almost before he cracked a book at the University of Illinois, and it was off to San Antonio for flight school.

Georgia was the next stop for six months of training to fly B25s. Lincoln, Neb., was next on his itinerary before he was shipped back to San Antonio for a couple of years with the four-engine B29; then West Palm Beach for the cargo-carrying C97; back to Lincoln for the KC97 aerial refueling tankers where he spent about six years before being assigned to Columbus, Ohio, for three years in the KC135, another tanker plane.

“I was tired of flying tankers,” said Billy, so he volunteered for service in Vietnam. “I wanted to go to Vietnam. It was the only way to get out of tanker service. I wanted to be a fighter pilot, but I didn’t have any choice of what I flew. You just flew what they assigned you. I just wanted to fly.”

He was sent to Alabama for command staff training, trained on the cargo plane and transitioned at a Tennessee base.

“When Vietnam first started building up, I got a call at 3 p.m. Sunday to go, and they said bring clothes for a long time. I went to the base, and they said you’re fueled up.”

He left in his plane with sealed orders, which contained his designation.

The Air Force stationed him in Taiwan, where he and his C130 crew rotated in and out of Vietnam every 23 days.

“You would bring the plane back to Taiwan for maintenance. We flew eight missions a day delivering everything, including an elephant. We hauled everything that the Army might need, from food to clothing to ammo.”

Billy remains a big fan of the C130s, which still are in use by the Air Guard and are being flown in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“You could land the C130s into anywhere you had a 2,000-foot strip to get into with a load. It didn’t take a paved runway to put them down. It’s the only plane the Air Force has had that had engines big enough to do what you wanted to do.”

He flew about 1,400 missions during Vietnam.

“For the type of business we were in, 1,000 was normal. Usually, you’d get an hour or two off. You were supposed to fly 16 hours a day.
and be off. More usually, it was 20 hours and then you'd be on the ground.”

His crew usually was four – him, the co-pilot, flight engineer and loadmaster. Sometimes there was a navigator, but not normally.

“You didn’t need a navigator, and they weren’t available either. Usually, you’d get close enough. We flew by the seat of our pants to get the job done.”

He remembers one mission. His crew was making a delivery in the dead of night. Ground troops marked the landing area with two cans of burning diesel “so we knew where the runway was. You got out as soon as you could.”

While the C130 he flew was a cargo plane, Billy said it was used several times to drop bombs to clear zones for troops to get in the jungles.

“You just pushed a 10,000-pound bomb out the back. It would clear the jungle for helicopters.”

“We hauled U.S. troops, Vietnamese troops and probably a few VC. We hauled a lot of troops, taking them into hot zones. Sometimes you have to drop them in because of ground activity. We just hauled anything that needed to move. Sometimes you had to justify it when you got back home.”

“We also flew lots of medivac missions in the Delta area. We’d stop and pick up the wounded. Some of that was a little touchy.”

“It was impossible to keep your airplane in good condition because you were doing so many flights. But, it was interesting.”

The Vietnam War escalated with the Tet Offensive, a series of operational offensives timed to coincide with the lunar new year. It lasted about two months, and is widely seen as the turning point of the war that led to the eventual withdrawal of American forces.

While the Tet Offensive was a tactical defeat for the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese army, it was a psychological and propaganda victory that polarized the U.S. over the war.

Billy and his crew were on the ground loaded with ammo when the offensive was launched. He pulled his C130 out, dumping ammo on the runway.

“I pushed the power up, released the brakes and the pallets went out. We started dumping cargo on the runway. They were dropping mortars in between every pallet.”

“It looked like fireworks coming across. It was the prettiest fireworks display I’d even seen, knowing at the same time it was deadly.”

The plane was in the air for five hours because “I didn’t have any place to fly” before Billy finally made it to Da Nang in northern part of the country.

“The loadmaster said we took 157 hits going in and out. It sounded like a hail storm from the small arms fire.”

Tet lasted about two months; however sporadic operations associated with the offensive continued into 1969.

Billy and his crew were the last going in and out of Khe Sanh, an airstrip and U.S. Marine based just south of the DMZ. The attack was intended by the North Vietnamese as a diversion to draw American attention and forces away from the Tet offensive and to prevent forces at Khe Sanh from attacking supplies and troops moving south on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The attack lasted almost three months, and was primarily heavy artillery bombardment. The ground supply to the base was cutoff, and airborne resupply was difficult due to enemy fire.

Billy remembers going back to land after one mission to Khe Sanh.

“We had lost fuel out of six of the eight fuel tanks. As we pulled into the parking area, the engines quit. We knew it was close.”

“We went back in and dropped again at Khe Sanh, two or three missions a day.”

During one of his last drops, he said they dropped a pallet with a case of eggs strapped on top.

“It was the first fresh eggs the troops had in a long time.”

When Billy finished his tour in Vietnam, he was assigned to Seymour Johnson Air Force base in North Carolina, spending 13 months flying VC135s.

“We flew all over the world. The plane didn’t have a boom (to refuel others in the air), so we just used all the fuel we hauled.”

He and his crew were on alert status (24-hour-a-day call up) the entire tour. The planes were equipped with radio relay – if a crisis did arise the planes were in the air and the relay feature allowed communication with anybody in the world.

“We could direct ground activities from that plane,” Billy says, calling it the forerunner of today’s AWACs.

Billy was involved with the design and building of AWACs while stationed at Seymour Johnson, but didn’t get to follow through.

“Those planes were the pre-runners of the National Airborne Command Post. It was quiet a challenge. Everybody had a little input into it.”

Billy also worked as a part of the Strategic Air Command, refueling B47s and B52s.

While he was stationed at Seymour Johnson, he received a call from his old commander who was stationed at the Pentagon.
Off we go into the wild blue yonder,  
Climbing high into the sun.  
Here they come, zooming to meet our thunder;  
At ‘em boys, give ‘er the gun!  
Down we dive, spouting our flame from under,  
Off with one hell-of-a-roar!  
We live in fame or go down in flame.  
Nothing will stop the U.S. Air Force!

The C130 Billy Gibson was piloting in Vietnam kept its engines going, stirring up dirt while cargo was being unloaded. Many landings Billy made in Vietnam were to remote areas with just makeshift dirt strips for runways. He remains a big fan of the C130 airplane, which still is in use today, and says it is the only airplane the Air Force has ever had with engines large enough to allow the pilot to do whatever was necessary to complete a mission.

Billy is pictured above with a flight training class in Lubbock, Texas. He is on the back row, the last one on the right. Right: Billy and crew members pose with their airplane. He is on the far left. Far right: Billy and crew members pose with another airplane. He is second from the left, wearing a parachute.
Billy couldn't afford the arms they wanted to buy, and that was a challenge. One African landlocked country wanted a submarine. That's how ridiculous it was.

Another project he worked on was Air Force One, the presidential airplane. That came after a move.

After four and one half years, the Air Force screwed up and sent this Okie to Oklahoma, and I was supposed to be a logistical officer. I was a project officer and had responsibility for the 747, which the president flies around in today. They sent me to Tinker. I just signed in, then they sent me to Seattle and I spent the next six months commuting.

“Janet built this house while I was doing all that running around,” Billy says from his recliner.

“On Christmas Eve 1975 at 8:30 p.m. I signed acceptance for four 747s, and then I was unemployed. I came home to visit my family and went back (to base).

“They wanted me back and started in and I got all kinds of promises they’d leave me at Tinker. I told them that I don’t want to stay. I’ve got other things I want to do because for the first time in 20 years, I was within 500 miles of home.

“I said there’s a ranch I’ve been gone from for 20 years. I told him (the commander) about that ranch. We were running about 4,000 stockers and 1,500 to 2,000 mama cows. It had been going on all the time I was in service.

“He (the commander) said ‘Why the hell did you come in the Air Force?’ I said I wanted to fly airplanes. After 21 years of service, I retired.”

Billy has not regretted leaving the service.

“I’ve been farming ever since. I’ve never missed it one bit, because I have lots to do. I just keep going nowadays.”

He still keeps a few contacts with old service friends, and attends a few reunions to reminisce with buddies. The group is getting smaller, maybe 50 percent its original size, because many have passed away.

“They were good people. That’s the biggest thing about service life – you’re just one big family. You could take off and not know where you were going. The phone would ring and you’d be gone. But you didn’t need to worry. There would be someone there at your house by daylight.”

He’s only been in the pilot’s seat once since retiring.

“I flew once after I took off that blue uniform. I didn’t want to, but a friend picked me up and said ‘you get in the left seat’.”

While Billy takes pride in his military service, and reiterates that he would do it again if he had the opportunity, he cannot tell visitors what the drawer full of medals in his dresser represent.

“Yeah, I’ve got some – a whole chest full, but I can’t tell you what they are. I was never impressed with medals. I wore ’em because I had to.”

Sounding like the rancher he’s been for the last 30-plus years, Billy sums up his Air Force career succinctly:

“It was interesting. The biggest challenge was to have the desire to go and fly.”
A new fishing lure that started in Costa Rica, went to the Far East then returned to set a record for bass in Mexico is now flexing its muscles in the U. S. It has out-fished shrimp bait in Washington State and beat top-selling U. S. lures three to one in Florida. The lure’s technology is so effective one state, Wyoming, has banned it. Canada may follow.

The breakthrough is a high-tech chip integrated into the lure’s body that blinks blood red in time with its swimming action, mimicking an injured prey. Some fishing authorities, like those in Wyoming and Canada, think light of any kind gives fishermen an unfair advantage; if so, then a light that impersonates a bleeding fish would give fishermen a whopping advantage.

And apparently it does. Three fishermen using the lure in Mexico caught 650 largemouth bass in just 25 hours. That’s 8.6 for each person per hour, and a record for the lake they were fishing. The bass struck with such ferocity they hardly lost a strike.

In Florida two professionals fished for four hours from the same boat. One used the new lure; the other used some top-selling U. S. lures. The new, “bleeding” lure caught three times as many fish.

Three fishermen in Washington State used a popular lure baited with shrimp and caught nothing after fishing three hours in cold weather. One of them tried the new lure and 30 minutes later caught a thirty-pound steelhead.

A Tournament fisherman on a lake in Florida tried everything in his tackle box and had no bites. He switched to the new lure, caught a bass on his first cast and had his limit in 45 minutes.

Before writing this, I asked a veteran fisherman in my office for his opinion. Monday morning he charged into my office, yelling “I caught six monster fish in an hour with this thing! Where can I get some?”

Finally, I phoned an ichthyologist (fish expert) to find out what’s behind all this. “Predators – lions, sharks,” he said, “will always go for the most vulnerable prey. Fish are predators, so if a fish sees a smaller fish bleeding, it knows it’s weakened and will strike. There’s a survival program built into predators that says ‘Grab a meal when you can. You may not find one tomorrow.’

“If the lure you’re talking about can simulate a live, bleeding fish, a few fishermen could probably empty a lake with it.”

I told him three almost did.

The lure’s construction makes each retrieval slightly different, so if a predator holds back on the first cast, it sees an entirely new presentation on the second. There are even small, steel balls inside the lure to attract fish with sound.

Because the tiny chip (you can see it inside the lure) cools between each blink, the lure lasts over 1,000 hours in the water. No battery replacement is required. There are four designs and the colors are virtual works of art. The construction is tough enough to take the fiercest hits.

A set of the four is available direct from the U. S. distributor: one for top water, one for middle, one for deep, and one that dives to the depth you want and stays there during retrieval. The lures work in salt or fresh water.

See for yourself. Cast one near some structure. If there’s a largemouth dozing nearby, based on what I’ve seen and heard, it’s yours.

To order, go to www.ngcsports.com or call 1-800-873-4415 anytime or day and ask for Bite Light™. Or send your name, address and a check or M.O. (or cc and exp. date) to NGC Sports (Dept. BL-75), 60 Church Street, Yalesville, CT 06492. One set of four Bite Lights™ costs $39.95. Each additional set costs only $34.50. S/h is only $7.00 no matter how many sets you order. There’s a money-back guarantee, if you return them within 30-days.
Bury a tradition, not a child

Tractors are responsible for 41 percent of the accidental farm deaths of children under 15, yet four out of five farm children regularly ride tractors with family members.

“While taking your son or daughter or grandson or granddaughter on a tractor ride may be a family tradition, it’s not a good one,” said Justin Grego, Oklahoma Farm Bureau Safety Services director. “There is no safe place for anyone besides the operator on the tractor itself or on any of its implements.

“The only good policy is a no riders policy. It makes no difference if Grandpa or Uncle Joe started the tradition of giving tractor rides.

“It is much easier to bury a tradition than a child!” said Grego.

“There’s only one seat on a tractor — the operator’s. There is no safe place for anyone else, especially a child. Make it a firm, unbreakable, no exception rule — No Riders!”

The leading cause of fatal farm-related accidents involved machinery, and the Grego said children are the forgotten victims of injuries and deaths associated with agriculture.

“Children account for about 20 percent of all farm fatalities and an even higher percentage of nonfatal injuries!”

Grego said the greatest danger of children riding on a tractor is falling from the platform under the tractor or into the path of trailing equipment.

“Tractors are not passenger vehicles.”

He said many also have the mistaken idea that enclosed cabs protect extra riders.

“This notion only gives tractor operators a false sense of security. Many tractor runover deaths happen when a person, often a child, falls out of an enclosed cab.

“An enclosed cab can reduce the chance that a rider will be bumped off a tractor, but it cannot eliminate the risk. The small measure of protection from an enclosed cab is not a guarantee of safety for riders. Door latches may not be fully latched; latches can be bumped; and children can become restless and tamper with latches and controls.”

Grego said tractors are designed to protect only one person – the operator. All tractors manufactured since 1976 have a ROPS, which provides a safe environment for the operator if the tractor overturns. The use of seatbelts on tractors with ROPS will protect the operator from serious injuries.

“Riders have no such protection. There is no safety environment for riders on tractors.”

Grego said riders not only endanger themselves but also the tractor operator.

“A passenger can interfere with the safe operation of the tractor. The rider can distract the operator, block access to controls or obstruct the operator’s vision. Any such instance puts the operator and rider at greater risk.”

Each year, more than 100,000 children are injured on farms and ranches. Grego said the problem extends beyond the 2 million family farms in this country, since about a third of the injury victims are children who do not live on farms.

“Never, never give in to pleas for a ride, no matter how much fun it might be. I know some consider riding on the tractor as quality time with a child. We’ve all seen children just a couple of years old riding on tractors with adults, either riding on the lap, sitting on a fender or standing on the axle.

“It’s never okay, never,” said Grego. “This tough approach, which no doubt will see a few momentary tears shed by youngsters, definitely is more acceptable than the tears that would be shed at a hospital or even worse, a funeral.”

Claims hotline debuts February 1

Oklahoma Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Company rolls out a toll-free claims hotline on Feb. 1 to better serve the needs of policyholders.

“We are instituting this as a free service to every policyholder,” said Richard Newberry, OFBMIC Claims vice president. “It is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week round.”

The new hotline enables policyholders to report new claims anytime, even after regular business hours, on weekends and holidays when District Claims offices and county Farm Bureau offices are closed.

Newberry said the new service would be invaluable to policyholders in case a catastrophe — such as major storm event — hits Oklahoma.

“There will be plenty of staff on hand to handle even the largest claims event. Sometimes telephone lines to our claims offices and county offices can become extremely congested with calls, making it difficult for policyholders to file the initial claim so we can get the ball rolling to provide the means to get their lives back to normal,” said Newberry.

He cautioned policyholders to use the new service only to report new claims. It is not designed to handle inquiries about the status of a claim or other questions policyholders may need answered.

“For anything other than reporting a new claim, we urge our policyholders to contact their claims office or their agent at the county Farm Bureau office,” Newberry declared. “This hotline is for the initial reporting of claims only.”

The hotline can be used to report a new claim under any type of policy an insured has with OFBMIC.

The new hotline is 1-877-OFB-CLAIM (1-877-632-2524).
A collection program has been scheduled in February at Webbers Falls, according to OSU's Charles Looper.

Farmers, ranchers, commercial and non-commercial applicators can bring any pesticides, including treated seed and unknown pesticides they want to be collected to the site.

There are no questions asked and no cost for this program to the participants.

Looper said dealers are asked to pre-register due to the potential of large quantities coming from multiple dealers and or multiple locations.

“If you have over 2,500 pounds of pesticides, then there is a cost of $1 per pound over 2,500 pounds. If you have mercury product in the overage the cost will be $2.50 per pound for mercury products over 2,500 pounds,” said Looper.

The collection event will be held Feb. 22 at the UAP facility in Webbers Falls.

For more information about the Webbers Falls collection program, contact Looper at 405-744-5531 or email him at charles.luper@okstate.edu.

Oklahoma Farm Bureau & Affiliated Companies was the major buyer at the 2006 Tulsa State Fair Junior Livestock Premium Auction Oct. 6.

The state’s largest farm organization purchased the reserve grand champion lamb and 21 other prize-winning animals that made the annual premium auction.

Farm Bureau was recognized prior to the auction with the 2005 Frank Sanders Memorial Award for last year’s premium auction, marking the sixth consecutive year for Farm Bureau to be recognized for purchasing the largest number of animals in the sale.

Oklahoma Farm Bureau also sponsored Tulsa State Fair FFA Livestock Judging Contest Oct. 6, and awarded a $750 cash prize to the winning Haworth FFA team in the senior division. The team will be Oklahoma’s representative at the National Western Show in Denver in January, where the best judging
teams from across the nation compete for national championship. Members of the Haworth FFA team included Mark McPeak, Hollie Coleman, Tara Maye and Meghan Frazier. The monetary award is presented to help the winning team defray its expenses at the National Western Show.

The 22 exhibitors of the prize-winning animals Farm Bureau purchased during the premium auction were:

- Chelsea Head of Waynoka FFA for her crossbreed wether, which was the reserve grand champion lamb.
- Kaylee Lindsey of Tonkawa FFA for the champion Hampshire lamb.
- Sheldon Rounds of Leedy FFA the reserve champion Hereford steer.
- Madison McGolden of Fairview FFA for the champion Southdown lamb.
- Cassandra Pickens of Payne County 4-H for the fifth place Shorthorn steer.
- Garrett Goodwin of Tonkawa 4-H for the third place Suffolk lamb.
- Laura Smith of Newcastle FFA for the third place crossbred barrow.
- Faith Wilkins of Craig County 4-H for the ninth place Maine-Anjou steer.
- Tyler Spencer of Vian FFA for the tenth place Maine-Anjou steer.
- Amber Cox of Noble 4-H for the sixth place Suffolk lamb.
- Natalie Eaton of Arapaho 4-H for the second place crossbred lamb.
- Cassie Pirtle of Copan FFA for the third place natural colored lamb.
- Haylie Simunek of Garfield County 4-H for the tenth place Shorthorn steer.
- Alaina Parker of Garvin County 4-H for the ninth place natural colored lamb.
- Codie Adcock of Thomas Fay Custer 4-H for the tenth place natural colored lamb.
- Heather Glass of Elgin FFA for the twelfth place crossbred lamb.
- Mindy McLemore of Chickasha FFA for the tenth place crossbred barrow.
- Blake Goss of Canute 4-H for the tenth place Hampshire barrow.
- Clinton Partain of Afton FFA for the third place Limousin steer.
- Katelyn Golden of Morris FFA for the eleventh place Shorthorn steer.
- Cassandra Mickelson of Yukon FFA for the eleventh place Hampshire barrow.
- Bryer Wood of Johnston County 4-H for the thirteenth place crossbred barrow.
The Haworth FFA team won the Oklahoma Farm Bureau Tulsa State Fair FFA Livestock Judging Contest Oct. 6. The team will be Oklahoma’s representative at the National Western Show in Denver in January, where the best judging teams from across the nation compete for national championship. Members of the Haworth FFA team, from left, included Mark McPeak, Hollie Coleman, Tara Maye, Meghan Frazier and the FFA Advisor Paul Ogden. Farm Bureau’s Tyler Norvell, right, was on hand to congratulate the team and award a $750 cash prize to the Haworth teens. Farm Bureau presents the monetary award to help the winning team defray its expenses at the National Western Show.

Oklahoma Farm Bureau & Affiliated Companies purchased the reserve grand champion lamb and 21 other prize-winning animals that made the annual premium auction at the 2006 Tulsa State Fair Junior Livestock Premium Auction Oct. 6. Chelsea Head of Waynoka FFA exhibited the reserve grand champion lamb. Pictured with Chelsea and other Waynoka FFA and 4-H members are OFB President Steve Kouplen holding his grandson Blake Gomez, and State Directors Mike Spradling, Charles Sloan and Roland Pederson.

Women in Ag Conference set

The Women in Agriculture Conference and Trade Show will be held in Stillwater March 10 at the Payne County Expo Center. Registration at the door begins at 8:30 a.m., and the cost is $15. Pre-registration is $10. It can be sent to the Payne County Conservation Foundation, c/o Payne County Women in Agriculture, 2600 S. Main, Suite C, Stillwater, OK 74074.

The fees include all programs, information literature, meal and vineyard tour. Rooms are separate.

There will be a wine and cheese tasting and facility tour Friday night, March 9, at the Woodland Park Vineyard in Stillwater and rooms can be booked at the Holiday Inn.

The theme is A Century of Women in Agriculture, and one of the sessions will be on Oklahoma Women who lived through the Dust Bowl by Professor Jennifer Paustenbough from OSU. Other sessions include home gardening, marketing products on the Internet, grant writing, livestock reproduction, farm safety and rural crime.

For more information call 405-372-5711, Ext. 2, or 405-372-7201.

Farm Bureau partners with Dodge on FFA scholarships

The American Farm Bureau is again partnering with Dodge Trucks by offering scholarships to support youth in pursuit of higher education. This is the eighth year of the scholarship program, which is a cooperative effort between AFBF, Dodge and the National FFA Organization.

To apply, a student must be an FFA member and a member of a Farm Bureau family. Students must complete the official National FFA Scholarship Application including the parent financial analysis section, as financial need will be considered. All applications must be postmarked by Feb. 15, 2007. Scholarships are available to FFA members in all 50 states.

The scholarships are designed to recognize FFA members from Farm Bureau families throughout the U.S. for their supervised agricultural experience programs, academic achievements and other school accomplishments. The National FFA Scholarship Program, through the sponsorship of AFBF, Dodge and other generous corporations and individuals, awards more than $2 million in scholarships annually to FFA members.

AFBF has continuously supported the National FFA Organization in a variety of capacities to further promote agriculture and sustain its future. Providing scholarships is one of the many ways AFBF rallies support for youth in agriculture.

FFA is a national organization of 485,046 members preparing for leadership and careers in the science, business and technology of agriculture with more than 7,200 local chapters in all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. FFA strives to make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.

To download a scholarship application, visit www.ffa.org.

Mediation program is here to help you

If you are a participant in a USDA program in Oklahoma, an agricultural borrower or creditor, or if you are involved in Oklahoma agriculture, the Oklahoma Agriculture Mediation Program at Oklahoma State University is here to help!

Who are we? OAMP is the USDA certified state mediation provider for the State of Oklahoma. OAMP is housed at the Institute for Dispute Resolution at Oklahoma State University. OAMP assists agricultural producers, their lenders, and other persons directly affected by the actions of USDA resolve disputes. Authorized by the Agricultural Credit Act of 1987 and Oklahoma statutes, mediation is an effective way to settle disputes in many different USDA program areas, including farm loans and farm programs, and agricultural credit issues.

OAMP can also assist rural Oklahomans with resolving a wide variety of issues that affect their daily lives.

What is mediation? Mediation is a voluntary, confidential meeting in which a