

**Terry “Moose” Carroll, Raven 48, 23  
Long Tieng, Oct 69 – Feb 70  
Vientiane, Feb – Mar 70**

My full name is Terry Malone Carroll, Jr. Before you ask, I got the nickname Moose at the U.S. Air Force Academy because I was a fan of (or reminded a lot of people of) Bullwinkle the Moose on the cartoon show Rocky and Bullwinkle. I was born August 31, 1945 in Victoria, Texas. My father was a career Air Force chief warrant officer with a 27-year Air Force career in boats, from crash rescue boats, to drone recovery boats, to general officer pleasure boats on the Rhine River in Germany post-WWII. I grew up primarily in Florida with significant time in Japan and Germany.

I was Raven 48 at Lima Site 20A from October 1969 to near the end of February 1970; then was Raven 23 at Vientiane until the end of March 1970. My largest regret from my Raven tour is that I did not keep a journal or take very many pictures. In reading Christopher Robbins’ book, The Ravens, and Karl Polifka’s book, Meeting Steve Canyon, I realize I missed an opportunity to document and record a unique piece of my life. As Tom Harris (who was with me at Lima Site 20A) said, he and I just flew and flew until we fell over, then we flew some more. This narrative is almost exclusively from my memory, and if anyone wants to challenge me on names, dates, or other facts, I will immediately yield and acknowledge my errors.

I have always been lucky; although, not always good luck. I graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1967. Those of us in my class that were going to be (and were physically qualified to be) pilots were all herded into a large auditorium prior to graduation to select where we were to go to pilot training and when. On the stage was a large hopper with something on the order of 400 plus numbers in it, and we went up one at a time to pick a number. The person who drew number one got first choice of Undergraduate Pilot Training class and location. The most desired assignment was Williams AFB in Phoenix, Arizona, and other choice assignments included college towns like Reese AFB, Lubbock, Texas. I drew the very last number possible — bad luck and good luck, as will be seen. The last assignment left when my turn came was the “B class” at Laughlin AFB, Del Rio, Texas. That meant I would have 90 days leave (60 days everyone got plus my first year’s 30 days) after graduation before I had to report to Laughlin.

So I took my new 1967 Chevelle and my new Suzuki 250 cc motorcycle and headed to my hometown of Port O’Connor, Texas. Port O’Connor is in the middle of the Texas coast and, at that time, had fewer than 1,000 residents. I proceeded to pass my leave time as a deck hand on my uncles’ shrimp boats, playing cowboy, and mostly carousing with my male cousins near my age. I had developed a taste for alcohol (gross understatement) and that, plus my new motorcycle, gave me an early unhealthy disregard for danger that would carry on through my Southeast Asia tour. But my time in Port O’Connor brought another happening that has had a profound influence on my life and influenced my SEA tour.

Sometime in June 1967, my cousin Johnny was looking for a girl for me to date. In a town of 1,000, one had to look hard. Johnny had a friend from another town whose family had a summer house in Port O’Connor and that friend had a sister, Marie, who might be eligible. Marie was the steady girlfriend of our second cousin, but he was in the Navy in the Mediterranean. Marie’s best friend was another second cousin of ours, Martha Hawes. One Saturday evening, Johnny

and I waited outside the Catholic Church for Mass to end. When Martha came out, we asked if we could give her a ride home. Her father may have been a bit suspicious, since they only lived one block from the church, but he said okay and so did Martha. I did not know Martha other than she was a cousin, but in the slow one-block ride she agreed to ask Marie for me. A week or so later, the answer was “Yes,” but only if Martha went with us as a threesome. Marie, Martha, and I spent the summer together — I had a flashy car, was comparatively rich by local standards, and was old enough to buy beer. What more could a local girl want? We rode around town partying with me driving, Marie in the middle (bench seat), and Martha on the right. In July, Marie went off to Colorado to be a camp counselor, and when she returned Martha was in the middle and Marie on the right. By the time I graduated from pilot training, Martha and I were not engaged, but I was hooked.

Our pilot training class got an assignment block that had very few fighters. There were two F-4s and two RF-4s that went higher than me in the class (assignments were chosen by class standing approximately two months prior to graduation). There were some F-111s, but that was a new aircraft with some problems and those assignments were not destined for the Southeast Asia war. When my turn to choose came, I took an O-2A forward air controller (FAC) assignment which was pipelined to Southeast Asia. After survival training at Fairchild AFB, Washington, I trained in the O-2A from December 1968 to January 1969 at Hurlburt AFB, Florida, and on February 19th at one o'clock in the morning flew out of San Francisco for the Philippines. After jungle survival training at Clark AFB, P.I., I arrived at Tan Son Nhut (Saigon) on February 27, 1969 to start my one-year wartime tour. The FACs on the plane all went to Bien Hoa the next day for in-processing and flew to Phan Rang for in-country orientation training on March 3rd. There were lots of FACs at Phan Rang with me, but only four of the O-2 pilots (me, 1st Lt Henry Allen, 1st Lt Phillip Mascari, and a captain whose name I do not remember) received assignments to the 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron (TASS) at Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB), Thailand. I left South Vietnam for Bangkok, Thailand on March 11th and began flying at NKP immediately. I said I was always lucky.

Flying with the 23rd TASS (call sign Nail) was very different from most of the FAC assignments in Vietnam. We were flying interdiction sorties over the eastern half of southern Laos trying to stop the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) supply traffic heading into South Vietnam. For one, there were no friendly troops in the areas where we flew and directed fighter bombing sorties. Also, there were big anti-aircraft guns, from the 14.5 mm ZPU and 23 mm ZSU-23 to the 37 mm, 57 mm, and 85 mm anti-aircraft guns. The 57 and 85 mm guns were mostly near the passes from North Vietnam into Laos and were often radar directed. Another difference was that we typically flew only one 4-to-5-hour mission per day. The Nails maintained FACs over three sectors of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in southern Laos 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The big difference in flying with the 23rd TASS at NKP, as opposed to Vietnam, was that when we returned to base, there was no more war. We were in Thailand and the base was never attacked. I heard a rumor that NKP had mortars or rockets fired at it once, but I never saw any. The bunkers we had were used by the maids to cook and eat their lunches or were so overgrown that no one wanted to go in there.

At NKP, the O-2 was flying both day missions and night missions. The night missions flew with a pilot and a navigator. The navigator in the right seat spotted truck traffic by leaning out the open window with a handheld Starlight Scope (a night-vision telescope). On the night

mission, the pilot primarily flew on instruments following directions from the navigator. The day missions were typically flown with just a pilot, and the Nail FAC was the boss within his assigned sector. Most of the mission was visual reconnaissance, but there were a lot of airstrikes to direct on a typical mission. The O-2 was a good airplane for this mission because it had decent speed, long endurance, and two engines. For day missions, we carried two pods with a total of 14 white phosphorous marking rockets. A few of the new OV-10s were at NKP flying day missions only and, as more arrived, they gradually took over most of the day missions from the O-2s. We did get shot at fairly often, especially by 37 mm guns, and we were taught to keep the nose of the airplane moving constantly while we were over Laos, a lesson I took with me to the Raven program.

I never took a hit as a Nail, and perhaps the most dangerous mission I had was an administrative flight from Ubon RTAFB back to NKP. I was being transferred from our detachment at Ubon and had all of my belongings and all my personnel records with me in the back of an OV-10 flown by a captain named Frank who had been grounded from flying combat missions due to recklessness. I was a little suspicious when I noted that the OV-10 had high-explosive rockets loaded in the pods. Frank and I took off right behind another OV-10 going out over Laos, and we joined him in formation so the radar sites would not see our aircraft going out over Laos. Then Frank peeled off and he and I attacked a spot just east of Tchepone “where he knew there was an anti-aircraft gun emplacement.” We did not get shot at and made it to NKP. As I said, he was crazy (and I was always lucky).

When I first began flying with the 23rd TASS, morale was high and everyone was flying a lot. We typically flew 26 days straight and then got 4 days off. The squadron commander flew as much as anyone. Sometime in June 1969, the squadron commander left and morale took a dive under the new commander. He flew only the minimum to get his combat pay and was more concerned with safety and adherence to directives than with accomplishment of the mission. He was rumored to sneak into adjacent sectors to check if the other FACs were adhering to the minimum safe altitudes. Henry Allen and I decided we wanted out, especially since we would likely be flying more night missions if we stayed.

Sometime in mid-1969, a Raven in an O-1 landed at NKP and came to the Nail hooch (bar). I can't remember if it was Smoky Greene or Ed Gunter, both Air Force Academy and pilot training classmates of mine. Whomever it was told us some of what he did and where. Henry and I applied for Ravens immediately, but the word from the FAC headquarters at Bien Hoa was that the Raven program would only accept O-1-qualified pilots, since that was the primary airplane the Ravens flew. We were rejected and dejected. Less than two weeks later, a message came saying that, if Henry and I were still interested, we could apply for Ravens. Henry and I flew a couple of O-2s to Bien Hoa for maintenance and interviewed with the Mother FAC (the commander of all the FACs in Vietnam and Thailand). The colonel was very discouraging. He said they really needed pilots in the Raven program, but “They have no safety or standardization evaluation programs and they live like a bunch of wild Indians.” While trying not to grin too much, Henry and I said we would like to give it a try. We both had to extend our tours to ensure that we had six months left before our return to the States. We were the first O-2 pilots accepted into the Raven program. I said I was always lucky.

I checked out in the O-1 in a couple of weeks at Phan Rang and was sent for ten days to fly with the FACs at Qui Nhon, South Vietnam to get a bit more time in the airplane. The FACs at Qui Nhon rarely put in airstrikes, but I did get to fly daily and assisted the local FACs in getting

banned from the Officers' Club due to our drunken rowdy behavior. On September 24, 1969, I flew from Cam Ranh Bay, South Vietnam to Bangkok. I happened to meet Fred Platt (a departing Raven) in Bangkok in my one night there (yes, we drank a lot), then went to NKP to pack up and transfer to Detachment 1 of the 56th Special Operations Wing (SOW) at Udorn RTAFB. I was in the Raven program.

I really knew very little about the Ravens when I arrived at Udorn. I knew that, although I was assigned to Detachment 1, 56 SOW, I would be on temporary duty (TDY) with the air attaché in Laos "to provide operational support". TDY was a good thing (extra dollars) and our orders specified that we were to be in civilian clothes and got one round trip to Udorn per month. I left all my military uniforms and stuff in a CONEX (a large steel storage bin) at Detachment 1. I needed civilian clothes for my clandestine mission in Laos, so one of the Ravens who happened to be at Udorn took me to a tailor in Udorn town. The tailor took my measurements and my notes on where I wanted pockets, etc., and I ordered two suits to fly in. I remember the tailor remarking, "Oh, you want Raven suits." Some secret mission. I also bought some Levis and a Levi jacket, which became my favorite flying suit. The Raven then flew me to Vientiane, and I stayed overnight in the air attaché (AIRA) house. The AIRA house was a very nice French colonial-style house with offices and residences included. Whenever we stayed at the AIRA house, we were told not to drink excessively and certainly never bring female friends home from downtown. There was a big concern for maintaining the appearance that the air attaché and his staff were simply advisors to the Royal Laotian Air Force. Ravens, as Ravens, simply did not exist at the AIRA house.

The next day, Joe Potter (I think) flew me to Lima Site 20A in a T-28, and I began flying as Raven 48 that same day. Joe Potter was the American Air Force site commander, and 20A was a very busy airstrip. We had five to six Ravens. During my six-month tour I remember Mike Cavanaugh, Karl Polifka, Mike Byers, Henry Allen, Tom Harris, Smoky Greene, Al Daines, Bob Dunbar, and Bill Kozma were there with me at various times, but there were never more than six of us at any one time. We also had an intelligence officer and three or four maintenance personnel. In addition to the Raven O-1s and T-28s, there were Hmong T-28s (call sign "Cha Pha Khao") and all sorts of helicopters and fixed-wing transports flown by Air America and Continental Air Services in and out every day. Lima Site 20A was a 4,400-foot, 60-foot wide asphalt strip at 3,200 feet above sea level, surrounded by mountains, with a large karst formation at one end (the "vertical speed brake"). It had no lights and no approach aids, so everything was daytime flying and in good weather only. Potter was not supposed to fly other than administrative flights to other sites, including Vientiane and Udorn, but he loved to secretly fly with the Hmong T-28s on bombing missions. I remember hearing him disguise his voice trying to sound like a Hmong as he called in as "Cha Pha Khao Five" on his bombing runs. Once he went with the Hmong on a mission to the east not knowing where the actual target would be. When the leader rolled in, Joe realized they were bombing a bridge in North Vietnam! He was fearless. Potter went for dinner and a situation briefing with General Vang Pao every night and took one or more Ravens with him each time. These dinners were also fraught with danger, since the only beverage served was White Horse scotch. The Hmong New Year celebrations in December 1969 were especially hard on Joe Potter, and Karl Polifka would have to drag Potter back from Vang Pao's house late in the night. At that time, the air-to-ground war in northeastern Laos was very busy and was being run by one captain (Potter) and six 1st lieutenants (the Ravens and an intelligence officer). We controlled the air war in northeastern Laos, much to the chagrin of the USAF commanders in Vietnam and Thailand.

Lima Site 20 Alternate, or Long Tieng, was also a big secret airfield and the headquarters of the Hmong army led by General Vang Pao. It was called Lima Site 20 Alternate to disguise it from Lima Site 20 at Sam Thong, about five and one-half miles over the ridge to the northwest. Sam Thong was a busy supply airfield providing food and other aid to the Hmong. Whenever news reporters wanted to go “up country” to get nearer to the war, they were taken to Sam Thong — never to Long Tieng. Once a reporter somehow managed to get a guide and made it from Sam Thong to Long Tieng on foot. The local authorities wanted to kill him and dispose of his body, but the CIA personnel convinced them to simply return him to Sam Thong. We would sometimes send maintenance personnel to Sam Thong for supplies, but I never knew of any Ravens going there. The “Raven hooch” at 20A was fairly nice. We had bedrooms (two to a room), a kitchen, and a small bar. Unless the weather was bad, we were only there to brief in the morning, debrief in the evening, eat something, party at the bar, and sleep. I was rarely there in the daylight hours. We also tried to spend some time at the CIA hooch, because they had a nicer bar built over the top of a bear cage. The bears, Floyd and his mate, were kept by the CIA personnel (also referred to as “CAS” personnel for Controlled American Source), and Floyd had a penchant for beer, which we fed him through the windows of the bar.



“Moose” Carroll

The CIA personnel at 20A were always a bit scary to me. They were serious military combat personnel who risked their lives almost daily. They were there to advise and assist the Hmong, and they accompanied the Hmong military units into the field to the numerous hilltop sites where the Hmong monitored the enemy activity and carried out attacks. These sites were frequently attacked and overrun by the North Vietnamese Army units, and the Hmong and the CIA personnel had to defend and then abandon the sites and melt into the jungle. It was not uncommon during my Raven tour to have a site be overrun by the NVA, then have all the defenders appear uninjured at another site a week later. Support of these hilltop sites was one of the main missions for the Ravens of 20A.

I arrived at 20A at an auspicious time — General Vang Pao and the Hmong were just completing a very successful campaign that pushed the NVA and Pathet Lao troops out of the Plaine des Jarres (PDJ) and captured a lot of territory and equipment. Friendly aircraft began flying out of Lima Site 22 (also called “Lima Lima”) in the northern PDJ, and it became one of the Ravens’ main daytime refueling and rearming stops. I also flew into Lima Site 108 at Muong Soui just west of the PDJ. LS 108 had been lost to the NVA; then retaken by Vang Pao’s forces in the late-summer offensive. The ground successes meant Hmong T-28s required extensive resupplies, and at one point USAF C-130s were tasked to bring 250-pound bombs into both Muong Soui and 20A. I directed the first USAF C-130 bringing 250-pound bombs into LS 108 for use by the T-28s for rearming during the day. At 20A I was sent to the airfield tower to talk to the USAF C-130s who had never been into 20A. The first USAF C-130 arrived overhead and expressed doubts upon seeing the airfield. He made a couple of low passes, then said he did not think the airfield was capable for a C-130. About that time, an Air America C-130 arrived and, without any fanfare, landed and began unloading his cargo. Needless to say, the USAF C-130 was suitably shamed and landed uneventfully.



Lima Site 22 (Lima Lima)

Attacks on hilltop sites became fewer, and I often flew without a Hmong Army spotter in the back seat. Prior to my arrival at 20A, the Ravens had been very busy doing close air support for the Hmong, as the NVA pushed to the west and into the PDJ and were then pushed back. Interdiction of the NVA supply trucks and equipment along Route 7 from the North Vietnamese border at the “Fish’s Mouth” to Ban Ban Valley northeast of the PDJ was not as high a Raven priority as close air support for the Hmong. We spent a couple of weeks in October 1969 burning rice with napalm in Ban Ban Valley, since General Vang Pao thought it would reduce the NVA food supplies. The USAF brought in “fast FACs” consisting of F-4s with marking rockets and other armament to search the eastern end of Route 7. These fast FACs rarely reported seeing

trucks or other equipment, but they put in some airstrikes on interdiction targets as directed by USAF.

Sometime in late 1969, with the ground situation looking calmer, USAF sent a request for either me or Henry Allen (presumably because of our interdiction experience) to take a look east along Route 7. I remember my first trip out Route 7 — I found trucks loaded with supplies parked on the road with just a minimum of camouflage. Once I followed truck tracks with my binoculars for several days before I found where they went into the jungle between karst formations just southwest of Ban Ban Valley. It was near the end of the day, so I reported it to our intel officer, who sent it up the line. The entire truck park was obliterated by B-52s the next day. I killed more trucks as a Raven than I ever did as a Nail, despite the fact that this was the primary mission of the Nails. One day while I was way east near Route 7, a fast FAC contacted me and asked me to come look for a reported four-position 37 mm gun site near the North Vietnamese border at Nong Het (coincidentally the birthplace of General Vang Pao). The fast FAC was up at around seven or eight thousand feet as I came in the area at about 1,500 feet (as a Nail, our minimum altitude would have been 3,500 feet above the ground in this type of threat area) with my nose constantly moving, as I was taught as a Nail. Just as I got over Nong Het, the 37 mm site opened up. It was indeed at least a four-position site and all the guns had time to reload and fire again before I was able to exit to the south at 70 mph. Meanwhile, the fast FAC lit his afterburners and made a hasty retreat skyward. My experience was that the fast FACs were not very effective, given the altitudes and speeds they travelled.

We flew a lot — I logged 159 hours of flying time in my first twenty days at 20A. Considering that all of the time was daytime VFR (visual flight rules) and did not include the time we spent refueling, reloading, or even eating during the day, I was going all out. Our typical day would have two Ravens take off at daylight (remember, we had no runway lights or bad weather navigation aids), with the remainder following at hourly intervals. You flew until you were out of gas or rockets (or both), then dropped into a forward airstrip where crates of rockets and 55-gallon drums of gas were pre-positioned. You broke open the crates, put the rockets together, and reloaded your rocket tubes. Then you used a hand pump and pumped gas from the drums into the airplane's tanks. You took off again and repeated the cycle until sundown approached, when you had to be back on the ground at 20A. There was no instrument approach into 20A for use in bad weather. Once when I was still fairly new and had been working well east, I was trying to get back to 20A under a cloud cover and was having trouble finding a clear valley to get through the mountains. My back seater was asleep, but he then sat up, had a quick look around, pointed where to go, and went back to sleep. One of my best navigation aids was in the back seat.

Once we had several days of early morning fog that blanketed the whole valley and 20A. It would form just before daylight and stay thick for several hours. On the second day, Smoky Greene and I decided to beat the fog and take off in the dark. We had the maintenance personnel drive their jeep down the dark runway to make sure there were no pigs or people in the way; then we took off. We got off okay, but when I got airborne, my main UHF radio for talking to the fighters would not work, so I was worthless, and 20A was now covered in heavy fog. I could have flown on to Lima Lima in the PDJ and waited for 20A to clear, but I was frustrated and decided to use the emergency bad weather approach back into 20A. During my checkout, I was shown a narrow and steep-sided river valley leading from southwest of the PDJ to the west and south back towards 20A. The theory was to fly in the river valley under the clouds

until you came to two burned-out tree stumps, then pull up into the clouds to the left and locate the road leading into the valley containing 20A. You then followed that road until you came to General Vang Pao's house, turned left then right (to get around the "vertical speed brake"), and you were then (in theory) over the runway, albeit heading the wrong way for landing. I located the river valley west of the PDJ (which was not foggy) and followed the procedure. While on the river, I was in an inverted pyramid with the clouds/fog covering the steep hills on both sides. I found the burned-out stumps and pulled up into the fog to find the road. By this time, I was flying by looking straight down from less than 100 feet. I followed the road, did the left-right turns, and landed opposite to the normal landing direction. By then, I was frustrated enough that I got in another airplane and took off again in the solid fog. I have always been lucky, and was pretty skillful that day.

Our main refueling and rearming site on the PDJ (Lima Site 22 aka Lima Lima) was a piece of cake for our O-1s compared to many of the sites where we landed. It was a PSP (pierced steel planking) runway and was busy with Air America ferrying troops and supplies into and out of it all day. The PDJ was grassland devoid of the jungle that covered the surrounding hills and mountains. It was also interesting, with the giant stone jars that gave it its name and the captured NVA equipment lying all around. I was able to climb all over Russian-made PT-76 light tanks and different types of antiaircraft guns. The PDJ was also the location of several herds of wild water buffalo, which the Air America helicopters would shoot for meat for the Hmong troops and villagers. The Hmong T-28 pilots were not supposed to fly into LS 22 except in an emergency, but one particular pilot announced he had an engine problem one day and landed there. Once he had his T-28 loaded with buffalo meat, his engine problem disappeared and he took off and returned to 20A. The second time he tried this "engine problem" routine, he forgot his flaps and ran off the end of the runway at Lima Lima. He was uninjured, but a few weeks later forgot his flaps at 20A and ran into a warehouse at the end of the runway. He announced he would go to Vientiane to a monastery "to get a new Buddha."

Lima Lima was also the location of the only time I ever got sick in an airplane. We had a rowdy drunken party at 20A one night that lasted well into the morning hours. Applying the Air Force guidance of "no smoking for 12 hours prior to flying and no drinking within 50 feet of the aircraft" (or maybe it was supposed to be the other way around), I took off with a very significant hangover. After my first mission, I refueled and rearmed at Lima Lima and my back seater took me to the local army unit to get something to eat. I seem to recall something like sticky rice and boiled water buffalo, which remained in my stomach only until just after takeoff. Fortunately, it was a relatively quiet day in the air war, and Smoky Greene (he was under the weather, too) and I returned to 20A early.

When we had slow times, we sometimes amused ourselves at 20A by going to the local firing range to shoot the many and varied weapons we had. I had a WWII .45 caliber submachine gun (a "grease gun"); someone had a Russian sniper rifle; and we all had some type of pistol and an AR-15 (our favorite personal weapon). We fired lots of rounds for several hours, although I only remember going there once or twice, so it was not a regular event. A couple of times when we were bored, we would take one of our rockets apart, exposing the solid rocket fuel open at both ends. We would then use gunpowder from a .50 caliber bullet to ignite the rocket fuel. It would make an awful racket with flames shooting out both ends of the tube until it eventually burned out. We were lucky we were not blown to kingdom come. Most of our entertainment at 20A was the nightly bash at the Raven bar. When I first arrived, we had a maintenance man

named Les who could play guitar and sing country and western songs. After he left, I played some, but was never any good. Come to think of it, I got better as the night rolled on. I should have spent time in the local village getting to know the Hmong, but I saw my job as flying and concentrated on that. Once when USAF Major General Pettit (7/13 AF Commander at Udorn) visited 20A with his aide, the party got rowdy and the aide was thrown through a window at the CIA bar and onto Floyd the bear's cage. General Pettit's remark to Joe Potter was that the Ravens looked like a bunch of Mexican bandits. After the general left, we all donned our best Mexican bandit paraphernalia and posed for the now-famous group photo, which was sent to General Pettit. We were flying to exhaustion, getting shot at on every mission, and were in no mood to be lectured to about our appearance.

Getting shot at was not new to me as a Raven. As a Nail FAC over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in southeastern Laos, I had been shot at by all of the various types of high-caliber antiaircraft guns in Laos. I was even shot at once by a radar-guided 85 mm gun while I was flying in the weather on instruments near Ban Karai pass on the North Vietnamese border. As a Nail, however, I did not get shot at on most missions. The big guns sited along the Ho Chi Minh Trail did not routinely shoot at the FACs until the fighters showed up for fear of giving away their positions. Once in a while, they would try to get lucky with a FAC, but our higher altitude (3,500 feet above the ground or higher) made hits difficult. There were exceptions — Phil Mascari, who became a Nail with me, disappeared one day in his O-2 and was presumably shot down. As a Raven, it was a rare day that I was not shot at, with good reasons. For one, we were flying at much lower altitudes. I would fly anywhere from a few hundred feet up to 1,000 feet in the normal operating areas. Also, the O-1 was much slower than the O-2. We flew at 70 mph versus 125 in the O-2. Moreover, the people shooting at us were mobile and had no fear of giving away their positions. I took a total of 13 hits in my aircraft (none in my body) during my Raven tour. Almost all of my hits were while I was flying below 500 feet but none immediately disabled the aircraft. An aircraft flying really low and slow is a much more tempting target for the troops on the ground. Once in February 1970, when the NVA had pushed back into the northern PDJ, we had several Ravens working in the area. Hmong sites on the hilltops north of the PDJ were reporting taking fire and hearing enemy troops downhill from them. Unfortunately, there was a heavy layer of clouds at about 500 feet, and the friendly sites were in the clouds. I found a hole in the clouds and dropped underneath flying at a couple of hundred feet above ground. I began circling around one of the hilltop sites below the clouds. As I was leaning out the left side of the aircraft looking downhill, I heard a bullet hit the right window. The single small-arms round entered the cockpit about at my right shoulder and hit the gas gauge above my left ear. If the NVA soldier had an automatic weapon or if I had been sitting up straight, he would have had me for sure. It pays to be lucky.

Ravens were lost in record numbers compared to other USAF units in Southeast Asia during the war. In August 1969, two months prior to my arrival, Dan Davis was killed in a midair collision with an F-105 while working an airstrike. I heard about it while I was a Nail FAC. After that, no Ravens were lost until March 26, 1970, five days before I flew back to the States. That seven-month-plus-a-week period was the longest period without losing a Raven from the first (Sam Deichelmann 9/6/1968) to the last (Skip Jackson 12/24/1972). During that seven-plus-month period and while I was a Raven, the Hmong had pushed the NVA and Pathet Lao out of the PDJ and back to Ban Ban Valley 25 miles to the northeast. There was not the intensity of ground operations during my Raven tour as there was both before and after. Plenty of Ravens were taking hits in their aircraft and some were wounded, but no deaths. As my tour was ending

in March 1970, the NVA were on the attack. By the last week of March, the Ravens were not able to spend the night at 20A, and I remember leading a flight of over a dozen O-1s into Udorn.

March 26, 1970 was especially significant to me. On that day, I was at Udorn processing out for my return to the States. I was flying home from Saigon in five days and my combat flying was over. On that day, Henry Allen had only a few weeks left in his tour (he had extended longer than I did because he wanted more leave time between his Nail and Raven tours). He took Richard Elzinga, a new Raven, on an orientation flight in an O-1 from Vientiane up to the PDJ area. They checked in after takeoff but were never heard from again. Richard's remains were recovered many years later, but Henry's were not. Although I was processed out and was not supposed to fly, I got an O-1 and joined in the search for Henry and Richard. I searched for three days, then had leave to catch my flight home. Henry Allen and I arrived in Vietnam together, went to NKP together as Nail FACs, and went to Ravens together (although Hank had taken a longer leave back in the States and his return date to the States was a few weeks after mine). Although occurring at the very end of my Raven tour, Henry's loss affected me more than anything. Henry was a bit older than me and was a steadying influence on me. He liked to party, too, but was not as reckless a party animal as I was. He was recognized for his serious approach to the mission and was checked out in the T-28 in addition to the O-1. Around December of 1969, Henry was wounded in the T-28 by a .51 caliber (12.7 mm) antiaircraft round. He was hit in the left arm and lost a lot of blood before he was able to get the aircraft back to 20A. Henry Allen was a good friend and a great pilot. His loss is with me daily.

When Henry Allen was wounded in December, all the Ravens airborne at the time stopped what they were doing and tried to assist him, especially in case he had to bail out. When an aircraft was shot down, Ravens were known for being on the spot and providing assistance. Air America was also a workhorse for getting pilots picked up and brought back to the friendlies. I worked one search and rescue (SAR) as a Raven. A reconnaissance RF-4, call sign Bullwhip 12, was hit and had to bail out just west of Ban Ban Valley. A fast FAC was in the area. I heard the radio traffic and arrived within five minutes. The SAR site was just north of the main enemy infiltration road, Route 7, and at first there was a lot of confusion. The first thing I heard on Guard (the emergency frequency 243.0 MHz) was someone shouting "They're all around me. Strafe the chute!" Then another voice calmly saying "I'm okay. Don't strafe the chute." I found a parachute in tall grass in the open and flew over it at about 100 feet. I determined that one of the two-man crew was there, and he said he was okay and was staying put. I searched the area and finally located the second parachute in jungle about 200 meters southwest of the first chute. The second crewman had left his chute and evaded west in the jungle. He had seen military personnel near his location and was calling for us to strafe the area to prevent his capture. I put a smoke rocket on his chute from a very low altitude, and directed the fast FAC in strafe runs in the area. Another set of fighters were diverted to me from another target, and I used their leftover 20 mm ammunition to strafe the area, too. That downed pilot was reassured and was able to hide and stop evading. An Air America UH-1 helicopter came up on the radio, but I told him not to attempt a pickup because of the activity on the ground. Eventually, a USAF helicopter ("Jolly Green") came in with his A-1 fighter escort (the "Sandies"). The Sandy A-1s were pilots who specialized in SAR. They were a highly decorated and fearless bunch and their aircraft carried an enormous mix of various munitions that might be needed in a SAR. The Sandies would risk all to protect the pilot on the ground and "their" Jolly Green helicopters. I heard that in late 1969 some of the other A-1 pilots at NKP petitioned to be allowed to fly as Sandies, so they could get credit for these high-visibility missions. The Sandies on my SAR

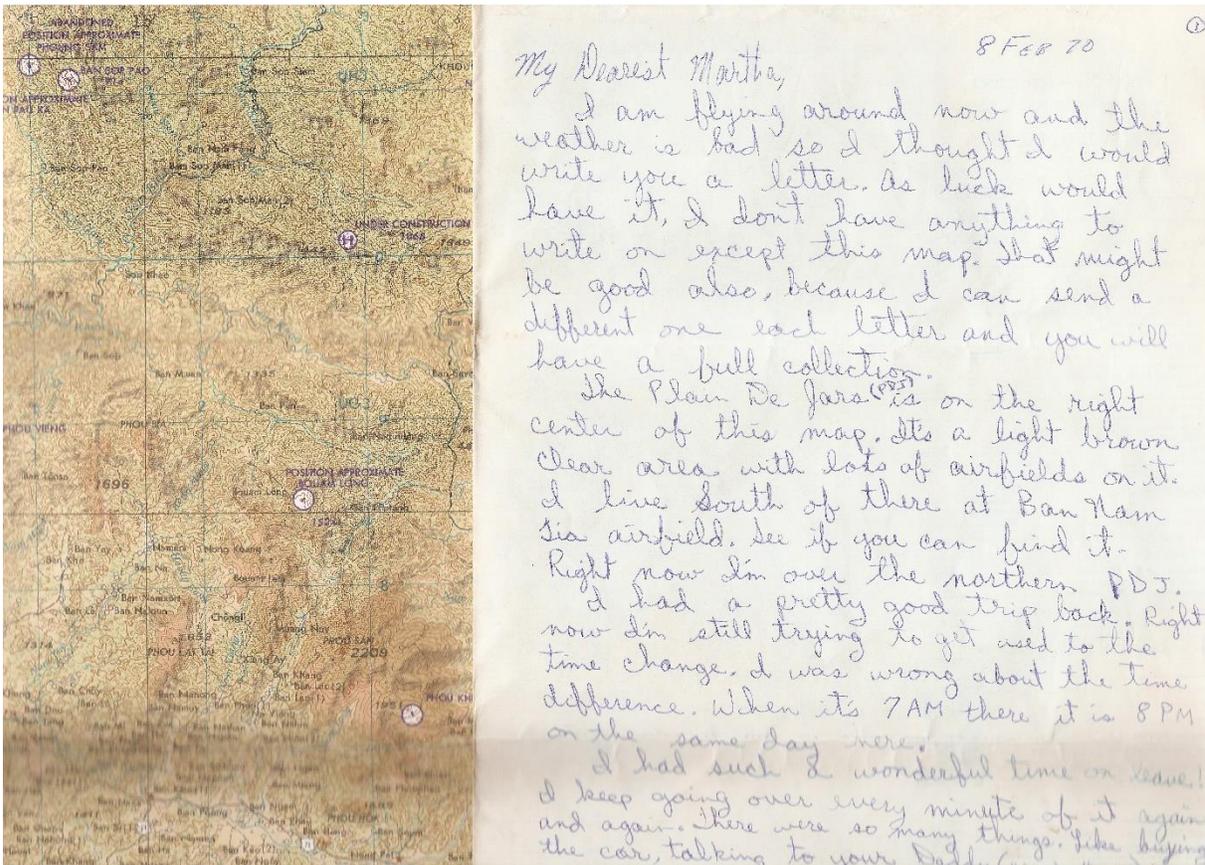
with Bullwhip 12 were of this later variety. The Sandy Low Lead, who directs the SAR and takes the most risks, never came below a 1,500-foot thin cloud layer in the area. At one point he directed the Jolly Green to the wrong site for the pilot in the jungle, and I had to come on the radio to tell the Jolly where to go. Nevertheless, the mission was a success and both crewmen were picked up safely and uninjured.

After my incident below the clouds in the northern PDJ in February 1970, I think Bob Foster (the Raven Mother FAC in Vientiane) got a little nervous about me and moved me to Vientiane for the last month of my tour. D. Craig Morrison had been the FAC flying out of Vientiane (there was only one Raven FAC in Vientiane.), and he was at the end of his tour. I became Raven 23. The Vientiane Raven supported the Royal Laotian Army (RLA) in Military Region 5 along the Mekong River east of Vientiane. Craig said the area was very tame and he never got shot at in MR 5. He showed me where to land (on a road at a nearby Laotian Army base) to pick up a back seater and gave me a tour of the flying area. He and I also flew low level along the Mekong River en route back to Vientiane, which was great fun. I always enjoyed my return trips down on the river and only dipped my wheels in the water twice. On my second mission in MR 5, my back seater and I found a Pathet Lao soldier running across a field. I flew low and the RLA back seater fired his M-79 grenade launcher out the window. I don't think we hit the enemy soldier, but we must have scared him pretty badly before he was able to escape into the jungle. The next day we returned to the area and a local army unit reported engaging an NVA unit. I was able to get some fighters from up north and we bombed the NVA unit heavily. The Royal Laotian Army unit reported finding numerous wounded and killed NVA, and one prisoner reported that he was severely wounded next to an NVA general and thought the general had to have been killed. I took two hits from a .51 caliber machine gun in the wing root on the right side, puncturing the fuel tank. We made it back to Vientiane leaking fuel, and the maintenance personnel were amazed to see actual damage from ground fire. It was a new thing in that area at that time. Since I had put the only O-1 out of commission and could not fly the next day, and since Henry Allen had come down that day for a short break, I decided Henry and I could party hardy. We stayed out very late, and I was very hung over the next morning at daylight when Colonel Foster knocked on the door telling me I needed to fly back out to where I had bombed the NVA. I protested that the O-1 was inoperative, but he said there was a U-17. I protested that I had never been in a U-17, but he said "The crew chief will start it for you." That's what happened, and I became a U-17 pilot.

I did not like the U-17 as well as the O-1 because it was heavier and had a wheel instead of a stick for flying the aircraft. Also, the throttle was a knob that slid into and out of the instrument panel like most civilian light aircraft do, as opposed to the throttle levers on the left side of the O-1 cockpit. The nearest I ever came to crashing was in the U-17. I was sent to a dirt strip north of Vientiane to pick up three Royal Laotian Army officers and bring them back to Vientiane. I found the place okay, landed, and loaded the three officers and their gear. The officers had not seen each other in a while, and proceeded to converse animatedly in Lao while I taxied out for takeoff. I was still fairly new in the U-17, but I knew it felt much heavier on takeoff than I was used to in the O-1. As we picked up speed on takeoff, I put both hands on the wheel to pull the aircraft into the air. Suddenly I felt the aircraft slow and the stall warning horn sounded. I looked down and found that the throttle had backed out to near idle. I immediately pushed it to full forward and struggled to keep the aircraft flying. Fortunately, a farmer had cut down the trees for a field just south of the airstrip, and we went across that field

between the trees with the stall warning horn blaring and the non-pilot Army officers continuing their conversations oblivious to the danger. I recovered and flew on to Vientiane. Lucky again.

Another word about my then-girlfriend, Martha Hawes, because she influenced my life and career, then and now. I went back to the States on leave in February 1970. During that leave, Martha and I became engaged. I wrote her often and even wrote her a letter on the back of one of my little-used maps of Laos. I returned to the States March 31, 1970 to fly T-38s as an instructor pilot at Laughlin AFB, Del Rio, Texas. Martha and I were married June 27, 1970 and are married still. I retired from the Air Force after 20 years, went to law school, then retired (for good) after 21 years as a lawyer.



As I said, I regret not having kept records of my time as a Raven. I still remember a lot about that time. Joe Potter took me with him to dinner at General Vang Pao's house, and I met the General several other times. As with all the Ravens at 20A, he gave me a Meo ring which I cherish. I went to the first Raven reunion at Randolph AFB, Texas and have started going again after a many-year absence. I continue to miss my friends who were lost as Ravens, but I also look forward to a continuing camaraderie with the surviving Ravens. We did a special job under significantly difficult and dangerous conditions. I am lucky to be a Raven and will always be proud to be a Raven.