

Resources

Hotel 67, 73, 88
Taven 26, 28

PJ

Arthur E. Koshak

ARTHUR E. KOSHAK, Major, USAF
Aircraft Commander/Airborne Mission Commander

Five 21 Crewmembers

1/10 Major Koshak
01 Lt Col Allgood
02 Major Schnegelsberger
03 1st Schmetz
04 TSGT Crozier
05 SSgt Hoover

BAD TIME CHARLIE AND

THE BUSHWHACKING OF SLICKS THAT WEREN'T SO... UNPAWEDER JOHN KONEK

THE VIET CONG EMPLOYED MINES AND BOOBY TRAPS (M/BT) AS A KEY WEAPON SYSTEM IN OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE ROLES AND TO INTERDICT MOVEMENT OF U.S. AND ALLIED FORCES THROUGHOUT RVN. OPERATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN RVN CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED THAT THE VC WERE IMAGINATIVE, RESOURCEFUL, AND TENACIOUS IN THE USE OF M/BT. AND DEVELOPED A HIGH DEGREE OF EXPERTISE IN THEIR USE WITHIN THEIR OWN FAMILIAR ENVIRONMENT.

THE MOST COMMON DEVICE WHICH CAUSED HELICOPTER DAMAGE INCIDENTS WAS THE DIRECTIONAL FRAGMENTATION MINE WHICH IS SIMILAR TO THE U.S. CLAYMORE M128A1 MINE. THIS VC MINE WAS COMPOSED OF TWO PARTS, — THE MINE BODY AND THE BIPODS. — THE CONCAVE FRONT OR FRAGMENTATION FACE OF THE MINE CONTAINED STEEL FRAGMENTS EMBEDDED IN A MATRIX, AND IS BACKED UP BY CAST TNT. THE MINE BODY WAS SHAPED LIKE A LARGE SAUCER, WEIGHED ABOUT 20 POUNDS, WAS FROM 12 TO 18 INCHES IN DIAMETER AND FROM 2 TO 4 INCHES IN DEPTH. THE MINE MOUNTED ON THE ADJUSTABLE BIPODS ABOUT A FOOT HIGH AND CAN BE PLACED ON VARIOUS TYPES OF SURFACES AND AIMED IN ANY DIRECTION. IT WAS DESIGNED FOR ELECTRICAL DETONATION BUT COULD BE DETONATED BY VARIOUS MEANS, INCLUDING PRESSURE DEVICES AND PULL-WIRE FRICTION FUSES. — A VERY NASTY BOY INDEED.

OTHER TYPES OF MINES USED AGAINST HELICOPTERS INCLUDED THOSE CONSTRUCTED OF CONCRETE AND EXPLOSIVE TNT SUCH AS THE "BETAL BOX" MINE. 8 INCHES IN DIAMETER BY 7 INCHES HIGH; THE "CONCRETE FRAGMENTATION MINE", CYLINDRICALLY SHAPED, 10 INCHES LONG, 6 INCHES HIGH WITH A 7 INCH FLAT SIDE FOR STABLE EMPLACEMENT; THE "CONCRETE MOUND MINE", WHICH WAS ABOUT 6 INCHES IN DIAMETER BY 14 INCHES LONG; THE "CONCRETE TURTLE MINE", A 5 INCH DIAMETER BY 9 INCH LONG DEVICE; AND

(2)

SEVERAL TYPES OF CAST-IRON FRAGMENTATION MINES, 2 TO 5 INCHES IN DIAMETER AND 6 TO 9 INCHES LONG. THESE EXAMPLES ARE GROUPED INTO WHAT IS CALLED "DIRECTIONAL FRAGMENTATION MINE (DH-10) SERIES".

ENEMY MINE ACTIVITIES AGAINST HELIBORNE OPERATIONS ARE LARGELY CONFINED TO POTENTIAL LANDING ZONES (LZ's). THE MAJORITY OF THESE MINES WERE ACTIVATED BY SIMPLE PRESSURE DEVICES, COMMON EXAMPLES BEING; TWO BOARDS HEID APART AT EACH END. BARE ELECTRICAL WIRES OR METAL CONTACTS ARE FASTENED TO THE INSIDE FACES OF THE PARALLEL BOARDS. THESE BOARDS VARY IN LENGTH FROM 1 TO 10 FEET AND ARE HEID APART AT A DISTANCE APPROPRIATE TO THEIR INTENDED PURPOSE AND DESIRED SENSITIVITY. PRESSURE FORCES THE BOARDS AND WIRE CONTACTS TOGETHER COMPLETING THE ELECTRIC CIRCUIT AND THIS DETONATES THE MINE.

THERE WERE MANY VARIATIONS OF THESE PRESSURE FIRING DEVICES, SOME OF WHICH SENSE THE PRESSURE OF THE HELICOPTERS DOWN-WASH AND DETONATE DIRECTIONAL MINES INTO ADJACENT LANDING ZONES (LZ's). ON SOME MINES, THE ROTOR-WASH SPINS A PINWHEEL PROPELLER, SHAKES AN ADJACENT TREE, OR BENDS A BAMBOO POLE TO INITIATE THE DETONATION BY MEANS OF A TRIP-WIRE. MOST COMMON AMONG THE PRESSURE-SENSITIVE MINES WERE THE "SLAPSTICKS", WHICH WERE HOLLOWED-OUT ELECTRIC-FIRING DEVICES MADE OF BOARDS OR BAMBOO CARVED OUT TO ENABLE THEM TO BOW UNDER PRESSURE AND MAKE CONTACT BETWEEN THE TWO PARTS CLOSING THE ELECTRIC CIRCUIT.

VIET CONG ANTI-AIRCRAFT MINES WERE VERY SIMPLE HOMEMADE AFFAIRS. ONE WAS A 10 INCH, FOUR-BLADED, FAN-LIKE PROP WITH BLADES ABOUT 1 INCH WIDE, MADE OF BAMBOO. THE SHAFT WAS A CAPSTAN AND A TAUT LINE THAT RUNS OUT TO A GREASED PIN ON THE MINE. THE MINE WAS ABOUT THE SIZE OF A LARGE SARDINE TIN, ONLY OF A ~~REG~~ TRIANGULAR SHAPE.

(3)

IT WAS SET IN TREES OR IN TALL GRASS NEAR ANYTHING THAT WOULD ATTRACT A PILOT'S ATTENTION. THE DOWNWASH FROM THE ROTOR WOULD ~~SET~~ ALMOST INSTANTLY WIND UP THE LINE, PULL THE PIN, AND DETONATE THE MINE.

OTHER DEVICES USED AGAINST HELICOPTERS WOULD BE CLASSED AS BOOBY TRAPS WHICH TOOK ON MANY FORMS AND WERE CUNNINGLY AND INGENUOUSLY EMPLOYED. THE COMMON FRAGMENTATION GRENADE WAS THE MOST GENERALLY EMPLOYED, BUT IN A VARIETY OF WAYS;

THE "GRENADE LAUNCHER" IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF AN ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPON AGAINST HELICOPTERS. A CHARGE OF TNT IS PLACED IN THE BOTTOM OF A FUNNEL SHAPED HOLE APPROXIMATELY 2 FEET DEEP IN A POTENTIAL LZ. A BOARD ABOUT 2 FEET SQUARE WITH ATTACHED HAND GRENADES ~~PLACED~~ HELD IN PLACE BY NAILS, WHICH PREVENT THE SAFETY LEVERS FROM RELEASING AND DETONATING THE GRENADE, IS PLACED OVER THE HOLE AND CAMOUFLAGED. WHEN THE CHARGE IS COMMAND DETONATED, THE GRENADES ARE THROWN INTO THE AIR WHERE THEY DETONATE AMONG THE LANDING FORCE.

ANOTHER GRENADE TYPE BOOBY TRAP WAS THE "HELICOPTER CAN TRAP". IN THIS TYPE, BAMBOO POLES WERE PLACED IN THE GROUND WITH A TIN CAN ATTACHED TO THE TOP OF EACH POLE. HAND GRENADES WITH THE SAFETY PINS PULLED, ARE PLACED INSIDE THE CANS AND TRIP-WIRES ARE ATTACHED TO THE GRENADES FROM ONE POLE TO ANOTHER IN AN "X" PATTERN. WHEN A HELICOPTER TOUCHES THE TRIP-WIRES, THE GRENADES DROP TO THE GROUND AND... YOU GET THE IDEA. THIS TYPE OF BOOBY TRAP WAS USED AGAINST ME NEAR TAY NINH DURING A MEDEVAC AND THE RESULTANT EXPLOSION BLEW OUT THE WIND SHIELDS AND DID EXTENSIVE DAMAGE TO THE MAIN ROTORS. ANOTHER NASTY LITTLE DEVICE WAS THE "PAPER BANG". GRENADES WITH PULLED SAFETY PINS WRAPPED IN PAPER WERE LEFT LYING HAP-HAZARD IN AN LZ. TO UNSUSPECTING AIRCREWS,

LOSE PAPER IN, OR ON, AN LZ WOULDNT NORMALLY REQUIRE A SECOND THOUGHT — TRIPPING ONE COULD VERY WELL END SECOND THOUGHTS ~~AND~~ ^{OR} ANY ^{OTHER} ~~THESE~~ THOUGHTS —. A "PAPER BANG" WAS A GRENADE WITH PULLED SAFETY PIN AND WRAPPED IN PAPER. AS THE HELICOPTERS DOWNWASH FORCES THE PAPER INTO THE AIR, IT RELEASES THE PRESSURE ON THE SAFETY LEVER — GOOD-BY HELICOPTER. ANOTHER VARIATION OF THIS SAME TECHNIQUE WAS SHEET METAL. THE ROTOR-WASH PASSES THE SHEET METAL DOWN AND EXPLODES MINES PLACED UNDERNEATH.

ALTHOUGH THERE WERE ONLY 32 HELICOPTERS DESTROYED BY MINES AND BOOBY-TRAPS, AND 218 DAMAGED, BETWEEN 1963 (WHEN ONE INCIDENT OCCURRED) AND JUNE 1970, WHEN ONE CAME IN CONTACT WITH SUCH DEVICES IT WOULD NOT LIKELY TO EVER BE FORGOTTEN. IT IS ONE THING TO BE FIRED UPON WITH SMALL TO HEAVY CALIBER WEAPONS, BUT QUITE ANOTHER AFFAIR INDEED TO BE BUSHWHACKED OR AMBUSHED BY HIDDEN EXPLOSIVE DEVICES. THE VERY NATURE OF THE WEAPON IS TO MAXIMIZE TOTAL DESTRUCTION. I CAN TELL YOU NOW THAT AFTER THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE "HELICOPTER CAN TRAP" NEAR TAY NINH, MY CONFIDENCE AS AN AVIATOR AND AIRCRAFT COMMANDER WAS GREATLY DIMINISHED. I DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT MY DIMINISHED CONFIDENCE COULD COMPARE TO THAT OF THE AIRCREWS BUSHWHACKED BY "BAD TIME CHARLIE" ON 19-MARCH-1970 DURING A COMBAT ASSULT NORTHWEST OF SAIGON.

IT WAS A FULL "D" ^{WHEEL} ~~WHEEL~~ SLICK FORMATION COMBAT ASSULTING AN LZ JUST NORTHWEST OF SAIGON AT COORDINATES XY 383 703 WHEN IT RAN INTO THE WORST BOOBY-TRAP AMBUSH OF THE VIETNAM WAR. BY THE TIME IT WAS OVER 2 SLICKS WITH 7 KILO'S (KIA) WOULD BE COMPLETELY DESTROYED, 5 SLICKS WOULD BE FORCED DOWN WITH MAJOR DAMAGE AND 7 WHISKEY'S (WOUNDED) FROM CRASH INJURIES OR SHRAPNEL WOUNDS AND

ANOTHER 5 SLICKS LIGHTLY DAMAGED FROM SHRAPNEL AND RESULTANT SHOCK WAVES FROM DETONATED MINES.

UH-1D 64-13799 SUFFERED THE MOST TAKING THE FULL IMPACT OF A 175 MM COMMAND DETONATED ROUND AT A VERY CLOSE PROXIMITY AT TOUCHDOWN WITH 65-09943 TAKING THE REST OF THE BLAST ALONG WITH AIRCRAFT SHRAPNEL FROM 799. 799 LOST 6 SOULS IN THE BLAST WITH ONE CREWMEMBER SURVIVING AND 943 LOST ONE SOUL AND ONE WOUNDED. BOTH AIRCRAFT WERE COMPLETELY DESTROYED BY FIRE. 65-09957, 64-13722, AND 65-09909 ARE ALSO IN THE FIRST WAVE AND TOUCHED DOWN WITH 799 AND 943 IN THE LEAD. JUST AFTER 799 WAS DESTROYED, 957 IS HIT BY A COMMAND DETONATED MINE CAUSING DAMAGE TO MAIN AND TAIL ROTOR BLADES. THIS SAME MINE CAUSES FRAG DAMAGE TO 722 BUT LIKE 957, NO-ONE IS HURT. 909 HOWEVER, SUSTAINS MINOR SKIN DAMAGE WITH ONE ~~W~~ WHISKEY. 957, 722, AND 909 ALL RETURN TO BASE FOR REPAIRS. 909 SUSTAINED ITS DAMAGE WHILE STILL IN ITS FLARE, 5 FEET OFF THE DECK.

THE SECOND WAVE IS JUST FLARING BEHIND THE FIRST WHEN 799 TOOK ITS HIT. 66-01034 TAKES A HELL OF A SHOCK WAVE FROM A COMMAND DETONATED MINE EXPLODING AT ITS LEFT FRONT CAUSING MINOR DAMAGE TO PLEXIGLASS AND BUCKLED DOORS. LIKEWISE, 65-10128 SUFFERS MINOR DAMAGE AS A MINE IS DETONATED 60 FEET TO HIS LEFT FRONT BUT UNLIKE 034, 128'S GUNNER RECEIVES WOUNDS FROM PLEXIGLASS FRAGMENTS AS ~~ITS~~ WINDSHIELD SHATTERS.

65-09815 IS ON THE DECK WITH THE FIRST WAVE WHEN A 30 CALIBER ROUND HITS AND MINE FRAGMENTS SEVERELY CRIPPLE HIM. HE RECEIVES DAMAGE TO HIS TAILBOOM AND ENGINE AND IS FORCED TO ~~SHUT~~ SHUT DOWN. 815 ALSO SUSTAINS ONE WHISKEY FROM MINE FRAGMENTS.

64-13699 WAS ON THE DECK WHEN 799 EXPLODED. WHEN HE POOLED PITCH, ANOTHER COMMAND DETONATED MINE GO'S OFF

WHEN HE'S ABOUT 5 FEET OFF THE DECK. HE SUSTAINS ENOUGH DAMAGE TO FORCE HIM TO SET DOWN INTO SOME BURNING ELEPHANT GRASS. 699 IS SO BADLY DAMAGED FROM THE FIRE AND FRAGMENTS ALONG ITS UNDERSIDE AND TAILBOOM, THAT IT WOULD BE EVACUATED TO CONUS FOR REPAIRS. IT WAS A MIRICAL THAT 699 SUSTAINED ONLY ONE WHISKEY FROM FRAGMENTATION.

IT IS UNCLEAR AS TO WHY THE THIRD WAVE WOULD COME IN WITHOUT THE GROUNDPOUNDERS CHECKING THE LZ FOR MORE MINES FIRST, BUT, COME IN THEY DID. 64-13702, 65-09908 AND 64-137?? WERE ALL ABOUT 5 FEET OFF THE DECK WHEN MORE MINES WERE DETONATED. 702's ROTOR COUNTERBALANCE WAS SHEARED OFF CAUSING SEVERE VIBRATIONS. HE TRIED TO, AND MADE IT, OUT OF THE LZ ONLY TO SET IT DOWN HARD. 702 SUSTAINED ONE WHISKEY FROM FRAGMENTATION AND THE AIRCRAFT WAS LATER RECOVERED. 908 RECEIVED EXTENSIVE DAMAGE AS A MINE BLEW ON HIS LEFT SIDE. THE ENTIRE LEFT SIDE OF 908 WAS POCKETED WITH FRAG HOLES CAUSING MAJOR DAMAGE TO TAILROTOR AND FUEL CELLS, HYDRAULIC AND CONTROL SYSTEMS. 908 MADE IT OUT OF THE LZ ONLY TO BE FORCED DOWN LATER DUE TO ITS DAMAGE. 908 HAD ONE CREWMEMBER WOUNDED FROM FRAGMENTATION. 7?? DETONATED A MINE FROM ITS DOWNWASH CAUSING SEVERE DAMAGE TO THE ROTORHEAD WHICH ALSO CAUSED A FORCED LANDING. THE AIRCRAFT COMMANDER'S DOOR/ARMOR PLATE, STOPPED ONE ROUND AND NUMEROUS FRAGMENTATION SHAPNEL. 702, 908 AND 7?? WERE ALL LATER RECOVERED.

BAD TIME CHARLIE TRUELY HAD A GOOD TIME... THIS TIME. IF YOU ARE ONE OF THE 218 INCIDENTS OF BOOBY-TRAPED OR MINED WHILE FLYING A HELICOPTER, YOU TRUELY BELONG TO AN EXCLUSIVE CLUB AND WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU. WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO ASK ANYONE WHO KNOWS OF THIS INCIDENT, TO CONTACT ME AS I DO NOT

KNOW THE UNIT INVOLVED. A CHECK WITH MY UHPA DIRECTORY HAS NO ONE LISTED KIA 19-MARCH-67 THAT FIT INTO THIS INCIDENT. THIS MEANS THAT THERE IS A CREW OUT THERE UNACCOUNTED FOR... IN FACT, I HAVE FOUND A NUMBER OF PILOTS UNACCOUNTED FOR PER MY RESEARCH EFFORTS.

MIKE:

PER OUR DISCUSSION ON "WHO ARE YOU" SERIES FOR
NEWSLETTER - YOU MAY EDIT TO HEARTS CONTENT - I
WILL TRY TO HAVE SOMETHING FOR EACH NEWSLETTER
IF YOU NEED SOMETHING TO FILL IN SPACE -

ALSO FIND ENCLOSED REPORT OF DOWNED LAOTIAN HELICOPTER
AND RESCUE OF CREW -

PER EDIT OF AA STORY - NO OFFENSE TAKEN AS

YOU KNOW MORE ABOUT THAT TYPE OF STUFF THAN I
DO. ACTUALLY, I WOULD RATHER HAVE A SECOND OPINION
AND THEREFORE, ALWAYS WELCOME YOUR INPUT. THIS STORY
CAME OUT A LITTLE LONG, BUT I THOUGHT BACKGROUND
MATERIAL WAS NEEDED AS MOST GUYS NEVER CAME ACROSS
BOOBY TRAPS/MINES -

HOPE YOU ENJOY

Jim