



For those that do not know me, I'm Bill Mahan and I flew from 1966 to 1969 out of Rhein-Main, Germany. I have been a member of the Prop Wash Gang since 1999, and I suspect my on-line posts are the reasons for the many painful groans and much of the awful cursing that have come from this group. Health issues are the only reasons that I and my wife, Martha, are not present. I had hoped to be here, but the docs seemed to think that it would be dangerous for my health. Too many of the Prop Wash Gang would want to do me serious and justifiable harm for my terrible jokes and worse puns. First and most importantly, I would like to express my undiluted appreciation to all of you here, and to all of those who are not here in this room. You are my family and have been such on an everyday basis for the past seven years. I cannot imagine what my life would be without all of you. Even those who do not post on our forum are an important part of my life.

Butch Moore once wrote that our time flying together was, for many of us, the determining point in our lives. Of course he was not ignoring marriages and children and other such events, but when we look back at what it was we did and the responsibilities we had, it surely shaped all of us. The Prop Wash Gang has reunited more than a group of old flyers whose body shapes now resemble the planes in which they flew, or brought back memories of old war stories to be retold with

more embellishments than are found on Elton John's performance outfits. We are more than bragging grandparents or terrible golfers. We are family, and we look out for one another now, just as we did in the past; some of it the very distant past.

The last year or so had me visiting those pretty young nurses in the hospital more times than I wanted. Me in a bed with a pretty girl close by is not what it used to be, mostly because I'm not what I used to be either. So many of the Prop Wash Gang called the hospital that the nurses asked Martha to have them back off because they were tying up the switchboard. I was very impressed. I don't even tie up Martha anymore. So for all the Prop Wash Gang, please know without any doubt that you are loved and like even more than I love and like my puns.

Before I end this sickeningly sweet letter, I'd like to have all those who were AMSs stand up. Thank you. Thank you for all that you have done for us and done it many, many times. For the wives and girl friends (hopefully no one brought both) that are here, please allow me to tell you about these men. They are very special, very special. The AMS is the Airborne Mission Supervisor. In some of the most difficult-to-imagine situations, it is their responsibility to protect the crew from any harm. They are expected to know everything that is going on in hostile airspace, who and what pose a threat if there is one, and to know what course of action to take. They are also responsible for making sure that the mission succeeds in all its objectives. The wings may carry the airplane into the sky, but it is the shoulders of the AMS that bring us home.

Say the number 60528 in this room and every ear will be tuned to what you say afterwards. Say the word MIG, and the eyes will become very alert. Mention missiles and rockets and those eyes will look around the room. Memories, like out-of-work relatives, keep coming back. We'll remember the threat as clear as can be, and

at the same time, we will also always—always—remember who the AMS on that flight was. Not even the memory loss from age will change that. These are the men that kept us out of harm's way and brought us home from our missions. They brought us home to our families, to our homes, to a warm bed and a good meal, and often to the stag bar at the club. It was the AMS that we trusted, and our trust was very well placed. The front-end crews, the pilots and navigators that flew our planes, officers all, also relied on these sergeants to bring them home. And, of course they did. Were it not for the leadership and management, the talents and skills, the training and experience, the intellect and judgment of these men, this room would not have as many in attendance as we do, and the Prop Wash Gang would be a lot smaller. Our nation would also not be as safe as it is. To all the Airborne Mission supervisors I flew with, to those I wish I had flown with, and to all those who sat on the most correctly named Number One Position, I salute you. We all salute you.

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