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"She 'Numba 1 girl — you keep!"

I didn't. I now correspond with Phuc and send pictures. You can see them at his stand if you'll stop.

The rest of my self-designed trip was spectacular! Hoi An, Loc Vinh, China Beach, Danang, Hai Van, Phu Loc, Phu Bai, Hue (I could live there), Quang Tri, Dong Ha, Cam Lo, Camp Carroll, LZ Stud, Rock Pile, LZ Shepherd, Khe Sanh, Hills 861,881,950 1015, Ho Chi Minh Trail, Montagnards, Con Tien, DMZ, Vinh Moc tunnels, Hanoi, Air Vietnam (take a coat if it's a Tupolev Tu-134!), and more!

It was therapeutic to see coffee and rubber plantations where there had been so much blood and death. I highly recommend it!

Capt. Duke Hammond, [REDACTED]  
HMM-363

## Losing a crew member like losing family member

Aug. 30, 1967 — the events that happened that day never will be forgotten by me!

Mine was not a singular experience. I'm certain it was repeated hundreds of times by slick pilots in Vietnam. Those of us who are still alive are very lucky to have had God by our side.

The morning's lift totaled 40 slicks from four companies and all the gunnies we could muster in the air or on ready standby. The LZ appeared to have been prepped with everything short of an arc light; maybe that would have been a good idea.

The insertion was normal — free fire until touchdown and the 25th Infantry Division troops were on the ground.

We departed in formation and at about 300 feet I noticed the engine oil pressure drop to zero. Since the engine was maintaining full power, I figured it was probably just a gauge failure.

We maintained our position in the formation, not knowing that we had indeed taken a hit. The single armor-piercing round had cut both lines to and from the oil cooler, which was completely draining the engine oil reservoir.

The bullet had continued on, hit a bolt holding the fuel control unit, glanced aft, and cut a line going into the engine diffuser. This line was now spraying JP4 all over the engine.

About midpoint in the 25-minute flight back to Cu Chi, the pilot directly across the formation called that we were "smoking pretty bad." I thanked him and asked that he keep an eye on us.

We landed long at Cu Chi and found all the makings of a nice fireball! Thank God we never got to see it!

WO Chuck Restivo had been hit in the leg during the assault and his ship was without a full crew, so WO J.J. Spearman and I transferred to that aircraft. It was crewed by Spec. 4 William Sondey, with Pfc. Alfred J. Smith, "Smitty" to us, as the gunner.

Shortly thereafter, we were asked to make an ammo run back out to the Horseshoe. The entire crew agreed to take the mission, so we loaded up and took off.

When we arrived on station, a Dustoff ship was requesting that the artillery fire be brought in closer for covering fire. The request was denied because the shells were already hitting within 500 meters of the friendlies and there was no room for safety.

We radioed the Dustoff that since we had ammo to deliver, we would get their wounded. We asked if they could continue to circle until we were clear and watch us in case we needed a pickup ourselves.

The Dustoff quickly agreed to that arrangement and we were glad to have the cover.

To lessen our exposure to hostile fire, I approached downwind over heavy covering fire from the infantry, kicked a hard left pedal, and landed adjacent to a treeline where most of our guys were. Sondey and Smitty threw out the ammo as quickly as possible.

The wounded were all on Sondey's side, so he helped them aboard. The last one at that part of the LZ was gut shot and was lying on a poncho.

Sondey was hit while bent over pulling in the man on the poncho, but there were three more about 100 meters away across the open paddy area with no treeline for protection.

About that time someone came over the intercom saying, "Sir, I'm hit." Glancing back, I saw Smitty hunched over in his seat, clutching his left shoulder.

"Smitty, are you going to be all right?" I asked.

He replied, "I think they broke my shoulder, but I think I'll be all right."

"OK," I said. "We'll go get the rest."

We picked up the Huey, turned and hovered across the open rice paddy to pick up the other wounded. Smitty was hit again, this time on his right side.

As soon as all the wounded were on, we pulled max power and then a little more in our haste to get out of there.

WO Spearman flew back to Cu Chi while I tried to raise the 12th Evac on the radio. I had left the 12th Evac to go to flight school, so I felt a special bond with that unit.

I tried many times, but there was no reply. Later I found out that they could hear us, but we weren't receiving them.

While tuning the radio for the 20th time, I noticed a strange sound and vibration and glanced at the airspeed

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indicator climbing for 140 knots. I screamed at Spearman to slow down because I thought we were approaching retreating blade stall speed.

We also were racing a huge monsoon that looked like a solid wall moving toward Cu Chi.

We made a straight-in shot to the 12th Evac and landed just as the full fury of the storm struck.

Later I counted 43 holes in that Huey. Chuck Restivo had taken one and we had collected the rest.

Smitty died about 45 minutes later.

That has always been hard on me. We depended on the guys in back 100 percent of the time and they on us. It's like part of my family died that day.

Being in the VHPA, talking with others at the Reunion who lost crew members and working with the committee to help record these details — that all helps, but I never will forget Aug. 30, 1967.

Mark O. Hayes  
188 AHC, Black Widow 14

## Aviator reassured mom shortly before his death

*"I've only seen one aviator killed since I've been here. You see, you're never alone on a mission. There's always somebody to protect you and get you out even before you hit the ground," my brother wrote in his last letter home, July 14, 1969.*

He was trying to reassure Mom.

*"I just don't want you to get upset because if you go down, you're only on the ground for about 3 minutes before they get you out of the area. We have what they call a downed bird alarm in all of the hooches. Whenever a bird goes down every bird here is airborne and en route to provide assistance to the bird in less than 2 minutes. That includes running to your aircraft, starting it, and taking off. So you see there's really nothing to worry about."*

A week later, on July 21, 1969, my brother was an observer in a Loach hit by a secondary explosion.

He was the only one to survive the crash and was transferred to 106th General Hospital where he died on 8-3-69 at age 19. I was eight years old at the time.

Now, 26 years after my brother wrote home about the protectiveness and loyalty that Army aviators felt for each other in Vietnam, I am experiencing the same thing.

Three years ago, I began a haphazard search for guys who might have known my brother, hoping to find out what kind of a person he was so that I could change his memory, in my mind, from a box of old letters and newspaper clippings, and a wallet that smelled of Vietnam, into a person.

Then I stumbled upon the VHPA via the Internet in

## Many families in dark about loved ones' deaths

Saw an item on the listserver that I recognized immediately. It involves an OH-6 crew blown out of the sky by a camo 250-pound bomb they were unknowingly shooting at (recon by fire).

The WO1 AC and the gunner were both KIA at the site and the WO1 observer survived two weeks.

To make a long story short, the observer's sister, Julie Kink, appealed to the listserver for info on her brother, David Kink. She was only 8 at the time and really knew nothing about the incident, nor did her parents.

I happened to be in another troop within the Unit (1/9 Cav), but remembered the incident very well. The AC and I were pretty good friends in flight school.

Anyway, I told her what I knew via AOL and she sounded very relieved and interested to finally learn what happened.

I can't help but believe there are thousands of other relatives still in the dark like this family. Thought you'd like to know. Later.

Chuck Adkinson  
Apache 34  
A Troop, 1st Sqdn, 9th Cav, 1969

April, received a copy of your newsletter and sent e-mail to Mel Canon and Mike Sloniker, my search was thrown into fourth gear!

Mike forwarded my message to Jim Schueckler, who has been tremendously supportive and willing to help me try to locate people who knew David.

He is obviously very experienced at this type of thing and brought tears to my eyes when he wrote in his first e-mail to me, "Your brother also was 'our' brother."

I have guarded hope that someday I will be able to talk with someone who can tell me what my brother laughed (or cried) at, what kind of music he liked, what he thought of being in C/1/9.

Under the protective "wing" of pilots who have provided assistance, I have also gained some insight into what it truly meant to be an aviator during the war and now.

I continue to be amazed that so many people are so willing to help me — I'm just a little sister, I wasn't even there, and I have nothing to offer in return.

I'll always be grateful for the help I've received from those associated with the VHPA ("You're never alone on a mission") and encourage your continued support of this essential link between those of us who were left behind and all of our brothers on The Wall.

Julie Kink

Sister of WO1 David R. Kink,  
C/1/9 First Cav, WORWAC 69-11, KIA 8-3-69

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