

Chapter 6; Unscheduled

Dec 22. 1971 Short! 205 days and a wakeup.

When you arrived in Nam, you were there for a 365 day tour. My date of expected return from over seas (deros) was July 14, 1972. Most GIs had some sort of chart that counted down to the magic day that you would go home. The term used was "short timer". A short timer with less than 100 days left is a 2 digit midget. There were many short timer jokes such as "I'm so short I have to jump up to look down".

2 pilots and myself were headed to Pleiku on a parts run in Snow Snake. We just got through the Northwest Pass when we got word that 756 was down at Phu Cat. We landed there, checked it out and found out it just had an oil pressure indicating problem. We headed back to Lane and picked up an oil gage and the electrician and went back to Phu Cat and fixed it. We then flew over An Khe Pass. Pleiku is on the west side of the mountains along QL1 (highway 1) and the monsoons are over there already. We have 3 or 4 weeks of monsoons left on the east side of the mountains. We got back to Lane about 6:30, too late for the mess hall, so I went to the Officers club and had a steak.

I got a ditty bag from troop 220. I don't know where they are from, but we sure appreciate the thoughtfulness. I got a fingernail clipper, pen knife, tooth paste, tooth brush, a comb, stationary, and best of all, a can of roast peanuts. Small things, but they meant a lot.

It is Christmas, a time to spend with family, but I won't be joining them this year. This year I am literally a world apart.

We had a bar at the hootch. "The bite and suck lounge", open from 00:01 to 23:59. Officers would frequent our hootch to spend the evening.



I would have a drink now and then, but was not a big drinker, and definitely took no part in the drugs that were available. Christmas Eve 1971 came and the guys asked "are you drinking?" I thought "sure why not. And further more, why waste time by

sipping this stuff". I grabbed a bottle of Jack Daniels and chugged half of it. Whoa boy did I get sick! While I lay outside on the ground retching, I decided that drinking was not all the fun it was cracked up to be. I hoped Charlie would not pick this time to attack since I was in no condition to fight.

As a junior member of Unscheduled, I was expected to perform normal maintenance along with the rest of the maintenance platoon. This meant standing in formation after breakfast. This practice always irked me.

We all take turns in the guard towers. The towers are manned all night, but not in the day time. Usually there are 2 of us. One can sleep while the other watches. The officers make rounds and check on us a couple times a night, and they bring sandwiches and coffee out too. When we go on duty, we set up claymore mines facing the concertina wire that rings the compound. We had a starlight scope, a 50 cal. Machine gun, our personal weapons, and a phone in the booth. We would check in periodically usually on the hour.

While I was on duty, a guard dog and his handler patrolling the perimeter by my guard tower picked up someone outside the perimeter. We couldn't fire without permission unless we were taking fire. Whoever it was took off.

Jan 6, 1972.

Tom and I finished some maintenance and headed back to the hootch. About 1030, Lt Wolf came running and said " we have a bird shot down up north".

I ran to the arms room and got our rifles, grabbed my helmet and met the rest of the crew at the connex where we keep our recovery gear. We threw it in a truck and took it to 740. Jim had it pre flighted and the pilots had already cranked the engine. The crew in the bird that got hit made it about a half mile to a Korean compound. One bullet went about an inch from the pilots face through the side window and ceiling. An American Major got hit in the leg. It passed through his leg, through a Vietnamese soldiers head (he died) and into the oil cooler. They lost oil pressure so they had to set it down. One of the rotor blades had holes in it as well. It took a while to get the Chinook to lift out the bird, so it was about 4:30 when we finally got back.

Yesterday we rigged one out North of Phu Cat that had hydraulic problems.

My normal deros is July 14, but there are rumors that I might get a month or so "drop", but with the military, don't count on anything until it happens.

I spend many evenings studying. I am taking a mail order electronics course.

Jan 8, 1972

Linhs brother got wounded in a terrorist bombing in Qui Nhon. This was apparently some kind of rally attended by the Mayor of Qui Nhon, the Chief of

Binh Dinh province and a bunch of students. There were 12 dead, 177 wounded. Linh says her brother was not wounded badly.

When Jim derosed, Sgt James D Smith appointed me the crew chief of Snow Snake. You never have seen a person more proud. Here I am a kid off the farm in charge of this expensive aircraft. We took real good care of her. In fact we found a glossy olive drab paint and painted the aircraft glossy olive drab with stylized white lettering 740 on the tail. The helicopters were supposed to be painted a flat olive drab with flat black numbers. Our work was against regulations, but since Lt Redman and Mr. Link (Sugar Bear) helped, nobody made a stink of it.



One of the perks of being the Snow Snake crew chief was also one of the down sides. I was expected to have the bird ready at a moments notice day or night. There are inspections on various parts of the helicopter due periodically. We spent some late nights performing maintenance so the helicopter would be ready to fly. The up side was that as long as the bird was ready to fly, I did not have to get up early or stand in those dumb morning formations. That also meant that I didn't have to get up early. The hootch maids would be picked up with a truck in Qui Nhon, and dropped off at the main gate around 8am. Here they would be searched for contraband or weapons. When they were through the gates, they would walk up about a quarter mile to the hootches, and begin their work. Linh

would walk with her friend Marie and I looked forward to seeing them come up the road.



Some time I would still be in bed and Linh would come in my room close to my bed and say “You lazy GI! time to get up!” I would grab her, throw her on the bed and tickle her. We had kind of a covered porch in the back where she would wash the clothes, and shine our shoes. She would bring some thin rice pancakes. I would get a canned ham and we would have lunches on the porch. She would also bring fresh ripe pineapples, Mmm good. We gave each other a lot of kidding and our bond grew each day.

There was a lunch wagon that would come by around 10 am. They had soggy burgers and mediocre chicken. But I would get some chicken or other snacks for us to share. The pictures are of Linh, and Linh and Marie. They would use the motor pool fence across the road from unscheduled, to hang clothes to dry.



One of the things I looked forward to was flying. When one of the helicopters needed a test flight after maintenance, I sought out the pilot and requested to go along. Most of the pilots encouraged the crew chiefs to learn to fly. I flew test flights with Mr. Link (Sugar Bear) several times. We would go out in an open area and he would give me unofficial instruction. Hovering a helicopter is like balancing a board on a marble. The rotor control

system does not respond immediately with control inputs, so you need to anticipate what inputs are needed. The control in your right hand is the cyclic which controls the angle of the rotor plane. A movement to the right tilts the rotors to the right and the helicopter goes right. Move forward and the helicopter moves forward. However some of the lift has gone from lifting straight up to moving forward. To maintain altitude you have to provide more total lift and power by lifting the collective with your left hand. This increases the pitch of the blades, and through the linkage also increases engine power. Okay now you prevented crashing into the ground by providing more lift, but because there is more power in the rotor system, the equal and opposite torque is trying to spin the fuselage (body) opposite the rotation of the rotor. The device responsible to counteract the torque is the tail rotor. The foot pedals vary the pitch of the tail

rotor and the counteracting torque. Especially in a hover, control is a continuous interaction of the three controls, a dance almost, with very small precise movements.

If you observe a helicopter piloted by a person learning to hover, you might think that some quantities of alcohol were consumed prior to the lesson. Once moving forward, control becomes simpler, more like the fixed wing flying I was already trained for.

The take off and landings are unique in that once a helicopter moves forward at about 25mph, the air moves over the rotor blades creating more lift than at hover. This is called translational lift and is characterized by an increase in climb rate and a transition from holding left rudder (foot pedal) to a right pedal position. At a hover, you have to hold left rudder, in fact with a large load, you may actually run out of left rudder.

A fixed wing aircraft lands at a more or less constant speed until touch down. The helicopter reduces speed on final approach until it comes to a hover. Slowing through the translational lift speed, the rudder again shifts to the left.

I was really impressed by the skill of the pilots we had. We parked the helicopters in individual revetments. These were L shaped walls about 5 feet high and about 3 feet thick. They were faced with PSP (pierced steel planking) and filled with sand. The idea was to limit the damage in case of mortar or rocket attack. The pilots could park impossibly close to the revetments. In this process, the pilot would call on the intercom "coming up", the crew chief would call "clear up left", the gunner would call "clear up right". The crew chief and gunner would watch out for obstructions, people on the ground, trees etc. we could watch the rotor tips and to the side and back of the helicopter.



January was cold and wet, the monsoon season. The temperatures got down into the 50's. It was always either raining or foggy. We didn't do a lot of flying during this time. What flying we did was frequently done right along a road at very low altitude for navigation. The helicopters were not equipped for flying in the clouds. Even if they could, there were no instrument landing systems

at Lane. Navigation was done by reference to maps and landmarks. Qui Nhon is in Binh Dinh Province, along the South China Sea coast, about halfway between the DMZ and Saigon. The terrain is fairly flat in the lowlands with hills

rising abruptly to 3000 feet. At the top of the hill in the picture is a ROK firebase with a commanding view of the valley below.

The cool weather also made for cold showers back at the hootch. At least we usually had water. One of the guys (Dorman) that lived in our hootch drove a water truck. He would stop at our hootch and fill the water tanks that someone before had put up for showers. The water was unheated, so a 50 degree shower was refreshing but quick. The water truck had several separate compartments with a large hatch at the top of each. It also had a large tool chest. The drivers found that these compartments could be used to smuggle girls on base. This at least made the cool nights a little warmer for some. Girls were not allowed on base if they were not officially cleared through the gates like the hootch maids, but there were many of them around. There were frequent raids conducted by the officers. They collected illegal weapons, drugs and of course girls. The girls were simply driven to the front gate and let go. Many were back before morning. I suspect that there were spies among the girls, and there was talk that one was found pacing off the fuel dump, but mostly I think they were there for the profit. One evening on base could make them more money than a whole month of work in Qui Nhon.

Linh never spent the night on base, and I never saw where she lived. I took pictures of Qui Nhon and she showed me about where she lived, but GI's were not allowed to roam around town alone. There was no possibility of visiting off base day or night.

There was danger from the enemy and from "cowboys". Cowboys were young Vietnamese males that rode around on scooters. They were a source of just about anything that could be bought, particularly illegal stuff like a virgin sister or drugs. They were more than happy to whack you on the head & steal anything of value. You didn't want to drive along in a jeep with your arm hanging outside. A cowboy would likely drive by and snatch the watch right off your wrist.

The hootch maids did not come on Sunday. We would typically not fly on Sundays and the mechanics would have the day off.

The living conditions were less than plush. The Army provided the Quonset hut hootch we lived in, but that is all. The occupants scrounged wood from ammo cases and who knows where to build individual rooms. We had doors that were lockable from the inside, and a small wardrobe that was lockable. Refrigerators were easily found. I bought a refrigerator from Ken Godwin that I roomed with when I first arrived and moved it to Unscheduled. The official bathroom for our area was a 4 hole "shitter" with half barrels under the holes to catch the waste. It became the job of those that were in administrative trouble to burn the barrels. These guys were called shitbirds. They would pull the barrels from the shitter, mix some jet fuel with the contents and light it. Of course it would require stirring to complete the burning. The shitters were not a private type of arrangement.

There were 4 seats across with no partitions. One time I was occupying one of the seats and a hootch maid came in and occupied the hole next to me which totally ruined my concentration.

Less serious jobs were accomplished at the “piss point”. It consisted of a couple boards at a designated point whose purpose was to officially mark the location, and shield the act from only half the world. A typical evening at the Bite & suck lounge would require frequent trips to recycle the beer. There was no container to catch the recycled liquid. The point did not need to be marked with a sign. You just followed your nose.



When I arrived at unscheduled, we had a small bunker made out of sandbags with some rotten wood holding up the roof. It was caving in and so low you had to crawl into it. We tore it down and made a fine stand up bunker with fighting positions on top.

Meals were served in the mess hall. That was also where we received our pay. We were paid in military payment certificates (MPC). The idea was to avoid getting American greenbacks into the underground economy.



When we were flying we frequently got back after the mess hall was closed. Sometime they would make some sandwiches for us or we would go

to the officers club and have a burger or steak.

Life on base was a constant stress. Not from fear of the enemy, but boredom and fear of the less desirable elements. Drugs in the form of marijuana and heroine were plentiful and easy to get. When walking around the hootches on the hill, the evening air held a constant odor of marijuana.

Another source of problems were race relations. We flew and worked with many black soldiers and usually they were good people one on one. There were a

number of militant blacks that constantly preached to the others that they were there to fight whiteys war. There were some willing to listen to their hatred, especially when drugs were involved. I never had any desire to get into the drug scene.



Dennis Showalter (on the left) was hooked on heroine. He was generally an ok guy, but absolutely hooked. Most of the guys would take some tobacco out of the end of a cigarette and put heroine in its place thinking they wouldn't get hooked smoking it.



Heroine was so prevalent that the empty plastic vials that held the heroine (dime caps) littered the pathways like cigarette butts. Rick and Tom smoked pot, but I don't think they experimented with heroine. I did smoke a pipe with regular tobacco until my hootch mates took it to smoke hashish. I broke it in half and threw it away.

Rick Stevens as another Unscheduled member (single picture on the right). He was a good natured guy and part of the team.

One day a friend of Dennis came by the hooch. He accused Linh of stealing drugs from him. Linh did not mess with drugs and was certainly not a thief. I backed him out of the hootch and told him to get lost and not come back. He gave me a bunch of lip and when I had enough I smacked him upside the head and told him again to get lost. Well he put his hand in his pocket and said "I'm gonna cut you man!" I stood toe to toe with the runt and informed him that "if your hand comes out of your pocket with anything in it, I'm gonna make you eat it". He finally backed off warning me to watch my back, yada yada. Whatever. He didn't bother us any more.

Jan 16, 1972. We got a call about a bird East of Phu Cat with hydraulics problems. The bird with problems and another was sitting on top of a tall hill with a very narrow landing surface. The Koreans were busy popping off mortars and recoilless rifles while we were landing. Just as we were landing, they popped off the recoilless rifle. The back blast hit us hard enough that we needed to take off and come around again.

Last night the guards killed a couple of VC trying to infiltrate our perimeter.

The mail is a problem. I have just now started to get mail again since I left Chu Lai. I still have not gotten the package Mom sent. It sometimes takes a package a month to get here. It is really nice hearing from friends and family. They are praying for us back home.

Linh has a Sister that lives in Omaha married to a GI. Mail service in Qui Nhon is even worse than at Lane. She sends her letters to me and I give them to Linh.

I'm getting SHORT! Only 178 days left

I take over as crew chief of Snow snake tomorrow Jan 30, 72.



This is the country side in the vicinity of Phu Cat, to the East of An Khe pass.



This is the bay off of Qui Nhon Red Beach.