

A-37 Association

December 2011

Newsletter



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Cleared Hot

by Vic Grahn, President

As many of you know, Judy and I have been out touch for the past two months as we completed a sweep of six National Parks and a couple of National Monuments, (Glacier, Yellowstone, Grand Tetons, Arches, Canyon Lands, and Mesa Verde).

While I enjoyed the parks and their beauty, the highlight of the trip for me was being able to TOUCH a flyable A-37 B (VNAF).

This A/C was in exceptional shape, but was far exceeded by the other restored A/C in this private collection. These included a P-51, F-4U, Spitfire, P-47, and the—the only remaining counter rotation prop super Marine Spitfire in the world. (The RAF tried to buy it, but the owner wouldn't sell).

There were many other A/C in the collection including the usual T-6, Steerman and a host of other rare types. His next project is an F-5 awaiting landing gear. All the A/C in his collection are in flyable condition.

How does one person afford these aircraft? Let me set the stage, this hanger is on a private airport surrounding his private golf course, main house, and a few townhouses,

Continued on next page

Great news... and not so great news...

The good news is obviously not the fact we were running out of the little A-37 booklets (and we still get orders for them). But what we think is Great news for us, the A-37, and the Association is the fact we are combining the booklets into a single book. (I use 'we' loosely as Gloria is currently doing 99% of the work and has already spent many many hours on it. Board members are helping too.)

This new book will be expanded to cover stories received after the last booklet was printed. These include those printed in the newsletters and also those received through an email request for them to all whom we have email addresses for in our A-37 lists.

And through this article here, we are hoping you who don't have email will also send us a story of something that happened in your relationship with the A-37 or those involved with it. Please do it soon.

The new book, just an interim one initially, will also have other sections we hope readers will enjoy including a section on 'Letters Home' by Fred Long and one section devoted to strictly the 'Tet' of '68. We are shooting to have this interim book by mid-summer of next year (2012.. so one can read it instead of watching all he political ads?).

Although the interim book is intended to be just a working copy of a more professional one to be developed from it later, we are trying to make it as good as possible. To get an idea of what we are hoping to do, check out the FAC 'Rustics' book. It recently came out and is available at <Lulu.com> electronically for just \$8.99. It has a number of stories relating to their working with the A-37 and we feel it is a good one.

So what is the 'not so great news'?

It's the fact that we are not getting the stories we know are still out there... whether it be a story in 'Nam, while in training, in the use of the A-37 in the Guard and Reserve units, from allied countries that used it, etc. We need them from both pilots and those who did all the work on the ground (which we are extremely thankful for).

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...the smallest fighter...the fastest gun

War Story...

Cleared Hot *continued from page 1*

surrounded by a lake. These are owned by the inventor of a valve essential to the worldwide oil industry.

It is too bad that more people can't view this outstanding collection, but he wants to keep it private. The only reason I was able to see it was through a fellow retired UPS pilot that knows him.

Our next trip is a ConFam in Columbus Ga. It is the closest one to the three sites selected at the last reunion.

Best Regards,
Vic and Judy

This newsletter is a publication of the A-37 'Reunion' Association. It is published quarterly (except when within six months of a reunion, then monthly) as a service to the membership, new contacts, and any other interested parties.

The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect any official position. The editor reserves the right to print any article/letter/e-mail/photo deemed to be of interest to contacts.

The newsletter staff also reserves the right to edit any article submitted for length and reject any material that might be considered libelous or obscene. The editors invite and encourage contacts/members to submit letters/articles/photos.

These newsletters continue to be the efforts of people concerned with spreading the word for our A-37 camaraderie and forthcoming reunions.

This includes the Board: Vic & Judy Grahn, Henry & Jimmie Hill, Jerry Sailors, Bud & Pat Abbott, Lon & Barbara Holtz, Eric Jackson, Ollie & Gloria Maier, and Tom & Debbie McCallum, Additional helpers: Liz & Jack Beam, George & Carolyn Courington, John Lamb, Robert Macaluso, Pat & Juda McAdoo, Bill & Anna Marie McCall, Ed & Kathy Norris, Dennis Selvig, Rolland Spring, and Gordon & Pat Weed plus all who submit stories/pictures/letters/e-mails/ideas...

Visit Dennis Selvig's A-37 Homepage!

A-37.org

Good one, wish I could remember who sent it... if it was you, please let me know so I can give you credit in the next newsletter...

You're Smokin' the Wrong Smoke, Dope!

It was the summer of 1970, and the Cambodian theater was officially open for operations.

Everyone in the three A-37 squadrons operating out of Bien Hoa at that time had been flying heavily since the first day of Cambodian operations. Almost all of us were regularly getting the maximum amount of daily sorties thanks to great maintenance turn-arounds that could get the Super Tweet ready to go again far quicker than any other fighter in the inventory.

The troops we were now going against were somewhat different from the in-country, battle-wise veterans of the full hike down the Ho Che Minh trail.

The NVA in Cambodia were mostly so green that they hadn't figured out that their tracer rounds were a dead giveaway to their positions. It made easier targets for us, but it also made it a lot more "exciting" to see exactly how much fire was actually coming back in our direction, especially at night.

Cambodia also offered more "learning opportunities." For example, it was a mistake to assume the Cambodian-based NVA were completely unsophisticated, as my experience on another day showed.

We were scrambled this day to support American Army troops in contact in Cambodia. We checked in with an airborne router known as "Head Beagle" and were quickly passed on to a FAC supporting the actual troops in contact situation.

The FAC did the usual initial contact briefing, and then told us our grunts were going to pop smoke (purple, the famous "goofy grape") to mark their position.

But, instead of the expected, single smoke plume, two identically colored purple clouds smartly formed out of the jungle below.

OK, said the FAC, watch for red smoke.

Sure enough, not one, but two plumes of identically colored red smoke appeared.

Somewhat exasperated, the FAC called for green smoke. Same thing again.

Finally, the FAC told us to watch for the white smoke. This time – only one smoke shaft, a white one, appeared.

"Hit that smoke," the FAC radioed with some glee.

The NVA troop with a radio on the ground obviously understood English quite well indeed, and he certainly had plenty of smoke grenades, probably captured from our side.

But, that NVA linguistics 'expert' had missed out on one important piece of "cultural" information. Because all the FAC marking rockets in 'Nam were white phosphorous rounds, there wasn't a grunt anywhere from I Corps to IV Corps who was going to pop white smoke to mark his own position – EVER!!!

Just goes to show how a little "learning" can be a dangerous thing, and you never want to be Smokin' the Wrong Smoke, Dope!



...the smallest fighter...the fastest gun

E-Mails continued

hope to own one some day. Alas, this does not appear to be my future,

Note: We wish Rudy well and sincerely appreciate the free and much needed service he provided the Association with.



From: Fred Long LETTERS HOME

Whereas we normally only publish one or two of the letters Fred Long wrote to his parents almost daily while in Vietnam, in this issue, we will add to it. In preparation for also putting those letters in the book being put together from the five little booklets of stories, we decided to ask him a little about of his life that was not readily surmised from his letters home. We found it so interested we are including it in this issue.

1. How old were you when you were there?

I had just turned 21 on June 13, 1967. Arrived at Bien Hoa Air Base on July 31, 1967.

2. Was this your first assignment (overseas or otherwise)?

I enlisted in the Air Force on June 16, 1966, knowing if I didn't I would be drafted into the Army and I wanted to work with jets. I completed basic training at Amarillo (34 days) and made a request to become a weapons mechanic. I was sent to Lowery Air Force Base, arriving by bus on July 21, 1966. Following weapons school (104 days), and a 18 day vacation home, the Air Force sent me to Nellis Air Force Base on Nov. 20, 1966.

While stationed at Nellis I was called in to headquarters and asked to volunteer for Vietnam. Another person in our weapons section had

been scheduled, but he had lost a finger working on a gun and a replacement was needed. I figured I would have to go sooner or later and agreed to accept the assignment.

At the time I was ignorant of the mission I had agreed to undertake. The Air Force gave me another 37 day leave home and I arrived at England Air Force Base on April 29, 1967 where my knowledge of "Combat Dragon"; the A-37A and the mission we were to undertake was finally realized. I was at England Air Force Base 93 days and arrived at Bien Hoa on July 31, 1967.

3. Express what a great relationship you had with your parents plus a photo of them, if desired. (We also think it was great of your mom to keep all your letters... she must be one wonderful person.)

I grew up in a tight family unit where family arguments and ugly scenes did not exist. We were a church family and every time the church door was open we were there.

Daddy worked on the railroad and mother was a housewife, passing to me the values she had learned and the rules of acceptable behavior. Growing up, hugs and kisses did not exist in our home, but Mother showed her love a hundred other ways.

She loved to sing and would burst into song at any moment of the day. She laughed a lot, and made me laugh with her at some of the silly things she would say or do. Mother was always there for me. When I had a problem, she was the one that I could go

to. She was the one that gave me encouragement and support. She was the one that seemed to care. She loved me and I knew she loved me and I loved her. She will be 97 in December and I have been blessed to have her with me so long.

Daddy taught me the values of work, punctuality and doing what you say you are going to do. My weekly allowance required me doing work around the house. He supplied me with needs to sustain my life and never refused a reasonable request. He wanted for me better than what he had and he gave it. So I was blessed with a loving family unit.

4. What was your time frame while you were in Vietnam? (I know it was during Combat Dragon but did you go over with the main group?)

I went over with the main unit and was on the first C-141 out. I was in Vietnam from July 31, 1967 to July 26, 1968.

5. Any pictures while you were in Vietnam, like the ammunition pile burning or other incidents, like the morning the base was hit with mortar shells and rocket and the VC got on base that you would like to share? We have some photos of some of the incidents on file.

I have some photos and will send. I suppose jpeg would be the best format.

6. What did it mean to get letters, packages and news from home at that time in your young life?

Well. I guess it was very important. It was nice to hear



from home and learn what family and friends were doing. I wish I had saved my letters. I don't guess I could have because I got one nearly everyday. I can remember getting as many as 7 at a time and was sorry when I would see others not getting any.

The packages were wonderful to receive and sparked excitement in opening them to learn what was inside. Like a child at Christmas time. They helped to make life a little better and brought a smile that was often needed.

7. What did the letter writing do for you while you were serving in Vietnam?

I can't say writing home provided any therapeutic value. However, it gave me a chance to vent frustrations and express my thoughts.

I'm thankful Mother had the foresight to save them and I look back on them nostalgically, recalling memories of friends there and capsules of time that would have otherwise faded like fog on a dew dripped morning.

8. What does staying in touch with your former comrades, through the A-37 Association mean to you?

It means a great deal to me, to renew friendships and exchange emails with those that were close to me during that troubled past.

Finding lost friends I worked with, joked with, played with and cried with; fills an empty space created by the passage of years and the uncertainty of what became of them.

Fred, anything else you would like to add we would surely welcome.

To all readers: We are fortunate that Fred was willing to share his letters home with us. Through them, many of us can related to the things that happened to us and others while we were there.

“King of the Pond”

by Don Dalton (another 'war' story)

Note: This might be the way the airplane got it's 'nickname' Dragonfly.

You know, I never did care for the A-37 monicker, “Dragonfly”. I don't know, it just didn't seem, well.. American enough. In my later years, I changed my mind.

Now, we have a KOI pond in our little backyard out here in the Valley of the Moon in Santa Rosa, California and one summer morning I was sitting in my patio chair getting some sun when I noticed this dragonfly flitting here and there over my pond.

Suddenly, he flies over and perches on the chair right across from me. Fantasizing a bit I say, “Hey you know, I'm a flyer too, I was the best, probably still am!”

With that, he flies back to the pond flitting here there and everywhere. He puts on an aerial demonstration you wouldn't believe. No doubt about it, he ruled the pond. He wasn't afraid of neither bird nor beast (nor me).

And guess what? Hard to believe I know, but he flies straight back to me, perches on that chair, looks me straight in the eyeball as if to say, “Still think you're the best?” Well “maudlin time” is over and I head back into the house for my second cup of coffee.

And so, let's go back a bit. I was a “check pilot” at Bartow Air Base. “Curtains Dalton” they called me, one ride with Dalton and it was curtains (which was not necessarily true).

I was one of the first pilots to checkout and fly the T-37; that inverted spin maneuver was indeed something! From Bartow I went on to San Antonio and the T-37 Standardization Board at Randolph AFB.

The years flew by and then I heard a rumor about a beefed up Cessna T-37, now called the A-37 going to SEA on an experimental mission called “Combat Dragon”. I was due for a “tour” so I wangled some of my buddies in Personnel to get me assigned to this A-37 squadron.

Because of my experience in the T-37, I was sent with four or five other guys to the Cessna Plant in Kansas to get checkout as an instructor pilot, so we could checkout the other Combat Dragon pilots at England AFB, Louisiana.

I would suppose most of you played football, baseball or basketball in high school or college. Do you remember that feeling when you were in the locker room? You put on your uniform and you were ready to go out and get 'em!

Well that's the way I felt at Bien Hoa. I'd go into operations. First, I'd put on my G-suit, then my flak jacket, and of course my .38 Caliber Combat Master, grab my helmet and out to the flight line I'd go (Oh yes, don't forget your parachute).

And there she was my “Dragonfly”. She had both beefed up wings and tail section, a Gattling gun and could carry it's own weight in ordnance.

The two things I liked best though were those two General Electric J-85 engines. It was like riding in a high-powered Porsche with an empty passenger seat on the right.

The plane never flew me; I flew it, right from the start. It wasn't supersonic like our competitors “the Hun” at Bien Hoa and the F-4 at Da Nang, but you didn't need to be supersonic in South Vietnam, only if you went up North.

The A-37 had just the right amount of power, speed and maneuverability to get right down amongst them, you know where you could see the “whites of their eyes” something FAC's wanted when there was a serious “fire fight”



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POND Continued from page 5

in progress. It was hard for those big “Huns” and F-4 s to do that, so it wasn’t long before our reputation grew.

At the end of the “tour” all of us had 300-400 missions under our belt and two had over 500, one was our Association’s esteemed editor. We got pretty good at dropping ordnance.

Now, I’m not exaggerating when I say most Combat Dragon pilots could drop a bomb in an old automobile tire, pickling-off at 1500 to 2000 feet in a 45 degree dive; Honest!

We flew all kinds of missions, like “scrambling” off the alert Pad and night “truck busting” out of Pleiku; they were a “horror” and I don’t think I’d be here today if it wasn’t for the maneuverability of the aircraft and the thrust of those two J-85 engines. There were also cover missions for Special Forces “helicopter extractions”.

You all know what the weather was like in South Vietnam; nothing like a night radar-controlled bomb-drop and having to really tuck it in close to your leader, full load and all while in the middle of a thunderstorm.

Everyone hated the “Agent Orange” C-123 escort spray missions with good reason and there were of course “Dignitary observation” missions.

I once flew such a mission with a high “mucky muck” Chaplin from the Pentagon in the right seat. Don’t remember his name, but after we landed I’ve never seen anyone so a charged-up. My thought at the time was that he had missed his “calling”

And so, I come back to the Dragonfly – a proud name, and from my point of view, the best and most effective aircraft for the ground war in South Vietnam.

The A-37 Dragonfly was indeed the “King of the pond”

‘Coming at Ya’

by Ollie, co-editor

Wishing you all a very Merry and Blessed Christmas and New Year.

As you have hopefully noticed, this newsletter contains several items which should have additional interest to many of you.

Some of them are: The new book we are working on (with the request for new stories for it), the availability of shirts and caps with a new A-37 logo developed by Lon who is also taking orders for them, and the tie idea from Dick (don’t know if they would be able to get you one in time for a Christmas gift, but you might check: Richard Innes <70224.434@compuserve.com>). Also mentioned, the availability of an updated list of our contacts/members.

(On the updated list, if you need/want one, please don’t ask for it until after the holidays. I will probably be quite busy before then and would like to get it to you shortly after you asked for it.)

And a quite personal note here: In my updating the A-37 contact/member list, it was very sad to see how many ‘Went West’ since the previous edition was updated just a few years ago.

We all know we are ‘born to die’ but it is sad anyway... especially since every one of them gave so much to their family and their country. Join me in a silent prayer for them... and their families, especially now during the holiday season.

Along that same line, for those of you with email, you know how I have pleaded (begged) for you to get your stories in to us... including any stories on what you were doing/thinking when Tet occurred in ‘68... now I am asking the rest of you without email to please write yours and mail them to us at the address shown on this newsletter’s return address. Don’t let the story we would all enjoy reading “Go West” when you do.

Note: If you are an annual member your dues are due.

WHY VETERANS MEET

(Author unknown)

On the one hand the answer is quite simple: To maintain and build on the friendships with other veterans with whom you served and with whom you may have shared the same experiences and to relive those not to be forgotten moments.

For those who served in combat, the reason is a bit more complicated and profound.

Military reunions are less about celebrations of life and more about remembrances of fallen or lost comrades. It is the “torch thrown” from them that makes this market segment so special and so different from all other forms of gatherings.

Veterans meet because it is an inspirational experience among individuals sharing a common bond.

Reunions allow us an opportunity to renew old friendships, to talk about the past, and to develop new memories of their brothers-in-arms.

Reunions allow former comrades to share their military service, the good times as well as the not-so-good times.

It is a time when they can open their minds and their hearts, discuss their personal growth in terms of family and career to those with whom they shared a different kind of experience.

Military reunions exist because those who were privileged to serve know they served their country with pride and honor, whether in war or peace, in defense of freedom.

They continue to meet to perpetuate that cause we Americans so often take for granted. The camaraderie among those who serve is the strongest and most enduring of service customs.

It is a powerful tradition that binds those that defend or have defended this nation.

**DO NOT LET
THAT TRADITION DIE!
(Attend Reunions!)**

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New or changed address

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The A-37 Association
contact/membership list has
been updated.

It is available electronically
to any of you who desire it.
<GM08@TxState.edu>

**WE JUST ASK YOU TO
PLEASE NOT FORWARD
IT TO ANYONE WHO MAY
USE IT FOR PERSONAL/
COMPANY PROFIT.**

If you do not have email, please
request it in hard copy.

TIE – message from Dick Innes

70224.434@compuserve.com>



Ollie & Gloria,

As you will recall, I asked some time ago if we had any A-37 memorabilia that would be suitable for a more formal Viet Nam Vets recognition ceremony that will be held in a N. Kentucky cemetery this coming Sunday (several Viet Nam casualties/vets are buried there).

When you didn't respond, I assumed that you didn't have anything that would work. (*Sorry Dick, must have slipped through the crack.*) So, Fran and I sat down with her embroidery sewing machine program and developed our own design to sew out on a necktie.

The photo shows how it turned out.

This isn't as good a quality as the sample embroider the professional firm you showed us last summer, but it still looks pretty good for a pair of amateurs.

The tie stock is inexpensive polyester, and Fran might be able to put a few more of these together for a group fund-raising activity. Or, you might have that commercial embroidery firm give you a quote on doing something similar with the nice design they developed.

By the way, the source picture used to develop this is from the AF Museum's on line picture archive. Looks like an "A" model, as there is no refueling probe.

Anyway, I'm set for the memorial – probably with the only A-37 necktie in current existence – thanks to my wonderful bride.



Shirt and caps from Lon...

Lon reported: The initial sale of the new logo A-37 Association shirt and cap has been outstanding with 59 items sold in the first ten days of the offering. And the vendor did a first class job on producing a quality product in a minimum amount of time.

Additionally, word spread quickly through the guard and reserve units that flew the bird and they also took part in the sale and expressed an interest in joining the A-37 association. Advised them to go to <A-37.org> for a membership form.

The majority of responses by those who bought either shirts or caps were raves at the quality of the merchandise and the first class embroidery.

Some shirts and caps are available in the large/extra large sizes along with some caps for those wanting to join in on the sale and can be ordered by email.

Contact Person: Lon Holtz
amscom@embarqmail.com
702/804-4232



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Letters Home

A little background on these letters if you've just joined us. When Fred Long returned from Vietnam, he found his mom had kept all the letters he wrote to them while in 'Nam. Reviewing them, he found they gave an idea of what life was like for some while over there so he asked if I'd like to include them in these newsletters. I said I surely would (one or two at a time) and thus he typed and emailed all of them to me. For those of us over there at that time (or even later), they surely bring back memories. Thanks Fred...

Dear Mom & Dad,

Feb. 21, 1968

Had a long day yesterday. Got up at 9:30. Did some reading. "Vietnam in the Mud." It is a good book by James Pickerell. I have a few more chapters to go. Went to the BX and by that time I had to go to work. Didn't get off till 4:20 the next morning (today). Went to breakfast and got to bed at 6.

Then got up again at 9:30. Couldn't sleep. I went so long on so little sleep that now when I can sleep I don't want to. Did more reading and then went to work at 3. Didn't start till 4:30 but didn't have anything else to do so went on down. Didn't do anything but read another book. Had to work till 8:30 and came back here. It is now 10:30. I got back at 9 and took a shower and talked to some of the guys and started my letter.

I got a lot of letters today. One from Mr. Tease and five from you. We were hit Saturday and Sunday, 10 & 11. You said two were injured and only slight damage. That night two were killed and a third died later Sunday.

The barrack next to mine was hit. The first rocket. Two were killed then. The second hit two barracks down and another was killed. He died immediately, never knew he was hit. Three jets were destroyed. One an F4C. The jets didn't bother me but those rockets were just to close for me.

After getting in the bunker we could hear people yelling. Then someone said "did you see that barracks, it was hit." I was near the front and went out with some of the others. The rockets were crossing the base from where we were. When I got to the front of the barracks where it was hit there were about 10 people there getting people out. They carried someone out. I looked at him and almost got sick. Grabbed a fire extinguisher and went up stairs fast. The place was on fire. People were in there trying to get more out. I tried to put the fire out. It looked hopeless and fought it by myself while others worked to get the people out. We finally got everyone out and even put the fire out. And I decided to not extend.

The attack on Jan. 31 was another close call. A rocket landed and went all over the end of the barracks in the latrine (bath room). If someone had been in there they would not have come out alive. My room was just a wall away.

We moved into a new barracks.

Everything is quiet now. It seems like every time I think we won't be hit again we are hit. So I'm not saying anything. We have been hit five times since Jan. 30.

But I'm fine, Fred