

Chapter History

The origin of the North Alabama Chapter of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (NAVHPA) dates back to 2009. A casual discussion led Jim White, Sam Maki, LaRue (Lash) Wisener, and Perry Smith to “go for it” and try to start a local Chapter. Jim posted an ad in *The VHPA Aviator* magazine asking interested Vietnam Veteran Helicopter Pilots to contact him, and Sam mailed 240 invitation letters to potential members in the North Alabama area, including the border towns in Mississippi, Georgia, and Tennessee. Jim and Sam hosted the first meeting of 22 Vietnam Army Aviators at the American Legion Post on Drake Avenue in Huntsville in May 2009.

Around the same time another local Army Aviation group, Save Our Flying Heritage (SOFH), was actively restoring an OH-13 Observation Helicopter for the Huntsville Veterans Museum. Ralph Weber and Bernie Parr headed this group, and they and other SOFH aviators were interested in joining a VHPA Chapter. They proved to be a great asset. This led to a beneficial relationship between the two organizations sharing a common goal of preserving the knowledge and history of Army Aviation during the Vietnam Era.

In those early meetings Jim was Acting President and Sam was Acting Secretary/Treasurer until the organization could be formalized. Attendance was often in the single digits, so in October 2009 Sam issued a second invitation to approximately 100 Army Aviators in the Huntsville area and growth began in earnest. Jim contacted the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA) that fall and the VHPA identified us as a Chapter in late 2009. The core group of Jim, Sam, Ralph, and Bernie, along with Marshall Eubanks and George Kitchens, developed the required documentation and organizational structure to establish a Chapter.

A recently opened local eatery, the Schnitzel Ranch, was suggested as a more convenient meeting place than the Legion Hall. The group met there for the first time on 23 September 2010. The Schnitzel Ranch was (and continues to be) a great host and offered their banquet room for our use. Monthly business meetings and membership building continued there. The Chapter’s first Christmas dinner was held that December at Baumhower’s Restaurant.

The initial Board of Directors was elected and installed on 20 January 2011; they and the 30 Charter Members are listed below. The Chapter was awarded 501(c)(3) tax exempt status by the IRS in June 2011, followed by incorporation as a Domestic Non-Profit Organization in the State of Alabama.

The NHVPA’s friendship with the Schnitzel Ranch continues to this day. It blossomed when Les Haas and Doug Madigan, along with his gang of “Black Hatters” CAV Troopers, joined the Chapter and came up with idea of fundraising with the Schnitzel Ranch by providing free labor in return for occasional donations to the Chapter.

The friendship with our Save Our Flying Heritage brothers led to the difficult but extremely rewarding non-flying restoration of a UH-1C Gunship through the Huntsville Veterans Memorial Museum. Known as Buc-3, she has attended numerous school and civic functions, enabling the NAVHPA to educate and inform many about the contributions of Army Aviation during the Vietnam War.

At the start of 2015 the NAVHPA recorded 60 members. We continue to meet on the third Thursday of each month at 1830 at the Schnitzel Ranch for a short business and planning meeting followed by camaraderie and lots of brats, pretzels, schnitzels, and bier!

The NAVHPA's 30 Charter Members (in order of precedence)

(P-President, S-Secretary, T-Treasurer, L-Member at Large)

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|---------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Lash Wisener | December 2010 | George Kitchens-T | April 2011 |
| Jimmy White-P | December 2010 | Paul Keil | May 2011 |
| Samuel Maki-S | December 2010 | Steve Pflanczer | May 2011 |
| Ralph Weber-L | December 2010 | Christopher Wheeler | June 2011 |
| Marshall Eubanks-L | December 2010 | Bob Monnette | June 2011 |
| John McDaniels | January 2011 | Rob Glaiser | June 2011 |
| Don Bisson | January 2011 | Hal Stitt | June 2011 |
| Don Williamson | January 2011 | Roger Christie | June 2011 |
| Sandy Weand | February 2011 | Michael Hodge | June 2011 |
| Tim Powell | February 2011 | Jim Siverd | June 2011 |
| Bernie Parr | March 2011 | Gil Boen | June 2011 |
| Rick Brunell | March 2011 | Charles Park | June 2011 |
| Perry Smith | March 2011 | Dick Ordway | June 2011 |
| Les Haas | March 2011 | Jack Berry | June 2011 |
| Rick Davis | May 2011 | John Miller | June 2011 |