



# THE DUSTOFFER



DUSTOFF ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

SPRING 1998

## Ft. Sam Houston DUSTOFF Memorial Plaza to be Dedicated in Honor of MG Spurgeon Neel



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**T**HE 1998 REUNION was fantastic. Starting with the reservation process (for which we owe special thanks to Sue Moore) and ending with the memorial service, it was just outstanding. If you didn't get enough to eat at the Friday night social, it was because you were either drinking too much or telling too many war stories. If you didn't have a lump in your throat and a tear in your eye listening to Byron Howlett, Joe Brown, Ben Knisely and Tim Lickness, you just aren't human. For the reunion and a super year as our leaders, we owe Charlie and Gloria Webb our appreciation. Although it will be a tall order, we hope to make our Twentieth Anniversary Reunion even bigger and better. We have already begun planning. The location will be the same, but the Holiday Inn will have been completely renovated and operating as a Marriott. So begin making your plans now to come to San Antonio for the big celebration.

During last year's business meeting, we voted to canvass the membership for pledges and donations for the DUSTOFF memorial to be named in honor of MG Spurgeon Neel, USA Retired. Please complete the form on page 13 and mail your pledge or donation

to the address indicated. We need your support to make this memorial a reality this year. Also use that form to indicate whether you want your name listed as a DUSTOFF Association member on the DUSTOFF home page.

We need some help from our DUSTOFF unit commanders. You are the folks who can ensure the future of our association. We need you to encourage your aviators and crew members to join the association and attend the reunions. We know that's tough, given your OPTEMPO, but we will all benefit by the infusion of your highly professional, young soldiers who are carrying on the DUSTOFF legend. We also ask that you take the time now to recognize your outstanding individuals and crews by preparing nominations for one of the annual awards. When we formally ask for nominations, you will be ready.

That's enough from me for now. If you have any comments and concerns, please call me at (210) 945-4999; write me at 8426 Ulysses, Universal City, Texas 78148; or e-mail me at [coleyhs@intx.net](mailto:coleyhs@intx.net). Stephanie and I are pleased to serve you this year and look forward to our Twentieth Reunion.

**DUSTOFF!**  
Herb Coley

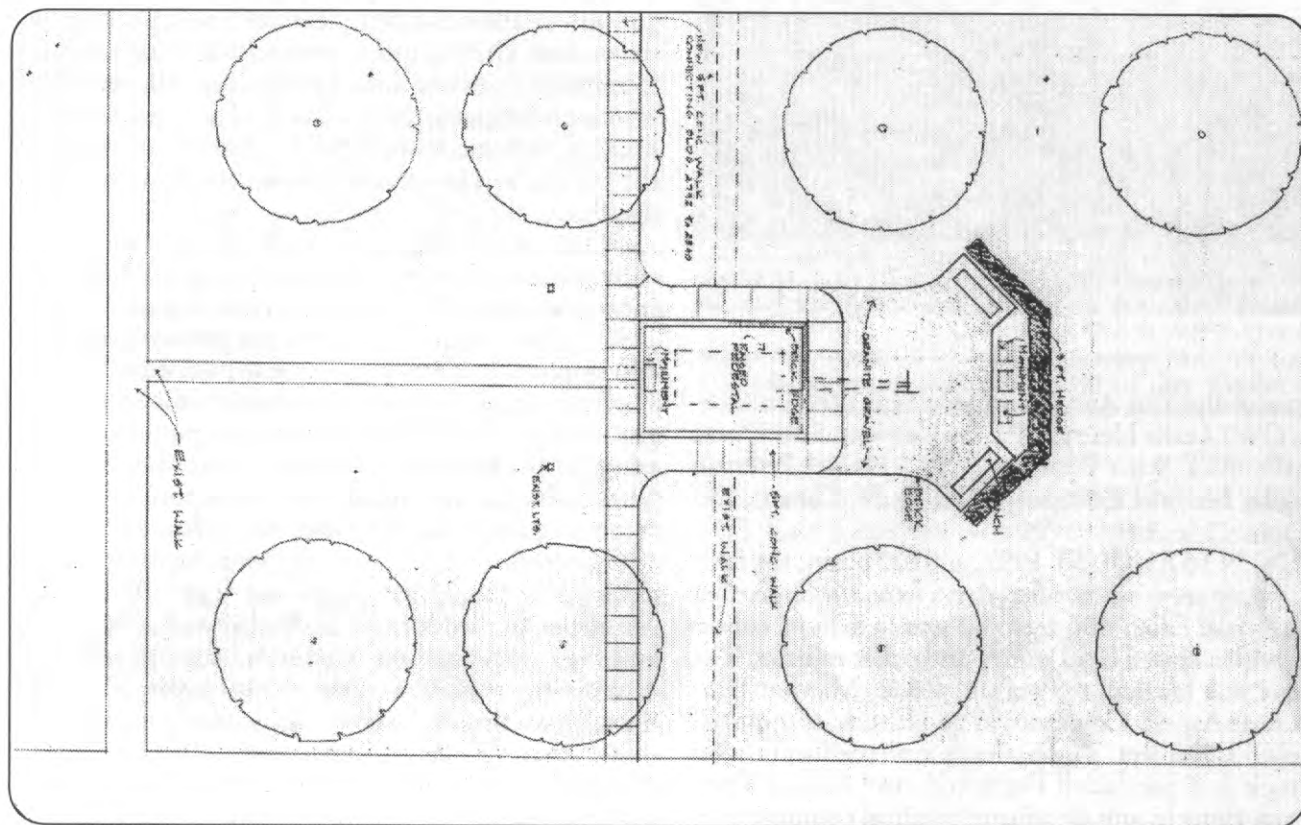
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<b>Historian:</b> Joe "Doc" Kralich	

# The DUSTOFF Memorial Plaza

by COL Daniel Gower, USA (Ret.)

The plans for the Ft. Sam Houston Memorial Plaza have been approved by the DUSTOFF Association's Executive Council and the Ft. Sam Houston Historical Architect. MG Peake has made it the top priority of all beautification and memorilization projects and recommended that the plaza be dedicated in honor of MG Spurgeon Neel, USA (Ret.), and all DUSTOFF crew members, past, present and future. Funding for the plans is projected at \$26,000. Because the funds available will not cover the entire project, the Association voted to raise \$6,000-\$10,000 for plaques, monuments, shrubbery and benches. The DUSTOFF Association is seeking pledges and contributions to the Memorial Plaza fund. We thank COL (Ret.) John Hosley and LTC (Ret.) and Mrs. Ken Forrest for their donations to the fund during the 1998 reunion.



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## DUSTOFF MEMORIAL FUND PLEDGE

Mail to:  
DUSTOFF Association  
P. O. Box 8091  
San Antonio, TX 78208

- ☐ I pledge \$\_\_\_\_\_ to the Ft. Sam Houston DUSTOFF Memorial Fund.
- ☐ I am enclosing \$\_\_\_\_\_ contribution to the Ft. Sam Houston DUSTOFF Memorial Fund.
- ☐ I want my name listed as a DUSTOFF Association member on the DUSTOFF home page.
- ☐ I do not want my name listed as a DUSTOFF Association member on the DUSTOFF home page.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_



# RESCUE OF THE YEAR



*LT Bill Gordon and CPT Jay Garvens accept the DUSTOFF Association Rescue of the Year Award presented by John Soehnlein of Sikorsky. (Photo by CPT Jon Fristoe.)*

Rescue of the Year Award winners: 1LT William Gordon, CW2 Leslie Henry, CPT Jay Garvens, SSG David Uebele, SGT Scott Foster and SPC Daniel Peterson — 571st Medical Company (AA) — Ft. Carson, CO

**O**N 16 AUGUST 1997, at 0100 hours, the first-up crew was notified that a female rock climber had fallen 600 feet and was in serious condition, with a closed head injury and other injuries. The patient was located at Pyramid Rock, Maroon Bells Peak near Aspen, Colorado, at an altitude of approximately 12,900 feet. The patient's extreme location on the rock face precluded the Search and Rescue Team from carrying in any significant medical equipment or evacuating the injured climber from the mountain.

At 0215 hours the first-up crew launched to a coordination site to evaluate the mission with the Pitkin County Sheriff, who was also the emergency action coordinator. An aerial recon was performed en route and matched with the ground SAR team's evaluation. After an in-depth review of the mission circumstances, the crew decided to wait for sunrise to perform the mission. Later, due to crew endurance and high altitude considerations, second-up was launched. This reduced the extreme risk associated with such a high-altitude mission. The first-up PIC (pilot in command) replaced the copilot, since he had reconned the site and performed extensive coordination with the ground elements.

The extreme altitude, combined with wind and temperature considerations, made it necessary to strip the aircraft of all nonessential equipment. The crew, 1LT Bill Gordon, CW2 Scott Henry, SSG David Uebele, SGT Scott Foster, CPT Jay Garvens, and SPC Daniel Peterson, were further required to minimize fuel, mak-

ing an evaluation of the time necessary to perform the hoist mission and return the patient to a treatment facility. As the crew approached the hoist site, expert mountain flying skills were required to position the aircraft. The terrain was extremely steep (approximately 70 degrees), and the rescue team was located on a narrow ledge above a 3,000-foot drop-off. The first requirement was to lower medical equipment to the ground to allow further treatment and packaging of the patient. During this maneuver, the rotor wash from the aircraft began to dislodge bowling ball-sized rocks, which endangered the patient and ground crew. The decision was made to abort a hoist rescue and move the patient to a site where a hovering rescue would be possible.

After an excruciating 6-hour descent, the ground crew was able to move the patient only 1,000 feet to a snow and rock shelf formed by the lip of a bowl at 11,600 feet. During this time, the patient's condition deteriorated to critical. The crew performed a precision two-wheeled pinnacle touchdown that allowed the ground crew to load the patient. The patient was then taken to the hospital in Aspen, where she was somewhat stabilized and readied for transport to a level-1 trauma center at Grand Junction, Colorado.

This mission, only one of the numerous missions this outstanding unit performs every year in the Rocky Mountains, called for elite leadership and aviation skills and close coordination with civilian authorities. The mixed crew performed above and beyond the call of duty. Operating at altitudes in excess of 11,000 feet in itself required superb professional skill. The difficulty of a high-altitude hoist mission and a pinnacle landing in a rocky, snow- and ice-covered ridge required superior skill and teamwork. These soldiers demonstrated those qualities that epitomize the best of DUSTOFF.

Other Nominees included:

CW4 Walter Smith, CW2 Thomas McClellan, SPC David Gadomski, SPC Michael Mangone — 507th Medical Company

CW3 Robert Petty, 1LT(P) Casey Carver, SGT Tycen Blucher, SGT Kevin Sturgeon — 507th Medical Company

CW4 Craig Yingling, CW2 Dan Richardson, SGT Randy Cox, SPC Chad Ledger — 36th Medical Det (HA)



# CREW MEMBER OF THE YEAR

**D**URING THE PAST YEAR, SGT Peter Carroll has completed over 60 MEDEVAC/MAST missions supporting Ft. Carson and the Colorado Springs, Colorado, region; Ft. Bliss and El Paso, Texas; Las Cruces, New Mexico, and its surrounding area; and the Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site. Of these missions, 49 were on-site patient pickup, of which three were hoist and 11 were patient transfers. On three missions SGT Carroll became the mass casualty incident coordinator when landing on-scene.

On one of the hoist missions (Gunnison, Colorado), SGT Carroll played a pivotal role, resulting in both participating crews receiving the Inaugural DUSTOFF Association Rescue of the Year Award.

A second hoist mission was performed over Eagle Peak at the U.S. Air Force Academy for an Air Force cadet with an open skull fracture. The patient pick-up zone (PZ) was a 60-degree up-slope boulder field, with an approximately eight-foot placement area, involving tall pines on three borders and a 90-degree cliff face on the other. Hover was at approximately 75–80 feet above the site.

The third hoist mission occurred south of Canyon City, Colorado, in the Wet Mountain Range on a small spur 20 feet wide, at an approximate altitude of 8,500 feet MSL (mean sea level). Three sides of this spur had drop-offs of over 1,000 feet and a 90-degree up-slope on the western edge. There were no forcible landing areas. The PZ was 25 feet below the patient, a gunshot victim. Hoist altitude was unreadable on the radar altimeter, due to the small area of placement. The patient was critically unstable. Initial intubation attempts to secure the airway were unsuccessful, necessitating that SGT Carroll perform a cricothyroidotomy. The situation was further complicated by zero peripheral vascular access, which led to the right external jugular vein being cannulated.

On-scene, it was decided that SGT Carroll should be hoisted first, so he could continue patient care in the aircraft. But the hoist ceased to operate after SGT Carroll had been hoisted out, and attempts to remedy the problem failed. No second crew or aircraft were available, and the aircraft had to return to Ft. Carson for another hoist, delaying the rescue for one hour. They then returned to recover the patient and second medic left on-scene.

The lifesaving actions taken by SGT Carroll on the ground and in the air not only helped to stabilize the patient, but helped the patient's condition to improve. If it were not for SGT Carroll's professionalism and expertise, the patient would not have survived.

Other Nominees included:

SGT Tycen Blucher (medic) — 507th Medical Company  
SSG John D. Eastburn (crewchief) — 498th Medical Company



*SGT Peter Carroll, 571st Medical Company (AA), Ft. Carson, Colorado, accepts the DUSTOFF Association Crew Member of the Year Award from Mike Thompson of Br eze Eastern. (Photo by CPT Jon Fristoe.)*

SSG David L. Hunt (medic) — 159th Medical Company  
SGT Carl Bartolozzi — 1059th Medical Company



## DUSTOFF on the World Wide Web

Your DUSTOFF Association has a web site on the Internet. Visit our site at <http://www.fbg.net/dustoff> and join the 500+ people per month who stop in to stay in touch with what is going on in the DUSTOFF Association and the Army air ambulance community. You will find an extensive list of aeromedically related Internet links, DUSTOFF Association merchandise, the story of our MIA DUSTOFF crew, a message board to help find old buddies and much more. So get out of that helicopter, grab your surfboard and surf to the DUSTOFF Association's web site.

# THE DUSTOFF LEGEND

Remarks by COL Ben Knisely, USA (Ret.), at the 1998 DUSTOFF Reunion

IT WAS A RAINY, foggy morning in the northern coastal areas of the Republic of Vietnam. The date was 4 April 1968. DUSTOFF 65 from the fourth platoon of the 498th Air Ambulance Company was field-sited at the Hue Phu Bai airfield, over 200 KM north of its home base at Lane field in Quin Yon. Operation "Pegasus" had just kicked off in the I Corps area, and the 68 Tet Offensive was underway. The Army's mission was to grind through the A Shau and Perfume River Valleys and link up with and provide a rescue route for a beleaguered battalion of marines that had been under siege for over 100 days at a remote airstrip in the northwest corner of Vietnam called Khe Sahn.

During the preceding night, Charlie Company of the 2/502 Infantry Bn of the 101st Abn Div became engaged in a tremendous firefight with North Vietnamese regular soldiers. They suffered heavy casualties and were holed up on a hillside about 10 KM from LZ Bastone in the A Shau Valley.

The division surgeon requested DUSTOFF 65 to make an attempt to hoist out some of the injured. It would be a 45-minute flight for DUSTOFF to make it to the pickup site deep in the enemy-infested A Shau Valley. Lieutenants Mike Meyer and Ben Knisely waited until sunrise to attempt the mission.

Upon arriving in the area, it was clear that the firefight was still ongoing. The company commander continually waved off the DUSTOFF aircraft and radioed that the action was too hot to attempt a hoist rescue. The aircraft circled overhead for nearly an hour before returning to Hue for fuel.

It was the second attempt an hour or two later that will never be forgotten, which is the subject of a great surprise story tonight. During that mission,

DUSTOFF 65 was hit by an enemy RPG missile while attempting to hoist several wounded soldiers. The helicopter crashed in the valley about a mile from any known friendly positions. The chronology of what happened in the next 72 hours was a featured story in the book, *DUSTOFF*, and is like a tale from a movie script.

How do you thank someone for saving your life? Such a statement has real meaning to many in this room because that's what many of you folks do as your day-to-day job. I have had the privilege on a couple occasions in the performance of that job to have contributed to saving a life or two—on the giving end, you might say. As so many of you in this room have experienced, that is a wonderful feeling of satisfaction that no one can ever take from you.

I stand before you tonight as one of the fortunate few who have been on both sides of the lifesaving equation. It is my privilege tonight to publicly thank someone for saving my life 30 years ago almost to the day. I was on the receiving end, you might say.

I can tell you there is an interesting relationship between the two ends of that survival equation. The most profound end is realizing that you would not be alive today were it not for the efforts and actions of another individual or individuals. When you think of how you might express your gratitude for such an incredible display of selflessness, even in the face of danger, trust me, the magnitude of what you want to convey is simply beyond the spoken word.

But having had the privilege of returning the same favor to another human being and knowing the personal, silent feeling of satisfaction and reward that you will forever cherish as a result of that event, allows me to utter three words and know that there is feeling and understanding between me and the individuals who are responsible for getting me out of that God-forsaken jungle so many years ago. I thank you for my life, Tim Lickness, Mike Myer, wherever you are, Byron Howlett, and Joe Brown, from the bottom of my heart.

One evening several years ago at the DUSTOFF gathering, we had an intriguing guest speaker named Carter Harmon. Some of you will recall he is credited with performing the first documented rescue mission with a YR-4 helicopter in Burma. At the time in 1944 Carter Harmon was a new flight lieutenant in the Army Air Corps. I remember his story well because it was much like what happened to me. He flew into some God-forsaken place to rescue an L-1 crew that had been shot down by enemy fire. You might say this was DUSTOFF mission number one, and it occurred long before many of you in this room were even born.

John Soehnlein helped me locate Carter a few weeks ago. Now 80 years old, he lives alone in an apartment in New York City. For the past 30 years he has been a



Tim and Barbie Lickness at the 1998 DUSTOFF Reunion. (Photo by CPT Jon Fristoe.)



musical reporter for the *New York Times*, and he has written a book that includes some excerpts from his old army aviation days. I talked to him briefly last week, and he asked me to say hello to you all. I reminded him that many of us still refer to him as "DUSTOFF One." When I was the Aviation Consultant, I exchanged several letters with Carter, and we became friends.

On the evening that he was our guest at this very function, he confessed to us that he was somewhat nervous. But his recollection and presentation about his personal experience in that historic aviation event were as sharp as any military briefing any of us had ever received. The story of his actions is truly an inspiration to all of us.

As he concluded his remarks that evening, I shall never forget a very moving moment that he created in a very innocent way. He said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I am very honored to have been invited to speak with your organization tonight. I don't think that in my entire life I have ever been in a room with so many heroes gathered at one time. I want to tell you how overwhelmed I am at the thought of that and with my presence here with you tonight." At that moment he became visibly emotional and had to wait a few moments before he could finish his last few sentences and walk off the podium.

The entire audience was overcome by a similar emotional reaction to his statement. There wasn't a dry eye in the room, and even our MC, then-president Joe Madrono, could hardly speak for a moment to thank him for coming to talk to us.

Each time this group has gathered since then, I find myself pausing sometime during the Saturday evening program and quietly scanning the faces in the room, remembering his extraordinary statement about a room full of heroes.

And now, as I scan the room again tonight, I see that same audience, and I feel that same admiration and awe that Carter Harmon did. I have many times thought about Carter's statement and his unsolicited tribute to us over the years since then, and I would like to offer to you and to him a plausible reply. What struck Lt. Carter Harmon that night is something all of us know and feel—simply the legend of DUSTOFF. All of you in this room tonight are in some way a part of that legend. The aura of humanitarian goodwill that permeates this room tonight and was present the night Carter was here is something we all sense but have difficulty explaining.

Charlie Webb described it well last year when he took over the gavel as your president—about how DUSTOFF is not about helicopters or wars—but about a special group of people. It's like the old adage that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

If you were to ask anyone in this room this evening if he or she was a hero, to a man the reply would be "not at all, but I am proud of any contribution I may have made to the story of DUSTOFF." Many of you present here tonight have perhaps saved one or more lives, or have certainly been the instrument to ameliorate

countless human suffering. No one will ever take that incredible, rewarding feeling away from you of knowing you made a difference in someone's life on some IFR night in Texas or Germany, or halfway around the world in a foggy jungle or a desert sandstorm. You will always feel it and know it right here in your heart.

Heroic feats? In some cases, absolutely, but in general what we are talking about is the sum of all those thousands of humanitarian efforts that are in themselves greater as a whole than the sum of all those individual performances. That, my friends, is truly the core of the legend of DUSTOFF.

It is the legend that brings you here tonight. It is who you are and from where you have come. You are a part of a great fraternity that is admired and respected around the world by your fellow servicemen. No other armed forces in the world has anything like DUSTOFF. We have now by some accounts evacuated or rescued over one million military patients.

Several of you in this room tonight have written some great chapters in our legend. Just to be here with you to shake your hand again is something many of us look forward to each year. Your story is now ours; it belongs forever to all of us.

But perhaps the most intriguing thought I wish to leave with you tonight is that some of you present this evening have yet to write some future chapters in this great legend. That will happen; you can bet on it. Remember, our legend is not very old. It spans less than half a century in years. This organization has met only 19 times.

Of all my lifelong deeds and accomplishments, as humble as they may be, the one thing I am proudest of and receive my greatest personal satisfaction from is that I have had the privilege and the honor to be a part of the great DUSTOFF team and its renowned legend.

The large wooden plaque that stands at the other end of this room represents hallowed ground for all of us. We all know someone whose name is inscribed thereon. Each time I return to San Antonio and take a moment to study it, first it is a stunning reminder to me of all the incredible things we do. But before I turn away, I am also reminded that sometimes there are things we simply cannot do—try hard as we may. That board containing 241 names is our legacy and perhaps the most visible symbol of our legend. We must preserve it forever.

Thank you Charlie Webb, for orchestrating this remarkable reunion for Tim Lickness and me. And thank you, fellow DUSTOFFers, for allowing this personal story to be part of your program tonight. It is, of course, just another story in the legend of DUSTOFF. I salute you all, and may God be with those of you who are today performing and perpetuating the great DUSTOFF legend.



# Financial Statement

MEMORANDUM FOR Executive Council, DUSTOFF Association

SUBJECT: Financial Status - Year-end Closeout - Fiscal Year 1997-98

SUBMITTED BY: CDR Daniel Green, USA (Ret.)

1. Following are the close-out figures for the DUSTOFF Association at the end of the Fiscal Year, 30 April 1998.

BEGINNING BALANCE	\$14,471.11
INCOME	
Donations	640.00
Dues	5,110.00
Interest	274.20
Reunions '98	15,475.96
Sales	3,200.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$24,695.42
EXPENSES	
Admin. Secretary	1,200.00
Compliance Purchase	2,560.95
Disbursements	775.00
Newsletters	2,180.00
Operating Expenses	1,089.56
Reunions '98	12,146.67
Taxes	104.11
Sales Expenses	5,000.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$27,654.27
INCOME LESS EXPENSES	(\$2,958.85)
Checkbook Balance	14,563.49
CD	10,479.08
Inventory	
Cans	\$1,000 (\$50 @ \$5.00)
T-shirts	1897 (\$5 @ \$13.00)
Golf shirts	3500 (\$5 @ \$20.00)
Disbursements	2825 (\$25 @ \$11.00)
TOTAL INVENTORY	\$4,222.00
NET WORTH	\$29,085.57

## How to Contribute Articles to the DUSTOFFer

THE DUSTOFFer would like to publish your article. If you have a recollection of a particular DUSTOFF or MAST mission, please share it with our members. If your unit has been involved in an outstanding rescue mission or worthwhile program, please submit your essay about it to the DUSTOFFer. Send photographs with your article or attach them electronically to your e-mail.

Send typed, double-spaced hard copy to the address below or e-mail your article to Dustoff 23@aol.com.

Please send your contributions to:

The DUSTOFFer  
P. O. Box 8091  
San Antonio, TX 78208

## From the Archives of the DUSTOFF Association

Thanks to Don and Norma Bush for the following announcement of the first DUSTOFF Reunion, which was published in the *Ft. Riley Post* on January 25, 1980.

### *DUSTOFF Reunion Plans Told*

Dedicated Unselfish Service to Our Fighting Forces (DUSTOFF) personnel who supported the DUSTOFF medevac mission in Vietnam will hold their first reunion at the Marriott Hotel at Perimeter Center in Atlanta, Georgia, February 1-3. Wives and girlfriends are also invited. Over 175 former crew members are planning to attend the reunion, which features guest speaker Gen. W. C. Westmoreland. Plans are also under way for a DUSTOFF Association. Room prices are \$32/day single and \$35/day double. For reservations call 1-800-228-... For more information call SSG Thomas Johnson at 205-831-... (home) or 865-... or 865-... (autovon).



# From the Wiregrass

by COL Randy Sexton

**L**TC(P) JOHNNY WEST will replace Mike Deets as the Director of MEPD this summer. For those of you who haven't heard, Mike is retiring in the St. Louis area. There are few people in the MEDEVAC business who have done more for the modern DUSTOFF era than Mike. Without him, the UH-60Q program would be a distant memory. He has been a great boss, a great golfing buddy and a great friend. We are going to miss both him and Keela, but I know they will remain close to the DUSTOFF tradition by leading the way at our DUSTOFF reunions for many years to come.

LTC(P) West is coming to us from the War College. He sports a single-digit handicap and an affection for fast cars and faster aircraft. We are looking forward to his and Susan's arrival. I had the honor of serving with LTC West in the 421st as the commander of the 45th, while he was the battalion commander. He will bring great leadership to MEPD.

LTC Timothy Toomey, Assistant Dean, US Army School of Aviation Medicine (USASAM), Ft. Rucker, Alabama, will retire this summer, bringing to a close an outstanding active duty career. During the course of his twenty-year career, Tim has served in a number of command and staff positions in CONUS, Europe and Korea. He is the former Commander, 54th Medical Company, Ft. Lewis, Washington. Tim, his wife, Vernetta, and their four children, Rachelle, Jennifer, Jessica and Justin, will reside in San Antonio.

Those of you who are members of the Aviation Association of America (AAAA) probably saw the two articles in the 28 February issue of Army Aviation (official publication of AAAA) written by LTC Crook and LTC Pfeiffer. I would encourage those of you who are not members to contact a friend who is a member of AAAA and take a look at the articles. They are very timely and well-written. LTC Crook, Commander, 421st Evacuation Battalion, Europe, wrote an article titled "Army Aeromedical Evacuation in Stability and Support Operations." LTC Pfeiffer, UH-60Q Assistant Project Manager, Utility Helicopter PMO, US Army AMCOM, wrote an article on the UH-60Q titled "21st Century-MEDEVAC Takes Shape." Anyone who would like a copy of the articles may contact me at (334) 255-6914/6917.

The next iteration of the AMEDD Aviation Pre-Command Course is scheduled to be held at Ft. Rucker 8-19 June 1998. The course is designed for captains promotable and majors en route to Air Ambulance Company command. MAJ Jeff Foe, USASAM, Ft. Rucker, is the course director.

Congratulations to the following majors who were recently selected for promotion to LTC: MAJ Ed Bernard, MAJ Doug Boom, MAJ Scott Burgess, MAJ Wayne Clark, MAJ Dennis Doyle, MAJ Elizabeth

Higgins, MAJ Bill Miklosey, MAJ Monty Nanton, MAJ Jim Rice and MAJ Pat Wilson. (That is not a typo; Doyle's name is on the list.) There is no doubt you will see any or all of these outstanding officers commanding at the 05 or 06 level in the very near future.

Congratulations also to LTC(P) Dave McCrady. Dave has recently been selected for the US Army War College Corresponding Studies Program. This is a very demanding two-year program, and we wish Dave the very best.

Congratulations to LTC Bryant Aldstadt and LTC Pete Garibaldi on their selection for battalion command. Both were selected to command AMEDD Recruiting Battalions.

I would like personally to thank LTC Mike Deets, LTC Ron Wilson and SFC Newingham for the great job they did this year orchestrating the 1998 Army Medical Evacuation Conference. The conference was approved at the very last minute, with minimal funding. Theirs was a Herculean effort. I would also like to thank COL Ben Knisely, USA (Ret.), LTC Gene Pfeiffer and MAJ Jay Jackson for their presentations during the DUSTOFF Professional Meeting.

## Closing Out the Flight Plan

Lifetime DUSTOFF Member, COL Ray Weeks Salmon, Jr., USA (Ret.), passed away December 18, 1997, in Fresno, California. Some of the units COL Salmon served with are: 203rd Med. Bn., Ft. Lewis, Washington; Office of the Surgeon, HQ I Corps, Korea; 53rd Med. Det., Darmstadt, Germany; 82nd Med. Det., Vietnam; 45th Med. Co., Ft. Bragg, North Carolina; 45th Med. Co., Vietnam; 30th Med. Group; and 421st Med. Co. (AA). He is survived by his wife, Lois Johnson Salmon, and family of Fresno, California.

Lifetime DUSTOFF Member, MSG Robert Dean Lindsay, Jr., passed away November 21, 1997, in Salt Lake City, Utah. Robert served in Inchon, Korea, Ft. Knox, Germany, and Vietnam. He is survived by his wife, Elena, and family of Salt Lake City, Utah.

DUSTOFF Member, LTC William Hawkins, USA (Ret.), passed away on February 28, 1998, in Columbus, Georgia. He is survived by his wife, Sam.

Steve Modica (Medevac 2), 15th Med. Bn., 1st Air Cavalry Division Vietnam, passed away as a result of a scuba diving accident.

# NIGHT DUSTOFF MISSIONS

by David Freeman

**D**AVID FREEMAN was a DUSTOFF pilot with the 57th Med. Det. from October through September 1971 in Vietnam, first at Navy Binh Thuy and later at Long Binh. Upon returning to the United States, CW2 Freeman was again assigned to the 57th Med. Det., this time at Fort Bragg. Between 1973 and 1975, he participated in the MAST mission with the 57th, in addition to providing medevac support for the 82nd Airborne Division. Today, the former Army DUSTOFF pilot is a web designer and author who lives in Grapevine, Texas. His book, *The Jesus Nut*, is a fictional story based on his tour as a DUSTOFF pilot in the Vietnam Delta. Freeman's company, Nissi Publishing, has published three Vietnam books. All are offered for sale on Nissi's web site at <http://www.nissipub.com>. Nissi's web site also presents a tribute to the DUSTOFF mission, including stories and photos about DUSTOFF flying in Vietnam.

By late 1971, American DUSTOFF crews in the delta had transferred the bulk of the daytime ARVN medevac support to the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF). The VNAF medevac pilots, despite their vast flight experience, were not inclined to fly at night. The 57th Medical Det. continued to fly night medevac missions in support of both the American and Vietnamese forces in the delta until late 1972 when the unit was returned to the United States.

Flying at night was a lonely experience. Rarely were there other helicopters in the air. The few fixed-wings that were flying, such as the army's OV-1 Mohawk surveillance aircraft and the air force's Specter of Puff gunships, were usually on a different frequency. The DUSTOFF crew that had first-up duty typically flew ten to twelve sorties each night. Our only company was provided by Paddy Control, the air force radar controllers who provided radar coverage for most of the delta.

The techniques we used for locating the people on the ground and making a safe pickup provided an interesting set of challenges. The new pilot pilots learned these techniques from the more experienced aircraft commanders. The proficiencies gained in night landings in the boonies have no parallel in civil aviation, with the possible exception of some Emergency Medical Service (EMS) missions.

Staying alive and successfully accomplishing the missions depended upon the DUSTOFF crews developing excellent crew coordination skills. Everyone was depended upon to do their part. Mission coordinates were plotted on a 1:50,000 tactical map. Paddy Control usually provided vectors to the general vicinity of the pickup. From there, a safe landing could be assured only if two-way radio communication was established with someone on the ground. It helped if that someone knew what they were doing. Many of

the Vietnamese units had at least one American advisor who could handle communication with the DUSTOFF crew. For other missions, a Vietnamese interpreter flew with the DUSTOFF crew and handled communication with the elements on the ground.

Several methods were used to identify the landing area. First contact was normally made by sound, since we flew without external lighting. With no other aerial traffic around, there was no reason to provide a visual target for an enemy gunner. To the guys on the ground, the sound of an approaching Huey was unmistakable. Upon first radio contact, we would confirm our proximity to the landing site by asking the ground troops if they heard us, and if so, which direction we were from them. A typical response would be along the lines of, "We hear you, DUSTOFF. It sounds like you're north of us about two clicks." If that were the case, we would turn south and ask the ground contact if it sounded like we were getting closer.

Once in visual range, we needed some type of light to identify the landing area. Among the possibilities were a hand-held strobe light, a flashlight, a flare, a small fire, or four small fires built to form a "T" on the ground. Most of us preferred the latter because it gave us a marker for the landing site, as well as something to line up with on our approach. The base of the "T" was oriented along the recommended approach path.

The least preferred method to mark a landing spot was a flare. This was for two reasons: 1) the flare would highlight the position of the ground troops, and 2) the flare adversely affected the night vision of the DUSTOFF pilots.

More often than not, a hand-held strobe light or a flashlight aimed at the helicopter was all we had to work with. The radio operator on the ground described the landing area to us, including any obstacles and an estimate of the wind direction and velocity. They also recommended a way back out based on obstacles, location of the enemy, etc. Rarely did it make sense to go back out the way we came in, but it did happen.

Using whatever we had to work with visually and the landing area briefing from the contact on the ground, we would set up a rectangular landing pattern. This helped us stay oriented with the landing spot. We made our approach to a point just shy of the LZ marker. The pilot not flying called altitude and airspeed every few seconds as the aircraft descended. He also kept his hands near the controls. Some ACs preferred that both sets of hands be on the controls during short final. The landing light was delayed as long as possible for obvious reasons. Without the light, enemy gunners had only sound and possibly a shadowy outline to aid in target acquisition. Once the landing light came on, it was pretty obvious where the Huey was located.

Normally we took the approach all the way to the ground because of dust and debris, but we would hold the chopper light on the skids. The surface we were landing on could be muddy, wet, lumpy, or littered with stumps or stubs that could easily puncture a hole in the bottom of the aircraft or, more importantly, the fuel cells.

Throughout the approach, the medic and crew chief hung out the sides of the aircraft watching for obstacles and enemy activity. Constant chatter on the intercom was a necessity to keep pilots informed, since we couldn't possibly see all that was around and beneath us.

At touchdown, the landing light was switched off and the crew in back supervised the loading of patients. They were not to unplug from the intercom, in the event a rapid departure was needed. They usually had long microphone cords that allowed them some freedom of movement outside the aircraft.

Seldom did more than fifteen or twenty seconds pass before the crew in back reported being ready to depart. "Ready right." "Ready left." "Coming up." "Clear up left." "Clear up right." The landing light was used on departure only if necessary to ensure obstacle clearance. Otherwise, it was best for the pilots to regain their night vision as soon as possible.

It was not unusual for a pilot who was flying to be coached by his AC. "Watch your torque; you're

at 38, 40, okay, nose her over." "We're still clear left." "Clear right." And off we'd go, either to a small local hospital or another pickup. If there were Americans on board, we'd be heading for the nearest U.S. Army hospital. En route, the medic and crew chief would be busy treating the patients. This scenario would be repeated multiple times each night, night after night.



Gloria and Charlie Webb at the 1998 Reunion. (Photo by CPT Jon Fristoe)

## NEW ENTRIES ON THE FLIGHT MANIFEST

Charles Andrews — APO AA  
 MAJ Edward Bernard — San Antonio, TX  
 John Blessing — Tucson, AZ  
 SGT Jack Blundell — Ocean Springs, MS  
 CW4 David Borrell — Crystal River, FL  
 George Carman — Ogdensburg, NJ  
 SGT Peter Carroll — Fort Carson, CO  
 LT Casey Carver — Killeen, TX  
 MAJ Steven Chowen — Roy, WA  
 Mike Clow — Scottsdale, AZ  
 1SG Ronald Dean — Colorado Springs, CO  
 William Dillard — Humble, TX  
 SGT Kevin Donoghue — Norristown, PA  
 Gary Edwards — Highland Ranch, CO  
 John Francis — Bethlehem, PA  
 CPT Jay Garvens — Colorado Springs, CO  
 CPT Guy Gierhart — Hope Mills, NC  
 COL Richard Harder — San Antonio, TX  
 William Hawkins — Columbus, GA  
 SGT Ronald Holcombe — Bath, ME  
 SGT Thomas Hurd — Clarksville, TN  
 LTC Raymond Jackson — Vero Beach, FL  
 Richard Jones — Milton-Freewater, OR  
 CPT Mark Kessler — Killeen, TX

CPT Chris Klobukowski — Charleston, SC  
 SFC George LaValley — Las Vegas, NV  
 Michael Mallon — Kailua, HI  
 CPT Suzanne McDonough — Cheyenne, WY  
 Jim Mueller — Norcross, GA  
 SFC Loren Newingham — Ozark, AL  
 Stanley Paden — Diamond Bar, CA  
 Francis Pommert, Jr. — Parkton, MD  
 SGT Charles Ramirez — Petaluma, CA  
 SPC Jeffrey Ratkovich — Fair Oaks, CA  
 SPC Gerry Rawles — Lafayette, IN  
 James Rodriguez — Indianapolis, IN  
 1SG Louise Sackey — Clarksville, TN  
 Sherrill Schaaf — Killeen, TX  
 SSG Brian Schwalen — Alamo, CA  
 SFC John Scudder — Newport News, VA  
 MAJ Donna Shahbaz — San Antonio, TX  
 Baisal Smith — Houston, TX  
 SGT Neel Stanley — Denver, CO  
 Samuel Stone — Centreville, VA  
 David Tousignant — Malvern, PA  
 SP5 Charlie Whaley — Mocksville, NC  
 Michael Zugmaier — Bettendorf, IA



# DUSTOFF UNIT PERFORMS HOIST MISSION AT RECORD ALTITUDE

Submitted by the MAST Coordinator 54th Medical Company (AA)

**T**HE 54TH MEDICAL Company (AA) is located at Gray Army Air Field, Fort Lewis, Washington. They have been operating under a MAST agreement to provide air ambulance for the citizens of the state of Washington since the 54th returned from Vietnam in 1972. The 54th has been flying UH-60A Blackhawk helicopters for about a year.

Due to the rugged, mountainous terrain in both the Olympic and Cascade ranges, the crews of the 54th have utilized their high-speed hoist on a number of missions, but nothing like the mission they responded to on Mt. Rainier, the highest point in the State at 14,410 feet. The mountain is within Mt. Ranier National Park and is approximately 40 nautical miles from GAAF.

The initial call to the operations center was made at 0650 hours, 20 July 1997, by Supervisory Climbing Ranger, Steve Winslow. He reported that an independent climber attempting a climb on Kautz glacier route was struck by avalanching ice debris and suffered a fall of approximately 150 feet. He suffered possible fractured cervical and thoracic vertebra. On-site were two EMTs from Seattle Mountain Rescue, who had witnessed the fall. They made the call by cell phone to the park dispatch center, advising them of the climber's injuries. The injured climber was moved to nearby Camp Hazard by his two climbing partners and the EMTs who had taken over treatment of the patient.

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## The Soldier's Medal

Presented to DUSTOFF Assn. life-member, Hugh Thompson, Jr., and Larry Colburn, March 6, 1998

**F**OR HEROISM above and beyond the call of duty on 16 March 1968, while saving the lives of at least 10 Vietnamese civilians, during the unlawful massacre of noncombatants by American forces at My Lai, Quang Ngai Province, South Vietnam. Warrant Officer Thompson landed his helicopter in the line of fire between fleeing Vietnamese civilians and pursuing American ground troops to prevent their murder. He then personally confronted the leader of the American ground troops and was prepared to open fire on those American troops, should they fire upon the civilians. Warrant Officer Thompson, at the risk of his own personal safety, went forward of the American lines and coaxed the Vietnamese civilians out of the bunker to enable their evacuation. Leaving the area after requesting and overseeing the civilians' air evacuation, his crew spotted movement in a ditch filled with bodies south of My Lai Four. Warrant Officer Thompson again landed his helicopter and covered his crew as they retrieved a wounded child from the pile of bodies. He then flew the child to the safety of a hospital at Quang Ngai. Warrant Officer Thompson's relayed radio reports of the massacre and subsequent report to his section leader and commander resulted in an order for the cease fire at My Lai and an end to the killing of innocent civilians. Warrant Officer Thompson's heroism exemplifies the highest standards of personal courage and ethical conduct, reflecting distinct credit on him and the United States Army.



*Maj. Gen. Michael W. Ackerman congratulates Lawrence Colburn after pinning the Soldier's Medal on him and former warrant officer aviator Hugh C. Thompson (center). Photo by U.S. Army Public Affairs (ArmyLINK Photos).*



*Larry Colburn, left, and Hugh Thompson reunite March 5, 1998, the night before they were awarded the Soldier's Medals for heroic actions that saved civilians from being killed by American soldiers in My Lai, Vietnam, in 1968. Photo © 1998 by The Army Times.*

Continued from p. 12.

The on-duty medic that day, SGT Kim Stewart, talked to Ranger Winslow to ascertain the patient's condition. CPT John McNalley (PIC) was getting his weather brief to ensure they could accept the mission. SGT Stewart advised CPT McNalley that the patient, a 34-year-old male with possible spinal cord injuries, was located at the 11,500-foot level. 1LT Massimo Federico then talked to Ranger Winslow for further details of the mission. He was told about the ice fall and a number of tents located in an area near the patient. CPT McNalley then made the decision to go forward with the mission. The crew chief, SSG Carl Olson, was out at his aircraft preparing his aircraft for the mission.

The crew launched for the mission at 0715 hours and was over the suspected site at 0800 hours. CPT McNalley evaluated the area for a suitable landing site near the location of their patient. Because of the dangers associated with the ice fall and tents, and because CPT McNalley knew he had two members of Seattle Mountain Rescue who were trained for hoist rescues, he opted to hover and lower SGT Stewart with his high-speed rescue hoist. After SGT Stewart was on the ground, he estimated 20 minutes to package the patient for the hoist into the aircraft.

CPT McNalley decided to land because he was down to 1,000 pounds of fuel (about one hour's worth). They found a suitable landing site in an unused parking lot. After landing they shut down the engines and left the APU running. About ten minutes later the medic notified his crew he was ready for pickup. Arriving over the site again, they hoisted the patient in the stokes litter, retrieved the medic and continued to Harborview Hospital. They went on to King County Airport (Boeing Field) to refuel and landed, with both fuel indicator lights flashing low. The climber recovered with no damage to his spinal cord and only fractures on the spinous process, a part of the vertebrae.

If the Park Service Climbing Rangers had not had a hoist-capable helicopter, they would have had a 7- to 10-hour climb to reach the patient and at least another day to get him down the mountain. The U.S. military has the only helicopters in the northwest that are hoist-capable. In the past the Park Service has used the CH-47 Chinook from Ft. Lewis for all rescues on the mountain above 7,000 feet. But with the arrival of the Blackhawk, they have been able to utilize the 54th in the role they have trained for—Medical Evacuation. This mission is believed to have been accomplished at the highest recorded altitude for a single-rotor system helicopter.

## The DUSTOFF Store

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