

EXTRACTS FROM EXCELLENT REFERENCE

Indochina Monographs

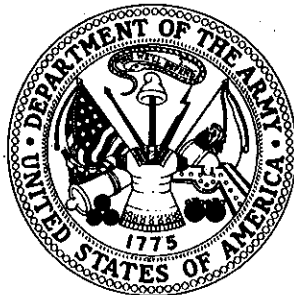
Mike -

I hope I haven't overwhelmed you with this stuff. It was a busy time and I know there are others with more stories - Along

Lam Son 719

by

Maj. Gen. Nguyen Duy Hinh



Jim Fulbrook has a picture of a VH-1 burning in Laos. John Gale, a flight school classmate may have taken the shot when he was shot down on 3 mar.

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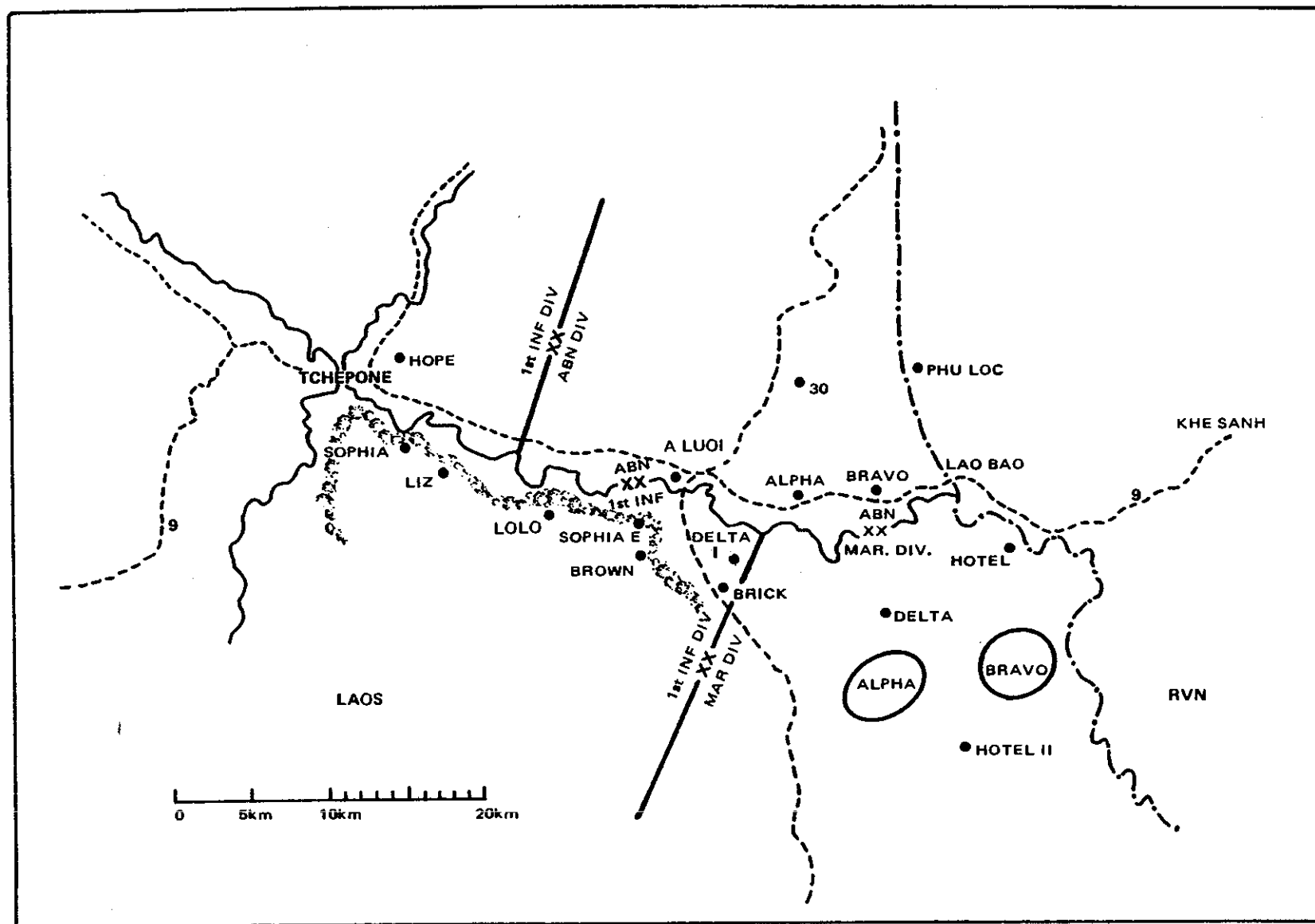
the remaining 43 armored wounded. Cumulative enemy losses for the period from 25 February to 3 March throughout the lower Laos area of operation were 1,536 killed. These losses amounted to about one regiment per week.

While the enemy endeavored to annihilate Fire Support Base 30 and the 17th Armored Task Force, the relief plan was being carried out, marking the beginning of a new offensive phase. (Map 20) Between Fire Support Base A Luoi (Ban Dong) and the border, the Airborne Division set up two fire support bases, Alpha and Bravo, to consolidate the security of Route No. 9. The 1st Ranger Group with its remaining two battalions (21st and 37th) was deployed northwest of Khe Sanh and provided security for Fire Support Base Phu Loc. The 369th Brigade, kept in reserve by the corps, conducted security operations south of Khe Sanh.

On 2 March, the 7th Marine Battalion, 147th Brigade, began landing troops in Fire Support Base Delta. The 2d Battalion of the 3d Regiment, which had suffered from combat attrition at Hotel 2, was sent to the rear to reorganize while other elements of the regiment moved out to operate in the areas of Delta 1 and Brown. For three consecutive days, the 147th Brigade Headquarters and the remaining 2d and 4th Battalions were inserted into Delta. Immediately thereafter, the 2d and 4th Marine Battalions moved out to operate in the area of objective Alpha. The entire 258th Brigade, meanwhile, was inserted at FSB Hotel. The 8th Battalion assumed security of the base and operated in the Co Roc area while the 1st and 3d Battalions searched for the enemy in the area of objective Bravo. Marine activities during this time resulted in 361 enemy killed and 51 weapons seized. Also, 153 enemy personnel killed by airstrikes were found by marine troops.

On 3 March, in execution of the plan to enter Tchepone, the 1st Battalion of the 1st Infantry Regiment was inserted at Landing Zone Lolo 13 kilometers southeast of Tchepone. The landing had met with strong enemy opposition and had been postponed twice because of additional preparations required for the landing zone. The 1/1 Battalion finally touched ground at the price of 11 helicopters shot down, 44

Map 20 - The Attack Toward Tchepone



PROBABLY
DATE OF
PICTURE
4 MAR.
ARTY
TUBE
SLUNG
IN BY
CHINDOK

others hit by gunfire and two D4 bulldozers destroyed after being dropped from the air. The following day, the 1st Regiment Headquarters, the 2/1 Battalion and a battery of 105-mm howitzers were brought into Landing Zone Lolo. Fire Support Base Lolo was thus established. The 4/1 Battalion meanwhile landed at Landing Zone Liz, six kilometers west-northwest of Lolo.⁷ The various units then moved out to search the area but only a few light contacts were made with minor results.

In the morning of 5 March, in order to continue its westward push, the 2d Infantry Regiment of the 1st Division was scheduled to occupy Landing Zone Sophia, four-and-a-half kilometers southwest of Tchepone at 1100 hours but unexpected bad weather delayed the operation. After preemptive airstrikes, at exactly 1320 hours five UH-1Hs landed safely. Sporadic gunfire was received but posed no major threat. By nightfall, Landing Zone Sophia had eight 105-mm howitzers in position with adequate ammunition. Searching further out the 4th and 5th Battalions found the bodies of 124 enemy troops and seized 43 AK-47s, nine 12.7-mm machineguns, four RPD automatic rifles, nine B-40 rocket launchers, three radios, military clothing, equipment and food supplies. After securing Fire Support Base Sophia, the 2d Regiment was now in a position to control Tchepone from its mountain base and keep the areas surrounding the town within range of its artillery.

⁷ English names were chosen for objectives, firebases and the like primarily to facilitate communications with U.S. support units. During the First Indochina War. The French had followed a parallel practice (at Dien Bien Phu, for example). Perhaps feminine names were selected to bring some softness into the virile world of combatants at war. "Lolo", "Liz", and "Sophia" were chosen by Colonel Vu Van Giai, the very effective deputy commander of the 1st Division who assisted in maneuvering the division during this period. He had served for several years in the DMZ area, in coordination with U.S. combat units, and he naturally followed their practice in naming firebases. The small return that the NVA might have enjoyed by exploiting these names for propaganda value—as proof that the Americans were still in charge despite Vietnamization—was certainly overridden by the practicality of having words the Americans could understand and pronounce.

For the next two days, throughout the areas of operation of the 1st Infantry and the Marine Divisions, friendly units caught the spirit of the new offensive. They fought aggressively, repeatedly engaged the enemy, and defeated him everywhere. In the morning of 5 March, in the area of Objective Alpha, the 4th Marine Battalion killed 130 enemy troops and seized 25 assorted weapons including two 82-mm mortars. Friendly forces sustained six killed and 42 wounded. The 4/1 Battalion made contact near Landing Zone Liz, killing 41 Communist troops and seizing 15 weapons along with two mortars. By 6 March, engagements were increasing and occurring everywhere, but friendly forces suffered only light casualties while inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. More importantly, they were now within easy reach of Tchepone, the final objective that President Thieu had ordered them to take just three days earlier.

In the afternoon of 6 March, Khe Sanh received an attack by fire of an estimated 22 rounds of 122-mm rockets and two U.S. troops were killed and 10 wounded. Elsewhere, the enemy appeared to take no significant initiative but he was increasing his use of surface-to-air missiles in lower Laos. Earlier, on 2 February, a Mohawk aircraft flying west of the demilitarized zone reported an unidentified missile fired from the ground which exploded approximately 100 meters away, causing no damage to the aircraft. Subsequently, 14 instances of surface-to-air missile firing were photographed or reported by forward air controllers, army pilots, tactical air and reconnaissance aircraft. Missile transportation equipment and antenna vans along with other equipment related to surface-to-air missile systems were also sighted in the tri-border area.

The day selected to enter the ultimate objective, Tchepone, was 6 March. A total of 120 U.S. helicopters were assembled to carry out the assault. In addition to B-52, U.S. tactical air strikes or air cover sorties were scheduled every 10 minutes. Elements of the 2/17 U.S. Air Cavalry reconnoitered targets, prepared landing zones and covered the assault. An enemy attack by fire on Khe Sanh Base forced the huge assemblage of U.S. helicopters to depart 90 minutes earlier

Battalion, operating outside the base, received a corresponding number of artillery rounds and had five wounded. Other units of the brigade, the 2d and 4th Battalions, continued to search objective area Alpha, approximately five kilometers south of Fire Support Base Delta.

During the afternoon of 16 March the headquarters of the 3d Infantry Regiment (1st Division) and its 4th Battalion were picked up in the Delta 1 area and taken to Ham Nghi Base along with a number of supporting units. The 3d Battalion had been taken out for rest and reorganization two days before. The 1st Battalion remained to secure the base (Delta 1).

Meanwhile, the enemy was beginning to harass Khe Sanh. For the second day running, this fire support base was hit by mortar fire which wounded four Americans and damaged two helicopters and a number of vehicles.

On 17 March, Communist gunners stepped up their shellings of other targets. In RVN territory, at the border, Fire Support Bases Phu Loc and Lao Bao were attacked by 130-mm artillery but the losses were small.

Fire Support Base A Luoi received attacks by fire practically every day and Fire Support Base Delta and the 7th Marine Battalion were pinned down. In a small engagement, the 7th Battalion killed 16 enemy troops while suffering only five casualties. A NVA recruit just assigned to the 812th Regiment, 324B Division rallied to the Marines and disclosed that the entire 324B Division was in the "Route 9 campaign" with its 29th, 803d and 812th regiments. The 29th Regiment had recently suffered heavy losses and the 812th Regiment was engaging the 147th Marine Brigade.

In the meantime, in the area of the 2d Regiment, the 5th Battalion received an intense early morning attack of an estimated 300 rounds of mortar and artillery fire. The battalion continued its search operations and, thanks to intensive air support, scored a major victory in the area near Landing Zone Brown, killing nearly 100 enemy and capturing a large number of weapons and a ton of ammunition. In accordance with the withdrawal plan, the headquarters of the 2d Infantry Regiment was

evacuated to Delta 1 while its battalion proceeded east on foot.

From 18 March on it seemed that the enemy was well aware of the ARVN withdrawal and there were signs of the enemy concentrating a regimental size unit northwest of Fire Support Base A Luoi while pressure increased around Fire Support Base Delta of the 147th Brigade. The base began to receive fire from 130-mm field guns and NVA infantry had infiltrated close enough to fire at aircraft. There were about 10 antiaircraft guns positioned on the mountain slopes around the base that could not be silenced. The 2d and 4th Battalions operating to the south were recalled to sweep the area around Delta and to prepare for the withdrawal.

By mid-day of 18 March the 1st Infantry Regiment, with its 1st, 2d and 3d battalions, after falling back from the Lolo area, arrived in an area approximately 2,000 meters southwest of Fire Support Base A Luoi. There they were picked up by helicopters and flown to Khe Sanh. The survivors of the 4th Battalion were also flown back in the late afternoon. Next came the turn of the 5th Battalion, 2d Regiment, which boarded helicopters from an area adjacent to Landing Zone Brown.

Immediately thereafter, from about 1600 hours and continuing through the night of 18 March, the remaining three battalions of the 2d Infantry Regiment, the 2d, 3d and 4th, received heavy attacks west of the Brown area. The NVA followed up its artillery with ground assaults. The next morning the 4th Battalion made a preliminary report that it had 33 wounded and five missing. The 2d Battalion had similar casualty figures while enemy losses were unknown.

For four days now, reports flowed into I Corps headquarters of strong attacks that included very heavy bombardments by heavy artillery and tank attacks. Reports of ARVN losses, including the decimation of the 4th Battalion, 1st Infantry, were very disturbing to General Lam, as were the many indications that the enemy was reinforcing and maneuvering to prevent the orderly ARVN withdrawal from Laos. So, on the night of 18 March, General Lam called his division commanders to a conference at Ham Nghi Base (Khe Sanh) to hear their assessments and recommendations. They each recommended that disengagement proceed as quickly

Table 1 - GVN Released Results for LAM SON 719¹

ALLIED LOSSES			ENEMY LOSSES	
UNITED STATES			TROOPS	
Dead: 102			Dead: About 13,000	
Wounded: 215			(Saigon government figure)	
Missing: 53			Captured: About 50	
			(Saigon government figure)	
SOUTH VIETNAM			WEAPONS	
	Official figure	Unofficial report	Captured or Destroyed:	
Dead:	1,146	3,800	1,968 crew-served	
Wounded:	4,236	5,200	4,545 individual	
Missing:	246	776		
HELICOPTERS			VEHICLES	
Destroyed: 92			Captured or Destroyed:	
Cost about \$30 million			100 tanks 291 trucks	
Damages to others about \$10 million				
PLANES			SUPPLIES	
Destroyed: 5			Captured or Destroyed:	
Cost about \$8 million			128,000 tons of ammunition	
			1.3 million drums of gasoline	
			7,600 yards of pipeline	
			Food, medicine and clothing	

¹This information was published in the American Newsweek magazine, April 5, 1971, p. 29.

Table 2 — LAM SON 719 Cumulative Casualties²

UNIT	FRIENDLY			
	KILLED	WOUNDED	MISSING	TOTAL
XXIV Corps -				
101st Airborne Division	68	281	17	346
1st Bde, 5th Inf Division	55	431	3	489
11th Bde, 23rd Inf Division	47	266	7	310
XXIV Corps Artillery	9	78	0	85
Other Support Forces	36	125	11	172
Total	215	1149	38	1402
I Corps -				
1st Infantry Division	537	1607	537	2681
Airborne Division	455	1993	0*	2448
Marine Division	355	770	63	1188
1st Armored Brigade	54	384	0	418
1st Ranger Group	93	435	27	555
I Corps Troops	55	314	24	393
Total	1549	5483	651	7683
Sum-Total (Adjusted)	1764	6632	689	9065

* It was not true that there was absolutely no MIA for the Airborne Division. Based on first hand information, the author knew that a number of Airborne officers and troops were captured by the enemy.

²Excerpt from "An Assessment of the Performance of South Vietnamese Forces During Operation LAM SON 719: 30 January - 6 April 1971" by Headquarters, US XXIV Corps, dated 3 May 1971.

Most enemy vehicles were destroyed by U.S. gunships and tactical air. So were enemy tanks of all types which largely consisted of the amphibious PT-76's and a number of T-34's and T-54's, all Russian-made. The ammunition destroyed included an important quantity of artillery shells and rockets, also Russian-made. In addition, the enemy fuel pipeline originating in North Vietnam and running through the LAM SON 719 area of operations was cut in several places.

United States Combat Support

No account of LAM SON 719 would be complete without mentioning the importance of U.S. support. In closing the balance sheet on friendly and enemy losses, credit should be duly given to the role performed by U.S. Army Aviation, U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Naval Air for without them, LAM SON 719 could hardly have been possible.

Topping the scale and from the point of view of the ARVN infantryman, U.S. Army Aviation units contributed by far the most important kind of support. In total, U.S. Army gunships and other types of helicopters flew over 90,000 sorties for the benefit of ARVN forces, to include nearly 24,000 gunship sorties, over 34,000 trooplift sorties and nearly 20,000 logistic-related sorties. (*Table 6*)

To carry out their vital support mission, U.S. Army Aviation units suffered losses in Laos amounting to 82 aircraft of all types destroyed and over 600 aircraft damaged but recoverable. (*Table 7*) U.S. Army pilots and crew members who sacrificed their lives in combat numbered 55 while 178 others were wounded and 34 were listed as missing in action.

The performance of the U.S. Air Force in support of LAM SON 719 was no less impressive. A total of 9,000 tactical air sorties were flown, to include 7,000 over lower Laos. The highest daily number of sorties reached 277 on 8 March 1971. (*Table 8*)

During the course of the operation, a total of 25 "Commando Vault" bombs (15,000-lb) were dropped by C-130 aircraft to clear landing zones and also to strike against specific targets such as warehouses, vehicle parks and enemy troop concentrations. Armed fixed-wing aircraft such

Table 6 — LAM SON 719: US Army Aviation Support Sorties

Type Sorties	(a) In Laos (South Vietnamese Support)	In South Vietnam			(e) Total South Vietnamese Support (a+b)	(f) Total Sorties (a+d)
		(b) South Vietnamese [*] Support	(c) US Support	(d) Total (b+c)		
Gunship	17,014	6,864	10,295	17,159	23,878	34,173
Trooplift	13,098	21,101	16,580	37,681	34,199	50,779
Medical Evacuation	909	585	1,244	1,829	1,494	2,738
Air Cavalry	7,284	4,453	6,150	10,603	11,737	17,887
Logistics	7,523	11,809	39,533	51,342	19,332	58,865
Total	45,828	44,812	73,802	118,614	90,640	164,442

^{*} Estimates based on available LAM SON 719 experience factors; during the initial weeks of the operation, no records were kept of the division of support in South Vietnam between US and South Vietnamese Forces.

Table 7 — U.S. Army Aircraft Damaged and Destroyed

Type Aircraft	Damaged*	Destroyed			Grand Total
		In Laos	In South Vietnam	Total	
OH6A	25	4	6	10	35
OH58	15	4	2	6	21
UH1C	63	7	1	8	71
UH1H	316	43	10	53	369
AH1G	158	20	6	26	184
CH47	26	3	0	3	29
CH53	13	1	1	2	15
CH54	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>
Total	618	82	26	108	728
(Non-hostile)	(4)	(0)	(5)	(5)	(9)

*Aircraft receiving any degree of combat damage but is economically repairable.

Table 8 — U.S. Air Force Tactical Air Support

	<u>In Laos</u>	<u>In South Vietnam</u>	<u>Total</u>
Total Sorties Flown	7104	2010	9114
Average Sorties/Day	103	29	132
Highest Number of Sorties on Any One Day (8 March 1971)			277
Total Ton Ordnance Delivered	10931	3100	14031
Number of Aircraft Lost			7

D-DAY WAS 30 JAN

D+? IN ALL PROBABILITY INDICATES PARTICIPATION
IN MAJOR OPERATIONS IN SUPPORT OF LAM SON

71ST WAS IN QUANG TRI D+9 BUT EVEN THOUGH WE
FLEW IN LAOS PRIOR TO THE END OF FEB, THEY SHOW

APPENDIX B

(P. 176) 71ST AS D+25 TO D+59

TASK ORGANIZATION, US XXIV CORPS
FOR LAM SON 719

Hq, XXIV Corps

108th Arty Gp

8th Bn, 4th Arty

2d Bn, 94th Arty

1st Bn, 39th Arty (-) (D+30)

1st Bn, 44th Arty AWSP (-)

45th Engr Gp (OPCON D-13 to D+23)

14th Engr Bn (CBT)

630th Engr Co (LW)

511th Engr Co (PB)

59th Engr Co (-) (LC)

27th Engr Bn (CBT) (-)

591st Engr Co (LE)

504th MP Bn (-)

300th MP Co (OPCON)

212th CAB

131st Surv Aerial Co

220th Recon Airplane Co

101st Abn Div (Ambl) (-)

101st Abn Div Arty (-)

2d Bn (Ambl) 11th Arty

2d Bn (Ambl) 319th Arty

4th Bn, 77th AFA (Ambl)

Co B, 326th Engr Bn (Ambl)

1st Bde, 101st Abn Div (Ambl) (Res)

3d Bde, 101st Abn Div (Ambl) (D+30 to D+67)

1st Bn, 501st Abn Inf (D+25 to D+67)

2d Bn, 502 Abn Inf (OPCON 3d Bde, 101st Abn Div) (D+26 to D+67)

1st Bn, 506th Abn Inf (D+47 to D+67)

2d Bn, 327th Abn Inf (D+29 to D+48)

TF 326th (-) (OPCON) (D-1 to D+67)

Co A, 326th Engr Bn (Ambl) (+)

59th EOD Det (-)

101st Combat Aviation Group

101st Avn Bn (AH) (Amb1) (D-1 to D+67)
158th Avn Bn (AH) (Amb1) (D-1 to D+67)
159th Avn Bn (AH) (Amb1) (D-1 to D+67)
5th Trans Bn (D-1 to D+67)
14th Avn Bn (OPCON) D+2 to D+63)
 71st AHC (D+25 to D+59)
 116th AHC (D+34 to D+36 & D+50 to D+53)
 174th AHC (D+25 to D+67)
 132d ASHC (D+25 to D+63)

223d Avn Bn HHC (OPCON) (D+2 to D+67)

48th AHC (D+2 to D+67)
173d AHC (D+2 to D+67)
282d AHC (D+34 to D+36 & D+50 to D+51)
235th AWC (D+38 to D+56)
238th AWC (D+2 to D+56)
D/227th AWC (D+28 to D+66)
179th ASHC (D+23 to D+66)
756th Med

2d Sqdn (Amb1), 17th Air Cav

C/7/17 Cav Sqdn (OPCON)
B/7/1 Cav Sqdn (OPCON)

67th Med Gp

237th Med Det
571st Med Det

34th Gen Spt Gp (-)

34th Avn Det (DS)
34th Co Spt Gp (AM&S)

58th Trans Bn

610th SG Trans Co
142d DS Trans Co
263d GS Avel Co

MHHS 463d, 1st MAW (OPCON D+1)

1st Bde, 5th Inf Div (Mech) (+) (OPCON 101st Abn Div (Amb1)
D+32 to D+67)

1st Bn, 11th Inf (Mech)

3d Bn, 187th Abn Inf, 101st Abn Div (OPCON D-1 to D+67)

1st Bn, 61st Inf (Mech) (OPCON 101st Abn Div (Amb1) D+26 to
D+31 and D+57 to D+67) (11th Bde, 23d Div D+32 to D+56)

3d Sqdn, 5th Cav

1st Bn, 77th Armor

5th Bn, 4th Arty (DS)

1st Bn, 82d Arty (-) 23d Div (Atch) (DS) (D-1)

Co A, 4th Bn, 12th Armor

Co A, 7th Engr

Co P, 75th Ranger

298th Sign Co
 Co B, 23d Med Bn, 23d Div (OPCON D+31 to D+48)
 75th Support Bn
 Trp F, 8th Cav (OPCON D+2 to D+67)
 11th Bde, 23d Inf Div (OPCON 101st Abn Div (Amb1) D+32 to D+66)
 1st Sqdn, 1st Cav (OPCON 1st Bde, 5th Inf Div (Mech) D-1 to
 D+56) (OPCON 101st Abn Div (Amb1 D+67)
 2d Bn, 1st Inf (D+21)
 4th Bn, 3d Inf, 23d Inf Div (OPCON 1st Bde, 5th Inf Div (Mech)
 D-1 to D+56)
 H Troop, 17th Cav
 Co C, 26th Engr Bn
 6th Bn, 11th Arty (-)
 Btry C, 1st Bn, 82d Arty
 Btry C, 6th Bn, 11th Arty
 Btry A, 3d Bn, 82d Arty
 11th Spt Bn (Prov)
 Hq, USASUPCOM - DNG
 26th GSG
 8th Trans Gp
 39th Trans Bn
 57th Trans Bn
 Co C, 11th Motor Trans Bn (+)
 2d Maint Bn
 63d Maint Bn
 FSA Maint Bn
 FSA 26-1
 FSA 26-2

13 FEB - CA FOR 71st was cancelled so I and another ship piloted by CW2 Bob Rensh were reassigned to a log mission in Laos. After calling Red Lion and confirming tubes clear, I led our flight of two out to Laos. Controls were given over to my pilot, a 2nd tour CPT - to give him some flight lead experience from left seat. Upon reaching Alouie HE was exploding everywhere. As we dove to avoid a gun target line, my pilot didn't see the dead side of a tree and blew out my chin bubble. I was picking shards of plexiglass out of my face and legs for a couple of months. I was told to get treated by a medic to get a purple heart, but I didn't think a few scratches warranted it when some of my friends died to earn theirs. I went to R&R in Thailand the next day!