

# C-7A Caribou Association

Volume 1, Issue 22

July 2005

## Time And Remembrance... Impressions of the Salt Lake City Reunion

*Robert Blaylock [457, 70]*

It is hard to believe that thirty-five years have gone by since I left Vietnam and the Caribou. I went alone to Vietnam and I went alone to the Wall in 1982. I didn't know what to expect either time and the trip to Salt Lake was the same. I was looking forward to seeing the Caribou again and I hoped the people I met in Odessa would be there. Somehow it seemed appropriate that the first and last legs of the trip would be flown on a Canadian-built aircraft.

I had been to Hill before, TDY in 1971 and had found it to be a beautiful place. I was looking forward to seeing it again and was not disappointed when the plane banked around the Wasatch Range and turned on final. It was as I remembered. When I got to the hotel I checked in and went to the War Room. There were several scrapbooks out and the pictures took me back in time. I was pleased to meet Jim Hathcoat there. We had been exchanging e-mails and meeting in person was a great pleasure. As we talked, I could feel the difference between Odessa and Salt Lake City. This time, there was a greater purpose to the re-

union. Also, I had spent most of my time at the airport in Odessa. The air show was the draw. This time it was about remembrance.

During the reunion, a man I didn't really know told me that I had great stories but that he didn't know how many were true. That pretty well summed up my reason for being there and my interest in the history of the Air Force Caribou operation. As a Crew Chief, most of my information came second-hand at best. When the aircraft launched, we knew very little about what was unfolding during the missions. When we recovered the planes, we got some information in bits and pieces as we began to ready the aircraft for the next day's mission. Sometimes we would have a longer conversation with crew members. I met one of the men on the memorial plaque having such a conversation. I wouldn't say we were friends, but we would talk briefly after missions. Talking with him was the first time I ever heard about Dak Seang. A couple of weeks later, he died there. I had thought of him a lot in the ensuing years, mostly

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## Kelly Lee Grissom - New Board Member

Kelly Grissom was born on 8 November 1947 in Lubbock, Texas. His dad Bob was a returning Army Air Corp veteran pilot flying B-17s during WWII. Kelly was in the first crop of the "Baby Boomers."

He grew up in Midland, Texas. After high school he enlisted in the Air Force on 23 April 1967 took basic training at Amarillo Air Force Base. From there he was sent to Shepard Air Force Base for Tech School as an aircraft mechanic, then on to Nashville for C-7A school and then to Phu Cat, Vietnam, landing in country on 28 November 1968. WHAT AN AWAKENING! He was assigned to the 537<sup>th</sup> TAS working on aircraft 174. Kelly was first assigned

See **Grissom** on page 5

## Terry "Obie" Obermiller – New Board Member

I am privileged to be asked to serve as a board member. It has been through the Caribou Association that I have been able to renew long lost relationships with some of the finest members of the military I have had the honor to serve with for more than thirty years.

I am currently working as a Program Analyst and Chief, Officer Assignments Branch, Headquarters Air Education and Training Command (AETC), Randolph AFB, Texas where I started a second career in January 2000. This position involves management of assignments for rated and support officers in and out of AETC, Air University and Recruiting Service. In so doing, I establish and imple-

See **Obie** on page 5

The C-7A Caribou Association Newsletter is the official publication of the C-7A Caribou Association.

#### Elected Officers and Board Members....

**President/Board Member** - Bob Markham [459, 69]

**Vice President/Board Member** - Peter Bird [535, 71]

**Treasurer/Board Member** - Jim Collier [537, 67]

**Secretary/Board Member** - Wayne DeLawter [458, 66]

**Chairman of Board** - Al Cunliffe [458, 68]

**Board Member at Large** - Terry Obermiller [537, 69]

**Board Member at Large** - Kelly Grissom [537, 67]

#### Appointed Officers...

**Bereavement Chairman** - Bob Markham [459, 69]

**Chaplains** - Sonny Spurger [537, 68], Jon Drury [537, 68]

**Historian** - Robert Blaylock [457,70]

**Parliamentarian** - Wilson Petefish [535, 68]

**Newsletter Editor** - Dave Hutchens [459, 69]

**Reunion Planner** - Wayne DeLawter [458, 66]

**Assistant Reunion Planner** - Huey Frye [457, 70]

**Reunion Advisor** - Earl Reynolds [537, 66]

**Reunion Coordinator** - Christine Phillips

**Webmaster** - Pete Bird [535, 71]

**President Emeritus** - Nick Evanish [457, 66]

**Chaplain Emeritus** - Bob Davis [457, 69]

#### Squadron Representatives...

457th Jim Fairweather

458th Steve Lentz

459th Bob Markham

535th William Buesking

536th Russell Riggleman

537th Kelly Grissom

Please advise the Association of any change of address, phone number, or e-mail address. Send your changes to:

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\$10.00 dues are payable annually. Send your check to Jim Collier, 5607 Jolly Ct., Fair Oaks, CA 95628-2707

All members are encouraged to communicate with the editor of the Association Newsletter. Write, call or e-mail to:

Dave Hutchens

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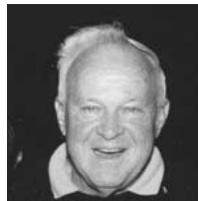
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## Thank You from the President:

I want to thank the past board members and the committee chairmen for their input in last year's agenda. A merchandise store was established and stocked with items that we felt would be of liking to the members. The merchandise can be viewed on the web site.



The dedication service at Hill AFB, Utah to honor the thirty-nine crew members who were killed in Vietnam was our second such service, the first being at Dyess AFB, Texas in March of 2002. Again, this service was another of the C-7A Caribou Association's finest hours. Bob Dugan was our master of ceremony, and he introduced our guest of honor, Ms Hillary Karsten Bundy

Hillary Karsten Bundy is the daughter of Capt Wayne Bundy, a member of the 537<sup>th</sup> TAS Phu Cat, Vietnam. He is one of the thirty-nine crewmembers that we were there to honor. Bob thanked the Hill Air Force Base people that helped make the dedication possible. He also thanked George Harmon and the forty-two people that donated the funds to repaint and repair the C-7A Caribou # 757. This airplane was part of the 537<sup>th</sup> at Phu Cat, Vietnam. The Honor Guard was posted and the singer from the base sang the National Anthem. We all joined in of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Jon Drury gave the invocation. Our guest speaker was Sonny Spurger. As he read the name of each of the thirty-nine lost crewmembers, I had the honor of ringing the bell in memory of each member. George Harmon and Terry Obermiller unveiled the plaque.

Later we all joined in the singing of God Bless America.

Bob gave the order for playing of Taps, and retiring the colors. Bob Davis gave the benediction.

George Harmon thanked each of the forty-two people who donated funds for the refurbishment of A/C 757.

We lost control of the photo taking, so I'm hoping someone has a good selection of photos. We had a very enjoyable lunch at the Club. Some people visited the museum, while others returned to the hotel.

During our banquet dinner Rene Canuel at long last coughed up a confession about his involvement in the missing Caribou antlers from 483<sup>rd</sup> Wing Headquarters. Our guest speaker, Jon Mood, conducted a slide show with slides that members brought to the reunion.

Everyone enjoyed the evening.

We welcome the new board members and look forward to next year's reunion.

Bob Markham

President

C-7A Caribou Association.

**C-7A Caribou Association 2005 General Membership Meeting  
May 13, 2005  
Salt Lake City, Utah**

1. The meeting was called to order by President Bob Markham at 2000 hours, with 92 members present.
2. Chaplain Jon Drury gave the invocation.
3. Election of officers: There were no nominations from the floor, so the ballot was approved by acclamation: President Bob Markham, Vice President Peter Bird, Treasurer Jim Collier, Secretary Wayne Delawter, and Board Members at large; Al Cunliffe, Kelly Grissom and Terry Obermiller. At a subsequent meeting of the new Board, Al Cunliffe was elected Chairman of the Board.
4. The minutes from the 2004 meeting, as posted on the web site were approved.
5. Financial report was given by Treasurer Bob Dugan. Motion and second to approve was passed.
6. Past COB Jim Collier gave a summary report on Board action items and the purchase of Caribou merchandise.
7. New business: a motion was made by Jim Davis, 537<sup>th</sup> to honor members who served in WWII. The motion was seconded and passed. Bob Cooper 458<sup>th</sup>, Bob Davis 457<sup>th</sup>, Joe Faulkner 535<sup>th</sup>, Milt Golart 457<sup>th</sup> and Herb Holdner 537<sup>th</sup> stood too accept a rousing applause. Pictures will be posted on the web page shortly.
8. President Bob Markham announced that the daughter of Capt. Wayne Bundy 537<sup>th</sup> was attending as the guest of honor. Wayne was lost on 3 Oct 1968.
9. Motion to adjourn at 2028, seconded and passed.
10. Chaplain Bob Davis gave the benediction.

C-7A Caribou Association  
For the Secretary  
Jim Collier Treasurer

## **Bob Markham Awarded Lifetime Member Status**

C-7A Caribou Association Motion To Award Honorary Lifetime Member Status to Robert Markham  
Whereas;

Bob Markham has served as the 459th Squadron Representative since 1998. He has continually kept the 459<sup>th</sup> advised of reunions and dedications. He has done an exceptional job as Chair of the Bereavement Committee. He has served as COB and President of the Association.

He was primarily responsible, along with Bob Dugan, for the success of the Abilene Memorial Dedication. He was solely responsible for establishing the Associate member category and getting the tremendous response of relatives attending. He has maintained contact with all the relatives and provided the roster chairman with fre-

quent updates.

He completed a survey of the Ogden site for the reunion and coordinated the dedication with the Hill Museum. He has attended The Reunion Network Comfams at Kalamazoo, MI, Buena Park, CA and DuPage County, IL as potential reunion sites, all on his own dime.

He has done more to advance the prestige of the Association than anyone except Nick Evanish.

It is therefore moved that Bob be awarded Honorary Lifetime Membership status, such award to be presented at the Salt Lake City reunion.

C-7A Caribou Association  
Board of Directors

## Bill Buesking, New 537th Representative

October 2004 and my wife Mae and I had just returned from our first C-7A Caribou Association Reunion which was held in Odessa, Texas. We really had a great time meeting many new friends and for me remembering the year that I had spent as a member of the 535th Tactical Airlift Squadron in Vietnam. I had arrived at Vaung Tau in March of 1970 and, after about 3 months there, our squadron was moved to Cam Ranh where I completed my year and returned to an assignment at Kelly AFB, TX in March of 1971.

I had met Jim Collier at Odessa and spoke with him several times about the Association and the fact that the 535th was not very well represented at the reunion. Mae and I were really enjoying ourselves and I signed up to attend the 2005 Reunion to be held in Salt Lake City. I was surprised to receive an e-mail from Jim a few days after we returned asking if I would accept the position of 535th Squadron Rep. After receiving assurances that he would help me get started and would send me a copy of the Standard Operating Procedures for the position, I accepted. Mae was also very supportive and really wanted me to get involved. I had purchased a copy of the complete association roster at the Odessa reunion and Jim started sending me update information and a monthly updated roster for the 535th Squadron. I also received several e-mails from other Squadron Reps with offers of help. My problem was to get organized with all of the data and then determine how I could best represent the 535th Squadron.

Of the approximate 190 members listed on the 535th roster there were mailing address, phone and e-mail data on just over 120 with just names for the remainder. Also fewer than half of the roster was current with

their Caribou Tax. I decided to tackle the problem head on by just calling everyone on the 535th roster with a listed telephone number to verify the roster information, urge attendance at the Salt Lake City Reunion and to remind those behind in Caribou Tax where to send their payments. On two weekends at the end of February and beginning of March I called all of the numbers listed on the 535th roster. My free weekend cell phone calls paid off handsomely and it was my privilege to talk with so many new friends about the experiences that we had in Viet Nam. I also e-mailed Jim with updated roster information on well over 60 of the 535th roster listing. I plan to call everyone again prior to our 2006 reunion in TN.

I set up my address list and sent my first e-mail updates to 101 squadron members on June 5th and June

6th. I can now report that all of the e-mail addresses listed for the 535th Squadron members at our WEB site are correct and up to date. Also my request for information on missing 535th comrades generated many responses and with additional data like a middle initial or a state of residence I was able to locate five squadron members. A great beginning for the task of contacting our missing comrades in the 535th. I plan to send periodic e-mail updates with information on our search status and hope to see many more 535th Squadron members at our 2006 reunion in TN.

I live at 18520 Rustling Ridge in San Antonio, TX 78259. Phone numbers 210 403-2635 and cell 210 240-0354. E-mail [wbuesk@earthlink.net](mailto:wbuesk@earthlink.net). I welcome any contacts if anyone wants to call or e-mail.

Bill Buesking [535th, 70]

*A follow up on the delayed delivery times of the January newsletter*

### Not All Efforts Prove Futile

After the January 2005 issue of the newsletter was deposited at the post office there seemed to be an unusually long delay before I received my copy in the mail – I normally receive it in a couple of days. I checked with a few members and they had not received their newsletters either.

I became worried that something had gone wrong – probably an error in the process of transferring our membership roster into the addressing software used to print the labels on the newsletters. I urged the company that does our addressing and mailing to reconfirm that the addressing process was completed successfully. They assured me that everything was done properly. I then suspected that the problem was at the post office. I wrote a letter to the postmaster complaining about the delivery delays and requesting a refund of the postage. The mailing company also wrote a letter to protest the delay and requested a refund of the postage.

**Results:** The postmaster replied with a letter stating that the refund neither confirmed nor denied that the post office was in error, nor did the refund obligate the postmaster to grant future requests for refunds.

**Guess What. The association received a postage refund check for \$185.07.**

*Dave Hutchens, Editor*

**Blaylock** from page 1

wondering if it was worth it. I had thought about his family over the years, had looked him up in the book at the Wall and had touched his name and the names of other C-7 crewmen whose names were near his on the Wall. I had wanted to learn about and write about the operations in Cambodia and the evacuations of Ba Kev and Boung Long in 1970. My interest was personal. My aircraft had come back with the wheel well a mess. Pieces of human remains were all over the nose of the plane and the crew told me that the propeller had hit a refugee. I assumed that he had walked into the prop. We finally hosed down the nose and wheel well and got it all cleaned up. Later one of our pilots earned a Silver Star pulling out the "Tailpipe" team—USAF combat controllers—who had worked the mission. At the reunion I met Bob Davis and Rene Canuel who flew those missions. Bob had been the Mission Commander at Boung Long. Back at Cam Ranh, we also heard about a woman throwing her baby into the plane. Rene was on that aircraft and remembered the incident. I told Bob Davis that I had wondered about those things for the past thirty years and he simply said, "Now you know."

The next day we went to the dedication. I met Jim Davis and his wife on the bus and we talked about New Jersey and McGuire AFB. I was stationed there after Vietnam and one of my best friends was from Toms River. We talked about New Jersey and the pine barrens. One of the unexpected things that have happened at the reunions is the "non-Caribou" reconnections. Time flows through people and places and machines and the Association reconnects us in ways that surprise and delight us. The reading of the names and the ringing of the bell was solemn and brought some closure to me. Going aboard the Caribou brought back old thoughts

and feelings and, in a clear way, re-connected me to my youth. As many others stated, it was smaller than I remembered.

Having Hillary Bundy Karsten at the dedication was especially wonderful. I sat with her for a few minutes after the banquet and we talked. She said that it had been an emotional experience with great highs and lows. I hadn't known her father but many of the attendees had known him and she also got closure and was surprised at the camaraderie among us. It was a great pleasure to meet and talk with her.

As I left the reunion, I thought about the many other reconnections. Meeting Al Cunliffe and remembering an airport and people from forty years ago. Seeing the pictures of Shepard AFB and remembering Tech School with two other maintainers. Meeting people I had e-mailed and sharing memories and feelings. I will be back to learn more at the next reunion.



**Grisson** from page 1

to crew the plane under Sgt. Bill Bickley and took over as crewchief in February 1968 when Bill rotated back to the World. Kelly, with his buddy Don Jackson, left Vietnam at 0000 hrs on 28 November 1968 for McCord AFB and the World.

On 6 December 1968 Kelly married the love of his life, Susan Venable, just eight days after returning back to the states. They were then stationed at Whiteman AFB at Knob Noster, Missouri. He was assigned to the 351<sup>st</sup> CAMS Job Control. He finished his enlistment there and was honorably discharged on 23 April 1971.

After the Air Force, Kelly moved his family back to Texas and went to work for his father in Odessa. Their

business sold in 1980, so he took a couple of years off and moved to south Texas and earned a BS from the University of Houston. After graduating he developed an RV campground in Edna, Texas. In 1985 he went to work for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and is currently stationed in Goliad, Texas.

Susi has a pre-school and day care center in Edna, Texas that she started in 1985 and is today teaching the children of the children that have gone through her school. These children are her "OPUS". They have three children, Angelia, Jennifer and Matthew, and six grandsons.

His plans are to work for about four more years and then retiring to work on his hobby of model trains—play with the boys, travel, golf and just have fun—

Kelly is very happy that he is able to serve the association and he feels honored to be selected as a board member. He extends an open invitation for anyone to call on him at any time with any question on any association matter.



**Obie** from page 1

ment assignment policy for over 2,700 pilot and navigator positions in 28 Major Weapon Systems and Trainers at 22 flying training wings/units, 6,000 support officers in 28 career fields, as well as, 900 special duty assignments. Oddly enough, this job is very similar to one I had at the Air Force Manpower and Personnel Center (AFMPC) while on active duty in the early 1980s. You may be surprised to know that not much has changed in the assignment process over the years. We still send people to places they don't want to go and have to explain why!

For the record, I was commissioned as a second lieutenant through

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the AFROTC program upon graduation from Texas Christian University in May 1967 and attended pilot training at Webb AFB, TX, graduating in June 1968. Following numerous operational flying and staff assignments, I retired from the USAF in July 1997 having achieved command pilot status with over 4,000 hours of flying time, including more than 500 combat hours.

I was fortunate to have flown and been qualified in six military and five civilian aircraft during my military service. Along the way, I had a tour with the Army flying the O-2A, the C-130E and C-12 aircraft, as well as my first assignment out of pilot training in the "Bou". In between there were three tours as a T-38 Instructor Pilot at Reese and Shepard AFBs, TX, and Williams AFB, AZ. Those "Trainer" years were probably my most gratifying airborne time, having first time soloed countless students in the jet, as well as, in two and four-ship formation. My liquor cabinet was never empty during those years!

I had my share of "flying a desk" as well, serving as a Personnel Officer at AFMPC, a War and Contingency Planner in J-5 at HQ U.S. European Command in Stuttgart Germany, and finally as the U. S. Defense and Air Attaché to Bolivia.

In total, the Air Force was very good to Candy and me, and we would not have changed a thing during our period of service. We look forward to retiring to the Hill Country at our Ranch in Llano, Texas, hopefully sometime within the next two years, where I will spend most of my time hunting and fishing and awaiting visits from our three sons and seven grandchildren. Thanks again for electing me as a Board member, as I look forward to serv-



## Reunion News

### From the Keyboard of the President.

As you all know we just finished our 2<sup>nd</sup> Dedication, to honor our thirty nine fallen crew members that were killed in Vietnam. This Dedication was held at Hill AFB Utah, on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2005. The first dedication occurred at Dyess A.F.B., Texas on March 13, 2002. I felt honored being part of this overall event.

I would like to enlighten some of the members of the association that were unable to attend this dedication. This is the way I saw it from the beginning and it's my story. (I know I'll get some letters or telephone calls about this),

During our 12<sup>th</sup> reunion held in Las Vegas, Nevada on September 4<sup>th</sup> 2001, Jerry York made a motion for the association to pay for the repainting of the C-7A Caribou serial number 63-9757 that was assigned to the 537<sup>th</sup> TAS at Phu Cat Vietnam, now on display at the Hill AFB Museum. The motion was tabled, and later disapproved by the board. It would have set precedence for the association to support the other museums with C-7A Caribou airplanes displayed. During our 14<sup>th</sup> reunion in Charleston South Carolina on November 5, 2003 George Harmon talked to a few of the 537<sup>th</sup> crew members that flew 63-9757 about the disrepair of aircraft 757. George started a donation program to raise the funds needed to have Hill AFB Museum repaint, and repair the airplane. With a total of 42 donors, George raised all the needed funds.

At the 15<sup>th</sup> reunion in Odessa Texas a vote was made to have a dedication and reunion in the month of May 2005. That started the ball rolling.

Jim Collier and I volunteered as hosts for a combination reunion and

dedication. Betty and Jim Collier and I met with the Aerospace Heritage Foundation of Utah Chairman Lt. General Marc Reynolds and his staff. After reviewing the pictures from the Dyess AFB dedication, they approved our planning for a dedication.

With your board's approval we ordered the plaque and monument. George picked the dedication date and time of May 14, 2005 10AM. Jim booked the transportation, hotel, reception, and banquet, while I arranged the dedication at the museum and the luncheon at the club.

This dedication was another Caribou Association's finest hour. I'm proud of ALL the people that made this day possible.

Bob Markham  
President  
C-7A Caribou Association



### A Plane And Its Crew

Sunday, May 15, 2005

By Amy K. Stewart

Standard-Examiner staff

*Hill's museum remembers the C-7 Caribou, and honors the 39 Vietnam vets who died flying her.*

HILL AIR FORCE BASE — The fat, shiny green cargo plane at Hill Air Force Base's aerospace museum is to serve as a memorial for Vietnam veterans, but also as an educational tool for the public. Sporting a fresh coat of paint, the refurbished C-7 Caribou airplane was the center of attention at a dedication ceremony on Saturday. "She reminds us of experiences and memories we hold in the deepest part of our hearts," said guest speaker chaplain George "Sonny" Spurger, of Lancaster, Texas. He was a pilot in Vietnam. Saturday's unveiling also honored 39 crewmen who died while engaged in C-7 Vietnam combat missions from 1966 to 1972.

Each veteran's name was read, followed by the chime of a bell, while about 300 people welcomed the restored Caribou to its now-permanent landing spot at the museum. The C-7 has been at Hill Air Force Base's museum since 1991 but was beginning to show signs of disrepair. "It needed some tender loving care," said museum curator Tom Hill. The aircraft's \$6,000 makeover was funded by donations from the C-7 Caribou Association. The project was spearheaded by Vietnam veteran George Harmon, who saw the plane while visiting family in Ogden two years ago. "I realized I had flown that airplane in Vietnam, in 1969," said Harmon, 60, of Temecula, Calif. In March, with funding in place, Hill personnel repainted and restored the aircraft to its original wartime condition. The plane is 72 feet long and 31 feet high, with a 96-foot wingspan. It weighs 16,850 pounds empty and 49,200 pounds loaded. The aircraft was built to transport supplies and use unprepared runways as short as 1,000 feet. It carried everything: ammunition, food, water, live animals, evacuees, the wounded and dead bodies. Saturday's dedication ceremony was the finale of a three-day annual conference of the C-7 Caribou Association. The event rotates to a different city each year. Hillary Bundy Karston, 39, of Littleton, Colo., doesn't remember her father, Vietnam veteran pilot Wayne P. Bundy. He went off to war when Karston was almost 3 years old and didn't come back. He was one of the 39 people honored Saturday. Bundy's comrades didn't hesitate to tell Karston about her dad, and show her photos during the three days of the conference. "It was very emotional, very overwhelming for me," said Karston, as she prepared to board the plane her father had once flown. For one day only, Saturday, the public was allowed to enter the cargo doors and tour the Caribou. The public will have an-

other chance to enter this aircraft and 25 others during a special event on Sept. 24. Harmon said this week's ceremony and conference served as a positive experience, bringing back good memories for him and other Vietnam veterans. "We were young and having a good time," he said. "We believed in what we were doing." "War is not all fun. You lose people. That's the bad part. But we don't dwell on it," Harmon said. "We respect them, but we still get together and have a good time."



## C-7B CARIBOU COMES HOME

HERITAGE HERALD, Hill AFB,  
Aerospace Heritage Foundation of Utah  
Spring 2005

The Museum's C-7B, S/N 63-9757, was originally manufactured as a CV-2B and delivered to the U.S. Army on 29 January 1965 by De Havilland Aircraft of Canada. Ltd., in Toronto, Ontario. It was transferred to the U.S. Air Force on 31 December 1966 from the Army's 17th Aviation Company at Phu Cat AFB, South Vietnam. In January 1967 it was assigned to the 483rd Troop Carrier Wing (Medium) of the Pacific Air Forces, headquartered at Cam Ranh Bay AB, South Vietnam, but it remained at Phu Cat with the 537th Tactical Airlift Squadron. One year later the 483rd TCW became the 483rd Tactical Airlift Wing.

While with the 537th TAS the aircraft was used to airdrop supplies to various ground units in forward areas. On one such air-supply mission to the besieged Special Forces camp at Dak Seang just outside Pleiku, three C-7s were shot down and all crew members aboard were lost. This aircraft returned from that mission with no damage or injuries.

The plane was sent to the Sacramento Air Materiel Area at McClellan AFB, California, in Sep-

tember 1971. It then traveled to the Warner-Robins AMA in Georgia three months later. In May 1972 it was assigned to the 908th Tactical Airlift Group of the USAF Reserve at Maxwell AFB, Alabama.

Then in September 1977 it was moved to the 357th Tactical Airlift Squadron, USAF Reserve, at Maxwell. It was dropped from the Air Force inventory in October 1983 by transfer back to the U.S. Army.

In November 1983 this aircraft was received by the Utah Army National Guard in West Jordan, Utah. It was later assigned to the Utah State Area Command. On 23 August 1991 the plane was flown to Hill AFB from the 211th Aviation Group of the U.S. Army Reserve in Salt Lake City. Six days later the aircraft was accepted by Hill Aerospace Museum for static exhibit.

In March 2005 the aircraft was repainted to match its appearance while flying with the 537th Tactical Airlift Squadron in Vietnam. This project was funded by the C-7 Caribou Association and the Aerospace Heritage Foundation of Utah. The painting was done on base by the professionals in the C-130 Paint Shop and the aircraft was restored by the 419<sup>th</sup> CLSS. The museum and Foundation would like to thank everyone involved in making this project such a success. Museum volunteers are now restoring the interior of the aircraft.

Dave,

Just a note about my flight home from the reunion. I flew Delta to Philly. As I got off the aircraft, the pilot calls out "Hey, Caribou." I stepped to the side and told him about the reunion and the dedication service. As it turns out the pilot told me he flew the Bou into Hill AFB on her last flight. Small world...

Paul Phillips [459, 68]

## About the dedication services...

*Dave Hutchens, Editor*

*I want to say just a few words about our reunion and dedication services. Bob Blaylock has written about his recollections of the reunion and dedication. Bob Markham has given us a very good account of his activities and involvement in preparing for the services. We have an article written by the Hill AFB Museum and also an article from the Salt Lake City newspaper, the Standard-Examiner. So the event has been well covered. But I feel that these descriptions would not be complete if we could not somehow feel the poignancy of the event, the moment.*

*Chaplain Sonny Spurger did just that when he addressed the gathering of members and friends with a slightly humorous, yet solemn message that touched our hearts and truly stirred the emotions of nearly everyone present. There was more than one moist eye noticed during his address. But Sonny said what needed to be said – he spoke for all of us – and he put the whole event into perspective that everyone felt and understood. The following is his address:*

### CARIBOU 757 The Dedication, 14 may 05

#### INTRODUCTION:

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for the honor of saying a few words this morning. I don't say that lightly. In my experience, the things that honor us most are the things that come from the folks we respect the most. I know who you are and where you've been and what you've done. And I deeply respect you. So, your invitation to speak is truly an honor for me.

#### Old 757 Has Had Quite a Journey:

She was construction # 220 from de Havilland.

First accepted by the U.S. Army on 1/29/1965 and assigned to the 17<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company.

On 1/1/67 She was transferred to the USAF and assigned to the 537<sup>th</sup> TAS Sq with tail code "KN".

In 1972 she was assigned to the 357<sup>th</sup> TAS of the 908<sup>th</sup> TAG of the 94<sup>th</sup> TAW (AFRES) with tail code "IM"

1981 returned to the Army.

November 1983 she was assigned to the 19<sup>th</sup> SF Group of the UT ARNG..

In 1991 she was assigned to the Utah State Area Command.

In 1992 she was flown to Hill AFB, UT and delivered to the Hill Aerospace Museum.

In 2004 she was rediscovered by George Harmon, who with a little help from his friends, has helped her have an "Extreme Makeover". Today she looks better than most of us do.

There is a saying in my part of the country, "**Been there, done that, got the T Shirt**".

Meaning: "I've had that experience." "I understand that."

Those who share the same experiences are often called "**peers**". Peers know each other. They speak the same language. They are bound together by what they have shared and what they hold in common.

My first wing commander was **Col. Jim Jabara**. He had been an Ace in WWII and was the Free World's first Jet Ace in an F-86 in Korea. After his 5<sup>th</sup> kill in Korea he was brought back to the US to go on a Public Relations Tour. He said that at one gathering he looked at the men in the front two rows and realized that there were a number of WWII German pilots in the group, many of whom had more combat hours and more kills than he did. He stepped away from the podium, sat on the front of the stage, and they just shared war stories! They were "peers". And as he later said, "**No one knows like someone who has been there.**"

These we honor today are our peers. We were all there. We are forever bonded by those experiences and memories shared in Southeast Asia that most of the world will never know and certainly can't understand. You just had to be there.

One of my military heroes was **General "Chappie" James**, the first African American Four Star General in the Air Force. He spoke at the dining-in for my graduation from pilot training. He had just been awarded his second George Washington Freedom Foundation Award for Patriotism. He spoke to us as young men at a time when there was social unrest everywhere, demonstrations on campuses, and lots of folks looking for ways to make it to Canada. He made a remark in his speech to us that night that has stayed with me through the years. He said, **"We will have to carry those folks on our backs. For this is our country. When she is well, we will rejoice with her. And when she is sick, we will hold her hand. And when she needs defending, we will be there."** And this group of "peers" was.

There is a camaraderie formed in times of conflict and combat that makes us brothers in a unique way and spans the years since that time with undiminished commitment and affection. For us in particular, we are bound together by both a war and an airplane.

The Latin Motto on the patch of the 537<sup>th</sup>, **"Gesta Non Verba", translates to "Deeds not Words"**. And certainly those we remember at this dedication will always be remembered for their "deeds", not what they said about what they believed, but what they did about what they believed. Scripture reminds us that **"Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."** And laying down your life is the ultimate deed.

I would like to suggest that there is another peer here this morning. Aircraft 757 has also, "Been there, done that, and got her brand new T shirt". Today, she represents all those "Bous" we flew, or crewed, or worked on. She reminds us of experiences and memories we hold in the deepest part of our hearts.

Take a moment and think back to your most memorable experience with a Caribou. It could have been the first time you saw one. It might have been ferrying one across the Pacific. It might have been an air drop over Ben Het or Dak Seang. It might have been a flight across the delta during Monsoon season. It could have been that first Type I landing on some patch of dirt the size of your backyard. It could have even been that beautiful afternoon when you finally found out that she could do a pretty good lazy 8. Whatever it was, the Bou was there, shared it, and is a peer.

So, I would like for us to issue a charge of honor, Peer to Peer, for Aircraft 757.

(Would those of you who flew the Bou, crewed her, or worked on her please stand with me?)

Would you join me in charging 757 with the honor and responsibility to stand vigil over the memories of our comrades and the memories of our experiences? Would you assist me by paying our respects to our peers?

(Please face the plaque and aircraft)

**ATTENTION**

**PRESENT ARMS**

**ORDER ARMS**

**AT EASE** (Please be seated)

May these "peers" of ours, both those whose names are on the plaque and this aircraft that we have just commissioned to stand watch, be a reminder to all those who visit this place, that **Freedom Is Never Free!**

May God bless you, and all your memories, and all our peers, and the United States of America

## Reunion 2005 Attendees

Aubray & Judy Abrams, GA  
 Max & Shirley Allison, WI  
 Francisco Archibeque, MS  
 \*Jack Artman,  
 James Bailey, VA  
 Alvin & Audrea Balak, CA  
 \*Ron Barrett  
 \*Andy & Joyce Bellucci  
 William Berta, AZ  
 Robert Blaylock, KY  
 Brian Bowen, FL  
 Bob & Evelyn Bowers, OH  
 Richard & Marilyn Brethouwer, FL  
 Patrick & Lesley Brooks, TN  
 William & Ella Mae Buesking, TX  
 Richard & Susan Bunting, CA  
 Wayne Buser, CA  
 Rene Canuel, CA  
 Kenneth & Venita Christman, MD  
 Duane & Judith Cocking, WA  
 Jim & Betty Collier, CA  
 Tom & Chantell Collins, NJ  
 Bill Combest, CA  
 Robert Cooper & Mary Furrie, TX  
 John & Nadine Craig, OK  
 Al & Shirley Cunliffe, AL  
 Don & Dorothy Dana, UT  
 \*Shelia Darsow  
 Robert & Georgia Davis, FL  
 Jim & Dot Davis, NJ  
 Jon Drury, CA  
 Bob & Pat Dugan, TX  
 Bill & Edeltraud Duvall, WA  
 Jim & Joanne Fairweather, MN  
 Stoney & Melva Faubus, CA  
 Jim Furlong, WA  
 Jerry Garner, CA  
 Milton Golart, OR  
 Joe & Sandy Graetch, CA  
 William Grant, CO  
 Kelly & Susan Grissom, TX  
 Ted & Cathy Hanchett, CO  
 George, Rebekah, Dan & Carolyn  
 Harmon, CA  
 \*Gary & Cathy Harris  
 James Hathcoat, KS  
 \*Keith & J.Maire Hayes  
 Martin Hillman, WA  
 Herb Holdener, AZ  
 William Horky, NV  
 Dave & Jill Hutchens, OK  
 Don & Susan Jackson, FL  
 Loyd & Nancy Jenny, WA  
 \*Hillary Bundy Karsten, CO  
 Kenneth Kimseu, CA  
 Tom & Olga Koza, MA  
 Jim & Sandra Laney, CO  
 \*Bill Lovern  
 Bill & BJ Manire, NE  
 Bob Markham, CA  
 Juan Martinez & Sandra Hill, OK  
 Larry Martwig, TX  
 Jim & Marcia McDonald, NC  
 Tom & Barb McHugh, OH  
 John Mood, HI  
 George Moore, LA  
 Mike Murphy, MO  
 Robert & Lola Neumayer, CO  
 Tom & Cheryl Neutzling, CA  
 Chris & Eileen Nevins, NH  
 Larry & Kristen Nilssen, UT  
 Terry Obermiller, TX  
 \*Jim & Steve Obermiller  
 Ken Pacholka, MI  
 James & Alice Parmelee, CO  
 \*Niesn Parmelee  
 Rick Patterson, VA  
 John Pentecost, ID  
 Paul Peoples, MI  
 William Perry, CA  
 Wilson & Betty Petefish, TX  
 John Pfanner, OR  
 Paul & Christine Phillips, PA  
 Terrell Presley, GA  
 Billy Quinn, ID  
 Michael Riess, MN  
 Russell Riggelman, VA  
 Hermon Rios, HI  
 Allan Rodda, CA  
 Keith Ryland, AL  
 Larry & Lee Schiff, PA  
 Allen & Karen Shanahan, AZ  
 Robert & Wynell Slade, FL  
 Jerry & Carolyn Smith, CO  
 Jerry Smolinski, LA  
 Sonny & Cindy Spurger, TX  
 Jene & Myra Stewart, CA  
 James Strickland, TX  
 David Sutton, TX  
 Ray Tanner, NV  
 John & Fran Tawes, GA  
 Curry & Nancy Taylor, AZ  
 \*Allison Taylor  
 Don & Sue Tippetts, UT  
 Charlie Tost, CA  
 Wayne Tuck, NJ  
 Bill Vondersmith, GA  
 Bud & Gloria, Beidman, NM  
 Clyde & Judith Wilson, CA  
 Hugh Wilson, MS  
 Roger Woodbury, IL  
 Frank Woznicki, NY  
 Jerry & Nancy York, WY  
 Dan & Arlene Yost, CA

*\* indicates a guest of the previous member*

### Air Force is the smartest of all the branches

Of all the Services, the Air Force has the most intelligent enlisted people!

Take the Army. When the stuff hits the fan, the young Army private wakes up to the bellowing of his First Sergeant. He grabs his BDUs out of his foot locker, dresses, runs to the chow-hall for breakfast on the fly, then jumps in his tank. Pretty soon, the company commander, a captain, arrives, gives him a big salute, and says, "Give 'em Hell, soldier!"

Now take the Navy. When the stuff hits the fan, the

young Sailor is eating breakfast in the mess. He hustles the 20 feet to his battle station, stuffing extra pastries in his pocket as he goes. There he sits, in the middle of a big, steel target, with nowhere to run, when the Captain comes on the IMC and says, "Give 'em Hell, Sailors! I salute you!"

Now take the Marines. When the stuff hits the fan, the young Marine is kicked out of bed by his First Sergeant and puts on the muddy set of BDUs he was wearing on the field exercise he was part of three hours earlier. He gets no breakfast, but is told to feel free to chew on his boots. He runs out and forms up with his rifle. Pretty soon, his company commander, a captain, comes out, gives the

## Reunion Demographics

Here are the statistics on the 2004 reunion: Odessa evidently was a good draw to get this many members out.

Total number of members and guests:	176
Members	102
Guests	72
First Time Attendees	15
FOA (Friends of Association)	2

Members by organization:

4449 - 1	458 - 8	483 - 1	536 - 9
457 - 7	459 - 18	535 - 12	537 - 45
18th AOD - 1 AFAT-2 - 1			

Members by year in country:

1963-1	1967- 18	1970- 7
1964-1	1968- 30	1971- 2
1966-16	1969- 27	

Members by State:

AL- 2	HI-2	MD-1	NE-1	OH-2	UT-3
AZ-4	ID-2	MI-3	NH-1	OK-3	VA-3
CA-20	IL-1	MN-2	NJ-3	OR-2	WA-5
CO-7	KS-1	MO-1	NM-1	PA-2	WI-1
FL-5	KY-1	MS-2	NV-2	TN-1	WY-1
GA-4	MA-1	NC-1	NY-1	TX-10	

Numbers for the past four years are:

		Members	Guests	Total
Tucson	1999	84	55	139
College Park	2000	58	36	94
Las Vegas	2001	100	61	161
St. Louis	2002	78	54	132
Charleston	2003	110	83	193
Odessa	2004	120	87	207
Salt Lake City	2005	104	72	176

First Time Members (FNG's)

2001	19	2004	45
2002	28	2005	15
2003	39		

## Heads Up for 2006 Caribou Reunion

The 2006 Caribou Reunion will be April 9th thru 13th, 2006. This is a beautiful and comfortable time of the year in East TN. This year the temperatures were in the 80s on the 9th & 10th, in the 60s on 11th — 13th with rain on the 12th. Our “Command Post” reunion hotel is the Music Road Hotel & Convention Center [www.musicroadhotel.com/](http://www.musicroadhotel.com/). If you thought the hotel in Odessa was something, you will really be impressed with Music Road. This hotel is only a couple years old and the most elegant we’ve stayed in yet. The incredible thing about this is the \$66 per night room fee. Those making early reservations may be able to get rooms with Jacuzzis or fireplaces.

Pigeon Forge is at the foot of the Smoky Mountains — less than 10 miles to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park entrance, 7 miles to Gatlinburg and 2 miles

from Dolly Parton’s Dollywood and within blocks of many popular venues like the Louise Mandrel Theater and the Black Bear Jamboree, we will be in the middle of where to be in East Tennessee.

Dollywood, [www.dollywood.com/](http://www.dollywood.com/) will be featuring its Festival of Nations while we are there. The Festival of Nations shows are the main reason we will be having our reunion in April. They are adult oriented but there is plenty for the grandkids to do if you want to bring them along. For a sharply reduced group admission price we will be able to view the premier shows from other nations around the world. In 2005 the Moscow Circus and China’s Dragon Legend Acrobats top the billing but there are entertainers from Czech Republic, Serbia, Zambia, Trinidad, Ecuador, Germany and Italy. Next year’s entertainment will be similar.

There are 2 excellent aviation museums in the area.

Wayne Delawter  
Chief reunion Planner



Marine a sharp salute, and says, “Give ‘em Hell, Marine!”

And then there’s the UNITED STATES AIR FORCE. When the stuff REALLY hits the fan, the Airman receives a phone call at his off-base quarters. He gets up, showers, shaves, and puts on the fresh uniform he picked up from the BX cleaners the day before. He jumps in his car and cruises through the McDonalds drive-thru for an

Egg McMuffin and Coca-Cola on his way into work. Once at work, he signs in on the duty roster. He proceeds to his F-15, spends 30 minutes pre-flighting it, and signs off the forms. Pretty soon the pilot, a young captain arrives, straps into the jet, and starts the engines. Our young Airman stands at attention, gives the aviator a sharp salute, and says, “Give ‘em Hell, Captain!”

## Senior Profiles

*"Senior Profiles" is an attempt to recognize our senior members that have service dating back to World War II. At the present we have identified six members that belong to this group: Bob Cooper, Bob Davis, Joe Faulkner, Milt Golart, Herb Holdener and Bill Perry. We are looking for others that we have not identified so far. Note that we have not located any sergeants. Please help us in this effort. So far we only have biographies from Bob Cooper and Herb Holdener. The others will appear in later issues, I'm sure. You young fellers ought to strike up some conversations with these older, more mature gentlemen and maybe get some real war tales. Their stories are fascinating.*

*Ed.*

### COLONEL ROBERT W. COOPER

Bob was born in Republic County, Kansas, raised on a farm in the same area and graduated from Belleville High School. In 1942 he enlisted as a private in the U.S. Army, applied for pilot training and entered training in the central Flying Training Command in July 1943 at San Antonio, Texas. He received his wings at Lubbock, Texas, Class of 44D. He attended B-24 Advanced Pilot Training at Liberal, Kansas and Combat Crew Training at March Field, California. He and his crew were assigned to the 43rd Bomb Group in the Southwest Pacific Area. He then moved from Nadzab, New Guinea to Owi Island, (Leyte), Mindoro, Clark Field, P.I., and was stationed at Ie Shima at the end of WW II. After returning to the U.S. in November 1945, he was stationed in California, Texas and Colorado, and married Jean K. Gilbert in Denver, Colorado



on 2 June 1946.

He was discharged as a captain January 1947 and re-enlisted as MSgt. in February 1947. He attended Airplane and Engine Mechanics School and Aircraft Electrical Specialist School. He was a crew chief on C-54 aircraft at Brookly AFB, Mobile, AL. His son, Van, was born there during November 1947. Bob was recalled to commissioned status in late 1948 as a B-29 pilot, 43rd Bomb Wing at Davis Monthan AFB, AZ.

In 1952 he moved to Japan for the Korean War flying B-29's and later moved to Forbes AFB, KS, 55th Strat Recon Wing where he flew RB-47's. This assignment lasted approximately 2 1/2 years. He was then assigned to 15th AF, March AFB, CA, May 1955. He was promoted to major April 1957 and moved to Yokota AB, Japan, assigned to 67th Tac Recon Wing as Field Maintenance Supervisor. This tour was especially enjoyable for the family with a maid, houseboy, gardener, and seamstress.

Bob received a Regular AF Commission in 1958. He returned to the U.S. in June 1960 to Minot AFB, ND, attended B-52 Advanced Pilot Training at Castle AFB, CA in the period November 1960 - April 1961. He departed Minot for an assignment at HQ SAC, Offutt in Nov. 1964 and was promoted to LTC in May 1965. He went to Viet Nam June 1967 and flew a tour in C-7A "Caribou. He returned to Carswell as Sq. Co. of 7th OMS in June 1968 and was promoted to Colonel in Aug. 1968. He moved in as Deputy Commander for Maintenance and went TDY with the 7th Bomb to Guam in October 1969. He returned to Carswell in April 1970 and moved to Blytheville AFB, AK as Vice Wing Commander of the 97th Bomb Wing. His next move was to HQ SAC as Director of Logistics Plans in Nov. 1970. This assignment lasted until January 1974 when he was moved to Carswell AFB, TX as

Director of Logistics for the 19th Air Division, a position he held until retirement 1 March 1977.

During over thirty-four years of active service he accumulated over 6000 hours of pilot time in twenty-five different aircraft models and flew over 200 combat missions in three wars. He holds the Legion of Merit with one Oak Leaf Cluster, the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star with one Oak Leaf Cluster, the Air Medal with six Oak Leaf Clusters, the Air Force Commendation Medal with one Oak Leaf Cluster and 18 other medals, decorations, ribbons and Presidential Unit Citations. Two years after retirement he started a window and door business in Ft. Worth which was successful, but he has tapered it off to very little business at the present. Jean died on Oct. 22, 1987. Their two sons and three grandchildren live in California and Bob has managed to spend Christmas with them the past several years.

Bob has had a few close calls, as most pilots have, and has been "shot at" with live ammunition on most of his combat missions, but the most harrowing experience was riding through and walking away from a major aircraft crash of a C-7A at Centerville, TN in March 1967. That was a major catastrophe but he was lucky enough to have survived it.

*(Bob has told me part of the story of the crash of the C-7A. I'm trying to get him to give us the whole story. It is a Lu-Lu.*

*Ed.)*



### HERB HOLDENER

Dave Hutchens asked some of us old (WWII Types) C7 Association members to write a dissertation on our flying experience and military career. My flying experience will be pretty limited compared to a lot of you C-7 Caribou Association Baby Boomers.

Well here goes, I was in college at Iowa State College and enlisted in the

Army Aviation Cadet Program in May 1942. I was not called until February 1943. After basic training, I went through pre-flight training in Santa Ana, CA, primary flight training in a Stearman PT-17 in Tulare, CA. (65 Hrs), basic in a BT-15 (20 hrs.) and AT-17 (55 hrs) at Lemoore, CA., advanced was at La Junta, CO. in a AT-24 (B-25) for 70 hours. I received a total of 210 flying hours in Cadet Training Program.

After advanced I went to Bergstrom Field, TX. (Austin, TX.) for transition training in C-47's. We flew a variety of "Gooney Birds" (i.e.: C-47's C-49's, C-52's and C-53's), flew 149 hours in the program and also received 8 hours of glider time. Our crew was sent to Baer Field, IN. to pick up a C-47 which we ferried to Townsville, Australia. I was assigned to the 403<sup>rd</sup> Troop Carrier Group, 64<sup>th</sup> TCS and I joined them in Guadalcanal on 27 September 1944. We were flying C-47's and C-46's and I flew in the South Pacific Theater from Guadalcanal to the Philippines. and returned back to the States in November 1945. I had a total 1025 flying hours in the Pacific Theater



with 109 c o m b a t missions, 625 hours c o m b a t t i m e (troop carrier type) and total f l y i n g time of

1389 hours.

Took some leave time and decided to stay in the service for another year. During that time I was stationed in Texas and California and flew AT-11's, C-45's, C-47's and B-25's I was a flight instructor in the C-47. During this time I flew 124 hours and was discharged from the Army Air Corps in October 1946 and joined the Reserves .

I returned to Iowa State College and graduated with a B.S. Degree in Ceramic Engineering in March 1949 and took a job in Cleveland, OH. I joined the Reserve 433<sup>rd</sup> Troop Carrier Group flying C-46's, T-7's and T-11's. We were on our month of active duty in July 1950 when the Korean War broke out. The Group got called back to active duty in October 1950 and was sent to Greenville, SC. to transition into C-119's We flew T-7's and T-11's until the C-119's arrived. I flew 111 hours in Greenville and the Group was transferred to Rhein Main, Germany in July 1951. Later we were at Neuberg, Germany. I returned to the States in March 1954 and was assigned to the University of Illinois and received a Masters Degree in Ceramic Engineering in June 1955.

My next tour was at Wright-Patterson AFB Dayton, OH. in the Materials Laboratory in the High Temperature Materials Section and I worked on the research and development of ceramic and graphite materials for military applications. While at WPAFB I flew primarily B-25's and occasionally C-47's and C-45's. I flew mostly on weekends.

In January 1959, I was assigned to the Ballistic Missiles Division, Systems Command, in Los Angeles, CA. I was the Project Officer for development of the 2nd stage of the Minuteman Missile System. Again, I flew when I could on weekends. We flew U3A's, C-47's, SC-47's and C-118's. In April 1963 the Air Force established a program, which took all the Engineering and Technical type pilots just flying a minimum amount of time for flight pay, off of flight status. We still received flight pay as long as we passed our yearly physical exam and signed an agreement to be subject to recall to flight status at any time in accordance with the needs of the Air Force. I was in this program from April 1963 till June 1968. We got the Minuteman Missile

into production and turned it over to SAC in 1962 and it was fully operational in July of 1963.

In May 1963, I went to Rennselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY and received another Masters Degree in Engineering Management in June 1964. The next assignment was at the Pentagon as Staff Officer for the Air Force Research and Development Programs under the auspices of the Systems Command. In July 1968, I was recalled to flight status. I had 2966 hours flight time and started flying again at Andrews AFB in U3A's. After attending the Survival Training Program at Fairchild AFB (29 July -7 Aug 1968), I was sent to Sewart AFB, TN. for 68 hours of transition training in the C7A. At the end of training, (Oct. 1968), an all volunteer crew (Lt. Col. Irwin K. Holdener, Major Morris C. Garrison, Capt. George A. Spurger and T. SGT. James C. Beach) went to Robbins AFB, GA. to pick up a C7 to ferry to Cam Rahn Bay, Viet Nam. Orders effective on or about 13 Nov. 1968. Spurger and myself were assigned to the 537<sup>th</sup> TAS. By date of rank, I became the Operations Officer replacing Lt. Col. Richardson. Counting the ferry flight time and the 537<sup>th</sup> flight time I had a total 832 hours flying time in SEA Total time of 4092 hours with 1649 hours of combat time (troop carrier type).

After my tour in SEA, I was assigned to the Space and Missiles Systems Organization (SAMSO) in Los Angeles, CA. in Dec. 1969. I was in charge of the Engineering Office responsible for modifying the Air Force Atlas Missiles in storage in San Diego, CA. to NASA specifications. They were used as 1st stage boosters for specific space flights. I retired from the Air Force in June 1972.



My Recollections

## Emergency Evacuation of Cambodian Refugees

by the 483rd Tactical Airlift Wing, SVN 22-23 June 1970

*Robert A. Davis [457, 69]*

These recollections are being recorded during 2004. They have been reinforced by references to my personal notes of the missions flown during my tour of duty with the 483rd Tactical Airlift Wing, Cam Rahn Bay, SVN, October 1969- October 1970. I have also made frequent referral to my Form 5, which is the Air Force Pilots Individual Flight Records, of accumulated flying time during my career as an Air Force pilot. The Form 5 reflects a grand total of 4219.7 hours of which 649.3 hours were in combat. The combat hours were 75 in Korea (B-29) during 1953, 16.75 from Thailand (C-47) during 1966-67 and 557 in SVN (C-7A). My Flight Record Master File indicates that I have recorded flying time in 18 different type of airplanes.

My assigned duty in the Wing was Operations Officer in the 457th Tactical Airlift Squadron based at Cam Rahn Bay. We were flying C-7A Caribou aircraft manufactured by de Havilland, of Canada, for the US Army. There were six squadrons in the Wing, two at Cam Rahn Bay (457, 458), two at Phu Cat (459, 537) and two at Vung Tau (535,536).

It was December 1966 when the last of 144 Caribou aircraft had been transferred from the Army to the Air Force so that all in-country fixed wing airlift service was consolidated under one authority. The transfer of airplanes was a joint decision between the Chiefs of Staff of the Air Force and Army and approved by the Department of Defense.

The aerial lifeline of the Special Forces camps in Vietnam proved to be the C-7A Caribou airplane. The ability to land on very short unimproved strips, capacity for carrying

## War Stories!



relatively large loads of many type cargo, the stalwart construction, maintainability and reliability made it the logical choice for re-supplying those boondocks isolated outposts of the Special Forces.

The C-7A Caribou, was a high-wing twin engine monoplane, reversible propellers with a long upswept tail that permitted using the rear door cargo loading ramp. The fuselage was just over 72 feet long, and wingspan was just over 95 feet 7 inches. The vertical fin was over 31 feet high and the plane had an empty weight of about 17,600 pounds. Powered by two Pratt & Whitney R-2000 1,400 horsepower engines, the Caribou had a cruising speed of 182 mph at 10,000 feet and a stall speed of 65 mph when fully loaded. A favorite with the air crews who flew them, the C-7A was a work horse of an airplane that really found a home in Vietnam supporting those gallant Special Forces troops.

My involvement with the refugee evacuation began with a telephone call from "Colby", the 483rd Tactical Airlift Wing Command Post advising that our squadron send an aircraft and crew, with a field grade Aircraft Commander, to Pleiku AB (Svn 2-4) for three days. The ALCE, Airlift Control Element, Commander would brief the air crew for the missions to be flown from that location. Since most of the squadrons eligible Aircraft Commanders would be out of crew rest as a result of today's missions, I volunteered to take the mission, with the permission of the Squadron Commander, Lt. Colonel Russell Draper.

While I was preparing for the TDY the Squadron scheduling Officer, Major Dawson White, rounded up a Copilot, Lt. McGregor and a Loadmaster/Engineer Msgr. Mathews to

fill out the flight crew. As the air crew members were preparing for the sortie, the maintenance troops were re-configuring a C-7A Caribou, tail number 61-2391, from cargo to a passenger carrying capability. Little did we realize at the time the type and numbers of passengers to be transported. The flight to Pleiku that evening was uneventful. There was however, some organized turmoil and orderly confusion on the tarmac and inside the ALCE.

I was briefed by the ALCE Commander that the 834th Air Division had been tasked to evacuate many hundreds of Cambodian refugees who were fleeing from Communist insurgents. The refugees were gathering at two airfield locations in eastern Cambodia, Bu Kev (East) and Bung Lung (West), both of them were only about 30 minutes flying time from Pleiku.

Initially the Air Division had laid the evacuation missions on the C-123, "Bookie Birds", located at Phan Rang, SVN. These very sturdy and dependable twin engine aircraft of "Mule Train" fame, could and did transport many refugees on 22 June 1970; however due to their gross weight and single wheel main landing gear foot print pressure, the landings had deeply rutted the touchdown area of the latterite surfaced (dirt) runway. As a result Air Division discontinued the gallant C-123's participation. The 483rd TAW with their lighter, dual wheeled aircraft was then tasked to continue the rescue missions in spite of the drastically reduced passenger carrying capacity of the C-7A Caribou

The 483rd TAW Director of Operations, Colonel Larivee designated one of his staff members as Mission Commander, who established a command center at the Pleiku ALCE. This office was located on the second floor of the Operations building. It had an excellent view of the entire airdrome flight line, aircraft parking and cargo

loading areas.

The Wing operations staff had planned for a Lt. Col. from each of the 457 and 458 TAS to be on-site Commanders at Bu Kev (east) and Bung Lung (west) airfields. These site Commanders were to be assisted by a Major. Each airfield would have a "Tailpipe" team which would control the air traffic.

A "tailpipe" Team consisted of three highly skilled enlisted aircraft traffic controllers. Their equipment consisted of a jeep vehicle and a communications trailer. This team had the capability of communicating with the 834th Air Division Command Center, code name "HILDA", as well as military aircraft. The Jeep and trailer combination was air transportable in a C-7A Caribou aircraft.

The morning of 23 June 1970 was very busy with flight planning, loading the aircraft with the "Tailpipe" equipment, and mission briefing. Air Division had directed that the "Tailpipe" teams be in position and operational prior to the C-7A rescue flights commencing. As a result a team was off loaded at each base of operations, Bu Kev (East) and Bung Lung (West), by late afternoon 23 June 1970.

As mission site commander at Bung Lung (West), I was to remain there over night so as to coordinate the ground operations with the Cambodian station Commander, "Tailpipe" team and the many hundreds of refugees who were anxiously awaiting evacuation.

My first priority, upon arriving at Bung Lung (West) in the early evening, was to check in with the "Tailpipe Team" who had been there since mid morning. This highly trained team had established themselves in the center of the airfield approximately 150 feet west of the 09-27 latterite landing strip. Their radio equipment trailer with power generator and antennas was functioning. Communications had been estab-

lished with Air Division..

My second priority was to inspect the landing strip, especially the touch-down area, to determine the extent and severity of the C-123 rutting. I was not surprised to find at least six deep ruts of approximately 8-10 inches deep and several more that measured only 3-5 inches deep. Any one of which would be hazardous to landing aircraft.. I immediately coordinated with the Cambodian Station Chief to make necessary repairs during the night so that early morning air operations could begin.

The Station Chief, who could speak English but would rather converse in French, assured me that the most severe ruts would be filled as quickly as possible. He did tell me though that the materials required to do the job correctly lay outside the airfield perimeter and was under the control of the attacking insurgents. Fortunately the ground was drying out, becoming more firm, and no rain had been forecast.

My third priority was to inspect the pierced steel planking (psp), in front of the operations terminal, that served as aircraft parking and on/off loading of cargo and passengers. The psp was in very good condition and provided ample room for at least two Caribou's to load passengers simultaneously. There was, however, a South Vietnamese C-47 parked just west of the terminal building that would have to be relocated. The Station Chief stated that the SVN C-47 was not in commission but that a crew was expected to arrive the next day to make repairs and evacuate the airplane along with several SVN military personnel.

The station chief extended an invitation to myself and the "Tail Pipe" team from Brigadier General Neak Sam, Commander of the Fifth Cambodian Region, for the evening meal. The General could not converse in English, consequently the evening was spent with the Station Chief

translating Cambodian, French and English. The meal consisted of a green leafy salad, white rice and a spicy chicken stew with vegetables. I have recollections of a cider or mild beer, from bottles, as the local water may not have been wise for us to drink. None of we Americans had any ill effects from the meal that could have limited our performance of duty the next day.

The Station Chief insisted that I use his quarters for the night. The room was about 12 feet square with a double bed surrounded by mosquito netting. I do recall being awakened several times during the night by the sounds of gunfire. There was an AK-47 weapon, which provided me with little or no comfort, along side of the bed. The "Tail Pipe" team chose to sleep under a shelter along side their jeep and communication trailer. This team was very capable, self-sufficient and equipped with small arms for their own protection. They needed absolutely no support from the airfield and certainly no input from me. Rather it was I who was dependent upon them as they controlled aircraft arrivals and departures.

Just prior to daybreak I was awakened by the changing of a guard, to find the Station Chief returning from overseeing repairs to the runway surface. To my dismay, upon making my own inspection, I saw that large pieces of concrete had been dumped in some of the deepest ruts. For the most part, this attempt to solve the touch down area problems was totally inadequate but it was too late to attempt any further repairs since the airplanes were already inbound. It took me about 20 minutes to remove the larger chunks of concrete which would have damaged the tires of landing Caribou's.

I informed the "Tail Pipe" team of the touch down area conditions so that the Aircraft Commanders could be advised to land "long" avoiding the first 200 feet of the landing strip.

The team advised me that the first Caribou's would be arriving from Pleiku at 0730 hours and then about every 30 minutes apart.

At first morning light I estimate that there were over 200 refugees crowded around the terminal building, however, this number rapidly increased in a very short period of time. There were people of every age, from babies slung in blankets around a mother's neck to several very old men who had to walk with a cane. There were only a very few young men or older boys, whom I suspect were being used as a defense against the insurgent overrun. Many of the women were carrying large bundles of their possessions on their backs or balanced on their heads. As the day grew older some of these bundles would be abandoned as the passengers scrambled to board the aircraft.

I have no recollection of a breakfast meal that morning. It is possible that the first arriving aircraft brought either in-flight or boxed rations with them for the four of us who had remained overnight. I do recall having one of my squadron Aircraft Commanders bring some sandwiches for lunch along with a cooler of ice and several soft drinks that we all shared.

With the arrival of the first C-7A, a Major (whose name I cannot recall) from the 458th TAS, came to assist in the marshaling of aircraft on the ground. After the first plane, loaded with refugees, had departed our next order of business was to relocate the SVN "gooney Bird" out of the turn around and loading area. The newly arrived Major, who was familiar with the aircraft, released the C-47 parking brake while I recruited about 20 refugees to push the airplane across 150 feet of psp ramp. That gave us sufficient room to load two C-7A aircraft simultaneously. This proved to be very beneficial since the SVN maintenance team and the air crew did not arrive until much later in the day. By that time we had evacuated

approximately 500 refugees.

The first of the aircraft that were to ferry the refugees to Pleiku SVN began to arrive at Bung Lung at about 0730 hours 23 June 1970. Aircraft were then scheduled to arrive at 30 minute intervals. All went well with this plan for the first few hours. Upon reviewing the 8 MM super eight movie film that I took, it was evident that the mass of refugees was not diminishing. In fact the number of Cambodians awaiting evacuation had increased as the hours passed. It was obvious that word had spread among the citizenry that an evacuation was really taking place at the airfield..

The fact that the airfield perimeter was undergoing probing attacks by the insurgents created an increased urgency to our operations. The rear loading ramps of the aircraft were no sooner lowered than the people would clamber aboard, assisting mothers with children and the elderly. The only way that we could stop the hectic boarding was for the loadmaster to begin to close the clam shell type rear doors and the Aircraft Commander begin taxing out of the loading area.

It was shortly after the "Tail pipe" team had coordinated for an air strike on the field perimeter that the urgency to load more people at a faster rate really took effect. The A-7 Spad came directly over the loading area, in a dive, as he fired both rockets and guns at the insurgents just outside the airfield perimeter. There had been some intermittent small arms firing as a result of the probing attacks. All of this sound of battle had created a panic of sorts among the women refugees, especially those with infants hung in blankets around their necks.

It was at this time that I saw a woman who could not get on a plane, due to the crush of anxious frantic people, actually toss her infant into an aircraft as the doors were closing. I can only surmise that the mother had pitched the child to a relative or

friend that was already in the plane. I truly do not know if the woman ever did get out on a subsequent flight later in the day.

As the day wore on, the temperature and sun started to have an effect on all of us. My only protection from the sun was a military overseas cap and I could feel the sun burning my face and neck. Many of the refugees were wearing the traditional round conical woven reed hats that shaded their head and shoulders. I actually tried one of them on, but it was very small and would have blown away in the slipstream of maneuvering airplanes. As luck would have it I saw, in a group of refugees who would be boarding on the next bird, a taller woman who was wearing a military style French campaign hat.

With a grateful apology I liberated the woman from that hat and gave her my overseas cap. I have often wondered at what kind of comments were generated when she got off the plane at Pleiku wearing a Lt. Colonel's rank insignia on an Air Force overseas cap. That liberated French campaign hat was a great relief to me during the rest of the evacuation. After all of this time I still have that hat and wear it to every Caribou reunion, even though it is sweat stained and slightly odorous.

I am very sorry and somewhat reluctant to relate this next occurrence. Of course, it was of military necessity to load the passengers with the engines still running at an idle RPM. At one time, following the strafing run of the "Spad" there were two C-7A's in the parking area. While I was marshaling the planes, watching the wing tip clearance, the right engine propeller of one of the planes struck an elderly man in the head. He had been sitting on a woven reed mat, blocked out of my line of sight by the right landing gear. I immediately contacted the Station

Chief and notified him of the accident, He, in turn, ordered the ambulance, that had been standing by all day, to remove the body. As I was apologizing for the death, he informed me that the victim had been an old soldier who had served in the Cambodian Army many years ago. He also told me that the victim was almost blind, profoundly deaf and probably would never have been able to climb aboard an airplane. His "c'est la vie" comments and demeanor did little to appease my feelings of remorse, but we had hundreds more people to evacuate and it was rapidly approaching late afternoon. It was a tragic accident and to my knowledge the only death or injury of the day.

As I recall, it was after 1700 hours when "Hilda" ordered me out on what was the last flight of the day. The "Tail Pipe" team was instructed to remain in position as the evacuation was planned to continue the next morning. As I boarded the aircraft and made my way forward to the flight deck I had to climb over what must have been at least 50 refugees. They were sitting two deep on the canvas seats and packed in elbow to elbow as they sat on the floor of the cargo compartment. Many of them tugged at my flight suit and speaking French, Cambodian and an occasional understandable "thank you" expressed their appreciation for aiding their escape from the insurgents

#### Postscript

It was in the very early morning hours of the following day when the "tail pipe" team notified "Hilda" that the airfield was under attack by insurgents and in imminent danger of being overrun. "Hilda" directed that a C-7A be sent from Pleiku to evacuate the team. An Aircraft Commander, Captain Palmer Arnold, and crew made a black-out landing to pick up the team. Due to the urgency and very minimum ground time they had been ordered to abandon the jeep and equipment trailer. The team did, however disable the equipment so as

to prevent the enemy from using it. I have recently been informed that Captain Arnold was awarded the Air Force Silver Star for the rescue of the "tail pipe" team. For my participation in this refugee evacuation, I was awarded The Bronze Star Medal by the United States Air Force. I can only surmise that the "tail pipe team" was appropriately decorated for their outstanding performance of duty. It was largely by their expertise and dedication that many hundreds of Cambodian refugees were rescued.

#### Postscript 2

If there was an "after action" report made for this Cambodian Refugee evacuation, I have no knowledge of its' author or current location. It was a common practice, by unit historians, to include such reports in their chronological history of the organization. These types of action reports were many times included or discussed in the "end of tour" reports compiled by the departing Wing Commanders. There is a possibility that a more comprehensive and perhaps revealing report of the "action" may be found in the Maxwell Air Force Base archives of the deactivated 483rd Tactical Airlift Wing.

*The following passage is borrowed from Ray Bower's Tactical Airlift, The United States Air Force in SouthEast Asia. It rather nicely adds to what Bob has told us in his report.*

"The 834th Air Division learned of the evacuation plan on June 22. Since neither Ba Kev nor Boung Long airfield had been used previously by 834th aircraft, survey teams flew in by C-7 before dusk that evening. Both strips were of laterite, and both were more than thirty-three hundred feet in length. Based on the surveys, the decision was made to attempt the evacuation using C-123s rather than Caribous to take advantage of the 123's greater passenger capacity and the reliability promised by their auxiliary jets. C-7s were left on standby. On the morning of the twenty-third, after several hours of delay caused

by rainfall and low visibility, C-7s lifted airlift mission commanders and combat control teams into the two evacuation points. Meanwhile three C-123s took off from home stations for the first pickups. The three landed and made safe departures, but it was clear that the rain-soaked laterite was too soft for further C-123 landings.

"Accordingly the effort became entirely a C-7 one, and by nightfall Caribou crews had withdrawn 542 refugees from the two points.

"Enemy fire prevented resumption of the airlift from Ba Kev the next morning, and the control team there was withdrawn by helicopter. The Boung Long evacuation continued, however, and by evening of the twenty-fourth another twenty-five hundred refugees had been lifted out to Pleiku. The communists nearly overran the camp during the night, and at dawn Capt. Palmer G. Arnold earned the Silver Star by flying out the last C-7 under small-arms fire. In all, the C-7s lifted out thirty-one hundred refugees in forty-five sorties, an average of sixty-nine passengers per load (twenty-four was the nominal maximum) without loss. In addition, Vietnamese Air Force C-47s and C-119s made landings at both Cambodian fields prior to the heavy rainfall. The garrison and the last two hundred civilians moved overland to Ba Kev by road on June 25 and by road and helicopter from Ba Kev to Duc Co. Most of the Cambodian troops, after reequipping and retraining, eventually returned to Cambodia."

Bob Blaylock, our historian, asks for other air or ground crews who participated in the operation to please get in touch with him. He would like to talk to anyone who has any knowledge that might add to this saga. Bob wants to develop this into an historical story.

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## KLOPPS FLOP

*The following story is taken from The Army Otter/Caribou Association Newsletter. I checked with Bruce Silvey to see if he thought it appropriate to run in our newsletter. He said go ahead. Ed*

Aircraft of the 61st Aviation Company were involved in two previous accidents in the same general sector, both involving sliding off the end of a slippery grass strip. (Remember, this was before the Caribou had reversible propellers.) The gear-up landing was to be accident number three.

The unfortunate Captain Klopp had a landing incident and damaged a Caribou nose gear. The A/C was left at the field. A maintenance crew was sent to this field to prepare it for ferry back to Vung Tau. The maintenance crew was actually working on the first A/C when Captain Klopp had his second unfortunate event at the same airfield.

The crew flying the Caribou on this fateful day, Captain Al Klopp and Captain Jake Keefer, had been involved in one of the earlier accidents. As I recall, Jake Keefer had been the pilot that day.

On the day of the gear-up accident, Al Klopp was pilot. The mission could not have been more stressful—this crew had an accident history, they were flying the C O M U S M A C V, G e n e r a l Harkins, AND they were going into a short grass strip that had been the scene of an earlier accident. Because of this, the crew elected to make a low pass over the strip to be absolutely sure that conditions were OK. They advised the crew chief that this was not a landing, but a low pass!

As they neared the strip, there was a great deal of radio traffic from people already on the ground and awaiting the arrival of General Harkins. There were some asking, "How many in the General's party? How long will they stay? Where will they go next? What does he want to see?" There were others, reportedly

including a helicopter pilot on the ground, saying "Come on in — the strip is in fine condition." And still another, urging the crew to hurry since the General was behind schedule. The crew completed the pre-landing checklist down to "landing gear," then noted "we'll hold the gear. This is a low pass."

The flight continued inbound, set up a landing pattern, and began the approach. The crew chief was comfortable that the gear was not needed since this approach was to end with a go-around. As luck would have it, however, the approach was perfect. The aircraft was stable, the strip was reported to be dry and firm, and there was pressure to get back on schedule. Somewhere on that glidepath the pilots made a mental estimate that a go-around wasn't needed. The conditions were fine, so "let's land."

Al Klopp made an excellent landing, and the stopping distance had never been shorter. Unfortunately, the Caribou was on its belly rather than on its wheels. General Harkins emerged, reportedly saying "That's a helluva way to get a Caribou stopped on a short field."

The aircrew was suspended from flying pending the outcome of a Flying Evaluation Board. In about thirty days, the Board was convened in Saigon to render judgment. Following an excellent defense by Paul Stansel (Operations Officer of the 1st Aviation Company) the two pilots were returned to full flying status. Paul cited the stressful situation, and the high volume of radio traffic that interfered with communications among the crewmembers, and showed that these ingredients could cause even the best pilots to err.

Some time later I shared an office with Al Klopp as we were on the same teaching team at the Command and General Staff College. He was a fine officer.



Hi Dave,

Well here's my story and I'm sticking to it. Most of it anyway. This is what an old aircraft mechanic can remember after 30 years. The airspeeds, altitudes and flight times might not be right on, as well as some of the numbers, but the story is close.

A lot of this is in note form so feel free to edit it as you see fit to make it more readable. Feel free to give me a call when questions come up.

Note – These aircraft were never test flown. The last time they were in the air was when the Vietnamese pilots flew them out of Saigon. We did a lot of run-ups and taxis but never a test hop before our GREAT ADVENTURE.

### Dave Kowalski's notes of his **GREAT ADVENTURE.**

In 1972 the Vietnamese Air Force was to take over a larger part of the war. Many of the C-7A Caribous were sent back to reserve units in the states. The 908<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Group at Maxwell AFB received eighteen of these aircraft.

**April 1975.** Vietnam falls to the Communists. Five C-7As are flown from Saigon, loaded with women, kids and whoever else they could get on, to Utao, Thailand. The crews couldn't get permission to land so they put the aircraft down in the grass between the runways. When the active duty Rapid Aircraft Teams found them – sunk in the mud, full of bullet holes – they used bulldozers to pull them out and take them to the wash racks.

Keep in mind that these C-7A's had been in Vietnam, flown by the Vietnamese from 1972 till 1975. They had no U.S. markings on them (Stars, USAF, Tail numbers, etc) and there weren't any 781 Aircraft Forms. No one knew when the last inspection was performed or even how many hours were on the engines or airframes.

(Note) These were the aircraft that

we would fly for 13,000 miles, 95 plus flying hours. Thinking back now, it was almost a suicide mission. (Why? Guess what happened to these aircraft.) The U.S. said we wanted the aircraft back because they were ours. The Communists said the South Vietnamese stole them because the Communists were in charge of the country when the aircraft took off from Saigon. Uncle Sam was determined to get the C-7A's back at all costs. (Why?)

During our daily intelligence briefings at Utapao the CIA guy said the Communist were ready to shoot us down if we tried to fly them out of Thailand. A plan was devised where F 4s would be on alert in Thailand until we got out of Mig range of South Vietnam. When we finally departed Thailand we had to call for air cover off the coast of Cambodia when we got threatening radio messages and could see the Migs high overhead. We were flying at 500 feet and when the F 4s showed up they said we were almost impossible to spot even though they knew about where we were. Keep in mind that all of this was happening during the same time frame as the Myguez Incident.

### **FIRST LEG**

**2 July 1975.** Six pilots, three flight mechanics, and two maintenance guys and me, as Maintenance Chief, were at Danley Field in Montgomery, Alabama to catch a flight to Travis AFB, California. We carried everything we would need to bring the C-7A's back to the U.S. – tool boxes, survival gear, parachutes, cold weather gear, mobility bags, aircraft forms, and five bicycle pumps that we had bought from Sears. We got some real strange looks at the airport especially when we carried the parachutes on board. We flew in a DC-10 from Montgomery to San Francisco. Flying in our military flight suits on a civilian aircraft generated a lot of questions from the civilian flight crews as well as the passengers. We

couldn't tell them anything, we didn't know much ourselves. Had a big time in Frisco that night before continuing on to Travis AFB the next day.

We had trouble getting a flight out of Travis. Our mission commander gave the local operations phone number to the Pentagon. After the local operations people talked with the Pentagon we got on a C-141 that afternoon. We didn't have any trouble from then on making connections at Hickam, Clark AFB Philippine Island, and then on to Thailand.

### **SECOND LEG**

#### **5 July 1975**

When we arrived at Utapao, Thailand we found that the RAM team had installed three 500-gallon fuel bladder tanks in each aircraft. Now the gross max weight of a C-7A was 28,500 pounds. With fuel, oil, and equipment installed it went off the slip stick at over 35,000 pounds! We called deHaviland (manufacturer of the C-7) for advice. They said it was possible to take off with that much weight if the runway was long enough, but we couldn't land until the fuel was burnt down to 28,500 pounds. The mission commander said OK since this was a high priority mission. (Why?)

The aircraft had no de-icing equipment installed. The people at Scott AFB said we would take the airplanes back by the northern route through Alaska. The de-icing pumps used to inflate the de-icing boots on the leading edges of the wings were inoperative long ago – who needs de-icing equipment in Vietnam? Those same de-icing pumps were designed to pressurize the ferry fuel bladder tanks. So, with them inoperable, we had to install an electric air pump in the cargo compartment to maintain 5 p.s.i. in the tanks to insure a positive flow of fuel when transferring fuel to the main wing tanks. The cargo compartment was all wires, tubes, hoses and fuel bladders. This is the first time the C-7A had three bladder

tanks installed; normally there are only two. The bicycle pumps we brought with us from Montgomery were the back up system to maintain the 5 p.s.i. if the electric pumps failed.

There were no U.S. markings on the aircraft. One of our pilots was a house painter so he took it upon himself to get some O.D. paint and paint over any Vietnamese markings, and some black paint to at least paint on some tail numbers so we could identify ourselves. The paint ran on the tail numbers, and looked even worse when he tried to paint USAF on the wings. (We were told how awful they looked by several irate base commanders when we got to the states. We were always parked where no one could see us.)

It was now time to start our trip home. We sorted ourselves into crews – we had five aircraft to take back. We made three crews from the 908th Tactical Airlift Group, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, two crews from the 94<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Wing, Dobbins AFB, Georgia. Our aircraft number was 639. I can't remember the others.

**9 July.** Our first stop was Clark AB, in the Philippine Islands. Some incidental facts on this leg:

A. Twelve and a half-hour flight from Utapao, Thailand to Clark AB.

B. Max speeds 110 knots, max altitude 2000 feet.

C. During this leg is where we were threatened to be shot down.

D. Got lost in thunderstorms off the Philippine islands. Duck Butt (C-130) had to bail us out and vector us into Clark AB.

E. Landed low on oil. The low oil level light never did come on.

F. Number one engine used 17 gallons of oil. Tank holds 22.2 gallons.

G. Customs made us off load entire aircraft. They searched everything – their dog found a clip of M-16 rounds under the pilot's seat.

H. Replaced three cylinders on the

See **Adventure** on page 20

**Adventure** from page 19

left engine to try to cut down on oil consumption.

I. They really had good beer in the Philippines.

**15 July.** Our second stop was Anderson AB, Guam.

A. The whole base was full of B-52s.

B. We had to change the nose tire. There were no jacks available so we used a 12 foot 4 x 4 and a block, and with four guys on the end of the 4 x 4 we got the nose off the ground.

C. The end of the runway dropped straight down to the ocean about 300 feet below. We were still taking off at 35,000 pounds gross. Everyone was hoping and praying that we didn't lose an engine on takeoff.

D. We had to leave one aircraft at Guam – it had a bad fuel leak in the wing tank. The crew of that Bou was from the 94<sup>th</sup> TAW at Dobbins AFB. They left the aircraft and caught hops back to Georgia. Never did hear what happened to the aircraft. Might still be sitting at Anderson AFB in Guam.

E. We couldn't go to Wake Island because Vietnamese boat people were there.

**19 July.** Third stop was at Kwajaleen Atoll.

A. Beautiful scenery along entire route, flying at about 1000 feet. Hundreds of Atolls, water was all shades of blue. Beautiful!

B. Flew with cargo door open to suck out the fuel fumes.

C. Threw wine bottles out of back door with notes and our address back in the states. About two years later a girl from New Guinea wrote and said she found a bottle on the beach.

D. Changed a magneto on the left engine.

E. Went skin diving. Water was beautiful – clear as a bell.

F. Called my wife, Chris, and found out we were going to have a baby!

**24 July.** Fourth stop was at Midway Island.

A. Slept in old navy aircraft hangar.

B. Crossed International Date Line.

C. There was a huge statue of a Gooney Bird. Midway is a bird sanctuary. When we ran up the aircraft engines the Gooney Birds would get in the prop wash and try to take off. It worked good for them until we went to power (2800 rpm). That killed several of the birds. We thought we were going to jail, and probably would have if the mission commander hadn't used priority mission status on the Navy Commander.

D. Worked hard on the engines. There was no place to stop between Midway and Adak in the Aleutian Islands.

**28 July 1975.** Fifth stop was at Adak.

A. About five hours out of Midway we developed high oil temp and low oil pressure on the left engine. We alerted Duck Butt – the para jumpers got all excited, but we landed at Adak OK and found that the oil temperature regulator was bad.

B. We landed with very strong (out of limits) crosswinds. I remember looking out the cargo compartment window just before touch down and I could see to the far end of the runway. Roughest and scariest landing I ever made in a C-7A.

C. This is in the last days of July. The wind was blowing about 50 knots and the temperature was 30 degrees with snow. A far cry from a few weeks ago in Thailand – 90 degrees plus.

D. Found out all of the cold weather gear in the mobility bags was either size small or extra large. And most boots and gloves were all for the right feet and right hands.

E. We landed on Sunday and there was no one in Base Operations. We were tired and hungry and we all layed down on the floor to rest. The base commander showed up about three hours after we landed, ranting

and raving about why no one told him we were coming. No one stood at attentions when he walked in and that made things worse yet. None of us had a hair cut in over three weeks and we looked a little scruffy. He wanted to know who was in charge.

Our mission commander, Lt. Col C.B., had got a hermit crab at Kwajaleen Atoll that he kept in his flight suit pocket. The crab died at Adak and Lt. Col C.B. was giving it its last rites on the counter in base ops. We told the Navy Commander this and he couldn't take it any more and he called the Shore Patrol who got us some chow and escorted us, and restricted us, to the barracks. The next day it all got sorted out after a trip to the base barber shop. He still wanted us off of his base ASAP. We fixed the airplane, refueled, and were gone in three days.

A word about our Mission Commander. Lt. Col C.B. was one of a kind. Just a few examples:

- On certain missions he would wear three watches on one arm and one on the other. I forget now the rationale.

- He would tell stories of how the trees made the wind blow.

- One early Sunday morning we were flying over Texas. The sun had just come up and it was a beautiful day for flying. The engines were running great, sounded good and never missed a beat. Lt. Col C.B started to give us a long dissertation on what was happening inside the engines; how the pistons were going up and down; how the planetary and sun gears were making the prop turn; how the pushrods were making the valves open and close; how the carburetor was delivering fuel to the impeller; ect. On and on it went for well over fifteen minutes. I think he was somewhere between the magnetos and the spark plugs when number two engine started backfiring and caught fire. I guess she just couldn't take how good

**Continued** on next page

Lt. Col. C.B. said she was running. Ha! Anyway, Lt.Col C.B. tells the copilot to look out the window and make sure the fire is out after shut down and firing the fire bottle. The copilot, a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt , opens the window, sticks his head out but forgets to take his head set off. It was blown off his head and into the engine. After an emergency landing at Lackland AFB, Texas the fire chief was looking at the engine and was curious about how the head set got slammed between the cylinders. I don't think he ever got a straight answer on that. Never a dull moment with Lt. Col C.B. around. And yes, he did give his crab last rites at Adak.

After Adak we headed for Elmendorf AFB in Anchorage, Alaska. One aircraft had to make an emergency landing at Nikolski on Umnak Island. We were getting light icing conditions and his carburetor door would not come out of the "hot" position. The rest of us continued on.

A. We soon got into severe icing conditions with clear ice at 1500 feet. Our pilot elected not to go up or down to try to get out of the icing because we didn't know where the other aircraft were. We started to lose altitude, so we sent out an SOS emergency call. We all got on our poopy suits – I flew the airplane while our pilot got out of the seat to get his on. We started losing airspeed. Pitot tube deicing didn't work and the tubes looked like they had soft balls on the ends. We broke out of the clouds at about 500 feet. Went on down to about 250 feet. There were high mountains on the left side and big waves with whitecaps below.

B. After we broke out the ice started to come off and we could maintain altitude. When the ice started breaking off the props it sounded like someone was beating on the fuselage with a sledgehammer.

C. We made an emergency landing at King Salmon.

**30 July.** King Salmon, on the

Alaskan Peninsula was our sixth stop.

A. We pulled a good inspection of the aircraft and found no damage. We all got drunk that night.

B. The other aircraft didn't ice up as bad as we did. We were in the middle, the top aircraft climbed and got out of it and the bottom aircraft descended and got out of it. We stayed put to prevent a mid air collision. The other aircraft continued on to Anchorage.

C. It was still cold. We all looked funny with our different size cold weather gear on.

Elmendorf AFB, Anchorage, Alaska was our seventh stop. It was a short flight from King Salmon to Elmendorf.

A. As soon as we cleared the runway at Elmendorf, we picked up an escort of several air police and other vehicles. We were led to a remote part of the base for customs and interrogation.

B. One of the aircraft that had landed the night before (a Dobbins crew) ran afoul of customs. They found twenty Thailand wallets that the flight mechanic had hidden overhead and not declared on the custom form. The crew also had given the custom guys a hard time – **BAD THING TO DO!**

C. The custom guys went over our aircraft with a fine tooth comb, but found nothing. After their inspection (eight hours sitting on the ramp) they took us to a room in a hanger to interrogate us one by one. Our flight mechanic said something wrong about a dress he had bought for his wife and customs confiscated everything he had. He never did get it all back.

D. Had a big bash at the "O" club, all the king crab we could eat. We all got drunk and left the next morning for McCord AFB in Tacoma, Washington.

E. The windshield on one aircraft cracked after takeoff and he returned to base. That crew was from the

94TAC and there was a maintenance guy on board, so a windshield was shipped up and he replaced it. The airplane made it to Dothan, but was a few days late behind us.

F. We flew along the coast at about 5000 feet. The glaciers were beautiful. But this was a very cold part of the trip. We rapped up in blankets to try and keep warm. The wooded islands off British Columbia were breathtaking.

**2 August.** McCord AFB, Washington, our eighth stop. This was a routine stop, however, I did meet an old buddy that I went to airframe and power plant school with.

**3 August.** McClellan AFB, California, our ninth stop. Right back where we started from.

**4 August.** Our tenth stop is at Davis Monthan AFB in Arizona. All routine.

**5 August.** Bergstrom AFB in Texas became our eleventh stop. Met another old buddy, Teddy Slaton, who I was stationed with in Vietnam and also at Homestead AFB, Florida. We spent the night telling war stories.

**6 August.** We made our twelfth stop at Dothan, Alabama on August 4, 1975.

A. The 908<sup>th</sup> sent a C-7A from Maxwell to pick us up. No one talked much on the way home.

B. A private contractor at Dothan Hays International, was supposed to rehab the aircraft and then send them back to our units in operational condition. We would incorporate them in with our eighteen other mission aircraft.

**Stop thirteen.** Home! Maxwell AFB, Alabama

**February 1976.** The rest of the story. Our commander got a call from the contractor who said the aircraft were in such bad shape that it would not be cost effective to put them back in operational status. After we flew 13,000 miles in them and risked our lives they were going back to the

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bone yard at Davis-Monthan AFB. A week later the same crews that flew them across the 4-engine ocean picked them up at Dothan and dropped them off at Davis-Monthan.

After thought. If we had been shot down or crashed somewhere, what would the Department of Defense say? I bet it wouldn't be the whole truth. It was a great adventure back then no matter what the risks. But looking back at it all, I wonder. . . ?



## Break Failure...Snow Blindness...Or What?

It was August 1967 when we got word on the 536<sup>th</sup> flight line that one of our birds was down and broke in the middle of the Michelin Rubber Plantation near Tay Ninh City in war zone "D" where, we were told there was a hot war going in.

The story was the crew, while taxiing and making a swinging right turn in a somewhat congested jungle airstrip and amid a cloud of dust and dirt, struck a large rubber tree damaging the left wing just outboard of the landing light.

Thoughtfully...I visualized that hitting a "rubber" tree couldn't do a whole heck of a lot of serious damage to the airplane. Maybe just a pimped dent to the leading edge. No Biggie!

I grubbed me a tin bender from the sheet metal shop and we jumped aboard a waiting caribou and headed up country for another routine recovery.

Boy! Did I ever luck out on this one. We arrived at Tay Ninh, touched down and taxied off the landing strip over to our wounded bird. It looked like bad news to me. The left wing was literally wrapped around the trunk of a 70-foot high palm-like rubber tree. The aircraft had struck the tree trunk and buried it all the way into the main spar. (Good Job!!) For-

tunately the damage was centered mainly in the area between the wing ribs. As we approached the aircraft from the rear it looked like the tree had grown up through the wing.

Someone had shinned up the tree (or they had sent their monkey up) and attached a two inch thick rope about 25 feet above the ground with the other end tied to the rear axle of a ten ton army dump truck. The army troops had pulled and arched the tree over in an attempt to free the airplane, but their efforts only resulted in dragging the Caribou along with the tree.

I asked an army grunt who was in charge of the camp. He directed me back a jungle trail to a 12-man tent where I found an overweight Sgt 1<sup>st</sup> who was busy eating junk food and watching Armed Forces TV from Saigon. He told me he had done all he could do to free the airplane from the tree and warned me that the VC owned the other side and south end of the 1500 foot runway (PSP) and that; "You guys better get that airplane out of here before night fall or the army won't be responsible for you or your airplane."

About that time I heard the roar of Caribou engines as the crew who brought us in was making their take-off run and high climb-out heading for home. All of a sudden the situation got a little lonesome in the Michelin Rubber Plantation for us five Air Force weenies who were left there pretty much to our own devices.

Now it was not "if" we can get it freed from the tree and get the wing repaired; it was "Hey Sarge! How soon will this bird be ready to fly?" And I don't need to name the individual who put that question to me but I will say I had a couple of your Caribou pilots who were getting pretty nervous. The flight Mechanic? He was back up the trail watching TV with that big hairy Army Sgt 1<sup>st</sup>.

The drama goes on. As we were standing there consulting with each other (two young officers and two

"older" NCO's) an army weapons carrier roars up and this army corporal hands me a large and cumbersome Macalluch chain saw with a 40 inch blade and a leaking fuel tank yelling: "This baby will take out that tree like you're cutting through butter." Well...what the heck – we may as well give it a try. So, while the army again pulled the tree and arched it over with their ten-ton truck, shaking and jerking the old Bou mercilessly (seemed worse that it really was) I began my cut through the "butter." The old chain saw blade had cut about a quarter of the way through the tree trunk when the rope broke, the tree snapped back up-right, the Caribou shook and shuttered and quivered (looked worse that it was) and that chain saw blade probably remains locked in that rubber tree to this day.

The tale goes on. My tin bender and I again talked over the situation. It came to us at the same moment. How much more damage would we cause if we attempted to back the airplane away from the tree instead of trying to pull the tree away from the airplane? We both agreed we would never know unless we tried it.

Assigning my tin bender as fireguard I fired up the number one engine (for any novices reading this tale that would be the left engine) after he assured me of clearance to the rear, and with the engine in idle I reversed the prop pitch and slowly brought up the power. At 2000 rpm the aircraft shook and rattled and vibrated but would not move back and away from the tree. At this time I was certain I was doing serious damage to the airplane (it looked, sounded and felt worse that it really was) so I eased off the power and brought the throttle back to idle. SSgt Johnny Harris, my tin bending fire guard already realized what I had in mind, moved over to the number two engine as I fired it up to idle, reversed the prop and very slowly and deliberately

brought up the power on both engines to 1500 rpm. Nothing happened at that point. Just as I began to push the throttles up a little more the aircraft shook itself loose from the tree and all I can recall is jerking the throttles back and tapping the brakes lightly. I felt the tail sink behind me as the nose raised a little and then settled back to the ground rather gently. Free at last, free at last. Johnny Harris later told me it looked like a large fly pulling itself away from a flytrap strip.

By this time the hole in the leading edge of the wing had taken on a different nature. There were tears and rips and shreds of metal giving the appearance of a bomb having exploded inside the wing. Looked real ugly. The hole was larger than a 25-gallon lard can lid.

But I indeed did luck out on this one! When I grabbed a tin bender back at Vung Tau I'll tell you I grabbed the very best. John Harris was a marvelous fabricator! As far as I am concerned John saved that airplane from getting mortared or shot up had we not got it fixed and out of there on time. Using the ten ton truck bed as a maintenance stand and with me assisting (actually trying to stay out of John's way) he trimmed all the damage away and applied a perfectly hand molded patch with a hand-squeeze pop-rivet gun.

We had stripped off our jungle fatigue tops because of the 108-degree heat in direct sunlight. As we were finishing up and admiring John's good work and while still up on the truck bed this army jeep comes skidding up to a stop, and of all people it's the old ugly army Sgt 1<sup>st</sup> (five stripes) yelling at us to get our shirts back on. He went on to explain he had just come from across the runway and Harris and I, in white tee shirts, were perfect targets for the VC gunners over there. We had been working up there for over three hours. He laughed as he told us we had definitely dodged a VC bullet this time.

## Caribou Hats and Shirts For Sale at The Caribou Store

The following merchandise is now in stock at the Caribou Merchandise store. All Hats and Shirts have the C-7A Caribou Logo Embroidery

- Caribou Ball Caps, White or Denim \$ 15.00.
- Polo Shirts. Colors: White, Light Blue, Gray, Red, and Yellow, Sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL \$20.00.
- Denim Short Sleeve Button Down Shirt with Pocket, Sizes: M, L, XL, 2XL \$25.00.
- Three View Tee Shirts, Sizes: M, L, XL, 2XL \$15.00.
- Colored Tee Shirt, Sizes: M, L, XL, 2XL \$15.00.
- Sweat Shirt Gray 8oz. Sizes M, L, XL, 2XL \$25.00.
- Unit Replica Patches 457<sup>th</sup>, 458<sup>th</sup>, 459<sup>th</sup>, 535<sup>th</sup>, 536<sup>th</sup>, 537<sup>th</sup> 483<sup>rd</sup> \$5.00.
- DVD. Doc Kugler's: "A Day In The life of a Caribou Pilot" \$10.00.



### C-7A Caribou Association Order Form

(Postage and Handling Included)

Qty	Item	Size	Color	Price	Amount
_____	Ball Cap	_____	_____	\$15.00	_____
_____	Polo Shirt	_____	_____	\$20.00	_____
_____	Denim shirt	_____	_____	\$25.00	_____
_____	Three View T Shirt	_____	White	\$15.00	_____
_____	Colored T Shirts	_____	_____	\$15.00	_____
_____	Sweat Shirt 8oz.	_____	Gray	\$25.00	_____
_____	Squadron Patches	Squadron_____	_____	\$5.00	_____
_____	DVD	_____	_____	\$10.00	_____
				<b>TOTAL</b>	_____

Make Check payable to C-7A Caribou Association

Mail to: Caribou Store

Attn: Bob Markham

838 Chestnut Ave.

Redlands CA 92373

For more information please call

(909) 792-0848

[markhambob@juno.com](mailto:markhambob@juno.com)

## Official Policy on Collecting Caribou Tax (Dues)

*Jim Collier: Treasurer, Roster Chairman*

At the 2001 Las Vegas Reunion the membership voted to discontinue sending News Letters to lapsed members. We also voted not to collect past dues, so any contribution you care to remit will be placed toward 2005 and forward. The Caribou Tax is \$10 a year, multiple years gladly accepted, and may be sent and payable to "C-7A Caribou Association" at: Jim Collier, 5607 Jolly Court, Fair Oaks, CA 95628-2707. For a mere \$10.00 "Caribou Tax" per year you are entitled to claim membership, attend reunions and receive the newsletter.

Thanks a lot Sarge!

Our young pilots loved the repair, bought the airplane and we departed the jungle airstrip just before sunset

– fast and low with just enough runway left to get us over the trees and on home.

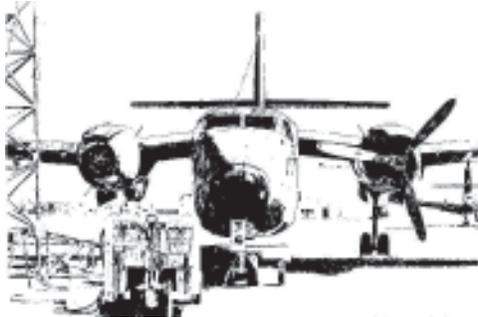
*Bob Bowers [536, 66]*

The following message was left on our web site by Andrew P. "Buzz" Wrobel

**Just Looking Back.**

I was stationed at Cam Rhan 69/70 with the 12th TFW Engineers. I have since gotten old and tonight was bringing back memories of my time in S.E. Asia. Coming to the web site brought back old memories for me and especially of a TDY flight I took with you guys on a bou while dropping off a generator and other power production equipment in country.

What a ride, quite an aircraft and some of the best bush pilots in the world in the front seats. They could make that plane almost walk on the ground. I recall most the take off and



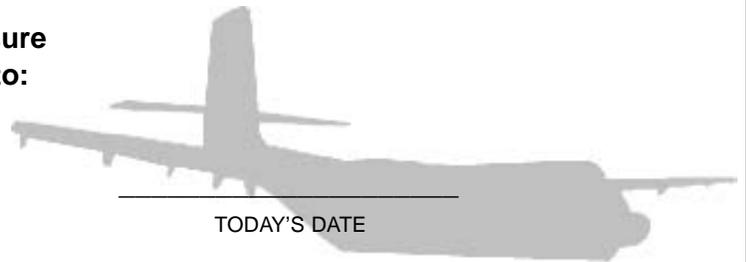
pullout to altitude and how nifty this little machine flew. My thoughts are with the guys who flew them heroically and with those who never came back. My prayers are always with you guys, especially those in the 483rd. I have since retired after 28 years as a Police Officer in North Eastern Pennsylvania, but the memories of the flight line, takeoffs and landings of the C-7A's are with me as if it was yesterday. God Bless You All.

Andrew P. "Buzz" Wrobel

**VITAL STATISTICS:** July 2005

Check your vital statistics and mail label to insure that the information is correct. Send changes to:

C-7A Caribou Association  
 Attn: Jim Collier  
 5607 Jolly Ct.  
 Fair Oaks, CA 95628-2707



TAX YEAR	SQUADRON	ARRIVAL YR.	RANK	AREA CODE	TELEPHONE
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STREET ADDRESS					
CITY	STATE	ZIP CODE PLUS 4	E-MAIL ADDRESS		

July 2005



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