

# “A Real Flying Tiger”

by Rick Rains

Buried within our ranks is badge #369, perhaps better known as ARJIS #604. This gentleman is senior in age to Sheriff John Duffy, and will talk about his four grandchildren at the drop of a hat.

#604 began his flying career before most of the readers of this article were born. In June of 1953, he began his career as a pilot: accumulating in excess of 7000 flight hours, surviving two crash landings, three emergency landings, three in-flight fires, two total engine failures, and one seriously shot-up helicopter.

His real flying career began in 1957 when he was part of a group of volunteers who tested and validated the concept of air to ground helicopter support. Various machine guns and rockets were jerry rigged to the skids of small Bell helicopters to determine if the machines could withstand the shock vibrations and check the accuracy to determine if targets could be destroyed effectively. More than one plexiglass bubble cracked or disintegrated in flight during these tests. Of major interest to Vets, he wrote most of the conceptual doctrine for the Field Manuals that would be the basis of the helicopter assaults used in Viet Nam. He put the concepts into practice when he commanded the first helicopter unit sent to Viet Nam in late 1961.

He returned from Viet Nam with the Distinguished Flying Cross, five air medals for leading 110 air assaults, the Army Commendation Medal and a few others. Upon return, he was given the job of determining the Army's need for armed helicopter gunships.

#604 wrote the military specs for these helicopters and their armament.



Milt Cherne

Courtesy of U.S. Army

*When I asked Uncle Miltie when he was going to hang up his white scarf and goggles, he replied, “Real soon, but you will have to excuse me, I need to suit up for a flight.”  
Go get’m TIGER!*

As the result of these efforts, the forces in Viet Nam received the Bell “COBRA”, with advanced armaments. Many years later the “APACHE”, an attack helicopter with greater sophistication, was the direct result of these early efforts.

On January 1, 1968, Lt. Col. Milton CHERNE became Uncle Miltie to most of us, as he retired as a PFC (Private Frustrated Civilian).

Being an adrenalin junkie, “Uncle Miltie”, became bored with the mundane civilian life and began looking for more barriers to break. At the age of 47 in Sept. 1976, he began the Sheriff's Academy. With the support of people like Lew Jones, Dick Reed, Jan Stauffer and others he struggled through while attending night school at National University to complete his Master's in Public Administration.

Following the normal tour at C.J., he was assigned to the Fallbrook Team. Uncle Miltie reached another goal by becoming a member of the ASTREA team. As a neophyte observer his two strongest memories include being left on the roof of a car while his partner, Archie Trott, transported a lady and her bird to safety, later returning for her husband, all the while a savage and rising Tijuana River was trying to sweep Uncle Miltie off his feet. Another adventure included being left on the roof of a collapsing building, as the rising waters were hungrily trying to engulf their additional victims.

Later adventures included brushing the main rotors against the cliffs at Torrey Pines during a rescue, and praying for total power-line recall during a high speed chase on a night shrouded in rolling fog. Other memories include the helpless feeling, during a search in the Palomar Mountains, while evacuating downed aircraft victims from a crash in Julian with a machine that didn't want to fly; numerous searches for lost children; marijuana; fires and on and on.

In the words of Uncle Miltie, “It is truly an exciting, adventurous and challenging part of my life, to fly with a group like this.”