

Air Calvary Huey ReUnion



7/17 Air Cavalry Huey 233 Reunion:

Many gathered from around the US for a mini Reunion of Huey 17**233**. This gathering was to commemorate an operation that happened many years ago. Our own Mike Law organized this activity. He brought together the Alumni of the 7/17 Air Cav. We gathered at the headquarters of Rampart Helicopter (who owns the helicopter) in Ft. Collins, at the Northern Colorado Metro Airport (NORCO), here in Colorado. Rampart Helicopter hosted this event to allow us to commemorate an operation involving "Huey 233" at Duc Lap in the Tay Ninh Province in II Corps, Central Highlands of South Vietnam Honoring our fallen and recognize the heroic actions of all those involved. The operation is a part of the 7/17th Air Cavalry

History, and I'm sure you've seen the story in a previous edition of the Aviator. For those that haven't heard this story, I've abbreviated it below. It resulted in several Service Medals, DFS's, POW medals, and many more.

Here's a brief history of the events of 2 Nov 1969 involving "Huey 233": WO George Grega and SGT Vernon Shepard (Shep) were flying Team Lead of a team of two B Troop 7/17th Cav OH-6As on a visual reconnaissance mission near the area of the Duc Lap Special Forces camp. George and Shep 'stayed a little too long' over an NVA bunker hosting an anti-aircraft gun. They received fire and began streaming fuel as they flew a short distance to a 'large open' area, made a controlled landing and exited the LOH. WO Jim Nowicki and 1Lt Kirk Curran in the other LOH landed nearby. George and Shep got in, but before they could get airborne; they were shot down. Badly wounded Shep was able to get out of the LOH, but George was trapped inside as it began to burn. WO Mike Peterson, the AC of AH-1G #67-15616 with CPT Lou Chirichigno in the front seat, tried to land his Cobra near the downed LOHs to rescue the wounded but was shot down by a large caliber anti-aircraft gun. WO Bob Rogers was the AC of UH-1H #67-17**233** from the Aviation Platoon of Headquarters and Headquarters Troop (HHT) of the 7/17th Cav. The rest of the crew was 1LT Joe Feeney as pilot, SP5 Chuck Lund as crew chief, and PFC Allen Sybesma as gunner.

While circling the area with B Troop's Aero Rifle Platoon Huey's preparing to insert their Blues, Bob saw some of the six men on the ground and attempted to land to rescue them. On short final, they received enemy fire and Joe was badly wounded in his foot. Bob aborted that landing and flew to Duc Lap to leave Joe at the aid station. Bob had Chuck, the crew chief, get in Joe's seat and returned to the downed aircraft. It was now dark. B Troop had inserted their Blues. Their Lift ships were refueling and hoped to return with more infantry. Only B Troop's Cobras were on station. LT Kirk Curran turned on a strobe light and Bob started down again to rescue him against all the warning advice from the gunships. 233 took more hits going in but landed not far from where Kirk was hiding. Kirk started running toward the Huey, but as he got near, the Huey's landing light came on and blinded him. Chuck stepped out of the helicopter, grabbed Kirk as he ran by, and threw him into the cargo area; Chuck followed. Bob quickly lifted off. That evening George died from his burns. Over the next few days Lou, Jim, Mike and Shep were captured by the NVA. On Thanksgiving Day, B Troop was allowed to retrieve George's body and extract Cobra 616 with a Chinook. LOHs #66-17760

and #66-07894 were destroyed. On 10 Dec 1969, Shep and Mike were released by the NVA near Duc Lap, but Jim and Lou were sent north. They were released 27 Mar 1973 with the majority of the POWs held in North Vietnam.

Chuck and Bob remember looking at Huey 233 the next day. They counted at least 20 major hits and described the Huey as looking like Swiss cheese. It was turned in to Army maintenance command in Vietnam and eventually sent to the Corpus Christi Army Depot where it was sold as surplus. Huey 233 ended up here in Denver and was being operated by Rampart Helicopters conducting Fire and External load missions since the early 80's. In the picture above with Huey 17233 are L To R: Terry Sullivan, Bill Bates, Walt Wise, Dale House, Mike Law, Lyle Borders, Chuck Lund, Bob Rogers, Chris Towne, and Bennie See who presented the history of the Duc Lap operation.

