

Major Jackie Willard Sanford

4 March 1932 – 16 June 1965

Soldier – Leader

Jack Sanford was no stranger to either combat or personal challenges. When he arrived in Vinh Long, Viet Nam in September 1964, he had already earned two Purple Hearts during a tour in Korea and held a list of personal accomplishments most men would find daunting.

Jack Sanford arrived in Vietnam as a key member of the Vinh Long “Outlaws”, the aviation company known as the 62d Assault Helicopter Company. The company arrived in Vietnam in September 1964 as a highly-skilled assemblage of officers, warrant officers, NCO’s and enlisted specialties, hand-picked from the best assets that the 11th Air Assault Division in Fort Benning, Georgia could provide. Although they were not aware of it at the time, the “Outlaws” were actually the “point unit” for the massive US force buildup that was to follow over the next 1 ½ years. Within the next year the 11th Air Assault Division would be renamed the 1st Air Cavalry Division and establish it’s own historic record in the Vietnam conflict. And, nearly 500,000 Americans would find themselves locked in combat in a land most of them had never heard of a year or two earlier.

Back at Fort Benning, in August 1964, Department of the Army had directed the CG, 11th Air Assault Division, to activate and deploy the 62d to Vietnam as soon as possible. Major Tom Anderson was selected to activate and command the new company and have it enroute to Vietnam within 40 days. The first company Morning Report, dated August 8, 1965, showed Major Anderson and the company clerk, as the first two members of the company. 39 days later, on September 17th, the company closed in Vietnam with its full complement of people and equipment and aircraft.

Within 24 hours after the company was activated, a young Captain Jack Sanford appeared in Major Anderson’s temporary office and not only volunteered to go to Vietnam with the company but also insisted that he be given command of the “gun” platoon, one of the most high risk positions in the unit. Sanford persuasively laid out his military and flying experience, a little of his personal background, and his conviction that the then little-known conflict was destined to become a milestone event in our country’s history.

But Sanford conveniently omitted revealing a number of things about himself during that interview. What he *didn’t* say at the time was that, at his age of 32, he already had 18 years military service! He also didn’t mention that at age 14 he had misled a recruiter about his age and joined the US Marines. He served in Asia and the Pacific before his age was found out and was mustered out.

He also didn’t think to mention that a few months later he again enlisted, this time in the Army, at age 17 and soon found himself as an infantry platoon sergeant in Korea earning his two Purple Hearts and the Combat Infantryman’s Badge. He also neglected to mention that he had not only earned his High School GED degree but also had been

awarded a college degree through the “Bootstrap” program, all on his own time. Major Anderson was also not aware that Jack Sanford held a Black Belt in Karate.

Major Anderson did observe that Sanford wore the Master Parachutist badge and the Senior Army Aviator badge. He also learned that, although he had received his Infantry officer’s commission through OCS, his Army serial number showed that he had subsequently earned a Regular Army Commission.

But, what most impressively stood out to Major Anderson was that he was listening to a true leader and a “soldier’s soldier”! And, he knew that he had found his gun platoon commander.

The fundamentals of leadership came second nature to Jack Sanford. During the time the 62d Aviation Company was still preparing for deployment to Vietnam, he personally selected his platoon personnel from the rosters of people being assigned to the company. Although CONUS-based Aviation Companies did not have an armed platoon, Sanford sought out recent “lessons-learned” reports from Vietnam in which the tactics and employment of armed helicopters was described. Upon arrival in Vietnam, he put himself into the hands of his counterpart in the 114th Aviation Company, Captain Pete Kendrick, for two weeks of in-country combat training before his own gun platoon was declared “operationally ready”. He learned the operational capabilities of every weapon and rocket system mounted on his gunships. A personnel infusion program took some of his hand-picked people but he made sure those who replaced them were qualified to fill their MOS positions.

Captain Al Iller, the company XO and later it’s second commander, led the 62d Advance Party heading to Vietnam and, while enroute, took on the mission of selecting a call-sign name for the company and drawing up a unit patch to depict the name. Lt. Bob Bergquist, also a member of the Advance Party, was one of the aviators selected by Sanford as one of his gunship pilots. Bergquist knew that the “guns” would also need a call sign, a practice already in place in those early days in Vietnam. Iller and Bergquist came up with “Outlaws” as the company call sign and the name was adopted by the 62d Aviation Company upon arrival in Vietnam. In keeping with the western motif of the name, Bergquist selected “Mavericks” as the gunship platoon name. When Sanford arrived in Vietnam, he was already designated as “Maverick Lead”. Bob Bergquist was also something of an artist and he personally designed the “Outlaws” patch as well as the steer-head insignia that would be painted on the nose of every Maverick gunship.

When the Outlaws arrived in the Mekong Delta, the Company assumed the primary combat support role of the 7th ARVN Division based in the Mekong Delta town of My Tho. Captain Bryce Kramer was serving as the Aviation LNO of the 145th Aviation Battalion, which had previously supported the 7th ARVN Division. When Sanford learned that his gun platoon would be supporting the 7th ARVN division, he sought out Kramer and asked Kramer to introduce him to the MAAG Senior Advisor (Colonel Robert Guenther), the Operations Advisor (Major Bob Sears), the ARVN Division Commander (Major General Nygyen Bao Tri), and his Operations staff so that he could quickly identify with both the US and ARVN personnel he would be working with and supporting. This type of “outreach” was unique but typified the thoroughness and

professional attention to detail that personified Sanford's approach to his duties. Jack Sanford and Bryce Kramer quickly became close personal friends and Kramer later commanded the Outlaw's 2d Platoon.

After attaining their initial "operational ready" status in late September 1964, the Outlaws and Mavericks rapidly established a remarkable record. Although there were already two combat-seasoned air mobile companies located in the Mekong Delta, the 62d quickly matched the performance and combat capabilities of its veteran counterparts. All three companies operated under the command of the 13th "Delta" Aviation Battalion, then located in Can Tho.

As Maverick Lead, Jack Sanford proved again and again not only his innate abilities to lead but also his talent for developing new and innovative tactics for helicopter gunship support. Many of the tactics and procedures he designed were adopted throughout Vietnam and are probably still valid in today's aviation training.

In December 1964, the 62d Aviation Company was renumbered as Company A, 502d Aviation Battalion but still retained their distinctive call sign, "Outlaws". This change was to allow the hastily activated 62d Aviation Company to be legitimately integrated into the budgeted Army force structure. Still later, the "Outlaws" were once again redesignated, this time as the 175th Aviation Company, and remained in Vietnam as the 175th until the US withdrawal.

In early April 1965 Jack Sanford and the Mavericks were flying escort into a hot LZ (Landing Zone) in support of a combat airlift of ARVN troops by the Outlaw troop carrying slicks. Suddenly a VC small arms round crashed through the plexiglass windscreen of his aircraft and passed through the heavy muscle on the right side of Jack's neck. Making a quick analysis of his injury he determined that medical treatment could wait until he finished his firing runs. When the last Outlaw slick lifted off the LZ, Sanford's copilot flew the aircraft directly to the medical treatment clinic at Soc Trang. After being hospitalized for three days, Sanford signed himself out of the clinic and rejoined his Maverick platoon at Vinh Long. His third Purple Heart was awarded while he was recovering. Less than 10 days after being wounded, he was again flying Maverick Lead on combat missions.

The events of June 16, 1965 that led to Jack Sanford's death are still vivid in the minds of those who were his friends in the company, both officer and enlisted alike. The action began when Outlaw Operations was alerted that an American advisor captain and his ARVN counterpart had been captured in an ambush about 10 miles north of the Vinh Long airfield. Jack Sanford immediately led a heavy fire team (three gunships) into the air and headed toward to area to search for the missing officers. Arriving on-station, Sanford soon radioed that he had observed a sampan with a rice-straw mat covering something and circled back for a closer look. On the next pass, his aircraft immediately received heavy ground fire. He pulled his team off while USAF and USN aircraft poured bombs and napalm into the area where the fire had originated. Moving back in for another look, Sanford's aircraft again took fire, Sanford was mortally wounded and his aircraft, being at only 50 feet, pulled nose-up, lost rotor rpm and exploded into the dry rice paddy less than 100 yards from the VC gunners.

Additional USAF and USN fighter-bomber aircraft made numerous passes with bombs and napalm until resistance was quieted. A slick was called in to attempt to rescue the survivors and was able to pick up the wounded and fly them to Vinh Long for subsequent Dust Off evacuation to Saigon. Jack Sanford died enroute to the hospital. His crew chief, Specialist Mike Moritz, died in the burning aircraft. The copilot, Captain Tim Bisch, and door gunner, Sergeant Ciacchino, survived but spent long months in and out of Walter Reed Army Hospital recovering from their wounds.

Jack Sanford's loss was felt deeply not only by the men in the Outlaws and Mavericks, but also throughout the 13th Battalion in the Mekong Delta. Sanford's name, exploits and heroism had become almost legendary throughout the Delta. While never a "dare-devil", he nonetheless never lacked for courage either in the face of enemy fire or in making critical, life or death decisions.

Jack Sanford was a popular, respected and admired officer both among the aviators and enlisted men of his Maverick platoon as well as throughout the Outlaw company.

Sgt. John Doyle had been the crew chief for Maverick 36 from the time he arrived in country and had come to know Maverick Lead very well. On June 16th, however, Doyle had recently been promoted to SSG E6 and was the new Platoon Sergeant for the 2d Platoon. He recalled, many years later, that he and another Sgt in the Mavericks, after a boisterous evening in the platoon area, decided they liked being in the Mavericks so well that they would extend another six months if Captain Sanford would do the same. They went to Sanford with, what they thought was a great idea, but Sanford "just looked at me, smiled, and made no commitment. So, neither did we!".

Sgt Doyle flew numerous missions as a crew member under Sanford's leadership in his Maverick aircraft. On June 16th, Doyle recalls being on the flight line, taking care of his new aircraft, when word began to spread that a Maverick ship was down. When the slick carrying the wounded landed at Vinh Long, Doyle was among those who were devastated at the sight of his mortally wounded Captain being transferred into the Dust Off for the trip to Saigon.

Sanford's friend, Captain Tim Bisch, who had agreed to fly with Jack on his last mission, was a personal friend of the young Army Captain who had been captured by the VC. Bisch was critically injured in the crash and spent two years in and out of Army hospitals fighting to recover from his wounds. Nearly 40 years later, in recounting the events of June 16, 1965, he still feels strongly that Jack Sanford "was the most outstanding officer and warrior I ever had the opportunity to know and serve with".

Captain Joe Moffett was on the search mission flying in the heavy fire team as Maverick 1, flying in the lead position, with Sanford's aircraft in trail. He recalls vividly how, moments before devastating enemy fire erupted from the canal line, Jack Sanford directed him to fall back onto his tail so that Sanford could take the lead position. Moffett has stated that he owes his survival to Sanford's assumption of the lead position moments before the fatal enemy fire was received.

Captain John Schumann, the object of the search mission on which Jack Sanford perished, was captured by the Viet Cong and was reportedly moved to North Vietnam where he died while serving as a POW.

Captain Bryce Kramer, who was probably Sanford's closest friend in the "Outlaws", was assigned to accompany Sanford's remains back to CONUS. Captain Sanford's wife, Jeannette, had come to the Far East to work for a construction company so that she could be in the vicinity of her husband. On June 16th, she was employed by Pacific Architects and Engineers Corporation and was working in Saigon. Bryce Kramer was honored to also be the Survivor Assistance Officer for Sanford's widow and made arrangements for his burial at Arlington National Cemetery.

Jack Sanford died without knowing he had already been selected for promotion to Major and was weeks away from being promoted. His promotion was made posthumously.

During his illustrious career, Jack Sanford was awarded the Silver Star, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, the Bronze Star with "V" device, four Purple Hearts and more than a score of other decorations from both his own country and the host nations in which he served.

Within weeks after Jack Sanford was killed, US Army Vietnam (USARV) command honored his memory by naming the newly constructed Long Binh Army Airfield as Sanford Army Airfield. LTG Frank T. Mildren, DepCG, USARV, and BG Alan Burdett, CG, 1st Aviation Brigade dedicated the airfield to Jack Sanford. A monument was placed in front of the Operations building which read:

"Sanford Army Airfield, in memory of Major Jack W. Sanford, Senior Army Aviator, Co. A, 502d Aviation Battalion, killed by hostile action on 16 June 1965".

An even more lasting tribute to Jack Sanford's memory stands in the form of one of Fort Rucker, Alabama's most prominent classroom buildings. Sanford Hall houses instructional classes for hundreds of US Army Aviators attending training courses at the U.S. Army Aviation School. Fittingly, Sanford Hall is located on "Outlaw Street", named in honor of the aviation company in which Sanford served, and gave his life for his country. All "Outlaws" will share the pride of this recognition for years to come.

In early March 1964, Mr. Eugene Patterson, Editor of the Atlanta Constitution newspaper spent a week with the Outlaws in Vinh Long and got to know Jack Sanford well during that short time. He wrote a series of 11 articles that appeared in the Constitution describing the activities of the outlaws, and Jack Sanford's Mavericks. On learning of Jack's death, Patterson wrote a poignant column in the Atlanta Constitution and concluded his story with the following:

“He was such a vital, self-sufficient man, so upright and unafraid, that I had somehow expected he would make it through. He spent 11 of his 33 years studying for that college degree, took three wounds for his country before the final one. He cashed all of it in on one fearless firing run for some friends whose language he couldn’t even speak”.

The loss of a soldier of the caliber of Jack Sanford drew the Outlaws, Mavericks and Roadrunners even closer as a unit. The company has lost other individuals and crews in earlier actions, but Sanford’s stature as a soldier and leader affected every man in the unit.

What follows are a collection of memories of June 16th, 1965, the day on which the original Maverick Lead, Jack Sanford, gave the supreme sacrifice in the service of his country and in support of his fellow soldiers in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam. These accounts are written by individuals who knew Jack Sanford well, both personally and professionally. Their accounts expand the on the persona of Major Jack Sanford. They also provide more specific details of the combat action in which Sanford lost his life.

Keep in mind that these are individual memories from a number of people who knew Jack Sanford well. Individual memories are often colored by the closeness of combat. Although these memories were recounted many years after June 16th, 1965 they are still extremely vivid to those who were there.

These recountings are written to reinforce the memory of a true soldier, a true leader and a good friend in order that his memory may be kept alive for those who pass through Sanford Hall. They personalize the person for whom the building is dedicated.

Jackie Willard Sanford is permanently memorialized on Panel 2E Row 11 on the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC.

Personal Accounts By:

Major Thomas E. Anderson	CO - Outlaws
Captain Frederick R. Bisch	Maintenance Detachment Commander – Sanford copilot
Captain Alfred J. Iller	XO - Outlaws
Captain Joseph U. Moffett	Maverick 1
Captain Bryce R. Kramer	1 st Platoon Commander - Outlaws
Captain Olen D. Thornton	Operations Officer - Outlaws
SSG E6 John E. Doyle	Platoon Sergeant - Mavericks

June 16th, 1965

As recounted by Colonel (Ret) Thomas E. Anderson
Then Major, Commanding Officer – Co A/502d – Outlaws

As I remember, June 16th was a Wednesday. I was nearing my DEROS, having received orders to report to C&GSC at Fort Leavenworth by the last week in July.

We had had two rather long and demanding operations the previous two days and most of the company was on stand-down alert. To give the crews a rest, the 13th Battalion TOC had not yet assigned any combat operation missions.

Battalion had sent down a group of ABC newspeople that morning so they could try to get a Vietnam combat story, either on camera or on audio tape. Since no combat assault operations were scheduled either in the 114th (our sister company in Vinh Long) or in A/502d, the ABC people were lounging in the operations shack near the tower on the flight line.

Sometime late in the morning, probably around 1100 – 1200, we got information from the Bn TOC, that Capt John Schumann, an advisor to the 7th ARVN Division, had been in a convoy on a road just north of Vinh Long and across the Mekong river, when the convoy had been ambushed at a VC roadblock. Capt Schumann, and his ARVN counterpart, reportedly had been taken captive by the VC. Battalion gave us the coordinates and asked us to send out a fire team to do a search and recon in the area.

I was told of the mission by Captain Olen Thornton, Outlaw Operations Officer, who had already assigned it to the Mavericks. Jack Sanford had received the mission at about the same time I was notified and had already designated a heavy fire team to conduct the search. He would, of course, fly Lead.

Nothing in the nature of the mission indicated that it would be anything other than a routine, low-level, search of the canals, roads, villages, etc. in the area. I thought this would be a good opportunity to put the ABC people in the back of my C&C ship and fly overhead, listen to the Maverick radio traffic, and let them watch how such a mission was conducted. It would also give them a chance to get some pictures and audio tape of the mission. So, I got my crew together, put the 3 or 4 ABC people in the back, fixed them up with headsets, and took off minutes behind the Maverick fire team.

Captain Tim Bisch was commanding the 150th Maintenance Detachment, assigned as the primary maintenance support for the “Outlaws”. Tim and Jack had become close friends during their nearly one year association in the company. When Jack Sanford was given the mission, he asked Tim if he would like to fly with him since the captured officer, Captain Schumann, was a personal friend of Bisch’s. No specific enemy situation or other information was given that would dictate taking any more than the usual precautions normally in place when flying such a mission. Besides, Jack was the best in the business in commanding such a mission and needed no particular outside advice or assistance.

Because I normally flew the company C&C ship, I had a wide variety of VHF, UHF and FM radio communications. I was able to simultaneously, or selectively, monitor the Maverick platoon net, the Outlaw company command net, the Battalion TOC net and various USAF liaison channels. Battalion TOC also had direct access to USAF and USN fighter support that was assigned to, and on-station, to support missions in the Delta.

I departed Vinh Long and I arrived on station, with the ABC news team in the back, just as the Maverick fire team was starting its search pattern. I was at about 1000 feet, circling overhead, keeping the fire team in sight. After about 5-10 minutes of flying up and down several canals, I heard Maverick Lead radio that he had spotted a sampan in a canal with some rice-straw mats covering something and that he wanted to circle back to have another look. Just as the team started making it's next pass over the area, it drew heavy fire from the tree line alongside the canal. Jack reported the fire and pulled off immediately. I told him to stand by, called Bn TOC and reported that the team had encountered heavy fire and requested fighter support.

Within 2-3 minutes I had a call from a FAC in the area. We quickly discussed the mission, I pointed out the smoke grenade thrown by one of the Mavericks, and gave him vectors from there. Within minutes, he was able to bring in at least two sorties of USAF fighter/bomber aircraft who strafed and dropped ordnance on the tree lines. After the air support pulled off, Jack indicated he was going back in to have another look.

No sooner had the team begun it's run into the area again when even heavier VC fire opened up. Maverick Lead, at very low level, took several hits. The ground fire found it's mark on Jack Sanford, critically wounding him and making it impossible to control the aircraft during the few seconds it took before the aircraft contacted the ground.

The other Maverick aircraft immediately pulled off. I called Battalion TOC for more air strike support. I was amazed, not only at how quickly we got a response on-station, but also with the amount of firepower they poured onto that tree line. It seems to me that both USAF and USN aircraft responded and, in the next 20 minutes, a fierce amount of ordnance and napalm was put into the area on the VC positions. (We didn't know it at the time, but later found out that a VC battalion was staging in that area.)

I watched Sanford and Bisch's aircraft hit the ground, explode and burst into flames and remember shouting "Oh God, no, no no..." From directly overhead, I could see three bodies on the ground near the burning UH-1 gunship. As the fighters were coming in, I called Vinh Long tower and asked for a slick to be sent to the area immediately. The tower and Outlaw operations were also monitoring the same combat frequencies and were abreast of the action.

Captain George Kyle and a crew were on stand-by at Vinh Long. When I called for an empty slick, he cranked immediately and was on-station within five minutes. While enroute, I gave him a quick summary of the situation which he could already see as he arrived just south of the area.

Enemy fire had now been reduced considerably by the fighter-bombers. George and I made the decision to have him come in low from the south, land as close as possible to Maverick Lead's aircraft, and have his crew pick up the three injured crewmen we could

see on the ground. It was obvious that both pilots had been ejected through the windshield. I couldn't tell if they were both still in their seats or on the ground beside the seats. The gunner, Sergeant Giacchino, had also been thrown from the aircraft and was unconscious on the ground. Mike Moritz, the crew chief, was not able to get out of the ship and died in the crash and fire. His remains were recovered the following day.

George's crew jumped out, picked up the three crewmen, put them into the slick and departed to the south for Vinh Long, only minutes away. By that time, a Dust Off medevac ship was landing at Vinh Long. When George landed, the injured were immediately transferred to the Dust Off, with the local flight surgeon on board, and flown to the hospital in Saigon.

Captain Jack Sanford died enroute to Saigon. Captain Tim Bisch and Sgt. Giacchino were transferred through medevac channels, ultimately to Walter Reed Army hospital in Washington, DC.

The U.S. Army lost a future senior leader that day. Jack Sanford had all the attributes and abilities to rise to a position of high prominence in the Army. I lost a good friend.

Thomas E. Anderson
Outlaw 6

June 16th, 1965

As recounted by Colonel (Ret) Frederick T. (Tim) Bisch
Then Captain, Commanding, 150th Transportation Detachment (CHFM)

I am pleased to pass on my memories regarding June 16, 1965, a sad day for me, our unit, Jack's family, relatives, numerous friends, and the US Army.

On June 16, 1965, I was Commander of the 150th Transportation Detachment (CHFM). Our mission was to provide maintenance and technical supply support to A/502d with it's 25 UH-1 helicopters, to include 8 gun ships assigned to the 3rd platoon, known as the Mavericks. Our call sign was Roadrunner!

Earlier that day I had flown with a flight of Maverick gun ships on a training mission. Newly assigned personnel from the 25th Inf Div, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii had recently arrived to serve as gunners on Maverick aircraft. To provide training with aircraft automatic weapons, learn firing techniques and targeting skills, the gunners were provided an opportunity for live firing exercises in-flight at the local "live fire" area.

After completion of a brief but focused flight, I returned to my Detachment maintenance office on the flight line.

Shortly thereafter, Captain Jack Sanford, Commander of the Maverick Platoon, came to my office. He informed me of the capture of my friend, Captain John Schumann, a military advisor located at Cai Bai, across the Mekong River, north of Vinh Long. Jack had received a mission to take his Mavericks out to try to locate him. He asked if I wanted to go with him on the mission. I was eager to go.

I collected my flight gear and went to the flight line to preflight and prepare the aircraft, known the "Hog", armed with 24 each 2.75 inch rockets on each side of the aircraft. Jack arrived with his gear, asked me to change seats from copilot to pilot. Coincidentally, armored flight gear had been issued that day or shortly before. I was inserting the lower portion of my chest plate under my lap seat belt when Jack urged me to hurry. I suggested to Jack that he also insert his plate under his belt for improved protection and ensure it wouldn't strike the cyclic. Jack just nodded and requested clearance from the tower to depart, which we did. I remember that we needed to use a running takeoff to get our heavy "hog" airborne.

I believe we initially flew at about 500 feet altitude to the area before dropping to low level. One of the fire team aircraft began taking fire. We, and the fire team, left the area. USAF fixed wing aircraft were close by and strafed the treeline where it was believed the fire was coming from. They made several firing passes into the area and shortly thereafter we received permission to return to the area. I remember watching the fighter-bomber aircraft climbing high into the air leaving the area as we were going back in.

I'm sorry to say that is the last I remember of what happened on June 16th. My next conscious remembrance was waking up, with both legs and one arm in casts, strapped down in a bed, inside an enclosed white curtained area, obviously at a hospital. It was Walter Reed General Hospital during early July. Due to my concussion from the accident, I was disoriented and confused for several weeks. I did not know what had happened or why I was there.

I was shocked with disbelief and grave sadness when I was later made aware of the accident and death's of Jack Sanford and Mike Moritz.

I remember Mike as a pleasant-natured soldier, an excellent crew chief, dedicated to the care and operational readiness of his aircraft at all times. Jack Sanford was a personable but very focused military officer. During my 29 years of active service, Jack was the most outstanding officer and warrior I ever had the opportunity to know and serve with.

Unfortunately, my friend Captain John Schumann, the Army Advisor at Cai Bai, died while being held as a POW, I believe in North Vietnam. John would be proud and humbled to know of the efforts and sacrifices that were made on his behalf to rescue him.

Jack Sanford's service to the Army, Army Aviation, and his country should be acknowledged so our junior military service men and women appreciate the caliber of many of their predecessors who led the way.

I am proud to have the opportunity to help honor the memory of Jack Sanford and his service to our country.

Frederick Timothy Bisch
Roadrunner !

June 16th, 1965

As recounted by Colonel (Ret) Alfred J. Iller
Then Captain, XO, Co. A/502d Aviation Bn - Outlaws
Later, CO, Co A/502d Aviation Bn - Outlaws

Jack Sanford was a soldier's soldier! During the nearly one year I served in the same helicopter company with Jack Sanford, he became a close friend. Our relationship and mutual respect grew with every day he was part of our unit.

I had occasion to fly with Jack in armed gunships on several of our missions. However, it was only after I assumed command of the Outlaws, following Major Tom Anderson's departure, that I realized the full impact of Jack's leadership. For a few weeks, after his death, I always had the feeling that the Mavericks, when out on a mission, were sort of looking back.... searching for Jack's firm hand of leadership.

Without question, Jack's successor as Maverick Lead, Captain Frank Estes, was an extremely well qualified Lead! I remember having a one-on-one discussion with Frank about the loss of Jack and the perceived impact on the Mavericks. We both reiterated that, although we had all lost a friend and true leader, Frank was now the Platoon Leader and it would be under his guidance and direction that the mavericks would continue to flourish in the same fashion that Jack had melded the platoon originally. As expected, Frank seized the situation and did the expected outstanding job during that difficult time just after Jack's death.

Jack was a vital part of our unit. How vital he was, not only to our Outlaw/Maverick group but also to the entire command in Vietnam, was poignantly brought home when I saw General William C. Westmoreland participate in the funeral/memorial service for Jack in Saigon. In our Outlaw archives is a photo of General Westmoreland with Jack's wife Jeannette, LTC Jack Mackmull and Major Tom Anderson saluting Jack's casket as it was carried out of the chapel.

When Jack was killed, another close friend, Captain Bryce Kramer, was called on to break the news to his wife, Jeannette, who was employed as a civilian in the Saigon area. Bryce handled the situation with extreme sensitivity and compassion. At the time, I thought to myself that, if ever something happened to me, I hoped my wife would be accorded the same personal and compassionate consideration. Because of his close relationship with Jack, Bryce brilliantly conveyed to his widow the true feelings of all of us toward Jack.

I am sure others have written eloquently of Jack Sanford's life and chronicled the events of June 16th very well. I can only add that Jack Sanford was, and still is, a soldier and friend of the first order in my memory.

Al Iller
Outlaw 5 – Outlaw 6

June 16th, 1965

As recounted by Colonel (Ret) Joseph U. Moffett
Then Captain – Maverick 1
Co A/502d Aviation Bn - Outlaws

THE DAY CAPTAIN SANFORD DIED

As I recall, it was a down day for the Mavericks. Seems like we were doing cleanup and routine maintenance of our revetments and aircraft.

Capt Sanford, Maverick Lead, told us that an American advisor had been captured and may have been seen being moved by sampan in the 7th ARVN Division area. We were scrambled as a heavy fire team to go look for him.

I was flying “1” with Lt. Chuck Wrenn in the left seat. We took off and headed across the river and began reconning all of the canals in the vicinity of the area where the advisor had been seen.

We were flying low, paralleling each canal, so we could see under the canopy of the tree line. I received a VHF transmission from Lead, saying, “‘1’, break around and get on my tail.” I broke left followed by “3”. As I completed my turn, I saw Lead’s aircraft, 90 degrees to the canal, in a very high nose up attitude with the rotor blades turning very slowly. I couldn’t comprehend what was wrong and was initially puzzled by this action.

Lead’s aircraft hit the ground without changing attitude. It scared me. I recall calling Vinh Long tower to say that Maverick Lead was down.

I do know we expended most, if not all, our ordnance on the area Lead had just flown over. Other Maverick aircraft scrambled from Vinh Long and were soon on the scene.

A slick flown by Captain George Kyle arrived soon after, landed and recovered Maverick Lead, Tim Bisch, and the door gunner and took them to Vinh Long.

I have always regretted that I didn’t jettison my rocket pods and attempt to immediately recover the crew myself. Had I done this, Capt Sanford might not have died.

I owe my life to Maverick Lead because of his instruction for me to break around and follow him. Otherwise, it would have been me to overfly that machine gun.

Joe Moffett
Maverick 1

June 16th, 1965

As recounted by Colonel (Ret) Bryce R. Kramer
Then Captain – Commander – 1st Lift Platoon
Co A/502d Aviation Bn - Outlaws

What follows is an overview of my memories of Jack Sanford during the brief time that I was privileged to know him – October '64 to June 16th, 1965.

I first met Jack in early October 1964. I was assigned as the 145th Aviation Battalion Aviation LNO, attached to the MAAG unit with the 7th ARVN Division stationed at My Tho, RVN. Jack was the Armed Platoon Commander of the newly-arrived 62d Aviation company which was about to be assigned as the primary aviation support company to the 7th ARVN, replacing the 145th Battalion.

At the time, Jack asked me to brief him on the Division AO, enemy OB, Division “modus operandi” and to introduce him to the MAAG Senior Advisor and staff, the Division Commander, the Operations staff, etc. so that he could quickly identify with the US and ARVN personnel that he would be working with and supporting.

This I did, to include the political subdivision Provincial and District RVN Chiefs and their MAAG advisors. This type of “outreach” was unique, but indicative of the thoroughness and professional attention to detail that personified Jack’s approach to his duties. Jack and I immediately formed a professional relationship that subsequently developed into a warm personal friendship.

In November '64, I was reassigned to the 62d Aviation company (Outlaws), initially as the assistant Operations and Intelligence officer and shortly thereafter as the commander of the 1st platoon. During this timeframe, I flew with Jack and his Maverick platoon a number of times and further cemented our professional and personal relationship.

As a side anecdote, Jack and I arranged to meet our wives (Jeannette and Gloria) on R&R in Hong Kong in March 1965. In spite of the dependent ban, both wives made a trip back to Saigon as civilians. While there, we were staying at the 145th Avn Bn compound when a VC sapper raid occurred with machine gun fire raking the BOQ in which were staying. The next day we moved our wives into the My Loan hotel (translate as “whorehouse”) which was reportedly paying the most “protection money” for security. Jack and I returned to duty in Vinh Long. My wife Gloria returned to the US and Jeannette went to Thailand and took a job with Pacific Architects and Engineers (PA&E), a very large military contractor organization. She subsequently returned to Saigon several weeks later in their employ where she remained until Jack’s death on June 16th, 1965.

My memory of June 16th is not “crystal clear”. It is still painful, after all the years, to address the circumstances.

On that day we did not have an operation scheduled. The Mavericks were on “standby” at Vinh Long for possible emergency support in the 7th Division AO. I was scheduled to fly with Jack that day and spent the morning in the sweltering sun on the runway at Vinh

Long. About midday, partially as a result of boredom or a desire to get to altitude to “cool off”, I took one of my platoon slicks and crew and decided to “recon” the Division AO to see what was going on with the ground operations. (Things were a lot looser back then and we had a lot of personal leeway). I asked Captain Joe Clelan, the commander of the 28th Signal Detachment, to go along with me as copilot, which he did.

A couple hours into our recon, we were enroute back to Vinh Long to refuel when we heard over the radio that a Cai Be Regional Force, conducting an operation in their AO, had been ambushed by a VC unit and that the District Advisor, Captain John Schumann and others, had been captured. Subsequently, a call went out for air and armed ship support of the operation to attempt to locate and rescue the advisor and any other survivors of the ambush.

Jack, and elements of his armed platoon, responded to this request. Years later, Captain (now Colonel) Tim Bisch, commander of the 150th Trans Det (which provided maintenance support for the 62d), told me that Jack came to his maintenance shack and asked him if he wanted to go with him on the search operation, since Schumann, also a TC officer, was a friend of Tim’s. Tim told me that the subsequent takeoff with Jack in the “Hog” was his last recollection of the operation until he woke up in Walter Reed Army Hospital several weeks later.

Tim also recalled that Jack told him to fly the right seat, for some unknown reason, since the AC of the “Hog” usually flew that seat. The irony of this was that, since Jack was the only crew member subsequently shot, had Tim flown the regular copilot “left seat”, the outcome may have been markedly different!

Jack’s fire team proceeded to the AO and apparently located and engaged the VC unit. During the ensuing fire fight, Jack’s ship took fire and crashed, killing Jack and his crew chief, Mike Moritz. Subsequent air and ground support enabled a slick, piloted by Captain George Kyle, to get into the area and evacuate the crew and medevac the survivors to the Saigon General Hospital.

Again, years later, Tim told me that while recuperating at Walter Reed, he ran into the door gunner, Sergeant Giacchino, who was also a patient, and who told him he was conscious throughout the action. He told Tim that he recalled that during a low level gun run, they encountered machine gun fire that hit the “Hog” in the cockpit area and that they immediately “pancaked in” with forward speed that caused the aircraft to crash and explode. He said the impact threw the crew 30 to 40 yards out of the aircraft, with Jack and Tim still strapped into their seats.

He also recalled an ensuing firefight that included helicopter gunships, USAF bombing and napalm support, the heat of which seemed to engulf the crash site, and ground support which apparently enabled their subsequent evacuation.

My next recollection was of Al Iller, XO A/502d, and I flying to Saigon later that evening and identifying Jack’s body which we found in a triage trailer outside of the hospital. Jack’s body was “intact” and the only gunshot wound, other than crash-related injuries,

was an apparent gunshot to the groin area. Subsequently, Al and I saw Tim Bisch in the hospital. Tim was unconscious and appeared to have every bone in his body broken. That was the last time I saw Tim until 35 years later at a reunion of the 62d Avn Co. !! At the time, I didn't think that he would live through the night and that it would be better if he didn't. Subsequently, Tim made a "miraculous" recovery, remained on active duty, was subsequently restored to flight status and retired as an O6! (Go figure!)

Later that night, Major Tom Anderson, unit CO, Al and I went to Jack's wife Jeannette's apartment in Saigon where I had the onerous task of telling her of Jack's death and the related circumstances. I subsequently spent the night at Jeanette's apartment while Tom and Al returned to Vinh Long.

The following days are somewhat of a blur. Since I was scheduled to DEROS in a few weeks, I was assigned to accompany Jack's body, and Jeannette, back to CONUS, to arrange for Jack's burial at Arlington National Cemetery and to serve as Jeannette's Survivor Assistance officer enroute to my next duty station. Somewhere in between all this, there was a "hero ceremony" for Jack in Saigon and all the other administrative minutia associated with departing RVN.

Enroute to Arlington, we had an "interim" service for Jack in his hometown of East Rainelle, WV, a small town in the heart of what is now known as Appalachia. A number of Jack's civilian and military friends, Jeannette, his mother and sister, and Gloria and I held a "wake" for Jack in the funeral director's house. Everybody got "smashed", to include the funeral director and his wife. Jack would have been proud of us!!!

We sobered up the next day by crashing a breakfast at the nearby White Sulphur Springs Resort and since there was no way to "pay" for the buffet, one of Jack's "ballsy" friends charged the tab to a fictitious room number. Jack would have been proud of us!!!

Subsequently, we buried Jack at Arlington. We took Jeannette back to Gloria's parents home at Pine Mountain, GA, where we stayed while she and I settled her affairs. I subsequently reported to Fort Rucker and Jeannette went back to work at Fort Benning, GA in the same job she had before Jack departed for RVN.

The above is my best recollection of the events surrounding June 16th, 1965. I have no doubt that, after almost 40 years, some recollections be at variance with those of others. Mine are not "set in stone".

Bryce Kramer
1st Platoon Commander – Outlaws

June 16th, 1965

As recounted by 1st Sergeant E8 (Ret) John E. Doyle
Then SSG E6 – Platoon Sergeant
Maverick Platoon, Co A/502d Aviation Bn - Outlaws

In early June 1965, I had just been promoted to SSG E6 and was assigned as Platoon Sergeant of the 2d Lift Platoon, Outlaws.

My recollection of the day that Jack Sanford and Mike Moritz died was that I was on the flight line when word started to spread about an aircraft having been shot down. I remember a Dust Off and a regular slick landed at Vinh Long. The slick brought in the crew members who been recovered from the Maverick aircraft. I quickly realized that it was Maverick Lead!

I had served as a crew chief in the Maverick platoon until I was promoted and took on my new position. I knew, and respected, Captain Sanford as a wonderful man and true leader.

I remember going over to the slick that had brought in the wounded crew. A crowd had gathered around the ship and I could see one of the injured, not sure who it was at the time. It appeared that his scalp was hanging down from his head. I quickly realized that we (the crowd) were only in the way of getting the injured onto the Dust Off, so I went back to the 2d Platoon flight line area.

Sometime after that, word came to the flight line that Captain Jack Sanford had died on the way to the hospital. Like everyone else, I was devastated! I felt helpless. I know now it was irrational, but at the time I felt very guilty. I felt that maybe if I had not just made E6, I could have been there on the mission, and maybe I could have done something.

Like everyone who knew Sanford and Moritz, I was immersed in grief. I was angry. Angry that Jack and Mike were dead. Angry that they had not been able to get Mike's body out of the wreckage and he would have to stay out there until the next day when recovery could be made. Angry that Tim and the gunner were seriously hurt, and angry at what I perceived to be the way we were handcuffed in fighting the war.

Later, I realized that I had no reason to feel guilty. There was nothing I could have done, even if I had been there. But, my life was changed in some deep way by that day. Still, today, I find myself talking about the events of that day. I have, after three tours in Vietnam, forgotten most of what happened there in Vietnam. But, the memories of that day will always live on.

I lost a leader I had the utmost respect for, a fellow crew chief, and two fellow Outlaws!

John Doyle
Maverick 36 crew

June 16th, 1965

As recounted by Colonel (Ret) Olen D. Thornton
Then Captain - Operations Officer
Co A/502d Aviation Bn - Outlaws

I was in Outlaw Operations the morning of June 16th, 1965. We were radio-monitoring frequencies of the Outlaw and Maverick aircraft on missions away from home field. We monitored a call that stated that the gunship that Jack Sanford and Tim Bisch were flying had been hit by enemy fire and was down.

I began to designate a standby crew to be prepared to go the area to assist when we monitored a transmission that one of our slicks was already airborne in the vicinity. I believe it was George Kyle.

We continued to monitor the transmissions of aircraft in the area involved in the operation.

After George Kyle and his crew picked up the injured, he did not have enough fuel remaining to go directly to the hospital in Saigon. He returned to Vinh Long where the wounded were transferred to a waiting Dust Off aircraft and then to Saigon.

I remember seeing Jack and Tim in the aircraft. Tim was rather lifeless; I thought he was dead. Jack was moving a lot and was obviously in a great deal of pain and shock. He was not conscious and it was evident that his wounds were in his groin area and were of major proportion.

I believe our local flight surgeon boarded the Dust Off for the flight to Saigon to do whatever he could do. It was about a 50 minute flight to Saigon. About half way into the flight time, we were notified via radio that Jack had died while enroute.

Olen Thornton
Outlaw 3