

Chapter 63

"HOW THE HANGMAN BECAME A LOACH OSCAR"

[Tony]; Hanegmom and I were talking about writing down his Vietnam experiences and the things that I have written. My writing began with a couple of Steno pads that had notes for my Battle Damage Reports that I had saved. Then a few years ago I looked at them and thought, "hey, these are some pretty interesting stories." That's when I started trying to write. It's been pretty tough for someone like me who can't spell or type.

Bill began telling me about his brother who had been in Vietnam also. "He had a six month tour in Vietnam with a Combat Engineers outfit. He was there before me and wrote letters home about what he was doing. He had volunteered to be a helicopter door gunner and was stationed at Can Tho." Bill had saved the letters, he said that they would have made interesting reading for me too. Bill had always thought about using the letters as a basis for a book sometime. The older Hanegmon was stationed with the 191st AHC as a door gunner on a Charlie model down at Can Tho. [The Bounty Hunters]

Bill continues; "When I went in, they sent me to Ft Bragg and then to Ft. Knox for Armored Cav training. I got orders for Vietnam. When my mother found out about it, she hit the roof. She wrote letters to the Army and called our Minnesota US Congressman John Blotnic on the telephone. Mom told the congressman, "I've already got one son in Vietnam and I don't want my second son going there. Can't you send some of them other kids over there?" My CO got a letter from Blotnic and he called me in and said "We can't have two bothers in Vietnam at the same time so you are going to be reassigned." He told me that I could even pick my station. Well, you know how it is. To show you how young and cocky I was, I stepped up and told him, "Sir that's why I volunteered for the draft so that I could go to Vietnam." My CO smiled and brought out his other hand with a DOD form for me to sign. It was a wavier that over ruled the congressman's letter."

I arrived in country at Cam Ranh Bay. When we were processing in they asked if any of us had any relatives in country. I showed them a copy of my bother's orders for Can Tho. I got stuck there for a week while all of the rest of the fellows that I came in with all processed out. I thought, "What the hell am I going to do, be a dog gone Life Guard on the beach at Cam Ranh Bay?" The next thing

that I know, I'm going to some place called Vinh Long. I got my orders for the 3/5th Cavalry.

To get to Vinh Long I had to go by way of Can Tho. When I got to Can Tho, they told me to stay right there at the Aerial Port because no one knew when some one would come by to pick me up. But me, I can't just sit around there doing nothing, I get up and start walking around.

I asked one of the guys, "Where am I?" He says, "Can tho." I asked him where the 191st Bounty Hunter's area was? He said, "About a half a mile down that road over there." I found out I had to overnight there before I got a ride to Vinh Long.

So, I went looking for my brother. I found the 191st company area and the Bounty Hunter's barracks and yelled out, "Anybody seen Hangman?" [They called him Hangman too] Some guys called back, "not here, I thought that you were out." [Our voices sounded alike] "Hey, you're not Hangman." I said, "I'm his brother Bill." They told me that he was out on a mission. They asked, "What the hell are you doing here? I told them that I had to overnight here and I came by to visit with him. We sat and talked with them in his hooch and had a few beers and waited.

I was alerted three or four hours later by sound of 3/4 ton Weapons Carrier coming from the flight line. He didn't know that I was coming. I had one of his buddies say, "Hangman, you've got a visitor." When he came in, he saw me and dropped his gear, and said, "What the hell you doing here." He hadn't known that I was coming. I told him that I'd come to help him. We had a pretty nice reunion that night.

When I came to 3/5 Cav. at Vinh Long I was assigned to the Armored Cav Platoon, then later I was in the Doughboys, the infantry component of the Cav unit. I found out that Operations of both the 191st and the 3/5th were trying to juggle my brother's flying and my time in the field with the Doughboys so that neither of us would be out in harms way at the same time. Finally, Command gave up and just sent my brother home a month early. My bother was forever after pissed off at me for that.

I didn't start to fly as an OH-6A Scout Observer until after my brother went home.

"The Short Stick"

More Regarding the "Rick's Foot" story.

Bill and I were talking about the broom handle Short Stick that "D" troop OH-6A Observers used when he was there. [1970-71] In the spring of 1969 when I had been first introduced to "D" troop, the

Scouts had a little different set up. I told Bill that I understood about the "broom handle cyclic" now, you had to have something short so that it would be out of the way and where you could swing around in your seat in your "Observer/Gunner mode." It's just that I had seen the real one in place even with the Frag Bags on the floor.

Bill: Oh no, Rick and I never had it that way. We had to make room for more important things like hand grenades and the "Baby Bombs" than a standard cyclic stick.

Tony: Well that must have been a Bitch to fly at best.

Bill: Yeah, well it was even worse in that "Rick's Foot" TINS, when your pilot is in a semi conscious and in a state of shock and thinks that he is helping you. I was trying to pull back to flare and Rick kept trying to push the nose down. I'm not sure what was in his mind. Maybe he thought we were higher, I don't know.

Then when we hit that rice dike road our rotor blades cut our tail boom off and sent it flying over our heads toward the C & C Chopper, I was really scared. If it had ever hit their rotor disk it could have thrown it right back at us. Not to mention trashing the C & C Huey. But somehow it passed over just missing by about two feet.

We were lucky that day, but then, I guess, most days that any of us made it back, we were lucky??

THE HANGMAN

"D" Troop Loach "Oscar"

3/5th Air Cav. 70-71

The badass M-79 and the location of the Observer's M-60 ammo supply box, or rather, boxes. A really GOOD M-60 gunner could remain firing at a target, holding the M-60 by its pistol grip to his shoulder with one hand and splice a fresh ammo belt to the last two feet with the other hand, without looking!





The "Oscar" Young Bill Hanegmon. "I had traded a regular M-79 to a ARVN for this sawed off version. I thought that it looked neat. Rick let me try it out one day on some Vietnamese VC pigs. No matter how I tried, I couldn't hit one. I even had it loaded with Canister [really big buckshot]. With that sawed off barrel and butt stock, I had absolutely no control over it. Finally Rick said, "I'll show you how to do it." He kicked pedals and pickled the mini-gun trigger and ran the burst from the pig's ass to its nose. There wasn't anything left for us to Bar-B-Q.

You'd never think they would let us fly a \$900,000 aircraft with a goddamn broomstick!!!!!!!

After the Rick's Foot incident, I was Oscaring for another Loach pilot who got wounded. Later, he profusely thanked me for saving his life. I told him no sweat; it wasn't him that I was trying to save!

I had some outside help from WO Keith Harris to make a pretty good running landing. My wounded pilot's name was Warrant Officer James McNamee.

I don't want the Troop to think that it was just Rick and me that won the war. [And we were winning when I left!]

Below are all the War-Wagon pilots who I flew with and who had a hand in teaching me to fly:

Captain Jerry Matthews

Captain Rick Waite

Warrant Officers:

Ray Murphy

Don Callison

Morris Clark

Ed Gallager

Keith Harris

Doug Brown

George Schmitz

James McNamee

Jack Ford.

I flew with all of the above at one time or another, but I probably flew with Rick Waite more. We were a good team.

It was WO Don Callison showed me how to get in a fight and get out of one. You run like a son-of-a-bitch!

WO Morris Clark got me puking sick and laughed!

WO Ray Murphy made me hold the Loach at two foot hover in the U-Minh forest down in the Elephant grass while he got out and took a shit!

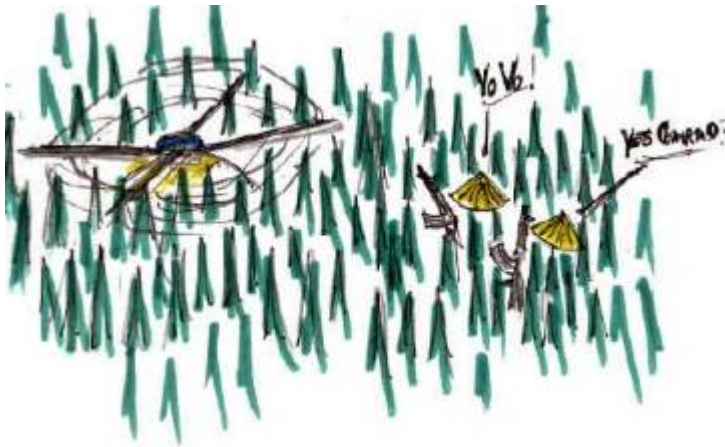
Murph and I were flying as part of a Light Fire Team on a mission in the U-Minh, when Murphy says, "Hangman I gotta go." I told him "You can't now, we're in the middle of a mission. What will the C&C say about that?" Murph says, "I don't care, I really got to go. I'll tell them that I felt a vibration and that I need to sit her down to check it out." I think that it was those Malaria shit pills they made us take. The pills had really gone to work on him.

I said, "Murph, do you really think that the C&C will go for that?" I'm thinking, "Here we are out here in this big patch of Elephant grass 10 feet high, there's no place to land, and there could be a whole company of VC down there and HE wants to stop and take a shit!"

Murph says, "Hangman! I gotta go damn it! Now! I'll let the Loach down and you hold it at a Hover." Down we went, he mowed off the top four foot of grass. I held it and Murph jumped out and

disappeared into the grass. I'm sitting there holding the hover and all that I can see is this elephant grass being whipped around by the rotor downwash. In my mind's eye I could just see hundreds of Gooks working their way through the grass toward us. I also wondered what our Trail and the C&C were thinking above us. Up there the Trail was circling, the Cobras were circling, the C&C was circling, nobody up there knew that what this was all about was that Murphy had the shits.

In a few minutes here comes Murphy out of the grass cinching up his pants with a big smile on his face. He says, "We'll tell them that I heard something grinding and thought that I had better check it out on the ground." Yeah! Right!



Hypothetical conversation between two Victor Charlies who were hiding in the grass nearby and witnessing this:

Wynn Charlie says, "Wow! Look at what those crazy Americans are doing now! Are they trying to find a new way to hide a helicopter? And did you see that one round eye take off alone into the elephant grass?"

Van Vo says, "Beats the `buffalo dung' out of me, but he maybe placing some new Running Dog Imperialist secret weapon that will kill us hideously."

Wynn Charlie says, "Look at the white guy still in the machine, he looks very angry."

Van Vo says, "Yes, we must be very quiet this could be a bad day to deal with people like that, but maybe soon they will go away."

Wynn Charlie says, "Yes Comrade, we must take care, there is no telling what these foreign devils are planning."

Captain Jerry Matthews was a maverick and needed some OJT concerning things that you don't take chances with. "Never underestimate Chuck." I chewed his butt about that once.

WO Ed Gallagher was a very intense personality, and was always chewing on his big red Moustache!

WO Jack Ford was a little shit and could barely see over the cyclic, but a great Scout pilot.

WO Doug Brown and me went on an overnigher to Saigon that we still can't talk about. It was supposed to be a parts run.

WO George Schmitz, the old pro, I started flying as Observer when he was just finishing up. I could have learned a lot from this one, ask Bottorff and Owens

WO Keith Harris jumped right in after most of the seasoned vets had left. Keith saved our ass by guiding and talking me through a running landing with wounded pilot, McNamee on a simple last light mission that turned ugly!!!

WO James McNamee, who I flew with just a few times, after getting Sir Victor Charles to shoot him in the knee, he forced me into making a running landing when I only had 2-weeks left in country. I just saved my own ass and he happened to be along!

Cpt. Rick Waite, our flying time together speaks for itself.

Pat Ross, Crusader 32, gave me some stick time on a Cobra and I almost shit my pants!

All of the Scout Pilots had balls of steel.

In all seriousness, all of our pilots/Loach/Huey/Cobra and all the other crewmembers were the best in the world, and still to this day I feel the utmost pride to have been able to fly with them at one time or another.

"D" troop's Observer weapons systems. Hanegmon's M-60, Car 15 and his trusty thirty-eight. Note the M-60 belt running over the back of the observer's seat.

This was a different setup than the M-60 ammo supply feed system that I had photographed on a D troop Loach in 1969.

[Tony Spletstoser](#)