

THE SAGA OF THE PLEIKU SIX

Episode I --- R&R

By [Mike Sheuerman](#)

Woody had already gone home in early February. After two years of combat flying and going to Bangkok every three months, the Army told him he couldn't extend anymore. Anyway, the war in Vietnam was winding down and his services were needed elsewhere. That left his best friend, Lash, as the "Old Guy" of the 361st and then came me. It was early March of '72 and Lash was going to Bangkok to get married and then heading home. Several of us were good friends with Lash and still had an R&R coming so six of us five backseaters and a four month "new guy" requested permission to go to Thailand for a week to attend Lash's wedding. To our surprise, all our requests were approved. Things were uncommonly quiet in our AO so that probably was a factor in the decision.

Lash would leave on the 3rd of March. John "Captain Teflon" Debay, Lynn Carlson, Mike Kieren, Jim "Ziggy" Siegfried, Mike "The Gofer" Pascoe and me would all follow on the 5th. I was the most straight laced of the crew and this would come in handy later on.

The night before we left Pleiku, there was a floor show at the O Club – Korean I think. We had a good time and knowing we would not have to fly the next day, some of us drank a little more than we should have including me. I was hammered. Finally reason set in and I decided to go back to my hooch and get some sleep. Staggering into the Company area I was tripped by a crack in the pavement and fell into the ditch that ran along side. Seeing that my hooch was close by and fearing sniper fire I decided to crawl the rest of the way.

Half way down I noticed a pair of VERY SHINNY boots at eye level directly in front of me. Now only one person in the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion had boots that spit polished so I immediately rolled over, came to attention on my back, rendered a snappy hand salute and said "Good evening, Sir." to Colonel Bagnal, the Battalion Commander. He politely ask "What are you doing, Lieutenant Sheuerman?" (We had dealings before this and were well acquainted.) "Getting ready to go on R&R tomorrow, Sir." I replied. The Colonel came to attention, returned my salute and said "Get some sleep, son, and have a good time." and continued down the sidewalk. I rolled over, continued my low crawl to the hooch and went to sleep. I always followed orders.

Somehow our CO, John Barfield, found out about this chance encounter and requested my presence in his office early the next morning. He asked what had happened and after I explained about the sniper concern he suggested I see the Colonel and make sure it was still permissible to go on R&R.

Feeling a touch under the weather from a cold I was probably catching, I trudged up to the Battalion HQ area, found the OD and requested permission to see Colonel Bagnal. After a few minutes, I was ushered in to his office, came to attention, saluted and requested permission to speak to him. He returned the salute and with a scowl on his face granted permission. I figured I was not going to see the wonders and historical attractions in Thailand I'd heard so much about. "Sir, Captain Barfield suggested I stop by and see if it was okay with you if I continued on my scheduled R&R. I sincerely apologize for my behavior last night and, if I caused you any embarrassment, I'm truly sorry." He hesitated a moment, looked up, the scowl changed in to a smile and said, "Sheuerman, get out of my office. See you when you get back." He didn't have to say it twice.

The six of us got down to Saigon somehow. We landed at Ton Son Nuit AFB, grabbed our bags and headed down town. Four of us rode in a cab but Mike Kieren and Lynn Carlson (Ithink) took a cyclo. They put their stuff in the trunk of our cab. That turned out to be a mistake. We arrived at the hotel, piled

out of the cab with out stuff, paid the driver and headed inside. Oh, when I say "we" I mean the four of us in the cab. Mike and Lynn weren't there yet. A few minutes later they came into the lobby. "Where's our stuff?"

"What stuff?"

"Our bags."

"Don't you have them?"

By now you can see that two things were happening, Mike and Lynn were pissed and there was a taxi driver in Saigon going through his new found wealth. Like idiots we decided to go looking for the thieving Saigon Cowboy and teach him a lesson. Two things happened as we attempted this feat --- we didn't find the guy and we didn't get killed in some of the places we looked.

Mike and Lynn made a "rush visit" to finance and picked up an advance so they could replenish EVERYTHING they lost - camera, shaving kit, cash, clothes, etc. We returned to the hotel, had dinner and got to know some of the locals in the bar.

Next morning we were off to Bangkok - or at least some of us were. When we arrived at the R&R center, it turned out Mike K and I had been charged with an R&R when we had visited Sydney the previous November. They wouldn't let us on the plane. The only way we could go to Bangkok was on Air Vietnam and that required a passport. The two of us bade our friends farewell and raced off to the US Embassy in search of assistance. We begged, we pleaded, we offered bribes, told them we were ushers in Lash's wedding.

Finally, a very nice lady who thought we were nuts and felt sorry for us took care of the red tape. Pictures, I mean really ugly pictures, finger prints, family histories, etc were taken and we were instructed to return at ten the next morning. We called the guys in Bangkok and gave them the good news. We returned to the hotel, had dinner, made new friends and retired for the evening. One other really funny thing happened that night at the hotel but you'll have to contact either Mike K or me to find out what that is. I can't put it in the AVIATOR since it is a "family" magazine.

The next morning we board Air Vietnam in our flight suits and its off to Bangkok. We are thrilled. Once off the ground the flight attendant announces we will land in Nom Phen, Cambodia in 40 minutes. Now we are not thrilled. We almost mess our britches. We are in combat uniforms. We are NOT ALLOWED in Cambodia. We don't know what to do.

The plane lands, some people get off, Cambodian military people get on, they check a few passports, give us a long look and then get off. Happiness is "wheels up and locked" as we leave Nom Phen International.

We clear customs in Thailand and head out the door. That's when we met Lik. Lik was a cab driver sent by our buddies to pick us up and would continue to haul us around during our entire stay. He's holding up a sign with our names on it. Once we identify ourselves, he grabs our bags and off we go in a death defying ride through the streets of Bangkok to the Opera Hotel. The Panthers, Bikinis, Bucs, Gators, Crocs and Gladiators always stayed at the Opera Hotel. The guys we inserted and covered - Special Forces guys from CCC, stayed there and made sure we were treated right. It was a small hotel with some very unusual items in the rooms. The showers were hot, the air-conditioning was perfect and the little restaurant made great food. AND THEY HAD A SWIMMING POOL. It would turn out to be a great place to stay.

We pulled up and the guys were there to meet us. While Lik got our bags out of the taxi, Mike and I walked into the pool area to greet our fellow Panthers and their new friends. They erupted in cheers and applause, congratulating us on our ability to get passports in record time. Then something happened I will never forget as long as I live. Captain Teflon walked over to me and placed in my hand a quart bottle of the finest beer I have ever tasted, a beer modeled after the drink of the Gods, a bottle of Singha. It was cold and refreshing and, to this day, all other beers pale in comparison to it. I raised it to my mouth, took a long swig and fell backwards into the pool, clothes, boots, wallet, beer and all. I was finally on R&R with six of my closest friends. They are still my closest friends to this day.

EPISODE II --- BANGKOK

Lash and John were experienced visitors to Bangkok. This was not their first rodeo. Both had served at least 18 months or more in the 361st and considered Thailand their home away from home. That being said, they were selected as the tour guides for the rest of us "first timers." After floating in the pool for several hours and a couple more quarts of Singha, we all went to our rooms to get ready for the evening's adventures. The AIR-CONDITIONER in the room was phenomenal. It kept the room cool to almost cold. And the shower was HOT with plenty of water. If you were stationed at Holloway, that was a real treat. I may be wrong but I seem to remember staying in the shower for over 30 minutes. I made sure to take two and sometimes three showers every day we were there. And the BED was full size and comfortable. We pile into two cabs and off we go to eat dinner - table clothes, background music, and great-looking waitresses. The food was excellent and there was plenty of it. I had Kobe steak for the first time and there was more Singha beer. We had died and gone to Heaven. After dinner, our leaders took us out on the town where we made new friends. We met for breakfast the next morning. Lash and Dang had to take care of some last minute paperwork details before their wedding on the 8th. The rest of us were going to see Bangkok on rented motor cycles, not little mini-bikes but big 450 Hondas. Now comes the fun part. I had never ridden on a motorcycle in my life much less driven one. But was I worried --- NO SIR. I was an experienced combat helicopter pilot flying a half million dollar gunship with great aplomb and this motorcycle would be a piece of cake - or so I thought. The bikes cost us \$35 each for the day including gas. Mike K, an experienced biker so he said, gave me a quick course in how to drive the thing. It didn't seem that difficult. I hop on, start it up, rev the engine and release the clutch. WRONG --- I released the brake and went flying forward into another bike, ripping a big gash in the leather seat and putting a big dent in the gas tank of it. The owners went nuts. They must have thought I spoke Thai. After everything calmed down I had to write a check for \$400 to cover the damage. Having not learned from my mistake, I took off on the Honda to explore the city with my buddies. Fortunately, nothing else happened - on the bike.

Let me digress a moment. When the decision to go to Bangkok was made, I asked Lash and John how much money I would need. They suggested \$200-\$300 should cover it. I went to American Express, gave them \$300, received 25 checks and left. I also took \$100 in cash. I had written a check for \$200 to cover my hotel room and other miscellaneous expenses upon arrival. Having written my second check, I was now overdrawn in the AMEX account and there were five days to go on the R&R or so I thought.

We returned to the hotel around four after turning in the bikes. Lash and Dang informed us there was a problem, some red tape BS and it would now be the 12th before they could get married. We were scheduled to return to Vietnam on the 12th. We were extremely disappointed. After all, that was the only reason we had come to Bangkok - to see Lash get married. He was our good friend and fellow combat aviator. Lynn suggested we call back to Holloway and see what could be worked out. John called, got Barfield on the phone, explained the development and requested a two day extension on our R&R. To our amazement, it was granted. We would fly back to Vietnam on the 13th and return to Camp Holloway on

the 14th. The CO asked that we call in every other day just to make sure things were still quiet and we weren't needed. Without hesitation, we agreed. Things were looking up.

John said "Since Lash and Dang can't get married till the 12th, let's go to Pattaeu Beach for a few days." Great idea. It's agreed, we go tomorrow morning. After all, we trust our tour guides. We decide to have dinner at the hotel restaurant and then go out on the town. During dinner, we receive a strange phone call from Mike Pascoe, "the Gofer." He is in his room and believes he has been poisoned. He wanted John to come there fast. John grabs me to go along. We rush up to his room concerned something else has gone wrong. We find him on his bed, STONED OUT OF HIS MIND.

Turns out Mike, a smoker, needed some cigarettes and some local cowboy had offered to sell him a pack of Salem Lights. Mike thought they were regular cigarettes, purchased them, went to his room to shower, lit one up and had his first and, I'm sure, only experience with cigarettes laced with opium. He lay there on the bed telling us he was seeing all sorts of strange things flying around the ceiling, the room was spinning, he felt like he was floating, he was sick - no, HE WAS DYING. He grabbed John and made him swear we would tell his folks he died in combat and not in a hotel in Thailand after smoking opium. It was hard to keep from laughing out loud. We left him there and returned to the restaurant. After we told the others and they finished laughing they all rushed up to say goodbye to our poor dying friend. The Gofer stayed in that night, slept like a baby and was fine the next morning for our trip to the Beach.

We go to the beach in a tour bus - just us. The thing is loaded with food, Singha and other things to drink. It takes several hours to get there. We are staying in a huge bungalow on an island off the coast. To get there, we will take a private party boat again loaded with everything we need to include scuba gear and fishing equipment. We also have a ski boat with us. I had fished before and thought it was boring, but Scuba and water skiing were new for me. My best friend, Mike Kieren, hops in the water at the dock, puts on the skis and starts skiing across the Gulf of Siam toward the island. I'm in the ski boat along with Lynn Carlson and the driver. Mike is really pretty good and, even though the water looks choppy, never falls. He skis 15-20 minutes and then Lynn takes over. After a while it's my turn. Looks simple enough -after all I'm an experienced combat helicopter pilot flying a half million dollar gunship in Southeast Asia, how hard can it be. They drug my sorry butt all over the Gulf of Siam. That body of water was six inches lower after they finally let me back in the boat. I had drunk that much salt water. To this day I can taste salt whenever I see a ski boat. The five days at the beach were unbelievable. All you could eat and drink, fresh seafood, great steaks, Singha, beautiful accommodations, plenty to do - and all this for \$150 each. Really an unbelievable trip. On the 11th we head back to Bangkok, the Opera Hotel and good/bad news, depending on how you look at it.

There was a problem with the paperwork concerning the wedding - either that or someone wanted more money. Anyway the wedding was postponed yet again. Now it would be the 15th or 16th at the earliest. Damn bureaucracy. The next day John called the Unit, got the CO on the phone, explained the situation and sought the advice of our leader. Again, much to our surprise, our request to stay in Bangkok was granted. We would leave Thailand on the 17th at the latest and get back to the Unit on the 18th. At least that was the current plan.

We spent the days relaxing, swimming, partying, touring the city, making new friends, shopping, eating, etc. By this time I was at least \$1500 overdrawn in the AMEX account. But as they say, "If you still have checks you ain't broke." I still had checks. On the 15th we received more good/bad news depending on how you look at it. It would be the 22nd before Lash and Dang could finally be wed, but this was a definite date. We were assured of it.

This time I made the call. Again permission was given but our good relationship with our Unit Commander was being tested. We were told, no matter what, we would be on a plane on the 23rd and headed back to Vietnam. Be back in Holloway on the 24th, no excuses. Don't even ask for another extension on peril of loosing our AC orders. Disappointed that we would not be allowed to ask for any more extensions we reluctantly decided to make the most of this extra time. Again, we spent our time wisely waiting for the 22nd. We had a ball.

The 22nd rolls around and Lash and Dang do get married. We weren't allowed to attend the ceremony for some reason but had an unbelievable wedding reception that night in the back yard of Bill Vitoon's house. I have the party on a CD. Bill was Lik's boss, the owner of the cab service we were using and a close friend of Lash and Dang. We partied to early in the morning. The Thai food was authentic, really good and the spiciest thing I had ever tasted. It was so hot, it would light your mouth on fire. Only Singha would cool it down. So naturally I had to drink a lot of Singha. When it was time to go back to the hotel, Lik was drunker than Cooter Brown. I was called on to drive us back to the hotel. Being an experienced combat helicopter pilot used to flying a half million dollar gunship, it was no problem. Just follow the cab in front of us. I have never driven that fast, run so many lights or taken so many chances in my life. Must have made it without any problems though, all the folks in the cab are still here to tell the tale.

We meet for breakfast the next morning, settle up our bills (I'm now almost \$3000 over drawn in the AMEX account but still have two or three checks left so I ain't broke), say good bye to our new found friends and especially Lash. I would not see or talk to Lash again for over 12 years or Dang for 25 years when she and Lash attended their first VHPA Reunion in Orlando in 1997. The seven of us Panthers posed for a picture outside the lobby of the Opera Hotel. Some of us are wearing party suits we had made while there (Mike K and Ziggy can still fit in to theirs - showoffs.) We each have a copy signed by all the rest of the guys in the photo. Mine hangs on the wall in my office at home as a reminder of great friends and great times. We look so young, confident and bullet proof. I guess we were or thought we were.

Our seven day R&R over, six of us head for the airport and back to Vietnam. Lash would head stateside several days later. The six of us returning to our Unit had been gone 17 days on a seven day R&R. Soon we would be known as "The Infamous Pleiku Six."

EPISODE III --- Return To Holloway

John Debay, Lynn Carlson, Mike Pascoe and Jim Siegfried flew back to Vietnam on the R&R aircraft. Mike Kieren and I went back on Air Vietnam. This time we wore our party suits just incase we made another surprise stop in Phnom Penh. This time it was straight back to Ton Son Nout International. The six of us had agreed to rendezvous at the Presidential Hotel in Saigon. No reason to rush back to Pleiku today. We weren't expected until tomorrow at the earliest anyway. John did call the Unit to let the CO know we were back in Vietnam and would be back the next day. He did mention that he sensed a little stress in Barfield's voice.

We decide to eat at the hotel and make it an early night. We go to the bar, have a couple of drinks, make new friends and head to our rooms. After breakfast the next morning, we head to the air field and catch a C123 direct to Pleiku AFB. We arrive around noon and I call the Company HQ. The XO, Bob Hutchison answers the phone. I say "Hi Cpt Hutchison, we're back. How 'bout sending a truck to pick us up? We're at OPNS over at Pleiku AFB." After a pause he replies, "LT Sheurman, the six of you have been gone this long, I believe you can get yourselves back on your own. Report to me as soon as you get back in the Unit area." Now that didn't sound good. I told the rest of my cohorts what Hutch said and how he said it. We were all puzzled at this.

We get Pleiku Tower to contact a passing slick about picking us up and hauling us back to Holloway. A Gladiator aircraft comes in, picks us up, flies us over to Holloway and drops us at Panther OPNS. We ease inside and find Art Childers, Panther 3. He tells us we are in "deep Kim she." Some upper level command (1st Aviation Brigade) has noticed six experienced pilots from the 361st have been on R&R a little longer than the time allotted. That command contacted the next lower command (17th Group) which contacted the next lower command (52nd CAB) which contacted the Unit. All hell was about to break loose now. John told him of the repeated phone calls to the Unit. Art told us that didn't matter and to expect the worst.

We drop our stuff in our hooch's and head down the hill to the Company orderly room. CPT Barfield is out flying. Hutch tells us we have been marked AWOL since March 14th and should consider ourselves under arrest. John tells Hutch he's lost his mind. He tells him we had permission. Hutch tells John that's between us and CPT Barfield. We go up to the O Club, have a soda and discuss the situation. We all agree we have nothing to worry about since, in our minds, we had permission to stay in Bangkok. That night we are told the situation will be investigated and charges ranging from insubordination to Absent without leave may be forthcoming. We are not to leave Holloway except on official business LIKE FLYING.

Now I was severely overdrawn in the AMEX account to the tune of \$3500 plus and broke. Yes --- I was out of checks. I contacted Finance and had \$3500 plus in my "Soldier's Savings Account" transferred to the AMEX account. I was so glad I had the account to fall back on but the stash of tax free cash was pretty much gone. I would go home with less than \$500 to show for all my savings while in Vietnam.

We all are scheduled to fly the next three or four days. Things were getting more active in the Central Highlands. Little did we know the first battle of the Easter Offensive was about to happen and we would all play a role. And that would turn out to be a very good thing for the now Infamous Pleiku Six.

I was now officially "the Old Guy" of the 361st. I was the next to go home. I was starting to feel "short." I had flown everyday since we returned to Holloway. Enemy activity was picking up. The Recon teams we were putting in didn't stay in very long. And they were being forced out by enemy contact rather than coming out on their own. I decided to take April 2nd off and ship my stuff home. There was talk of drops and I didn't want to get caught having to rush.

Our Unit flew escort and gun cover for the SOG mission out of Kontom. We provided two fire teams in support of the northern mission into Laos launching out of Dak To and a third fire team in support of the southern mission into Cambodia launching out of Plei Djereng. While I was there we covered the 57th AHC "Gladiator" and the VNAF "King Bees." Both were outstanding Units with some of the bravest crews you ever saw. We flew a rotation. 1st platoon --- low guns on the northern mission, 2nd platoon --- high guns on the northern mission, 3rd platoon --- southern mission. The next day the 1st platoon would handle the southern mission, the 2nd platoon would drop down to the low guns on the northern mission and the 3rd platoon would handle high guns on the northern mission and so on and so on and so. You get the picture.

Now back to April 2nd. As I said I was getting short and had taken the day down. Lynn Carlson had been AMC on the northern mission that day and had done the unthinkable. HE HAD VOLUNTEERED OUR PLATOON, THE 2nd PLATOON, TO FLY LOW GUNS FOR THE SECOND DAY IN A ROW. We never changed the rotation. That was a rule that never was to be broken.

A Chinook had been shot down on approach to Firebase Delta. The AC, Walt Zutter, was ok but his co-pilot had a broken leg. Attempts to get them off the firebase had been, to say the least, unsuccessful. Every aircraft going in had received tremendous fire and had to abort. The bad guys had numerous

.50 and .51 cal "toys" ringing the firebase and were very good at using them. To get Walt and his crew off would require a surprise extraction. Lynn, a really great guy who we now call "the Pimp" volunteered to lead the mission and us to come along for the fun.

The plan was to have eight Cobras, four Panthers from the 361st and four Cougars from the 57th and two Gladiator slicks from the 57th arrive on station at 6AM, I'M SORRY, 0600 hrs, set up two low level racetrack gun patterns on either side of the firebase, send the slicks in low and fast, kick off supplies, pick up the downed crew and haul butt straight ahead. It was a great plan except for two things. I'll cover one now and the other later. The first thing --- I WAS SCHEDULED TO FLY, I WAS SHORT AND IT WASN'T OUR TURN TO FLY LOW GUNS. In fact I was going to do some training with Ronnie Lewis. He was getting close to his AC orders and I was going to fly front seat so he could get some back seat time. This development changed all that. I bitched and complained for a while but, in the end, was more than willing to go.

We pre-flight that night. We're up at 0400hrs and headed north to Kontom by 0445hrs. We arrive on station around 0530hrs with three of our four Snakes from both Units. There is a lot of activity going on. Somehow, John Paul Vann, the II Corps civilian advisor, had gotten involved and was interjecting himself into the situation. This is the same --- excuse me --- ASSHOLE that said helicopter pilots were expendable and would not be searched for if shot down after Bill Reeder was shot down at Ben Het on May 9th. (Bill was captured on May 12th.) Vann sure wanted his butt picked up after the OH-58 he was riding in was shot down several weeks later. If it hadn't been for the other guys with him the 361st might have left his sorry tail there.

I digress, forgive me. Lynn is talking with the advisor on the ground at the firebase. He's getting everything set up. We're just about ready to pull off this well planned extraction when the bad guys, two reinforced battalions of bad guys, decide they want to get Walt also. The advisor starts yelling "they're in the wire, they're in the wire!" Lynn sets up the Panthers on the west side with right breaks and the Cougars on the east side with left breaks so we won't run into each other and in we go. Lynn's in first followed by me and then Dan Jones. It's still pitch black except for the bazillion tracers coming up at us. They don't scare me as much as the 4 bazillion bullets that aren't tracers that I can't see. "They're in the compound, shoot the compound." I'm in for my second pass with a little surprise for MR Bad Guy, two seven shot pods with nails. TEE, HEE, HEE! I ask the advisor if the good guys are in the bunkers. He replies "yes, they are. They're in the compound, shoot the compound. I go to 4 pair and start punching them off. BEEP,BEEP,BEEP, BEEP! MASTER CAUTION LIGHT!

EPISODE IV --- REDEMPTION

Yellow lights everywhere. I tell Lynn I'm hit, my MASTER CAUTION LIGHT is going nuts, I'm headed to Dak To and I'm going to kill him right after I get this bird on the ground. He has Dan follow me for a few minutes. I've lost my #1 and #2 hydraulics. Somebody tells me to head for Kontom because Dak To is getting hit also - Sounds good to me. We go through the check list, notify all aircraft in the area on guard of my intentions and line up for a running landing into the rising sun as it comes over the mountains. Manuel says "touch down above 35 knots", I touch down closer to 80. We slide for a few seconds, seems like a few hours and come to a stop three quarters down the runway. While I shut her down, Ronnie hops out to see the damage. Col Bagnal is in right behind me. "You men ok" he asks? We ascertain the damage as hydraulic lines shot away, Col Bagnal climbs to altitude, contacts Panther OPNS and has them bring up the parts to fix the aircraft. Of course there was hidden damage we couldn't see and we were eventually "hooked back" to Holloway. Since we got down without loss of life or limb I decided to forgive The Pimp but I've never forgotten he tried to have me killed. The attack on the firebase failed but it would be several days before the siege was broken and Zutter's crew rescued.

On the 16th of April we are to be awarded medals for the action at Firebase Delta. Even the Vietnamese are giving us a goodie. Turns out I get a COG with Silver Star and Ronnie Lewis got one with a Gold Star because he was scheduled to be in the backseat. When the Vietnamese official called to get the crew names for the awards, Panther OPNS gave him the original crew assignments. No biggie.

On April 16th the Pleiku Six, along with our Company Commander, were to go see the Battalion Commander. He wanted the details of our being gone from the Unit for so long without authority. After hearing the details he would decide what course of action he would take. We report to his office and are ushered in. Col Bagnal is not there yet. He is saying goodbye to the Generals who awarded the heroes of Firebase Delta their medals. He comes in, we snap to attention and salute. He starts to return the salute and stops in mid salute. Standing in front of him are four guys he just awarded two medals each. Only Mike Kieren and Ziggy Siegfried missed the party and were not involved in the action. He finishes the salute and tells us to stand at ease.

"Will somebody please tell me what you six men were thinking? I want to know why you did not return on time. Gentlemen, being AWOL in time of war is a serious offense." John Debay snapped to attention. Sir, permission to speak." Col Bagnal nodded and John started to tell the tale. "Sir, Lash Wisener was our buddy. He was getting married in Bangkok. We all went with him to see him get married. There were some paperwork problems that delayed the marriage. We called every time something came up. Each time we were told we could stay. Sir, we called every other day to make sure we weren't needed. Sir, if the Unit had needed us we would have been back in less than 48 hours."

Col Bagnal turned to Capt. Barfield. "John, is this true?" "Yes, Sir." "On whose authority did you do this?" "Mine, Sir."

Col Bagnal Thought for a minute. He looked at us and said "What you did was wrong. You should have returned when you were supposed to. However, I can't do too much to you since you did ask for and received permission to stay. I am placing unofficial letters of reprimand in your files. They will be pulled and destroyed when you leave my command IF AND ONLY IF you don't get in any more trouble till you leave my command. Is that understood?"

"YES, SIR" we replied. "Now, get out of my office and congratulations on your awards."

I flew 5 more days and was notified I was leaving the Unit on the 23rd of April. Mike Kieren followed me on the 24th. Ziggy was right behind him. Lynn Carlson went to II Corps as Aviation Officer in June. John Debay was with the Unit till it stood down in August and then went home. He bitched to the new CO, Major Dick Peterson, so much about maintenance he was made Maintenance Officer. Mike Pascoe, The Gofer, having survived his brush with death in Bangkok, brought the Unit colors home.

And me, I flew to Saigon on the 23rd, changed into civilian clothes and caught an Air Vietnam flight to Bangkok for a ten day vacation on Uncle Sam. But that's a story for another issue of the Aviator.

Epilog

Please be advised that a request has been made of me to change a small part of this thrilling story by one of the pilots who lived it. James L Siegfried, better known to those who flew with him as "Ziggy" has asked that I change the part concerning his departure from the Unit and Vietnam. As one with great respect for accuracy, please allow me to grant Ziggy his wish. See correction below.

Ziggy did not leave the Unit right after Mike Kieren and me as I stated in Episode 4. He continued to fly with the Panthers until June 30, 1972. On that date he was AMC in a flight of two returning from a mission covering a Chinook on its weekly supply run to Leghorn, a top secret radio relay and eaves dropping outpost that, of course, did not exist, located on a rocky mountain top in southeast Laos. The weather was going south in a hurry due to the approaching monsoons. The fire team was forced to fly at tree top level from Kontom south toward Pleiku. Northwest of Pleiku Ziggy, contacted Pleiku AFB and requested permission to cross their extended west runway low level in route to Camp Holloway. Permission was granted and, as he crossed, 26 AK-47 rounds made Swiss cheese of AH-1G # 70-17023, 12 going through the cockpit. Several hit his frontseater, "Fearless" Forrest Snyder, in the left foot, behind the left calf and left knee. Ziggy took one in his right foot. There were also holes in the tail boom and tail rotor. Ziggy always loved to practice MAYDAY calls over the intercom. This day he got to do it for real. After making the MAYDAY call on guard he notified his wingman, Bernie Busby, he had taken hits, both Fearless and he were wounded and he was putting the Snake down. Bernie notified Panther OPNS and called for a MEDEVAC. Gladiator 10, hearing the MAYDAY call and having the fire team in sight, called Ziggy on guard to let him know he would be in behind them for pick up. Both pilots remained alert and headed for the pad at Artillery Hill, Ziggy using his left foot and Fearless, his right. Three Chinooks occupied that space so Ziggy and Fearless landed in a parking lot across from the pad. Bernie was in behind them. Gladiator 10 arrived and carted both of the wounded guys to the 94th EVAC hospital in Pleiku.

When John Debay, the 361st Maintenance Officer found out, he was concerned about the pilots. When he saw the aircraft and realized it would have to be sent back to the States for repair, he was irate. 70-17023 was a new aircraft in Vietnam and had less than 10 hours on it. Several days later, when he went to visit Ziggy and Fearless in the hospital, he said and I quote "Why weren't you two ASSHOLES flying 295? That thing is a piece of S___ and needs to be shot up and shipped home." The Crew chief, Roy Snisko, was also fit to be tied when he saw the aircraft. There was blood everywhere in the cockpit. Roy had done such a great job keeping 68-15295 in the air, he had been given 70-17023 as a reward.

Ziggy and Fearless stayed in the hospital in Pleiku until July 6 then were flown to Okinawa and then Japan. From there they were flown to Travis AFB on July 16. Ziggy spent several months in an Army hospital in San Francisco. Fearless was flown on to Washington, DC and spent almost a year in Walter Reed. Oh, don't be too concerned about him, he got to go home every night.

Ziggy attended the 1992 Atlanta Reunion with Mike Kieren and me. It was the first time either of us had seen him since Vietnam. He still looked the same. I located Fearless in the spring of 1999. He attended his first Reunion that year in Nashville. He and Paula, his beautiful wife (and my secret girlfriend) haven't missed one since. After the Nashville Reunion was over, Fearless was flying to California to meet Paula and visit their son, a Navy man, who lived on the west coast. He made a point of going to see Ziggy. It was the first time they had seen each other since July 16, 1972.