

Assault Helicopter Battalion April-June 1972

An Loc 2
SPM STA

5 Apr, 1530 hrs

1, 67-15594 XU 746054 (Loc Ninh)

1st Windeler Jr./CPT Henry Merso Spengler III KIA

wing ship was flown by Cpt Bill Leach. Section was launched from Song Be. NVA wire team was seen in the open laying wire. On climbout the AH-1G was hit by ground fire and caught fire. Windeler asked Leach to check where the aircraft was hit. Leach told him he was on fire and to land immediately. On approach to the ground, the AH-1G took fire again, Windeler extended his approach as the fire got worse. As the aircraft descended to 100', Leach encouraged Windeler to expedite; by then the fire was in the cockpit behind Windeler. Spengler, in the front seat, had his radio selector on UHF, intended to be on intercom, and could be heard by Leach to be hollering at Windeler to get the aircraft down. The aircraft exploded at 50'; the crew was lost. The crash site was in NVA control and could not be searched to recover the bodies. The crew was designated KIA-bodies not returned (BNR) The remains were returned to US control in 1989, and funeral services were done in Aug 1989, with Spengler being buried at Arlington Cemetery and Windeler in NY state.

8 April 1972

F/9 CAV OH-6A #67-16078

CPT Joseph Richard Harris

Harris was killed just east of the Bu Dop Special Forces camp by NVA automatic weapons fire. He was flying reconnaissance missions around Bu Dop in support of the ARVN evacuation mission by the Chinooks from 362 ASHC "Fly United", 229th AHB, 1st CAV. Harris was known for his blue freckles, which he got as the result of an accident as a teenager when he was loading shotgun shells. He had not put the pellets in the shell, when the powder went off and inbedded in his face. He was 6'2" and weighed 220. As this was occurring, a CH-47A took a load of 108 Vietnamese out and was hit in the main rotor blades on departure. Since Bu Dop was not secure, and surrounded by NVA, the CH-47 lumbered to Song Be and passengers offloaded. An immediate postflight inspection revealed that the blades had to be changed before the aircraft could be flown any further. CPT Tom Wallace was the CH-47A aircraft commander. Blades were flown up and the flight crews, maintenance personnel and anybody else standing around helped the crews manually change the blades. The task took about 5 hours and was completed in time to return to the 362d's homebase at Long Thanh North in the dark.

Cpt Mike Sloniker and WO1 Joe Layman, A/229th, were over the OH-6 crash site when the crew chief was being brought up the hoist by a 1st Cav Dustoff. The Dustoff pilot received a Silver Star for the rescue that was conducted under heavy fire. The A/229th crew was flying the overall commander of the evacuation effort, LTC Keaton, at Bu Dop. Keaton, a master Army aviator, was commanding the 1/21st Field Artillery Battalion, at the time. When he DEROS'ed, he was replaced by LTC Ira Jones. Jones was

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→ WO1 Robert B. Gentry

06 Feb 49 08 Feb 71

Orlando FL

05W87

Bob Gentry was killed during a combat assault into LZ Hotel on the first day of Lam Son 719. His copilot was WO1 Burch, CE was Pat Wade and the Gunner was Lee Fairchild. As the aircraft lifted off the LZ, a two man NVA machine gun team at the ten o'clock position fired several rounds into the nose section near Gentry. Pat Wade killed the two NVA and Burch was able to gain control of the ship that almost crashed. Luckily the aircraft was over a very steep incline and took no more fire. The automatic weapons that hit Gentry, destroyed his cyclic, the radios and several hydraulic lines. Wade and Fairchild lowered Gentry's seat back and administered first aid. Fairchild stayed with Gentry, while Burch crawled back into Gentry's seat to assist Burch with the pedals. Gentry had lost a lot of blood during the short flight back to Khe Sahn, and due to the destroyed radio, Burch had no contact with the ground. After avoiding several mid-air over Khe Sahn, Burch was able to put the aircraft down at POL. Gentry was placed on another aircraft, barely alive. After the crew secured their damaged aircraft, they were flown to Quang Tri, where they learned that Bob had died. Fairchild passed this information to Gentry's dad in the summer of 1989. Fairchild also wrote a moving poem that says "I was holding his head when life left his eyes."

There is a building in Orlando FL, Gentry's hometown, named after him.

Source: Lee Fairchild Dec 89/Fred Thompson Jan 90/Mike Sloniker May 91/Bill Early Jul 91

PFC Gary T. Padilla

7 Nov 49 03 Mar 71

Sacramento CA

04W20

Gary was the gunner on CPT Bill Early's ship when Early was a Dolphin platoon leader. He came to the 174th after having been in the Infantry for 5 months. On March 3d he was the gunner on Cpt John Bishop's ship, UH-1H #68-15639, copilot was 1lt Carl Flemer, and SP4 Larry Rhodes was the CE. The aircraft was part of an afternoon combat assault from Khe Sahn to LZ Lolo in Laos. Due to the enormous amount of confusion in the landing zones, smoke, and intense enemy fire, the aircraft erroneously landed to smoke that had been thrown by the NVA and was destroyed. Gary was the only casualty. Flemer escaped and evaded (E&E) 10 miles back to an ARVN firebase near the border and was reported alive to the 174th by the end of the 3d. It was a few days later before the survival of Bishop and Rhodes was learned. Gary's body was recovered when the area had been secured by the ARVN.

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Source: Fred Thompson, Sep 89, Bill Early Jul 1991.

WO1 Steven R. Burch

15 Jun 51 05 Mar 71

St Paul MN

04W23

WO1 Patrick D. Erb

07 Jul 49 15 Mar 71

Sylmcar CA

04W48

This was WO1 Erb's first aircraft commander mission. On 25 Feb 71 they were resupplying troops on or near a pinnacle LZ (LZ Scotch), which is near the Rockpile. Scotch was obscured by smoke from Laos, had marginal visibility, dead trees around the approach and departure that limited maneuvering. A major firefight was being fought at the base of the pinnacle, and the aircraft was advised to expedite departure. The aircraft took fire on climb out, exploded, caught fire, and fell to the ground among the trees. The CE, SP4 Bricker, and the Gunner, SP4 Mike Walsh were blown out of the burning aircraft. Walsh heard someone cry out and found Birch. He carried Birch to a log, that they hid behind until rescued by the Infantry. Simultaneously, Bricker, who was badly burned cried out for Walsh to get him, but Walsh could not, because of the intensity of the enemy fire. The Infantry, came down the hill and assisted in the recovery of the crew to the mountain top, where they were flown out. During the crash, the pilots rode the aircraft in and were unable to get out the burning aircraft from the front. They both had to run through the fire and were severely burned. They were able to walk away from the aircraft under their own power and were taken to the hospital at Quang Tri by a following 174th aircraft. Both pilots had burned their lungs running through the fire and succumbed to pneumonia weeks later in Japan, which was commonplace, and the reason they were in Japan and not shipped back to the states for recovery. Erb was in the bed next to Walsh, when he died. Walsh and Bricker were sent to the Burn Center at Brooke Army Hospital, Ft Sam Houston TX. Walsh was the least damaged of the four, but was medically retired from active duty. Bricker's fate was not as good. Bricker lost his testicles in the fire. He broke off his marriage engagement soon after being visited in the burn center by his fiancée. Walsh made a valiant but futile effort to raise Bricker's spirits. Bricker's fate today is unknown

Source: Fred Thompson Sep 89/Bill Early Jul 91/COL Bob Berk, Pentagon, June 1992 who was an attending nurse in the burn ward that they were treated in. Fred Thompson and Mike Walsh phone conversation-May 1993. Mike Walsh VHPA reunion Jul 1993, Phoenix.

First Sergeant Harry Kendall Harris

01Mar 71

PA

03W115

1SG was an E-7 who had been in job for short period when he died. He asked to fly as a gunner with the Sharks, and on the day of the accident, he had just been woken to prepare for the flight. He always demonstrated a deep concern for the welfare of the company. Although he would have side effects he would donate blood at the dispensary. Prior to being assigned to the unit,

while it was temporarily assigned to Quang Tri for LAMSON 719, he had asked for a delay in his reassignment to Vietnam for compassionate reasons and had been denied.

Source: Fred Thompson May 91/Dale Spratt Jul 91/Yogi Reeves Jul 92

CSM George T. Williamson CE on Dolphin 284 and 490, April 1970-April 1971 May 93

SP4 Wayne W. Baggett

14 Mar 50 11 Apr 71

Tampa FL 04W117

Wayne Baggett was killed near Easter Sunday. Baggett's ship was hit by an RPG round as it was lifting off from an LZ east and north of Duc Pho. One of the aircraft's passengers was a chaplain who had just conducted Easter services for the infantry. The chaplain, Baggett and others lost their lives; Baggett was the only 174th AHC casualty.

Source: Lee Fairchild Dec 89

WO1 Allan L. Harris

12 Dec 48 29 Aug 71

Ettwanda CA 02W05

Big Al was the only casualty in a UH-1M that was bounced midday to cover an extraction NW of LZ Professional. Aircraft commander was Chuck Blake. All deaths are tragic and sometimes senseless. This one was hard because the Americal was standing down, and everybody's thoughts were of going home or being reassigned to another unit. The pilots that flew in LAMSON 719 were very noticeably quiet and reserved after the loss of Big Al. Bill Wilder was the CE.

Source: Mike Sloniker and memorial service leaflet. Oct 88.

PFC Emil M. Miltnovich

24 Jan 53 26 Sep 71

Rock Springs WY 02W25

Max was the gunner on Cpt Keith Deans aircraft, UH-1H #522. He was killed by hostile fire while the aircraft was at a hover over a single ship hover hole SE of LZ Professional. The weather was rainy, overcast and windy. The aircraft took multiple hits with only one KIA, Max. Numerous other Dolphin aircraft had made landings and takeoffs out of that hover hole prior to the incident. This attack caused the launch of four more Shark guns to assist the two already on station.

#522 went from Chu Lai to Can Tho to Bien Hoa from Oct 71 to Mar 72. The aircraft was last seen in A/229th AHB 1st Cav in Jun 72.

Bill Wilder talked to Max's dad in Jan 90, which was the father first contact with anyone who knew his son before he died.

Source: Mike Sloniker Oct 88/Bill Wilder Jan 89/Morgan Mills Jul 91/the memorial service leaflet.