

Chopper Pilot

For Americans of a certain age, the UH-1 helicopter is an enduring image of the Vietnam War. The “Huey,” as it was nicknamed, was used for many purposes from gunship and troop transport to cargo hauler and aerial medical evacuation. Regardless of its role, the chopper’s missions, flying over jungle, in poor weather, and above armed enemy troops, was often laden with hazard. Howard Dixon Ulmer, Jr. of North Augusta was a Huey pilot with the Army’s 175th Aviation Company.



Dick Ulmer enrolled at Clemson College in 1960. He participated in Air Force ROTC and was a member of the Freshman Precision Drill Team. Ulmer was a skilled musician who played piano and guitar and who seemed able to pick up and play almost any instrument. After his sophomore year, Ulmer transferred to the University of Georgia from which he graduated in 1964.

By 1966, Ulmer was an Army aviator, pilot of the seemingly ubiquitous Huey. He arrived in Vietnam on June 3, just as US aircraft began attacking North Vietnamese cities for the first time. American troop strength in the country had crossed 400,000 on its way to half-a-million.



Ulmer was assigned to the 175th Aviation Company based at Vinh Long in the Mekong River Delta, the vast maze of rivers, swamps, and islands south and west of Saigon. The 175th provided aerial transport and firepower for the 7th Division of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

On October 3, 1966, Ulmer was the designated copilot on a helicopter mission piloted by Captain Richard Rosbeck. During Vietnam’s wet season, from May

through November, rain showers are frequent and often severe, even if of short duration. On this mission, the two aviators found themselves in severe weather which exceeded their capabilities and those of their helicopter. Both Rosbeck and Ulmer were killed when their aircraft crashed and burned.

First Lieutenant Ulmer was awarded the Air Medal. He was survived by his wife and son, Howard Dixon Ulmer III, who was born in July 1966, after his father had departed for Vietnam. Ulmer’s body was recovered and returned to North Augusta where he was buried in Pinewood Memorial Park.

