

(Webmaster Note -This personal story of events surrounding assignment to the 219th Aviation Company “Headhunters” and associated military service is unedited and shown as submitted by the author)

JOHN A. KUBIK

HEADHUNTER 22

1967-1970

I graduated from flight school on 29 August 1967 and was more proud of this accomplishment than receiving my commission as an officer.



While in flight school, those of us who were not married, pretty much were treated as “top gun” kind of guys by the local female population. I suspected that is why the schools were located in rural south Georgia and Alabama farm country so that we young “studs” would have few to choose from. I did manage to date a nice girl while in Georgia but I could not get past her “southern twang” (she was a bright attractive kid but her accent was definitely not for this Yankee Boy).

I did however, meet my first wife while I was in Alabama (she was originally from Oklahoma – much better).

Vietnam...

Growing up, I gave little attention to the reality of a war. Most certainly I had concerns, but I was not in a position to judge if the conflict was just or unjust. Having been directly involved in this conflict I do now have an opinion; all wars are an incredible waste of humanity and resources. Imagine this; a group of old men (politicians) direct the youth of a nation (the military) to jeopardize their life and limb because “they” think this action is justified (really). There would be far fewer wars if the “old men” were in the trenches fighting other old men because they could not reach an agreement on a matter of import.

I did not arrive in Vietnam with an agenda nor did I judge the conflict for its correctness in purpose; I just went and did what I was instructed to do to the best of my ability.

All people arrive in this environment with an element of uncertainty and fear. These concerns usually diminish once you are allowed to settle-in with your unit and you are briefed on your mission and your responsibilities.

I arrived on 3 October 1967 and would remain in country until 3 October 1968. I was assigned to the Second Platoon of the 219th Reconnaissance Airplane Company (RAC) Platoon and my first

duty assignment was near the city of Quy Nhon. A moderate sized port city in the middle of the II Corp. Our unit provided aerial reconnaissance (intelligence gathering) over a large area in the central highlands. The topography in this region was exciting to witness, large undisturbed sandy beaches, steep mountains (similar to the Smokies) to the west and north and an expansive low land area that stretched for miles between the mountain ranges along a river valley. It takes close to 30 days to become familiar with your area of operation. You are taken or follow the experienced pilots as they conduct missions and you observe how they conduct themselves and how intelligence information (sightings on the ground) is gathered and passed up the chain of command. From time to time you would be asked to adjust artillery (mostly to adjust their guns). My call sign during my tour of duty was Headhunter 22.



O1-E Bird Dog

Two months after my arrival, our platoon was relocated 100 miles to the northwest in the city of Kon Tum. Unfortunately I was left behind to orient/train the replacement unit known as the Pterodactyls. In three weeks I was called back to company headquarters in Pleiku to train aerial observers and spent the next two weeks taking enlisted men for a ride to teach them how to fly and land the plane should the pilot be killed and how to read topographic maps to record sightings on the ground. I don't know which "nimrod" came up with this dumb idea but it did not last long and never were these observers allowed to participate in an actual mission (in my unit). Fact of the matter is that, 200 additional pounds had a significant impact on the performance of the aircraft and the pilot would rather be driving a sports car (well sort of) instead of a sedan.

I was then returned to my unit in Kon Tum in the mountainous region of II Corp. The setting was far more “rustic” than our accommodations in Quy Nhon where we lived in a 5 bedroom one-story new house with a kitchen and multiple bathrooms. Our billets at the base were a series of one-story multi-unit screened barracks with two persons to every room, sleeping on a bunk bed and sharing a multi-stalled bath area (well it was better than a tent).

This area was very remote and the only town (village) north of our base (area of operation) was Dak To which had a sizable military presence at the airfield. Due to the remoteness of the region, many of the missions we flew were two ship missions so that if one plane went down, at least they would know where to find you. Our primary mission was to support MACV forces near Kon Tum and in the remote areas, several Special Forces A teams in the mountains that were located adjacent to a Montagnard village. Occasionally we acted as air cover for Special Forces patrol missions but once in a while we would carry a prostitute from the “city” to spend the weekend with the 10 men in the A team (boys will be boys where ever they are).

The “tranquil” days and nights ended on 30 January 1968 when the Tet Offensive commenced. Shortly after mid-night an enemy rocket flew over our sleeping quarters and we then all took off to our positions on the perimeter of the compound. The compound probably had no more than 200 personnel and covered about 5 acres with an adjacent but separate Special Forces B team compound with 100 personnel. Throughout the night we could hear rifle fire and minor explosions, but they were occurring a mile or two to our south. There was no further attack on the compound that evening so we prepared to head to the airfield (2 miles east of the compound) at first light.

Two APC’s (armored personal carriers) arrived at the main gate at dawn and took us to the airfield. That was one noisy, scary ride through the outskirts of Kon Tum, but fortunately it was uneventful.

As we were preparing to launch the aircraft to see what was happening (we had no communications with outside units so we had no idea as to the scope of the offensive), bullets started penetrating the Quonset hut that served as our flight operations building. With adrenalin cursing through our bodies the energy level increased to “full bore” and we sprinted to our planes. As I was about to enter my plane, Cpt. Neal Griffin, my section leader, pulled rank on me and advised me that he was taking my plane. When Neal returned from his flight the day before, it was discovered that there was a leaky petcock in the right wing’s fuel tank and hence all the fuel was drained from the tank the previous day. This condition rendered the aircraft un-flyable except that it could be flown one and one time only to a destination where repairs could be performed (this condition is known as **Circle Red X** in the aircraft’s log book). If I were going to “war”, I would rather be in the air than on the ground with only a rifle for my defense. I took Neal’s plane and our planes were the first to meet on the runway. We began our takeoff rolls together (he on my left) and as I reached flying speed (mid-field) I climbed and banked sharply to the right, Neal continued straight down the runway and was engaged by an enemy 37mm machine gun near the end of the runway that put two large holes in his wing. One round penetrated the mid-point of the right wing’s strut and the other penetrated through the outboard portion of his right wing missing the wing tank mounted fuel cell. The impact of these exploding shells partially flipped the plane which he was able to recover. Once again in stable flight he was able to locate and destroy this anti-aircraft battery with one of his wing mounted rockets. Neil

received the Silver Star for his extraordinary bravery that prevented the enemy from taking down other planes that were in the process of taking off from the air field.

Now while all this excitement was going on, which I did not witness, as I was in this steep climbing turn, I felt the plane shudder from the impact of a rifle round. I did not know where the round had landed but I did know that 2 of my 3 radios (air to air and air to ground) were not operating. It took a bit of time to regain communications with the ground but I was unable to talk to the other planes now in the air. I conducted aerial reconnaissance south of the airfield but observed no unusual activities and the gunfire at the flight line had stopped. We later learned that this was part of the overall plan of the offensive.

I was instructed to fly my plane to company head quarters at Pleiku, have necessary repairs made and await further instructions. After landing at the Camp Holloway Airfield and parking the plane in an available revetment, I was advised by the crew chief that there was a 6" tear in the right wing and the fuel tank in this wing (this was the tank that was drained the day before). The round that penetrated the top portion of the right wing and stopped in the radio control panel just above my head (this was one of those God is my copilot days – thank you!). Later in the day I was give a different plane and was instructed to return to Kon Tum to pick up a crew chief and bring him back to Pleiku as the airfield was to be evacuated leaving only the 57th Assault Helicopter Company to defend their compound on the airfield.

We were able to evacuate all but four members of our unit which included CPT Larry Thompson (CO), CPT Neal Griffin, LT Jimmy Wilson and SGT Penn. They were to remain at the MACV compound throughout the night and the rest were returned to company headquarters at Pleiku.

After evening mess (dinner) most members of the company were assembled at the company bunker as reports were coming in that this was a nationwide offensive. The company bunker had 8 steel Conex shipping containers that were connected together and they were covered with sand bags (tops and sides). Each container was 6'x6'x6' and had 2 triple bunk beds that would sleep 6 individuals (very cramped). I and others could not handle this claustrophobic environment and elected to remain in the central enclosed area. Soon thereafter the CO, Major F. Maffett entered the chamber and asked for two volunteers (officers) to go down to the flight line and keep an eye on the enlisted men that were charged with guarding our planes (a secondary defense position of the airfield). I don't remember volunteering but soon LT Dave Farenbaugh and myself made it down to the flight line and took up our position in a plane occupied revetment.

A revetment is an 8' tall "U" shaped chamber made of corrugated steel planking to protect the planes from enemy fire. We checked in with the men and advised them where we would be located should we be needed. After Dave and I arrived at our chosen position we chatted for a while and decided that we would try to get some shut-eye as we had been up for more than 36 hours. Now some might think that we were guilty of dereliction of duty, but I can assure you that the primary defensive perimeter at the airfield was reasonably substantial and nobody would breach the perimeter before every member on the base would be wide awake. Dave chose to sleep in the plane and I slept on the ground with my back against a side wall of the revetment.

How much time passed before the first mortar round impacted on the airfield was unknown to me but the first round hit our fuel bladder which contained about 1,000 gallons of avgas and as I

had predicted, we were all instantly awake. The following rounds (about 10) were walked uphill toward the company headquarters area and bunker. A number of rounds hit around the facility and there was a limited number of minor casualties and only one that was serious.

American airpower soon jumped into action and whoever thought that they would breach Camp Holloway Airfield's perimeter tonight was soon to be disappointed. Watching "Spooky" in action at less than a mile is an awesome sight. Things quieted down after a while and no further enemy activity occurred before sunrise.



We were ordered back into the air (4 planes) to return to Kon Tum to collect the other members of our unit that remained there. The MACV compound was attacked by a sizable force during the night time hours. While I was not there to witness the events that transpired, I was told that wave after wave of enemy soldiers attacked the compound and without the use of substantial air power and artillery the base would have been overrun (must have been one scary place to be). Surprisingly, there were few if any casualties in MACV or "B"

Team compounds that night (more on that later).

Our flight line revetments, munitions storage area and flight operations building were destroyed. A number of casualties were sustained by members of the 57th Assault Helicopter Company however, I have no numbers to substantiate this fact. Flight operations for the unit was moved to company headquarters for a number of days before the EOD (explosive ordnance disposal unit) could remove all the unexploded munitions from our previous munitions storage area.

It took several weeks to rebuild our flight operation building and the Corp of Engineers came in and built replacement revetments. While enemy activity substantially diminished a few days after the Tet Offensive, things would never be the same.

A week or two later I was dispatched to a city in the southern part of II Corp (Ban Me Thuot) to assist a sister unit in aerial reconnaissance duties. The assignment lasted about a week before I was allowed to return to my unit in Kon Tum. The rainy season had arrived and I departed in the early afternoon. During the rainy season you had a choice on how you could travel for an extended flight. You could fly at low level and dodge a few rain showers in rough air or you could climb above the clouds (usually about 10,000') and fly in smooth cool air (I chose the latter).

Nearing my arrival to my destination I was looking for a suitable hole in the clouds to begin my descent and found one large enough to do a split "S" to lose altitude rapidly. I was now at 4,000' and began to feel serious pressure in my sinus cavities (frontal and maxillary) however, I

continued my descent toward the airbase. As I neared 3,000' (airfield was at 2,500') I could descend no further as I was afraid that I would blackout from the pain that I was experiencing. I advised my unit of my condition and climbed back to an altitude where the pain was bearable and remained there for several minutes before beginning a shallow descent to the airfield. Unfortunately there was no change in my condition such that I could land at Kon Tum.

I am not aware of what the proper name would be to name this condition but, I was aware that I had developed a complete blockage in my sinus cavities as a result of a head cold. During the course of the trip, when I was above the clouds, the reduced air pressure allowed rapid swelling to develop and close off the air passage ways. As I was running out of fuel it was decided that I would fly to a Special Forces airfield in the mountains with an elevation of 4,000. Headquarters would send a plane to meet me and take me up again to altitude so that I could slowly decompress my sinuses. The flight to Plato Gee was uneventful and I was able to land with some difficulty but without incident. The medic at the camp pumped me full of medication and I awaited the arrival of LT Doug Walton.

It was now dusk as we climbed to altitude and began the slow decompression process again. The clouds soon moved in and fully covered the airfield below us. During the rainy season it was typical to have heavy rain showers during the early evening hours and this day was to be no exception. It was decided that we would fly to Pleiku Air Force base as it had instrument landing capabilities that was not available at Camp Holloway or Kon Tum. Doug and I bounced along in moderate to heavy rain showers on our way to the airbase. We had covered about 75% of the 100 mile trip when the plane's instrument lights went out (you do not want to be flying a plane in IFR conditions at night without lights to illuminate your instruments). Fortunately the map light above our heads worked or we would have been in deep dodo. I held the light above Doug's shoulder and he had adequate light to view his instruments.

The Bird Dog was capable of flying in "weather" but it lacked instrumentation that would allow it to land in IFR conditions, hence our approach to the airfield was guided by radar. You can bet that Doug was as anxious as I was making the approach but things turned a bit worse when approach control ordered us to make a missed approach. Doug could not hold the headings he was given by approach control due to the heavy weather conditions and or his lack of experience as he was a "new bee" pilot (there are no instruments in the rear seat of the plane). Doug executed a missed approach and we were advised that we would be given a "no gyro" radar approach into the airfield. I do not want to educate the non-flying reader as to how far things have degraded but suffice it to say, that we were out of options. No one was happier than I was when we broke out of the clouds and the runway was in front of us. The ambulance raced down the runway following our plane and I was immediately taken to the base hospital.

One would think that I should have "blacked out" by now as we were at 2,000' however, the drugs that I was given earlier coupled with the excitement of the approach for landing surely distracted any concern about the pounding going on in my head. I soon met with the base Flight Surgeon who used a device that looked like a football with an air hose to force air into my sinus cavities. Check out how this thing works... you insert a hose with a nozzle that mimics the opening in your nose and while holding your other nostril closed, the Doc squeezes this bladder with all his might to force air into you sinus cavities (did not work very well but the narcotics sure did knock me out).

I remained in the hospital for a few days before I was allowed to return to my unit. The Flight Surgeon gave me a bottle of Afrin spray which I carried on my person every time I flew (forever).

More Changes...

CPT Griffin approached me one day weeks later with the comment that he had both good news and bad news to share with me. I took the bait and he said, “the good news is that he had been promoted to Operations Officer at Company Headquarters; the bad news was that I was going with him as the Assistant Operations Officer”.

Operations in a unit of this size are more administrative than anything else and Neil and I settled into our duties. I became the Mess Officer, the Motor Pool Officer, the Company Pay Master and whatever else needed to be done. The pay master position meant that I would fly to Quy Nhon at the end of every month with an armed escort and pick up the entire payroll for all members of the unit. Pay day was later in the day and I would distribute script to each and every individual in the unit to include the indigenous individuals (locals) that were employed by the unit (there were several). Here is the bummer about this job; you would pick up more than 100 pay vouchers (receipts and money, individually counted by others) and if there was an error where money was short...you got to pay for the “short fall” if you did not count all the individual packets when you picked them up (I suppose some people did that but I could not.. no short falls were discovered, well sort of). A directive was sent down from higher up that we were to terminate all “locals” that were employed on the base (caused by increased security concerns after the Tet Offensive). A special “pay day” was arranged for these 20 or so individuals and I distributed their accrued earnings to them.

A week later I received a visit from a JAG (Judge Advocate General – same as a lawyer) at my office. I was advised that the locals had accused me of not paying them one week of their accrued wages and if I did not rectify this issue I would be prosecuted in the military court system. I did not know what this was all about, especially since I had been the Pay Officer for only two months and I for damn sure did not have a dime of their money. I talked with the CO and others and here is how the plan went down.

The locals were brought onto the base and the meeting was to occur in the mess hall between meals. I had two armed guards at the entrance to the mess hall and two armed guards and a bus at the exit from the mess hall. I had an interpreter and I asked that the most vocal “agitator” be the first that I met with. I explained as best I could why there was a discrepancy and that the issue was their misunderstanding as how they were to be paid (fact of the matter was, I did not know what was the correct answer to the “problem”). I met with “what’s his name” (the agitator) and explained as best I could what I thought the problem was. He continued to object to my explanation until, I took my side arm (pistol) out, laid it on the table and I said “sign the damn document in front of you or I will blow your head off.” All locals signed the documents and were loaded onto the bus and were on their way in less than an hour (matter closed).

Finally Some Fun Stuff...

Neil advised me one day that I had been selected to attend the Naval Jungle Survival School in the Philippines and that while I was there I was to travel to Baguio City and order/pickup/ship a number of Head Hunter wood statues that were, as a custom, given to departing officers in the unit. The Philippines is a beautiful country and I found the locals to be very accommodating in every way (seems Americans were still welcome there in the 60's). I attended the 5 day survival school which was two days of classroom room training, followed by three days in the jungle without food or water. We were taught some skills necessary to survive in the wilderness and I was fascinated with what you could do with bamboo - starting fires, a cooking vessel and a number of other interesting tools and shelter materials that could be fabricated with this plant. And while bamboo was an indigenous plant in Vietnam, I sure did not see any of it in the mountainous region where I was flying.

We were bused to a remote area on the island and the eight of us guys plus two local guides/instructors, made camp after walking to a stream after a few hours. Skinny dipping in the stream was part of the afternoon activities as well as making some kind of primitive shelter for the night. We were also obligated to search/hunt for food for the evening meal. We searched all right but were not successful in finding anything that would be considered edible. The locals had brought some rice and waded into the stream with a primitive spear and they were able to catch a number of crayfish that they served us with rice for dinner (apparently a little experience goes a long way in this environment). Morning arrived and we were advised that we were on our own for the day and to find food so that we would have something to eat.

I had made friends with LT Pete Peracca on the flight into the Philippines and he was my partner on this survival adventure. I advised Pete in the morning that I had a plan, he agreed and we soon began to execute the plan. We moved downhill following the stream and were rewarded after a few of miles by arriving at a fuel depot that was part of the naval base. Nearby where we exited the "jungle" was a phone which we used to call a cab. A cab soon arrived and delivered us to our quarters on the base. We showered and changed clothes and had a hardy lunch at the "Spanish Cafe." While we waited for the second cab, we purchased a case of Cokes and a number of candy bars and shared them with all others when we returned to camp. The guides were embarrassed, but said nothing when we separated the following day. If you are in an E&E (escape and evasion) environment it is essential that you be resourceful and use all the assets that are at your disposal; and that is exactly what Pete and I did.

Unfortunately obtaining the Head Hunter statues in Baguio City was not without problems. Seems that there were some roving bands of hostile natives in the mountainous region where we were going and it would be necessary for us to rent a car and driver to take us there. It took two days to make arrangements for a car and driver which greatly slowed our progress. Now if I were on vacation this would be a serious problem, however if you are fighting a war in Vietnam, this would be considered a serious blessing. Pete and I enjoyed the local culture during our down time and when all was said and done it took close to a full week to finish my assignment and get back to Vietnam. I have no idea what Pete told his commanding office after his delayed return, but it must have been a good one.

Three days after my return I was off to Hawaii for R&R. This was to be no ordinary R&R, as I became engaged to my first wife (Joan Neher) while there. To not be in the military, outside of a war zone, for a few days was fantastic. To be with someone you loved, well that was even better.

We stayed at the Ilikai Hotel one floor below Det. Steve McGarret's room (for those who remember Hawaii 50). We engaged in all the activities that you would expect that two young people would engage in for the better part of a full week and as would be expected the week was over way too soon.

When I arrived back at my unit I was advised by the XO (Executive Officer) that one of our pilots went down while on a mission northwest of Pleiku. The pilot had died during the crash but the aerial observer had survived (R.I.P LT Donald Jacobs). Also troubling was that our CO (Major Williams) and Neil Griffin took a helicopter and crew to the crash site and they also went down injuring all that were aboard. I was never to see or hear from the CO or Neil again as they were transported out of country for prolonged and serious medical care. The XO and I were charged with identifying the pilot's remains and I can assure you that is something that you never want to do.

A few days passed and things began to stabilize in the unit as this was the first and only pilot lost during my tour of duty. The further tragedy of this event was that the plane crash was determined to be caused by pilot error which could have been avoided. I did not know Don well, only in passing, but his loss weighed heavy on many members in the unit.



Within a few days the replacement (CO) Company Commander, MAJ James Kidd arrived. I was never one to prejudge anyone but, it did not take long to realize that this guy and I were on the opposite sides of the world and that my position as Operations Officer was to be short lived. I lasted two weeks before I was sent back to my unit in Kon Tum. My only consolation, to this day, is that I am still taller than this little "putz".

Not many changes at the 2nd platoon since my departure 5 months ago, but there were a number of new faces. For the next 2 months I did what pilots always do and that was to fly my assigned missions to the best of my ability. I did make and record on a daily basis the passing of time on my "short timers" calendar.

Enemy activity in the area was showing some sign of increase and I had the pleasure of giving the weekly security briefing each Saturday morning to the MACV

Base Commander (COL Cayhill). One of the things that I missed while at company head quarters was the opportunity to conduct the dawn patrol (first flight in the morning). Its purpose was to circle the city multiple times to see if there were changes that might indicate nearby enemy activity and this took about 30 minutes and then you would conduct reconnaissance in your assigned area. I especially enjoyed the district southwest of the city as it was generally level in topography with a tall mountain range to the west where it bordered Laos/Cambodian. The area was bisected by a river named the Dak Bla, that was a medium sized river about 200' feet in width and it traversed large areas that were totally uninhabited. It was my routine after the dawn patrol to fly the riverbed 10'- 20' in the air. The beauty of this area of the country cannot be

described, but early in the morning flying in “smooth air” a few feet above water was “outstanding.” A common observation as you neared the end of the river run (40 miles) before it crossed the border was to see elephant or water buffalo grazing at the water’s edge (cool).

The remaining weeks passed quickly and it was not long before I was on my way back to the States. It was an all night flight and ended with all passengers cheering as we touched down in Seattle. I departed Seattle at dawn and as we climbed above the clouds I witnessed for the first time the beauty of Mt. Rainer’s summit rising majestically above the clouds. I told myself that one day I would return so that I could experience the beauty of this mountain close-up.

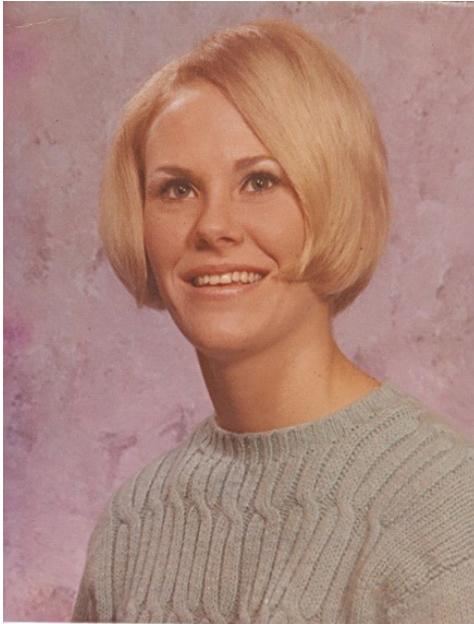
The next two weeks flew by with me spending most of my time in Ozark, AL with my soon to be wife. I was assigned to the 5th Army Flight Detachment at Ft. Sheridan, IL to act at a pilot flying military VIP’s throughout the 13 state area of operation. The first 30 days of my assignment were spent flying missions as a co-pilot on a variety of multi-engine aircraft; my favorite was the U-8 Seminole (Beachcraft Queen Air).



Our wedding (December 15th) was held at the Chapel at Fort Rucker, AL and the reception was held at the officer’s club. Weddings are considered a “big deal” for the bride, her family and friends and although I was proud of the event, as I look back on that day, the word that comes to mind was that it was an “ordeal” the groom endures as best he can.

I also am amazed as I reflect back over the years at the naivety and arrogant mind set of “young people” when they enter into a marriage contract with little if any concern for the consequences

of their actions. Neither of us had any ideal as to the responsibilities to one another that we had just assumed and all that we knew was that we were in love (the ignorance of “youth” transcends all generations).



No time for a “honeymoon” and we arrived, two days later, at our new apartment in Waukegan, IL I had hired a decorator who helped me furnish/decorate the apartment and Joan was pleased with most of my selections. We settled in doing what young newlyweds do and I began to expose my wife to the beauty of Chicago during the wintertime. I did not understand how much a person from Alabama could not only hate this snow covered environment or how she could miss her family as much as she did. Things began to improve when the weather improved but I was beginning to witness firsthand the many differences that existed between a girl from the South who is forced to live in a strange and lonely environment devoid of contact with a family that Joan deeply loved and missed. Joan found a job nearby doing paste-up and lay-out work for a printing firm and she was most certainly an accomplished artist doing what she did. Walking nearly a mile to work most days was a problem

for her and I did not blame her for her objections, but we had few options at this time to improve this situation.

My work was moving forward with few restrictions and soon after my arrival in Chicago I was promoted to Captain. Within a short period of time I became qualified in all the aircraft types at the base, was promoted to aircraft commander (left seat guy) and within a few months was asked (told) that I would be the assistant aircraft maintenance officer. I worked with an experienced and dedicated Major (his name escapes me), and he was an excellent teacher in explaining the responsibilities and showing me the ropes of this department. We had 16 aircraft at the base and employed a staff of 70 aviation maintenance personnel who worked a double shift each and every day. The responsibility of maintaining these airplanes was an enormous task with great consequences for failing to perform necessary and regular duties. The maintenance staff was mixed with both military and civilian workers and their work was second to none.

Our CO (Commanding Officer), LTC Charles Ogle was an incredible man who to this day I am thankful for the opportunities that he allowed me to experience. By the fall of '69 my boss (the Major) was transferred and the CO advised me that I was to be the new Aviation Maintenance Officer. Army regulations require that to be qualified for this position you had to attend a 9 month school covering all of the aspects of this position. The CO waved this requirement and I was made the new “guy in charge”. When you consider that we were flying VIP’s that were Code 7 and above, he had to have great confidence in my ability, and he did.

One advantage of this new position was that I went to the front of the line for base housing and was given access to a townhouse overlooking the 15th green of the golf course which paralleled the runway at Haley Army Airfield. The wife was delighted as she now had access to a vehicle as

I would be the one to walk the 200 yards to my office. The missions that we flew were varied and while some were out and back in a single day, others would require that you would remain at your destination for up to 5 days. The longer missions were usually associated with flying a General to a reserve camp where we (me and my co-pilot) would spend the week. I was appointed as the personal pilot of the Deputy Commander of the 5th Army (Major General Childes) likely because the times I flew him the weather was behaving, but nonetheless, I was his “go to guy”.

On these longer trips, we were given the option to remain on base at a BOQ (bachelor office quarters) or to seek lodging at a local hotel (we always chose the hotel). We were always given a staff car and often were asked, since we were with the General’s staff, would we like to have a guide take us fishing or hunting depending on the time of the year (we usually declined). Seems that young military officers enjoyed the restaurant/bar scene in small towns across America and it was not uncommon for a former military guy to buy your dinner or drinks if you dressed in uniform. It was also pleasant to interact with the local ladies even for a short while even though I was still a newlywed and no, I did not play around with any of them.

These extended travel missions were a “big problem” for the wife for a number of reasons that included the fact that she was alone and scared at night. I understand the being alone thing, but I have a lot of trouble when you are scared in a fenced and guarded military base. The other major issue was that this girl was insanely jealous and would pitch a major fit if I would take a civilian sport coat on one of these extended trips. This one problem remained an issue throughout the duration of our marriage and was likely a contributor to its termination in later years.

During my stay with the detachment I enjoyed a number of interesting missions which included a low level flight in early March from Big Red Lake in middle Minnesota south following the Mississippi River to Saint Louis, MO to assess the potential of spring flooding from snow melt by the Corp of Engineers. Another interesting mission was ferrying a U-21 (Beachcraft King Air) from St. Louis to Stockton, CA with a night in Las Vegas (first time in Vegas) and a low level pass over the Grand Canyon in route to our destination. This is pretty interesting stuff for a young guy that is just 24 years old.



One “special flight” that I will always remember was that we were asked to scramble a plane to deliver a package to Detroit and meet with General Woollnough’s plane prior to his departure to Washington D.C. (he was The Commanding General of the Continental Army Command). LTC Jim Garner was flying as co-pilot and I asked him what was in the bag and after a short period of negotiations we removed the single staple from the paper shopping bag. Inside the bag were two frozen pheasants and five pounds of Wisconsin cheese both of

which were the General's spoils from his hunting trip over the weekend. While I suppose that I believe in the concept that "rank has its privileges" this seems a bit much. The mission was logged as a training mission and since we were required to get 4 hours each of flight training every month, well it was then perfectly legal (well sort of).

Work was not all that was going on at the base, as we had both a softball and golf team that I thoroughly enjoyed playing on. We also had access to multiple racket ball courts and it was a pleasure to beat the older officers that I worked with on a regular basis.

My obligation to the Army ended in August 1970 and I was honorably discharged and we moved to Daytona, FL where I was enrolled in Embry Riddle Aeronautical University with the hopes of finally getting my degree. I had considered staying in the Army but the service would not give me the assignment that I wanted to remain active, nor was the wife excited about me having to go back to Vietnam.