

Lam Son 719

It was going to be a large artillery raid, what else could it be? "Charlie Horse", C/3/17 Air Cav, had been assigned specific missions in the early days of Jan 71, and the road conditions on QL 9, a muddy unused road that ran from Quang Tri was the target. Instead of the usual recon performed by the troop, referred to as "Hunter Killer" operations, this assignment was to insert some very nervous military engineer teams, along with the troop's infantry, to inspect the road conditions, culverts and bridges. The inspections continued all the way to Khe San. The logical conclusion for this interest was an artillery raid, a charge out to abandoned Khe Sahn base with a force of mobile tracked heavy artillery. Some pounding of selected targets, and a quick exit after several days. No other reason was considered. We all had locations that warranted a good pounding, places where the NVA were holed up or where the unit had lost aircraft and friends.

In August of 1970, the troop, commanded by Maj Danielson, had been detached from the 3/17 Squadron for a supposed ninety day operation. The deployment from Di An in III CORP to Quang Tri was at the request of MACV, and the troop was attached to 1/5 MECH commanded by BG Hill. One of the few officers with any experience in I CORP was Larry Brown, one of the troop's scout pilots who had flown that AO with the 1st CAV earlier in his extended tour, so he briefed the pilots with what to expect in those northern areas, and he lead the gaggle of the troop's choppers northward. The troop traveled rather light thinking that the assignment was temporary, but they would learn otherwise and greatly miss the relative comfort of Di An.

AO recon, support of "Papa" Co. 75 Rangers, and whatever BG

Hill wanted was became the daily mission. The Area of Operation was an historic one. The troop's responsibility was armed visual recon from the South China Sea where the DMZ met the surf, west along the northern most reaches of the I Corp past the abandoned village of Gio Linh and the fire bases that replaced it, past Con Thien where the US Marines fought epic battles, north of the Rock Pile and the Razor Back to the tri-border, and then South. South along the border, past where QL 9 crossed into Laos, past the abandoned Special Forces camp at Lang Vei. Then an easterly turn with Khe Sahn in view to the north and following the Da Krong River past "Sarge" and "Vandigrift" till the sea was met. Nice Place. All this belonged to an unsupported air cav troop. In the eighteen months that the troop was to remain in that AO, forty-five "Charlie Horse" troopers would lose their lives. Approximately three men a month KIA'd, WIA's were numerous.

Quonset huts that had stood deserted next to the river on the combat base were patched up with plywood and tape to provide shelter but not much comfort. A simple corrugated roofed hut with slat sides were the new "club" and the flight line was just down the muddy road. The "Hitching Post" was rather primitive, but was a happy sight many a day to those of us that lived there. But the pain started right away.

Aug 22 the troop lost Dunaway and Ward, KIA while the scout pilot, CW2 Osborn was wounded. Working north of the Rockpile the scout received heavy fire, went inverted and entered the trees. The fireball that arose gave little hope to crew survival, but Osborn's seat had separated in the crash, and he had only superficial burns on his shoulder. He was recovered later in the day as he wandered dazed down a creek bed. WO Steve Peck volunteered to accompany the ARPS in the recovery mission to recover the remains.

That incident was quickly followed on Sept 15 with the loss of Sp4 Freeman and Meadows KIA, and the scout pilot 1st Lt Bob Montaro WIA. Shot down west of the Rockpile, Lt Montaro was hit in the calf and thigh with .51 rounds, an AK wound in the shoulder while his chicken plate stopped several more AK rounds. WO Jim Moran and WO John Murray flying their Cobras provided cover fire for the insert of the ARPS, and were joined by other aircraft from the troop on a rotating basis for the extract of the wounded and dead. Troop ARPS, once more into the breach.

Sept 22 was the day Spec5 Brooks, another scout crewman was killed.

On Oct 8th, just south of the abandoned Special Forces camp at Lang Vei, and so close to the Laos border that the orbits of the Charliehorse team went transborder, the scout aircraft, piloted by Capt Phil Nelson went down to small arms fire. WO Jim Ross and Nelson were able to land the OH-58 and were OK. Not so the Crew chief Griner who was wounded in the leg. The chase aircraft was still in the process of joining the team due to a refuel stop was some distance away. Capt Chuck Gibson, the team commander, elected to extract the three scout crewmen on his ammo bay doors due to the close proximity to the fighting positions of the NVA. With the three clinging to the open ammo bay doors, he was able to move the crew a short distance away before his Cobra was hit with ground fire, and forced to land. WO Russ Whipple, in the remaining Cobra, was left to cover the downed crews alone, and escorted the Chase ship, piloted by Capt Bob Larkin, the "Bagger" Platoon Leader with Capt Berchell as copilot, into the extraction zone with depleted ammo supplies. Both downed aircraft were destroyed in place rather than risk recovery.

In the space of just over a month the troop had five men killed in action.

On Nov 18 a tail boom separation on final to the active at Quang Tri Combat Base cost Capt Miller and WO Tom Knopik their lives during a check ride. There was nothing the unit check pilot Miller could do with a major airframe failure, a tail boom separation on a practice auto-rotation. A troop Cobra that was in the traffic pattern at the time, piloted by Chuck Gibson, hovered over the downed Huey blowing the flames away from the cockpit as troop members on the ground recovered the two pilots. The aircraft had gone down not far from the troop billet area, so close to home.

The official start to Lam Son 719 was two months away.

What was the troop doing here?

Considering the time that is invested in any military planning, especially any operation of a grand scale, Charlie Horse had been assigned to work for BG Hill, CO of the 1/5 MECH to provide armed recon of the area that would become the operational base for the upcoming Lam Son 719. Supporting the P Co. 75th Rangers whose mission was reflective of the troop's, together the two units performed the preliminary groundwork for the upcoming incursion into Laos. This was an unknown factor until months later.

In late Dec 70 and early Jan 71, road recon along QL 9 was a dominant task required by BG Hill, I/5 MECH Co. He had voiced his interest in the road conditions, the state of the culverts and bridges, and the size of the washouts on that road. Charliehorse was tasked to perform the visual recon, and to insert some very

nervous brigade engineer personnel covered by the troop ARPS, to asses the viability of the road's use. Many of the troop pilots saw this as preliminary work indicating a possible mobile artillery raid out to Khe Sahn, and had targets selected that were both strategic and personal that needed pounding.

At the same time, a large number of missions were spent west of the area where QL 9 turned south just east of the Rock Pile. This valley was to become very expensive for the troop with half a dozen aircraft shot down with losses. The area was referred to as the "Punch Bowl". Who gave it that name is unknown, but the valley was costly real estate paid for in aircraft and blood. This is where the engineer road known as "Red Devil Road" would be cut to interdict to the future location of 3/5 Cav commanded by LTC Osborn would take up a blocking position north of Khe Sahn in Feb 71. As far as the troop was concerned, it was the "Yellow Brick Road" and the "Wizard of Oz" was LTC Osborn.

D/3/5 Air Cav

As the number of units and aircraft arriving at Quang Tri grew, it became abundantly clear that what was in store was not a simple arty raid to KS as we had suspected. Word had it for a time that we were going to invade North Viet Nam. As a troop, I believe to a man, we collectively were amazed when we found that the mission was to move west, occupy KS and support the ARVN with their incursion into Laos. ARVN was arriving in huge numbers, and the little "O" club we shared with A/2/17 AC was teaming with unfamiliar faces. Helicopter units of any description were filling the airfield, camping in the infield and crowding the confines of the clubhouse. Pilots by nature are adventurous group, hilo pilots are more than that. We felt the pressing need to inform these new comers to I CORP that there was a willing enemy out west, and as recent arrivals to this AO as a troop ourselves, a fair warning of

what might be awaiting them was in order. Especially the "C" Model Guns. Some of our AC's were second tour pilots, and flew UH1-C's on their first tour, and they had a fair idea of what it was going to be like for these old birds when southern tactics were used here in a high density anti-aircraft environment. Some didn't want to hear it, some took it to heart. Charlie Horse had been informed that our troop designation was now D/3/5 AC, and the HQ had transferred the troop to become part of the 3/5 CAV under LTC Osborn. We also were to stay east of the border and support the defense of KS against any possible ground effort the NVA might make against the American bases. This would require that the main thrust of our recon to be in the tri-border and east to FSB Fuller. Additional effort would be recon to the south to the limit of the A/2/17 area of responsibility protecting the QL 9 route. This was also to include anything that BG Hill desired in the way of special requirements.

KILO SIERRA

Feb 5 1971, the first helicopter loss of the Lam Son 719 Operation was from Charlie Horse's gun platoon. A team from P 75th Rangers, six men on the Khe Sahn plain, requested assistance with an NVA force near their location. The troop responded with a team consisting of two "Assassin" Cobra guns, a "Kamikaze" scout in a '58, and a UH1-H "Bagger" chase with five of the troop's "blues" on board. The weather that morning was awful, low clouds with limited visibility requiring the team to proceed low level in trail up the valley from VANDY on QL 9 and not sparing the horses. Skimming the treetops while following the road was dangerous unto itself, and the enemy was anywhere along the route waiting a good chance to hammer the flight as it passes. As Khe Sahn was approached from the east, the terrain rose quickly and wound up the face of the last hills before the plateau came into view. As

altitude was gained, the clouds swirled creating a classic sucker hole that opened and closed tantalizingly with the surrounding hills invisible and deadly. The scout leading the flight, WO Forbes, followed by the first Cobra, Capt Jim Jackson, got through to clear air. Not so the second Cobra. The forth in the flight, the Huey, went IFR, and only the most fleeting vision of a passing hilltop gave ground reference clear enough to decelerate and reverse course with a lowered airspeed and recovery. WO Wood, the AC in the second Cobra, along with WO Paul, his front seat, had disappeared into the clouds and found their mountain. Both killed instantly. While the mission was completed, the loss of the Cobra and crew was made worse as the crash site was not located until the next day when the weather cleared enough to enable a search team to spot the site in a dense thicket of bamboo. There had been hope that they had a forced landing and would be recovered but it was not to be. The Cobra had gone into the bamboo in what seemed to be a steep angle, leaving little evidence of it's presence to be spotted from the air, and had been invisible the previous day as it was above the cloud level. Recovery was made by the troop's blues in very difficult terrain. Charlie Horse would employ the blues with frequency in the coming months, inserting five men into downed helicopter sites against huge odds. The bravery of those men in the infantry platoon was never in question, and the tasks that they were asked to accomplish were daunting. Five men would exit the Huey unquestioningly to perform their jobs in the most remote areas of the AO. Brave is not a big enough word.

The weather that hampered the recovery of Charlie Horse's first loss since the start of the Lam Son 719 did not improve for the majority of the days the operations continued. Weather ruled that AO. It had also become clear that the engineer road that was being pushed through the Punch Bowl was having some degree of difficulty, not only weather but enemy opposition. Progress was

being made with superhuman effort. QL 9 was showing herself to be a shooting gallery with the heavy truck traffic and fuel tankers running a gauntlet daily. Repair of the old base at Kha Sahn was more than a handful, but the engineers were up to the task. Vandy was a re-arm and re-fuel site very quickly and Mi Loc was operational.

Feb 11, a scout, Capt Riviezzo, was working the northwest side of the Rockpile when he was engaged by .51 and AK fire. He executed what appeared to be an autorotation down the slope and his aircraft disappeared into the tall trees. The guns rolled in as soon as he had slipped from view and were met with green and red tracers. The chase bird, a UH1-H flown by Aircraft Commander WO "Skip" Barger was already into the area the scout was last seen in the hope that a hover hole was possible but was met with ground fire. The Huey sank into the trees and was gone from sight. Radio calls went out from the Cobra guns to the Operations Officer Capt Ken Gingrich who redirected the other team from the troop that was operating to the south and the troop was scrambled to assist. The arrival of the second team, which had limited fuel due to it's own time spent on VR, was on the scene and the scout, WO Wayne Forbes, was working the duel crash sites in spite of the ground fire. Capt Harley Jones, the second team commander, was husbanding fuel and rockets as long as possible in the hope that the troop Cobra teams would arrive before one or the other ran out. When his front seat confirmed that mini-gun and 40mm chunker were expended, and with his rockets all gone, he and the other Cobra proceeded to remain on station to distract the ground fire until help arrived. The team's scout was having his own set of problems. Besides being covered by expended gun-ships, the activity of the team had activated seismic sensors which were designed to alert artillery batteries to enemy activity and friendly fire was impacting the area. Unable to contact the downed crews,

and the ARP's radioman was not transmitting, heavy arty impacting and the guns expended, things were not going well for Charlie Horse.

After what seemed like an eternity, especially for the hoped for survivors on the ground, the troop's available aircraft arrived, and the Cobra teams raced to Mi Loc to rearm. Major Wolfe, the Troop Commander, organized the insert of the unit's blues, ten men, who led by the troop's ARP Platoon Leader Lt Fred Alf, pushed uphill toward the crash sites against unknown odds. Intel had reported that Battalion sized NVA units were working the area.

Meanwhile, at the multiple crash sites, the scout crew had survived the shoot down and the resulting crash. The UH-1 crew was not so fortunate. WO Barger was KIA as was the Crew chief Carroll. Lt Mel Pobre was injured as was the door gunner and all the ARP's. Even while suffering with what later was later diagnosed as a broken back, Capt Riviezzo was able to lead Spec-5 Bunney, his injured Crew chief with a bullet to the leg and dazed from the impact, and the Observer, WO Douglas who had suffered a crushed eye socket, in an escape toward the downed Huey down slope. Fortune smiled when they came upon Lt Mel Pobre, Barger's co-pilot, and soon after, the remaining survivors at the now burning UH-1. He was able to gather the able bodied into a defensive perimeter and were soon reinforced by the blues led by Lt Alf. The recovery of the dead and wounded was assisted by a DMZ Dustoff with a jungle penitration, something missing in the Charliehorse inventory. The Dustoff bird hovered for twenty minutes as the troop guns provided covering fire, rotating to re-arm at Mi Loc as a freshly armed teams arrived. The ARPS, along with the walking wounded, retreated down the hill to a clearing and were extracted with troop lift aircraft. The two killed, and all the survivors WIA, left many bunks empty in QT that night.

Nine days later the troop was reduced by two more of the Gun

XEB 20

Platoon pilots KIA. Charlie Horse had a "Hunter Killer" team working the Tri- Border area north of 3/5 CAV's location at the "Emerald City" when they were engaged by multiple .51 positions which shot down both Cobra guns. Capt Al Wester was able to execute a forced landing, and he and his front seat, Capt Paul Carter, were able to exit the aircraft and were recovered by the UH-1 flown by WO Fred Blanchard. 1st Lt John Hunter and his front seat WO Carl Nacca, also hit by the .51's, were on fire as they impacted the ground. The recovery mission was going to be very difficult with the enemy being very active in that area. In the troop scramble to lift off from positions at Khe Sahn, John Winlow, "Batman 69" climbed into Russ Whipple's Cobra. A fixed wing pilot, he saw the need to man the chopper and assist anyway he could. WO Whipple knew the need to discern as quickly as possible if there were survivors on Lt Hunter's Cobra, as the urgency of the insert needed to be assessed. With a low and slow pass over the burning Cobra while taking fire, both Whipple and Winlow concluded both Hunter and Nacca had been killed instantly, and were beyond assistance. The troop had worked closely with the Batman Foreword Air Controllers, but Winlow had never been this close, he earned added respect from troop members that day. Never leaving anyone behind was SOP in the troop, and this was no exception. Getting a recovery team in and out of that location was fraught with extreme danger, but once again the blues and the aircrews met the challenge with bravery and resolve. More friends to be mourned.

Aircraft and crew losses were affecting the troop's ability to perform, and while heroic efforts were being made by all members of the Maintenance Platoon and the Avionics Section, replacement aircraft that were arriving were less than wonderful in their condition and airworthiness. Scout aircraft in particular were becoming hard to find. The Bell 58 was the workhorse of the

Scout Platoon, and the losses of these little birds, along with the loss of the Cobras was a mounting problem. Units in the south, not involved in the Laos Operation were being levied for aircraft to replace the choppers lost by all the units facing frightening attrition in Laos, and our own missions in support of that operation. Needless to say, they weren't sending their best. I suppose that is understandable but some of the tired horses we were in receipt of were of low quality....hanger queens.

With the troop's responsibilities covering such a large and active AO, BG Hill saw fit to assign an Artillery Forward Observer to the unit to aid as needed in accurate and knowledgeable adjustment of assets of the 1/5 MECH. 1st Lt Al Thornton, an FO from 5th Bn/4th Arty was the lucky selection made by Col. Ridgeway, his Bn CO. He was a valuable asset, and his accurate adjustments destroyed many bunker lines and fighting positions all along the DMZ to the joy of whoever he flew with. This freed up Cobra time and risk, and insured destruction of enemy positions that would otherwise have provided safe haven for the enemy.

20 FEB
Three days after the loss of Hunter and Nacca, ground fire claimed another Charlie Horse scout crew, and in the same area, the Tri-Border. The level of enemy activity in that area had LTG Sutherland and BG Hill wary of a possible NVA ground assault that would endanger the combat base. The 122mm rocket attacks, and ground probes by Sappers, had the KS inhabitants on constant edge. Charlie Horse spent airtime in the Tri-Border daily, and ground fire was constant in all caliber.

Feb 23rd, while searching for 122mm rocket sites, WO Steve Hiscock called out, "Taking fire, taking fire", and as the guns rolled in to cover his escape, appeared to just run out of rotor RPM and crash. The Scout Crew Chief was Spec. Arementrout, who had

recently volunteered from the Lift Platoon for scout duty, and the Observer Walerzak, along with Hiscock were all killed instantly as the aircraft rolled and exploded on ground contact. The troop was by this time holding joint memorial services as time permitted and down time was available.

By the middle of March, it was painfully evident that things were not going according to plan with the ARVN in Laos. From the troop's vantage point on a small hilltop south of the HQ bunker at KS, Charlie Horse was witness to the return of the aircraft from the FSB's in Laos. Ranger North and Lolo were reducing the air assets of the proud units that had arrived just over a month ago. Sharing the re-fuel and re-arm sites at Khe Sahn with the many units that had deployed in support of this incursion, stories were shared that bordered on the unbelievable. Back at Quang Tri, the mood was somber in the little shack we referred to as the "Officer's Club". Losses were being spoken of in hushed terms, but the morning came and all mounted up and continued to carry on.

The loss of WO Steve Peck KIA on Mar 15 to a .51 while near Lang Vei further reduced the list of seasoned scout pilots available to work the AO. Joe Roberts, an Air Force "Barky" FAC had reported a 37mm and multiple .51's and had a flight of F-4's stacked up at altitude. All he needed was to gain their location and the fast movers were ready to unload. Only in the area for a short time, the scout was engaged by a .51 hitting Steve, passing through his chicken plate and his armored seat. WO Rossiter who was piloting the OH-58 managed to get the aircraft down even with the battle damage it had incurred, and the chase bird evacuated Steve to Bravo Med at Khe Sahn. It was futile. The ARP team securing the downed 58 were subjected to an inadvertent bomb run by one of the F-4 fast movers due to what was referred to as a "communications mistake". The bombs passes directly through the

orbiting Charliehorse team covering the ARPS. Escaping with concussion injuries, the ARPS were recovered by a troop Huey.

Steve had been to the Monterey Language School. Seemed like he should have been somewhere else.

Mar 24, 71, another bad day. The Tri-Border, the miserable, bloody Tri-Border. Concern continued for a possible advance of a strong force of NVA coming across the border north of KS had Charlie Horse working a visual armed recon right on the line. Many hundreds of 122mm rockets impacting KS and ground contact by elements of 3/5 CAV resulting in large body counts of NVA while taking US losses, had put a high priority on the troop's daily presence in this danger zone.

WO Jim Ross had his airspeed up in the OH 58 at treetop level, as was now the norm working this hot area, but he was blown out of the sky with an RPG to his tail boom regardless. The ground fire was intense, and .51's were numerous. The scout had rolled on impact, and the crash site was on a hillside. While the Cobra's covered his insert, WO Jerry Lay brought the UH-1 in between what hills seemed to give some defilade from the heavy machinegun fire. The five ARP's jumped from the aircraft as it slowed enough to make the dangerous exit. Ground fire was intense but the damaged Huey managed to carry the crew a short distance to a safe forced landing. Any view of Ross's crash site had been limited and there was no sight of any apparent survivors.

All Charlie Horse aircraft were by this time proceeding to the contact site from where ever they had been, be it Khe Sahn or Quang Tri. In this type of situation, fast response is necessary before the enemy can marshal enough organized force to exploit an opportunity fast developing. Arriving piecemeal, not an optimum plan, found events unfolding in fast order, and not well for Charlie Horse. While the Cobra team covering Ross were engaging the

multiple anti-aircraft positions, Capt Jimmy Jackson's Cobra had his attitude indicator removed compliments of a .51 passing through the cockpit and disabling the electronics controlling his weapons systems. Undeterred, he and the other Cobra commanded by Capt Paul Carter, continued to suppress fire. The first aircraft to arrive was the troop's Scout Platoon Leader, Capt Cocker in a OH 58. As he was descending to provide visual contact, he was engaged by another .51 at about 200ft, inverted, went down and burned. It was clear to those present that there was little likelihood of any survivors in that aircraft, so the focus of what limited assets were available was directed toward the ARPS at the Ross crash site.

The next aircraft on site was a UH-1 commanded by WO Jeff Bavar. WO Bavar was intent on getting his ARP's on the ground as near to the first crash site as possible, and terminating his approach 20ft, he found that there was no possible place to descend. At this point, with expended ammo and disabled weapon systems, Capt Jackson was covering the insert by the Huey with his .45 shooting out of his open canopy. Two of the ARP's, not realizing that he was going to attempt another location, leaped from the aircraft expecting the rest of the team to follow. Taking fire and struggling with the Huey, he didn't realize that they had exited the aircraft until he had moved some distance from the area they had jumped from. WO Whipple arrived quickly thereafter and took his Cobra down to a high hover over the two radio less ARPS, and directed them with hand signals in what direction to proceed to link up with friendlies on the ground. All the while, ground fire continued.

Jim Ross, in the meantime, found himself to be the only survivor of the initial shoot down. His crew chief and observer were both KIA from gunshots and the effects of the crash. Despite a severely broken ankle, a crushed hand and a deep facial cut, managed to

extract himself from the wrecked 58, and ascend the hill to link up with the ARP team inserted by Lay. From that position, they exchanged hand grenades with the enemy in close vicinity.

WO Randy Fisher now arrived in a UH-1 with a five man ARP squad, and effected the extract of Jerry Lay and his crew from the downed Huey that was a half mile away from the concentrated action around the Ross and the Coker downed scout aircraft . With thirteen men on board he had his hands full.

At this point, the troop commander, Maj Wolfe coming at all possible speed from Quang Tri in the front seat of a Cobra piloted by Capt Bob Barthelmess, called off the piece meal attempts being made by the singularly arriving troop aircraft, and directed the efforts be delayed until some organization could be brought to bear in a combined assault. As he was enroute to the crash sites, he had contacted the 1/5th Commander, BG Hill, and the 71st AHC, 14th

CAB, the "Rattlers" and the "Firebirds" were quickly levied to affect the extraction of the Charlie Horse dead. This element of the 101st performed a combat assault into the crash sites and recovered all the Charlie Horse KIA's. This included the three KIA at Capt Coker's scout crash site, and the two KIA from Ross's scout.

*BDE AND
OFFICER
MAJ TOMMY
STINER*

During this courageous effort they lost two aircraft. Without their timely assistance, Charlie Horse would have been hard pressed to execute such an effort in the depleted condition the troop was in. While it may be difficult at such a time to be told internal troop assets were inadequate to perform the extract of the our own troopers, the timely arrival of the 71st AHC, 14th CAB was instrumental and necessary to do that mission.

Later that day at the 18th Surgical Hospital at Quang Tri, troopers visiting to say their good-by's to Jim Ross were informed he had also broken his back. We all wished him a healthy recovery, and

had a toast at his bedside.

For their courage and bravery in that assigned mission, all the Air Craft Commanders from the 71st AHC received well deserved Distinguished Flying Crosses.

Charlie Horse closed that day's chapter with many Purple Hearts.
WIA: Jim Ross.

KIA: Capt Coker, SGT Bauer, SGT Beckwith, SP4Neal, PFC Walters.

Toward the end of March the operation was winding down with the ARVN finding their way out of Laos. Aviation units were being removed to their home locations south. The troop Lift Platoon was performing extractions of ARVN soldiers in the ones and two as they were found making their way out of Laos. These extracts were performed at great risk but these men could not be left to fend for themselves as most were weaponless and vastly demoralized.

March 28th found a P 75th Ranger team on a hilltop just north of QL 9 in contact with an undisclosed enemy force and requesting immediate extraction. Charlie Horse responded with a heavy team of Cobra guns, scout, and two UH-1 slicks. As fate would have it, the first UH-1 into the saddle of the hills was commanded by WO Jerry Lay, the same aircraft commander who had been forced down four days earlier in the Tri-Border. While the ranger team hurried aboard, small arm fire was hitting the Huey, and an AK round went through Jerry's upper left arm. More hits on the aircraft as it exited the zone wounded the crew chief Cisz and the door gunner Martinez, and reduced the aircraft's ability to maintain flight. A successful forced landing was performed on an island in the middle of the Da Krong River by the co-pilot WO Angotti. Once again it was WO Fisher that came in to rescue Lay, his crew and all the rangers. A seasoned aircraft commander, crew chief and gunner off

the rolls. Another Charlie Horse aircraft lost.

March ended with no more losses, but plenty of activity to occupy the troop.

As the forces at Khe Sahn were reducing quickly, and assets moved back to Quang Tri and points south, the enemy moved in right behind the exiting friendlies. There were huge amounts of logistics abandoned by the retreating ARVN. Pallets of artillery rounds, small arms ammo, hand grenades, to say nothing of the fleets of rolling stock including trucks, personnel carriers and tanks left in Laos. April saw the loss of one of the troop's Scout Crew Chiefs when Sgt Minchy was grievously wounded by small arms fire while performing Armed Recon along the DMZ on April 15th. The reduction of the air assets that had assisted in the visual/armed recon during Lam Son had returned the entirety of the AO for this mission back to Charlie Horse. The troop was rebuilding the skills, required in both pilots and crews, that had been reduced in the ranks of all the platoons. There were many new faces. All losses were sorely felt.

Charlie Horse now was busy in the Khe Sahn area, inserting the blues, led by Lt Alf, to blow the pallets of high explosives and whatever else they could destroy to deny the enemy these assets. The abandoned TOC at Khe Sahn was a convenient storage point used by the NVA to gather what they found. This was abruptly pointed out when Capt Bill Allen, a troop scout, had his crew chief pitch a white phosphorus grenade into the entry. As he hovered away, an enormous explosion exposed the location of a hidden cache the NVA had stored there and almost resulted in the loss of the scout. The radio relay/observation post "Hickory", northwest of Khe Sahn, was reporting truck traffic at night in the Khe Sahn vicinity. The NVA were driving about with their lights on. It was

out of range of the 175mm's at Camp Carroll so all they could do was watch, especially if the weather was marginal, which it proved to be. Monitoring the activity in and around the now abandoned base was a daily mission assignment for the Charlie Horse "Hunter Killer" teams. The area was being defended aggressively by the day with .51 and 23mm anti aircraft, and at times it was a roll reversal as to was doing the hunting and who was doing the killing. Ground fire was a daily expectation for the recon teams, and tactics had been adjusted to counter this changing environment.

The losses by all units during the Lam Son 719 of the OH-58 Bell Ranger had them in short supply. The troop transitioned to the Hughes OH-6, and the 58 was not missed by the majority of the scout platoon. The survivability of the Hughes was tested on May 3 when small armes fire peppered the Loach flown by Capt Marty Gronburg just east of Khe Sahn, killing the newly arrived Scout Platoon Leader, Capt Derrill Burnside, and wounding the crew chief Mike Duffy.

The scout platoon had been severely stricken during the recent operation, and the experienced scouts were working hard to pass the required skills to the newly arrived pilots. The enlisted crewmembers were working hard as well. There was a bond that developed between the pilots and their crews, none was stronger than in the scouts. Reflexive teamwork was necessary to successfully function in that close action scouts found themselves in, and the troop had few proficient scout pilots and scout crew chiefs to rely on. Missions that were perceived to be more dangerous than others fell to fewer and fewer qualified crews. WO Forbes, Capt Allen and WO Roth were called on with frequency that belied reason to reflect survivability. Capt Gronburg was a second tour scout, and a valuable asset. WO Tom Bell, WO William Halevy and WO Steve Hanson were on their

first tours, but were gaining time and experience fast. The platoon patch, "Kamikaze" reflected the dedication, hopefully not the outcome.

Not only Charlie Horse, but new teams with P Co, 75 Ranger were training extensively. The piedmont areas and the foothills just west of Quang Tri were areas of enemy activity. Enemy individuals and squad sized elements operated with regularity, and offered a target rich environment for the rangers and "white" teams from Charliehorse to gain valuable field experience while operating near the combat base providing security. "White" teams consisted of two OH-6 scouts working in mutual support, and the air time along with experience coordinating with the ranger elements provided combat experience and excellent VR situation reports. When leaving or returning to Quang Tri, the missions heading west made it a habit of checking the radio contact and status of the ranger teams in the close in areas.

On May 27, a Charlie Horse team of two Cobra guns, a OH-6 scout and a chase UH1-H were outbound to perform VR around Khe Sahn. One of the Cobra AH1-G aircraft was a recently acquired "heavy" fitted with additional rocket pods, and was commanded by Capt Paul Carter with WO Jerry Foy riding front seat. Capt Jimmy Jackson with copilot WO Marvin Quinn flew the second Cobra. Checking in with the ranger team in passing, a request was made for a demonstration of a potential gun run for training purposes. Capt Carter, flying a fully fueled Cobra, and caring the additional weight of a larger rocket package than he was accustomed to, initiated a simulated gun run. The obvious combination of the fuel and rocket load, combined with the high density altitude present on that day, and what could have been a mechanical shortfall or target fixation, resulted in the impact with the ground at the end of his simulated gun run. Both pilots were killed instantly.

In late April, while flying recon, a Cobra flown by 1st Lt Brian Mitchell and WO Irv Hopkins, the aircraft was engaged and hit with ground fire, resulting in a forced landing, injuring both pilots and the loss of the aircraft.

May, June and July saw an rapid escalation in the enemy activity in the entirety of the areas in the west and along the DMZ. In the Khe Sahn area, NVA engineers were improving the road network. Bulldozers and trucks were observed and destroyed in the Tri-border area. Heavy anti-aircraft fire was a daily hazard, including .51, 23mm and 37mm protecting the enemy efforts. June 5th “Hickory” fell to ground assaults. This observation/radio relay hilltop NE of Khe Sahn had seemed to be impregnable, but the NVA were demonstrating a resolve to have the western AO in their control. The weather during the assault had been terrible with the mountain top in the clouds, but at first light an assessment was made by a Charlie Horse team. Capt Bill Allen, his crew chief Spec 4 George Brennigan and observer, made a hazardless approach onto the now deserted mountain top and found no survivors. June 16th saw FSB “Fuller” over run and occupied by NVA forces that were undeterred by all the airpower, arty and gunship support that could be brought to bare on that hill. While “Fuller” was reoccupied, it’s loss was a demonstration of the level of activity that had been sparked by the failure of the Lam Son 719 Operation. The American and the ARVN forces associated with that operation had left the AO, but 1/5th MECH, 3/5 CAV, P Co 75th Ranger, and all the remaining units, including Charlie Horse, were still immersed in that disaster. A brick had been tossed into a hornet’s nest, and a whirlwind of pain was being harvested.

Aug 12 reflected the level of sophistication the NVA’s weapon system’s had advanced to when a suspected Strella SA-7 was

employed against a team working the area east of "Fuller" along the DMZ. The UH1-H, operating at apx 8000ft AGL, was destroyed with the loss of all onboard. CWO Mack Cockerell, the team commander in a Cobra, along with ----- in the other Cobra, were able to cover the scout piloted by WO Roth, in an assessment of the remains of the Huey to affirm that there were no survivors. With the loss of the ARP squad in the Huey, immediate recovery was impossible. Due to the hazardous location of the crash site near the DMZ, and the high level of enemy activity, higher command refused the deployment of US Forces in the ground recovery of the remains. Concern centered on the possibility of US Forces being captured as there was heavy NVA activity in that area. An ARVN ground cav force entered the area and made the recovery with Charlie Horse Cobra and scout support.

KIA were: L.L. Kelly-aircraft commander, G. Holian-co-pilot, E.S. Kelly-crew chief, L. McCoy-door gunner along with the ARP squad, R.T. Nelson, G.L. Strickland, J.C. Thompson and J. Wright.

The DMZ was getting hotter finding Charlie Horse being directed there by BG Hill with frequency reflective of the increase of NVA movements. The foreword fire support bases were reporting increasing activity along with ground probes resulting in escalating US causalities.

August 24th, Bell-Halevy shootdown.----details coming-----

On Sept4th, while working bunker lines along the beach north of A-1, the most northeastern reaches of SVN, an RPG hit the OH-6 piloted by Capt Marty Gronborg, killing him and his crew chief Sgt Dillenseger. The observer, WO Orcini, WIA, was hit multiple times with small arms fire. All were recovered by the chase aircraft commanded by WO Jeff Bavar.

Later that day, that same UH-1 commanded by WO Jeff Bavar with WO Marvin Quinn as copilot, was forced down north of Khe Sahn when a .51 round impacted the rotor blade's leading edge, removing a sizeable portion of the rotor and forcing an emergency landing. The crew was recovered with troop aircraft.

White teams, two Loaches mutually supporting, were active in the "Backyard", the area close to Quang Tri Combat Base. This provided security for the airfield while monitoring and engaging enemy forces. On Sept 24th, one of the OH-6 aircraft was forced down into some heavy brush resulting in a hard landing. In such close proximity to Quang Tri, with only another Loach in the team, recovery was going to rely on which full team in the AO was able to get to the crash site first. A troop UH-1 arrived from the airfield, but the downed crew was in some tall brush surrounding the river banks and, unable to reach the crew, and having no rope on board, the UH-1 along with the OH-6 insured the near area was secure and waited for assistance. A CH-47 Chinook from the 101st happened to be in the area and had monitored the situation on the radio. The Chinook offered assistance with a jungle penitator with which to move the grounded crew to a clearing where they could be recovered by the troop's waiting UH-1 and be evacuated to the 18th Surg for the minor injuries they had sustained in the forced landing. What seemed like a viable solution to the situation proved fatal to the first two crewmembers extracted when a malfunction or error caused the cable to release them, and they fell to their deaths. WO Steve Hanson and his crew chief Spec 4 E. Hubrins were KIA. The co-pilot, Lt Wagner, was recovered shortly thereafter by troop aircraft. There was of course shock and anger at the senseless loss of these two men, seemingly being plucked from a dire situation which then ended so tragically. The crew of the Chinook truly meant well in their offer of aid, and having the result of that aid end so badly must have borne heavily upon them. War and all it's

consequences are truly Hell.

On Dec 31st, enemy fire brought down the UH-1 flown by the Lift Platoon Leader, Capt Noel Harvey with Lt Neil Flynn as copilot, and the accompanying OH-6 commanded by WO Dwain Herrick. The weather conditions were reminiscent of the day back on Feb 5th 71 and the IFR loss of WO Wood and WO Paul. The Charliehorse team of two AH-1G Cobra Guns, a OH-6, and the following UH1-H were approaching the Khe Sahn area from the east under a low cloud cover. The Huey at the end of the four ship formation was engaged by .51 fire, wounding the door gunner Ronnie Mickle, and forcing the Huey to make an emergency landing just west of the abandoned airstrip into tall grass and trees. All on board survived the forced landing, but as they took up defensive positions around the aircraft, an NVA opened fire at very close range killing the crew chief Robert Denmark with AK fire. Eliminating that threat, they found themselves in very close proximity to a sizeable NVA unit and were rapidly engaged in a fight to keep from being overrun. The troop was scrambling to launch of all available aircraft from Quang Tri, and aircraft already on missions were quickly diverted to assist. The two Cobra guns were providing close fire with 20mm, rockets, 40mm and minigun and were quickly expending their ordinance. The small group on the ground was running out of ammunition and grenades. Using the ARP's radio, Capt Harvey radioed the scout pilot WO Herrick for immediate resupply. Bringing his OH-6 directly over the fight to a hover, his crew chief dropped grenades and ammo into the bomb crater they were fighting from. The scout crew chief, Neil Jones was hit with AK fire and was killed instantly while the aircraft took numerous hits. The scout managed to clear the area and made a forced landing on the Khe Sahn strip.

Three sets of Charliehorse Cobra's were racing to the site as fast as possible. The first team to arrive was low on fuel as they had been diverted from their own VR, so they expended quickly and departed to rearm. Contacting "King" on guard, a C-141 on 24/7 orbit to assist downed aircraft, two "Jolly Greens" were soon in the vicinity. With the arriving Charliehorse AH1-G teams fueled and armed, "King" directed the first Jolly Green team to extract the troopers. Taking intense ground fire in the extraction attempt, the CH-54 had to withdraw with battle damage to Quang Tri accompanied by their wing ship. "King" now had numerous air strikes in progress with air assets stacked and providing continuous bomb runs all over the immediate area. A Charliehorse UH-1 arrived commanded by Capt Joe Hogg, with Lt Alf, the ARP Platoon Leader. He had the aircraft rigged with ropes to attempt an extract if the second team of Jollies were unable to get the troopers out. With multiple Charliehorse gun teams providing close cover, the second set of Jolly Greens extracted all the members of the embattled crew. A Charliehorse UH-1 had recovered the scout crew off the Khe Sahn strip, and both aircraft were destroyed in place.

In the shoot down of the Huey, the crew chief Spec 4 Robert Denmark was KIA. The downing of the loach resulted in Spec 4 Neil Jones KIA. WIA were Capt Harvey, the gunner Ronnie Mickle, and all in the ARP squad, David Trimble, David McMillon, Fernando Figeroa and George Cobb.

Happy New Year Charliehorse.

1972 finds the troop still doing recon monitoring the aftermath of Lam Son 719, and seeing the preparation for the coming Easter Offensive by the NVA.

Jan 20, while returning to Quang Tri, a Charliehorse team started taking concentrated fire over the east end of the Khe Sahn plateau. In trail formation, the lead UH-1 flown by Capt Bill Allen was hit and erupted in flame. His flaming decent into the canyon toward the river was observed by Capt Joe Hogg flying a C&C UH-1. With the two cobra guns were engaging the ambush, Capt Hogg followed the flaming Huey down into the canyon, and exiting the aircraft, accompanied by an RTO, managed to rescue the survivors of that flaming decent.

KIA from wounds or results of the crash and fire were the door gunner David Berdahl, ARP squad members Harry Edwards, Fernando Figeroa, and Walter Moran.

WIA in the UH-1 were Capt Allen, WO Frank Angotti, crew chief Spec 4 Walter Morris, ARP Pvt Dennis Trimble.

WIA during the rescue effort was Capt Hogg.

Ten days later, Capt Hugh Mills lost a tail rotor in a AH-1G north of FSB Fuller resulting in a forced landing and loss of the Cobra. Both he and his front seat John Bryant were WIA and recovered by troop aircraft.

The last mission performed by a Charliehorse aircraft was on Feb 20 and was ironically a med-evac. When a Dustoff aircraft was unable to perform an extract due to darkness and weather in the northern Ah Shaw, BG Hill ordered Charliehorse to make the attempt. Capt Hogg, having a standard ticket, made the successful extraction, concluding the troops eighteen months of "Hunter Killer" operations with a mercy mission.

That concludes the odyssey of the "Charlie Horse" experience in I CORP. Both as C/3/17 and as later redesignated as D/3/5 Air Cav, the troop's mission in I CORP was always tied to the Lam Son 719.

Be it the preliminary recon for the operation, helping to hold the "bridge" open for the return of the American and the ARVN forces to Khe Sahn, or the covering of the withdrawal to the south, Lam Son 719 just seemed to never end. It seemed strange to the troopers that served during this period to never see Charlie Horse listed in the Order of Battle for that operation. It wasn't until 2010 with the assistance of BG Rodney Wolfe(ret) the then Commander of Charlie Horse, and LTC Mike Sloniker (ret), 101st Historian, that Charlie Horse was added to this heroic list of Army Aviation units as a participant. While this may seem to many to be only a small footnote in history, it is well deserved and paid for in the blood of the troopers who served in any capacity with the troop.

The troop was stood down Feb 72, her aircraft dispersed and the troopers delt to other units. The last Troop Commander, Maj Seery, folded the guidon and put it away.

C/3/17 Air Cav

D/3/5 Air Cav

"Now who will stand on either hand and defend this bridge with me?"

HORATIUS

7 KIA prior to the official start of Lam Son 719

15 KIA during Lam Son 719

23 KIA post Lam Son 719

August 1970-February 1972

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Lam Son 719

It was going to be a large artillery raid, what else could it be? "Charlie Horse", C/3/17 Air Cav, had been assigned specific missions in the early days of Jan 71, and the road conditions on QL 9, a muddy unused road that ran from Quang Tri was the target. Instead of the usual recon performed by the troop, referred to as "Hunter Killer" operations, this assignment was to insert some very nervous military engineer teams, along with the troop's infantry, to inspect the road conditions, culverts and bridges. The inspections continued all the way to Khe San. The logical conclusion for this interest was an artillery raid, a charge out to abandoned Khe Sahn base with a force of mobile tracked heavy artillery. Some pounding of selected targets, and a quick exit after several days. No other reason was considered. We all had locations that warranted a good pounding, places where the NVA were holed up or where the unit had lost aircraft and friends.

In August of 1970, the troop, commanded by Maj Danielson, had been detached from the 3/17 Squadron for a supposed ninety day operation. The deployment from Di An in III CORP to Quang Tri was at the request of MACV, and the troop was attached to 1/5 MECH commanded by BG Hill. One of the few officers with any experience in I CORP was Larry Brown, one of the troop's scout pilots who had flown that AO with the 1st CAV earlier in his extended tour, so he briefed the pilots with what to expect in those northern areas, and he lead the gaggle of the troop's choppers northward. The troop traveled rather light thinking that the assignment was temporary, but they would learn otherwise and greatly miss the relative comfort of Di An.

AO recon, support of "Papa" Co. 75 Rangers, and whatever BG Hill wanted was became the daily mission. The Area of Operation was an historic one. The troop's responsibility was armed visual

recon from the South China Sea where the DMZ met the surf, west along the northern most reaches of the I Corp past the abandoned village of Gio Linh and the fire bases that replaced it, past Con Thien where the US Marines fought epic battles, north of the Rock Pile and the Razor Back to the tri-border, and then South. South along the border, past where QL 9 crossed into Laos, past the abandoned Special Forces camp at Lang Vei. Then an easterly turn with Khe Sahn in view to the north and following the Da Krong River past "Sarge" and "Vandigrift" till the sea was met. Nice Place. All this belonged to an unsupported air cav troop. In the eighteen months that the troop was to remain in that AO, forty-five "Charlie Horse" troopers would lose their lives. Approximately three men a month KIA'd, WIA's were numerous.

Quonset huts that had stood deserted next to the river on the combat base were patched up with plywood and tape to provide shelter but not much comfort. A simple corrugated roofed hut with slat sides were the new "club" and the flight line was just down the muddy road. The "Hitching Post" was rather primitive, but was a happy sight many a day to those of us that lived there. But the pain started right away.

Aug 22 the troop lost Dunaway and Ward, KIA while the scout pilot, CW2 Osborn was wounded. Working north of the Rockpile the scout received heavy fire, went inverted and entered the trees. The fireball that arose gave little hope to crew survival, but Osborn's seat had separated in the crash, and he had only superficial burns on his shoulder. He was recovered later in the day as he wandered dazed down a creek bed. WO Steve Peck volunteered to accompany the ARPS in the recovery mission to recover the remains.

That incident was quickly followed on Sept 15 with the loss of Sp4 Freeman and Meadows KIA, and the scout pilot 1st Lt Bob Montaro WIA. Shot down west of the Rockpile, Lt Montaro was

hit in the calf and thigh with .51 rounds, an AK wound in the shoulder while his chicken plate stopped several more AK rounds. WO Jim Moran and WO John Murray flying their Cobras provided cover fire for the insert of the ARPS, and were joined by other aircraft from the troop on a rotating basis for the extract of the wounded and dead. Troop ARPS, once more into the breach.

Sept 22 was the day Spec5 Brooks, another scout crewman was killed.

On Oct 8th, just south of the abandoned Special Forces camp at Lang Vei, and so close to the Laos border that the orbits of the Charliehorse team went transborder, the scout aircraft, piloted by Capt Phil Nelson went down to small arms fire. WO Jim Ross and Nelson were able to land the OH-58 and were OK. Not so the Crew chief Griner who was wounded in the leg. The chase aircraft was still in the process of joining the team due to a refuel stop was some distance away. Capt Chuck Gibson, the team commander, elected to extract the three scout crewmen on his ammo bay doors due to the close proximity to the fighting positions of the NVA. With the three clinging to the open ammo bay doors, he was able to move the crew a short distance away before his Cobra was hit with ground fire, and forced to land. WO Russ Whipple, in the remaining Cobra, was left to cover the downed crews alone, and escorted the Chase ship, piloted by Capt Bob Larkin, the "Bagger" Platoon Leader with Capt Berchell as copilot, into the extraction zone with depleted ammo supplies. Both downed aircraft were destroyed in place rather than risk recovery.

In the space of just over a month the troop had five men killed in action.

On Nov 18 a tail boom separation on final to the active at Quang Tri Combat Base cost Capt Miller and WO Tom Knopik their lives during a check ride. There was nothing the unit check pilot Miller

could do with a major airframe failure, a tail boom separation on a practice auto-rotation. A troop Cobra that was in the traffic pattern at the time, piloted by Chuck Gibson, hovered over the downed Huey blowing the flames away from the cockpit as troop members on the ground recovered the two pilots. The aircraft had gone down not far from the troop billet area, so close to home.

The official start to Lam Son 719 was two months away.

What was the troop doing here?

Considering the time that is invested in any military planning, especially any operation of a grand scale, Charlie Horse had been assigned to work for BG Hill, CO of the 1/5 MECH to provide armed recon of the area that would become the operational base for the upcoming Lam Son 719. Supporting the P Co. 75th Rangers whose mission was reflective of the troop's, together the two units performed the preliminary groundwork for the upcoming incursion into Laos. This was an unknown factor until months later.

In late Dec 70 and early Jan 71, road recon along QL 9 was a dominant task required by BG Hill, I/5 MECH Co. He had voiced his interest in the road conditions, the state of the culverts and bridges, and the size of the washouts on that road. Charliehorse was tasked to perform the visual recon, and to insert some very nervous brigade engineer personnel covered by the troop ARPS, to asses the viability of the road's use. Many of the troop pilots saw this as preliminary work indicating a possible mobile artillery raid out to Khe Sahn, and had targets selected that were both strategic and personal that needed pounding.

At the same time, a large number of missions were spent west of the area where QL 9 turned south just east of the Rock Pile. This valley was to become very expensive for the troop with half a

dozen aircraft shot down with losses. The area was referred to as the "Punch Bowl". Who gave it that name is unknown, but the valley was costly real estate paid for in aircraft and blood. This is where the engineer road known as "Red Devil Road" would be cut to interdict to the future location of 3/5 Cav commanded by LTC Osborn would take up a blocking position north of Khe Sahn in Feb 71. As far as the troop was concerned, it was the "Yellow Brick Road" and the "Wizard of Oz" was LTC Osborn.

D/3/5 Air Cav

As the number of units and aircraft arriving at Quang Tri grew, it became abundantly clear that what was in store was not a simple arty raid to KS as we had suspected. Word had it for a time that we were going to invade North Viet Nam. As a troop, I believe to a man, we collectively were amazed when we found that the mission was to move west, occupy KS and support the ARVN with their incursion into Laos. ARVN was arriving in huge numbers, and the little "O" club we shared with A/2/17 AC was teaming with unfamiliar faces. Helicopter units of any description were filling the airfield, camping in the infield and crowding the confines of the clubhouse. Pilots by nature are adventurous group, hilo pilots are more than that. We felt the pressing need to inform these new comers to I CORP that there was a willing enemy out west, and as recent arrivals to this AO as a troop ourselves, a fair warning of what might be awaiting them was in order. Especially the "C" Model Guns. Some of our AC's were second tour pilots, and flew UH1-C's on their first tour, and they had a fair idea of what it was going to be like for these old birds when southern tactics were used here in a high density anti-aircraft environment. Some didn't want to hear it, some took it to heart. Charlie Horse had been informed that our troop designation was now D/3/5 AC, and the HQ had transferred the troop to become part of the 3/5 CAV under LTC Osborn. We also were to stay east of the border and support the defense of KS against any possible ground effort the NVA might

make against the American bases. This would require that the main thrust of our recon to be in the tri-border and east to FSB Fuller. Additional effort would be recon to the south to the limit of the A/2/17 area of responsibility protecting the QL 9 route. This was also to include anything that BG Hill desired in the way of special requirements.

KILO SIERRA

Feb 5 1971, the first helicopter loss of the Lam Son 719 Operation was from Charlie Horse's gun platoon. A team from P 75th Rangers, six men on the Khe Sahn plain, requested assistance with an NVA force near their location. The troop responded with a team consisting of two "Assassin" Cobra guns, a "Kamikaze" scout in a '58, and a UH1-H "Bagger" chase with five of the troop's "blues" on board. The weather that morning was awful, low clouds with limited visibility requiring the team to proceed low level in trail up the valley from VANDY on QL 9 and not sparing the horses. Skimming the treetops while following the road was dangerous unto itself, and the enemy was anywhere along the route waiting a good chance to hammer the flight as it passes. As Khe Sahn was approached from the east, the terrain rose quickly and wound up the face of the last hills before the plateau came into view. As altitude was gained, the clouds swirled creating a classic sucker hole that opened and closed tantalizingly with the surrounding hills invisible and deadly. The scout leading the flight, WO Forbes, followed by the first Cobra, Capt Jim Jackson, got through to clear air. Not so the second Cobra. The forth in the flight, the Huey, went IFR, and only the most fleeting vision of a passing hilltop gave ground reference clear enough to decelerate and reverse course with a lowered airspeed and recovery. WO Wood, the AC in the second Cobra, along with WO Paul, his front seat, had disappeared into the clouds and found their mountain. Both killed instantly. While the mission was completed, the loss of the Cobra and crew was made worse as the crash site was not located until

the next day when the weather cleared enough to enable a search team to spot the site in a dense thicket of bamboo. There had been hope that they had a forced landing and would be recovered but it was not to be. The Cobra had gone into the bamboo in what seemed to be a steep angle, leaving little evidence of it's presence to be spotted from the air, and had been invisible the previous day as it was above the cloud level. Recovery was made by the troop's blues in very difficult terrain. Charlie Horse would employ the blues with frequency in the coming months, inserting five men into downed helicopter sites against huge odds. The bravery of those men in the infantry platoon was never in question, and the tasks that they were asked to accomplish were daunting. Five men would exit the Huey unquestioningly to perform their jobs in the most remote areas of the AO. Brave is not a big enough word.

The weather that hampered the recovery of Charlie Horse's first loss since the start of the Lam Son 719 did not improve for the majority of the days the operations continued. Weather ruled that AO. It had also become clear that the engineer road that was being pushed through the Punch Bowl was having some degree of difficulty, not only weather but enemy opposition. Progress was being made with superhuman effort. QL 9 was showing herself to be a shooting gallery with the heavy truck traffic and fuel tankers running a gauntlet daily. Repair of the old base at Kha Sahn was more than a handful, but the engineers were up to the task. Vandy was a re-arm and re-fuel site very quickly and Mi Loc was operational.

Feb 11, a scout, Capt Riviezzo, was working the northwest side of the Rockpile when he was engaged by .51 and AK fire. He executed what appeared to be an autorotation down the slope and his aircraft disappeared into the tall trees. The guns rolled in as soon as he had slipped from view and were met with green and red tracers. The chase bird, a UH1-H flown by Aircraft Commander WO "Skip" Barger was already into the area the scout was last

seen in the hope that a hover hole was possible but was met with ground fire. The Huey sank into the trees and was gone from sight. Radio calls went out from the Cobra guns to the Operations Officer Capt Ken Gingrich who redirected the other team from the troop that was operating to the south and the troop was scrambled to assist. The arrival of the second team, which had limited fuel due to it's own time spent on VR, was on the scene and the scout, WO Wayne Forbes, was working the duel crash sites in spite of the ground fire. Capt Harley Jones, the second team commander, was husbanding fuel and rockets as long as possible in the hope that the troop Cobra teams would arrive before one or the other ran out. When his front seat confirmed that mini-gun and 40mm chunker were expended, and with his rockets all gone, he and the other Cobra proceeded to remain on station to distract the ground fire until help arrived. The team's scout was having his own set of problems. Besides being covered by expended gun-ships, the activity of the team had activated seismic sensors which were designed to alert artillery batteries to enemy activity and friendly fire was impacting the area. Unable to contact the downed crews, and the ARP's radioman was not transmitting, heavy arty impacting and the guns expended, things were not going well for Charlie Horse.

After what seemed like an eternity, especially for the hoped for survivors on the ground, the troop's available aircraft arrived, and the Cobra teams raced to Mi Loc to rearm. Major Wolfe, the Troop Commander, organized the insert of the unit's blues, ten men, who led by the troop's ARP Platoon Leader Lt Fred Alf, pushed uphill toward the crash sites against unknown odds. Intel had reported that Battalion sized NVA units were working the area.

Meanwhile, at the multiple crash sites, the scout crew had survived the shoot down and the resulting crash. The UH-1 crew was not so fortunate. WO Barger was KIA as was the Crew chief Carroll. Lt Mel Pobre was injured as was the door gunner and all the ARP's. Even while suffering with what later was later diagnosed as a broken back, Capt Riviezzo was able to lead Spec-5

Bunney, his injured Crew chief with a bullet to the leg and dazed from the impact, and the Observer, WO Douglas who had suffered a crushed eye socket, in an escape toward the downed Huey down slope. Fortune smiled when they came upon Lt Mel Pobre, Barger's co-pilot, and soon after, the remaining survivors at the now burning UH-1. He was able to gather the able bodied into a defensive perimeter and were soon reinforced by the blues led by Lt Alf. The recovery of the dead and wounded was assisted by a DMZ Dustoff with a jungle penitator, something missing in the Charliehorse inventory. The Dustoff bird hovered for twenty minutes as the troop guns provided covering fire, rotating to re-arm at Mi Loc as a freshly armed teams arrived. The ARPS, along with the walking wounded, retreated down the hill to a clearing and were extracted with troop lift aircraft. The two killed, and all the survivors WIA, left many bunks empty in QT that night.

Nine days later the troop was reduced by two more of the Gun Platoon pilots KIA. Charlie Horse had a "Hunter Killer" team working the Tri- Border area north of 3/5 CAV's location at the "Emerald City" when they were engaged by multiple .51 positions which shot down both Cobra guns. Capt Al Wester was able to execute a forced landing, and he and his front seat, Capt Paul Carter, were able to exit the aircraft and were recovered by the UH-1 flown by WO Fred Blanchard. 1st Lt John Hunter and his front seat WO Carl Nacca, also hit by the .51's, were on fire as they impacted the ground. The recovery mission was going to be very difficult with the enemy being very active in that area. In the troop scramble to lift off from positions at Khe Sahn, John Winlow, "Batman 69" climbed into Russ Whipple's Cobra. A fixed wing pilot, he saw the need to man the chopper and assist anyway he could. WO Whipple knew the need to discern as quickly as possible if there were survivors on Lt Hunter's Cobra, as the urgency of the insert needed to assessed. With a low and slow pass over the burning Cobra while taking fire, both Whipple and Winlow concluded both Hunter and Nacca had been killed.

instantly, and were beyond assistance. The troop had worked closely with the Batman Foreword Air Controllers, but Winlow had never been this close, he earned added respect from troop members that day. Never leaving anyone behind was SOP in the troop, and this was no exception. Getting a recovery team in and out of that location was fraught with extreme danger, but once again the blues and the aircrews met the challenge with bravery and resolve. More friends to be mourned.

Aircraft and crew losses were affecting the troop's ability to perform, and while heroic efforts were being made by all members of the Maintenance Platoon and the Avionics Section, replacement aircraft that were arriving were less than wonderful in their condition and airworthiness. Scout aircraft in particular were becoming hard to find. The Bell 58 was the workhorse of the Scout Platoon, and the losses of these little birds, along with the loss of the Cobras was a mounting problem. Units in the south, not involved in the Laos Operation were being levied for aircraft to replace the choppers lost by all the units facing frightening attrition in Laos, and our own missions in support of that operation. Needless to say, they weren't sending their best. I suppose that is understandable but some of the tired horses we were in receipt of were of low quality.....hanger queens.

With the troop's responsibilities covering such a large and active AO, BG Hill saw fit to assign an Artillery Forward Observer to the unit to aid as needed in accurate and knowledgeable adjustment of assets of the 1/5 MECH. 1st Lt Al Thornton, an FO from 5th Bn/4th Arty was the lucky selection made by Col. Ridgeway, his Bn CO. He was a valuable asset, and his accurate adjustments destroyed many bunker lines and fighting positions all along the DMZ to the joy of whoever he flew with. This freed up Cobra time and risk, and insured destruction of enemy positions that would otherwise have provided safe haven for the enemy.

Three days after the loss of Hunter and Nacca, ground fire claimed another Charlie Horse scout crew, and in the same area, the Tri-Border. The level of enemy activity in that area had LTG Sutherland and BG Hill wary of a possible NVA ground assault that would endanger the combat base. The 122mm rocket attacks, and ground probes by Sappers, had the KS inhabitants on constant edge. Charlie Horse spent airtime in the Tri-Border daily, and ground fire was constant in all caliber.

Feb 23rd, while searching for 122mm rocket sites, WO Steve Hiscock called out, "Taking fire, taking fire", and as the guns rolled in to cover his escape, appeared to just run out of rotor RPM and crash. The Scout Crew Chief was Spec. Arementrout, who had recently volunteered from the Lift Platoon for scout duty, and the Observer Walerzak, along with Hiscock were all killed instantly as the aircraft rolled and exploded on ground contact. The troop was by this time holding joint memorial services as time permitted and down time was available.

By the middle of March, it was painfully evident that things were not going according to plan with the ARVN in Laos. From the troop's vantage point on a small hilltop south of the HQ bunker at KS, Charlie Horse was witness to the return of the aircraft from the FSB's in Laos. Ranger North and Lolo were reducing the air assets of the proud units that had arrived just over a month ago. Sharing the re-fuel and re-arm sites at Khe Sahn with the many units that had deployed in support of this incursion, stories were shared that bordered on the unbelievable. Back at Quang Tri, the mood was somber in the little shack we referred to as the "Officer's Club". Losses were being spoken of in hushed terms, but the morning came and all mounted up and continued to carry on.

The loss of WO Steve Peck KIA on Mar 15 to a .51 while near Lang Vei further reduced the list of seasoned scout pilots available

to work the AO. Joe Roberts, an Air Force "Barky" FAC had reported a 37mm and multiple .51's and had a flight of F-4's stacked up at altitude. All he needed was to gain their location and the fast movers were ready to unload. Only in the area for a short time, the scout was engaged by a .51 hitting Steve, passing through his chicken plate and his armored seat. WO Rossiter who was piloting the OH-58 managed to get the aircraft down even with the battle damage it had incurred, and the chase bird evacuated Steve to Bravo Med at Khe Sahn. It was futile. The ARP team securing the downed 58 were subjected to an inadvertent bomb run by one of the F-4 fast movers due to what was referred to as a "communications mistake". The bombs passes directly through the orbiting Charliehorse team covering the ARPS. Escaping with concussion injuries, the ARPS were recovered by a troop Huey.

Steve had been to the Monterey Language School. Seemed like he should have been somewhere else.

Mar 24, 71, another bad day. The Tri-Border, the miserable, bloody Tri-Border. Concern continued for a possible advance of a strong force of NVA coming across the border north of KS had Charlie Horse working a visual armed recon right on the line. Many hundreds of 122mm rockets impacting KS and ground contact by elements of 3/5 CAV resulting in large body counts of NVA while taking US losses, had put a high priority on the troop's daily presence in this danger zone.

WO Jim Ross had his airspeed up in the OH 58 at treetop level, as was now the norm working this hot area, but he was blown out of the sky with an RPG to his tail boom regardless. The ground fire was intense, and .51's were numerous. The scout had rolled on impact, and the crash site was on a hillside. While the Cobra's covered his insert, WO Jerry Lay brought the UH-1 in between what hills seemed to give some defilade from the heavy machinegun fire. The five ARP's jumped from the aircraft as it slowed enough to make the dangerous exit. Ground fire was

intense but the damaged Huey managed to carry the crew a short distance to a safe forced landing. Any view of Ross's crash site had been limited and there was no sight of any apparent survivors.

All Charlie Horse aircraft were by this time proceeding to the contact site from where ever they had been, be it Khe Sahn or Quang Tri. In this type of situation, fast response is necessary before the enemy can marshal enough organized force to exploit an opportunity fast developing. Arriving piecemeal, not an optimum plan, found events unfolding in fast order, and not well for Charlie Horse. While the Cobra team covering Ross were engaging the multiple anti-aircraft positions, Capt Jimmy Jackson's Cobra had his attitude indicator removed compliments of a .51 passing through the cockpit and disabling the electronics controlling his weapons systems. Undeterred, he and the other Cobra commanded by Capt Paul Carter, continued to suppress fire. The first aircraft to arrive was the troop's Scout Platoon Leader, Capt Cocker in a OH 58. As he was descending to provide visual contact, he was engaged by another .51 at about 200ft, inverted, went down and burned. It was clear to those present that there was little likelihood of any survivors in that aircraft, so the focus of what limited assets were available was directed toward the ARPS at the Ross crash site.

The next aircraft on site was a UH-1 commanded by WO Jeff Bavar. WO Bavar was intent on getting his ARP's on the ground as near to the first crash site as possible, and terminating his approach 20ft, he found that there was no possible place to descend. At this point, with expended ammo and disabled weapon systems, Capt Jackson was covering the insert by the Huey with his .45 shooting out of his open canopy. Two of the ARP's, not realizing that he was going to attempt another location, leaped from the aircraft expecting the rest of the team to follow. Taking fire and struggling with the Huey, he didn't realize that they had exited the aircraft until he had moved some distance from the area they had jumped from. WO Whipple arrived quickly thereafter and took his Cobra down to a high hover over the two radio less

ARPS, and directed them with hand signals in what direction to proceed to link up with friendlies on the ground. All the while, ground fire continued.

Jim Ross, in the meantime, found himself to be the only survivor of the initial shoot down. His crew chief and observer were both KIA from gunshots and the effects of the crash. Despite a severely broken ankle, a crushed hand and a deep facial cut, managed to extract himself from the wrecked 58, and ascend the hill to link up with the ARP team inserted by Lay. From that position, they exchanged hand grenades with the enemy in close vicinity.

WO Randy Fisher now arrived in a UH-1 with a five man ARP squad, and effected the extract of Jerry Lay and his crew from the downed Huey that was a half mile away from the concentrated action around the Ross and the Coker downed scout aircraft . With thirteen men on board he had his hands full.

At this point, the troop commander, Maj Wolfe coming at all possible speed from Quang Tri in the front seat of a Cobra piloted by Capt Bob Barthelmess, called off the piece meal attempts being made by the singularly arriving troop aircraft, and directed the efforts be delayed until some organization could be brought to bear in a combined assault. As he was enroute to the crash sites, he had contacted the 1/5th Commander, BG Hill, and the 71st AHC, 14th CAB, the "Rattlers" and the "Firebirds" were quickly levied to affect the extraction of the Charlie Horse dead. This element of the 101st performed a combat assault into the crash sites and recovered all the Charlie Horse KIA's. This included the three KIA at Capt Coker's scout crash site, and the two KIA from Ross's scout. During this courageous effort they lost two aircraft. Without their timely assistance, Charlie Horse would have been hard pressed to execute such an effort in the depleted condition the troop was in. While it may be difficult at such a time to be told

internal troop assets were inadequate to perform the extract of the our own troopers, the timely arrival of the 71st AHC, 14th CAB was instrumental and necessary to do that mission.

Later that day at the 18th Surgical Hospital at Quang Tri, troopers visiting to say their good-by's to Jim Ross were informed he had also broken his back. We all wished him a healthy recovery, and had a toast at his bedside.

For their courage and bravery in that assigned mission, all the Air Craft Commanders from the 71st AHC received well deserved Distinguished Flying Crosses.

Charlie Horse closed that day's chapter with many Purple Hearts.
WIA: Jim Ross.

KIA: Capt Coker, SGT Bauer, SGT Beckwith, SP4Neal, PFC Walters.

Toward the end of March the operation was winding down with the ARVN finding their way out of Laos. Aviation units were being removed to their home locations south. The troop Lift Platoon was performing extractions of ARVN soldiers in the ones and two as they were found making their way out of Laos. These extracts were performed at great risk but these men could not be left to fend for themselves as most were weaponless and vastly demoralized.

March 28th found a P 75th Ranger team on a hilltop just north of QL 9 in contact with an undisclosed enemy force and requesting immediate extraction. Charlie Horse responded with a heavy team of Cobra guns, scout, and two UH-1 slicks. As fate would have it, the first UH-1 into the saddle of the hills was commanded by WO Jerry Lay, the same aircraft commander who had been forced down four days earlier in the Tri-Border. While the ranger team hurried aboard, small arm fire was hitting the Huey, and an AK round went through Jerry's upper left arm. More hits on the aircraft as it exited the zone wounded the crew chief Cisz and the door gunner

Martinez, and reduced the aircraft's ability to maintain flight. A successful forced landing was performed on an island in the middle of the Da Krong River by the co-pilot WO Angotti. Once again it was WO Fisher that came in to rescue Lay, his crew and all the rangers. A seasoned aircraft commander, crew chief and gunner off the rolls. Another Charlie Horse aircraft lost.

March ended with no more losses, but plenty of activity to occupy the troop.

As the forces at Khe Sahn were reducing quickly, and assets moved back to Quang Tri and points south, the enemy moved in right behind the exiting friendlies. There were huge amounts of logistics abandoned by the retreating ARVN. Pallets of artillery rounds, small arms ammo, hand grenades, to say nothing of the fleets of rolling stock including trucks, personnel carriers and tanks left in Laos. April saw the loss of one of the troop's Scout Crew Chiefs when Sgt Minchy was grievously wounded by small arms fire while performing Armed Recon along the DMZ on April 15th. The reduction of the air assets that had assisted in the visual/armed recon during Lam Son had returned the entirety of the AO for this mission back to Charlie Horse. The troop was rebuilding the skills, required in both pilots and crews, that had been reduced in the ranks of all the platoons. There were many new faces. All losses were sorely felt.

Charlie Horse now was busy in the Khe Sahn area, inserting the blues, led by Lt Alf, to blow the pallets of high explosives and whatever else they could destroy to deny the enemy these assets. The abandoned TOC at Khe Sahn was a convenient storage point used by the NVA to gather what they found. This was abruptly pointed out when Capt Bill Allen, a troop scout, had his crew chief pitch a white phosphorus grenade into the entry. As he hovered away, an enormous explosion exposed the location of a hidden cache the NVA had stored there and almost resulted in the loss of

the scout. The radio relay/observation post "Hickory", northwest of Khe Sahn, was reporting truck traffic at night in the Khe Sahn vicinity. The NVA were driving about with their lights on. It was out of range of the 175mm's at Camp Carroll so all they could do was watch, especially if the weather was marginal, which it proved to be. Monitoring the activity in and around the now abandoned base was a daily mission assignment for the Charlie Horse "Hunter Killer" teams. The area was being defended aggressively by the day with .51 and 23mm anti aircraft, and at times it was a roll reversal as to who was doing the hunting and who was doing the killing. Ground fire was a daily expectation for the recon teams, and tactics had been adjusted to counter this changing environment.

The losses by all units during the Lam Son 719 of the OH-58 Bell Ranger had them in short supply. The troop transitioned to the Hughes OH-6, and the 58 was not missed by the majority of the scout platoon. The survivability of the Hughes was tested on May 3 when small arms fire peppered the Loach flown by Capt Marty Gronburg just east of Khe Sahn, killing the newly arrived Scout Platoon Leader, Capt Derrill Burnside, and wounding the crew chief Mike Duffy.

The scout platoon had been severely stricken during the recent operation, and the experienced scouts were working hard to pass the required skills to the newly arrived pilots. The enlisted crewmembers were working hard as well. There was a bond that developed between the pilots and their crews, none was stronger than in the scouts. Reflexive teamwork was necessary to successfully function in that close action scouts found themselves in, and the troop had few proficient scout pilots and scout crew chiefs to rely on. Missions that were perceived to be more dangerous than others fell to fewer and fewer qualified crews. WO Forbes, Capt Allen and WO Roth were called on with frequency that belied reason to reflect survivability. Capt Gronburg was a second tour scout, and a valuable asset. WO Tom

Bell, WO William Halevy and WO Steve Hanson were on their first tours, but were gaining time and experience fast. The platoon patch, "Kamikaze" reflected the dedication, hopefully not the outcome.

Not only Charlie Horse, but new teams with P Co, 75 Ranger were training extensively. The piedmont areas and the foothills just west of Quang Tri were areas of enemy activity. Enemy individuals and squad sized elements operated with regularity, and offered a target rich environment for the rangers and "white" teams from Charliehorse to gain valuable field experience while operating near the combat base providing security. "White" teams consisted of two OH-6 scouts working in mutual support, and the air time along with experience coordinating with the ranger elements provided combat experience and excellent VR situation reports. When leaving or returning to Quang Tri, the missions heading west made it a habit of checking the radio contact and status of the ranger teams in the close in areas.

On May 27, a Charlie Horse team of two Cobra guns, a OH-6 scout and a chase UH1-H were outbound to perform VR around Khe Sahn. One of the Cobra AH1-G aircraft was a recently acquired "heavy" fitted with additional rocket pods, and was commanded by Capt Paul Carter with WO Jerry Foy riding front seat. Capt Jimmy Jackson with copilot WO Marvin Quinn flew the second Cobra. Checking in with the ranger team in passing, a request was made for a demonstration of a potential gun run for training purposes. Capt Carter, flying a fully fueled Cobra, and carrying the additional weight of a larger rocket package than he was accustomed to, initiated a simulated gun run. The obvious combination of the fuel and rocket load, combined with the high density altitude present on that day, and what could have been a mechanical shortfall or target fixation, resulted in the impact with the ground at the end of his simulated gun run. Both pilots were killed instantly.

In late April, while flying recon, a Cobra flown by 1st Lt Brian Mitchell and WO Irv Hopkins, the aircraft was engaged and hit with ground fire, resulting in a forced landing, injuring both pilots and the loss of the aircraft.

May, June and July saw an rapid escalation in the enemy activity in the entirety of the areas in the west and along the DMZ. In the Khe Sahn area, NVA engineers were improving the road network. Bulldozers and trucks were observed and destroyed in the Tri-border area. Heavy anti-aircraft fire was a daily hazard, including .51, 23mm and 37mm protecting the enemy efforts. June 5th “Hickory” fell to ground assaults. This observation/radio relay hilltop NE of Khe Sahn had seemed to be impregnable, but the NVA were demonstrating a resolve to have the western AO in their control. The weather during the assault had been terrible with the mountain top in the clouds, but at first light an assessment was made by a Charlie Horse team. Capt Bill Allen, his crew chief Spec 4 George Brennigan and observer, made a hazardless approach onto the now deserted mountain top and found no survivors. June 16th saw FSB “Fuller” over run and occupied by NVA forces that were undeterred by all the airpower, arty and gunship support that could be brought to bare on that hill. While “Fuller” was reoccupied, it’s loss was a demonstration of the level of activity that had been sparked by the failure of the Lam Son 719 Operation. The American and the ARVN forces associated with that operation had left the AO, but 1/5th MECH, 3/5 CAV, P Co 75th Ranger, and all the remaining units, including Charlie Horse, were still immersed in that disaster. A brick had been tossed into a hornet’s nest, and a whirlwind of pain was being harvested.

Aug 12 reflected the level of sophistication the NVA’s weapon system’s had advanced to when a suspected Strella SA-7 was employed against a team working the area east of “Fuller” along the DMZ. The UH1-H, operating at apx 8000ft AGL, was

destroyed with the loss of all onboard. CWO Mack Cockerell, the team commander in a Cobra, along with ----- in the other Cobra, were able to cover the scout piloted by WO Brian Roth, in an assessment of the remains of the Huey to affirm that there were no survivors. With the loss of the ARP squad in the Huey, immediate recovery was impossible. Due to the hazardous location of the crash site near the DMZ, and the high level of enemy activity, higher command refused the deployment of US Forces in the ground recovery of the remains. Concern centered on the possibility of US Forces being captured as there was heavy NVA activity in that area. An ARVN ground cav force entered the area and made the recovery with Charlie Horse Cobra and scout support.

KIA were: L.L. Kelly-aircraft commander, G. Holian-co-pilot, E.S. Kelly-crew chief, L. McCoy-door gunner along with the ARP squad, R.T. Nelson, G.L. Strickland, J.C. Thompson and J. Wright.

The DMZ was getting hotter finding Charlie Horse being directed there by BG Hill with frequency reflective of the increase of NVA movements. The foreword fire support bases were reporting increasing activity along with ground probes resulting in escalating US causalities.

August 24th, Bell-Halevy shootdown.----details coming-----

On Sept 4th, while working bunker lines along the beach north of A-1, the most northeastern reaches of SVN, an RPG hit the OH-6 piloted by Capt Marty Gronborg, killing him and his crew chief Sgt Dillenseger. The observer, WO Orcini, WIA, was hit multiple times with small arms fire. All were recovered by the chase aircraft commanded by WO Jeff Bavar.

Later that day, that same UH-1 commanded by WO Jeff Bavar with WO Marvin Quinn as copilot, was forced down north of Khe Sahn when a .51 round impacted the rotor blade's leading edge,

removing a sizeable portion of the rotor and forcing an emergency landing. The crew was recovered with troop aircraft.

White teams, two Loaches mutually supporting, were active in the "Backyard", the area close to Quang Tri Combat Base. This provided security for the airfield while monitoring and engaging enemy forces. On Sept 24th, one of the OH-6 aircraft was forced down into some heavy brush resulting in a hard landing. In such close proximity to Quang Tri, with only another Loach in the team, recovery was going to rely on which full team in the AO was able to get to the crash site first. A troop UH-1 arrived from the airfield, but the downed crew was in some tall brush surrounding the river banks and, unable to reach the crew, and having no rope on board, the UH-1 along with the OH-6 insured the near area was secure and waited for assistance. A CH-47 Chinook from the 101st happened to be in the area and had monitored the situation on the radio. The Chinook offered assistance with a jungle penitator with which to move the grounded crew to a clearing where they could be recovered by the troop's waiting UH-1 and be evacuated to the 18th Surg for the minor injuries they had sustained in the forced landing. What seemed like a viable solution to the situation proved fatal to the first two crewmembers extracted when a malfunction or error caused the cable to release them, and they fell to their deaths. WO Steve Hanson and his crew chief Spec 4 E. Hubrins were KIA. The co-pilot, Lt Wagner, was recovered shortly thereafter by troop aircraft. There was of course shock and anger at the senseless loss of these two men, seemingly being plucked from a dire situation which then ended so tragically. The crew of the Chinook truly meant well in their offer of aid, and having the result of that aid end so badly must have borne heavily upon them. War and all it's consequences are truly Hell.

On Dec 31st, enemy fire brought down the UH-1 flown by the Lift

Platoon Leader, Capt Noel Harvey with Lt Neil Flynn as copilot, and the accompanying OH-6 commanded by WO Dwain Herrick. The weather conditions were reminiscent of the day back on Feb 5th 71 and the IFR loss of WO Wood and WO Paul. The Charliehorse team of two AH-1G Cobra Guns, a OH-6, and the following UH1-H were approaching the Khe Sahn area from the east under a low cloud cover. The Huey at the end of the four ship formation was engaged by .51 fire, wounding the door gunner Ronnie Mickle, and forcing the Huey to make an emergency landing just west of the abandoned airstrip into tall grass and trees. All on board survived the forced landing, but as they took up defensive positions around the aircraft, an NVA opened fire at very close range killing the crew chief Robert Denmark with AK fire. Eliminating that threat, they found themselves in very close proximity to a sizeable NVA unit and were rapidly engaged in a fight to keep from being overrun. The troop was scrambling to launch of all available aircraft from Quang Tri, and aircraft already on missions were quickly diverted to assist. The two Cobra guns were providing close fire with 20mm, rockets, 40mm and minigun and were quickly expending their ordinance. The small group on the ground was running out of ammunition and grenades. Using the ARP's radio, Capt Harvey radioed the scout pilot WO Herrick for immediate resupply. Bringing his OH-6 directly over the fight to a hover, his crew chief dropped grenades and ammo into the bomb crater they were fighting from. The scout crew chief, Neil Jones was hit with AK fire and was killed instantly while the aircraft took numerous hits. The scout managed to clear the area and made a forced landing on the Khe Sahn strip.

Three sets of Charliehorse Cobra's were racing to the site as fast as possible. The first team to arrive was low on fuel as they had been diverted from their own VR, so they expended quickly and departed to rearm. Contacting "King" on guard, a C-141 on 24/7 orbit to assist downed aircraft, two "Jolly Greens" were soon in the vicinity. With the arriving Charliehorse AH1-G teams fueled and

armed, "King" directed the first Jolly Green team to extract the troopers. Taking intense ground fire in the extraction attempt, the CH-54 had to withdraw with battle damage to Quang Tri accompanied by their wing ship. "King" now had numerous air strikes in progress with air assets stacked and providing continuous bomb runs all over the immediate area. A Charliehorse UH-1 arrived commanded by Capt Joe Hogg, with Lt Alf, the ARP Platoon Leader. He had the aircraft rigged with ropes to attempt an extract if the second team of Jollies were unable to get the troopers out. With multiple Charliehorse gun teams providing close cover, the second set of Jolly Greens extracted all the members of the embattled crew. A Charliehorse UH-1 had recovered the scout crew off the Khe Sahn strip, and both aircraft were destroyed in place.

In the shoot down of the Huey, the crew chief Spec 4 Robert Denmark was KIA. The downing of the loach resulted in Spec 4 Neil Jones KIA. WIA were Capt Harvey, the gunner Ronnie Mickle, and all in the ARP squad, David Trimble, David McMillon, Fernando Figeroa and George Cobb.

Happy New Year Charliehorse.

1972 finds the troop still doing recon monitoring the aftermath of Lam Son 719, and seeing the preparation for the coming Easter Offensive by the NVA.

Jan 20, while returning to Quang Tri, a Charliehorse team started taking concentrated fire over the east end of the Khe Sahn plateau. In trail formation, the lead UH-1 flown by Capt Bill Allen was hit and erupted in flame. His flaming decent into the canyon toward the river was observed by Capt Joe Hogg flying a C&C UH-1. With the two cobra guns were engaging the ambush, Capt Hogg followed the flaming Huey down into the canyon, and exiting the aircraft, accompanied by an RTO, managed to rescue the survivors

of that flaming decent.

KIA from wounds or results of the crash and fire were the door gunner David Berdahl, ARP squad members Harry Edwards, Fernando Figeroa, and Walter Moran.

WIA in the UH-1 were Capt Allen, WO Frank Angotti, crew chief Spec 4 Walter Morris, ARP Pvt Dennis Trimble.

WIA during the rescue effort was Capt Hogg.

Ten days later, Capt Hugh Mills lost a tail rotor in a AH-1G north of FSB Fuller resulting in a forced landing and loss of the Cobra. Both he and his front seat John Bryant were WIA and recovered by troop aircraft.

The last mission performed by a Charliehorse aircraft was on Feb 20 and was ironically a med-evac. When a Dustoff aircraft was unable to perform an extract due to darkness and weather in the northern Ah Shaw, BG Hill ordered Charliehorse to make the attempt. Capt Hogg, having a standard ticket, made the successful extraction, concluding the troops eighteen months of "Hunter Killer" operations with a mercy mission.

That concludes the odyssey of the "Charlie Horse" experience in I CORP. Both as C/3/17 and as later redesignated as D/3/5 Air Cav, the troop's mission in I CORP was always tied to the Lam Son 719. Be it the preliminary recon for the operation, helping to hold the "bridge" open for the return of the American and the ARVN forces to Khe Sahn, or the covering of the withdrawal to the south, Lam Son 719 just seemed to never end. It seemed strange to the troopers that served during this period to never see Charlie Horse listed in the Order of Battle for that operation. It wasn't until 2010 with the assistance of BG Rodney Wolfe(ret) the then Commander of Charlie Horse, and LTC Mike Sloniker (ret), 101st Historian, that Charlie Horse was added to this heroic list of Army Aviation units as a participant. While this may seem to many to be only a small footnote in history, it is well deserved and paid for in the

blood of the troopers who served in any capacity with the troop.

The troop was stood down Feb 72, her aircraft dispersed and the troopers delt to other units. The last Troop Commander, Maj Seery, folded the guidon and put it away.

C/3/17 Air Cav

D/3/5 Air Cav

“Now who will stand on either hand and defend this bridge with me?”

HORATIUS

7 KIA prior to the official start of Lam Son 719

15 KIA during Lam Son 719

23 KIA post Lam Son 719

August 1970-February 1972

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