



To celebrate the life and honor the heroism of Scott Alwin, we interviewed four people who knew him well: his older sister Penny Alwin, his younger sister Pamela Fullerton, his friend and fellow pilot in Vietnam Ed Strazzini, and his crew chief in Vietnam Frans Vandenbroek. These are their thoughts and remembrances:

Penny - Scott, Pam, and I are all members of a large family of 16 children. We are preacher's kids. The four eldest were an adopted family of three and their best friend, all a little bit older than we were, but we grew up together. We started out in Milwaukee and then moved to a number of different places as my dad became a country preacher.

Pam - I think we probably lived in around 15 or 16 different places around the state. They didn't know what to do with such a large family. They'd try to find a place to house us, which usually meant an abandoned farmhouse.

Penny - Our dad was an instructor in the Army Air Force in WWII. When we were little, he used to drive us to Billy Mitchell field in Milwaukee. Back then there was no security and we'd park along the runway. We'd have half a gallon of chocolate milk, a package of sliced liver sausage, and a couple of bags of crackers and we'd sit there and watch the planes take off and land. Scott knew he wanted to fly since he was six years old.

Pam - He was a preacher's kid and didn't hide it. He thought that there was right and wrong. To us he was just Scott. He was a leader in the family. We didn't think of him as a hero. But every single one of the guys who came to his funeral or who stopped by over the years called him that. It was incredible hearing the stories of the missions they flew together. And he was enough of a daredevil that he scared the bejeesus out of them once in a while. But they also said that if they were going with Scott, they knew he would get them home.

Ed - Scott arrived in Vietnam in August of 1967, as did I. We were both assigned to the 68th Assault Helicopter Company. We ended up flying the troop-carrying helicopters known as "slicks", UH-1Ds at the time. Hard work, lots and lots of flying, long days. Some nights. All kinds of weather and difficult conditions. And sometimes under a rather hostile reception on the ground.

I transferred over to flying the attack helicopters, the UH-1C, which we called "the guns". Once the troops were inserted in an area and the "slicks" departed, we stayed out there and supported them. You were very much in tune to everything that was going on and had a good insight into what the infantry guys had to deal with.

Scott was very much the idealist. He was a guy who didn't smoke or drink or use strong language. That was okay with me and we became friends. He would occasionally get on me for something that he heard we had done, secondhand stories. I told him, "Scott, you've got to come fly with us. You'll see what we really do." Sure enough, he took me up on that one day and we took him out on a mission. When we came back, he said, "Yeah, that's what I want to do."

Frans - I was assigned to the 68th Assault Helicopter Company as a mechanic, but in June of 1968 I was invited to join the gunship platoon and became a crew chief. The crew chief looks after the helicopter. During the mission he sits in back with the gunner, but they have the same duty. We have the M60 machine guns in our hands. The pilots and the crews are very much interdependent. We depended on them to get us home safely. They depended on us to keep them alive.

At some point during the latter half of 1968 Scott Alwin showed up. He was sort of an enigma. He was very quiet, almost sad when he walked up. But when he got into the helicopter and started flying, he totally changed. He became so determined, so committed, that it was startling to see. As a pilot... my goodness, he was one of the most fearless ones I flew with. I always knew that whenever Mr. Alwin showed up, I was in for an exciting day.

Ed - Towards the end of our tour - in 1968, most of the guys had been over there for a year and had had a bellyful. They were looking forward to going home. Scott and I came down on orders to go to West Germany. As the days got closer, I think it was two weeks before we were supposed to leave, he came to me and said, "I'm not going, I've extended."

I tried to talk him out of it. Only later did I come to learn that he had other reasons that he wanted to stay, beyond his dedication to the mission. He had gotten interested in one of our Vietnamese employees who worked at our officer's club. He would sit at the bar, nursing a soft drink, and chat with her and fend off some of the other guys who tended to be a little crude at times. He saw himself as her guardian and we kind of laughed about that. But I didn't realize how deeply he felt for her.

Frans - Mr. Alwin had sublime flying skills. His precision with the helicopter was just outstanding. He could set it down without us even knowing that we had landed. But when it came to managing the mission, Mr. Alwin was always looking for trouble. He did not mind getting involved. But it wasn't trouble for the sake of trouble, he used the gunship as a way of helping folks on the ground. That's the way he saw it. He didn't brag about the things he accomplished in the helicopter. Lots of pilots did, but Mr. Alwin wasn't that way.

March 23rd, 1969 was my last day in Vietnam. We were patrolling an area and Scott was the aircraft commander. I spotted some North Vietnamese soldiers running from one hut to another and got on the intercom, "Charles Sir, six o'clock!" Scott whipped the helicopter around, got on the radio and informed the battalion commander, who was flying 2,000 feet above us, "Mustang 17 going hot, rolling in!" I remember thinking, "Wait a minute, he didn't ask for permission."

We're attacking the hut and Scott is firing rockets, maintaining the same angle as long as possible so that he can hit it. I'm leaning out of the cabin with my machine gun pointing forward and I'm pumping bullets into this target. Scott pulls up at the last second and the next thing you know we're going down. The helicopter didn't make the turn. We hit belly first, skipped like a stone, flipped over, and then all hell broke loose. It completely came apart.

I was thrown from the helicopter. Miraculously, Scott, the co-pilot and our gunner staggered out of the broken helicopter, intact and walking. The battalion commander landed within seconds and rescued us. He dropped me off at a field hospital and the medics discovered that I had a badly broken arm. But other than that and some cuts and bruises I was not badly injured.

An hour and a half after the crash I was drifting in and out of consciousness. They're stitching up a cut on my chin and I have gauze covering my face. I heard this nasally voice asking, "How's Van doing?" I peeked out from under the fabric and saw a .45 revolver hanging really low on a hip. I recognized it as Scott's sidearm and knew he was checking up on his crew chief. That was the last time I saw him.

Ed - I came back to Vietnam in 1970 but I was way up north, so there was no way to visit Scott. I was able to call our old unit and asked to speak to him, but he had just left to go back to the States. With his wife. I had a good guess who it was.

Then, around Christmas time in 1976 I was here in Virginia and got an obvious red and green Christmas card. I saw that the return address was Alwin in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, or someplace. I thought, "Oh, great! He found me." I tear open the envelope and it was a card, a true Christmas card - I still have it - from his wife that he had been killed back in July of that year. I went from being so excited to reconnect to learning of this tragic event. It just took the breath out of me.

Penny - He was 31 when he died. At the hands of a drunk driver, for heaven's sake, after everything that he went through in Vietnam. Five tours, 136 Air Medals, the most of any pilot who served there. I hate to say this, but I think it was something that we never recovered from. He meant something different to every one of us, but he meant so MUCH to each of us.

Pam - When he was 12, I made the mistake of uttering the word "adventure" to Scott. All I wanted to do was talk about Stanley Livingston's adventure finding the Nile. His comeback was, "Well, let's find the source of our own Nile." So we built a raft out of scavenged lumber and went upstream looking for the source of the Rock River.

We pulled that raft, probably six or seven hours, up the Rock River and at that point the raft disintegrated in a swamp and we almost killed ourselves. But Scott managed to save me, and we crawled out through the sawgrass and mud, cut to ribbons, only to find out that we had only made it five miles out of Fort Atkinson. By the time we got to a road we were very distressed and disappointed. We're squelching along in our sneakers and all of a sudden, Scott turns to me with the big grin and says, "Next time, we're going to try for the source of the real Nile!"



Capt Scott R Alwin
United States Army