Section 1, Remembering Missing Comrades In Memoria: Memories of Those We Have Lost along the Way. We have been able to identify twenty-three classmates who have passed away since our August 1969 graduation. Two, Jim DuPont and Tom Edgren, lost their lives serving our country in Vietnam. The others have died of "natural" causes in the intervening years. How much their Army service contributed to their deaths, we will never know.

James "Jim/Jimmy" DuPont: Ken Knudsen, who served with Jim in Vietnam, contributed the following account. Our First Meeting: I met Jim DuPont on the first day of AIT, in early December 1969. We both were assigned to A-1-1. After introducing ourselves we realized that we were going to OCS together and we went into town to buy our jump boots. We spent the next eight weeks with Paul Kochis, John Morrissey, Dennis O'Brien and a number of other OCS classmates. After OCS Jim and I went our separate ways learning how to be officers. I was assigned to Ft. Jackson and my roommate was Bill Gist. In April of 1970 I reported for Jump School and was very happy to find Jim, Mike Thornton, and David Doe in the same class. I thought I was in great shape, but after the first day of doing PLFs (parachute landing falls), I remember meeting the three guys for breakfast the next morning. We all admitted that every muscle in our body was in agony. Jim and I then went to Jungle School in Panama. We survived the miserable conditions and had a great time with David Doe and Mike Thornton going to Panama City for a weekend pass. We noticed the dictator's soldiers carrying weapons on the street. Then we had the biggest steak we could find for dinner. We all agreed that we were probably eating horse. Vietnam: In June of 1970, I arrived in San Francisco for my trip to Vietnam and again was very happy to see Mike Thornton, David Doe and Jim DuPont. We arrived at the processing center in III Corps where I bumped into an old friend, Artie Bills. He was also OCS and was leaving Vietnam. He told me to ask for the 1st Cavalry Division since their area of operation was calming down. I told the guys about the conversation, and we were all assigned to 1st Air Cav Units. I went to the

2nd Platoon, Charlie Company, 1- 5th, and Jim, David and Mike to others. Lieutenant James C. Dupont. Mike Thornton, who served as Jim's "body escort," provided this comment on Jim's homecoming: "In September 1970, three months into my assignment as a platoon leader in Vietnam I was assigned as the body escort for my OCS classmate, Jim DuPont, who had been killed in action. Jim was also a platoon leader with a different battalion of the First Cavalry Division. The family requested me, and I was extracted from the jungle and arrived stateside 48 hours later wearing fatigues and my broken-in jungle boots." Darrel Moore commented: "Jim DuPont was my roommate during OCS and we became close friends. He and his wife stopped in Wyoming to visit us on his way to Ft. Lewis. His death in Vietnam had a profound effect on both my wife and me. While in Washington DC, I visited the Memorial Wall and cried at seeing his name."

Thomas "Tom" Edgren – [Editor's Note: In 2015 Brian Walrath learned the details of Tom's death from a Vietnam Veteran named Jimmy Morrison. Tom was a platoon leader in the 23rd "Americal" Division which was operating in the northern part of South Vietnam. Jimmy was a squad leader in Tom's platoon and was with Tom when he was mortally wounded.]

In the summer of 1970, Tom's platoon was operating out of a firebase known as LZ Mary Ann in a mountainous area where there had been quite a bit of enemy activity. On July 30, the platoon left Mary Ann to sweep the nearby hills. Since he was nearing the end of his tour, Jimmy Morrison was trying to get out of going on field operations, but Tom told him that he needed him since they had mostly new guys in the platoon. As Morrison put it "He was new and I was an old timer. We had trouble getting on the same page. He had just come from officer school and I had been here 11 months." Tom's platoon was ambushed on August 5, with four men killed in action. They were stuck on a ridge for two days and nights waiting for helicopters to get out the bodies. Tom told Jimmy that he would try to send him out to escort one of the bodies home, which struck Jimmy as a

“very unselfish thing to do.” They were hit again on August 8 with many casualties, including a machine gunner. Tom picked up the M60 and started firing but was then seriously wounded himself. As he was lying on the ground waiting to be medevacked, Tom called for Jimmy Morrison, who went over to talk with him. Tom said he had not realized how bad things were in the field and that he was sorry that he had made Morrison go on the operation. He also said he was trying to do his job to the best of his ability. This was all typical of Tom, who was known in OCS as one of our most enthusiastic and sincere candidates. Said Morrison, “He had a tough job and he was a hero. I found out only a few years ago that he died. I only knew him a short time, maybe 14 days, but in this short time these were two amazing, unselfish things he did. Tom was exposed to more in eight days than a lot [of men] were exposed to in a year. This was most likely the worst four days we had, and the sad thing is that he was in charge so quickly that he did not have the time to get his feet wet.” George Hatfield commented in retrospect: “I remember Thomas Edgren telling us at the 50th Company’s 18-week party that he knew he would not make it back from VN. Bless his heart, he was right.” Michael Hughes: A Friend Who Dropped Out and Went to Nam – Chuck Granner Michael Hughes was a fellow candidate in our class from Salt Lake City. I really appreciated his fine character and friendship. Early in the cycle our TAC, Lt. Cross, appointed me 3rd Platoon leader and Mike was my First Sergeant for that particular period. Sometime after that he became discouraged and decided to drop out of OCS, but as he left he urged me to stay in the program. He went to dog school at Ft. Benning and I remember learning that he had been killed in Vietnam, just as his first letter to me arrived. When I was asked to contribute this story to our 50th Company stories collection, I searched for it and found it in a box with some Vietnam memorabilia.

In his letter he related that there were three infantry battalions in his brigade; two of them were at the southwestern perimeter around Saigon and one was out by the Cambodian border. He was hoping to be stationed

near Saigon as the mission there was to "protect and pacify the people." Cold beer was one of the big concerns -- I took this as his humor. He mentioned that sniper fire was present and that a fellow in his formation was shot in the leg and received a Purple Heart with only ten days in-country! His last page touched me. He wrote: "How is everything in 50th Co. with less than two months to go? I'll be interested to hear who has departed. I'll write again when I have a few war stories to pass on." (Of course, he never got the chance as he was killed shortly thereafter.) "Give my regards to all remaining 3rd PLT members, including LT Cross. Write when you get the chance." Signed, "ex-candidate Hughes" I wrote his parents a letter expressing my condolences and told them how much I thought of him. I have been to see his name on the "Traveling Vietnam Wall." I am sure some of you had the same experiences with your former friends.

Death in the Delta – Mike Eberhardt

It was summer in 1970, although I'm not sure of the exact date, when I arrived at MAT 5, Ham Loung District, Ben Tre Province. I was picked up by Captain Denny, the team leader, and one of the NCOs. Denny got appendicitis a month after I arrived and was shipped out, so I became team leader and was required to go on all missions. Before that, we would usually have one officer and one NCO accompany the RF's on their operations. The NCO team members were Mac (Arthur McPherson) and "Wolf" (Can't remember his name.) We lived in a compound made up of the Ham Loung District offices, the Vietnamese District Chief, the MACV District Team (MAJ Tom Cottington and CPT Huber). A NCO medic arrived shortly before my last mission, but I can't remember his name. "Fang" was my interpreter. On Oct. 3, 1970, LT John Jacobsen arrived and joined the team. He was ROTC out of Penn State. We were given a mission for Oct. 7. I encouraged him to sit this one out and take a few days to get used to being "in-country," but he insisted on going along. Mac was short by 31 days. I told him not to go, but be said he would go along instead of Wolf

and this would be his (Mac's) last mission. We headed for Ben Tre where we would catch a ride on gun boats to a location north of Ham Loung. We spent the night in the compound barracks and headed out the next morning. However, the MP at the gate told us the mission had been cancelled because it was "currency day," when the color of the various military "scrip" currencies was changed to thwart black market currency speculation. So we headed back to the barracks after calling back to Ham Luong and telling the others to bring our money. After about an hour we were told the mission was now a "go," so we headed for the gun boats. After travelling through the Delta for several hours, we were dropped off along with the RF forces and began making our way to a heavily VC-controlled area. After making it to a major trail used by the VC to transport weapons and supplies through the Delta, we began our slow movement through thick brush and triple canopy trees. We had not gone far when one of the RF's stepped off the trail to "relieve" himself. He stepped on a booby trap and injured his foot. At that point I told my interpreter (Fang), Mac and Jacobsen to spread out on the trail since we were seeing "kill zone" signs on trees used to ward off intruders. This made it difficult to see one another. After covering what I figured was about 100 feet or so, there was a powerful explosion. When I woke up, I was lying in the brush about 20 feet from the trail in a great deal of pain. I was medevacked to the hospital in Ben Hoa, where Major Cottington visited me. He told me an investigation revealed that the explosion was a command-detonated artillery round. To my great sorrow, Jacobsen, whom I had first met just four days before, was killed instantly; Fang died from his wounds before a helicopter could get to us; and Mac died in the hospital the next day. From what I could tell while lying on the ground, Mac and Jacobsen had not put much distance between themselves, and when they passed the spot of the booby trap, the VC blew it on them. After a couple of surgeries I returned to Ft. Gordon, Georgia, where I had more operations. That's where I finished out my time of service.

HUEY DOWN!!! – Mike Gilpin

After OCS, I attended flight school and was later deployed to Vietnam. I flew UH-1s (Hueys) with the 114th Assault Helicopter Company, based at Vinh Long in the Mekong Delta (IV Corps). The 114th was the first Airmobile Company with Hueys deployed to Vietnam (1963). We had two lift platoons, (White Knight, Red Knight), a gunship platoon (the original Cobras), a maintenance platoon (Blue Knight) and a Command and Control Platoon. I flew over the entire IV Corps from Saigon to U Minh and parts of Southern III Corps. On December 2, 1971 we were involved in an air assault deep into the VC stronghold in the dense U Minh Forest at the southern tip of Vietnam. We were transporting elements of the 9th ARVN Division in their effort to strike at NVA base camps in the area. It was an all-day tasking; we started with a flight of five Hueys and two Cobras, but we lost one Huey that morning. We flew four lifts before noon and were transporting multiple ARVN companies from the 16th Regiment. The combat assaults resumed in early afternoon. It was a clear and sunny day. We were the lead helicopter in the flight. Jim, my co-pilot, was "on the controls" flying the afternoon's first lift. We cleared the landing zone while taking light to moderate ground fire. Suddenly, the aircraft shuddered violently from left to right and began a nose-up, left roll almost to the point of going inverted. There were loud bangs of sheet metal ripping from the aircraft. I immediately looked to Jim and our eyes met. We both had a "what's happening expression." Aviators are noted for playing "games," pulling circuit breakers, throttle manipulation, bumping the cyclic, or other trickery. It was obvious, however, that we were experiencing a major in-flight emergency. This was no game. It was real.

I grabbed the controls to keep the helicopter from rolling inverted while shouting over the intercom, "I've got the controls…I've got the controls." I leveled the aircraft and the nose dipped (the center of gravity had shifted). It was obvious once my feet touched the pedals that there was a complete loss of tail rotor. (We were unaware that we had lost the entire tail rotor

and vertical fin, and neither of us knew what was happening.) Simultaneously, the low RPM audio began beeping in our helmets and the red warning lights were flashing on the console. The yellow hydraulics failure warning light and the master control panel light were flashing. I attempted to lower the collective pitch and enter autorotation. It was impossible without hydraulics. I yelled for Jim, "Get on the controls…get on the controls…autorotate, autorotate… get the pitch down…get the pitch down!" Jim acted accordingly.

At this moment, we were autorotating in a seemingly slow, falling, shallow left turn. The helicopter was uncontrollably shaking, laterally and vertically. I reached to change the radio channel to Guard (emergency channel) for a May Day call, but it occurred to me that there was no need for a call as aircraft were following. Don't waste the time. In the chaos, I was squeezing the intercom and talking incessantly. It was a monologue. "Jim, stay on the controls…stay on the controls…6600 RPM…rotor in the green…maintain a high airspeed…no ground run, Jim, no ground run…stay with me…looking good…looking good." Again our eyes met in a non-verbal manner. We had done all we could do. It was now a matter of flying it to the ground. The cockpit events were occurring at warp speed. In contrast, a look outside showed the ground slowly coming up to meet us.

My mind was blurred with thoughts. I noticed fire in my peripheral vision. Post-crash fire is an aviator's greatest fear. Were we on fire? Then another thought raced into my mind: "I'm gonna die. I hope someone tells my mother how it happened." Another look outside and the ground was closer. "Fly the aircraft, Jim. Fly the aircraft. We're looking good." Despite the noise of a dying aircraft, warning audio beeps, and intercom blast I heard another sound. I looked over my right shoulder. Rodriquez, acting as door gunner, had moved to the front. He was holding to the back of Jim's seat in a kneeling position with head bowed and speaking loudly in Spanish. I assumed he was praying and thought, "You are a good man Rodriquez. Keep it up Rodriquez, and I'll fly the helicopter." Note: Rodriquez was a company cook and not a qualified door gunner. He

simply wanted to fly with me one day. There was a shortage of door gunners, he had the "day off," and I allowed him to fly. I did not give him a safety briefing, etc. This was Vietnam. It was a war zone and the day-to-day ethic was, “Kick the skids and light the fire. Pull, pitch and go.”

We continued to fall. A canal and tree line loomed to the front of the helicopter. The time had come. The intercom relayed my appeal, “No ground run, no ground run… pull pitch, pull pitch, pull pitch.” The helicopter slammed into the rice paddy with a slight spin to the left before impact. The attempt to achieve a “no ground run autorotation” allowed the tail boom to hit first and break away from the cabin. Next the right rear skid hit and then the right front skid as the helicopter rolled onto its right side. The rotor blades dug into the ground and separated.

I screamed in pain and everything went black. My eyes opened and I saw the tree line at a perpendicular angle. “I didn’t know there were trees in heaven,” raced through my mind. Adrenaline rushed as I shouted “I’m alive!” Jim was the first one I saw. He was still strapped in his seat, face-down in the rice paddy, and unconscious with traces of blood clouding the water. Fearing fire and hanging in the left seat, I quickly pulled the seat belt harness release and fell, striking Jim’s seat. To egress I scrambled, climbed through the cargo doors, and jumped to the rice paddy. Once I realized there was no post-crash fire, I re-entered the aircraft. My crew chief, Cordle, began to move slowly. I pulled him from the aircraft to a safe distance.

The Cobras were now flying cover in left hand orbits over the crash site. We were safe. No one will shoot at us now. I returned to the helicopter to evacuate Rodriquez, the door gunner. The trail aircraft landed and its crew assisted me as I shoved him over the cargo door. I yelled for them to get Jim out. The crew unstrapped Jim and pulled him by his ankles through the broken the chin bubble (lower windshield). He was carried to the trail aircraft still unconscious, but the next thing I knew he had jumped from the trail helicopter and staggered across the paddy to the crash. As I

gathered personal weapons, maps, and other sensitive items Jim, still dazed, uttered, "I forgot to turn off the radios…I forgot to turn off the radios." I pulled him by the arm and we got aboard the trail aircraft. Warrant Officer Gary Wheeler, aka Lizard Man, was the aircraft commander. I grabbed the crew chief's intercom cord. I connected my helmet and transmitted, "I cannot believe I got it down Lizard Man. I cannot believe I got it down. Thanks for coming and getting me, Lizard Man. Thanks for coming and getting me." His response was, "Shutup damn it. Look out the left door. Foley and Hiebert are dead." He banked the aircraft in a steep left hand turn and I saw a helicopter burning across the canal. It had buried itself about 20-**25 feet deep. The adrenaline was fading and reality was apparent. I listened as he called the 3rd Surgical Hospital and advised that he was inbound with an emergency medevac. I gazed to the floor. My crew chief and door gunner were rolling on the cargo deck writhing in pain. I witnessed the tears. I heard the curses and screaming despite the helmet and engine noise. Jim simply looked stunned. He was not moving as blood was dripping from his chin. My back was pounding in severe pain. Arriving at the hospital, I was paralyzed from my neck to my waist. We soon discovered that we all had cracked spinal columns. I sustained a closed head wound (concussion). Jim had 12 stitches under the chin. It was then that Jim and I learned a mid-air collision had occurred. The number two aircraft veered and collided with us. The cause is unknown. It might have been pilot fatigue. We always flew close to the 140 hours in 30 days limit (stateside, the limit was 90 hours in a month), and you can imagine the pressure we were under. It might also have been ground fire hits, or perhaps pilot distraction because of ground fire or mechanical failure. We'll never know. Anyway, I have lived with back pain ever since and have also suffered seizures since 1981 (controlled by medication) from the closed head wound. I was awarded an 80% VA disability for my injuries.**

Look At His Boots – Mike Thornton

In September 1970, three months into my assignment as a platoon leader in Vietnam I was assigned as the body escort for my OCS classmate, Jim DuPont, who had been killed in action. Jim was also a platoon leader with a different battalion of the First Cavalry Division. The family requested me, and I was extracted from the jungle and arrived stateside 48 hours later wearing fatigues and my broken-in jungle boots.

My first stateside stop was at the Oakland Army Terminal where I would stay for a day or so to be briefed on funeral protocols and get fitted for a dress green uniform. It was late in the evening when I arrived and I was the last person allowed through food line in the nearly deserted mess hall. I found a table and ate alone. The acoustics were such that I could overhear the only other diners that evening, several junior officers who seemed to be assigned to the Oakland Army Terminal. I could only hear parts of their conversation, but I did hear one say, "Look at his boots. You know where he is going." Later they mentioned that one of their colleagues seemed to "love that stuff."

It did not take me long to piece together the context for these comments. First of all, the jungle boots in use then, had black leather bottoms with khaki colored canvas uppers. After only a short time in the bush, the entire boot became caked with brownish dust and mud and looked nothing like these same boots fresh from the box. The second was that these young men were often assigned as body escorts as part of their jobs. It took a family request to bring a soldier stateside from Vietnam and when a family request was not forthcoming, the Army grabbed anyone available for the job. They also thought it was an assignment to be avoided. As it turned out, it was a sad, difficult and emotionally charged week. And even more difficult was going back to Vietnam to my platoon. My nearly-71-year-old self tells me that I should have called the Pentagon and spoken to one of the officers on the Lieutenant's Desk and explained that I was in no emotional shape to return to my previous job. It may not

have worked, but my 24- year old self never even considered this course of action.

Flash forward to 2017. I still exchange the odd holiday and/or birthday greeting with Jim's widow, Adele, who remarried and has three adult sons. Even now, a lifetime on, when I think of that time, I can still hear these bits of conversation drifting across that nearly empty mess hall: "Look at his boots."