

THE FLYER

1

Published By Jackson Chapter 304 Of The Experimental Aircraft Association October 2007

www.eaa304.com

Chapter Meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month at the Sport Aviation Center, 3600 Wildwood Ave, Jackson, Michigan 49202-1811 unless otherwise published....

This month's Meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 3rd at 7:30PM.

CONTENTS:

1 – CHAPTER NOTES

2 – FUN AT THE BEACH

6 – WORD OF WISDOM

CHAPTER NOTES

September Chapter Meeting Minutes (9/5/07)

The Treasurer's Report was given.

The *WW I RENDEZVOUS* Bus Trip to The Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio was discussed in some detail.

John Feldvary brought up the need for an Chapter 304 Representative for the Airport Advisory Board.

The President announced, that after twenty-one years the roof on the meeting room/museum/restoration shop needs to be replaced... Over the past year it has presented the chapter with several major leaks... and the shingles now are as brittle as a saltine cracker... The President will ask for professional estimates and probably present them at this Chapter meeting.

It was suggested that the chapter members repair the roof, but that would require added liability insurance and the roof needs to be replaced by licensed professionals not bandaged by amateurs, per our President...

An Election Committee for the Chapter's November Election was established. All interested in running for an elected office please contact Earl Scott (President) call 517-783-3988 or Chuck Furgason (Assistant Treasurer) call 517-783-1066, either will forward your name and position of interest to the Committee.

The Election Committee will present a list of candidates to the membership for their concurrence...

Website Director

The Geek (I was advised, in no uncertain terms that the work Geek was out and Tech-Nerd was preferred) is packing up his Laptop and relocating to New Jersey...

Yes, Jim Buist will be relocating to the land of high prices, expensive homes and a noted sanctuary for illegal aliens. New Jersey does have some attributes but I just can't think of any, maybe you can...

Yet, we wish Jim and his family well on their sojourn to the hinterland of New Jersey...

Formally or informally, at the September Meeting, it was discussed that the Website might be maintained by more than one individual as more of a efficient team effort.

Two teams came to the fore: Larry, Moe and Curly or the team of Heuy, Louie, and Dewy... Both were rejected as being too technically advanced for the our Website... Therefore the search continues...

WW I RENDEZVOUS

I'm sorry to announce that the *WW I Rendezvous* bus trip to the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio was cancelled due to the lack of interest... Possibly, a few of the membership traveled by car-caravan, to the event. If so, I'm sure we'll have a report from them at this meeting.

Fun at the Beach

By

Captain Richard C. Knott, USN (Ret.)

Excerpted from

Fire from the Sky: Seawolf Gunships in the Mekong Delta

Published by The Naval Aviation Museum Foundation in their publication Foundation Spring 2007

In early July 1971, HA(L)-3 Det. 9, flying "Huey" Gunships in the *Mekong Delta* of South Vietnam had moved from the YRBM-21 to *USS Westchester County (LST-1167)*, located just off the mouth of the *Bassac River*. Later that month, the detachment transferred again and began operation from *USS Windham County (LST-1170)*, anchored at the same location. The detachment's operating area was the nearby coastal terrain the *Lieutenant Commander Charles R. "Charlie" Hall*, Det. 9's officer-in-charge, described as "*the boon-docks of Vietnam. In fact,*" with tongue in cheek, "*it was so remote that the people living there thought they were still fighting the Japanese.*"

Actually, the only people living there were the bad guys, and they knew very well whom they were fighting. Much of the area had been designated as free-fire-zone, an area from which noncombatants had been cleared. North Vietnamese regulars and Viet Cong guerrillas, however, operated there on a continual basis. It was bona-fide bad guy land, and except for the Tank Landing Ships (LST's), there were no active friendly outposts in the immediate vicinity...

On 28 August, Det. 9 launched a daylight patrol that was really more of a training flight. The fire team leader, Lieutenant Gilbert A. Evans, was newly qualified; this was his first flight in that capacity. Lieutenant Steve Hanvey, with some serious combat under his belt, was the Attack helicopter Aircraft Commander (AHAC) in the trail bird. Hall recalls that Evans was told to put in a strike at a location near the beach that they knew the enemy used, although it was not certain that anyone was actually there on this day. In any case, it was a good chance to get in some target practice and to break in a couple of new gunners. To this end, each aircraft carried a trainee in addition to the two regular door gunners, for a total of five crewmembers....

The day was sunny and clear, the kind during which the enemy holed up under some triple canopy to rest and prepare for some nocturnal mischief....

Consequently, except for the whap, whap, whap of the rotor blades, the jungle was eerily quiet.... There was no movement below.... Even the vegetation seemed to be in repose...

The two Hueys put in the required strike and found no sign of the enemy. Then they scoured the surrounding area, with similar results. The gunners contented themselves with creating targets out of inanimate objects and shredding them. It was good training. There was no return fire, and none was expected. If the enemy was down there, he was not stupid and was certainly not about to reveal his presence to a pair of *Seawolf* Gunships in broad daylight...

The two aircraft each carried a typical fuel load for shipboard operations that allowed them to remain airborne for precisely eighty minutes. But time flies when you're having fun, and all too soon it was time to return to the ship. As they headed toward their floating home, however, they discovered a large black squall squatting menacingly over the ocean between them and the ship. A prudent helicopter pilot did not fly directly into any squall if he could help it and the official squadron history records that this squall was laced with "*violent and numerous thunderstorms.*"

One option was to divert to a base or fueling outpost ashore for a drink. Unfortunately, there was nothing close by, but the Hueys had enough fuel to fly to one of the bases upriver, provided they did not wait too long to commit. It was, perhaps, the most prudent choice, but it would leave the operation area uncovered for a short period... It seemed like a waste of time...

Another option was to try to sneak under the squall to get to the ship... *Seawolves* did things like that as a matter of routine, and it was no big deal. Evans chose the third option, which was an attempt to circumnavigate the squall to get to the ship. He could see that the weather was fine on either side of the black clouds. The ship was bound to be in the clear on the other side...

As it turned out, the squall covered a much more extensive area than it was thought, and it took more time and precious fuel to circle to the outer limit than had been anticipated. Sure enough, it was clear there, but there was no ship. Bad news! Evans now led the two Hueys around the other side. Still nothing, Darn! It must be sitting under the squall. Okay, they would have to slip under the weather and find it. Again, no big deal...

Hanvery, flying the trail bird, was not so sure. The rain was very heavy, and the ceiling was low. None of the LSTs had anything in the way of sophisticated navigation aids. The last thing Hanvey wanted to do was run out of fuel tooling around under the squall. Of course, the beach was within reach if they had to make an emergency landing, but that would put them down in hostile territory, not an especially pleasant thought. Even though they had found no sign of the enemy during their patrol, everyone knew that Charlie was not far away. Hanvey recommended they head for the nearest friendly outpost while they had just enough fuel to make it. Evans still believed he could find the ship...

The two aircraft descended and headed into the squall, flying underneath it just above the surface of the ocean. Visibility was so lousy that they passed the ship without seeing it. They tried again, with the same result. Evans was talking to the ship, but the people aboard could do very little to help. The Helos' fuel state was now critical, and it would take much

too long for the LST to weigh anchor and steam out from under the squall....

The Hueys headed for land, but they now lacked sufficient fuel to reach a friendly outpost. Barry Solomon, the right door gunner on Hanvey's aircraft, remembers a very uncomfortable feeling. "*By this time,*" he says, "*we were low on fuel, and I mean really low.*"

The two Det. 9 Hueys would have to land ashore, and they would need some cover. Hall alerted the world to the fast developing problem. Det. 7 at Dong Tam was first to take action. Unfortunately, however, that detachment was not all that close; it would take a good twenty minutes or more for personnel to make it to the area. To make matters worse, one of the Det. 7 aircraft had suffered battle damage and was down for repair...

Single Hueys, of course, were not permitted to operate alone except in emergency circumstances. Fellow *Seawolves* were in trouble, and as far as Det 7 pilot Lieutenant Junior Grade Howard M. "Mike" Reid was concerned, this was clearly one of those times. He, and copilot Robert A. "Bob" Young, and their two gunners launched immediately. Because the second Det. 7 Gunship was down, Lieutenant Junior Grade John M. "Mike" Masica and his crew were left out of the scramble...

Seawolf Pilots, however, were very resourceful people. If he couldn't be part of the action, perhaps he could be on hand to witness it. Masica buttonholed the pilot of an Army 0-1 Bird Dog light observation aircraft that had just arrived from Vinh Long and cajoled him into taking him to the scene. The Army Pilot didn't need much coaxing. Things at the beach were about to get very interesting...

Meanwhile, Evans, Hanvey and Company broke out of the weather and approached the shoreline. Several miles inland was a tiny air facility at Long Toan, but it was abandoned and, for some reason, listed on the chart as unusable. No fuel there. More to the point, it was also in an ideal location for an enemy ambush and not any place the *Seawolves* wanted to put down, even if they could make it that far...

The two Hueys were now running on fumes and would have to land within minutes or risk flameouts. Before reaching shore they spotted a sandbar a half-mile or so out that looked inviting. It was plenty large enough for both aircraft, but Evans decided not to land there because the tide was out. If they became stranded before someone could get to them with fuel, the Hueys would be engulfed at high water. Instead, they headed for the beach...

Evans landed on the sand near a little inlet, very close to where they had put in a strike a short time before. Hanvey put his aircraft down close by, with the right door facing inland so that the .50-caliber gun could be brought to bear in case of attack. It was a wise move. Both aircraft were shut down, and Hanvey told right door gunner Solomon to remain on board, with his gun at the ready. Except for Solomon, both crews exited the aircraft and took defensive positions on the sloping sand beach. They were armed with M-60s, M-14s, M-16s and side arms and were somewhat protected by the slope of the beach...

Opposition was not long in coming. It started with a few shots from the tree line across the inlet that quickly became many, as more of the enemy arrived. Where in the hell had they all come from? The gunships had just scoured that area and encountered nary a soul...

The hunters were now the hunted. And what a prize! Two intact *Seawolf* helicopter gunships and their crews had fallen into the enemy's lap. Charlie must have been elated at his good fortune and was certainly going to make the most of it.

Automatic weapons fire now became heavy, and it was evident that the defensive position they had chosen on the beach was not, in fact, very defensible. Soon fire was coming from both flanks, as well as from the tree line across the inlet. The aircraft themselves were nice fat targets. Solomon recalls: "*Bullets were flying all around and hitting the helicopters. I sprayed the bank with the .50.*" That action seemed to have a momentary effect, but it was just that – momentary. The situation deteriorated further, as mortar fire began from the tree line...

The enemy mortar crews seemed to be having a difficult time zeroing in, probably because they could not see the aircraft from their position due to the slope of the beach. Nevertheless, a lucky shot could disable or destroy one or both of the helicopters. If that happened, there would be no way for the *Seawolf* crews to escape...

As the fire became intense, the enemy began to advance toward the men hunkered down on the sand. Evans ordered everyone back to the Hueys, they all made a run for it, with the enemy close behind. *Door gunner Buzz Landy remembers them screaming and "shooting at us like you wouldn't believe."* Incredibly, everyone reached the aircraft, the gunners standing outside and covering them with their M-60s until everyone scrambled aboard. Solomon recalls that Evans got a hot start and had to do it over again, but Hanvey started clean and was first off. No one strapped in or bothered with helmets. There was no time. They made it off the beach by the skin of their teeth but didn't get very far...

Hanvey's bird could not have been much more than a hundred yards off the beach and twenty or thirty feet in the air when it was hit by enemy fire. Whatever it was that scored the hit disabled the controls, and at that altitude the crash was instantaneous. Both pilots were thrown through the windscreen. The three gunners were also thrown clear, probably out the doors. All five men came to the surface in what Hanvey estimated was ten to twelve feet of water...

Evan's aircraft, meanwhile, made it to the sandbar that they had passed on the way to the beach and landed safely with all its crew. They did not have enough fuel to do much other than to watch the drama taking place in the water...

Hanvey was badly cut up, bruised and bleeding from his encounter with the windscreen, but otherwise, he seemed intact. Looking around to make sure the rest of his crew had made it out, he counted three heads near by swimming toward the sandbar, which was a good distance away. "*Where's the fourth one?*" he asked himself...

Then he saw him AMS2 Thomas E. "Tom" Elliott was making his way with great diff-

icuity, but in the opposite direction, toward the beach and the waiting VC. *“My God,”* thought Hanvey. *“What’s the matter with him? He must be dazed.”*

There was just one thing to do. Hanvey, a former lifeguard and a superb swimmer, took off after Elliott, who seemed to be struggling as he made for the beach, his head disappearing below the surface from time to time. *“He must be hurt,”* Hanvey thought. The VC were firing at them both now, but it was no easy matter to hit small bobbing heads from a distance that was about the length of a football field...

Hanvey overtook the gunner about seventy-five yards from the beach. Elliott was still neck deep in water, but he could now just touch bottom and had begun to wade ashore when Hanvey caught up and grabbed him. *“What in hell are you doing?”* the pilot shouted at him. Elliott looked back and said, simply, *“I can’t swim.”*

Hanvey was dumbfounded. Everyone in the Navy knew how to swim. Anyone who didn’t was taught, either during officer training or boot camp. It was a hard-and-fast requirement. How did Elliott ever get away with it? Hall would later speculate: *“He must have bought his [qualification] with a bottle of scotch.”* No matter, there was no time to deliberate over it...

“Okay,” said Hanvey, the lifeguard. *“I’m going to drag you out to the sandbar, but if you try to pull me under I’m going to let you go, understand?”* Elliott nodded that he did. Hanvey grasped him in a traditional chest hold and, keeping his mouth and nose above water as best he could, swam slowly away from the beach, bullets plinking in the water around them. Why the Viet Cong decided not to go in after them while they were so close to shore will never be known.

It was slow going, but eventually Hanvey and Elliott caught up with the other swimmers. The sandbar seemed a long way off, and there was some question whether they could all make it. There were, however, no really appealing options. The enemy on the beach continued shooting, but whether the angle of fire was too low, the distance was too great, or

the NVA/VC were just lousy shots, no bullets met their intended targets...

Out on the sandbar, Evans and his crew were safe for the moment, but there was not enough fuel left for an attempt to rescue Hanvey and his crew. Such a move would certainly have resulted in everyone taking a swim. Their only option was to sit tight. Back aboard the ship, things were moving with all deliberate speed. Jet fuel had already been pumped into drums and was being loaded into a boat even as the LST approached the coast. Time was of the essence. In a few hours, the incoming tide would decide the fate of the stranded Gunship, and two crews would find themselves swimming – with no place to go.

While all this was happening, Mike Reid, copilot Bob Young, and the crew aboard the Det. 7 Gunship had been hightailing it for the site of the action. They now arrived on the scene and circled low to find Steve Hanvey and crew in the water, making their way slowly, and with some difficulty toward the distant sandbar. Reid’s Gunship was too heavy at this point to make an immediate rescue attempt. He would have to get rid of some of the weight...

The enemy, meanwhile, was belatedly launching a few small sampan-type boats, presumably to go after the Americans in the water. With the arrival of Reid’s Gunship, they apparently thought better of it and were now retreating up the beach toward the tree line and cover. Turning sharply and making a steep descent, Reid headed in toward shore firing both rockets and guns at the hastily retiring enemy. Charlie had waited too long. Reid fired all fourteen rockets on that one pass, relieving the aircraft of a significant amount of weight and stopping some of the runners in the process. His door gunner picked off a few more as the Gunship streaked by. Now it was time to rescue the waterlogged crew....

In the meantime, Mike Masica had arrived in the Army 0-1 aircraft and was now circling overhead with a bird’s-eye view of the action. *“Reid’s gunners were throwing out ammunition and tool boxes, anything that wasn’t bolted down. Even so, the weight of nine men in that under-powered UH-1B was going to be cutting it very close.”*

Arriving over the swimmers, Reid settled into a hover and slowly lowered his skids into the water. He had wisely maneuvered the aircraft so the men were obliged to climb aboard on the right side, where he could see them. On the beach Charlie all of a sudden realized that there was only one gunship instead of the customary two. It could not rescue the people in the water and take the enemy under fire at the same time. The NVA/VC soldiers regrouped and began firing at the hovering Huey, scoring several hits on the tail boom. The left door gunner returned the fire, even as the men in the water were pulled aboard...

The weight and balance now began to change drastically, and the right door gunner rudely slammed Lieutenant Hanvey's crew up against the rear bulkhead as they entered the aircraft to prevent the center of gravity from moving too far forward. Reid now struggled to hold the hover until the last man was aboard. He did so with considerable difficulty, and he could not keep the Huey from slowly settling. Hanvey was the last one to board, and water was now lapping at the belly of the Huey.

With the engine straining, Reid, uttering a bit of a prayer, carefully began transitioning to forward flight. He could feel the overloaded Huey protest and threaten to settle further. Slowly, however, it began to come up and move toward the sandbar. It was heavy and sluggish with the weight of the extra five men. Reid also wondered how much water he had scooped up. For some long minutes he held his breath as the gunship strained and clawed for a few feet of altitude...

Finally, the Huey broke free. They were too heavy to go very far, however and Reid set the overloaded gunship down on the sandbar with a sigh of relief. To those who were there, not the least of whom were those who had been rescued, it was a grand exhibition of helicopter airmanship. Masica had watched it all from the catbird's seat aboard the Army Bird Dog. *"That was some of the finest flying I've ever seen."*

Having been alerted – like everyone else – by the LST, squadron C.O. Captain Charlie Borgstrom had also launched in a *Sealord* slick from Binh Thuy. He now arrived and

landed on the sandbar to evaluate the situation firsthand. Every one of Hanvey's crew had been injured to some extent in the crash. Barry Solomon had also been shot in the left ankle and was the most seriously injured.

Their big chance having dissolved before their eyes, a frustrated enemy disappeared into the jungle. Having assured himself, that a boat from the LST was on its way with fuel for Evan's Huey, Charlie Borgstrom loaded Hanvey and company aboard the slick and took off. With no rocket pods, flex M-60s or mini-guns, the lighter and more powerful Sealord slick soon had the five injured and exhausted crewmen ensconced at the Third Surgical Hospital in Binh Thuy.

The boat soon arrived at the sandbar, and after taking on fuel, the surviving Det. 9 gunship returned to the ship. Although it had some combat damage, it seemed to be functioning normally. Reid now joined his single Det. 7 gunship with the single Det. 9 aircraft aboard the LST to make up a combined ready fire team. The two aircraft, each, sporting brand-new bullet holes, answered calls for assistance that night. It was business as usual. Other detachments shifted to fill in the Det. 7 operating area as necessary...

Steve Hanvey and crew all received purple Hearts for their various injuries. Hanvey received a Silver Star for his selfless and courageous rescue of door gunner Tom Elliott. Mike Reid was also recommended for a Silver Star, but was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross instead, his second in just a little over a month.... (end)

Word of Wisdom

"Generally speaking you aren't learning much when your lips are moving. Remember a closed mouth gathers no foot...."

- Kamikaze Joe

**OFFICERS / DIRECTOR(S) /
TECHNICAL COUNSELOR
AND
NEWSLETTER EDITOR**

President:

Earl E. Scott

Telephone: 517-783-3988

E-mail: earub@modempool.com

Secretary:

Scott Preuninger

Telephone: 734-475-1545

E-mail: sp_flyby@msn.com

Assistant Treasurer

Charles Furgason

Telephone: 517-783-1066

E-mail: chucknlinda@sbcglobal.net

Technical Counselor:

Joe Phelan

Telephone: 517-783-5040

E-mail: phelan.j@acd.net

Newsletter Editor:

Kamikaze Joe

E-mail: kamikazejoe1940@yahoo.com

Website Director Geek:

Jim Buist

Telephone: 517-764-7404

E-mail: jimbuist@yahoo.com

Disclaimer for errors in print: "One who reads everything is a litterateur. One who believes everything he reads is Da-nincompoop"...

- "Never let the truth get in the way of good fiction"- Kamikaze Joe -