



220th Aviation Company

(Surveillance Airplane Light)

(Reconnaissance Airplane)

(Utility Airplane)



"Catkillers" and Family, and all Friends and brothers in Arms, in memory of those who have served.

A MEMORIAL TRIBUTE TO LLOYD RUGGE^I



SILVER STAR



LLOYD TAYLOR RUGGE

Wall Name: LLOYD T. RUGGE
Date of Birth: 7/2/1941
Date of Casualty: 1/26/1967
Home of Record: NORTH HOLLYWOOD
State: CA
Branch of Service: ARMY
Rank: 1LT
Casualty Country: SOUTH VIETNAM
Casualty Province: Quang Ngai

From the preface of "One Day in Vietnam", "this book tells the story of one man who went to Vietnam and did not return. He was a cousin of mine, the eldest son of my grandmother's younger brother, and his name was Lloyd Taylor Rugge. You can find his name on Panel 14E, Line 82 at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. Lloyd was a 1st Lieutenant and a reconnaissance pilot in the U.S. Army who was killed in action on January 26, 1967 near a village called Duc Pho. I wrote about him for reasons of kinship, because I considered it important to my own life to understand who my cousin was and what happened to him in Vietnam. But I hope others might see in him something of the spirit of the more than million Americans who served their country in the Vietnam War, those who returned to live among us as well as those left behind on the Battlefield."
Author Gary Hook.

1ST PLATOON QUANG NGAI



**BACK ROW L/R: Kurt Lauer, CPT Ulysses S. "Harry" Harrison , Unknown,
George Aman, CPT Johnson, Unknown.**

FRONT ROW L/R: Dick Kiper, Dave Antonoplos, Unknown, Bert Wiggins, Lloyd Rugge.

BIRDDOGS AND AIR OBSERVERS

By Sgt. Mike McCusker – Sea Tiger Newspaper

CHU LAI:

A reconnaissance team spotted 150 Viet Cong in a narrow mountain valley and two small airplanes raced through the stormy late afternoon sky. They came from the sea, passing over a marshy river delta and crossed the first ridges, then dropped into the valley in tight spirals over a brown ribbon of muddy stream where the VC had been observed. Forty miles away silver jets roared off the Chu Lai airstrip and within minutes, high above the thick layers of dark cloud they orbited, ready to swoop down with their bombs and rockets.

They waited for targets. Marine First Lieutenant William A. Berry, an Air Observer for the 1st marine Division was going to give them some. Strapped into the rear seat of one of the tiny single-engine Cessna O-1B "Birddogs", he searched the scraggly brush on either side of the stream with eyes long practiced what untrained eyes would never see. With only half his Vietnam tour behind him, Berry had already logged more than 140 combat missions. Flying above enemy concentrations in frail airplanes, Berry's job is to bring air and artillery strikes on the enemy after marking the targets with smoke rockets slung on the underside of each wing. Sometimes the rockets can be used as weapons. Except for an M-16 rifle lashed to the inner cabin wall, they are the only armament Birddogs carry.

They are Army planes, flown by Army pilots based at Quang Ngai with the 1st Platoon ("Catkillers") of the

Lloyd Rugge-2

220th Aviation Company. Their primary purpose is to support the Army of the republic of Vietnam but for each day for three hours or more, one of them carries a Marine observer. They are hunters, wriggling into tight mountain passes, crisscrossing low over rice paddies, spiraling directly over hostile villages; these observers hunt the Viet Cong. And when they find them, they hammer him to death with bombs from Marine jets or with heavy artillery fire originating several miles away in such cities as Quang Ngai, Tam Ky, Bien Son or from the Chu Lai base itself.

“Down there, Lloyd, I see a bunch,” Berry shouted through his throat mike to pilot, First Lieutenant Lloyd Rugge. Rugge spun his airplane on its tail and swung back over the area, one wing almost completely vertical. Several Viet Cong were running along the stream. “We’ve got a target for you,” Berry radioed the jets circling unseen above the clouds. “We will mark it with smoke.” Rugge climbed a hundred feet and then put the plane in a steep dive straight for the deck. The ground raced towards them – two crackling explosions and the rockets were on the way. Rugge was skimming the trees as smoke blossomed against a strong wind that rushed through the canyons. “Target marked,” Berry told the jets. “Make your run from the north and pull out to the left. We will be on your right...” Hardly were the words spoken when a streak flashed from the top of the fog shrouded canyon and stream at its foot suddenly erupted in smoke and fire as the Marine jet pulled out of its dive and swung to the east, climbing over the sea. His wingman came sizzling on his tail, hurtling through the canyon at a blinding 500 miles an hour and another bomb explosion reverberated through the valley. Berry and Rugge went down to take a look. No trace of the enemy. Either they were dead or had managed to hide safely in a sheltering cave.

The second Birddog which had been flying through canyons to the east, now made a run for the stream. Captain Dave Antonoplos threw his plane into a headlong dive and two more rockets marked the target area. Again jets pounded the valley and they had to go home, empty of ordinance, fuel almost exhausted.

Meanwhile the sky had become crowded. Huey helicopters wheeled around pouring machine gun and rocket fire into the trees and gulley’s; CH-46 choppers growled to the valleys western rim, dropping off Marines who would sweep east to the sea, to trap the surviving enemy; more jets arrived on station. Everybody had to look out for everybody else. The two Birddogs hung around for a while, probing the now darkening canyons, fighting against the winds that seemed strong enough to hurl them against the mountain walls. Finally, they too had to head for home. Fuel was low. Another team of pilots and observers would be airborne and take their places later. It would go on all night. The small recon team, sitting on one of the mountains, would not feel so alone in the long dark hours. If the VC had planned to attack, they had been thwarted and were no longer the hunter but the pursued.

It began to rain. Within a few minutes the Birddog was over the Chu Lai strip, requesting permission to land. A giant four-engine transport lifted from the strip and Rugge dropped a hundred or so feet to avoid collision, then swung gracefully into a long dive toward the wet, gleaming runway.

Tired and hungry, Berry unstrapped his seat belt and shoulder harness and clambered to the ground. “See you tomorrow Lloyd,” he waved and Rugge ran his plane down the strip and headed for Quang Ngai. Tomorrow was another day.

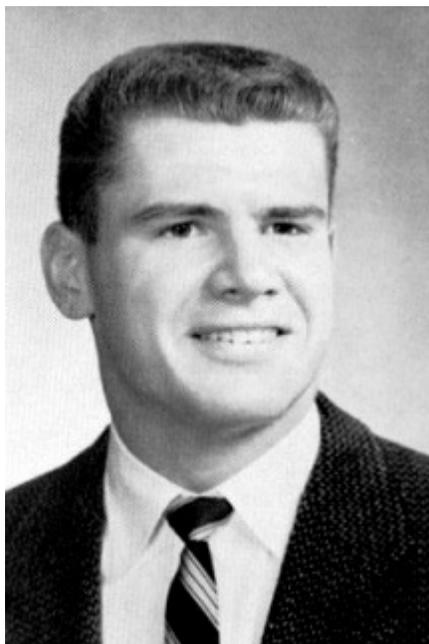
However, it wasn't all about the war. In the attached photograph taken by Darrell Harrison, Crew Chief at Quang Nhai, shows Lieutenant Rugge and Mr. Wiggins in a familiar pastime, sharing an occasional celebratory beer with their crew chiefs. Our then Operations Officer, Major Gene Wilson, recalled that Lloyd was a 'party guy' from the LA area and USC, an attribute that endeared him to all who made his acquaintance.



BACK ROW: Robert Martinez, Lloyd Rugge, Bert Wiggins
FRONT ROW: Bill Wilson, (?) Blessing

The *Sea Tiger* article on Lieutenant Rugge was published on 1 February 1967, six days after 1st Lieutenant Patrick O'Malley and 1st Lieutenant Lloyd Rugge crashed in the jungles of Vietnam. 1st Lieutenant William Berry and 1st Lieutenant Patrick O'Malley were routinely in the back seats of the 220th Aviation Company aircraft and passengers of Lieutenant Rugge and Captain David Antonoplos. The ongoing reporting by Sgt. Mike McCusker for *Sea Tiger* Newspaper reflected the growing danger that was building in and around the Quang Ngai vicinity.

EDITOR: The "Sea Tiger" was a weekly newspaper distributed throughout the III MAF area of northern South Vietnam, published by the III Marine Amphibious Force. The first issue was published on 10 November 1965 and the last issue on 14 April 1971.



WILLIAM A. BERRY

KIA 5 March 1967

AO'S SHARP VISION ELIMINATES 15 VC

By: Sgt. Mike McCusker – Sea Tiger Newspaper

CHU LAI:

The sharp eyes of First Marine Division aerial observer led to 15 Viet Cong dead yesterday. First Lieutenant William A. Berry was flying as an observer in a Marine two seater aircraft when he sighted the VC in an open rice paddy, several miles northwest of Chu Lai. The VC had frozen their movements to avoid detection, but when the observer aircraft had the pilot swing in for another pass, they broke and ran. Berry's radio to ground units malfunctioned, so with his other set, he radioed another observer aircraft in the area, an O-1 "Birdog" piloted by Army Captain David Antonoplos, 220th Aviation company, to relay the enemies position to "L" Battery 11th Marine Regiment. After the artillerymen fired the mission, the kills were confirmed by body count.

In other action near Chu Lai, elements of the Seventh Marine Regiment were pressing the attack against strong forces of hard core Viet Cong, 15 miles south of Quang Ngai City. The search and destroy mission, in its 5th day on February 1st, has encountered heavy resistance from the VC who have controlled the area for several years and are well dug in. The total casualties as of February 1st, were 37 VC KIA, Marine casualties were termed as light.

Marine First Lieutenant William A. Berry, 24, son of Mr. and Mrs. Frank C. Berry of 112 Howard Ave., Austintown, [Ohio] was killed in action at Quang Tri in Vietnam Sunday, 5 March 1967, while flying a mission as an aerial observer. An officer [who served] with the 1st Marine Division, Sub-unit 2, Headquarters Battalion, Lieutenant Berry had been in Vietnam since July [1966]

Finally, on 26 January 1st Lieutenants Rugge and O'Malley were to fly their fateful mission, in pursuit of the mounting enemy presence just south of Quang Ngai. Pictured here in one of the last known photos of Lieutenant Rugge preparing for a mission, Lieutenant Rugge and his Marine AO counterparts were always willing to bring the fight to the enemy.



1LT Lloyd Rugge with CPT Herbert W. "Herb" De Groft, USMC, AO, MACV Advisory Team 2, Chu Lai/Quang Ngai, April 1966— May 1967

Last photograph of Lloyd Rugge taken in Vietnam, 1966. (Photo courtesy Susan Townsley.)

"GOD LET HIM GO HOME"

By: Sgt. Mike McCusker – Sea Tiger News Paper

CHU LAI:

The last thing Marine Lieutenant Patrick Anthony O'Malley remembered before the plane crashed was the trees "hurtling toward him." The 24 year old 1st Marine Division air observer had spotted some Viet Cong just moments before, and his pilot was on a rocket run to mark their position 15 miles south of Quang Ngai on 26 January when suddenly everything happened at once.

The Cessna O-1 "Bird Dog" was in a steep dive, its rockets misfired, and enemy ground fire tore through the tiny plane. The pilot could not pull out of the dive and the plane smashed into the trees lining a muddy stream. The force of the crash ripped off a wing and spun the plane around. Its nose settled into the water.

O'Malley hurt and dazed, crawled through a broken window of the wrecked cabin and was about to check the damage when he froze. An armed Viet Cong was staring at him from the opposite river bank. O'Malley didn't move a muscle. The VC turned and walked away. Tuning back to the plane, O'Malley saw the pilot still in his seat. "I'm trapped" the aviator said, "how about putting this fire out under me." An electrical fire was crackling beneath

the pilot's seat. O'Malley extinguished it as the pilot made a wry joke about where he felt the heat. His leg was trapped beneath the crushed metal and the observer, using most of his strength, managed to pry away the steel and get the pilot out.

Both agreed to leave the crash site before the VC came.

The pilot started into the stream. He was walking with the current when three grenades exploded nearby sending spray high into the air. O'Malley plunged into the water: he never saw the pilot again. Viet Cong were charging across the paddies towards the plane when O'Malley surfaced for air. He ducked under water again and swam upstream to an overhanging bush. He crouched beneath it, keeping all but his head immersed in the water for two hours..

Miraculously the 30 VC search force did not find him, Several beat down the brush on the opposite shore and three more grenade were thrown into the area around the plane. O'Malley's heart nearly stopped as a black-pajama clad VC started spraying the bushes with automatic fire. The rounds chopped up the water and one of them hit him square in the back. All he felt was a stab of pain, as if someone had thrown a rock, and he knew his flack jacket had stopped the bullet.

After what seemed an eternity, the VC left. O'Malley just had time to think of the baby daughter he had never seen when another force, smaller than the first, approached the plane. The VC milled about and soon left, replaced in a few minutes by yet another group that wandered about aimlessly before they too lost interest and straggled away. During the time, O'Malley thought constantly of his wife and his daughter born just after his arrival in Vietnam four months before. He could hear firefights between helicopters and VC on the ground, and explosions of bombs and rockets nearby.

When the sun emerged from behind the thick clouds, O'Malley was worried that he would be outlined in the water. It was not the VC who saw the silhouette, but another Marine aerial observer. First Lieutenant William A. Berry was searching for his old classmate O'Malley. Berry and O'Malley had become observers together, graduating from the same class. Berry saw the wrecked plane and a second later spotted the nearly invisible form in the water just upstream. At the same instant O'Malley risked enemy detection by leaving his cover and waving. The second time around Berry dropped a yellow smoke grenade in a rice paddy next to the stream. Right behind, an Army Huey helicopter swooped down and landed. Within seconds it was surrounded and hammered by VC fire. O'Malley said later the Huey just sat there and waited for him. "It was the most beautiful sight I had ever seen," he said. He had to crawl across the paddy through enemy fire to the chopper. The two machine gunners in the Huey raked the enemy positions until O'Malley was aboard the helicopter and lifted over the trees and out of danger.

Later, O'Malley took off his flack jacket and found the bullet imbedded in the fiberglass. "If I hadn't been trained to never give myself up," he said later, "I might have tried to surrender." "I hung on, frightened and helpless but determined to escape because I just had a feeling God was going to let me go home," he added.

In another article 1st Lieutenant Patrick O'Malley relates his experience and shared his thoughts on his newly born daughter Elizabeth and the prayers he offered up during his ordeal.

DOWNED MARINE PRAYS FOR HELP -AND GETS IT

By Robert Kaylor

CHU LAI, VIETNAM (UPI):

"All I could think about was that I have never seen my baby and I want to get home to see her," said 1st Lieutenant Patrick A. O'Malley. "I kept saying to myself 'I'm not going to die.'" The Marine lieutenant, an observer in an O1-E single-engine spotter plane, told how his aircraft had been shot down over a Viet Cong controlled village and how he had hidden under an overhanging bush at the bank of a stream while communists searched just two feet away.

The pilot of the Army spotter plane, (1st Lieutenant Lloyd Ruge), was killed by the guerrillas, but O'Malley escaped and was picked up a short time later by an Army helicopter which braved heavy ground fire to rescue him.

O'Malley, 24, has been in Vietnam four months. His first child, Elizabeth, was born two weeks after he left the United States. O'Malley said he was flying with the Army pilot over the village to spot Viet Cong who had pinned down a company of Marines with heavy automatic weapons fire. "We were drawing a lot of ground fire. The next thing we knew, we were almost at ground level...we had leveled out and were going as fast as we could go right toward the trees." When the plane went into the trees, the right wing was torn off. O'Malley pried the pilot out of the wreckage, but the pilot lost his balance in the stream and drifted a few feet away. The lieutenant watched helplessly as three grenades landed around the pilot.

"I just had time to yell 'grenade' and dive in the water," said O'Malley. "I heard the explosion. When I came up, he was gone." The Viet Cong searched the area and O'Malley stayed in his hiding place. He thought about his baby, and that was when he started telling himself he couldn't die. "And I prayed more than I ever had in my life," the lieutenant said.

When the Viet Cong left, O'Malley stayed where he was for fear of being spotted. Then he saw a Marine spotter plane, circling overhead, and waded out and waved. The plane saw him on its third pass. The spotter plane called in an armed helicopter, which came down to within 40 feet of the ground and blasted the communist positions. Then a second Army Huey chopper came to a halt a few feet off the ground 100 yards away from O'Malley. The communists opened up on the choppers, but they hauled him aboard and were gone.

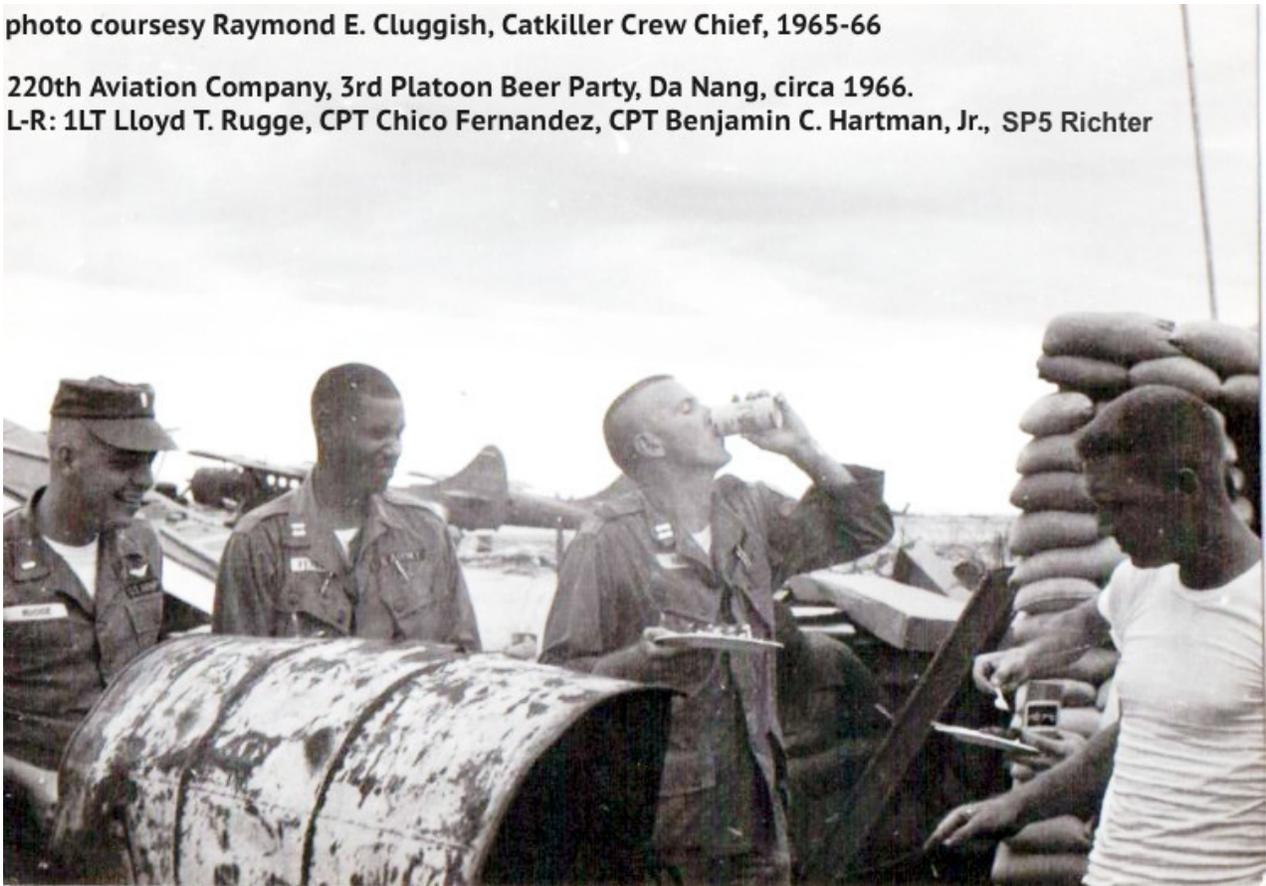
1st Lieutenant Lloyd Ruge remained MIA (Missing In Action) for a period of time, as our Company Operations Officer Major Gene Wilson recalled: "*Lloyd was in pretty bad shape when they got separated and was captured by the VC. He was MIA for some time before a local villager led a search team to his grave. Gene*"

The following photograph of Lloyd Rugge and others enjoying a platoon party is only the fifth known surviving photographic record of Lloyd in Vietnam. It also gives further credence to a previous statement that he enjoyed fellowship with unit members:

photo courtesy Raymond E. Cluggish, Catkiller Crew Chief, 1965-66

220th Aviation Company, 3rd Platoon Beer Party, Da Nang, circa 1966.

L-R: 1LT Lloyd T. Rugge, CPT Chico Fernandez, CPT Benjamin C. Hartman, Jr., SP5 Richter



REFERENCES:

- One Day In Vietnam – The True Story Of An Army Bird Dog (sic) Pilot – By Gary Hook
- Downed Marine Prays For Help And Gets It – UPI – Robert Kaylor
- Birddogs And Air Observers – Sea Tiger Newspaper – Sgt. Mike McCusker
- AO's Sharp Vision Eliminates 15 VC – Sea Tiger Newspaper – Sgt. Mike McCusker
- "God Let Him Go Home" – Sea Tiger Newspaper – Sgt. Mike McCusker
- Last Photograph of Lloyd Rugge taken in Vietnam, 1966 – Provided By Susan Townsley
- Photograph of 3rd Platoon party by Raymond E. Cluggish
- Quang Ngai photo by Darrell Harrison

ⁱ *Compiled and transcribed for historical publication purposes only by Dennis D. Currie, Assistant Editor, Quang Ngai, 1966-67, and are made available by the Editor for the sole purpose of consolidating historical actions, disposition of events and unit personnel and assigned crew members who flew with the 220th Aviation Company "Catkillers." Articles are believed copyrighted by respective authors or organizations that could later declare All Rights Reserved.*