

The White T-Shirt

May 17 1971
Examp
(A)
" I think I can get in there!" These words were Warrant Officer (WO1) pilot David Soyland's next to last radio transmission as he tried to extract a Special Forces reconnaissance team, two kilometers east of Laos, that had been compromised and had wounded. Three other Army UH-1H helicopters had been severely damaged, had to abort the approach, and made emergency landings at American bases at Mai Loc and Quang Tri, with wounded on board. With the Pickup Zone close to the Laotian border, the NVA showed there strength and were not intimidated by the withering fire from the AH-1G "Cobras." They were not hesitant to fire at up the next approaching aircraft. It was a perfect trap.

As the early morning business of starting another day in I Corps with the 101st Airborne Division began, Captains (CPT) Skip Butler (D/158 AHB, Redskin 15) and Don Davis (C/158 Phoenix 26) had no clue that the day May 17, 1971 would be a day they would never forget. Although I was not there, it is a day I won't forget either. Between 1988 and 1990, while I was still on active duty in the Pentagon, I began to do research in POW/MIA files for the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA). During one of my forays into the data, I ran across my friend Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Skip Butler's witness statements to this incident. The keeper of these files asked if I could persuade Butler to come talk to him so that they could update as much data as possible, since they had difficulty finding the crash site in 1989.

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1989
Butler agreed, and on December 16, 1989, I sat and listened, in awe, at the level of detail he could recall then and what he had written in his statements in May 1971. He had not seen his 1971 statements when he spoke for 4 hours on the December day. The aircraft armament, the weather, the ground fire, the terrain features, the Special Forces team on the ground, the approaches, the aircraft, direction of attack and effect of the airstrikes, the FAC and the makeup of the flight crews all poured out of him. His efforts enabled the American recovery team to go back into the correct crash site in 1990, however, all that remains are pieces of the aircraft that could not positively identify it as 65-17607.

I got the impression that Skip was releasing a mass of suppressed emotion and memories on a rescue attempt that failed. It was a significant event for me, because I knew from first hand professional experience of working on fast acting events in the Pentagon that Butler has little patience with failures.

May 17-71
~~In May 1971~~, Butler was assigned as a section leader to D Company 158th Assault Helicopter Battalion (AHB) 101st Airborne Division at Camp Evans, a northern base camp for the 3d Brigade and its supporting units. D\158th mission was to provide gunship support to the 3 UH-1H companies in the 158th. The company had 12 AH-1G's and a single OH-6A, which was used for maintenance runs. D/158th, the Redskins, usually were assigned direct support missions to one of the brigades of the 101st Airborne Division, or general support missions to the division or higher headquarters.

On May 17th, Butler was gun team lead of the AH-1G's assigned to provide general support to a classified ground reconnaissance unit, officially listed as Mobile Launch Team (MLT) 2 Task Force One Advisory Element(TF1AE), at Quang Tri. This unit was known to the helicopter crews as Combat Control North (CCN) and they understood it to be subordinate to the former Special Forces unit, the Studies and Observation Group (SOG). The CCN cadre would ask for Butler by name, to the 101st ABN tactical operations center (TOC) because they knew he was prefix 3, Special Forces qualified at Ft. Bragg, prior to going to flight school. Skip enjoyed this mission because of the great sense of accomplishment he received from doing it and the professionalism of the people he covered as they were inserted to conduct ground reconnaissance in northern I Corps and Laos. Everyone was thoroughly briefed before going on the mission and the helicopter crews knew that once the team was inserted, they had to be ready to extract them at moment's notice.

Don Davis began the day, with what he thought to be a no-fly day for him. Don was a platoon leader in C/158 AHB, the Phoenix, and was monitoring the flying assignments of his platoon. On this morning one of the pilots was sick and unable to fly, so Don took his place on a mission to logistically support one of the Division's three brigades. The aircraft commander was to be WO1 David P. Soyland, who was also the company standization instructor pilot(SIP). Soyland was disturbed that the originally assigned pilot, WO1 Dale A. Pearce was unable to fly, and wanted to know more about why Pearce couldn't fly. Due to the mission

report time, and change in crew, Soyland had to wait to learn the reason. From 0700 to 1530, Soyland and Davis flew many resupply missions in the flatlands, east of the mountains between Camp Eagle and Camp Evans.

Butler in the meantime had been monitoring the efforts of RT Alaska and the reports of 1LT Danny Entrician, who was on the team. According to Shelby Stanton's book, Green Berets At War, Entrician was the team leader, the one-zero. They had been inserted on May 15, 1971 along the border of Laos and northwest of the A Shau valley. The team had reported that numerous NVA were in the area, and Butler was thinking through his plan in the event the team was compromised. He knew what he had readily available with the 4 AH-1G's and how he would have to buy time for the FAC to get fighters on station, if they were needed.

By May 1971, Butler, Davis and Soyland were highly experienced, with each one having ⁵6 months or more in country and qualified as aircraft commanders(AC). Some pilots went there entire tour without being qualified as AC's. Usually after a pilot had accumulated 300 hours on his first flying tour in Vietnam, he was recommended by another aircraft commander for consideration.

Foremost in being aircraft commander qualified, was the pilots ability to demonstrate strong flying skills, which included rapid and correct response to emergencies, a totally thorough knowledge of his aircraft and its operational limitations, safety, and a demonstrated high level of expertise in correctly and rapidly responding to the challenges of working

in the area of responsibility (AO). All of these skills required sound judgement.

After being recommended by other AC's, given an evaluation check ride by the unit instructor pilot(IP), the information was forwarded to the company commander with the SIP's input. The company commander was the final deciding authority. One of the good things about flying in Vietnam, was that the hours were plentiful and the ability to sharpen a flying skill was up to the individual, because the hours, environment, enemy threat, and possible aircraft emergencies were there for the taking.

"There wasn't any special training for pilots to fly the hazardous CCN missions," recalls Ken Mayberry, who was in C/158 AHB from Feb 70 to Feb 71. "My first month in-country, I flew constantly, because the Phoenix were having a large changeover in experienced pilots, and the company commander wanted to pass around as much experience as possible, before they left to return to the States." Mayberry's diary, shows that he flew constantly until he had accumulated a total of 120 hours, then he was held down, because of the United States Army Vietnam (USARV) directive that was concerned with fatigue of the flight crews and allowed only 120 hours per month. "You could rack up 120 hours fairly quickly, if things got hot and the unit was short of pilots, considering how missions sometimes ran 8-12 hours," Ken reflected in September 1992 in his home in Nebraska as he and I looked at his diary and went through his slides. "You wanted to do CCN missions, because there seemed to be a purpose in it, the people were highly professional, and you didn't want to mess up."

"Looking back on my tour, the CCN missions, although pretty hairy, really helped pass the time, because of the intensity of the situation."

Ken Mayberry has impressed me since the first time I saw him at the 1988 Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Reunion at Ft Worth. Ken has been confined to a wheel chair since 1983, because of multiple sclerosis; it is a physical, but not spiritual confinement. He's attitude and outlook on life has always inspirational. Whenever I get irritated because I can't exercise, at the pace I want to because of age and girth, I remember that Ken can't climb on a stair climber or Nordic track at all.

Skip Butler exuded confidence, then in 1971, as he does now. He came to Vietnam in December 1970 as a first lieutenant fresh out of flight school and the AH-1G "Cobra" transition. A tall, fair haired Southerner (Alabama), Skip was ready to mix it up, and chomped at the bit to get into the fight, even while an OCS candidate at Ft. Benning. In D/158th, "Redskins", he made his mark as a brash real live officer (RLO). RLO was a sarcastic term bestowed on the commissioned pilots by the warrant officer pilots. By the time he covered the first flight into Laos on Feb 8, 1971 at the beginning of Lam Son 719, he had been through the I Corps school of bad weather, unforgiving terrain and deadly combat, been humbled by the Cobra, humbled by the warrant officers, humbled by the experience of being shot at and missed. As he reflects back on his experiences, today, he writes off some of the more dangerous ones, such as diving at .51 cal machine

guns while being completely out of ammunition in the Cobra in order to save a downed Phoenix crew, as "the ignorance of youth." Those who were protected by "Redskin 15," still recall his unhesitant willingness to attack anything that threatened the "slicks."

Don Davis, confident, articulate, and reserved was the opposite of Skip in many ways, and similar in many others. Don graduated from West Point in 1968, and after attending Infantry officers basic, Ranger school, and airborne school, headed off to Germany with his new wife. By early 1970, Davis was in flight school at the Primary Helicopter School at Ft Wolters TX, his wife had just had a baby, and his life was being changed. Upon completion of flight school, he was assigned to fly UH-1H's in C/158 AHB. Prior to Lam Son 719, Davis had been in a crash at night and missed the early opening days. By March 5th, he would have been awarded a Silver Star, been covered by Butler on a hot LZ in Laos, and witnessed the sadness of losing two Phoenix flight crews in Laos. When the mission was hot, Davis performed.

David Soyland, all of 5'8'', 135 pounds, earned his wings going through the hell and harassment of Warrant Officer Candidate flight training. As the Tac Officers made serious attempts to weed out the weak, they met their match with David and his strong "can-do" spirit. He came from South Dakota and reflected the strong work ethic of that region. After flight school graduation, David was assigned to C\158 and earned his place as an aircraft commander. His single act of defiance to the "system" was to wear white T-shirts rather than the green

ones everybody else wore. His call sign was Phoenix 22. The previous Phoenix 22, CW2 Stewart was killed on the first day of Lam Son 719, when his UH-1H crashed inverted, killing all souls on board.

During Lam Son 719, C\158 had an acute shortage of IP's, so WO1s David Soyland and Dean Grau went to an IP course. Their rigorous course schedule took all of their time, but they also witnessed the sadness and hardship of loosing close friends in the two lost Phoenix crews. Both pilots had to demonstrate extremely high flying skills, maturity, and a cool head in order to be recommended for IP training. By May 17th, Soyland was ranked among the best, if not the best, of the Phoenix pilots.

The afternoon of May 17th, upon return from the resupply mission, Soyland's aircraft, UH-1H #65-17607 was put on standby and the crew waited at the Phoenix Nest at Camp Evans. In the meantime, Soyland met with Pearce, then told Davis that Pearce would be able to fly if the aircraft was recalled. Davis agreed since he had some administrative paper work to finish.

~~Don Davis still remembered in May 1990 with Skip Butler how~~
A short two hours later everything was permanently changed. The aircraft was shot down by a B-40 rocket propelled grenade (RPG) and ground fire, Pearce was dead, Soyland had extracted himself from the upside down aircraft and was away from it. The crew chief, SP5 Harold E. Parker, was hanging upside down by the seat belt in the crew chief's well and unconscious from the wounds he recieved. The gunner, SP4 Garry E. Allcorn, a D\158 Cobra crew chief, who was filling in for the critical shortage of gunners in

C/158, was laying on the ground away from the aircraft, unconscious and in the same spot he was blown out of aircraft from the force of the explosion. Davis, now a pilot for the FBI leaves the impression, when he reflects back on this day, "There by the grace of God, go I."

The official report states" the helicopter was to extract a reconnaissance team that was under heavy fire by unknown sized enemy force. On approach to the pickup zone, the helicopter began taking heavy enemy fire. The aircraft began banking right and was hit by the enemy fire causing the aircraft to continue to bank and start to turn over. An rpg hit and severed the tailboom. The violence of the explosion threw SP4 Allcorn out of the aircraft, just before the aircraft crashed. After impact, the aircraft continued to slide to the bottom of the slope."

~~The sequence of events show that~~ Butler, his wingship and 2 more Cobra's from D/101st AHB, "the Hawks," launched out of FOB Star at Quang Tri when the mission went bad. Butler's recalls, "On 17 May 71, I was team lead of two Cobra light fire teams assigned to CCN, MLT-2 in Quang Tri. My teams had just finished an insertion and extraction and were re-arming at Quang Tri Airstrip. I received a call that one of the CCN 8-man recon teams was in contact , they were pinned down and two dead and several wounded. I scrambled my four guns and CCN control launched the lift aircraft, which I think were the "Comancheros from A/101 AHB." I arrived on station and got a briefing from the Air Force FAC. (Note: In order to get a mental picture of how these "Blue suiters" orchestrated all the assets, and had the

complete respect and loyalty of the Special Forces teams, see DaNang Diary by COL Tom Yarborough, VietNam Above the Trees, by John F. Flanagan, or A Lonely Kind of War by Marshall Harrison. All are written by FACs that supported CCN, Project Delta, or CCS.)

Skip continues, "it was decided that we would try to extract the dead and wounded with one slick and the remainder with the second lift ship. ^{Butler} I directed guns 3 & 4 to put a heavy prep on the woodline to the North and Northeast since the concentration of enemy fire was from that direction. The pickup zone that the team had fought there way to, was a finger(vicinity (VIC) YD 047 275) running south, southeast, off a 2 Klick long ridgeline that ran southeast to northwest. Elevation was marked at 860 meters(approximately 27-2800 feet) at the highest point of the ridge and the PZ was at a lower altitude. ^{Butler} I held everybody in a daisy chain about 3 clicks to the northeast at about 5000 feet over a spot where the trails passed a stream. We had to get up to that "nose bleed" altitude in order to stay out of small arms range. We had not taken any heavy fire, like the 23mm or 37mm we had shot at us in Laos. Myself and my wingman escorted the slick in using heavy suppression. We flew down towards the PZ making maximum use of the terrain for navigation, because the enemy fire was too hot to be fooling around with a map. We had to fly over a creek, "blue line," that approached the finger, then we had to just fly, level, straight into the PZ. I was on the left and my wingman was on the right, the slick was in the middle. We were flying at about 50 knots in order to adjust to the slicks flight

attitude. Every time I fired a rocket, I had to dump the nose in order to hit the target and then readjust to protect the left side of the slick. Just as the slick lost his forward momentum and terminated over the PZ, the enemy began a heavy volume of fire and the lift ship had to abort with heavy damage and two wounded crew members. The second slick then tried to make the extraction after guns 3 & 4 had put another heavy prep on the enemy locations. I and my wingman again used heavy suppression as he was going in. As he terminated his approach, enemy fire caused him to abort. As he climbed out he lost his hydraulics, several of his instruments and had wounded on board. He proceeded to Quang Tri where he made a successful running landing. We had escorted him back since we needed to rearm, refuel, and rethink how we were going to get the CCN Reconnaissance Team(RT) Alaska out.

We then went back into the area with the 2 remaining Slicks and my four Cobras. Enroute we linked up with 4 more Slicks and 2 more guns, who had been launched from Phu Bai MLT-1, to assist us.

On our third attempt, my second set of guns made two passes on the enemy location before the Slick began his approach. I had the 4 remaining guns ready for heavy suppression when he went down. (Heavy suppression is risky, because the ammunition expenditure is high, and if there are complications, the Cobra does not have a lot of ammo left.) Despite our efforts the NVA fired up the Slick, wounded the co-pilot and damaged the aircraft. As the aircraft was climbing out I noticed what

appeared to be white smoke pouring out of the belly of the aircraft so my wingman, Cpt Steve Cook and I got in close to take a look. The white smoke was fuel and he had to get the aircraft down now. However, there was just nowhere to land so he made it over the mountain ridge to Mai Loc and landed safely there.

The FAC, either a "Barky" FAC in an OV-10 or a "Trail" FAC in an O-2, then was able to get some TAC Air into the area, snake and nape, as I recall and very close to the embattled team. We were putting rockets so close to the team, that they said, "Some of the stuff is exploding at the top of the trees and falling on us, but keep it coming!" While the fast movers were working over the area, all helicopters returned for fuel. While at Quang Tri, I requested another light fire team(2 Cobras) from D/158 be released from their mission and aid us. The request was approved and now we had 8 Cobras. After re-arm, we again headed for the area and were joined by still another set of guns from D/158, and 3 Slicks from C/158, David Soyland in the lead. We started up a daisy chain over the target area with 10 Cobras and 7 Slicks. It was now 1730 hours.

After the airstrikes, we again attempted to get a slick into the beseiged team. Soyland said he could get in there, so after a prep of the area by 2 Cobras from the aerial rocket artillery (ARA) unit, 4/77th ARA, he started his approach. I was using 4 D/158 guns as escort with full suppression. All the way down his flight path, Soyland had a Cobra on each side of him firing all the way down to the pickup zone(PZ). As Steve Cook and I made our break, the other two would be right behind us.

Just as I made my break, I saw the aircraft kick right pedal and start out. The pilot said he was "taking fire, taking heavy fire!" I saw pieces of the aircraft flying through the air and aircraft began to roll. By then my aircraft was in a position where I did not see the aircraft impact."

Steve Cook, Butler's wingman, was in a better position to observe as he made his break. Steve was extremely observant, and picked many things quickly about a target area, because he was on his second tour in the 101st and had been on the ground on the previous tour, as an Infantry platoon leader. He earned a Silver Star on the ground as an Infantry platoon leader and in the air, during Lam Son 719.

Steve's statement, written immediately after the mission, states, "I was breaking out of the run, directly over the PZ and was in a perfect position to observe the Phoenix aircraft. It was very apparent that he was receiving fire. I observed impacting rounds and pieces of his aircraft being torn off. This was on his left side as he was breaking to the Southeast. Suddenly the aircraft yawed violently to the right, the entire tail boom separated from the fuselage. The aircraft then inverted, rolling to its right, impacted on the side of the ridge, slid down approximately 100 ft and came to rest in a deeply vegetated area. The two D/158 guns covering us immediately dived into the target area. The lead, Cpt Mike Petty and his wingman, CW2 Don Wann, reported that the aircraft was immersed in thick vegetation and couldn't be seen. Due to our critically low fuel state, we all had to break for fuel.

In our absence, a Bright Light team, sometimes used for extraction of downed aircraft crews, was inserted approximately 700 meters to the south-southwest of the recon team with the intention of linking up and reinforcing the team in trouble. The link-up never occurred due to darkness, the extremely difficult terrain and the hazardous tactical situation. A first light extraction was scheduled for the next day.

The following morning we arrived at the extraction site and held in orbit while the FAC employed the TAC AIR. Upon completion of the airstrikes, the Bright Light team and 4 remaining members were extracted." (Steve Cook died in 1984.)

Official statements after the shootdown of Soyland's aircraft state. "...at 1930 a rescue force (Bright Light) was inserted to link up with the ground element and extract any downed aircraft crew members. Due to the darkness and enemy movement, the rescue force was unable to move south to the ground element or the downed aircraft during the night.

At 0700 the next day, May 18th, the rescue force was attempting to link up when it was struck by suspected enemy B-40 rocket propelled grenades (RPG) resulting on one friendly KIA, and several serious WIA. Shortly thereafter, contact was made with the original ground force that had been in contact and overrun by enemy forces. MLT 2, the TF1AE element controlling the operation, extracted the survivors of the ground force and the rescue force.

At 1245, after three airstrikes, MLT-2 inserted a second rescue, believed to be RT Krait and RT HABU, which swept through

the area of the contact and crash. Although receiving sporadic enemy fire, the second rescue force succeeded in extract the two survivors from the aircraft(SP4 Allcorn and SP5 Parker) and the bodies of three members of the ground force. The leader of the second rescue force later informed the CO, MLT 2 that there was another body near the downed aircraft but that he was unable to extract the body.

A FAC continued to fly over the area of contact and crash site until darkness without seeing any signs of life, On 19 May numerous search aircraft flew over the area by reported no signs of life, On 20 May the AO was turned over to the 101st so that the division resources could be utilized to search for the missing personnel."

The body near the aircraft was believed to be WO1 Pearce. The body was unidentifiable, but bigger than Soyland. The name tag, rank, or any other insignia could not be seen, because the body was buried in heavy debris and the rescue team did not have the equipment to dig him out, nor the time, because of the enemy activity.

The downed helicopter was upside down and pointing uphill at the bottom of a steep ravine. The tail boom was broken off as were both of the rotors. The aircraft's path to its final resting place cut a wide(approximately 5 meters) trail through the masked vegetation and broken pieces of the bird were scattered about. The right side of the aircraft was badly damaged and the right front seat was almost completely ripped out of the aircraft. The seatbelt and shoulder harness had been completely ripped out.

The left seat (Soyland's) was intact, as was the left side. The armor plate on the left side of the aircraft was moved back and no blood was found on the pilots's side. All indications were that the pilot exited the aircraft under his own power. Also there were footprints in the mud on the left side of the aircraft where someone had exited and entered the aircraft. At this point, all that was certain was that the crew chief, SP5 Parker was alive and being medically treated for a wound in the upper leg and a fracture in the same place. The unidentifiable body could have been the co-pilot, WO1 Pearce.

The next day
The crew chief (SP5 Parker) stated, "at 1730 as we began our final approach into the LZ we started receiving enemy fire. I remember returning fire and I was knocked out. When I awoke I was all alone in the chopper. I tried the radio and then noticed that my door gunner's M-60 was gone and also both of my survival packets. There was no movement around the chopper that I could detect. I did not see anyone until the next day when I was rescued. While I was at the 18th Surgical Hospital, I ran into my door gunner (SP4 Allhorn). I asked him if he what happened to the two pilots and he said he was thrown out of the aircraft and I was the only person he had seen since the incident." Today, in 1994 is a command sergeant major.

The gunner was SP4 Allcorn from the Cobra unit, D/158th. He was a Cobra crew chief with the military occupational specialty of 67Y. 67Y's were not on flight status, because the AH-1G only carried a crew of two, the pilot and the copilot/gunner, and there was no flying position for them. Their days were boring,

since all they had to do was be on the flight line to see their aircraft off and perform required maintenance when it returned. Because Allcorn had a lot of time on his hands, he would volunteer to fly as a door gunner in the UH-1H companies that were short gunners. The gunner's position was in the right rear well of the UH-1H's cargo area behind the co-pilot. The crew chief was on the left side in the well behind the aircraft commander. He states, "I was flying door gunner for C/158th with the crew chief, SP5 Parker. I did not know the names of the co-pilot nor aircraft commander. Our aircraft was scrambled off the Phoenix Nest on a CCN tactical emergency around 1700 hours. Enroute to the field location, I heard the briefing given to the aircraft commander and learned that were to take part in the extraction of a CCN team that had several dead and wounded and was out of ammunition. On short final to the PZ, our aircraft was hit by ground fire and forced to crash. Also when on short final and I was firing my M-60 to the front of the aircraft, I saw the pilot in the right seat throw his arms into the air over his head. I was thrown from the aircraft and it inverted, when the tail boom separated. I was knocked unconscious and when I woke up, I saw that I was 25 meters from the tail boom. I saw marks on the ground where the aircraft had slid down the hill. I was following the marks downhill, when I heard movement in the direction I was going. My first thought was it must be the enemy, so I hid in the bushes and spent the night. Next morning at dawn, I heard one rifle shot below me and figured the enemy probably shot someone in the aircraft. I proceeded on up the

slope toward the direction of the PZ. I heard Cobras firing in the PZ, turned back around and started back down hill. I got misoriented and ended up on the wrong ridgeline. I saw someone wearing a white T-shirt on a neighboring ridgeline running downhill and using the banana trees as a springboard to propel himself faster. I couldn't tell if he was friendly or enemy. I walked on a couple ridgelines and waved down a helicopter and was rescued the afternoon of 18 May 1971. After I saw the man with the white T-shirt, I didn't see anyone else until I was rescued, although I did hear movement. After I was rescued, I learned that the crew chief, SP5 Parker had been rescued and a search operation was going on for the co-pilot and aircraft commander." Today, Master Sergeant Allcorn US Army Reserve, posted in an aviation unit in Olathe Kansas, can recall with detail the events.

A report from a scout pilot from Troop A, 2/17th CAV, 101st ABN, starkly describes the area around the crash site, YD 048265. It also clearly shows why the NVA were so bold:

"The area of the downed aircraft was a known NVA infiltration route with numerous trails and bunker complexes throughout the trees. Most of the trails had signs of activity within 24 to 36 hours.

The area directly up the mountain from the crash site had bunkers and spider holes, as well as trails. Moving farther up the ridge, there were a few more trails and trees that had been chopped down. Moving down the mountain, toward the stream, there was still more activity. There was a trail that runs parallel

along the stream all the way throughout the valley.

Moving along the stream towards the Da Krong River, we found at least four fish traps and one pole type object as well as a bag lying next to the stream. Moving along the stream towards the Da Krong river, on the left bank we found construction under some trees made from logs with a semi walk-in entrance. About the second bend up from the Da Krong, next to the stream, there were several hootches concealed under trees and brush.

Moving the other direction along the stream NW away from the crash site, there was still enemy activity; trails, crossing clearings in many places. At one point we found new construction along the stream, but were unable to locate it the next day. When we had flown up the valley almost to its end, we found one fresh .51 cal pit and two hootches. Also, we located a large double entrance bunker.

Moving across the valley from the crash site, there were many cultivated corn fields. The bunkers were much more spread out in this area, but trail activity was about the same. Throughout the valley you could find cut wood and logs; trails were frequent."

Officially, the search for Soyland ended around May 26th. His room in the pilot's hootch at Camp Evans was nailed shut and his call sign, Phoenix 22 was never used again. Skip Butler wears Soyland's POW/MIA bracelet daily. Dean Grau, who went through IP training, still thinks of Soyland.

Don Davis, visited Soyland's brother in South Dakota in 1991, during a pheasant hunting trip. Typically, there was a

family resemblance, the family had not heard from anyone who had known David, and it was extremely hard to do, but immensely rewarding.

Although I did not know David Soyland, I always think of him when someone at the Vietnam Memorial, after seeing my Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA) logo on my hat, thanks me for some helicopter crew that willingly pulled them out of some mess. I think of him, when I see former members of the Special Forces at the memorial, and wonder what happened to 1LT Danny Entrician, who like David, did not return. Or what happened to those courageous Green Berets, who went back into the crash site and brought back the crew chief and gunner? How can we the pilots and crews ever thank them, other than preserving their memory.

I remember David when I see the gathering of the Phoenix at the annual VHPA reunions. Now, they are older, grayer, a little thicker; they're lawyers, dentists, Army Brigadier Generals, retired military, salesmen, policemen, pilots, school teachers, and leading different lives. Finally, I always am reminded of David Soyland's sacrifice, when I see the saying, "You've never lived 'til you've almost died. For those who fight for it, life has a flavor the protected will never know!"

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" *I think I can get in there!*" These words were Warrant Officer (WO1) pilot David Soyland's next to last radio transmission as he tried to extract a Special Forces reconnaissance team, two kilometers east of Laos, that had been compromised and had wounded. Three other Army UH-1H helicopters had been severely damaged, had to abort the approach, and made emergency landings at American bases at Mai Loc and Quang Tri, with wounded on board. With the Pickup Zone close to the Laotian border, the NVA showed their strength and were not intimidated by the withering fire from the AH-1G "Cobras." They were not hesitant to fire at up the next approaching aircraft. It was a perfect trap.

As the early morning business of starting another day in I Corps with the 101st Airborne Division began, Captains (CPT) Skip Butler (D/158 AHB, Redskin 15) and Don Davis (C/158 Phoenix 26) had no clue that the day May 17, 1971 would be a day they would never forget. Although I was not there, it is a day I won't forget either. Between 1988 and 1990, while I was still on active duty in the Pentagon, I began to do research in POW/MIA files for the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA). During one of my forays into the data, I ran across my friend Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Skip Butler's witness statements to this incident. The keeper of these files asked if I could persuade Butler to come talk to him so that they could update as much data as possible, since they had difficulty finding the crash site in 1989.

Butler agreed, and on December 16, 1989, I sat and listened, in awe, at the level of detail he could recall then and what he had written in his statements in May 1971. He had not seen his 1971 statements when he spoke for 4 hours on the December day. The aircraft armament, the weather, the ground fire, the terrain features, the Special Forces team on the ground, the approaches, the aircraft, direction of attack and effect of the airstrikes, the FAC and the makeup of the flight crews all poured out of him. His efforts enabled the American recovery team to go back into the correct crash site in 1990, however, all that remains are pieces of the aircraft that could not positively identify it as 65-17607.

I got the impression that Skip was releasing a mass of suppressed emotion and memories on a rescue attempt that failed. It was a significant event for me, because I knew from first hand professional experience of working on fast acting events in the Pentagon that Butler has little patience with failures.

In May 1971, Butler was assigned as a section leader to D Company 158th Assault Helicopter Battalion (AHB) 101st Airborne Division at Camp Evans, a northern base camp for the 3d Brigade and its supporting units. D\158th mission was to provide gunship support to the 3 UH-1H companies in the 158th. The company had 12 AH-1G's and a single OH-6A, which was used for maintenance runs. D/158th, the Redskins, usually were assigned direct support missions to one of the brigades of the 101st Airborne Division, or general support missions to the division or higher headquarters.

On May 17th, Butler was gun team lead of the AH-1G's assigned to provide general support to a classified ground reconnaissance unit, officially listed as Mobile Launch Team (MLT) 2 Task Force One Advisory Element (TF1AE), at Quang Tri. This unit was known to the helicopter crews as Combat Control North (CCN) and they understood it to be subordinate to the former Special Forces unit, the Studies and Observation Group (SOG). The CCN cadre would ask for Butler by name, to the 101st ABN tactical operations center (TOC) because they knew he was prefix 3, Special Forces qualified at Ft. Bragg, prior to going to flight school. Skip enjoyed this mission because of the great sense of accomplishment he received from doing it and the professionalism of the people he covered as they were inserted to conduct ground reconnaissance in northern I Corps and Laos. Everyone was thoroughly briefed before going on the mission and the helicopter crews knew that once the team was inserted, they had to be ready to extract them at moment's notice.

Don Davis began the day, with what he thought to be a no-fly day for him. Don was a platoon leader in C/158 AHB, the Phoenix, and was monitoring the flying assignments of his platoon. On this morning one of the pilots was sick and unable to fly, so Don took his place on a mission to logistically support one of the Division's three brigades. The aircraft commander was to be WO1 David P. Soyland, who was also the company standization instructor pilot (SIP). Soyland was disturbed that the originally assigned pilot, WO1 Dale A. Pearce was unable to fly, and wanted to know more about why Pearce couldn't fly. Due to the mission

report time, and change in crew, Soyland had to wait to learn the reason. From 0700 to 1530, Soyland and Davis flew many resupply missions in the flatlands, east of the mountains between Camp Eagle and Camp Evans.

Butler in the meantime had been monitoring the efforts of RT Alaska and the reports of 1LT Danny Entrician, who was on the team. According to Shelby Stanton's book, Green Berets At War, Entrician was the team leader, the one-zero. They had been inserted on May 15, 1971 along the border of Laos and northwest of the A Shau valley. The team had reported that numerous NVA were in the area, and Butler was thinking through his plan in the event the team was compromised. He knew what he had readily available with the 4 AH-1G's and how he would have to buy time for the FAC to get fighters on station, if they were needed.

By May 1971, Butler, Davis and Soyland were highly experienced, with each one having 6 months or more in country and qualified as aircraft commanders(AC). Some pilots went there entire tour without being qualified as AC's. Usually after a pilot had accumulated 300 hours on his first flying tour in Vietnam, he was recommended by another aircraft commander for consideration.

Foremost in being aircraft commander qualified, was the pilots ability to demonstrate strong flying skills, which included rapid and correct response to emergencies, a totally thorough knowledge of his aircraft and its operational limitations, safety, and a demonstrated high level of expertise in correctly and rapidly responding to the challenges of working

in the area of responsibility (AO). All of these skills required sound judgement.

After being recommended by other AC's, given an evaluation check ride by the unit instructor pilot(IP), the information was forwarded to the company commander with the SIP's input. The company commander was the final deciding authority. One of the good things about flying in Vietnam, was that the hours were plentiful and the ability to sharpen a flying skill was up to the individual, because the hours, environment, enemy threat, and possible aircraft emergencies were there for the taking.

"There wasn't any special training for pilots to fly the hazardous CCN missions," recalls Ken Mayberry, who was in C/158 AHB from Feb 70 to Feb 71. "My first month in-country, I flew constantly, because the Phoenix were having a large changeover in experienced pilots, and the company commander wanted to pass around as much experience as possible, before they left to return to the States." Mayberry's diary, shows that he flew constantly until he had accumulated a total of 120 hours, then he was held down, because of the United States Army Vietnam (USARV) directive that was concerned with fatigue of the flight crews and allowed only 120 hours per month. "You could rack up 120 hours fairly quickly, if things got hot and the unit was short of pilots, considering how missions sometimes ran 8-12 hours," Ken reflected in September 1992 in his home in Nebraska as he and I looked at his diary and went through his slides. "You wanted to do CCN missions, because there seemed to be a purpose in it, the people were highly professional, and you didn't want to mess up."

"Looking back on my tour, the CCN missions, although pretty hairy, really helped pass the time, because of the intensity of the situation."

Ken Mayberry has impressed me since the first time I saw him at the 1988 Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Reunion at Ft Worth. Ken has been confined to a wheel chair since 1983, because of multiple sclerosis; it is a physical, but not spiritual confinement. He's attitude and outlook on life has always inspirational. Whenever I get irritated because I can't exercise, at the pace I want to because of age and girth, I remember that Ken can't climb on a stair climber or Nordic track at all.

Skip Butler exuded confidence, then in 1971, as he does now. He came to Vietnam in December 1970 as a first lieutenant fresh out of flight school and the AH-1G "Cobra" transition. A tall, fair haired Southerner(Alabama), Skip was ready to mix it up, and chomped at the bit to get into the fight, even while an OCS candidate at Ft. Benning. In D/158th, "Redskins", he made his mark as a brash real live officer(RLO). RLO was a sarcastic term bestowed on the commissioned pilots by the warrant officer pilots. By the time he covered the first flight into Laos on Feb 8, 1971 at the beginning of Lam Son 719, he had been through the I Corps school of bad weather, unforgiving terrain and deadly combat, been humbled by the Cobra, humbled by the warrant officers, humbled by the experience of being shot at and missed. As he reflects back on his experiences, today, he writes off some of the more dangerous ones, such as diving at .51 cal machine

guns while being completely out of ammunition in the Cobra in order to save a downed Phoenix crew, as "the ignorance of youth." Those who were protected by "Redskin 15," still recall his unhesitant willingness to attack anything that threatened the "slicks."

Don Davis, confident, articulate, and reserved was the opposite of Skip in many ways, and similar in many others. Don graduated from West Point in 1968, and after attending Infantry officers basic, Ranger school, and airborne school, headed off to Germany with his new wife. By early 1970, Davis was in flight school at the Primary Helicopter School at Ft Wolters TX, his wife had just had a baby, and his life was being changed. Upon completion of flight school, he was assigned to fly UH-1H's in C/158 AHB. Prior to Lam Son 719, Davis had been in a crash at night and missed the early opening days. By March 5th, he would have been awarded a Silver Star, been covered by Butler on a hot LZ in Laos, and witnessed the sadness of losing two Phoenix flight crews in Laos. When the mission was hot, Davis performed.

David Soyland, all of 5'8'', 135 pounds, earned his wings going through the hell and harassment of Warrant Officer Candidate flight training. As the Tac Officers made serious attempts to weed out the weak, they met their match with David and his strong "can-do" spirit. He came from South Dakota and reflected the strong work ethic of that region. After flight school graduation, David was assigned to C\158 and earned his place as an aircraft commander. His single act of defiance to the "system" was to wear white T-shirts rather than the green

ones everybody else wore. His call sign was Phoenix 22. The previous Phoenix 22, CW2 Stewart was killed on the first day of Lam Son 719, when his UH-1H crashed inverted, killing all souls on board.

During Lam Son 719, C\158 had an acute shortage of IP's, so WO1s David Soyland and Dean Grau went to an IP course. Their rigorous course schedule took all of their time, but they also witnessed the sadness and hardship of loosing close friends in the two lost Phoenix crews. Both pilots had to demonstrate extremely high flying skills, maturity, and a cool head in order to be recommended for IP training. By May 17th, Soyland was ranked among the best, if not the best, of the Phoenix pilots.

The afternoon of May 17th, upon return from the resupply mission, Soyland's aircraft, UH-1H #65-17607 was put on standby and the crew waited at the Phoenix Nest at Camp Evans. In the meantime, Soyland met with Pearce, then told Davis that Pearce would be able to fly if the aircraft was recalled. Davis agreed since he had some administrative paper work to finish.

Don Davis still remembered in May 1990 with Skip Butler how a short two hours later everything was permanently changed. The aircraft was shot down by a B-40 rocket propelled grenade (RPG) and ground fire, Pearce was dead, Soyland had extracted himself from the upside down aircraft and was away from it. The crew chief, SP5 Harold E. Parker, was hanging upside down by the seat belt in the crew chief's well and unconscious from the wounds he recieved. The gunner, SP4 Garry E. Allcorn, a D\158 Cobra crew chief, who was filling in for the critical shortage of gunners in

C/158, was laying on the ground away from the aircraft, unconscious and in the same spot he was blown out of aircraft from the force of the explosion. Davis, now a pilot for the FBI leaves the impression, when he reflects back on this day, "There by the grace of God, go I."

The official report states" the helicopter was to extract a reconnaissance team that was under heavy fire by unknown sized enemy force. On approach to the pickup zone, the helicopter began taking heavy enemy fire. The aircraft began banking right and was hit by the enemy fire causing the aircraft to continue to bank and start to turn over. An rpg hit and severed the tailboom. The violence of the explosion threw SP4 Allcorn out of the aircraft, just before the aircraft crashed. After impact, the aircraft continued to slide to the bottom of the slope."

The sequence of events show that Butler, his wingship and 2 more Cobra's from D/101st AHB, "the Hawks," launched out of FOB Star at Quang Tri when the mission went bad. Butler's recalls, "On 17 May 71, I was team lead of two Cobra light fire teams assigned to CCN, MLT-2 in Quang Tri. My teams had just finished an insertion and extraction and were re-arming at Quang Tri Airstrip. I received a call that one of the CCN 8-man recon teams was in contact , they were pinned down and two dead and several wounded. I scrambled my four guns and CCN control launched the lift aircraft, which I think were the "Comancheros from A/101 AHB." I arrived on station and got a briefing from the Air Force FAC. (Note: In order to get a mental picture of how these "Blue suiters" orchestrated all the assets, and had the

complete respect and loyalty of the Special Forces teams, see DaNang Diary by COL Tom Yarborough, VietNam Above the Trees, by John F. Flanagan, or A Lonely Kind of War by Marshall Harrison. All are written by FACs that supported CCN, Project Delta, or CCS.)

Skip continues, "it was decided that we would try to extract the dead and wounded with one slick and the remainder with the second lift ship. I directed guns 3 & 4 to put a heavy prep on the woodline to the North and Northeast since the concentration of enemy fire was from that direction. The pickup zone that the team had fought there way to, was a finger(vicinity (VIC) YD 047 275) running south, southeast, off a 2 Klick long ridgeline that ran southeast to northwest. Elevation was marked at 860 meters(approximately 27-2800 feet) at the highest point of the ridge and the PZ was at a lower altitude. I held everybody in a daisy chain about 3 klicks to the northeast at about 5000 feet over a spot where the trails passed a stream. We had to get up to that "nose bleed" altitude in order to stay out of small arms range. We had not taken any heavy fire, like the 23mm or 37mm we had shot at us in Laos. Myself and my wingman escorted the slick in using heavy suppression. We flew down towards the PZ making maximum use of the terrain for navigation, because the enemy fire was too hot to be fooling around with a map. We had to fly over a creek, "blue line," that approached the finger, then we had to just fly, level, straight into the PZ. I was on the left and my wingman was on the right, the slick was in the middle. We were flying at about 50 knots in order to adjust to the slicks flight

attitude. Every time I fired a rocket, I had to dump the nose in order to hit the target and then readjust to protect the left side of the slick. Just as the slick lost his forward momentum and terminated over the PZ, the enemy began a heavy volume of fire and the lift ship had to abort with heavy damage and two wounded crew members. The second slick then tried to make the extraction after guns 3 & 4 had put another heavy prep on the enemy locations. I and my wingman again used heavy suppression as he was going in. As he terminated his approach, enemy fire caused him to abort. As he climbed out he lost his hydraulics, several of his instruments and had wounded on board. He proceeded to Quang Tri where he made a successful running landing. We had escorted him back since we needed to rearm, refuel, and rethink how we were going to get the CCN Reconnaissance Team(RT) Alaska out.

We then went back into the area with the 2 remaining Slicks and my four Cobras. Enroute we linked up with 4 more Slicks and 2 more guns, who had been launched from Phu Bai MLT-1, to assist us.

On our third attempt, my second set of guns made two passes on the enemy location before the Slick began his approach. I had the 4 remaining guns ready for heavy suppression when he went down. (Heavy suppression is risky, because the ammunition expenditure is high, and if there are complications, the Cobra does not have a lot of ammo left.) Despite our efforts the NVA fired up the Slick, wounded the co-pilot and damaged the aircraft. As the aircraft was climbing out I noticed what

appeared to be white smoke pouring out of the belly of the aircraft so my wingman, Cpt Steve Cook and I got in close to take a look. The white smoke was fuel and he had to get the aircraft down now. However, there was just nowhere to land so he made it over the mountain ridge to Mai Loc and landed safely there.

The FAC, either a "Barky" FAC in an OV-10 or a "Trail" FAC in an O-2, then was able to get some TAC Air into the area, snake and nape, as I recall and very close to the embattled team. We were putting rockets so close to the team, that they said, "Some of the stuff is exploding at the top of the trees and falling on us, but keep it coming!" While the fast movers were working over the area, all helicopters returned for fuel. While at Quang Tri, I requested another light fire team(2 Cobras) from D/158 be released from their mission and aid us. The request was approved and now we had 8 Cobras. After re-arm, we again headed for the area and were joined by still another set of guns from D/158, and 3 Slicks from C/158, David Soyland in the lead. We started up a daisy chain over the target area with 10 Cobras and 7 Slicks. It was now 1730 hours.

After the airstrikes, we again attempted to get a slick into the beseiged team. Soyland said he could get in there, so after a prep of the area by 2 Cobras from the aerial rocket artillery (ARA) unit, 4/77th ARA, he started his approach. I was using 4 D/158 guns as escort with full suppression. All the way down his flight path, Soyland had a Cobra on each side of him firing all the way down to the pickup zone(PZ). As Steve Cook and I made our break, the other two would be right behind us.

Just as I made my break, I saw the aircraft kick right pedal and start out. The pilot said he was "taking fire, taking heavy fire!" I saw pieces of the aircraft flying through the air and aircraft began to roll. By then my aircraft was in a position where I did not see the aircraft impact."

Steve Cook, Butler's wingman, was in a better position to observe as he made his break. Steve was extremely observant, and picked many things quickly about a target area, because he was on his second tour in the 101st and had been on the ground on the previous tour, as an Infantry platoon leader. He earned a Silver Star on the ground as an Infantry platoon leader and in the air, during Lam Son 719.

Steve's statement, written immediately after the mission, states, "I was breaking out of the run, directly over the PZ and was in a perfect position to observe the Phoenix aircraft. It was very apparent that he was receiving fire. I observed impacting rounds and pieces of his aircraft being torn off. This was on his left side as he was breaking to the Southeast. Suddenly the aircraft yawed violently to the right, the entire tail boom separated from the fuselage. The aircraft then inverted, rolling to its right, impacted on the side of the ridge, slid down approximately 100 ft and came to rest in a deeply vegetated area. The two D/158 guns covering us immediately dived into the target area. The lead, Cpt Mike Petty and his wingman, CW2 Don Wann, reported that the aircraft was immersed in thick vegetation and couldn't be seen. Due to our critically low fuel state, we all had to break for fuel.

In our absence, a Bright Light team, sometimes used for extraction of downed aircraft crews, was inserted approximately 700 meters to the south-southwest of the recon team with the intention of linking up and reinforcing the team in trouble. The link-up never occurred due to darkness, the extremely difficult terrain and the hazardous tactical situation. A first light extraction was scheduled for the next day.

The following morning we arrived at the extraction site and held in orbit while the FAC employed the TAC AIR. Upon completion of the airstrikes, the Bright Light team and 4 remaining members were extracted." (Steve Cook died in 1984.)

Official statements after the shootdown of Soyland's aircraft state. "...at 1930 a rescue force(Bright Light) was inserted to link up with the ground element and extract any downed aircraft crew members. Due to the darkness and enemy movement, the rescue force was unable to move south to the ground element or the downed aircraft during the night.

At 0700 the next day, May 18th, the rescue force was attempting to link up when it was struck by suspected enemy B-40 rocket propelled grenades (RPG) resulting on one friendly KIA, and several serious WIA. Shortly thereafter, contact was made with the original ground force that had been in contact and overrun by enemy forces. MLT 2, the TF1AE element controlling the operation, extracted the survivors of the ground force and the rescue force.

At 1245, after three airstrikes, MLT-2 inserted a second rescue, believed to be RT KRAU and RT HABU, which swept through

the area of the contact and crash. Although receiving sporadic enemy fire, the second rescue force succeeded in extract the two survivors from the aircraft(SP4 Allcorn and SP5 Parker) and the bodies of three members of the ground force. The leader of the second rescue force later informed the CO, MLT 2 that there was another body near the downed aircraft but that he was unable to extract the body.

A FAC continued to fly over the area of contact and crash site until darkness without seeing any signs of life, On 19 May numerous search aircraft flew over the area by reported no signs of life, On 20 May the AO was turned over to the 101st so that the division resources could be utilized to search for the missing personnel."

The body near the aircraft was believed to be WO1 Pearce. The body was unidentifiable, but bigger than Soyland. The name tag, rank, or any other insignia could not be seen, because the body was buried in heavy debris and the rescue team did not have the equipment to dig him out, nor the time, because of the enemy activity.

The downed helicopter was upside down and pointing uphill at the bottom of a steep ravine. The tail boom was broken off as were both of the rotors. The aircraft's path to its final resting place cut a wide(approximately 5 meters) trail through the masked vegetation and broken pieces of the bird were scattered about. The right side of the aircraft was badly damaged and the right front seat was almost completely ripped out of the aircraft. The seatbelt and shoulder harness had been completely ripped out.

The left seat(Soyland's) was intact, as was the left side. The armor plate on the left side of the aircraft was moved back and no blood was found on the pilots's side. All indications were that the pilot exited the aircraft under his own power. Also there were footprints in the mud on the left side of the aircraft where someone had exited and entered the aircraft. At this point, all that was certain was that the crew chief, SP5 Parker was alive and being medically treated for a wound in the upper leg and a fracture in the same place. The unidentifiable body could have been the co-pilot, WO1 Pearce.

The crew chief (SP5 Parker)stated, "at 1730 as we began our final approach into the LZ we started receiving enemy fire. I remember returning fire and I was knocked out. When I awoke I was all alone in the chopper. I tried the radio and then noticed that my door gunner's M-60 was gone and also both of my survival packets. There was no movement around the chopper that I could detect. I did not see anyone until the next day when I was rescued. While I was at the 18th Surgical Hospital, I ran into my door gunner(SP4 Allhorn). I asked him if he what happened to the two pilots and he said he was thrown out of the aircraft and I was the only person he had seen since the incident." Today, in 1994 is a command sergeant major.

The gunner was SP4 Allcorn from the Cobra unit, D/158th. He was a Cobra crew chief with the military occupational specialty of 67Y. 67Y's were not on flight status, because the AH-1G only carried a crew of two, the pilot and the copilot/gunner, and there was no flying position for them. Their days were boring,

since all they had to do was be on the flight line to see their aircraft off and perform required maintenance when it returned. Because Allcorn had a lot of time on his hands, he would volunteer to fly as a door gunner in the UH-1H companies that were short gunners. The gunner's position was in the right rear well of the UH-1H's cargo area behind the co-pilot. The crew chief was on the left side in the well behind the aircraft commander. He states, "I was flying door gunner for C/158th with the crew chief, SP5 Parker. I did not know the names of the co-pilot nor aircraft commander. Our aircraft was scrambled off the Phoenix Nest on a CCN tactical emergency around 1700 hours. Enroute to the field location, I heard the briefing given to the aircraft commander and learned that were to take part in the extraction of a CCN team that had several dead and wounded and was out of ammunition. On short final to the PZ, our aircraft was hit by ground fire and forced to crash. Also when on short final and I was firing my M-60 to the front of the aircraft, I saw the pilot in the right seat throw his arms into the air over his head. I was thrown from the aircraft and it inverted, when the tail boom separated. I was knocked unconscious and when I woke up, I saw that I was 25 meters from the tail boom. I saw marks on the ground where the aircraft had slid down the hill. I was following the marks downhill, when I heard movement in the direction I was going. My first thought was it must be the enemy, so I hid in the bushes and spent the night. Next morning at dawn, I heard one rifle shot below me and figured the enemy probably shot someone in the aircraft. I proceeded on up the

slope toward the direction of the PZ. I heard Cobras firing in the PZ, turned back around and started back down hill. I got misoriented and ended up on the wrong ridgeline. I saw someone wearing a white T-shirt on a neighboring ridgeline running downhill and using the banana trees as a springboard to propel himself faster. I couldn't tell if he was friendly or enemy. I walked on a couple ridgelines and waved down a helicopter and was rescued the afternoon of 18 May 1971. After I saw the man with the white T-shirt, I didn't see anyone else until I was rescued, although I did hear movement. After I was rescued, I learned that the crew chief, SP5 Parker had been rescued and a search operation was going on for the co-pilot and aircraft commander." Today, Master Sergeant Allcorn US Army Reserve, posted in an aviation unit in Olathe Kansas, can recall with detail the events.

A report from a scout pilot from Troop A, 2/17th CAV, 101st ABN, starkly describes the area around the crash site, YD 048265. It also clearly shows why the NVA were so bold:

"The area of the downed aircraft was a known NVA infiltration route with numerous trails and bunker complexes throughout the trees. Most of the trails had signs of activity within 24 to 36 hours.

The area directly up the mountain from the crash site had bunkers and spider holes, as well as trails. Moving farther up the ridge, there were a few more trails and trees that had been chopped down. Moving down the mountain, toward the stream, there was still more activity. There was a trail that runs parallel

along the stream all the way throughout the valley.

Moving along the stream towards the Da Krong River, we found at least four fish traps and one pole type object as well as a bag lying next to the stream. Moving along the stream towards the Da Krong river, on the left bank we found construction under some trees made from logs with a semi walk-in entrance. About the second bend up from the Da Krong, next to the stream, there were several hootches concealed under trees and brush.

Moving the other direct along the stream NW away from the crash site, there was still enemy activity; trails, crossing clearings in many places. At one point we found new construction along the stream, but were unable to locate it the next day. When we had flown up the valley almost to its end, we found one fresh .51 cal pit and two hootches. Also, we located a large double entrance bunker.

Moving across the valley from the crash site, there were many cultivated corn fields. The bunkers were much more spread out in this area, but trail activity was about the same. Throughout the valley you could find cut wood and logs; trails were frequent."

Officially, the search for Soyland ended around May 26th. His room in the pilot's hootch at Camp Evans was nailed shut and his call sign, Phoenix 22 was never used again. Skip Butler wears Soyland's POW/MIA bracelet daily. Dean Grau, who went through IP training, still thinks of Soyland.

Don Davis, visited Soyland's brother in South Dakota in 1991, during a pheasant hunting trip. Typically, there was a

family resemblance, the family had not heard from anyone who had known David, and it was extremely hard to do, but immensely rewarding.

Although I did not know David Soyland, I always think of him when someone at the Vietnam Memorial, after seeing my Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA) logo on my hat, thanks me for some helicopter crew that willingly pulled them out of some mess. I think of him, when I see former members of the Special Forces at the memorial, and wonder what happened to 1LT Danny Entrician, who like David, did not return. Or what happened to those courageous Green Berets, who went back into the crash site and brought back the crew chief and gunner? How can we the pilots and crews ever thank them, other than preserving their memory.

I remember David when I see the gathering of the Phoenix at the annual VHPA reunions. Now, they are older, grayer, a little thicker; they're lawyers, dentists, Army Generals, retired military, salesmen, policemen, pilots, school teachers, and leading different lives. Finally, I always am reminded of David Soyland's sacrifice, when I see the saying, "You've never lived 'til you've almost died. For those who fight for it, life has a flavor the protected will never know!"