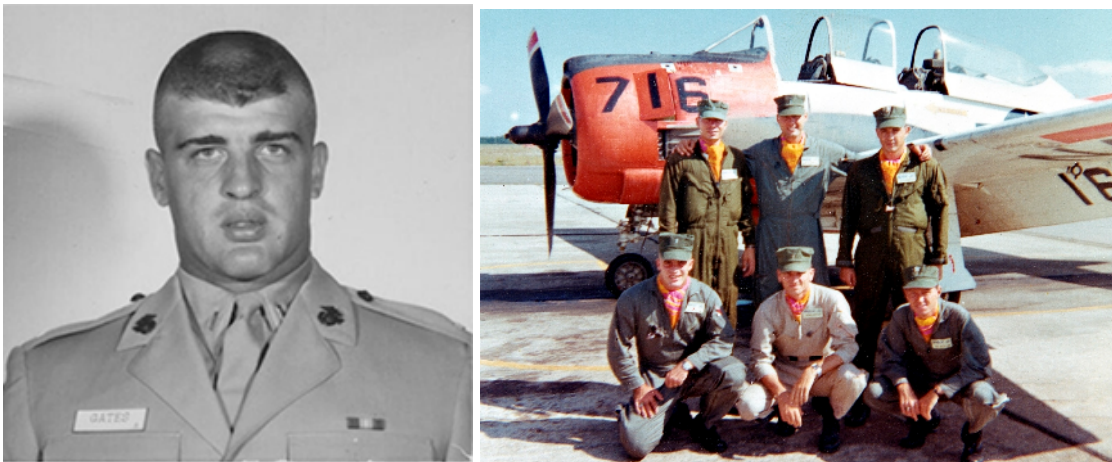


Gates, Albert Henry Jr. (Al), 2nd Platoon

1 February 1946 - 7 March 1970

Courts of the Missing, MIA Mem, HI

Captain Albert Henry Gates Jr. of East Greenbush, New York was a member of the Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263, Marine Air Group 15, 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade. On 7 March 1970, he was aircraft commander of a CH-46D flying near Da Nang, South Vietnam, when the aircraft crashed into the water killing him. His remains were not recovered. His name is inscribed on the Courts of the Missing at the Honolulu Memorial. Captain Albert Henry Gates, Jr. is honored on Panel 13W, Row 92 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.



Bottom row, left to right, Al Gates, Randy Crew, Navy guy. Top row, left to right, Bob Chiesa, Dick Averitt, Navy guy. NAS Pensacola (Barin Field) 1968.

Personal Reflections about Al Gates:

From Brian O'Neil, HMM-263 Helo Pilot, 19 Apr 2015: Captain Al Gates joined Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263 (HMM-263) at Marble Mountain Air Facility in Vietnam the end of 1969. This was Al's first combat tour. As a Captain Al was senior in rank to the "salty" Lieutenants who he flew with as a copilot for his first few months in country. As one of those "salty" Lieutenants I had the opportunity to fly with Al often and get to know him and his abilities.

Al proved to be a Marine who cared about all people. He took care of the flight crews and was concerned about their well-being and put their welfare above his own. His quiet leadership provided a calming influence on those around him. In the air Al was expected to excel, and he did. Al was with me on a day in which we took a lot of ground fire and numerous rounds hit the aircraft, with one round coming through the cockpit and striking a hydraulic line spewing hydraulic fluid all over him. Al maintained his calm composure and handled the situation like the professional he was.

From Ray Norton, TBS 1-68, 4th Platoon, 12 Apr 2015:

I recall that Al had grown a pilot's mustache. It was always neatly groomed and apparently in exact compliance with the Regulations. Al was one squared away Marine. It was an honor to be a Basic School Classmate and a member of his Vietnam combat unit, HMM 161 call sign Cattle Call.

From Randy Crew, TBS 1-68, 2nd Platoon, 31 Mar 2015:

There were six of us—four Marines and two Navy Ensigns. Our call sign was "Bearcat 60" but I never knew why. Maybe our instructor, a Navy A-1 driver who had recently been based aboard an aircraft carrier in the Tonkin Gulf, had graduated from the University of Cincinnati in 1960. He may have even played football for Cincinnati. He looked the part—six feet tall, thick, bulldog jowls. He wasn't a bad guy but he wasn't there to cut us any slack either. Our lives were in his hands, carrier landings in a T-28C were dangerous, and he didn't intend to lose any of us to stupid mistakes. So from our small ready room in a shack by the legendary old WWII Navy base west of Pensacola known as "Bloody Barin Field," he laid down the law. We would be on time, we would have our procedures memorized, and we would know the taxiways and runways like the inside of our garage back home. No time would be wasted wandering around on the wrong taxiways. He would lead us out the first day then it was up to us to find a leader for each of the following days.

The following day came and from the podium in front of the blackboard, Bearcat Lead asked who wanted to be the leader that day. I looked at the floor. I was on time, I had the procedures memorized, I knew the T-28C well from earlier training, but that damn Barin Field was a maze of taxiways and runways—all of them with faded and crumbling lines and markings and numbers that had been there since the early '40s. Even the buildings on the base sat abandoned and crumbling away in the Alabama sunshine. Except for our little shack on our one little spot of activity on one of the old flight lines, Barin Field was a ghost town. So with four different old WWII runways, each with two directions to take off and land from, plus a couple of different ways to get to each runway, I sat with my five Bearcat 60 mates and waited. Al Gates raised his hand.

And lead he did. He got us on the right taxiway, then the right runway, then into the air for an hour of touch-and-go simulated carrier landings. And someone else volunteered the next day. I took my turn but by then I was confident I wouldn't screw it up. Al had that confidence from the get-go.

After the first week, we six pilots of Bearcat 60 had our act together and we had the swagger to prove it. Tracy Gates, Al's wife, had even sewn Clark Gable style flying scarves for each of us and had embroidered them with "Bearcat 60." To even further enhance our look, I had made "Bearcat 60" nametags of us to wear on our flightsuits. In the vernacular of the times, we were "shit hot." The result was a graduation day of dramatic but accident free carrier landings on the USS Lexington and a post-mission debrief from our gruff but now smiling Bearcat Lead at a Pensacola bar. And Al Gates had led the way.

Born Albert Henry Gates, Jr., on 1 September, 1943, Al was the oldest of three children born to Albert and Shirley Gates of Greenbush, NY. He graduated from Cornell University on 13 June, 1966, with a degree in Agriculture and Life Sciences. He also received a reserve commission in the Marine Corps from the Cornell NROTC program with a Pay Entry Base Date of 13 June, 1966. He immediately entered graduate school at Cornell where he finished in June, 1967, with an MBA. He met Ellen "Tracy" Pulver at Cornell when he was a senior and she was a freshman. As there were three girls on her dorm floor named Ellen, thus making it difficult to call a given Ellen to the phone, she told them to just call her "Tracy," the pen name she had used on her poetry in high school. The name stuck. Al and Tracy married immediately after Al

graduated in 1967. After TBS, they moved to Pensacola for flight school where they became God-parents to Dick and Sandi Averitt's first child, Dawn. After receiving his wings, Al was assigned to transition training in the CH-46 at New River, NC.

In a recent email, Dick Averitt (1st Platoon, TBS 1-68 and one of Al's closest friends) picks up the story:

"At Pensacola, Al and Tracy had become dear friends to both Sandi and me. After we got our wings, we drove through Atlanta to New River in tandem, trained in the H-46 together, then reported in at HMM-162 in Marble Mountain.

"Our squadron was composed of 3 majors, one captain and about 40 lieutenants. Gates was the one captain, because he had taken a year to get his master's degree. We went aboard the helicopter carrier (I can't remember the name) and bunked together in a 4 man room. We were destined for Okinawa (allegedly the first unit withdrawn from Vietnam under Nixon) when I woke him one morning to tell him he was a new father. *[Editor note: The child was a son they named Albert.]*

"It was also aboard ship when he got called back to Vietnam. Ironically, I wanted to go back and he didn't. We tried to switch, but they wanted a captain.

"I called Tracy from Okinawa to tell her Al had gone down over the water on a cover mission for brass in another helo. She had already been notified that he was missing." *[End of Averitt Narrative]*

The "cover mission" Dick referred to is also known as a "chase mission." A "heavy" is a Colonel or General and the chase bird is there to rescue him if the Huey flying the heavy were to go down.

The following is a personal narrative posted on the Popasmoke web site by a pilot named Martin. He identified himself as one of Al's HMM-263 squadron mates and a member of the accident board that investigated the Gates/Kimura crash:

"Originally I *[Martin]* was scheduled to fly co-pilot with Al Gates that day. The frag order was for a 46 to chase a Huey that was coming down from up north. The Huey was carrying a heavy who was attending some sort of change of command ceremony in the Da Nang area. K.K. Kimura had only recently reported in and was a very junior co-pilot. He was scheduled to fly co-pilot with Paul Sniffin who had the Recon mission.

"The WX was really bad that morning, almost zero/zero, and all launches were holding. K.K. and I played a little Acey-Deucey while waiting for things to clear up a bit. While we sat at the A-Doo board, the Ops Officer, Maj. Toben came in, looked at the schedules board and directed the ODO to switch K.K. and me. Since I was the more experienced co-pilot, he thought I should be on Recon instead of what was basically a milk-run VIP chase.

"After several hours, the WX improved somewhat and the Recon package launched out. After an uneventful day of routine inserts and extracts, we recovered back at Marble around 1700-1800. While I was post-fighting the a/c one of the crew chiefs came up and asked me if I had heard that his bird had gone down in the water, killing the entire crew. When I asked who was flying it he said it was Capt. Gates and Lt. Kimura. As it turned out, one of the gunners survived. Basically, all we found out came from his account. He told us that they were flying in "really bad" WX, chasing the Huey when they went inadvertent IFR and crashed into the water about 500 yards off the beach. I don't recall the exact location, but it seems to me that it was north of Da Nang. He also told us that even though he couldn't be sure, he thought he remembered a loud noise coming from the rear of the a/c and both pilots looking back into the cabin just before impact.

"The surviving gunner was picked up by a Vietnamese fisherman, who took him to the beach, dropped him off and then just left, apparently unconcerned with helping him any further.

About a week later, KK's remains washed up on the beach down by Chu Lai. To the best of my knowledge, the other three were never recovered.

"I was appointed to the investigating board and tasked with looking into contributing factors. My comments indicated that the most significant factor was sending an inexperienced crew (Gates had only recently made HAC with very little in-country H2P time) out in unsatisfactory weather to fly an unnecessary mission." *[End of Martin Narrative]*

Al Gates is listed as KIA on March 7th, 1970. His body was not recovered.

I remember Al had legs like tree trunks. He was not a poster Marine in PT shorts, but he didn't need to be. He had other gifts. I can still see him seated at a card table in the ready room at Barin Field in his sage-gray cotton flightsuit with cards in his hands and a starched and blocked utility cover pushed to the back of his head. The game was Hearts or maybe Bridge. Dick Averitt and Bob Chiesa are seated with him. A Navy guy may be the 4th. We were young men then, living the dream. And we had swagger.

Randy Crew, TBS 1-68, 2nd Platoon

Postscript: Ellen "Tracy" Gates remarried in 1973 to David Lee Brower, a Navy F-14 pilot stationed at San Diego. Young Albert Henry Gates III became Albert Gates Brower and quickly took to his new father. Tracy and Dave had two more boys then they adopted a Chinese girl to complete their family. In 1981 Tracy finished her degree in Textile and Apparel at San Diego State. Young Al graduated from Cal Berkley and is now on staff at the University of Washington designing computer programs for the Engineering Department. He is married with one child, a daughter named Aria. Tracy says Aria is really smart like her father and grandfather Gates. I can tell you—if she's really smart like her grandfather Gates, she's really, really smart. Tracy and Dave, as well as Al and his family, all live in the Seattle, WA, area.