



February 22, 1968 Hue, Republic of Vietnam The Death of 1LT Terance Bozarth

Terry Bozarth, a fresh 1LT on his second mission in country was killed on the afternoon of February 22, 1968. The family requested that I escort the body back to Kettering, Ohio for internment. Terry and I were fast friends through flight school and arrived together at the 220th. My life would never be the same, what with the haunting look his bride, Connie, gave me as I presented her with the flag from his coffin, "On behalf of a grateful nation...", tears streaming from both our faces at the gravesite surrounded by hundreds of his friends and family. His little Brother and Sister couldn't fathom what had happened to say the least.

Of course the family wanted to know the circumstances of his death, and I assured them it was quick, that he felt nothing, and that he was in every sense of the word a true hero. Unfortunately, because of the fog of war, Tet being a Marine operation, the back seat Marine FAC disappeared, and no documentation available, I made it all up in my head to help the grieving family. Terry's parents came to visit me in Washington DC several years later—they had both aged 20 years. We visited the Vietnam memorial the "Wall" and it was heartbreaking as the three of us stood there in our group hug.

For the next 30 years I searched for the facts of what happened that day. Finally, three years ago I finished my research. The relief I felt was overwhelming; for all I knew Terry could have botched up the whole mission, been wounded, crashed and died a horrible death surrounded by the burning aircraft. I was determined to find out the facts and read every account I could find in the papers and books about that day, which was apparently a if not the, turning point for the battle of Hue.

My first information came from our own Gene Frey who had flown the previous mission with Marine AO John Slater. He wrote in these pages some time ago to a high school friend of Terry's who had contacted our web site:

GENE: "...it was a truly sad day when I found the aircraft and learned what had happened. I will never forget the feeling (It was somewhat gratifying to learn from Ted that the "proposed narrative" I was ordered to write the very next day may have been helpful in his getting a posthumous award.)

I served in the 220th, 1967–68, and flew two missions/day during Tet. Your friend was a fellow pilot that I knew. But, he was in the unit such a short time I can't say I knew him "well." However, your letter caused me to revisit my 42 year old diary."

Notes and quotes from my (Gene Frey) entries on February 22, 1968:

"Well, the worst has happened again. Lt. Terry Bozarth was shot down and killed w/a .50 caliber machine gun. He was over the S.E. outer wall of Hue. As CK 29 [Catkiller 29], he had just finished his checkout and was on only his second mission, having been in country about 3 wks."

"I was returning from a mission over Hue when I got an emergency request from 'Plutocrat II (DASC)' for search and rescue in the SE.quadrant."

"The observer got out with just a few scratches. Morale is way down."

"Weather at the time was 400' overcast, heavy rain, poor vis."

Next, I doubled down on my search for the Marine FAC and with the help of Catkillers Ray Caryl and Don Pepe, and their Marine friends, finally located him in Savannah. Bob Laramy had retired from the Corps with a medical discharge from wounds suffered that day. Our first telephone conversation lasted over an hour and I came to realize that Terry had indeed flown an heroic mission in the highest traditions of professionalism of the 220th, and that he had died instantly while running very close air support to the beleaguered Marines on the southeast corner of the Citadel. I was overcome with relief when I finally absorbed these two points. Bob Laramy recounted that, many years later, at a Marine reunion, a former grunt Lieutenant said, "That pilot may have been Army, but on that day he was all Marine!"

Bob found this letter from Ray Latall, a senior Major, one of the A4 (Navy Aircraft) drivers. He graciously agreed to share it with me:

Bob (LaFerriere),

Here is the copy of the letter Ray Latall sent me in 1969.

As I recall the jets were armed with (8) 300 pound snake eyes, two 500 lb. napalm bombs and a full load of 20 mm cannon rounds.

Ray died two years ago from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma resulting from agent orange exposure in Vietnam.

Bob (Laramy)

24 June 1969

Dear Bob,

By way of introduction I am Marine Ray Latall. No, I'm not an insurance or mutual fund salesman - I'm a Marine Corps airplane driver, and probably the last guy with whom you spoke on 22 February last year at Hue City. I was the second man in the last flight you controlled - our call sign was "Hellborne 513" - 2 A-4s.

I'm just writing this note to let you know that I do appreciate the outstanding performance you exhibited on that mission. You did a magnificent job, to say the least.

In inquiring into the status of "Benchmark 15", I was told that the pilot had been killed and that you had been seriously injured & evacuated out of country. No further information as to your whereabouts was available to me.

However, once I was sent to the D.C. area, I was able to resume the inquiry.

The personnel section of HQMC had no record of you but said you had therefore been either discharged or retired. Of course, the retirement section did have your address. The actions you guys performed were far in excess of what one might be expected to produce. It was a distinct privilege to work both for and with you on that occasion.

During that mission you probably thought that I, the number two now, was some sort of a spastic on my passes. But they really zeroed in on me and hit my bird on every single pass over the target. As a result, I had to make a quick sweep of the engine instruments to see how things were going mechanically - then, because the rounds hit with such force, I felt I should check-out the controls. That took a quick left-right, forward and backward movement on the stick. As a result, I spent a good portion of the time in & out of the 300' - 400' overcast just to insure I could make another pass on the target.

I'm certain that your plane was hit by the same sheet of fire that hit mine on my 5th pass (3rd firing pass).

I felt the wounds impacting on my plane as I passed just off of your right wing at about the 300' altitude.

When I made my left turn downwind, I heard a voice call "Benchmark 15, pull up, pull!" I thought that possibly you had gone into a port turn & that we were on a collision course, so I pushed over to about 150' above the ground to avoid you.

Then the call came again & I finally caught a glimpse of your plane at my 7 o'clock position at 100' or so and streaming what it appeared to be a yellowish fluid from the engine cowl area.

Realizing that you could probably use all the cover you could get, but also that it was a most crucial time in the battle for Hue I decided not to release my remaining ordnance, but to make "dummy" runs over the target and extend the pattern to include your downed position.

Hopefully, I felt, that the passes over the city would allow the Marines to continue & to secure their objective, and also, the dummy runs over your position, with live ordnance aboard and visible to the enemy, would discourage any hostiles from advancing on your crash site & thus enhance the chance of your survival.

The lead A-4 elected to circle overhead to keep an eye on things in general I guess.

I continued my pattern to cover the assigned target we had been working and your position until informed that there was a ground rescue team at your site.

By then the ceiling was down to about 150' in rain that, coupled with a fuel figure well below "Bingo" prompted a hasty departure from the area.

Since there was an unknown amount of battle damage to my bird, we elected to make an idle decent into Chu Lai & I landed there with about 500 lbs aboard (and about 15 holes). They had shot out my navigation gear, undercarriage and the control surfaces were shot up.

At the time, I was assigned as the MAG-12 Intelligence Officer, and at the debriefing, I really sang your praises to the high heavens. Strong statements followed & I do hope that your uncommon efforts were in some way recognized.

It's my understanding that air accounted for 100 - 150 KBA's that day and I resume we got our share. Even at that, I feel badly about the losses you suffered.

I'm about to conclude my stay at Bethesda Naval Hospital in a few more weeks, I hope. They are in the process of patching up my VC inflicted damage. But I do believe that my flying days are about over. I guess since I have almost 18 ½ years in now, that they will let me finish up my 20 - then I'll have to pound the pavement for a more profitable & less exciting means of existence.

I would like to hear from you, Bob. Just a note to let me know how you be getting along - - perhaps even your reflections of "that day" as you saw it.

Take care & if there is anything I can do for you in D.C. area - at HQMC -don't hesitate to ask.

Best regards,

Ray Latall

Following is a newspaper clip from around the 22nd of February:

The Hartford Courant

No. 54 Hartford, Conn Friday, Morning, February 23, 1968

Marines Pierce Citadel; Move into Hue for Kill - GIs Take Key Part of Bridge: Bombers Hit Radio Hanoi

SAIGON (UPI) U.S. Marines assaulting behind a wall of flaming napalm captured the southeast corner of Hue's Citadel Thursday, raised the American flag over the battlement and then moved westward for the kill against Viet Cong still holding out in the Imperial Palace.

The Marines also recaptured the northern end of a key Perfume River bridge, thus linking U.S. Forces fighting on both sides of the river for the first time in the savage 23-day old battle for the once beautiful city of Hue.

LBJ Approved

In North Vietnam American jets, striking with the express approval of President Johnson, bombed Radio Hanoi, the most powerful radio transmitter in Southeast Asia, for the first time. The bombing of the station, 3 ½ miles southwest of Hanoi, was seen as direct retaliation for the Communist offensive in South Vietnam.

Despite the bombing, U.S. mission officials said Radio Hanoi was still on the air Thursday with its propaganda broadcasts, including those of “Hanoi Hannah” aimed at GIs.

In Saigon, the U.S. command announced that 543 Americans were killed in Vietnam fighting last week - - the highest death toll of any week in the war - and 2,547 others wounded.

The record new toll raised to 18,329 the total of Americans killed in the Vietnam War and the wounded to 112,469. In the past three weeks covering the Communist’s big offensive, officials said, the Americans lost 1,539 dead with Communist fatalities placed at 37,515.

The Marines’ advance in Hue Thursday moved allied troops closer to the end of the bloodiest close-in fighting of the Vietnam War.

Marine Vow

The Marines raised the Stars and Stripes over the southeast battlement of the fortress which covers more than two square miles on the north bank of the Perfume River. They vowed to tear down the Viet Cong flag still flying further west along the southern wall of the Citadel, where Communist diehards clung to the Imperial Palace and the southwest corner.

“Dammit, I’d like to get that thing down,” said Brig. Gen. Foster C. Lahue, commander of the American Marines, in Hue, 400 miles north of Saigon. The red-and-blue Communist banner has flown there for all 23 days of the battle.

Fresh Marine reinforcements flown in Wednesday spearheaded the Hue Marines in their 150-yard thrust to the Citadel’s south wall behind bombs and napalm dropped by Marine jets.

“The echo of the bombs was still ringing in this place when they radioed back that they had the southeast tower,” a Marine spokesman reported. The move put the Marines in command of the Nguyen Hoang Bridge spanning the Perfume River for the first time since Communist knocked it out early in the battle for Hue.

The Marine spokesman estimated that about 200 suicidal Viet Cong troops still held positions in the Imperial Palace, now virtually surrounded by the U.S. Marines and South Vietnamese Rangers.

Down Plane

But the bitterly resisting Viet Cong poured heavy streams of fire from positions around the walled palace and shot down an American spotter plane directing aerial bombardments against the remaining Communist positions. An Army pilot and a U.S. Marine observer aboard the plane were killed (*Marine Observer Bob Laramy survived*).

In the Saigon area American infantrymen were disclosed to have killed 158 Communists in a daylong battle on Saigon’s northwestern fringe Wednesday and a top-ranking U.S. officer warned there was little doubt the Communist troops would attack the capital again.

"I feel they obviously are up to something." said the officer. "Otherwise they would have withdrawn to their base areas by now."

The officer said three Communist divisions are lingering around the capital and there are indications they are being supplied with a new type of rocket, lighter and more mobile than the 122mm missile they used last week against the Tan Son Nhut airbase, a headquarters complex outside Saigon.

Destruction Power

He said the new 107mm rockets are just as destructive as the 122mm projectiles but have a slightly shorter range - - seven miles. They are Chinese made and have never before been used in South Vietnam.

Further notes:

I met Bob Laramy and his charming wife Reba in Savannah, where we reminisced for a few hours in the hotel lobby (bar!) and then enjoyed a long fabulous meal at one of Savannah's finest restaurants. Bob was evacuated to Japan where he spent a month recovering from his many wounds before he was finally evac'd stateside to Boston, close to his family (with two children still in diapers!), for more medical treatment; he dead stuck the aircraft from just over the Perfume river and crashed it into a masonry building entrance way, where he was finally able to extricate himself. After a fierce gun battle, a Marine platoon came to his rescue and he was evac'd to Phu Bai, 100 yards from our Catkiller ramp. He vaguely recalls the CK CO coming to see him (Bob himself couldn't see) and told him that initial reports were that the Catkillers had saved the day for the Marines. Bob had flown 150 missions and said the scene was right out of hell with smoke, explosions, and radio chatter at higher levels than he had ever encountered. With no WP's, they used grenades to mark positions, but the NVA were matching their smokes with their own, adding to the confusion. Terry was flying the racetrack pattern along the east side of the Citadel wall. On the fatal third run the enemy 50 cal's blew away all the Plexiglas and the engine. After the evac for Bob, the Platoon Leader on the ground, Bob Black, led another group of volunteers from the platoon to retrieve Terry's body.

Bob Laramy is one of the quietest, most humble men I have ever encountered. He owns a real estate company in Savannah and has two older children. I cannot begin to describe my joy at finally meeting Bob and getting the straight skinny. I started my one man campaign for Terry being decorated (tombstone says purple heart and air medal) well beyond a DFC, but later learned from his family that the DFC was awarded posthumously (thanks, Gene).

For those of you that were there, God Bless and God Bless Terry Bozarth, Catkiller 29.

Bob LaFerriere
Petoskey, MI July 29, 2014