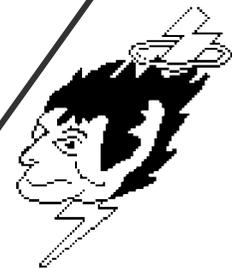


The Ugly Angel

Memorial Foundation Newsletter

Vol 8, No.1, January 2003



After much fretting and arguing with myself, I have decided to put the bad news first. Those on e-mail will have received the news of Bill last month.

TAPS

Received from Archie Clapp:

One of the most recently located "Archie's Angels alumni" was Bill Rose. Contact with him was made just in time for he and his wife to join us in Pensacola for our reunion. On November 15th, I received a message from Jan Murley (wife of another Archie's Angels Alumni) informing me that Bill had developed a blood clot, presumably in his neck, a couple of nights before which was removed the following day and a tracheotomy was successfully performed on him. At that time the doctors seemed to be pleased with Bill's prospects.

Then, on November 30th, Jan Murley shared the sad news that Bill had passed away on Tuesday, November 26th, in the Saint Francis Hospital in Memphis at the age of 68 years. Memorial services are scheduled for December 7th.

Bill Rose was a "Charter Member" of Archie's Angels, having joined the squadron in 1960 as a lieutenant. From the beginning, he was a promising young officer and was especially popular with the other squadron members. He served as squadron Flight Equipment Officer, in addition to helicopter pilot.

He left the Marine Corps in the rank of Major, and became a pilot with FedEx. He graduated from the University of Memphis and was a 32nd degree Mason and a member of Al Chymia Shrine Temple.

Bill is survived by his wife, Lea, as well as by daughter, Dee Rose, of Phoenix, AZ; son, Craig Rose, of Orlando, FL; stepdaughter, Lisa Landman, of Memphis; and a grandson.

Received from Ben Cascio/Larry Turner:

I am sorry to have to pass on that Roger Cook, a good friend, former Ugly Angel, Air America pilot, and retired Continental 727 Captain, passed away January 20th, following a quad bi-pass, while waiting for a heart transplant.

Services were Monday, February 3 at 1 PM at Fort Sam Houston Cemetery in San Antonio. A reception was held at the hotel following the services.

As many will recall, Roger was one of the original Angels & the main culprit in the famous Water Buffalo Story that has been handed down in Marine combat helicopter operations. Some of Roger's numbers are as follows: HMM-362 Original Ugly Angel, Vietnam 1965-1966, H-34, Flew 503 Missions - 26 Air Medals Flew H-34 with Air America 1971-1973, Flew 1000+ missions, 1/8 Cherokee, Flew Commercial with: Continental Air -

Braniff Air 707, 727, DC-8. He will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

The Famous Water Buffalo Story

Close your eyes for a moment, and travel with me back to the springtime of 1966. Recall the images of that era: Lyndon Johnson in the White House, Ed Sullivan on Sunday nights, and a new issue of Life Magazine on the stand each week.

One of the lasting mental pictures of the period is a battered Sikorsky helicopter carrying a bewildered, terrified water buffalo in a cargo net suspended beneath it as it flew over the verdant wet rice paddies and reddish brown rivers. American Marines working to win the hearts and minds of Vietnamese peasants.

This is the rest of the story.

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Jim Aldworth had led the Marines of Helo Squadron 362 from California to Vietnam in mid-1965, and the ensuing months were nothing if not filled with what we have come to refer to as "learning experiences," those events and mishaps that we promise never NEVER to let happen again. One involved the unfortunate premature death of a mangy old water buffalo in the village of Tam Ky. Whether the animal was hit by a Jeep, rammed by a six-by, or shot by an eager Marine mistaking it for the enemy, is lost to history. All we are sure of is that the poor beast was on its way to the great grazing ground in the sky.

Some enterprising sort -- perhaps the Public Information Officer of MAG-36 -- got the idea that it would endear the Marines to the residents of Tam Ky if they would arrange to replace the water buffalo. A water buffalo is as essential to the life of a Vietnamese town as the general store is to the United States: it pulls a plow to grow the rice, fathers cows for milk and butter, and -- after years of doing that, provides beef and leather for food and shoes. So the Marines went into the little hamlet outside the wire at Ky Ha and purchased a bullock. Roger Cook, who had experience in both the cowboy country of Colorado and the rich ranchland of Texas, was selected to head the team to replace the deceased critter. Phil Turner, a farmer from Iowa and a couple of lance corporals took charge of leading the beast back to the flight line.

Arriving on the marston matting in Ky Ha, Ferdinand the Bull was docile. "How ya gonna get him in the chopper, lieutenant?" several troops inquired.

"Not a problem, boys. I'm on top of it," Roger explained. "It's just like gettin' him into a cattle truck." He and a couple of guys from maintenance put together a ramp, and as Roger held a bucket of grain in front of it, the animal walked into the belly of the bird just as smooth and happy as could be. Old Willy the Water Buffalo looked around, bored. The crew chief -- it may have been Dick Houghton -- attached a couple of chains across the open door, and sidled past the hind quarters to fire up the APU.

After a few final words with the Operations Duty Officer to assure things were set at the other end, Roger climbed up into the H-34 and Jack Lodge strapped into the left seat. By now the half-ton bovine had become so bored that he decided to take a nap. Somewhere in the archives of the United States Marine Corps, there is a faded black-and-white photograph of the Ugly Angels H-34 number YL 53, Roger Cook grinning like a pig in dirt, with a sleeping water buffalo clearly visible at the knees of the crew chief. Even the roar of the powerful Pratt and Whitney radial engine coming to life failed to disturb the bull's reveries.

Perhaps the air rushing through the crew compartment interrupted the animal's dreams. Perhaps the dip of hitting an air pocket jolted it awake. Perhaps its ears popped as the helicopter gained altitude. We'll never know. But this water buffalo woke, took one look out the crew door, saw that the pasture it longed for was now twenty-five hundred feet below, and absolutely freaked out. It bellowed with a roar from the depths of hell, and recoiled backward to the port side of the helo. This, of course, caused the aircraft to lurch into a left bank, "What the hell was that?" hollered Roger, struggling to regain control of the copter. As if on cue, the water buffalo moved forward, throwing YL 53 into a shallow dive. "Houghton! Get that beast under control before we crash!"

The next few seconds of chaos were mercifully ended when the crew chief, seizing the situation as only a Marine can, whipped out his .45 caliber Colt M1941A1, and -- waiting until the beast was right at the center of gravity -- dispatched the animal between the eyes; it collapsed.

As they began to get their heart rate under control, and as they began the final approach to the Tam Ky, Roger and Jack realized they now faced a diplomacy problem.

Tam Ky is the capital of Quang Nam province. A wealthy town during the French Colonial period, it features a long green town plaza, lined with palm trees and punctuated by flower gardens, leading to a colonial capitol building. In front of the capital was a small brass band in white uniforms, a formation of village elders in formal attire - long coats and cummerbunds, the mayor adorned with a sash across his breast. It was evident that this was the biggest event in the political life of Tam Ky in a long time.

Roger landed, quickly kicked the dead animal out of the helicopter, immediately took off, and climbed to altitude. The whole thing took maybe twelve seconds.

Three days later, as Roger was returning to the tent that served as the Ugly Angels' Ready Room, he was told to report without delay to the Group Commander's office. Don't change your clothes, don't shave, just get your duff up there most skosh. He hurried.

He hammered on the pine and was told to enter. The colonel stood behind his desk. Beside the desk stood an entourage of four Vietnamese. The sergeant major looked stern; the colonel spoke. "Mayor Cao, this is First Lieutenant Cook. Lieutenant, this gentleman

is Mayor Nguyen Lan Cao of Tam Ky. He wishes to speak to us, and thought it appropriate that you hear what he has to say."

In halting and broken English, but with undiminished dignity, the mayor alternated eye contact with the colonel and Cook. "Is very generous of American Marines to offer to village of Tam Ky replacement of old, decrepit carabao sadly killed by Marines by young and strong water buffalo. Is sad, however. Village hoped the replacement of old dead water buffalo would be a living water buffalo, rather than young dead animal."

Always thinking, Roger saw the light go on over his head. He broke the position of attention, rose his arms in a gesture of victory, and leaped into action. "A living buffalo? They wanted a living one? Hell, colonel, we can do that! We must have misunderstood! We can take care of this with no problem!"

Well they did. But never again did a Marine pilot carry a living farm animal that size inside a helicopter. The world's lasting image of Marines winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese -- a water buffalo suspended beneath an H-34 -- was the result of Roger Cook's harrowing experience in the air, and his quick thinking under the scrutinizing eyes of an angry colonel.

----Retold by Rusty Sachs

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Okie II Looking Likely

Report from Mark Stanton, coordinator for the following:
It's becoming more official every day. Mark the weekend of October 19th, 2003, as the 2nd Trip to Oklahoma, once again hosted by the YL 37 Group.

One suggested addition could be a Wall Ceremony across from the hangar. The remainder of the reunion activities would be centered in and around Gerald Hail's hanger as in 1999.

Embassy Suites is being contacted to make arrangements for accommodations. They provided good rooms at reasonable prices (\$60-\$80 per night), provided numerous amenities including function rooms, free breakfast buffet and a fairly liberal Happy Hour on Friday and Saturday evenings. Mark will report in as events progress. His and other board members' e-mail addresses are posted at the end of the newsletter. Let him know if you have questions or suggestions.

What our expenses will be is not certain yet but it will be less than PNS by a long shot.

Pop A Smoke Connection

Tom Hewes has been promoted within Pop A Smoke from just another Board Member to Vice President of the whole she-bang. He has ordered me to forego anything remotely resembling congratulations and has ordered that I only remind you that now you have a direct line to HQ and you ought to take advantage of it. You all know that he didn't do too bad a job running us so let's hope he doesn't screw this newest endeavor up too badly. Drop him a line at hewes@coxnet

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History Newsletter

Since I have you on the line anyway, please send me some stories, rumors, tales or any bit that I can use to send out those requests for information. As we saw above, everyone of us will leave the planet, some sooner than later. Now is the time to sit down and tell me what happened when you got shot down, broke a 34 or went in the drink. There are stories in this squadron and if they don't get told now they may be gone forever. Our fans deserve better...and I ain't fooling this time. If you're afraid to brag on yourself tell a story about a buddy. Surprise him.

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Speaking of Okie II

The USS Okinawa LPH was Transferred to Naval Inactive ship Maintenance facility Bremerton Ca. in August 2000 for SINKEX Preparation; Final Disposition, SUNK as a Target, 06/06/2002, By Portsmouth ssn-707), Location, 031 deg. 27`00.0" north 119deg.41' 00.6 West Depth: 2020 Fathoms off the coast Southern California

Submitted by Jim Matney

The Man in the Doorway

They came in low and hot, close to the trees and dropped their tail in a flare, rocked forward and we raced for the open doorways. This was always the worst for us, we couldn't hear anything and our backs were turned to the tree line. The best you could hope for was a sign on the face of the man in the doorway, leaning out waiting to help with a tug or to lay down some lead. Sometimes you could glance quickly at his face and pick up a clue as to what was about to happen. We would pitch ourselves in headfirst and tumble against the scuffed riveted aluminum, grab for a handhold and will that son-of-a-bitch into the air.

Sometimes the deck was slick with blood or worse, sometimes something had been left in the shadows under the web seats, and sometimes they landed in a shallow river to wash them out. Sometimes they were late, sometimes...they were parked in some other LZ with their rotors turning a lazy arc, a ghost crew strapped in once too often, motionless, waiting for their own lift, their own bags, once too often into the margins.

The getting on and the getting off were the worst for us but this was all he knew, the man in the doorway, he was always standing there in the noise, watching, urging...swinging out with his gun, grabbing the black plastic and heaving, leaning out and spitting, spitting the taste away, as though it would go away...

They came in low and hot, close to the trees and dropped their tail in a flare, rocked forward and began to kick the boxes out, bouncing against the skids, piling up on each other, food and water, and bullets...a thousand pounds of Cs, warm water and rounds, 7.62mm... half a ton of life and death.

And when the deck was clear, we would pile the bags, swing them against their weight and throw them through the doorway, his doorway, onto his deck and nod and he'd speak into that little mic and they'd go nose down and lift into their last flight, their last extraction. Sometimes he'd raise a thumb or perhaps a fist or sometimes just a sly, knowing smile, knowing we were staying and he was going but also knowing he'd be back, he'd be back in a blink, standing in the swirling noise and the rotor wash, back to let us rush through his door and skid across his deck and will that son-of-a-bitch into the air.

They came in low and hot, close to the trees and dropped their tail in a flare, rocked forward, kicked out the boxes and slipped the litter across the deck and sometimes he'd lean down and hold the IV and brush the dirt off of a bloodless face, or hold back the flailing arms and the tears, a thumbs-up to the right seat and you're only minutes away from the white sheets and the saws and the plasma.

They came in low and hot, close to the trees and dropped their tail in a flare, rocked forward and we'd never hear that sound again without feeling our stomachs go just a bit weightless, listen just a bit closer for the gunfire and look up for the man in the doorway.

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Mike Ryerson was an 0844/0846 with 11th Marines at Chu Lai (hill 69) and then an FO with 5thMarines for a while before being transferred to 3rd MarDiv, 12th Marines(hill155) and then to the DMZ (Dong Ha, Charlie 2, Con Thien) with 4th and 9th Marines. Feb '66 to Mar '68(yes, 25 months!) michaelryerson@sbcglobal.net

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