

the commander of the 229th AHB, prior to taking command of the 1/21st FA. Jones replacement was LTC Lewis McConnell, who was one of the very few Transportation Corps officers who commanded combat aviation battalions.

8 Apr

Possibly the single most heroic act of the entire Loc Ninh/AnLoc operation occurred mid-morning when Cpt John Whitehead, D/229, flying an OH-6, rescued 9 personnel evading south from Loc Ninh to An Loc. Responding to a radioed SOS from four American advisors, CPT Whitehead landed under withering enemy fire only to have his aircraft swamped by desperate ARVN soldiers seeking to escape the surrounded town of Loc Ninh. CPT Bill Leach, Blue Max 26 from F/79 AFA remembers thinking the little bird was lost in a cloud of dust and intense ground fire. However, with 9 people clinging to the aircraft and enemy fire increasing, Whitehead skipped, bounced and forced the OH-6 into the air. The aircraft was out of the center of gravity (CG) limits and would not fly level. Once clear of the fire, Whitehead landed the aircraft, and the 9 were placed on larger aircraft and evacuated. The mission was flown with M-24 gas masks, because a preceding B-52 strike had mixed CS with HE, and the gas was floating over the PZ. Nobody's mask fit and it was the first time, any of the majority of the pilots and crews had ever put the protective gear on. Whitehead's crew chief, SGT Ray Waite had been thrown out of the OH-6 by the ARVN and was hanging on to the skids. He hung on to the skids until the aircraft landed. The crewchief was having intense difficulty breathing while hanging under the aircraft, but could not adjust the gas mask, because both hands were required to hold on to the skids. In 1993, John Whitehead reflected that if he had flown on to Lai Khe, the crew chief would have perished, but he would not have known about it because of the chaos of having 9 in an aircraft built for 4. Whitehead was nominated for the Medal of Honor, and received the Distinguished Service Cross. The CE also received the Distinguished Service Cross.

10 May 1972

CH-47A 64-13157 YT 168 032

362 ASHC CPT Barry Coley Tomlin/1LT Samuel Harrell

United 157 was a flight of four Chinooks that picked up the 3d Bde (1st Cav) infantry troops at the Sandy Pad at Bien Hoa Army Base. The troops were being taken to Vung Tau for a three day incountry R&R.. As 157 neared Long Thanh North airfield, other Chinooks in the flight described 157 as exploding like a lightbulb flash. Since there had been an increase in NVA activity at An Loc, the aircraft was thought to have been shot down. The remaining CH-47's sped from the area. It was learned later that the Chinook had a material failure of a blade retaining pin. 5 crewmen and 27 soldiers were lost.

11 May 1972 1205 hours

AH-1G F/79 AFA 68-15009 XT 755 872 (An Loc)

CPT Rodney Lynn Strobbridge/CPT Robert John Williams

Shot down by an SA-7 missile in AH-1G #68-15009, 1233 hours, over An Loc at XT 755 872

Might have been a survivable tail boom loss, several thought they may have gotten out landed upright, didn't burn wasn't there when ARVNs

24 May 1972, 1425 hours

AH-1G 67-15836 F/79 AFA XT 768 786 F/79 AFA

CW2 Isaac Yoshiro Hosaka/CW2 John Robert Henn Jr.

Shot down by an SA-7 missile in AH-1G #67-15836, south of An Loc near the village of Tan Khai at XT 768 786

13 June 1972, 0905 hours

AH-1G 69-15095 XT 763 790

A/229 AHB WO1 Josh Dunigan/CPT F. John Bowers

Dunigan was "White 2" in a flight of 5 UH-1H's. Flight was inserting troops in the vicinity of Tan Khai and took fire in and out of the LZ. White 1 WO1 Bill Nuess/CPT Jim Orahoad flared hard into the LZ because of the speed needed to outwit the NVA gunners. After dropping the ARVNs the flight made a left turn out of the LZ for a southerly departure. The aircraft were in a loose 120 knot treetop gaggle when White 2 was hit. With the aircraft losing power, the cockpit filling with smoke, Josh Dunigan initiated a high speed low level autorotation, which was successful to a point 3 feet above the ground. Because Josh could not tell the depth of the elephant grass he had pulled all available pitch at an altitude of 3 feet. 095 slammed hard vertically and spread the skids, with the only injury being the door gunner's back. Josh immediately informed lead that "White 2's down in the LZ." Dunigan and his crew were immediately rescued by "White 5," CW2 Vickery. Within minutes Comet 67, the OPS officer for F troop was in the vicinity of the crash site with a pink team, and the "Browns,"* ready to initiate aircraft recovery. However, the intensity of the ground fire and the condition of 095, made recovery too dangerous for the slow lumbering procedure required when the Chinook hovers over the downed aircraft for recovery. 095 was abandoned, but her crew survived.

* The "Blues" from the Air Cav Troops normally provided security for aircraft recovery. Other than the aircrews and the advisors, no other Americans were allowed to be on the ground during this battle, so ARVN were used in place of the "Blues" and were called the "Browns."

20 June 1972 0825

AH-1G 67-15718 XT 769 770

F/79 AFA 1LT Shields/CPT Northrup

1LT Stephen Edward Shields/Cpt Edwin Gilbert Northrup
Shot down by heavy anti-aircraft fire in AH-1G #67-15718, 0955 hours, at XT 769 770, also in the vicinity of Tan Khai.

LTC Lew McConnell, Bn Cdr-229th, went to extract the pathfinders south of a creek bed. Pink team was covering McConnell, when a puff of white smoke went off under his aircraft. Three Blue Max aircraft were in the area; Causey and Funk were lead, Shields and Northrup were in the second aircraft, and Leach was in three. All Cobras were flying low level at high speed, when Shields and Northrup were hit by .51 cal fire. They went straight in with such impact that their bodies were thrown out of the aircraft. Causey/Funk were also in the area and took 12.7 hits aft of the cockpit. Also an RPG went through all rocket pads and damaged primary hydraulic and nitrogen accumulator. Crew successfully landed the aircraft.

20 June 1972

AH-1G #67-15670 from F/9 CAV with 1LT Breuer/CW2 Townsend on board was hit by an SA-7 missile and lost at XT 776 768.

21 June 1972

F/79 AFA CPT Brown/CPT Cordonne

Hit by SA-7 missile at 4000 feet, tailboom separated, aircraft crashed into trees. This was the first Cobra crew to survive a SA-7 missile hit and survive. (see following statement by Brown)

24 June 1972

AH-1G #68-15206 developed flight control problems during a night maintenance flight, 2340 hours, and crashed into a river west of Long Binh at YS 048 915

Speculation was that the pilot purposely crashed the aircraft into the Dong Ngai river in order to give the appearance that he was lost in the crash, and he had other plans. Plans failed, he didn't get out the aircraft in time, drowned and was found down river floating in his shorts-no flight suit.