

Mike - I'm sure you will find this very interesting! This is exactly the level of information I am soliciting - plenty of details and first hand accounts with a flavor of what the individual felt while it was happening. Please treat the more sensitive items confidentially. If it's ok with you - I would like to copy you on all like future correspondence - Just in case I get hit by a truck or something - I would hate for it all to be lost. Also I value your opinion (comments and will continue to use you as an advisor / sounding board - But friend first and foremost.

CLEWELL, BOB A/101 Comancheros LS719

1/6/92

Joe

Transcript of letter received from Bob Clewell dated Dec. 27, 1991.

Thank you so much for your kind words, cards, letter, newsletters, photos, and the tape. We watched it (Kingsmen tape) the same evening that it arrived down at our little "center" in Lisbon <OH>. It was easy to recognize the voice of COL Peachy, the others I'm not sure of.

First off. I want to encourage your fine work. I should tell you also of my conversation today with WO Berg's <A/101 pilot lost 2/18/71 RefNo 1706-0-01> Father. I had left him a message on his recorder in New York on Dec. 24th. He spent Christmas with his daughter in Maine, returning, heard my message, read a little in the book "Run Silent, Run Deep", then called. He said who he was and I thanked him for calling. We discussed our lives and the events of Feb 18/19, 1971, which took the lives of his son and others. He said how he had lost his wife of 49 years, George's mother, on the 1st of June, and that George's brother Donald had died some 5 or 6 years ago. He had a lovely daughter, Norma Jean, who was married and lived in Maine. He spoke of the years since 1971 and how the family had taken George's inheritance and purchased with it a favorite piece of land that George Berg had loved and that they built a house on the land.

Norman Berg <the father> had become a rated aviator on Dec. 10, 1941, flew torpedo bombers throughout the Pacific and commanded a squadron (VT-28)... was in the big battles Midway, Marianas, Guadalcanal. The two of them, he and his wife, had accepted George's death, it was like he'd been "lost at sea" he said...and he read for me a quote from "Run Silent, Run Deep" which went something like this, talking about heroes. "They were heroes because they died doing something they believed in". He also mentioned to me a series of articles which perhaps "Buoni" <Bon "Butch" Buoni ? B/101> wrote for Aviation Digest several years after the war. One of the articles was entitled "Those Who Serve" and told how George had gone to work on the flightline with his crew members after missions each day. The articles were a source of comfort for them. I believe.

I spoke of what a fine pilot George had been, very courageous and how we all admired Walter Demsey <RefNo 1706-0-04> his crew chief. I told him of Wayne Jones, the doorgunner, who had DROS'd only a week before the loss. It was a wonderful conversation. Afterward, I felt as if a great weight had been lifted from my mind and heart.

Also, Dave Demsey<brother of Walter?> got in touch with John Gale, who is listed in the VHPA directory<A/101 70-71>. Later on, this morning, Dave called me, then I called John. We had a nice talk. He flies for a hospital in eastern Pennsylvania. He and wife Barbara have a 2 1/2 year-old daughter. John was Comanchero 14, I think. I remember that he got shot down three times, on the special days he flew in

until I come up with something better, the transcript format seems to work pretty well! The one thing that I might try is future is to have the lines as well as pages numbered - for quicker access reference. After I get out from under the holiday backlog at my (other) job - the one that puts food on the table - I'll set up a meeting with John to see. I understand the need for doing it soon.

Laos, that is on successive Lam Son missions he personally flew, not necessarily in succeeding calendar days. And there were other days he flew Lam Son when he didn't get shot down. He never complained, but on the fourth day morning, he politely asked me if perhaps he could be considered for a mission elsewhere. We knew nothing about P.T.S.D. or so-called "battle fatigue" back then. Nobody ever refused to fly or even much bitched about it...We knew we had a job to do, and we took a lot of pride in doing it. Not only well, but perhaps better than most.

Anyway, I'm going to make this a long letter and make some notes and comments on your enclosure<The transcript that I sent him of our phone conversation on 12/17/91>. Perhaps we can meet and you can Xerox what you find interesting from my old flight bag. I may even have my gloves someplace or other. Often look at the old bed-sheet map (1:50,000)-read on.

<Followed by two page copy of 12/17/91 transcript with numerous notes, and the following addition to item 8 on said transcript re:rescue of reporters from Laos>.

Item 8. This is really a nice little story, a lot of detail which I remember very clearly. First off, we had one helluva day...everyone(lift birds) had left Khe Sanh or was shut down, so we were just ready to head back to Eagle ourselves when this radio mission came in. Nobody really felt like risking the mission out there. The weather was deteriorating. You have to remember that we had been busy on March 1 and 2 also. We flew 97+ hours on March 1. Comanchero 17+32 got hit by 12.7MG fire. Five ACFT resupplied FB30 and units south of FB31. Comanchero 40 RON ed <?>at Khe Sanh on March 1 with flares, 3 others had to stand by. We also had set up a CP on the lagger pad. The lagger pad was a large cleared area on the south eastern end of the new active at Khe Sanh. We set up a GP medium tent, and installed 2 PRC 25 radios...4 people ran it, a T.I., a rigger, somebody from ACFT parts and an NCO. on March 2, we did a 9 ship resupply of FB31 and Comanchero 14 was hit with 12.7. landed at A Loui. Later that day we'd gone in to resupply FB30, made several sorties, got mortared out of the place. Then, went back out to an area below FB31 where the "survivors" so-to-speak, had "lifted to". Lifted means "moved" more or less as an organized body to establish positions away from the original firebase. Our mission was to resupply with ammo and water.

The infamous CPT Federovich was AC, I was AMC <Air Mission Commander> in the right seat. We stupidly landed in the only available place, next to what looked like their last remaining APC, began taking fire almost 500 meters out, and the first thing that happened was a mortar round exploded on the other side of the APC. Meanwhile 36<!> ARVN climbed into the ACFT. At least 3 tried to get into my window and one had hold of the <windshield> wipers, we staggered off with 20 onboard plus crew, meanwhile, Wallace had to go-around, under fire, and the others came thru high

enough to kick ammo and water off. Comanchero 24 took mortar fragments and at the termination of the "medevac" we landed all 20 at the ARVN CP.

The doorgunner, Nichol, was real cool on this mission... while I was loosing my cool and was really angry at being swamped in the LZ by this swarm of folks, Nichol just patted each man and sign-languaged them to get off to "lighten us enough". We made 3 attempts to get "light on the skids".

Federovich, a Captain, really should have been a W4 pilot cause he knew how to bleed RPM, let out pedal and crowd it out whilst sort of spinning a little through translational lift...then the streamlining effect took over and if you got it that far, chances are you're going to make it. Nichol later received the Air Medal with V for his coolness. The ARVN weren't exactly panicked. But, there were probably only about 100 of them left out of 500 originals or more who had started out on FB31.

A really unfortunate thing happened on FB31. One of the supporting fast movers was shot down about the same time an NVA regiment was assaulting with tanks and infantry, possibly the morning of March 1. When the U.S. jet went in, the pilot somehow survived I think. Anyway, his wingman started getting busy on UHF guard and the subsequent flights of aircraft scheduled in on NVA went over to protect the downed crew. You can imagine my frame of mind...I love the Air Force, but here was one of those truly unique situations-10 or 11 AM - assaulting enemy in the open, friendlies in dire need of U.S. air, and what happens?

Now, here we are some day(s) later at great risk making this resupply. Over the night of March 2 we left a flare ship at Khe Sanh. Now on March 3, the Comancheros arrived at Khe Sanh and were placed in direct support of or to "Dragon 9". A flight of 5 B/158<Lancer> joined behind our 10 Comancheros to comprise chalks 10 thru 24 of a flight of 40. The PZ was SW of FB Delta. The LZ "LULU"<LOLO>, so called by the AMC at first because the "O's" on the op order weren't closed- looked like LULU, not LOLO to him. (Later on we caught on and everybody started saying LOLO, "LULU" fit).

Anyway, during the initial assault, the lead flight (9 aircraft, callsign "FIRES"- a rather stupid callsign I'd say- seemed to overshoot the LZ, causing the rest of the flight to stack up. then, both the LZ and the PZ became hot simultaneously, subject to direct and indirect fire from a variety of weapons. In all, 35 aircraft received battle damage. 8 were lost. 11 of the 35 were Comancheros...eg. everyone got hit but we only "lost" 2 aircraft and both of these got safely in on the LZ...This was during the first assault...and 3 other aircraft were also downed then, but none of them, perhaps only "one" of them- made it to the LZ. Anyway, you know, it was one of those moments when here we were with 15 aircraft...we see the LZ, we see this relatively screwy flight pattern has and is developing, what do you do? Pete <Federovich> and I had only a moment to decide and we decided to go for it. We deliberately committed

an "unpardonable", we shot on in to LOLO with our flight behind us and you might say we cut what was left of the first 9 ships pretty much out of the pattern. I mean these fellows were just not used to flying in I Corps in high density attitudes and in mountainous terrain...There is a way to do it which works and there is a way to do it which, while it also "works", just doesn't get the job done without subjecting EVERYONE to unnecessary risks...eg. precision timing, relatively simple straight-in pattern so that everybody's fires overlap including guns, and don't piss around in the LZ, don't crowd the guy in front of you- don't start "S" turning or accordianing the flight, stay off the radio EXCEPT to say what EVERYONE needs to know, etc., etc.

Anyway, we did it...We got, I believe, a total of 7 chalks on the ground and the ACL <Aircraft load> may have been 10 for all I know. And then with so many (two?) birds finally down there wasn't anyplace to land. It was called off.

Meanwhile, I had about got to Lang Vei and by the time we get the refueling point at Khe Sanh, we were ready for a 2nd go. I held an important "rally type" briefing at the lagger pad with AC's and guns, everybody agreed we should just go back out there and reinforce- nobody had the slightest idea what the tactical situation was, but we knew our people were, generally speaking, we thought, "in a world of shlt".

The NVA were clean-looking, had shiny helmets, and thick...so I changed helicopters...we'd taken a round in the engine compartment...it was one of those assaults on top of a dug-in enemy position and the enemy were fairly well protected by the rocks, etc...So they could just shoot straight at you, on short final they were actually above us...and in the second effort we got 3 chalks onto the ground...then "perhaps" is when Richardsons aircraft got shot down or took a mortar round on short final...They got in OK, but I believe he simply didn't duck when he ran for cover or something."Crews"<an A/101 pilot> will know.

He later said he was "high hovering"- we'd shot our approach to an area a little farther out towards the escarpment- maybe 75-100 meters from the jammed-up touchdown point- but didn't want to leave the trenches (enemy trenches moments before) and face the kind of ground fire we were apparently taking...I guess we did take a few hits.

In any event, we didn't stick around VERY long; had to make room for chalk 2, besides, even if that had come up, there were some stumps that kept us from touching down. After the 3rd ship got in and it became really apparent that this was as many as we'd better try to get in on this impromptu 2nd assault, we all headed back to Khe Sanh to give the AMC (John Klose) time to get some supporting fires in there- some more airstrikes, etc., and work by CPT Jerry Crews, and by afternoon we went after it again, this time down the river/not the escarpment we came, Comancheros in the lead, turned I think almost 180 degrees(90 probably)

into the face of the escarpment, and let down into the LZ. A Success.

Medium lift Chinooks with howitzers and a bulldozer followed. The flight made more than 1 sortie, 2 I believe, before the heavies, and myself and WO Mike Victory each had altogether 5 sorties into LOLO that day. A couple of our crewmen were wounded. We'd lost a couple aircraft, but no Comancheros were lost in Lam Son 719...Lucky? or simply good? Perhaps both. Anyway, after this kind of a day, you'd have thought we could just go back to the "Hideout" <The Comancheros company area> but here we were about 4:30 PM, now, with this ugly dust storm/thunder roll brewing up out over the Laotian plateau, and some bunkered-up guy in the T.O.C. is saying "emergency mission"? "Civilians! COME ON!! But we couldn't just say no...We were the Comancheros and we were concerned about several things...Maybe those guys really were in deep trouble out there. DELTA 1 was, we knew, under heavy attack. With weather closing in, would it last the night? We honestly didn't know.

The others at first didn't really want to go out- their pride, however, prevented them from admitting this directly...They decided "If we had a set of guns we'd try the mission. We knew that all the gun teams had departed Khe Sanh and this would get us "of the hook" so-to-speak. Then, in transmitting this, somehow a C-model <UH-1C> gun team monitoring the frequency decided to call-in and soon showed up, maybe "Sidewinder 21" or "Rattlesnake 21" or something.

About 5 or 10 minutes into the mission this very courageous gun team lead called up to say they just "could not proceed"- visibility was too poor at the altitude they were able to reach. So we churned on out. In a moment or two, COL Peachy's voice came in from the T.O.C. and he got fairly emphatic about this "not being an emergency mission;" and to return. Well, we more or less ignored him...We were fully close and at least wanted to "see" what it looked like...It looked fairly grim...A number of rockets/artillery rounds were impacting around and on the firebase. Meanwhile, we had established some sort of radio frequency with the ARVN T.O.C. which got the PZ on DELTA 1 to pop smoke...A number of other smokes got popped, but only one was purple. You have to understand that in spite of my relatively young age, at the time 29 I think, I had been in Vietnam on and off for over 3 years...Had flown enough L-19 Bird Dog Recon to know when a firebase is being pounded, and our chances of getting in and out of DELTA 1 looked pretty doubtful to me...We were still at 4,500' AGL I suppose and I started to say on the intercom that "well, we've come this far..."(and I was going to say,"so we might as well go back") when, CPT Pete<Federovich> says; "Yea! I Know. So we might as well get them", and off we went. Down and fast, you know the rest. Remember now, Pete Federovich started his day, March 3rd by taking us into LOLO...you know the rest. But you should also know that Nichol, the doorgunner, also was on the right gun, also had made the multiple trips into LOLO, had had the PAK

next to him badly leg-shot the 2nd time in, and, during the pick-up of the civilians, physically for the first or second time, actually hooked-up his monkey strap before he got out amidst the incoming and heaved/helped the folks on board. Nichol is 6'4" tall and then weighed 180, maybe 170. Rangey and strong. Great sense of humor.(Reachable at (812) 768-5336). Then 20 years old. Remembers himself thinking "NO WAY WAS HE GOING TO BE SEPARATED FROM THAT AIRCRAFT!"<Hence the monkey strap>.

According to my notebook, as of 11:00PM the night of March 3rd, 1971, the Comancheros had 23 ACFT as follows.

252-loss

189-loss

049-5th Trans

086-test flight for vibrations

261-P/E

491 P/E w 4 red X

268-P/E

252-retro

641-retro

189-retro

495-retro

720-loss

103-P/E

956-flyable

511-flyable

350-flyable

023-flyable

294-flyable (D model)

701-flyable

702-flyable

693-flyable

694-flyable

We also had 557 on the books for a total of 24 acft (briefly). Maintenance people worked round the clock, never complained, and were incredible! A Captain named "Pope" I believe.

On March 4th, we went back to Khe Sanh and lead the assault on LZ. As I recall there were 40 aircraft. The line-up was BOSS, SPASM, TRAPS, and MOANER (10 each). We also reinforced LOLO that day. I do not remember much about LZ. except for the hard faces and determinedness of the ARVN on lead. Also, tha AMC or C&C was John Klose and he did a much better job of airstrikes and prepping the LZ. I don't even ever want to begin to sound critical of John. He did a fantastic job.

On March 5th, the Comancheros led the assault on SOPHIA II. My note pad shows 60 ships, 10 each, BOSS, SPASM, TRAPS, BLACKCATS, DOLPHINS, AUCTION. The P2 time was 10:30. I think...At Kilo (Oscar pad) the ACL was 7, HEADHUNTERS 39.75 FM callsign at P2. It was a 2 ACFT P2. I had all ACFT monitor UHF but only flight leads were to transmit on UHF. Otherwise, flights were on their own internal FM/VHF as follows. BOSS 140.30, SPASM 139.10, TRAPS 122.10, BLACKCATS 122.70, DOLPHINS ?, AUCTION ? UHF primary was 310.1, first alternate UHF was 305.8, second alternate was 314.2.

We had 2 chase ACFT, 1 vicinity ALOUI, 1 vicinity LZ (north of the LZ) Comancheros used 60.70 FM.

On March 6th the line-up at Khe Sanh looked as shown below:

Lagger Pad	XX	Old Active
	XX	
	XX	
2. SPASM	XX	1. AUCTION C/158
4. TRAPS	XX	3. LOTUS
282 PHC 6. BLACKCATS	XX	5. MOANER A/168
116 AHC 8. HORNETS	XX	7. BOSS A/101
174 AHC 10. DOLPHINS	XX	9. COLOR B/101
71 AHC 12. RATTLERS	XX	11. COZY

I think we departed in the order shown 1 thru 12 in flights of 10 each.

PZ was supposed to be 10:30AM "KILO" HEADHUNTER CONTROL 39.75.

LZ HOPE XD344498 turned out to be XD344479 by my notes, I believe.

Now, the flight altitude out to LZ HOPE was 5,500', return at 6,500'. There are some other notes in my pad. We had another busy day on March 8th supporting ARVN Marines. Comanchero 30 got shot down in an LZ SW of DELTA. Two crewmembers were seriously wounded and evacuated. 30 shot down at XD621281. 42 went after him and pulled out 10 Marine wounded. 12 and crew rescued the survivors (all survived from 30's ACFT, including 4 WIA). Sortie count looks like.

"12" PZ GLOVE 63 PAX to Field Site 1.

"16" 80 PAX Field Site 1 to Field Site 2.

"20" 102 PAX Field Site 2 to CA HILL

"5" Log. Small arms to DELTA.

March 9th looks like resupply.

I have lots of entries for March 18th. An extraction Comancheros did not lead. Line-up was SPASM, TRAPS, BOSS, COLOR, AUCTION, BOATS. Comancheros got 50 sorties altogether. 399 ARVN, 6 US, 1 "skid faller".

18 March, 1971 was a Thursday. The Comancheros flight was organized like I show below. First two digits is A/C Comanchero callsign, next three digits ACFT tail number. Chalk number follows. Then A/C, PP.

20-956-Chalk 1, Clewell<VHPA\*>, Crews \*new VHPA member

17-261-Chalk 2, Sexton, McKittrick

14-491-Chalk 3, Gale<VHPA>, Burkholder<VHPA>

33-701-Chalk 4, Diehl<VHPA>, Farlow

32-103-Chalk 5, Trujillo<VHPA>, Stevens

25-497-Chalk 6, Wilkerson, Knight

24-693-Chalk 7, Wallace, Cornet

Note:<VHPA> indicates

23-694-Chalk 8, Handcock, Tate

listing in 1990

22-294-Chalk 9, Hallam,

Directory

42-252-Chalk 10, Nietsche<VHPA>, Hamilton

On 19 March, Peachy was shot down north of ALPHA. Comanchero 14 was shot down and landed at ALPHA. We got 60 out including 7 US from downed ACFT. Did not lose anybody.

On 20 March, when COLOR 6 <MAJ Barker and crew> was shot down and killed, the line-up was:

TRAPS-3	TRAPS-3
SPASM-1	SPASM-1
COLOR-1 but it evolved to:	COLOR-1
COZY-2	BOATS-5
BOATS-5	COZY-2
BOSS-10	BOSS-10

MAJ Jack Barker was a man (Kingsen CO) we knew and respected. From the numbers and types of aircraft flights we hastily constituted for the adjusted final attempt, you can see what a day it had been for the others. The period 18 thru 24 March is a little fuzzy in my head and note book, but there is a lot of pretty good info in it.

The actual transmission which MUSIC 16 <Kieth Brandt> made that I have written in my notebook was "I'm hit", "I've lost hydraulics, and the engines out" - "I'm autorotating" . . . "I can't make the river" . . . "Oh my God, I'm Dead" . . . (This last phrase was transmitted as the aircraft/Cobra plunged suddenly nose down to the ground, then exploded. Music 16, Brandt, would receive "only the DFC" and according to Klose, who talked with me recently, "was the most courageous pilot he'd ever seen for his actions that day. I suspect that the 174th<173rd> ROBIN HOODS were Klose's old unit and that this particular day found Klose in really deep. The extraction phase was just getting started and the NVA were by now very thick in certain areas. It took a good bit of nerve and common sense to make these extractions and keep flight integrity... We had a number of pilots who had done RIPCORD in July 1970... We knew how to time our approaches between incoming arty and mortar rounds, how to stay in formation to keep suppressive fires under the ship ahead, and how to slip, at the last minute, last 15 or 20 seconds of the approach, into a safe pocket maybe 50-75 meters away from the previous touch down point... The ARVN caught on quickly and would RIIFT/run to us. We didn't lose anybody. We sneaked an extra Chase from maintenance with riggers and weapons to secure the downed aircraft. We expected losses- we knew how important radio discipline was- we made little deceptive adjustments- people flew "slightly" staggered in trail, varying altitude maybe 100-200 ft. and laterally a couple hundred feet from the guy in front.

On the extractions, we even experimented to make it look like the PZ was a click or so from the real one. We'd shoot flight approaches to a point then relatively close to the ground, we'd hug the terrain, then scoot in for a touch down, then hump again along the terrain a little ways before bugging up to altitude. The comancheros took great pride in

helping the "little guys" - ARVN- and in not letting any occasional skid hangers fall.

Back to the day COLOR 6 **Barker** died. Remember, of all the action that day, while the Comancheros were laggered at Lang Vei actually "in reserve"- something I'd never heard of before being done- and we got the call rather late to "join" this effort...The briefing was hasty but more than adequate...The problem was, in my view, that of judgement...How many losses were acceptable...on a particular situation...anyway. So we found ourselves tagging into this extremely tough situation...We couldn't see very well...Visibility was very smoky and hazy. The whole area looked and smelled like, well, a battlefield. Out over the escarpment and river we could hear folks up ahead being shot up and down, lots of ground fire, lots of things which indicated big problems ahead. We were, I believe, two ships behind Jack and he was going down. I had just reached up to flick the "garbage" radios off so I could concentrate only on flight, guns, and lead...You know...What the hell good was Klose at altitude where we were headed, down, we wouldn't be needing to talk to him and during this "getting on down in there" phase, flight integrity, and keeping up with what sudden events were about to explode requires every bit of concentration a leader can muster...Now, a really incredible thing happened. I heard Klose say "BOSS, break it off". I knew what he meant; and I rogered, then peeled the flight back towards Khe Sanh, meanwhile, I turned it over to my Chalk 2, and headed for the Corps TOC.

Klose came into the TOC and we received a sit down briefing, sort of an "audience" thing, seems like a place where security was quite high. Seats were, I believe, reminiscent of a little amphitheatre almost, probably steel chairs, but arranged in almost tiers so folks in back could see the large map boards, etc. I suppose there were over 60 people in there, maybe more. I sat up in the middle back. They decided not to go back out that afternoon. Meanwhile, before coming inside, I had got a briefing both in the air and on the Corps pad, from whoever it was that was immediately behind Barker to ascertain for myself his chances.

Whoever this was, and I believe it was one of the Kingsmen warrant officers, they had made a very gallant low pass and verified to me that there couldn't have been any survivors..."There are no survivors," is what I think he had said.

Then, after the briefing, I got face to face with Klose. I introduced myself...All this shit and I think that this was the first and last time that we physically met. "I just couldn't do it," he said. "What?" I wanted to know. "I just couldn't send you in there," he earnestly, almost beseechingly replied. "You are "the best" ...I didn't know exactly what he meant, and I said something like..."What do you mean?" He said something like, "I saw you there (meaning flying out to him and our probable deaths) and I just

couldn't do it" (meaning put us into the cauldron of hell with the certain knowledge that we would die). I know exactly what he meant, but I wanted to impress on him something which I have never told anyone else, Joe Kline...The ARVN's weren't the only ones to have command problems in Lam Son 719. The aviation units from down south, with Klose and all, were not as trusted as people we knew like Peachy. Peachy had done RIPCORD. Sure, he'd gotten folks killed, but the operation was a success, and he knew our capabilities...Better still, we knew his voice and I trusted his judgement. Klose I wasn't sure of. After all, the bottom line was he was still learning. Now, he did an incredible job...We were plowing new "mid-intensity" ground. There was a helluva lot going on. Lam Son 719 was not either the debacle that folks might have you believe, folks like the editor of VIETNAM who tends to blame, in retrospect, the Cooper/Church Amendment and the media for portraying all of the seemingly rout aspects, skid hangers, and the like.

The Military (US) that is, may want to rewrite history, but the truth is perhaps a lot different...They were out-foxed...Could have known more about Thieu's secret orders to avoid casualties when the maneuver battalions were sent out on Feb 8. They should have grasped the significance of Hanoi's commitment of a portion of it's reserve to the operational area, and ought to have had a much better grasp of what was going on, early on.

We'd flown enough CCN up there to judge that the enemy had been there for years. Moreover, the ARVN battalions fought bravely, and for the most part well. What was lacking in fire support coordination could have been achieved with more English-speaking interpreters and aerial FO's. Where in the hell were the Bird Dogs? Finally, there was no very effective "unity of command" in my view of the aviation units. These large stringy assaults and extractions were new to the folks from down south. Why were C-Model gunships employed to begin with? Why weren't single ships detached from units down south and integrated with 101/158th companies for the duration? Where in the hell was the Air Force, Spooky, Spectre, etc.? And what ever happened to the idea of public affairs? Was Lam Son 719 a test of Vietnamization deliberately geared by some strategist to suck sustained involvement of US? - if so, it backfired.

A lot of questions here, but in my own mind, WE meaning the aviators and crews, maintenance people and ARVN ground soldiers, pulled it off. In spite of the obstacles, we got to Tchepone, we kicked a lot of ass, and for the most part we got away with our ass. I mean, on the final extractions we were taking brave, very brave men who had been in many cases out there for 5, maybe 6 weeks from the jaws of the enemy...A superior force.

Remember who advised the ARVN, who trained their leadership, and what examples had been set of "body count/kill ratios" - "minimize friendly losses" - "employ huge

amounts of supporting fires"-No, in my view, the US High Command must share a big portion of the responsibility for what happened in Laos.

Likewise, I believe, there is always a tendency to blame the press for portraying things to sell newspapers and magazines. Where in the hell were our own PIO people? Saigon? I think Kevin Buckley <Newsweek bureau chief> and the others were very heroic and that history will treat them kindly. Their job was to find out just what was going on and without a whole lot of different viewpoints. How in the hell do we ever learn the truth about anything?

On March 21, 1971, the Comancheros line-up was as shown:

20-693-1	Clewell/Whitfield
24-086	Wallace/Stevens
33-701-2	Diehl/Nolan
10-268-3	Burkholder/Farlow
22-261-4	Hallam/Searight
40-103-5	Heiniken/Hamilton
28-694-6	Fronfelter/Knight
17-497-7	Sexton/Crews
23-252-8	Handcock/Campbell
32-294-9	Trujillo/Cornett
42-511-10	Neitsche/Anderson

My entry shows "flew low level for the airborne with LOTUS (A/158)-Flew lead and the Comancheros extracted 460 troops from a PZ @ XD6336- Got shot up on the second sortie and returned. Actually on the second trip out we sort of went low-leveling, some VC nailed me with a round that hit the bubble bar, split

and a small fragment went into my eye. The crew flew me to DaNang and I remember it was late when we got there... This little piece of metal sticking in my eyeball. I felt ridiculous (had got frags in the same eye back in '68 once when some folks in a sampan - now dead - put 3 rounds thru the windshield of my bird dog) but the crew insisted.

I went into some huge hospital and it was nearly empty, a long corridor, found the specialists wing in the place, rang up somebody and somebody said sit down and wait, so I did...I closed my eyes and went to sleep. You know, one of those ten second sleeps (like sometimes coming back from Khe Sanh. I would catch a few seconds coming down Highway 1, very comfortable letting flight just drive home and a very nice nap for me, nothing to do, no life or death decisions, sort of like getting a haircut at base camp)...When I woke up, somehow this tiny piece of metal or whatever had expunged itself. Somebody saved it for me, and I left...The guys treated me to chow I think, and took me back to the HIDEOUT at Eagle. I don't think that I flew again with the Comancheros until March 24. I have the lineup in my notebook that day and on March 26, set down and wrote up a long thing of lessons learned, Lam Son 719, which you could get a copy of real easy, Joe.

This is too long a letter, but I felt something of a desire to write to you. Thank you for what you have done and are doing. Keep after me. You know how busy and forgetful I am. Try to say plenty of nice things about the Comanchero crewmen and pilots, especially maintenance. Spare me any heroics. I am not very heroic, just a farm boy from Ohio and

somebody who worked hard to accomplish the mission and get  
as many mother's sons home alive as possible, ARVN included.  
Thanks again!

Respectfully,  
Bob Clewell, Comanchero 6 Oct 70-May 71