



# FAC NEWS

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 1  
January 2012



PRESIDENT'S CORNER  
Phil Litts

Jake 26, Bully 21, Tam Ky, DaNang  
September 1970-71



Phillip Litts

Ladies and Gents,  
To start with, and probably to the delight of all, since most of the relevant FAC news that took place in 2011 happened before the July

[www.fac-assoc.org](http://www.fac-assoc.org)

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Newsletter, this column will probably be pretty short! You're welcome.

By the time you get this all of you will, hopefully, have had a wonderful and blessed Holiday Season, full of much laughter, great family get-togethers, and good health-be it continued or improved.

I think that health is a great place to start since a number of folks who've had health issues this past year are much improved. Seems our prayers were received and acted on for Anne Crouch, Pat (Barracks Chief) Green, Joyce Caven, and Judy Eby. We know that things will just keep getting better for these wonderful ladies. I'm sure there are more that I don't know about. *(Insert by Ed. Ken Blutt, George Boehmer, Sue Edwards (Lendy), and now Ken Semmler, who is undergoing radiation to the base of his tongue as we speak, come to mind. Those of us involved truly appreciate your prayers. And now back to our regular program...)*

Our Esteemed Keeper of the Royal Treasury, Bob Gorman (Jake 44), had a knee replacement done a few months back, and while he's "not quite ready to do an Irish jig yet", he and Nancy did go out the other night and "danced a couple of dances the Polish folks do." Uh Bob- they're called Polkas!!

Our beloved Chaplain, Howie Pierson (Nail 01), is recovering well in a rehab facility after his latest (and hopefully last!) surgery. He greatly appreciates all the cards and e-mails, and says, "They've really made a difference in my life!" Howie and Gilberta are "gonna be bearin' to go to the reunion in Tucson", and also says that we're all "Cleared Hot on Life, Freedom, Liberty, and Justice. I love you all!"

On another note on Howie- he and Gilberta were flown back to Tuscaloosa, AL, where on Sept 3rd, at half-time, on the 50 yard line, he was inducted into the University of Alabama Sports Hall of Fame! (Bama' beat Kent St. that day 48-7!) Howie said he and Gilberta got to sit in the President's Box and had two of his Nail buddies with him. Not sure if Bama' will recover from the Nail assault!! Turns out that Fast Howie lettered in both football and track there. Way to go, Fast Howie!

The official award is called the Bryant Alumni-Athlete Award. It is presented by the UA National Alumni Association to former athletes whose accomplishments have been outstanding based on character, contributions to society, professional achievement and service. That's our Howie in a nutshell.

That's about all from me. Our Tucson Reunion will be here before we know it and you'll find an update on this gala event that Pratt Ashworth and Company have in store for us, further on in this issue. Also, there's a recap of the Rustic reunion, courtesy of Claude Newland.

Y'all have a wonderful spring. Patricia and I send our very best to all and look forward to seeing you this October in Tucson!!

Fond regards to all,  
Phil Litts



## FAC REUNION COMING NEXT OCTOBER 17-21

If you've been to Arizona, you know our great fall weather, the grandeur of the mountains and desert, and our unique plants and animals; whether you have or haven't been before, come on down for a treat - in conjunction with the FAC reunion, scheduled **17-21 October 2012 in Tucson, Arizona.**

The fun begins on Wednesday, 17 Oct, and goes through Sunday morning, 21 Oct. The Doubletree By Hilton Hotel Tucson - Reid Park is a 3.5-star spa hotel with excellent amenities to include pool, gym, and tennis courts on site.

By way of overview, the **Board of Directors meeting** is scheduled for **Wednesday afternoon. Tennis and Golf** tournaments are **also** in the offering for **Wednesday** with **tours to various places** happening **Thursday through Saturday**, the **memorial service** will be on **Saturday**, and the **Hooch** (hospitality suite) will be open **Wednesday through Saturday.**

We are working with a **local casino** for free shuttle transportation between the hotel and casino on **Thursday evening. Friday and Saturday evening events** will be held at the **hotel banquet facilities.** See the **accompanying flyer for more details**, and get yourself prepared for a **thoroughly enjoyable** experience next Fall.

Ask yourself how many more times you're going to get a chance to see these friends and compatriots - and block your calendars to take advantage of the opportunity. You may want to come early and stay late to enjoy Tucson and the surrounding area.

Stay tuned! Contact information and more details will be forthcoming.

Thanks  
Pratt Ashworth  
Hm: 480-575-7355  
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*Do be there! Few events are more meaningful than our biennial FAC family reunions. If you have been there you know it's true. If you have not experienced one before, you owe it to yourself to take advantage of this one. Lots of fellow FACs put in lots of time and effort planning and preparing, and they always succeed in giving us the opportunity to choose activities that enhance our camaraderie, or we can choose to just hang out and tell lies. Either approach is mountaintop.*

*See page 4 for specifics and watch the website and the July newsletter for registration forms and instructions. Ed.*

## TREASURER'S REPORT

5 December, 2011



As of 12/5/2011 our current financial position is as follows:

**Checking: Current Balance - \$4973.32**

**Money Market: Current Balance - \$20857.08**

**CD's (2) : Current Balance - \$143360.55**

By the time you read this report I will have written our final check to MOAA that completely funds our first Designated Scholarship. Next year (2013), with the approval of your BOD, I will initiate funding of our second scholarship fund.

### I OWE A FEW OF YOU AN APOLOGY.

In my eagerness to make sure that the FAC NEWS gets into the hands of all of our current dues paying members I sent out a second reminder to those who appeared to be a little behind the power curve in paying their 2010 dues. Unfortunately I used an outdated master data base as I put out my email. Boy, did I catch hell from those who had responded to an earlier email!

**BUT STOP HERE FOR JUST A MOMENT BEFORE YOU READ ANY FURTHER.** (5-4-3-2-1....*Okay you can read on now — Ed. Sorry, I just couldn't help it...*)

The back page of your personal copy of the FAC NEWS contains a line showing your personal dues status info. If for any reason you feel that this info is in error don't hesitate to contact me and I'll stop whatever I'm doing and review your finances with you. There is no reason for any of you to pay your annual dues in advance. I told one of the guys who had sent in a check yesterday paying his dues thru 2016 that I'd call him when it was time to send in more money. I won't have time to make a personal call to each one of you.....**SO PLEASE READ THE BACK PAGE OF THE FAC NEWS** to check out your own status.

The FAC Associations financial position is solid, but it is changing. When I went in to the bank this morning to roll over one of our CDs I was told the best interest available would be .6% for a 15 month CD.

When I originally opened that CD in 2008 the interest rate was 5.0%!! But, on the other hand, we don't have to pay taxes on any of it.

Have a Happy New Year, stay safe.

Bob Gorman, Jake 44

Photo: Gary Dikkers

O-1A N193 TX

At Oshkosh

July 2011



## IN MEMORIAM

“To fly west, my friend, is a flight we all must take for a final check.” — *Author unknown*

	Callsign	DoD
Delbert W. Fleener	19th TASS	28May 10
Dale Kingsbury	Covey Nav	06May 09
Tom Eigel	19th TASS	19Jul 11
Laurence Lackey	20th TASS	28Feb 11
Walter A. Krueger	Covey 04	26July 11
Larry Mink	Tamale 16	08July 11
Hugh R. Martin	Issue 21	12Sep 11
David Brookbank		21Nov 11

## THE RUSTICS DO IT AGAIN

### Rustic Reunion After Action Report

They do know how to party. After a pre-party party at the Newlands' on October 12, the official party kicked off the next day in Destin, FL. Fifty four rowdy folks gathered, including special guests Kohn Om and Peter Condon.

Besides rowdy poolside and hootch festivities, tours of Hurlburt, eating lots of seafood, sunset sailing cruises, a golf match, a banquet, eating more seafood, happy hour with entertainment by Roger Dodd, remembering fallen comrades, including Col Lieou Oum, honoring Peter Condon and the whole Rustic book crew, and mangling the accent of Waltzing Matilda, they really didn't do much.

Speaking of the book: It is a completely revised and expanded “*The Rustics—A Top Secret Air War in Cambodia*”. It now encompasses 488 pages with lots of additional photos, new stories and new information. It is available on [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) for \$34.99 and an electronic version for \$8.99. It is a priceless keepsake for anyone involved.

Claude headed up the committee that did the work, and Peter, of “*CLEARED HOT—I & II*” fame voluntarily formatted the entire book. He's not even a Rustic and he talks funny, being an Aussie. What a guy! There's just something about those Aussies.



*Shamelessly excerpted from “Rustic News” (with permission)*

Peter Condon and Claude Newland being honored for their literary exploits.

Familiar sight to the intrepid Rustic interpreters. (Rear cockpit of OV-10 #639 being prepared for display in the Australian War Memorial.)



## WELCOME HOME

Missing Vietnam War Pilot Identified: Pentagon forensic scientists have identified the remains of Maj. Richard G. Elzinga, of Shedd, Ore., an Air Force pilot who went missing in action on March 26, 1970, along with his co-pilot, when his O-1G Bird Dog failed to return from a familiarization flight over Laos. They have returned his remains to his family; his burial, with full military honors, took place 8July2011 at Arlington National Cemetery. Search and rescue crews looked for Elzinga and his co-pilot in vain for two days after controllers lost radio contact with their aircraft. Between 1994 and 2009, DOD teams found Elzinga's remains during on-site investigations and several field surveys with Laotian counterparts. (DOD release)

## WELCOME (to your new) HOME Part II

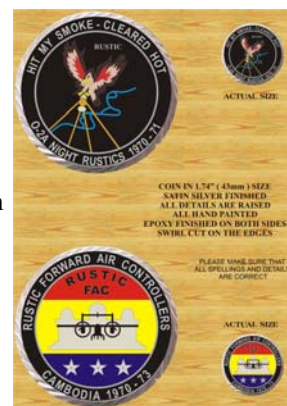
*From the FACNET*

Hi Gary , I leave Saigon with my wife and 4 children , on April 30-1975 at 10.15 AM by boat. I have been in refugee camp at FORT CHAFFEE ARKANSAS for couple months. Then move out to NEW CASTLE PENNSYLVANIA at mid August by Good Shepherd Lutheran Church SPONSOR.

This is country town, population around couple thousands, many OMSK peoples. We start a new life . I work as custodian in night shift . My wife work in hand bag factory. Children in the school. Very hard to start my life over here!!!Just a year, I have contact with BG.LUONG ,Abn/Div/Com. And I move to Hampton VIRGINIA. I work day time and go back to Vo/Tech. school for study skill Machinist at night time .Then I got a job at Siemen's Automobile Co. My wife find a job Assembly .and children has good school After high school, my old son joint AFA /Colo.class 1986. My 2nd. son joint NVA /Annapolis/MD.class 1990. My old daughter graduate MBA at UVA and young daughter graduate MBA at GeorgeMason....Now me and my wife RETIRED... Thank's GOD brought my family over here.-Thank's AMERICA open arm for VN. refugee and gave us a new life Happy THANKGIVING .....Best regard....Truc...

*Just thought you would be interested. Ed.*

Beautiful new Rustic challenge Coin showing both sides. To order this beauty go to the *RUSTIC STORE* on their website at [www.rustic.org](http://www.rustic.org) or from Lendy Edwards at [lendy@cox.net](mailto:lendy@cox.net).



Another familiar sight to a bunch of us (front office of an O-2A)



# 2012 FAC REUNION

17-21 October 2012  
in Tucson, Arizona  
at the *Doubletree Reid Park Hotel*  
Hosted by the Arizona FACs

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF EVENTS:**  
(as of 16 December 2011)



[Doubletree Reid Park Hotel](#)



[Old Tucson Studios](#)



SR-71 at the [Pima Air Museum](#).

## WEDNESDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2012

- Reunion Registration Open.
- Golf or Tennis available.
- Hospitality Suite & FAC Hooch.
- FAC Association Board of Directors Meeting.
- Meals on your own.

## THURSDAY, 18 OCTOBER 2012

- Reunion Registration Open.
- Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum & Old Tucson.
- Hospitality Suite, Ladies Boutique & FAC Hooch.
- Optional Casino Night.
- Meals on your own.

## FRIDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2012

- Pima Air & Space Museum (pick one):
  1. Pima Air Museum only.
  2. Pima Air Museum & AMARG ("Bone Yard"), DOD Aircraft Storage.
  3. Pima Air Museum & Titan Missile Museum.
- Hospitality Suite, Ladies Boutique & FAC Hooch.
- Evening Mexican Buffet.



[D-M's AMARG](#) ("Bone Yard")



[Arizona Desert Museum](#)

## SATURDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2012

- Memorial Service at Davis-Monthan AFB's Heritage Park (9:00 - 10:00 AM).
- Option 1 (10:00 AM - 2:30 PM):
  - Tour Davis-Monthan AFB: A-10s, HH-60G Helicopters and MQ-1 "Predator".
  - Lunch at D-M O'Club (Briefings: Air Base Wing, 12th AF & ANG Predator).
- Option 2 (10:00 AM - 5:00 PM): For spouses and honored guests only: Tour of Tumacacori Mission (Arizona's First Spanish Mission) & Shopping in Tubac, Arizona.
- Hospitality Suite & FAC Hooch.
- 3:30 PM: General Membership Meeting at hotel.
- Informal Evening Banquet with Speaker.



D-M [A-10](#) on the Goldwater Range



One of Davis-Monthan's [HH-60G](#) "PAVEHAWK" Rescue Helicopters

## SUNDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2012

- Breakfast (on an individual basis).
- Golf, Tennis or more tours on your own.

**NOTE:** Registration forms and final details will be posted on the FAC Association web site in March 2012. (<http://www.fac-assoc.org>)

*We're looking forward to seeing you all in Tucson next October!*

*-- The Arizona FACs*



[USAF MQ-1 "Predator"](#)



[Historic Tumacacori Mission](#)

## How the O-2s Really Got There

Taken from an article by Richard Woods

It was 1967 or maybe early 1968, I forget, and the Air Force had bought a mess of Cessna Super Skymasters and called them O-2s. The Cessna factory at Wichita, Kansas was pumping them out at a pretty good clip, and your problem was to figure out how to get them to Vietnam where they were needed.

Your choices were:

1. Fly them to the West Coast and turn them over to the Army for transport by cargo ship.
2. Take the wings off them, stuff them three at a time into the belly of C-124s, and,
3. Fly them over under their own power with no C-124 attached.



*Pic credit: Greg Moorhead*

Which method was used? Right! Every single one of those puppies was hand-flown across the big pond to Vietnam. That sounds like it might have been a Mickey Mouse operation. Believe me, it wasn't that good. The Air Force had a perfectly good organization called the 44th Aircraft Delivery Group which operated worldwide and managed the ferrying of all aircraft—except the O-2s. AFSC contracted with some outfit in San Francisco to deliver the planes to Saigon. The contractor hired a bunch of civilian pilots who couldn't find honest work elsewhere. Since the O-2s were technically "public" aircraft (as opposed to civil aircraft), no pilot certificate was necessary to fly one, and I'm not sure that all of the pilots had certificates. Some of them were pretty good, but the rest of them were the most god-awful collection of unqualified scruffy-looking alcoholics you ever saw.

The deal worked like this. The pilots were given a plane ticket to Wichita where they got a quickie checkout in the O-2 if they needed one. Then they launched in bunches of four and headed for Hamilton Air Force Base (AFB) on the coast of California. En route, they were instructed to carefully monitor and record their oil consumption, which of course they didn't do. That type of pilot didn't monitor and record oil consumption. At Hamilton, the Air Force removed all the seats except the left front one. The seats were shipped to Vietnam by air, which was what should have happened to the rest of the plane, too. Extra fuel tanks were installed in the vacant floor space, followed by the pilot himself. He had to crawl over the copilot tank to get to the left seat. Next, an oil tank was installed on top of the copilot tank, followed by a small emergency high-frequency (HF) radio on top of that. Now, the pilot was truly locked in. To get out, he could either wait for someone to remove the radio and oil tank or crawl out the emergency escape window on the left side. With all that fuel, the planes were way over max gross weight. They had no single-engine capability at all for about the first five hours of flight. If either engine hiccupped, the pilot went swimming.

The route was Hawaii (Hickam AFB), Midway, Wake Island, Guam (Andersen AFB), Philippines (Clark AFB), and Saigon (Tan Son Nhut Air Base). The Hamilton-Hickam leg was by far the longest, nominally about 13 hours. The O-2s were carrying fuel for about 14-1/2 hours of flight. Navigation was strictly dead reckoning. The pilots took up a heading based on wind calculations and flew out their ETA, hoping to be lost within range of a Hawaiian

radio station. They had no long-range navigation equipment.

The fuel tanks were disposable and were dropped off when they were no longer needed. The fuel pumps weren't disposable, so the pilots were instructed to bring them back, along with their dirty underwear and the HF radio. The trip was supposed to take about a week, and each pilot carried an airline ticket from Saigon to Wichita to go back and pick up another plane. For this effort, the pilots were paid \$800 per trip with the flight leader getting \$1,000. They planned on averaging three trips a month and getting rich doing it.

How come I know so much about this? Well, I was the director of safety at Hickam AFB; every single one of over 300 O-2s passed through my domain and created almost constant headaches. The trouble started with the very first flight and began with the extra oil tank. The reason for determining oil consumption on the Wichita-Hamilton leg was to know how much oil to add during the really long legs. There were no oil quantity gauges. Shortly after takeoff from Hamilton, boredom set in, and the pilots would give the oil tank wobble pump a jab or two and squirt some more oil into the engines. All this did was over-service the engines which resulted in fluctuating oil pressure. The pilots didn't like that at all, so they added more oil which led to more pressure fluctuation. Meanwhile, they were totally lost and not getting much closer to Hawaii. Time for the old Mayday call on the HF radio. Once, when that call came in, the Coast Guard in Hawaii was running a very interesting seminar on sea rescue in downtown Honolulu. I was attending, which is how I found out that we had an O-2 problem. The Coast Guard shut down the seminar and launched its C-130 and a pair of cutters to find the O-2s—which it did. The Coast Guard herded them to the nearest runway which happened to be the Marine Corps Air Station at Kaneohe on the northeast side of Oahu. I drove over the mountains to Kaneohe to find out what the hell this was all about. That's when I saw my first O-2. Actually, my first four O-2s. Aside from being ugly, they were all soaked with oil over-flowing from both engines, and they didn't have 10 gallons of gas among them. That silliness continued for three or four weeks with every flight of O-2s getting into some sort of trouble. At Hickam, the O-2 pilots were fairly easy to find. Most of the time they were draped over the bar at the Officers Club, a situation which was attracting the attention of the Officers Wives Club. I went to Pacific Air Forces headquarters and told them what was happening. They were absolutely appalled. We began firing off messages to get this idiocy stopped. AFSC couldn't understand what the problem was and probably still doesn't. I was agitating about the stupidity of this through all the safety channels. AFSC backed down and agreed to let the 44th Aircraft Delivery Group run the operation. The 44th wasn't too happy about that because the civilian pilots didn't seem to take instructions very well. Nevertheless, that brought some organization to the festivities which included details like mission planning, weather analysis, flight following, and escort. The O-2s were required to be accompanied by a C-47 or C-7 Caribou that could fly at their speed and handle the navigation.

Appearances aside, the aircraft weren't Air Force aircraft and wouldn't be until they arrived in Saigon and were formally accepted. Since they weren't technically Air Force aircraft, they couldn't have an Air Force accident. The planes weren't registered as civil aircraft, so they couldn't have a civil accident, either. They were in regulatory limbo, and any accidents were non-events. Nobody cared.

Incidentally, how do you suppose they got the O-2s out of Vietnam and back to the United States? They took the wings off, stuffed them three at a time into the belly of C-124s, and flew them back. AFSC wasn't involved which, I later learned, tended to improve almost any operation.

## Community Honors Local Hero

By Brad Wright

Captain Hilliard A. Wilbanks was born and raised in Habersham County, GA. He died in combat in 1967 in South Viet Nam. He gave his life so that others could live and for this he was awarded our nation's highest honor, the Medal of Honor.

Over time his home town of Cornelia, GA erected a monument in the center of the town depicting his actions in war. I have had the distinct honor to help represent the FAC Association at two ceremonies in Cornelia and was deeply moved both times.

This year was different. A middle school in the town of Demorest (just a short drive down the road from Cornelia) was named in honor of Wilbanks and I was able to attend the dedication ceremony on behalf of the FAC Association.

The ceremony was hosted by the faculty and students of the school. In addition to Wilbanks' family members many of the local citizens came to honor his memory. The school band played, JROTC cadets from the local high school formed the color guard and there was a fly over of three Bird Dogs to begin the ceremonies. His cousin, also a FAC in SEA, lead the pledge of allegiance. Local dignitaries read the official words from the legislature dedicating the school to his memory. LtCol Joe Jackson, MOH recipient from SEA, spoke of patriotism, honor and duty. The school district superintendent told of how the students were given the opportunity to pick a mascot for their school and when the final tally was taken 90 percent of them chose "Patriots". Not just any patriot, but an O-1 Bird Dog centered patriot symbol.

The crowd was then moved into the gymnasium for the unveiling of a mural depicting Wilbanks' final flight.



Mural in gymnasium



Bird dog in lobby

There were displays throughout the school depicting Wilbanks' life in the local area and his assignments in the USAF. As you walked through the school taking in the many displays and pictures, you could not help but notice that the faculty and student body had spent a great deal of time and effort to honor Wilbanks. And when you left you could not help but be proud that the spirit of America was alive and well in Habersham County, GA.

## A RIDE ON THE FULTON SKY HOOK

By Randy Roberts (R2)

*Note from editor... This is a new feature that we will try and see how it works. Space in the newsletter was insufficient to include this very interesting article, yet I wanted to bring it to you. So I will run a "teaser" in the available space and then invite you to visit our FAC website for the REST OF THE STORY at [www.fac-assoc.org](http://www.fac-assoc.org). Click on THE JANUARY FAC NEWS to read the whole article.*

*Don't have access to the internet? Hmm... Make friends with someone who does, I guess. Sorry 'bout that. I'm trying to bring the best newsletter to the most people that I can. If this doesn't work, well, I used to be a punter, and I can still punt. Feedback invited. Ed.*

I was a 2/LT right out of Air Intelligence School and assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> TFW at Bien Hoa Air Base, Republic of Viet Nam in 1968. The 3<sup>rd</sup> TFW was composed of 3 F-100 squadrons, an A-37 squadron and an F-102 Air Defense FOL TDY from Clark AB in the Philippines. There were four assigned intell officers and we were all co-located at the 3<sup>rd</sup> TFW headquarters building. Our duties were to brief the Commander, his staff and all assigned flying personnel on enemy capabilities, movements, areas of high threat ground fire and best areas of escape and evasion if shot down. My boss discovered that I had been out with the Air Police guarding the base perimeter and asked me, "What the hell are you doing out there in the middle of the night?" I replied that I felt it was my duty to know everything that was going on so that I might be better prepared to inform him of what was really happening, instead of reading about it in some intelligence summary. From that time on, he cleared me to fly with anyone who would take me and go anywhere someone would let me go in order to better brief him and the staff as to what was happening (as long as I got his go ahead and it did not interfere with my regular duties). This was my ticket to see some very interesting places and do some very interesting things that are another story.

Word came down that the Air Rescue Service was going to demonstrate the Fulton "Skyhook" Recovery System for all assigned flying personnel and that they would like to have a volunteer to be the "dummy" to be picked-up. This seemed like a great opportunity for me to do two things at once. First, to show the fighter pilots that I had what it took to put my fanny on the line like they did, and second, to get an Air Medal. Getting an Air Medal while not on flight orders was next to impossible if you were not rated. As luck would have it, a TSgt on base also volunteered and I lost the flip of the coin to see who would get picked-up. What a bummer! Two days before the demonstration ...

*(Don't you hate it when you're left hanging? Go to the website to read THE REST OF THE STORY.)*

## **A RIDE ON THE FULTON SKY HOOK**

**By Randy Roberts (R2)**

**(Continued)**

..... was to take place, guess who was in the base hospital with a severe case of the flu? My boss called and said “you’re now the dummy”. That’s the first and only time that my boss called me a “dummy” and I was overjoyed!

The afternoon of the day before the demonstration, the Air Rescue C-130 arrived and I was asked to attend the briefing for the guy who was going to be “picked-up”. The briefing was just a brief overview as to what was to take place. I was informed that I would be just like a downed crewmember and would have to read the directions that would be dropped with the recovery kit. It was interesting trying to get some sleep that night! The next morning at 1000hrs I was taken to the other side of the base where the whole wing was assembled to watch the show. The C-130 dropped the recovery kit with the Air Rescue coordinator briefing all-present as to what was taking place. When the kit hit the ground I was told to get over there and get with the program. After releasing the parachute from the kit, I got out the instructions and proceeded from there. The recovery “suit” I put on was designed for all geographical locations, including the North and South Poles. It became a contest to see if I could deploy the system and get recovered before I died of heat exhaustion. To make a long story short, the real work is the deployment and filling-up of the balloon and the subsequent securing of the balloon to the recovery suit without it “getting away” and sitting down wondering at that point just what the heck I had gotten myself into! It might be helpful at this point to mention that the deployment of a very large balloon 1500 feet into the air that does not look anything like any bird found on earth tends to alert any of the enemy that are looking for you of a possible location (like, here I am!!). The actual “pick-up” is smooth and so quick that you don’t have any time to analyze what is really going on. You next find yourself at 1500 feet in the air and going 150MPH and praying to God that the rope doesn’t snap (this all happens in less than 3 seconds!). It took just 6 minutes to winch me into the back end to the C-130, but it seemed like a lot longer than that. After I had gotten into the aircraft and was allowed to doff that bear rug they called the recovery suit, I tried to drink every last drop of water they had on the aircraft. I was never “just a lowly 2LT, non-rated type” after that, I had proved myself to the pilots and that really counted for something to me at that time. Two years later, I finally got my medical waiver and attended flight school. I retired in 1988 as a Command Pilot with over 6500hrs of flying time. I never forgot what it was like to be a non-rated type and went out of my way to treat the support types with the respect they really deserved.

Randall A. Roberts, LTCOL, USAF, RET.

## The Unofficial History of the Red Markers

Gary Willis, Red Marker 18

*(Clean your glasses, guys. I had to make it small to get it in. Ed.)*

From 1962 until early 1973, a small unit of FACs, ROMADs and crew chiefs supported the Vietnamese Airborne. These USAF men served alongside MACV Advisory Team 162, a team of US Army advisors. The Army advisors were known as “Red Hats” and the FACs as “Red Markers”, which they adopted as their radio call signs.

The Red Markers began as a single Air Liaison Officer providing close air support and advice for the Vietnamese Airborne Brigade, but dependent upon the VNAF to control airstrikes. As the U.S. built up its forces, the Red Markers became a full-fledged combat unit. Meanwhile, the Airborne grew into a Division, ultimately comprising four brigades. At its peak in 1969, Red Marker manpower totaled thirty-six officers and enlisted personnel, with a dozen aircraft and support equipment. The unit rapidly shrank from that peak to a single ALO in February 1971, which continued until the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973. At one time or another, the unit operated from locations in each of the four military regions in Vietnam from the DMZ to the Mekong Delta, sometimes simultaneously, and into Cambodia.

In 2000, Joe Granducci III, who was Red Marker 02 in 1965-66, began to collect Red Marker stories. His intent was to publish those stories but died before he could complete the project. In 2004, Gene McCutchan, the original Red Marker, published the recollections of his career in his book *A Mark Too High*. That career included service in WW II, Korea and Vietnam, and he wrote a lot about his time with the Red Markers. Gene’s several tours with the Airborne spanned more than 36 months during the years 1962-63 and 1965-67. He is shown here in the adopted Airborne uniform.

In late 2008, I began the Red Marker Roster Project. Our incomplete, reconstructed roster now includes 161 Americans -- 87 officers and 74 enlisted. Of these warriors, three FACs and one ROMAD died in combat. An additional Red Marker FAC was killed in action after he had transferred to another unit.

As I communicated with these Red Markers, the Roster Project evolved into the History Project, and I determined to finish Joe’s project. His widow, Gene McCutchan, Mike Morea, and 35 other Red Markers contributed material, which led to many other sources of information.

One of the great discoveries of the project was making contact with Carleton Casteel, Red Marker 01 in 1964-65, the third ALO of the unit. “Cas” sent an oral history and digital photos from his scrapbook.

A more recent find has been the scrapbook of Jack Cebe-Habersky, who was Red Marker 02 in 1963. Jack *(on the left, saluting)* was the first FAC assigned to work for the Brigade ALO, who was James F. Martin, the second ALO of the Red Markers. *(on the right)*

We have now identified all 14 ALOs who headed the Red Markers and have stories about most of them, as well as stories from many of the FACs, radio operators and crew chiefs arranged chronologically. We hope these will tell the story of the Red Markers’ birth, growth and ultimate withdrawal from Vietnam. Our Yahoo Group, [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Red Markers](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Red_Markers), contains dozens of member photographs, many of which will be used in the book. The current draft of *The Unofficial History of the Red Marker FACs, Close Air Support for the Vietnamese Airborne, 1962-1975* now totals about 200 pages and is almost ready for editing prior to publication. The target date is anytime prior to the next reunion of the FAC Association and of the Society of the Vietnamese Airborne. My thanks go to everyone who has helped with the project so far. Each story has contributed to the history, and recording each memory has been personally satisfying. *(Apologies to Gary for the merciless editing to make this fit. Ed.)*



# FAC Association

1849 Southlawn Drive  
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Annual dues are \$20  
Life membership dues depend on your age

55yrs and under	—\$225
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Bob Gorman  
3416 Broken Hill St.  
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<b>Enclosed is my check for \$ -- -- --- Make me a member of/continue my membership in the FAC Association. (Note: Your Dues Status can be found in the address block printed above.)</b>					
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