

UH-1 73-21776 departs Summerall Field, Ft. Myer, VA at conclusion of the retirement ceremony.

Venerable UH-1 Retires from the Operational Force

By CW4 (Ret.) Delbert M. Hardiman

October 2, 2009, a UH-1 from Davison Army Airfield, Ft. Belvoir, VA, tail number 73-21776, flew to historic Summerall Field, Ft. Myer, VA for a final tribute representing a legion of "Hueys" that had served this country countless times through generations of contingencies, most notably a conflict half a world away with some pilots and crewmembers barely out of high school.

On this flight there would be no heavy fire team, insertions, emer-

gency resupply, forty-ship formations, heavy enemy ground fire, urgent DUSTOFF requests - just a lone representative of some 15,000 Bell-built multi-purpose utility helicopters which served this country well and paved the trail for today's Army Air Assault/MEDEVAC fighting teams.

More than 7,000 Hueys saw action in Vietnam. Of these, over 3,300 were destroyed and more than 2,700 American crewmembers and passengers lost their lives.

Old Friends Reunited

At the controls of 73-21776 was CW4 Mike Miles, one of the few Vietnam-era aviators still flying, with CW5 Steve Mueck, MSG Marlin Leonard and SGT Richard Sellner of the 121st Medical Air Ambulance, D.C. National Guard filling out the crew.

They would present this aircraft in a Departure Ceremony, honoring the UH-1's retirement from the Operational Force. A hero in its own right, this ceremony would bring the UH-1 together once again with another hero of Vietnam, Medal of Honor recipient LTC (Ret.) Bruce Crandall.



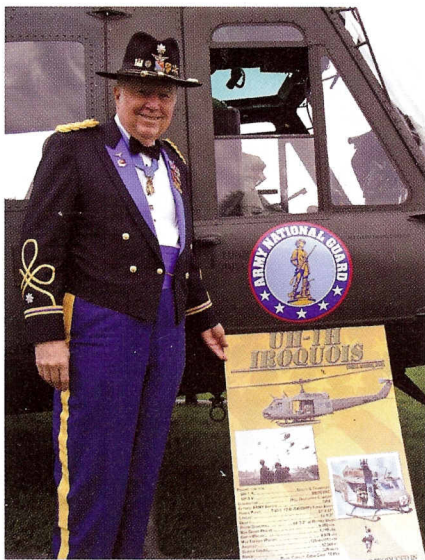
Crewmembers of UH-1 73-21776: (from left) Crew Chiefs MSG Marlin Leonard and SGT Richard Sellner; Pilots, CW5 Steve Mueck and Vietnam Veteran CW4 Michael Miles.

In November 1965, then Major Crandall, together with his wingman and longtime friend, also a Medal of Honor recipient, the late Major Ed "Too Tall" Freeman, flew their Hueys on flight after flight over three days to deliver water, ammunition and medical supplies to a besieged battalion.

During this famed Battle of the Ia Drang Valley they saved more than 70 wounded soldiers of the 1st Cavalry



From the left: Vietnam Veterans CW4 Billy Milliken and CW5 Norman McIntosh of the 2/224 Atk. Hel. Bn., Sandston, VA, both currently UH-60 pilots, took part in the ceremony.



Medal of Honor recipient LTC (R) Bruce Crandall poses next to UH-1 73-21776. Then Major Crandall distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism as a Flight Commander in the Republic of Vietnam, while serving with Company A, 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile).

Division's 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment.

LTC Crandall, graduate of the first class of advanced flight school at Camp Rucker, class of 56' and 2004 Army Aviation Hall of Fame inductee was among guests and would later be guest speaker after the ceremony at a Dining Out at the Ft. Myer Officer's club.

CW4 Miles prepositioned 73-21776 at Summerall Field where it would be on static display 2 hours before the Army National Guard sponsored ceremony.

On its right flank was a National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk from 2nd Bn., 224th Avn. Regt., Sandston, VA; on its left, a UH-72 also from the 121st Medical Air Ambulance, D.C. National Guard.

Recognition and Retirement

Host, MG Raymond W. Carpenter, Acting Director of the Army National Guard, noted during his opening remarks that, "The UH-1, more than any other helicopter or any item of equipment, became the symbol of Vietnam.

It was in Vietnam where the aircraft earned the reputation for being rugged, durable, versatile and able to fly even after receiving damage from tremendous enemy fire.

And just as the Jeep became the Soldiers' best friend in World War II,

for many aviators and crews there will always be something special about the Huey." Because of that, for many, the conflict and the aircraft will forever be linked.

"I can attest to you that it was not just a machine, it became part of us," said Brig. Gen. Alberto J. Jimenez, the Deputy Assistant Adjutant General for the Maryland Army National Guard and the Army National Guard's senior aviator.

Other speakers at the ceremony were Mr. Nick Lappos, Sr. VP, Bell Helicopter Textron; Mr. David Haines, VP Rotorcraft programs, EADS, North America; Mr. Joseph Haddock, VP Sikorsky Aircraft, and Dr. Jim Fulbrook, Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association.

The ceremony concluded with CW4 Miles reporting at the podium to COL Garrett Jensen, Army National Guard Aviation and Safety Division Chief, "Request permission to retire the UH-1 from the Operational Force."

COL Jensen: "Roger, permission granted. Contact Fiddlers Green outbound."

One Last Flight

With blades turning, ignition popping, 73-21776 came to life, then to a hover, making that resounding "wop-wop" known throughout the free world.

As the crowd witnessed in reverence the end of a 50 year saga, some saluting, the last operational unit UH-1 made a left pedal turn and slowly accelerated through translational lift fading into the twilight toward the far horizon.

The UH-1 Iroquois helicopter was officially retired by the Army National Guard, ending a service life of more than 50 years to the Army and close to 40 years in the Army Guard.

A few miles away in repose, stands the black reflective granite Vietnam War memorial inscribed with the names of over 58,000 brave men and women who gave their lives in the Vietnam conflict, many of whom were delivered from their fallen places by the UH-1.

May they rest in peace and let us always remember.

Del Hardiman is a retired CW4 and the LUH/UH-1 Systems Manager, Aviation and Safety Division, National Guard Bureau.



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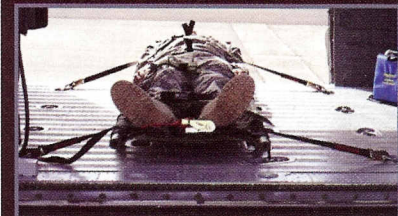
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