



THE DUSTOFFER



DUSTOFF ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

SPRING/SUMMER 2006

In this issue:

2007 HALL OF FAME NOMINEE
AND BALLOT

PLUS

PLAN NOW FOR DUSTOFF REUNION
FEBRUARY 16-18, 2007



Always a beautiful sight in a foreign land, a DUSTOFF aircraft from the 68th Medical Company (Air Ambulance), including aircraft and crews of the 45th and 159th Medical companies (AA), greets the sunset near Bagram, Afghanistan.



President's Message



Please accept my best wishes for all DUSTOFFers and their families.

The past few days have been sad ones for our small community because we have lost a true legend from our ranks. CW4 Michael J. Novosel represented everything good about aviation and especially the role that DUSTOFF has played. More than that, he was simply a wonderful human being and a friend to all of us.

Mike was buried in a beautiful ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery on April 13, with six of his fellow Medal of Honor winners in attendance. The weather was warm and sunny, and it was particularly fitting that the Army's most senior aviator was present. General Richard Cody, Vice Chief of Staff, recounted Mike's long history of aviation service before saying, "Being a medical evacuation pilot was Mike's greatest joy."

Also attending was a large group from the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America. The following day, a memorial service was held for Mike on the grounds of the State Capital in Harrisburg, as Mike was a native Pennsylvanian. Three Hueys from the Pennsylvania National Guard conducted a fly-over in his honor.

Like most of you, I have known Mike for nearly 40 years, and it will be tough going to reunions and other events without him. I know you all join me in offering our sincerest

sympathies to Mike Jr., also a fellow DUSTOFFer, and to the Novosel family.

I think all of us who attended the recent reunion owe former President Garry Atkins and Executive Director Dan Gower a round of applause. I have only been involved in that process around the edges, but am now aware of the planning, coordination, and plain hard work required to put something like that together.

As the new president, I would like to appeal to all of you for ideas to improve our organization. I think it is no secret that many of us are getting a little grey around the edges, and we need to do everything we can to get the younger folks involved, so they can pick up the reins when the time comes. In my mind, that is especially important now because of the drastic change that medical aviation is undergoing in the force structure. I would only say to the younger folks that we have faced significant obstacles before, and hard chargers like you will make things come out right.

My email is Doug.Moore@NA.AMEDD.Army.Mil, and my home address is 8907 Kenilworth Drive, Burke, VA 22015. Please call on me if I can help or if you have thoughts for improvement of our association.

—DUSTOFFer—

Letters to *The DUSTOFFer*

Dear DUSTOFFer,

This letter is almost a year late as I write it. Because I am not "in the loop" of Army Aviation's current events, I am finding out things I care deeply about in a very belated fashion. I have a strong need to express my opinion, even though I know this letter will not change anything on iota.

In the Fall/Winter 2005 issue of *The DUSTOFFer*, I read with GREAT dismay the comments of COL Bill Forrester, Chief of Staff, U.S. Army Aviation Center. Of course, he has the best interests of his troops in mind, but I am very concerned about his decisions and comments.

First of all, I would like to thank MG Pat Brady for his comments regarding this issue. Right on the money, sir!

I was just one of hundreds of DUSTOFF pilots many years ago in Vietnam—a lowly Warrant Officer fresh out of Mother Rucker and Fort Sam. I don't think COL Forrester was in Vietnam. You see, sir, it WAS the haste after a call for help that blindly launched us.

It was a haste that allowed us to save countless lives, even while losing some of our own. An acceptable risk, I would think. Hastily launched because we knew every second counted, often going into hot LZs because we weren't comfortable waiting for gunships.

Had you been lying on the ground wounded and in pain, would you have wanted me to check with higher-ups and

attend a briefing before I launched? Should I synchronize the enormous and complex requirements to ensure successful completion of your rescue as you propose? Should I wait 24 hours to ensure all is clear and it's safe to land?

No, sir, I don't understand all the ramifications of the issues. I am not so naive as to presume that I do. But this is what I DO UNDERSTAND:

I understand that the guys on the ground depended on us, sir, depended on us to save their lives and the lives of their comrades. We launched into pitch-black skies at night. We launched into the mountains of Northern Vietnam where the bad guys lived, descended through minute holes in the clouds from several thousand feet, so that others may live.

Had we gone through a weather briefing and waited for an official go, it would never have happened. The weather would have been deemed too bad to fly, and another head wound would have gone untreated until too late. I was there, sir, and we launched and saved that soldier on a moonless night in a jungle valley. Had we not launched, he would surely have died, and there would be one more name on The Wall. Those hasty launches were repeated all over the theater, saving lives on a daily and nightly basis.

I understand that the guys on the ground don't understand weather briefings and chain of command decisions before "unhastily" launching. Wasn't having to go through

a Chain of Command and red tape at least partially responsible for us being surprised at Pearl Harbor? Can't we learn from that? Of course, there is a time and a place for all that, but not when our boys' blood is spilling all over the ground and we have the assets and ability to save them. They don't understand a perfectly good DUSTOFF helicopter sitting idle on the pad while they are suffering.

I understand the battered and bloody bodies being loaded on my aircraft—some still breathing and some not. "If we had got there sooner, could we have saved them?" is a question I asked myself more than once. I guarantee that, had we waited for a "go-ahead" from higher-up, many more would have died.

Consolidate your assets, sir; incorporate your combat multipliers, your APXs, your FHUIYs, and any other acronyms you care to. But DUSTOFF must remain as an entity to "launch with haste" if it is to remain effective and of true service to our fighting forces. Keep it simple, sir, for without the simplicity and the ability to responsibly launch with haste, many lives will be lost.

I'm not suggesting blind bravado here, but are today's Army Aviators so protected that they won't launch without a blessing from above? Of course not, but that seems to be the trend. I'm certain their training is still the best available and they are just as committed as we were, but are their skills and responsible decision-making abilities being taken away from them? Shouldn't they be allowed to complete the mission based on their OWN assessment of their abilities and equipment?

I also understand that I share MG Brady's concerns. In my opinion, we, as Vietnam DUSTOFF pilots, sometimes learned the hard way and that we have tried to pass those lessons on to our successors. Unfortunately, it appears that our efforts have been lost to history and forgotten or ignored as "old school" by those in power and, therefore, "rife with danger." To me, the real danger is in ignoring what has already been learned. No, I am not whining about the good 'ole days. In claiming that DUSTOFF is coming full circle, by your own words, you are stating that you are going back to doing it wrong. We, As DUSTOFF, already fought that battle once!

Finally, I understand that, sadly, from now on, when I read of casualties, I will wonder how many could have lived had the DUSTOFF crews been allowed to launch in haste. I am very disheartened that my sacrifices and the sacrifices of ALL DUSTOFF crews have apparently been for naught. We did it right, sir. It ain't broke, but it appears that now it will be. I hope that I am wrong.

(Former) CW2 Phil Marshall
DMZ DUSTOFF 711
237th Medical Detachment (Helicopter Ambulance)

—DUSTOFFer—



Army Aviators

An 80 year-old man went to the doctor for a checkup. The doctor was amazed at what great shape the guy was in.

The doctor asked, "To what do you attribute your good health?"

The old timer said, "I'm an Army Aviator, and that's why I'm in such good shape. I'm up well before daylight and out flying up and down the countryside."

The doctor said, "Well, I'm sure that helps, but there's got to be more to it. How old was your dad when he died?"

The old timer said, "Who said my dad's dead?"

The doctor said, "You mean you're 80 years old and your dad's still alive? How old is he?"

The old timer said, "He's 100 years old, and in fact he flew next to me this morning in his own airplane. That's why he's still alive . . . he's an Army Aviator!"

The doctor said, "Well, that's great, but I'm sure there's more to it. How about your dad's dad? How old was he when he died?"

The old timer said, "Who said my grandpa's dead?"

The doctor said, "You mean you're 80 years old and your grandfather's still living? How old is he?"

The old timer said, "He's 118 years old."

The doctor was getting frustrated at this point and said, "I guess he went flying with you this morning too?"

The old timer said, "No . . . Grandpa couldn't go this morning because he got married."

The doctor said in amazement, "Got married! Why would a 118 year old guy want to get married?"

The old timer said, "Who said he wanted to?"

A Typical Pilot's T-Shirt

The average pilot, despite the somewhat swaggering exterior, is very much capable of such feelings as love, affection, intimacy, and caring.

These feelings just don't involve anyone else.

Closing Out the Flight Plan

Mike Novosel, Medal of Honor Holder, Dies

by Jim Tice, Army Times staff writer



Michael J. Novosel Sr., a veteran of three wars, a Medal of Honor recipient, and a major figure in Army aviation history, died April 2 at Walter Reed Army Medical Center after a long battle with cancer.

The 83-year-old retired Chief Warrant Officer 4 earned the Medal of Honor for actions on October 2, 1969, when he completed 15 hazardous combat extractions in a UH-1 Huey helicopter, saving the lives of 29 South Vietnamese soldiers who had been surrounded by enemy forces along the Cambodian border.

His military career began during World War II when, at age 19, he was commissioned in the Army Air Forces, and subsequently flew combat missions against Japan as a B-29 bomber

pilot. When the Japanese surrendered aboard the battleship Missouri in September 1945, Novosel commanded a bomber in a massive flyover of the ceremony in Tokyo harbor.

After leaving active duty in 1949, Novosel joined the Air Force Reserve and was recalled to active duty for the Korean War.

By 1964, when Vietnam was heating up, Novosel, by then a reserve lieutenant colonel, requested recall to active duty for the burgeoning war. Told the Air Force was overstrength in lieutenant colonels, Novosel—by then 42 years old—accepted an appointment as an Army warrant officer, and eventually was assigned to the 283rd Medical Detachment as a “dustoff” air evacuation pilot.

Interestingly, around the same time as the action that earned Novosel the Medal of Honor, his son joined him in Vietnam as a helicopter pilot in the same unit. Also named Mike, and also now a retired chief warrant officer 4, the younger Novosel was also a “dustoff” pilot. Together with his father, he is credited with rescuing more than 7,000 men during their tours in Vietnam.

After several assignments as an author, lecturer, and instructor with the Warrant Officer Career College and

Army Aviation Center at Fort Rucker, Alabama, Novosel retired in 1985. The Army renamed Fort Rucker’s main street “Novosel Avenue” to honor the last serving U.S. military pilot to have flown combat missions during World War II.

As a master army aviator and Air Force command pilot, Novosel is the only person to hold the top pilot ratings for the two services. In 42 years on flight status, he logged 12,400 flying hours, 2,038 of those in combat. During two tours in Vietnam, he rescued an astounding 5,589 wounded soldiers.

“I was in awe of his bravery and the stories I had heard,” recalled Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Richard Cody, remembering how he first met Novosel early in his own career. “But what inspired me at the time, and what has stayed with me all these years, was Mike’s quiet, matter-of-fact, ‘follow-me’ example.

“When I last saw Mike he was at Walter Reed, clearly ailing, but making his way among the wards visiting our injured soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Sometimes the soldier defines the man,” Cody said. “In Mike’s case, the character of the man defines what it means to be a soldier.” ■

Army Pilot Who Saved Villagers Dies

New Orleans—Hugh Thompson Jr., a former Army helicopter pilot honored for rescuing Vietnamese civilians from his fellow GIs during the My Lai massacre, died early Friday, 6 January 2006. He was 62.

Mr. Thompson, whose role in the 1968 massacre did not become widely known until decades later, died of cancer at the Veteran’s Affairs Medical Center in Alexandria.

“These people were looking at me for help and there was no way I could

turn my back on them,” Thompson recalled in a 1988 interview.

Early in the morning of 16 March 1968, Thompson, door-gunner Lawrence Colburn, and crew chief Glenn Andreotta came upon U.S. ground troops killing Vietnamese civilians in and around the village of My Lai. They landed a helicopter in the line of fire between American troops and fleeing Vietnamese civilians and pointed their own guns at the U.S. soldiers to prevent more killings. Colburn

and Andreotta had provided cover for Mr. Thompson as he went forward to confront the leader of the U.S. forces. Mr. Thompson later coaxed civilians out of a bunker, so they could be evacuated, and then landed his helicopter again to pick up a wounded child whom they transported to a hospital. Their efforts led to the cease-fire order at My Lai.

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In 1988, the Army honored the three men with the prestigious soldier's Medal, the highest award for bravery not involving conflict with an enemy. It was a posthumous award for Andreotta, who was killed in battle three weeks after My Lai.

"It was the ability to do the right thing, even at the risk of their personal safety, that guided these soldiers to do what they did," Army MG Michael

Ackerman said at the 1988 ceremony. The three "set the standard for all soldiers to follow."

LT William Calley, a platoon leader, was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for his role in the killings, but served just three years under house arrest when then-President Richard Nixon reduced his sentence.

For years, Mr. Thompson suffered snubs from those who considered him

unpatriotic. He recalled a congressman angrily saying that Thompson himself was the only serviceman who should be punished because of My Lai.

As the years passed, Mr. Thompson, a member of the DUSTOFF Association and a former DUSTOFF pilot, became an example to future generations of soldiers. ■

Member of First Med-Evac Mission Dies

Jim Phelan, who was involved in the first helicopter combat rescue, died at his home on May 16, 2006. He was the husband of the late Jean Ross Howard Phelan, founder of the Whirly-Girls.

Phelan, a crew chief, performed the first helicopter combat rescue, along with pilot Carter Harman, on April 25–26, 1944. This crew flew their Sikorsky YR-4 behind Japanese lines in the China-Burma Jungle and rescued American pilot Ed "Murphy" Hladovcak and three British soldiers after their plane had crashed. ■

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Time Capsule—1971

Notes from the Aviation Consultant

Many times removed famous DUSTOFFer Dick Scott, then the Aviation Consultant for the Army Surgeon General, dropped these notes in the Fall 1971 edition of the *U.S. Army Medical Department Newsletter*.

As the dust settles from the many changes affecting the aviator, several factors should begin emerging. First, AMEDDD Aviation is an integral part of both the Army Medical Department and Army Aviation, and must continue to provide a vital service to each. This statement in itself should set the stage for our mission. We do provide a service, and that attitude should permeate through each unit and individual. When we cease to operate within this concept, we cease to justify our existence.

Second, progress is continuing at a fast pace. Despite the cutback in Army strength and resources, we will have those units required to support the modern geographically located to provide the best area aeromedical mission and staffed with the best individuals. To illustrate the last statement, let me quote just a few instances:

- In San Antonio, the 507th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) has led the way in the MAST project and has gained worldwide fame for dedication and professionalism. At the same time, the 507th has been conducting an instrument training course, increasing our resources in instrument pilots.
- Concurrently, Brooke Army Medical Center's Aviation Branch has conducted instrument training. One of their first graduates was LTC Ed Haswell, adding a long overdue dimension to one of our senior aviators. Perhaps others in this category will at last be afforded this opportunity.
- At Fort Meade, CPT Tom Jacoby has started instrument training and will soon be assisted by another examiner, CPT Clarence Cooper.
- At Fort Carson, Colorado, the MAST missions have doubled since the 78th Medical Detachment Helicopter Ambulance) took the mission in mid-April. Again, with CPT George Hurtado, an instrument examiner, present and commanding, the aviator training takes high priority.
- Every unit either has an examiner present or programmed for the near future. Aviation safety officers are moving into safety jobs and getting excellent results. Additionally, professional maintenance officers are assisting in creating new safety and operational readiness records.
- Our efforts will continue to upgrade the air ambulance units in Europe by adding examiners, safety officers, and maintenance officers to their numbers.

Some confusion headed your way—approximately a year ago, in an effort to clarify and better identify skills by MOS, Department of the Army decided that a 63506 MOS better suited the AMEDDD aviator. This change recently surfaced in TOE changes. When it was quickly pointed out by the Surgeon General's staff that the 1981 was a career field within the AMEDDD, the error was corrected and action taken to maintain the 1981 in all references. However, expect six months to a year of confusion, as TOEs and records are changed back to reflect the correct MOS of 1981.

The Army Air/Sea Rescue Award

The Army Aviation Air/Sea Rescue award, sponsored by Goodrich Hoist and Winch, has been presented to Company C, 3rd Battalion, 25th Aviation Regiment, Combat Aviation Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. The DUSTOFF crew from Company C, formerly the 68th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) performed a lifesaving mission on 26 June 2005 during a training flight. They spotted three Afghan children being swept down a raging river, in danger of drowning. Putting their own lives at risk in a hostile combat area and in deteriorating weather with high winds, the crew saved the children, using the rescue hoist. Due to their actions, a local Afghan village was able to understand the positive things the U.S. and allied forces are doing for their country. DUSTOFF crewmembers included CW2 James Gisclair, CW2 Nathan Scott, SGT Tyrone Jordan, and SPC Christopher Zimmerman. MAJ Peter Eberhardt, Commander, and Gisclair accepted the award from Goodrich's Roy Zavitz on behalf of the others.

Landmine Victim Gets U.S. Army Help

An article in the *Philippine Inquirer* in Spring 2005 shows how the U.S. Army, with dedicated aeromedical aircraft, helps its allies as they strive to become self-sufficient.

Jolo, Sulu—The United States Army military facilitated the medical evacuation of a 37-year-old farmer here, who has been suffering from gangrene following a landmine explosion.

Captain Abe Sarajan, spokesperson of the Army's 104th Infantry Brigade, said the farmer was walking with his daughter and another companion on Pata Island on April 27 when he stepped on a landmine. The farmer's daughter and the other victim died from the explosion, while he suffered a severely damaged leg.

He was rushed to the Sulu Provincial Hospital, but doctors said he should be brought to Zamboanga. However, transporting the farmer proved to be a big problem.

There was simply no available means because, at the time the advice was issued, there were no longer any flights available for Zamboanga, and ferry trips had been cancelled.

Sarajan said the International Red Cross had informed them of the situation.

On Thursday, the farmer was airlifted by U.S. soldiers to the Zamboanga Medical Center, where his leg had to be amputated.

"The U.S. military is providing this farmer from Pata with medical transport because it is the right thing to do. Take care of others who are in need," said LTC Greg Wilson, Commander of the U.S. contingent in Jolo for the assessment.

U.S. soldiers have come to war-torn areas in the province to assess the need for humanitarian support and civil projects. ■

Three Afghan Children Rescued Near Salerno

A great DUSTOFF story released by Regular Army, June 30, 2005

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan—A routine orientation flight turned out to be anything but routine, at least for three Afghan children stranded in the middle of a flooded river near Salerno Wednesday.

It all started as Chief Warrant Officer James Gisclair, from California, was giving an orientation flight to a pilot new to the area. He and the new pilot, Chief Warrant Officer Nathan Scott, from Utah, spotted a flash flood occurring after heavy rains hit the area earlier that day. They noticed a group of people standing alongside the banks of a flooding river pointing toward the middle as they followed its path.

"As we looked closer, we saw three kids stuck on a concrete foundation with the river rushing past them," Gisclair said. "We went back to Salerno where we asked to go back to rescue the kids. We were approved to go back and get them, and when we got back there, the water had risen above their feet."

The pilots, flying a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter configured for medical evacuation, couldn't land close enough to pull the stranded kids to safety and had to rely on a hoist system called a jungle penetrator. The hoist is basically a cable with a seat at the end and is lowered or raised with the help of the aircraft's crew chief. To rescue the children, someone had to sit on the end of the cable, while someone else lowered them to the children.

The arduous task fell to SGT Tyrone Jordan from North Carolina. As Jordan got ready to be lowered to the now panic-

stricken children, SP Christopher Zimmerman, from Arizona, set the winch in motion, lowering him toward the rapidly moving water.

"They were real scared. Scared and cold, shivering in fact," said Jordan. "They didn't want to come to me at first, but when I smiled and held out my hand, they came running."

"They didn't want to come to me at first, but when I smiled and held out my hand, they came running."

The hoist could hold only three people at a time, so Jordan took the two youngest boys, whom he guesses were ages five and eight, up with him to the helicopter.

"They were really scared of heights, I think, as one of them panicked and kicked me off the hoist when I put them into the aircraft. Thanks to Zimmerman, I was secured to the cable and was able

to pull myself back into it," Jordan said.

Gisclair and Scott piloted the helicopter a short distance away to let the two children out before going back for the last one.

"We flew them about three football fields away," Gisclair said. "We set them down in an open back yard and then went back for the last kid."

The crowd of onlookers, which had looked disappointed and in fact, mad, when the aircraft flew away after first spotting the children, had now swelled to approximately 600 people, Gisclair said. The aircrew had no way of telling

(Children, continued on page 8.)

54th Returns Home from OIF 04-06/Flies over 7,000 Hours

Reported by MAJ Peter Lehning, Commander of the 54th Medical Company (Air Ambulance)

The Mighty 54th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) has rotated home once again after another successful deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Support OIF 04-06, the 54th found itself in the familiar confines of LSA Anaconda, better known as Balad Air Base, less than nine months after they had left the first time.

The company found the surroundings very familiar but much improved by the 82nd Med, who served in the interim. The company fell under the command of the 36th Evacuation Battalion for the majority of the year. Then on 10 October 2005, as part of Army Transformation, the company became a separate company under 1/159th Aviation Battalion out of Fort Bragg, known as the Renegades.

Upon arrival in December 2004, the 54th was given the honor and added responsibility by LTC Robert Mitchell, Commander, 36th Evacuation Battalion, of taking on six aircraft and aircrews

(Children, continued from page 7.)

them they had to go to Salerno Air Base before they could rescue the children. In the end, it didn't matter, and their intent was soon clear enough for all to see.

"They were happy to see us, I could tell," he said. "They were clapping and waving their hands when we picked up and set down the first two. The kids were scared but they were safe."

The third boy, who Jordan guesses was age 10, came quickly to the aircraft. "He wasn't scared at all of me or the helicopter, but he was cold and shivering very badly. The wind near the water was whipping around pretty good, and the water was flowing very fast."

The aircraft's pilots and crew are made up of a hodgepodge of units from across the world. Gisclair and Zimmerman are from the 68th Medical Evacuation Company in Hawaii and Alaska, and co-pilot Scott is from the 159th Medical Evacuation Company from Germany. Jordan is also based in Germany with the 45th Medical Evacuation Company. ■

from the 236th Medical Company out of Germany. The crews were attached and became fully embedded into every facet of the 54th, helping cover down at all field sites. This resulted in the 54th becoming the largest MEDEVAC in the Army, with over 170 Soldiers, 18 aircraft, and over 20 flight crews, covering six different locations throughout Iraq.

The company actually surged to serving with 21 aircraft for two months, as the 82nd left three behind for the 54th's use. They covered Balad, Baqubah, Caldwell, Al Kut, Ad Diwaniyah, and Talil, supporting U.S., Coalition, and Iraqi forces. They had the additional mission of supporting Baghdad with Class VIII resupply and nightly patient movement into and out of the hospitals in the Baghdad area.

The 54th was relieved by the 57th Medical Company (AA) and Charlie Company, 3/126th Medical Company (AA), as they spilt the mission the 54th had been covering. The 54th had tremendous accomplishments during the past year. In support of OIF 04-06, the 54th logged over 7,000 combat flying hours, conducted over 3,200 flight missions, and treated and evacuated over 6,500 patients to medical care, of which 1,150 were urgent care patients. Of these missions, over 400 were point-of-injury pickups.

In addition, the 54th was collocated with the theater blood and Class VIII warehouses, resulting in over 1,450 boxes of medical resupply being moved. These accomplishments reset OIF history in every category for MEDEVAC companies serving in theater.

In the critical, often forgotten, supporting role was the aviation maintenance platoon. Manned to handle only 15 aircraft in garrison, they were thrust into the position of maintaining 18-21 aircraft with no additional assets. The 236th organic crews were attached with no support personnel. The maintenance platoon responded with typical DUSTOFF excellence, maintaining a 77% or better Fully Mission Capable rate all year, and seven of those months were above 80% FMC. Internally, they conducted 12 PMI-1 phases and ran 24-hour operations in support of the mission. They were rewarded with the Sikorsky Unit Maintenance Award and the Sikorsky Maintenance Milestone Award.

The 54th returned to Fort Lewis, Washington, on 15 April 2006 and cased its colors for the final time as an Air Ambulance Company. This will close a chapter on the long and proud lineage of the Mighty 54th, until it is called again to serve under a new DUSTOFF guidon. ■

To Be or Not to Be: Air Force Pilot vs. Naval Aviator

In response to a letter from an aspiring fighter pilot on which military academy to attend, pilot/author Bob Norris penned the following:

Congratulations on your selection to both the Naval and Air Force Academies. Your goal to become a fighter pilot is impressive. Each service has a different culture.

USAF Snapshot: Exceptionally well-organized and well-run. Terrific training. Top-notch aircraft and maintenance. Facilities are excellent. USAF is homogenous, and enlisted personnel are brightest and best trained. Your Mom would want you to become an Air Force pilot.

Navy Snapshot: Navy is split into two different fleets. Aviators are a part of the Navy, but so are Surface Warfare and Submariners. Navy is heterogeneous. You are deployed for long periods. Maintenance is variable. You fly in very bad weather, and you will be scared very often. The hottest girl in the bar wants to meet you in Singapore.

Oh yes, the Army flight program—don't even think about it unless you've got a pair bigger than basketballs. Those guys are completely crazy.

Lessons Learned from Crew Members

- Everybody's a hero on the ground in the club after the fourth drink.
- The farther you fly into the mountains, the louder the strange engine noises become.
- Medals are okay, but having your body and all your friends in one piece at the end of the mission day is better.
- Being shot hurts.
- Running out of pedal, fore or aft cyclic, or collective are all bad ideas. Any combination of these can be deadly.
- Nomex is NOT fireproof.
- There is only one rule in war: When you win, you get to make up the Rules.
- C-4 can make a dull day fun.
- If you win the battle, you are entitled to the spoils. If you lose, you don't care.
- Always make sure someone has a P-38.
- Prayer may not help . . . but it can't hurt.
- Flying is better than walking. Walking is better than running. Running is better than crawling. All of these, however, are better than extraction by DUSTOFF, even if this is technically a form of flying.
- "You have the right to remain silent" is excellent advice.

DUSTOFF Pilot's Report from New Orleans

A note forwarded by COL (Ret.) John Erskine about DUSTOFF operations in response to Hurricane Katrina

I'm back home for a few days while we work on our helicopters and wait for the crowd at the Naval Air Station in New Orleans to thin out. I flew Wednesday, Friday, Monday, and Tuesday with the D.C. Guard before we left. My crew had 81 saves in the days we flew. Tuesday, I couldn't find anybody alive who needed to come out, but we marked the location of five bodies for retrieval. My unit got to New Orleans as soon as the winds abated, and as soon as we could get fuel to sustain operations. I've heard the news report that the Red Cross helicopters did a great job. Some observations:

- We trained our enlisted men, specifically the medics and crew chiefs, very hard on the rescue hoist. During our deployment in Operation Enduring Freedom, we had only two hoist missions. The same number is typical for an experienced medical in a Reserve Component DUSTOFF unit over his whole career. We now have medics and crew chiefs with 50 hoists under their belts—many of them difficult precision hoists onto car hoods, 18 wheeler cab roofs, and onto covered porches. We kept our crew chiefs and medics together as battle-rostered crews, and they developed advanced techniques early and amazed me with their skills and bravery.
- Some people just don't get it. Yesterday, I flew over people with grills and coolers on their roofs and they raised signs saying, "We're OK." Two houses down, bodies were floating.
- The violence you heard about was only the tip of the iceberg. Some of the guys who deployed early as security forces encountered in a neighborhood four dead men who had been shot, execution style; their wives had been raped.
- There were more helicopters in New Orleans than I've ever seen before. We lost one of our aircraft doing a roof top pickup. He rocked back on his skids and broke through the roof; he was unable to free the aircraft. They hoisted the crew out and recovered the aircraft with a CH-47 a few days later.
- We all have personal firearms. I briefed my crews to expect a "Blackhawk Down" scenario if we went down. Unbelievable over a U.S. city.
- I flew within 100 yards of Air Force One at Louis Armstrong International Airport. Bush had flown in and out without shutting down the airspace. I was cautioned by Air Traffic Control "not to overfly THE AIRPLANE." I complied by flying back behind THE AIRPLANE and the following SUVs full of instant death.
- Two things would have made our situation better for us. The first is iridium phones—10 at each flight facility would have made all of the difference. Our radio communications sucked. The second is getting our own refueling tankers in place early. By the time they got ready to refuel us, the Naval Air Station and Louis Armstrong International were all pumping fuel.
- The airspace over New Orleans turned into the Wild West. All the other aircraft over the city were using our VHF and UHF internal frequencies for the first few days. As time went on, the airport towers came back online, and we started using the normal frequencies again. I saw every conceivable helicopter over New Orleans, including Soviet designs.
- I'm glad to be home for a few days. The search and rescue phase is over. Now it's all body retrieval and clean-up.
- We're still waiting for the French contingent to show up. ■

E-DUSTOFFer Available Online Fall 2006

With the rising costs associated with production and mailing of *The DUSTOFFer*, the Executive Council has voted to explore moving *The DUSTOFFer* to become *The eDUSTOFFer*.

We will publish *The DUSTOFFer* in its present form for this edition. After that, to receive *The DUSTOFFer* in hard copy, members would specifically request that it be mailed to them. We will still produce hard copy editions to place in the Aviation Museum, at the AMEDD Museum, and to provide in new member packets.

We will publish *The eDUSTOFFer* and post it on the DUSTOFF Association Web site. It will be in Adobe Acrobat Portable Digital Format (commonly known as a .pdf file). Readers are available free online from <<http://www.adobe.com>>.

Several benefits are made possible by this move. First, we will save approximately \$1,500 in operating expenses. Each hard copy *DUSTOFFer* costs \$1.20 to print and mail. Each time one is forwarded or returned, it costs us either \$.70 or \$2.02 for the post office to accomplish forwarding or returning undeliverable copies. We pay out an additional \$50 each edition for members who fail to send in changes of address.

Second, we can produce *eDUSTOFFer* with color photos, and we can expand the size. Currently we are limiting our editions to 28 pages with no color photos. We can actually include more articles in each online edition and use more photos.

Lastly, it will be immediately available online when it is finished. A notice will be placed on the Web site in advance, giving members the expected date of publication and then notice of its actual publication. We will archive copies for reference and retrieval, as well. We will publish in June and November.

If you do not operate a computer, just need to have a hard copy mailed to you, or just prefer that method, please send us a letter or e-mail requesting your "hard copy" subscription. Otherwise, starting with the fall 2006 edition *The eDUSTOFFer* will be published and made available online.

Current Events in Medical Evacuation Proponency

*CPT Adrian Salvetti, Primary Action Officer
for Medical Evacuation Proponency,
forwarded a few interesting facts on
DUSTOFF units worldwide.*

Two Air Ambulance companies have officially transformed to a new 85-person TOE—only one of which has the new HH-60L aircraft—one in Korea and one at Fort Hood, now in Iraq. Most of the other companies are currently working under more informal, semi-transformed relationships. Many still retain their maintenance platoon. Several companies have, or will soon, conducted geographic moves from one home station to another to accommodate transformation—the 542nd has moved to Fort Campbell, 498th to Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia, and the 54th to Fort Bragg.

We have begun to fully field the HH-60L, and the HH-60M will appear in FY 2007 with a relatively slow production schedule. The UH-60As will remain in the DUSTOFF fleet for some time. The new aircraft have updated and more modern avionics, storm scope, Forward-Looking Infrared Radar (FLIR), and the "glass cockpit," among other enhancements. The cabin will have a completely new setup, with hydraulic litters on the cabin walls, built-in oxygen production, air conditioning, and crashworthy crew seats in the rear of the cabin.

The Light Utility Helicopter (LUH) will tentatively be fielded in FY 07, with priority to our TDA DUSTOFF units. The LUH is still in the selection process.

We have units deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Balkans. The garrison DUSTOFF mission and the MAST Program have been cancelled at Army level. Private air ambulance contractors, ground ambulances, or other alternatives are used at each post. This move is generally triggered by OPTEMPO and Transformation. Units in Korea, Germany, Alaska, and the TDA DUSTOFF units still perform the garrison mission. Hawaii just recently gave up the mission due to multiple deployments. ■

Special Meeting

Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 542
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania



Doug Moore, DUSTOFF Association president, presents the first Mike Novosel DUSTOFF Hall of Fame coin to Mike Novosel Jr. and Margaret Novosel.

On Sunday, 7 May 2006, Doug Moore, Dan Gower, and Jim Truscott represented the DUSTOFF Association at a very special occasion in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. John Travers, Chapter President of the Vietnam Veterans of America, officiated at a ceremony that changed the name of the local organization to the Michael J. Novosel, Medal of Honor, Capital Chapter 542. Receiving the honor were Mike Novosel Jr. and his wife, Margaret. Additional remarks and salutations were provided by Pennsylvania's gracious Lieutenant Governor, Catherine Baker Knoll. The meeting was attended by a large number of chapter members, their families, and patriotic friends and supporters.

—*DUSTOFFer*—

DUSTOFF Association Proudly Announces Expanded Awards Program

Beginning with the 2007 Reunion, the DUSTOFF Association will be expanding its awards program. Thanks to the generosity of our corporate sponsors, we will now be awarding four categories of awards. Sikorsky Aircraft will sponsor the DUSTOFF Rescue of the Year Award. Breeze Eastern will sponsor our DUSTOFF Crew Chief of the Year Award. Air Methods Inc. will sponsor our DUSTOFF Medic of the Year Award, and Mayor Stephen R. Reed of Harrisburg, PA, will sponsor our DUSTOFF Aviator of the Year Award. Unit commanders, please look for a "call for nominations" email shortly with instructions on how to nominate worthy members of your units. Members, take time to thank our corporate sponsors when you see their representatives at the next reunion.

Plan Now for Reunion 2007

Make your plans now to join us for the next DUSTOFF Association Reunion. We will meet in San Antonio at the Holiday Inn Riverwalk on the weekend of 16–28 February 2007. We are working hard to make this another memorable event. Friday night is once again going to be set aside for reuniting with your favorite unit. We DESPERATELY need volunteers to step up to the plate and be "Unit Captions." Your duty, should you decide to accept it, will be to work with our Executive Director to decide where you will hold your unit get-together on Friday night. Use your imagination and get together with your comrades to decide how you want to handle it. We will publish any known plans in the November *DUSTOFFer*, so time is of the essence—make your plans now. For those who don't have a favorite unit or have a unit that doesn't set up a separate event, we will work on having a big mixer at the hotel of some sort. We don't want anyone to feel left out. Contact Dan Gower and discuss the options as soon as possible. You may call him at work (210-221-1835), on his cell phone (210-379-3985), or at home in the evenings (210-822-7206 or 325-388-2631). Don't be afraid to volunteer—it can be fun.

DUSTOFF Reunion 2006



COL David MacDonald, Director, Medical Evacuation Proponency, Fort Rucker, discusses critical issues at the Business Meeting on Saturday Morning.



Original DUSTOFFers Tom Christie and Ray Jackson.



Retired DUSTOFFers Vince Cedola, Dave Dryden, and Incoming Association President Doug Moore.



The elegant and gracious Ladies of DUSTOFF gather for their traditional Saturday reunion luncheon.



COL (Ret) Merle Snyder speaks at his Induction into the DUSTOFF Hall of Fame.



DUSTOFFer Walt Harris has eloquent words for the induction of Billy Hughes into the DUSTOFF Hall of Fame.

DUSTOFF Reunion 2006



Quintessential DUSTOFF Flight Medic Billy Hughes receives his well-deserved induction into the DUSTOFF Hall of Fame.



SGT Michael Bishop accepts the award for 2005 DUSTOFF Crewmember of the Year.



Recipients of 2005 DUSTOFF Rescue of the Year.



Lovely wives of DUSTOFF Hall of Fame inductees Billy Hughes and Merle Snyder join them at their plaques at the AMEDD Museum.



Mike Novosel's caisson moves from the chapel at Arlington to his final resting place, followed by family and fellow DUSTOFFers, appreciating the beautiful environment and Mike's many contributions to DUSTOFF and to Army Aviation—A friend forever who has gone to a far better place.



LTC Bob Mitchell addresses the Business Meeting on Army Transformation on Saturday morning.

Combat Aviation Brigade Purple Heart Awardee Returns to Fight

SGT 1st Class Reginald Rogers, Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs Office, 4th Infantry Division, reported the following story of a heroic young man.

CAMP TAJI, Iraq—The Encarta Dictionary’s definition of a hero is somebody who commits an act of remarkable bravery or who has shown great courage, strength of character, or another admirable quality. One Combat Aviation Brigade pilot has exhibited every quality associated with the word.

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jason Didonato rejoined his comrades in Company C, 2nd Battalion, 4th Aviation Regiment, here at Camp Taji April 12, 2006. Didonato was gravely wounded when a round from a terrorist’s anti-aircraft gun pierced the cockpit of the HH-60L MEDEVAC helicopter he was piloting during a MEDEVAC mission Nov. 26, 2005.

Despite several months of surgery and physical therapy, Didonato said he was ready to get back to Iraq and continue with the mission. He pointed out, however, that the incident remains fresh in his mind.

“We were pulling duty that morning, and we had some routines (MEDEVAC missions) in the chute down at Kalsu,” explained Didonato, who was awarded the Purple Heart for his actions on that day. “We flew down to Kalsu, and on our way back to the combat surgical hospital with the pa-

tients on board, we started taking surface-to-air fire.”

Didonato and his co-pilot, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Toby Blackmon,

“I was trying to make sense of what had happened. . . . I realized I was hurt, so I transferred the flight controls to Toby, then I passed out.”

along with crew chief Spc. Saul Lopez and flight medic Sgt. Shane Pollock, all heard the discharge of the gun firing at them but were unsure of what it was and dismissed it as being normal aircraft rattle.

“We basically said, ‘you hear that tapping noise?’” Didonato said. “We thought maybe it was just a normal aircraft rattle. It was questionable, but it wasn’t really alarming. Right after that . . . boom! Everything changed, and it was way too fast for my brain to comprehend. I thought something had come through the windshield and hit me in the chest.”

He said he could clearly see the big

hole in the windshield, but what he didn’t know at the time was that the windshield was actually where the round had exited the aircraft. He explained that he could feel the round impacting his body, but the reality of the situation had yet to set in.

“I could feel the impact; it felt more like a vacuum,” he explained. “It was a concussion-type feel, where you can feel the vacuum from the blast. I almost went into complete shock because it ripped my pectoralis major (chest muscle) almost completely off.”

The round, which was believed to be a .50 caliber-type round used on anti-aircraft guns, entered the helicopter from below and behind Didonato’s seat. It then traveled upward and entered his left tricep muscle, severing the whole nerve in his arm. The bullet then ripped through his left pectoral muscle and exited his body before shattering the windshield.

“I was trying to make sense of what had happened,” he explained. “I realized I was hurt, so I transferred the flight controls to Toby, and then . . . I passed out.”

He said he remembered regaining consciousness just as Blackmon was landing the aircraft at Camp Falcon, which is where the unit was stationed at the time in support of the 3rd Infantry Division.

“I came-to right before he was landing at Falcon,” he said. “I think my lung was collapsing because I remember gasping for air, and maybe the aircraft was vibrating during the landing. It starts to shudder real bad. That may have helped me regain consciousness. I remember landing, getting out of the aircraft and lying down on a litter.”

It was then that another flight medic from the unit, SGT Branden Coughlin, came over and had him moved into the troop medical clinic there. Didonato said he recalls them listening to his lungs, and one of them wasn’t breathing very well. They inserted a chest



CAMP TAJI, Iraq—Pictured are members of Company C, 2nd Battalion, 4th Aviation Regiment who participated in the medical evacuation of CW2 Jason Didonato, third from left. Also pictured are SSG Richard Miller, SPC Saul Lopez, Didonato, CW2 Toby Blackmon, SGT Branden Coughlin, and CPT Corey Boudreau. (U.S. Army photo by SGT 1st Class Reginald Rogers, CAB PAO, 4th Inf. Div.)

(Awardee, continued on page 15.)

A Ribbon for Soldiers Fighting in Iraq

Submitted by a grade school friend of Jim Truscott, Betty Taylor of Shawnee, Oklahoma.

Written by Chrystal Koehly.

I sat in my seat on the Boeing 767 waiting for everyone to hurry and stow their carry-ons and grab a seat so we could start what I was sure would be a long, uneventful flight home. With the huge capacity and slow moving people taking their time to stuff luggage far too big for the overhead and never paying attention to holding up the growing line behind them, I simply shook my head, knowing that this flight was not starting out very well.

I was anxious to get home to see my loved ones, so I was focused on “my” issues. I felt like standing up and yelling for some of these clowns to get their act together. I knew I couldn’t say a word, so I thumbed through the *Sky Mall* magazine from the seat pocket in front of me. You know it’s getting rough when you resort to the overpriced, useless *Sky Mall* crap to break the monotony. With everyone finally seated, we sat there with the cabin door open and no one in any hurry to get us going, although we were well past the scheduled takeoff time. No wonder the airline industry is in trouble, I told my-

self. Just then, an attendant came on the intercom to inform us that we were being delayed.

The entire plane let out a collective groan. She resumed speaking to say “We are holding the aircraft for some very special people who are on their

I was expecting some celebrity or sports figure to be the reason for the hold-up.

way to the plane and the delay shouldn’t be more than five minutes.” After waiting six times as long as we were promised, word came that “I” was finally going to be on my way home. Why the hoopla over “these” folks? I was expecting some celebrity or sports figure to be the reason for the holdup. Just get their butts in the seat and let’s hit the gas, I thought.

The attendant came back on the speaker to announce in a loud and ex-

cited voice that we were being joined by several U.S. soldiers returning home from Iraq!

As they walked on board, the entire plane erupted into applause. The men were a bit taken by surprise by the 340 people cheering for them as they searched for their seats. Their hands were shaken and touched by almost everyone who was within an arm’s distance of them as they passed down the aisle.

An elderly woman kissed the hand of one of the soldiers as he passed by her. The applause, whistles, and cheering didn’t stop for a long time. When we were finally airborne, “I” was not the only civilian checking his conscience as to the delays in “me” getting home, finding my easy chair, a cold beverage, and the remote in my hand.

These men had done their duties for all of us, and I had been complaining silently about “me” and “my” issues. I took for granted the everyday freedoms I enjoy and the conveniences of the American way of life. I took for granted others who paid the price for my ability to moan and complain about a few minutes delay to “me” and for those heroes going home to their loved ones.

I attempted to get my selfish outlook back in order and minutes before we landed, I suggested to the flight attendant that she announce a request for everyone to remain in their seats until our heroes were allowed to gather their things and be first off the plane.

The cheers and applause continued until the last soldier stepped off and we all rose to go about our too often taken for granted everyday freedoms. I felt so proud of them! I felt it an honor and a privilege to be among the first to welcome them home and say, “Thank you for a job well done.” I vowed that I will never forget that flight nor the lesson learned.

—DUSTOFFer—

(Awardee, continued from page 14.)

tube to assist in removing the blood, which kept his lung from collapsing.

“That was agonizing pain,” he said. “They shot me full of drugs, and CPT Cory Boudreau took me to the CSH. I don’t remember anything after that.”

According to Boudreau, a fellow pilot with the CAB’s MEDEVAC unit, he was unaware of the situation when Didonato’s aircraft arrived. He said they received word that they would have to transport the patients who were onboard, but at that point, had no idea Didonato had been shot.

“Toby called in and said something to the effect that we were bringing our patients to Falcon and they needed to set up to take them where they needed to go,” Didonato said.

“We had no idea what was going on,” Boudreau explained. “Because he had routine patients on board, I was

under the impression that we needed to do a tail-to-tail (MEDEVAC aircraft exchange) swap of those patients because of maintenance problems or something.

Boudreau, along with co-pilot Chief Warrant Officer 2 Ryan Klaftenegger, said they were loaded into the aircraft and ready to go when they saw Didonato’s aircraft come in and land. At that point, Blackmon, Didonato’s co-pilot, sent a radio transmission that he was going to shut the aircraft down by himself. Boudreau said that’s when they became alarmed.

“Immediately, we were like, ‘what’s going on?’” he said. “After a little while, operations couldn’t tell us what was going on, so we sent our medic, SGT Coughlin over to the aircraft to find out what was going on. That’s when SGT Coughlin saw Didonato and

(Awardee, continued on page 22.)

MEDEVAC Unit Saves U.S., Afghan Lives

Article by MSG Doug Sample, Task Force Falcon Public Affairs Office, in *The Aviator*, 30 April 2006

Bagram Airfield—The nine-line Medevac request that came in the afternoon of 11 April was no more urgent than any other, but the personnel of Task Force Centaur's 159th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) were touched more deeply than usual. This time children were involved—lots of them, killed and injured after a mortar exploded in a school yard in Asadabad.

"A call like that changes your sense of urgency," said SSG Gene Belis, a flight medic from Seal Beach, California, who has a 10-year-old son at home. "We're moving at 100 miles an hour regardless of the mission, but it hits you in the guts when you know it's a child."

Belis was angered even more because the deaths and injuries were caused by a senseless attack.

"It does make you think—what kind of person would do something like this?" he asked.

Within minutes after the call came in, the flight crew—two pilots, a crew chief, and a medic—were ready to go, loading their HH-60 Black Hawk air ambulance with boxes of medical supplies. They raced to the scene, where they would medevac two of the most seriously injured children. Thanks to the crew's dedicated efforts, both children survived.

While gratifying, providing assistance in a war-torn country can be dangerous.

SSG Christina Roberts, a crew chief from Crocker, Mississippi, said she knew they were flying into a hostile situation with the Asadabad mission. There were reports of indirect fire in

"We are consistently called upon to help local nationals and soldiers. Our job is to deliver quality medical care to those who need it. . . ."

the vicinity of the school the night before and the day of the attack, she said.

"We knew the bad guys were somewhere out there, but we couldn't worry about that," Roberts explained. "Yes, the thought of danger is in the back of your mind, but when you know you can help a U.S. soldier, a local national, or child, then it's your job to get help to them."

The 159th, from Wiesbaden, Germany, has been doing just that since it arrived here in January. The unit also has satellite detachments in Salerno, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Qualat, and Tarin Kowt.

Although the unit's primary duty is getting help to injured soldiers on the battlefield, Black Hawk pilot CW2 Scott Forbes, of Cape May, New Jersey, said a good part of the unit's mission in Afghanistan has been humanitarian.

"We are consistently called upon to help local nationals and soldiers," Forbes explained. "Our job is to deliver quality medical care to those who need it, and that makes helping the Afghan people just as rewarding as helping our own soldiers."

Forbes said about half the Medevac requests they received are to assist Afghans who need urgent medical transport to U.S. or Afghan medical facilities, or to rescue accident victims in remote areas not accessible by any other means than helicopter.

Recently, he said, the unit rescued two children who had fallen from a cliff.

Often, though, the unit's successes go unacknowledged. By the time the crew completed the Asadabad mission, reports of the incident had surfaced on the Internet. Footage showing doctors at the Bagram Airfield hospital caring for young patients appeared on CNN. However, there was no mention of the medics or the Medevac unit that transported the children there.

"You never hear anything about DUSTOFF," said SPC John Collier, a flight medic from Ames, Iowa, referring to the acronym for "Dedicated, Unhesitating, Service to Our Fighting Forces."

"I guess we're just not exciting enough to write about," he lamented.

Collier's fellow crewmembers keep the situation in perspective: "We're not trying to be heroes; we are just doing our job," CW2 Jorge Correa, from Coamo, Puerto Rico, emphasized.

Belis agreed, saying, "We're not here to win medals. We're here to win the hearts of the Afghan people. I'm here to provide help to anyone who needs it. That is the mission of DUSTOFF." ■



DUSTOFF UH-60 at 11,300 feet in Afghanistan.

Marines Find “A Few Good Men” and Women in 571st Medical Company

An article by 1LT Brent Hayward in The Nine-Line News, 36th Medical Evacuation Battalion, March 2005.

The 571st Medical company (Air Ambulance) is currently supporting the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force. The company is headquartered in Al Asad, Iraq, and has remote sites spread out over western and northern Iraq. Routine missions in their area of operations included patient transport, point of injury pickups, and training

flights. The Marines provide excellent assistance for all missions by providing AH-1 Cobra helicopter gunship escorts for fire support.

Soldiers of the 571st dominated the recent 3-on-3 basketball tournament at Al Asad. SGT Ramirez and SGT Ortega were integral to the success of “Team 571.” Other recreational activi-

ties available to soldiers at Al Asad include martial arts, card tournaments, boxing, ping pong, and even computer game competition.

The unit is currently busy in-processing and training new pilots, medics, and crew chiefs. Training flights in all modes occur almost daily. All of the soldiers involved are excelling. ■

498th Medical Company (AA) Returns from Iraq

An article by Mick Walsh in the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer, April 2005, addresses the return of the famous unit to Fort Benning.

The numbers posted during the 498th Medical Company’s yearlong deployment to Iraq are impressive:

- Medevac missions completed: 1,248
- Total flight hours: 3,786
- Casualties airlifted to medical facilities: 2,256
- Number of aircraft lost: 1

The number commander MAJ Terence McDowell is most pleased with?

- Total number of soldiers either killed or seriously injured: 0

“And we were shot at almost everywhere we went,” said McDowell, who was greeted at the Lawson Army Airfield terminal by his wife, Leslie and their three children, Ashley, 12; Lauren, 11; and Brent, 7.

“Mortars, rockets, small arms fire. You name it. And you have to remember that in our many rescues, we don’t have much protection at all.”

The unit was responsible for an area roughly 80 percent the size of Georgia, with headquarters in Tikrit.

McDowell, a military brat whose parents live in Warner Robbins, talked shop soon after the Omni Air International chartered jet landed Thursday afternoon. But once the 142 soldiers had turned in their weapons and other equipment, it was time to be reunited with their families, many of whom carried signs of endearment.

CW2 Fred Hall, a UH-60 Black Hawk pilot, was returning from Iraq for a second time.

“I probably worried about him as much this time as I did last,” said Nicki Hall, who had Jordan, 4, and Gavin, 2, in tow.

“Probably with good reason,” said Fred Hall. “It was more dangerous this time. Each pick-up was an event.

Once the 142 soldiers had turned in their weapons and other equipment, it was time to be reunited with their families.

Sometimes it meant putting down near where a roadside bomb just went off. The insurgents set off IEDs just to get us to come in to rescue. Every time we landed, it was scary.”

The one Black Hawk knocked out of commission was hit by enemy gun fire in November 2004. No one was injured, and the helicopter was sent back to the States for repairs.

Another two-timer was SSG Michael Richardson, who was greeted by his wife, Shattika, and his kids, Beunica, 11; Iyana, 4; and Makayla, 2.

“It was a whole lot better this time,” he smiled. “In ’03, I was a crew chief on an air ambulance; this time I was a technical inspector and spent most of my time making sure the birds were in the air.”

He did a pretty good job.

McDowell was most pleased that the 498th won the 2004 Master of Readiness Award.

“We posted more hours in air than any other Medevac unit,” he said.

A.J. Tripp, a Vietnam vet who suffered a broken back in that war, drove up from Daytona Beach, Florida, to welcome his son, CPT Brian Tripp, back from Iraq.

“I gave Brian my K-bar knife for good luck before he left, and I’m guessing it did the job,” he said. “I know this year really dragged for me, but it went by pretty quick for him.”

Three of Brian Tripp’s friends from Savannah made the trip to Fort Benning.

“We kept in contact with him almost every day through Internet messaging,” said Clay Culver, who with his wife Kelly and close friend Casey O’Rear, wore special T-shirts welcoming Brien. “He’s a strong person. We saw the leader side of him come through during this year.”

Few of the hundreds who came to the terminal were more excited to see their loved ones than 7-year-old Brent McDowell.

“Daddy’s getting home just in time for baseball season,” he giggled. ■



The Legacy of DUSTOFF

Best with commentary that DUSTOFF crews of today are somehow different than in the old days, DUSTOFF Association Founder Thomas “Egor” Johnson responded in his typically profound, honest comments.

What is DUSTOFF? It is many things to many people. It is a legacy of valor and dedication to service for our fellow man in time of great need—born in the conflict of Korea and defined in the rice paddies of Vietnam. If that was the end of the story, it would be a story worth telling. But the DUSTOFF legacy is so much more.

The vision that Major Charles Kelly and fought and died for has expanded and become a way of life for those of us, past, present and those yet to fly this lifesaving mission. Major Kelly’s final words have become the hallmark and battle cry of our mission. “WHEN I HAVE YOUR WOUNDED!” Simple words with a meaning that transcends war and has become a way of life.

Forty-two years ago, when DUSTOFF became the call sign for the 57th Medical Detachment in Vietnam, no one could have foreseen the impact it would have. Over the years, the men and women who have dedicated themselves to the legacy that is DUSTOFF have constantly defined the very essence of DUSTOFF. In war and in peace, every day, crews of DUSTOFF put themselves in harm’s way to save lives. From battlefields in the Middle East to rescues during the traumatic days in New Orleans, crewmembers of DUSTOFF prove the finest traditions of this, our legacy.

There has been a suggestion that, in some way, the current DUSTOFF crewmembers are not as heroic as those of us who flew DUSTOFF during the early days in the rice paddies of Vietnam. This is so far from the truth. Just as in Vietnam, all the crews of DUSTOFF have had to overcome and adapt to the ever-changing demands of the DUSTOFF mission.

Today’s DUSTOFF crews have at their disposal many more tools to assist the wounded and injured in the lifesaving mission. This in large part has been developed through the experiences of those of us who flew before. I, for one, wish I had had the tools they have today, during my missions in Vietnam.

The one common dominator between those of us who flew back then and the heroic crews who fly now is the dedication to the legacy of DUSTOFF and the lives that hang in the balance.

Just like us, the original DUSTOFF crews, when the call comes in for

Today . . . the soldier knows . . . if he’s injured or wounded, DUSTOFF will come, right now. And no matter what, they will get him out and to a hospital.

today’s soldiers, there is no hesitation, no compromise. They take off day or night, in good weather or bad, at maximum speed to the scene, and SAVE LIVES. Regardless of the danger from enemy fire, weather conditions, or difficulties, the DUSTOFF crew is there, not only for their fellow soldiers, but for anyone whose life is in danger.

Today, as in Vietnam, the soldier who goes in harm’s way knows that no matter what, if he’s injured or wounded, DUSTOFF will come, right now. And no matter what, they will get him out and to a hospital.

As stated in the song, “MedEvac Angels,” they are the “Backbone of the battle, the morale of the men,” for they fulfill every day the mission and legacy that is DUSTOFF.

As happens from time to time, this legacy’s importance is forgotten by some who want to change the dedicated role of DUSTOFF. As in the days of Captain John Temperelli and Major Kelly, DUSTOFF is again fighting for its dedicated mission. As in those days DUSTOFF leaders are again fighting this battle with the same dedication as the DUSTOFF leaders who went before them.

This being said, the legacy of DUSTOFF has a larger meaning to

those who have flown DUSTOFF. The mission and the demands of the legacy have a life-changing effect on those who have flown DUSTOFF.

The DUSTOFF history over the years tells a story that has every element of a heroic novel. But the lives of crews after they left DUSTOFF is a story that is yet to be told.

Of those who flew with me, there are paramedics of note in their communities, police officers dedicated to their fellow men, men who have become leaders in their communities and in business, and in the medical community throughout this nation. To a man, when I talk to them, they say that flying DUSTOFF was a defining moment in their lives.

I can say that all the success I have had, and the positive impact I have had in my post-military career in law enforcement, can be traced directly to the time I flew DUSTOFF and the association with the men I have served with, and those DUSTOFF crewmembers I have had the honor to know throughout the years.

The legacy of Dustoff and the traditions to which all our crews subscribe continue to build and have spilled over into the world of civilian Life Flight missions. No one can ever adequately express the impact that this legacy has had on the saving of lives. Without the dedication inspired by this legacy, many more would have died. I, as one old DUSTOFFer, would like to say to those who carry on our legacy and today place themselves in harm’s way for those in need, I AM PROUD OF EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU. With your performance you do honor to those who went before.

THOMAS L. “EGOR” JOHNSON

—DUSTOFFer—



Crew Recalls Dangerous Mission

An article in *The Aviator*, written by MSG Doug Sample of the Task Force Falcon Public Affairs Office.

Bagram Army Airfield, Afghanistan—Not many soldiers can share true tales of heroism like those of a DUSTOFF air ambulance crew, who fly into each and every mission knowing they hold someone's life in their hands.

On a recent mission, one crew learned that sometimes that life is their own.

CW2 Jorge Correa, a pilot from Coamo, Puerto Rico; SPC John Collier, A flight medic from Ames, Iowa; and crew chief SSG Christian Roberts, of Crocker, Mississippi, vividly recall what they describe as their most horrific mission ever—one that threatened the lives not only of their patients, but their lives as well.

The incident took place in March 2006, Collier said, when the DUSTOFF crew received a Medevac request after a rocket attack on a U.S.

military convoy. It seemed like a standard mission, but problems soon developed.

The crew arrived to find the landing zone still under fire, and instead of two wounded soldiers, as the nine-line request reported, there were four casualties—two Afghan National Army soldiers were also among the wounded.

“We had more patients than we could possibly handle,” Collier said, noting their aircraft had room for only two. “But we knew a second Medevac would take too long and we could lose patients, so I asked my crew chief, SGT Roberts, what we should do. He said, ‘Grab them all and let’s go.’”

The biggest challenge of the mission didn't present itself until the crew was evaluating the casualties. They found one of the U.S. Soldiers was still alive, but barely. A rocket-propelled

grenade had torn open his abdomen and lodged there, unexploded.

While Collier and Roberts were faced with saving the soldier's life, Correa had to worry about piloting an aircraft with a live grenade onboard that could explode at any time, jeopardizing the lives of his crew.

Momentarily considering the safety of flying, Correa said his focus soon returned to saving the soldier's life.

“I asked my crew members if they felt comfortable with this,” he explained, “and they said, ‘Let’s do it.’”

In the end everyone survived, including the rescued soldiers; but Correa doesn't want to be called a hero.

“This is what we do,” he explained. “We put our lives on the line to save others.” ■

FLIGHT FACTS

- As an aviator in flight, you can do anything you want . . . as long as it's right, and we'll let you know it's right after you get down.
- As a pilot, only two bad things can happen to you, and one of them will.
- Any flight over water in a single-engine aircraft will absolutely guarantee abnormal engine noises and vibrations.
- If you're gonna fly low, do not fly slow!
- The concept of “controlling” airspace with radar is just another form of FAA sarcasm directed at pilots to see if they're gullible enough to swallow it. Or to put it another way, when is the last time the FAA ever shot anyone down?
- Remember, the radio is only an electronic suggestion box for the pilot. Sometimes the only way to clear up a problem is to turn it off.
- A tactic done twice is a procedure.
- If a mother has the slightest suspicion that her infant child might grow up to be a pilot, she had better teach him to put things back where he got them.
- The ultimate responsibility of the pilot is to fulfill the dreams of the countless millions of earthbound ancestors who could only stare skyward . . . and wish.

How to Contribute Articles to *The DUSTOFFer*

The DUSTOFFer would like to publish your article. If you have a recollection of a particular DUSTOFF or MAST mission, please share it with our members. If your unit has been involved in an outstanding rescue mission or worthwhile program, please submit your essay about it to *The DUSTOFFer*. Send photographs with your article or attach them electronically to your e-mail.

Send typed, double-spaced hard copy to the address below, or e-mail your article to secretary@dustoff.org or jtrus5@aol.com.

Please send your submissions to:
The DUSTOFFer
P. O. Box 8091
San Antonio, TX 78208

Nominate Your Hero for the DUSTOFF Hall of Fame

DUSTOFFers, don't let our legacy go untold. The Hall of Fame honors those who exhibited our ethics and standards in their actions and their contributions to DUSTOFF. Do your homework. Find out about that man or woman who made a difference in your career by his or her inspiration. Research your hero and nominate them. Deadline is May 1. Details are on the dustoff.org homepage. Click on the Hall of Fame tab at the left of the opening page for information. It's OUR Hall of Fame; let's make it complete.



Treasurer's Report

As of 30 April 2006
FY 2005-6 Close Out



Interest Income	\$288.60
Membership Dues	\$5,057.50
Returning Unit Coins Fund	\$470.00
Reunion 2006	\$17,627.27
Sales—Memorabilia/Email	\$6,433.60
Scholarship Fund Donations	<u>\$3,257.25</u>
Total Income	\$32,834.22
Memorial Expenses	\$1,758.00
Returning Unit Coins	\$82.15
Support for Museum	\$1,000.00
Newsletter Publishing	\$4,510.15
Operating Expenses	\$2,053.46
Reunion Expenses 2006	\$12,295.13
Sales Expense Membla.	\$6,745.87
Sales Taxes	<u>\$510.11</u>
Total Expenses	\$28,954.87
NET INCOME (LOSS)	\$3,879.35

New Entries on the Flight Manifest

Tommy Bailey	L
SSG Gene E. Belis	M
SGT Michael A. Bishop	L.
SFC Richard A. Bock	L
SGT Jeffrey M. Bosinske	L
Scott Brown	L
1LT Lorna J. Bryan	M
SGT Kirk E. Bugg	M
SGT Clayton A. Chittim	L
CPT Christopher M. Chung	L
Vincente Cogal	L
Timothy M. Coogan	L
SGT Keith A. Dawson	L
SGT Donny T. Dowd	M
SGT John R. Ferguson	L
Michael Flores	L
Jason Fogarty	L
LTC Gary W. Gaston	L
SFC Francisco F. Garcia	L
SSG Michael A. Graves	L
John Hammett	L
LTC Joseph B. Houser	L
MAJ William G. Howard	L
Lawrence Huskey	M
Terry Janney	L
1SG Raymond F. Jones	L
Daniel P. Katen	M
SGM Billy R. King	L
CPT Mark C. Knight	L
SFC Walter Konstantynowicz	L
John Koss	L
Darrell Lease	L
MAJ Brian L. Mayard	L
SGM James S. McDowell	L
MAJ Terence McDowell	L
George McGinnis	M
Gerald McGowan	L
MAJ John McNally	L
LTC Robert Mitchell	L
CPT John J. Mullins	L
National Combat Medical Memorial	C
CW3 Clinton Nelson	M
CPT Joel Neuenschwander	L
Kevin O'Brien	L
SGT David R. Painter	L
SFC Douglas E. Porter	L
1ST Raymond Jones	L
Gloria M. Riley	L
Eric Robertson	L
SGT William P. Roddy	L
Richard Rosenthal	M
Don Sewell	L
SGT Ernest B. Sharum	L
Jay Shearer	M
Trent Short	M
SGT Victor M. St. Germain	L
MSG Keith M. Stafford	L
MAJ Warren R. Stump	L
Chris Swiss	L
Bruce Terry	L
Arthur Torwirt	L
CPT Thomas E. Valley	L
SGT Kimberly D. Viles	L
SSG Amanda Westfall-Sell	L
SGT Elmer Wilber	L
Barry Wilson	L

Air Ambulance Company Deactivated after Historic Service

Reported by Jon Kalahar in the local Columbus, Georgia, newspaper, the description of another emotional change in DUSTOFF history.

During wartime, it was their job to fly into harm's way, only to turn right back around to get our wounded soldiers off the battlefield.

The 498th Air Ambulance Company was inactivated at a ceremony on Fort Benning.

They leave behind a history that won't soon be forgotten. The Army band played as if this were a joyous occasion. Instead, it was a time to reflect on forty-one years of saving lives, delivering relief, and even providing help to the Olympic Games in Atlanta.

The original commander of the 498th could only accept the change. "Sad and nostalgic, but recognizing with changes in the Army, as I indicated the hope that the Army will be more

effective and efficient." said COL Joe Madrano, first commander of the 498th.

Colonel Madrano led the 498th into Vietnam. It was the Medevac missions during that war that saved thousands of soldiers. The current commander calls them angels of mercy.

"We're the angels of mercy on the battlefield, and we take the mission of DUSTOFF very seriously," said MAJ John McNally, current 498th commander.

DUSTOFF is dedicated, unhesitating service to our fighting forces.

With the vast history of the 498th and the many missions they took part in on the battlefield, their final mission was evacuating people following Hurricane Katrina. The 498th pulled more

than a thousand victims off roofs following the storm.

"Some of the sights they saw reminded them of Iraq, and they were a bit shocked to see that on our home soil," said MAJ McNally.

The veterans of the company in attendance said it felt more like a funeral. For current soldiers, the spirit of the 498th will live on, no matter where they go.

It was the air ambulance's success in Vietnam that led hospitals across the nation to start using them to transport patients.

Members of the 498th will join the General Support Aviation Battalion at Fort Stewart near Savannah. ■

Closing Out the Flight Plan

1st Lieutenant Landon R. Casillas was born to Richard and MayLing Casillas on 17 May 1980 in Hawaii. While located in Hawaii, Landon spent time at both Schofield Barracks and Ft. Shafter. In 1987 the family moved to Ft. Bragg, NC, where they resided until 1992. In 1992, the family moved again, this time to Germany, where they lived first in Nuremberg and then in Grafenwoher. It was at this time that the family moved back to the United States to reside in Bedford, TX.

1LT Casillas was a 1999 graduate of Lawrence D. Bell High School in Bedford. He attended and was a scholarship football player for Abilene Christian University from 1998 to 1999. After one year he moved on to the University of North Texas, where he studied from 1999 to 2001. Following his time at North Texas, he relocated to Texas Christian University in Ft. Worth. It was here that he was awarded entrance into the scholarship ROTC program. He graduated from TCU in 2004 with a BA in Criminal Justice and a Regular Army commission.

1st Lieutenant Casillas is survived

by his wife, Jessica, and daughter, Arle. He is also survived by his father, SGT (ret) Richard Casillas, mother, MayLing Casillas, and sister, Shannon Casillas

1st Lieutenant Casillas was the 3rd Forward Support MEDEVAC Team Leader for the 50th Medical Company (Air Ambulance), 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Ft. Campbell, KY. Previous assignments include: Ft. Rucker, AL, Initial Entry Rotary Wing Training 2005, and Ft. Sam Houston, TX for AMEDD Officer Basic Course 2004.

1st Lieutenant Casillas's military schools and awards are as follows: Medical Service Corps Officer Basic Course, Army Flight School, UH-60A Blackhawk Aircraft Qualification Course, Airborne School, and Air Assault School. Awards include the German Proficiency Badge, Airborne Badge, Air Assault Badge, Army Commendation Medal (awarded posthumously), National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the Army Service Ribbon. ■

The Mike Novosel DUSTOFF Scholarship

The Vietnam Veterans Association Mike Novosel Chapter of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, recently donated \$5,000 to our scholarship program. Our total annuity is now \$30,000, allowing a \$1,000 scholarship each year.

The chapter also voted to add \$1,500 each year to the amount awarded. Our Mike Novosel DUSTOFF Scholarship is now worth \$2,500 each year.

Go to <http://dustoff.org> for application instructions. Applications must be submitted by 1 May each year.

(Awardee, continued from page 15.)

helped him once he got out of the aircraft.”

Coughlin said he immediately noticed the large hole in the windshield of the aircraft on Didonato’s side as it was landing.

“You could see that his windshield was broken and had holes in it,” explained Coughlin. “I noticed the hole in the side of the aircraft, and I could see Didonato slumped over. I could also see that the front of his vest was blown out.”

Coughlin said that although all visible evidence pointed to a gunshot injury, he still hadn’t dismissed the thought that maybe the aircraft had struck a bird during the flight.

“I could see the blood on the door handle, but I didn’t know if it was ‘Dido’s or not,” he said. It wasn’t until he helped Didonato from the aircraft that he noticed the blood that began to cover the sleeve of his own uniform.

Coughlin and several other medics, including Pollock, moved Didonato inside the TMC. With the help of a team of 3rd Inf. Div. doctors and medics, they began to treat him for a gunshot wound and a collapsed lung. Throughout the entire process, Didonato remained con-

scious and endured the excruciating pain.

Meanwhile, back at the waiting aircraft, Boudreau said the only thing his crew saw was Didonato being placed on the stretcher with his helmet and vest still on and blood dripping down his arm.

“We thought maybe he had hit a bird or something,” said Boudreau, a three-year member of the CAB’s

“. . . I’d see all the amputees and head injuries, and I realized ‘I ain’t got it so bad.’ I made the decision that I wasn’t going to be defeated. . . .”

MEDEVAC unit. “In these situations, you always wish for the best. After about 10 minutes, SGT Pollock came out and gave us an update. He told us Didonato had been shot and they were stabilizing him. We didn’t know how serious the injury was at the time—we just knew he was getting stabilized.”

After another 10 minutes, a flight crew brought Didonato out and they

were “bagging” him, which means using a manual respirator to help him breathe.

Coughlin said he told one of the 3rd Inf. Div. physician’s assistants to travel with them to Balad, so he could continue squeezing the respirator that was helping Didonato breathe at the time. Boudreau and Klaftenegger then piloted the aircraft to the CSH at Balad.

“You know, you try to keep your emotions out of it because you want to make sure you get to the CSH safely,” Boudreau said. “So we briefed the crew to treat it like it’s just another patient. But, unfortunately, it’s a lot different when you’re flying one of your own.”

“I was still in pain,” said Didonato, who was heavily sedated at that point. “I have vague memories of seeing Chief Warrant Officer 2 Scott Kimball, who’s also in the MEDEVAC unit. But he said it was at Balad when I was getting ready to get on the big bird to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany.”

Didonato arrived at the hospital in Balad and was flown to Germany, where he underwent surgery at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center before being transported back to the United States. He then spent several weeks at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington until he was well enough to travel to Fort Hood.

He said it was at Walter Reed that he found his inspiration and motivation to return to the fight.

“Walter Reed was an inspiration to me because when I was finally able to get up and walk. I’d go down to the cafeteria on my own, and I’d go through the different wards,” he explained. “On the way to the cafeteria, you’d see all the amputees and the head injuries, and I realized ‘I ain’t got it so bad.’ I made the decision that I wasn’t going to be defeated—I was going to get back to work. And that’s what I did.”

He said his physical therapy, which took place at Walter Reed and Fort Hood’s Darnell Army Medical Center, included work to restore range of motion in his chest and arm, and exercises to increase his flexibility and dexterity. They said the feeling in the lower part of his arm may or may not return,

(Awardee, continued on page 25.)



December 2005, Dan Gower visited with Jason Didonato and his girlfriend, Stephanie, at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. He presented to Didonato a DUSTOFF Association coin and a coin from the Commanding General, AMEDD Center and School. The following February Didonato was able to attend the 2006 DUSTOFF Reunion in San Antonio.



Top of the Schoolhouse

by ISG Carl Martin



The concept for medical evacuation has been tried and tested over the centuries. Ancient Greek and Roman armies introduced the concept of providing surgeons, medics, and litter bearers, in addition to a standardized medical system similar to today's levels of care.

The Civil War identified the need for trained medics to go into war with the combat soldiers. Throughout ensuing conflicts, the U.S. Army followed and built upon Letterman's doctrine of dedicated assets for evacuation. This decreased the evacuation time from point of injury to receiving treatment facilities. With an emphasis on doctrine, technology and command oversight on medical evacuation survivability rates increased.

The Korean War demonstrated the value of helicopter evacuation, but lacked enroute care, highlighting a need for trained air crews augmented with a flight medic with limited aviation training. During the Vietnam conflict, the UH-1 was ushered in as an air ambulance, with trained flight medics working in the cabin.

Soldier morale instantly lifted with the introduction of air evacuation and skilled flight medics. With these two assets, the combat soldier was able to receive lifesaving in-flight care within 30 minutes, greatly increasing his chance of survival. This remains the "Gold Standard" of evacuation. Over the past three decades, evacuation and training of flight medics evolved into a modern state-of-the-art system, saving thousands of lives.

Prior to the Global War On Terrorism (GWOT), flight medics proved how valuable they were as aircrew members by bringing the perfect balance of medical skills and knowledge of aeromedical factors. They had the ability to work as nonrated aircrew members and to train crew chiefs and flight medics with vast experience and backgrounds from Readiness Level 3 (RL3) to Readiness Level 1 (RL1).

After GWOT was declared, all the preparation and dedication that the

flight medics course put into training came full circle. Flight medics from two decades of training were called upon to accomplish a mission that would test even the most skilled flight medic. Year-long deployments and

A rich history of service, combined with current, relevant training and the ability to adapt, means that flight medics will continue to be ready for any mission, anytime and anywhere.

short turnaround periods at home stations, with an ever-evolving enemy, demanded a change in the program of instruction at the flight medic course.

Ensuring flight medics continued basic skills, International Trauma Life Support (ITLS) was continued, with a high level of concentration placed on patient assessment and identifying life-threatening wounds on any type of patient (Penetrating vs. Blunt).

Advance Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) continues to be taught to ensure flight medics can treat medical patients with supportive care, ranging from medication support to early defibrillation for patients severely injured or ill, not breathing, and without a pulse.

Case simulations also build the flight medic's confidence by letting him/her act as the person in charge of a trauma and medical situation. Students must demonstrate to a high degree their ability to direct and lead a team to effectively manage these situations.

The flight medic course needed to prepare medics for medevac units by teaching aeromedical factors, aircrew coordination, and increasing their knowledge of lifesaving skills in aviation environment. Classes also demon-

strate the effects of altitude on patients in the aircraft and how to identify symptoms to manage patients in the unique aeromedical environment.

Because the enemy is constantly changing and the tactics are becoming more dangerous, the U.S. Army adopted a concept called Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TC3). This concept proved vital in saving military lives in OIF and OEF. This changed the old school military thought process that tourniquets should be applied as a last resort. Instead, tourniquets can be applied early to immediately stop bleeding in combat conditions.

The TC3 concept introduces three phases of care: care under-fire, tactical field care, and CASEVAC care. This course teaches needle decompressions, antibiotics, IV fluids, and many other skills needed for today's battlefield. TC3 is being taught Army-wide to ensure more soldiers will return home alive.

Another part of the flight medic course is the flight medic's first introduction to the UH-60A and HH-60Q airframes and experience in different modes of flight in a UH-60A. The flight medic course allows the flight medic to experience hoist operations in a safe training environment. Using the USASAM's 65-foot hoist tower, students learn insertion and extraction techniques and have the opportunity to operate the high-performance hoist.

All this training prepares the flight medic for one of the high points of the four-week intensive course, a twenty-four-hour Situational Training Exercise (STX). This exercise allows the medic to apply the concepts, tactics, techniques, and procedures taught in the first three weeks of the course. Students prepare like actual flight medics, assuming first-up crew duties, starting with packing aid bags and conducting PMCS on their equipment.

They receive a nine-line MEDEVAC request and are sent on a rescue mission. The students are in-

(Schoolhouse, continued on page 25.)

From the Consultant

by COL David McDonald

The 2006 Army Medical Evacuation Conference in San Antonio, Texas, was attended by an unprecedented variety of Army Aviation and AMEDD evacuation professionals. The theme of this year's conference was "Transforming in Support of the Joint Force." This working conference set the foundation for future Aviation, Ground, and Joint MEDEVAC operations. Furthermore, it highlighted challenges that affect Army Medical Evacuation across DOTMLPF, providing direction to the AMEDD evacuation community during this turbulent transformation process.

The following is an outline of challenges highlighted and their status:

Doctrine: *Current Joint and Army evacuation doctrine does not reflect current operations. Both must be updated.*

The final draft of the Joint Publication 4-02 "Health Service Support in Joint Operations," will be coming out in August 06. This publication combines the old JP 4-02 and JP 4-02.2 into one document. It will discuss, for the first time, Army MEDEVAC's greater scope of mission within the Joint community, stating that the Army is the preferred service to provide intra-theater medical evacuation for the joint force.

The final draft of the AMEDD FM 4.02.2 Medical Evacuation, will be published by 30 June 2006. This FM combines both ground and air evacuation doctrine and will provide AMEDD planners and medical evacuators current doctrine from which they can plan and execute Army medical evacuation operations. It will also provide the AMEDD a document from which they can discuss and educate other Army branches on the scope and breadth of the medical evacuation mission.

Organization: *The "transformed" Army Air Ambulance Companies are not numerous enough (basis of allocation) and are not designed correctly (no platoons, Platoon Leaders and Sergeants) to support the required mission.*

The new MEDEVAC structure does not provide enough Air Ambulance

units to support current or projected MEDEVAC requirements. Specifically, there are not enough MEDEVAC companies to support the Echelon above Division (EAD) and Joint missions that provide operational and strategic medical evacuation support.

The reason for this insufficiency is that Army Aviation's initial focus during the transformation process was to structure MEDEVAC to provide direct

While Army Transformation moves on at a rapid pace, Army MEDEVAC Air and Ground continue to provide world-class medical evacuation to forces worldwide. . . .

support to Brigade Combat Teams (BCT). This focus resulted in a transformed MEDEVAC design that provides outstanding MEDEVAC support to Army divisions and BCTs, but does little to address MEDEVAC's EAD and Joint mission responsibilities. This oversight, coupled with Army rotational requirements, has significantly stressed the MEDEVAC structure.

Army Aviation has realized the need for additional MEDEVAC companies, and in concert with AMEDD leadership, agreed on increasing the MEDEVAC structure from 28 to 33 MEDEVAC companies. An additional four MEDEVAC companies are being considered. All additional companies would reside within EAD aviation organizations.

The premise is to design an EAD MEDEVAC structure that will focus on EAD and Joint medical evacuation support, allowing Army aviation to meet its original intent of a dedicated MEDEVAC structure that focuses on Army division and brigade medical evacuation support. Furthermore, this initiative will satisfy geographic com-

mander and army rotational requirements.

MEPD has proposed A Force Design Update (FDU) to address the current company design, which was deemed inadequate for mission requirements. MEPD will draft an FDU proposal by the beginning of 2007.

Training: *67Js need training appropriate for a new career path.*

An update to the DA Pam 600-4 will be published in August 2006. This update will outline the new 67J officer education. The 67J will require proficiency in both AMEDD and Aviation branches and will participate in both officer education systems to gain this proficiency.

Material: *The Air Ambulance fleet is the oldest in Army aviation and has not been updated in 20 years.*

No headway has been made to accelerate MEDEVAC modernization. Army aviation is aware of this issue and is making every effort to modernize the MEDEVAC fleet. Their current initiative is to modernize MEDEVAC companies as GSABs convert, which could accelerate MEDEVAC modernization.

Leadership: *A 67J career path and career progression beyond the rank of MAJ must be developed to compliment Army Transformation.*

The update to DA Pam 600-4 will outline the new 67J career path. This career path will offer more opportunities for the 67J than before and ensure they are competitive AMEDD commands. The GSAB command issue has yet to be resolved.

Personnel: *A professional evacuator MOS must be developed for the 91W.*

Since Army Transformation began and Air Ambulance Companies have moved under the Command and Control of Army Aviation, several important changes have been proposed by Aviation Leadership that would have profound effects on Army MEDEVAC. One of the proposed actions is to remove flight medics as fully integrated non-rated crew members.

(Consultant, continued on page 25.)

(Consultant, continued from page 24.)

A proposed action would remove many of the ATM tasks that allow flight medics to serve as fully functional crewmembers. Efforts to rewrite AR 95-1 and TC 1-237 to reflect these changes are currently underway. Additionally, medics have been blocked from attending the NCIC course. Finally, medics attending the Flight Medic Course will not receive the Aviation Badge, in accordance with Army regulation.

CSM Eddy, CSM MEDCOM, CSM Burke, CSM AMEDDC&S will address this issue with CSM Thomas, CSM USAAWC on 8 June 05, in attempt to resolve this issue and allow the flight medics to retain their current status.

MEPD has proposed the creation of an evacuation MOS that would ensure knowledgeable NCO leadership for both ground and air evacuation organizations. This would also provide a bridge between the air and ground units now separated under two different chains of command.

While Army Transformation moves on at a rapid pace, Army MEDEVAC Air and Ground continue to provide world-class medical evacuation to forces worldwide, a fact made clear at the 2006 AMEC. MEPD will continue to ensure smooth integration, not dilution, of the MEDEVAC mission into Army aviation, as well as resolution of all identified issues.

The AMEDD aviator continues to remain true to the aeromedical evacuation mission by quietly, professionally, and superbly executing your mission. You continue to uphold the highest standards and traditions of your profession. I am proud to be a part of this unique and august group. Thank you for who you are and what you do.

—DUSTOFFer—

(Schoolhouse, continued from page 23.)

served with the hoist, navigate through the woods tactically to a downed aircraft, and assess and treat multiple patients. They will apply the TC3 tactics and package the patients for movement.

They move again tactically through

the woods to USASAM's UH-60A and HH 60 Medical Suite Trainers (MST), where they train on treating patients in an in-flight aircraft.

At the completion of the MST portion, they move to the survival portion. Survival skills taught earlier in the course must be employed to save themselves, their team, and their patients. Armed with only the equipment found in aviation life-support equipment (ALSE) vest, flight medic students must perform a variety of survival tasks.

Eventually, the student will receive a radio call that his/her aircraft is inbound and to prepare for hoist operations. Students prepare the patients and their team for hoist operations. All students receive a detailed AAR to ensure training was effective and realistic. Pryotechnics, to include simulators, smoke, and a 240 B machine gun, are used.

The majority of the STX occurs at night under limited visibility. The STX was introduced to provide the flight medic a realistic combat training experience and to show what it would be like to treat a patient in a combat environment, integrating all the skills taught in the flight medic course.

The GWOT continues to prove the flight medic is a combat multiplier. A rich history of service, combined with current, relevant training and the ability to adapt, means that flight medics will continue to be ready for any mission, anytime and anywhere. Some of the Army's finest soldier medics continue to walk through the doors of USASAM motivated to take on the course challenges and become part of the great history of medevac.

The U.S. Army School of Aviation Medicine will continue to evolve, as new lessons are learned in the GWOT. The war fighters can depend on receiving the very best emergency medical care from the flight medic.

The POC for the Flight Medic Course is SFC Ronald Belcher, NCOIC, Flight Medic Course, e-mail roland.belcher@amedd.army.mil, DSN 558-7463 or (334) 255-7463.

DUSTOFF !

—DUSTOFFer—

(Awardee, continued from page 22.)

despite the therapy.

"I went on to Darnell and got my strength, range of motion and flexibility back. Then they released me to do it on my own. My girlfriend and I went to the gym every day and lifted weights. Bench pressing helped me to get some muscle mass back, and I got almost all my strength back."

Didonato returned to the soldiers of Lonestar Dustoff almost five months to the date of his injury. During the time he was recovering from his injury, the 4th Infantry Division conducted its transfer of authority with the 3rd Inf. Div. for the Multi-National Division-Baghdad area of operation. He said despite the incident being fresh in his mind, he looked forward to getting back to work.

"Naturally I have some anxiety about coming back into the area," he explained, "not because I don't want to assume any of the risks that my peers and everyone else around here assumes. It's just the thought of having to deal with that much pain again is something I don't want to do—but it's part of the risk, so I accept it."

He said he especially missed being with his fellow pilots and soldiers in his unit. That also served as inspiration for him to return to Iraq and complete the mission.

According to Boudreau, the company has missed Didonato just as much.

"Dido's a huge part of the company," Boudreau said. "He's a very professional pilot, but he's also just a great person. He has lots of friends, so it's great having him back. We were surprised to hear that he was coming back when he actually had an option. But if anybody knows anything about Didonato, they know he's all about the mission, and he's just a great guy. It's a huge boost for morale that he wanted to come back and be with his unit."

"I love this mission. I love my leadership, and I love my buddies," said Didonato, who has been in the unit for five years. "My mission is not complete until we all go home. That's just how I feel, even though it's my third trip over here. I still want to be a part of it." ■



DUSTOFF Hall of Fame Nominee

Thomas L. "Egor" Johnson is nominated for induction into the DUSTOFF Hall of Fame for his lifelong impact on the DUSTOFF Association and his contributions to the legacy that is DUSTOFF. Egor served three tours in combat in Vietnam, primarily with DUSTOFF units. From the back of UH-1 helicopters he was captivated with the mission of saving lives. In his "yet-to-be-published"

autobiography, he relates the story of his experiences in DUSTOFF and how saving lives became the single most important mission he flew.

As one of the more experienced crew chiefs in the units he flew with, Egor was always on the lookout for training opportunities to ensure others were ready for any event they might face. During his multiple tours in combat, he was presented numerous awards for his actions. Seventeen Air Medals, four for Valor, the Bronze Star, two Army Commendation Medals for Valor, and three Purple Hearts are but the start of the official transcript that describes Egor. However, if you spend much time talking with Egor, you'll soon find that, like most DUSTOFFers, Egor would rather talk about the mission and what it means to save a life than about himself.

Upon his return from Vietnam, Egor discovered that peacetime missions and leadership began to change DUSTOFF and in his mind erode the legacy that was bought with valor in Vietnam. In 1975 it became his mission to establish a venue in which DUSTOFFers could come together and reunite to remember missions, comrades, and perpetuate the DUSTOFF ethos. As a young Staff Sergeant, over a period of about five years Egor spent a considerable amount of his own money contacting others to build a network and establish the foundation of what is today the DUSTOFF Association. Not willing to take no for an answer, he established relationships with senior DUSTOFFers from around the Army. He solicited their support in his endeavors to hold the first reunion. Rank posed no obstacle to him, as he wrote to General William C. Westmoreland, asking him to be the keynote speaker of the first reunion. Through his personal perseverance and persistence, he was able to get General Westmoreland to agree to be the first keynote speaker at a DUSTOFF reunion. With this agreement in hand, Egor set about to pull in his "due outs" and set the date for the first DUSTOFF reunion, held in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1980.

With men like Charles Mateer, Byron Howlett, and John Hosely, Egor developed the constitution of the association, established its vision, and orchestrated the association's establishment. By the very power of his will, Egor defended the vision with which he established the association and ensured that the future of the association was founded upon a sound, logical basis. He fought to allow future generations of DUSTOFFers to join and not to limit the association to Vietnam combat veterans. Egor was adamant that crewmembers as well as pilots be allowed into the association and that the DUSTOFF Association represent the "team" that is a DUSTOFF crew.

Throughout the next 27 years, Thomas "Egor" Johnson has been revered as the Founder of the DUSTOFF Association, lending his support and the wisdom of his vision in defense of the essence of the DUSTOFF Association's charter. On more than one occasion, even when he was unemployed and short on money, Egor unselfishly found a way to get to reunions and provide his help, vision, and presence, so efforts detrimental to the original vision were not successful. It was his vision that the DUSTOFF Association serve as the "keeper of the legacy" of DUSTOFF.

The result of his efforts is an organization that today stands in the breach to defend such efforts as the award of the Combat Medic's Badge to DUSTOFF crewmembers. The Association has served as an advocate for modernization of aircraft and equipment. The Association has established award programs that recognize crewmembers for their service and heroic efforts during lifesaving rescue missions. Most notably, Egor has supported, defended, and promoted the Hall of Fame. It has been his vision that any Second Lieutenant or young Private First Class be able to walk across Harry Wurzbach Road from the "school house" at Fort Sam Houston to the Army Medical Department Museum and be able to read about "what it means to be DUSTOFF."

All one would have to do is know Thomas "Egor" Johnson, and one would see that being a DUSTOFFer means putting others before self, never leaving a comrade behind, standing in the breach for those in need, taking one's vision and making it happen through persistent hard work and living an honorable life dedicated to serving our fighting forces.

Tom Johnson—"Egor"—is DUSTOFF!



DUSTOFF ASSOCIATION HALL OF FAME BALLOT



This ballot is for the 2006 election for **DUSTOFF Hall of Fame induction**. Those elected will be inducted into the DUSTOFF Hall of Fame at the 2007 Annual DUSTOFF Reunion in San Antonio, Texas, 16–18 February 2007.

Nominees must capture two-thirds of the votes cast to be elected. Please participate in this endeavor. It's your hall of fame and our legacy. Vote yes or no for the nominee below.

Thomas L. "Egor" Johnson Yes No

You may vote online (instructions below), or mail this ballot and any donation you wish to make to:

DUSTOFF Association
P. O. Box 8091
San Antonio, TX 78208

Your ballot must be received at the post office box or online on or before October 31, 2006, to be counted.



INSTRUCTIONS FOR VOTING ONLINE

- Log on to <http://dustoff.org>.
- Click **HALL OF FAME**
- Click **2006 NOMINEE** to read narrative of the nominee
- When ready to vote, click **VOTING BOOTH**
- To log in, use the following:
Username: dustoff
Password: hof2006
- Fill in all blanks, including your member number. The member number is above your name on the mailing label of this *DUSTOFFer*.

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DUSTOFF Association Membership Application/Change of Address

- I want to join the Association as a Member
Officers and Civilians**
\$10.00 Initial fee
\$15.00 Annual fee
\$25.00 Total

- I want to join the Association as a Member
Enlisted**
E-5 & below **\$ 7.50 Annual fee**
E-6 & above **No Initial fee**
\$10.00 Initial fee

- I want to join the Association as a Life Member
Officers and Civilians** **\$100.00 One-time fee**
E-9 and below **\$ 50.00 One-time fee**

- Check here if change of address, or e-mail change to secretary@dustoff.org**

Rank _____ Last name _____ First name _____ M.I. _____
Mailing address _____
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to DUSTOFF Association, to:

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