

The Mad Mormon

**A Vietnam Helicopter Pilots'
Journal**

by

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To those who preserve our freedom:

- Who served honorably and came home
- Who served honorably and didn't come home
- Who still struggle with combat in their lives

“Freedom isn't free”

For Bishop Richard M. Pratt

(3/14/1912 ~ 4/1/2009)

“... a noble man of God”

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INTRODUCTION

In the Beginning . . .

Life can be lived at different levels. For every life there is a level, made unique because of four basic aspects through which all experiences are filtered. These filters, in order of importance, are perception, principle, process, and purpose. Some never come to understand these P-aspects, simply because the definitions of these filters vary widely from individual to individual. Discrepancies in perceptions come through and from the power of choice. As Dumbledore said to Harry Potter, “our abilities do not define who we really are. It is our choices.”

Not all men acknowledge a faith that they are offspring of divine parentage. Nevertheless, it is the readily accepted perception that the most successful societies have had as their foundation a legal system based on Judeo-Christian principles whose origin is divine. You have your ways, I have mine, and God has His ways, and His ways are divine. In striving to attain a bit of that divinity, I believe that not only can I come to know that I am a son of God, but that there is a divine purpose for me in mortality, and a glorious inheritance possible if I achieve the qualities He invites me to acquire. As with all possibilities, real freedom exhibits itself in the power of choice. In the words of Cecil B. DeMille, "God gave us our freedom, and then gave us the commandments to teach us how to remain free." Whatever the outcome is becomes the result and responsibility of individual choice.

Educational enterprises of all types present principles of varied value, as we learn from our experience. Scientific theory relies on repetitive, constant outcomes as the substance of truth. Faith concepts, however, seem to appeal to the heart of each individual, some getting different outcomes than others. Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge, but yet there comes a certainty of heart that can be greater than any outcome of disciplined scientific experiments. Ultimately, the choice to follow head or heart comes from the process of life's opportunities to make decisions and each is left to draw his own conclusions.

I Am A Person of Principle

How do we come to know 'true' principles? Can science and experience alone prove everything to our satisfaction? Many look for proofs, but at the same time lack confidence in the results of their search. Without a spiritual confirmation, the heart remains troubled and the head is left to wonder.

Why is perception the most important of the P-aspects in life?

Ask any police officer what the greatest challenge in accident investigation is and he will tell you that regardless of the number of witnesses to a collision, each one will have a different rendering of what happened. Why? Each witness will relate to the event in a fashion based on their own personal experiences. For this reason, one may give what appears to be a completely objective account, while another will report in such an

emotionally charged fashion as to leave the officer wondering if both witnessed the same crash. To interpret what is received through the five senses is all the mortal world has to offer. However, for those of faith who have come to know and appreciate their divine nature, mortal events can be measured to an even greater degree by a sixth sense and how it relates to the eternal dimensions of their lives and to their eternal pedigree.

How Do I Know What Is True?

The greatest concern of war is the finality of death, unless those who participate understand the greater dimension of life everlasting and the author thereof. “Fear not those who can kill the body, but more those who can kill the spirit . . . Thou hast been faithful over a few things. I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” (First Presidency declaration to all LDS servicemen in the Introduction to Principles of the Gospel, servicemen’s scripture kit).

With prophets as His mouthpiece God has given principles that can only be perceived by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost. The most important verse of all scripture ever written was engraved on gold plates by the American prophet Moroni in the Book of Mormon when he tells us that “by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.” (Moroni 10:5) It is not enough to know principles, but it is more important to have a certainty of their source and to select for life those of divine origin. Choosing to live by true principles not only adds to personal character enrichment, but bears witness of a need for a Savior who is empowered to provide forgiveness for all the mistakes encountered or committed during the search process for truth.

None of the worlds religions except the Jewish and Christian faiths point to the need for one who can pay the price for sins and errors, and who can also provide power over death through a universal resurrection. This has been the message of true prophets since time began.

Additionally, the confirmation of that divine message has always been the domain of the third member of the Godhead, the Holy Ghost, whose mission it is to be revealer of all truth to the hearts of men who want true knowledge of the Father and the Son. The scriptures are filled with descriptions and evidences of the gifts of the Spirit, for those who diligently seek them. Obedience (to true principles) brings forth the blessings of heaven,

and as sons and daughters of heavenly parents, each has equal access to lay claim to those gifts of our heritage.

If there were only the 360 points of the compass from which to select a direction, life would be infinitely less complicated in our efforts to find True North -- if that is what we choose to call the "strait and narrow way." Our world, as such, would only be two-dimensional. To add the third dimension, however, complicates the process in unfathomable ways. Like astronauts, the immensity of space confuses even the simplest choices of "up" and "down". There is no north or south, east or west, or even above and below. There is only "here" and "there", and direction concerns itself more with time, speed and distance.

In finding the true way back to our eternal home, God appears to have given the adversary tremendous advantage. Whatever course we choose will ultimately result in a destination. More importantly, any destination that does not include the Kingdom of God will ultimately prove to be inadequate for us and our loved ones. There are so many choices to make, and so many possibilities, especially when the Adversary is ever present, using all his enticements to keep us from the "strait and narrow path."

The Stakes Are High

To cultivate perception (VISION) through the gifts of the Holy Ghost is to have guidance from heaven for daily life. To live by true principles (THE PLAN) is to have tools to build for everlasting life. To be productively engaged in the service of our fellow man is the opportunity and refining process – (THE JOURNEY). Ultimately, faithfully, each can come to know their purpose (THE DESTINATION) and reach their heavenly home.

For those with eternal VISION, the endless joy is in the journey.

What Is Most Important In Life?

In relatively recent times a young prophet, when asked by two brothers considerably his seniors if he would inquire of God what important work they could devote their lives to, received the following reply: "And now, behold, I say unto you, that the thing which will

be of most worth unto you will be to declare repentance unto this people, that you may bring souls unto me, that you may rest with them in the kingdom of my Father.” (Doctrine and Covenants 15:6, 16:6) Such was God’s response through the Prophet Joseph Smith to John and Peter Whitmer in June of 1829. Of all the opportunities of service, there is no greater call in mortality than this.

FORMATIVE YEARS

My Life or His?

My timing was bad, being born when I was. I would have thought to make a better choice. However, I believe that my experiences in the Army and Vietnam War were exceptional. When you are subject to a “random” draft, the first point of faith is discovering whether your life is really governed by random events, or that there “are no accidents,” and that there is a larger view to discover by getting close to your Maker. Is it my life to live, or could I find more by discovering what His way for me is?

Being a Latter Day Saint in the military has its problems, principally because important moral standards kept me apart from those around whom I lived. I was surrounded by conscripted soldiers in situations that were not conducive to living the principles of the gospel; but as I did, I quickly became a lone stand out in barracks life and in the units in which I served.

The Draft

Initially, I viewed my military and Vietnam experiences as opportunities to again be involved in missionary work. From October, 1964, to January, 1967, I served as a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Brazil South Mission (Brazil's three most southern states). I returned from my mission in time for college spring semester, 1967, and with the war going on, was able to avoid the draft by reenrolling in school. Deferments were hard to get, but because I was also in Air Force ROTC prior to missionary service, a deferment was automatic upon my return to Brigham Young University.

At the end of Spring Semester, I had completed freshman and sophomore years of ROTC. The Professor of Military Studies (PMS) required me as a registering junior to provide him with a guarantee that within the next two years I would complete a BA or BS degree and be ready for Air Force officer commissioning.

My only vocational dream had been to be a jet fighter pilot. Obtaining a degree would be my ticket to a commission and flight school. My dilemma was that I lacked a major, and ROTC could not give me guidance as to what field of study to pursue. I could not major in ROTC. There was no aviation field of study at BYU. There was not, at that time, a general education degree I could obtain. I became somewhat offended when the PMS suggested that I get a degree in basket weaving – he didn't care. He was only interested that I be ready for commissioning in two years with a degree in something.

Consequently, I dropped ROTC, lost my deferment and hoped that I would not be discovered by my draft board.

I continued in school until mid-December of 1967, when I had a setback in a courtship. Being somewhat in a funk, my future seemed a total confusion. About that same time I received a notice from my draft board to report for a physical examination. My agitation was high. It was generally known that an induction notice would soon follow and I wouldn't have many options to exercise if I didn't act quickly before the draft would get me.

Knowing my desires to be a pilot, my father mentioned one evening that he had read in the local newspaper that the Army was looking for aviators for helicopter training. They were asking for men with only a high school diploma. Two years of college were

preferred, but not mandatory.

Enlistment

Feeling the urgency to act in advance of my draft board, I went to an Army Recruiting Center and asked for aptitude testing to see if I would qualify for flight school. They found me well-suited, suggested I would surrender all choice possibilities if drafted, and said they could guarantee me a flight school billet that would follow basic training if I contracted immediately to join through them. Consequently, on 1 April 1968, eight days prior to my draft being up, I enlisted in the U.S. Army for the Warrant Officer Rotary Wing Aviation Course (WORWAC) in what was called the delayed enlistment program. I was allowed to stay in school until the end of the semester and report for Basic Training the day following my last exam.

Finding Mrs. Right

Since the end of my mission I knew that the next step in a purposeful life was marriage. I had intently dated for that purpose and had fasted and prayed about a number of girls during my seventeen months in school before leaving for the military. All answers were unsatisfactory as well as disconcerting, but at least my life appeared to have some purpose with the new military obligation before me. Leaving behind several broken hearts, I was determined to undertake a new beginning. I severed all social ties from a number of courtships I had had and left for the service with a clean slate.

THE FIRST YEAR

Basic Training (BCT)

I boarded a bus in Provo, 27 May, 1968, to go to Salt Lake City's induction center, and was excited to feel that I was back in the mission field. In fact, I took the opportunity to have a missionary discussion with a Jehovah's Witness missionary next to whom I was seated on the bus. It was the spirit of South Brazil returning, and I looked forward to meeting new people in new places and sharing the gospel.

I entered Basic Training (BCT) ready to shed all civilian identity, knowing that a rigorous officer training program and flight school would follow BCT. Instruction from my older brother who had entered a similar Air Force program years earlier -- about how to preparer for what was to come -- was most helpful. I was ready to be 100% Army for the next three years. I knew the training would be competitive and highly regimented, and upon reaching B Company, 5th Battalion, 2nd Basic Training Brigade (BCT) at Fort Polk, Louisiana, I discarded everything I had of civilian attire as soon as the initial uniform issue was given

BCT was a horrendous experience for most soldiers. I was assigned to a company made up of men half from the south side of Chicago and the other half from the east side of Dallas. Many of these men were extremely militant and against the war -- members of

the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), and Black Panthers. Drafted and not happy to be where they were, these men were trapped in something they wanted out of, and a lot of bad things happened as I shall later relate.

During the first barracks meeting with our assigned 'Smokey Bear Hat' DI (Drill Instructor), the first questions he put to the platoon were: "Who has had ROTC experience?" I raised my hand. "Who of you is an Eagle Scout?" I raised my hand again. "Is anyone in this group a Mormon?" I raised my hand for the third time.

Guilty on all three counts I was selected and assigned by the DI to be a squad leader over 15 men. Later, my knowledge of march, drill, and ceremony from ROTC earned me the position of company guide-on. I now held the lead position whenever the entire company was on the move. Where I went, everyone followed . . . except to Church services.

With assigned leadership authority I taught my squad members how to quickly get squared away. Growing up in a home with a retired military father, ROTC, and with Aaronic priesthood leadership experience, I knew basic barracks standards and how to live a tidy, organized life and be fair in handing out assignments to the men. In the service there is "the right way, the wrong way, and the Army way." I was responsible to teach my men the Army way and each knew quickly what was expected and how to work with others. They all soon learned I knew how to do it – from tight bunks to shinny boots.

Garments

My most surprising experience came the second day in basic when, without notice, the 500+ men of our Battalion were herded into a two-block long non-descript building that I soon realized was clothing issue. Not having had time to prepare, I was concerned that, when the command came to "strip to your shorts," I would be the only man standing in temple garments. I thought for a moment about what to do. I didn't have much time to worry. Not wanting to be stark naked, I stood in my garments and decided that the looks the men were giving me I would return in kind.

It was the usual 100+ degrees and 100 percent humidity on that sultry southern Louisiana afternoon and I could hear the whispers, "what's with this guy? He's wearing

long johns in this sweltering heat.” As they checked me out, I returned a look of “what’s the matter with you guys? Why aren’t you in vogue with the latest style of underwear?”

During the next forty-eight hours, some forty to fifty men approached asking why I wore the funny underwear. With little hesitation, I considered it best to tell the truth. There was too much of importance regarding protection and covenants to lay anything aside. I said, “I’m a minister in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and this garment I wear is a priesthood garment.” Very soon the word got around -- “Weeks is a preacher.”

Prayer in an Open Bay Barracks

That evening in the barracks after we had been to clothing issue, I felt like it was time to risk kneeling by the side of my bed after lights out to say my prayers. I look back now and wonder if I was foolhardy or courageous. Nevertheless, my knees hit the floor, and almost immediately the titter and comments could be heard at the other end of the bay. Someone called out, “Hey, Weeks, what cha’ doin’? Did ya loose yer contacts?”

Someone else across the aisle from the caller said, “You know what he’s doing. Leave him alone.”

The next night, the same thing happened. As I got on my knees, someone again offered, “Hey, Weeks, say hello for me, will ya?”

Another response came, “Keep your mouth shut. Leave the man alone.” From the second night on, I never heard another word. Each night that I went to my knees it came to be expected that Preacher Weeks was talking to his boss.

The Bad Boys of Company B

The first week of basic training made it apparent to our cadre that B Company posed some very special problems. The vast majority of the company consisted of militant blacks and draftees and the cadre knew they were training mean, even vicious men. This viciousness was apparent the first weekend we were in our newly assigned barracks.

When we left the reception station with it’s shake down inspections for unauthorized items (knives, guns, pornography, etc.) and sporty new ¼ inch haircuts, lonely fellows with not much to do put a lot of importance on getting to a telephone to connect with loved

ones and home. Military posts never have enough telephone booths, especially in basic training areas. Any time after training hours a number of men, fifteen to twenty deep, could be found in front of each of the limited number of phone booths, waiting their turn to talk to parents or a sweetheart.

Sherrard Phone Home

The number one squad leader in B Company was a militant black named Sherrard. I was second squad leader, and with numbers three and four, worked to develop some cohesiveness in our platoon. Sherrard, however, brought no desirable leadership qualities with him from his housing project. He thought himself to be "real bad", and assumed an arrogance from being number one in his assigned position. He was very demanding and had a lot of bad friends that ran around with him only because they perceived him to be of some importance with his temporary rank.

Sherrard went to a phone booth that first Sunday afternoon and became impatient with the length of the line and his place at the rear. Being quite a tall fellow, and sporting his recently issued rank stripe, he walked to the head of the line, announced to everyone that he was next, told the soldier in the booth that his time had expired, and that he better get off the phone right now so he could use it.

The fellow in the booth, another African American, ignored Sherrard. Given another one or two minutes Sherrard grabbed him, pulled him out of the booth, knocked him about a bit and threw him to the ground. He then stepped inside to make a call. Well before he had finished his conversation, the fellow who had been thrown out of the booth had returned to his platoon area, recruited some helping hands and was back with about ten buddies who returned Sherrard's treatment in kind.

Bleeding and crying, Sherrard came back to our platoon area, recruited almost everyone in the building to return with him, and worked over the previous ten men from the other company. In ten minutes time the escalation hit numbers into the hundreds and a full-blown riot between two companies exploded in the parking lot behind our barracks.

The MP's and the fire department from main post quickly responded with everything they had -- from fire engines and water cannons to German Shepherd dogs to break up the melee.

What I saw as the fight developed horrified me. The men of our company tore the bunk beds apart and, taking the three-foot long posts that separated the upper and lower bunks, crammed metal tent stakes in one end and, using them for shalalies, entered the fight. I sat at the window atop my footlocker and watched everything unfold – two huge waves of men colliding with a ferocity I had never seen. I'd never been in a fight in my life. I didn't move a muscle when the MPs and water cannons rolled in. Five men went to the hospital that afternoon in critical condition. It was later reported that one of them died. Ultimately, one of my company soldiers was sentenced to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to the federal penitentiary for his part in the incident. However, it wasn't Sherrard.

Lord, Save Me From Sheradon

About a month into basic training we were required to sleep with, and always secure our issued M-14 rifles. There was quite a cross-section of characters in my squad, and as squad leader, I took great care to insure that my men were informed well in advance of any duties so they would be ready with all required equipment. Most assignments needed only one man, but sometimes two or three were asked for. All were generally required to report in full gear and be inspection ready. I ran a duty roster from the first day and each man knew the order he would follow. It was somewhat the luck of the draw as to where they went and what they did, some duties being worse than others.

On a particular afternoon, it fell upon a southern fellow by the name of Sheradon, a mouthy and quite immature kid, to pull all-night duty as the CQ (charge of quarters) runner. This trainee was assigned as the errand boy for the officer in charge of the company. The duty ran from 5:00 P.M. until 5:00 A.M. Accordingly, early in the day, I informed Sheradon that it would be his turn for duty that evening and to be ready.

Each training day we were released around 4:15 pm to clean up for dinner, and everyone usually let down by going to the PX to get snacks and "cold drinks" -- more often than not, beer. I specifically warned Sheradon that he not get drunk. To report drunk for duty would be hazardous to his career, I told him. Disregarding the instruction, however, Sheradan came into the barracks about 4:55 to say he was a bit plowed and wasn't going to report. I responded, "Sheradon, it's your turn in the duty cycle and I'm

not sending anyone else. I don't care what condition you're in. You'd better report."

He walked out the door muttering that I wasn't fair and that he wasn't fit for duty. I didn't disagree. Within five minutes he was back in the barracks, mouth in high gear, threatening to kill me. He had been given severe punishment by the company commander. Seeing his drunken condition, the CO had restricted him to the company area for the next month, reduced his pay and given him an Article 15 -- a form of non-judicial military punishment.

Of course, all this was my fault, he argued. Then he announced that he had kept a live M-14 round from the rifle range and, since we were sleeping with our weapons, he was going to use that round and put me away for good. "Don't go to sleep, Weeks, 'cause you ain't goin' to wake up."

Fortunately, Sheradon was at the far end of the barracks and fourteen men of the squad were bunked between us.

That night, as lights went out, my prayer went something like this: "Heavenly Father, I'm worried. Sheradon has said he's going to kill me tonight. If he comes my way will you please wake me so that I can defend myself?"

I closed my prayer, plopped my head on the pillow and I enjoyed a most restful, peaceful night of sleep. I don't believe I'd ever had a better night's sleep.

Morning came. I felt myself to see if I was still alive. During the duty day the greatest tributes I had ever received came one at a time from individuals of my squad. Privately each approached to tell me they had lain awake during the night waiting for Sheradon's feet to hit the floor. Everyone was in agreement to give him a blanket party.

A blanket party is earned when someone refuses to fall in line. It's a peer pressure thing. Contemporaries grab the contrarian, throw a blanket over his head and work him over pretty good. It is usually night work so no one can tell who is putting in the overtime. Fortunately, Sheradon, drunk as he was, quickly went to sleep and the whole thing blew over in the next few days. Counseling came from the other men in the squad who wouldn't put up with his nonsense and told him to get his act together.

Cadre Replacement

Our cadre knew they had a rough bunch of guys to deal with, but all was not entirely right with them, either. After the fourth week of training, the entire cadre with the exception of the CO and two DI's (drill sergeants/instructors) was replaced in hopes that new trainers would move us along faster.

Our CO, Cpt. Neal F. Siebert, was a soldier's soldier. Tall, a fiery redhead, Cpt. Siebert was always out front in our training and a man of great example. However, he may not have known all the character flaws of some of the cadre assigned under him. Some of our trainers were actually busted at the end of the fourth week for running a pot ring that used trainees to make drug runs to Shreveport on weekends. I had wondered at times how a PFC mail clerk could afford a new Pontiac GTO convertible on poor Army pay. It appeared he was the kingpin of the operation and when the cadre changed, the reefer butts commonly found on the ground in our company area during police call, soon disappeared.

Ammon Among the Lamanites

During the ten-week period in basic I felt like a Nephite of the Book of Mormon in the middle of savage Lamanites; a lamb thrown in with a bunch of lions. I felt like I could be easily slaughtered if I wasn't careful. I didn't want to make any enemies, and somehow through it all I managed to make a few friends and have a rapport with most in my platoon. More than once I overheard someone say, "Don't swear – the preacher's here."

As company guide-on I loved to be up front with Capt. Siebert. We got to talk together quite a bit on company marches. I decided I would enjoy the training – camping, hiking, running, shooting, etc. This was far better than Scout Camp. Where else can you get paid for having all this outdoor fun? Regarding the rest of the men in the company, I'm sure Captain Siebert felt like he was trying to herd cats.

The DI's were good at what they did best – harassment and submission. As the men talked, the cadre picked up on what was going around and picked up on the grumbles. Both the men and the cadre expected that, as a minister I would act like one – no drinking, smoking or cussing -- and that I would go to Church on Sunday. There were

few problems with the men. However, it was not so with the DI's.

Cavorting With Questionables

Late one afternoon, as I was returning from a brief meeting with some missionaries assigned to Fort Polk who I regularly encountered on the perimeter road of our company area, a newly assigned DI of no small size called me over for an impromptu inspection and interrogation. He asked to see my wallet, a request I knew to be extra-regular, and as I mildly protested the search, I nonetheless relinquished the asked for item. This DI was a massive black man and former prizefighter. He never swore or spoke above a normal speaking voice. If not obeyed, he spoke even softer and a trainee had to make an extra effort to pick up on his instructions. He had honed his powers of intimidation to a professional fine edge and no one crossed him. In almost a whisper he said; "Gimme dat dare, cheer, traineeeee." He was from the South, no doubt, and proceeded to search my wallet inside and out. He inspected every piece of paper, skowered the entirety of the contents -- except the paper money -- and then handed everything back to me in a pile and without comment walked away.

In the days that followed rumor had it that Weeks was possible CID (Criminal Investigation Division), sent to investigate this basic training unit undercover. I laughed at first, but then thought more about how I must have looked, being seen talking regularly to two fellows in suit clothes, driving a single paint tone unmarked car with black wall tires. At two months short of 23, I was old for a trainee, was the only man out of bed on Sunday mornings by 6:00 a.m. to leave the company area (to go to Church), was in top physical shape (I almost 'maxed' the first PT test the first week of training and beat everyone in the company on the mile run by half a lap), and was an expert shot on the rifle range -- (I was on the BYU rifle team during my two years in AFROTC). I may have "blown my cover" by 'being too good' to be just a trainee. Constant contact with the missionaries was a sure way to maintain the mystique.

The final day of basic training was marked by a parade and review of the troops. Ten weeks of intensive training should have brought everyone to a high level of readiness, discipline, and basic unit skills. Our company wasn't quite there. Most of the men were not proud to wear their uniforms, and many had thrown issued items in the garbage can in protest -- to include prescription glasses, boots, socks, etc, as they packed for their next assignments. During the graduation ceremony many men in the center of the company formation laid down on the grassy parade field instead of standing at attention. They thought they couldn't be seen from the bleachers by the reviewing officials. Some kind of discipline, no?

An hour after parading past the reviewing stand everyone was suppose to return to the company area to receive advance training orders and immediately move out to their next duty stations. Fully two-thirds of B Company's men went AWOL, disappearing over the hill, some never to return until apprehended by federal marshals.

Ft. Polk was known as the back door to Vietnam. With advanced infantry training (AIT) conducted in a swampy lowland area called "Tiger Land", Polk had the reputation for producing the best jungle ready infantry soldiers from the States. The funny thing was that only a handful of men from our company had orders for Tiger Land -- the Army didn't want our guys as trigger pullers. Over 90% were given orders to "cooks, clerks and jerks" schools, with fifteen of the remainder of us anxious to get on the bus with a billet for flight school, half a days bus ride away in Texas. I found, when it was all over, that I enjoyed basic training. Someone told me before I left home that it would be like a big Boy Scout camp, except there would be lots more fun things to do and stuff that would blow up. Indeed, the training was the fun part. The hard part was the unexpected things from the other men.

Surprisingly, when basic ended, not only did I receive an accelerated promotion to Pvt. E-2, but I was voted Outstanding Trainee by the cadre of B-5-2 cycle, with a personal "attaboy" letter from Capt. Siebert. Few were there to see Capt. Siebert hand me the certificate and trophy. He took a moment to talk one on one and congratulate me, gave me unexpected appreciation, and a warm goodbye with a hope we would see each other again. That meant a lot to me. Little did I know that I would meet him again in the thick

of things on a fire base in far away I Corps, Vietnam.

There were fifteen of us in B Company who were already pre-qualified candidates with orders for flight school. We returned quickly after the final parade and review and were ready to leave in the early afternoon for Warrant Officer Rotary Wing Aviation Course (WORWAC), located at Fort Wolters, in Mineral Wells, Texas, 40 miles west of Fort Worth.

As I climbed on the bus I took little pride in my past awards and accomplishments from BCT. Warrant Officer Candidate School loomed before me, reportedly many times harder than basic training. I buried my trophy deep in my duffel bag and didn't sew my new rank on lest I be singled out upon arrival at Fort Wolters.

AIT Flight Officer Candidate School (WORWAC)

The principal objective of WORWAC was not to produce helicopter pilots. The training objective was to first make an officer of the individual, with pilot training of secondary importance.

For twenty-three weeks at Ft. Wolters, each Warrant Officer Candidate (WOC) had to be prepared for inspection twenty-four hours a day. Everything had to be in its proper place, in like new condition, and there could be no item that was not an issue item. Spit, polish, prescribed order, and discipline were demanded not only of the candidate and his person, but his living quarters as well. Cleanliness standards were so high you could literally eat off of any surface in our old World War II barracks. You could bounce a quarter a foot off anyone's bedcover. Shoes and boots were not only spit shined, but had to be lined up in perfect rank beneath the bunk. Spit shines on all footwear surfaces were mandatory and sacred, as it took great time and effort to produce a glassy sheen. No one could be found with dirty laundry under any circumstances. Soiled articles had to be bundled and turned in to the laundry pickup point immediately after use. If you broke a sweat, you changed uniforms, sometimes two or three times a day, and had to plan disposal accordingly. My laundry bill was in the hundreds of dollars during the twenty-three weeks at Ft. Wolters.

I was, of course, not authorized to have long-handled underwear. I am grateful that I

took my training during the summer months, principally because each time I felt the need to have a clean change of underwear, I could go to the latrine moments before lights out, take off my garments, shower, wash out the underwear by hand, put it on wet, and climb into bed. Hurray for nylon.

Every effort was made by the cadre to load us with so many housekeeping and personal grooming and conduct standards that we could not possibly get everything done. We were forced to make decisions about each requirement and what the repercussions would be if we failed to do a particular thing. Some things had to be done. Other things must be done, and some things should be done if we wanted to go on Sunday pass.

Toiletries had to be used everyday. The soap in ones soap dish had to be used, but before being returned to the display in the footlocker, it had to be wiped dry, and no soap film was allowed in the dish. Our inspecting Tactical Officer (TAC) would come often and at any hour view the displays of living essentials. Some candidates would shower without soap and avoid the soap film problem altogether, only to be caught by an inspector who would carve his initial in the bottom of the soap bar. Unless the soap was used and the initial washed out, the WOC received a demerit, which in turn could restrict him to the company area the following weekend.

Ninth and Tenth WOC Companies were housed in old World War II barracks. They had the old type red sheet linoleum flooring that was not conducive to a shine. But with tremendous attention, using 'classified' skills, and the desire to improve the appearance of the place, we put a wax coat on the floor that was so shiny you could stand at attention, look down, open your mouth, and count the fillings in your teeth.

WOCs had to accomplish all of these miracles using only authorized materials, and the floor wax the Army provided would turn any shiny surface dull. Consequently, we had to be very expert at hiding contraband materials so they would not be found. To get caught with flaming Johnson's Paste Wax would be grounds for our entire platoon to be sent out the door. I was amazed at how many materials could be discarded at the last minute down a toilet. Even cans, cut up, could be flushed. We hid some materials more than a block away from our barracks in the surrounding flora.

In the fourth week we had an Inspector General's (IG) inspection. The entire company received only one derogatory comment. The floors in all of the buildings were too shiny

and wax laden. This constituted a fire hazard as far as the IG was concerned. When the IG left, the requirements stayed the same.

The name of the game was merits/demerits. Anything out of place of your person or property was awarded demerits. Merits were achievable but rarely obtained. Great performance by an individual simply became the new standard for everyone else. I only heard of one merit ever received, and that was for a perfect set of polished uniform brass of a WOC who was a former E-5 Drill Instructor before coming to flight school. He made his polished brass look like molten gold.

Each class was identified by a specific color of baseball cap. 10th WOC's color was white. Even if I donned a brand new cap every day, there was never an occasion that I would be able to earn a merit. Nonetheless, the cap would be pure white every hour of the day, or demerits would flow by the minute if it were smudged in the least. We of 10th WOC learned that the standard of color was paramount, and met the standard by bathing our hats in white liquid shoe polish. Having learned the trick, I was able to wear my last hat for over five weeks. It was stiff as a baseball batter's helmet when I left Ft. Wolters.

Demerits forced everyone to pay attention to detail. The amount of "excess" demerits diminished each week, and excess demerits had to be worked off in full uniform, to include raincoat, with every button buttoned, marching on the parade field in the hot Texas sun on week ends. . . one hour marching to erase one demerit. It was common knowledge that past WOC Candidates had perished from heat stroke while working off demerits on the 9th and 10th WOC parade field.

Moving Up On the Hill?

The extreme regimentation was not to last forever. The initial standards the Army wanted to impress upon WOC's was supposed to be achieved in the first four weeks of pre-flight training. Every new WOC had to pass through 9th or 10th WOC companies. These two pre-flight companies were assigned to weed out all individuals who did not meet minimum officer standards. After four weeks of grueling introductory training, WOC's were to then move to flight training companies located nearer the flight line (on the hill) where regimentation requirements were more relaxed and the living quarters more modern.

I have never been known to be a lucky person. As my luck would have it, 10th WOC Company became my permanent home for the entire twenty-three weeks of training. The Fort Wolters company assignment policy changed for the first time in flight school history with my cycle. The new policy was that the company you started with would be your home for the entire twenty-three week training cycle. Hence, 10th WOC Company (white hats) retained its strictest military standards through our entire stay at Fort Wolters.

None But The Brave

Class 69-9 started with over 500 warrant officer candidates and graduated 251. Most of them were washed out in the first four weeks, with some sent packing later for infractions as simple as signing their name incorrectly on the mess hall roster. In the tenth week of training one candidate thought signing for every meal ludicrous, penned his name Micky Mouse, was discovered and dismissed from the program within an hour. Others would wash out later for poor flight performance, or give up for lack of sleep and because things were just too hard.

We were to be respectful and respected gentlemen, and then, if we happened to become qualified aviators through academic excellence and acquired controls dexterity, we would receive our wings the day after commissioning as Warrant Officers.

The Church and Flight School

Church was my primary motivator. I knew that in order to be able to go to the branch in Weatherford, Texas, located some twenty miles away, I would have to be found as spotless as possible during the week and worthy of a pass.

Previous experience came to my rescue. I fell in line very quickly, more so than the majority of the other men. I had to have a pass. My first Sunday at Church brought a call from the Branch President to be the Aaronic Priesthood Teachers Quorum Advisor. I couldn't mess up. Many weekends I was the only one who had a pass, something I found was soon discovered by other candidates -- jealous because they weren't allowed to even see their wives.

A number of the candidates were married. With too many demerits they were restricted and not allowed out of the barracks. They had to work off with extra duties the demerits they had acquired during the week. My absence made me a target of much of their frustration and near hated when I returned because I always had a pass.

I'll relate one particular story here. Being again the only Mormon in my Flight School Company and having "a church reputation" from basic training that followed me into 10th WOC, I was a target of opportunity for diversions from a small click of heathens. When there was nothing else to do, the men of this click liked to harass Candidate Weeks. They would sing dirty songs and tell filthy stories, and their activities targeted me to raise my ire. Once or twice I was accommodating – with the ire. I was goaded more and more to say, as one candidate put it, "just one bad word." I fumed on the bus one day and told everyone that they were being trained to be "officers and gentlemen", but from their actions they would never make the grade. However, to swear I could never do, and I impatiently bore the taunting.

His Wonders to Perform – Roosevelt T. Wilson, Jr.

Many of the flight school candidates were prior service and combat veterans. They brought a lot of experience to our barracks to organize and aid in common tasks, but they would also not reveal individual talents and secrets of personal appearance in an effort to stand out from their peers and gain leadership positions. Such was Candidate Roosevelt T. Wilson, Jr. -- a sergeant E-6 when he arrived at 10th WOC. He was immediately assigned as the candidate company first sergeant.

Wilson was a soft-spoken, moderate height, black man with a chest full of good conduct medals. I don't know if he had combat time as yet. If he was of above average intelligence, he didn't show it. He had, however, a sense of unusual military polish whenever we marched somewhere, as he called out cadence with unmistakable experience and authority. Otherwise, he seemed a person of regimented military charisma rather than one who had to work hard at spotless performance. He seemed to have been a military character from the moment of his birth. A quiet man, he held his position of authority

mildly, with dependable steadiness and dignity. Both Wilson and the Candidate Company Commander Donald Jones, himself an E-6 or 7 from Special Forces, were from my same platoon and barracks. Both of these men held their candidate leadership positions for the entire 23 weeks at Ft. Wolters.

Solo

Without doubt the first and most exciting event of flight school was to solo. If ease began to set in with flight controls and aircraft handling, it was immediately erased and replaced with terror when the instructor pilot suddenly stepped out of the aircraft and said: “take her around the pattern a couple of times, and don’t break anything.” Many a rotary wing aviator has offered the prayer: “Please, God, don’t let me screw up.” You knew your life was literally in your hands and it could easily be taken if you let the machine get out of control. “Lord, I can get it into the air – it’s just the landing that I’ll need help with.”

Solo completed, the joy for those new pilots would be celebrated at the Mineral Wells Holiday Inn swimming pool. The first time flyers would be lifted from the bus, carried on the shoulders of other candidates through the arch of embedded rotor blades at poolside that was labeled, “through these portals pass the greatest helicopter pilots in the world”, and deposited ceremoniously in the water – properly baptized into that fearless group of unique airmen who were not just pilots (anyone can fly a plane), but helicopter aviators. Knowing that they could now not only command a craft that by nature wants to come apart in its’ effort to beat the air into submission, but they had done something even more important – they had conquered their greatest fears in this accomplishment and encountered newfound power in themselves.

Flying a helicopter is not something that just anybody can do. The earlier you soloed, the higher you ranked in your peer group.

Candidate Wilson and I soloed the same day and had reserved front row seats in the bus for the return trip from the Stage Field. As the bus pulled up at the Holiday Inn, I noticed that Wilson showed no excitement for what was about to happen. He wasn’t taking anything out of his flight suit pockets or removing his boots. In fact, he was almost grey and pale, shivering in the hot Texas afternoon.

“Aren’t you excited to take this swim?” I asked.

“I don’t know how to swim,” he blurted.

Though Wilson and I had never interacted with each other to this point in the course, I held him in deep respect for many things previously mentioned, but abruptly felt like I had found a hole in his person. How could anyone reach his level of experience in the military and not know how to swim? I guessed that he had never been a Boy Scout, gone to camp, been to the beach. . . In the high spirits of this occasion I knew he really needed something. I put my hand on his shoulder and said: “Don’t worry about this. I’ll take care of you.”

Quickly hands grabbed us, lifted us, and carried us through the rotor portals. I was tossed in face up and landed in the water on my back and watched Wilson struggle in the air and land almost flat on his face. He was still wearing his boots. I fought to the surface and looked to find him. He was a foot under water with only his hands reaching furtively upward. I grabbed him and rolled him to a tow position and started paddling for the bank. Some of the men of keener sense knew something was wrong and were quick to get him out of the water with little loss of his military bearing. He thought he’d swallowed half the pool, looked up at me and offered a sincere “Thanks”. I believe at that moment he thought that I had saved his life.

Some weeks passed before we crossed paths again in our training, this time assigned to fly together on a night cross-country navigation mission. It was a no moon night in the west Texas vacant countryside and there was no room for error on this time-distance-heading problem. I was to fly first hour long period, report by radio to a “field site”, and Wilson was to fly the reverse course back to home base.

I nailed all three legs of the course outbound, reporting to a single light in a black void at the destination of my course. I loved navigation and felt particularly good that I had performed well with Wilson. On the return flight home, however, he had some course troubles. More importantly he got dangerously low on altitude, but finally recovered when the well lit heliport at flight end came into view, with no harm done.

Wilson knew he didn’t do well, and was somewhat shook. He touched down cross-wind when parking the aircraft on the ramp pad and began the shut down procedure by rolling off the throttle. He shut off the main fuel lever and waited for the carburetor and fuel line to empty and the engine to quit. I asked if he intended to leave the aircraft parked cross-wind, to which he responded by rolling up the throttle and raising the

collective pitch to lift our craft into the air. I jammed my hand down on the collective and barked at him that we weren't going anywhere until he got the fuel back on so that we were air worthy. My precision met with his position in the moment, and he backed down, went through the checklist to correct his error, repositioned, and completed the shut down. His error was critical enough to bust him on the mission were I to report it.

As we walked toward Operations, I felt like a ball player who had just kicked his coach. Flying is always forgiving as long as you don't hit the ground hard enough to break things. We were back safe, and I wasn't too concerned about it unless I was assigned to fly with Wilson again. That probably wouldn't ever happen. Quietly he asked if I would not report what had happened that night. For a second time he looked at me the same way he did when he'd just been pulled out of the swimming pool after solo. I knew he needed something, and I gave him the assurance that I'd say nothing.

Candidate Owens

There was one particular fellow by the name of Candidate Owens, from Virginia. Tall, lanky, having about three inches of greater height on him than I did, He was a Southern Baptist who respected the fact that I was a "minister", but was always very judgmental of my actions. Owens was the leader of the small click of other candidates who made sport of me as mentioned before.

Characteristically, one evening during study hours, Owens appeared at my cubical, threw his bible down on my desk and sneered: "Weeks, prove to me that fornication is against the Word of God." I thought it a rather pointless challenge, but produced my Ricks Ready Reference from my missionary bible, looked up a few scriptures, noted them on a piece of paper, handed his bible back with the references, and suggested he study the topic for himself and come back with his own conclusions. I certainly could not convince him of the point, but perhaps these few passages would. He never returned to give me feedback on this or any other scriptural topic.

From then on I was under constant over-watch by Owens. He went out of his way to

see that I always came up short in living the letter of the law. He seemed to take great pleasure in finding my deficiencies and attempted many times to get me run out of the program. Fortunately the TAC officer intervened in dismissal cases, and my TAC's sense of justice prevailed over Candidate Owens's innuendos and accusations.

Candidate Owens's arrogance went before him, though, and was observed by all the men in the company. He seemed confident that he could expect me to be a Christian no matter what he did, and that I would always turn the other cheek. As we marched from place to place, Owens would position himself behind me in the first platoon formation whenever opportunity allowed. I mentioned previously how sacred spit shines were. Owens would very carefully kick me in the heels as we marched, his scuff marks bringing the possibility of demerits for me. He would do it only with a frequency that I could still surmise to be clumsiness or an accident on his part. He did this trick a number of times for which I never protested.

The Shameless Fight

As we stood outside the post theater just two days before completing our primary training, an incident took place that became his finale. We were awaiting the command to march into the theater by files. I was the number two person in the second squad and Owens was right behind me. As we waited, one of Owens' buddies reached over and took the pencil out of my flight jacket sleeve pocket. For twenty-three weeks we had all learned the importance of being prepared. If anyone lacked, it was always to his own expense, with demerits for any over-sight. No one went anywhere without a pen and pencil. Why was mine being lifted?

As I turned to the fellow and grabbed his hand, I said, "Candidate, if you only need a writing instrument, I'll provide you with one once we get inside. But if we are filling out a computer evaluation form that requires pencil, I'll need mine."

Candidate Owens, quick to intervene, railed: "You two-faced. . . (he started every charge of my shortcomings with this moniker). You call yourself a Christian. If it were me, I'd give the man a pencil." Owens, of course, failed to produce his own pencil for his buddy, but was effective in bringing judgment upon me.

As we did a left face to file into the building, Owens came around with his right foot on my blind side and kicked me in the side of my boot -- nothing unobvious about it. I turned, came square in his face and said: "Owens, don't ever touch me again."

"Oh, wow," he retorted.

I marched three steps forward in a column of files from the left, and Owens kicked me in the heels all three steps. Turning again, I grabbed him at his throat by his fatigue shirt collar, ready and wondering what would happen next. He obliged by throwing a right which grazed my left cheek, and the fight was on.

I tightened up my left-hand grip at his throat and pulled his head right down into my belly. He now could not throw any punches as he was looking squarely at my boots. I began to work over the back of his head and the top of his shoulders with my right hand.

Surprisingly, I felt calmness. He who knows all things had seen my patience and I felt that it was time for acceptable retribution.

For a quick moment the thought crossed my mind that all I'd have to do was bring my knee straight up through his face, and it would all be over.

A guiding voice spoke explicit instructions to me: "No, Glen, don't do it. If you send him to the hospital or hurt him seriously, both of you will be eliminated from the program and your future will be frustrated."

I obeyed.

As I threw punch after punch across his back, my major concern was a hope that someone would drag us apart soon and stop the fight.

But it was not to be. All the time I punched Owens, the rest of the men side-stepped us and filed by, one by one, to enter the building. Relief did not come until the last two men, the Candidate Company Commander and the Candidate First Sergeant Roosevelt T. Wilson, Jr., stepped in to break us up.

You Will Report

I was quite winded by the time we were separated, but knew that I had been directed in every punch.

"Both of you report to my office when we return to barracks," came the Candidate

Company Commander's order.

As I entered the building, trying to feel bad for having had the first fight of my life, one of the other fellows who had been somewhat on the periphery of Owens group motioned to me. Catching my attention he said, "Weeks, it's about time you did something."

In the next few hours many patted me on the back for giving Owens what he deserved. It gave me confidence, as I had weathered the storm for nearly twenty-three weeks but had my moment in the end.

Owens and I reported to our candidate company leaders after our course review to account for our actions. Little was said to me, while Owens received a heavy rebuke from the Candidate Company First Sergeant. I walked out knowing I had surely been repaid for my attention to Candidate First Sergeant Wilson and grateful for earlier events in our training. Patients ultimately brings joys, but only for those who are willing to "...wait upon the Lord" for it. Candidate First Sergeant Wilson was His stand-in that day. Fortunately, Owens was going to Fort Hunter-Stewart in Georgia, for advanced phase training, and I was going to Ft. Rucker, Alabama. We never encountered each other again.

Few Ways to Escape

Before bringing my Ft. Wolters story to a close I should relate a little about emotional reprieves that came from time to time that made the extreme regimentation bearable. The only time a candidate could really be alone during 10th WOC was either after lights-out (which some used under bed blankets and flashlight to polish brass or write letters), or walking to the mess hall in the early morning after first formation. The training day always started two hours before first light, and many times walking to breakfast at "o'dark-thirty", I asked myself why I was here and if it was all worth it. WOC school was the hardest thing I had ever done in my life. But, I knew I wanted to fly. Everything that was going on was just payment I had to make to get qualified in what I wanted to do.

The biggest difficulty of Ft. Wolters wasn't the training. It was the loneliness – the social quarantine away from anyone who thought like I did or had the same values. No visitors were allowed for the first twelve weeks, except for married men who could see their wives long enough to exchange laundry "if" they could find the time between 4:30

and 5:00 pm -- Tuesdays and Thursdays only -- if our bus returned in time from training and they could run fast enough to the WOC Lounge. I remember how thrilled I was after three and a half months at Wolters to spend one or two hours on a Saturday afternoon at a post picnic area with my sister Myrna and her family. They had driven down from Denton, Texas to see me. I loved being with them. I was apprehensive at first and self-conscious in my starched fatigues and tight military bearing hair cut. I was still sporting a first week quality haircut that had all WOC candidates looking like cancer ward patients. Those few hours with my sister and her family provided a needed boost to keep me going. There is nothing like the power of family, made more special because they had come some distance just to see me.

The Solo Party

The only group departure from our first three months' training isolation was the solo party. Held at the end of the eighth week, this event allowed for college girls from a women's college in Denton, to be bussed in for four hours of dancing and drinking with the rowdy, celebrating candidates. For the first time we felt deserving. We had earned our candidate flight wings and almost felt like pilots. Most of the girls seemed familiar with our setting and the festive function that repeated regularly with each flight school class -- every two or three weeks. Most of them came for the free liquor, lonely guys and a raucous time.

I didn't go to the party for the first two hours knowing there would be little of interest there for me. I finally made a token appearance to sip a seven-up with a cherry in it, giving some to think that I had broken down and was drinking a Tom Collins or some such thing. I did find a sober girl to dance with in the last hour and learned that she was a minister's daughter and knew my brother-in-law who was a professor at her college. I had a forty-five minute social life with her and put her on the bus thankful that she was different from the rest of the crowd and a wonderful breath of fresh air.

Encouraged to Go to Church

Sunday church meeting attendance was encouraged of all candidates. Officers are to

be gentlemen and have some spiritual qualities. Of course, you had to have few enough demerits to get out of the company area in order to enjoy the break that church services provided. Most denominations held services in the Post Chapel that was just a block from 10th WOC area. But for some candidates the chapel could have been a hundred miles away. They had too many demerits to be allowed out of the company area. The nearest LDS services, however, were 20 miles away and posed the additional problem of finding transportation to get there and back.

The association with the members of the Weatherford, Texas, Latter-Day Saint Branch proved to be an unbelievable weekly escape for four or five WOC's from different companies, who, once discovered by branch members, were looked after with every kindness that could be lavished upon us. Not only was the Branch filled with Texans and missionaries, but Army servicemen of every rank and skill who knew what we were going through.

When we all came to Church as brothers and sisters, I always had to ask who others were and what they did. WOC's were required to be in uniform off post, but even so, our hair cuts gave us away within 100 miles of Ft. Wolters. Otherwise, I could never know if I was in the presence of a member of great rank or importance.

I was taken to church by a CW2 and his wife and kids on numerous weekends, only to find out that he was a dreaded TAC Officer in another WOC Company who not only was defanged and pleasant on weekends, but who, with his family, threw a surprise birthday party for me after Church when he learned that morning on the way to Church that it was my twenty-third birthday.

On another occasion a new arrival candidate was worried about whether it was allowable for him to leave post to go to church when offered a ride into Weatherford. His escort told him: "Don't worry about a thing, Candidate. If I say it's alright for you to go to church, it's alright. Hop in."

The young WOC later learned that his chauffeur was a full bird Colonel who was Commandant of Ft. Wolter's Flight School.

Mama Baker's Family

It was the Church that also brought "Mama" Marjorie Baker into the life of every WOC.

Mama Baker and her four kids went out of their way to adopt every flight school candidate into their family. No matter how we got to Church in Weatherford, Mama nearly always took us home for dinner at her place near Lake Weatherford. Before we went back to the base we got as close to normal as one could get from exercise as a member of the Baker Family.

The first Sunday I escaped Wolters to Church I met another candidate in my 10th WOC Preflight Company I had not encountered before. Norman H. Bloomfield of Ramah, New Mexico was a sparkling young man who grabbed me after Church and announced that we were going to Mama Baker's. Norm and I had bonded instantly with our signature haircuts and pre-flight tales of doom and gloom. Norm had met the Baker family some weeks earlier and told me I had an invitation to dinner. Without fanfare, the adoption was formalized when I put my feet under the table that memorable afternoon.

In the third week of training another candidate showed up at Church from a newly formed 8th WOC (gray hats) company. His name was John W. Wilcox, from Sacramento, California. Being two weeks (one training cycle) senior to John, I felt needed and briefed him weekly about training he was going to get in his next cycle. I would turn over all my maps, etc., to him to cut his work load somewhat so we could spend more escape time together at Baker's.

John began to tell me about the romance developing between Norm and Becky Baker, and that Norm was having second thoughts about staying in flight school. When 10th WOC candidates arrived a week early for our cycle to start, I jumped at the chance to take leave until our class commenced. Norm did not. He was consequently put through a week of pure hell along with about twenty-two other fellows. When I returned from leave, there were only seven of the twenty-two left to start pre-flight training. Norm lasted only another four weeks, and electively resigned. But before he left, he and Becky were engaged, and Norm took it upon himself to find out what had become of Papa Baker.

Norman Bloomfield's Vietnam Mission

When WOC's washed out of flight school, they were usually sent to a combat arms school to become infantry or artillery qualified. Norm became an RTO – radio telephone operator, assigned initially to work with the 101st Airborne Division out of Bien Hoa, (Three

Corps) outside of Saigon in the southern part of Vietnam. Working in a rear area assignment gave him time to do some searching for Papa Baker.

Some three years prior to my flight school experience, Mama Bakers' husband, working as a helicopter mechanic at Ft. Wolters, had asked to be assigned to Vietnam as a civilian mechanic. He subsequently estranged himself from his family. Seldom was financial support sent home from their father, and why he didn't want to come home became a mystery to everyone. It didn't take long for WOCs in the Weatherford Branch to realize that what the Baker Family was inviting us to each Sunday was a sacrifice of their last 'measure of meal'. It became easy to spend our money on groceries to make sure we always brought more to their table than we ate. We WOC's came more for the family than the food. When Norm became a prospective member of the family, he was determined that perhaps his feelings about leaving flight school were driven by a higher mission of getting to Vietnam to find Papa Baker.

Fortunately, Norm was assigned to a rear support area upon reaching Vietnam. Unfortunately, he found Papa Baker living contrary to the kingdom and his covenants. He was able to write home to the family his first hand report, allowing the family to pursue closure with their separate lives. That mission ended, however, did not bring a finale to my relationship with Norman Bloomfield. Something more than fate would bring us together in Vietnam some months later.

“For Some It Is Given To Know . . .”

When I left school for the military, I wiped the slate of social attachments clean, to make a new start. However, there was one frustrating exception that hunted me. This girl had skills as a military brat. Let me set the stage for this story.

I returned to BYU after my mission in South Brazil and I was reenrolled in Air Force ROTC, safe with a deferment from the draft. Career oriented cadets joined the Arnold Air Society that had a sister service called Angel Flight. To most cadets, the members of Angel Flight appeared to be aspiring wives for future Air Force officers, and a number of MRS. recognitions could be expected during any given year.

I dated a number of girls on campus, and eventually dated one more than all the others. I will simply refer to her as “Heather”. Heather was a military brat who had come

to BYU because of considerable influence from her parents, because of its' high moral standards and student code of conduct. The family was very strong in another faith, and her father was serving the final years of his professional Service career.

Heather was taken in quickly by my family. My dad was especially warm to her, giving extra attention because she was not a member of the Church. Up for the missionary challenge, I was very interested in teaching her the gospel, but soon found that she knew the *Book of Mormon* as well as I did. What I could not understand was why she didn't have a testimony. She said she had prayed, but there was no answer.

Something that created more than just a missionary interest for me was the fact that Heather and I thought alike. I had never experienced anything like this before. In an environment (BYU) where everyone was contemplating marriage, we were somewhat pushed into the spotlight in the ROTC group as the next expected couple to announce an engagement. Heather's frustration was that she knew she could not marry me unless it was in the temple. For that to happen would mean she would have to have a testimony, be baptized, wait a year, and I would have to love her as a wife, not as a sister. Loving her as a sister was easy. My frustration was that I could get no closer to her than that.

When I left Air Force ROTC and, after one more semester, went off to Basic Training, we were both locked in a stale-mated relationship, and parted almost inimical to one another.

When I first prayed about Heather to ask the Lord to give answer to her prayers about the Church, I early on received an answer: "Heather will one day be baptized, Glen, but don't worry about it . . . and DO NOT tell her." A puzzling answer at best.

All through Basic Training I knew that Heather's home was not that far away, and felt I needed to visit with her for the sake of her testimony. Numbers of times opportunities would come for a three day pass, if I could perform in exceptional fashion. Captain Siebert promised three day passes to anyone who "maxed" the PT test when we ran for record scores. I prayed: "Heavenly Father, I've done extra running and should do well. If I am to visit Heather, help me run to get full points in the race and obtain a pass."

I finished a full lap ahead of everyone else, only to hear my time called out as six seconds too slow for full points. The next man who finished was only "eight" seconds too slow, but a full lap behind me. I then knew that no one would max the test. Perhaps a timer's mistake? I didn't think so.

When we went to the rifle range for “record fire”, the CO again promised that the top five shooters would receive three day passes. My prayer was a repeat of the earlier one I had offered about the PT test. I shot a sixty-seven out of seventy possible score, only to be bested by six higher scores, purchased by shooters from their scorers for \$50 to \$100 each – men who were desperate to get off post at any cost for a few days. Two of the men wore glasses that had ‘Coke bottle’ lenses, and the exercise did not allow anyone to wear glasses when shooting for record. Even Sherrard bested me, and he had never fired a rifle before coming to Basic. He paid \$100 to his scorer for a sixty-eight, only to be sixth in line of shooters better (richer) than he was.

I had an answer, but not the desired one, though I shot the top “true” score of the day.

After basic training, when our bus arrived at Fort Wolters a full week before the next pre-flight class was to start, I knew I had my chance to visit Heather. When I called her to see if it was all right to visit, she received a reluctant approval from her parents, and I was on the next plane out of Dallas.

The San Antonio World Exposition was going on during the summer of 1968, and my parents had visited it, and the military post where my dad had served in an Army Headquarters. They later made contact with Heather and traveled to visit her and meet her parents. My subsequent visit heralded something ominous for her parents who were sure something major must be up for their daughter and me. We, therefore, had little time together, unless it be for about one hour during my last evening when we were sent to fetch groceries. In her family car we parked at a quiet place. We talked, but fewer than a dozen words were spoken as we read each other’s thoughts. I wanted to kneel in the car seat and ask for her testimony. She wanted something else – perhaps a greater commitment from me, I felt. Frustrated again, I left her home and departed the next day for Love Field, Dallas, and flight school. We parted as we had two and a half months before, stalemated.

So many times my oldest brother’s thought came to mind when he quoted the Doctrine and Covenants 46:13-14: “To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that He was crucified for the sins of the world. To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful.”

For over a year since meeting Heather I didn’t think it fair that she would only be

“. . . given to believe . . .” rather than know and have a testimony of the gospel. I had never experienced anything in missionary work like this before.

Preflight and soloing took every minute of every day, until about mid October, when I again thought to call Heather. To do so, I would have to take great risk, and steal away from the barracks in the middle of the night to a phone booth across the street that was restricted from use. The phone call preceded letter writing, which escalated to weekly writing intervals. Again the uncanny mind reading behaviors manifest themselves. We both wrote each other on Sunday. What questions Heather asked in her letters would already be answered in mine that would arrive Wednesday of that same week.

In Mine Own Due Time

Sometime in mid November, while writing my ‘regular’ letter, the Spirit prompted me again that “. . . not only will Heather be baptized one day, but you should now write and tell her that she will.” Excitedly I penned the words, hoping that barriers and frustrations would somehow melt away.

Nothing seemed to change.

We agreed as Christmas of that year drew near that we would meet again while in transit – I was flying out of Dallas, home to Salt Lake City, through Denver, and she would be going home from Provo, through Denver also.

The two hours we spent in the Denver airport were as fruitless as any previous visits. We couldn’t get further than an agreement to disagree. Home for the holidays, sporting almost perceptible hair, I ventured out little other than to date a long time girl friend once or twice before returning to advanced helicopter training at Ft. Rucker, Alabama, at the beginning of the New Year.

Fort Rucker WORWAC

On 8 January, 1969, I reported to Fort Rucker, Alabama, 1st Warrant Officer Candidate Company, and as a senior WOC, enjoyed a relief from open barracks life and the strict standards of Ft. Wolters. At Rucker men were assigned two to a room and expected to live tidy lives. Even though the buildings were very old, we were seldom inspected, and

the TAC officers and cadre took on more of a role as mentors, rather than adversaries. We were treated as professionals in training and finally allowed to have decent haircuts. Few fell out of the program unless it was because of flight deficiencies.

Cars were prohibited at Ft. Wolters, but allowed when we moved to Rucker. I purchased a near new '67 Mustang from a recently returned Vietnam Vet in the Weatherford Branch, a Warrant Officer pilot who had the car tricked out with extra gauges, etc., which I drove to my new duty station in Alabama. The car became a wonderful means to occasionally escape the post and visit and participate in church activities in my new branch in Ozark.

With a car I was able to serve as a Home Teacher. Additionally, I was surprised to be called to be the Gospel Doctrine instructor to a class that was all married couples of mostly high ranking Army officers. One of those officers was the Commandant of Flight Instruction for all of Fort Rucker. His name was Colonel Hugh McDonald. I was made his Home Teacher, and was called to serve without a companion. Col. McDonald was to become a miracle maker for me in two incidents that will be related later.

Unfortunately, in all of my flight school experience, I never found a Warrant Officer Candidate who showed any interest in the gospel. I did assist local missionaries at BCT, in teaching one young man from another Basic Training Company who was baptized at Ft. Polk. However, knowing that most all WOC's were bound for Vietnam after receiving their wings, gave me hope that some might experience a spiritual awakening of some sort, and at least inquire about the Church. It did not happen at Ft. Wolters, nor did it happen at Ft. Rucker.

At Rucker, we learned instrument flying, and then transitioned into the Huey, UH-1 helicopter to learn combat flying and field operations. The Huey would be the service craft for most graduates who were Vietnam bound. Graduation day came 4 May, 1969, when we were presented Warrant Officer bars, anti-climactic to receiving our wings the next day.

Finding 'Lovely Lady'

Ever since age thirteen I had been praying for two things: what should I be when I grow up, and bless my wife, keep her safe, and help me to be the quality young man she would want. Help me to know her when I meet her.

My Patriarchal blessing told me to let my heart be at ease as to my major concern (profession), and that “the time will come, . . . when you will be able to go to the House of the Lord and be sealed to a lovely lady, one of your own choosing, for time and all eternity.”

I had to say I was dissatisfied with my blessing, even disappointed with the thought that I could marry someone ‘of my own choosing’. I had always considered that the only marriage requirement for me would be that I would have my Father’s blessings – both of them. My earthly dad was the easy sell because he liked most every girl I dated. How could I ever come to know a girl well enough to ask for an eternal bond if it were not for the confirmation of my Heavenly Father? It was His blessing I wanted. Eternity lasts a long time. I objected to that part about “. . . of your own choosing.”

It had been more than a small frustration for me since returning home from my mission to find my “lovely lady”. I had kept my ‘hooks’ in the water, making every effort to find a catch, but it just wasn’t happening. My dating list was not a short one – 47 since my mission to be exact, (I have the list to this day) and I had seriously fasted and prayed about more than eight of those girls in the search process.

Three weeks before graduation from Ft. Rucker, I wrote a girl who had always been a steady friend for years – the one I had a few dates with during Christmas leave. I wrote that we had never talked about marriage, and would she like to see what Army life was like, as I intended to make the military and aviation my career. If she wanted to fly to Alabama, I’d pick up all the expenses from Ft. Rucker to home, and we’d invest some time together. She was quick to catch a plane out of Salt Lake City.

I housed this young lady off post with John Wilcox and his wife, and we went to the graduation parties, etc., after she pinned my bars and wings on me. Starting for home, we over-nighted with friends and family on each leg of our trip. Congratulatory comments came from everyone that thought we were well suited for each other. A lovely girl – BUT -- I knew there was no answer or confirmation from my Heavenly Father. I knew the girl I had just spent more than two weeks with at Ft. Rucker and driving across the country from Alabama, was not the one.

We got home on a Sunday morning after over-nighting with her parents in Vernal. I took her to church, took her to her apartment, kissed her goodbye, and knew it was over.

There was nothing left to do except to wait for my departure date of 5 June.

My little sister (five years my junior) was getting married June 5th. That would leave me the “last” in my family of eight to find a mate. I wasn’t sure I would feel bad if I missed her wedding . . . “because of orders.” My last home teaching visit with Col. McDonald’s family brought the wedding date up, whereupon he said not to worry about this. He would get me a leave extension. The orders were on my bed two days later. I couldn’t object. But there was more yet to come from Col. McDonald.

Despair

At this point, however, I began to feel that perhaps the only remaining destiny for me was to give my life for my country. I had never been more despondent. I had readied myself, was trained in a career skill and self-sustaining, but there seemed to be no purpose for my life other than what I was imagining could happen to me in combat.

A New Commission

With this sinking feeling, I made an appointment to see my Bishop Tuesday evening immediately after arriving home on leave. I’m afraid I poured out every doubt of my heart on him, and after about three hours, this great man, Bishop Richard M. Pratt, of the Provo 8th Ward, said he had an impression that he should give me a blessing, if I would have one. I needed all the help I could get. I did not refuse.

Bishop Pratt laid his hands on my head and began to tell me in prophetic and patriarchal fashion all of the experiences that would be part of my life in the coming year. He promised me protection of heaven and, in fact, mentioned that a guardian angel had been appointed, . . . ‘a man of stature’, to watch over and be with me during the remainder of my leave AND entire combat tour, until I was safely home. He mentioned that there would be many times when I would fly into danger where there would seemingly be no means of escape, but that the way would be made open where I would be able to return to my unit in safety. He said that the men would not respond much to my efforts in missionary work, but yet, at a distance, would stand in awe of a power that would be with

me. "The men will test you to see if you will uphold the gospel standards you profess" and "you will be revered", he said. However, ". . .you will have no missionary success with any in your Company. Rather, they will test you repeatedly."

As somewhat of a postscript to the blessing, he mentioned that the Lord was conscious of the efforts I had made to try and find a wife and that a special person would be made known to me, and I would find the woman I had been looking for.

Little did I know that the fulfillment of that particular promise would be accomplished sooner than I ever thought possible.

After the blessing, Bishop Pratt commented that in all the years he had given blessings, he couldn't recall ever hearing of anyone having a guardian angel. When I left his house late that night, however, I could feel the dimensions of the person who accompanied me from the front door of his home, the moment I started for my car.

Strike Out With My "Lovely Lady"

The first Monday that I was home on leave – the day before my Bishop's blessing -- a buddy had me slated to play softball at a Home Evening activity of young adults. On the mound for the opposing team was a young lady who promptly struck me out, not once, but three times, as she delivered such slow pitches that I could have easily swung three times on one pitch. I had been playing fast pitch softball for six months in flight school and could not adjust my timing. I was the Army klutz with a fancy car.

The next evening the same group got together for a water fight, from which I left early to meet with my Bishop for the prearranged appointment. From these two activities I met two very impressive girls who had recently sent out missionaries. I figured they were a safe bet with which to have a social date or two. Having just broken up with the thirteenth "steady" I had dated since coming home from Brazil, I felt little desire to tie up a girl's heartstrings worrying about an aviator in combat for the next year. I wanted to exit the country with no involvement hanging over anyone's heart.

The girls full names I did not know. Neither did I know they were cousins, both from small towns in Southern Utah. One, Vione, I approached to see if she would be "interested in going out sometime." The other, Dianne, I promised to pick up the next day

for a ride to work. Work was ONLY three blocks away from her apartment. I had nothing else to do, I told her. I was just making an effort to get to know her a little better.

When I picked up Dianne the next day, my expectations were little, if any. I had driven only one of the three blocks toward her workplace at Brick Oven Pizza (well known to BYU students) when the Spirit spoke to me in volume sufficient to block out all other distractions, saying, "You don't know this girl very well, but you better hurry and get to know her. She is going to be your wife."

Miracle of least expected miracles, and least desired miracle at that moment!!! Every prayer I had ever uttered since age thirteen was suddenly answered.

"How can you tell me this when I don't even know this girl's last name?" I questioned.

The spirit responded that "all the qualities you have ever looked for in a wife are embodied in this one sweet soul."

I was content to find purpose for the remainder of my leave and great faith in the rest of my Bishop's blessing.

Full Court Press

My courtship with Dianne Black began immediately. She was surprised to see that I was at her apartment when she came home from work that night. After I dropped her off at the Brick Oven, I turned North half a block, returned to the Brick Oven, then West half a block, and then I knew of nothing else to do but return to her apartment. Knowing some of her roommates, and my dating history being known to them, when I returned to the apartment and told one roommate whom I had known the longest that "I think I have just met the girl I'm suppose to marry," her glare suggested that I go home, take two aspirin and don't even think about messing with that girls' heart.

But, I knew something different. I was about to start a courtship where I knew the end from the beginning, and I didn't even love this girl . . . yet.

Every day that followed I had to find excuses to be near Dianne. Being the final days of spring semester, I made myself available to type papers, do errands, buy pizza, and be around for anyone that needed help to prepare for finals. At the same time I had to avoid Vione with whom I had made a date to have a date. After three weeks of avoiding her, I

learned that she was Dianne's cousin, and she was quite excited for us.

Busy as everyone was, Dianne and I had our first date ten days after meeting, to the ball park. I was on the ward softball team, and she had to study for a final. We compromised and decided that she could study in my car, from which she could see the game that I would play. After the game we would go for ice cream.

I hit a home run first time up, ran the bases and kept running right over to the car. I asked if she saw my hit. She said "no", and I told her to watch the next time I was at bat and I would hit something for her. I hit another home run which thoroughly impressed her, especially since she had struck me out at the earlier Home Evening ball game. I was not the uncoordinated klutz after all, and she did like my car, too.

With full court pressure on her for about four weeks, I asked her to go to the Salt Lake Temple for the wedding of my sister on 5 June. I expressed my intention to fast to see if we should get married. This was the only fast I ever did where I already knew the answer, but I felt it would be helpful for Dianne. When I dropped her at her apartment the night before the wedding, the words marriage and fast entered our conversation for the first time. When she showed no surprise, I knew everything was going well.

We began our fast after the wedding breakfast at the Hotel Utah and returned to the temple the next day to break the fast. I then asked the big question: "Would you like to go look at rings?"

"Just look", she responded, and we were off down Main Street to McKay Jewelry.

Unknown to Dianne, I had already picked out a stone some weeks earlier in Brother McKay's shop. She found a setting that she liked "a lot" and things were really progressing well. Feigning a need to shop for an hour for things I would need overseas, we parted. Bro. McKay mounted and packaged Dianne's rings in jiffy quick time to take with me that afternoon.

Where in the World is Antimony?

As we drove back to Provo, I mentioned to Dianne that I would really like to meet her parents. We quickly grabbed a few things from her apartment and continued south for the next three hours, not stopping until we reached her tiny hometown of Antimony. We were lucky. Friday was one of the three days of the week that you could find Antimony. The

other four days it's too small to locate.

With no sleep for the last two days, and sporting three day beards, Dianne's dad and oldest brother Rod came in for supper from their long irrigating chores. Eight kids in a two bedroom home was quite an accomplishment, I thought. For the next three hours the loving spirit of the Black Family enveloped me and I knew Heavenly Father was right. This was my "lovely lady." She had been raised in the best kind of home.

With no place for us to find unexpected lodging at Dianne's home, we started for Provo, arriving just as the sun was coming up on a Saturday morning. Since visiting McKay's Jewelry I had been giving Dianne a small present each morning and evening to throw her off what my intentions were. She received a helicopter pin, a huge all-day sucker that was to last until I got home, and other trinkets. With the sun just coming over the Wasatch mountains of Provo, I thought the moment right to give her an antiqued shoe box that contained within it my gift of all gifts:

- a wicker sewing box – to mend our socks, clothes, etc., as we go through life, together.
- a wire rimmed pair of glasses – the kind old people wear, for that is how long our earthly love should last.
- a candy peppermint stick – symbolic of how old I was when I first started looking for her.
- a can of scented wedding rice – for our wedding day.
- a crystal cut scented candle – for our wedding night.
- an open wedding ring box – that she didn't see with her sleepy eyes until last, when I asked her to marry me, and she came full awake.

It was as though all of the wheels, cogs, opportunities, and energies had come together from several directions at once for this special moment to happen. Now it was all in the hands of Dianne.

She awoke repeatedly for the next six hours to see if there really was a ring on her finger, as she tried to recover from an almost sleepless night of travel from our return trip to Antimony.

Since I was shipping out Sunday, 8 June, I knew that I would be eligible for an R&R (rest and relaxation) around Christmas time. I talked with Dianne about a formal

engagement in Hawaii, hoping that everything would work out for her to settle her concerns with her missionary, and for me to procure orders for Hawaii during her Christmas break from school. That's when we would plan our wedding if she felt ready.

Getting the right Hawaii R&R would prove to be a bigger marvel than I thought possible. But, there were yet more blessings to come from Col. McDonald's contributions to our courtship that were too far beyond the horizon for us to see. The really big adventure started the morning of Sunday, 8 June, when I kissed Dianne goodbye and left for Vietnam.

THE SECOND YEAR

RVN and The Lancers

I arrived in Vietnam (RVN) 10 June, 1969, and was assigned to the "B" Company "Lancers", 158th Aviation Battalion, of the 101st Airborne Division. Not only was I the only Mormon in the company, but I was also the first replacement who had arrived in that company since their deployment as a unit from Fort Carson, Colorado, four months earlier.

All of the Lancer pilots were high-time pilots. All of them were aircraft commanders

(ACs). As the first new guy in a unit of long time veterans, chances were zero that I would ever be an AC until lots of people went home. That was the bad news. The good news was that flying with ACs, I logged First Pilot time on every mission, which was just as good as AC hours as far as aviation career time was concerned. I never did get any co-pilot (CP) time the entire time I was in the unit.

Everyone was quite accommodating in teaching “the new guy” the art of combat flying. I was somewhat fought over when crew assignments were made. I replaced pilots who needed crew rest time, and that gave me the opportunity to learn from everyone. But some began to feel very quickly that I had an ‘attitude’ problem. I was not the average Army pilot, capable of drinking great quantities of beer and liquor most every evening, playing cards until late, and working off a hangover the next day behind the stick.

“Weeks doesn’t drink. He doesn’t even come to the club. He must be anti-social.”

War reduces life to its basics. People fight all day long for a hot meal, a warm, dry place to sleep, and time to be left alone long enough to get the sleep. In aviation units, when you were not flying you were drinking, and vice versa.

Men would wake up after hours of flying early morning missions, not knowing what they had been doing or where they had been – flying, as it were, on auto-pilot. (Rule #1 -- You never take your hands off helicopter controls -- THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN AUTO-PILOT IN AN ARMY HELICOPTER).

I was an above average new guy with a great touch on the controls, having been taught by a flight school instructor who told me never to spill his coffee. He told me if I ever spilled a drop, he would bust me on that ride. I got good, good and quick.

I was a good pilot, but not a worthy, seasoned one who knew everything from bottle to throttle. I had too few hours to be accepted into the brotherhood. Combat would bring a baptism by fire that every pilot eventually receives, and drinking would probably ensue. “Give him some real missions with real bullets flying both ways – that’s when Weeks will find the bottle to conquer his fears.

“But Weeks doesn’t drink. He goes to Church.”

It was quickly learned that I had been made Camp Evans Church President (Franch President) for some faith or other. I wasn’t going to be the kind of pilot that would hang out or mix well in a bar setting. I was, therefore, unofficially ostracized. While I was in my hooch writing letters to my sweetheart, reading, recording good music or studying

scriptures, the rest of the men were trying to sort out the stuff young lives were ill-equipped to deal with. Drinking was the readily accepted pressure relief valve and an easy way to cope with things that couldn't be repressed.

At all times, however, I tried to be as cordial as possible. But staying aloof from the club environment did not promote any great friendships. I tried, additionally, to win friends by being supportive of all of the interests that the other aviators had, including the building of a new officers' club within our company area. That's where the "new guy" would really be different and make his best contribution.

Water Walking

There was no small amount of confusion when it became known that I had an unusual capability of procuring needed things . . . scarce things that everyone could enjoy.

The first Officer's Call I attended came just two weeks after joining the Lancers. The CO, Major John E. Watts, a very personable man and yet one who commanded respect, had a mission for us. He said that he was pleased with the progress on our O Club that was under construction, but would not be satisfied until we had a really first class facility. To do that, we had to find cement. A walkway and stairs were needed. Up to that time anyone entering the club had to find a dirt path and hike up a pallet that leaned from the ground to the base of the front door. We were told we not only needed concrete steps, but a three foot wide sidewalk leading to the entrance to form a welcome approach.

"I don't care if you have to beg, borrow, or steal it, but every pilot should keep his eyes peeled throughout the AO for bagged cement," commanded the CO. "We will probably have to mix everything ourselves, by hand, but we will do it to insure that we have a club second to none in the Division."

The meeting ended and I approached the CO and asked, "How much concrete do you think we'll need, Sir?"

"We're going to need at least four to five yards to do the job right," he responded.

"When do you want it delivered?" I asked.

Imagine Major Watt's look when the greenest of his officers fresh from the States intimated that he might have some chance of filling an order of this magnitude. What I didn't know at the time was that there was only one mixer truck within a hundred miles of

Camp Evans and chances of getting ready mixed concrete delivered through channels was less than zero.

What my CO didn't know was the power of an Elder's Quorum. In the service it's never what you know, but who you know that counts . . . and I knew Chief Dwaine Ramacotti of the Sea Bees' unit, stationed at Camp Evans. Dwaine was one of our faithful Saints in the Branch who just happened to be in charge of a lot of materiel.

Swallowing his disbelief as best he could, Major Watts asked, "Okay, Weeks, what's this going to cost me?"

"I'll have to get back with you on that, Sir," I responded.

Early the next morning I had Dwaine on the land line talking about our need. "It will cost you . . . I need two pair of boots and three poncho liners," he said. "I can deliver the mud Saturday morning – I'll be there about 9:00 am. And yes, Sir, I do own that truck." You could have knocked me over with a bulldozer.

At lunch I cornered Major Watts to report my findings. This time his look was "this is too good to be true." Since the Lancers first landed in Vietnam, Major Watts had dispatched two of his company captains to Saigon with the mission of procuring materiel any way they could for our unit. Now he has a new guy who is showing more possibilities in 12 hours than they have in the last two months. "Are you absolutely sure, Mr. Weeks?" He spoke heavy on the Mister."

"I suggest, Sir, that we have everything formed up well before 9 o'clock," I responded.

When the Sea Bees' ready mix truck chugged up the hill road to approach our O Club at 8:45 a. m. Saturday morning, WO1 Weeks achieved 'water walker' status among his peers, never to be doubted again. Two disappointed captains were subsequently recalled from Saigon, and I was unofficially appointed company scrounge for the duration of my time with the unit.

There was still serious confusion when unit members saw that I did not choose to frequent the club to which I had been a major contributor. But the social issues became the least of my worries as more important things were happening on combat missions.

Called to Serve

The first week I was in my new unit, I had no idea where church meetings were held.

Spending the first Sunday alone, I finally discovered the base chapel and a posted LDS meeting schedule midway through the next week. As I walked in the door that second Sunday, I was greeted by Chaplain Kenneth Smith, of Orem, Ut, who, after the meeting, interviewed me and called me to be the Branch President for Camp Evans base camp. I was replacing the former President who couldn't come back to the rear area on weekends to conduct meetings. His name was Norman H. Bloomfield, of Ramah, New Mexico. Yes, this was the same good friend who left flight school at Ft. Wolters in August of the previous year and came to Vietnam to find Mama Baker's husband. I didn't know he was with the infantry of the famed 502nd of the 101st, and in the A Shau Valley.

Norm Goes Home

Norm had been made the group leader at Camp Evans when the 101st rear support area was moved north from Bien Hoa, near Saigon. Having replaced Norm as the group leader, I was anxious to not only find him to tell him about that, but to share old times and new developments in our common area of operation. Norm and Becky Baker were still engaged and planning to be married when he returned home from combat. He'd be going home in December and everybody looked forward with great anticipation to the marriage of this great couple.

Norm was from a very special family that lived and worked with the Indians on a reservation in northwest New Mexico. He was truly the town's fair-haired boy, and the gal he had chosen was just as exceptional as he was.

In the next two weeks I was able to talk twice by field phone with Norm at his forward firebase in the A Shau Valley. However, while conducting branch services on 13 July, 1969, I was informed that Norm had been killed in an ambush in the western side of the A Shau two days earlier. I now had the heart-rending task to write to the families. I was there for a purpose, knowing what I knew of all involved, grateful to be able to soften the blow that would come to the Baker and Bloomfield families with a near first-hand report.

From the mission field I learned that nothing in this life happens by accident. The Lord places the right people in the right places at the right time to do His work. I had lost a good friend. I didn't know why Norm was taken, but I knew why I was here. I don't think

there was anyone closer to Norm in the military than I was. Who else was there to do this thing. It was the most difficult letter I had ever written in my life. But, that in itself was the greatest tribute I could possibly be allowed to give to my good friend.

My letter arrived before notification from the Department of the Army that Norm had been killed. It would have been easier for me to write home to my own mother about the death of one of her sons and a brother than it was for me to tell these families that Norm had been lost. But I realized again that the Lord brought me here, and He knew everything about the timing of it all.

Things move at great speed in war. The common thought describing combat is *hours and hours of sheer boredom, interrupted intermittently by moments of stark terror*. The days of the week fade quickly in a war zone – unless Sunday means something. Any other day is nameless, and one remembers only benchmark events or crucial situations that develop.

It was only a week after Norm's loss that the second brother of our servicemen's group was taken. His name was Raymond D. Hales. Ray's story will require some groundwork.

Raymon Draper Hales

When I first arrived at Camp Evans, I looked around for someone who looked like he would make a great Young Men's President. I found such a fellow from an adjoining company -- a scout dog company. As it happened, this fellow was the commander of that company. His name was Eugene Roger Amberson. Gene was a somewhat reserved fellow, possibly because of my extremely inferior rank. He was a first lieutenant and I was just a lowly WO1. He and his men used to eat in our mess-hall. By rank we would normally not have associated at all except that we ate in the same area reserved for Officer's in the mess. But Gene had a great smile.

I asked Gene one day what he knew about the Mormons and would he like to know more. He mentioned he knew a guy in officer candidate school who wore funny under wear, but politely refused to know anything more about religion. He smoked, and that always gave me reservations, knowing how hard a habit that is to break. A couple of

days later I felt prompted to ask again (by direction of the Spirit) “Don’t you think you’d like to know something about the Church?” His response was increasingly negative, as he reminded me of our previous conversation. Finally, a week later, still another stronger prompting came to ask a third time. With fear and trepidation I approached, only to be flatly refused by a senior officer. I was completely burned out with Gene Amberson, who began to avoid me like I was some kind of radical born again something or other.

Just about that time, Raymon Draper Hales from Mapleton, Utah, was assigned to Gene’s company as a new dog handler. Upon arrival in a scout dog unit, a handler would be required a certain amount of time to train to a new animal. The dogs were permanently kept in country, and the handlers rotated in and out. Ray had to learn to relate well with his assigned German Shepard, the process normally requiring about two weeks.

In that two-week period, this magnetic man won the respect of all of the members of his Scout Dog Company. Ray was a singular stand-out, very mature, well beyond his years. Recently married, he left his three-month-pregnant wife to enter combat knowing some terrible things that none of us ever suspected. Ray’s power and magnetism were so manifest to everyone who knew him that the men of his company had nicknamed him “Noah.” The nickname was in no way meant to harass him. It was just a manifestation from the men that they equated this man and his dynamism with someone of Old Testament vintage. The men had further nicknamed their company “Hale’s Angels.”

As a new church group leader, I had been fasting and praying about whom I should call as counselors. Ray was a shoe-in for the job. As I prayed about him, however, my mind remained confused and muddled. For that reason I didn’t call him to the position. I did make him priesthood instructor, which I felt was one of the most important positions of responsibility in the branch. In the three weeks Ray was in Vietnam, in his patient, peaceful, loving, powerful way he won over every one of his contemporaries as a quiet, humble example of the gospel.

A Changed Man

The night of 19 July, 1969, just a week after Norm Bloomfield’s death, as it were, “the Lord” had me assigned as company all night staff duty officer. My duties required me to

remain awake the entire night and monitor the operations in the company area and bunker line sector.

About eight-fifteen in the evening, in through the door of my Operations Office came Lt. Amberson bearing the news, with deepest regret, that Raymon Draper Hales had been killed that afternoon in the A Shau Valley -- in much the same place and way that Norm Bloomfield had been killed a week earlier.

Gene was a changed man. The once aloof Amberson was now humbled. You could see he had suffered a deep loss from Ray's death. He came to ask what it was that made Ray Hales so different from all the other men he had ever known. Ray was so revered that the men of his company immediately took up a collection and sent a sizable amount of money home to his wife for a grave marker. Personally shocked by another great loss to our branch, I was immediately comforted by a spiritual assistance that buoyed me with faith instead of weakening me with grief as I talked with Gene.

Gene arrived with items he knew were of great importance to Ray and asked what he should do with them. He handed me Ray's scriptures, some garments, and a bottle of consecrated oil that he reverently held. I explained that it would be alright for him to include these things in Ray's personal effects that he would be sending to his family. We talked well into the night -- almost seven hours -- before I finally sent him back to his company area with a *Meet The Mormons* book and a *Joseph Smith Story* pamphlet. Over the next few weeks, I never saw Gene light another cigarette. What I did see was a light within this man that grew brighter and brighter as we met together. I was able to teach him all the discussions, introduce him to the district authorities for interview, and on Sunday, 17 August, 1969, at an early hour, Eugene Roger Amberson and I entered the swimming pool of the officer's club at Phu Bai, Vietnam, in our brown T-shirts and jungle fatigue pants, and I baptized him into the Church -- just two days short of one month after Ray's death.

Ray's Postscript

Ray's story certainly does not end here. I came to later learn that Ray had spent an afternoon one Sunday comparing patriarchal blessings with those of his brothers. He had

made the statement after reading his blessing that after a mission, marriage, and starting a family, that would be the end of his life. Where his brothers' blessings had continued, his had stopped, and he felt like his sojourn on earth would be of a short duration.

When Ray kissed his new expecting wife and family good-bye at the Salt Lake Airport on his way to Vietnam, he bid them all farewell, promising "to see you all again in the eternities." The spiritual strength of his family had dispelled much of the gloom of that parting, but when the message came from the Department of the Army, it was not entirely an unanticipated surprise.

Additionally, moments after Ray had been killed, his mother, sleeping in her bed in Mapleton, not knowing why, awakened to see her husband pacing the floor in an agitated state. In an attempt to calm him, Sister Hales made a cup of coffee for him. Brother Hales had a heart condition and, under orders from the doctor, had to take either caffeine pills or coffee. The caffeine was needed to stimulate his ailing heart. The coffee had no calming effect on Brother Hales, as he announced to his wife that he knew something had happened to Ray. He said that Ray had appeared to him and, standing at the foot of his bed, told him that everything was all right and that he was all right. From what we can determine, this was immediately after Ray had walked into the ambush that took his life. Of course, Ray's father knew there would be no way Ray could be alive and well in Vietnam and at the same time be standing at the foot of his bed.

Ray had bravely and diligently lived his life, understanding more than anyone else the nature and duration of his stewardship. Of a certainty, had Ray Hales not come to Vietnam, Gene Amberson would not be a member of the Church today. Ray's stewardship was not complete until Gene was safe in the fold.

Chastise the Lord?

After the news of Ray's death, I went to my knees feeling justified to chastise the Lord - to chew Him out for taking two of our group's finest young men. In frustration I asked why he had taken Ray. His response was immediate. He answered, "because Norm needs a companion." Calmness came over me and I recognized in His response the great plan of mercy for all of God's children. Whether the answer to my prayer was figurative or factual, I envied Norm and Ray's assignment in their new area of missionary work

beyond the veil, and knew they were both okay, especially if they were together.

Additionally, my prayers were answered as to the names of two brethren to call as counselors in our group presidency. Spiritually things were great. My mind, however, was not entirely at ease with frustrations that were building as I tried to interpret all the things we had to cope with in the combat environment I was just beginning to experience.

Ray's death brought a climax to simultaneous events from air operations that were fast getting me a reputation for being untouchable in combat - someone with a lucky rabbit's foot. More precisely, some in my unit felt that I had an extra force watching over me that they wouldn't mind benefiting from by being close by me. It made me wonder if I was really doing my part in service to my country, however, when my blessing said nothing about bleeding a little.

James Michael Lyon

On 26 June, 1969, (my third mission into the combat zone) I was assigned to fly with Lt. Jim Lyon, who was known in the company as being of somewhat limited and questionable aptitude. As the lowest ranking company grade officer, Lyon was being groomed for higher position and responsibility that would come in time when those senior to him would move up to higher assignments or rotate back to the States. Lyon had problems with dubious judgment and even shoddier aircraft operator talent. He was occasionally guilty of overlooking items critical to safety. Being the new guy, I was assigned to fly a low risk mission with him that would cover much of the AO (area of operation). Lyon would have to carry the day as a newly appointed AC (aircraft commander). My first time flying with him was to be one of his days for a major misjudgment.

As the AC, Lyon was to be my mentor, instructor, and protector. I was the peter pilot, as co-pilots were called - "second pilot in command." As a know-nothing new guy I was expected to do nothing but "watch the standby load meter and don't touch anything shiny." For Lyon, school was over and his first foray into harms way made every day a test day for him as the 'in charge' guy. Serious costs could follow failure or errors of any kind.

Our mission involved carrying mail, rations, replacement personnel and other materiel

ordered up by units we were supporting, to be delivered in the field to forward fire and support bases. Without escort cover, we were expected to fly secure routes and generally be a trucking service for the day.

The A Shau Valley

My initial entry into the combat zone was an experience of awe inspiring beauty as we flew west up jungle covered valleys and over the high eastern ridgeline of the A Shau before reaching the border of Laos on it's western side. My first descent into the A Shau out of altitude was breath taking. As the valley floor began to rise up like a spacious manicured golf course I saw endless grass greens, with occasional water hazards, that went for miles along the north-south axis of the valley. I had never experienced flora like this, and soon saw how disoriented I was as we descended. The beautiful grass was, on closer inspection, fifty-foot high elephant grass, and the water hazards were fifty to sixty feet across bomb craters that were deep enough to completely cover a helicopter with rain water that filled them. I had never experienced spatial disorientation and skewed depth perception like this and began to orient better only when we came closer to Fire Base Currahee in our low-level approach. Jeeps, 105 mm howitzers, and finally GI's on the ground guiding us to a sparse PSP (perforated steel paneling) landing pad gave me my first recognizable objects and size comparables that made sense.

Flying on Fumes

The flight would have been much more enjoyable had I not been over-anxious about our fuel situation. A small gauge reads out pounds of fuel, with an additional caution light warning of 20 minutes of remaining fuel if one is negligent in cross checking. Any time the Master Caution light illuminates, a scan of the *peak and panic panel* would always raise adrenalin levels, some conditions being more grave than others. . . "hours of sheer boredom, interrupted intermittently (with a Master Caution light) by moments of stark terror." If everything was going right, you never got a light.

We had just lifted off the support pad at Fire Base Blaze, the most westerly FAARP (forward-most area arming and refueling point) of the Division, when the 20 minute fuel

caution light came on. Lt. Lyon took a quick glance at his map and announced that we could make it out to Currahee and back, no problem. As we flew further and further west, I knew we couldn't exceed 10 minutes outbound without having to reverse course to get back to the fueling point. As we approached Firebase Currahee I knew we were close to the thick of things when an F-4 Phantom overflew us, making a bomb run on a hillside just south and west of our intended landing site. Lyon ordered the Crew Chief and Door Gunner to kick our load out quickly so we could make an immediate turn-around. My appreciation for the ambience diminished and my grip on my seat increased, seeing the time tick down on the clock and the "motion lotion" gauge getting closer and closer to zero. The higher the stress, the more indelible the quality of lessons learned – things you never forget, and hope you never experience again. Flight school taught me that you never fly very far into a 20 minute fuel light, even though the Huey had a very accurate fuel gauge. But this was combat, and here you learned what your limitations really were, based on how your AC handled the exigencies of the moment. The fuel pressure gauge, right next to the quantity gauge, always showed 25 psi. . . until, for the first time in my life, I saw it drop to 15 psi. We still had three miles to go. I knew we were sucking air into the fuel lines from our forward floor tanks. A further drop to 12.5 psi. and I fully expected that the next indicator of this emergency would be the terrible sound of silence – the noise the engine makes when there is no more fire in the combustion chamber. We had burned all four floor tanks dry, and all there was left was the main tank right under the mast and the fuel in the fuel line to the engine. I prayed, Lyon flew, making very shallow turns and an extra shallow approach to the fuel pits at Fire Base Blaze. We touched down with nothing left but a sigh.

Saved by the Standby Load Meter

Fortunately crews and missions changed every day and I was relieved to not have to fly with Lyon the next day. I actually felt more comfortable flying combat assaults all day on the 27th.

But such was not the case the following day, 28 July, when I was again assigned to fly with Lyon. During the course of our missions that day, I observed Lyons' approaches to

be consistently shallow and was finally even brave enough to say something about it. I'd had four days of combat flying by now with one emergency under my belt. I was reminded that this was not flight school, and I'd have to get used to combat techniques. The general rule was to fly "1,500 feet above ground level (AGL), or below 50 feet AGL" to avoid being a target of small arms ground fire in what was called the 'dead man's zone'. Nothing was said about dragging your skids through the trees.

It was not until after flying was over that day that our post-flight inspection revealed a 14 inch tear through the leading edge of the right synchronized elevator on the tail boom.

Sometime during the day we had dragged our tail through a very sturdy tree limb. As the new guy, my job was usually to monitor the stand-by generator load meter – that's the gauge that always shows zero, unless the main generator fails and the stand-by picks up the load. The crew members backed me up that it was pretty certain I was not on the controls during any approaches that day. Inside we had felt nothing, but this sort of impact could have sent our helicopter tail over tea kettle in the air. Not a good thing. The incident was viewed as having such possible disastrous consequences that Lt. Lyon received a severe reprimand and my promise that I would never fly with him again.

Trouble Comes in Three's

It seemed inconsequential that I was party to these first two incidents, being second pilot on the aircraft. However, on July 1st, just four days later, another situation developed of the gravest proportions. Flying with another crew, again always as second pilot, our assignment was combat assault (CA) missions on the steep eastern ridgeline of the A Chau Valley. This was my fourth day of combat assault missions and my first trip into the valley for CA's. My ship was the second in a daisy-chain of five that were to take combat troops into a very tight landing zone. The landing zone (LZ) had space for only one aircraft at a time and was in the middle of triple canopy jungle that had been blown away by two hours of artillery fire to make a hole in the two hundred foot high trees sufficient for one helicopter. Flying in and out of "hover holes" was the nastiest stuff we ever had to do.

This was to be one of those days my bishop had referred to as being a day when I

would “seemingly find no escape” from a critical situation.

We strung our formation out over five to eight miles through the sky to allow time for each aircraft to descend into the hover hole, drop paxs (soldiers) and equipment, and get back out. Trouble started when the lead aircraft reported on short final that they had a major malfunction. The main oil line to the engine had ruptured, gauges were going in all sorts of directions, and they had to land immediately at the nearest fire base (FB Airborne) before everything came to a “grinding” halt. We were the second aircraft in the formation, and as such now became lead and the first bird to test the flight conditions of the LZ.

The Hover Hole

Some of the hazards of our combat job came principally because we were always flying our aircraft close to the upper limits of their performance capabilities. Our loads were always near maximum (you never really knew what the weight was), and we were constantly required to monitor changing atmospheric conditions to ensure that there was sufficient power and lift for take offs and landings at all elevations of mission requirements. With experience came a quick calculation capability, but that was always an estimate that was confirmed solely by the “feel” of the aircraft. With time you wore your aircraft like a pair of boxers.

The worst hazards came from the mountainous jungle terrain in our AO where the measured temperature and weather conditions were not available. ‘What you see is what you got’, and PT (pilot technique) was the ultimate measure of success at the end of the day. Since the Air Force owned the sky in our sector, we were not too worried about enemy fighter aircraft or Triple-A (anti-aircraft artillery). The pucker factor for helicopter crews, however, always went up on final approach -- below 50 feet all the way to the ground -- when small arms fire was most likely, or your “feel” was off and you bounced one in, logging seven or eight tough-downs on one landing.

But on this day our greatest concern was the flora – tree limbs and elephant grass that could easily turn a Huey into an expensive wood chopper or grass mower, depending on how keen the pilots skills were.

As we approached our “hover hole” half way up the north-east ridgeline of the A Shau, I monitored the gauges while the AC flew. Hovering out of ground effect above trees was the most power demanding maneuver of the day -- the higher the elevation, the higher the power requirement to hover. We made our power checks and seemed to have adequate to make the two hundred foot vertical descent to drop off our five paxs. We always computed each of the paxs at around 250 pounds. Most young soldiers only weighed around 150, but always carried more than a hundred pounds of gear. Shedding their weight at the drop off point, climb out would be a cinch.

As we fell below the canopy, however, the effect of an imperceptible breeze blowing across the top of the trees was lost. Being at maximum power during our hover check meant that the lost bit of wind lift left us short of what we needed to remain airborne. In short, we began to fall out of the sky. The RPM began to bleed simultaneously on both our engine gauge and main rotor system.

This condition can best be described if you are driving a car up a hill in third gear and feel the power wane until a shift to second gear is required to keep the engine from stalling. In this situation, however, there was no down-shifting capability in our Bell UH-1H Huey. We were getting all there was out of the engine, and there wasn't any more. Total output was not enough. The lower our engine RPM went, the lower our rotor RPM drooped, and the smaller the rotor disk became as the blades began to flex upwards. Our “wing” was shrinking and I knew that we would soon reach a point that no man had ever been able to sustain flight in this aircraft before.

Buying the Farm

Our operating RPM normally was 6,600. As we fell through 6,000 RPM, I disabled the engine RPM warning alarm – the loud audio siren in the pilots' headsets accompanied by the flashing red light on the instrument panel. I could turn the audio off, but the red binky light stayed on. I looked at CW2 Elam B. McCharen, my A/C for the day, struggling with the controls. He was exceptional on PT, but this was too much for anyone. Hearing the alarm, all Mac could say was: “I've got it, . . . I think.”

I knew at 5,500 RPM we were past the point of the aircraft being capable of sustaining flight – and the gauges were still going down. I had heard of two test pilots successfully hovering a Huey on level ground, at sea level, with no paxs on board, and half a bag of fuel, at 5,600 RPM. Here we were, above 4,600 feet elevation, out of ground effect, on a mountain slope, with over 800 pounds of fuel (1,450 lbs is max.), crew of four, and five paxs on board, going through 5,400 RPM. There was nothing left.

My final emergency procedure was to look outside and find a place to crash as softly as possible and hope everyone could walk away. The ground was coming up fast. We were going to “auger in”, and it was only about sixty more feet before everything would start coming apart for all of us.

At that moment when I knew disaster or death was certain, above the noise and the adrenalin rush that has the mind attempting to muster more from the machine than it is capable of, a voice came clearly, calmly, and with a surety: “Let your heart be calm, and watch.”

My fears were instantly gone, dispelled by a power that, in the moment, I had little time to pray for. My terrified heart was suddenly calmed as though warm hands wrapped around it, taking away all fret and tension. Poised to assist on the controls if needed, I instead placed both feet flat on the floor and released my security grip on my armored seat. I folded both arms like a kid in primary, and watched.

There was really nothing I could do to aid the AC, whose hands were full trying to jack the collective pitch up and down to diminish the loss of rotor RPM, and at the same time keep the cyclic stick from battering his legs. The aircraft bucked like a rodeo bronco and feedback through the controls increased as hydraulic pressure faded from lessening engine RPM to drive the system. The crew chief and door gunner were flooding the intercom with panicked advisories of impending tree limb strikes. Waddling down the hover hole, we were somehow lucky enough to miss early branches that could have knocked us uncontrollably out of the air. There was no question that we were going to “buy the farm.” The only question was at what price.

Just Enough Miracles. . .

Then the first miracle happened. . . we stabilized. We were still above fifty feet, and way too high for any paxs to jump to lighten our gross weight. The burning slope and the smoking stumps were visible indicators we were still too high to get any ground effect. At 5,200 RPM we shouldn't be able to hover. BUT, then. . . the second miracle happened. We began to climb. . . up, steadily up, laboriously upward, somehow missing tree branch after tree branch that could easily finish us. . . up, until we were finally above the canopy once again, able to pick up the wind and that little extra lift that brought everything back to normal so we could fly away.

I had never flown with McCharen before. I was not unknown to him, being in the same flight platoon, but this was only my eighth day of flying -- my fourth day actually flying combat. I looked left to see him stunned, looking straight ahead as if wanting to be in another world, in disbelief that we had just escaped the thick of the things we were just in. I could see he was still wearing the adrenalin effects. Finally, with a deep sigh, it ended for him. With his eyes still caged, looking straight ahead, all he could say was: "Damn, that was close." We never spoke again about how close we all came to death. To those who get there, a weighty situation like this was never topic for discussion.

In the end more information came. That same voice that had calmed me just minutes before, spoke again as I looked at my aircraft commander. It simply said: "He knows!" The man who had been at the controls on the other side of the center radio console knew that there had been a greater hand than his manifesting its power to maintain our flight, and he knew I knew the extent of the divine help we had received to get out. But, what was there to discuss from any textbook point of view? NOTHING.

We objectively radioed the circumstances we had encountered to the other aircraft of our flight, warning them of the severe dangers. The seasoned platoon veterans decided, however, to press on with the mission, calculating that they could make it in and out for the reason that they had burned off more fuel and their gross weight had diminished. All three aircraft that ventured one by one in to the LZ suffered damage for their decision. All three had either main rotor strikes, or tail rotor impacts when they descended below the canopy and experienced extreme low RPM. That day my aircraft was the only one that came back untouched and unharmed of our flight of five.

Luck of the Irish?

Word was out that Weeks had defied the law of averages again. Not being a drinker, nor needing the smoky environment of the EM, NCO or Officer Clubs, I had no idea that crew members gathered at day's end to share their version of near death experiences from the day's missions. When the hairy stuff happened and the question was asked: "Who was in your crew today?". . . . and the answer was ". . . and that new guy pilot was in the right seat," someone discovered that I was the only element common to the three incidents of the previous week. The word got around. Something was wrong(?).

As the "new guy" I truly didn't know what to expect from flying. My perspective was that what ever occurred in the first couple of weeks of missions would probably be typical of what I should expect for the rest of my tour. . . that would be a new guy perspective. I had no idea I was party to every bad event that took place in B Company in my first nine days behind the stick. Would anyone call that luck?

By regulation, crew members were only allowed to fly a certain number of hours in a thirty-day period, after which pilots would be automatically grounded for crew rest. Platoon leaders charted the hours, and days off were regularly programmed into schedules. I was regularly plugged into crews that had pilots who needed a break. I had the advantage of getting experience with almost every AC in the platoon.

I had suggested to my platoon leader that, because I didn't drink or smoke, I would be willing and ready to fly any time day or night, if it could warrant some consideration for stand down time on Sunday mornings during the hours of church services, so that I could attend and perform in the leadership role I had been called to.

I guess I seemed a little too much for platoon members and leaders to comprehend – for me to be able to come through hair-raising experiences without a scratch, and be completely removed from the after hours society of pilots in group therapy sessions as they dove into bottles in the Club to help them forget. For most everyone except me the Club replaced the Mess Hall for the evening meal after the difficult days of flying.

Not to be Thankless. . .

“Am I really in this, Father? Am I doing my duty for country and for Thee? Am I really doing all that I can, or am I being a little too protected in not being allowed into the thick of things where my contribution would be judged at least equal to that which you are requiring of other young men around me?”

In reality, it wasn't that I was never in the thick of things. Quite the opposite. The thick things for me were thinned out, and everyone who flew with me knew it. . . except me.

A Door Gunner's Testimony

I did not fly a day mission the next day, but was assigned a night standby mission which gave me the following day off. I had the next six days off for some reason, and when I went out to the flight line on the morning of 8 July, at 'o dark thirty', to preflight my aircraft for the day's missions, to my surprise I came across two GI's having a knock down, drag out fight. At first I timidly approached with my weapon at the ready. In the dim light of my issue flashlight, I identified the brawlers and asked what was going on. The scuffle ended and one of the soldiers answered: "We're fighting to see who crews your bird, Sir. We're both gunners and you can only take one of us in the gunner's slot on your aircraft."

"Why are you fighting to get on my bird?" I asked.

"Because everybody in the company knows nothing ever happens to you, Sir."

As far as the protective nature of my guardian angel was concerned, I would have to grapple with that problem myself.

Same Song, Second Verse

Candidate Owens from flight school days struggled to understand me. I guess it was no real surprise that two more men in my Lancer unit found me to be a puzzlement, too.

Equal rights do not apply to people of unequal character. There is protection in being

average. It seems that the weakest and the strongest always get picked on. Why or how it happens, I can't say. I never thought myself strong. In later years I used to tell people that I had an inferiority complex in my youth. . . until I got older and found out it was no complex. I was just inferior. That's what some contemporaries thought, I guess, . . . again.

Two new tormenters in Bravo Company emerged in the form of Chief Warrant Officer (CW2) Ben Sutton and his higher ranking friend First Lieutenant (1Lt) Orbie J. Mattox. To them I also seemed a little too good to be true. No matter how I catered to company requests, they always seemed to find my performance less than acceptable.

One evening in mid-August, when our O Club was completed and ready for opening night, officers came from adjoining companies to break in the new bar. Having no affinity for a noisy, dimly lit club, I remained in my hooch.

Into the evening Sutton and Maddox came into my room, encouraging me to come down to the celebration. "You helped build it, and you are the only officer who isn't there," said Sutton. A special ceremony was going to take place and it couldn't go on without me, he said.

It was proposed that Weeks and two other recently arrived "new guy" pilots had never been formally initiated into the combat aviators' club, which right or passage they should properly undergo at this time of celebration. This ceremony would be the focal point of the night and as the senior new guy, it would be a letdown to all the men without me. I gave in and was escorted by Sutton and Mattox into a grand welcome at the Club.

The ceremony began. I was invited to sit on the floor with the two newer, lighter weight aviators sitting on top of me. We were all to lock arms and legs and hang onto each other in such a way that the powerful Lt. Maddox would perform a one-man dead lift and bring us to a ceremonial hover. Little did we know that, with our attention diverted, the rest of the group was hands free to grab drinks to pour all over us as a proper baptism into our combat company.

Being known as "the man of the cloth" that I was, I was the major target of most all in attendance. Looking up from the shower of booze, I saw both Sutton and Mattox each emptying the contents of a six-pack on me, which I received as tight-lipped as possible and without protest. I felt so uneasy as I headed for the shower, smelling like a brewery,

thinking on the lines the Savior said, "Not wanting to be part of the world but still in it" I could only be useful if I showed some desire for association with these good young men that were here for more reasons than just being drafted.

In the final analysis, the friendly gesture of the initiation gained me a few new officer friends, but didn't seem to diminish the fissure that existed between me and the Mattox/Sutton consortium.

It's Only a Gauge

The morning of September 3, 1969, found us up and out of base camp before dawn. Our mission was to perform a twenty-ship lift to take a battalion of troops deep into the jungle at first light. Every aircraft and crew, except our reserve bird, would be on this lift.

Our pickup zone (PZ) was in a heavily wooded area almost straight west of Camp Evans. In typical fashion, it was only big enough for one ship. The sky was filled with aircraft strung out for miles. With thirty second spacing I was number seven ship into the PZ. It was only a matter of ten seconds on the ground and our paxs were loaded with all of their equipment, and we were calling departure to the next ship that was already on short final.

These were some of the most dangerous flight conditions I had ever seen. Defoliated trees stuck up in our flight path both going in and coming out of the PZ. Departing into what little wind there was put our heading easterly, right into the early morning rising sun. The glare coupled with rotor wash dust that overlaid the windscreen, made it impossible to see out the front Plexiglas on take off. All we could do was pull 105% maximum power and climb with as little forward movement as possible, looking out the side windows until we knew we were above the trees, praying we didn't hit any of them.

As soon as possible, after lift-off from the PZ, I cross-checked our instruments and got a huge shock. I watched as our transmission oil pressure gauge slowly unwound until the needle came to rest on the bottom peg. We were in extreme trouble. Additionally, however, I noticed that the Master Caution light had not illuminated to confirm the failure. With no trans. oil pressure, temperature should show some increase, but there was none.

After the initial adrenalin rush had passed, I could see that we simply had a gauge failure. The needle had lost its' friction connection to its center shaft and dropped by its' own weight onto the peg at the bottom of the scale. As refreshing a discovery as this was didn't diminish the situation a bit, since this particular gauge was a most important one and its failure required an immediate landing at the nearest possible safe area. It is difficult to get safely out of the sky if important gears seize up in the transmission and rotor blades stop turning.

"You're Suppose To Be Dead, Sir."

We immediately exited the formation and headed directly for home base, that being the nearest safe landing area. Only seconds had passed since take off from the PZ. Because of an inordinate amount of chatter that suddenly erupted on the radio, I could not inform anyone as to our intentions. Additionally, someone clearly said "Weeks" on the net. That breach of radio etiquette was totally improper, but after proceeding low level around a mountain, we lost total communication with the flight. Why someone would say my name *in the clear* was a violation of combat radio discipline. Someone ought to hear about that one.

We had no success raising our company operations on our usual FM frequency, leaving us to wonder if we had experienced a radio failure as well as a bad gauge. Accordingly, we knew nothing as to what had happened to the rest of the flight.

Within twenty minutes we were safely on the ground. I walked from the Round Table flight line to operations to check in and report our situation to the Ops Sergeant. As I entered, the Ops Sergeant, looking a bit unnerved, said: "Mr. Weeks, you're supposed to be dead."

I answered: "Obviously I'm not. What's the matter?"

He then recited the tragic details received on the FM command net from the command and control (C&C) bird to our company headquarters. We had lost an aircraft with full crew and troops on board, and there were no survivors. The aircraft, the eighth in the daisy chain, had hit a ten inch defoliated tree at fifty feet elevation coming out of the PZ. The outboard two or three feet of rotor blade were lost and the pilot had been unsuccessful in trying to land the near uncontrollable craft in a nearby river. Too much

weight and too little rotor rpm had caused the aircraft to fall almost vertically into the water and explode on impact. Five soldiers, including the supported unit company commander, and our crew of four were lost. The pilot in command was CW2 Ben Sutton.

Why Couldn't That Have Been You?

With my bird down the end of my mission brought an early lunch. I stepped out of my hooch headed for the mess hall, I came face to face with 1Lt. Maddox. Apprehensively I looked at the man. With deep despair lines cut into his face, he didn't hesitate to speak to me, saying: "Weeks, why couldn't that have been you this morning, instead of my friend Ben Sutton?"

There was a different spirit that came with his words. I knew his expression was far from threatening. It was meant as . . .a compliment. It came with feelings deep within his heart, . . .of admiration stirred in with his pain. What he was really saying was, "Weeks, if there's anyone in the unit that would be ready to meet his Maker today, it would be you." Lieutenant Maddox never troubled me again, nor did anyone else in B company.

Parenthetically, the standby aircraft that was scrambled to replace my grounded bird to insert our paxs back into the operation, returned that afternoon riddled with seventeen small arms bullet holes.

No Success?

From that time on, I spent many late evening hours talking with guys with broken things in their lives. So many times I was asked, "Weeks, do you think there's still hope for me?" I felt no different about myself after the loss of our first aircraft and crew, nor did I expect dramatic, immediate changes in the lives of other unit members. We were still the same men, expected to continue doing the same dangerous job. I did hope, however, that seeds patiently sewn would one day reach fruition, and that these same men would perhaps encounter missionaries from the Church in a more peaceful future and listen to their message.

The Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC)

I guess it's only normal for any combatant in war to want to return home with a chest full of medals. I didn't. I only wanted one. I hoped to earn the Distinguished Flying Cross.

When I first arrived in my unit, I sadly learned that, in it's wisdom, the 101st Division Headquarters had put out the word that too many valor medals had been given over the previous six months and, therefore, declared a moratorium on all medals. Well, that made things easy for me, . . . just one less item to worry about.

As I kept my flight time log book, I found that the only things I seemed to have to worry about were even days on the calendar. Almost without fail, every even day brought missions to fly combat assaults all day, making even days the most dangerous for me.

In September of '69, there was talk of the war winding down and hope of units going home early. However, the 101st Division wouldn't be one of those organizations. Soon our missions expanded to fill in where the 5th Marine Division had been pulled out between our Division Headquarters and the DMZ. We now covered everything from Camp Eagle North to the DMZ and beyond -- *West into Laos, and North into North Vietnam* -- classified stuff taking Recon teams places where our President said we had no presence. Flying in sterile flight suits, without dog tags or ID of any kind, we were taking troops on deep penetrations as far as our aircraft range would allow. At times I could feel the hostile areas we should avoid before we over-flew them. I was good with a map, and was the main guide for many of those flights.

Since the loss of Ben Sutton and crew, nothing happened on the days I flew. . . . until 14 November, 1969.

During that week we were providing support to Special Forces and Ranger units that were doing forward observation base (FOB) and command and control north (CCN) missions. These missions were hairy enough that when you returned, you received a special patch of recognition that you could proudly wear that was as esteemed as any bronze or silver star for valor -- a suitable substitute decoration, given the medals moratorium still in effect in the division.

The Call You Didn't Want to Receive

These missions usually began for a flight of three aircraft on stand-by status. You could kick back until SF Ops received, usually whispered, a radio transmission like the following: "Black master 6, Sneaky 34, 6 paxs surrounded by an estimated NVA battalion, grid coordinates VB533697, close air napalm marking location, request immediate STABO extraction, expect small arms fire, over." What the message meant: six men were surrounded by 1,500 enemy and wanted three aircraft, rigged with 200 foot long ropes for a vertical jungle extraction, two ropes per aircraft to extract one man per rope. We'd know where they were from the burning jungle and napalm smoke surrounding them. Expect hostile ground fire.

These guys were so far west that refueling would be closest if we went further west into Thailand. With no wind, we could loiter on station no more than ten minutes before reversing course for home. We'd be lucky to have ten minutes of our twenty minute fuel reserve left. . . maybe.

With two Cobra gunships for escort (and to draw fire at the PZ) we lifted off Camp Eagle to 5,000 feet MSL to gain terrain clearance. Passing through 2,000 feet I could see the thick black smoke plume on the distant horizon marking our pick up zone. Forty-five minutes outbound, the target didn't seem to be getting any closer. We didn't measure distance by miles. We measured fuel consumption outbound, doubling that to get back, and the rest represented on station time, to include our reserve. With a topped off tank, an H Model Huey carried about 2:45 hours of fuel to burn out. This one was going to be close.

Lead made contact when we were an hour out bound. CW2 Tommy Thornton (AC) and I were ordered in for the first pick up. We were still fifteen minutes away. We frequency changed to the guys on the ground for guidance right into the middle of the smoke. Tommy felt it best if he kept his head outside and had me stay on the controls to fly the approach to the top of the trees. Listening to the guys outside on the ground, the crew chief and door gunner inside on the intercom, and the chatter from the gun ship drivers, I managed the aircraft into position for the ropes to go overboard and word to come that we had two men on the lines.

I waited, . . . and waited. Focusing on one treetop branch to hold a steady heading

at a hover two hundred feet above the ground was no easy task. Then the automatic weapons fire began.

I had to patiently make small movements to get exactly overhead of the SF team. I prayed we would be invisible to anyone on the ground, but knew we had less chance of that than a clay pigeon on a skeet range. My faith was riding with the Cobras for gun cover, and my own crew. Watching the gauges, seeing the clock tick down, steady with the small arms fire below me, waiting each second for the sound an ice pick makes stabbing repeatedly through a tin can, correcting with each order -- "left 15 feet, and forward about 10, Sir, . . . hold, . . . steady, . . . steady, . . . wait, . . . wait, . . . GO, GO, GO," as my three other crew members barked simultaneously into the intercom.

On that signal I pulled the collective pitch control in my left hand into my armpit until the engine RPM started to droop. At maximum power we reached for 2-3,000 feet of altitude, nearly straight up, with a Ranger grunt on each line. As the aircraft swayed, the SF guys grabbed each other for stability and warmth, and started to turn blue with altitude.

E. G. T.

At maximum power I checked the gauges and suddenly became more conscious of the EGT than anything else -- the (E)ngine (G)as (T)emperature was on an extreme rise. This was not a good sign, normal, nor a good time to have engine problems.

Greater than the attendant adrenalin rush and excitement of cheating death again, the strong impression came: "turn on your engine de-ice, now."

Helicopters don't need engine deicing. They never fly high enough, or into cold enough temperatures in Southeast Asia where they would ever need it. ENG DE-ICE is one of those overhead switches that has mold growing on it from disuse. Most pilots don't even know where the switch is. Why would you ever expect engine inlet ice in these conditions?

Nevertheless, I moved quickly to actuate the switch as instructed and the EGT began to lower to normal operating temperature.

When heat and humidity get together in jungle theaters, a rapid change in temperature from an increase in altitude, with 100% humidity, can cause inordinate cooling in the air intake, especially when the air is being compressed. I understood why the grunts on the

ropes were turning blue from cold, and passing out, also.

By the time we flew ten miles or so to where we felt it safe enough to land and reel in our SF boys, they were just regaining consciousness. To get them inside to warm them up and close the side slider doors would ultimately save fuel, and we were in a fuel savings mode until we could get back to our forward refueling site in Vietnam. All considered, at the end of the mission, we still had a good five minutes left in the bag when we pulled into the fuel pits.

When we returned to Camp Evans at the end of the day and put the aircraft down in the protective revetment, Tommy Thornton, the AC, was not fully recovered from the day's events. Exhausted, he exhaled heavily and said: "We did more today than I had to do to get my DFC."

Doing Things "Backwards"

Every pilot knows that his aircraft is designed to take off most efficiently into the wind. Lift comes from air traveling at a certain speed over the wings, and whether that air comes from ground speed or wind speed, lift is achieved from the combination of both. If an airfoil achieves lift at 50 MPH, and there's a 50 MPH wind sweeping across the parking ramp, airplanes could be flying in their tie-downs if they were pointed into that wind.

On 24 November, 1969, our mission briefing told us that 50 soldiers, weather trapped in a mountain saddle about 10 miles northeast of the abandon Marine base of Khe Sanh, had run out of food at their Observation Point (OP) ten days ago. We were to load and wait for a break in the clouds for any opportunity to get supplies into them. From their unit tactical operations center we could see the continuous cumulous flow layer that was keeping the OP obscured. We stayed on alert from early morning until late afternoon, waiting for a break in the clouds. Around five o'clock two large fluffy formations didn't quite butt together. I suggested to my AC that we were light enough that we could probably fly into the gap, hover along the ridge with the clouds until we spotted the OP, drop into a short pattern and kick the tail boom around so we would be into the wind, and get on the ground before the clouds closed in on us. He liked the idea, especially since we didn't know when another opportunity like this would come along to effect a rescue.

We raced into the forward edge of the gap, zeroed out our airspeed, and moved along

the ridge top looking for the landing zone. Everything looked exceptionally good, with the power setting much lower than expected. Pad in sight, we banked heavily in a descending left turn into the wind and suddenly found ourselves at maximum power plus, pancaking onto the pad with clouds immediately enveloping us. We were down, gratefully but not gracefully. The grunts stripped our bird of its precious supplies in less than minute.

The AC and I were still shaking our heads about what had just happened. Not only had the landing into the wind taken twice as much power as we anticipated, but we were worried that we had over-torqued the power train. Additionally, we were showing a tail rotor gearbox chip light that the crew chief would have to check out before we could leave. The puzzlement was that with the 30+ knots of wind, not only did we need way too much power to land, but the rotor blades would not stop after we shut down the engine. I had to continue to “fly” the bird so that the rotor path stayed well above the crew chief who was hiking up the tail stinger to access the suspect gearbox and make his checks. It was his additional job to stay away from the tail rotor that was just on the other side of the vertical support. A small error in balance could cost him his life, as the tail rotor turned thirteen times faster than the main rotor, both of which he had to continually be aware.

The report was good – there was a little ‘fuzz’ on the chip plug in the gearbox. We could immediately be on our way, and the grunts were EXTREMELY GRATEFUL for the needed supplies and rations. Problem: how should we take off? Doing an instrument takeoff in zero/zero visibility is hard enough from an airfield; but, we were in a saddle, pointed into the wind, wondering why everything about this seemed wrong.

My takeoff planning took in a quick prayer. The impression came that we ought to take off down wind. No, it didn’t make sense. Neither did our landing make sense, pulling max power into the wind when we should have needed half of what we used.

I plotted a takeoff course free of obstructions that would give us descent room down and out of the clouds – down wind. My AC concurred that it was worth a try (this decision is called “you bet your life”). Lifting to a hover, we were using everything we could get out of the engine to just clear the pad. Turning and banking left we began to use less and less power until we came to our outbound heading. Holding altitude and picking up airspeed, we continued to need less power until we were at flat pitch – using no power at all. Basically we were a kite being held aloft by air currents. As we exited

the clouds, the altimeter read the same as it did when we were on the ground at the OP.

Final conclusion for all pilots: don't ever do what we did without a lot of prayer and confirmation of the Spirit.

And What of Heather?

My 'sole-mate' sister, for want of a better descriptor, finished her degree at BYU at the end of Spring Semester, 1969, just a few weeks before I left for Vietnam. Though I had met my "lovely lady", I still took time to visit with Heather one last time before leaving for Vietnam. She had been offered a job on campus and elected to stay and be on her own for the first time in her life. She was taking the economic leap of faith from parental support with her first real full-time job.

Did she have a testimony yet? No. Had she received answers to her prayers yet? No, but she was staying close to the wholesome environment she had grown to love at BYU, and that was a good sign.

Heather knew I was going to give a girl a diamond before leaving for Vietnam when I told her how I had met Dianne and "been instructed." That was a severance way of encouraging her to continue to search for her answers, although not a comforting way for either one of us to say goodbye. It was just a new reality, but that shouldn't extinguish our feelings for each other. We parted for the last time, each with different hopes.

In October I got a final letter from Heather. It put me on my knees. I read how she continued to take in campus activities, church services, firesides, etc. She wrote about attending a *Book of Mormon* fireside one evening given by Cleon Skowson. She told me how the Spirit suddenly came upon her with such force that she greeted Brother Skowson at the end of the meeting and expressed the deepest desire to be baptized. She finally got the answer to her prayers about the Church and the *Book of Mormon*.

Shortly thereafter, to the joy of many who had waited so long, Heather was baptized. What the Spirit told me more than eighteen months earlier had finally come to fruition. That was the good news. The bad news was that when she became a member, her parents disowned her and cut off all correspondence and support for her.

And Doing Quite Well

What came to mind in that moment was that, had Heather been given a testimony years earlier, she probably would have buckled. A sweet impression came and was most assuring that Heavenly Father doesn't require anything of us that we are not capable of shouldering. In all my anxiety about Heather's prayers not being answered, a wiser Father was carefully raising His daughter in a spiritual fashion best for her. Had I greater vision, that broader perspective would have replaced my anxiety with faith. "To some it is given to believe on the words of those who know. . . ,” until their faithfulness in good works is rewarded by our Father in Heaven with His best blessings.

I heard Him say to me: "Learn patience, my son." Being "anxiously engaged" in missionary work, I've struggled with that council ever since.

Thanksgiving? e,t,b,a,w

Weather reports issued by FAA through their meteorological service facilities (METRO) are filled with abbreviations for every imaginable sky condition. Hz means haze, sg is smog, sk is smoke, etc. If the report had all three of these conditions, it would read hz,sg,sk, followed by information about winds aloft, etc. Had we access to quality weather briefings as this, Thanksgiving Day, 27 November, 1969, would have had sky conditions listed as e,t,b,a,w. . . . "even the birds are walking."

A long standing tradition of Army cooks is to put out a seventeen course hot meal for every soldier in the command on Thanksgiving Day. This tradition was of special importance in Vietnam. It was our mission to deliver the goods to every soldier in the field who was in the battalion we were assigned to support that month. Thermos insulated canisters called "marmite" cans could keep food hot for hours. On this day we would deliver everything from soup to nuts, and almost die five times in the process.

As the 'rainy season' came beginning in September, combat units had to pull back from the A Shau Valley, or be mired and cut off from all support. The Fall weather conditions in 1969, were particularly bad, to include a typhoon that came through the last week of September and dumped over 120 inches of rain on us during a five day period. Three of

our four bunker line two story gun emplacements were completely under water in our perimeter sector of Camp Evans. For the enemy to attack, he'd have to swim more than a hundred yards over most of our barbed wire.

By November, the 502nd and 506th Infantry Battalions were covering trails that came through the high eastern ridgeline of the A Shau, off the main Ho Chi Minh trail. The war belonged only to those on foot in the jungle. Whatever our troops' location or condition, however, we were devoted to make the Thanksgiving tradition a reality for every grunt on the ground.

Our Lancer birds drew missions that day that were for units located in the western-most line of defense. We were flying the eastern slopes of the A Shau range in very high elevations, steep canyons, and thick jungle. Each sortie was to a general location with a specific call sign and frequency. Loaded with meals to feed 30-50 men, we flew to an area on the map and then tried to make radio contact to home in overhead for the rations drop 150-200 feet above the troops. The problems were the usual: weather, enemy, and terrain.

The US Forces could call a holiday in the war about any time we wanted. It simply meant we wouldn't fire on the enemy, if they didn't fire at us. The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) used those holidays to resupply without harassment as our forces stood down. On Thanksgiving Day the enemy wasn't our worry. It was the weather.

Crashing Thanksgiving Dinner

If we made FM radio contact, we could follow our homing device to get closer to a unit, and when they heard us, a ground guide would talk us in to a safe drop area to unload. We never reached a single map point that day without first running into cloud cover that came down to tree top level. If we could make radio contact, we had a direction with homing. Without the radio contact, we were forced to go on to the next unit, and the next, until we had a contact. Flying tree to tree in steep mountainous terrain with elevations up to 5,000 feet above us along with the threat of punching into heavy unforgiving clouds – we were on the edge of our seats all day. It took the entire day, often trying two and three times before reaching a specific unit, to get the job done. This most fatiguing flying

day was rewarded with the greatest satisfaction that, because of us, every soldier had a fantastic hot meal. I just hope we didn't deliver rations to an enemy unit that might have had a correct frequency and call sign. We never could see the ground or any grunts we were bombing with our cans.

I started counting the times that we almost went IMC (Inadvertent Meteorological Conditions) – when none of our four crew members could see the ground. I stopped at five when I was too worn out to care anymore. I know I kept my guardian angel on his toes the entire day.

I Almost Made It Home for Christmas . . . in a Coffee Can

Long before 10 December, I had orders for a new assignment. I was leaving the Lancers for another unit, with a moving date of the 11th -- tomorrow. I almost missed that move -- by two inches.

The missions on 10 December, were in support of the Division Chemical Detachment at Camp Eagle. Occasionally Division G-2 Intelligence would get information on an enemy troop build-up in the making, and would hand a harassment mission to the Chemical Detachment to dispense CS (tear gas), Napalm, or white phosphorous grenades in the area to break things up. Usually these concentrations were in areas out of reach of our friendly troops. This was less than comforting information when supporting the chemical people. Flying single ship with no gun cover and no ground troops close by made the contents of your survival pack very dear. Worse still was to know that these chemical people had the meanest stuff to throw over the side of our low flying chopper, and it usually made the biggest bang.

I didn't get the name of the lone Captain we were flying for that day – we'll just call him Cpt. Fumble – because I wanted to forget him as quickly as possible when the mission terminated. After that day, however, I knew I'd never forget his face.

As usual, we were given a grid coordinate and a plan of attack from Cpt. Fumble. As we over-flew an area, he would sit in the center of the rear bench seat with four cases of white phosphorous (WP) grenades and toss them one at a time as quickly as possible out both left and right open doors. "Four or five passes ought to do it," he said.

WP is a terrible weapon. When WP contacts air, it explodes in a thousand pieces and burns through just about anything. It is especially destructive to skin. The violent grenade explosion radius is about thirty meters, and the distinctive thick white smoke is very visible. Additionally used for marking targets, the sticky, toxic, choking smoke was also awful to people unfortunate enough to be in the target area.

Well past the forward line of friendly troops, we told Cpt. Fumble to get ready for our first pass. On our mark, he began pulling pins and tossing grenades as fast as he could.

I asked if he'd like some help from our crew chief and door gunner, but he cordially declined. He wanted all the 'fun' for himself, but my foremost worry was for our safety. He wasn't tossing eggs out the door, and a couple more hands might speed things along and insure against errors in handling. I didn't expect ground fire on our first pass, but knew if there was anyone on the ground, they wouldn't be very hospitable as we made subsequent passes.

The smoke from our first pass marked the path for succeeding passes very well. It was kind of like crop dusting, row after row after row. Then it happened – on our fifth pass. Cpt. Fumble hit the forward right side door post, right behind my seat, with one of his grenades. The distinctive sound brought all eyes to the point of impact and the entire crew knew we stood a significant chance of dying in less than six seconds. Six seconds is the duration of burn time of the fuse of any grenade. We were all holding our collective breathe.

Fortunately for us all, the WP grenade bounced out instead of in -- under my seat, or somewhere forward into the chin bubble where it would be completely inaccessible. Had the grenade stayed inside, there would have been less of me to send home than would fill a coffee can.

The mission came to an immediate end when the AC (a lowly Chief Warrant Officer 2) pulled rank on Cpt. Fumble and conveyed him directly to his base at Camp Eagle, ordering him out of the aircraft with the recommendation that he polish his throwing skills by joining the base softball team as a shortstop. The entire crew relived that six second experience numerous times in the coming days, weeks and years. The unique spine tension still returns to me just thinking about it after 40 years.

Being Forewarned

Without the forewarning of my bishop's blessing as to what I would encounter in my Vietnam experiences, I have often wondered if I would have been as understanding as I was of situations that developed. Each day became an episode that I may have already experienced in the forewarning. I told my dad of the Bishops blessing, and he advised me – as the experienced war veteran that he was – to not tempt fate or knowingly place myself in harms way. “The dangers will find you,” he said. “We just want you to come home.”

Every detail of Bishop Pratt's blessing was fulfilled. The opposite of prophecy is hindsight, and the two can be separated by only a moment (in the hover hole), a day (when I met Dianne and knew I was going to marry her), a week (when “everyone knows nothing ever happens to you”), or years, when something out of the blue helps you connect the dots of several yesterdays. Never once in all of my combat flying did I ever take a hit, did I ever suffer an engine failure or serious in-flight mechanical failure, nor was anyone ever hurt while flying in my aircraft. I've never heard of another combat pilot that went through a Vietnam tour that can say the same.

Oh yes, my Bishop's blessing also promised me that none of the men in my unit would respond to invitations to go to church, or show any interest in spiritual things. Just the opposite. He told me that they would try me and test me to see if I really was who and what I said I was. For this reason I tried all the harder to prove my bishop wrong by taking every opportunity, few as they were, to share thoughts from the gospel as circumstances arose. My only success came when I discovered that one of the AC's in my flight platoon was a baptized member who confided his membership to me after he had put in a request to have me permanently assigned as his copilot. His action brought to an end the mixing of flight assignments for crewmembers. I had to promise to keep his membership secret, which I do to this day, and we flew together for more than three months during my time as a Lancer.

The Report Card

I logged 974 hours of combat flight time during my tour of duty, in and out of places that have become quite well known in the history of the war. Yet, never once did I have

to witness a fatality, nor have to fire on the enemy. During combat assaults the noise was so intense that one's eyes would nearly swell shut from the deafening thunder of machine guns and exploding munitions, tracers coming up around my aircraft as men were inserted or as we snatched them off hill tops or out of deep jungle. My aircraft and crew members always came back without a scratch. Even the severely wounded were stable until we could get them into the care of an off-shore hospital ship. Once men were inside my aircraft, they were always safe and none ever came to additional harm.

The Mad Mormon

On the back of my helmet, in big letters, I had stenciled a design for the 101st Airborne and put in it my call sign . . . the "Mad Mormon." My real call sign in numerical order of issue was Lancer 50, being the 50th pilot in the unit since its formation at Fort Carson, Colorado, in 1968. My helmet was the only advertizing bill board I had. Using The Mad Mormon, my attempt was to find members of the Church in the field as they got on and off my aircraft. The paxs checked out the pilots to see who was driving, and many times I received a thump on the head and a friendly "hi" to know I had a member on board. I did my best to keep track of them and supply Church magazines and lemonade mix when possible. Had I always been driving, I wouldn't have been able to meet my back-seaters.

The Lord Got Me My Own Aircraft

My efforts to serve were enhanced considerably 11 December, 1969, when I received a new assignment and transfer from the Lancer Assault Company to a general support company attached to Division Headquarters of the 101st Airborne Division. I was assigned to fly the staff and the generals of the 101st as part of the 163rd AVN Co (GS). With the new assignment came a transition into the single pilot, Hughes OH-6 helicopter (LOH). I now had a much more responsible job, covering the entire area of operation for the 101st, always with a VIP on board. I was finally a PIC (pilot in command) with my own aircraft.

Flying alone was a much riskier business. General Support missions no longer enjoyed Cobra gun ship cover and the safety of numbers that multi-ship combat formations

provided. However, the commanders and staffers that the 163rd supported went everywhere in the area of operation (AO), which gave me the flexibility to locate church members throughout the entire division.

The Move to Camp Eagle

I was relocated to Camp Eagle, the Base Camp for the 101st, just south of Hue City, in Northern "I Corps". I was now a "Road Runner".

The workings of my new company were so remarkably different from my assault unit that, for starters, our appearance standard was to be 'above the rest,' spotless, giving an inspection sharp look every day. Our aircraft even had to be waxed. In the Lancer field unit, we seldom took flack from higher commanders because we were almost expected to look like dirt. We blended better with the terrain we operated in. Now, in the elite "Road Runner" unit, each pilot had to know every location of subordinate unit headquarters in the division, how to communicate with and get safely in and out of every location, arrange for flight following, gun cover and support, and navigate unassisted, and do it all in spit shinned boots. Additionally, there was no one qualified to hand the controls to. It was just me and my angel.

I arrived in my new company area just prior to my anticipated R&R that had been scheduled earlier in September for the Christmas holidays. I was to meet my fiancé in Honolulu.

What Could Be Better Than Christmas in Hawaii?

Before leaving for Vietnam, Dianne and I talked about meeting in Hawaii, feeling that time together was necessary to firm up our plans for the coming wedding and to make sure that we were making the right decision. She would be on Christmas break from school at BYU.

Dianne had not worn her ring since I had given it to her the day before leaving for the war zone. She wanted to clear the slate with her missionary who was then less than a year on his mission, and she wanted to make sure that it was as right for her as it was for me. She was going to bring the ring with her and, if everything worked out, we would

get formally engaged in Hawaii.

I planned to buy two motel rooms each night, if necessary, to accommodate us and maintain a proper moral setting. We both tried to enroll our parents to come along and be chaperones, but neither was able to come. I prayed that something would happen so that we would not have to be alone together so far away from home.

After securing the hard to get Hawaii R&R orders in August, I attended a 3-day servicemen's conference in mid-September in Da Nang, presided over by Elders Bruce R. McConkie and Marian D. Hanks.

I was billeted with three other fellows: Cpt. Eugene Amberson (our new member), Cpt. Steven Peterson (my new Camp Eagle Branch President who would soon call me to be his councilor) and the last fellow, a Marine Lieutenant from Delta, Utah, by the name of Robert Riding.

We palled around and had a great time during the conference. Not two minutes before splitting up, "Bob" Riding was about to hop a ride on a Marine chopper back to his base camp, when I asked where he was going for R&R. Over the deafening noise of the helicopter he yelled: "I'm going to Hawaii to get engaged to my girlfriend from BYU during her Christmas break."

"What's her name," I asked.

"Her name's Diane."

"What's her last name?" I yelled. I trembled to ask, fearing that our circumstances would be tooooo alike.

Happily, there was only one difference in our stories: our girlfriends did have different last names.

However, the dates of my R&R orders were 23 thru 29 December, and Bob's orders were for 31 December thru 6 January.

"Is there any way we can go together?" I inquired.

Bob was yelling at me as we walked to his chopper that he was phenomenally lucky to get a Hawaii slot, and Marine Corps orders were "set in stone – too much risk to change them." When we parted I knew it would be up to me if we were to be able to go together.

The Three Month Miracle

I somehow knew at the outset that it would be difficult but not totally impossible to get my orders changed, and that if I did all I could, the way would be opened and everything would work out so that we could go together in the security of numbers. But, it wouldn't happen overnight.

When I applied to have my orders changed, the personnel officer told me I was "nuts" to risk giving up a sure slot to Hawaii for something on another specific date that probably would not be possible. "This stuff is scheduled way in advance. And besides, all the married guys have priority to Hawaii over you singles, and how you got Hawaii approval in the first place is beyond me," he said. I was in the same position as Bob Riding.

I asked if he would be kind enough to pursue the change, but I would be prepared to leave on the twenty-third as planned if he couldn't get me a date. I continued to make contact with him and with other people I knew, but felt that the personnel officer wasn't very interested in one soldier's special needs and, after all, no one knew more about these things than he did.

Home Teaching is Never Done

In the first week of November, I was assigned a mission where we were to take some press people and VIPs to Division Headquarters at Camp Eagle. Still in B Company Lancers field unit, dirty and grungy and in the real war, this was our first visit to the 'big city'. We were even briefed that every crew chief was to scrub out their aircraft, and everyone was to wear a clean flight suit.

We landed our flight of three on the center pad of five in right echelon at Eagle VIP. As our rotors were winding down, I looked over to the end pad to my left (I was flying in the left PIC seat that day) and saw someone I recognized. At first I couldn't remember his name and simply lowered the window and let out a yell. My AC grabbed my arm and said: "Weeks, what are you doing? That's probably somebody really important and you're going to get us all in trouble."

I jumped out of the aircraft before the rotor stopped turning and headed for the center of a group, mostly civilians, that were surrounding an officer. The officer was obviously a commander of high rank. He was dressed in starched fatigues, looking very much like General Patton. The group parted as I approached. As the officer turned in my direction I stuck out my hand and said: "Hi, Brother McDonald. I had no idea you were in Vietnam."

Before me stood Col. Hugh McDonald, previous flight school commandant at Ft. Rucker, and to whom I was formerly assigned as home teacher. He was now the 101st Airborne Division Artillery Commander.

Now, it is imperative to remember that there is nothing lower in the officer ranks in any branch of military service than a Warrant Officer One. Warrant officers are always called Mister instead of Sir, the title carrying with it some doubt as to whether WO's are officers at all.

"MISTER Weeks," he said. "How good to see you. Grab your flight crew and come have lunch with me. You can do that, can't you?"

"Yes, Sir," I said. "I wouldn't want to disobey an order from a superior officer, Sir."

I went back to get my flight crew who reluctantly picked their jaws up off the helipad tarmac and followed me into the VIP mess hall for Fillet Minion. Mr. Weeks was walking on water again, and word about a Fillet Minion lunch would certainly get around among the other flight crews.

I can't remember much about the luncheon. However, Col. McDonald chatted with me like I was his son, and wanted me to tell him everything about what I'd been doing since our last home teaching visit at Rucker. The only things I remember telling him were that I appreciated the leave extension he got me that allowed me to attend my sister's wedding, and that I had met the girl of my dreams, and we were going to get married when I got home. He gave me his whole time and attention for almost an hour, as though no one else around us mattered.

Lunch over, it was time for both of us to get back to work. I told him I was going to meet Dianne in Hawaii for Christmas, and hoped to see him in the AO again. When we shook hands to depart, he said: "if there's anything I can ever do for you, just let me know."

"Yes, Sir, . . . , a, Sir, yes. . . , there is something. I really need help with. . . , do you

have any power over R&Rs?" I asked. "I've been trying to change my dates to be able to go with another LDS Marine friend who has my identical engagement story, except I have to see if I can get my R&R dates changed to the same week he has so we can go together."

"Let me see what I can do," he said. "I'll let you know."

The Lord Loves a Cliffhanger

The days following our encounter turned into weeks, and then it was mid-December. Dianne had already bought her airline tickets for the 23rd, and it looked like nothing was going to change. I had heard nothing from Col. McDonald at Eagle, and I was transferred there on December 11. I tried to contact him a couple of times about my new unit assignment, but still no word. I tried the Division Artillery Commander's TOC, and despite wanting to connect with him again, all I could do was leave messages.

If I called Dianne at 8:00 pm Vietnam time, it would be 7:00 am in Provo, Utah, on the same day. Taking everything into consideration, I knew the morning of 22 December, that if something didn't come by the time I returned from the day's missions, I would be leaving on an Hawaiian R&R the next day without Bob Riding and his bride-to-be.

After much tense effort and no word from Col. McDonald, the days' missions completed, I apprehensively walked slowly into my hooch, almost certain that I had better start packing for Hawaii. I entered my hooch at 4:35 pm and, wanting desperately to see the paperwork on my bed, the papers magically seemed to appear. As I came to my senses, I picked up a stapled stack of about ten pages and quickly searched the subject line. I was holding R&R orders – perhaps a few more copies of some that I had had for a number of months. I checked to confirm the dates, to see if the orders had the desired date change, and suddenly I lost my breath. They did. There, as I stared again at the departure date, was 31 December, leaving from Da Nang for Honolulu. Now, I was in real trouble.

Angels Come From MARRS

I had 20 minutes to get to a telephone hookup to the States -- a Mars Radio Repeater Station (a network of volunteer Ham Radio operators that helped GI's with phone patches to the US). Their office closed every afternoon at 5 pm, and they were located at Phu Bai, about eight miles away. If I didn't make it to MARRS to tell Dianne to change her flight schedule, I'd be going on R&R the next day.

Luckily, blessedly, I got a Jeep ride to the MARRS station and was able to get the necessary connections to my sweetheart in Provo.

"Hello, over," I said. No answer. . . .

"Dianne, over," I yelled into the phone.

"Oh, hi, honey," (long pause) she said, groggy from her 4 a.m. awakening.

"I know it's early in Provo, but listen carefully, and be sure to say over when you end each sentence, over," I said.

"Uh, what do you mean?" (long pause) she said.

"We are talking through a series of radio links and the operators won't know when to click their microphones unless we each say over, over," I instructed.

"Oh," (really long pause). "It's really early here and I'm not quite awake," (no over).

I then told her not to get on the airplane the next day, and to change her itinerary. "I've got the change in orders we've been praying for and we will be going on R&R with Bob and Diane, arriving on the thirty-first of December in Honolulu, over."

Then she was awake, and her squeal woke up all the other girls in her apartment. She shot up from bed and hit her head on the bunk above her, but with difficulty understood what she had to do THAT DAY to get a new itinerary, and make the schedule change and spend Christmas at home. Everything had worked out for our big double date, with time to spare. ("Lord, I would appreciate just a few extra minutes, next time I ask for a miracle.")

My impressions from mid-September had proven true as I did my best to make it all happen. Everyone in our families could see the miraculous hand that brought Col. McDonald into my life again, at the right time and the right place, to be the answer to so many prayers. Again, the evidence was clear that He who sees all things knows the end from the beginning. My role was to simply bare up under the test of faith. Little had really been required of me since I had been forewarned of Dianne entering my life, when

that part of my Bishop's blessing was so quickly fulfilled. The fact that she was in my life was the surety that everything would work out. The blessing of meeting her was enough to know that Father would do the rest to fill our needs as we came together to plan our wedding.

The same could certainly be said for Bob and Diane Riding, who were not only wonderful double daters, but who also were married on the same day, in the same hour, in the Salt Lake Temple when Dianne and I were. They have been life long friends as a result of our experience.

Who knows. We all probably got together in the pre-existence and planned everything out beforehand. "It could happen," we said.

Getting Out of Dodge

Bob Riding didn't know of the change in my orders until we both showed up at Da Nang Air Base. We came out of Vietnam on the same flight, with a midway stop in Guam. As we lifted off the runway, you could feel the tension in the aircraft. Everyone on board knew that this escape from combat was too good to be true. Something would happen to stop our egress – an engine failure, bullets from ground fire,. . . *something*, . . . *anything*. As we passed through five thousand feet about five miles off the coast, it was as though the DC-8 suddenly leaped upward another thousand feet as everyone on board simultaneously heaved a sigh of relief. The refreshing wave that swept through the cabin was what every soldier who has ever gone to battle has hoped for – freedom. We were quite probably far enough away from Vietnam that we could now feel safe. We were all being given six days and five nights of freedom, without the worry of RPGs, 122mm rockets, mortars, or sappers. We were going to a place as close to paradise as there could be, with friends or family, the best reprieve possible from the hell we had been in. To feel that much tension dissipate as though on queue was to experience a satisfaction that vocabulary cannot convey, a feeling known only to those who have earned it by their service in harms way.

We left Nam around 4:00 pm, December 31, 1969. We landed for refuel in Guam at 12:30 am, January 1, 1970. This was cause to celebrate. It was New Years Day. Some managed to find a drink or two before reboarding the aircraft. For most, the next leg was

a chance to get another good sleep before arriving in Honolulu at 11:00 am, December 31, 1969. We had flown through a day, a month, a year, a decade, and back again. We would all get to experience New Years all over again, and this one would be better than the last.

Hawaii – Paradise

It was a wonderful hiatus from the combat zone. What a double date. The girls arrived later in the afternoon after Bob and I had checked into the Hawaiian Hilton Hotel on Waikiki. We had all we could hope for with separate rooms, including something that was strangely familiar.

An American Standard

As we met for the first time together in one of the rooms, I felt the need to exit for a bathroom break. After completing the simple work at hand, I felt a bit remiss to disturb the pleasant ambiance with a loud toilet flush. As luck would have it, the Hilton had toilets that were the turbo-charged, high pressure models that didn't know how to exchange water supply quietly. And then it dawned on me what a wonderful, wonder-filled opportunity I had.

I pushed the handle of the "super power flush" valve before me, ripped open the bathroom door, and yelled: "Bob, get in here."

Still sensitized to hair trigger combat responses, Bob sprang from his chair and shot into the bathroom. He found me sitting on the tile floor with both legs wrapped around this marvelous American Standard, hand poised on the lever, ready to initiate a second, third, and fourth aquatic experience from this modern marvel.

The dependable, ever humorous Bob immediately sunk to his knees, in near worship fashion, and we both "oohed" and "awed" as we witnessed about fifteen cycles of the commode, with an amazement that only those who haven't seen a flush toilet for eight months can understand.

The girls knew they were in for all kinds of amazing things in the next few days, at least until we could readjust to civilized ways of doing things. Little could they understand

the reasons for our merriment about a simple flush. We couldn't expect them to understand our joy when we knew there were no possible splinters, or even the scent of jet grade kerosene in the wonderful sanitation facilities of our rooms.

The four of us toured around Oahu and saw very little of the island, but a lot of each other. We conversed for over five days, making wedding plans, and exchanged rings on Waikiki Beach, exactly on the hour of New Year's, 1970. We were just excited about being together.

When we went to the temple at Laie, the girls suggested that since we all had our temple recommends, we could get married right now. I held my breath until we discovered that the temple was closed for the holidays. I knew that neither of the girls wanted to give up big weddings at home. The whole thing was a tease. They had their moments with two rough G I's, and all that transpired was good clean fun.

The Near Broken Engagement

The morning of 1 January, found us out on the beach, ready for surf, sand and sun. I was the first one into the water, and almost crippled myself running from the shore. I had never been told that the sand on Waikiki was in short supply, and that your feet would hit a lava bottom before you were in water deep enough to float. You just don't go swimming on Waikiki without wearing something to protect your feet, nor do you dive deeply or you could seriously rake yourself across the lava bottom and be in a hospital with a nurse picking rock chunks out of you for a week. (We only had six days.)

That surprise quickly over, Dianne and I floated out on a board to experience the famous surfing that every travel poster of Honolulu shows. The posters make it look easy enough.

However, the travel posters don't say that you need three to four foot waves to surf, and they rarely have those at Waikiki either.

As we turned around to float back to shore, Dianne was paddling on the front of the board. With her first stroke I noticed that there was no ring on her left hand. About that same time she turned around, but before she could speak, I blurted out, "Your ring. Where's your ring?"

She said that when she saw the blood drain from my face, she was instantly repentant

and afraid to tell me that she had taken it off, only to play a joke on me and tell me she had dropped it in the water. She has been deeply indebted to me ever since for that one.

The Presents of An Apostle

A couple of days later we were on the north end of the island to visit the Polynesian Cultural Center (PCC), Church College, and the temple. When we arrived, we found there was only one motel in Laie, where we could spend the night. When we checked in, it just happened that we did so right behind people that Bob and I both recognized -- Apostle Spencer W. Kimball and his wife. Pres. Kimball kindly remembered me from an encounter we had in Brazil three and a half years earlier when we met to discuss maintenance problems of a critical nature on a chapel in the mission. He looked at us all and asked what we were doing in Hawaii. We explained our circumstances as singles who had just become engaged, to which he responded, "Now, you kids be good." A short interview. . . . a great resolution for us all. We dared not depart from his apostolic counsel.

That evening at the PCC show, we entered to find our seats, and again found ourselves right behind Pres. and Sister Kimball, as we walked down the isle. He was bedecked with a dozen lays and a traditional crown of greenery. Seeing us, he spontaneously took two of the beautiful lays from his shoulders and gave them to our girls. It made our hearts jump and thrilled us to be witnesses to this great man's spontaneous generosity.

No six days have ever gone by quite so fast in my life as the fun packed six days of R&R.

When Bob and I climbed on the plane in Da Nang to leave for R&R, the flight seemed to take forever to get to Hawaii. After our cheerful but tearful farewell with our girls, the plane ride back seemed to take little over an hour for the leg to Guam -- one short nap, and an even shorter nap before we were touching down in Da Nang.

The Other Chemical Officer -- Henry Louis Meyer

While still flying with the Lancers, I was assigned in late fall of 1969, a single ship mission to support the Division Chemical Officer. This was not another adventure with Cpt. Fumble. This new Chemical Officer became one of the most enjoyable people I ever came to know. Not only was this man enormously impressive (he was a big guy), but we did one of the most memorable missions I experienced.

“Memorable?”

Cpt. Henry Louis “Hank” Meyer was doing creative things with Agent Orange, a defoliant that proved to be far more toxic than anyone handling it thought. Generally, the Air Force carried out missions to spray tremendous quantities of this defoliant in the A Shau Valley and around our AO, to denude the jungle trees that provided concealment and cover for the enemy. Cpt. Meyer had additional designs to ‘bomb’ cultivated fields used for food growing with 5 gallon jugs of the stuff.

We flew well forward of any friendly troops that day, onto the valley floor. Making high speed low level passes diagonally across the fields we located, Cpt. Meyer threw the jugs of agent out the open door. If we did it right, the jugs would burst at a corner of the field and the agent would disperse diagonally across the field and ruin the crops.

This mission may not sound like much, but when you are twenty miles from the nearest friendlies, without gun cover, making repeated passes in a relatively small area, you worried for your own safety, let alone the safety of the Division Chemical Officer who could have easily fallen out the door trying to complete his mission. Despite all these odds, we came through, probably on the strength of brawn and our youthful ignorance.

Hal had a spirit about him that drew me to find occasion to ask him about the Church. He was easy to talk to, but there was little time during the mission to do much else than what was required. I didn’t think I’d ever see him again.

When I was assigned to Camp Eagle, I remembered the pad from which we had worked when I was a “Lancer” and, with my own ship and no one to ask permission, I dropped in to it and reacquainted myself with Cpt. Meyer. I told him that my new unit was located right next door to the Division Chapel on our base, and that we had not only Sunday morning meetings, but also something called MIA (Mutual) on Wednesday evenings that I’d like to invite him to. I’m sure he was puzzled by a Church term MIA, especially when that’s the last thing a wartime soldier wants to be – Missing In Action.

Hal attended and found the meetings to his liking, and became a regular at both Sunday and Wednesday meetings.

Hal was a man's man. The thing I remembered most about him was his large stature. He was easy to pick out in any setting, but I couldn't quite understand what his hang-up was. We frequently had good gospel discussions, but Hal was not keen on anything that was close to a baptism commitment. He had a strong love and respect for his parents and a solid tie to his mother that I only became aware of much later. Baptism into the Church was not for him – not right now. However, he rarely missed a meeting while I was at Eagle and until I left for home.

With leave, marriage and a next assignment in Germany after my return home, I soon forgot names and put behind me those who I thought I'd never see again.

Many years later, 1974, when I was off active duty and back in college, I received a Christmas card at my home (parents) address from a missionary in Northern Italy. His name was a mystery to me. I am naturally short-minded with names and do far better with places and events. I kept the card, however, thinking that perhaps the name would mean more to me on a better day.

With two more years gone by, Dianne's brother Greg, who was living with us while also going to college, came home one day with an extra-ordinary, exciting story. He was in a Human Development and Family Relations class where class members were divided into groups of six or eight, and asked to come to class prepared to share with their group something personal that they considered a "life changing" experience. One student in Greg's group shared his story about how, as a soldier in Vietnam he had encountered the Church. A helicopter pilot had taught him the gospel, but not wanting to be baptized without his parents knowing of his decision, he had returned home to Williamsburg, Va., and enrolled in William and Mary College. Lonely for the association he had felt with members of the LDS Church in the Camp Eagle Branch, he had looked for and found a branch of the Church in Williamsburg. Of course, missionaries serving in that area connected quickly with him, and he was baptized. He mentioned how impressed he was that these two missionaries would sacrifice so much to teach him, in as much as they walked five miles each way from their apartment across the York River bridge to meet with him for each discussion.

After class Greg approached this student, and mentioned that he had a brother-in-law

that had been a pilot in Vietnam.

“What’s your brother-in-laws name?” he asked.

“His name’s Glen Weeks.”

“That’s him. That’s the helicopter pilot who taught me,” said Hal.

You can imagine the joy we three felt as a reunion quickly came about.

Hal returned to active duty after graduation, and because of his travels, we became lost to each other again. Some twenty years later I had occasion to visit professionally with the parents of a client who were considering opening a retirement account with the company I represented. As part of the subscription process I asked the question: “If something happens to you, who would you like to receive all your money? Please list your beneficiaries.”

“You already know our son,” said the mother. “We have two additional daughters, one living in Ogden, Utah, and one who is married to a chemical officer in the US Army who lives in Omaha.”

“She wouldn’t be married to Hal Meyer?” I asked. “Her name isn’t Peggy Meyer, is it?”

Stunned, thinking I could read her mind, she replied: “How did you know?”

“I’ll need her address and phone number, please,” I said. “I want to reconnect with her husband today. I taught him the gospel when we knew each other in Vietnam almost thirty years ago.”

Ripples

The foregoing are only a few of many experiences that have, like ripples on a pond, gone out, only to come back again in joyous fashion. The testimony of these experiences reflects the law of the harvest. In this case, seeds that were sewn decades earlier have returned multiple harvests. Today, Hal and Peggy Meyer live only a local call away in Stansbury Park, Ut. We’ve collaborated together on projects concerning home preparedness, missionary work, and the military. Our daughters of the same first name have come to know each other, also.

Additionally, while in a professional setting in an elementary school in Payson, Utah, I sat with a single teacher in her early thirties, only to discover that she had come to Utah from Wisconsin to teach, after joining the Church there two years earlier. She had been

church hopping from one faith to another, eventually landing in an LDS Ward where missionaries collected her up, taught and baptized her. The following Sunday she awoke to say to herself: "I'm a Latter-day Saint now. I'd best find an LDS Church to go to today." (Someone had dropped the ball on fellowshipping in the ward where she was baptized).

She found the Sun Prairie Ward near Beaver Dam, she told me. She went on to say: "When I entered the chapel, there was a lady at the door who greeted me and asked if I was new in the ward. I told her I didn't know what a ward was, or where I belonged."

"You belong right here," she told me. "You can be a member of our Ward."

"Was this sister a bit short, with dark hair and black rimmed glasses?" I asked. "And was her husband blonde, with a short haircut, short neck like a fullback, black rimmed glasses, and was he the Bishop?"

"Yes, yes," she said. "How did you know?"

"That was Gene and Thelma Amberson you met. I baptized Gene in Vietnam."

Stretching for the Wire

After moving to the "Road Runners" at Camp Eagle, there were many tense moments yet to be experienced in the five months remaining in my tour.

Normally, pilots do not put in more than sixty to ninety hours of flying time in a month. By regulation an aviator must see the Flight Surgeon for a health clearance beyond 80 hours, again at 100 hours, and no one is allowed more than 120 hours of flight time in any thirty day period.

The number of hours and missions we were flying in the "Road Runners", however, were inordinately high. Major Frank Burns and my new Company Commander had something in common. They were both "professional" soldiers. Not wanting to make waves, our CO would never give feedback as to the best employment of his unit's men and assets. He was a desk jockey, not a combat leader, and only took to the sky once each month to make his flight minimums for pay purposes. A lazy afternoon flight to Da Nang and back accomplished that. As to everything else, he never allowed Operations to refuse a mission.

The "Road Runners" became a taxi cab company to take field grade officers (O-4) and above anywhere they wanted, at almost any hour. We gave needed mobility for the command generals and staff. However, many low level staffers would request flights for personal extravagances, and that unnecessarily forced over-use of crews and aircraft, much to the faltering moral of flight personnel. Fortunately, higher ranking officers seldom liked to fly at night, which became the only saving grace for maintenance to keep up on aircraft availability.

When I joined the Army I wanted to be a career pilot, and high flight hours always show well on a resume. Piloting a single pilot aircraft, however, is the roughest kind of flying there is, since you have no one with whom to share the workload. You can never take a break in the air or hand over the controls. Of course, in a helicopter you can never take your hands off any of the controls. That's why helicopters have no automatic pilots.

Within two months of this heavy flying I was worn to a frazzle and began to lose quite a bit of weight. The trips to the flight surgeon became more and more frequent for extended hours clearances, and I was flying well beyond what regulations allowed. Because I didn't drink or smoke, I was always up to fly, a necessity to keep my advantage for Sunday church time off -- I was again called to be in the Branch Presidency. Within six weeks I became high time pilot in the unit, with well over 150 hours in a 30 day period. I could take three consecutive days off (mandated by the flight surgeon upon my request) and never drop below 150 hours.

Since becoming a Warrant Officer, my luck, if that is what to call it, was to either have a great CO with a dud for a platoon leader, or a great platoon leader with a dud for a CO. When I came to the "Road Runners" I had received excellent OER's (Officer Efficiency Reports), hence my recommendation came forward from the "Lancers" to be a "Road Runner". Suddenly, I was being used and abused in my new unit, and the only compensation for my long hours behind the stick came from the company of officers who were the passengers on my missions -- I did get to fly some great men -- and the members of the Church in the field I was able to visit.

High Time Pilot – and Then Some

Because of the flying load in the last five months of my tour, other than Hal Meyer,

there was very little of spiritual significance to report from missionary efforts. I did manage to take a lot of things to men in the field, but the time simply was not available for missionary discussions or much church activity other than Sunday meetings and a few MIAs.

Operating alone as a single aircraft would be quite worrisome to most pilots. The previous seven months of Lancer experience, however, had taught me to fly by feel, and with the protection of that guiding spirit, I could literally detect the direction and nature of the enemy that was near, and avoid the presence of danger. I did not participate in the activities common at the club that "Road Runner" pilots did after duty hours. Flying extended hours was the better activity and I was the continuous high-time pilot for more than four months of the five I was a "Road Runner".

For reasons known only to him, I was often requested by the (G-3) Division Operations Officer, Colonel Dykes, to be pilot for his missions. This man was a very impressive individual, thirty-seven years of age, a lieutenant colonel, and in charge of all of the operations of the 101st division. I had often looked for the opportunity to test this man's spiritual metal, and felt he would have been quite receptive had there been a moments lull in his duties. Once he climbed aboard, however, his radio communications never stopped as he coordinated missions and actions of units in the division during our flights.

I had one moment with LTC Dykes that was somewhat remarkable. As he climbed into my LOH, I cleared myself left and right- rear to ensure that I was free for take-off. He happened to notice the "Mad Mormon" call sign on the back of my helmet that was highly visible. He came eye to eye with me and said, "Mad Mormon -- is your call sign indicative of your excitement about your faith or your state of mind about it, Mr. Weeks?"

"The former, Sir," I responded, with a smile.

Those few words were my only opportunity to have a short spiritual moment with Colonel Dykes, and I know he felt something. All I could hope for was that one day he would meet the Church again and be inclined to investigate it.

The Greatest Lesson Learned

The impression of most worth that came upon my mind through all my combat experience was this: given the rigors of war, it was as easy to witness spiritual life and death on an almost daily basis as it was physical life and death in the men with whom I served. When the spiritual casualties become as apparent as the physical ones, one need not wonder why many come home bearing a tormented conscience so great as to render them disgruntled, continuously unhappy, and needy -- unless repentance could cleanse their souls and correct their lives. To this day many disorders diagnosed as PTSD (Post Traumatic Shock Disorder) I know to have started with many broken commandments, suffering from which continues in the troubled lives of many vets.

When the moral fiber of a society is so frayed as to leave the nation divided and undecided about aggression, no war can be won. A debilitating, devastating battle will continue, as evidenced by Vietnam. Many souls perished spiritually as well as physically, both at home and on the battlefield. Divided, we can never stand, and we may only become united through the education and appreciation of moral principles that the gospel sets forth for a disciplined way of life. Only when a people can unitedly rally as they did around the Prophet Moroni when he hoisted the standard of liberty in the *Book of Mormon* times, can the strength be found sufficient to put down wicked aggression. Moroni, great teacher that he was, pointed out that their cause could not, . . . would not tolerate dissention when it came to maintaining the principles of freedom. **True freedom only allows one the right to be their best.**

Our society had little regard for South Vietnam, illustrated by one simple point: ‘the media never quantified the aggression – never identified who the aggressor was and where the aggression was taking place.’ Our lack of resolve to support a peaceful nation that came under attack, left conscripted home grown boys little pride in doing their duty to win the South Vietnamese peace. Our lackluster performance on the battlefield from binding political controls over military leaders lost the battle before it began. The adversary took control over another piece of the terrain of this earth, and enslaved the people thereof.

Regardless of how great the confusion in the media, society, and the disgruntled soldier ranks, the Lord’s power could be felt on the battlefield as his purposes were accomplished. There were trials and tests on every hand. However, He had His people in

the right place when the important eternal decisions had to be made, and such a greater strength of priesthood and brotherhood you would never expect to see anywhere else but in a congregation of elders gathered together in a combat zone conference, sharing with each other their miraculous experiences as they witnessed divine help in their individual preservation. The great sifting process of the combat experience either turned them red hot or ice cold. The red hot ones came home with greater testimonies of His plan for them and for the world in general.

In my entire year in country with all the brethren with whom I associated, I never saw one active member of the Church make a wrong decision. The strong ones became stronger, and the weak ones improved. There were a few more baptisms that I witnessed, but the greatest thrill was to see the increase in strength among brethren and to jointly express our gratitude for our lives and the blessings of our Father in Heaven whenever we met together.

Roy Lee Richardson

Lee was one of those soldiers who you had few words for when a moment with a hand shake was shared. A soldier's soldier, Lee naturally stood out as a leader. I saw immediately in Lee the same great spiritual qualities that I did in Ray Hales, and Norm Bloomfield, and it brought cause for great concern. I say concern, because it does one no good to worry about anything in a war. You quickly resign yourself to an understanding that you have between you and God. If He wants you home, He will take you in His own time, by any number of means. The "magic bullet" was talked about often by those who dodged it each day. In Roy's case – Lee as we all knew him – it would come on 9 May, 1970.

As a councilor in the Camp Eagle Branch Presidency, the presidency would meet to discuss what we thought was needful for the men of our group. We had about 25-30 members, or investigators like Hal Mayer, to mull over. But really, there wasn't much to mull about since all real needs were taken care of by the Military. Combat always had a common effect on members – we kept the commandments because we needed the blessings. Meetings were our only usual topic and who was going to ask what members

to speak, do the sacrament, give prayers, and what were the activities for Wednesday's MIA.

The first days of May were a bit different. There was a feeling at Sunday church that something was different – something very important. There was a feeling or premonition that we were going to lose someone. The time spent after services was one of those times where we made sure we shook the hand of every member. Someone was going to be missing next week.

I probably could have guessed the Lord's hand if I had just revisited the previous painful losses I had witnessed, knowing that the Lord always takes those most prepared, leaving the rest of us who still need considerable work.

It was not that much of a surprise to hear that Lee had been killed when we gathered on Sunday, 10 May, 1970. He was leading his platoon against a hardened position of the enemy and refused to quit until his death.

Spiritual Safety in Numbers

As close to Hell as combat is, the closer we were to heaven whenever the opportunity to hear testimonies came around. We gathered in two's and three's on week nights in someone's hooch, and in ten's and twenties on MIA night. Fast and Testimony Meetings and Conferences that came about semi-annually were powerful experiences. Brethren told of how many times they had been protected, or prompted to get out of harms way. Whenever two or three were gathered in his name, we Could and would enjoy the influence of heaven.

When meetings came to an end, members didn't quickly exit to get back to their units. Men lingered to shake hands with one another, expressing love and concern for each others safety. Ultimately, the concern for each was that the other might not be here next week or next meeting. Everyone wanted to know if there was a way to look after each other. We shared radio frequencies like members elsewhere share phone numbers. "If you get in trouble, call me on my freq.," was common to be heard. There was even a sense that one particular member might be next as a casualty, and when the word came, it was not all together a surprise. That was definitely the case with the great young warrior Lee Richardson. Every member felt bad that we weren't there to help him.

The Magic Bullet

After a wonderful Conference in Da Nang, I came upon a soldier who had a .30 caliber bullet hanging from his ID tags chain. During the war there was an era of symbols and necklace “garb” that demonstrated serious attitudes. Some will remember the large pewter “peace” symbols that many wore, countered by those who wore “war” pieces. In my reverent view, I thought that this soldier might be one to celebrate “war” with the slug he had invested effort to drill.

“Why are you wearing that?” I asked, somewhat disappointedly.

“This is the ‘magic bullet’ that had my name on it, Sir,” he softly replied.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

He turned his right hand upward and pointed to a small burn mark at the base of his middle finger and explained: “You see that burn, Sir? I got that when I picked this slug up when it fell to my feet. I wasn’t going to let it go. It’s a tracer round, as you can see.”

“You picked it up off the battle field?” I said flatly.

“No Sir. I picked it up at my feet,” he corrected me. “We were in a fire fight, Sir. I saw the NVA soldier who fired this round at me. It was the size of a softball, burning green (the color of enemy tracers) as it came at me, right between my eyes.”

“It wasn’t a spent round, then?” I asked.

“Oh, no, Sir. It was coming straight at me, but stopped six inches in front of my nose, and fell to the ground. I had to pick it up, Sir. I keep it with me all the time. It reminds me how much Heavenly Father loves me and how much he is protecting me. I’ll never let it go.”

Some say that testimonies should be limited – that travel logs, stories, etc., should not be part of a testimony. You have never lived until you attend a testimony meeting in a combat zone. The “truths” attested to from young men’s experiences were unforgettable and spiritually empowering -- from young men who knew they needed blessings, and recounted how they came in bushels.

What Luck?

Normally when pilots were considered high time, or had been in country for at least ten or eleven months, they would be released from flying duties and assigned to more administrative responsibilities on the ground. This action usually kept them out of harms way and insured their safe return home. Not so for "Road Runners".

"Road Runner" pilots had more hours than were allowed by regulation, a fact that I casually mentioned to an officer from headquarters who, unbeknown to me, was the Division Aviation Officer. We met in the Division Officer's Club where I was grabbing a quick sandwich between sorties one afternoon.

"Are you getting enough flying time, Mr. Weeks?" he asked.

"We've got so many hours that we're flying our butts off. I'm down ten pounds in the last six weeks," I replied.

"We wanted to make sure you "Road Runners" weren't short on hours," he responded.

My comment found its way back to my CO, who promptly reprimanded my Platoon Leader and me for "making him and the unit look bad." As we left our tongue lashing in the CO's office, my platoon leader assured me that everything would be better and thanked me for being the means of getting the message to higher so that changes could take place. I would have felt much better about the situation had my great platoon leader not taken flack from the CO with me. Such are the rewards of rank and responsibility he had for me. He assured me, however, that what happened was going to be good for the unit.

Perhaps it was my comment at Division that prompted a 'payback' from my CO. There would be no time off for CW2 Weeks before going home. I was told that "I was needed", right up until the day of my departure. I didn't even get an evening to celebrate my promotion to CW2. That had its good side. I didn't have to buy booze for all the other officers, as was customary to celebrate promotions. I continued to fly, logging 7.5 hours of blade time the day before I left "the Bird Cage." I put my OH-6 in the revetment for the last time at 8:00pm the evening before leaving.

I packed late, got up early, and caught the 6:30am shuttle chopper from our company helipad, and lifted off Camp Eagle for the last time 4 June, 1970. No "farewell" for me at the O-Club my last night. The other guys in my unit may have used the occasion to party, but it was without me. I was on my own to get home, now, and it would prove to

be no small process.

One Last Miracle, aka Mark Springer

The shortest way home for me, to make my wedding date, was to enter the United States through San Francisco, rather than through Seattle. There was extensive in and out processing at Fort Lewis, Washington. Consequently, I requested exit orders out of Bien Hoa, near Saigon, which allowed me to leave my unit two days early to fly south.

I caught a C-130 out of Phu Bai, arriving at the Bien Hoa compound front gate minutes before 8:00pm. Seated in a phone booth sized receiving post was an NCO who asked for my orders. With a quick review he surprisingly said: "Sir, you're not suppose to be here. Your orders are to report to Long Bien to the 90th Replacement Battalion."

I had been here before – Camp Alpha. This was the first place in Vietnam I reported to, and I knew the surroundings. How I had made the mistake in reading my orders to return to Bien Hoa was a complete mystery. I had read Bien Hoa, not Long Bien. The Sergeant showed me my mistake.

"Is there a convoy that can get me to where I need to be?" I asked.

"Sir, Charley (the enemy) owns everything outside that fence after 8:00pm. The gates are closing, and I'd advise you not to leave, unarmed, in the dark," he said. "You don't even want to go out there at night."

In the lower left-hand corner of the booth window I noticed a 3 x 5" card that said: 'If you are LDS, ask for Sgt. Mark Springer.' Chi grinned, I asked: "Where can I find Sgt. Springer?"

"You're lookin' at 'im, Sir," he said.

I took off my service baseball style hat with wings and new CW2 rank embroidered on it, turned it around in Sgt. Springer's face, and he read: "The Mad Mormon."

"Ah ha," he said. "I've got just the thing for you. Come with me, Sir, and I'll personally take care of you."

The front gate closed, and Mark left his post to escort me to sleeping quarters after a snack in the mess hall. As we chatted, he said: "It's a good thing you came here, Sir.

The 90th has a huge backlog of out-processing personnel. Guys have been sitting on their bunks for three weeks waiting for a flight out of country.”

“But I have to be home within ten days. I’m getting married on the nineteenth of this month,” I said.

“All the better you came here, . . . and not to worry! I’ll put you up in the VIP hooch tonight. We’ll go over to Tan Son Nhut Air Base in the morning for Church services -- we’ll take your stuff with us -- and I’ll get you a priority stand-by slot for a flight out tomorrow afternoon. You’ll be home tomorrow night – same day.”

“How can you do all that?” I asked. “And where do I go for out-processing?”

“I just happen to be the MACV Liaison, and I can do all that for you, Sir,” he said. (What ever is a MACV Liaison?)

“I can give you your out-briefing right now,” he went on. “Everyone will know that you have been in the war. Now, you don’t say anything about where you’ve been or what you’ve been doing, is that understood?”

“Yes, Sir,” I said.

“You have officially been out-briefed, Sir,” he said.

“Please stop calling me Sir, Brother,” I chided.

Mark was as good as his word. He picked me up in the morning in a Jeep and we had a great time at Church. I hauled my bags with me, and as soon as Church was over, we were headed to the Air Base. Mark walked me through receiving without a hitch, making explanations where necessary, as though he had ultimate power to amend and change what was written on my orders. His last instructions to me were: “Sit right there, Sir, and they will come get you for boarding. If for any reason they can’t get you on the next flight to Travis AFB, California, they will call me and we’ll try it again tomorrow. But, I’m pretty sure you’re out of here this afternoon. Good luck, Sir.”

“What you’ve done was pretty miraculous,” I said. “And stop calling me Sir, brother.”

Once again the Lord had the right person in the right place for me to have my prayers answered.

Welcome Home?

The drug activity among servicemen returning from Vietnam was on a tremendous increase. At our en-route stops in Tokyo and Anchorage, as well as at our final destination at Travis AFB, everyone was searched to see if anyone was in possession of illegal substances. Wearing pilots wings seemed to qualify me for an extensive search, conducted in private. I smiled and congratulated the officers doing the search, and that seemed to put them at ease as far as I was concerned.

Upon arrival at Travis, I took a shower and changed into a Class A uniform and was on a bus headed for San Francisco International for the final leg of my flight home. I was considerably early and knew that no one at home would be expecting me for almost another week.

Having purchased my flight ticket at the counter, I went immediately to a phone and called my parents to let them know when I would be arriving in Salt Lake. I “encouraged” them to coordinate with my fiancé so that she would meet me at the airport. I knew, however, that there was no possibly way Dianne could get from southern Utah to Salt Lake City in the same amount of time that it took me to get from San Francisco to Salt Lake. I could hope, but it wouldn’t be practicable.

As I entered the airplane and sat in my assigned seat, a headset beckoned me to listen to some stereo selections, with various channels from which to choose. I happened to select a patriotic program that consisted of some special numbers offered by the Tabernacle Choir. Among the selections were “This is My Country” and “God Bless America.” As I sat and listened, I suddenly felt . . . someone leave. The presence I had enjoyed for more than a year, that special spirit, the guardian angel who had protected me and preserved my life, was leaving me now, assured that I would be safely delivered to my destination.

Tears of gratitude flowed. I cried from somewhere in the skies over Nevada all the way to Salt Lake. The blessings that had been promised me had all been delivered. Mission completed, my protector withdrew.

I felt great pride for having served my country loyally and honorably, but if there was any readjustment that I was required to go through, it would be solely in relation to the emptiness that I now felt without the companionship of that guardian spirit that had been with me for so long.

An Unanticipated Revelation

The planned wedding and the companionship of my special sweetheart quickly took my attention away from the experiences of the war. Many years passed until, surprisingly, I began to ponder who it might have been that the Lord assigned as my special wartime protector. Why my mind pondered on the subject puzzled me. This wasn't anything of a particular necessity that I needed to know. It seemed that it didn't much matter. His marvelous mission completed, my gratitude couldn't expand any more than it already had for almost fifteen years of grand memories. I felt it good, however, to fast about the identity of this mystery individual and enjoyed a special spiritual experience as it was revealed to me just who had cared so well for me. The answer came in September of 1984.

My first name is Werner, namesake of my mother's youngest brother who was killed in a tragic accident at age eleven. While my mother and her parents were attending a mountain outing with the Young Women of their Gridley, California, Ward, my Uncle Werner was left alone, old enough to take care of himself, on the family farm. Responsible for seeing a number of chores through to completion before going off adventuring with neighbor boys, Werner sat on the back porch to put on his shoes before rabbit hunting with his friends. The neighbor boys, checking out a shotgun in the kitchen of the home, were confirming that the gun was not loaded. A boy pointed the weapon at the back screen door -- in Werner's direction -- and pulled both triggers. To his surprise, he emptied two barrels of shot into Werner's face. Werner's death was instantaneous.

I have often spoken with my mother about this tragedy and know of her feelings for the brother who was taken from life before he had the opportunity to receive the priesthood. As his namesake, I have felt a kinship to him, if for no other reason than his untimely death. He was the uncle I never knew. On 20 September, 1984, the Spirit revealed to me that my Uncle Werner had indeed been my guardian angel. As with other good friends who have passed through the incomprehensible veil of death, I look forward to meeting him when my mortal learning experience comes to an end, and Father decides to bring me home. I'm sure that Werner's companionship will feel easily identifiable again,

and his voice not at all unfamiliar.

The Final Disappointment

The years of struggle to write these things comes to an end today, 6 April, 2009. It comes with some disappointment in myself, that it took so long to record. I promised Bishop Pratt some eight months ago when we last visited that I would finish it soon. I was not soon enough. I must conclude now, however, so as not to be late for his funeral. Bishop Pratt died on the First of April, five days ago. This is my last chance to see him.

I apologize to you, Bishop Pratt, that you will have to read the promised copy of my journal on-line. May it be a testament of how important you were to a young man who really needed his Bishop – a noble man of God.

Werner Glen Weeks

Lancer 50

“The Mad Mormon”

In Memoriam

Richard Marden Pratt



Richard Marden Pratt 3/14/1912 ~ 4/1/2009 Richard Marden Pratt, a noble man of God, died peacefully at his home on Wednesday April First. After 97 years, he returns home to the arms of his beloved Adaline Kearnl to whom he was sealed in 1934 at the LDS Cardston Temple. He was a Father-Extraordinaire, a kind and generous Patriarch. Richard was born to Benjamin Pratt and Lilly Shirk on 14 March 1912 in Washougal, Washington. Richard believed in the ethic of hard work, lived the rule "every member a missionary." He was a sought-after speaker. As a story teller, he was unsurpassed. Richard's careers included rancher,dairyman, residential contractor. He was an accomplished furniture craftsman. But after achieving his BYU BA degree in 1963, he became best known as a Seminary teacher. He served as Bishop, Branch President and High Councilman in many wards and taught Gospel Doctrine classes 80 years. He served at Provo Temple nearly 20 years, and went on six missions - five with his wife - to Iowa, California, Arizona, Las Vegas and the Gilbert Islands. As the first education missionaries in Tarawa, they ran a church school and he constructed many campus buildings with only the help of students, a few home tools and several miracles. Two brothers survive him: Leroy Pratt (Libby), Virginia, and David Pratt (Beverly), Provo. His

son is Richard Stephen Pratt (Belva Gae), Cove Fort. His daughters are Carolyn Mock James (Syd), Orem, Dawn Taylor (Nelson), Salem, Rose Rowbury (Roger), Provo, Sheryl VanOrman (Gibb), Provo, and Darlene Kay Smith (Vern) deceased. Richard was proud of his 47 grand children, 129 great-grandchildren and 12 great-great-grandchildren. Viewings are Sunday 6 p.m. - 8 p.m. Walker Mortuary, Provo, and Monday April 6th 9 a.m. - 10 a.m. at Provo Peak 10th Ward, 500 East 200 North. The funeral services will be held thereafter at 11 a.m. Interment is at the Provo City Cemetery. Condolences may be sent to www.walkerfamilymortuary.com