could possibly move the gun and fire, even though he was only 20 feet away and I was completely ready with the gun pointed nearly in

his direction. I'm sure he immediately unasssed his position and counted himself very lucky to be alive as that had to scare the bejesus out of him. It sure surprised me, and I was the one holding the loaded gun, he was completely unarmed. I reported the sighting to the rest of the crew, as no one else on the aircraft had seen him, oh, and we didn't get a reading in that area, even though it was obvious that he had enough cookware for at least a platoon.

**Pilots are people who drive airplanes for other people who can't fly.  
Flying is a hard way to earn an easy living.**

#### **499 SIGNAL DETACHMENT AVIONICS by Wayne Sellers, 68-69**

As the Detachment Commander, I was invited to live in the China Sea beach area Officer's Villa. This wasn't a nice experience, because I felt that I was being used as the "flunky". The primary issue was the water system that periodically stopped because of an air clog and had to be relieved. The problem was that the outlet that needed to be relived was up inside the attic and you had to climb in there to open the valve. Since I was the new guy, junior officer and the only warrant officer living in the villa, I was the person who had to do the dirty work and climb into the attic to relieve the air block. It didn't take long and I requested to return to the officer barracks. Life became much better at the Officer barracks.

On the duty down side, since I was the only non-rated officer in the 281 AHC, I was given as many of the extra duties such as

Vector Control Officer, etc. that the Commissioned Officers normally would be tasked as an extra duty.

Also, officially I was never recognized for being a detachment commander, although as you



can see throughout this story, I was the Detachment Commander of the 499<sup>th</sup> Signal Detachment. This status would have identified me as one of the few if

not the only warrant officer with combat command time. My career is over, so it doesn't matter now. Anyway, I was on flight status and found that the 15 to 20-minute maintenance flights at night didn't allow for enough time to qualify for flight pay. I was advised to fly missions as a gunner to learn and understand the 281 AHC combat missions and gain enough flight time to qualify for flight pay. I flew many Sniffer missions. The Sniffer mission consisted of the helicopter pilot(s) flying the contour of the area with a 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces NCO attendant operating the equipment. When the Green Beret NCO commanded a "mark" we would fire our M60s at the area indicated. There were at least two gunships orbiting above the sniffer mission helicopter "slicks" and when a mark was noted, they would fly down and strafe the jungle area. At first, urine detection was used and then changed to smoke detection. The transition from urine to smoke detection, I was told, was because the urine detector unknowingly detected monkey's urine and they were killed not the enemy. Although, the enemy didn't make too many camp fires, when there was detection, the crew knew they were shooting the enemy and not animals.

I tried to only fly with the older pilots, such as Frederick "Freddy" Funk, Wilber "Lee" Brewer, David "Fred" Sherrill, and others. I also became friends with Frank Martin, Larry Salzman and others. I knew Larry Salzman because he was wounded during a Korean Army support mission. After he was wounded, he returned to the 281 AHC with a non-flight status. Larry was assigned as the Motor Pool officer to maintain our small fleet of vehicles. He was extremely unhappy and wanted to get back on flight status, so he could fly missions again. All the pilots were this dedicated. There was like a "love affair" between these guys. There was nothing they wouldn't do for one another.

A great deal of my time was also taken up going to many of the other Avionic Signal Detachments such as the 155 AHC at Ban Me Thout because the 10 CAB tapped me to go to these other locations to inspect and help them on behalf of the S-4. This event was like a Maintenance Assistance and Instruction Team (MAIT) effort because these other units were not up to speed as the 281 AHC was in the Avionic maintenance support mission. A lot of things I don't remember because we just responded to requirements without hesitation.

I remember Martha Raye's visits to the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group during the time I was in Vietnam. I took her visit as something very big and well received. Her visits gave the Green Berets a little leisure time, which they well deserved. This reminds me of the activities that I did for the Avionics men. I found several pieces of Single Side Band Radio equipment and traded them to the US Air Force dining hall cooks for steaks and chicken. I took my men, except one to maintain the shop, on Saturday or Sunday (don't remember the down day) morning to the South China Sea Beach for a BBQ. We also had some beer, sodas and liquor. I was able to do this several Saturday mornings, so everyone wouldn't miss out. They were all deserving. In an effort to reward my men for their hard work and mission dedication, I coordinated visits to the Detachment for the Red Cross "Donut Dollies" to come to the shop so the guys could relax. These young ladies played games and entertained the men for relaxation. It seemed to work because they maintained a 100% avionic capability for the 281 AHC.

Men of the 499<sup>th</sup> Signal Detachment Avionics 68- 69: SSG Engebretson, Sp5 Frank Becker, CWO Wayne Sellers, Sp5 Rogers, SP4 Lay, SP5 Garner, SP 4 Cottrell, SP4 High, SP5 Morano, SP5 Hutchinson, SSG James, SP5 Hernandez, SP5 Caudill.

### TO BE CONTINUED NEXT NEWSLETTER

### JUST ANOTHER DAY AT PROJECT DELTA by Dave Mitchell, Pilot, 68-69

I believe that it was April 1969 when this happened. We were supporting Project Delta out of the FOB at Hue/Phu Bai. I was an AC at the time and had inserted a LRRP team consisting of three Special Forces troops and three South Vietnamese Rangers. When you had a team on the ground you did not fly again until the team had been taken out. The team that I had inserted had been ambushed and needed an immediate extraction. I am not sure who was my PP, Crew Chief or Door Gunner, but hopefully if they read this they might remember. I would really like to know who they were.

When we got to the team's location, we knew that they were in real trouble. The Rangers had been separated from the Special Forces guys. The SF guys were all wounded with only one of them even being able to walk. Because of the terrain we had to do a McGuire rig extraction. The only SF guy that was able to walk had to move the other two guys over to

where we had dropped the McGuire rigs. To say that this took some time is an understatement. We had great cover from Wolf Pack and before we got out of there, they ran out of ammunition. One of the ships left, but Lee Brewer the AC and Wes Schuster the PP stayed on station with me. Wes was firing his 45 with solid tracers out of the window, which must have helped, because we are all here to talk about this mission. To this day, I remind Lee Brewer how he probably saved my life that day.

Once we had all the SF guys on the rigs, my Crew Chief and Gunner did an excellent job of getting us out of the trees without dragging anyone through them. Because of the injuries the SF guys had, we had to find a location quickly to put them down and get them inside the helicopter. We found an artillery unit on a hilltop that had enough room for us to set the SF down and get them on board. The only problem was that the Sgt at the artillery location was not happy with us dusting off his equipment.

We are now off to the hospital as fast as we can go. After landing at the hospital and unloading the SF guys, we headed back to the FOB. Only problem we had was we ran out of fuel and had to land on a road in an ammo dump. Here comes another Sgt to find out what the hell we are doing. After some conversation, he understood our situation. He did advise us to stay on the road, because of the many land mines just off the road.

After a fuel truck showed up, we cranked it back up and went back to the FOB. As far as I know, the three SF guys all survived their wounds.



A Typical Special Forces A Camp in Vietnam

### Cairns AAF in the movie 12 O'CLOCK HIGH

Screenwriters Bartlett and Lay, drew on their own wartime experiences with Eighth Air Force bomber units at the Eighth Air Force headquarters for the film "12 O'CLOCK HIGH". Bartlett had worked closely with Colonel Armstrong, who was the primary model for the character General Savage. The film's 918th Bomber Group was modeled primarily on the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group because that group remained a significant part of the Eighth Air Force throughout the war in Europe.

### Casting

The lead character, Brigadier General Frank Savage, was created as a composite of several group commanders but the primary inspiration was Colonel Frank A. Armstrong, who commanded the 306th Bomb Group on which the 918th was modeled. The name 'Savage' was inspired by Armstrong's Cherokee heritage.

Clark Gable was interested in the lead role of General Frank Savage. Gable, who had served as a gunner in the USAAF during World War II, played a similar role in the 1948 film Command Decision. John Wayne was offered the leading role as well, but turned it down. Burt Lancaster, James Cagney, Dana Andrews, Van Heflin, Edmond O'Brien, Robert Young, and Robert Montgomery were also considered for the role. Eventually, the role went to Gregory Peck.

### Filming

Veterans of the heavy bomber campaign frequently cite "12 O'CLOCK HIGH" as the only Hollywood film that accurately captured their combat experiences. Along with the 1948 film Command Decision, it marked a turning away from the optimistic, morale-boosting style of wartime films and toward a grittier realism that deals more directly with the human costs of war. Both films deal with the realities of daylight precision bombing without fighter escort, the basic Army Air Forces doctrine at the start of World War II; prior to the arrival of long range Allied fighter aircraft like the P-51 Mustang.

### Stunts

Paul Mantz, Hollywood's leading stunt pilot, was paid the then-unprecedented sum of \$4,500 to crash-land a B-17 bomber for an early scene in the film. The scene was filmed at Cairns AAF. Frank Tallman, Mantz's partner in Tallmantz Aviation, wrote in his autobiography that, while many B-17s

had been landed by one pilot, as far as he knew this flight was the first time that a B-17 ever took off with only one pilot and no other crew; nobody was sure that it could be done. The footage was used again in the 1962 film “**THE WAR LOVER**”.



Paul Mantz had once been a flight instructor for Amelia Earhart. He later died in a crash in a movie scene that was omitted from the film “**FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX**”, starring Jimmy Stewart.

### Locations

For creating the bomber airfield at RAF Archbury, many locations were scouted by director Henry King. Flying his own private aircraft some 16,000 miles in February and March 1949. King visited Eglin AFB on March 8, 1949 and found an ideal location for principal photography several miles north of the main base at its Eglin AFB. Auxiliary Field No. 3, better known as Duke Field, is where the mock installation with 15 buildings (including a World War II control tower) were constructed to simulate RAF Archbury. The 'tough guy' character Major Joe Cobb was inspired by Colonel Paul Tibbets who had flown B-17's with Colonel Armstrong. Tibbets was initially approved as the film's technical advisor in February 1949 but was replaced shortly after by Colonel John H. deRussy, a former operations officer for the 306th Bomb Group. Colonel deRussy, was stationed at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama and suggested Ozark Army Air Field near Daleville, Alabama (now known as Cairns Army Airfield, adjacent to Fort Rucker). King chose Cairns as the location for filming B-17 takeoffs and landings, including the B-17 belly landing sequence, since the light-colored runways at Eglin did not match wartime runways in England which had been black to make them less visible to enemy aircraft. When the crew arrived at Cairns, it was also considered as an ideal for shots of Harvey Stovall reminiscing about his World War II service, since the field was somewhat overgrown. This movie was filmed a couple of years before and Rucker was selected to be the Army Aviation School.

Additional background photography was shot at RAF Barford St John, a satellite station of RAF Croughton in Oxfordshire, England. Other locations around Eglin AFB and Fort Walton also served as secondary locations for filming. The crew used 12 B-17s for filming which were pulled from QB-17 drones used at Eglin and other B-17s from depot locations in Alabama and New Mexico. Since some of the aircraft had been used in the 1946 Bikini atomic experiments and absorbed high levels of radioactivity, they could only be used for shooting for limited periods.

### Production

“**12 O’CLOCK HIGH**” was in production from late April to early July 1949. Although originally planned to be shot in Technicolor, it was instead shot in black and white, allowing the inclusion of actual combat footage by Allied and Luftwaffe cameras.

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### The Following From Walt Pikul, Pilot 68-69

I have enclosed a copy of a plaque that may or may not have already been placed inside The National Vietnam War Museum in Mineral Wells, TX. Also enclosed is a copy of a letter verifying the info. The Board sent the info to the Museum. Funds were donated by a 281<sup>st</sup> AHC Association member who has chosen to remain anonymous.

**IN MEMORY AND IN HONOR OF  
OUR 53 “INTRUDERS” WHO DID  
NOT RETURN HOME FROM THE  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH VIETNAM.  
YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN AND  
WILL REMAIN FOREVER IN OUR  
THOUGHTS.**

**281ST ASSAULT HELICOPTER  
ASSOCIATION, INC.**

July 11, 2021, 281<sup>st</sup> Assault Helicopter Association.  
Dear Intruders, I think the item and words that you have chosen are perfect for your unit plaque. I will get busy tomorrow ordering that plaque and have it hanging in the Visitor Center in a couple of months. When our new building opens, it will be displayed along with the others in the new building. Thank you for your continued support. Sincerely Jim Messinger,

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**A FOREIGN AWARD? Frank Little, CE 67-68**

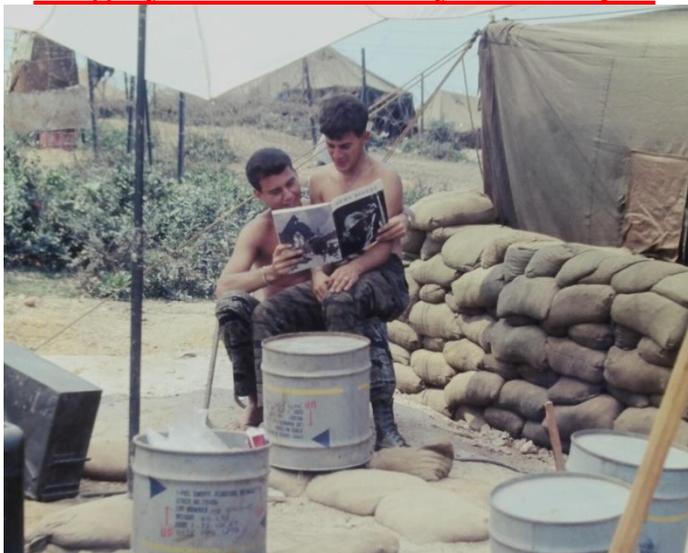
Yesterday I was honored by the United Daughters of The Confederacy in Anniston, Al. As both a VN Vet and that my family served in the War Between the States or as I say "The War of Northern Aggression" I was very honored!!!



to go, to make the trip, I wanted to be there. Fred and I have talked numerous times in the past ten or more years. I admired the way he attended to his beautiful wife, Margaret, and his love for family. I remember him as an easygoing, easy-to-talk-to warrant officer pilot who earned two Distinguished Flying Crosses, during his year in Vietnam. His attention to detail as our 281st association treasurer and his life as a husband, father, and friend marked him as a one-of-a-kind man. God made only one Jerome "Jerry" "Fred" Beck.

Family and friends packed the St. Gabriel Catholic Church, and the local Neenah Veterans Association Honor Guard was professional in every way. Father Robert Kollath, a former Army Veteran was impressive. Margaret still looks beautiful, she was tired but she did great with all the attention she received. What an honor it was for me to be there.

**Anyone remember what originally came in the gray barrels with the yellow stripe?**



Joe Bilitzke (pilot) reading a bedtime story to John "Jonesy" Jones (CE) at FOB Hue/Phu Bai, Delta Operation, spring 1968. Yes, beer was involved. BTW, the grey barrels held the very large smoke pots dropped to mark ground locations for airstrikes.



**Margie Beck and Will Mcollum left, Margie with Flag and case right**

**FRED BECK by Will Mcollum**

Saturday the 1st of October, Bain Black texted thanking me for representing the 281st at CWO Fred Beck's funeral and the text also said it would not be an easy task. He was so right. I am not good with funerals. It was a four-and-a-half-hour drive from Waterloo, Iowa to Keenah, Wisconsin. I volunteered

**DEAR 281<sup>ST</sup> AHC by Jenna Hartz**

I am a recent graduate of Bowling Green State University. I have been receiving the 281<sup>st</sup> AHC Scholarship for the past 4 years of my college career. I wanted to say thank you to everyone who made the past 4 years possible for me. I graduated with a degree in Early Childhood Education and Special Education. This is a double major which allows little to no time for work outside of the classroom. I am thankful for the scholarship which allowed me to focus on my studies to complete my career and dreams. I am starting a full-time position as a preschool teacher in Cincinnati, Ohio in the fall. Thank you again for everything the past 4 years. (Jenna is the niece of Ed Haas, Rat Pack Pilot, 67-68)

**SCHOLARSHIP by Jim Baker, Chairman**

Don't forget your Scholarship Fund donation for this year. We really count on you. If you have already done so, thanks!

**OBITUARIES****James "Beetle" Bailey**

Served in 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon  
(Wolf Pack) as a  
Crew Chief  
3-69 to 3-70



9-5-48 to 10-29-22

**Ramon Acevedo**

Served in 281st  
as a Pilot  
1970



9-15-43 to 10-27-22

**Jerome "Fred" Beck**

Served in 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon  
(Rat Pack) as a Pilot  
6-67 to 6-68  
Served in  
281<sup>st</sup> AHC Reunion  
Association as Treasurer  
and Membership  
Chairman.



7-7-43 to 9-20-22

**Edward W, "Ed" Duke**

Served in 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon  
(Rat Pack) as a Pilot  
11-66 to 9-67



1-2-43 to 8-1-22

**Jack E Perrell**

Served in Maintenance  
and as Company Clerk  
68 to 69



2-18-41 to 6-26-22

**Rose Boarman**, wife of Joe Boarman, Maintenance  
68-69, died on 10/31/22 after a long illness.

**Joan Stevens**, wife of Daryl Stevens, Commanding  
Officer 1970, died on 11/17/22 after a long illness.

**281st AHC Association Contact Information****THE EXECUTIVE BOARD (Elected)**

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Bain Black, Reunion Chair [kbainblack@gmail.com](mailto:kbainblack@gmail.com)

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