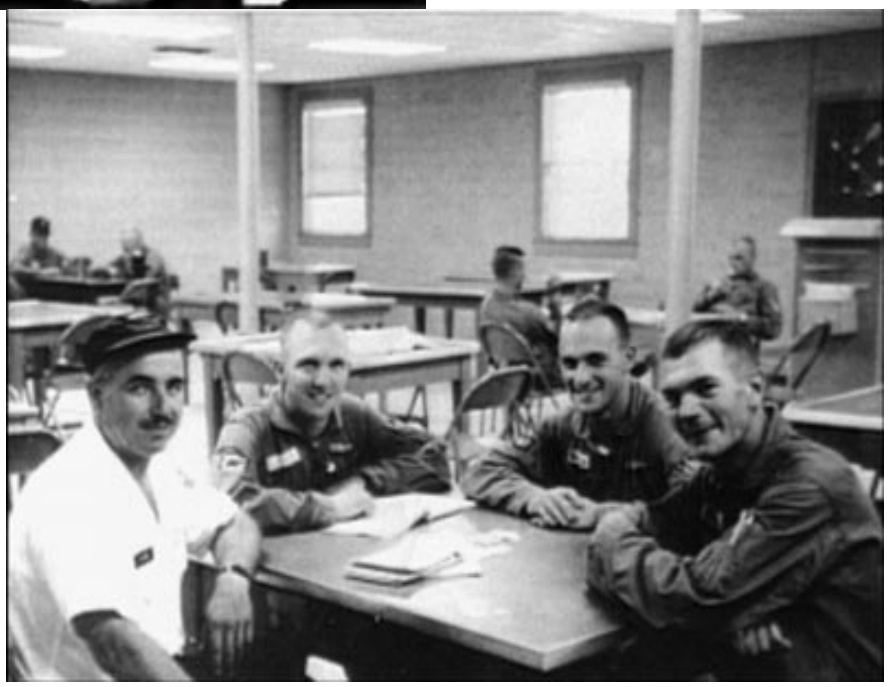

Left to Right: Mr. Pyper (Instructor Pilot), John Westover, Benjamin Van Etten, Sgt. Webster (WORWAC 63-4W)

Army Aviation Hall of Fame 1998 Induction

CW5 Benjamin Van Etten has had an unusual and remarkable career in Army and civil Aviation.

He started as a crew chief with the Presidential Flight Detachment of the 3rd Transportation Company. In 1963 he completed flight training flying H-34s and was assigned to the 504th Avn. Bn. in Germany.

After two years Van Etten was deployed in 1965 to Vietnam with the 128th Assault Helicopter Co. (Tomahawks) and while there was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star Medal, the Purple Heart, and an impressive 27 Air medals and 2 Air Medals with Valor devices.

After service as a civilian flight instructor at Fort Wolters, Texas, Van Etten became a flight captain for Air America.

Flying S-58, H-34 and UH-1 aircraft out of Udorn, Thailand, he flew over 2,500 missions in the unpublicized and still unrecognized American supported conflict in Laos.

These missions were characterized by rugged terrain, long distances and little to non-existent navigation aids; often in combat conditions involving ground fire, including anti-aircraft weaponry and occasional interdiction by enemy fixed wing fighters.

During his five year tour he was in numerous major campaigns, shot down several times, wounded in action, detained in a POW camp in Burma, and flew four rescue operations under fire recovering downed U.S. Air Force pilots and crewmembers.

He returned in 1973 to America and continued his diverse career in both civil and Army Reserve aviation.

He served in the 116th Air Cavalry, the 92nd Med. Helicopter Co., the 171st Air Ambulance Co., and the John F. Kennedy Flight Detachment.

He was chief pilot for Southern Gulf Helicopters and Davidson Helicopter Service; a mountain flying check pilot for the U.S. Office of Aviation Service; and spent a year in Esfahan, Iran as a helicopter instructor pilot.

After a 14 year break, Van Etten returned to active duty with the Army in the JFK Flight Det.

In 1981, he was on the U.S. Army Helicopter Team that won the world championship in Poland. While there he completed 10,000 accident free hours.

He participated in operations Urgent Fury in Granada, Desert Shield and Desert Storm in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, and played a critical role in preparing a Louisiana Army National Guard aviation unit for deployment to Haiti.

While serving at Fort Drum, N.Y., Van Etten was cited for several rescues of civilians trapped in severe winter weather.

His significant AAAA recognitions including serving in the 1981 Aviation Unit of the Year and the 1991 Aviation Logistics Unit of the Year.

In 1997 Van Etten was assigned as the chief of Aviation Logistics Management Division in support of all Army aviation under the XVIII Airborne Corps.