

MEMORIES

You know how you remember some event from Vietnam, but most of the details are lost to time and fading memory? I know a lot of us have fading memories of events and they get dimmer as time goes on. Yeah, there are those “special” events that never seem to fade, but linger around just as they happened yesterday, we all have those.

I remember an event from late in 1968 that I remember and talk to my Radioman Lance Larson about every once in a while. Lance has a great memory, he remembers events that have long been erased from my memory. I'll bring it up, then he'll add something and we'll try and remember just exactly what went down. One such event is the finding of a helicopter deep in the mountains at some long forgotten location in Vietnam. Lance and I will talk about it and how Alpha Company stumbled on it in late 1968, but that's about all we remember. The story of the helicopter overgrown with jungle and what we actually found still plays out in our minds.

It's September 2004, 36 years after that one event lingers in the back of my mind trying to come to light. And low and behold, I hit the jackpot. I am reading the daily event log from the December 1968, 9th Marine Regiment Command Chronology. And right there in front of me is 19 December, A/1/9 found 1 CH-53 downed chopper. I stare in disbelief, could it be the same event? It had to be.

Transcribed from the actual 19 December 1968 report is the actual transcript that refers to the event.

19 Dec At 1430H, vic YD223260 A/1/9 found 1 CH-53 downed chopper estimated to be 1 year old. Found human bones and ID tags with names WHITE, R 2353781, PORTLAND, G.J. 2266513 AND BERRY, K.D. 235949?. Also found 1 watch with name SCRAM, F.L. engraved on back. At 1630H, found 4 ID cards with names fo NICHOLSON, D.D. 2323079, FREEMAN, G.W. 2200577, DIAZ, D. 2347916, DAY, M.R. 2152524. Also, 2 45 cal pistols #936454 and #2130875.

After all these years, I finally had confirmation that Alpha did indeed find a “missing” downed helicopter. But, if we found it, what happened to the rest of the crew (and passengers)? I had to find out, so I turned to the Internet to see if I could find out more information. I went to www. Popasmoke.com and found more information on the downed helicopter.

On the Popasmoke website, I found the information on the Ch-53 Tail #153710 and details of the event. It seems that the CH-53 loaded with a crew of 5 and 40 passengers, a total of 45 individuals. The helicopter had crashed almost a year earlier on 8 Jan 68, and we did not find it until 19 Dec 68, but it had been found and bodies recovered 11 months before in late January 1968.

FROM THE POPASMOKE WEBSITE:

Comment on Incident:

According to the HMH-463 Squadron Command Chronologies for Jan and Feb 1968, the crew was reported as MIA on 8 Jan 1968. The crew was reclassified as KIA/DAI on 26 Feb 1968.

Personal Narrative:

As a platoon commander with A/1/3, it was my unpleasant task to command a reinforced platoon that was dropped above the crash site to hike down to where the actual aircraft came to rest. There was more to the story than just a body recovery operation, as I found out later. I thought the flight commander was a Major at the time, I found his flight jacket with name patch.

We had CID, graves [registration] and a Colonel from MAG-? in Da Nang there with us. Seems some important documents were on board.

Col. Ellis was traveling with the "Die Marker" plans, McNamara's defensive positions in I Corps. I searched his wallet and found his CA driver's license. SgtMaj Cyr is a mystery. One of the SSgts, SSgt Grimes, I knew from OCS at Quantico.

The aircraft literally slammed into the side of a mountain, in the fog and was off course. Bringing Marines back from R&R, I believe. Found part of WO Price wrapped around a tree. Most of the bodies were unrecognizable. Col. Ellis' body was remarkably intact. It looked like he was stretched out sleeping near part of the aircraft. It is my understanding that the aircraft had been there three weeks before we went after it. Spooky area, Hai Lang Forest, R&R for NVA. I was there on 28 Jan.

There was an arty FO [Artillery Forward Observer] with us and he took a few photos, but I don't remember his name. The graves people put bodies in bags. Don't know if anyone went in after we left. I wasn't told to look for a briefcase with the "Die Marker" plans. Found out about it a few days after we returned to Quang Tri.

Submitted by Bruce S. Lewy, A/1/3, platoon commander, recovery platoon

Another comment on Incident:

The following two men died while missing as a result of an unknown helicopter crash on January 8th, 1968. I have no record of any other helicopter crashes, Army or Marine, on that day. Neither was a helicopter crewmember. They were reported as helicopter passengers downed in "province unknown, Military Region 1" and died while missing.

[Passengers - US Army]

Bardach, Alan Jensen CAPT(US Army) Pass HHB, 108th ARTY GRP, USARV 680108

Zirfas, Ewald 1Lt(US Army) Pass 507th Transportation Group, USARV 680108

Submitted by [Alan H. Barbour](#), Historian, USMC/VHA

Personal Narrative:

A good and dear friend of mine died in that crash. Tommy "Grumpy" Grimes as we called him. We served together as Marine Security Guards at our Embassy in Lima, Peru in 65-66. The funny thing here was that Tommy was from Lima, Indiana. He told all of the women that his home town was named after Lima, Peru it made him quite a hit.

I have a lot of Grumpy story's I could share, but the one that stands out is the day that Senator and Ms. B. Bayh from Indiana called on us at the Marine house in Lima. The Senator was on a fact finding trip, and when he found out that one of our Marines was from Indiana he wanted some photos. Tommy could not make up his mind if he should wear his Dress Blues or civvies. Grumpy was in rare form. I can not reprint his words here. In the end all hands had a good time. He took a lot of ribbing from the rest of us about sucking up to the Senator. Tommy was a fine Marine and a good leader. He is missed. PS: We all wore civvies.

Submitted by [Jim Rutherford](#), SSgt. USMC

The list of crew and passengers of CH53 tail #153710

CREW-HMH-463 MAG-16:

Chapman, John Thomas Capt Co-,Olson, Bennett Walfred SSgt Gunner ,Schram, Frederick
Lloyd Capt Pilot ,Strand Jr., Philip Stanley Cpl Crew ChiefVenegas, Vernon Bernabe Cpl
Gunner

PASSENGERS:

Bardach, Alan Jensen 1stLt HHB, 108th Arty , * Barry, Kenneth Donald PFC H&SCo/1/1, *
Curry, Hovey Rice PFC A/1/1 ,Cyr, * Lawrence Joseph SgtMaj HQBtty/4/12 , * Day, Michael
Robert Sgt A/3rdTankBn, Diaz, * Daniel PFC HQCo/3rdMarines, * Dietz, Gary Philip Cpl
B/1stAmtracBn, Dornak, * Leonard Edward 1stLt CommSuptBn/7thCommBn, * Eaddy, Ishmell

PFC E/2/9, * Ellis, George Walter Col H&SCo 3rdMAF, * Fennell, Alton Jimmy PFC 3rdMAF, * Fox, Ronald Lee LCpl I/1/12, * Freeman, Glenn Wayne Cpl 3rdMAF, * Fulwider, Daniel Raymond Sgt 3rdMAF, * Garza, Vicente Sgt 3DATCo/3TANKBn Grimes, * Thomas Allen SSgt K/3/26, *Hall, Michael Jennings 2ndLt H&SCo/FLSG"B"/ForceLogCom * Hetland, Ronald Lee LCpl BttyE/2/12, * Jackson, Donney Lyrcce HM3 Corpsman-Pass 4/12 * Jones Jr., Halcott Pride HM2 Corpsman-Pass 1/4 * Kirschner, Stephen Benjamin PVT HQBtty/1/12, * May, Craig Nolan LCpl Passenger H&SCo/1/1, * Miller, James Irvin LCpl C/1/1 1stMarDiv * Nicholson, David Donell Cpl E/2/9, * Patrick, Jerry PFC H&SCo/1/1 1stMarDiv * Pintar, James Albert LCpl H&SCo/1/1, * Price Jr., Millard Ernest WO HQCo/HQBn/3rdMarDiv, * Protano Jr., Guy Jerry LCpl G/2/1, * Schautteet Jr., Louis L LCpl A/1/1, * Shaffer Jr., Wallace Clair HM3 Corpsman 3rdMedBn, * Sigmon, Harold Wayne Sgt B/1/4, * Smith, Charles Herbert LCpl H&SCo/3/2, * Teeter, Gary Alan LCpl C/1/1, * Ugino, John Joseph PFC M/3/26, * Vaught, Michael Eugene LCpl A/1/4, * White, Craig Preston LCpl C/1/1, * White, Raymond PFC A/1/1, * Wilson, Robert Charles PFC B/1/1, * Zirfas, Ewald Capt 507thTransGrp/TMA/MACV

These Marines are listed with a casualty date of January 08, 1968, Air Loss Crash Land : Crew or Passenger : body recovered : Thua Thien Province. A total of 45 Marines lost their lives in that fatal crash, all but 2 are interred at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery, St Louis, MO : Plot 81 0 270-272. Burial date is listed as 07/23/1968.

That's my little piece of memory put to rest.
DanBeckham