

Dear Rick, (ABBCOT)

I was happy to finally hear from you, although the news of your condition wasn't all that good. Although you say that your progress is slow, I am sure that you are happy that there is progress! I am happy for your sake and hope that you get stronger and better every day.

The news I have for you is not good. We had a bad morning out in the boondocks, I'm sorry to say. We were on a strike near the border up near Moc Hoa and strayed across the candy stripe into a VC base camp. They laid everything but B-40's on us and the wing ship went down like a rock. We took a lot of hits, but turned back to help them and collected a lot more. By the time we got near enough to make an approach to them, we had lost engine oil pressure and put it in about 35 meters away from them. We all got out of the aircraft okay, but Larsen got an AK round in the buttocks right away. Williams ran all the way to the other ship through a real hail of bullets and pulled George Page out. He was in pretty bad shape, with his clothes on fire and lots of fractures, but Willie cut his flight suit off and carried him away from the fire. Mike Shafernocker, Mr. Reardon and Mr. Castle were all lost. We couldn't get them or even get to the aircraft again. The rockets started to let go and then the 7.62, so it wasn't possible to get to the aircraft. They were all killed in the first impact or pretty soon after that, though. I think that George only got out because he was thrown free.

Besides our other problems, the VC were not leaving us alone. Mr. Hart got two with the M-79 and we all gave them a few rounds to teach them to keep their heads down. My radio was working like a charm and I had gotten off a good accurate MAYDAY call just before we went in, so help was on the way.

Outlaw 25 swooped in and picked us all up, but as we were picking up, Mr. Hart was hit in the side with an AK round. He fell out of the seat and died in just a few seconds.

When we got back to Moc Hoa and took stock, we had a real mess! There were nine of us, since Larsen was TO for Miley, a new man. Only three of us walked away from it! Willie, Miley and I were not even scratched. Larsen was in the hospital here for a couple of weeks, but went back to the Det the 19th. George is in the 106th at Yoko and will go to Brooke Army Medical Center for burn treatment before too long. The box score shows that it was Charlie's day. Four KIA, two WIA and two helos. Besides that, the Outlaw gunners were both shot up, neither one badly, and we found seventeen holes in the ship when we got back!

That's all I have to say about that right now. It's not a good memory.

I'll let Personnel answer the other questions in your letter. They will do that pretty soon. I have some Aircrew Wings here for you and I'll send them along as soon as I can get them packed. They were sent to Meute by his parents and they asked me to see that his friends got them.

I've got to close for now. It's time to go fall in for a visit by SECNAV! I'm the Asst. Ops Officer at Binh Thuy (we finally moved!) now. I couldn't go back like nothing had happened, so I asked to come in for a while.

I'll pass your news and address on to the fellows when I see them again. They will be glad to hear of you and will take your advice, I'm sure.

With sincere wishes for your speedy escape from the white world, I remain:

Sincerely,

*James L. Keyes*  
James L. KEYES  
Lieutenant Commander,  
United States Navy