Rolla Breed

Hornet 25 66-67, Lighthorse 3 Aug 68-Mar 69, Warwagon 16 Mar 69-Jul 69

The following "war stories", in chronological order, detail my recollections of the actions for which I received awards. I have included my thoughts and reactions (at least those to which I can appropriately admit).

Army Commendation Medal with "V" device

4 August 1966

On the 4th of August, I was the pilot on ash and trash missions in Tay Ninh province. We had just completed our last sortie of the day, dropping off supplies to the Signal Corps base at the top of Nui Ba Dinh (Black Virgin) mountain. We were returning to the Tay Ninh base camp to refuel for the trip home when we were advised that the fuel at the base was contaminated. We decided to make it to the 25th Division base at Cu Chi to refuel before returning to the Hornets' nest at Phu Loi. As we neared Long Cong, the engine quit. We still had 400 pounds of fuel, so we didn't know why the engine quit.

I turned into the wind and set up an autorotation into the spot I had selected. I knew the Aircraft Commander (an old CWO with more than 5000 hours) would take over to complete the autorotation, so I looked over at him to see when he would take the controls. I saw him near the controls, sweating and tense. I grinned, knowing that he was ready and I relaxed as he reached for the cyclic stick. He pressed the intercom button and instead of saying "I got it", he said "screw you, you got it". Suddenly I was tense and sweating. This was my first actual autorotation. The AC later told me that he had me make the autorotation because he knew I had more recent experience than he did.

The aircraft flown by our platoon leader was also low on fuel and he landed in the same area so that we had a stronger defense. This gave us 4 M60 machine guns manned by the crew chiefs and door gunners, and 4 riflemen (the ACs and the pilots). Prior to landing his aircraft, the platoon leader called operations and told them to send out the maintenance aircraft with two 55-gallon drums of fuel for us.

We set up our defensive perimeter and waited for maintenance to arrive and refuel us. The ship came in without incidence, and the first fuel drum was being pumped into the platoon leader's ship by means of a hand pump. That was when the Viet Cong began firing on us. We were later told that they were waiting for mortars, but they knew we would get away when we were refueled, so they began firing. As we returned the fire, I looked over to see how the refueling was going. The mechanic who was pumping gas had wisely dived under the aircraft. I didn't want to hang around to see how the fight would turn out, so I jumped up and ran over and started pumping the fuel. As I was running, I saw dirt spurting up around me where the bullets were hitting the rice paddy. I thought "this looks just like it does in a John Wayne movie". When I got to the drum and began pumping, I made sure I was behind the fuel drum so that I was safe from enemy fire. Those two sentences ought to give you some idea of why FNGs are not allowed out of the house without adult supervision.

After finishing refueling the platoon leader's ship, I went over to my aircraft and began refueling it. I was fairly relaxed and pumping at a steady rate when suddenly I heard a horrendous sound. It sounded like the sky was being ripped apart. I was so terrified that my arm became a blur and I emptied the drum into the fuel tank in less than three minutes. The noise was caused by our gunships coming in to support us, and that was the first time I ever heard a mini-gun fired.

When we started the aircraft after refueling, I discovered that my AC had completely shut the aircraft down after I had left it "combat cocked". We had a short but not sweet 1LT to CWO discussion about that after we returned to base and were on the ground.

The next day I was informed that I might be given a court martial for running out of fuel. I told them we had 400 pounds of fuel and made them check it. The result of the investigation was that the ship had just come out of periodic maintenance, and a rag had been left in the feed from the 2 aft cells, trapping 400 pounds in the cells. Instead of a court martial for running out of fuel, I got an Army Commendation Medal with V.

Distinguished Service Cross

22 October 1966

During the mission briefing the evening of 21 October 1966, the Hornets were told that a North Vietnamese Army General was meeting with the Viet Cong Phu Loi Battalion. The General was accompanied by an NVA Battalion as a bodyguard. The fact that the planned meeting was reportedly going to take place just a few kilometers northeast of the 25th division base camp made the intelligence report difficult to believe. In view of the fact that the Phu Loi Battalion was an elite VC unit, and that the meeting was in an operational area of the unit, we did take the mission seriously in spite of our skepticism of the intelligence.

On the morning of the 22nd, we inserted Company A, 4th / 23rd into an LZ located in a U-shaped bend of the Saigon River. The flight then returned to the assembly area to continue support as required. Our flight was comprised of the usual formation of 10 UH-1D s, a Command and Control aircraft, and two light fire teams of UH-1B armed helicopters. Apparently, the ground commanders were not convinced that the intelligence was valid, either. Who would send a company of troops into enemy territory containing two elite battalions? We soon found out that we were wrong and that the intelligence was accurate.

The area to be searched was small, and it only took a few hours for the infantry to cover it. They found nothing (the VC and NVA were apparently hiding in the Bo Loi tunnels) and called for extraction around 1600 hours. We landed in the PZ and waited for the troops to load. The PZ was under water, knee-deep in mud, and covered with tall grass, making movement difficult for the ground troops. It took almost three minutes to get all the troops loaded. While the troops were loading, a mortar attack and small arms fire knocked out four of our helicopters. One of the four helicopters took a hit by a mortar round directly on the rotor mast.

In this photo taken 50 years after the date of action, the village of Cu Chi is circled in blue, the area where the 25th Division was located is circled in yellow, and the Area of Operation in red.

As we were taking off, our lead aircraft was shot down by a 12.7mm machine gun. It was located in a hooch at the open end of the U-shaped river bend. Due to the small size of the PZ our trail aircraft, commanded by Major James Patterson, our company commander, had to land to pick up his load of troops after the rest of the flight took off. His aircraft was shot down by small arms fire. All of our helicopters were hit by small arms fire. We were ordered to re-insert the troops we had just extracted. The insertion was conducted under small arms and 60mm mortar fire. Another helicopter was shot down by the heavy machine gun.

Replacement aircraft arrived from the Hornet's Nest in Phu Loi, and we made another insertion of infantry to reinforce the original unit. The lead helicopter was piloted by our executive officer (XO), Major

William Bournes. We lost three more helicopters in the LZ, including the lead ship. Major Bournes was wounded by a round that entered his abdomen below his chicken plate. My ship received several hits, including one that created a flesh wound in my crew chief's leg and went through a transmission line, draining the fluid. Thankfully, the Huey is designed to fly for 30 minutes with a dry transmission before the transmission freezes, so we were able to make it back to the assembly area. The line was patched and the aircraft was flown back to Phu Loi for repair. The pucker factor during this sortie was the highest I ever experienced in my life!

On landing at the assembly area, I commandeered another helicopter and assumed lead of the flight. The A/C whose ship I took immediately kicked his pilot (an FNG) out and informed me he had no intention of leaving his ship. I turned over normal A/C duties to him so that I could organize the flight over the radio, fly the helicopter, and attend to other flight lead duties (which included catching my breath after holding it for more than ten minutes while flying without any fluid in my transmission).

A platoon of 118th Assault Helicopter Company (call sign Blue Birds) were already waiting at the assembly area. They accompanied us on another insertion and lost two of their helicopters. We also lost another helicopter. The flight lead of the Blue Bird platoon was a flight school classmate of mine, Captain Stephen Etzel. Steve later informed me if he had known I was involved, the Blue Birds would never have responded to the call. Of course, he was just kidding me (I think). Apparently, I had acquired a reputation.

The surviving Hornet helicopters returned to the assembly area awaiting orders while our aircraft began extracting wounded troops and crew members. It began to rain, with a solid cloud cover. Darkness came early as a result, and it was the blackest I have ever experienced. I could not see anything. The command and control helicopter, piloted by Major James Johnson, the Hornets' operations officer, and two light fire teams of B model gunships, commanded by the armed helicopter platoon leader Captain Earl Hyers, were circling the area. I was able to find it by using their position and strobe lights for navigation. We had to turn off all the lights on our helicopter (including instrumentation lights) to deny aiming information to the VC. The ground troops pointed a hooded and filtered flashlight at the sound of our helicopter to indicate where we should land. I also used the light from the VC tracers to see the ground. The VC were using green tracers, one tracer per seven rounds. The tracer rounds (those that missed our ship) actually were a help!

Another comment on the tracers: our gunships had to be very careful where they placed supporting fires in the area. Our tracers are all red, the VC mostly used green tracers. All of Charlie's tracers were green this battle. The gunships would fire at the sources of green tracers (tracers work both ways; they are used to show where the bullets are going, but they also show where they are coming from). Often both red and green tracers would come from the same area! Charlie was intermingled with our troops!

I was very proud of the crew chief for thinking of something I should have. When we were on short final to the area, he would remind the door gunner not to fire so the VC could not aim at their muzzle flashes. They would both leave their guns to prepare to receive and place the wounded in the helicopter as the troops passed them up. The troops would try to minimize their exposure by staying close to the ground while loading the wounded as the crew chief and door gunner were standing up in the cargo compartment of the helicopter moving them into position for transport!

There were so many wounded that we had to minimize our fuel in order to maximize the number of casualties the helicopter could carry each load (30 gallons less fuel equals one more wounded evacuated). Fortunately, the 25th Division area was only about six kilometers away, so very little fuel was required for each trip and we could refuel after every drop-off. One of the wounded we extracted was our XO. I also begged Major Patterson to come out, but he stubbornly refused and remained to take command of the troops on the ground. He received the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions that night.

At some point during the evening, our Battalion Commander ordered all Hornets to return to the Hornets' Nest (116th AHC base at Phu Loi), stating that the Little Bears (25th Division Aviation Company) would assume responsibility for continued support. He did not mention how someone who was not familiar with the area could provide the necessary support in the total darkness. My helicopter was having intermittent communication problems and I did not receive the order, so we continued supporting the operation with only minimal communications available. The gun team and the Command and Control helicopter remained and

provided support until we finished the medevacs. Around midnight (after five medical evacuation trips into the area), one of the infantry officers crawled over to the helicopter and informed me that they did not need any further support, so we left the area and returned to base.

I returned to the Hornets' nest where I was met by the Battalion Commander and an avionics technician. I was surprised to see the BnCo standing there in the dark and rain. The technician went straight to the nose of the aircraft and removed both the UHF and VHF radios. The Battalion Commander escorted me to the Operations Office. While I was completing my reports and turning in the required paperwork, he showed me two manila envelopes on the counter. He informed me that one of them contained the paperwork for a general court martial for failure to obey direct orders under fire, and the other a recommendation for the Distinguished Service Cross. One would be submitted and the other destroyed based on the results of the avionics technician's findings.

The BnCo and his S-3 then accompanied our crew to the mess hall. It was customary for us to have a Sunday dinner of steaks and beer. Although it was Saturday night (Sunday morning for our crew), the cooks had been called out to serve Sunday dinner when the Hornets returned to base. Although we were three or four hours behind the rest of the flight, they had saved our portions. We chatted while enjoying our meal and continued with more beer until the avionics tech joined us and reported to the BnCo. Fortunately, the avionics technician found the problems within a couple of hours (an intermittent connection in a wire in the UHF radio and a cold solder joint in the VHF radio). I was relieved because intermittent problems are usually difficult to diagnose and thus take a lot of time. The next day I was told that a maintenance crew tried to count the holes in our aircraft to complete the hit report that was required to be submitted for battle damaged aircraft, but they lost count at over 300 entrance holes! The Huey was an amazing aircraft.

Additional personal note: I was an electronics technician (missile control and TV engineer) when I was an enlisted man. When I was grounded for excessive flight time (a fictional condition created by flight surgeons so that it was easier to blame any given accident on pilot error) I would go to the avionics shack and work with the specialist assigned to maintaining the communications equipment. Perhaps this enabled me to describe the problems in more detail to facilitate the diagnosis. The avionics tech graciously credited this as the reason for the rapid turn-around of the repairs.

Bronze Star with V device

5 – 11 November 1966

This medal was awarded by the 1st Infantry Division for the support of Operation Attleboro by the Hornets. All the Aircraft Commanders received one. Despite the fact that it was awarded "en masse", it was well earned by all who received it. We were on call day and night from 5 – 11 November, and most missions were in very bad weather with intense enemy fire. Every LZ was hot and all aircraft took hits. We spent the entire week in tents sleeping on folding cots at a forward infantry base (poor babies, the grunts in the field were sleeping with leeches in rice paddies). Aircrew sure have it rough.

Army Commendation Medal /V, First Oak Leaf Cluster

2 December 1966

On the 2nd of December 1966, we were on an ash and trash mission. We heard a transmission on the guard channel from an Air Force pilot who had ejected. The coordinates given were nearby, so we flew over to find and recover the pilot. When we arrived at the coordinates, the pilot directed us to a position directly above him. The jungle was too dense in that location for us to land, so I tried to get him to move to a clearing less than a hundred meters away. He requested that we just lower our hoist to him. Our Hueys were not equipped with hoists, so we couldn't comply. The pilot decided to wait for the Air Force "Jolly Green Giant" combat search and rescue (CSAR) helicopter which had already been dispatched, He was already in radio contact with it, and it was "only" 15 or 20 minutes away. I informed him that Charlie would be there before the Jolly Green Giant. He still wanted to wait. I guess he had a lot of faith in his .38 caliber revolver.

I was also in contact with the CSAR and told him that I would move away from the area to prevent the VC from locating the pilot due to our presence. When he was near enough to see us, we moved to a position directly over the pilot's location so they would know where he was. When the Jolly Green Giant hovered over the pilot and lowered his hoist, the VC began firing. They were still some distance away, but within effective range. I flew our ship between the VC and the CSAR while the crew chief and door gunner engaged the enemy. Since we were a more immediate threat to them, they concentrated on us. The Jolly Green Giant recovered the pilot and returned to base. We disengaged and continued our mission.

Distinguished Flying Cross

21 March 1967

Some RVN pilots were attached to the Hornets for training during March. They were assigned to experienced pilots and were used only on ash and trash missions. I hated these missions because I had to "behave myself" on these missions and we were under orders to let the RVN pilots fly the helicopter to get experience. My policy was that I flew all the time and the pilot was there to observe and learn. We were in aircraft 501, with Crew Chief John Young and Door Gunner Robert Schwab. I am withholding the pilot's name for reasons that will become obvious.

During the mission we received orders to rendezvous with two other First Platoon ships. A forward artillery base of the 3rd Battalion 4th Infantry near Dau Tieng was under attack by Viet Cong using human wave tactics, supported by mortars and automatic weapons. The base was running out of ammunition and declared a tactical emergency to get priority on helicopter support. We joined up with my platoon leader, Captain Dale Snell and another aircraft at a re-supply area and loaded up with flechette artillery rounds and ammunition for machine guns and rifles.

When we arrived at the fire base, it was under heavy mortar attack. Explosions were almost continuous and covered nearly all of the area inside the perimeter. It was the most extensive use of mortars I had seen. My RVN pilot had a strong sense of survival and kept calling my attention to the explosions by means of his limited English, gestures, and repeated sounds of "Boom, Boom, Boom" over the intercom. I ignored him until he tried to take over the controls. I had to break formation and notify Captain Snell, that I had a situation to take care of and would land behind the flight. He understood what I meant and landed his two-ship formation without comment. The RVN pilot calmed down when I broke formation, believing he had made his point. I told the door gunner that if the pilot touched the controls again he was to shoot him. The pilot said, "No shoot, no shoot, we leave". I looked at the door gunner and he placed the muzzle of his .45 on the back of the pilot's neck. I looked at the pilot and said, "No move". Situation resolved.

We landed just as the other ships took off. After the ammunition was unloaded, we hovered over to pick up wounded. The door gunner had to remain behind the pilot's seat to keep him calm. His survival instinct was growing stronger the longer we were in the area. We took the wounded to the nearest aid station and returned to the re-supply base, where we joined several other Hornets who had arrived to participate in the re-supply mission. A light fire team had also arrived to support the fire base. After three sorties by a flight of nine aircraft, Captain Snell was contacted and told that all but one the aircraft could be released, so he released the other ships. When we landed at the re-supply point, he came over and gave me the choice of returning to my ash and trash missions, or trading pilots and continuing support of the fire base. He was grinning as he talked, knowing what my choice would be. He gave me his pilot, Gordon Fitzgerald, and took the RVN pilot back to the Hornets' nest. We continued to make re-supply and medevac runs until Charlie broke off the attack. The fire base personnel were already cleaning up after the attack when we made the last medevac. The VC bodies were stacked like cord wood. The stack was already over five feet high and at least 40 feet long.

This was named the Battle of Suoi Tre and was the greatest US victory of the Viet Nam war to date. An official report stated that Fire Support Base Gold was manned by 450 US soldiers. The attacking force was reported to be 2,500 Viet Cong. Thirty-three US were killed and 187 wounded. The Hornets evacuated 76 of the wounded. Enemy casualties were 647 confirmed killed, with an estimated 200 additional killed whose bodies were recovered and removed.

When we returned to base, the RVN pilot was already gone. Nobody would tell me what happened after he got back to base. I was later told (unofficially) that he had reported to his commander what happened, and that there was a request through channels that I be disciplined for threatening an officer of the RVN Air Force. That was the last I heard of the incident. Instead of discipline, I received the Distinguished Flying Cross. The crew members all received Air Medals with V device, including the RVN pilot.

Distinguished Flying Cross, First OLC

2 May 1967

We were supporting units of the 25th Infantry Division with re-supply missions. We reported to the unit Monday morning just before 0700 hours, and at approximately 1900 hours, the unit supply officer informed me that we were released. He told me to contact Hornet operations when we left. The Hornet ops officer told me that a unit of the 2nd Brigade, Ninth Infantry Division needed a couple of supply runs and a non-urgent medevac of a sick soldier. He asked if we could handle this before we returned to base. No problem, and it would save getting another helicopter and crew ready just for a mission that would only take about an hour.

We stopped at the unit in the field, picked up the soldier and took him back to the hospital at his base camp. We then picked up some supplies at the support base and took them to the unit. During the second run to the support base to pick up the next load, the unit in the field came under attack. They reported two wounded, so we dropped the supplies at the unit's location and picked up the wounded. We took them to the base camp and dropped them off, then to the support base for another load of ammo for the unit. This became an established pattern for the rest of the night and the following day: pick up ammo at the support base, take it to the unit and pick up their wounded, take them to the base camp and on to the support base for more ammo.

The VC increased their attack and began to mortar the unit. Around midnight, during our run from the support base to the unit, the crew chief spotted the location of one of the mortars. He requested that I fly over the mortar location so he could shoot at it. We made three or four passes over the area and silenced the mortar. The door gunner spotted another one on the next run. A few passes and it was silenced. After a third one was spotted and silenced, there was no more mortar fire. The attack continued throughout the rest of the night into the next day. Around mid-afternoon, we spotted more VC inbound and reported them to 2nd Brigade operations. Ops asked if we could direct mortar fire on the reinforcements. I was trained as an artillery observer at OCS, so I was able to comply. The fire mission succeeded in causing the VC to abort their reinforcement effort. We continued the mission and were released around 1830 hours. We returned to base and logged thirty-six straight hours of flying.

Silver Star

4 January 1969

I was the ops officer (Lighthorse 3) for D/3/5 Cav, 9th Infantry Division and was Mission Commander on a reconnaissance mission on Saturday, the fourth of January. One of the supported units became heavily engaged and was taking casualties. We heard the radio reports to the Brigade CO and flew to the area to provide fire support and aerial observation. The unit commander was concerned about his wounded soldiers and requested immediate medevac. While the Brigade CO was explaining to the unit commander that the area was so hot that a helicopter couldn't get in without being shot down, we were on short final and taking hits from intense fire.

We made it out of the area and took the wounded to the Division hospital at Dong Tam, leaving the Cobra fire team and scouts to continue to support to the unit. As we were returning to the area, the unit commander reported three more casualties. I informed him that we were inbound. The Brigade CO again expressed his concern about the safety of the aircraft if we attempted another landing. I respectfully replied that I was busy and would continue the conversation in a few minutes. After the casualties were loaded and we completed the take-off from the area, I contacted the CO, apologized for interrupting him and asked him to continue. He stated he would like to meet me at the Brigade helipad. I thought "Oh well, another chewing out from a senior officer for being a smart ass". He was waiting for me at the helipad when I landed. The Colonel

didn't even give me a chance to get out of the helicopter. He jumped up on the skid, reached through the window and *hugged* me! He told me that was the bravest thing he had ever seen and he was putting me in for a Silver Star.

Distinguished Flying Cross, Second Oak Leaf Cluster

31 January 1967

On this day I was Mission Commander on a reconnaissance mission in the Kien Hoa province, a large island in the Mekong River south of My Tho and Dong Tam. We were under the operational control of the 2nd brigade. We were just out looking for trouble, not supporting a specific unit in the brigade.

One of the units became heavily engaged and called for a medevac. The unit was in wooded area, and there was no area large enough for a Huey. The scout team each picked up one casualty, but we needed to get many more out. The only way was to execute a "blivet" maneuver. This would be my third attempt. The first two were very easy in clearings that were almost large enough to hover into them. Once you got used to the sound of the blade tips contacting the tree branches (sounded like machine guns firing at you from just a few feet away), there were no problems.

This was a totally different story. The clearing was not large enough in any dimension for the helicopter to fit. In order to get to the ground, we had to maneuver the tail to pass through openings between branches. Although the main rotor blades were strong enough to cut branches, the tail rotor is very fragile and would disintegrate if it struck anything. Since I couldn't see the tail rotor or anything behind me, I had to rely on directions from the crew chief and door gunner, who had stepped out on the skids so they could see. While following their instructions, I did pedal turns to avoid tail rotor strikes. I also had to hover the aircraft fore and aft and side to side to avoid larger limbs. It was extremely slow going with a lot of tension. We made it safely to the ground and loaded the wounded. I checked with the unit commander to ensure we got them all before attempting the climb back out. If anything, it was even more difficult climbing out with the increased weight due to the wounded aboard.

After dropping the wounded off at Dong Tam, we rejoined the scouts and gunships to continue the mission We completed the mission without further incident. We returned to base and discovered during post-flight inspection that we had taken several hits. Due to the intense concentration required to complete the maneuvers, none of the crew was even aware that we were taking fire. The battalion commander observed the action from his command and control helicopter. He was very impressed and put the crew in for medals.

Soldiers Medal

28 February 1969

I was not scheduled to fly, but we received a request to fly a command and control (C&C) mission in addition to our normal reconnaissance mission. I was the next up, so it was assigned to me. We picked up the Brigade CO, and flew him, his S-3, and Sergeant Major around the brigade AO to allow them to get an idea of how things were going that day. After the CO was satisfied that he had seen enough, he told us to take them back to Brigade Headquarters and we would be released. On the way back we were shot at. The crew chief saw the lone VC behind a rice paddy dike. The CO asked me if we could take him out. When I replied that we could, he told me to "get him". The crew chief engaged the VC and the Sergeant Major also fired at him with his M-16. They killed the VC, but he shot out our tail rotor drive shaft. We were at a hover, so the ship began an uncontrollable spin. I executed a hovering autorotation, but we hit the paddy dike and landed inverted.

After shutting down and exiting the helicopter, I checked on the crew and the C&C party. Everyone was good, just some bruises. However, the door gunner had jumped out during the autorotation and his leg was pinned under the mast. The six of us tried to raise the mast enough to free him. Even using the parts of broken rotor blades as levers we couldn't pry him loose. While we were working the problem, I heard a "WHOOSH". The leaking fuel had run onto the hot exhaust nozzle of the engine and started a fire. I was afraid not only of the fire from the burning aircraft, but also the possibility of explosion. I have always been terrified of burning. The

fear hit me, and I grabbed the end of the mast and LIFTED it! The crew chief and pilot pulled the door gunner free. The door gunners leg was badly bruised and hurt like Hell, but fortunately was not broken.

I had heard tales about what people did when under the influence of fear induced adrenaline but was very skeptical of them. I am now a believer!

Our Aero rifle platoon was inserted to secure the aircraft until it could be extracted by a Chinook. One of the slicks that inserted the platoon took the C&C party and the crew back to Dong Tam. I stayed with the rifle platoon until the Huey was recovered and was extracted with them.

Air Medal w/V 67th OLC

1 April 1969

After my six months as Operations Officer was completed, the CO (Major Ray Swindell) informed me that I would be moved to the XO slot. I politely refused the position. He asked me what I wanted. I told him I wanted a platoon. He apologetically said that the only platoon available was the scout platoon. He was sure that I wouldn't want it for the second half of my second (and final) tour. One look at my grin convinced him and I was the Aero Scout Platoon Leader (call sign War Wagon 16).

I had only been the Aero-Scout Platoon Leader for a couple of weeks when this occurred. I was the lead of a scout team on a reconnaissance mission when the ground unit commander notified his Battalion CO that that one of his men had stepped on a mine. Further investigation indicated that the whole area was mined. While the company commander and Battalion CO discussed how to get the company out of the area safely, I flew to the wounded man. My door gunner volunteered to stand on the skid while I hovered the aircraft and lean down to pick up the casualty. It was a very difficult feat to accomplish. He had to pick up a wounded man, being careful to not injure him further or drop him on another mine, while balancing on a round tube and hoping the mines were not sensitive enough that the pressure from the rotor wash would set them off. This was one time I was definitely glad I was flying a Loach and not a Huey. We were lucky and able to get the wounded out safely.

The rest of the unit managed to get safely back to the PZ and were getting into pick-up formation. The C&C ship took the wounded soldier from my ship so he would have a more comfortable ride to the hospital. We were released from our mission and returned to base. I recommended my door gunner for a Bronze Star with V device, but we both got the Air Medal with V device.

Army Commendation Medal w/V Second OLC

15 April 1960

Our maintenance section received a UH-1M helicopter for use as the maintenance ship. The M model was an upgrade to the C model. When I was in the 116th, I was a unit IP and maintenance test pilot for the UH-1C, so I was sent to another unit for transition to the UH-1M and a check-ride with a SIP. Three hours later I was back at the unit as an IP and maintenance test pilot for the M model.

The next day I gave Captain Paul Booterbaugh, the Maintenance Platoon Leader, an instruction ride. After the instruction period, we refueled and I gave him a check-ride to certify him as a qualified UH-1M pilot and maintenance test pilot. During the check-ride, we heard a call on guard for Dustoff. We responded that we were nearby and would be there in ten or 15 minutes. Paul pointed out that we did not have a crew chief or door gunner on board since this was a check-ride. I asked him if that was a problem. He grinned and said "No problem, just reminding you"

The unit was in a village of about a dozen huts. The wounded soldier was located in the center of the huts where there was plenty of room to land. I made a high overhead approach (an approach from 1200 feet to the ground at 2500 feet per minute rate of descent in one circle). When I flared to land, the stored energy in the blades popped us back up to approximately 200 feet. Charlie must have been as surprised as I was because we didn't receive any fire before we got back to the ground. We got the man aboard, took some fire on the way out, and dropped the wounded off at the base hospital. We then completed the check-ride, filled out the paperwork, and went to the club for a beer.

Silver Star, First Oak Leaf Cluster

9 May 1969

I was the lead pilot of a scout team on a reconnaissance in force mission near Cai Lay. While we were doing the recon, one of the infantry platoons was pinned down by heavy fire from bunkers. The ground commander immediately requested that we try to relieve the platoon. When we got to the area, the Cobras rolled in on the bunkers. Due to the construction of the bunkers, the rockets and 40mm rounds were ineffective. The roofs of the bunkers were reinforced with logs under mounds of dirt. The roofs were extended so that there was no way to angle aircraft fire into them. Even artillery could not penetrate the overhead. To fire into the bunker, one had to be near the ground and in front of the firing slots of the bunker.

The platoon was not only pinned down but began to take casualties as a result of their exposed position. I asked the Cobras to maintain rocket and 40mm suppression in front of the bunkers to distract the VC while I hovered between the platoon and the bunkers firing my mini-gun through the firing slots. After a few minutes my mini-gun jammed and I had to move off a couple of klicks to clear it. We returned to the attack on the bunkers, and the enemy fire began to subside. The platoon was able to withdraw and join with the rest of its company to attack and destroy the bunker complex. The ground commander was most appreciative of the Cavalry Troop's performance that day and credited us with saving his platoon.

Paul Booterbaugh (the maintenance officer previously mentioned) was definitely not appreciative when we returned to base. The entire console was shot out and had to be replaced, along with the windshields and most of the canopy frame. I told him "quitch yer bitchin', I only got one shot up today". He had to give me that one, but commented that I did an exceptional job of getting the one shot up.

Air Medal w/V 69th OLC

5 July 1969

This one was a little hairy. We were doing reconnaissance for an infantry company on a search and destroy mission north of Ben Tre. One of its platoons was ambushed and began taking casualties. Our helicopters were directed to clear the area so that the platoon could receive support from air strikes and artillery fire. One of the fighters got shot down. The pilot ejected and landed safely, but in a heavily wooded area where extraction was not possible.

Another platoon of the infantry company was maneuvering to reinforce the platoon in contact. Because they were moving into the same wooded area that the pilot went into, they were directed to find him and bring him with them. The problem was to locate the pilot while engaging the enemy. I volunteered to scout the area to find the pilot. I was told that the artillery support was more vital, so it would not be turned off. I told them I had the impact areas in sight and would avoid them. As a trained artillery observer, I was familiar with the trajectories of the rounds and could stay out of their paths. As we were discussing this on the radio, I was inbound to the area. Forgiveness is easier to obtain than permission, and no one told me to stop.

We had to fly at the level of the tree-tops, both to be able to see into the trees while looking for the pilot and to reduce the enemy's ability to observe and fire at us. With the pilot guiding us on guard, we soon located him and were able to direct the platoon to link up with the pilot. We took a few hits in the process but were successful in avoiding the artillery. I was later counseled on the vagaries of artillery round trajectories and the inadvisability of flying near impact areas. Artillery rounds do have the right of way in the air. But I was forgiven.

Purple Heart

11 July 1969

This is the wildest story of them all. It was two weeks before my DEROS. General Electric had designed an automatic 40mm grenade launcher for Loaches. Since I had cobbled together a two-tube rocket launcher and

fire control unit for my Loach, I was selected to test the "chunker" in country. I guess someone thought improvisation made me an engineer.

My gunner spotted a sampan covered by cardboard and a tarp. This aroused our curiosity and I hovered over the sampan in an attempt to blow the coverings away. The gunner reported that they were nailed to the sampan. This increased our curiosity. I suspected that there might be ammunition stored for delivery that night. I hovered a couple of hundred meters away and fired grenades into the sampan anticipating a secondary explosion. No luck. When I hovered over it again, I noticed that the coverings were coming loose. I hovered about fifty meters away and fired more grenades. Chunks of wood, cardboard, and tarp began bursting from the sampan. I hovered closer, and eventually I felt someone hit my left eye with a baseball bat. A fragment hit my eye socket less than a half-inch from the eyeball. The fragment followed the left side of my skull under the skin until stopped by the cartilage of my ear.

I flew to the 9th Division Hospital. They stopped the bleeding and cleaned me up, then med-evaced me to the Third Surgical Hospital in Saigon to remove the pieces of Plexiglas from my eyeball. A clerk came by to ask me if this was my first Purple Heart. I told him that the wound was self-inflicted and not eligible for a Purple Heart. He told me that the paperwork said the wound was the result of hostile action and showed me the sheet. It had my name as Captain Rollo B. Reed, and my serial number and unit were also slightly incorrect, so I agreed it was my first award and let it go.

When the doctor made his rounds, I asked when I would be discharged. He said they were holding me for observation until I was within ten days of DEROS, then shipping me back to the world. As soon as he left, I went to the supply room to get fatigues and boots. The clerk would not issue me a uniform without discharge papers from the hospital. As I was leaving the supply room, I ran into my platoon sergeant from the Hornets. After we got caught up, I asked him what he was in the hospital for. He told me he was the Supply Sergeant!

Thirty minutes later I was on the street with no ID of any kind, no money, and trying to find my way to Hotel 3. At some point I walked past a bar where MPs were checking out a disturbance. I heard on their jeep radio to be on the lookout for an unidentified soldier who was AWOL from the Third Surg. I did make it to Hotel 3 where a clerk I had done some favors hid me out until the unit picked me up. So far as I know they never did find that AWOL soldier.

The First Sergeant and I had a running argument going because I refused to accept a Purple Heart for pieces of floorboard, windshield, console, etc. piercing my skin. Secondary shrapnel doesn't cut it for me. He told me nobody leaves the cav without a Purple Heart. So, when guys were saying goodbye to me when I left for Ben Hoa, The first shirt shook my hand and said "I told you nobody leaves the cav without a Purple Heart". I just grinned and told him I proved him wrong. He checked and found out that no Captain Rolla Breed was ever in the hospital. So he went to the 9th Division hospital and had them fill out the award. When I got home, my wife told me I had a package from Viet Nam. I opened it to find a Purple Heart with orders, citation, and a sheet of typing paper with HAW, HAW, HAW written on it in magic marker.