

Action Report: Memorial Day Writers' Project (MDWP)

Activity: A Tribute to Our Nation's Veterans

Date: May 31, 2010

Location: Washington, DC, adjacent to the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial

Weather: Clear sky, 88 degrees—a beautiful day.



What a day! We had whopping twenty presenter-participants, who took us to the Vietnam DMZ, Cu Chi, Chu Lai, Bong Son, Da Nang, An Khe, Hoi An, Qui Nhon and Saigon. Old friendships were renewed and new friendships formed as we remembered and paid tribute to those who served our country. Journalist and Author Nancy Lynch Steel and her husband manned the information table in front of the MDWP tent along with Barbara Morris ("Cologne Number 10 for Men") and author Doug Bergman ("Names I Can't Remember").

Invocation: MDWP Co-founder **Ed Henry** (Corpsmen, USN) started us off with a non-denominational invocation/poem written by friend and fellow veteran Vince Kaspar. Ed was followed by VVA Chaplain **Gerald Ney** who said a prayer for all who are with us today and for those who have come before.



MDWP Co-founder **Mike McDonell** (1st Mar Div) read “It’s My Job,” written by Rod Kane, a poem that highlights the daily life and thoughts of an overworked corpsman. Mike read an interesting piece received just 10 days ago from his nephew, 1st Lt. Brian Jaquith, a Marine working out of Camp Leatherneck in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. The piece aptly demonstrates that the importance of following established rules and regulations never changes. This true story was told as a radio conversation between a convoy escort leader and his operations center, which would not let the convoy depart until the name of each Afghani driver, as well as DOB, SSN, and blood type was obtained. Mike also read several of his own poems that reflect his thoughts (past and present) based on his first return trip to Viet Nam.

Tom McLean, (accompanied by his ever watchful grandson) first sang with the MDWP in 1993. Tom sang several of his original songs: “Talked with John Today,” a song about regular visits to a comrade named on the Wall; “We Built The Wall,” a song about what the Wall means to Tom; “Conversation With Grandfather,” an imaginary conversation with Civil War ancestors bringing them up to date on veterans’ issues; and “I Am An Aging Veteran,” a song about the impact of the Viet Nam war on a veteran. It’s always good to have Tom with us.



Lt. Michael Myers (RPL 198th Light Infantry Brigade, 23rd Americal Div) began with a prose piece entitled *“Salute to the Nurses,”* where he recalled Night Nurse Brown, who appeared to him as an angel each night. Michael also reminisced about a meeting and conversation with a Marine platoon commander at a parade some twenty years after his return and an emotional meeting with a nurse who knew of his Nurse Brown while at the 67 Evac Hospital in Qui Nhon. Michael also read *“Coming Home,”* a prose piece, which described the reception he received as a veteran home from war and the lack of interest by most Americans. You can find the prose on page two of Michael's web page. Michael also introduced three people, two cousins to the late Roger Shrewsbury_Dear DeRosa and Megghan Nicklaus and a lifelong friend, Howard Board, whom he accompanied to take rubbings of the names of the six men listed on the Wall: Roger Shrewsbury, Robert E. Harris, Steve Masao Ohara, John B. Hurtado, William L. Menconi, and Leroy Ferguson. Michael also brought copies of his award winning DVD entitled *“A Healing of War,”* available at www.ahealingofwar.com.





Jonathan Myer and Dave MacKay, Forward Air Controllers (FACs), sang flying songs throughout the day. Jonathan flew the O-1E "Bird Dog" as a Kontum Province FAC in the Central Highlands of II Corps and the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) with Project "Tally Ho" based at Dong Ha in I (or "Eye") Corps from April 1966 through February 1967; during his Kontum (in-country) flying, his call-signs were Baron then Cagey 82, while for his DMZ (out-country) flying he was Covey 75. Jonathan led off with three of his own songs and was then joined by Dave MacKay. Dave flew the O-2 "Super Skymaster" (aka "Oscar Deuce," or "Oscar Duck") from his base at Pleiku (the province just south of Kontum) to conduct out-country interdiction missions over the "Steel Tiger" sector of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in southern Laos; during his 1969 tour, his call-sign was Covey 536. When asked if he flew any in-country missions, apart from flying north from Pleiku to Dak To and then "turning left" to reach The Trail, he replied, Yes — at the end of his mission, he'd "turn right at Dak To" for his in-country return to Pleiku. Dave's and Jonathan's songs are listed, with background notes at the end of the report.



Dick Morris (1st Cav) read from his novel "*Cologne No. 10 for Men*" (available on iUniverse.com, B&N.com, Amazon.com) and he sang several songs he wrote while stationed in Vietnam: "*Bong Son Bridge*"; "*Diggin' a Hole*"; "*The Chaplain*"; "*I Got a Lonesome Me*"; "*You Ain't Alone*"; "*Mirage*"; "*Dandelion*"; and "*When's the Sun Gonna Shine on Camp Evans?*" A brief description of Dick's songs is provided at the end of the report. Dick's Skytroopers CD is available at (www.cdbaby.com/cd/RichardMorris, lyrics can be seen at www.vietwarsongs.com). Dick served as 2nd Lt. rifle platoon leader in the 2nd Battalion, Fifth Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division during the second half of 1967, and 1st Lt. Battalion Communications Officer (battalion songwriter and historian) for the 2/5 during the first half of 1968.

Gerald Ney read "*In Memory of Skip*," a reading a year late for the 40th anniversary of 1st Lt. Skip Renshaw, who was KIA Easter Sunday 1969; "*The Haunted Dream*," which commemorates the 22nd anniversary of the fall of Saigon; "*The Leaf Rider*;" and "*An Honest Man*." On a second trip to the mic, Gerald read "*On the Road to Ollie*," a poem that tells of riding a jeep back to LZ English on Hwy 1; "*Bullet Rinsed Duds and Hold the Ice Cream*," a poem about supporting the local economy despite Charlie's interference; "*Pass the Pipe and Sugar Cane...Light on the Shrapnel, Please*," a poem about taking ID photos of deceased VC following a firefight between a Montagnard unit and local VC and near miss by shrapnel from an erratic 105 round; "*Christmas Eve at Shitfield Tower*," a memory of 24 December, 1968, which begins as a parody of "*The Night Before Christmas*," but takes a different direction from the memory of a night as a perimeter duty officer on the edge of LZ English's airfield (opposite the village Shitfield).

Holley Watts (Donut Dolly, '66-'67, 3rd Marine Amphibious Forces, Cu Chi, Da Nang, An Khe, and Phu Bai). Holley read a touching and wistful poem entitled "Where Can I Find Them on the Wall?" a poem that tells of her desire to pay tribute on Memorial Day, to remember, to touch their names on the Wall, but they were only known by their nicknames—such as Skeeter, Yank, Red and 31 other nicknames. The last line of the poem reads: "I never got to say goodbye or welcome home—I miss that, most of all." The poem "Remembering Bunny Olson" was about an Aussie Holley met in Da Nang, but never stayed in touch with. He gave Holley a rabbit-furred Koala Bear toy with open arms. "Being a peacenik at heart, those open (and welcoming) arms are really the ONLY kind of arms we should have," said Holley. "Where Can I Find Them on the Wall" and "Remembering Bunny Olson" can be seen on Holley's website (holleywatts.com).



Holley came with another Red Cross worker, Penni Evans from CO, who shared several poems with us. Penni read two poems, both related to the Vietnam Women's Memorial statue: "Frozen in Bronze" and "Sisters." The first was an introspective look while visiting the memorial and the second addresses all the women who served, recognizing their different backgrounds, training, color, religions, capacities and education. It recognizes the pain and loss, and the strength in the support women gave as they reached out for one another. Both are powerful poems.

Clyde Christofferson read excerpts from his book "Your Hero and Mine, Scott," a great read created from letters, written by his then 19-year old brother, Scott, who was killed near Chu Lai as part of Operation Wheeler, as he served with the 101st as combat reporter. Scott and the 2nd platoon were ambushed by two NVA companies (about 200 enemy soldiers).



Tom Lacombe read from his new book, "Light Ruck, Vietnam 1969." Tom's book tells of the life of a ground-pounder with the 4th Inf. Div. Tom's reading told of the assault on LZ Swift, in the Plei Trap valley. Tom is pictured here with his granddaughters Audrey and Olivia. This was Tom's first visit with us and we hope he'll be back again.

Wayne Karlin read an article he published several years ago in the "The Washington Post," about visiting the Wall to commemorate a friend who died after switching duty on a helicopter mission over Marble Mountain (near Da Nang). Wayne's son was also with us and read about his visit to Marble Mountain in 2004, where he lit incense at the top of the mountain to commemorate his father's friend. Wayne is the author of "Wondering Souls," a true story of a soldier who made a trip back to Viet Nam to return the diary of an NVA soldier he had killed on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. It was a treat to have them both at the MDWP tent and we hope to have them read with us again.



Lt. Tom Brinston, Activist Poet/Dramatist, read from his chapbook (published by Post Traumatic Press) "Chief Nurse," a poem which conveys Tom's image of the life of the chief nurse in a Qui Nhon hospital in 1967; "War Is Over For Me," a reflection of the impact of war and how it intrudes on peaceful moments; "Pleiku Jacket," a reflection of how a war of long ago has a habit of hitting us especially when we are not looking; and "Metal



Statue Standing Alone in a Field," a poem that tells of Tom's unexpected reaction to a statue sculpted by a fellow veteran; and "Memorial," by Charles Cameron, which I have repeated below:

The wall falls like a butcher's knife across time. Lives end here, tens of thousands of streaming ribbons of lives cut short at this wall in which names are sunk -- like a wall pitted with drive-by bullets but in ordered columns and rows -- cut off from their colors, their sway with the breeze, their lilt of step and song, their many loves, the very flag their lives would have woven had they lived.

They wait here, less than an inch deep into death: you can pry their lives back out of their names if you knew one of them -- or resemble them, being human, and caring, and having a name. They are as alive as memory and words can praise them, and once again today we inscribe them into ourselves.

Tom made a healing trip back to Viet Nam in 2003 and also served as a peacemaker with the Nonviolent Peace Force in Mutur, Sri Lanka from 2003 to 2005 and yes, he was there for the tsunami.

Joe Finch talked about his role as a medevac pilot vs. that of the nurses at the field hospitals located throughout Viet Nam. Tom told of his experiences as a helicopter pilot and read from his book "Angle's Wing." I understand Joe has several other books in the works.



Lt. Doug Bergman lugged his own table, set up shop in front of the MDWP tent, and greeted veterans and tourists as they walked by. He told of his experience as a young Lt. and platoon leader of a rifle company and read from his book "*Names I Can't Remember*." The following was sent in by Doug: Lt. Doug Bergman enlisted as a private when he was 18, homeless and unemployed. The Army on the hunt for 'hamburger' lieutenants saw his cocky kid test scores and signed him up for the complete idiot package: airborne, infantry and OCS! He is the author of the acclaimed and rave reviewed Shelton award memoir "*Names I Can't Remember*." The award is named after the famous POW Charles Shelton. Doug spends his time speaking all over the east coast at book events, veteran's events and all manner of art/civic organizations. He is a well known lay veteran issue activist and works for many vet causes. In 2005, he went back to Vietnam just to see the ground again before he died and to try and find the names of two key characters from his book: the nun and boy that figured in a key event in the book. He spent his creative life in the theatre and in journalism as a published playwright and journalist. He is very proud of his life member status in the Ex-Drunks Hall of Fame.

Tanker (aka James W Stewart) was an E5. He was an 11E40 and a member of B Company, 1st Battalion, 69th Armored Regiment, assigned to II Corps. With his black beret and guitar he carried from OK., Tanker reminisced about life in the military and helped us close out the day with several songs by Woody Guthrie, Hank Williams, and Johnny Cash. He started off with a fun tune: "*Deep in the Heart of Taxes!*" followed by "*Cottonfields*," "*The Midnight Special*," "*Jambalaya*," "*I Walk the Line*," and "*Folsom Prison Blues*."



Thanks to all of you who came to participate and to listen as we honored our veterans. **Thanks** to VVA 227 and those of you who helped with the donations that made this event possible. **Thanks** to all those who served and those who are serving today in heeding their country's call. Don't forget our Website at: www.memoraldaywritersproject.com

The following (provided by Dick) briefly describes each of the songs sung.

- “*Bong Son Bridge.*” The 2nd Battalion 5th Cavalry 1st Cavalry Division [Airmobile] spent a week guarding the bridge across the Bong Son River after three weeks of combat assaults and patrols in the field. It was a pleasant time when soldiers received passes to town. The song has the rhythm of rolling wheels and includes the words “Bong Son” in which repetition is done by background singers (my daughter) in a Doo Op style.
- “*Diggin' a Hole.*” This song received a Finalist award in the Vocal Jazz & Blues category of the 23rd Annual Mid-Atlantic Song Contest in Vienna, Virginia (2006). (www.saw.org/masc.asp). It’s about the foxholes and sleeping holes we dug everywhere we went—to stay alive. The musical style is jazz-blues in a fast walking beat.
- “*The Chaplain.*” A fictional story of a chaplain who suffers battle fatigue, which we now call PTSD. It’s a slow-walking blues with acoustical guitar accompaniment.
- “*I Got A Lonesome Me.*” This silly rockabilly song, with an interlude of scat, is about the many things we missed about the girl back home.
- “*You Ain't Alone.*” A soldier blues in Vietnam, when we sometimes felt really alone, accompanied by acoustical guitar.
- “*Mirage.*” I met my wife when I was in Officer Candidate School at Ft. Benning, Georgia, and she was a student at Auburn University. We were married in Auburn three months before I went to Nam. Her letters and care packages helped "keep me going" during the war. I wrote this song thinking of her on a sand dune overlooking the South China Sea. It has a lazy acoustical guitar accompaniment.
- “*Dandelion.*” This rolling jazz waltz is about my favorite flower—the most reviled of all in suburbia.
- “*When's the Sun Gonna Shine on Camp Evans?*” During monsoon season, Camp Evans—the 1st Cav northern HQ base between Quang Tri and Hue in 1968—was socked-in and vulnerable to enemy mortar and rocket attack. I wrote the verses in a dark, bluesy style, which bursts into a driving, optimistic bridge, then returns, with gritted teeth and determination, to hopes of penetrating the mist and prevailing over the enemy “when the sun shines again.”

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Dave McKay and Jonathan Myer's song list:

1. "Frankie and Johnnie" (Air Force Style): This is Jonathan's update of the classic love-and-betrayal song to recast the couple as an Air Force Officers' Club hostess and Squadron fighter pilot, respectively, with the same events culminating in the same penalty for Johnnie — a verdict "Spoken by [Frankie's] old forty-four" — except that he gets a formal military funeral in the

Arlington National Cemetery, Frankie gets his "coffin flag," and his squadron throws "nickels on the grass" as another "fighter jock lost his ass! . . . He was her man — till he done her wrong!"

2. "Your Flying Special": Using the convict song's tune of "Midnight Special," Jonathan treats every combat pilot's aircraft as his "flying special," ranging from FACs flying reconnaissance ("recce") over "province, DMZ or the Trail looking for the Charlies," to "choppers . . . in and out of LZs" (landing zones, often under fire), and whether flying from "carriers or solid ground" needing to watch out for ground fire — especially if flying over Hanoi ("Downtown," aka Route Package 6), where defenses were the most lethal and residence in the "Hanoi Hilton" (as POWs) or burial "six feet under ground" awaited the unlucky.

3. "How I Went IFR in Flying Buffalo Shit"; tune "Strawberry Roan": Based on an actual mission in July 1966, Jonathan tells how he landed his Bird Dog at the Dak Pek Special Forces camp (in northwest Kontum Province) after shooing some water buffalo off its narrow dirt landing strip. However, they left some "residue" behind, which the aircraft's rolling tires hurled forward into its propeller, which then flung them back onto the windshield (hence "IFR" conditions, or "instrument flight rules" when a pilot couldn't see outside his cockpit) — and through the open side windows onto his O-1E's back seat. . . .

4. "Warrior Bards" (by "Yodelin' Irv" LeVine; added verses by Jonathan Myer): This is Irv's (and Jonathan's) tribute to the relatively few Southeast Asia (SEA) War singer-songwriters who represent first-person accounts of that war's triumphs, tragedies, pain, and insane humor: "All across the country side, You'll hear them sing and play, / Those warrior bards from long ago, It seems like yesterday / they'll sing you songs of fighting men On land and in the sky, / Of how it felt to live back then And have their good friends die." Irv took the war up through LBJ and McNamara; Jonathan added Nixon, Kerry, Fonda, and how "Congress left the South [Vietnam] bereft By cutting off the funds." Most of the songs that follow were written and/or sung by those mentioned in this version of "Warrior Bards."

5. "Tchepone" (by Toby Hughes): In this, his best-known song (to the cantering tune and theme of "Strawberry Roan") Toby laconically relates how he and his F-4C wingman were suckered into flying a strike on "Unsuspecting, peaceful Tchepone," a "hamlet" 350 miles to their northwest in Laos. They arrive overhead, come "screaming on down . . . for the kill" when — Surprise! Ground defenses strike back. He has to limp home with "six holes in my bird," a chastened flying cowboy indeed . . . but the Saigon Colonel with whom "he'd sure like a word" is nowhere to be found. The rueful lesson: "Oh, don't go to Tchepone."

6. "Teak Lead" (as sung by Chip Dockery; tune "Red River Valley"): As Chip tells it, "Teak" was a call-sign used by a succession of fighter-bomber flights going into harm's way — and suffering so many losses that the Air Force "retired" that call-sign. The singer relates how his leader, "Teak One (or "Teak Lead"), led his flight through bad weather and ground-to-air defenses — only to die as "he never pulled out of his bomb run." The ballad ends as the singer briefs his own flight for the next day's mission . . . as "Teak Lead."

7. "A Shau Tower" (aka "Ballad of Bernie Fisher"; written by then-Capt. Rich Robbins, with the "family version" as sung by Ron Barker; tune "Wabash Cannonball"): A Shau Valley, located near the Laotian border south of the then-DMZ (and still pockmarked by bomb craters), "is my favorite vietnam map—it is definately a must have for vietnam fans," said an internet photo collector in 2004. It was a lot grimmer in March of 1966, when A-1E "Skyraiders" supporting resupply flights for a Green Beret camp under attack lost one of their own to ground fire: D. Wayne "Jump" Myers crash-landed it and sought cover nearby. Flight lead Bernard F. Fisher made an emergency landing on the camp's debris-strewn runway, taxied back to Myers's position,

Myers clambered into the right seat, and Bernie flew them back to base — with 19 holes in his rugged A-1E. Fisher was awarded the Air Force's first Medal of Honor of the SEA War.

8. "Jolly Green" (as sung by Bull Durham; tune "Abilene"): "Jolly Green (Giant)" was the nickname of the Air Force's CH- and HH-3 combat rescue and resupply helicopters (upgraded versions of the Navy's Sikorsky S-61), so-named for their imposing size and camouflage. The song describes the anxiety felt by a downed pilot — "I sit alone, here in this tree, / Afraid of Charlie as I can be" — until he hears the "Sounds of rotors" and then sees the P(ararescue) J(umper)s cables being lowered from "that great big whirly-bird" to assure his rescue. (Whew!)

9. "BUFF" (written by Dick Jonas for Bull Durham): Bull had flown B-52s (aka "Big Ugly Fat Fu- (er) Fellers") for many years after flying B-36s (though in Vietnam he flew AC-47s, aka "Puff the Magic Dragons," whose side-firing guns devastated enemy troops). B-52s, originally deployed as nuclear-armed bombers, have been operating for nearly 60 years, and (from B-52Ds to B-52Hs) have been used to deadly effect with non-nuclear bomb loads from all over Indochina (to include 11 days of the "Christmas bombing" in 1972 of military targets in and around Hanoi) to present operations over Afghanistan. "BUFF" traces these missions in the words of a B-52 pilot happy in his work.

10: "FAC and the Green Beret" (by Jonathan Myer, January 1967; tune "Wabash Cannonball"): Sung as a duet with Dave MacKay as the Special Forces radio operator asking for air support and Jonathan as (what else?) a somewhat snotty FAC, the song traces how a situation can "turn to worms" as both come under fire. After further confusion, the song ends happily: "Your friendly FAC and fighters will always save the day, / Killing off the Charlies till the last Green Beret." While the song is a spoof on the actual "blood brotherhood" that prevailed between Province FACs and the Green Beret A-teams they supported, some of its incidents actually happened during Jonathan's FAC missions in Kontum Province.

11. "Saigon Warrior" (by Hershel Gober; as sung by Saul Broudy; tune "Sweet Betsy from Pike"): Another spoof, this song satirizes the staff troops (aka "REMFs," for "Rear Echelon [uh] Maternal Fornicators") who populated major headquarters, especially HQ MAC-V ("Military Assistance Command — Vietnam) in Saigon. These troops were able to outfit themselves in combat gear that thus never reached the frontline troops; hence the singer's contempt for these in-country "wannabes."

12. "O-1E Song" (by Irv LeVine): Irv flew the F-105 "Thunderchief" (aka "Thud" by its pilots), and here compares his aircraft's lethal strike capabilities with those of a FAC in his unarmed "Bird Dog" who controls one of his missions. Confident in his "mean machine," he claims that the primitive low-and-slow O-1E ran far greater risks than he did. (However, post-war statistics show a greater percentage of F-105 losses — against more hazardous targets — than the O-1Es experienced throughout the war.) FYI, "Twinkie," the FAC's callsign (says Irv), was the name of his cat.

13. "Raven FACero" (as sung by Jim Roper and fellow-Raven FACs): As Jim says, this song has not a single dirty word in it; however, its nomenclature is perhaps suggestive as it traces the journey of a Raven FAC(ero) flying his "aero" from his base in Thailand to an R&R location in Laos . . . where he acquires a social disease that necessitates drastic surgical remedies before he can fly home. Clearly, there was no end to the risks faced by combat flyers, whether on or off duty.

14. "The Sycamore Tree" (by Dave MacKay): Dave's "Sycamore Tree . . . straight and tall" is his lyrical analog for the U.S., while he refers to the Republic of Viet Nam (RVN), tongue-in-

cheek, as a "friendly little country" run largely by our mutual enemy, the Viet Cong (VC); as such it was "A thorn in the side" of the U.S. government, which throughout the 1960s refused either to empower our military to pursue a more aggressive strategy or to withdraw from an increasingly unpopular war. The VC (aided and eventually supplanted by the North Vietnamese Army, or NVA) carried out a steady campaign of terror against the RVN's infrastructure, thus to control its people — as typified by "five men dead . . . lying in the shade of the Sycamore Tree." Although Dave finishes with "And we've been there, you and me," his original words before going to Vietnam himself were "And it's waiting there for you and me" — to reflect the fact that, whether they volunteered or were drafted, most young American men faced the prospect of being sent there.

Coincidentally, as Dave was about to begin the song, a parade of young Vietnamese men and women, dressed respectively in uniforms and flowing dresses of bright yellow tinged with red — the colors of the RVN flag — passed us, waving greetings, on their way to The Wall, themselves survivors of a lost cause.

15. "My Peace Song" (by Jonathan Myer): "While cruising down I-95 ten years ago to attend fellow-FAC Hilliard A. 'Willie' Wilbanks's inauguration into Georgia's Aviation Hall of Fame, I heard Brownie McGhee's butter-smooth guitar and Sonny Terry's chugging harmonica as they sang 'Down by the Riverside.' As the SEA War had been over for more than 25 years, I decided to write my own peace song and 'study war no more' . . . AFTER I 'lay down my Willie Pete' (marking rockets), 'smoke grenade,' 'nape and snake' (napalm and high-drag 500-lb bombs), 'CBUs (cluster bomb units), and '20 mike-mike' (20-millimeter machine-gun fire) — 'Then I'll study war no more!' Like Frank Warner's 'Old Rebel Soldier' — 'I won't be reconstructed, and I do not give a damn!'"

16. "The Misty Song" (by Tony McPeak, later USAF Chief of Staff; sung by Dave MacKay): As NVA air defenses increased throughout North Vietnam and along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the first "Fast FACs," call-sign "Misty," began to provide armed reconnaissance ("recce") and airstrike control in areas where Slow FACs (in O-1s and O-2s) had become increasingly vulnerable. They flew two-seat F-100Fs, first out of Phu Cat and then out of Tuy Hoa, for four years from 15 June 1967 to 19 May 1970. The song attests to the dangers of flying at jet speeds while both dodging flak and avoiding terrain at low altitudes — all the while searching for targets to mark for other strike forces. Typical missions lasted several hours, with two or more air refuelings. Misty FACs also responded to downed-aircrew rescue operations (RESCAPs) until slower "Jolly Green" helicopters and their A-1E "Sandy" support fighters could arrive on-scene. Later Fast FAC units, most based in Thailand, flew F-4s on the same demanding, dangerous and long missions over the enemy's higher-threat areas.

17: "160 VC in the Open" (by Toby Hughes): Although Toby flew the F-4C fighter-bomber during his Vietnam tour, this song is more from a FAC's vantage point: He sees a large VC force "in the open" — a rarity; calls his Corps' Direct Air Support Center (DASC) to send some fighters, which should be equipped with a range of munitions optimized for an anti-personnel strike; has a flight of F-100 "Huns" holding high as he marks his target area with a "willie pete" (white phosphorous smoke rocket; and revels in his opportunity ("It's the kind of situation that I love"). After the strike, he credits his fighters with "150 KBA" ("killed by air"). The final verse has been attributed to "Nail" FACs (based at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand — aka "NKP" or "Naked Fanny"), who'd pass the bomb damage assessment (BDA) for their missions over Laos to their airborne control plane, call-sign "Cricket."

18. "Sher-Babes" (by Toby Hughes): Toby named his F-4C "Phantom II" "Sher-Babes," after his wife. The siege of Khe Sanh, a U.S. Marine base at the extreme northwestern corner of the RVN,

began on 21 Jan 1968 and lasted 77 days until 9 April, thus both preceding and outlasting the 25-day battle for Hué and the RVN-wide "Tet Offensive," which began on 31 Jan. "On the thirty-third day of the fight" (22 Feb), Toby's mission was to interdict supplies destined for NVA forces besieging Khe Sanh. "Hit as he pulled off the bomb run," the rest of his suspenseful ballad details how he managed to nurse "Sher-Babes" as far as Da Nang's runway, where "She dies as her wheels touch the ground."

19: "I Fly the Line" (by Dave MacKay; tune "I Walk the Line"): Dave wrote "I Fly the Line" (to the famous Johnny Cash tune) in 1969 during his tour as a Covey (out-country) FAC flying out of Pleiku Air Base north and west into southern Laos to conduct interdiction missions over the lower Ho Chi Minh Trail. This song, however, tells the general story of how a FAC did his primary job of visual reconnaissance and airstrike control during the SEA War, whether he faced small arms fire (which "I don't sweat") or automatic crew-served weapons (which was "what I fret"). The end of his second verse, "I'll fly and fight anywhere at any time / Because they're mine, I Fly the Line" reflects the close relationship between FACs and the ground units they supported.

20: "My Last Flight" (by Jonathan Myer): They say a pilot never forgets his first squadron. Jonathan's was the 13th Fighter Interceptor Squadron (FIS), where he flew first F-86L "Sabrejets" and then F-101B "Voodoos," both aircraft jet interceptors with the mission of homeland air defense. A pilot's "last flight" is when he "goes west"; i.e., he dies. In the mind's eye, he may relive the sheer joys of special missions and the memories of comrades lost over the years, whether in battle, from accidents, or due to old age. He seeks that "final Great Reunion," whether in heaven or (more likely) "the other way," where he can relive the "Flying and fellowship, missions and crew — / A thousand souvenirs for those who flew. . . ."

21. "Stand to Your Glasses" (first sung by the Royal Flying Corps in France, during the Great War): Legend has it that the casualty rate for new pilots was so high in those days that maintenance crewmen had to come to the Officers' Mess to teach their replacements the words. This (American) version mixes original words, such as toasts "to the dead already" and "the next . . . to die" in "flaming Spad and Camel" (French and British pursuit ships of the day), with later references to "Bosom buddies while boozin' are we" as combat pilots rueful at the risk of death while adhering to principles of honor and duty, as "knights of the air."

Anyone interested in learning more about combat flying missions during the Southeast Asia War and the songs that describe them, or where to find CDs or DVDs that document them — please contact Jonathan Myer at: <j-bmyer-alexva@erols.com> or <soba@erols.com>