

The Saga of [Captain America](#), DMZ Dustoff 713

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One of the neat things about the assumption of Historian duties of the 237th Medical Detachment, DMZ Dustoff, has been locating former members of the unit, their photos....and their family members.

At the first reunion, Richard Villa (CO-host) and I received a "Thank You" from every family member in attendance that was related to someone Killed In Action, KIA. Because the results were so positive, Richard and I resolved to find the families of the KIAs we had yet to locate. In the early Spring of 2007, I was able to locate Dr. Jason MacLurg, brother of David MacLurg, Medic, who was KIA on 27 September 1970. Dr. MacLurg sent me a collection of many photos that David had taken, and included were a series of 3 photos of a damaged 237th Huey. Inspecting the damage to the Huey in the photos was pilot WO1 Bob McKeegan, one of the most accomplished and respected pilots ever to come out of the 237th. The aircraft showed damage to the left windshield, left door and the entire nose and windshield were covered with mud.

Unfortunately, Bob died in a motorcycle accident in September of 2003, and I was afraid that the story of this aircraft might be lost, but his best friend in country, Dave "GoGo" Gomez, DMZ Dustoff 701, had the details. An email from me with the photos brought a swift and interesting reply from GoGo on 29 September, 2007.

It follows:

[Phil-](#)

[Well,, I have to go back to one night sitting at our outdoor theatre in Quang Tri watching a newly released movie, called "Easy Rider". Bob McKeegan was completely taken by the cool Captain America helmet worn by Peter Fonda in the movie, and was determined to also wear a similarly painted one. He spent a few days gathering up the required red, white, and blue paint, and meticulously painting the bright stars and stripes on his helmet. When he was done, it looked great, but somehow looked out of place in a jungle warfare environment.](#)



On his next scheduled day to fly, Bob proudly wore the helmet on his early morning mission to fly a hospital transfer from Quang Tri to Da Nang . On the return flight from Da Nang , Bob flew the established low-level route at the departure end of Da Nang's runway, and under the departing traffic. Unfortunately, at the same time, an Air Force F-4 was departing and for some reason decided to maintain a very low level altitude after takeoff. Bob said that he looked over his shoulder just in time to see the low-level fighter coming right at him and made an abrupt evasive maneuver to barely avoid a mid-air collision. Bob, was always Mr. Cool, but he was still pretty shook up about it when he got back to Quang Tri an hour later.

Later that afternoon, Bob and his crew got a mission to pick up a downed flight crew. Sounded fairly routine until hearing that 6 other helicopters, from other units, had already tried to do the rescue pick up, but were turned away by heavy enemy fire and after receiving multiple aircraft hits. Bob and his crew flew in and successfully picked up the downed crew while also receiving heavy enemy small arms fire and accurate mortar rounds. Bob was able to fly to an area of safety before setting down to inspect the damage caused by several small arms hits. I don't recall how many hits his aircraft took, but every bullet and mortar shrapnel penetration was on the left cockpit area. It appeared as if the bad guys were aiming at his brightly painted helmet. Bob sustained a lot of small plexiglass fragments imbedded in his face and was later awarded a Purple Heart for his wounds.

To this day, I still laugh when I think of the image of Bob jumping out of the helicopter, throwing his newly painted helmet to the ground, and swearing that he would never wear that f####ing helmet again. The very next day, Bob re-painted his helmet back to O.D. green.

Dave

Dustoff 701



The mortar rounds explained the mud on the front and now we know how the aircraft was damaged. Apparently, Medic David MacLurg was on both those missions with Bob as the helmet painting only lasted for one day, the day David took these photos. One day in the war can be pinpointed by a little detective work and a little luck. One day in the Saga of flying Dustoff near the DMZ in Viet Nam can be documented. And the demise of one Captain America helmet can be forever recorded for history, regardless of how short-lived it was.

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