



A view of a flight of HU-1B lift "Hueys" from inside one of the ships somewhere over Viet-Nam.

Nobody knew his name

Colonel John A. G. Klose
USA (Ret.)

His call sign was "Music One Six." His voice was very deep, clear and unforgettable. Everyone there knew who "Music One Six" was, but nobody there knew his name. His remains, and those of his copilot First Lieutenant Alan Boffman, came home to the United States on 19 July 1990, 19 years, four months and one day after being shot down in Laos, 18 March 1971.

It was during Lam Son 709. "Music One Six" was the leader of an attack helicopter section from "D" Company, 101st Aviation Battalion. He and his section were assisting in the extraction of 1st ARVN Infantry Division's 4/1 Battalion after six weeks of heavy combat in Laos.

The 4/1 Battalion had a strength of 420 when they had been inserted 40 kilometers into Laos by helicopter combat assault. After six weeks of continuous contact with North Vietnamese Regulars, the battalion had been reduced in strength to 88, 61 of which were wounded. All of the officers had been killed. An English-speaking sergeant whose call sign was "Whiskey" was in command and had the only operable radio. They were surrounded in a bomb crater at the base of a 1,500 foot escarpment near the Xe Pon River. The enemy had loudspeakers and was calling

for the unit to surrender.

Sixty-eight U.S. Air Force airstrikes were used to keep the enemy forces from overrunning the 4/1 Battalion's final positions. U.S. Army Cobra gunships fired in direct support of the unit. Often, the effects of their fire were on the perimeter of the bomb crater.

"Music One Six" and his section had refueled, rearmed a number of times, returning to the battle and expended their ammunition throughout the afternoon in support of "Whiskey" and his unit. The last smoke grenade to mark the friendly position had long since been used. "Music One Six" knew exactly where the 4/1 survivors were. It was he who volunteered to lead the troop carrying helicopters into the bomb crater to extract the unit. He said "Spasm Two Two (Operations Officer of the 173 Combat Aviation Company), this is Muxic One Six, follow me and I will lead you to the friendlies."

On final approach to the bomb crater, "Music One Six's" Cobra came under intense enemy ground fire. He aborted the approach and told the other helicopters to follow

him around for another approach. His aircraft was on fire and he had lost his hydraulic controls. He brought his gunships into a slow 360-degree turn back toward the friendly unit. He calmly stated, "My mast is on fire and I've lost my hydraulics. There they are. Twelve O'clock. 100 meters, I'm going to try to make it to the river."

Smoke and flames could be seen trailing from his gunship as it turned toward the river. His rotor RPM was decaying as the rotors noticeably began to slow down. "I've lost my engine and my transmission is breaking up. Good-bye. Give my love to my wife and family," were "Music One Six's" last words as his helicopter crashed and became a ball of fire.

Everyone in the air over the bomb crater knew that they had witnessed an unparalleled act of courage and selfless devotion to duty; that one aircrew had given their lives so that 88 other soldiers might live. Everyone there will always remember

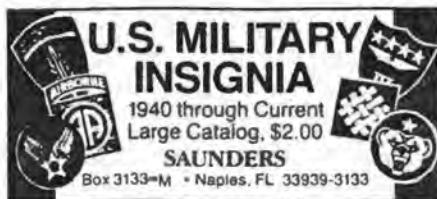


An AH-1G Cobra gunship in Viet-Nam.

"Music One Six." But nobody there that day knew his name. The urgency of a situation involving fellow soldiers on the ground, had everyone together that day.

To paraphrase General MacArthur, "I know not of the dignity of their births, but I can attest to the dignity of their deaths . . ." No heroes ever died more courageous deaths. I was proud to be with them on the field of battle that day. I was privileged to be at Travis Air Force Base on 18 July 1990 when "Music One Six" Captain Keith Brandt (age 31 at death), and his copilot 1/Lt. Alan Boffman (age 24 at death) came home. I was proud to salute their caskets on behalf of their many comrades who served with them that day in Laos. None of us will ever forget them. □

Editor's note: Col. Klose, witness to the fatal crash of "Music One Six," was on his third tour as an Army helicopter pilot at the time.

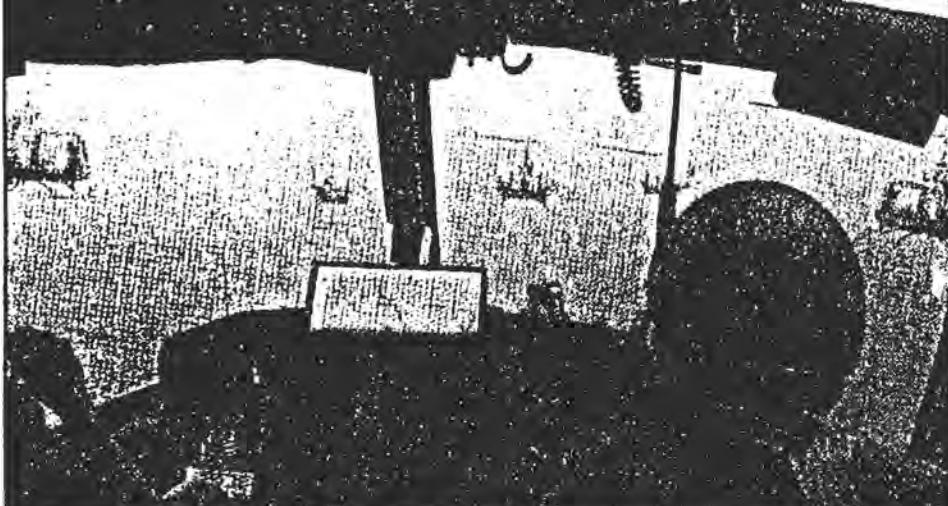


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*Biographical information on
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