

# C-7A Caribou Association

Volume 28, Issue 2

## 1967 USAF Proves What Caribou Can Do

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In 1967, U.S. forces in Vietnam were increasing in numbers and the tempo of combat operations was constant and demanding. The Air Force had a new transport aircraft, the C-7A Caribou, and user organizations that needed and expected support, often in hazardous and hostile conditions. The Air Force “soon realized that this short haul operation did not match the complexity of most Air Force airlift operations – a very large number of sorties per day with a small cargo load per sortie. Many wondered more and more whether the Air Force way would work or if it needed some changes to make it mesh with this type of mission...A subtle question resided in the minds of Air Force and Army personnel, ‘Could the Air Force do the job?’ (*Caribou Airlines, Vol. I.*)”

The Air Force had a couple of advantages. First was the C-7A aircraft itself. USAF fighter aircraft used in Vietnam were primarily supersonic fighters designed for high speed, high altitude air-to-air combat or to deliver nuclear weapons. They were not designed for air-to-ground operations and close air support in the mountains, jungles, and rice paddies of Southeast Asia. The C-7A was distinctly different because it had been designed specifically for the mission it performed in Vietnam – short haul airlift to short, unimproved airfields in forward areas.

The Air Force's other advantage was its personnel. At all levels and in all areas of command, flight operations, maintenance, supply, and administration, dedicated USAF personnel of all ranks found ways to “make it work,” solve problems, and overcome obstacles everyday. The mission was the priority.

“Lt. Col. Charles Smith, 537<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron Commander, answered (the doubters) in his ‘The Bou Can Do’ article in the first *Caribou Courier*, 12 April 1967. He wrote, ‘Is there still doubt that the Air Force crews flying (the) C-7A Caribou can effectively and efficiently support the Army in Vietnam? I think the statistics over the first three months of operation speak for themselves. Yes, they can. This has been accomplished while possessing fewer airframes than the Army during the same period a year ago.’ (*Caribou Airlines, Vol. I.*)”

By the end of 1967, the USAF had clearly established what the Bou could do.



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

### Elected Officers and Board Members...

Chairman of Board/Member at Large - Peter Bird [535, 71]  
President/Board Member - Pat Hanavan [535, 68]  
Vice President/Board Member - John Tawes [537, 69]  
Treasurer/Board Member - Jess Cogley [535, 68]  
Secretary/Board Member - Al Cunliffe [458, 68]  
Board Member at Large - Doug Boston [458, 68]  
Board Member at Large - Ed Breslin [537, 67]

### Appointed Positions

Bereavement Chairman - Jay Baker [535, 66]  
Chaplain - Jon Drury [537, 68]  
Historian - Pat Hanavan [535,68]  
Newsletter Editor - Ron Lester [459, 67]  
Newsletter Editor Emeritus - Pat Hanavan [535,68]  
Newsletter Editor Emeritus - Dave Hutchens [459, 69]  
Reunion 2018 Planners - John and Fran Tawes [537, 69]  
Doug and Ellen Boston [458, 68]  
Webmaster - Peter Bird [535, 71]  
President Emeritus - Nick Evanish [457, 66]  
Chaplains Emeritus - Bob Davis [457, 69]  
Sonny Spurger [537, 68]

### Squadron Representatives...

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Send change of address, phone number, or e-mail address to:

Pat Hanavan  
12402 Winding Branch  
San Antonio, TX 78230-2770  
pathanavan@aol.com  
210-479-0226 (home), 210-861-9353 (cell)

\$10.00 dues are payable each January.

Write your check to **C-7A Caribou Association**  
(not Jess Cogley) and send it to:

Jess Cogley  
244 Mecca Dr  
San Antonio, TX 78232-2209  
jesscogley@att.net Phone: 210-494-7437

## Chairman of the Board's Corner

It is fall again and another successful reunion is in the books. The reunion photos have been posted on the web site. For those of us who live north of 42 degrees N, winter is bearing down and preparations are well under way. For those of you affected by hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria, and Nate, we wish you all the best in recovering.



In case you have not looked recently, we created a new challenge coin to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of USAF Caribou operations in Vietnam. You will find that posted on the web site also. The new coin is larger in diameter and it really came out nice; so nice that I ordered ten of them! Get them while they are hot!

We are still in the search for a professional artist to paint a suitable picture of the Caribou for the Air Force Art Collection (no, of course they don't have one). Just as we did for the aircraft model, we are apparently going to have to force the Pentagon not to forget that our Caribou was a proud war bird from a war long ago. We are thinking that the most appropriate image is that of a Caribou on short final in a STOL approach to a forward field, but we welcome any other thoughts you may have. We would also welcome any photos you may have to guide an artist in creating the painting.

Once again, we are still looking for USAF T.O. 1C-7A-2. If anyone has one or can get your hands on one, we would sure like to digitize it and add it to our collection. The other thing missing from our collection is an 834<sup>th</sup> Air Division patch. We really could use a good scan of *Hilda's* patch!

The planning for next year's reunion is well under way and it will be back in Dayton. The National Museum of the USAF (NMUSAF) has added another entire hangar of displays, including the Presidential aircraft, the X-planes, and my beloved C-141. For those of you who got the tour of the restoration hangar last time, the B-17 *Memphis Belle* is finally finished after nearly ten years of work and will be on display in the WW II Gallery. I think the NMUSAF is about the best museum of Air Force aircraft in existence. If you have not seen it, you really should. I can guarantee that standing in the Vietnam Gallery will transport you back 40 to 50 years in an instant. If nothing else, Dayton will not be as hot as Tucson was! Watch the web site for information as it becomes available.

We hope everyone has a wonderful time with family and friends through the coming holidays and be ready to make that reservation in Dayton as soon as the information is posted.

**Reunion 2018** will be in **Dayton, OH** from **5-9 September** at the Marriott at the University of Dayton, 1414 South Patterson Boulevard, Dayton, OH, 45409.

It is not too early to start planning to attend.

## Minutes of 2017 Business Meeting

Al Cunliffe, Secretary, announced at 10:07 AM that a quorum, 78 members, was present.

Pat Hanavan, President, called the meeting to order at 10:08 AM.

Pledge of Allegiance was led by Pat Hanavan.

Invocation was given by Jon Drury.

A motion to adopt the agenda as published was made by Stoney Faubus, seconded by Pat Howe, and carried unanimously.

A motion to accept the minutes of the 2016 business meeting as published on the Association Website and included in the registration packet was made by Marty Hillman. The motion was seconded by Mark Erickson and passed unanimously.

### Officer and Committee Reports:

#### Secretary Report: Al Cunliffe:

The secretary presented a report on the motions considered and passed by the Board of Directors for the previous year.

20170302: Title: Marriot Dayton Contract for 2018

20170303: Title: Appointment of Newsletter Editor

20170314: Title: 2017 Audit Committee

20170508: Title: Appointment of Nominating Committee.

20170605: Title: 2017 Reunion Budget.

20170718: Title: Vietnam Anniversary Challenge Coin.

#### Bereavement Committee Report:

Jay Baker was unable to attend, so Pat Hanavan provided a report of the previous year's activities, which consisted primarily of providing a letter of condolence or suitable condolence card to the deceased's family, and an offer for the widow to become an Honorary Associate Member of the C-7A Caribou Association if they so desired.

#### Audit Committee Report:

Pat Hanavan provided a review of the audit committee's finding. No significant findings were reported.

*Treasurer's Report:* Our Treasurer, Jess Cogley, was unable to attend, Pat Hanavan provided a summary of the Association's financial status which was also included in the registration packet given to each attendee.

*Report on the Roster:* Pat Hanavan provided an update of current membership; we have 789 active members, 269 inactive members, 10 Honorary Lifetime Members, 47 Honorary Associate Members and 7 Friends of the Association. There are approximately 7400 names listed on the roster, of these 965 are deceased.

*Reunion Committee Report:* Doug Boston.

Doug Boston was recognized for his hard work in coordinating the 2017 reunion, especially the significant effort required to coordinate our visits to AMARG with the Pima Air and Space Museum and the Davis-Monthan AFB Security Forces.

#### Nominating Committee:

Ron Lester, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, reported on the work of the Nominating Committee to the Board of Directors. Their report presented the following names for positions on the Board of Directors:

President: Pat Hanavan

Vice President: John Tawes

Treasurer: Jess Cogley

Secretary: Al Cunliffe

At-Large/Webmaster: Peter Bird

At-Large Members: Doug Boston  
Ed Breslin

#### Old Business:

A possible 41<sup>st</sup> casualty is being investigated.

*Caribou Airlines, Vol. V* is now available.

Reunion 2018 will be in Dayton, Ohio, at the Marriott at the University of Dayton, 1414 South Patterson Boulevard, Dayton, OH, 45409.

The Chair provided a summary of ongoing research projects, request for pictures of the people who were KIA to be provided to the National Park Service for inclusion in a presentation being prepared for the WALL.

The status of the ongoing search for an artist to paint an aviation art picture of the Caribou for presentation to the Air Force Art Collection was discussed at length. The Association is still researching to find an artist and how to present the completed artwork to the Air Force Art Collection.

#### New Business:

A motion was made by T.J. Haikel and seconded by Stoney Faubus to increase the Association subsidy to our reunions to \$3,000 from \$2,000. Motion carried unanimously.

*Election of Officers:* A call for open floor nominations was made to the members. No nominations were received from the floor.

Stoney Faubus moved the slate of officers presented by the Nominating Committee be elected by acclamation, Pat Howe seconded. Motion passed by acclamation.

*Free Room Nights:* Drawings for free room nights were made. They were won by: Dave Larson, Doug Lewis, Wayne DeLawter, Russ Finlayson, Tom Collins, Mike Lavelle, Larry Hartwig, and Paul Holman.

Bruce Cowee discussed his books *From Vietnam to Western Airlines, Vols. 1 and 2* and the importance of individuals recording their experiences. The books are available from Bruce Cowee at \$40.00 each, plus shipping.

Chair entertained a motion to adjourn. Doug Boston moved for adjournment, Keith Ryland seconded. Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:10.

Respectfully submitted

Hillis "Al" Cunliffe

Secretary

C-7A Caribou Association

## 2017 Reunion Attendance by Name

Don Asbury  
 Dick Baird  
 \*John Bell  
 Tim and Grizelda Black  
 Doug Boston  
 Paul and Terry Bowen  
 Wayne and Joyce Brunz  
 Allen Cathell  
 Randall Catlin  
 Tom and Chantell Collins  
 Bruce Cowee  
 Al and Shirley Cunliffe  
 Rick and Dee Davis  
 Wayne and Patty DeLawter  
 Jon and Bev Drury  
 Bob and Pat Dugan  
 Roy and Burma Dunn  
 Steve and Sue Elsasser  
 George and Kim Embrey  
 Jerry and Jane Engles  
 Mark Erickson  
 Stoney and Melva Faubus  
 Gary Faubus, Jr.  
 \*Russ Finlinson  
 Gary and Sharon Fox  
 \*Jack Froelich  
 Jim Furlong  
 Larry and Tricia Garrison and guests  
 Laura Garrison, Ron and Elizabeth  
 Sassano, Dimitry Karsos, Brookelyn  
 Ziegler, and Lori Hiller  
 Hal and Angie Gayer  
 Bruce Gerrity and guest Virginia  
 Gerrity  
 Al Ghizzoni and guest Lorraine  
 Estelle  
 Frank Godek and guest Ellie Mathews  
 \*"Gute" and Janelle Gutierrez  
 T.J. Hainkel  
 Pat Hanavan and guest Carl Maggio  
 George Harmon  
 Chuck Harris  
 Wyatt and Annelle Heard  
 Rick and Debbie Hedrick  
 Marty Hillman and guest Margie  
 Wright  
 Herb and Lillian Holdener  
 \*Wayne and Deonna Hollrah  
 Paul and Pam Holman

Pat Howe  
 Larry and Judy Jackson  
 Bob and Gail Kopp  
 Dave and Chris Kowalski  
 Dave and Debbie Larson  
 Mike Lavelle  
 Eugene Lehmann  
 Ron Lester  
 Doug Lewis  
 \*Larry and Mary Lundin  
 Larry Martwig  
 Ken Mascaro  
 Phil and Lynn Molohosky  
 Bob and Iola Neumayer  
 \*Jay and Ellen Norton  
 Dave and Aggie O'Meara  
 Rick and Antoinette Patterson  
 \*Larry Pennington  
 John and Susan Pfanner  
 Pat and Barbara Phillips  
 Andy Quillope  
 John and Pam Record  
 Jan Reifenberg  
 \*"Marty" and Anna Reza  
 Bill and Marinee Ricks  
 Mary Beth Riedner  
 Mike Riess  
 Russell Riggelman  
 Earl Reynolds  
 Keith Ryland and guests Todd and  
 Nancy Mohs, and Steven and  
 Branne Fleming  
 Doug and Theresa Schoenhals  
 Ron and Nancy Seymour  
 Alan and Karen Shanahan  
 Lew and Evie Shedd  
 Johnnie and Sharon Skinner  
 Tom and Kathy Snodgrass  
 Link and Jean Spann  
 Bob Strang  
 Larry Stuppy  
 Ray Tanner  
 John Tawes  
 Curry Taylor  
 Don and Daphne Terrill  
 Billy and Carol Tidmore  
 Staton and Debbie Tompkins  
 Charlie Tost  
 Gam and Kathy Tran  
 John and Jan Tupper  
 Gary and Bernie Underwood  
 and guest Roger and Amy Ford  
 John Vickery

Bob and Ginny Waldron  
 \*Wayne Walker  
 John Westman  
 Bob and Ruth Whitehouse  
 Bobbie Williams  
 Clyde Wilson  
 Frank Woznicki  
 Cy and Karen Young  
 Jay and Mary Ellen Yovin  
 \* Indicates first time attendee.

Guests:  
 AFROTC color guard of Det. 020,  
 University of Arizona:  
 Cadet Ryan Storm  
 Cadet Dylan Brummett  
 Cadet Tyson Galloway  
 Cadet Kaelyn Murphy  
 Accompanied by:  
 Col. Thomas Nicholson, USAF,  
 Commander, Det. 020  
 Cadet Wing Commander Clayton  
 Utley

## Attendance by State

AL	5	KS	2	NY	1
AR	1	KY	2	OK	2
AZ	12	LA	3	OR	3
CA	16	MD	1	SC	2
CO	1	MN	1	TN	3
FL	1	MO	2	TX	13
GA	2	NC	2	UT	2
IA	1	NE	2	VA	4
ID	1	NM	1	WA	5
IL	2	NV	4	WV	1

## Attendance by Unit

429 VNAF	1
457	15
458	12
459	15
483	4
535	17
536	15
537	20
908	1
Total	100

## Rubber Tree Collision

by Bob Bowers [536, 66]  
from Newsletter Vol. 1-21, July 2005

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 on.

The story was that the crew, while taxing and making a swinging right turn in a somewhat congested jungle airstrip, 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 pimpled dent to the leading edge. No Biggie! I grabbed me a tin bender (sheet metal specialist) from the sheet metal shop and we jumped aboard a waiting Caribou and headed up country for another routine recovery. I was thinking, ‘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!! Fortunately 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 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. First Class 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 that the VC (Viet Cong) owned the other side and south end of the 1500 foot (Pierced Steel Planking) runway. He warned, “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 takeoff 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 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?” I don’t need to name the individual who put that question to me, but I will say I had a couple of young Caribou pilots who were getting pretty nervous. The Flight Mechanic? He was back up the trail watching TV with that big hairy Army Sgt. First Class.

As we were standing there consulting with each other (two young AF officers and two “older” NCOs) an Army weapons carrier roars up and this Army corporal hands me a large, cumbersome McCulloch chain saw with a 40-inch blade and a leaking fuel tank. He was 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.’

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 upright, and the Caribou

shook and shuttered and quivered. That chain saw blade probably remains locked in that rubber tree to this day.

My tin bender, SSgt. John Harris, 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.

Assigning my tin bender as fire guard I fired up the number one 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. My tin bending fire guard already realized what I had in mind. He 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. Just as I began to push the throttles up a little more the aircraft shook itself loose from the tree. 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 fly-trap 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. It looked real ugly. The hole was larger than a 25-gallon lard can lid.

But I really did luck out on this one!

**Continued on Page 6**

## Rubber Tree (from Page 5)

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, but mainly trying to stay out of John's way, he trimmed all the damage away and applied a perfectly fitted, 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 while still up on the truck bed, this Army jeep comes skidding up to a stop, and, of all people, it is the old ugly Army Sgt. First Class 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 T-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.

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.

## Blue Tiger Line

Why the 535<sup>th</sup> TAS was known as the "Blue Tiger Line" has been a mystery to many.

The nickname "Blue Tiger" was derived from the Army 57<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company's call sign *Gray Tiger*. This name was acquired from the first 57<sup>th</sup> Commander, Maj. Britton. Maj. Britton was endowed with a healthy head of hair, all gray. Therefore, they called

him the Gray Tiger and, eventually, his company was known as the "Gray Tigers."

When the Air Force took over the Caribou on 1 January 1967, the "Tiger" remained, but the color changed to Air Force blue.

## Helicopter Hazards

from *Caribou Airlines, Vol. 1*

There were numerous hazards at the forward airstrips. The greatest hazard for a fixed wing pilot was the helicopter. The congestion around Army fields and Landing Zones (LZ) created numerous conflicts and a danger zone for incidents, accidents, and collisions.

The C-7A pilots operating in this environment (especially the 537<sup>th</sup> crews whose primary mission was support to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division) tried to achieve a compromise, realizing the importance of the runway as access ground for loading troops for an operation without compromising the safety of aircrews and hardware. In an initial assault of an operation, only so much real estate can be secured and a runway takes up the major portion of this ground. The runway was an ideal open area for on- and off-loading of UH-1 Huey and CH-47 Chinook formations so the runway was used (by the Army) to the greatest extent possible.



Another aspect of the situation that appeared dangerous was the speculative, latent attitude of helicopter pilots concerning their movement with respect to fixed wing aircraft. They tended to be overconfident about the agility of the helicopter in getting out

of the way quickly enough, lifting when they felt like it or crossing over the approach path without control approval, and not taking into account the effect of the rotor wash.



The turbulent rotor wash generated by CH-47 Chinooks was especially dangerous and caused several critical incidents. The Chinooks would often run-up alongside the approach end of the runway or operate from the active runway. The rotor wash could linger in the vicinity of the approach end of the runway, disrupting the air, and was invisible to the C-7A pilots until it was encountered on short final when they were short of altitude, airspeed, and options.

The problem of who should have precedence in the traffic pattern was far from solved. It was a struggle to see how much cooperation could be generated between the two services and how many accidents involving fixed and rotary wing aircraft could be averted.

## Caribou Bowl Update

Scoring of Caribou Bowl VI was reviewed after closure of the reunion.

The wording of questions 8 and 30 was checked. The wording was technically correct, but confusing.

"Bridge over Troubled Water" was the Best Song of 1970, awarded at the 1971 Grammys.

Signals for bailout are 3 short rings (alert) and 1 long ring (to go).

Both questions were eliminated from the scoring.

After the review, **the winning squadron remains the 457<sup>th</sup> TAS.**

## 457<sup>th</sup> Celebrates 75 Years

by Mike Loughran [457, 71]

The 457<sup>th</sup> Airlift Squadron (AS) hosted a 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of its initial World War II (WW II) beginnings at Joint Base Andrews, MD on June 30, 2017. A few squadron veterans from WW II and a few from Vietnam attended the celebration.

I attended as a representative of the squadron's Vietnam heritage and was honored to be one of the guest speakers. Another C-7A Caribou Association member, Steve Kobelas of North Charleston, SC, also attended the celebration. Steve was in the 457<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron in 1967, soon after the transfer of the C-7A aircraft and mission from the Army to the USAF. So, between the two of us, we represented the bookends of the Caribou's time in Vietnam.

The day started with a welcoming ceremony, followed by tours of 89<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing aircraft and a formal dinner that evening. The Wing opened up their B-757, also known as *Air Force Two*, a Gulfstream III and, of course, the 457<sup>th</sup>'s C-21A Learjet for the tours.

After dinner, a 75 year squadron history was presented along with a video, painstakingly compiled by Lt. Col. Gregory Adams, the current 457<sup>th</sup> AS Commander. The enthusiastic leadership of Lt. Col. Adams reflected the pride of mission displayed by all squadron members.

Three guest speakers presented stories from each era of the unit's history.

Ms. Krisitn Homan, the unofficial historian of the 330<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group that was the parent organization of the 457<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron in WW II, related several interesting vignettes from the squadron's history.

The 457<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron (Very Heavy) flew the B-29 in combat operations against Japan from Guam during WW II. It compiled a distinguished record in the war, starting

as a B-29 training squadron before deploying to Andersen AAFB, Guam. Ms. Homan related several interesting vignettes from the squadron's history.

She told how one of the bombers flew near enough to see Hiroshima the day after the first atomic bomb was dropped. After landing, the pilot was summoned by General Tommy Powers and asked what he observed as he flew their strike mission. The pilot was so completely astonished by the devastation that he thought it was from a 500 aircraft raid. When the General told him one airplane and just one bomb caused the city's destruction he was dumbfounded and doubtful. He became convinced when the General repeated it.



I then spoke and focused my comments on the transition of the C-7A Caribou to the South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) in 1971 when I flew as an instructor pilot (IP) training VNAF pilots and upgrading them to IP status. I discussed the unique challenges of doing the mission combined with a complicated training environment.

Finally, the evening's highlight was the comments of Lt. Gen. Giovanni K. Tuck, 18<sup>th</sup> Air Force Commander and a former squadron pilot. General Tuck spoke of his early career as a 457<sup>th</sup> AS pilot, the challenges of today, and the

future mission.

Today, the 457<sup>th</sup> AS is a geographically separated unit staffed by more than 35 Airmen and civilians and four C-21A aircraft. The squadron is part of the 375<sup>th</sup> Air Mobility Wing at Scott AFB, IL, and provides priority airlift for key federal officials, members of Congress, and senior-ranking military leaders in support of U.S. national policy, and maintains a global deployment capability.

The 457<sup>th</sup> has rediscovered its history in a big way. As part of the work up to the event, the pilots revived the Vietnam patch, use "Hustler" as their call sign and the "briefing room" has large coffee mugs (the politically correct term for beer steins) with the old Hustler patch. Today's Air Force allows airmen to wear a "morale" patch on Fridays as a way to allow some individuality to the regulation norms.

The 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration was an excellent event and a great way to spend some time with the men and women carrying on the legacy of the 457<sup>th</sup>. We are always reminded of those who have gone before as well as the generations keeping the mission going today and into the future.

## Time To Renew!!

Check the mailing label on this newsletter. If it does not show "2018" or later, then it is **TIME TO PAY** your Bou Tax or this will be the **last** newsletter you will receive.

If the year is before 2017, you may have: changed your address and the last newsletter went to an old address, or you just sent in your check, or forgot to send your check

### DO IT TODAY!

Make your \$10 check to the **C-7A Caribou Association** and send it to:

Jess Cogley  
244 Mecca Dr  
San Antonio, TX 78232-2209

## Heroism at LZ Litts

by Jerry York [537, 67]

from Newsletter Vol. 21-1, April 2010

April 15, 1967 was quite an exciting day at Landing Zone (LZ) Litts, several miles north of Phu Cat. The 1<sup>st</sup> Cav mounted an operation in the area and we were tasked with hauling troops and equipment in there from the Cav main base at An Khe. The runway was 1500 feet of laterite, with a steep embankment on each end because the runway was built by cutting crosswise into the top of a small hill.

One of our aircraft, S/N 62-4178, loaded with 25 fully equipped infantry troops (yes, probably overloaded), crashed on landing, having encountered rotor wash from a departing CH-47 Chinook. The right landing gear hit below the lip of the runway, ripping off the right wing. The aircraft skidded on its side and came to rest about 25 yards from another Bou waiting to take off.

I was sitting in the overhead hatch of that Caribou catching some breeze and had a ringside seat. Seeing that wreckage come sliding down the airfield towards me was a breathtaking experience. It came to rest and we shut down our engines and bailed out to help.

Sgt. David F. Theroux, TSgt. Gerald M. Malloy, TSgt. Earl A. Jackson, and MSgt. Leo D. Harrington were 537<sup>th</sup> flight mechanics on the field as coordinators and helpers responsible for getting the planes off loaded and acting as air traffic controllers. We all pitched in. At first we couldn't get the cargo door to drop off, but the crew inside the aircraft finally managed to get to the rear and pull the release handle, dropping the cargo door on the ground.

What a mess inside. None of the troops were belted in. They were all in a jumble along with their M-60's, mortars and base plates, radios, ammo cans, etc. Fuel was running down into the cargo compartment from the left wing. We managed to get in there and get the troops out without touching off

the fuel, which was our main concern. Interestingly, none of the troops was injured. They collected their stuff and wandered off into the morning. The crew was okay, except for the Flight Mechanic, John Godfrey, who somehow got a sprained foot in the crash.



### **7<sup>th</sup> AF Airman's Medal Citation S.O. G-1704, 12 Oct 1967**

Staff Sergeant Jerry A. York distinguished himself by heroism involving voluntary risk of life at Landing Zone Litts near Phu My, Republic of Vietnam on 15 April 1967. On that date, Sergeant York was unloading his aircraft when a C-7A aircraft loaded with twenty-five combat infantrymen crashed on the runway, losing its right wing and skidding to a stop on its right side. With complete disregard for his own safety, Sergeant York ran to the demolished aircraft which was becoming drenched in fuel and assisted in carrying the dazed passengers to safety. There was no fire fighting equipment available and his courageous action helped to insure the safety of the passengers and crew of the aircraft. By his courageous action and humanitarian regard for his fellow man, Sergeant York has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

## CSAF Statement on Wingman Conduct

by Gen. David L. Goldfein, USAF  
Chief of Staff

AF News Service 10 Mar 2017

People are the foundation of our Air Force. Our mutual support for each other is based on dignity, respect and trust – a Wingman culture. As Wingmen we must continuously demonstrate courage and strength of character to do and say the right things, at the right times, to protect each other—there is no other acceptable option.

When Airmen fail to live up to our core values – Integrity First, Service Before Self and Excellence in All We Do – the reputation of all who serve and have served is tarnished. These values apply to behavior on social media. Any conduct or participation in activities, whether online or offline, that does not adhere to these core values is NOT acceptable.

From our newest airman basic to the chief of staff, we are all accountable for meeting ethical and performance standards in our actions. We should live our core values every day – on and off duty. We must continuously conduct ourselves in a manner that brings credit to our nation and each other. Service in our Air Force is a higher calling and we carry this legacy forward for future generations of Airmen.

## C-7A Accomplishments

### **Airlift Accomplishments 1966**

Sorties	129,324
Flight Hours	87,125
Cargo Tons	89,010
Passengers	822,432

*The 1966 data is for the Army Aviation Companies, including attached USAF personnel starting in July 1966.*

### **Airlift Accomplishments 1967**

Sorties	155,938
Flight Hours	100,230.8
Cargo Tons	95,320
Passengers	1,081,629

## Airdrops on Target

by Steve Kobelas [457, 66]  
from Newsletter Vol 21-2, Oct 2010

I was with the 134<sup>th</sup> Aviation Company at Can Tho. On 26 December 1967, I was the Aircraft Commander and we were assigned four crew members for the air drop mission to a Special Forces camp near Phan Rang. I wish I could remember their names, but try as I could, I can't.

We had two pallets to drop: food, medical stuff, and ammunition. The drop zone was on the side of a mountain and our only approach was from the valley up toward the camp. So, we were dropping uphill. There was an overcast. It was sort of hairy. We could only drop one pallet at a time so we had to make two passes.

The ground forces said that we were being shot at pretty heavily. Providence must have stepped in twice, because we didn't pick up one hit. I know that we were being looked after.

The drop zone area was so forested that we had trouble finding the place and making the drops. The first pallet was right on target and the Special Forces had no trouble getting that one. The second pallet landed at the edge of the drop zone, but it was recoverable according to the guys in the camp.

After the last drop, we felt pretty good about helping the guys on the ground. I really had a feeling that I was contributing more on that mission than on any other.

After that, most other missions seemed fairly routine.

*Editor's Note. Maj. Kobelas was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for this mission.*



## First Night

by Pat Howe [459, 66]

After finishing Jungle Survival School in November 1966, we headed to our assignments in Vietnam. Our flight from Clark AB, Philippines arrived at Tan Son Nhut late in the afternoon. I went to the housing office but was told there were no bunks available. Everything was taken and no hotels. Ten of us went to the Officers' Club to have a drink. What else would we do?

While drinking in the bar and discussing our luck, we met a medical doctor and explained our predicament. "No problem," he said. "Follow me." He took all ten of us to the hospital and put us up in empty beds in the wards. We walked in with our luggage and did not ride in on a gurney. The patients in the wards thought we were nuts.

The sheets were white and clean. There was air conditioning. We all got a good night's sleep. I doubt that anyone had a better "first night" in country. It was sweet.

## Gen. Mattis on Christmas Day

by Dr. Albert C. Pierce

When I told General Krulak, [USNA, 1964] the former Commandant of the Marine Corps, now the chair of the Naval Academy Board of Visitors, that we were having General Mattis speak, he said, "Let me tell you a Jim Mattis story."

General Krulak said, when he was Commandant of the Marine Corps, every year, starting about a week before Christmas, he and his wife would bake hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of Christmas cookies. They would package them in small bundles.

Then on Christmas day, he would load his vehicle. At about 4 AM, General Krulak would drive himself to every Marine guard post in the Washington-Annapolis-Baltimore area and deliver a small package of Christmas cookies to

whatever Marines were pulling guard duty that day. He said that one year, he had gone down to Quantico as one of his stops to deliver Christmas cookies to the Marines on guard duty. He went to the Command Center and gave a package to the lance corporal who was on duty.

He asked, "Who's the Officer of the Day?" The lance corporal said, "Sir, it's Brigadier General Mattis."

And General Krulak said, "No, no, no. I know who General Mattis is. I mean, who's the Officer of the Day today, Christmas day?"

The lance corporal, feeling a little anxious, said, "Sir, it is Brigadier General Mattis."

General Krulak said that, about that time, he spotted in the back room a cot, or a daybed. He said, "No, Lance Corporal. Who slept in that bed last night?"

The lance corporal said, "Sir, it was Brigadier General Mattis."

About that time, General Krulak said that General Mattis came in, in a duty uniform with a sword, and General Krulak said, "Jim, what are you doing here on Christmas day? Why do you have duty?" General Mattis told him that the young officer who was scheduled to have duty on Christmas day had a family, and General Mattis decided it was better for the young officer to spend Christmas Day with his family, and so he chose to have duty on Christmas Day.

General Krulak said, "That's the kind of officer that Jim Mattis is."

*This story was told by Dr. Albert C. Pierce, the Director of the Center for the Study of Professional Military Ethics at The United States Naval Academy. He was introducing General James Mattis who gave a lecture on Ethical Challenges in Contemporary Conflict in the spring of 2006. This was taken from the transcript of that lecture.*

*General Mattis is currently serving as the Secretary of Defense.*

## Impossible Mission

by Randy Roughton

*Airman Magazine*, January 26, 2015

When General Douglas MacArthur began his campaign up the New Guinea coast, the only air route available for flying supplies to him was over the 14,000 foot Owen Stanley Range in the southeastern end of the island. When a shorter route became imperative to keep air transport abreast of MacArthur's advances, Col. Ray T. Elsmore, Director of Air Transport, Allied Air Forces in the Pacific, flew survey flights to chart an alternate route.

One of the flights took him over Grand Valley, also known as Hidden Valley or "Shangri-La." The mysterious valley, surrounded by steep mountain peaks, was first called that by two war correspondents who borrowed the name from James Hilton's 1933 novel, *Lost Horizon*. The valley was about 20 miles long and four miles wide at an elevation of approximately 5,000 feet.

On May 13, 1945 a C-47 transport, the *Gremlin Special*, left the base in Hollandia on New Guinea's northern coast about 2:15 PM carrying 24 military personnel, including members of the Women's Army Corps (WAC). The plane crashed 45 minutes later into a mountain near the valley entrance, killing all but six instantly. Within 24 hours, three others died of their injuries, leaving only three survivors: 1/Lt. John McCollum, whose twin brother died in the crash, TSgt. Kenneth Decker, and WAC Cpl. Margaret Hastings. Decker hurt his head badly in the crash, and Hastings suffered blistering burns on her face, feet, and legs.

Three days after the crash, the three survivors reached a clearing between the crash site and Hidden Valley where they were spotted by a B-17 search plane.

That was also where, for the first time, they encountered Dani natives. Neither side knew what to make of the other. The natives hadn't yet discovered the wheel, knew of no number higher



*1/Lt. McCullom and Dani natives. Photo by Capt. Earl Walters, Jr., courtesy of Martin Zuckoff.*

than three, and had never seen a white person. They believed in an old legend that predicted white ghosts would visit and signal the end of the world. This superstition saved the survivors' lives.

1/Lt. McCollum met the village leader on a log over a small gully and ordered TSgt. Decker and Cpl. Hastings to stand and smile. They offered the only food they had, candies called Charms. Soon, they were shaking hands with the natives.

On May 19, two medics of the 1<sup>st</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Filipino Infantry Regiment, parachuted into the clearing to help the injured survivors. The next day, a group of eight more Filipino-American paratroopers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Reconnaissance Battalion, led by Capt. C. Earl Walter Jr., descended on the valley to protect and assist the survivors.

The U.S. Army Air Forces (AAF) knew rescue was going to be difficult. There was no place to land an airplane in the valley and thousands of Japanese soldiers lay in hiding between the survivors and the sea.

Col. Elsmore, then commander of the 322<sup>nd</sup> Troop Carrier Wing, was tasked with developing a rescue plan. He worked a seemingly crazy concept using Waco CG-4A gliders. The glider would land in the valley, then be snatched into the air by a hook attached

to a C-47 flying less than 20 feet from the ground. Test runs flown at sea level at Hollandia experienced many mishaps and setbacks before a functional system was developed.

A glider snatch at the altitude of Hidden Valley was a dicey operation at best. The unstable weather over the hump of the surrounding mountains could also threaten to cancel any glider pick-up or smack one down that was being attempted.

It was decided that it would take three flights in and three snatches out to bring the survivors and paratroopers back to civilization.

While the AAF was working on the extraction system, the paratroopers guided the crash survivors to Hidden Valley; trekked through the formidable jungle to the crash site and buried those who perished in the crash; and cleared a 400 yard long glider landing strip in the valley.



*Filipino-American paratroopers Cpl. Canilo "Rammy" Ramirez (left) and Sgt. Benjamin "Doc" Bulatao (right) with WAC Cpl. Margaret Hastings. Photo by Capt. Earl Walters, Jr., courtesy of Martin Zuckoff.*

During the almost seven weeks it took before a rescue could be attempted, numerous airdrop missions were flown to provide food, medicines, and other supplies.

**Continued on Page 11**

## Impossible (from Page 10)



*Native Dani tribesmen help push the "Waco" glider into position for a snatch attempt. Photo by Capt. Earl Walter, Jr. courtesy of Martin Zuckoff.*

On June 28, 1945 a C-46 towed a CG-4A Waco glider to the valley where it was released from its tow plane and landed without incident. The glider, with the three survivors aboard, was successfully snatched by a C-47. Two other glider deployments and snatches were completed the same day. The impossible rescue at Shangri La had been accomplished.

*Editor's Note. Mitchell Zuckoff tells the story of the rescue in "Lost in Shangri-La: A True Story of Survival, Adventure and the Most Incredible Rescue Mission of World War II." While he visited the crash site, most of the book is based upon his interviews with the late Capt. C. Earl Walter Jr. and Capt. Walter's diary. There is also an account of the rescue in the book "Silent Invaders: Combat Gliders of the Second World War" by Gary A. Best.*



## Help!!!

Check your email address on our web site, <http://www.c-7acaribou.com/>. Send any change to:

[pathanavan@aol.com](mailto:pathanavan@aol.com)

## USAF Santa Bou

by Guy D. Perham [535, 67]

It was mid-December 1967. Several of us were sitting around the bar at our hotel quarters in Vung Tau hashing over the events of the day. Someone mentioned that Christmas was almost here and wouldn't it be great if we could do something to add a little cheer for our Special Forces (SF) customers.

The conversation went around the table a few times. Someone, probably Squadron Commander Lt. Col. Joe Faulkner, suggested we load a Bou with some Class 6 spirits and beer and deliver it to the Green Berets on Christmas day. Someone else suggested we paint the Bou in Christmas colors and dress the Flight Mechanic in a Santa suit with a bullhorn for proper introductory communications. We would deliver the Christmas cheer to as many of our SF customers' sites as possible.

What a terrific plan! So we were off: gathering the goodies at the local Class 6 store at the Army's Pacific Hotel; commandeering a Santa suit and accompanying bullhorn; selecting the crew (naturally it was Joe Faulkner's); and letting the Wing know what we were up to. The Wing approved and suggested we get lots of pictures for some much deserved Caribou credit.

All went as planned except the "bird" crapped out after about five sorties and we had to send the rest of the goodies via a plain, non-holiday dressed Caribou. Also, when *Stars and Stripes* got hold of the story, they reported it as a C-123 mission instead of a C-7A mission and gave them all the glory.

Our Special Forces customers knew where those crazy Caribou "Santa One" missions came from. That was all the credit we wanted, and then some.

*(Editor's Note. Santa Bous were flown in December 1967 by the 535<sup>th</sup> and 536<sup>th</sup> squadrons. The 458<sup>th</sup> also flew an "Operation Santa Claus" on 24 Dec 67. The next year, all squadrons participated in Santa Bou flights at the urging of the Wing Commander.)*



*Human Statue of Liberty made by 18,000 U.S. Army officers and men at Camp Dodge, Des Moines, IA in 1918.*

## Heat and Old Age

from *Caribou Courier*, June 1967

After an early season rush, the Wing Wienies slowed down when old age and soaring temperatures started to take their toll. As Coach Strovas remarked after a 5-4 loss to the Army Hawks, "I knew we'd be in trouble in the hot weather with a bald 115-pound pitcher. We'll be in good shape once it starts snowing."

Snow hasn't arrived but Big Stan Nichols took over mound duties to lead the team to a 18-2 victory over the 391<sup>st</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron, as the left-hander showed good speed and a sharp breaking curve. He lost his shutout only after a balding 115-pound catcher threw the ball over the center field fence attempting to throw a runner out at second base. Highlight of the 18-run attack was Tony Strovas' wallop over the left center field fence. Defensively Teddy Wolanin pulled off the gem of the year with a twisting half gainer catch on a sinking line drive. Ed Lev, Bruce Bellg and Danny Novak came up with sterling glove work and accurate throwing to put the victory on ice.

## Airport Renamed for C-7A Pilot

by John Ellis

*Pike County Journal-Reporter*

March 30, 2017

On March 25, 2017, the Alexander family and visitors from near and far gathered for a Celebration of Life service in honor of the late Ron Alexander [459, 66 and 4449 CCTS, 67] at Candler Field Museum, Williamson, GA. Over 600 people attended. During the ceremony, it was announced that Peach State Aerodrome was renamed Alexander Memorial Airport in his honor. (*The airfield was named Candler Field before being named Peach State Aerodrome in 2005.*)

The program started with a formation of eight World War II vintage T-6 Texan airplanes.

Bill Taylor, from radio station WKEU, introduced the speakers. He mentioned it has been said that at the end of your life if you can count at least five real friends, then you were a very lucky fellow. Bill said by looking at the audience of hundreds of people from all over the country, Ron did not have to worry about that. He said Ron was one of the greatest men he has ever known.

Jack McCormick, who is a retired Delta Airlines Captain and a Vietnam veteran, was the first speaker. Jack, an FAA Compliance Officer, said he was compelled to find some way to memorialize Ron Alexander and his family for all they had done and, after getting the family's approval, officially changed the name of the airport from Peach State Aerodrome to Alexander Memorial Airport in honor of its founder.

Clay Hammond, vice president of the Board of Directors of the Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome and Museum in New York, announced that Ron Alexander had been awarded their "Spirit of the Aerodrome Award."

The next speaker was Cayla McLeod, 17 years old, who is part of the Youth Aviation Program and has earned her

pilot's license and is a student aircraft mechanic. She spoke of the many positive impacts Ron had made on her life and the lives of other youth in the program.

David Moffett then shared interesting stories of flying with Ron while working at Delta Airlines. He spoke of Ron's many talents and abilities and said his passing has left a void that no one will ever fill. Steve Fulton, the last speaker, shared how Ron had made an impact on him and changed his life.

Following a rifle volley, the playing of "Taps," and the folding of three flags given to the family by the Marine Corps League, the ceremony ended with the "Missing Man Formation" performed by four Stearman biplanes, and the playing of "Amazing Grace" on bagpipes by Laurie Bailey.



*Editor's Note. Ron Alexander flew C-130's before going to C-7A's in late 1966. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in Vietnam and was assigned to Sewart AFB, TN as a C-7A instructor pilot in 1967. Ron left the USAF in 1969 with the rank of Captain.*

*In addition to his exemplary flying career with Delta Airlines, Ron Alexander was also a highly successful aviation entrepreneur. Active in restoring vintage aircraft, he started Alexander Aeroplane Company, an aviation supply company that made restorations easier. He launched a highly successful series of traveling SportAir Workshops that provided hands-on experience for restorers learning skills including rib stitching, fabric application, and*

*welding. He also established Atlanta Aerospace Composites to repair composite-constructed general aviation and Embraer ERJ 145 commercial aircraft.*

*In 2005, Ron bought the neglected Candler Field and transformed it. He renamed the airfield and established the Candler Field Museum, dedicated to recreating the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport as it was in the 1920's-30's when it was known as Candler Field, and hosted a popular yearly fly-in, complete with period costumes from the early years of aviation.*

*He also founded the Candler Field Youth Mentorship Program to help young people establish an aviation career.*

*In 2013, Ron was inducted into the Georgia Aviation Hall of fame.*

*Ron Alexander died on November 17, 2016 in the fiery crash of a Curtiss JN-4 Jenny shortly after takeoff at Peach State Aerodrome.*

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## Helmet in the Sky

by Lew Shedd [459, 66]

It was a cold, dreary morning in January 1967. We were on our way from Da Nang to Con Thien, near the DMZ, running in between dark clouds. Capt. "Smiling" Jack O'Donnell (he was smiling all the time) was the aircraft commander and 1/Lt. Ron Alexander was the copilot. I was standing in the cockpit between the pilots and keeping a close eye on the instruments. My major concern at the time was carburetor icing. "Smiling" Jack had always flown jet aircraft and had never seen a reciprocating engine before he came to Caribous. I had doubts if he knew what a carburetor was.

The left engine suddenly backfired with a loud "Bang!" and a bright flash reflected off the nearby clouds. Capt. O'Donnell immediately turned and stuck his head all the way out of

**Continued on Page 13**

## Helmet in Sky (from Page 12)

the side window to get a good look at the engine. His helmet was ripped off by the airstream and flew into the left propeller.

He wasn't smiling when he turned back to us and sternly ordered, "Not a word! Not one word!" I took off my helmet and handed it to him. "I guess you are going to need this. I'm going in the back to strap-in. You need to watch the carburetor heat."

Of course, when we got back to Da Nang, everyone at the mission site knew about the flying helmet within ten minutes of shutdown.

## Honor at Plei Mei

by R.C. Morris

Adapted from the *Ether Zone*



On 24 October 1965, with the Siege of Plei Mei in full swing and struggles underway to strengthen the camp's fortifications, the American element of the task force decided to run a dangerous operation to recover an American Captain's body from where he had fallen outside the defensive wire.

The senior Vietnamese Ranger commander was adamant that he and his troops would be the ones to recover the body of this young American friend. He was insistent. "No. We will go. The Vietnamese soldiers will recover the Captain. He was our advisor and died on the field of battle with honor and courage, fighting for us and with us. He is ours. We will do it."

## 7<sup>th</sup> AF DFC Citation S.O. G-0407, 18 Mar 1967

Captain Clarence J. Beardsley (*attached to the 92<sup>nd</sup> Aviation Company*) distinguished himself by extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as a C-7A Aircraft Commander near Plei Mei, Republic of Vietnam, on 15 September 1966. On that date, Captain Beardsley was flying a combat resupply mission to the Special Forces camp at Plei Mei when his aircraft was hit by automatic weapons fire from hostile ground forces. The hostile fire wounded Captain Beardsley and his copilot, disabling him, and destroyed the hydraulic system of the aircraft. With great determination and superior airmanship, Captain Beardsley returned the crippled aircraft to Pleiku Air Base where he adroitly and skillfully effected an emergency landing, in spite of his painful wounds, thus saving the lives of two other crew members and preserving a valuable aircraft and cargo. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Captain Beardsley reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

## X-37B Lands after Two Years in Orbit

by Wilson Brissett

from *Air Force Magazine*, May 9, 2017

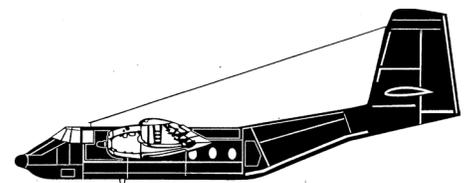
The Air Force's X-37B Orbital Test Vehicle (OTV) landed at NASA's Kennedy Space Center, FL, on Sunday, May 7, 2017 after nearly two years in low-earth orbit. The mission, which launched on May 21, 2015, was the fourth completed flight for the OTV program. Each successive mission has been longer in duration than the last: the first was 224 days, the second was 468, and the third was 675. OTV-4 remained in orbit for 718 days, during which time it flew at altitudes ranging between 190 and 225 miles, reported *Space Flight Now*.

The length of its mission was in part related to the assessment of an electric propulsion system, called a Hall Effect thruster. The thruster is slow to start up and the Air Force wanted to test it for long-term exposure to the space environment. It is designed to get more propulsive effect out of the same mass of fuel, which would allow future spacecraft to be lighter and cheaper to launch, and not run out of fuel and maneuvering capability as quickly.



"The landing of OTV-4 marks another success for the X-37B program and the nation," said Lt. Col. Ron Fehlen, X-37B program manager. "This mission once again set an on-orbit endurance record and marks the vehicle's first landing in the state of Florida. We are incredibly pleased with the performance of the space vehicle and are excited about the data gathered to support the scientific and space communities. We are extremely proud of the dedication and hard work by the entire team."

The X-37B is managed by the Air Force's Rapid Capabilities Office and conducts experiments, performs risk reduction activities, and does concept of operations development for reusable space vehicle technologies. Sunday's landing was the X-37B's first in Florida. The Air Force plans to launch the fifth OTV mission from Cape Canaveral before the end of 2017.



## We Will Never Forget

On August 3, 1967, 459<sup>th</sup> TCS C-7A S/N 62-4161, flown by **Capt. Alan E. Hendrickson**, **Capt. John D. Wiley**, and **TSgt. Zane A. Carter**, was shot down while making a landing approach to the strip at Ha Thanh. They were shot down by a 155 mm U.S. Army artillery battery located just off the approach end of the runway. The 155 mm shell tore the tail section from the aircraft and the forward section crashed inverted into the Special Forces camp. No crewmember survived this unfortunate friendly fire incident.

On November 30, 1967, 458<sup>th</sup> TAS C-7A S/N 62-4175, flown by **Maj. Thomas D. Moore**, Instructor Pilot; **Maj. William J. Clark**, copilot; and **SSgt. Arturo Delgado-Marin**, flight engineer; hit a hill about six miles southeast of Qui Nhon during a heavy rainstorm. **SSgt. Stanley J. Yurewicz**, 483<sup>rd</sup> CAMS, was an additional crewmember. The crew and all 22 passengers were killed.

### Some Gave All

by Billy Ray Cyrus

I knew a man called him Sandy Kane  
Few folks even knew his name  
But a hero was he  
Left a boy, came back a man  
Still many just don't understand  
About the reasons we are free

I can't forget the look in his eyes  
Or the tears he cries  
As he said these words to me

All gave some and some gave all  
And some stood through for the red,  
white and blue  
And some had to fall  
And if you ever think of me  
Think of all your liberties and recall  
Some gave all

Now Sandy Kane is no longer here  
But his words are oh so clear  
As they echo throughout our land  
For all his friends who gave us all  
Who stood the ground and took the  
fall  
To help their fellow man

Love your country and live with pride  
And don't forget those who died  
America can't you see

All gave some and some gave all  
And some stood through for the red,  
white and blue  
And some had to fall

And if you ever think of me  
Think of all your liberties and recall  
Some gave all

And if you ever think of me  
Think of all your liberties and recall,  
yes recall

Some gave all  
Some gave all

### Enlisted Complete RPA Training

by Amy McCullough and Wilson Brissett  
from *Air Force Magazine*, May 9, 2017

The first three enlisted airmen graduated from the Air Force's undergraduate remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) training program (URT) at Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA)-Randolph, TX, on May 5.

One of the students, a Master Sergeant, graduated in the top 10 percent of his class (the Air Force does not release the names of RPA pilots or sensor operators). He was also the first member of the enlisted pilot initial class (EPIC) to conduct a solo flight in a DA-20 Katana aircraft during initial flight training at Pueblo Memorial Airport, Colorado, in November 2016. "What makes this accomplishment even more extraordinary is the quality of the students who make up this URT class 17-10," said Lt. Col. Jason Thompson, the 558<sup>th</sup> Flying Training Squadron commander, who



World War II Post Card

is responsible for training pilots and sensor operators at JBSA-Randolph. The three enlisted pilots still need to complete formal training at Beale AFB, CA, where they will qualify to fly the RQ-4 Global Hawk.

On March 8, the Air Force announced that the inaugural Enlisted Remotely Piloted Aircraft Pilot Selection Board had selected 30 enlisted airmen from a total of 200 applicants to fill pilot training slots for Fiscal 2017 and 2018. Davis said that selection means Air Education and Training Command has "normalized the pipeline" for enlisted RPA pilots.

## Caribou's Role at Khe Sanh

by Marty Hillman [459, 67] and Link Spann [459, 67]

During the late fall of 1967, the 3900 foot runway at the U.S. Marine Combat Base at Khe Sanh required repair. The runway was made of AM-2 interlocking aluminum panels laid on a cement reinforced dirt bed. Due to the heavy and frequent landings by C-130 and C-123 aircraft, the panels were buckling and causing damage to the underside of these aircraft during landings. The buckling was due to the deterioration of the runway bed and it had to be rebuilt.

In order to keep the runway operational, half the runway was taken up and repaired, and then the other half was taken up and repaired. Runway repair work took place from late August to the end of October.

The remaining runway was adequate for C-7A operations, but had many hazards such as bulldozers, tanks, dirt piles, and work crews. No other fixed wing transport could land at Khe Sanh during that time and the primary means of supply were daily airdrop operations by C-130 and C-123 aircraft, weather permitting. On one bleak day, a C-130 on a LAPES (Low Altitude Parachute Extraction System) run crashed in nasty weather.



As part of its mission in support of the Third Marine Amphibious Forces (III MAF), the 459<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Squadron (TAS) provided the Khe Sanh Base with much needed supplies and mail, as well as taking out cargo and departing personnel during that period. Due to the sizable logistical support requirements for the Marine Base's combat opera-

tions and the threat of North Vietnamese attack, C-130 airdrop and LAPES missions were required throughout the runway repair period. To support the extensive airdrop operations, the availability of large cargo parachutes became critical. There were not sufficient cargo parachutes in country. Thus, one of the primary Caribou missions at Khe Sanh was to back-haul the cargo parachutes. After each drop, the chutes had to be returned to Cam Ranh Bay Air Base for cleaning, drying, and



repacking. The Caribous were the only fixed wing means for transporting the chutes from Khe Sanh to Da Nang for transshipment to Cam Ranh Bay.

When Khe Sanh was reopened to C-130 and C-123 traffic, USMC Lt. Gen. Robert E. Cushman Jr., Commanding General of the III MAF, sent a congratulatory message to the 483<sup>rd</sup> TAW saying in part:

"From 26 August through 28 October, Khe Sanh Air Base has been closed to all fixed wing aircraft with the exception of the C-7A. During this period outstanding support has been provided by the Da Nang detachment of the 459<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Squadron in transporting personnel, POL, and supplies to Khe Sanh. Through the perseverance of the flight crews, the 459<sup>th</sup> has continued to meet this challenge despite marginal weather and other adverse conditions."

During the Battle of Khe Sanh that began in late January 1968, the runway

was sufficiently damaged by shelling and aircraft crashes that, once again, Khe Sanh was closed to all fixed wing transport operations except for the Caribou. Under more dire circumstances this time, C-130 airdrops and LAPES again became the main means of supply for a Marine Combat Base under siege, and once more the Caribous were needed to bring the cargo chutes back to Da Nang to sustain the airdrop operations. Caribous on the ground at Khe Sanh providing support to the em-

battled Marines often attracted North Vietnamese mortar and rocket attacks. All six C-7A squadrons supported the Marines at Khe Sanh during this battle.

According to USMC Lt. General Lewis Walt, "Although the airstrip was partially destroyed and littered with damaged aircraft, the short-field capabilities of the C-7A aircraft allowed the aircrews to land on the undamaged portions of the runway and the ramp area. As a result of this and other Air Force support, the Marines were able to defend the strategic outpost from a massed enemy attack."

The Navy Presidential Unit Citation awarded to the U.S. Marine combatant units at Khe Sanh, and to the supporting Navy and USAF units, specifically identifies the six C-7A Tactical Airlift Squadrons for recognition.

## Bookie 102 Coming Home

by Tom Snodgrass [457, 70]

Everyone has a favorite mentor who provided guidance and leadership to them during their Air Force career. Mine was Bill O’Kieff. His formal name was Technical Sergeant William Brandon O’Kieff. He was my first trainer at my first duty station in 1968.

I was 19 and fresh out of aircraft maintenance technical school when he was assigned to train me as I pursued my 5 Skill Level. I didn’t want to show it, but coming from a big family and being away from home for the first time, I was a little homesick.

He, on the other hand, was 36 years old, with a wife and two children. His son, Alexander, was eight and his daughter, Dawn, was three. When you are 19 years old, you view a 36 year old guy as an old man, so I was disappointed at first that I had been assigned to this old fossil. Little did I know that his plate was already full, with family and work, not to mention the two new kids (myself and Mel Hughes) whom he now had to train. I have no doubt that the two new knuckleheads were not particularly a welcome addition to his load, but you would never know it.

Bill took us in like the professional he was, and treated us more like sons, rather than obligations. Truth is, he could have treated us like his personal doormat, but he did just the opposite. He devoted many hours to our training and was always available to counsel us when we needed it, or cheer for us when we passed a test or mastered a task. I saw how some of the other new guys were trained by their trainers, and it paled in comparison to the expertise, patience, and compassion that Bill showed to us. We progressed faster than anyone, and achieved our 5 Skill Level in minimum time.

Empowered with my new Skill level, I dared to dream about one day being able to qualify as a flight engineer.

From the first time I became aware that Bill O’Kieff and some of the other old guys flew C-118 aircraft and actually operated the engines and systems. I knew what I wanted to do. However, with two puny stripes on my sleeve and still being new to the aircraft business, I didn’t dare share my aspirations with my friends. They would have enjoyed a good laugh at the thought of me wanting to be a flight engineer, and I would have certainly felt humiliated by their response. As time went on, my desire to fly did not diminish. I became increasingly attentive to the duties a flight engineer performed. A few questions here and there to some of the old guys who flew produced a lot of information, all of which only fueled my desire.

Then, in the spring of 1969, it dawned on me that there was someone who might not laugh at me. I nervously approached my mentor, Bill O’Kieff. He didn’t laugh. Instead, he grinned and said, “You will make a good one.” He also told me that if I really wanted it, I would need to be prepared for a lot of hard work, hours of studying and no more free time. I was elated!

After poring through all of the assignments Bill gave me, and successfully completing the “Bill O’Kieff Academy” (BOA), I applied for and was accepted into the flight engineer training program. It was a dizzying few months that included a flight physical, many hours in the flight simulator, dozens of flights with my instructor (Bill O’Kieff), and more tests than I can count. Finally, it was time for my check rides. Bill turned me over to a hard-nosed flight examiner who tried to wear me out with emergency procedures and aircraft performance computations, but I was a graduate of the BOA, so my local and cross-country check rides were a piece of cake.

All this happened shortly before Bill left for Vietnam, and we were both proud of ourselves. He told me that once Air Force Military Personnel Center picked me up as fully qualified, I would be assigned to a flying squad-

ron in Vietnam. He also asked me to look for him when I got in country. He would be crewing a C-123K Provider as a member of the 19<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Squadron, 315<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Wing at Tan Son Nhut AB. That was November 1969. He was right, by the end of January 1970, I had orders to Cam Ranh Bay AB.

After Global Survival School at Fairchild AFB, WA, C-7A Caribou school at Dyess AFB, TX, and Jungle Survival School at Clark AB, Philippines, I found myself in the 457<sup>th</sup> Tactical Airlift Squadron. After my in-country certification was complete and I was flying regularly, I looked for him at every God-forsaken excuse for a landing zone in Vietnam.

Finally, on November 24, 1970 as we were loading at Bien Hoa, I looked towards the *Bookie* C-123K on the ramp behind me and saw the familiar



silhouette of my friend. We got to visit for about 20 minutes that Tuesday, and he told me that his *fini* flight was scheduled for Friday. I was disappointed and a little jealous that his tour was almost over, but happy for him at the same time. He shook my hand and said goodbye. He was very happy.

A few days before Christmas I found out that *Bookie 102*, with Bill O’Kieff on board, crashed into a mountain in Khanh Hoa Province, 25 kilometers (km) southwest of Nha Trang. It was a very sad Christmas for me. I assumed that he was returned to his family. I was wrong.

After retiring from 49 years of work covering two careers, I had some time on my hands, so I looked online for

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## Bookie 102 (from Page 16)

information about my old mentor and friend. I was not prepared for what I found. *Bookie 102* departed Tan Son Nhut with 74 Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) passengers on November 27, 1970. They were heading for Nha Trang, and the weather was very poor. Rain and low visibility dogged them along their route. The Nha Trang weather was observed as a broken overcast at 2,000 feet with less than a mile of visibility. As they flew within 30 km of Nha Trang, it seems to me that they would have been in contact with Approach Control by then and, most likely, following their heading and altitude directions. I know that the pilots are responsible for knowing and abiding by the minimum enroute altitude (MEA), but experience has shown me that pilots generally comply with the radar controller's directions when receiving radar vectors to a precision approach. Maybe the formal accident report would enlighten me as to the exact cause, or causes, but I do not have access to that document. Either way, whether an MEA violation by the pilot or controller error, *Bookie 102* and all on board were lost.

The remoteness of the crash site was such that it took nine days to find the remains of *Bookie 102*. Since the C-123K was a war bird and not equipped for 74 passengers, the ARVN troops sat on the cargo floor in lines, each row secured with a tie-down strap that ran from one side of the cargo compartment to the other. The violence of striking a mountain at 150 knots, coupled with absence of DNA technology in 1970, meant that the commingled DNA of 79 souls was impossible to sort. The Air Force and the mortuary folks in Hawaii did their best, but the best that could be done in 1970 resulted in the crew of *Bookie 102* being buried in a mass grave at Arlington on May 25, 1971.

Then, by luck or by Divine intervention, I saw an e-mail at the bottom of

one of the websites I visited. It was written in 2007 by Dawn O'Kieff, Bill's daughter, sharing her sadness at the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her dad's crash. She included her e-mail address, so I wrote to her, told her how her dad impacted my life and expressed my sincere condolences. She responded immediately, saying that I was the first Air Force member, other than the mortuary affairs staff, to contact her.

We exchanged e-mails throughout the fall of 2016, and I learned many sad things about the impact on her and her family. Her father's crash set in motion a notification process that broke the hearts of a five-year-old girl, her ten-year-old brother, and a loving wife. They didn't receive Bill's dog tags until 1983, and went decades not knowing for sure if any of Bill's DNA was actually buried at Arlington. We take DNA technology for granted today, but it wasn't that way 45 years ago. Bill's wife, Margaret Adair O'Kieff, was resigned to the fact that her husband was dead, but not knowing for sure was a weight that was shared by the whole family. Margaret O'Kieff passed away on February 19, 2016, never really having the closure she so desperately needed. Bill's dog tags were buried with her. As if the O'Kieff family had not suffered enough, Bill's sister, Jane, passed away on Christmas eve, 2016. The family was at a low point, as the mystery surrounding the whereabouts of Bill O'Kieff seemed lost to the ages.

Then, in May 2017, the family was notified by the Air Force that the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency used DNA provided by Bill's sisters some 17 years earlier to positively identify newly discovered bone fragments as those of TSgt. William B. O'Kieff.

The family was elated to hear that Bill's remains would be shipped from Hawaii to his home in Murfreesboro, Tennessee on June 15. The Air Force, as well as representatives in the Tennessee Governor's office, worked with the O'Kieff family as arrangements were made for Bill's homecoming. He

would arrive on an American Airlines flight landing in Nashville on June 15. A funeral and burial would follow in Murfreesboro on June 17.

I was honored to be asked by the family to attend the funeral. Kathy and I left Wichita on June 15 by car and arrived in Murfreesboro on June 16. We checked into our hotel just in time to see Bill's arrival at Nashville International Airport on television. He was greeted by a piper who played "Going Home" as his casket was removed from the plane. The honor shown to him at the airport was emotional, and appropriate for the hero we all knew. I was proud of the respect shown by the Air Force Honor Guard team, the American Airlines passengers on his flight, the airport authorities, and the media. After the hero's welcome, viewed by his family on the tarmac, Bill received an escort by the Tennessee Highway Patrol to the Woodfin Memorial Chapel in Murfreesboro.

The ceremonies on June 17 are hard to describe without losing some composure. The day began with the Governor ordering flags across the state to half-staff in Bill's honor. I could not be more proud of the attention to detail paid by those who prepared the uniform that was placed on a mannequin torso in Bill's casket. While his remains were positioned out of sight in the lower end of the casket, his service dress blouse with perfect stripes, medals, and a name tag were displayed in the open casket.

It was at this time that I finally got to meet Dawn, Alexander, and the remainder of the O'Kieff family. They welcomed Kathy and me into their family and shared many memories of their 47 year struggle to get to this day – a day that they thought would never arrive.

The funeral included a eulogy presented by a member of the Tennessee Governor's office. It was well received by everyone. As Bill's casket was being removed from the mortuary, the exterior doors opened to reveal an awe-

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## Bookie 102 (from Page 17)

inspiring contingent of the Air Force Honor Guard, the Patriot Guard Riders, police escorts and community members who wanted to pay their respects to this hero. Salutes were rendered and held until Bill was secured in the hearse.

The long funeral procession lasted about 25 minutes as it wound through his home town and along a divided four-lane highway to Roselawn Memorial Gardens, where he would rest for eternity. The 25 or so members of the Patriot Guard motorcycle team, coupled with the lights and sirens on what seemed like 20 police cars, commanded the attention and respect of the whole town. Not a person walked, and not another vehicle moved all along the route. Veterans stood at attention outside of their cars and saluted all along the route, children held American flags, and many along the route held their hands over their hearts in respect. If you witnessed this display without tears in your eyes, you were either not human or not American. Bill was greeted at Roselawn by the Patriot Guard Riders, an Air Force Honor Guard rifle team, and hundreds from the community.

When his wife was buried at Roselawn in 2016, the family was asked if they wanted to purchase the plot next to her, but at that time they had lost hope of Bill ever returning home, so they did not buy the plot. In May 2017, when the family was notified that his bones had been positively identified, they returned to Roselawn to see if the plot was still available. They had little hope of it being available though, since it was in a prime location. As if it was always meant to be, the plot was still available for Bill to rest alongside the love of his life.

While the Patriot Guard Riders held flags and law enforcement officers from multiple agencies stood at attention, a respectful silence fell over the hundreds gathered. After an Air Force KC-135 performed a fly over with the refueling boom fully extended in salute,

a piper played "Tennessee Waltz," a song played at the wedding of Bill and Margaret, 59 years ago. The piper also played "When You and I Were Young Maggie," Bill's song to Margaret. The grave-side services were moving as the Air Force Honor Guard and an Air Force Chaplain conducted the final tribute to a fallen hero. After the rifle team completed a 21-gun salute, two flags were expertly folded; one was presented to Alexander, and one to Dawn, the symbol of a grateful nation.

I admit that I was fearful as we made our way from Wichita to Murfreesboro, fearful that our nation, the State of Tennessee, or the Murfreesboro community would cut some corners on this homecoming. They did not. If Bill would have been a four star General, he could not have received a more distinguished and heartfelt homecoming.

Well done America! You made me proud.

He was my trainer, my friend, and even filled in as a dad when I needed one. He is greatly missed by his family, his country, and one knucklehead kid he mentored many years ago.

## Farewell to Tong Le Chan

by Be Van Le [VNAF 431 Sq, 71]

After huge losses, the North Vietnamese Armed Forces attacked hundreds of South Vietnamese cities in the summer of 1972. The Vietnamese people called this the "Red Fire Summer." The Armed Forces of South Vietnam recaptured the big cities and won the four biggest battles at Quang Tri, Kontum, Binh Dinh, and An Loc.

The Viet Cong's biggest loss was at An Loc. They withdrew back into the jungle, waiting for re-enforcements for future battles and to rest. They encircled the Tong Le Chan outpost, aka Tonle Cham, about 20 miles southwest of An Loc.

*Editor's Note. U.S. pilots knew the 3,000 foot laterite airstrip as Tonle*

*Cham, VA3-292. U.S. Special Forces named the Tonle Cham camp based on the Montagnard language of the local villagers. Few Vietnamese understood the language of these mountain people and Tonle Cham does not directly translate into Vietnamese. When South Vietnamese Rangers assumed command of the camp, they changed the name to Tong Le Chan. A name easier understood in written and spoken Vietnamese.*



Tong Le Chan was a U.S. Special Forces camp before the 92<sup>nd</sup> ARVN (Army, Republic of Vietnam) Ranger battalion took over. The Viet Cong (VC) surrounded Tong Le Chan with over 250 fighting men, but they didn't overrun it. They set a trap we called "Steel Bird Hunting" with a lot of mortars deployed to devastate South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) support.

The South Vietnamese government was determined to keep Tong Le Chan at any price to keep the Viet Cong out of War Zone III and Saigon.

The roads to bring supplies to support Tong Le Chan were cut off and dangerous. Only the air support of our two C-7A Caribou squadrons, the 429<sup>th</sup> and 431<sup>st</sup>, stationed at Tan Son Nhut AB, supplied Tong Le Chan. For many months, support of Tong Le Chan was very difficult with Viet Cong forces nearby. No C-7A Caribous could safely land for resupply.

In April 1973, the crew of Captain Ut, our 431<sup>st</sup> Squadron Safety Officer, flew in and tested the VC skill by his method of "quickly touch and go" to

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## Tong Le Chan (from Page 18)

check how the “Steel Bird Hunters” reacted. They hit the Tong Le Chan airfield with a dozen mortars. Captain Ut’s crew took off safely and escaped from the extremely dangerous airfield.

The ARVN 92<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Battalion was terribly short of supplies, without food, medicines, or ability to evacuate the wounded. The two Caribou squadrons few daily airdrop missions to Tong Le Chan, but no one could land safely to provide support.

When I checked my next day’s flight schedule, I felt bad when I saw my name on 2/Lt. Thu’s crew (name changed). We would fly two times to supply food from Bien Hoa AB to Tong Le Chan.

I complained to my Flight Mechanic (FM) leader, MSgt. Nhu Nha. He had scheduled me to fly with this pilot with whom I did not get along. I flew with many excellent Vietnamese pilots, but I did not like flying with Lt. Thu. I thought he did not make good decisions and took too many chances. Twice I was unhappy because I had been on flights with him I thought unsafe. I did not trust him as Aircraft Commander.

MSgt. Nha thought I was concerned about flying into the hot Tong Le Chan outpost. I told him that I did not like to work with this pilot. I thought he took unnecessary risks and we couldn’t get along well. He told me that he was sorry, but “We are the leaders and you, as the oldest FM, must fly to the hot airfield first for the younger FMs to follow.” MSgt. Nha insisted that, “We can’t change the schedule now, it is already set.” I said, “I am not complaining about the hot battlefield. I don’t mind! But, I can’t work well with this Aircraft Commander.” He replied, “I understand. Take your mission tomorrow. I will try not to schedule you to work with him again. Okay!”

As I started my hot mission, I was standing at my locker for a moment thinking about the flight. It may be the last flight of my life. I quickly decided

to take my anti-bullet jacket, which had hung in my locker for a year without being used. I knew I needed it today. I knew Thu would land at the hot Tong Le Chan airfield even though it had been a long time since any airplane had landed there.

Our C-7A Caribou (*PC 722*) took off from Tan Son Nhut for Bien Hoa. Lt. Thu told our crew, “We will fly to Tong Le Chan and see what situation is there. Then we will decide what to do.”

While we were flying to Bien Hoa, he requested the VNAF Saigon operators to provide two fighters for our safe landing at Tong Le Chan. The VNAF operation officers took his request and set up the fighters to help. I strongly believed that we were landing at Tong Le Chan that day. I was already prepared for this horrible, unforgettable mission.

We loaded 2,000 pounds of fresh food on a large pallet. We took off from Bien Hoa with the food and a Ranger who left Tong Le Chan on leave and then waited for many weeks for a flight back to his unit.

Lt. Thu contacted the VNAF Saigon Operators and reported leaving for Tong Le Chan and asked for the information about the fighters. They gave Lt. Thu the radio channel to contact the fighters. Two VNAF A-1 Skyraiders would fly along with us for protection. Lt. Thu contacted one of the A-1’s and they answered on the VHF radio. They informed Lt. Thu that they were flying on the left side, behind our aircraft. Thu ordered our crew to check them out and find where the A-1’s were. For ten minutes, both I, and our loadmaster, looked without any A-1 Skyraiders appearing in our sight. I thought to myself, “Maybe they are cheating us. Within 30 minutes they can maneuver the fighters to protect us. I don’t believe this! They’re not ready yet. It may be that the A-1’s are calling us from their parking lot.” We didn’t see them in the sky behind us.

I didn’t know why Lt. Thu was flying at a low altitude along side Highway 13, the road leading to Tong Le Chan.

He flew at much less than 3,000 feet. I looked down at the highway activity. I clearly saw huge buses and smaller, three wheel Lambretta scooters running down there. I even saw tiny motorcycles. Of course the VC saw us in the sky. I wondered why Thu didn’t fly higher than 6,000 feet to avoid them tracking us and guessing where we were going.

I was concerned for two reasons. The VC saw our heading going to the Tong Le Chan outpost. They may have contacted their Steel Bird Hunters to be ready to kill their target.

Another concern was that guerrillas might be shooting at us with their rifles. I opened up my anti-bullet jacket, put it on my seat, and sat on it, very concerned. I didn’t feel able to talk to this Aircraft Commander. I believed that the VC were ready and waiting for us with their Steel Bird Hunters in this Tong Le Chan trap.

We made a final check for the air support aircraft, but no aircraft appeared around us. Our aircraft got into the Tong Le Chan airspace. Lt. Thu contacted the Tong Le Chan outpost on their ground radio and asked for landing information.

The man answering the ground radio seemed like the voice of a base commander who waited there so long for our support until their food and supplies ran out. His happy voice greeted our crew with confidence. He encouraged us to land at a safe Tong Le Chan airfield where he was setting up his armed forces around the outpost. We were concerned about rockets, but we were not worried about VC attacking the airfield.

It was 20 minutes to the airfield. The FM ground radio encouraged us again. “*PC 722*, our airfield is safe for your landing. All our soldiers are at the airfield for your safety.” The ground commander gave us his instructions. That sounded so nice and encouraging. Lt. Thu decided to land without any VNAF

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## Tong Le Chan (from Page 19)

attack aircraft to support us. I felt we could get hit real hard on this landing.

Our aircraft was over the Tong Le Chan outpost. Lt. Thu briefed us for landing. He reduced the engines to idle speed for a STOL landing. We heard the stall warning sound in the cockpit and the Caribou was quickly falling from the air like a falling leaf. I saw the hands of the attitude indicator falling down. My ears hurt, so I covered my nose and blew air out to make my ears comfortable. The Before Landing procedure was completed and, four minutes later, our aircraft touched down on the runway.

Our Loadmaster took off all the cargo straps, keeping a single one to hold the cargo for the last release. We had opened the cargo and ramp doors 30 seconds before our C-7A touched down on the runway. I quickly put my anti-bullet jacket on and got up to help our Loadmaster to quickly release the cargo. The Ranger also released his seat belt and moved to the ramp door, waiting for our aircraft to stop.

Lt. Thu made a very smooth landing and quickly used reverse thrust and brakes to stop our aircraft less than half way down the runway, preparing for an emergency takeoff without taking time to make a U-turn to head into the wind. The Loadmaster quickly released the last cargo strap and I helped him push the cargo out.

Right at the moment that our aircraft stopped, the ground radioman yelled on the radio, scaring our crew to death "Viet Cong is starting to mortar, fly away! Hurry up! Go! Go quick! Fly away!"

I was trembling, unnerved by the ground radioman's words. He kept yelling on the radio. "Leave! The Tong Le Chan airfield is under mortar attack." I looked through the large cargo and ramp door opening to see the smoke rising up everywhere. Both pilots readied for an emergency takeoff out of Tong Le Chan. The Loadmaster and I were

still pushing the food pallet out. The aircraft moved forward and the heavy cargo rolled backwards. Luckily, it ran straight on the rollers to the ramp. I was concerned that it might get crooked and hang up on the tail of the aircraft. Certainly we might be killed. The cargo pushed the Ranger standing on the ramp down onto the runway surface with the cargo. We didn't know how hurt he was. We took off with the cargo and ramp doors open and things were scattered over the cabin floor.

The mortar smoke rose up everywhere, back on the runway, on the



*"Farewell" Drawing by Bill Le.*

side of our aircraft, and in the front as well. Although scared, the pilot bravely lifted the aircraft into the air through the smoke. Lt. Thu made a tactical departure, turning our aircraft close over the outpost to avoid the enemy shooting. He quickly got to a high attitude over the outpost before we left the area of Tong Le Chan. Lt. Thu looked back to see us cheerfully yelling.

On the ground radio, the Ranger Battalion commander congratulated our lucky crew. He said that 23 mortar rounds exploded on the Tong Le Chan airfield while we were on the runway there. We were really lucky! We would live for more days in the Vietnam War.

On the way back to Bien Hoa AB for the second flight to Tong Le Chan, Lt. Thu reported an emergency and dangerous situation because of the mortar attack on Tong Le Chan airfield and requested that the second mission be canceled. The VNAF operator in-

structed our crew to land at Bien Hoa AB and wait for their orders.

After noon, the VNAF Saigon Operations Officer informed us that our second flight to Tong Le Chan had been canceled and we flew back to Tan Son Nhut AB. That was our last landing at Tong Le Chan, a C-7A Caribou farewell to the Tong Le Chan outpost! After our last flight, the VNAF decided that no more C-7A Caribou would land there to supply the outpost.

Two VNAF C-130 squadrons, the 435<sup>th</sup> and 437<sup>th</sup>, now responded with low-level parachute drops to support Tong Le Chan. There was a lot of enemy anti-aircraft gun and mortar fire there. The C-130's had a hard time getting low-level parachutes. Some of them made high altitude drops. Fifty percent of the supplies fell inside the Tong Le Chan base, helping our servicemen survive, but the other half of the supplies landed outside the outpost and were gifts for the Viet Cong. They loved getting "free booties."

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## RoVAF Exhibit

A Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Weapons Exhibit will be open daily from Saturday, November 25 through Friday, December 1, 2017. The exhibit of war paintings and artifacts can be seen at 10880 Bissonnet, Houston, TX 77099 from 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM. Admission is free.

The display will include numerous Vietnam landscapes and paintings of Vietnam War VNAF aircraft (A-1 Skyraider, A-37 Dragonfly, C-7A Caribou, UH-1 Huey), ARVN weapons (105 mm howitzer), ROV naval craft, and paintings of well-known landmarks, such as, the Flying Dragon gate at Tan Son Nhut AB, the entrance gate at Pleiku AB, and the runway at Tan Son Nhut AB.

Also available for viewing will be various military items including a M-72 light anti-tank weapon, documents, and photographs.

## You Want to Do What?

by J.V. "Cuff" Kelso [537, 69]

The cover story on the April 2017 issue of the Caribou Newsletter brought back some vivid memories when it said, "Many of us were disappointed when we received our Caribou assignment, but, for more than a few, it turned out to be the best assignment we ever had."

I was in the upper quarter of my 70-01 Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT) class at Laredo AFB, TX and had dreams of getting a fast mover. But when the block of aircraft came out, there were only two fighters, an F-100 and an A-37, and every conceivable form of transport known to mankind (plus, of course, the usual B-52's and KC-135's). So I sucked it up and asked for a C-130 assignment to Taiwan and went back to the BOQ in a not very good mood. That, of course, was after a trip to the O-Club to help deal with the disappointment.

Well, when I got back to my room, I happened to pick up a copy of the Airman magazine, and low and behold, it had a little article on the Caribou. It even had a picture of one taking off from one of the short airstrips in Vietnam. I looked at that picture and thought to myself, "Now that looks like fun!" I remembered that the last guy in our class had gotten a Bou for his assignment (that's how popular they were). So the next day, I went to the flight commander and asked if there was any way I could switch with the last guy in the class and get his C-7A in exchange for my C-130. The flight commander looked at me in disbelief and said, "You want to do what?" So, I explained my reason. He told me that it had never been done before, but he would check into it.

The next day he came to me and asked one more time if this was really what I wanted to do and I said, "Yes". He said he had checked with the last guy in the class who was more than

willing to trade, since he was married and the C-7A would have sent him to Vietnam. Then he checked with the assignment folks who said it was okay, so it was a done deal. I had the Bou!!!! And that one move changed my entire life, as well as my Air Force career.

I absolutely loved flying into all the short airstrips and the guys I was stationed with. What a great group we had at Phu Cat. But, the even bigger consequence of getting that assignment was that when I finished my year in Nam and went back to the States, I had to fly something different. So, hoping to get back into jets, I took a T-41 assignment to the Air Force Academy, which was supposed to guarantee going into one of the jet trainers following that. Well, what do you know? When I got to Colorado Springs, CO, I met the gal who became my wife six months later and we are now coming up on 46 years of a wonderful marriage.

Then to top it off, I got a T-38 for a follow-on assignment, and that led to my getting my absolute dream aircraft, the RF-4, which would allow me to fly as fast and as low to the ground as anyone could ever want to fly. And all of that happened because I picked up a magazine and read about the C-7A. I truly became a believer that God was in control of my life. It's been great. And, yes, that C-7A assignment was one of the best I had in my Air Force career.

## Just the Opposite

by Ron Lester [459, 67]

My C-7A assignment story is the opposite of Cuff's.

I was in UPT Class 67-F at Laredo AFB, TX. When our initial assignments came in, most of the block was fighter aircraft of one type or another. Almost everyone who wanted a fighter assignment got one. Who didn't want to be a fighter pilot in the spring of 1967? I was assigned to F-4C's and still have a copy of my orders to the 479<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing at George AFB, CA.

It was a couple of weeks before graduation. Some guys had already finished flying. The remainder needed only one ride and a check-ride or just the final check-ride. The end was in sight.

We came into the squadron room on a Friday morning. Written on "white boards" in the front of the room were our new assignments. About 40 percent of the fighter assignments had been changed to bombers, tankers and transports. I was the only one with a C-7A assignment. No one knew what a C-7A was, other than C meant "cargo." A lot of young studs (students) were extremely unhappy. It was a very, very drunk night at the O-Club that evening.

The Caribou assignment definitely changed my life and my USAF career path. Starting off in the back seat of an F-4C would have been a completely different story.

If the assignment to C-7A's was not my best flying assignment, it was definitely the most important and where I learned the most – which probably makes it the best.

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## Memorial Dedication

On 26 December 1969, 459<sup>th</sup> TAS Caribou S/N 63-9723 was shot down by small arms ground fire as it approached Tien Phuoc. First Lieutenant David B. Bowling was one of those killed in that shoot down. David was a member of La Plata United Methodist Church, La Plata, MD. The congregation established a memorial in his honor at their church. The memorial was improved over time and was rededicated on Sunday, November 12, 2017.

The C-7A Caribou Association members who planned to attend the dedication to honor and remember our fallen comrade include: Dick Lanoue [459, 69] and his wife Phyllis, Gary Clark [459, 69], Link Spann [459, 67], Bob Striegel [535, 66], Marty Reza [458, 67] and his wife Anna, and Art Candenuist [535,70].

## Bob Hope Christmas in Vietnam

by Judith Johnson  
Vietnam Magazine  
December 23, 2009

One of the few constants of the Vietnam War, and one eagerly anticipated by American troops, was the annual Bob Hope Christmas Show. From 1964 to 1972, Bob Hope included South Vietnam on his annual trips to visit troops during the holiday season, a tradition that started for him during World War II (WW II). “Back in 1941, at March Field, CA, I still remember fondly that first soldier audience,” Hope once said. “I looked at them, they laughed at me, and it was love at first sight.”

While only a small fraction of the 2.5 million troops who served in Southeast Asia actually got to attend Hope’s performances, for those who did he managed to break the monotony, ease the loneliness, and give the troops in combat zones across Vietnam a couple of hours of laughter, and a memory for a lifetime. Bob Hope’s classic opening monologues of rapid-fire jokes always took jabs at the GIs and the specifics of the local situation.

Under a hot sun or a driving rain, his young audiences laughed and cheered the legendary comedian and his cast of singers, dancers, and the musicians of Les Brown and his “Band of Renown”. Hope’s shtick included a constant, sometimes bawdy banter with the other performers, taking plenty of shots at the absurdities of military life while conveying a real sense of how difficult it was for the troops to be away from home during the holidays.

Hope began taking his show on the road after the United States entered WW II and the United Service Organization (USO) started sending Hollywood and radio entertainers to perform for military audiences at bases in North Africa, Europe, and the South Pacific. Already a giant movie and radio star, Hope traveled overseas six times, log-

ging more than a million miles during WW II. At the outset of the Cold War in 1948, when the Soviets closed all ground travel from West Germany to Berlin, Hope’s show followed the reserves sent by President Harry Truman to facilitate the airlift into the western sectors of Berlin. Later, in the 1950’s, Hope traveled to South Korea and all during the 1950’s his show played at military bases in Japan. By the 1960’s, Hope’s Christmas shows for troops overseas had become a fixture of America’s traditional holiday season.



As early as 1962, Hope wanted to go to Vietnam to perform for the growing contingent of American military advisers. Planning moved at a steady pace for a 1963 show, but the Pentagon ultimately pulled the plug on it because of what it considered too high a risk. Nevertheless, at age 61, Hope persisted and won approval for his first Vietnam shows in December 1964. With his new destination came a new twist to the shows. They would be filmed and be broadcast as holiday specials in early January of the next year.

These filmed productions required a new level of effort in organization and execution to bring them to a new domestic audience. Hope remained the star and the driving force behind his tours. Other leading performers such

as Connie Stevens, Ann-Margret, and Joey Heatherton welcomed the opportunity to join him, despite the stress of travel into a far-flung war zone and the hardships they encountered there. Hope’s Vietnam engagements were among the most dangerous ever for the funnyman and his entertainers.

On December 15, 1964, Hope’s contingent left Los Angeles aboard a military transport aircraft large enough to carry the support staff and all the entertainers, including Les Brown and his band, the reigning Miss World, Anita Bryant, actresses Janis Paige, and Jill St. John, and comic actor Jerry Colonna, who had been part of Hope’s group during World War II.

The tour covered 25,000 miles and included stops at Wake Island and Guam. They flew on to Korea for a performance in which Hope opened his monologue by labeling South Korea as “Vietnam North.” He won thunderous applause when he cracked, “We had a little trouble landing in Seoul – Someone stole the runway.”

Security was exceptionally tight for Bob Hope’s first visit to Vietnam. Although the planners had made intricate arrangements through the offices of Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) prior to his December 24 landing, there had been no official announcements or confirmation of Hope’s visit. The locations of all his shows remained secret. Even Hope and his staff never knew the name of the base they were to perform at until they landed. Reporters noted that plans for Hope’s visits to different areas were more secret than those for generals or cabinet officials. Troops who made up the audiences were never told who would be visiting until the last minute. Hope’s show schedule was a well-guarded secret on air bases or ships, until he touched down with his famous golf club.

The first show in Vietnam, on Christmas Eve, began almost immediately

**Continued on Page 23**

## Bob Hope (from Page 22)

upon landing at Bien Hoa Air Base, which the Viet Cong had bombed in November, destroying many aircraft. As soon as Hope reached the stage, he opened with a hearty “Hello, advisers! I asked Secretary McNamara if we could come and he said, ‘Why not, we’ve tried everything else!’ No, really, we’re thrilled to be here in Sniper Valley. What a welcome I got at the airport – they thought I was a replacement.”

Although a Communist attack was a real possibility, Hope appeared relaxed, swinging a golf club, which became a constant prop during his monologues. “I love the runway you have here,” he quipped. “Great golfing country – even the runway has 18 holes.”

After the show, the group moved to Saigon, where the dire warnings of danger literally exploded into reality. Hope and most of the performers stayed at the Caravelle Hotel, while Brown and members of the band stayed at the Continental Palace. Both were close to the Brinks Hotel, which served as a Bachelor Officers Quarters for the Americans. That afternoon, a bomb flattened the Brinks, sent glass and other debris into some rooms of the Continental and shook the Caravelle. No one in the troupe was injured, but the explosion left all the hotels without water or electricity. True to form, Hope stitched this incident into his act at Tan Son Nhut the next day: “I want to thank General Westmoreland for that wonderful welcome yesterday. We opened with a bang!” And at the outpost in the Mekong Delta, he joked: “A funny thing happened to me when I was driving through downtown Saigon to my hotel last night. We met a hotel going the other way.”

Next up was a flight to Pleiku, a helicopter base in the highlands, with heavy security in place for the visitors. Rumors had circulated that Hope’s group was headed their way, but no one was sure until the airplane landed and Bob Hope walked onto the stage. “What

a welcome,” he declared. “Wherever we land we’re met by thousands of cheering servicemen – they think it’s Secretary McNamara with shut-down orders!”

Jill St. John did her stand-up routine with Hope, trading one-liners about her IQ and his golf score, and later in the show she performed the segment that became very popular with the servicemen, when they joined her on stage to dance the “Go-Go” to the beat of Les Brown’s band.



At Da Nang, the tour’s largest audience in Vietnam, Hope made light of the frequent changes in government that year. “Vietnam is a very democratic country, everyone gets to be president.” As usual, he joked about military cut-backs and the aircraft he was forced to fly in. “It’s one of the earlier jets, instead of afterburners, it has an oven and a bag of charcoal.”

The last show on the 1964 Vietnam tour was at the seaside city of Nha Trang. At this and every performance, after a brief prayer from the chaplain, Anita Bryant closed the show by singing the first verse of “Silent Night,” and asked the troops and other performers to join in on the second verse, a tradition that continued through all the show’s years. The group left Vietnam on December 28 and flew to Clark Air Base in the Philippines for a show before heading home. Arriving back in Los Angeles on December 30, Hope

told reporters, “This was the most exciting Christmas trip since 1943.”

The 1964 trip set the pace and the pattern for all of Bob Hope’s visits to American troops around the world for the next eight years. While the performers changed and the locations varied, Hope was always the star and began the shows by strutting on stage with his golf club in hand, firing off jokes tailored to each base. He always had the reigning Miss World and always tried to bring the troops the outstanding glamour star from back home. He started appearing on stage in military uniform shirts and jackets outlandishly decorated with patches, stripes, stars, and insignias. And as the number of military personnel stationed in Vietnam grew each year, the tour’s length expanded too. Hope and his guest stars also made stops at hospitals and on ships to visit with wounded service members.

All the shows were filmed live and later edited down to 90 minute television specials broadcast on NBC in January, sponsored by Chrysler and run commercial-free. The telecasts featured not only the entertainers, but also plenty of shots of the U.S. troops, including footage of the Christmas meals they shared together, and Hope’s visits to the hospitals and hospital ships.

At the end of the 1964 telecast, Hope displayed his more serious side:

“We want to thank Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara for making this Christmas trip possible. Let’s face it. We’re the Big Daddy of this world. I talked to a lot of our fighting men over here and even though they’re putting up a great fight, against tremendous odds in this hide-and-seek war, they’re not about to give up, because they know if they walk out of this bamboo obstacle course, it would be like saying to the Commies, ‘come and get it.’ That’s why they’re laying their lives on the line everyday – and they said Thank You. I don’t think any of us ever had a better Christmas present.”

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## Bob Hope (from Page 23)

For the 1965 tour, Hope's troupe flew for 22 hours in a C-141 and spent much of the flight in rehearsal. Stopping at Guam to refuel, the cast put on a full two-and-a-half hour show.

The American escalation had a direct influence on Hope's shows. Within a year, the number of American military bases had multiplied, troop levels increased eight-fold, to 180,000, and so had the size of Hope's audiences. Two fighter escorts accompanied the entertainers to Tan Son Nhut on Christmas Eve, and the cast was rushed to the site of the show. Hope took the stage and announced to the crowd of 12,000 that he had to "come to Vietnam to see his congressman," referring to the flood of members of Congress who made frequent jaunts to Vietnam at the time. The troupe flew next to Cam Ranh Bay, where Hope, sauntering across the stage wagging his golf club, scolded the troops: "I don't know what you guys did to get here, but let that be a lesson to you!" Baking in the hot sun, the troops roared in agreement.

Hope looked relaxed and genuinely enthusiastic, even in the withering heat, when he delivered his monologue at Bien Hoa for the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade on Christmas Day. His guest star Carroll Baker, hot off the movie "Harlow," bantered with him and Colonna, Kaye Stevens sang for the troops, and Joey Heatherton danced the "Watusi" with servicemen who were brave enough to step up to the stage.

On their flight north to entertain the Marines at Chu Lai, Hope's plane lost an engine on the way, and they arrived late. Hope then set the mood, opening with: "Other bases here in South Vietnam invited me; this one dared me!" Later, at Da Nang, the monsoons caught up with them, and they performed through a heavy downpour. It was here that Hope had some serious reflections on what he was seeing among the troops he was meeting. After the show,

Hope told an interviewer, "The kids here seem more optimistic than those at home. They have more confidence in our leaders."

Bob Hope performed 22 shows and visited five hospitals in 1965. Each show lasted more than two hours, and typically there were two performances a day. Every tour he made to South Vietnam drew the attention not only of American fighting forces, but of the enemy as well. It was not unusual for the Communists to fire on or attack a base shortly after the show ended. After each show at Pleiku, the Viet Cong would shell the area.

In 1966, for the first time in many years, Bob Hope's partner and friend, Jerry Colonna, was unable to join the troupe after suffering a stroke. Nevertheless, Hope's company, featuring



guest stars Phyllis Diller and Heather-ton, left Los Angeles on December 16, and by Christmas they were at Cu Chi. Actress Chris Noel, who was asked by Hope to join the show for this performance, arrived on a chopper in time to join him and the troops for a traditional turkey dinner in the mess. Noticing some men precariously perched on tall poles before the show began, Hope asked during his opening monologue, "How did you get up there? LSD?"

The tenor of the Christmas tour of 1966 reflected changing attitudes in the United States regarding the course of the war, and Hope's humor didn't shy away from it. He reassured the troops that "the country is behind you 50 percent." He then added, "I'm very happy to be here; I'm leaving tomorrow!"

While Hope largely kept his personal

opinions out of his on-stage performances, he spoke freely with reporters off stage. At one stop, he announced he was definitely 'hawkish' and expressed his desire that the "United States would move a little faster to end the war."

By Christmas 1967, the number of American military in South Vietnam had reached almost 500,000, resulting in ever-larger audiences and making Hope's appearances even more important for boosting morale. Joined on the tour by actresses Raquel Welch and Barbara McNair, Hope performed for 25,000 men and women at Long Binh who sat in a brutal sun while organizers fretted about security. He told the troops at Da Nang that Dow Chemical just got even with student protesters: "They came up with an asbestos draft card." During a visit with the wounded, Hope asked one soldier, "Did you see the show or were you already sick?"

The next year, as audiences swelled, Hope added former Los Angeles Rams player turned actor Rosie Grier to his entourage, and Ann-Margret, who was a hit in her mini-dress and go-go boots. At Cu Chi, they had to travel in a safety pod of three aircraft to get in, and Hope noted, "Every time we come here, there is action!"

"And did you read where President Johnson just requested another \$50 billion to cover the rising cost of the war? Wouldn't it be awful if we ran out of money and they repossessed the war?"

Actress Ann-Margret joined Bob Hope's troupe for the 1968 tour. At Cam Ranh Bay, where it poured rain, the ensemble donned hats and remained on stage. "We're not going to let this little rain shower bother us are we?" asked Hope. "Where's Billy Graham when you need him?" When a stagehand came to take Ann-Margret's fur out of the rain, Hope remarked, "Look at this, nothing gets saved but Ann-Margret's fur." They finished the show with "Silent Night," and the audience sat there in the rain and sang with them. "It was

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## Bob Hope (from Page 24)

the only Christmas they had, and they weren't going to miss it," said Hope during the telecast.

The 1969 tour left Los Angeles and stopped off in Washington for a state dinner with President Richard Nixon and a rehearsal at the White House, where Hope and guest stars Connie Stevens, The "Golddiggers" from The Dean Martin Show, and astronaut Neil Armstrong, who just a few months before had become the first man on the moon, tried out their material before taking it to Vietnam.

As with all great comedians, dissecting contemporary culture, politics, and changing societal mores was a Hope staple. Widespread recreational drug use in America and among troops in Vietnam had become a comedic target by 1970 and a part of Hope's routine. With all-star Cincinnati Reds catcher Johnny Bench as his foil, Hope chimed: "Where else can you spend eight months on grass and not get busted?"

But even Bob Hope couldn't escape criticism in 1970 when he made references to drug use by the troops. NBC removed most of the drug jokes prior to its January broadcast. But, at a show at the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division's base, Hope got huge laughs during his opening monologue when he said: "I hear you guys are interested in gardening here. Our security officers said a lot of you are growing your own grass. I was wondering how you guys managed to bomb Hanoi without planes!"

Hope never knew when the brass would show up, but every year Generals William Westmoreland, Creighton Abrams and Fred Weyand, and Admiral John McCain would find him on stage somewhere to thank him and his crew.

The Bob Hope Christmas tours continued to go to Vietnam until 1972. On the last tour, the group spent less time in Vietnam because of the drastic decrease in the number of American troops by then. That year Hope greeted the Ma-

rines at Da Nang with, "Wonderful to be working for you leftovers!" But, he quickly added: "You guys are lucky because you get to go home, not like our representatives at the Paris Peace Talks."

While steady troop withdrawals meant smaller audiences, there was no less commitment and enthusiasm from the performers. And even though they spent less time in Vietnam, the grueling 1972 Christmas tour lasted more than two weeks with shows at bases in the Philippines, Singapore, Guam, and a Christmas morning performance for 1,200 Seabees at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.

Decades removed, Bob Hope's material still holds its own, and his jokes about military life ring as true now as they did then.

Clearly, after nine consecutive Christmas trips to Vietnam, Hope was tired, and he was also suffering from a serious eye condition. In addition, he was increasingly criticized because of his vocal support for a war that much of the public had turned against. Vietnam tore the nation apart and Hope got caught in the fray. After more than three decades of making troops around the globe laugh during wartime and peacetime, he found himself defending his commitment. For those who saw him perform in Vietnam, his shows made them feel they were not forgotten in an unpopular war and that their sacrifices, in their war, were as important as the "Big One" in which their fathers fought.

During the final montage of photos and film of his last televised Vietnam Christmas special in 1972, Hope narrates film footage of Long Binh shot a year earlier, bustling with troops. "Well," he said, showing the new footage of a deserted Long Binh, overgrown with weeds, "this is how [it] looks now, and this is how it should be, all those happy, smiling, beautiful faces are gone. But most of them are really where they belong, home with their loved ones."

Sure Vietnam is a dirty war.  
I've never heard of a clean one.  
Bob Hope

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## Share a Story

by Ron Lester [459, 67]

The primary purpose of the newsletter is to provide C-7A Caribou Association members a forum to share their stories. For this to work well, members have to submit stories.

At the Tucson reunion, I saw 100 members sharing stories day and night for four days. I encourage everyone who was at the reunion to think about the stories they told there, write them down, and send them to me.

I noticed everyone else did exactly what I did at the reunion. They drank, ate, and socialized with members from their own squadron. This is perfectly natural, but it means members only heard stories from their squadron mates and did not hear anyone else's. I guarantee you the members of the other squadrons would like to hear your stories.

There are a couple of reasons people may be hesitant to submit a story.

Some people may be concerned with the nuts and bolts of writing like spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and formatting. Don't be. Those are the editor's problems, not yours. Simply tell the story you want to tell. Don't worry. It doesn't have to be perfect.

Some people may be concerned whether or not the story is appropriate. Don't be. If you think your Bou Brothers would enjoy the story, jot it down, and submit it. Let the editor decide whether it is "In" or "Out."

Not every story or item submitted will make it to the newsletter, for various reasons, but the more material there is to work with, the better the newsletter will be.

**Share a story. Please send to:  
ron.lester43@verizon.net**

## Da Nang F-4C Crash

459<sup>th</sup> TAS History, Oct-Dec 67

“On 25 December 1967, a Marine Corps F-4C crashed into the 459 TAS operations and maintenance building at Da Nang while attempting to make a go-around. Capt. Martin S. Hillman, Jr.; Capt. Robert F. Mullen, the supervisor of flying; SSgt Nelson Guadalupe; Sgt. Terry L. Green; and Sgt. Peter Smithlin were working in the building, preparing a Christmas dinner for the detachment party that evening. Capt. Mullen heard a roar, looked outside and saw the F-4C coming down right on top of them. He judged from the trajectory of the aircraft that it would strike the operations building, or immediately to the rear of the building where a tent and picnic table had been erected for the Christmas party. He knew that most of the detachment was gathered there for lunch. Without hesitation and with no thought of his personal safety, he rushed to the rear of the building, shouted a warning, and then tried to exit the front of the operations building.



At this time, the aircraft hit and the resulting explosion blew him (Capt. Mullen) out the front door. There is absolutely no doubt that his timely warning, at great risk of personal safety, saved many lives. Due to Capt. Mullen's timely warning, Capt. Hillman, SSgt. Guadalupe, and Sgt. Green were able to make it to the front of the operations building before the aircraft crashed. They saw Capt. Mullen, who was in shock by this time, trying to get away from the building. With the

aircraft burning fiercely and with complete disregard for the danger to themselves, they rushed to Capt. Mullen and carried him north across the parking area to safety. Seeing the F-4C pilot, still bound in his parachute harness, lying dangerously close to the crashed aircraft, Capt. Hillman ran to him, cut him from his parachute harness, and removed him to safety. Capt. Kenneth C. Barnes and Sgt. Smithlin were at the loading area when they saw the aircraft stall and crash into the operations building. Having just left the group there, they were certain there must have been many casualties.

Despite the fact that the F-4C was burning fiercely, and believing the aircraft to have live ordinance aboard, Capt. Barnes and Sgt. Smithlin ran to the crash area and began searching for survivors. This search was conducted in intense heat, smoke, and flames while minor explosions were occurring. Finding no survivors and believing that there must have been people trapped by the crash, they ran into the partially demolished operations building to see if a phone would work so help could be summoned. With the burning aircraft less than thirty feet away and with the possibility of ordinance exploding at any moment, Capt. Barnes and Sgt. Smithlin then ran outside to the bunker and found several people in it. Realizing that if the bomb did explode the bunker would be destroyed, they took the people north, across the parking area to safety.

The exemplary heroism displayed by these airmen is in the highest tradition of the military service and reflect great credit upon themselves and the United States Air Force.”

*Editor's Note. Capt. Hillman and Capt. Mullen were each awarded the Airman's Medal for their actions. That evening, the C-7A members at Da Nang enjoyed one of the best Christmas parties ever held, celebrating life and the good fortune that all of them were alive and uninjured after a day which could have been much different.*

## B-17 Navigator's Log



**11-30-43. Mission No.12.** Briefed at 0300 for Solenger, Germany. Town of 150,000. MPI (Main Point of Impact) was business district. Took off at 0800 in the rain and climbed for 12,000 feet before we broke out of clouds. Assembled over Point #7 at 19,000 feet.

Capt. Smith's ship caught on fire. Their flares started it and six gunners bailed out. One jumped without a chute and was killed. Two officers couldn't get out and crashed. Smith jumped but was badly burned.

Ten ships from our group aborted. We finally flew to the Dutch coast and only had four ships, so came home. 44 degrees below zero. Bombay doors frozen, guns frozen. Clouds clear up to 30,000 feet over Germany.

Two of our ships went down in yesterday's raid. One ran out of gas and the other shot down. Everyone pretty much beaten tonight. Losing some good crews and not hitting much.

**12-12-43, Mission No. 13.** Keil, Germany. Germany's North Sea Fleet's harbor. City of 250,000. Submarine pens, etc. Took off at 0830. Left England at 1045. Our group led our division. We carried ten 500-pound demolition bombs. Twenty minutes ahead of us. 350 miles over the North Sea.

Germany was closed over, so the Pathfinder was used. (*Editor's Note. Pathfinder was a Royal Air Force target-marking force that flew Halifax and Mosquito bombers.*) Went by Hamburg which had a cloud of flak, but we were out of range. Dropped our bombs over Keil on the area lit by Pathfinder's incendiary bombs. Flak was lighter than expected. We only saw seven to eight JU-88's who attacked our low squadron. Got back to base at 1530. Got off easy considering it was our 13<sup>th</sup> raid.

## USAFA Caribou Plaque

from USAFA AOG on Facebook

On October 4, 2017, approximately 40 people attended a special ceremony to recognize those who flew the C-7A Caribou during the Vietnam War.

A plaque highlighting the mission of the C-7A and commemorating those who lost their lives during combat missions was unveiled by United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) graduates Gordon Bredvik '63 [66, 537], and Tom Smith '70 of the Association of Graduates (AOG).

One hundred Academy graduates flew the C-7A in Vietnam: one from the Class of 1959, four from 1961, two from 1962, 12 from 1963, seven from 1964, 15 from 1966, 11 from 1967, 28 from 1968, 14 from 1969, and six from 1970.

A total of 40 Air Force C-7A crew members lost their lives in combat missions during the war, including two USAFA graduates, Capt. Robert Bull II '61 [457, 68] and 1/Lt. Theron Fehrenbach II '68 [457, 70].

The C-7A plaque is the 13<sup>th</sup> unit plaque added to the Unit Wall at the Southeast Asia Pavilion along the Association of Graduates' Heritage Trail. The plaque dedication emcee, Bruce Buono '68 [458, 70], said the Air Force used the C-7A in the Vietnam War for about six years, supplying Army, Marine and other customers with weapons, troops and critical supplies. "We risked our own safety by supporting our troops on the ground," Buono said.

What made the C-7A unique was its ability to land on short and unimproved runways, Buono explained, and to deliver supplies to troops who were closest to the enemy front or at isolated outposts.

*Editor's Note. Bruce Cowee [458, 68] and Allen Pichon [536, 70] led the funding effort. Pat Hanavan [535, 68] designed the plaque and iterated the design with Bruce, Allen and the AOG point of contact.*



## Caribou Airlines Review

Reviewed by Francis L. Kapp,  
Col, USAF (Ret)

from *Daedalus Flyer*, July 2017

Oh my goodness, Pat Hanavan, you have my respect for putting this three volume set together. The details are amazing: everything you ever wanted to know about the venerable C-7A Caribou is in them (well, almost – I suspect there could be a Vol. IV in the works to cover the period after Vol. III). This history of USAF C-7A Caribou operations in Vietnam is very thorough, and seems to be based upon the official USAF Histories of the Wing, the Tactical Airlift Squadrons, the Maintenance Squadrons and the Combat Crew Training Squadron, augmented with stories from those, who were there (some of

the latter are priceless and will give the reader a good laugh). Each chapter, for each unit, is organized the same way, so if your interest is in unit leadership, or parts and supplies issues, you can easily find them to compare the differences between units. It's the same if you are primarily interested in flight operations, training, awards and decorations, etc. Vol. I details the handoff of the Caribou and its mission from the Army to the Air Force, and the resulting challenges to spin up the new units and man them. It is subtitled "The First Years: 1966-1967". Vol. II is subtitled "Tet Offensive: 1968," and Vol. III is subtitled "Ben Het: 1969." If you are going to read them, as I did, from cover to cover, just don't expect to do it quickly, as the amount of information to absorb is immense.

## ***Fini 403***

by Ron Lester [459, 67]

Corrected article from  
Newsletter Vol 1-18, Mar 2007

It was early in the morning of October 9, 1967, when Capt. Joe Dennehey and I took off from Da Nang on the first flight of the day to take a load to Khe Sanh. I was a newly promoted 1/Lt. copilot, but was an experienced hand by that time, having arrived in-country the first week of July as a brown bar. There were angry clouds and numerous thunder bumpers as we proceeded north from Hue. The thunder bumpers increased in number and intensity as we left the coastal plain and crossed into the mountainous region enroute to Khe Sanh. We tried unsuccessfully to find a path through the dark clouds and it became impossible to remain VFR. During these gyrations, we lost oil pressure on the right engine and the Flight Mechanic visually confirmed the engine was covered with oil. We shutdown the engine and headed for the coast. Joe was not able to maintain altitude on the single engine and we were already at a low altitude when we finally broke-out of the clouds and could see the ground. A quick review of the terrain told us we were close to Quang Tri. It was obvious we weren't going far and our options were limited. Joe immediately decided to land at Quang Tri City.

As I remember, Quang Tri City (listed as Quang Tri 1, VA1-79 in the Tactical Airdrome Directory) was on the north-east edge of the town. It was a dirt strip approximately 1,500 to 1,600 feet long and about 50 feet wide with no over runs worth mentioning. The airfield was surrounded by several rows of barbed wire fences and there were mine fields at each end of the runway. The runway was basically aligned north-south and there was a ditch with a culvert that ran under the runway a hundred feet or so from the north end.

Less than five minutes after we broke-out of the clouds, we were on

short final approach for a landing to the north. Joe certainly didn't want to land short (mine field) and going around was not a realistic option, so Joe wanted to make sure we made the runway. We touched down farther down the runway than usual for a short runway, but we still had plenty of room to stop under normal conditions; however, not much was normal that day. The runway was very slick due to recent heavy rains. Joe reversed the good engine and attempted to keep the aircraft on the runway while I held the yoke full forward. Despite Joe's efforts the Bou slowly drifted left. The left gear left the runway, but we continued to track down the runway. We were slowing down, but the end of the runway was coming up quick. Forward progress ended abruptly when the left gear hit the culvert. The landing gear collapsed and the working propeller sheared from its shaft upon impact with the ground. The freed prop spun up and impacted the left side of the fuselage, shattering the passenger window and tearing a large gash in the fuselage where the Flight Mechanic normally sat for landing.



I do not remember the Flight Mechanic's name (*AIC Lyhue Fisher, Jr.*). He was a young, black Airman, broad-shouldered and solidly built. I don't know if it was from training, habit or natural intelligence, but instead of sitting with his back to the window, the Flight Mechanic had strapped-in and sat side-ways, facing the rear of the aircraft with his back braced against the bulkhead in anticipation of a possible rough landing. His foresight saved him from serious injury and kept our day from being really tragic. As it was, we all walked away with minor bumps

and bruises.

Much more happened before that long day ended, but that is my story of what happened when Joe Dennehey landed the crippled Bou at Quang Tri City.

The damage to the Bou, S/N 61-2403, we left at Quang Tri City was substantial. Repairs were estimated at 6,000 to 8,000 man-hours. The lack of space and facilities, and security issues, made it impossible to repair the aircraft on-site. The recovery plan was to take the wings off and use a Sky Crane helicopter to lift the fuselage and fly it to Phu Cat – a long haul from Quang Tri City.

I later saw a photo of the Bou slung under the helicopter enroute home, but it never made it. I am not sure what happened or why, but the unlucky Bou was dropped from several thousand feet. When I heard about the dropped Bou, I thought it was the end of the story, but it wasn't. Several weeks later, the aircraft Crew Chief came up to me and said, "I thought you might want to have this." He was holding the copilot's yoke from the lost Bou. A maintenance team had been transported to 403's final crash site to salvage what they could. The yoke was one of the items they brought back. The original trim button had been lost during the Bou's helicopter adventure and the missing button had been replaced with a shiny new trim button. Other than that, it was clearly the same grungy looking yoke I had held during the Quang Tri landing, including the black electrical tape that was wrapped around the upper right portion of the yoke. I gladly accepted the yoke from the Crew Chief.

Months later, I was among the first group of 459<sup>th</sup> copilots that arrived as brown bars and upgraded to Aircraft Commander (AC) towards the end of their tours. Shortly after being made an AC, I had a run-in with one of the senior maintenance sergeants. I don't remember the exact discrepancy in dispute, but the bottom line is that I

**Continued on Page 29**

### **Fini 403 (from Page 28)**

refused to accept a plane he thought I should take. He was not at all happy and I am sure he was thinking, "That smart ass Lieutenant has no business being an AC anyway." (*In all fairness to the maintenance sergeant, I probably was something of a smart ass.*)

In a few weeks, it was time to rotate home. You had to pack your bags and turn them in for inspection the day prior departure. I had several "memento" items packed including the copilot's yoke, a copy of the Tactical Airdrome Directory, and an Army field jacket I had scrounged the first few weeks I was in country.

It was afternoon when I heard a knock and Lt. Col. Secrest's large frame filled my barracks room door. He had the copilot's yoke in his hand. My favorite maintenance sergeant had been in charge of out-bound bag inspection that day and my "mementos" had been confiscated. The sergeant had personally gone to Lt. Col. Secrest, 459<sup>th</sup> TAS Commander, and filed a complaint that I was illegally in possession of government property. Lt. Col. Secrest gave me a lecture on the proper and improper use of government property – and taking government property out of country was not proper. He then growled something about, "Anyone who squeezed this not knowing if he was going to walk away or not deserves to have it," and stomped from the room.

*In 2015, the yoke was finally mounted and hung on the wall.*

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### **Words of Wisdom**

I am only one, but I am one.

I can not do everything, but  
I can do something.

I refuse not to do the something  
I can do.

Helen Keller

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### **New 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Association Coin**

This coin is similar to the original Association coin, but it commemorates the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Air Force operation of the C-7A and is larger in diameter. This coin will replace the original coin when it has sold out. Price: \$11.00 shipped.

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### **XS-1 Spaceplane Award Coming Soon**

by John A. Tirpak  
from *Air Force Magazine*  
May 11, 2017

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) expects to award a contract for the XS-1 spaceplane program "soon," according to a contractor authorized to speak about the program. Michael Arnone of Spire Communications said DARPA is indeed in the final stages of a "downselect" to choose one company to proceed into the flying phase of the spaceplane, which is meant to be a two-stage to orbit vehicle potentially able to bring down the cost of space lift "by orders of magnitude," according to DARPA's website.

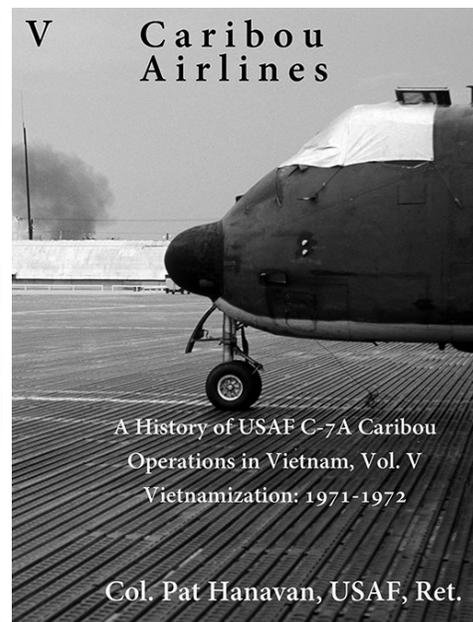
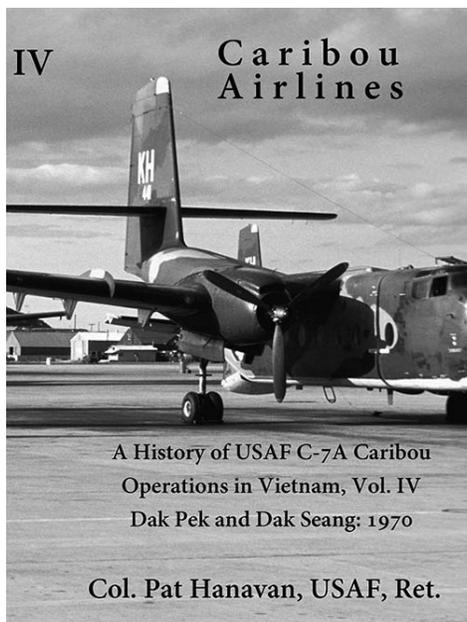
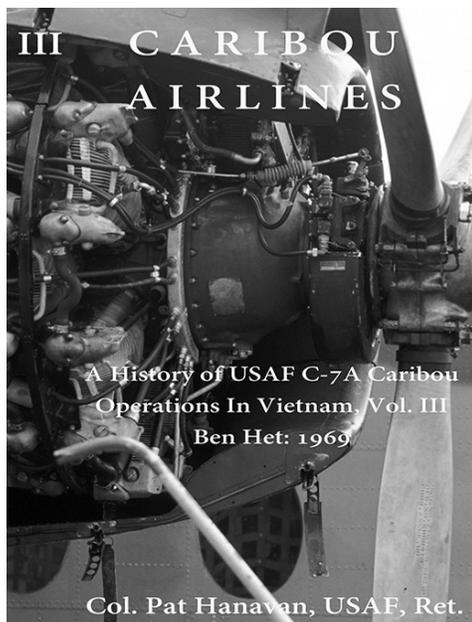
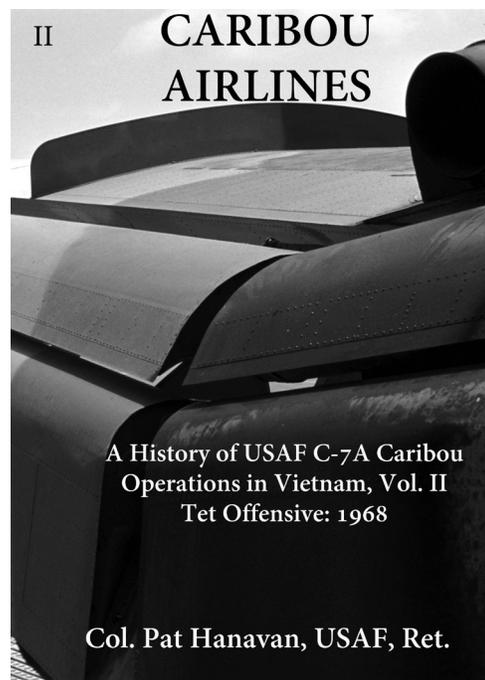
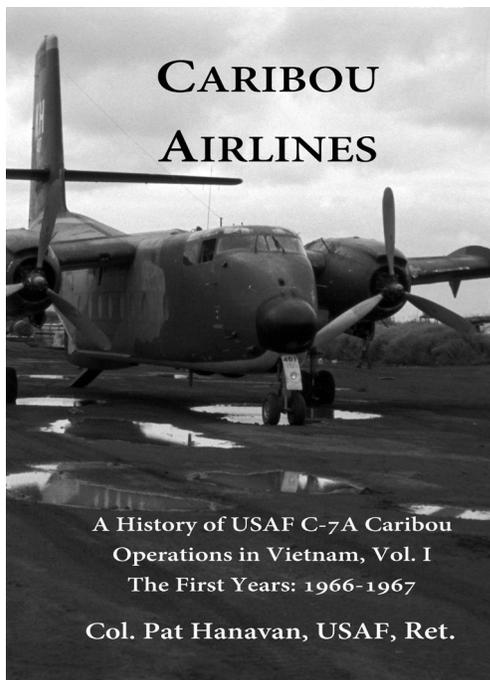
Arnone acknowledged that program plans called for the downselect in late 2016 or early this year, but "this is the government and things sometimes take time," he said. Phase I of the program explored concepts offered by Boeing partnered with Blue Origin, Masten Space Systems teamed with XCOR Aerospace, and Northrop Grumman



working with Virgin Galactic. However, the Phase II contractor won't necessarily be chosen from the three Phase I participants.

After downselect, a critical design review would take place in 2018 and a series of flights could be made as early as 2020.

One of the program requirements is to fly 10 suborbital or orbital missions in as many days, achieving space operations with "aircraft-like" frequency, DARPA said. If successful, a "public-private partnership" model of operating the vehicles could be adopted, DARPA documents show.



*Caribou Airlines* is a comprehensive history of USAF C-7A operations in Vietnam. It is about aircrews, crew chiefs, maintenance officers, line chiefs, maintainers, phase inspection personnel, specialty shop personnel, supply personnel, personal equipment specialists, administration and operations personnel, commanders, staff personnel, etc. They made it possible to deliver the troops, guns, ammunition, rations, beer, soda, equipment, animals, etc. to hundreds of bases on the battlefields of Vietnam. The 483<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Airlift Wing and its squadrons were not an airline, *per se*. They were tasked with supporting Army and Marine units and other customers with air landed and air dropped supplies using pre-defined, emergency, and opportune sorties to front line locations where the supplies were needed.

The history of the Military Advisory Command, Vietnam (MACV); C-7A Caribou Association newsletters; and personal stories of those involved in C-7A operations provide the context for the books.

Signed individual copies of the book can be ordered from the author for \$20 and a set of all five signed for \$80, shipping included: Pat Hanavan, 12402 Winding Branch, San Antonio, TX 78230-2770. The books are also available from Amazon.

## C-7A DVD #2 – New!



### New C-7A DVD

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Air\_War\_over\_South\_Vietnam\_1968-1975  
Army Air Facilities 1973

#### Art

Art\Logo Images  
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Art\Poster  
Art\R2000  
ATC Manuals  
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C-7A-1  
Cam Ranh Ammo Dump  
Cam Ranh Ghost Town  
Caribou Agreement (USAF and USA)

Caribou Sales Brochure  
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CRB\_Approach\_Plates  
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Video\UPT  
Vietnam Campaigns  
Vietnam Gazeteer

#### DISK 2

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Fire Bases  
Google Earth database (add-in)  
ONC\_K-10  
Series 1301 Charts  
Series\_1501\_Charts  
Series\_L509\_Charts  
Series\_L701\_L7014\_Maps  
Series\_L701\_L7014\_Maps\L7014\_Below\_17N  
Tactical\_VFR\_Chart  
Vietnam Country Maps

#### Available on our web site:

<http://www.c-7acaribou.com/memorabilia/memorabilia.htm>  
for \$8, shipped.

### White House VA Hotline

A Veterans' Administration Hotline has been established at the White House. Call **855-948-2311** to communicate your problem.

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## Memorabilia (Previous Order Forms Are Obsolete)

### MEMORABILIA ORDER FORM

Contact [pathanavan@aol.com](mailto:pathanavan@aol.com) to check availability of items.

Fill out and mail with a check to: **C-7A Caribou Association, c/o Pat Hanavan, 12402 Winding Branch, San Antonio, TX 78230.**

1. Polo Shirt*	Size - Please Mark: M L XL XXL	Qty. _____ @ \$20.00	Total: _____
2. Colored T-Shirt	Size - Please Mark: M L XL XXL	Qty. _____ @ \$16.00	Total: _____
3. R-2000 T-Shirt	Size - Please Mark: M L XL XXL	Qty. _____ @ \$13.00	Total: _____
4. Denim Shirt (short sleeve)	Size - Please Mark: M L XL XXL	Qty. _____ @ \$25.00	Total: _____
5. Denim Shirt (long sleeve)	Size - Please Mark: M L XL XXL	Qty. _____ @ \$30.00	Total: _____
6. Cap, Denim	One size fits all	Qty. _____ @ \$13.00	Total: _____
7. Cap, White	One size fits all	Qty. _____ @ \$13.00	Total: _____
8. 457 <sup>th</sup> Patch		Qty. _____ @ \$3.00	Total: _____
9. 458 <sup>th</sup> Patch		Qty. _____ @ \$3.00	Total: _____
10. 459 <sup>th</sup> Patch		Qty. _____ @ \$3.00	Total: _____
11. 535 <sup>th</sup> Patch		Qty. _____ @ \$3.00	Total: _____
12. 536 <sup>th</sup> Patch		Qty. _____ @ \$3.00	Total: _____
13. 537 <sup>th</sup> Patch		Qty. _____ @ \$3.00	Total: _____
14. 483 <sup>rd</sup> Patch		Qty. _____ @ \$3.00	Total: _____
15. C-7A DVD (1:10 long movie)		Qty. _____ @ \$5.00	Total: _____
16. C-7A DVD Archives (documents, art, videos, charts, maps)		Qty. _____ @ \$8.00	Total: _____
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18. C-7A Coin		Qty. _____ @ \$8.00	Total: _____
19. 50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary C-7A Coin		Qty. _____ @ \$11.00	Total: _____
20. C-7A Pin		Qty. _____ @ \$3.00	Total: _____
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\*Polo shirt colors: White, Gray, Yellow, Red, and Light Blue (please specify)

**Total:** \_\_\_\_\_

Note: Each amount above includes cost of purchasing item and domestic shipping. Any excess funds are a donation to the Association.

Photos of items can be seen on the web site: <http://www.c-7acaribou.com/memorabilia/memorabilia.htm>