

Bill Picton



Bill Picton was born in Merced, CA on August 31, 1944. His father worked for the Southern Pacific railroad, and his mother was a school teacher. For the first two years of his life, he lived above the railroad station in Livingston, CA in quarters provided by the railroad. He attended public schools in Livingston and graduated from Livingston High School in 1962.



In the Spring of 1964 while attending Modesto Junior College, he stopped to talk with a Marine recruiter who was on campus for the day. The rest, as they say, is history. He was sworn into the Marine Corps on July 13, 1964 as a Marine Aviation Cadet (Marcad). In fact, his mother had to sign giving him permission to enlist since he was only 19. Careful students of history might observe that this happened only weeks before the infamous Gulf of Tonkin incident which led to our full scale involvement in Viet Nam. Thus, the recruiter's response to his mother asking if he would have to go to war had been truthful. He said that Bill would be trained as a combat pilot, but that we were not at war with anyone.



Bill's Mother standing by a F-11 the day Bill received his commission

Bill began flight training in Pensacola FL in October 1964. He was trained in the T-34 at Saufley Field, then moved on to the T-2 in Meridian Mississippi. Following completion of the basic jet syllabus, he went back to

Pensacola for carrier qualification and gunnery, and then on to advanced flight training in Beeville TX where he flew the F-9 and F-11. He was commissioned and received his wings in June 1966.



Picture taken after Formation training flight in the T-2 in Meridian MS.

Following a little over a year in his first fleet squadron, VMA-331, in Beaufort, SC, Bill received his orders overseas. He arrived in Chu Lai RVN in October 1967 and was assigned to VMA-223 flying the A-4 Skyhawk. One of the more memorable of his 100 missions involved his plane getting hit with a 50 Cal. round over North Viet Nam and having to make a forced landing in Phu Bai while on fire. He may be the only person ever to land a jet at Phu Bai which was primarily a base for helicopters and small fixed wing aircraft. The second half of his tour in Viet Nam was spent as a forward air controller with the 2nd Battalion Third Marines in and around Khe Sahn and the DMZ. While there he managed to pick up a case of Malaria and a small piece of shrapnel.



Picture at Dong Ha when Bill was assigned to Second Battalion 3rd Marines in the DMZ. Bill is with Dale Luster, who was the Battalion ALO, Bill was the FAC. Dale was shot down and killed a month after this photo was taken, just before he was to return home.

Following release from active duty in June 1969, Bill returned to college and graduated with honors from San Jose State University in 1971 with a BS degree in Aeronautics. His civilian working career has been spent in a variety of organizations ranging from Electronic Data Systems to the accounting firm of KPMG. He returned to school in 1975 and graduated with an MBA in Finance from UC Berkeley in 1977. While at KPMG, he became a CPA in 1982. He now works as the MIS Director for THARCO, a manufacturing firm in San Lorenzo.

While attending SJSU, Bill met his wife Suzanne who lived in the same apartment complex in San Jose. They married in August 1971 and have 3 children. Cory, the oldest, was born in 1973 and is currently an attorney in the Marine Corps and assigned to the civil law division of the staff judge advocate in Camp Pendleton. Their daughter, Kate, was born in 1976 and is an associate producer for CNN in Atlanta. Colby, the youngest son, was born in 1985. Bill, Sue and Colby reside in Alamo.

Bill was the second president of The Viet Nam Veterans of Diablo Valley. Prior to serving as President, he was the Treasurer for several years, and actually incorporated the VNVDV as a tax exempt veterans' organization in the early 1990's. The VietNam Veterans of Diablo Valley Salute You, Bill Picton!