



# THE DUSTOFFER NEWSLETTER



DUSTOFF ASSOCIATION

JULY 1991



Doctor Dustoff - An original creation drawn by SGT (Ret) Billy Hughes in 1965 and re-created for the DUSTOFF Association in 1991.

P.O. BOX 8091 • WAINWRIGHT STATION • SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS 78208



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Perhaps appropriately, the victorious 100 hour ground battle phase of Operation Desert Storm began during the 1991 DUSTOFF Association Reunion. Although attendance was down a bit from previous years...not at all surprising considering that a significant percentage of our membership was deployed to Southwest Asia...the enthusiasm was rampant and a memorable weekend passed noisily into history. Pat Brady was the featured speaker on Saturday evening and performed with his usual excellence. A crew from the 377th Medical Company in Korea, represented by CW3 P.J. Young, accepted the 1990 Lucas Aerospace Air/Sea Rescue Award. Ms. Mary Teater, mother of Wayne 'Tiny' Simmons, the first enlisted DUSTOFF crewmember killed in Vietnam, brightened the festivities with her grace and warmth. Several long-lost 'Original' DUSTOFFers, Billy and Elaine Hughes, Charles and Joanne Allen, and Tom Thomas, returned to the fold after some 25 years. Everyone parted looking forward to the 1992 Reunion which will feature, among other gala events, the return of the Desert Storm DUSTOFF

crewmembers. Plan NOW to attend. Tentatively we're looking at 28 February-1 March 1992, the weekend following the Army Medical Evacuation Conference (AMEC), for the 13th Annual Reunion.

We plan to publish one other newsletter this year. Hopefully we'll get it to you just after Christmas to allow you plenty of time to make your plans and reservations for the 1992 Reunion. Some very positive comments have been received on the Newsletter format, so we'll try not to change what's been going well.

We have continuing challenges with keeping up with changing addresses for members. We'll take telephone calls, scribbled notes...just let us know where you are...or DON'T bitch when you don't get your newsletter!

Keep looking for new members...old guys not yet in the fold and new crew members and friends of DUSTOFF. It all counts toward making the Association bigger, more viable, and strong well into the future.

A bit of a challenge trying to figure out where some of the Association's 'stuff' ought to go. We have a number of plaques, etchings, and other memorabilia

that have been given to us, but there's no real office or other location where these items can be displayed. Subject to better ideas, I'm using the Academy of Health Sciences as the current display site. Where the items may be of some historic value, such as our memorial boards, we'll use the Army Medical Department (AMEDD) Museum.

We have received approval for dedication of the helipad to be located at the new Brooke General Hospital in honour of CW4 Tony Westbrook, one of the finest of the fine corps of Aviation Warrant Officers that have advanced aeromedical aviation over the years. We'll arrange a dedication ceremony when construction reaches an appropriate point on the hospital complex. Some of you at the past reunion may have seen the projected text of the plaque to be placed at the site which reads: 'DUSTOFF Helipad - In memory of Chief Warrant Officer Anthony Westbrook - A soldier and consummate aviator who dedicated his life to saving others and who lost his life on a training mission in October 1989 - Dedicated by the DUSTOFF Association'.

## A TRIBUTE TO DUSTOFF PILOTS AND CREWS

I know you won't get this in time for your reunion, but I would like to submit it for your newsletter. This is how a non-Vietnam veteran expresses his feelings about your service to this country.

Their eyes told a story  
That their lips could not speak  
Of the terrible Cost  
That war could wreak

A thousand hot LZs  
They've seen it all  
How precious life is  
When brothers fall

Night or day  
Anytime, anywhere  
When they are called  
They'll be there

Brave pilots and crews  
Have been lost, too  
Never to be forgotten  
By me and by you.

Quenton C. Burge, Jr.  
Little Rock, Arkansas

### DUSTOFF ASSOCIATION

**FOUNDER: TOM 'EGOR' JOHNSON**

**DUSTOFF OFFICERS**

**AND**

#### **EXECUTIVE BOARD**

PRESIDENT	JIM TRUSCOTT
VICE-PRESIDENT	ROGER OPIO
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#### **MEMBERS AT LARGE:**

JERRY FOUST  
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JOHN SAPANOS  
ROY LEATHERBERRY  
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ART HAPNER



## CLOSING OUT THE FLIGHT PLAN

The dramatic and overwhelming victory of the coalition forces in the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations (KTO) was not without its human cost. Among those courageous soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines who paid the ultimate price for freedom in our time were 12 DUSTOFF crewmembers. Although the redeployment is not yet complete, hopefully this listing reflects the final toll. Those lost in Operations Desert Shield/ Storm were:

### 14 December 1990

- 1LT Peter Rose
- CW2 Carol McKinney
- SGT Dallas Cooper
- 1267th Medical Company (Air Ambulance), Missouri Army National Guard

### 19 January 1991

- SSG Garland Hailey
- 236th Medical Company (Air Ambulance), 421st Medical Battalion (Evacuation), Landstuhl, Germany

### 7 February 1991

- CW3 Richard Lee
- 229th Medical Detachment (Helicopter Ambulance), Fort Drum, New York

### 27 February 1991

- 1LT Daniel Graybeal
- WO1 Kerry Heine
- SSG Michael Robson
- 507th Medical Company (Air Ambulance), Fort Sam Houston, Texas

### 12 March 1991

- 1LT Joseph Maks

- CW2 Patrick Donaldson
- SGT Michael Smith
- SPC Kelly Phillips
- 36th Medical Detachment (Helicopter Ambulance), Fort Polk, Louisiana

We were also sad to learn of the 20 March 1991 death of CW3 (Ret) Bill Grauling from cancer. Bill served with the 498th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) in Vietnam in 1967 and was '... extremely proud to have served with such a valourous group of men as his DUSTOFF comrades-in-arms.'

A fatal helicopter crash in Honduras claimed the lives of three DUSTOFF crewmembers on 13 May. All members of the 126th Medical Company (Air Ambulance), California Army National Guard, the victims were:

- Captain Sashai Dawn
- 1LT Vicki Boyd
- SSG Linda Simonds

## CHUCK MATEER ANNUAL MEMORIAL GOLF CLASSIC

### HELP!

We're trying to fill in the blanks on the plaque which commemorates the golfing exploits, if not the virtues, of past winners of the annual DUSTOFF golf tournament. Uncharacteristically, many of the past winners' identities have been lost in the mists of time. We'd like to bring the plaque up to date and need your help in filling in the blanks. At this time, we don't know the winning teams for 1984, 1985, 1987, or 1989, nor can we come up with Dennis Bradshaw's and Al Flory's team mates for 1988. At the risk of sponsoring spurious claims for sporting immortality, please call or write if you know any of the winners for these tournaments.

## 1990 LUCAS AEROSPACE AIR/SEA RESCUE AWARD

The selection committee for this year's award consisted of three eminent DUSTOFF Aviators: **Colonels John Lowe, Doug Moore, and Walt Berry**, who judged the nominated crews based on the nature of the life-saving missions, crew risk, and the hazards involved in the flight. The 377th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) earned the award with the crew consisting of CW3 P.J. Young, pilot; CW2 Gary Bottger, co-pilot; SPC Raul Espejo, crew chief; and PFC Sheila Sikes, flight medic. Responding to a 3 am request to rescue two soldiers whose vehicle had been swept into the rain-swollen Namhan River near Anmal, Korea, the crew was required to launch with the aid of night vision goggles in the hoist-equipped UH60 Blackhawk aircraft. CW2 Bottger navigated the course while CW3 Young performed the piloting duties through the rugged mountain passes to the location of the two soldiers who were clinging to the roof of their submerged vehicle. CW3 Young carefully and expertly positioned the aircraft over the rescue site with navigation and hover instructions from CW2 Bottger and SPC Espejo. PFC Sikes, assisted by SPC Espejo in controlling the high performance hoist, was lowered to the roof of the vehicle where the victims struggled to stay afloat. Apprehensive, the first victim initially refused to leave the vehicle but, with reassurance from PFC Sikes, was persuaded to be hoisted with her into the hovering Blackhawk. After assisting SPC Espejo in securing the patient in the aircraft, PFC Sikes was lowered to the second soldier on the jungle penetrator. Both were quickly hoisted into the aircraft. PFC Sikes treated both men for hypothermia, later releasing them to a supporting medical facility.





## OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FRONT LINES

Exercising some editorial prerogative, the following lines are excerpts from 3 letters written by Captain Randy Anderson, 498th Medical Company (Air Ambulance), while engaged in aeromedical support operations in Operation Desert Shield/Storm:

### 4 January 1991

Seasons Greetings from Saudi Arabia! Happy to hear that everything is going well in San Antonio. I wish I was there for the season - I fondly remember last year's Riverwalk ceremonies.

Life in the desert is great! My crew and another UH60 crew are attached to the 5th MASH. This is an ideal situation and allows us perfect access to the large assortment of nurses.

This place is just like the television show M\*A\*S\*H. A loud speaker announces messages every couple of minutes...we bribed the operator and played a tape with "Songs of the Humpback Whales"...lots of calls lit up the switchboard.

Flying is unique with camels, wild sheep, and nomad camps everywhere. Landings are almost always a 'brown-out'. Our blades took a serious beating until we taped them up. The sand melts in the engines, spitting out a glass-like residue. Flying with night vision goggles is different, especially due to lack of contrast. It is hard to judge depth and we rely on our radar altimeter to keep us out of sand dunes. Everyone is ready for the war, but most are scared about air defense artillery, both enemy and friendly. One bored soldier blew away a camel with a LAW (Light Anti-Tank Weapon).

A Marine stopped to have his picture taken with a camel...the camel spit on him and he retaliated by trying to hit the camel with his rifle. The camel dodged and bit the Marine on the head...a messy, smelly wound...should be a moral somewhere in that story. Flew a goggle mission on New Year's Eve for a soldier

who'd celebrated by drinking half a cup of diesel fuel.

### 30 January 1991

I'm now a member of the 57th Medical Detachment (Original Dustoff) - attached until after the war. I like the history behind the unit and hope to keep the tradition of DUSTOFF alive and proud. As the air war has been joined, we're attached to the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR), about 15 miles south of the Iraqi border. We've had crews on missions in Iraq.

I think we all hoped and prayed that this conflict would not result in bloodshed, but it seems the only way to peace. I support the President's decision and hope that it is over quickly. This is what we have trained for, get paid for, and I feel that we are ready.

### 11 March 1991

Greetings from Iraq! The war went really well and casualties were very low. We found that most of our missions were wounded enemy prisoners of war or civilian Bedouins caught in a fire fight. Since the end of the war, we've carried many US wounded, mostly generated by GIs playing with unexploded ammunition bomblets and from stepping on landmines. It is sad that so many soldiers are getting hurt after the fighting. As for the war...there were 30 hour periods without sleep. On one mission we received Iraqi artillery fire while picking up 5 casualties. The 3d ACR regimental surgeon recommended our crew for award of the Bronze Star...who knows if we will get it?

I've had the same combat crew and aircraft for the entire war. The right front seat is my home and my office where I write my daily journal. The only problem with my office is that the cyclic gets in the way. We sleep on cots beside the aircraft...keeps us mobile and ready to move to a new location at a moment's notice. I truly know the meaning of living 'light'...one flight suit can be preserved to last many days without washing. We hang an Australian shower from the rotor blades every fourth day. This has been a real camping trip - one I'll never forget.

## DIFFERENT KIND OF CORRESPONDENCE

Received a kind of poignant note from a former DUSTOFF pilot. I was prepared to omit his name and wartime organization so as to avoid any possible embarrassment. He's since informed me that he not only has no such sensitivities, but has learned to take full credit for his actions and their consequences. His letter is a bit of reality therapy any way you look at it. When most of us feel we're going through difficulties, we don't envision the kind of situation in which retired CW2 John B. Konek, former DUSTOFF pilot with the 1st Cavalry Division, has found himself.

'I want to thank you for the DUSTOFF directory and to enclose the DUSTOFF application. Please be advised that, at this time, I am an indigent and incarcerated inmate of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice..I have been at this facility for the past 11 years. Should your Association accept my application, I give you my word that I will try to get off the yearly dues to you. I have at this time sent a letter to my mother and asked that she take care of the dues. *continued on page 10*



DUSTOFF was not far behind...Igor Sikorsky, Orville Wright, and COL Frank Gregory. The US Army takes delivery of the XR-4 helicopter. (Photo courtesy of Joe Kralich)



# STORM CLOUDS IMMINENT

**1** 8 February 1991 Letter from Ben Knisely, Deputy Command Surgeon, US Central Command -

'As I glance at the calendar, I realize that, in a very few days, you will be hosting this year's annual DUSTOFF gathering. I thought I would take a few moments to update the letter I wrote you a few months ago and, if I can get this to you in time, you may wish to share some of this with the membership.

Operation DESERT STORM has now surpassed by almost two times the number of DUSTOFF aircraft and crews that we had in Vietnam. My last count was 213 aircraft and I believe there is another company yet to arrive. As you know, the Army structure is two Combat Corps on line with a very lean Theater Army Support Force. The Marines represent yet a third US Corps sized organization and the coalition Islamic Forces yet another. Friendly forces number 525,000 and are arrayed in a battle area about the size of Southern Texas.

The largest medical support package since WWII is in support of the force. We have 63 major hospitals with over 41,000 medical personnel on the ground and at sea.

Over 700 ground ambulances and buses are distributed throughout the system. Five major airheads have been assigned to handle patient evacuations by C130s (intratheater) and C141s to Europe. Over 200 tactical (C130) medical evacuation crews and 100 strategic (C141) evacuation crews are on the ground ready to go. Each Corps has about 90 DUSTOFF aircraft in direct support and the remainder are allocated to echelons above Corps medical groups. The 45th Air Ambulance Company is in direct support of both hospital ships. The DUSTOFF units have been methodically preparing themselves for the ground phase of the operation. Everyone would like a few more days to 'fine tune' the preparation and plans, but they are ready and we all can be very proud of their valiant efforts. Unfortunately, we have experienced two accidents already, killing one crewmember in each occurrence.

I have the privilege to spend several hours a day with General Schwarzkopf in the 'War Room' (a small command bunker from which he commands the war). My association with him during these stressful moments has only served to reinforce my belief that he is a fine commander. He is always asking, "What can be done to preclude casualties and reduce the risk?"

A few days ago during a quiet afternoon, General Schwarzkopf asked me, "What



Desert Storm UH60 equipped for long range self-deployment from Germany to Saudi Arabia.

(Photo courtesy of CW3 G. Fullam)

were the differences between flying DUSTOFF in Vietnam and DESERT STORM?". I gave him a litany of some things that seemed obvious (terrain, longer distances, dust storms, difficulty in navigation) and then, with the wisdom of an old ground soldier, he noted that there was one similarity that hadn't changed a bit. He reminded me of what the Red Cross helicopter meant in the minds of the combat soldiers. It's an ever-present symbol of confidence that, should he fall, DUSTOFF would give him that chance that his adversary didn't have. His final word on the subject was, "It's the best morale multiplier a division commander has got!". With a lump in my throat, I couldn't add any more to the conversation. Noting my emotion, the CINC patted me on the back and said, "I'm glad they're here," and went back to his desk. Thought this story was worth sharing: I think it is the essence of what we are about.

I am aware that, as you folks gather in San Antonio at almost that exact moment in time (barring any diplomatic changes), we will be launching the most intense armored land battle of our lifetime. The amount of ordnance that will be expended by ground and air forces during the first 96 hours of that effort will be unmatched in history. Although we know we will take casualties, you can be assured that from day one of the operation, extensive planning and

meticulous targeting have been designed with only one thing in mind—minimize the ground phase threat. We have achieved that goal. The air defense threat to forward helicopter operations has been significantly reduced and, with the proper flight techniques and careful planning, DUSTOFF will have no problems.

In closing, please allow me a brief comment about the Association. We are, as most of us know, much more than just an annual social club—we are a fraternity and family, committed individually and collectively to the preservation of a legend that is a unique part of medical military history.

The next watch for this Association is standing in the sand

today doing precisely what most of our original members did two decades ago. Their dedication is the same, their sacrifice will be no less, and their stories will be just as wild.

There are, today, over 2000 young men and women wearing a DUSTOFF patch in Operation DESERT STORM. They are our family and we, as an Association, must not be remiss in extending our hands to them—recognizing their contributions to our legend and seeking their membership in our Association. They are the future and perpetuation to something we all hold very dear.

On behalf of all of us here—to all of you there, we extend our personal thanks for the tremendous support. We would like to be with you, but will gladly accept a rain check. Place a few yellow ribbons around that hotel for us. See you in '92 (plan a big one). God Bless Desert DUSTOFF!



## A BEST WISHES FROM KUWAIT CITY INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Excerpt from a letter from SGT Stuart Molver, a flight medic with the 343d Medical Detachment (Helicopter Ambulance), out of Hamilton Army Air field, California, written on the stationery of the Directorate of Civil Aviation, Meteorological Department, Kuwait City, Kuwait. SGT Molver forwarded Lifetime Membership dues with his letter.

'As a child, I used to watch the 237th Med Det (Fort Ord) fly over my house to and from Letterman Army Medical Center in San Francisco. I once went, with my brother Brian, to the old hangars and visited with the helicopter mechanics working on the air ambulances. Later I went to Fort Bliss after graduating from the medical aidman course at Fort Sam Houston. CWO John Fleenor, a pilot with the 507th, gave me a tour of the UH-1V and its equipment. I worked as a Patriot Battalion medic during the day and hung out with the 507th as a 'piggy-back medic' during my off-duty hours. If there was room, I would fly with the flight medic to gain experience. MAJ Mansfield, the CO of the 507th, accepted me into his unit but I couldn't get released from my assignment.

I left active service in 1985 and joined the Reserves in California. Couldn't find a medical evacuation unit, so I joined a Combat Support Hospital. I found out about the 343d Med Det (Hel Amb) and called, visited, and sent letters until, two years later, the unit had a slot for a flight medic.

We were activated in November 1990 and sent to Saudi Arabia in support of Operation Desert Shield. Little did we know we would run into the same type of missions we had at annual training, only this time there was a real war going on with real patients. We're flying many missions in service of all forces over here, primarily Saudi, British, French,

and US forces. We've flown many Iraqi EPWs who were critically wounded, many of whom were malnourished. Fortunately the coalition forces had a very low number of casualties. I know we helped in making the difference. I know that some DUSTOFF personnel perished while on lifesaving missions. Flying over the wreckage of a DUSTOFF bird is very saddening and sorrowful. It could have happened to you and your crew. They are in God's care now and my prayers are with them. Time to go back to duty and get ready for another 'Swoop and Scoop' on another Desert DUSTOFF mission. I'm proud to be a member in good standing with the DUSTOFF Association.'

## RECOMMENDATION FOR CHANGE OF CONSTITUTION

With the indulgence of the membership, we're recommending a change to the DUSTOFF Association Bylaws, to read as follows (underlined portion indicates change):

3. The Secretary, Treasurer, and Members at Large are elected for a two year term. One Member at large shall come from the retired military community.

The thrust of the change involves the increasing membership and the resultant increase in correspondence and financial transactions. We recognized the need for continuity at the President-Vice President level some time back, extending the collective tour for those positions. The demands are no less critical in the Secretary and Treasurer positions. With no permanent operating positions in the Association, there's little other means of maintaining a reasonable level of efficiency when all or most of the officers have other pressing duties much of the time.

We'll vote on the proposition at the next meeting of the general membership, allying with that vote the provision that we begin with the current Secretary and Treasurer.

## 1990-1991 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Promised to include the statement in this newsletter as we hadn't all the data together at the last business meeting. Below is that statement. Our performance appears to be about right for a non-profit organization that is required to avoid annual gross receipts above the \$25,000 level. We are, by the way, doing several things to cut or avoid some costs we've encountered in the past, specifically in the areas of composition and timing of the newsletter, storage location and costs, and maintenance of separate accounts for the Association funds. We'll also save the annual stipend we've traditionally voted for the DUSTOFF Europe Meeting which was cancelled this past year. Although we've not heard from Ray Keith, the assumption is that he's safeguarding the \$1000 from the Association for this year's meeting.

### ACCOUNTING PERIOD:

19 February 1990 - 23 February 1991

Beginning Balance: .....\$27,765.69

#### Money Market

Account .....\$25,118.48  
Checking Account .....\$2622.21  
Savings Account .....\$25.00  
Receipts: .....\$17,317.96

Dues .....\$7310.00  
Reunion 1991 .....\$6848.00  
Corporate Donations .....\$1200  
Interest .....\$928.22  
Golf Tournament .....\$334.00  
Other .....\$697.74

Expenditures: .....\$26,703.74

Reunion 1990 .....\$11,872.98  
Newsletters .....\$8420.17  
Postage .....\$832.84  
Computer Equipment .....\$899.19  
Storage .....\$540.00  
DUSTOFF Europe .....\$1000.00  
Awards .....\$151.50

*continued on page 12*



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# 'WHEN I HAVE YOUR WOUNDED'

**M**ajor General Pat Brady, then a Brigadier General and Chief of Army Public Affairs, put pen eloquently to paper in 1989 and wrote an article that pretty much gives a definition to all of this DUSTOFF business and the man who introduced DUSTOFF to the military—Major Charles Kelly. It coincidentally provides a powerful insight into General Brady and his perspective on the kinds of things that are important in our business. Many of the active duty soldiers will remember the article, but perhaps many of the retired members hadn't the chance to read Army Magazine's June 1989 issue. With General Brady's permission, the article is reproduced in its entirety.

'Today, after 25 years, I still remember in detail the first time I saw him. I have often wondered why. It is the same with my wife, but with few others. I certainly never knew at the first meeting the impact either would have on my life—but the man has been with me these many years, in my decisions and in many of my efforts to sort out what I wanted to be. I'd like to share with you a part of his life I shared, and some of the things I learned from him about leadership.

I had arrived in Vietnam the day before. Never had I experienced such heat. It was as if someone had covered me with a hot, steamy wool blanket. There was no sleeping that night because of the heat, the excitement, and the persistent chirping in my room. I thought it must be some wayward birds. When the sun came up, I found my walls covered with lizards. Singing lizards? Indeed, it was a reptile rhapsody that had serenaded me that first night.

I was joining the 57th Medical Detachment (Helicopter Ambulance), which had arrived in Vietnam in April of 1962. Since then, they had struggled for operational definition, recognition, and

permanence. There were those who coveted their brand-new helicopters and many who felt that the medevac (medical evacuation) mission should be a part time mission. Their primary mission was American casualties and, since there were few of them at this time, these folks believed that the medevac birds should be fitted with convertible red crosses and used for other missions when there were no casualties to carry. The unit was holding its own and had become known as DUSTOFF. This radio call sign had no particular significance. It had been picked from a list of call signs and kept to avoid confusion. When someone called for DUSTOFF, everyone knew it was for a casualty. Major Charles L. Kelly was the commander.

Early the next morning, I reported to Tan Son Nhut airfield where I saw my first DUSTOFF clearing the end of the runway. They told me it was Major Kelly going on a mission. We were at lunch when he joined us.

Charles Kelly was a small man—very proud, perhaps a bit vain but still rather shy. He combed his hair toward his eyebrows to camouflage a receding hairline. His belt seemed too tight and, although it never affected his breathing, he seemed always to be holding his belly in and puffing out his chest. His walk was structured but rather graceful. His face was quite Irish, freckled, and round, dominated by large eyes that seemed to change size according to his mood. Those eyes moved more quickly than the rest of him and could be rather disquieting once they rested on you. Only rarely did I ever see them twinkle and I never heard him laugh. He spoke with a soft Georgia drawl and never raised his voice, regardless of the mood or the danger of the moment. You only needed to look in his eyes to know his mood. He was deeply religious and I believe he read the Bible daily.

I had heard a lot about him. Vietnam was his third war. Between wars, he was a high school principal. I was told that he was the only man to wear the Combat Infantryman Badge, Combat Medical Badge, as well as jump and aviator wings. He had been an enlisted man and rose through the ranks to Major. Legend had it that he had been court-martialed earlier in his career and would never make Lieutenant Colonel.

The first words I heard him say were: 'We never covered ourselves with glory today.' He had just returned from an operation along the coast south of Saigon. An H-21, the old banana-shaped helicopter, had gone down in the South China Sea. Kelly and his crew heard the distress call and almost beat them to the water. Miraculously, the entire crew had gotten out before their bird sank. They were in the water clear of the '21 when Kelly came over them.

Kelly started to put his skids in the ocean but his copilot, who was the commander of the mission since Kelly had only been in country one week, would not allow it. He was concerned about the waves. Kelly was forced to hover over the downed crew and watch them drown one by one as his crew, using a litter, failed to pull all but one aboard. The combination of the downwash from Kelly's rotor blades, rough seas, and the weight of their clothing—especially their boots—prevented Kelly's crew from pulling them on board. We heard later that some washed ashore with one boot on and one off.

There was deep anguish in Kelly's face as he told the story. I don't think he ever forgave his copilot for not letting him put his skids in the water. As risky as they might have been, it was the only way those men could have been saved. That would be the last time Kelly left undone anything that had any chance of saving a life, no matter how dangerous.

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## WOUNDED *cont.*

When Kelly focused on me, he told me not to unpack. I learned later he was sending me north where we had two birds, one in the central highlands at Pleiku and the other one on the coast in Qui Nhon. The three in Saigon rounded out the five DUSTOFFs that covered Vietnam in those days. That was all he said to me: no welcome and no pep talk—simply, ‘Don’t unpack.’

The first meeting was not pleasant, but I don’t believe I was ever around that man without learning something. We had no hoists at that time; but I never flew without a rope; and I put zippers in my boots as soon as I could find some. Often, I learned, it was some small overlooked detail that made the difference between surviving and dying.

Kelly was a teacher, a quality rare in many commanders I have known. He seemed unconcerned about previous flying experience. Although there were many experienced medical pilots (in terms of service and flying hours) in the Army, most of the pilots in Kelly’s unit were not experienced. He made no effort to get anyone specifically assigned to his unit but took what the pipeline brought. He was as interested in what he could do for his men, and what he could teach them, as he was in what they could do for him. Mostly, he was interested in what they could do together for the mission.

From him, I learned that experience was not always related to time and repetition. It is not what has happened to us that makes us experienced, but rather what we do with what has happened to us—or better yet, what we do with what has happened to others. I worked two tours with ‘inexperienced’ pilots and they were marvelous. Alertness is part of all

that. It is vital in experience and should be vital in training. Some soldiers just are more alert; and time, repetition or duration is not the key. Caring is the key. The inner quality that makes soldiers alert, that makes them experienced, is caring. I’ve never met a soldier who cared more than Kelly, not just about people, but about what was right and about doing what you did right.

There was little action up north and I

come back to Saigon. I never missed an opportunity to rag him about his earlier promise to let me command Detachment A. Hewould just look at me, occasionally with his twinkle (mostly without), and ignore me.

An early encounter I had with Kelly was the result of a mission we flew near Phan Thiet, just north of Saigon. The Vietnamese friendlies were surrounded and had taken quite a few casualties. We

had been carrying patients out of the area all day. During a refueling stop, a US advisor asked if we would carry some ordnance in on our next trip. The only other bird in the area was a fixed-wing spotter plane. My copilot, who had been in country longer than I had, called me to one side and we discussed the propriety of the request. He noted the Geneva Convention prohibitions on such use of medical resources and the medical community’s concerns in this



The search, rescue, and aeromedical evacuation mission begins to take shape.

YR-4 helicopter landing on the USS Parker.

(Photo courtesy of Joe Kralich)

was grateful when the decision was made to move those aircraft to Soc Trang in the Mekong River Delta where most of the fighting was. The two aircraft and their crews would become Detachment A of the 57th and, much to my delight, Kelly told me I could command it. He would go down first and set things up. I would follow shortly after.

Soon after I got back to Saigon, I went on a mission with the unit supply officer. We were one short final into a ‘secure’ area when there was a splatter of blood across the cockpit and he announced, rather quietly I thought, that he had been shot. Kelly wasted no time notifying me that, since I had gotten his supply officer shot, I was now the new supply officer—a job I hated. The truth was that Kelly was flying in the Delta and didn’t want to

regard. If the word got out, we might get into trouble. I wasn’t all that clear on the Geneva Convention, but we both agreed that what was clear was that, if our friendlies didn’t get some ammunition, we would end up carrying all of them to the morgue. We took the ammo in.

About that time, the spotter plane was shot down. When we got to the crash location, we found both US flyers dead. We were forced out of the area by enemy fire but decided to wait for the friendlies to secure the crash site so we could take the bodies back that night. Carrying the dead was also not an approved medical mission and frequent cause of discord between the medical and operational folks. On the way back, much to my discomfort, I got word that Kelly wanted to see me.



We got into the airfield after midnight and Kelly and many of the 57th were waiting. Kelly did not look pleased. He took me to one side and, in measured tones, quieter than usual, asked me what in the Hell I was thinking of—carrying that ammo. I told him that I was practicing preventive medicine. He kind of blinked, almost smiled, but said no more.

I followed him back to the group where he announced that he was proud of our work that day. He said it was the kind of thing he wanted to see DUSTOFF do and he was recommending our crew for medals (we had carried quite a few casualties and had taken several rounds). No one mentioned the Geneva Convention after that, nor did I ever hesitate to carry the dead as long as it did not interfere with service to the living. You'll find disagreement on both missions. To this day, I'm not sure what the book says about a situation like that—nor do I care. As a young officer I had taken a risk, right or wrong, and my boss, even though he would have been the one to answer for my actions, stood by me. It's easy to find a boss to stand by you when the buck stops at him, not so easy when it stops at his boss.

Kelly's great adversary and boss was Brig. Gen. Joe (Joseph W.) Stilwell. He was Vinegar Joe's (Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell of World War II China-Burma fame) boy and we called him Cider Joe. This guy was a genuine character. He was not an aviator, but he flew; and when he wasn't flying, he rode as a door gunner. The man was combat hungry and tough as Hell. I was told he once survived a jump after his parachute malfunctioned. The last I heard about him was that his plane ditched at sea and he was never found. Some folks waited a long time for him to walk up off the ocean floor.

His meetings with Kelly were always colorful, occasionally comical and even violent. Kelly was not intimidated by anything, let alone rank. Stilwell

resurrected the issue of convertible red crosses and the cannibalization of DUSTOFF. He told Kelly that it was only a matter of time until he gained control of DUSTOFF and noted that the Surgeon General was a personal friend of his. Kelly allowed that the Surgeon General might be his friend, but he wasn't a damn fool.

Kelly called us together after his first meeting with Stilwell and warned that



1990 Christmas Card from the 24th Infantry Division and the 498th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) in their battle positions on the Saudi Arabian-Kuwait Border

those folks in headquarters did not wish us well. If DUSTOFF is to survive, he said, we had better prove that no one else could do what we did as well as we did. Performance was the key to our survival and, although he never set any rules for us, he certainly set the example.

The key was patients—saving lives no matter what the circumstances; get them out—during the battle, at night, in weather, whatever. Get those patients, the more the better. We increased, even advertised, our service to the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam). We even carried the enemy wounded. We never discriminated against a hurt human being, no matter his cause.

Kelly set up a kind of circuit. He would head out at dusk and cover the outposts of the Delta, checking for patients and putting out the word that DUSTOFF was available anytime it was needed. Although he had many close calls, it was because of the night flying that many began to call him Madman Kelly.

Night missions, single ship, with one engine, were viewed with alarm by many and flown only in the most extreme emergencies. Most believed that, if you lost that engine at night, you certainly were dead. Even if you lived through the autorotation, they warned, 'Charlie' would get you before sunup. Kelly flew missions nightly, on a routine basis.

The key to lifesaving was time—the time from injury to medical care, not necessarily to a hospital. DUSTOFF had highly competent medical care on board. The helicopter destroyed the time obstacles of terrain, but it made no sense to waste lifesaving time waiting for the sun to come up.

DUSTOFF was a pioneer in night flying. Indeed, many of us felt it was the safest time to fly and we all became good at it. I was never in a DUSTOFF unit that lost an aircraft because of darkness—because of the enemy on rare occasions, but never because of night. Repetition, not avoidance, is vital in dangerous

training. You don't get good at something you have to do by avoiding it. Night hours were training multipliers—they made you better at all types of flying.

Even day missions were primitive and challenging in those days. Our communication with the ARVN seldom worked and it was rarely accurate even when it was working. You never knew what was waiting when you found the site (which in itself could be a challenge) and seldom had anyone to talk to when you got there. It was not rare for DUSTOFF to land in the middle of the Viet Cong. We learned fast and quickly developed many flying techniques to promote survival. Before long, we were very



## WOUNDED *cont.*

difficult to kill. Although we took a lot of hits, nothing stopped us from eventually bringing home the patient.

Kelly was burning up the Delta and also becoming very famous down there. Jim Lucas, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, began to write about him. Only later would those of us in Saigon learn of his fame, but we were working hard to keep up with him. His methods were occasionally unorthodox but always effective as far as the patients were concerned. On one pickup, his crew got out and fought with the ground forces until they could get the patients aboard. Another time, he took some hits in the fuel cell and was leaking JP4 on the way back to Soc Trang. The tower called and said they would meet him on the runway with a fire truck and ambulance. They asked if he needed anything else. He said yes, that he'd be obliged if they'd bring some ice cream. He made it to the approach end of the runway and the base commander met him with a quart of ice cream.

Even though Kelly did not come home without the patient, he never criticized a pilot who did—he would simply go and get the patient himself. Nor did he ever criticize a crew member who wanted out of DUSTOFF. Some did not agree with his methods and wanted out. They went with his best wishes. There were also a lot of adventurous young men lined up to fly with DUSTOFF.

I don't want you to get the idea he was perfect. Kelly had his ways. He didn't like our unit patch and wanted us to develop a new one. He said he was open to ideas but thought there should be some way to get an angel in it. That raised some eyebrows. He had a picture of an angel by his bed. It may have been a daughter dressed for a play, but Kelly had this thing for angels.

I found a gunship pilot who was a great patch designer. I asked him to paint a design using a kangaroo in a flight suit carrying a patient in its pouch. It was beautiful. I put it in his chair so he would see it when he came to Saigon. He walked into his office, never even tried to sit down, completely ignored the painting and left without comment. Next

time I saw him, he asked how I was doing with the angel.

Toward the end of June 1964, the command was changing hands. Stilwell was leaving as Commander, US Army Support Command, Vietnam, and Kelly came to town for the farewell dinner. I was having lunch that day with Kelly when we got word that a ship had gone down up north and a pilot was killed. I asked for his name. Kelly wondered why I wanted to know that. I told him that I had some flight school friends up there, including a close friend who was my stick buddy in Flight School. He remarked that it is better not to ask for names in this business. I worried about the coldness of his remark but figured that three wars might do that to you.

That evening, he and I and a recently arrived chaplain were sitting together listening to the Stilwell farewells. I had never seen Kelly so animated. He was by nature a quiet, private man, but this night he was cheerful. He read between the lines of the speeches and his remarks were colorful and his language rather earthy. The chaplain winced on more than one occasion.

At their last meeting, Kelly presented Stilwell with a plaque decorated with five red crosses and the tail numbers of our aircraft. He told Stilwell, "General, you wanted my aircraft so bad, here they are." I have a picture of that encounter and Stilwell is smiling. I don't think the DUSTOFF issue was completely settled by then, but Kelly had his antagonist at bay. For all their differences, I always felt there was something rather special between Kelly and Stilwell.

I took Kelly back to Soc Trang after Stilwell's farewell and once again bugged him on his promise to let me have Detachment A. I was shocked when he said I could take over on 1 July. I think he was concerned about the fight for DUSTOFF and had finally decided he should be in Saigon for that battle.

I can still remember the cold chill I felt in my belly when we got word that Kelly was down. We all raced for our birds and headed for the Delta. On the way down we monitored the operation. A slick (troop-carrying helicopter) went in and got the DUSTOFF crew, and we heard they were safe at Long Binh. We

all breathed a sigh of relief and I remember sighing to myself as I thought about Kelly's reaction to being picked up by a slick.

I saw a lone DUSTOFF on the ramp at Long Binh and parked behind it. One of our pilots was sitting in the door. I was in a cheerful mood until I noticed he was crying. Then I saw the body bag behind him. Before I could say anything, he nodded at the bag and said it was Kelly. All the air went out of my body and I sank down beside him. He had come through so many tight spots, so close so many times, that it never occurred to me they could kill him. The reality just shook me.

He had gone into a supposedly secure area for some urgent wounded—one of them a US soldier. Once on the ground, they began drawing fire. It was not unusual in those days to take fire out of the friendly lines. The ground forces screamed at Kelly to get out. He replied in his quiet Georgia drawl, "When I have your wounded." His next words were "My God," and he curled up from a single bullet right through the heart. The ship curled with him and the rotors beat it to pieces. The crew got out safely but would not leave until they dragged Kelly out. There was a US physician on board and he declared Kelly dead on the spot. Then they were rescued.

They had been at Long Binh a few minutes before I got there and the same people were yelling for a DUSTOFF to come back for the urgent patients Kelly was killed trying to rescue. I recall Kelly's deputy, now our new commander, rushing over to us as we sat there in silent numbness. He began to shout and wave and give orders and question why we sat while there were patients in the field.

I can remember rousing from my stupor and becoming outraged at his insensitivity to what had happened to Kelly. They had been friends for years. He saw my anger and said simply and quietly, "It's over; it's done; and we've got work to do."

He was right. Kelly was probably smiling in the body bag behind us.

We cranked up and went back for Kelly's patients. That area is so clear in my mind. Kelly's ship was still burning,



the area still called secure, and the patients still classified urgent. We were landing beside the burning DUSTOFF when our ship took several rounds, probably the same folks who shot Kelly. We jumped over a tree line, checked to see if we were still flyable and went back.

This time we made a tactical approach, found some cover, and retrieved the patients. The US patient walked to the aircraft carrying a bag. All the patients were ambulatory. None was urgent. I was told that one was coming out of the field to go on R&R.

I stayed in Kelly's room that night and slept in his bed. I remember sitting at his desk writing up the missions of that day. It was 1 July 1964 and I was finally the commander of Detachment A, just as Kelly had promised.

He was the 149th American killed in Vietnam and the outcry was overwhelming. I think it was then that we realized how revered he was in the Delta.

I was told that Stilwell broke down and cried when told of Kelly's death. He was given the highest awards of the Vietnamese government and they had the biggest funeral I had ever seen in Saigon. His pilots were pallbearers. It was an emotionally tough time for all of us.

There were two coffins in the chapel that day. The other one was my stick buddy, the one Kelly told me not to inquire about. They were now side by side. The chaplain was the same one who had winced at Kelly's war stories a few days earlier. He never mentioned the names of the dead on his altar that day and I have often wondered if he knew who it was he was praying over.

I never again heard another word about convertible DUSTOFFs. In fact, they began to bring in more DUSTOFF units. There is no telling how many lives were saved because of Kelly, probably because of his death, and the preservation of the dedicated DUSTOFF as opposed to some part-time, ad hoc system.

Shortly after I took over Detachment A, the local commander called me in. I listened while he said that he was not at all surprised that someone had been

killed. He didn't think it would be Kelly though. He thought it would be one of the young pilots. He expected Kelly's death would teach us a lesson and we would modify our methods. As I listened, it was clear that some really did think Kelly was crazy and that much of the flying we did routinely was believed by others to demonstrate poor judgement.

When he had finished, I told him nothing would change. We would continue to fly as he had taught us and try to learn as much as possible from the only battlefield we had for use on the battlefields of the future. We would be wasting our time to do otherwise.

To his credit, he never tried to change or restrict us despite his personal convictions. When I left, he gave me the bullet that killed Kelly. Apparently it had come in the open rear door, passed through Kelly's heart and lodged in the door to his right. Kelly would not wear a flak vest and he had long been criticized for that. It was uncomfortable and really didn't stop much. (The cockpit armor 'chicken plates' hadn't arrived yet.) But some said that, if Kelly had had one on, he might have lived. He might have lived. I guess his mortician is the only one who knows. Now that Kelly was dead, we remembered his angel and made a metal crest of an angel in a flight suit. We wore them on our hats and holsters. I lost my last one during my second tour when my hat flew out the door on a night mission. I still grieve over that loss.

The only change to the 57th patch was made some time after I left when they added the words, "The Originals." I flew with the Originals but never got to wear that patch. I can tell you that members of the 57th wore that patch with pride, but I must also confess I feel a strange emotion when I see others wearing it and I don't really know why. Those of us who flew with the original DUSTOFF tried to prevent them from using our call sign but the same rationale that allowed us to keep it prevailed and we lost.

I can tell you that some of those who came behind Kelly did not agree with his methods. They were more concerned with getting themselves out than with getting the patients out. He was a tough

act to follow. As the older ones washed out, the young ones fought to preserve his spirit and his traditions. I think he is still alive in DUSTOFF units today.

Although Kelly is most remembered for his physical courage in saving lives in combat, it was his moral courage that saved DUSTOFF—the greatest lifesaver the battlefield has ever seen. I have known many with blinding courage on the battlefield who would later succumb to the outrages and onslaughts of the bureaucracy and its daily drill of paper. I have known others who would cower in the unending war we all wage between our security, our desires, our passions, and those wonderful things called our ideals. Kelly was unique in the degree to which he possessed all forms of courage.

Although I know virtually nothing about Kelly beyond the few months in Vietnam, I would bet he was from modest beginnings. He certainly was a humble man and humility is a constant mark of great leaders. He drove for me the incredible treasure that is courage, however, we are all equal. Courage is the greatest resource in life and it is readily and abundantly available to all. In fact, courage is probably the most significant equalizer in life; it certainly produces great people from among those without remarkable ability or opportunity.

I think I also found the source, the key, to courage in Kelly. Of those I know who died in combat, none that I knew died for the flag or the country. They died for the people of this country, those they loved, their buddies—the country only inasmuch as it protected those they loved. So love was a part of it (sacrifice is really nothing more than love in action), but so was faith—a belief that there is something beyond the moment and beyond and above the self.

I've not known many men of consistent, repetitive courage who were not also men of faith. Fear is nothing more than our faith on trial. Kelly was a man of deep faith. He never missed church and each day he posted an inspirational thought on the bulletin board. He certainly didn't wear it on his sleeve, but it was evident to all around him. I know that in my own experiences, my faith was for me a substitute for fear,



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## ASSOCIATION DUES

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The past year has been especially hard on the renewal of annual dues for active duty DUSTOFF Association members who were involved in Operation Desert Storm. Many typically pay their annual dues in conjunction with registration for the Reunion. Due to operations in the Persian Gulf, fewer operational crewmembers were able to attend and many have understandably neglected to bring their membership status up to date. Being a benevolent, understanding organization of members with common aims and perspectives, there's no need to impose any kind of deadline or undue suspension of membership, but the need to become current is important. Among other issues, the Association loses money when many members have not renewed in a timely manner and we lose track of members who often notify of address changes with their renewals. Please send your renewals; they're due each calendar year by the first of January.

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## OPERATION AMERICAN VETERANS

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During the period 27 May - 11 November 1991, a former Vietnam combat medic, Michael Burnes, will be attempting to walk across the United States—from San Diego to Washington, DC—in an effort to bring to the American public an awareness of issues of importance to many veterans. Homelessness, disabilities, POW-MIA, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and incarceration are among those concerns about which the group "Operation American Veterans" hopes to highlight by the march. Anyone wishing further information or desiring to

contribute to the cause may contact:  
Operation American Veterans, [redacted]  
[redacted] San Diego, California  
92101.

This information is provided for those who may have an interest and does not in any way constitute an endorsement by the DUSTOFF Association or anyone associated therewith.

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## 1991 DUSTOFF ASSOCIATION SCHOLARSHIP

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There were a number of highly qualified candidates for the first DUSTOFF Association Scholarship. The winner, Jennifer Carroll, daughter of Michael and Mary Carroll of Anchorage, Alaska, excelled in every facet of her student, family, and community life. She's attained a 4.0 grade point average throughout her highschool years, including a number of advanced and honors classes. Her college board scores indicate that she should have graduated from college years ago. Jennifer's been an Honor Society member, a participant in school tennis and cross country skiing teams, the jazz, pep, and symphonic bands, and is an accomplished classical pianist. She was among only 1500 students nationwide chosen as semifinalists in the 1991 US Presidential Scholars Program. Jennifer has been accepted at the University of Virginia in the School of Engineering and Applied Science and plans to study bioengineering with her final goal becoming a physician. Not a bad choice if she really is not interested in being a helicopter pilot like her father or following in her mother's nursing career. Both parents served in Vietnam.

All DUSTOFF members should feel proud that this first scholarship is being awarded to such a fine young lady. Congratulations, Jennifer, we know you'll go far and we're with you all the way.

### WOUNDED *cont.*

a source of calm and comfort and it gave me a confidence I don't think I would have had otherwise. I think the greatest fear I ever had was that I might let him down.

The contrasts in this man were sharp. He was quiet, even shy, but as loudly decisive as anyone I've ever met. He was colorful, some said flamboyant, but so aware of his humanity, really almost meek. He did not take himself seriously, but he was very serious, even fanatical, about his mission and responsibilities. That trait has been present in all the great men I've known. Others may make rank, but they'll never make a difference. He had no nose for the perks of leadership—only the responsibilities. He seemed to have no insecurities. Inside this modest man was a volcano of certainty about what he was about. He could not even pretend to be phony.

I'm sure if I looked hard enough I could find flaws in this man—but I don't want to. And that is what a real leader will do to his subordinates—that's the difference between a leader and someone in a leadership position.

Today there are many monuments and memorials to this man, but none as lasting as those in the men who served with him. His last words, "When I have your wounded," set a standard for excellence that was both monumental and memorable. He was responsible for what DUSTOFF was in Vietnam—simply the most effective and efficient execution of a vital mission in that war. Kelly was one man who made a difference. He was a leader, a man who provoked openness, honesty, and caring—who lasted beyond his lifetime. The great thing about true leaders like Kelly is that they never leave us. Dead or alive, the noblest part of their being remains behind, becomes a part of our beings—as soldiers, of our profession, of all those things that make our way unique.

**"When I have your wounded"—  
what a great way to die; and,  
really, not a bad way to live.'**



*continued from page 4*

I flew with DUSTOFF in 1970-71 and have a total of 640 combat flight time in country.'

The DUSTOFF Association responded, by the way, that its bylaws do not contain any provisions which allow for rejection of the application for membership of anyone otherwise eligible. John's annual dues were paid by a Lifetime Member upon learning of the former crewmember's plight.

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# Notes

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## 1991 Financial Statement

*continued*

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Advertising .....\$203.06  
Refunds .....\$422.00  
Entertainment -  
Reunion 91 .....\$275.00  
Memorial Board .....\$2080.00  
Current Account Balance: \$18,379.91

Money Market Account - \$7900.02  
Checking Account - \$10,454.89  
Savings Account - \$25.00



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# *Notes*

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# *Notes*

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## NEW ENTRIES ON THE FLIGHT MANIFEST

### Life Members

Mike Avila

Marcus Cox

Douglas Camden

Barry Fitzgerald

David Egesdal

Scott Lehman

Michael Bruce

Stuart Molver

Kit Cline

Ranzell Nickelson

Guy Kiyokawa

Don Hicks

Jeffrey Long

Stephen Rumbaugh

Dale Demmin

Harry Silsby

Bradley Rustan

Billy Hughes

Robert Miller

Keith Johnson

H.A. Huntsman, Jr.

### Members

John Watson

Mary Teater

Joseph Ponce

Ron Cain

Javier Casanova

Joe Dawson

Teddy Jackson

John Konek

David Cooper

Steve Euhus

Vince Battaglia



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## DUSTOFF ASSOCIATION

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