



The Ban Me Thuot Barb

Newsletter of the 155th Assault Helicopter Company and All Units Serving at Camp Coryell; Central Highlands, II Corps, South Vietnam 1965–1970

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Here we go again!
(Roger Elliott)

Hi everyone. I'm Roger Elliott. I served in the 155th November '68 - August '70.

I don't know if anyone would remember me. I started out in the engine shop and through the months I ended up being the Motor Sergeant.

I was reading the Barb and wondering why the whole thing was about the M60. Then I got to the end and understood what was going on. I've always enjoyed the stories about the 155th and just never sat down to write down any of my own. Not as exciting as most of yours.

I'm setting in Kuwait, waiting to head up into Iraq. I have a few down days so I'm going to try to write an article for the Barb. I hope that some of you can come up with more stories. I do enjoy reading them.

Being on the ground team means that I don't have the exciting stories that the fly guys have but I do have a few that the younger troops seem to like to hear. I'll just tell one for now.

I was working in the Motor Pool as a vehicle repairman/wrecker operator. We got a call that a recovery mission was needed to retrieve a downed Huey out of jungle, so a Chinook could pick it up.

I think it was MSG Newman that organized the mission. We loaded three M60s, a couple of M79s and about six personnel with their M16s, on my 5 ton wrecker. Talk about looking like a John Wayne movie!

It was one of our ships that had taken off from a Special Forces Camp I think it was northeast of Ban Me Thuot. For some reason it flipped and ended up upside down in the jungle. If I remember correctly the crew walked away, shaken but not hurt.

Anyway, we got there and plowed our way into the jungle and got hooked up to it and started bouncing

our way out into a clearing. We forgot to do the first thing that you are supposed to do, when moving a ship—we didn't disconnect the battery. Well, with all the bouncing around, sparks flew and a fire started. Not a good thing to see on the end of your hook! A very quick thinking PFC disconnected the battery and someone grabbed a fire extinguisher and put the fire out. I was very glad!

We got the ship to the clearing so the Chinook could hook up to it. The crew chief stood on top of the Huey with a ring to hook to the Chinook. We all were amazed when he hung it he was thrown clear off the top of the Huey. Something about the pilot had forgotten to hit the anti-static switch. He did hook it though and then he came over to us and said he was going to kill the pilot.

Our mission was complete but it was too late to drive back to Camp. The Special Forces guys invited us to stay and party with them that night. I think they liked to see Americans once and a while. We called it in and asked permission but it was denied. Some of us had guard duty that night; I was one that had to be back for guard.

They sent a Huey to pick us up. I did so want to party with the Green Berets.

Anyway we got back to Camp and I went out to my guard post thinking how much fun I could be having.

About 0100 hours I got a call from the Commo Shack telling me that I needed to come up and listen to something that was coming over the radio. It was my friends at the Special Forces camp. They were being over run. They were shooting them off the fence. I think they all made it OK.

There have been many times that I feel I have had a Guardian Angel.

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Well this is just one story, I have many but I don't know if I'll have any time to tell anymore in the next

year. I'll see how things go.

Your brother, MSG Roger Elliott

A Message from Bob Spencer

I really enjoyed the November 2009 issue, thanks for sending it. I want to pass on a short story relating to the 155th.

Back about 1995 I was flying Citations for a company in Iowa when I overheard a conversation at the Oskaloosa, IA airport. One of the people said their Congressman, Leonard Boswell had flown in that day in his airplane.

I got into the conversation and said I knew a Leonard Boswell from my assignment with the A/1/155 tour. He and I had both been Captains and deployed with the unit from Fort Riley in April of 1965. Anyway, I learned

that the Leonard Boswell they were talking about was a retired Army O-5 and I gave him a call at his home town and determined that it was the same guy I had known 30 years earlier.

He was indeed a member of Congress and still is to this day. I was able to drop in on him a couple of times when flights took me to Washington before 9/11 all but shut down National/Reagan airport. Leonard had been our first Flight Operations Officer in Ban Me Thuot. He was the best Operations Officer I knew in my three tours in Vietnam. Iowa is lucky to have him looking out for them.

I do plan to make an effort to attend the St Louis reunion this year

155 AHC REUNION 2010

(Chuck Markham)

This year the reunion is being held in St. Louis, Mo. at the Crowne Royal Airport hotel August 8-10. The reunion is being hosted by the 281st AHC on behalf of all the 10th Battalion units. The 155th will have our own Hospitality room as will the other units. Free finger food, beer, and soft drinks will be available in the 281st hospitality and I'm sure libation will also be available in our place.

The Hotel is first class and a free shuttle is available from the airport and within a 15 mile radius of the hotel. That radius includes dining, shopping, etc. There is a T.G.I. Fridays and a Breakfast Buffet in the hotel but they are not included in the fees.

Included in the \$125 per person registration fee and \$60 per night hotel room rate are a buffet dinner and

party (cash bar), a sit down dinner (cash bar), a brunch for the ladies with an area shopping and entertainment briefing, and unlimited beer and snacks in the 281st hospitality room.

They are asking us to pre-register. You can go to the 281st web site (www.281st.com) and print the registration form (available after March 10) and mail it in with the appropriate funds. I know that many of you were never in the 10th CAB but I also know that many of you went to other units in the 10th when we de-activated. We will accommodate both groups.

I know that members of the 92nd, 192nd and 281st will be in attendance so it should be great opportunity to mingle with other people who served in our general area. More details will follow and if you have questions don't hesitate to contact me.

Request for Information

Name: Kevin Hayes

Email: kevinhayes7@verizon.net

My farther was James B. Hayes Jr. I believe my dad was a Major when with the 155th. He was in Nam in 1966, stationed at Ban-Me-Thuot. He was the flight

officer and flew Stage Coach 3. My dad died in 1984 and this is pretty much all I know of his time in Vietnam. If anybody remembers him I would appreciate any stories you might have of him.

Thank You for your service to our country.

Kevin Hayes

A Message from Milo

(Milo Taylor)

Below is a story I wrote about the 155th Assault Helicopter outfit in VN.

Good Monday Bo; I really appreciate your informative

mail this morning. I have not gone to the site you mentioned yet but will shortly. I am interested in the "A" Co. history from the setup at BMT to the time it changed to the 155th. Kind of a personal reason, ha, ha.

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As you well know we had the standard two slick platoons and the gunships. Capt Boswell (later a US Senator I understand) and Capt. ??? with the slicks and Capt Gilmer commanded the guns. I just remembered Lt. Wilkie was the leader before Gilmer. A real hot shot and go getter. He came to us during the pilot swap right after arriving at BMT. I believe his father was a General grade officer; at least that was the story that circulated. I could believe it because he was definitely a leader and would go far in his career.

I was the platoon Sergeant for the Guns. I would relieve a crew chief on about a daily basis so one could have a day off. We flew missions just about every day supporting the Special Forces in the area. One day we were supporting the Special Forces making a sweep through a village out East, maybe a little NE of BMT and somewhere along the road to Nha Trang. The back seat passengers didn't need to know where we were going, just hang on.

We prepped the area and the slicks were landing the troops. Capt Gilmer and WO Hassart were up front and I was in the crewchief's seat. I can't really remember our gunner's name.

Capt. Gilmer was lead in the right-hand daisy chain. Capt Boswell called they were getting .51 fire from a church. Gilmer said, "I am going to get that SOB". In my recollections, he went a lot lower and closer than we probably should have but he was a determined leader. As we made the break the .51 put a round up through the LH fuel cell, and out through the bulkhead about 12 inches inboard of my posterior. We were really lower on fuel than we should have been but Gilmer was determined to make that one last pass before returning to rearm and refuel. I would like to say the fuel cell exploded which probably isn't absolutely correct. I do vividly remember looking over my right shoulder and all the lights on the panel turned red like a Christmas tree; the cabin immediately filled with thick

smoke. Flames and smoke was coming out of the hole in the bulkhead. I put my hand (gloved) over the hole to cut down on the smoke so Gilmer could do his thing. Was too hot to handle and by that time we were about to touch down anyway. Gilmer was kind of abrasive at times but he was a hell of a good pilot (and leader). Engine-out autorotation from about 500 feet with all the other problems cropping up by the second was bad enough but there were a lot of tall trees in the area also. How he spotted and made the small clearing just short of a Banana plantation was a miracle. We hit level, rocked up on the skids, fell back and we un-

assed that bird. We had flames coming out of the engine-transmission area up to the rotor. Hassart and I went left, Gilmer and the gunner went right. The fellow with the .51 was nearby and I bet he had many friends. The gunner and I had our M-60s, Hassart had an M-2 carbine with a sawed off stock, Gilmer had a six shooter. He also had a 16MM camera.

A string of ammo followed me out of the chopper. As soon as we made it into the scrubby brush we crouched down and made two bandoleers to go around Hassart's shoulders, got rid of our white crash helmets, and started working towards the banana trees a couple hundred feet in front of the burning chopper. We met up with Gilmer and the gunner there. There were also four Montagnards there, one of which was gut-shot and had a bubbling chest wound. He died a few minutes later.

Gilmer took pictures of the burning helicopter with the ammo cooking off. One thing visible was the right cargo door window was shattered with a big hole in it where the missing fuel cap had gone through. That is why I said we probably blew up in the air. Flames were way over the rotor in another picture. Also pictures of the Montagnards. Special Forces got there shortly and we were invited to continue making the sweep through the village with them. C and C wanted to pick us up with a slick but Gilmer refused till after all the wounded had been transported. I do believe that was the first helicopter A Co. lost.

I am sure Gilmer got some medals, same with Hassart. A Commendation Medal with V and the VN Cross of Gallantry caught up with me years later. The VN General from the 23rd presented us with the Cross of Gallantry at a formation back in the Company area.

I thought there might be a write up in the Company history, but all I have ever found is the Vung Tau landing and initial arrival at BMT. The History starts off with the 155th.

A Co 1st Avn Bn history starts off after the 155th swap. I wish Gilmer had a 35mm camera when taking the pictures. The picture of the B-model with the old M-6 kit quad machine guns and 7-shot rocket pods, flames above the rotor and framed by the banana trees is a pretty one-of-a-kind picture. Black and white naturally and developed in down town Ban Me Thuot so the quality could be better. I have it hanging on the wall.

Sorry my response was so long. Again, I really appreciate the info you furnished. By the way, Capt. Curry was

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our Medical officer and could possibly tell you more. He lives 40 miles away in Metter, GA, and we have attended some of the reunions together. I haven't seen him since the Tybee Island Reunion. I wonder if he is still doing OK. We are all getting in that age bracket when we disappear and people wonder why they don't hear from us and wonder where we went.

Respectfully,
Milam (Milo) Taylor

P.S. I quit the Army and went to work for Bell Helicopter as a Tech Rep. Guess Where! Dragon Mountain with the 4th Division Avn. Dusty Red Dragon Mountain!! About Christmas 67 I moved to the 119th and other units at Pleiku. No, think it was Oct 67 I was moved by my superiors to Ben Hoa to be the Rep on

the first Cobras.

The 334th had six Cobras in their Playboy Platoon. Major Grey was the Platoon Leader and was flying with WO Ron ??? Goldman? on Tet Day. A bullet came up through the gunner's left window lower corner, up under Ron's crash helmet and into his brain. Grey said he just slumped over, never uttering a sound.

Ron was the first Casualty in the Cobras. I had a beer with him the night before. Life sure is short but full of memories.

My last tour in VN was as advisor to the VN 4th Air Division at Bien Tuey (Can Tho) from 71-73. All the GIs were gone and the APO and PX were in Saigon at the Attache's Compound. I can't recall the proper name. DAO, Defense Attache's Office?

I am gone this time.

Message from Iraq - From Iraq on Veterans Day

On Veterans Day this Thursday, November 11th we will honor all those service members and their families that have served and sacrificed before us. We deeply respect and admire the dedication and selfless service of all combat veterans.

Task Force 185th Aviation would like to dedicate our success here in Iraq to the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots that developed the basics of our modern day Army Aviation doctrine. Thanks to our predecessors we have the most modern high tech aircraft, we have tried and true tactics, techniques and procedures and we have the proven skills to accomplish our mission. When we arrived in Iraq we were more than prepared for the challenge.

In contrast, the helicopter pilots of Vietnam were young men that went from high school to flight school and then straight to Vietnam. The average age of a helicopter pilot in Vietnam was in their early 20s and the concept of helicopters in combat was a novelty. 35 years later, the average age of TF 185th pilots is 34 and the average flight experience is almost 3,000 hours. Despite their inexperience, the Vietnam era pilots were fearless and innovative as they adapted and developed ways to utilize the helicopter in combat.

The 185th is mostly a National Guard and Reserve task force. While most Vietnam Veterans have long been retired, 10% of our pilots are Vietnam "old timers" in their mid 50s. Over the years these veterans along with many others have been our mentors and role models as we trained and prepared for combat.

The enemy in Vietnam was more ferocious, smarter, and dedicated. Iraqi insurgents are cowards, picking on the innocent or using hit and run tactics to avoid a fight. The Viet Cong may have used hit and run tactics, but they were deliberate in their prosecution of the war. When in a situation they couldn't back out of, they fought fiercely.

Shoulder fired man portable anti-aircraft missiles appeared at the end of the Vietnam War, so the aviators did not have to contend with them for long. What they learned about these new, small heat seeking missiles was critical to our tactics today. The greatest threat to our aircraft in Iraq is encountering new versions of this man portable anti-aircraft missile.

Due to the enemy threat and dense airspace usage here in Iraq detailed and time consuming mission planning is a way of life. Fortunately we have the computers, software and internet transmitted airspace coordination means to create computer generated maps and mission data for each flight. We also have GPS navigation systems, long range radios and complete flight instruments. For protection we only fly in pairs here, while in Vietnam they many times flew single ship with minimal pre-planning time using only a map and compass.

Today in Iraq, safety is paramount to everything we do. We even say our biggest enemy is ourselves in the form of an accident. We are required to conduct thorough risk analysis and track our duty time to prevent fatigue. In contrast, Vietnam Vets developed safety

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procedures only after frequent accidents or shoot-downs. In Iraq we also enjoy the tactical advantage of flying "blacked out" at night with Night Vision Goggles that were not invented back then.

But perhaps the greatest difference between Iraq and Vietnam is the support at home. Today we enjoy widespread support on the home front. Even those who can't see why we are fighting rarely slander soldiers when they protest the war. This may be in part due to 9/11 but it is also because our nation remembers the nature of 1960s war protesters and their actions toward returning Vietnam Vets. Such conduct is no longer acceptable in mainstream American society.

This quote by Vietnam Veteran CW4 Ronnie Wells makes it clear:

"When comparing Vietnam to Iraq, there were a few things that were painful. First, we went as individuals, not as units. We came and went at different times. We often left in the middle of the night, coming home to a town that may or may not have known you even left. We were cursed, called baby killers, and completely

disrespected for many years. You, however, are seen as heroes and should receive the accolades you deserve."

We in Task Force 185th have a lot to thank the aviators of Vietnam for, from their pioneering tactics in Air Mobile Warfare to the way they proved what was needed in the way of future aircraft. The burdens they bore both at war and at home have made our success in Iraq possible. We could write a book about this issue but not at this time. We ask that you forward this email to a Vietnam aviator, crewmember or mechanic and thank them.

On this Veterans Day we also want to give a special thanks to our family members for their sacrifices this year while we serve in Iraq. Your thoughts, support and prayers are literally a God send. Our families are now veterans too and they are our heroes!!!

Catfish 6
Bradly MacNealy
TF 185th Aviation
"In the Sunni Triangle"
Commanding

Art Newman checks in.

I was at Hunter Liggett and Ft. Ord and with the 155th for only a short time somewhere around 71 - 73... it was long ago. My job was avionics repair. I remember a Cobra crashing at the airfield one day... it was hovering and lost control while I was standing there. Sad. Was with CDCEC Combat Devel Cmd Experimentation Cmd as well. Used to fly fixed-wing out of Fritz as a hobby and sometimes to transport materials between Ft Ord and Hunter Liggett. Also enjoyed practicing IFR in the flight simulator at the air field. Lots more done in other units as well.

It is wonderful to just hear from you even though we may not remember each other due to different capacities then.

Take good care Matt. Stay in-touch if you wish. I'm 57 now and it is a time for reflection. In some ways it seems like it all just happened... all these years have whisked by... but at the same time -- long ago, like a dream.

My last long-term government work was here in the UK at a US Base in N. Yorkshire called Menwith Hill.

Now retired, Art Neumann

Written by Laura Bishop, November 11, 2005

OPERATION: Santa Claus

I recently visited the Punchbowl National Cemetery in Honolulu, Hawaii, this year, and saw a beautiful resting place and memorial to the men and women who have served our country. Viewing the graves of the veterans there, reminded me of an experience in 1978 where I recalled the name and face of a young veteran named Terry W. Nelson, who died in Vietnam.

Sacramento Veterans of Foreign Wars Post No. 1267 had honored Terry Nelson by naming their Post after him. It was there that I remembered seeing a framed black-and-white photo of Terry that hung on the wall by the bar, decorated with two flags over a bronze plaque.

I did not personally know Terry Nelson, but I was fortunate to have met his father. This is an account of my experience working with the men and women at the Sacramento Army Depot. That is where I met Mr. Jim Nelson, who was an angel of generosity in our community.

December 1977 - Was the holiday season in the Maintenance Directorate at the Sacramento Army Depot. Established in 1945, the old Depot served as a repair facility for Army electronic equipment. It was my first real job as an office clerk in the noisy, smoke-filled, production scheduling office. The people there seemed closer to my parent's age. I was only 20-years old then, so several co-workers took me under their wing, when it appeared I needed their advice.

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Peggy gave me a set of life skills, which helped me solve financial problems, and eventually raise a family. Henry advised me on auto repair problems. Sandi taught me how to have fun. Rod was a devoted family man who advocated the "institution" of marriage, which later helped me decide to get married. Then there was my good friend Emma Lou, who was a fountain of patience, warmth, and humor, underneath her quiet exterior. Emma Lou helped me to distinguish between right and wrong, at least where office politics was concerned. She also pointed me in the direction of other people, who would eventually influence and change my values about life.

One time there was a particular incident at work between me and a career Army man named Master Sgt. St. Jules. The Sergeant came out of nowhere one day, and verbally attacked me at the copy machine. The nerve of that man! How dare he talk to me that way! He was irritated with my inefficiency at the copier, and complained to some other people standing by that the Army was hiring useless, younger people all the time. Then he made some wild accusation that I was probably one of those hippie-type, bleeding hearts that had marched in peace rallies, crying that the military was no good.

What's it to you! I thought to myself, as I flushed red in the face – not believing that he could be so forward. After all, I did attend college, and everyone knew that the Vietnam War was wrong.

It was a travesty the way our government sent thousands of young men off to die, and to needlessly kill innocent people.

I didn't quite say those exact words aloud, but it was obvious that he had me on the defensive.

A few months earlier, I had already mouthed off on that same issue to some other co-workers. When the Sergeant walked away, there was an uncomfortable silence at the other desks as people turned away from me, which gave me the sense I had said something hurtful.

Early in my young career, I had rolled my eyes at the work ethic of the civilian workers there. Always in before 6:00 a.m. every morning with newspaper, lunchbox, and thermos in hand, they seemed like dull creatures of habit to me. Some seemed to enjoy being there, like it was an honor for them just to go to work. People had talked about how busy the depot was during Vietnam, and how it hummed with activity 24-hours a day, 7-days a week. When the war ended and the draw down came, many civilians had retired, or were reduced down in their duties and pay. Occasionally, someone would point out a particular man or woman who seemed especially dedicated in his or her work, because they had lost a son or husband during the war. I didn't understand how anyone could work in that environment if they had lost a loved one that way.

At this point, Emma Lou had heard enough of my 20-year-old educated opinions.

She was always careful never to criticize or talk down to me, and sometimes she would pose different questions for me to think about. After my altercation with Sgt. St. Jules, she decided it was time for a little talk. Since it was the holidays, she had invited me to her house for a small get-together with some retired depot friends. A group of older guys sat in the living room drinking beers, as Chief Willis strummed his beautiful old guitar. These men were like fraternal brothers with a funny and loving camaraderie. Like so many other depot employees, they had worked with each for over 30 years. That was the night I met Mr. Jim Nelson, who they said worked in a warehouse at the depot. It was also when Emma Lou suggested I try doing a little volunteer work.

Two days before Christmas Eve, Emma Lou took me down to the warehouse to see where Jim Nelson and his volunteer "crew" of a dozen or so retired employees were located. The old Warehouse (6-6) had just been established as an area called **OPERATION: Santa Claus**.

Each year the retirees collected food donations there for distribution to needy families. Mr. Nelson had started the operation back in 1948 just to help out a couple of military families at Christmas time, then during the Korean and Vietnam wars, hundreds more military families were stationed at the depot. The civilians wanted to help those who were away from their homes, so they delivered food and toys to their families on the day before Christmas Eve. Their cheerful gestures toward the military families eventually grew into an enormous charitable distribution effort that touched the entire community. Operation Santa Claus volunteers took calls from local churches and charities, as well as from concerned citizens who wanted to help their neighbors in need. As years went by, response to the operation became so overwhelming the volunteers could not keep up with all the requests. The Salvation Army eventually took over the administrative role of collecting the names and numbers of the thousands of families in need. Almost 40 years later, Mr. Nelson's volunteers were assembling over 8,000 food baskets a year, to be distributed throughout the Sacramento area.

You volunteers be here at 0500 in the morning – after the trucks unload the frozen chickens and milk! Wear warm clothes, hats, and gloves, so you don't freeze to death!

The Operation Santa Claus crew had labored all year long to prepare for this one-day event. They even had a space set aside for jail inmates to come in and repair old bicycles to give as Christmas toys. Mr. Nelson looked tired, but yet excited. He had a wrinkled, handsome rugged face, with glassy, blue eyes. He also had a well-stocked bar in his office. Those warehouses were freezing during the winter months, and a guy's rear-end could fall off at 42 degrees. A good stiff belt is what any good Santa Claus should have plenty on hand. There was no argument from me.

The next morning I was up at 0400 and dressed in ski clothes to go to the warehouse. At 0700, Security would open the front gate to allow the community to drive through to pick-up their holiday meals. Mr. Nelson always held about 1,500

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boxes at the depot for those who came at the last minute. Volunteers were buzzing around like bees, cheerful, yet nervous with concern that they may run out of food and have to turn someone away. We lined up in a moving assembly line, packing chickens and gallons of milk into the boxes with canned goods. Mr. Nelson still received calls from private citizens, and when certain requests came in, he made sure that a volunteer would hand deliver those boxes with "special care" to the person receiving the donation. He said those deliveries might go to shut-ins, or to those whose pride could never let them ask for help on their own. Emma Lou was one of his "special" volunteers who delivered baskets to those lonely places.

They let me ride with Emma Lou on one delivery, where they drove us to a woman's home in Sacramento. An anonymous neighbor had called in, saying the woman's husband had left her and their five children with nothing. We arrived at the family's duplex, where an old Honda cycle was parked on the front lawn with a For Sale sign. Emma Lou went to the door to talk to the lady.

The lady looked surprised, then she hugged Emma Lou and they both started crying. We carried in the boxes as fast as we could. Just inside their front door was a Charlie Brown type Christmas tree with homemade paper ornaments and some sparse pieces of tinsel hanging on it. There were no presents under the tree, and there was absolutely no food in their cupboards or refrigerator.

Emma Lou couldn't get the driver to leave there fast enough, as we dashed back to the depot to pick up four more boxes of food. Emma Lou cried all the way back to the duplex and the second time the lady opened the door for her, the driver and I both cried.

After packing frozen chickens that morning, we were each given a few shots of vodka in our coffee, and asked to stand outside on the distribution line to hand out boxes. We verified the names provided by the Salvation Army to check each ticket, as the men loaded the food and toys into each car. At first I was embarrassed, that the recipients would be embarrassed, then after a few hours it just didn't matter. It just felt good to smile and say Merry Christmas. A couple of times, someone would yell an "expletive" at us as they drove away with their food.

Mr. Nelson and Mike came outside to check on the process. Jim told us to remember, we never judge anyone here – ever. We are not here for that. We're just here to do God's work and that is all. Looking like an old warehouseman dressed in his green flight jacket and black safety boots, Jim got to me again with those glassy, blue eyes. There was a passion inside of him and in his friends, and this was their mission of love.

Jim's best friends, Mike and Fred, were like lieutenants who were always at his side. All of their volunteers were dedicated to the Operation cause, and would often work six days a week at different times throughout the year. Mr. Nelson was

humbled, never wanting to take credit for the effort, since it was something that he and the others felt privileged to do. Emma Lou explained to me how Jim literally died inside when he lost his son Terry – ten years earlier in Vietnam. Here was yet another man who worked at the depot, who had worked to support a conflict, where his own son was killed. I would never forget the look in Mr. Nelson's eyes. Always smiling, with compassion, and with Spirit, as they sought to fill an empty place inside him, by giving what he could to help others.

The second year I worked on the food distribution line, there seemed to be an unusually large number of Vietnamese families who drove through the front gate to pick up their boxes. Some of the military wives working on the line made comments that were tentatively suspicious, since it seemed the same people kept driving through again, and again, and again. We couldn't tell their first names from the last names on our lists, and neither could the Salvation Army.

Again, Jim Nelson came out to the line and cautioned us that any act we do for someone else cannot be judged. He pointed out that the Vietnamese people were here in a foreign country where they had to live together in poverty-ridden neighborhoods just to survive. They were lucky if one out of 40 people had a car, so they had to pool their resources. One person with a car made a food run for all the other families who had no way to get there.

It occurred to me then, that Jim Nelson's 20-year old son Terry had died in their country, far away from his own home, and now through some divine path, his own father was trying to feed the very people that Terry was trying to help.

In 1986, the all-volunteer organization of Operation Santa Claus was awarded a Presidential Service Award, under the Points of Light Foundation that honored nation-wide volunteer efforts. Mr. Jim Nelson passed away in early May of that year, just one month before President Reagan could present the award to him in a ceremony scheduled at the White House, on June 2, 1986.

In our world today, there is as much concern and painful discussion about the current war situation, as there was during Vietnam. There also seems to be a sentiment that people have died for nothing. Reflecting on that idea, I wonder how many people in our community here today would remember when a certain Vietnam veteran died on May 23, 1967.

Who was Warrant Officer (W01) Terrence William Nelson?

He was an Aircraft Commander assigned to the 155th AHC. His short tour lasted from 2/10/1967 to 5/23/1967. The accident report indicated a mechanical failure occurred in the new UH-1D helicopter before it ever attained 40-hours of flight:

His three passengers survived. Terry did not live to see his 21st birthday.

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Did Terry die for nothing? Or did he in some way, through the passion and love in his father, touch the lives of thousands and thousands of people every year at Christmas time?

Visiting the VFW Post No. 1267 a few weeks ago, I found where Terry's picture had been moved from the bar area to a meeting room in the back. He was a mature looking 20-year old in that photo, and it was touching to recognize that Terry had the same handsome features and glassy, blue eyes that his father had.

I am grateful today for the values I received from working with those generous people at the Army Depot. I grew to admire them for their quiet passion and the work they did. They did what they could to help others, no matter who it was, and they did not judge. They always did what they felt was right.

As a good friend once said, upon his retirement from there – I won't miss this place, but I will sure miss the people.



Terry W. Nelson
(6/6/1946 – 5/23/1967)

155th AHC Association
c/o L. Matthews