I've never told this story to anyone and I don't know who Im telling it to now. Maybe myself.

Wayne was a friend of mine. I first met him when he showed up at my unit one day in early 1968. I'm not certain, but I think Wayne was assigned as a laison officer to the 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry from his own unit which was one of the lift companies of the 229th Aviation Battalion. Its possible that he was temporarily assigned to us as a "Peter Pilot" for the Command and Control section. In any event , it doesn't matter. I met him and we became friends.

The 1ST Brigade Aviation Section was a small unit as 1st Air Cav ALRY DIVISION Units went. We had four UH-1H Hueys and eight OH-13 S models and were divided into two sections: Command and Control (C&C or more commonly Charlie-Charlie) and Aeroscouts. I was the section leader for the Aeroscouts.

The C&C section provided support to the Brigade and ~~the~~ HIS three manuever Battalions. The Charlie-Charlie Hueys were stuffed with radios and were used by the Commanders to maintain contact with their units in the field. They provided an aerial communications and observation platform when troops were manuevering or WHEN THEY were in contact with the enemy. ~~In addition,~~ They were ALSO called on to perform all types of other missions ranging from Medevac to emergency resupplies, ~~usually because they were Johnny-on-the-spot~~.

The Aeroscout Section was exactly what it sounds like. A modern version of what the cavalry scout has always been; light, fast, manueverable observors of the battlefield. The eyes and ears of the Commander, as it were. We were flying the OH-13 S model (alias "teenybopper" after a hit song by Sonny and Cher) and were scheduled to receive the OH-6A "Loach" in the near future. The OH-13s was a Bell design that predated the Korean War. It had a turbocharged reciprocating engine, a manual throttle, and pilots that loved it. It was a stable and stoggy performer, limited in airspeed and useful load, but it's ability to hover made it an ideal scout platform.

The ~~missions~~ aircraft were flown from the left seat and the observor sat in the right seat. The controls had been removed from the right side of the cockpit to make room for an ammunition box that sat on the floor between the observors feet. The box contained 1000 rounds of linked 7.62 ammunition for the M-60 machine gun carried by the observor. There was an ammo can filled with fragmentation grenades between the pilot and observors seats and hand grenades of all ~~kinds~~ types hung from safety wire which had been strung like clothsline throughout the cockpit. We carried smoke grenades (all colors except white), white phosperous grenades (willie pete ~~were super~~ was ideal for starting fires or marking targets for the Air Force), concussion grenades (worked great on bunkers), CS (tear gas) grenades and whatever else we thought would be useful or entertaining. The bottom and back of the bench style seats had sheets of armour plating lying on them that would protect the crew from small arms fire. I can't think of a crew that didn't have at least one round ~~in the~~ stopped by the armour plating. The shock of the round hitting the armour would leave you stiff & sore, but that was much preferred to the alternative.

– add comment about combat utility of helicopters & their ~~the~~ ability to absorb damage

The Aeroscout mission was a simple one: Find the enemy. We worked ahead of the troops maneuvering on the ground, checked out LZ's before the troops went in and PZ's after they left. We were responsible for first and last light recon's of the Brigade AO (area of operation) and reconed areas of contact before the troops ~~went in~~ attacked. If we ran across a small enemy force we would engage them ourselves. If there were more than we could handle, and there usually ~~was~~ were, we'd call in artillery, airstrikes, and the Cavalry.

– add comments about power at disposal

The pilots were all volunteers. More than that, they had to be accepted by the small fraternity of pilots they sought to join. If one of the scout pilots did not feel a candidate was someone he wanted to fly with, the selection process stopped right then and there with a blackball. No questions were asked, no explaination was required. The nature of the job was such that we put ourselves in harms way on a regular basis and did not feel the ~~desire~~ need to have second thoughts about the competancy of ~~a~~ our wingman.

As a group, we were younger than most, independant as hell, secure in ourselves and our ability to the point of being real pains in the ass when on the ground. We were probably viewed as crazy by others (including the enemy), and typically had nothing to lose. The latter characteristic was probably the most important since one of the primary techniques we employed to accomplish our mission of finding the enemy was to invent new and more adventuresome ways to get shot at, and ~~get~~ we got shot at a lot. ~~We did.~~

~~[illegible] officer corps~~

Fortunately they missed most of the time. However, a scout pilots definition of "missed" is different than that of most others. When a Lift pilot tells you that he was shot at and "missed", he means that no rounds hit his aircraft. When a scout pilot tells you he was shot at and "missed", he means that they missed him. We drove our maintenance officer crazy — add comments

In any event, Wayne met ~~all~~ the criteria for a good scout pilot. He was handsome, or at least I remember him to be so, self-assured to the point of cockiness, had a devil-may-care attitude, told good stories, drank well (happy, not sullen or violent), and was one of those persons you like instinctively. At least I did. Wayne had a few drawbacks. He was older than most of us, ~~married~~, and had a, ~~small~~ baby back in the World. Wayne's likeability and desire to become a scout pilot may have clouded my judgement a little, but in any event, he was in, no blackball.

Wayne's transfer was approved and, in short order, we began his transition into the OH-13. This training was mixed with some right seat (observor) ~~flying~~ time to help him learn what the mission was all about while an experienced pilot handled the controls. Transitions in Vietnam did not proceed at the leisurly pace of stateside transitions. Wayne was to devote all his time to completing the transition and passing a checkride as quickly as possible. Since a transitioning pilot had nothing else to do and an aircraft at his disposal, he was expected to ~~literally~~ live with the helicopter and fly as many hours as he

felt were productive every day. It was not unusual for four or more hours of flight time to be burned off in a single day. Most transitions took less than a week depending on aircraft and Instructor Pilot availability. We tried to tailor the training to the mission, so special emphasis was placed on hovering and low, slow flight.

Once Wayne had passed his checkride, he started flying Ass & Trash missions (carrying people, mail, and reports) until he built up about 50 to 100 hours in the aircraft. ~~Once~~ When a pilot was deemed proficient by his peers, he began flying wing on easy missions or at least missions I thought would be easy. This, however, ~~It~~ was damned hard to predict. Missions that appeared easy had a habit of getting complicated quickly.

1968 was not an easy year to be in Vietnam, let alone in the 1st Air Cavalry Division. We had moved from Binh Dinh Province in Northern II Corps to Northern I Corps and were pretty much responsible for everything from the old imperial city of Hue, north to Quang Tri. ~~After several stops at~~ Hue Phu Bai, Camp Evans, ~~and~~ LZ Nancy and Dong Ha, the 1st Bde finally settled at LZ Betty. ~~just south of Quang Tri, the Provincial Capital~~. In late January, one of the most publicised and controversial battles of the war began at a Marine base in northwest Quang Tri province ~~called~~ named Khe Sanh. Except for rumors of heavy fighting, the battle had little immediate effect on us. This would not last for long.

The 1st Cav had been involved in Operation Lancaster II since it moved to I Corps. The primary activity of the 1st Brigade, ~~at that~~ during this time involved sweeps of the area south of the Quang Tri river from the sea to the mountains. The area, except

for a large strip of low lying sand dunes, perhaps two miles wide and parallel to the coast, consisted of rice paddy fields liberally sprinkled with small villages. The rice paddies continued until Route 1, the major north-south highway in Vietnam. Once west of Route 1, the terrain changed to rolling hills then mountains within about ten miles. Add comments about Hue Stint without Tay and a few large ones

A number of small actions were fought during the first couple of weeks until the NVA realized they were dealing with the Cav. Once they get the message that massive and immediate retaliation was our ~~Immediate~~ response, NVA initiated attacks slowed and we had to rely on sweeps and scout activity ~~the~~ to find the enemy. There were a couple of medium sized contacts, but nothing serious. It seemed that the NVA had simply decided not to challenge us, at least thats what we thought.

On 30 January 1968, at dawn of the first day of the lunar new year or Tet, the Vietcong and NVA launched the largest most coordinated offensive of the war. They attacked South Vietnams seven largest cities and thirty provincial capitals ranging from the Delta to the DMZ. ~~In our area of responsibility~~ At LZ Betty, the day started with an hour long Pre-dawn rocket and mortor attack. There was a ground attack on LZ Sherman etc The NVA had taken downtown Quang Tri and the city of Hue. Since the 1st Brigade was stationed just outside of Quang Tri, the next few days were spent in intense battles driving the NVA forces from the city and surrounding areas. Despite the magnitude of the attacks, our casualities were relatively light. This was not true of the NVA. Their forces were devastated. They were simply no match for the firepower and manuever capabilities of the Cav. By the third day, the battle at Quang Tri was largely over. This was not the case at Hue.

The attack on the old imperial capital had been in force and the NVA had managed to take the lightly defended Citadel and moved large numbers of troops into the old fortress. The battle there took almost a month and consisted largely of house to house fighting. The 1st Cav together with significant assistance from the South Vietnamese Army and the Marines. ultimately retook the Citadel on 24 February. The battle of Hue officially ended about a week later. The NVA and Vietcong suffered massive losses everywhere during Tet. They were simply no match for our ability to fire and manuever. The Tet Offensive was a military disaster for the enemy, and while we had been itching for just such an opportunity to fight the NVA in a pitched battle, history ultimately showed Tet to be a psychological and political defeat.

During this time period, the seige at Khe Sanh continued. On 7 February, nine NVA PT-76 light tanks crossed the river that constituted the Laotian Border and, together with infanrty, attacked the Special Forces camp at Lang Vei, southwest of Khe Sanh. The battle lasted about eighteen hours and resulted in the loss of over 300 allied troops, including eight Americans. Weather and the enemy prevented any aid from reaching the outpost from Khe Sanh.

The base at Khe Sanh was in trouble and the monsoon season was not making things any easier. Our preoccuation with the events surrounding Tet prevented any significant relief from reaching Khe Sanh for the time being. NVA artillery located in

the DMZ and Laos kept up an incessant barrage of the base and sapper units tried the perimeter repeatedly. The troops were pinned in their trenchs and bunkers by the barrage and news reports reaching us painted a picture of ultimate defeat and was beginning to draw parallels between Khe Sanh and Dien Bien Phu. Due to the difficulty in supplying the base by air, the decision was made not to reinforce but to use massive artillery barrages and air strikes during the seige. Neutron Operation Niagra

In late March, the weather started to improve and on 1 April, Operation Pegasus, the 1st Cav's relief of Khe Sanh began. The Quang Tri River flows east out of the Khe Sanh valley, turns south at a hamlet named Ca Lu, continues throught the Ba Tang valley, then turns northeast to Quanq Tri. The 1st Cav followed the river upstream from it's staging areas south of Quang Tri and flew into the Valley from the east. My scout team was sitting on the ground at Ca Lu as the assault began. The necessary artillery preps and air strikes had gone in and the LZ's were ready to accept the troops. The lift companies of the 227th and 229th as well as the Chinooks of the 228th were all airborne at the same time. Since the Cav had over 400 helicopters, it was an awesome sight to see. We sat on the ground waiting for our signal to depart for Khe Sanh and watched flights of six helicopters spaced about two miles apart turn west on to the final leg into the valley for over an hour. It was a bit like the little clown car at the circus. It never ended or even slowed up. Part of it was an illusion caused by the fact that the outbound route was different from the inbound, but this never ending stream of helicopters could not help but

impress on you the incredible striking power of the Cav. The ability to lift and move an entire division and all it's supporting artillery 50 miles in a matter of a few hours made it clear that a new manner of fighting had been developed.

Tucked into the northwest corner of South Vietnam ,Khe Sanh was an incredible place. Flying into that valley hard up against the Laotian border and ~~into~~ within artillery range of NVA guns in Laos was frightening enough, but the landscape made it seem as if you'd landed on the moon. During the seige, the Air Force had dropped over 5000 bombs a day on the area surrounding the base. The Arc Lights (B-52 raids) had literally turned the surface inside out. It was as if some giant had taken a spade and simply turned over the soil in his garden. The Cav took considerable pride in relieving the Marines and were not shy about letting people know about it. The trail ship on the first lift into Khe Sanh dropped off a detail who painted a huge Cav patch on the end of the runway while another ship scattered leaflets around the base bearing a Cav patch with the message "You can come out now". On 6 April, the seige was officially lifted when we linked up with the marines just south of the Khe Sanh airstrip.

Over a three day period, starting on 10 April, we retook the Special Forces camp at Lang Vei. Seeing the PT-76 tanks sitting on top of what had been the command bunker was an eerie sight. It was the first enemy armour I had seen and the prospect of running into more in an OH-13 was a little disconcerting. - add comment about impromptu anti tank weapons

The relief of Khe Sanh was over within two weeks. We returned to Quang Tri and almost immediately left for the Ashau Valley.

The Ashau is a long, narrow, verdant valley located deep in the mountains, approximately 40 miles southwest of Hue. The valley parallels the Laotion border and runs from the small village of A Shau, northwest for about twenty-five miles, to a point about five miles north of the village of A Luoi. None of the villages in the valley were populated and in the case of A Luoi, there was no sign of habitation other than the ruins of an old French outpost. No allied troops had been in the valley in over two years and the NVA had taken full advantage of their absence.

The valley had been the main supply and staging area for the attacks throughout I Corps during Tet and, despite the massive losses the NVA had suffered, the A Shau continued to function as a major resupply area. The floor of the valley was filled with small and large supply dumps and was serviced by a excellent network of roads. The place didn't just have roads,it had highways. There were Russian supplied bulldozers and 2 1/2 ton trucks stationed along the valley floor to repair the handiwork of the Air Force as soon as the bombs stopped falling. Entire road networks and warehousing areas were protected from aerial observation by trellises hung with folage. The intelligence we had indicated that at night the valley was alive with truck convoys. In fact, once we were in the valley, some of our units had NVA convoys drive up on them in broad daylight.

The NVA had the most extensive anti-aircraft installations that we had yet faced. There were radar guided 37mm canons and quad 12.7mm machine guns in addition to optically aimed canons and numerous 12.7mm gun installations, particularly in the area near the "hourglass" just north of A Luoi runway. A Luoi was an old French outpost in the northern third of the valley located just southeast of a mountain with a bowl shaped southen face that the 101st Airborne would make infamous as "Hamburger Hill" a year or so later.

It was a scary place to fly. The valley floor was around 3000 feet above sea level and the surrounding mountains ran up to 7000 feet or more. The high temperature and humidity made it a very difficult place to operate our OH-13's. The restricted engine power and reduced effectiveness of our rotor systems caused by the high density altitudes we were operating at made scout operations much more difficult. Most of our ships would not hover out of ground effect and the lack of reserve power made it very dangerous since we gave up much of our ability to manuever out of bad situations.

Consequently we found ourselves hanging our butts out that much farther in order to get the mission done. The division lost something like 43 aircraft the first day out. Unfortunately, I managed to contribute to the total. Frank Vanetta and I were the two scout team leaders in the section, but had decided to fly the initial mission together so that both of us would have experience in the valley on subsequant missions. We were to supply scout coverage for the initial

assault on the runway at A Luoi and provide the ground troops with assistance as they moved to their initial objective. We arrived on station about twenty minutes prior to the arrival of the lift aircraft carrying the troops and began to scour the LZ. On the third pass, a 12.7mm opened up on us. It was imperative that we take out that gun. It was located on final approach to the LZ and would raise holy hell with the loaded Huey's that were inbound. We didn't have access to artillery since the fire support bases had not been established yet, but the Air Force was providing air strikes on-call. Frank got on the radio with some F-4,s that were on station and when he gave the word, I made a low pass over the gun position and marked it with a Willie Pete.

The F-4 must have been inbound to the target, because I was no more 500 meters away from the target when the first load of 500 pounders hit. The F-4's were with the Gunfighters out of Da Nang and had consistantly delivered bombs on time and on target and they did the same thing this time. The 12.7 mm was turned into a smoking hole and the lift proceeded relatively uneventfully. One of the Huey's took a hit in the tailboom but the round didn't hit anything important and they were able to continue the flight. It was years later that I found out my twin brother had been flying Chock 2 in the lift flight that made the initial assault on A Luoi.

Once the troops were on the ground, they formed up on-line and moved off to the north. Their objective was a small hill less than one kilometer north of the airfield. It wasn't large,

but it commanded the surrounding terrain and it was important that we controll it. We would be bringing in a battalion of infantry to A Luoi in the next hour and didn't need any interference. We moved out ahead of the troops to check for enemy positions. The area the troops had to move through was covered in relatively short vegetation and the first likely spot for difficulty was a small stream and the forward face of the hill they were trying to take. I flew over to and around the base of the hill so that I would approach the forward slope from behind. As we swept past the forward slope my observor started yelling at me that there were all kinds of NVA dug in below us. I looked out his side of the aircraft and sure enough there was at least a platoon of NVA set in ambush for the griund troops.

We tried to reach the troops by radio, but were unable to raise anyone. The leading elements were only about 500 meters away by this time and something needed to be done fast. There was no place to land near the troops to warn and we didn't have any effective way to warn them of what was ahead. I called Frank, told him what we had and told him I was going to make one more pass and fire on the dug in NVA positions to see if we could draw their fire and get the message to the ground troops that way.

Some plans are destined for failure and some suceed beyond your wildest dreams. We flew around the hill one more time and as soon as we came up on the NVA positions on the forward face, my observor opened fire with his M-60. The response was immediate and overwhelming. The entire platoon must have opened

up on us because the gunfire sounded like popcorn going off. I could feel the rounds striking the aircraft, but it didn't feel like it had in the past when one or two rounds had been taken. This time it was as if we were being hit by hail.

I immediately broke away from the contact and headed for the runway at A Luoi. On the way in, I noticed that the troops had hit the ground, so at least we had gotten our message across. The aircraft handled okay and nothing seemed to be broken, but I made a run-on landing anyway and shut down the aircraft. While I was inspecting my aircraft (and my underwear), Frank contacted the Air Force and our own gunships and ruined the rest of the day for the NVA that had opened up on me.

We had taken hits in both fuel tanks and fuel spurted out of them in streams. The rotor head, both blades, and numerous locations on the tailboom had taken hits. There were twenty-three hit in the tailboom alone, which is remarkable considering that the OH-13 tailboom is struss construction (tubular) and there isn't much to hit. I sat on the runway for a while and was ultimately picked up by one of our Charlie-Charlies on it's way back to Camp Evans. Remarkably enough, the damaged aircraft was flown out of the valley two days later after repairs had been made. We took the hill, nobody except the enemy was hurt, and my aircraft was repairable. What more could a guy want.

Losses of aircraft continued the entire time we were in the valley, including F-4's and at least one C-130 that wouldn't listen to our pleas to break right instead of left as he para-dropped supplies to us at Aloi. In any event, the Ashau Valley was no place for Wayne to learn how to fly scouts, so we didn't let him come.

We had been operating in the valley for about three weeks when I received orders to go to the OH-6A transition at Vung-Tau. I was to pick up our first "loach" on the way back. Vung-Tau was located on the Vietnamese "Riviera" and was the in-country R&R center for Vietnam. After six months in country and three weeks in the valley, I jumped at the chance to leave. I flew out of Aloi runway on a C-123 that took me directly to Vung-Tau (from the worst place in Vietnam to the best in a couple of hours). The only transition more unreal was when I DEROSed and ended up on the streets of Detroit three days after I flew my last combat
mission. I wish I had thought out the repercussions of my decission to leave. Unfortunately, I hadn't, and since I was no longer there, Wayne mounted his OH-13 and flew into the Valley, a little like the Light Brigade.

In order to understand how special this trip to Vung-Tau was, it's important to understand some things about the 1st Air Cavalry Division. The Cav. was the ready reaction force for Viet-Nam and as such was normally stationed wherever the action was the hottest. We were constantly on the move. In the five months I had been in country, my unit had lived in nine

different places. As a consequence, our living conditions were decidedly primitive. We never seemed to manage to get beyond the tent and pallet flooring stage. We were a combat unit, proud of it and we took a certain pride in being the scruffiest troops in Vietnam. Our uniforms were normally dirty, torn and mismatched. The monsoon season was just ending and the Army and Air Force had found it difficult enough keeping us supplied with fuel and ammunition let alone food and clothing. The tropical climate of Vietnam seemed to breed bugs and fungi that ate our boots and uniforms. These conditions made it impossible to keep our uniforms and boots clean let alone up to standards. If you saw a soldier in starched fatigues and shiney boots, bearing the

correct patches and other insignia, you could rest assured you had not run into a Cav trooper.

The three weeks spent in the valley had been typical. We slept in a GP Medium tent on stretchers raised above the dirt floor by ammo boxes. Meals were "C" rations and occasionally "B" rations. For the uninformed, the opinion was that "B"'s were "C"'s that came in bigger cans. Until the engineers had repaired the cratered Aloi runway, the Air Force had to paradrop everything to us. Since our perimeter was so small, and there was no seperate and secure DZ, the drops were made literally overhead. It was an rather exciting experience to have pallets of food, fuel and ammunition dropped on your head. It tended to keep one alert and nimble.

The facilities for personal hygiene were equally primitive. Our only bathing facility was a crater left by a bomb that had fallen into a stream just outside the wire on the north end of the runway. The water was muddy, but refreshing and while we may not have come out clean, we at least removed most of the crud. We did have a four holer, a concession to the physiological side effects of the anti-malarial medication we were required to take.

Vung Tau was heaven. The city was an old French resort located on a peninsula that jutted southwestward into the South China sea about sixty miles southeast of Saigon. It retained much of the elegance of the French colonial era and was still widely known by it's colonial name of Cap Saint Jacques.

Vung Tau was the beneficiery of an informal truce. It was widely rumored that the NVA and the allied forces had a quid pro quo understanding that as long as neither side acted against the other, Vung Tau was off limits for fighting. While it was impossible to tell, the story was that the NVA and Viet-Cong also used Vung Tau as an R&R center.

The hotel I was billeted at was an old colonial hotel called the Grand. It had a large courtyard that led to a terraced veranda. The French doors along the front of the hotel opened into the lobby area and bar. It looked like something you'd find in a Bogart movie or a Hemmingway novel. My room had a real bed with clean white sheets, an old style pull-chain comode and it's own shower. I took a long shower, crawled between the crisp white sheets (the first I had seen in six months) and slept for 18 hours.

When I awoke, I found the uniform I had worn into the hotel hanging in the closet, cleaned and starched. An attempt had been made to polish my boots, but a note in one of them bearing the word "sorry" indicated that they were beyond hope. While I hadn't requested the valet service, I suspect the manager caught one whiff of me and decided "Not in my hotel". I took another shower, dressed and went down to the bar.

The bar was made of elegantly carved mahogony as was the backbar. Ceiling fans stirred the air and the place left the impression that it was taken off the set of a thirty's adventure movie. I had a drink and asked the bartender where I could get a good meal. He directed me to a French restaurant not far away.

The restaurant was a genuine "French" style establishment complete with a tuxedoed Maitre 'd hotel and waiters in white waistcoats. The dining area was located outdoors on a terrace with a spectacular view of the South China Sea. Tropical plants were placed throughout the dining area, and the tables were set in fine china, crystal and silver. The service was classic french and there I sat in a set of stained and rotting jungle fatigues. After a couple more drinks, I had a real salad, a delicious lobster dinner with a bottle of imported French wine. I was sure I had died and gone to heaven. This tropical resort couldn't possibly be in Vietnam.

The OH-6A transition course was great. My IP was a young Warrant Officer who really knew the aircraft but didn't know diddly about the mission we flew or it's tactics. As a consequence, once he was confident I had learned the basics about flying the aircraft, he pretty much let me have my head to find out what the aircraft would do.

The "six" was fabulous machine. It was built by Hughs Aircraft and according to the propaganda was built to be a pilot's aircraft. The propaganda was not only true, it understated the case by a considerable margin. The ship had a fully articulated rotor system which made it smooth, fast and more importantly, highly manueverable. It had a turbine engine with plenty of reserve power. The design made the aircraft look a little like an egg with a hard-on, but the design had been intentional. The round shape and "A" frame construction made this aircraft incredibly strong. It was to become the safest helicopter to crash ever built and since crashing helicopters seemed to be part of the job description for scout pilots, this characteristic became it's most valued. While you couldnt guarantee that you'd never roll one up into a little ball, the "six" gave you better than even odds that you'd walk away. What more could a guy want.

The other thing that they gave us was a mini-gun. The XM-27E1 mounted on the left side of the aircraft and had a internal ammo box that carried 2000 rounds of 7.62mm. The gun would fire either 2000 SPM (shots per minute) or 4000 SPM and gave you an incredible sense of power and invincibility. It was great. For the first time the pilot had an effective weapon system at his disposal and did not have to rely entirely on his observors

M-60 machinegun for firepower. The downside is that it made us a little too agressive and often we would hang around and duke it out when we should have di-di'ed the area and called for help. Later, many units removed the gun from the aircraft because of this tendancy.

I don't want to imply that the aircraft was perfect, it wasn't. It had some problems, like the disturbing tendancy of the leading edge of the rotor to erode away if it was flown in rain. We had a little difficulty understanding how this one got by the engineers, especially since the ship was destined for place where it rained all the time. In any event, a fix was developed which worked out just fine. We put adhesive tape on the first foot of the leading edge and when it wore through, we simply replaced tape rather than rotor blades. It was a lot cheaper.

Another problem that cropped up was a little wiring glitch that caused the mini-gun to fire if a press to test button unrelated to the weapons system was pressed with the system armed. Unintentional I'm sure, but I suspect it was a little disconcerting to the pilot who discovered the problem. I always wondered where the gun was aimed. The fix for this was even simpler. The Army just said: "Don't do that!".

The transition course lasted for about a week or so and I hitched a ride to Quang Nai, where I picked up our units first OH-6A. I was there for a day or so completing the necessary paperwork and doing the acceptance inspection. Once I was done, I ferried the aircraft back to Quang Tri. I probably could have

stretched the trip out for another day or two, but I was anxious to get this new ship back to my unit and show it off to the guys.

I followed the coastline north to Da Nang and refueled at the airbase. I took off and followed the coast and Route 1 through Hoa Van pass to Hue and on to Camp Evans. I stopped briefly at Evans to show the new bird to my brother who was flying for A Co. 227th. I refueled again and flew the final fifteen miles into LZ Betty. It was then I found out that Wayne had been killed withih two days of my leaving the valley.

Wayne had been flying wing on Frank on a morning mission one ridgeline north of A Luoi when they began to draw heavy ground fire. The broke away from the contact, circled and flew back to mark the target for fastmovers. No one knew whether Wayne had been hit or if the flight controls had been damaged, but Wayne's ship rolled inverted, blew up and crashed in flames. Wayne and his observor were killed instantly. The general concensus was that Wayne was probably dead before the aircraft rolled inverted.

Frank told me the story over and over, at my prompting and I still could not believe it. I wanted so much for it not to be true. I had been having such a great time in Vung-Tau, it was simply impossible that this could happen. The worst of the battle was over. We were just dinking around with clean-up operations. Frank said that the fire was so intense it had to be at least a full platoon they had run across. The area was

quite hot and it took ground troops all day to reach the ~~sight~~ SITE of the wreck. Once it had cooled down enough, the bodies were recovered and flown to the morgue for identification and shipment home.

Wayne was the first pilot in my section to die during my tour. Pretty much everyone had been wounded at one time or another and there had been several crashes after suffering battle damage, but we had been very lucky and not lost anyone, until now. It just didn't seem fair, none of us had as much reason to live. Wayne had shown me pictures of his beautiful wife and child and talked about them most nights. Our conversations had lasted late into the night and it was clear to us all that he loved them very much. It always seemed strange to me that Wayne would volunteer to fly a mission as hazardous as scouts, but it was clear that he loved it. The few missions I had with Wayne as my wingman went very well. He had the ability that so many pilots lacked to keep his head about him when thing were going to hell by the second and rounds were flying everywhere you turned. I have seen pilots literally panick when the first round headed their way. That was a luxury we couldn't afford and guys like that usually ended up flying permanent peter pilot for the maintainence officer in a lift company. Wayne never flinched. He was cool, competant and lucid. He never abandoned his lead no matter what, which is the highest compliment you can give a wingman.

We had a short ceremony after Waynes death. Standing in formation, staring at the inverted M-16's stuck into the ground with their bayonets, helmets resting on their stocks and empty

boots standing at attention in front of them, we all felt the loss deeply. This was the only tangible reminder we had of him. Otherwise it was as if he had simply flown off and never come back.

Several weeks later, I received a letter from Waynes wife. She had written to me because Wayne had mentioned me to her in letters and when he met her on R&R in Hawaii. In the letter, she said that the Army had told her that Wayne was missing in action (MIA) and begged me to tell her if I knew anything. I couldn't believe it. Of course I knew, hell, everybody knew. Everybody that is except the "official" Army and Waynes wife and family. They were being told that every attempt was being made to find Wayne. False hope was being extended to a family that didn't know whether they should greive their loss or hope against hope that Wayne was going to be found or had been taken prisoner. In the Ariy's favor, I'm sure they were making every reasonable attempt to identify the body (bodies of aircrew members who crash and burn are not always easy to identify). Still, I and everyone in the unit knew that Wayne was dead and I wrote back to Waynes wife telling her everything.

I believe she wrote a second letter thanking me for the information, but I destroyed both letters shortly after receipt of the second. I'm not sure why I destroyed the letters. Possibly it was because I had violated a rule about communicating with a dead soldiers family outside of official Army channels, possibly they were too painful to keep around, possibly it was because I felt guilty that Wayne had died while

I was off having a good time in Vung Tau. All I know is that I have always felt guilty about Wayne's death.

The good news is that after twenty years, I recently found Wayne's family. I joined the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association and found Waynes name int their KIA/MIA Directory. I managed to get copies of the Lanier section of the telephone directory for Wayne's hometown and started to dial. On the third call I hit paydirt and on the fourth cal I was talking to Wayne's mother. I learned from her that Wayne's wife was named Amaryillis and his daughter was named Ann and that Amaryillis had remarried after Wayne's death and that Ann had recently been married and had been a beautiful bride. I called and talked to Amaryillis. It was a difficult call to make, more difficult than the call to the mother. I really wasn't sure that I wanted to dredge up all the painful memories of a life and events that had ended so long ago. I wasn't sure that I had the right to interfere in the new lives they made for themselves. I'm happy to say that the calls were received warmly and the conversation about Wayne and the events of the last twenty years were a wonderful catharsis. It was wonderful to find out that Amaryillis had gone on to receive her masters degree and had remarried a man she describe as wonderful who had adopted Ann and raised her as his own. It was also good to find that Wayne's memory was still cherished after all this time. Finally, it was nice to talk to people who had loved Dayton Wayne Lanier. I loved him too.