

Action Report: Memorial Day Writers' Project (MDWP)

Activity: A Tribute to our Veterans

Date: Nov 11, 2014

Location: Washington, DC

(Constitution Ave., and 20 St.) behind the sidewalk facing Constitution Ave.

Weather: Mid 80s (degrees), clear sky.



The weather was amazing. Temperature was in the 60's and the sky was blue with a gentle breeze. It couldn't be nicer. Dick Epstein brought his photo board displaying photographs of Vietnam as well as the easel, which displayed information about the MDWP. **Barbara Morris** greeted the passing veterans and tourists and took care of books and CD sales. **Ken Williams** and his wife shared duties with Barbara as they displayed their 383 page photo book "*Saying Goodbye to Vietnam.*" We had quite a few new readers and authors who came to spend the day with us. Our tent was put up a day in advance and several authors used the tent for an extra day of book sales. The following describes several of the readers at the MDWP microphone.

This is a temporary file and will be updated as I find additional source material for the Veterans Day 2014 After Action Report.

Jonathan Myer sang fifteen songs, backed up by his 12-string guitar, which sometimes has a mind of its own. The songs were mostly his own, based on events and experiences during his tour in the Republic of Viet Nam (RVN), where he flew the O-1E "Bird Dog" as a Forward Air Controller, or FAC, mostly in II Corps' Kontum Province in the Central Highlands, plus 3-1/2 weeks in I ("Eye") Corps flying over the so-called Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) out of Dong Ha, a Marine Corps base in



Quang Tri Province. In his real life Jonathan flew fighter-interceptors in the Air/Aerospace Defense Command at the height of the Cold War — a year in the F-86L “Sabre” jet, and ten years (three tours) in the F-101B/F “Voodoo” — with his 1966-67 Southeast Asia tour in the middle. His songs included:

1. Teeny Weeny Bird Dog.
2. FAC Meets Saigon Warrior
3. Beer Call in the Boonies.
4. Your “Flying Special.”
5. Loved My C’s.
6. Coyote Four-One.
7. Frankie and Johnnie (Air Force Style).
8. A Death in the Dak Na Valley.
9. The Dumbest Thing.
10. 58,000 Names Carved in a Wall.
11. FAC and the Green Beret.
12. Glory Flying Regulations (III: plus SEA & GWOT).
13. Warrior Bards (II).
14. “Willie” Wilbanks’ One-Man War.
15. Last Flight.



Richard (Dick) Morris. Dick was a rifle platoon leader with A Co. 2nd Bn 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division in '67 and '68. Dick sang tunes from his CD “Skytroopers.” and he read excerpts from his award-winning novel “Cologne No. 10 for Men.” which Dick sang the following songs interspersed with his readings.

- “The Bong Song Bridge,” guarding the Bong Son Bridge (in Binh Dinh Province). •
- “John Wesley,” a song about a 1st Cavalry Division point man who volunteered for point for an entire year and killed a dozen VC.
- “Chanh Giao Cave,” a song about the Rockpile Operation of A Co. 2/5, a 13-day siege where 179 NVA were extracted from holes between the rocks.
- “When’s The Sun Gonna Shine On Camp Evans?” monsoon season at the northern HQ of the 1st Cav. • “Lonesome for You,” a love song from Richard to his wife, Barbara.
- “Diggin’ A Hole,” about digging foxholes and sleeping holes, an activity soldiers performed daily all over Vietnam. This song received a finalist award in the Vocal Jazz & Blues category of the 23rd Annual Mid-Atlantic Song Contest in 2006 (www.saw.org/masc.asp).
- “The Chaplain” is his song about a fictitious chaplain who leaves the field with battle fatigue. He dedicated it to the soldiers who come home with PTSD.
- “I Got A Lonesome Me,” about all his body parts (except one) that were lonesome
- “Mirage,” a love song he wrote to his wife (of 43 years, now) while sitting on a sand dune overlooking the South China Sea
- “Go To Sleep,” a lullaby he wrote for his yet-to-be-conceived children. “Go To Sleep” is also on his daughter's CD, “Imagine That” (see www.rickandaudrey.com).

Tom Glenn. Tom read excerpts from his novel *Friendly Casualties* (2012) which was drawn from personal experience. The first described a skirmish between the Viet Cong and two officers, one South Vietnamese and one American, who worked to save each other's lives. The second told of the farewell during the fall of Saigon between a Vietnamese amah and the American child she had cared for. The third was a monologue by a retired military officer mourning his son, an army lieutenant, killed in combat in Vietnam.

Maritza Rivera and David Martin. These two poets from the Washington area read several poems in two voices. Maritza read *The Encounter*, a Marine on patrol encounters a female civilian and makes a quick decision and *Camouflage*, a poem about preparing for deployment with the sights, sounds, thoughts and the endless waiting to say goodbye. When David arrived, he read several poems about war, the cosmos and our place in the world to come.

Curt Nelson, Jr. Curt arrived in Long Binh USAECAV - HQ on August 31, 1969 and was assigned to 26th Public Information Detachment as editor of KYSU' Magazine. Curt spent most of the day taking photos of MDWP participants and for others who wanted photos of the activities on the National Mall. Curt read several poems refereing to WW I and WW II.

Dick Epstein read several new poems he wrote to be added to his existing chapbook about his time in Thailand and Vietnam. He also read several poems for MDWP participants who couldnt be with us including Rod Kane and Clyde Wray. Dick read *The Flower Next Door*, a poem about his next door neighbor in Qui Nhon; *Close Call*, about almost falling out of a C-130 during takeoff; *On a Jungle Trail*, about riding motorcycles in the woods somewhere near the Saigon River; and *Feeling No Pain*, recalling his first trip to a communiucations site in the delta.

Conclusion: It was a great day, being together, honoring the memories of veterans we knew and those we didn't know. Thank you all for sharing yourselves, for raising your voices so that others won't forget, so that names on the Wall will never be just names. I Hope to see many of you again next Veterans Day. P.S. Your donation is most welcomed to help pay for the rental of our tent on the Mall and the wonderful sound system we use.

Thank you to all of you who participated and to those who help sponsors MDWP activities on the Mall. Special thanks to **VVA 227** for their monitory support. Our best wishes to our brother USMC **Briah "Gunny" Conner** who is with us in spirit. If you have any suggestions for corporate sponsorship, let me know. Don't forget to visit our website: www.memorialdaywritersproject.com or contact me at www.dick_epstein@hotmail.com.
God Bless.

[ADDITIONAL DETAILS OF Jonathan's tour of duty in Vietnam and songs sung Veterans Day 2014:]

Then-Capt. Jonathan Myer was torn away from his sacred mission of homeland defense, known as Continental U.S. ("ConUS") air defense, to take his turn in "Veetnahm" (as then-Sec Def McNamara pronounced it). He left the Mighty "Voodoo" for a near-total opposite, originally the U.S. Army's L-19 "Bird Dog" — officially standardized for all Services in 1962 as the "O-1," but with variations for specific Service configurations and missions). The Army's "L" stood for Liaison, while the multi-Service "O" stood for "Observation" — which, for all its flyers, was the blandest of the Bird Dog's many missions.

Jonathan flew the O-1E, which had a fixed-pitch propeller and was thus slower than the heavier O-1F (Army TO-1D) version, which had a variable-pitch propeller that gave it a 20-mph advantage over the O-1E at cruise altitudes. This was verified, Jonathan says, when he engaged an Army TO-1D in [um] various airborne maneuvers, wherein he could remain on the Army aviator's tail — until said aviator straightened out and climbed straight ahead . . . and Jonathan's O-1E couldn't keep up. . . . Somebody once asked him how it felt flying the O-1 after the F-101. He said, "First you delete the 'F-1,' which leaves the 'O-1'; then you take the F-101's performance figures [speed, altitude, and such] and divide by 10, and you have the Bird Dog's . . . all except rate of climb, which you divide by 100!" (The F-101B's initial rate of climb in full afterburner was indeed about 50,000 feet per minute [fpm], while the O-1E, overloaded with two armed people aboard plus smoke rockets and grenades, climbing out of Kontum on a hot summer day, barely managed 500 fpm.)

During his 1966-67 tour as a Province or Sector FAC, Jonathan was administratively assigned to the 21st Tactical Air Support Squadron (TASS), located at Nha Trang in the southeastern corner of II Corps. However, he was belonged to the 24th Special Tactical Zone (24 STZ), comprising Kontum and Pleiku provinces, which abutted the key "tri-border area" (the junction of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, known as a major infiltration route eastward from the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Jonathan's initial province FAC callsign, Baron 82, was changed to Cagey 82 a few weeks later. His callsign while assigned temporarily to Project "Tally Ho," flying over the (so-called) Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between South and North Vietnam, was Covey 75, "Covey" being the callsign of most out-of-country FACs based in South Vietnam.

The above facts and background should provide context for Jonathan's songs, almost all of them written decades after his "SEA vacation."

1. **Teeny Weeny Bird Dog.** (© 1997) A paean to my O-1E "FAC Bird," this was my first song since leaving South Vietnam some 30 years before. It characterizes the anomalies of fighting a "world war II-plus" (i.e., with jet fighters that could carry as much ordnance as most multi-engine bombers of WW-II), while the O-1E would have been more akin to the "pursuit ships" of the Great War (later and presently known as WW-I) — albeit not as maneuverable. It had aluminum skin rather than fabric, of course, but also had a tail wheel . . . which could prove tricky if landing in a gusty crosswind. Its cruise speed of 80 mph (70 knots) could match cars cruising down an American interstate, but nothing else flying the combat skies of Southeast Asia — i.e., except helicopters inserting fresh troops or evacuating casualties in the boondocks.
2. **FAC Meets Saigon Warrior** (© 1997. *Tune: Streets of Laredo*) This was my second retrospective song, and essentially a fantasy. It was May of 1966, I had been in Kontum three or four weeks, the weather got too bad for reconnaissance sorties, and I took a few days off to visit Saigon, . . . and there saw my first "Saigon Warrior" — so-called because they had all the equipage of combat troops, while actually they were mostly "REMFs" (rear-echelon [um] maternal fornicators) or "staff weenies," who did the various HQs' admin, planning, logistics, briefings, shopping, and drinking in the Saigon bistros, in contrast to those of us at the "pointy edge of the spear." How I managed to swap my grungy flight suit for his cammies, survival vest and jungle hat . . . is the fantasy part.

3. **Beer Call in the Boonies.** (© 2010. *Tune: Little Old Shanty*) This is the true “rest-of-the-story” above — one of the few I thought would be too complex to compile. My reasons for that May '66 Saigon trip were three: bid farewell to John Perry (who had checked me out for Kontum operations and now was heading back to the States); check some paperwork and buy cameras; and (most important!) bring some beer back to Kontum, as our FACs were suffering from a three-week drought. All three goals were met and I was a hero. In retrospect, somebody might have put me in for a Bronze Star (for initiative), but nobody was worrying about “gongs” back then and for me the *free beer* was reward enough!
4. **Your “Flying Special.”** (© 2001. *Tune: Midnight Special*) Any machine that one operates for a good length of time,,time enough to handle it expertly, develops a practically symbiotic relationship with it. My two “special” aircraft were the F-101B/F, the interceptor version of the “Voodoo,” and the O-1E “Bird Dog” for forward air control during our Southeast Asia (SEA) War. Other FAC aircraft, notably the O-2A “Super Skymaster” and later OV-10 “Bronco” were doubtless as special to their pilots for the FAC missions they flew over their operational areas in SEA. The same goes for our fighters, and the Services that used them . . . with the extra warning that, if they flew “down town” (i.e., over Hanoi or Haiphong in North Vietnam), they faced greater dangers that could result in captivity or death.
5. **Loved My C’s.** (© 2013. *Tune: Rye Whiskey*) My newest song describes how, with missions flown at all hours of the day in-country (and night, if flying over North Vietnam or the Ho Chi Minh Trail for out-of-country missions), an on-board source of food was mighty handy. In our province at any rate, the messhall did not stay open around the clock. For me, by the summer of 1966 I was flying with a box of C-rations under my front seat, and soon kept a case of them under the bed in my hootch. The song goes on to identify which foodstuffs I liked, and which I did not and threw over the side — until I recognized the risk of providing the Viet Cong with possible booby-trap cans. Finally and by the accidental experience of heating a “C” can one late evening, I learned that they also tasted good hot! (*And thanks to Gerry Ney for forwarding “A Brief History of the C-Ration.”*)
6. **Coyote Four-One.** (© 1997) I flew with Project “Tally Ho” over Route Pack 1 (the southernmost “route package” in North Vietnam) from about the last week of September 1966 to October 16th, when Kontum reclaimed me. I flew a night mission on the 13th, with a normally garulous graduate of the Air Force Academy in my backseat, as part of his Tally Ho pilot checkout. We had a two-ship flight of two-seat F-4Cs, Coyote 41 and 42, armed with napalm and high-explosive (HE) bombs . . . and '41 flew into the ground, their trail marked by a streak of fire three napalm cans long. Next morning, I jumped aboard a “Jolly Green” Air Force rescue helicopter, but no trace of life was found. As my narration describes, I learned the names of the two lost crew members 32 years later, via a “decoding” method taught me for our Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall by two-tour Army artillery and helo gunship pilot, Mike Sloniker (aka “Loadhacker”), a fellow-member of the Red River Rats, an all-Service organization of (initially) SEA War flyers.

7. **Frankie and Johnnie (Air Force Style).** (© 2005. *Tune: Frankie and Johnny*) My first “impossible” song combined a military funeral of the day at the Arlington National Cemetery (of which I had seen several by then) with the classic Frankie-and-Johnnie theme describing how Johnnie had “done her wrong.” However, in this case the characters were an Air Force Officers’ Club hostess (Frankie), and her straying squadron fighter pilot (Johnnie); the original characters of the bartender (who ratted Johnnie out) and 19th-century reporter Nellie Bly (who was slandered in the original song and again in this version). Clearly, some activities never die; they just change time and place. Think of it as a parallel to Shakespeare in modern dress. . . .
8. **A Death in the Dak Na Valley.** (© 2000. *Tune: ‘Omie Wise*) 1st Lieut. Arthur J. Abramoff, our youngest and newest FAC at Kontum, was killed on January 20, 1967. He was putting in an airstrike in the Dak Na valley, a few miles north of Dak To, when he did not pull out of his marking-pass dive. His backseat observer was an Army 2LT Hull, a new Intelligence Officer with the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) office in our MACV compound, who was badly injured in the crash but managed to crawl away and hide until rescued. Having flown that day’s “dawn patrol,” I had gone back to bed; when awakened there were no more O-1Es available, so I went to our radio shack to help coordinate rescue efforts. Thus the bulk of the story combines: (1) a later recorded dinner conversation with then-1st Lt. DeVere (“Dee”) Henderson, who had taken over as the On-Scene FAC; (2) the combat diary of then-Major Vance Leuthold, who had commandeered a U.S. Army UH-1B “Huey” helicopter (“Mardi Gras 730”) to fly to the crash scene; and (3) three of the four U.S. Army “Huey” pilots involved. The first helicopter to attempt rescue was a Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) “Charley Horse” CH-34, but it was driven off by ground fire. The second was a U.S. Army “Huey” (“Black Cat 606”), which hovered near the wreck and was about to depart when its crew chief saw somebody (LT Hull) hanging onto a skid; he jumped out, heaved Hull aboard, and they departed, first to Dak To’s airstrip for fuel, then to the Army hospital at Pleiku to the south. Meanwhile, Mardi Gras 730 was approaching from the other side and Major Leuthold grabbed an M-16, jumped out and made his way through the smoke to Art Abramoff’s downed Bird Dog . . . where he confirmed that Art was dead. A sad day for us at Kontum, and (of course) a worse one for Art’s family. In 2012, Art’s New York University classmates dedicated the new student union at its downtown campus to his memory; DeVere and I were there. And “Arthur John Abramoff” is the first name read at each of our biennial FAC reunions from our list of 220+ FACs KIA (killed in action) in our SEA War.
9. **The Dumbest Thing.** (© 2002. *Tune: Talking Blues*) “. . . a flyer can do — / And this is no lie, I’m telling you — / Is starve the engine till it quits, / It’s enough to give you the running shits — / And I’m fearless. . . . Did it twice! . . . / And lived to tell about it . . . both times!” The first time was a surprise. I was in the middle of an airstrike in the Dak Akoi valley at 4,000 ft, a known VC area, and with Army CPT Lee Bourdon in my backseat. (He was head of MACV Intel at Kontum, later joined — momentarily — by 2LT Hull.) I knew immediately what was wrong: I had neglected to switch fuel tanks earlier to keep my fuel in balance, and my engine picked that moment to advise me of that fact . . . by going on strike. (I didn’t know that Bird Dog engines had their own union!) So I switched tanks, the Bird Dog immediately resumed powered flight, and I didn’t even miss a word on the

radio as we finished the strike. The second time I became aware (a leetle late) that I was stretching my fuel, so I set fuel and airspeed for a best-endurance RTB (return to base) and hoped for the best. Not quite soon enough, as my engine quit a couple of miles from touchdown. However, I nursed my glide and fortunately made it to the runway safely . . . and the engine restarted once I had my tail wheel on the ground, so i didn't even need a tow — proving that “*it's much more better to be lucky than smart!*” — and I'd just proved it . . . again!

1. **58,000 Names Carved in a Wall.** The original poem “50,000 Names” was by a Native American woman named Johnnie Rainwater, the song was on a single by country singer Jamie O’Hara in 1994, and further popularized by country singer George Jones, backed by the haunting moan of his band’s steel guitar. “Yodelin’ Irv” LeVine introduced the progression from “50,000” names to “58,+++,” and I have upgraded that final number to concur with the “official total” as may be adjusted every Memorial Day by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial authorities. The sheer power of this song — a hymn, really — is its capture of the samples of Americana associated with “our Wall” by the many who visit it each year . . . some as tourists, others as mourners for lost family members, and yet others as veterans who take the opportunity to commune with lost comrades and relive friendships — now that they have the time and opportunity to do so. For me, it has had the added benefit of filling gaps in my knowledge of events when they occurred, such as providing the names of the F-4C crew who died as “Coyote 41” 3+ decades before: Murray L. Borden and Eugene T. Meadows, of the 480th Tactical Fighter Squadron, 366th Tactical Fighter Wing . . . amid the others who had perished on October 13th of 1966.

11. **FAC and the Green Beret.** (© 1967. *Tune: “Wabash Cannonball”*) This is the only song I wrote *about* my time in Vietnam while I was *still* in Vietnam. It was also the one that not only gave me “my 15 minutes of fame” — without my knowing about it — but when I did find out, it became the forerunner of all my songs and ballads in the nearly 20 years since. When I went to Vietnam (early April 1966), Robin Moore’s 1965 book *Tales of the Green Berets* was top of the charts, with a comic strip to follow, the Batman theme (duh-duh-~~DUH-DUH-DUH-DUH~~-duh-duh) resonated daily, and Nancy Sinatra’s “These Boots Are Made for Walkin’” was bowling us over. From the beginning I got along well with the Special Forces’ A-teams, and dropped in on their camps whenever I could; moreover, their B-team was across the wire from our MACV compound. So it was only natural that, towards the end of my tour, I wrote “FAC and the Green Beret” (in January 1967) as a spoof on our relationship. Some of the events alluded to had actually happened, while the narrative imagined everything going wrong for all of us . . . until a happy ending. The song became the last track on a cassette of all the dirty songs I knew, and I made copies for all the A-camps in Kontum and Pleiku provinces plus a couple of fellow-FACs, in tribute. Then I forgot about it until I received a pocketbook in 1995: “Bucky” Burrus’s *Mike Force* (1987), with a sticky that said “See p. 125” — and there, spread across 2+ pages, was my song, with a few minor changes, which Burrus and his fellow-Green Berets used to sing along with their own FACs during beer calls at Nha Trang, some 18+ months after I’d left Kontum for home! . . . “And the rest [as they say] is history.”

- 12. Glory Flying Regulations (III: plus SEA & GWOT)** (© 2000, 2008. *Tune: Battle Hymn of the Republic*) In his *THE WILD BLUE YONDER: Songs of the Air Force*, editor (and WW-II pilot) C.W. “Bill” Getz has collected enough verses to his “Air Corps Lament” (aka “Air Force Has Gone to Hell” & “Glory Flying Regulations”) to fill a full page of his oversize book. The theme of each verse is to contrast the challenging days of combat flying with the subsequent peacetime regulations that take all the fun out of taking to the air. Oscar Brand, whose records did so much to keep military flyers’ song traditions alive, had a different version, whose last verse went:

By the ring around his eyeball you can tell a bombardier,
You can tell a bomber pilot by the spread across his rear,
You can tell a navigator by his sextant, maps, and such,
You can tell a fighter pilot, but you cannot tell him much. . . . [*Chorus*]

As the 21st century dawned, I maintained the theme but updated the verses for the jet age, first to reflect each Service’s typical war-to-peace changes after the Southeast Asia War, and finally to reflect the military culture changes by both the advent of unmanned aerial vehicles or systems (UAVs or UASs, *not* “drones”!) combined with the steady force reductions of manned aircraft . . . due both to aging of the planes themselves and the ever-increasing costs of their more capable replacements. Yet, the quandary remains. As Lt General Mike Dunn, USAF (Ret.), former president and CEO of the Air Force Association, used to say (attributed to a Senate staffer):

The only thing more expensive than a 1st-rate Air Force is . . . a 2nd-rate Air Force.

I hope it’s understood that this dictum could apply to any military force, when needed.

- 13. Warrior Bards (II).** (*Original by “Yodelin’ Irv” LeVine; additions by JM. Tune: All Around the Water Tank*) As explained in a verse added between the two halves of this version, the original first half was written by “Yodelin’ Irv” LeVine — as a tribute to his fellow-SEA War balladeers . . . most of whom I’ve grown to know and with whom I have occasionally performed. The second part is my expansion on the later years of that war, and how the combinations of our national leadership and the increased public opposition to that war led to our ultimate defeat — not on any battlefield, but in our failure to preserve the freedom of those we sought to help . . . resulting in an additional 2 to 3 million Asian lives after we withdrew our forces from the region. Some “collateral damage”! Some “return on our investment” of the 58,300 lives whose names are commemorated on Our Wall, not to mention the 300+ thousands of wounded or maimed survivors and their families, whose sacrifices may still mark their lives.

- 14. “Willie” Wilbanks’ One-Man War.** (© 1997. *Tune: “Jesse James”*) Capt. Hilliard A. Wilbanks and I were in the same class at Hurlburt AFB, Florida, where we spent three weeks in a Special Air Warfare Indictination Course (SAWIC), followed by a two-month transition into the O-1E “Bird Dog,” and learned how to be Forward Air Controllers, or FACs. We never saw each other again, though I knew his last assignment was to Dalat, further south in the Central Highlands and regarded as the “garden spot” of South Vietnam. I learned of his death in battle just two days before my own DEROS (date of estimated return from overseas), and of his award of the Medal of Honor, the second (and first

posthumous) MOS of 16 awarded by the U.S. Air Force during the Southeast Asia War. During the past 14 years (and thanks to this song) I had the honor of meeting most of his family members and attending most of the honors he received in his home state of Georgia. His memorial in his home town of Cornelia is the finest I've ever seen, and in 2011 a new middle school was named after him in the adjacent town of Demorest. His foundation may be reached at: <<http://www.hilliardawilbanksfoundation.com/>>

- 15. Last Flight.** (© 2001.) There were five of us 2nd Lieutenants who were the last to join the 13th Fighter Interceptor Squadron in the Fall of 1958, while it was still located on Sioux City Air Base, Iowa, flying the F-86L single-engine single-seat interceptor, nicknamed the "Sabre" (or "Sabrejet"). In the summer of 1959, the 13th moved to a new Glasgow AFB, Montana, where the squadron met a growing complement of Radar Interceptor Officers (RIOs) and received its fleet of the twin-engine two-seat interceptor version of the F-101 "Voodoo." Those aircraft configured for a pilot in the front seat and RIO in the rear seat were F-101Bs, while the few configured for a pilot or RIO in the rear seat, initially designated TF-101s, were soon redesignated as F-101Fs. Peter D. Chadwick, the second of the five of us to take that final "flight west," passed away on Saturday, November 8th, 2014; this performance of "Last Flight" was dedicated to him.

