

Weapons

By Pete Poirier

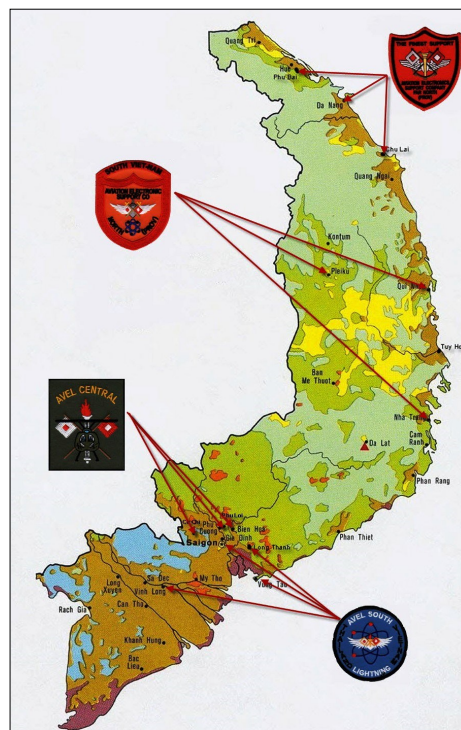
I'll Bet that if I asked many people what the most important weapon used in Vietnam was, they would tell me it was the ubiquitous M-16. I would disagree. The M-16 was a short, lightweight, air cooled, 5.23 mm carbine capable of either semi-automatic or automatic fire. It exists to this day as an AR-15 with all the same characteristics as its military cousin except that it is not (supposed to be) fully automatic. That makes it an iconic weapon for sure.

However, for my money, the UH-1 was the most important weapon of the day. It could be configured in three basic ways which served the most important tactical missions of the war. In fact, the Vietnam war became known as the first helicopter war due to its omnipresence and its incredible utility. Hueys were every where in Vietnam doing what needed to be done. The first function was logistics; that is moving men and materials to the places where the greatest need existed. It really is the first mission in war. Think of Hannibal and his elephants or Pericles and his ships or Lincoln and his railroads. Those activities were performed with "slicks" which were striped down versions with a pilot, co-pilot and crew chief and one or two mounted M-60 machine guns. All the available space was dedicated to carrying troops (11-B grunts) to outlying points mostly for search and destroy missions or to resupply troops in areas where action became continuous or where troops were greatly outnumbered. If troops weren't being positioned, then supplies including ammunition and food were being brought to those in need. Remember the old maxim, an army travels on its stomach.

The second configuration was as gun ships. A gun ship carried a full compliment of medium arms from M-60s to rockets to cannons. In addition, many units used improvised devices that were simply dropped on targets . Gun ships were used primarily for attacking ground targets with greater efficiency than fixed wing aircraft which typically strafe their targets or drop ordinance in a "bombing run".

Choppers on the other hand could circle and rain fire from 360 degrees. They could spiral above a target and use a variety of arms as the situation dictated. Those were great strengths; however, there was at least one troublesome weakness. They were slow. The first generation of Hueys had a top speed of 90 miles an hour. Consequently, very many of them were shot down by ground fire. In fact, many crews were reported to have been shot down more than once.

The third major configuration was Medivac. Medical practitioners talk about the "golden hour" that is the period of time in which they have the highest probability of saving a heart attack victim. The same rule generally applies to soldiers in the field. Battlefield commanders have long known that a wounded enemy takes three fighters out of the fray. In years past, the wounded simply laid where they were until the battle was over.



Continued on Page 2

Continued from Page 1

Then the wounded were collected and makeshift field hospitals were set up in the open air while surgeons patched holes or removed damaged limbs. Many of those soldiers died from infections in poorly treated wounds. Not so in Vietnam. Every U.S. soldier learns field first aid in basic training. Stop the bleeding; Clear the air passage; Protect the wound; Treat for shock. In other words keep the guy next to you alive until Medivac gets there and can transport that person to a sophisticated medical facility in an incredibly short period of time.



Long term, multi-phase treatment could then be accomplished in Japan or Germany or the good ole USA. I admired the Medivac crews enormously. As you know, those ambulance crews did not get any Geneva Convention protection. That is perfectly exemplified by AVEL's own Bob Madore who while piloting a Medivac chopper, was shot through both legs yet continued to fly his damaged ship loaded with wounded soldiers away from a hot LZ to a nearby South Vietnamese camp where he set his chopper down. Yeah, he's one of my heroes.



So, there you have it. One helicopter, three different missions, three different configurations each critical to the conduct of that war. They did have one thing in common other than their extraordinary crew members. Avionics; aviation electronics. When the Army realized that they were headed more and more toward a helicopter war they knew that they had to build a support system capable of keeping helicopters airborne. They knew for example that for every hour of flight time those rotary wing aircraft needed six hours of ground maintenance. They also knew that they would need hours and hours to repair and or replace damaged equipment. They knew that the on-board communication and navigation equipment were critical to the success of every mission in each of the three major strategic areas of use.

Three provisional avionics companies were established early in the war, later a fourth company was established in I Corps as the Tet Counter Offensive developed. Those companies were to be manned with specialists in electronics who were capable of becoming reliable, skilled technicians who could operate sophisticated electronic test equipment and trouble shoot/diagnose equipment failures. They had to be volunteers because of the extended training involved. They had to have a high probability of success during an approximately 1000 hour training program with a typical General Technology (GT) test score of around 130. They were tested weekly during their training and failure was not an option. That is unless you considered getting recycled or being moved to some unbearable MOS instead as a viable option. These same technicians often were required to perform duty not at all related to their primary training. That was especially true in 1967 and 1968 which was the lead up to Tet and the aftermath. Those two years had the heaviest casualties of the entire war and every soldier was engaged. Regardless of where you were, rocket and mortar attacks were normal. So was ground fire. Meanwhile there were chopper crews depending on air to ground and air to air communication. "Where are you? What's happening? What do you need and when?" War is chaos and the only cure for chaos is reliable information. AVEL provided the tools that made it possible to get reliable information instantly. All that is to say nothing about emergency transmitters as location devices for downed crews.

Another critical avionics function was navigation. The mountainous jungles of South Vietnam were no place to get lost. One pilot I knew was my classmate in grade school. He didn't get to Vietnam until late in 1972. Toward the very end of the war he was flying escort for a Medivac mission on a foggy monsoon morning when his chopper crashed into a mountain side. His name, Donald Thompson, is on the wall. His basic nav aid was not GPS. Rather it was either by LORAN, a long range low frequency system that used fixed radio beacons or a system of triangulation that vectored commercial transmitters. Until quite late in the war all these electronic devices including Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) were vacuum tube devices, not solid state. Imagine for a moment what the vibrations in a helicopter could do to a vacuum tube radio.

Continued on Page 3

Continued from Page 2

Maintaining that kind of equipment under those conditions while ducking mortars and 122mm rockets and guarding against sappers was no easy task. Today many of those same specialists suffer from the effects of exposure to Agent Orange both from the environment in which they lived for a year or two and from the equipment itself which in many cases was coated with the dusty residue from overspray. Today, too many of them are either dead or dying slowly with devastating consequences from their exposure. I salute each and every one of them for their service and their endurance. I am so proud to be one of them and to call them my brothers.

THE GIRL IN THE KENT STATE PHOTO

On the afternoon of May 4th in 1970, the world was riveted by an image that showed the life draining out of a young man on the ground, in a stark black-and-white still photo. Mary Ann Vecchio was at the center of that photo, her arms raised in anguish, begging for help.

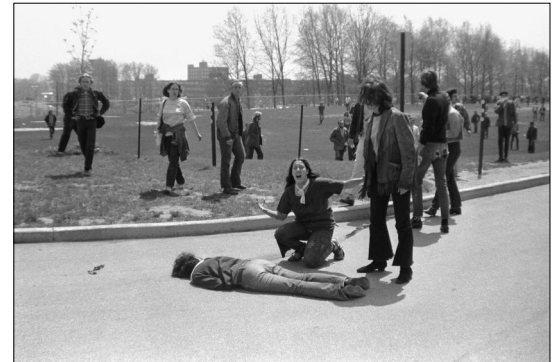
That photo, of her kneeling over the body of Kent State University student Jeffrey Miller, is one of the most important images of the 20th century. Taken by student photographer John Filo, it captures Mary Ann's raw grief and disbelief at the realization that the nation's soldiers had just fired at its own children. The Kent State Pietà, as it's sometimes called, is one of those rare photos that fundamentally changed the way we see ourselves and the world around us. Like the image of the solitary protester standing in front of a line of tanks in Tiananmen Square. Or the photo of Kim Phuc, the naked Vietnamese girl fleeing the napalm that has just incinerated her home. Or the image of Aylan Kurdi's tiny, 3-year-old body facedown in the sand, he and his mother and brother having drowned while fleeing Syria.

These images shocked our collective conscience — and insisted that we look. But eventually we look away, unaware, or perhaps unwilling, to think about the suffering that went on long after the shutter has snapped — or of the cost to the human beings trapped inside those photos.

"That picture hijacked my life," says Mary Ann, now 65. "And 50 years later, I still haven't really moved on."

Before Kent State, she says, she was a free spirit. "I was the kid rolling down the river on a raft," she recalls. "I was magic. In my childhood, I believed anything was possible." But her home in Opa-locka, Fla., not far from Miami International Airport, where her father was a carpenter, could be volatile. When her parents fought, she and her brothers and sisters would scatter, with Mary Ann hiding out in spots as far away as Miami Beach, some 15 miles from home. Soon she got in trouble — smoking pot, skipping school. So in February 1970, when the police told Mary Ann, then 14, that they'd throw her in jail if they caught her playing hooky one more time, she took off — in her bare feet. She says she wasn't rebelling against her parents' authority or seeking to join the antiwar movement: "I just wanted to be anywhere that wasn't Opa-locka."

Hitchhiking her way across the country, Mary Ann slept in fields, at hamburger shacks, at crash pads, working here and there for money for food, which she shared with other kids who were also bumming around. Seeing the country, meeting new people, sharing music and the occasional joint — the adventure had that feeling of magic from her childhood. Until, that is, she got to Kent State in northern Ohio, where, on May 4, student protests erupted over President Richard Nixon's decision to invade Cambodia. Mary Ann, in her jeans, white scarf and a pair of hippie sandals someone had given her, headed toward a field where students were gathered. On her way to join the protest, she struck up a conversation with a guy in bell-bottoms.



Continued on Page 4

Continued from Page 3

The two of them watched as another student waved a black flag, taunting the National Guard troops who had been sent in after protesters had burned down the ROTC building two nights before. The soldiers seemed to retreat to a nearby hill; then, in the next 13 seconds, they fired more than 60 shots.

Mary Ann dropped to the pavement and waited until the smoke had cleared to look up. Jeffrey Miller, the student she'd been talking to, was facedown on the ground; he'd been shot through the mouth. She knelt over his body as blood seeped onto the pavement. Other students walked by, too stunned or confused to look. "Doesn't anyone see what just happened here?" she remembers crying. "Why is no one helping him?" As the soldiers approached, their guns at the ready, she recalls asking them a question that countless others across the country would soon ask as well: "Why did you do this?"

Nearby were more bodies. Allison Krause was shot in the chest; William Schroeder in the back. Sandy Scheuer, who was just passing through the area on her way to class, was struck by a bullet that hit her jugular vein. Four dead in Ohio.

Mary Ann just remembers running. She didn't know anyone at Kent State; she'd known Miller for only 25 minutes. But she saw National Guard troops herding students onto buses, so she followed in a daze. Some two hours later, when the bus arrived in Columbus, the soldiers told everyone to get off. Many of the students ran to waiting parents. Mary Ann stumbled around the streets of the city; she'd never even heard of Columbus.

The days after the shooting went by in a haze for her. She hitchhiked out of Columbus, drifting west and sleeping wherever she could. She had heard she was wanted by the FBI, so she didn't tell anyone who she was. She wound up at a crash pad in Indianapolis, thinking that if she could just get to California, she could start her life over again, but a kid at the house where she was staying recognized her and tipped off a reporter from the Indianapolis Star. Mary Ann, barely disguised in a granny gown and fake glasses, talked to the reporter, hoping he'd give her bus fare to California in exchange for her story. The reporter got his scoop, then called the authorities, who put her in juvenile detention as a runaway.

"I would have stayed anonymous forever," she says. "But that guy from the Indianapolis Star, he knocked out my future." Within days, she was back home in Opa-locka.

Many people refused to believe the nearly 6-foot-tall girl with the long, flowing hair and the mournful face was only 14. Her family received calls and letters calling her a drug addict, a tramp, a communist. The governor of Florida said she was "part of a nationally organized conspiracy of professional agitators" that was "responsible for the students' death." While some people saw her as a symbol of the national conscience, some Kent State students expressed resentment about her fame, saying she wasn't even a protester.

She ran away from home again and got caught, ending up in juvenile detention. "They tried to give me Thora-zine," she says. She ran away from there, too, was caught again and returned. But when she was sent back home, she recalls, the police followed her incessantly, arresting her for loitering, for smoking pot. "I was a mess, like I was trying to punch my way out of a paper bag," she says.

Eventually, at age 22, Mary Ann took off from Florida, moved to Las Vegas, married and got a job in a casino coffee shop. She was rarely mentioned in news stories commemorating the events of May 4, 1970. In May 1990, she told the Orlando Sentinel that the photograph had "really destroyed my life." Still, she said, she was proud of a job where she wore a nicely pressed blouse and skirt and where she'd built a new life far removed from the shooting. "Kent State has nothing to do with my life," she said.

By that time, she'd also learned it was risky to tell people that she was the girl in the iconic photo. "The less I said, the safer I felt," she recalls. And while she took pride in her job and the stability she'd achieved, underneath she carried a sadness about the way her life had turned out. "My life was already upside-down by the time of Kent State, but with some different guidance, maybe I could have made something of myself," she says. "Maybe I could've done something good with my life. That's the damage, when you don't get to be who you were going to be."

5

In 2001, however, she took the story of her life back into her own hands. She had earned a high school diploma at the age of 39; now in her mid-40s, she was ready to study for a career in health.

Continued on Page 5

Continued from Page 4

She also ended an unhappy marriage and started over again by returning to Florida. She bought a 24-foot camper, worked full time at the Trump Spa at Doral, enrolled at nearby Miami Dade Community College and studied to be a respiratory therapist. Between shifts and classes she spent time nursing her dying mother.

After school, the woman who perhaps had been the most visible symbol of protest against the Vietnam War worked at the Miami VA hospital, where she cared for men who'd served in that war. But she never told them she was the girl from the Kent State photo. Sometimes, she says, she wanted to tell the veterans who she was so she could explain that the protesters weren't anti-soldier, just antiwar, and that they did what they did to bring soldiers home. Instead, she operated on a "no-need-to-know policy." She wanted "to be in the vets' shoes," she says. "I had to make a connection on a spiritual level."

By working with veterans, she learned about resilience and came to understand what being in the line of fire had done to her. "I tried to hide my shell-shockedness from them," she says, but she saw ways in which they were traumatized that echoed some of her own behaviors. "I'm very positional," she says. "Wherever I go, I sit with my back to the wall so I can see what's coming in the front door."

Mary Ann is retired now — she didn't remarry or have children — and leads a quiet life, growing avocados and oranges on a small plot at the edge of the Florida Everglades.

BORN IN THE USA



Did you ever listen to the lyrics? I mean really listen?

One of Springsteen's most iconic songs, "Born in the U.S.A." is about the troubled return home of a Vietnam veteran. Its original working title was "Vietnam".

Bruce's original version, recorded in 1982 for the Nebraska album, was downbeat and somber – a straightforward fit sonically for the song's sad story.

The upbeat sounding version that everyone knows, released in 1984, infuses the track with a sense of bitter sarcasm that's at the center of what makes it such a classic. It was internationally successful, reaching the top 20 in nine countries including the US and the UK. It's is Springsteen's highest-charting single in the US, peaking at #2.

If you're listening closely, the lyrics of "Born in the U.S.A." make its subject pretty clear: The 1984 hit by Bruce Springsteen describes a Vietnam War veteran who returns home to desperate circumstances and few options. Listen only to its surging refrain, though, and you could mistake it for an uncomplicated celebration of patriotism. You wouldn't be the only one.

"Born in the U.S.A." may hold the title for the most historically misunderstood. But as NPR Music director Lauren Onkey explained to *Morning Edition*, it took time for Springsteen himself to figure out just what the song was meant to say.

"He did a big benefit in the summer of '81 for Vietnam veterans in Los Angeles and met with vets," Onkey says. "After that tour ends, there's a number of places where he's trying to write about the Vietnam veteran experience, so the song grows out of that moment. And it starts out as something just called 'Vietnam.'"

Next time you hear that song really listen to the lyrics.

Born In The USA

Born down in a dead man's town
The first kick I took was when I hit the ground
You end up like a dog that's been beat too much
Till you spend half your life just covering up

Continued on Page 6

Continued from Page 5

Born in the U.S.A.
I was born in the U.S.A.
I was born in the U.S.A.
Born in the U.S.A.

Got in a little hometown jam
So they put a rifle in my hand
Sent me off to a foreign land
To go and kill the yellow man

Born in the U.S.A.
I was born in the U.S.A.
I was born in the U.S.A.
I was born in the U.S.A.
Born in the U.S.A.

Come back home to the refinery
Hiring man says "Son if it was up to me"
Went down to see my V.A. man
He said "Son, don't you understand"

I had a brother at Khe Sanh fighting off the Viet Cong
They're still there, he's all gone

He had a woman he loved in Saigon
I got a picture of him in her arms now
Down in the shadow of the penitentiary
Out by the gas fires of the refinery
I'm ten years burning down the road
Nowhere to run ain't got nowhere to go

Born in the U.S.A.
I was born in the U.S.A.
Born in the U.S.A.
I'm a long gone Daddy in the U.S.A.
Born in the U.S.A.
Born in the U.S.A.
Born in the U.S.A.
I'm a cool rocking Daddy in the U.S.A.

NEW AVEL, AVIONICS AND VIETNAM VETERANS REGISTERED

Kirk, Gary (SP5)
1621 W Broadway Blvd
Sedalia, MO 65301
660-281-0827
458th Signal Detachment, Vinh Long: 10/01/69 to 04/30/71
knobgrad@charter.net
MOS: 35k20 Avionics Mechanic
AGENT ORANGE: Parkinson's Disease, Heart problems

TAPS

Marvin York

Avel Far North 1968-1969

He died on 9 May 2021.

Marv attended many of our reunions. He was a great guy and will be missed by all who knew him.



PHOTOS

None Submitted

CHANGE OF ADDRESS/EMAIL/PHONE

None Submitted

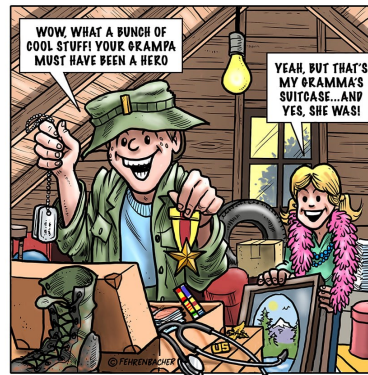
Send your change of address and email to jmccabe51@gmail.com

IN-COUNTRY VET



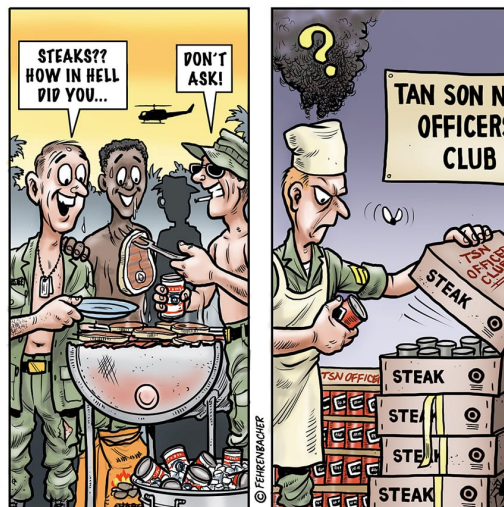
SOME THINGS JUST TAKE TIME!

IN-COUNTRY



FINDING THE ANGEL IN THE ATTIC.

IN-COUNTRY



ALL HAIL...THE SCROUNGER!

Continued from Page 4

ALL AVEL GATHERING 2021

**Virginia Beach, Virginia
October 14 - 17, 2021**

DoubleTree by Hilton

1900 Pavilion Dr.
Virginia Beach, VA 23452
757-422-8900

Room Rate is \$107.00/night plus tax

This special room rate will be honored 3 days prior and 3 days post event
Details on registration to follow

Early Bird, Tuesday October 12th, 2021

Early Bird arrivals can explore Virginia Beach and the area on their own.
There is a lot to see and do.

Wednesday October 13th, 2021

Early Bird arrivals can explore Virginia Beach and the area on their own.
There is a lot to see and do.

Thursday October 14th, 2021

The Hospitality Room will be open and well stocked with adult beverages and snacks!
There may be several possible carpool events depending on turnout.

Friday October 15th, 2021

The Hospitality Room will be open and well stocked with adult beverages and snacks!

Saturday October 16th, 2021

John Veers Martini Golf Outing
Group Banquet. Cash bar during dinner. (*Dinner paid by Avel*)
The Hospitality Room will be open after dinner until 23:00

Sunday October 17th, 2021

Final goodbyes and head home until next year

There has been a poor turnout so far. Due to lack of registrants we will probably have to cancel group events except final dinner. If you are going please register.

If you want to attend please go to the website and register www.avelvietnam.com. The Reunion cost is still \$80.00 per person. Checks can be sent now. If we have to cancel the Reunion you will receive a full refund.



AVEL VIETNAM



May/June 2021 Newsletter