February 2015

From The President
Milan Tesanovich

New technologies are enabling us to spend our money easier and faster, which in turn makes it more fun than ever. We are quickly becoming a culture that is paralyzed unless we obtain instant gratification in all things. Patience is definitely losing ground as a virtue.

Mobile device manufacturers and the banking and credit card industries fully understand that. They track the trends emerging from analyzing big data generated by spending habits. These two industries have finally combined together to adapt mobile technology and banking to mimic a page from Las Vegas casinos’ playbooks. Casinos put those one-armed bandits in all the entryways to make them convenient to just walk in the door and sit down and start playing. You put your money in and hit the “play max credits” button and voila! No more having to waste valuable time and effort putting-in individual coins or tokens and pulling down on that lever. Forget about table games – they take infinitely longer to play one round, so the casinos put them in the middle of the casino where you have to take more time to reach, and, force you to pass by the slot machines first. The casinos know that people want instant gratification on knowing whether they win – or lose. It doesn’t really matter which because they’re going to try again and again, at least until they run out of credits or hit the jackpot. You know that’s true because you’ve all been there, right?

So, you ask, how does mobile technology mimic slot machines? To answer that question, we first ask, “How do people currently pay for things.” Well, they endure the tedium of digging in a purse or wallet to fish out a credit card (really, no one carries a check book around anymore, and cash doesn’t earn us those valuable points on our credit cards) only to have it not work the first time. If only someone would deliver us from this vexing problem.

Well, someone has. Do any of you use the new Apple iPhone to take advantage of that new payment system known as Apple Pay? All it takes is a tap of the iPhone, confirmed with a satisfying beep — and that’s it. Ahhh, instant payment gratification. What could be easier, faster, or more satisfying?
Well, that’s one way of looking at it. Another way might be, “Holy cow! My money is slipping through my fingers faster than ever!” That view is one that Apple is hoping you’ll overlook. They’ve partnered with all the major credit card companies plus most of the big U.S. banks to take a cut of every transaction. As CEO Tim Cook pointed out, the transaction business numbers in the trillions of dollars every year in the U.S. alone. Plus, Apple is working hard to bring its payment system to other countries. Hold onto your money, Canadians!

Oh, and by the way, one of the first things you could buy with Apple Pay is an Apple Watch, which also uses the new system. You won’t even have to bother pulling your phone out of your pocket. A simple flick of the wrist and you’re done!

OK, to the reason I bring this up now. Today, I received an email from a lawyer publication that assured me that I will need to buy an Apple Watch so I can be more effective as a lawyer. The lowest-end version of the watch is the Apple Watch Sport -- which technology folks predict will start at about $350. But, the email suggests that as a lawyer, I will want the high-end 18K gold version, called Apple Watch Edition, which will likely retail for $3,000. Fat chance. IF, and it’s a big IF, I eventually embrace instant gratification purchasing, it will be with the cheapest version of the watch I can find. I don’t know about you, but I already spend money faster than I would like. I don’t need technology to make that any faster or any easier.

Please consider sponsoring CHPA’s programs. You may make tax deductible donations to support the Goldie Fund, CHPA’s Scholarship program, the Holiday Boxes for the Troops, T-shirts for Heroes or the Association. For further information please look at Sponsorship at the website, http://www.chpa-us.org.

Share the “Swash”

Please feel free to forward this issue of “The Swash Plate” to your colleagues, potential members and other interested parties!
2015 Goldie Fund Scholarship Program Announcement

Milan Tesanovich

The CHPA is pleased to announce the launch of our 2015 Goldie Fund Scholarship Program for certain family members of active CHPA members.

CHPA has had a scholarship program, known as the Goldie Fund Scholarship Program since 2008. The Board of Directors awards scholarships of up to $1,500. Scholarship recipients were originally restricted to the surviving children and grandchildren of helicopter pilots who were killed in combat operations. Beginning in 2014, the scholarship was expanded to allow awards to certain family members of any current active CHPA member.

Last year, a $1,000 scholarship was awarded to Katherine Conde, the daughter of CHPA member Sam Conde. Katherine is attending Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. Katherine is maintaining a 3.4 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. We are all very proud of Katherine.

You can’t receive a scholarship award unless you apply. An application form detailing Eligibility Requirements and Rules for the scholarship is attached to this email.

Applications must be filled out completely, include all required support materials, and be sent to the address on the application and postmarked on or before the deadline of June 15, 2015.

Scholarship recipients will be publicly announced at the 2015 CHPA Annual Meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana and will be posted online on the CHPA’s web site on September 27, 2015.

The CHPA is looking forward to receiving applications for CHPA scholarships in 2015.

Reunions and Gatherings

The alumni association of A Troop of the 2nd Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry (A-2/17), 101st Airborne Division, US Army is having their reunion in Nashville, TN from May 28 thru May 31. The reunion will include a trip to Ft. Campbell to spend time with the active troops, visit the museum and a possible stop at the Cav Shop. For further information contact Mike Mabe 336-782-6258 (mikemabe@mac.com) or visit the website at www.alphatroopalumni.com.

Are you planning a reunion or event that may be of interest to our members? Let us help you get the word out and support veterans groups of all sizes and locations. Just send a message with the information to HQ@chpa-us.org. If you have a logo, send that along as well.

Be sure to include accurate contact and registration information and we’ll take care of the rest.
- Registration Open -

Yale Veterans Summit
April 10-11, 2015
New Haven, Connecticut

Bridging the Divide:
The Way Forward in US Civil-Military Relations

The first-ever Yale Veterans Summit will bring together a formidable cross section of military, government, civic, and academic leaders to discuss the most pressing needs and challenges facing military service members and veterans today, and the way forward for civil-military relations in the United States. We look forward to your participation and seeing you at the Summit!

For more details and to register, click here. Or go to:

www.yaleveteranssummit.squarespace.com

(Limited number of discount tickets available)
Air Force or Navy?

Bob Norris

The piece is written by Bob Norris, a former Naval aviator who also did a 3 year exchange tour flying the F-15 Eagle. He is now an accomplished author of entertaining books about US Naval Aviation including "Check Six" and "Fly-Off". All you US Army Rotor Heads be sure to read to the end.

In response to a letter from an aspiring fighter pilot on which military academy to attend, Bob replied with the following:

Young Man,

Congratulations on your selection to both the Naval and Air Force Academies. Your goal of becoming a fighter pilot is impressive and a fine way to serve your country. As you requested, I'd be happy to share some insight into which service would be the best choice. Each service has a distinctly different culture. You need to ask yourself "Which one am I more likely to thrive in?"

USAF Snapshot: The USAF is exceptionally well organized and well run. Their training programs are terrific. All pilots are groomed to meet high standards for knowledge and professionalism. Their aircraft are top-notch and extremely well maintained. Their facilities are excellent. Their enlisted personnel are the brightest and the best trained. The USAF is homogenous and macro. No matter where you go, you'll know what to expect, what is expected of you, and you'll be given the training and tools you need to meet those expectations. You will never be put in a situation over your head. Over a 20-year career you will be home for most important family events. Your Mom would want you to be an Air Force pilot ... so would your wife. Your Dad would want your sister to marry one.

Navy Snapshot: Aviators are part of the Navy, but so are Black Shoes (surface warfare) and Bubble Heads (submariners). Furthermore, the Navy is split into two distinctly different Fleets (West and East Coast). The Navy is heterogeneous and micro. Your squadron is your home; it may be great, average, or awful. A squadron can go from one extreme to the other before you know it. You will spend months preparing for cruise and months on cruise. The quality of the aircraft varies directly with the availability of parts. Senior Navy enlisted are the salt of the earth; you'll be proud if you earn their respect. Junior enlisted vary from terrific to the troubled kid the judge made join the service. You will be given the opportunity to lead these people during your career; you will be humbled and get your hands dirty. The quality of your training will vary and sometimes you will be over your head. You will miss many important family events. There will be long stretches of tedious duty aboard ship. You will fly in very bad weather and/or at night and you will be scared many times. You will fly with legends in the Navy and they will kick your ass until you become a lethal force. And some days - when the scheduling Gods have smiled upon you - your jet will catapult into a glorious morning over a far-away sea and you will be drop-jawed that someone would pay you to do it. The hottest girl in the bar wants to meet the Naval Aviator. That bar is in Singapore.

Bottom line, son, if you gotta ask ... pack warm & good luck in Colorado.

P.S.: Air Force pilots wear scarves and iron their flight suits.

P.S.S.: And oh yes, the Army pilot program, don't even think about it unless you got a pair bigger than basketballs. Those guys are completely crazy.
A Change Is Coming To The VA

Jim Donadini, Veterans Committee

The VA is going to standardized forms for some claims processing. It will affect claimants and Service Officers, alike. This new system is intended to standardize claims. In an effort to improve the processing of claims, the VA is following examples of the IRS and Social Security. After March 24th, 2015 the following forms will be mandatory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VA Form Number</th>
<th>Use of the form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21-0966</td>
<td>Intent to file a claim for compensation or Pension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-526 EZ</td>
<td>Application for disability Compensation and related compensation Benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21527EZ</td>
<td>Application for Pension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-534EZ</td>
<td>Survivors claims for dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-0958</td>
<td>Initiate an Appeal on the formal notice of disagreement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By requiring the use of standard forms as other agencies do, the VA will be able to quickly identify what the individual is claiming and then initiate the process to gather evidence for that specific issue.

While standard forms will ensure request are in the right Channel, veterans and Service Officers need to assist in the gathering of evidence. The more thorough the case is developed, the easier it will be for the VA to render a decision.

Service Officers are schooled in navigating the change, the rules, and time lines necessary to process a timely valid claim.

More information on this program can be obtained by clicking on this link: http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2634

Note: Jim is a Life Member of CHPA and serves a local DAV Chapter Service Officer in his area.

Welcome New Members

CHPA extends a hearty “Welcome Aboard” to these new members, who have joined so far in February, 2015.

Victor Diatschenko  Guy Diaz  Ronald Dillard  Donald Gaudreau
John Hart  Carl Harte  Howard Klein  John Knox
Clarence Kreis  John Middleton  Richard Turner  Randall Willis
America Loves A Sniper
Terry Garlock

There is appalling irony in the dustup caused by outspoken liberals on the movie American Sniper. Their anti-sniper cheap shots actually reinforce the theme of the movie, which I submit is only incidentally about a sniper.

I took with me to the movie a buddy who was a sniper in the Vietnam War. While gasbags like Michael Moore toss around the word “cowardly” about men whose boots they are not fit to lace up, those who have served in combat know snipers were just another reliable weapon, typically picking off with precision enemy threats to our own troops, at considerable risk to the snipers themselves who were hunted with vigor. Of course Michael Moore’s ilk think of snipers as unfair, while we know a fair fight in combat is glaring evidence of a failure to plan.

The encouraging thing about the American Sniper film is that America is turning out in droves to see it. Since the show has been selling out locally an hour before evening show-time, we went in the middle of a weekday instead of lunch and even then we weren’t lonely in the theater as we applied our man-rules of one empty seat in between, no touching and no sharing popcorn. These movie crowds are a good thing since our country needs to absorb the subtle message of this film - the ever-widening gulf that separates America from its own military, and the price our troops and their families pay to serve.

This film does a fine job of portraying good people giving their all to do America’s dirtiest work in Iraq. It will make you think about the cost to survivors of combat, things I slowly came to realize about myself and others over several years as I interviewed lots of Vietnam vets while writing a book about them.

You don’t emerge from combat unchanged. When a sniper receives a radioed “green light” to shoot a target 800 yards away and he has already set lateral windage and elevation for bullet drop, he concentrates on gentle pressure on his very light trigger and steadies the cross-hairs in the scope while breathing very shallow, ideally timing the shot in between breaths and heartbeats to eliminate the slightest unwanted motion. If his shot succeeds, he may have protected his brothers by taking a body shot or turning the enemy’s head into a distant puff of pink mist. If you asked him what he felt when he fired, he might lightheartedly respond, “Recoil!” because he was shooting at a “thing” that threatened his brothers, but in the quiet recesses of his mind, how long do you think it takes him to wipe that life he took from his memory? Probably never. Our troops have many different jobs in battle, and lots of them create lingering ghosts.

We outside the military tend to think of war as something that takes place in a different locale, but it is removed by more than just distance. A combat zone is like a different planet, with a foreign civilization, its own culture and customs, values and even language. The behaviors one learns there would be unacceptable at home, and yet we judge from the safety of our couch when TV news brings us events from a war zone. Combat snatches young men out of the morality they learned growing up, puts them in a different world and teaches them radically new skills they need to stay alive and to kill people in violently terrible ways. When they come home we expect them to turn the war switch off and neatly step back into the morality and norms of home life. Sometimes it doesn’t work smoothly.

Days in a war zone usually include fantasizing about returning home to be reunited with loved ones. The reunion doesn’t always turn out as expected because the troops don’t realize how much they have changed. It seems surreal at home that people go about their trivia-filled lives with nary a thought for a war going on with Americans fighting and dying. With a newfound sense of what is important, our troops might have difficulty re-connecting with unchanged old friends. Even their wife and kids might seem out of reach.
They might be puzzled by and never admit to a yearning to be back with their fellow troops, the ones they respect now, the ones who understand them now, the ones who share new fighting and survival skills civilians will never comprehend, and they might wonder just when those guys became their other family.

Many combat vets feel isolated, surrounded by civilians who know nothing of routine physical hardship or watching each other’s back with trust as if your life depends on it, because it does. Is it any wonder so many combat vets are relentlessly quiet, refusing to open up to relieve the pressure? Even if they want to talk to their spouse about it, how could they possibly find the right words for the things bubbling inside them they don’t even understand themselves?

For Vietnam vets long ago the isolation was made worse by an ungrateful nation that listened to anti-war stories painting us as inept, victims or villains, none of which was true but it stuck anyway.

For veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, their isolation has been made far worse since the all-volunteer force meant we were sending the same people back on two, three, four, five and six combat tours, compounding the ever-building pressure they carried and tearing their families apart. Along the way, neither Republican nor Democrat leaders could muster the courage to call on the rest of us to do anything at all, not even to pay higher taxes to fund the war.

Maybe these messages in Clint Eastwood’s film won’t be so clear to you but they were to me and my buddy. We talked about it a little after the movie, and he said quietly, “Some of us never came home.” He meant some who lived and returned, but whose wife and kids could tell you he might be here, but his thoughts are always far away.

American Sniper did not touch on why combat veterans seek each other’s company, but I think it’s part of this puzzle. I will bet the farm that Iraq and Afghanistan vets would understand that, even though my combat experience was shorter than theirs and many years ago, I still feel alone in a crowd of strangers to military experience but when I walk into a room of vets from my war, even if I never met any of them it feels a bit like coming home where you are automatically welcome, where you share a deep unspoken bond and you know others will watch your back. I also know that the men and women who served so many tours in recent wars are part of a brotherhood that will grow stronger with every passing year, and they will find comfort in the company of others who did the same hard things well when they were young while the rest of our country went to the mall.

That’s why, I think, America is loving this movie, a kind of salute to those who have been required to do far too much in wars that might have been avoided, fought with unwise Washington DC strategies that prolonged war and killed too many of our own.

In the aftermath of WWII, more than half of America’s families had veterans. Today most Americans don’t even know anyone who serves in the military. Michael Moore proved how little he knows of military matters with his stupid comments about snipers, and now by rushing to this movie Americans are unveiling their patriotism and at the same time telling Michael Moore to go to hell.
VISIT THE CHPA STORE AT http://www.chpa-us.org/chpa-store TO SHOP FOR HIGH QUALITY T-SHIRTS, POLO SHIRTS, BUTTON DOWNS, JACKETS, PATCHES, DECALS, CHALLENGE COINS AND MANY OTHER ITEMS FOR YOURSELF OR THAT SPECIAL SOMEONE. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR LIMITED TIME SPECIALS.

CHPA MERCHANDISE NOW ON SALE

Closeout Special: For a limited time buy a high quality poplin button down shirt at regular price and get a 16 oz CHPA travel mug half off regular price. Comes in khaki or black. Sizes limited to stock on hand.

Closeout Special: For a limited time buy a high quality CHPA Windbreaker at regular price and get a 16 oz CHPA travel mug half off regular price. Sizes limited to stock on hand.

OTHER ITEMS AVAILABLE ONLINE

CHPA Polo Shirt  
CHPA Logo Patch  
Flight Crewmember Tab  
CHPA Baseball Cap
The Swash!

[Call for Articles]

One of the things we all know, nobody tells a better story than a combat helicopter crewmember, whether it’s the truth or “enhanced truth.” Our most entertaining and informative stories come from you, our membership. We often receive responses from our members when an article is published that opens a memory or touches a nerve, in a good way.

So where are all the story tellers out there? All you veterans of the skies of OEF and OIF with an idea for an article, or a story to tell it’s as easy as sending it in. Take a moment to lay fingers on keyboard or just put pen to paper and send them in. You can email them to hq@chpa-us.org or through the US Post Office to: CHPA • PO Box 42 • Divide, CO 80814-0042

Help us help you tell the tales of your experiences and continue to preserve our shared legacy of combat under a rotor disc.

GOT PATCHES?

CHPA continues to receive quite an assortment of patches from our members. These patches are displayed at our booth at HAI, Quad A, and VHPA. Several of you have donated patches, but we’re always looking for more. They are very eye catching and help us garner attention. So please dig through your old patches and if you have some you’d like to share, send them to us at:

CHPA • PO Box 42 • Divide, CO 80814-0042
Gift Hunt 2015

Ed Turner

We’ve just completed another great gift hunt for a deserving veteran. We went, again, to Georgia on a four day hog hunt and all had a great time. Our guest hunter this year was a young Marine LCpl who was badly injured in Afghanistan, January 2014. He is still assigned at Walter Reed and was given some time off to visit his home in Marietta and also to enjoy a free hunt with our group.

Once again I must thank both “Operation Second Chance” and my POC there, Kevin Kenney. Kevin and his wonderful organization continue to be our liaison between these great young men and our efforts to give them an enjoyable time hunting hogs in the great state of Georgia. It was through Jay Brown, Executive Director of CHPA that I was introduced to Kevin and things have worked very well since then.

The same group of hunters have joined me in this gift hunt for all three iterations now and along with some donations we receive from private citizens scattered throughout the US we have enjoyed immensely our hunts treating these great young Americans to an enjoyable time! Three of our group traveled together to Georgia from Clarksville, TN. and a fourth came from Florida where he is an active duty Navy Pilot. As already mentioned, our guest came to the camp from Marietta, Ga.

Three of us arrived on Friday afternoon, 13 February and two chose to do a quick clothes change and head for the woods in search of our first harvest. I stayed at camp awaiting the arrival of our guest, who was delayed with the typically heavy Atlanta traffic. Our camp for this hunt is owned by Blaine Burley and is located in rural Johnson County on about 115 acres. We do not hunt hogs around the cabin, but travel 10-30 minutes to several different parcels Blaine either owns or leases that total over 3,000 acres. This is a fair chase hunt for completely wild hogs and as such we run the chance of going home empty handed. Matter of fact, last year’s guest was the only hunter to even score on that four day trip.

Our Marine guest arrived in plenty of time for dinner and our two hunters already out along with group member #5 were all in place for a pleasant home made lasagna dinner and a couple of rounds of cheer on top. This first evening we also choose to surprise our guest with another part of his gift hunt that he knew nothing about. We give our honored guest a new rifle to round out their time with us and also hopefully to take their first hog with.

Our guest was caught completely by surprise when his gift rifle was handed to him and he spent a good while giving it the once-over. We were all set now to begin our highly anticipated annual gift hunt! During the winter months, our host has found that the best time to see the most hogs is to hunt late afternoons well into darkness (legal in Georgia for hogs). So, we all set out the next day with lights as needed and even with some forms of NV to utilize on the evening’s hunt.

First night (second for some) success was realized by our Navy Pilot and Rodney took a couple of hogs, a trophy boar and also a smaller sow (meat hog). This after a delicious lunch and dinner of BBQ wild hog! The ice was now broken and we were all excited to get to another day’s hunt. The next night was the big one for our Marine, Alex. He scored on a monster hog of over 300 pounds and we all could not have been happier. He made a one shot harvest at well after dark utilizing some of the NV components the guides lent us to
enable him to see that big hog in full dark. The next night saw two more hogs harvested (one a brute) and our last night of hunting also saw two more big hogs taken.

An absolutely GREAT hunt for our entire group, as everyone harvested at least one hog. As we made plans originally for this hunt, it came to my attention that our guest’s Birthday was to be the day after our hunt ended and I made arrangements to have a special surprise B-day cake made and delivered to the cabin for our last midday meal together.

I cannot imagine a nicer group nor a better time on any hunt. I’ve already mentioned Kevin Kenney and Jay Brown as being instrumental in getting things done. Blaine Burley, the camp owner also does much to help us and ensure a great time is had by all. He has become as fond of this type of hunt for our deserving veterans as we have, I believe.

Lastly, I need to mention those benefactors that choose to donate either money, their time to join on the hunt, or both. I am forever in debt to those everyday people who have chosen to open their wallets to show these fine young Americans that we have an appreciation for the sacrifices they have made to protect those freedoms we all share and enjoy. This hunt also included two individuals who donated additional gifts to our guest; a beautiful handmade knife from England and two books on shooting, signed by the author to our guest.

I have also now decided to add another gift hunt this coming September for another deserving Service Member. This hunt will be for black bear in the great state of Maine.

Wish us well!

How Are We Doing?

Jay Brown

Every month we try to bring you articles and notices that interest all of our members. Of course that entails gathering news items and articles from various sources and varying topics, from the humorous to serious news of world events. We hope we’re meeting your needs and providing entertainment and we’d love to hear from you on whether we’re meeting those goals. If you have a comment or suggestion on what we’ve done well, where we could improve or want to submit a story drop us an email at HQ@chpa-us.org or give us a call at 800-832-5144 and let us know. Always of particular interest are stories from our members and supporters. Anything from tales of woe in Flight School to genuine TINS TIW stories can be submitted. So drop us a line and tell your story.
Upcountry Work Day

Duane Keele

It is usually quite difficult to come up with an answer to the question, "What did you do in the war" or "What was it like over there." One wonders where you start, what would the questioner really be interested in knowing, or will they understand what I’m telling them.

These thoughts went through my head before I sat down to write this story. Then it dawned on me that it isn’t a problem telling your story to a fellow veteran because they were there; perhaps not in the same job or the same country, but certainly in a brotherhood of experiences. It’s not like having to explain the punch line of your best joke to a 5 year old. But then I wouldn’t be telling my best joke to anyone under the age of 21.

When told that my experience as an Air America helicopter pilot would be read by combat helicopter aviators, I concluded that it might be a lot like re-telling my stories at the Air America Association reunions. I've become pretty good at that. The only difference in this case is that I feel I should first explain a little about the Air America history and what our mission was during the Vietnam War era.

I wish to start with a short history and list of missions of Air America. Then I, in my usual modest manner, will conclude with a short story of a rare mistake that I made during my tour with Air America. It doesn't, of course, exemplify the many normal heroic helicopter pilot adventures so many of us have participated in. And I feel it necessary, in all modesty of course, to say that it is one of the few mistakes, witnessed by others, made in the seven years and 5,000 hours spent with the company. However, this tale will be one of those stories that usually attract the most rapt attention around the reunion bars and frankly are usually the most truthful.

Air America could loosely be considered a continuation of the Flying Tigers. After WWII, the Tiger's GEN Claire Chennault and his partner, Whitey Willauer started a civilian airline in China called Civil Air Transport (CAT). After the onset of the Chinese civil war and prior to the ousting of Chiang Kai Shek, who was Chennault’s friend, by Mao Tse-tung's forces, CAT was sold to the American government. It was eventually forced out of mainland China to the island of Taipei. There, besides operating as a civilian airline, it did clandestine operations for the American government in Southeast Asia and Korea.

One notable CAT operation, was resupplying the besieged French outpost of Dien Bien Phu, in 1954, during which one of CAT's C119s was shot down killing its crew. The pilot on that flight was James McGovern, nicknamed "Earthquake McGoon" due to his size (his story can be found in Wikipedia). His copilot was Wallace Buford. One might argue that they were the first American casualties of the Vietnam War.

In 1959 CAT was moved to Laos. The CAT pilots assumed the duty of flying C-46s, C-47s, and T-28 attack aircraft in support of the Lao anti-communist government forces. About a year later Air America came into existence.

When the CAT fixed wing pilots were called upon to fly helicopters in Laos, they had a problem transitioning to those new contraptions. Meanwhile, Air America had been formed and a detachment of Marines on an aircraft carrier in the South China Sea were told to doff their uniforms and report to Air America in Udorn, Thailand to fly helicopters until civilian helicopter pilots could be hired. And Air America replaced all of CAT's operations.

The duties of the newly formed Air America were varied, but one task that later developed was the rescuing of approximately 150 downed American crewmen flying fixed wing aircraft sorties out of Vietnam and Thailand. These rescues were from enemy territory in Laos, done mostly without overhead air cover, and with unarmed helicopters. Most employees list that as their proudest accomplishment.
One of Air America's major customers in Laos was the United States Government's assistance program to underdeveloped nations (USaid). Their mission was providing for the jungle refugees and civilian population disrupted by the war using helicopters and large fixed wing air drops. Tons of "soft rice" was dropped to the villages. (This term was used to distinguish USaid goods from "hard rice", a code word for munitions supplied by another customer.)

A second customer was the American government's Requirements Office (RO). Their duties involved distributing equipment, weapons, ammunition, bombs, etc. supplied by the American government and necessary to the operation of the "secret war" effort being waged in Laos.

The third customer was the CIA (also referred to as 713). Working for them was probably the most dangerous. The mission included transporting case workers to the work locations, moving and supplying the indigenous troops, infilling and ex-filling them into battle sites, extracting the Ho Chi Minh Trail watchers and supplying the TACAN sites in Laos. There were several other odd missions which involved excursions into North Vietnam, Cambodia, and "another place" (even before Nixon's visit there). The purpose of some of those missions remains a mystery to me to this day.

As a rule, Air America helicopters covered a large portion of Laos on a daily basis. Upon hearing of a downed aircraft on the constantly monitored guard radio, they would determine their nearness and, if close, rush to the scene. They located the pilot by visual reference, smoke, or sometimes with the help of a Raven forward air controller. Then they dropped into the zone and hopefully lifted out the crew before the bad guys got to the scene. A pick up earned you $50. I mention that sum because it doesn't seem as mercenary compared to the rumored $2,000 received for a pick up. I think these rescue missions were outside the normal contracted jobs, but I don't know of any that were rejected.

The only customer I know of that Air America worked for in Vietnam was the CIA.

Air America did some "odd" missions on the side. One that I went on consisted of ferrying refurbished H-34s to Indonesia via the Malaysia peninsula, Singapore, and Sumatra. I’m sure they were American aid to assist the Indonesian government in the fight against the communist guerrilla factions. Whatever the reason, it was an interesting visit to a Muslim dominated country. It was on this trip that our mechanics discovered that under-the-table Playboy magazines could be exchanged for $20 of local merchandise.

I suppose my association with Air America came in a roundabout way. I met General Chennault at a buddy’s pre-wedding event in San Antonio, TX when I was a college student. The General happened to be the bride’s uncle. The problem was, at the time I did know who he was. A retired general in San Antonio is no novelty. I said hello, had a couple words with him, and headed to the bachelor party. In the car, my friend asked me if I knew who the general was, and I said no. He then told me he was the General Chennault of the Flying Tigers. Well he didn’t look like John Wayne, but I was more than willing to give up a night on the town to go back in and talk to him. That was not to be. I did not run into him again before he died a few months later. But I was left with a lasting interest in that organization that even the movie hadn't instilled in me. That was in 1958.

After graduating college in 1963, I made what I thought for a time was an ill advised trip to a recruiting center. I think my enlistment had a lot to do with an extended stop by the Pearl Brewery there in San Antonio. Long story short, in 1965, I ended up flying helicopters for the Marine Corp and landed in Vietnam fresh out of Pensacola to boot.

While standing outside the air ops shack in Qui Nhon, I met my first Air America pilot. He was flying a Porter and was waiting for his customer. I struck up a conversation with him to find out all that I could about his company. That talk was to serve me well; and years later, we were to become good friends.
After my Vietnam tour, I still had a couple years on my enlistment and ended up instructing at Pensacola. As that tour started to come to a close, I knew if I stayed in the Corp then my next tour would be back in Vietnam. From my previous talk with the Porter pilot, I also knew that the pay with Air America was about four times that of a Marine Captain. I wanted in, but I still had a service obligation with the Marines. I was due to be discharged in January 1968 so I started making calls to Air America in hopes of getting a job interview that would land me in a training class. I also started begging my CO for an early out so that I could make the new Air America hire group that was going to take place in December 1967.

I did not get my early out and missed that hiring. I was resigned to taking a job with a civilian company when luckily I got a call for an Air America interview in Washington, DC. I was hired and on my way to SEA within the week. I made my way in several steps to Bangkok where, fortunately, having a lot of H-34 time I was sent to Udorn, Thailand where the UH-34s were stationed. The rest of new hires with their Huey experience went to Saigon.

I spent almost seven years with Air America until the war in Southeast Asia drew to a close. There would probably never be another job like the one I had just left.

Now that you have had a very abbreviated look at the Air America that I recall, I shall relate my selected "OH S**T" moment that every military aviator has experienced at least once.

While in upcountry Laos on one of my scheduled tours, I was directed to work LS272. This stood for Lima Site 272 which was one of the many Laotian landing fields. It was a staging airstrip for USaid. For me it was a good mission since working for USaid was least likely to take your helicopter into a hostile environment. The drawback was that, because you weren’t in a hostile environment being shot at, your hourly pay was less. You could weigh the advantages of more pay in the more "exciting" 713 assignments vs. a more relaxing work day. I was particularly looking forward to a rather relaxing mission this day.

My mechanic, a Filipino whose name I cannot recall now, and I landed at the airstrip and taxied over to the USaid warehouse to pick up a load of "soft" rice, canned meat, pots, pans, blankets, etc. We loaded and rolled out to the runway and took off heading north. We made an immediate turnoff up the valley. It was a beautiful green valley like so many of the others in Laos. There was a small stream running down its center like most of the valleys, and I recall that the ground rose up from the valley floor on both sides to an altitude of about 3,000 feet. There was abundant green tropical vegetation covering most of the hillsides except where occasional village fields had been cut and burned out by the local inhabitants. There were also rare bare spots along the hilltops where villagers had cut out airstrips for receiving small aircraft they hoped would come and bring supplies or maybe transport them to market. This need for transportation to a market was because there were almost no roads in upcountry Laos. It seems natural that villagers must have thought Air America had been heaven sent when it arrived with those marvelous flying machines. Their logic was that if their gods had sent them Air America, then certainly those gods had meant them to take full advantage of this gift!

On this particular lovely sunny day our first delivery was to an airstrip located on the outskirts of a small village. Picture this strip near the top of the hillside that sloped up at a very steep incline and ended at a nearly level turn around area. I had come with a loaded helicopter to drop off gifts from the "USaid, God of plenty." What I did not know was that several villagers were eagerly waiting to take advantage of a heaven sent trip to the market.

The turnaround area was located near the edge of the hill with a several hundred foot drop off. If you have seen the Air America movie starring Mel Gibson, then you get the idea of this airstrip layout.
I landed near the top of the strip and rolled up on the turnaround area and told the mechanic to get ready to drop the load going to this village; after which, the plan would be to beat a hasty departure for the next village. I turned the 34 back around to face the valley and rolled the engines back to idle.

During this time, I looked toward the village side of the turnaround area. To my horror, a dreaded line up of several of the village matrons had gathered with their shopping paraphernalia (bags, woven bamboo cages with chickens in them, and a several small pigs). A couple of other women were wasting no time in heading for the airstrip with their assorted goods.

It is not an exaggeration that I frantically called down to the mechanic, who was busy unloading the supplies onto the ground, to close the sliding door FAST. Crap, I was too late!! He was totally overwhelmed by 6 Lao women, pigs, and a half dozen or so chicken cages. Visualize in your mind a Black Friday sale at a department store. That's what he faced.

So my next instruction to him was to throw them all out. Duh! A minute or two passes and I key the intercom again, "WELL?"

My breathless mechanic, in a rather weak and pitiful voice replies, "I can't, Captain."

Then I tell him well I will and proceed to swing out of my perch in the cockpit and start descending the steps on the side of the H-34 (about 10 feet) in order to affirm my authority as aircraft captain. Just as one foot touches the ground, I detect a definite movement of the helicopter from its previous location on the airstrip. It is rolling toward the void at the edge of the turnaround area ... maybe 8 feet at most. Crap, again. I had forgotten something important ... like setting the brakes.

As I started a frantic climb back to the cockpit, I must confess my thoughts were not so much on the hazard of the several hundred foot fall over the edge of the strip. It was the thought of how I was going to explain this to the chief pilot should I survive the fall.

Luckily, I had no problem bringing the helicopter to a halt a safe distance from the edge of the drop off. But, after getting control of the situation in the cockpit, I glanced back over my shoulder to check on our uninvited passengers. From what I observed, it appears the old girls had started exiting the aircraft while I was still frantically climbing up to the cockpit. A couple of them, with their chicken cages and runaway pigs, were giving me some severe stares. I think that they had just become more sophisticated air travelers, realizing that there would be another aircraft coming by in a few days, and it would most likely have a much smarter pilot.

I told the mechanic to close the door, and we departed for our next drop zone and a long day.

It was just another up country work day. Some of which left you feeling quite heroic with a rescue or emergency resupply, and others that left you feeling like a mere mortal.

I miss all of them.

Editors Note: After his tour with Air America, Duane spent his next 30 years flying helicopters for Petroleum Helicopters. His 40 year career as an aviator accounts for his 22,000 flight hours. He is now retired and living near Austin, TX.
Making New Friends in Far Away Places

Terry Garlock

Long ago in Vietnam some allies had well-earned reputations. ROKs (Republic of Korea troops) were tough as nails. Aussies were reliable but deadly in any drinking situation. The wise word was, don’t try to out-drink an Aussie.

I never had that chance because I only encountered Aussies one time, and the situation did not allow for the relief we sought in alcohol.

It was a 1969 fall morning, I think, with me flying front seat in a 334th Dragons Cobra out of Bien Hoa, with John Synowsky in the back seat. I don’t remember the mission, just that we had been scrambled to help a ground unit in contact when I glanced rearward and noticed one of the 17 pound warheads in the port 19-shot rocket pod had vibrated to the point of unscrewing from the rocket motor and was hanging cockeyed out in front of all the other warheads.

We had to get rid of that unscrewed warhead fast since we didn’t know when that particular rocket tube would be next to fire, and if it did the possibility of tumbling the rocket motor up into the rotor plane – or slamming sideways into the cockpit – was a risk we could not take. We also didn’t need to be focused on that problem once we were in contact. So John nosed it over in hopes the wayward warhead would fall out but it was still hanging. We gained some altitude and tried a steep dive with John wagging the nose to and fro with pedals to shake it loose but the sticky warhead still stuck.

We started looking for an open spot to make a quick landing to solve the problem even though we didn’t want to put the aircraft on the ground in an unsecure area. Luckily, we spotted an obviously friendly ground unit. We had no idea who they were and certainly had no radio frequency to contact them, but they were operating on a dirt road, an APC with grunts, and we set up an approach to land on the road near the friendlies. An approaching Cobra in the middle of nowhere of course caused a little excitement, and as we touched down I jumped out, in a hurry to get airborne again to resume our flight to the ground unit needing close air support. An Aussie grunt jogged over and greeted me in that delightful Australian dialect, “Wha’s up, Mate?”

I grabbed the 17 pound warhead, jerked it loose, and with no time to re-screw it into the motor and try to tighten without being able to grab the rocket motor encased in the pod, I quickly handed it to the Aussie and said, “Hold this!” as I jumped back in the front seat and closed the canopy while John was taking off.

I had time for one quick look back at the Aussie holding that warhead with the delicacy of a newborn baby and his eyes were so big they almost merged. Of course we laughed our butts off because we knew the fuse was armed only by extreme acceleration when fired, while the Aussie thought he was holding something that might go off if not handled with care. But we had to go.

Too bad I never had a chance to buy that Aussie grunt a drink, but that was my only encounter with our brothers down under. Probably a good thing they never had a chance to get their hands on me, or make me try to match them drink for drink. But I’ll bet some of you have stories ...
Quotes From Afar

1. “Umm, you want to buckle in?” Asked by IFE to WOC after taxiing to the take-off pad for an instrument check ride.
2. “I don’t believe I rightly know what that is.” Response from a CW2 during an instrument AAPART.
3. “Never had one lesson.” Statement by a CW2 after several “less than stellar” NVG shipboard landings.
4. “I’m not buying it, I’m just renting it for a couple of hours.” Statement from an IP during a “very detailed” explanation by an IP student of what was going on during a preflight.
5. “This thing has the glide ratio of a simonized coke machine.” SIP to IP student entering first autorotation in an OH-58D.
6. “Can I be an Instrument Unit Trainer?” Question from pilot after failing Instrument Check Ride.
7. “What’s that on your face, Candidate?” “Sir, that’s a nose, Sir.” “Where did you get that nose, Candidate?” “Sir, my mother gave it to me, Sir.” Very loud conversation overheard by everyone between a TAC officer and a WOC.
8. “OK, let’s go get your cookies burned.” From IP to FNG in Vietnam walking out to the aircraft for an in-country check ride.