



# INCOMING

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA  
**CHAPTER 535**

Website: [www.vva535.org](http://www.vva535.org)



Volume 27 Issue 1

January 2017

## President's Message

Well, another Victorian Christmas is on the books and we did quite well, again. I need to thank a lot of our members for a great job. I need to give a special thanks to Dick Corn, Dale Epps, Bart Ruud for coming to the kitchen every day to brew up our Cider and Chocolate, Bart being the Pot man, Dale the head Brewer. and Dick for every thing else. Ric Sheridan worked both ends and filled in every time we were short a person. (He came even if we weren't that short.) Ralph Remick gave us more than two days, as did Armando Garza, Chuck Holmes and VP Al Hernandez (he even conned his son The Marine to work on the last Sunday) We also got Dave Johnson to work his tale off. Gary Barnes gave us a busy Sunday and Peter Hidalgo showed up twice so we worked him hard. Dave Chaix gave us his usual 1st Day regular performance. New members Bill Alexander and Dave Middleton took my mistaken advice when I told everybody that "It's a lot of fun," and you will have to ask them for the truth. MERRY CHRISTMAS and see you in the New Year.

Gross sales combined with donations were \$5,663.30. Year 2015 saw a gross of \$4652, meaning that 2016 bettered 2015 by \$1011.

Harold Graves

## Matters of interest as outlined at Board Meeting of December 15, 2016:

The meeting was canceled so there is no report.

## Upcoming Events

Unveiling of VVA-535's bronze plaque, and others, at the Auburn Veterans Pavilion on Saturday, Feb. 25, 2017 at 11:00 a.m. All riders, veterans and families invited.

## Chapter 535 Officers

President	
Harold Graves .....	470-8507
Vice-President	
Al Hernandez .....	864-2480
Treasurer	
Ralph Remick .....	559-7716
Secretary	
Dave Johnson .....	887-8297
Past President	
Pete Burelle .....	(deceased)

## Directors

Al Hernandez .....	864-2480
Dave Johnson .....	887-8297
Ralph Remick .....	559-7716
Ric Sheridan .....	274-1413
Dave Chaix .....	269-1431
Bill Holman .....	265-8387
Kent Hawley .....	432-3551

Bart Ruud ..... 823-1368  
 Dale Epps ..... 368-6156  
 Harold Graves ..... 470-8507  
 Dick Corn ..... 277-8856

**Committee Chairs**

Finance .....Ralph Remick & Dave Johnson  
 Parade and Honor Guard ..... (vacant)  
 Membership Affairs ..... Ric Sheridan  
 Newsletter ..... Interim editor Bart Ruud  
 Nominations ..... Dick Corn  
 Christmas Year Round ..... Harold Graves  
 NCCVC ..... Ken Farmer  
 Web Master ..... Ralph Remick

Quartermaster ..... Kent Hawley

**Nevada County Veterans Affairs Rep.**

Kevin Edwards ..... (530) 273-3396

ncvso@co.nevada,ca.us

**VVA 535 Jackets Available**

President Harold Graves has distributed jackets for which VVA members had submitted unit patches. Completed price of each jacket is \$100, and due before the jacket is released.

**TIDE 6**

Upon arriving in Vietnam to begin my second tour, I was informed by the 11<sup>th</sup> Group Commander of the First Air Cavalry Division I would take command of Charlie Company of the 228<sup>th</sup> Assault Support Helicopter Battalion. I was thrilled to get a command, but not so thrilled with Charlie Company’s call sign, Crimson Tide. Being a member of the University of Illinois football squad from 1955 – 1960, I would have preferred a different call sign, perhaps Fighting Illini.

I may have been troubled by the call sign, but nobody else was. And why should they be?

University of Alabama football teams had eight National Championships to their credit, the most recent in 1961, 1964, and 1965 under Coach Paul “Bear” Bryant. I admired Coach Bryant, not so much for his national titles, but more for his credo with respect for what he looked for in a football player. He was quoted as saying, “What matters is not the size of the dog in the fight, but the size of the fight in the dog.” Being an undersized lineman, that was my kind of philosophy.

I decided early on since I was announcing to the world over FM and UHF radio waves I was head coach of the Crimson Tide in Vietnam, I might as well communicate with the head coach of the Crimson Tide back in Tuscaloosa, AL. So, with the help of First Sergeant Bob Bratton and Captain Rick Storm, we sat down and collectively drafted a letter for Coach Bryant to inform him there was, indeed, another Crimson Tide team on this planet. We told him we were proud of our name and he and his team would likewise be proud of our achievements. The letter included some details about what we did for a living and how we went about doing it. We also included a company guidon and a couple of action photographs of our aircraft supporting 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry soldiers in the field. About a month later, we received a letter from Coach Bryant along with a Crimson Tide football. Coach Bryant, his coaching staff, and the entire 1969 football squad signed one panel of the football. Because of Coach Bryant’s popularity, Charlie Company gained a little notoriety as his gesture was written up in the Stars and Stripes.

When I left the unit, about seven months later, the officers and men of Charlie Company signed the remaining two panels of the ball and gave it to me as a going away gift. Today that ball resides in my home as one of my most prized possessions. Ironically, the last of Coach Bryant’s twenty-four straight bowl appearances would be against the Fighting Illini in the Liberty Bowl on December 29, 1982. It was Coach Bryant’s last game, and its

outcome would advance his win column from 322 to 323. While my loyalty remained with the Fighting Illini during the entire game, the disappointment of the final score was certainly diminished by my affiliation with the Crimson Tide of Vietnam. Like the rest of the world, and certainly all of the Vietnam Crimson Tide, I was pleased Coach Bryant improved his winning percentage in the very last game he would coach. Hell, I just wish his last game hadn't been against the Fighting Illini. I grew to love that call sign, Tide 6. Everyone loves a winner.

(By Bob Lanzotti. From Nov. 2016, *The VHPA Aviator – The Newsletter of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association*)

### **My First Combat Mission**

By former USAF Captain Howard "Rusty"  
Hamer 42nd TEWs

In late October 1967 I arrived at Takhli Air base Thailand. I was one of three FNGs (which is short hand for "F####ing New Guys") on that C-130 flight assigned to the 41st Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron, an EB-66 unit. (After about ten missions we would no longer be considered FNGs). Our Squadron Operations Officer, Major "Sonny" Mercer, met us and welcomed us to the Squadron (A few months later Sonny died in the hospital from injuries he suffered while bailing out from his EB-66C that was shot down by a MIG 21 over western North Vietnam. Sonny had been rescued about three days after the shoot-down and had broken both legs as the seat left the aircraft the injuries, which ultimately caused his death in the hospital.)

My military orders after completing graduate school directed me to attend a two week refresher ECM course at Mather AFB and then report directly overseas without attending the three month B-66 flight training course at Shaw AFB which was the normal route for replacement crew members. It appears that the 41st TEWs squadron was short of Electron

Warfare Officers and felt that they could train former experienced EWOs themselves. So, many former B-52 EWOs came directly to the squadron without going to Shaw for aircraft training. Now two months after finishing Grad school at Purdue University, I was on my way to the war in South East Asia. I had a week stop over at Clark AFB in the Philippines to attend Jungle Survival School. On an off day I visited the US Military Cemetery in Manila, the largest WWII Military cemetery and all those seventeen thousand graves put me in very sober mood.

Once I signed in to the squadron, the planners scheduled me for the necessary activities to get me a combat designated flight soon, in this case as a passenger and not a crewmember. This flight would qualify me for combat pay in October so they quickly scheduled me for ejection seat qualification training and survival equipment check out. The next thing I knew I was on the flight schedule for a flight in the empty third seat up front on a EB-66C model electronic reconnaissance/jamming flight on 29 October. An additional benefit that I really didn't appreciate at the time was, I would get credit for a mission over North Vietnam (NVN) that would be the first of a hundred "Counters" that would qualify me to end my SEA tour prior to the stated standard requirement of one year in Country.

In the flight briefing in the morning of 29 October I met my crewmates. The Navigator, who I was to sit across from, directed me to record all the MIG calls (Red Crown a Navy ship in the Gulf of Tonkin had the ability to track the MIG fighters and alert strike aircraft) and advise him if any MIG appeared to be a threat to our aircraft. In addition, I was to monitor our SAM and Airborne radar warning receiver audio. After the Squadron briefing the crew assembled for a crew briefing where they explained to me if I had to bail out my call sign to any rescue aircraft was our assigned aircraft call sign followed with what position I was on the crew, and in this case that was "G" the

seventh guy in Marlin 1, the first six were the pilot, navigator and four EWOs seated in the former bomb bay section. To identify myself on my survival radio I was "Marlin 1Golf". This discussion did nothing to reduce my anxiety about the flight. We then got a ride to the Personal Equipment building where yesterday I was issued the required set of gear. Each crewmember picked up their parachute, helmet and mask, survival vest and 38 revolver with ammo. We loaded five cartridges in the revolver's cylinder leaving the empty portion under the firing pin. Then we went out to the aircraft for preflight, including connecting our chutes to the survival kit already in the ejection seat. Since engine start was still about ten minutes away the crew exited the hot aircraft and waited for the last minute to reenter the aircraft. While waiting we relieved ourselves behind the revetment. Our mission was planned for five hours and there was no opportunity in the aircraft to relieve yourself.

Once the engines were started we taxied to the arming area near the end of the active runway. The bomb/missile armors (who perform a weapons check and then pull the safety wires) were standing around waiting the first of the F-105 strike flights that were scheduled to depart after us. The base Chaplain was always there when the 105s were taking off - if the mission was going "Down Town" Hanoi area, it was very likely one or two of the forty or so 105s was not coming back. Our take off was uneventful but it seemed to me we were on the ground a long time (48 seconds) until we finally lifted off near the end the 9,000 ft. runway. The forward upward ejection seats were capable of successfully saving the forward crew members once the aircraft reached take off speed, any engine failure before reaching 180 knots and a crash was unavoidable. The downward seats could not be successfully used until the aircraft had climbed to 500ft above the ground, this took about two minutes after the start of the take off roll. (Our Allison J-71 engines were originally designed for the Northrup Snark, a one-way cruise missile. A couple months after

my arrival on base I lost a new friend when his aircraft did not have enough power on a single engine landing to reach the runway with the landing gear and flaps deployed. It hit short of the runway and four of the crew died in the fire. Shortly after I returned to the states our Squadron commander and crew were killed when one of their J-71 engines failed during take-off. Inspection of all the squadron engines found non-repairable cracks in many of the engine cases.)

On climb-out we joined up with Marlin 2, a Jammer-only EB-66E, and headed for the Gulf of Tonkin at a point just below the DMZ. Once over the Gulf we turned north and prepared for rendezvous with our KC-135 tanker. After refueling, we proceeded to our orbit's northern most turn point. Our orbit was planned to be outside of the known SAM sites missile range of about 20 miles. The SAM sites were mobile so we had to worry that the NVN might have moved a site within 20 miles of our orbit. On the leg North we started to hear MIG warnings from Red Crown. It seemed the NVN had decided that today they would concentrate on using the fighters vs. using SAMs to counter the strike flights. The warnings gave the type fighter MIG 17 (Red Bandit) or MIG 21 (Blue Bandit) and their location from Hanoi (Bullseye) and direction travel, such as "Blue Bandits 20 South heading 090." There was call after call that I recorded but none of which seemed to venture near the coast where we were orbiting. The four EWOs job was to jam the search, triple A and any SAMs radars that were transmitting and obtain directional bearings and signal characteristics on active threat radars.

The EWO crew in back recorded the angle the signals from the SAM radar and triple A radar emissions painted our aircraft. After several minutes of recording the angles to the site that site could be located using the navigator's chart with timed fixes after we landed. There was a way to estimate quickly if we were within the lethal range of a SAM site by noting how

quickly the radar strobe moved aft on the scope, if an EWO determined we were within lethal SAM range the pilot was alerted and he would quickly start a spiraling maximum rate descent while turning at our maximum turn rate.

Soon after, we were on station and jamming for the strike fighters who were under attack by the MIGs as they approached the target. The strike flight typically approached the Hanoi area from the north at low level along a mountainous ridgeline known as Thud Ridge. After leaving the shelter of the ridge northwest of Hanoi they quickly climbed to their dive-bombing altitude about 17,000 ft., acquired the target and dove in where they released their bombs at about 7,000 feet. All this time they were exposed to SAM missiles and AAA fire.

Marlin 1 had one UHF radio on the Red Crown frequency and the other UHF radio on the Strike fighter frequency; in addition, a Guard frequency was monitored. Our HF radio was on Red Crowns HF frequency, which we monitored when our own lower frequency jammers were blocking good UHF reception. To a new guy like me, it seemed like chaos, especially after a bail out and the parachute's automation activated beepers were added to the audio mix. With the three radios, inter phone and signals from the warning receiver all on at the same time, trying to make sense of what I was hearing became a overload problem for me, a FNG. Soon, I had one page of my clipboard full of MIG calls and was working on my second page. I had to point out to the Navigator several calls that if the MIGs continued in our direction they could be a problem but in both cases the MIGs reversed direction before they came too close. Apparently they didn't want to get within range of the Navy ships with their ship-to-air missiles cruising just off the coast.

After the Takhli fighter-bombers and Wild Weasel aircraft (dedicated SAM site attack aircraft) had struck their targets and departed,

we were scheduled to remain on station to support the Korat Air Base F-105 squadrons that had their targets in the same general area. When the Korat aircraft departed we were cleared to return to base (RTB). Marlin 1 and 2 flew south until we were past the DMZ then turned west to return to Takhli. On the return flight I counted up the number of MIG calls and thought to myself, if this was a typical mission and I needed 99 more to complete my tour, this was going to be a very stressful period of my life. It appeared that I would be flying every other day and could get 100 missions in about nine months. However, missions over Laos and South Vietnam did not count toward the 100 to go home early.

After landing and on the way back to the Squadron for a debriefing I mentioned to the Navigator the number of MIG calls I recorded and asked "Was this typical mission?" and he exclaimed that he had never heard so many calls before and hoped that this was not the wave of the future. It seems the President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara had finally approved the attack to occur on 24 October of the main MIG base at Phuc Yen, 19 miles North of Hanoi, which had been off limits until then. Today we were supporting a continuation of attacks on that airfield. The bombing missions continued on Phuc Yen and Kep Air bases into early November. It appears that the NVN decided to minimize loss of aircraft on the ground so they would launch most of their aircraft to avoid their destruction from the bombs, or fly them to China. They had lost nine MIG aircraft on the ground from the first mission on the 24th.

My second "Counter" was the very next day in position 2 in the ECM compartment in the bomb bay area even though I had not yet completed the squadron's on ground training program.

Footnote:

The B-66s had their origin as an off-the-shelf modification of the Navy A3D designed by the

famous Ed Heinemann of Douglas Aircraft. The Navy had Douglas design a strategic nuclear-capable high altitude bomber in the early 1950s. At that time, nuclear weapons were large and heavy and Navy fighter-bombers couldn't carry them very far. So Douglas designed the largest aircraft possible, 70,000 lbs. max gross weight that could still fly off existing aircraft carriers. The Air Force decided to modify the existing Navy A3D design to be a nuclear low-level light tactical bomber. When all the Air Force modifications were added up, the AF B-66 version had very little in common with the Navy A3D, but at a distance they looked alike. Unfortunately, one modification, specifically the engines selected by the Air Force, were a major weakness of the AF aircraft and resulted in a number of lost aircraft,

which subsequently were the cause of death of several of my friends.

Written by Howard "Rusty" Hamer on 29 Oct 2016 with reference to my log book, historical records, and copies of official orders, 49 years after my first combat mission. In my year at Takhli I flew 111 combat missions of which there were 31 "Counters" flown over NVN. In March of 1968 B-66 aircraft were directed to remain outside of the border of NVN after Sonny Mercer's aircraft Preview1 was shot down and several rescue aircraft were shot down while attempting rescue of the seven crew members, three of the were rescued but four became prisoners of war for the next five years.

## **Writing Your Story for INCOMING**

### **Ongoing repeat solicitation**

Ideas for your story:

- Think about what you appreciated about the Vietnam experience. There is surely a means to segue into that with very little reflection on the negative aspects of war.
- What did you appreciate about the Vietnamese people during your deployment?
- Can you steer away from the bad stuff and reflect on the best experience you had in the Nam?
- Surely you had a close buddy and you supported each other. Maybe there is a story in that.
- What really got you through the day-to-day anxieties and fears? There might be a positive recollection in that regard.
- How did your experience instill in you a

sense of patriotism that you possibly express every day of your life.

So far we have heard from Ruud, Epps, Chaix, Hamer & current Marine LCpl. Jesse Hernandez. (Thank you!)

No writer needs to dwell on the negatives of war Each of us who was there lived the negatives, and all of us are better people for having served, especially when we look at how we matured as a result of our experiences. Each of us has derived a sense of being and an energy that is different from what it might have been had we not gone across the pond.

Do share with us, in your own words, something of that chapter of your life. And, thank you for your service.

Forward your story to Bart Ruud at [bruud45@gmail.com](mailto:bruud45@gmail.com) or hand deliver to Bart.

## **VA Drug Prices to Change Jan. 1**

Military.com | Dec 12, 2016 | by Amy Bushatz

Prescription drugs received through the Department of Veterans Affairs for non-service connected conditions could cost many veterans less under a new rule that kicks in Jan. 1. Currently, the VA charges veterans who do not qualify for free health care \$8 or \$9 for a 30-day or less drug supply, depending on their category. Those costs were set to increase over time based on a Medical Consumer Price Index calculation.

The new plan, however, will categorize drugs into tiers, similar to how medication is handled by Tricare. Tier 1 medications, described as "preferred generics," will cost \$5 for a 30-day or less supply. Tier 2, or "non-preferred generics," will cost \$8 for a 30-day or less supply. Tier 3, or "brand name," will cost \$11 for a 30-day or less supply. Officials estimate that most users will see a 10 to 50 percent reduction in the cost of the drugs they receive from the VA, according to the rule proposal posted to the federal register early this year.

"By our estimate, 94 percent of co-payment eligible veterans would experience no cost increase, and 80 percent would realize a savings of between \$1 and \$5 per 30-day equivalent of medications," the proposal states.

A series of seven criteria is used by the VA to determine which generic drugs are on the lower-cost "preferred generics" list, and which drugs are "non-preferred generics" and cost \$3 more per 30-day or less supply, according to the rule proposal.

For example, generic drugs typically used to treat a common "chronic condition," such as hypertension, will be on the list, while topical creams, products used to treat musculoskeletal conditions, antihistamines and steroid-containing generics would not because they are typically used on an "as-needed basis," the document says.

"VA estimates that at least 50 percent of all billable prescriptions would be in Tier 1, with no more than 35 percent in Tier 2, and approximately 15 percent in Tier 3," the rule proposal states.

The annual drug co-payment cap for veterans in priority groups two through seven is \$700. Veterans who meet certain qualifications, including a disability rating above 50 percent or who qualify as low-income, can receive free health care from the VA and are not subject to the co-pay costs.

## Victorian Christmas – 2016

The VVA-535 Victorian Christmas project was the brainchild of Glenn Frazier and Bill Baird somewhere in the late 1990s. Glenn and Bill started serving mulled cider heated in 18-cup coffee pots. Then, in 2002 Harold Graves and Patricia came along and have taken the project to a new level over the ensuing years. The behind-the-scenes work Harold and Patricia have done is worthy of mention by Ripley's Believe-It-Or-Not. By my calculation, Harold and Patricia, this year alone, will have shopped for the basic ingredients and prepared 480 triple chocolate brownies and had a hand in preparing at least 90 gallons of mulled cider and hot chocolate. That means they have baked 8 batches of brownies to prepare 96 brownies for each of the five outings on Broad Street. Harold has approached this project with passion for 15 years, but each of those who stepped in to help, is acknowledged. Several among our membership helped on more than one occasion. In addition, Dale Epps served as our kitchen manager throughout the 2016 project. Dick Corn captured a few photos on December 11, 2016.



Bart splashing water



Harold, Dale and Bart brewing the goods



Dale, Bart and Harold contemplating the work



Dale checking the temperature of the cider



## January 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 New Year's Day	2	3	4	5 VVA 535 General Meeting 6:00 p.m.	6	7
8	9	10	11	12 Operation "Ranch Hand" launched (1962)	13	14
15	16 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (observed)	17 Ike warned us about military industrial complex (1961)  Operation Desert Storm began (1991)	18	19 VVA 535 Board Meeting 6:00 p.m.	20	21 Battle of Khe Sanh began (1968)
22 Operation Dewey Canyon began (1969)	23 US ship Pueblo seized by North Korea (1968)	24	25	26	27 Signing of Vietnam Peace Accord (1973)	28
29	30 Tet Offensive began (1968)	31 Apollo 14 launched (1971)				

Application For Membership  
VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA, INC., CHAPTER 535  
P.O. Box 37, Grass Valley, CA 95945

Individual membership is open to all Vietnam-era veterans who served on active duty for other than training purposes between August 5, 1964 – May 7, 1975 and In-Country Veterans: February 28, 1961 – May 7, 1975.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Marital  
Status \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter No. 535 Sponsor \_\_\_\_\_ ID No. \_\_\_\_\_

◆ Membership Type: ■ Individual – 1 year @ \$20 annual ■ Individual – 3 years @ \$50  
(select one) ■ Life Member Payment Plan ■ \$50 down, \$25/mo Until paid in full

Select Age Group ■ Ages 56-60 \$200 ■ Ages 61-65 \$175 Ages 66 and over \$150  
■ Ages 72+ \$100

◆ Payment Method: ■ Check ■ Money Order ■ Visa ■ MasterCard (select one)

◆ Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_