

that appeared ready to surrender. The "Kit Carson" scout called for him to stand up and come forward, but he didn't move. Our Scouts had returned for fuel and we were short LOHs due to combat damage, so I hovered the C&C ship just behind the NVA. Suddenly we came under intense fire from a large force to his rear - a trap had been planned for the Blues. I called for the Guns and they were already in-bound. They put every rocket right on top of the NVA. It was a thing of beauty!! I climbed to altitude and called from some artillery. About that time, Dak To received another attack from Rocket Ridge. Just as the artillery got registered for us, the ARVN canceled our mission and our stand-by reserve. I tried to tell them the rocket attack was just a diversion and that we had their NVA Regimental folks located. No luck, so we had to withdraw. However, we called in TAC air and they did a fine job on that target! From that day on, the battle of Dak To - Ben Het was over and the NVA withdrew. I am convinced we had found and hit a major headquarters.

For May and June, A Trp claimed 124 NVA killed, 66 more by airstrikes and artillery, one captured plus 93 bunkers destroyed. They also captured one AK-50, a 122mm rocket, three AKs and an assortment of ammos.

July - On the 7th, a D Trp jeep struck a mine while returning from a mounted mission killing SSG Charles E. Smith, SP4 Colon D. Young, and PFC Paul E. Johnson. During the latter part of July, A Trp started working for the 1st Bde against the 18th, K-2, and 95B NVA Regiments during Operation Hines. The primary AO was between the Mang Gang Pass on QL19 and LZ Action. D Trp continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Division's TAOR during this month.

August - On the 2nd, A Trp was worked to the east of An Khe when they observed numerous high speed trails, structures and over 60 bunkers. Chickens and livestock were seen in the area, so the enemy was near at hand. About 1530, one LOH reported that he was experiencing difficulties with the aircraft. It then lost power, crashed into some trees and burned. The crew were seen departing the area with enemy soldiers following close behind but the foliage was too thick for the ARP to be inserted. At 1610, the downed crew were located in a small clearing about 1000 meters from the crash site and were extracted by a med evac ship with a jungle penetrator. A series of intensive airstrikes were directed on the enemy positions that killed 23 NVA. On the 3rd, A Trp found a high speed trail and followed it for eight miles. They found several NVA, bicycles, and bunkers along the way. All total the Guns and airstrikes killed ten NVA that day. On the 6th, A Trp received heavy AW fire from a large NVA complex about 35 KM northwest of An Khe. When the Scouts returned after the Guns had expended, they found 11 dead NVA. A further VR revealed that the complex was surrounded by numerous man traps that were constructed on 16-foot lengths of bamboo with punji stakes every six inches. Several airstrikes were put into the complex. On the 16th, A Trp was called to support a 4-man LRRP in contact. The Guns killed ten NVA and helped extract the LRRPs. On the 16th, C Trp's ARP discovered what one 173rd Abn officer called "one of the most valuable pieces of information of the Vietnam War". In the northern end of the An Lao Valley the Scouts observed a tunnel and bunker complex. The Blues encountered AW fire from the complex but battled their way inside one of the caves. There they met and killed four NVA. It was later determined that two were Russian trained doctors and the other a Russian trained pharmacist. One of the doctor carried a map and information pinpointing the position of the NVA hospitals and medical supply points in the AO. On the 17th, A Trp made light contact and inserted the Blues. They found a well equipped base camp and caches of clothes plus a barbershop and destroyed it with fire and explosives. D Trp continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Division's TAOR during this month; but on the 31st they moved to Ban Me Thuot East with a contingency from HHT to prepare for operations around the Bu Prang SF camp.

September - On the 1st, B Trp moved to Ban Me Thuot East and the Squadron set up a "Ruthless Forward" there to support TF Fighter and elements of the 23rd ARVN Division. Weather handicapped tactical operations for parts of the month. Even though various Squadron elements had lived at Ban Me Thuot East prior to this, it was still a lot of work to re-establish a base at old "Camp Bleakness". Aircraft maintenance was never a pleasant experience at Ban Me Thuot East. Within a few days two of D Trp's platoons were lifted to Bu Prang in an Infantry, security, air-mobile reaction force for B Trp. Bu Prang was a small camp and logically not prepared for this large American unit. As a result HHT was given the responsibility of flying food, shelter material, and essential supplies to the D Trp elements at Bu Prang. Basically they flew two resupply missions every day to Bu Prang. HHT and D Trp also established an ammo resupply point at Nhon Co for the Sqdn. By the end of the month, HHT ships were also making single ship insertions of D Trp personnel and Vietnamese MPs along QL8B. They would question the locals in attempts to learn more about the enemy build up in the surrounding areas. HHT ships also performed medevac missions from the Bu Prang area. B Trp managed to kill ten enemy soldiers and located numerous bunker complexes, routes of infiltration and areas where massive amounts of food were under cultivation by the enemy. Two aircraft were badly damaged by enemy fire and one pilot seriously wounded.

October - B Trp's daily reconnaissance provided considerable intelligence data as the enemy movements and activities in the Bu Prang area increased. Numerous bivouac sites and bunker complexes, well used trails, and crops under harvest were reported. AW fire directed against B Trp's aircraft increased as the month progressed. Weather precluded some operations early and near the middle of the month. During the last week of the month, five B Trp aircraft were damaged by AA fire. On the 28th, the expected enemy offensive was launched with attacks on CIDG camps all around the Bu Prang area. This action would be known as "The Siege of Bu Prang". On the 29th, B Trp thwarted three separate attacks on firebases around Bu Prang. Gun ship attacks destroyed two 12.7 mm AA guns and one 57mm RR. The friendlies began abandoning firebases and consolidating around the main Bu Prang and Duc Lap camps. From actions during this month it was learned that elements of the 28th, 40th, and 66th NVA Regiments were involved in the siege.

November - During this month, A Trp supported the 1st Bde in operations to the southwest and west of An Khe and occasionally the 3rd Bde west of Enari. A Trp finally completed the construction of their aircraft maintenance hanger at Camp Enari. B Trp continued to support TF Fighter until the 1st Bde started Operation SPREAGINS WHITE during the "Siege of Bu Prang". C Trp worked the An Lao Valley with the 173rd Abn. D Trp worked with B Trp until the 13th when it returned to Camp Enari and started providing convoy security on the Enari to Cheo Reo highway. On the 2nd, B Trp was working an AO on the edge of the main battle area and VHPA Member Kirk Curran remembers:

I was a 1LT then and had been flying Cobras with the Undertakers since I joined B Trp in August. MAJ Bowling had asked several RLOs if they were interested in flying the "little birds". So that day I was flying as Jim Nowicki's Observer as part of my training to become the Scout platoon leader. Jim was ScalpHunter 13, flying wing for ScalpHunter 17, CW2 George W. Grega, who had SGT Vernon C. Shepard as his Observer. The area we were working had been defoliated some time prior, so the foliage and trees didn't completely obscure our view of the ground. As we orbited around Grega, Jim and I spotted this huge bunker complex. One of the bunkers had a very large opening that looked like a wide set of stairs going down into the ground. We called Grega to have a look and reported what we'd seen to the C&C and Guns. It was really unusual and Grega moved around for a few seconds and then came to a near hover over the bunker with the large opening. That's when the NVA laced him bad. Even though they took a lot of fire and SGT Shepard was wounded in the foot, he got a Pete out and George moved off. He was streaming fuel like crazy and Jim and I thought he was going to blow up. You could see the fuel atomizing in the rotor wash and forming clouds near the hot exhaust. The Guns rolled in and started beating up the bunkers complex on SGT Shepard's mark. We told George to get it on the ground QUICK and suddenly this large "L" shaped LZ seemed to pop up in front of us; so George just flared and dropped it in. The next thing that happened was just plain good luck. I had a "hot Pete" (a WP grenade without a safety pin) in my hand and told Jim I wanted to throw it out in the trees and not the LZ; so we overflew George and started to circle back - as we reached the trees where I pitched the Pete. We quickly got back to the downed ship and landed near them. Our LOH had a Mini and I had an M-60 fed from the back. Grega and Shepard got in the back; I'd guess George was near the center of the compartment and Shepard was closer to the outside. We took off and didn't get to 100' when the world opened up. I don't know if the NVA had ambushed that LZ or the road that went through it or what. Maybe they hoped to get the relief column for some of the firebase battles that were going on. Anyway, Jim and I saw two 51 cal at our 10 and 2 and later learned of another at our 7 o'clock. Jim hollered over the radio and I worked the 60 against the 2 o'clock gun position until the belt broke. The good part about this was that by that time the Pete I'd thrown was now fully developed; so the Guns and C&C had no trouble finding us even though their attention had been directed toward that bunker complex. The Mini was on and I reached back to get the ammo belt, opened the cover of the 60 and was just closing it when I noticed that the front of the little bird was gone and we were going down. There was big explosion. The fire ball that went past us taking off part of my mustache and burned part of my hand between my gloves and the nomex flight suit. I'm not certain if we tumbled in the air at that point or what; but we hit the ground hard and bounced into the air to land again without any rotor blades or skids or tail boom. Naturally we were hanging upside-down, trapped inside and I remember thinking it was going to blow again. Later I would joke that what caused us to crash was being overgrossed with NVA 51 cal - really a bad joke! Anyway, Jim and I finally got out and started grabbing stuff we thought we might need. I set up the 60, we got some WPs and an AR-15 (you know one of those shorties). I had my 45 (the Trp didn't have any more 38s at that time, so I was blessed with a 45). The survival radio was in a net between the seats. We didn't think about it, so it stayed there. About then we noticed SGT Shepard at our 3 o'clock laying face down. He had been thrown from the ship and had a terrible wound from a 51 completely across his buttock. You remember how large the Army field dressings seemed when we were in training? Well I remember thinking it would take half a bed sheet to cover that wound; he was laid open that badly. The fire was still pretty intense all around us and really the position was untenable; so we decided to book. The LOH was still burning and there were small explosions coming from it now and then as the grenades or a WP went off. Anyway, we dumped the 60 back in the LOH and started to move away when we heard George from inside the aircraft. Jim went back to get him but returned saying he couldn't get him out. We moved away and never saw George again. I later learned that the guys in the air had seen figures running toward the trees and determined we were all together and were at least not killed in the crashes. But what they had seen was the NVA running for the trees because we had crashed almost on top of one of their bunkers and they were scared to death. We started moving toward the south because we had received less fire from that direction. Jim was in the lead, then SGT Shepard, then me. SGT Shepard hadn't received any bone hits but he looked terrible. The grass was tall in the LZ. We hadn't moved off very far when we saw this Cobra coming in to land.

VHCMA Member Vernon Shepard gives us his point of view. I was a brick layer by trade. When I received my draft notice, I thought - well I don't want to go to Vietnam as an Infantry guy, so I enlisted in the Army as a brick layer. As you might guess, I never saw another brick and ended up in helicopters! After AIT I went to carpenter school, then to Ft. Knox as a carpenter, and somehow I ended up in Vietnam assigned to HHT/7/17 as a jeep driver and mail room clerk. That lasted less than two weeks when someone asked me to shine some officer's boots and I thought "that's it - I ain't doing that!" I asked around and was told there were opening in B Trp's Scouts but I'd have to volunteer. They decided the job. It sounded OK to me, so I volunteered. I'd been flying as a Scout for about four months and really liked it. I don't think I'd do it again, but I really liked it at the time! I'd flown with George Grega a few times prior to this day. He seemed to like me and I liked him. We communicated and worked well together as Scouts. I think it was the night before this battle or maybe two nights before, but we were all in one of the Scout tents having a beer and George said to me. "I don't want to scare you or anything, but today when we were returning home from the AO as a flight of four LOHs I happened to notice there were only three shadows on the ground. At first I thought it was because we were sort of in a cloud or something, so I moved over a bit. Shep, (that was my nickname in B Trp) we didn't have a shadow - we just weren't there! No matter what I did, we didn't have a shadow." At the time I sort of "wrote this off" but maybe George had a premonition of things to come. I only remembered it afterwards. Anyway back to the battle, I don't remember the bunker with the large opening Kirk described but I DO REMEMBER the bunker complex and looking "eye to eye" with an NVA 51-cal crew. I literally could see the whites of their eyes!! I put out the Pete and fired. They fired and did a damned fine job. I used to fly with my feet on the skids. I was hit in the left foot (after a few days this wound wouldn't bother me that much) and in the chin (that wound caused me a lot of discomfort for some time because there was a piece of meat inside my mouth - I finally bit that off and it healed with a big lump of scar tissue.). But I don't think there was much left of the bottom of the LOH. The radios had been shot out and the fuel cell must have been dumping fuel like crazy because it got all over the front bubble and started to obscure our vision. At first I thought it was engine oil but I looked back into the engine compartment and could see that the oil tank level looked normal. Anyway, the other ship flew along side us and with arm and hand signals made it clear that we should land RIGHT NOW. I'd guess we fly for maybe two or three minutes after we were shot. I remember landing, getting into their ship, and getting shot down again pretty much like Kirk described it. I wasn't hurt by the explosion he described but I knew I'd been hit in the butt. I got out of the LOH after it hit and sort of ran down the hill a little ways. I don't think I "blacked out" during any of that but I might have. I do remember crawling away from the two LOHs because I had a hard time moving. We weren't too far away when we saw the Cobra come in.

We interrupt both Kirk and Shep at this point to hear from VHPA Member Mike Peterson who was flying the Snake they saw trying to land. I had been in B Trp about 5 months and was in the back seat as AC that day. CPT Lou Chirichigno, who was my platoon leader but hadn't been in that position all that long, was in the front seat. We had flown as the high Gun earlier in the day. Our team was refueling at Bu Prang when we got the word that a LOH was down and that the other team was firing. We left in a hurry. I don't remember the briefing we usually had as one team replaced another on station. It seems to me that we got there first and never even assumed the position of high Gun; just started trying to help our people on the ground. I do remember seeing the LOH burning when we arrived at this huge L shaped clearing but I don't remember seeing the other LOH. We made a quick, low pass and told the C&C that it certainly didn't look like a survivable crash. On our second pass we were surprised to see someone get out of the wreck and from the way he walked we could tell he was seriously hurt. I believe we were the only ship on station and that we were talking to the C&C who was some distance away. Anyway, Lou and I talked it over and decided to land. The plan was for Lou to get out, put the injured person in his place, and remain on the ground until someone could come get him. Please remember that we were working under the premise that the LOH had received fire from a place 3 or 4 miles away and had managed to fly away from the danger only to crash in this open area that we believed to be safe. Naturally, that assumption got us into lots of trouble later on but at that time we knew nothing of the action that had gone on in this area before we arrived. Lou argued that we should go straight in at that point but I suggested that we make one more low, slow pass to see if we drew any fire. We flew about 50 feet off the trees, rather slow, and right along the edge of the clearing - nothing - or at least nothing that we could tell. I made a turn and started back to land. The NVA maintained great fire discipline and really suckered me in. Suddenly we got hit from everywhere!! I remember the cyclic being shot in two but I still had the grip in my hand. Lou yelled he had been hit in the hand. I was hit in my left leg and foot. We went in inverted and impacted not far from where Grega was. After things stopped flying around, I was able to get out without that much difficulty and went around to help Lou out. He didn't have the use of his hand and it was really hurting him. Anyway, we got out and managed to link up with Grega. I remember he was badly burned but could speak to us even though he was dazed and incoherent at times. Funny, I felt no pain at the time - the adrenalin must have kept me going because my wounds were really rather serious. We kept telling Grega that help was on the way but he knew he was in bad shape. The only thing I took from the Cobra was a shot gun without any shells - really smart! We could see the NVA all around us in the trees and knew it was only a matter of time before they'd come after us. After awhile we came up with a plan for me to move to the southern end of the LZ in such a way as to convince the NVA that all three of us had moved there and thus Lou and George, who were the most seriously injured, could hide and wait for the rescue ship. That is how we separated. I was successful in moving in a rather obvious way through the tall grass to the southern end of the LZ. Not long after I got there a Huey tried to land to get me.

We interrupt Kirk, Shep, and Mike at this point to insert some comments from VHPA Member Joe Feeney who was in the Huey that tried to get Mike out that afternoon. During my first tour in Vietnam I was a crew chief, then I went to flight school and to Maintenance Officer school before my second tour when I was with HHT. I had only been in country a little over a month. Bob Rogers and I used to fly together often. He was a pilot in the Aviation Section and flew a lot, especially with D Trp and the various detachments from HHT scattered all around Quang Duc and Darc Provinces. On Sunday the 2nd, we had a pay master on board and had flown about six hours since we left Enari that morning. The general offensive had been on for a few days already and as we flew around we saw lots of convoy ambushes and bases taking fire. We were refueling at Duc Lap, which was under mortar and 57mm RR fire most of that day, when B Trp's Blues jumped into their ships and left in a hurry. We followed and asked if we could help. The B Trp C&C asked if we could go to Ban Me Thuot East and get a jungle penetrator because he thought he might need one in a hurry that day. When we returned from East we followed this B Trp Cobra to the site of the battle. B Trp had inserted their Blues and didn't have anyone on station except this Cobra as everyone else was refueling. I think the Cobra had expended already but was just trying to stay over their people on the ground. We both made a low, slow pass over this huge LZ; unfortunately well marked with the three downed aircraft. I remember thinking at the time - we are going too slow, I just know we'll never make it to the other end of this LZ and we didn't even have chicken plates! It was then that I saw one of the Americans standing up under some trees. As Bob circled around, he told the Snake that we were going in to pick him up and started an approach for an area near where I had seen the guy. Almost immediately we started taking lots of fire. As best I can recall, I don't think we got very close to the touch down point when I got hit in the left leg - my side of the Huey took several hits. I do remember my left leg fly up and hit me in the chest from the force of a bullet. As determined as Bob was, we were taking a hell of a beating; so he aborted the approach and we climbed back to altitude where the Snake was. We talked the situation over inside the aircraft for a few minutes and with the Snake. While I didn't have a life threatening wound, I was pretty well unable to function as a pilot. About that time several B Trp aircraft returned and I can remember listening to the C&C on Guard. After further discussions, he released us and we went back to Duc Lap where there was an SF aid station. When we got to Duc Lap, Bob made certain I was in the good hands of the medics; then he put the crew chief in my seat and took off. The SF medics were very good. They treated my wounds as best they could and I got something to eat and drink. Helicopters were coming and going all the time. They called for a Dust-Off and one came but wouldn't land because the camp was really under pretty steady fire. B Trp came back again that night to refuel between 8 and 9. We talked to them and asked if they would come back when they were done to take me to Ban Me Thuot. They said "Sure" but they never came back that night. I guess they got real busy and I really wasn't in any grave danger. Anyway, the next morning I did get a ride to East and was taken to their aid station which consisted of some below ground conex containers. They told me the crew chief was there as well because he had "Tipped out". Anyway, when he saw me he got very excited and ran over to me and hugged me. He said when they had taken me away at Duc Lap; he just knew I was going to die but now he was very happy to see me again. The medics were glad to see him respond favorably and asked if I would stay with him a little while longer. Anyway, by the end of the day I was in a big hospital in Nha Trang; then on to Japan and finally the States. But you know I never got any of my stuff back from Vietnam!

Mike Peterson continues with his story about the Huey flown by Rogers and Feeney. Just like they had done when I was trying to land, the NVA held their fire until he had slowed to touch down. Then, all hell broke loose!! My fingers were on the skid and the crew chief was reaching out to get me; but the ship was taking a terrible pounding. I remember dropping to the ground and believing that the Huey would surely be crashing in on top of me any second. I was both surprised and glad to see them get away. It wasn't until after I was released and Philly Fogg visited me in the Pleiku hospital that I learned one of the pilots and one of the guys in the back were wounded seriously in that ship. Anyway, I laid low after that until it got dark and then moved into a thick clump of bamboo in the trees for the night. Everything was quiet that evening from my vantage point, save for a few shots from individual weapons. I heard a Huey return and land later that evening but I couldn't see it from where I was.

Kirk Curran continues. Jim, Shep, and I watched what I later learned was Peterson's and Chirichigno's Snake coming in at an angle and get lower and lower until it was about to be masked from view by the grass. The NVA 51 cal opened up again and you could see the ship shudder with each hit. It sort of stopped in the air, then went straight down and crashed. Soon we heard lots of small arms fire and believed the NVA had killed the crew. I later learned that Lou and Mike were not killed and did link up with George. I learned that they moved in a southern direction as well and must have passed us but we didn't know it at the time. (Editor's note: This is not exactly correct; only Peterson moved to the south, Lou and George remained near the aircraft.) Naturally the guys in the air were doing everything they could to help us. It was a thing of

beauty to watch the Blues get inserted. In fact it looked like the Lift was just making a low pass; they were in and out that quickly. Unfortunately we were not that close to them and in the tall grass we would probably have shot each other in the link up.

(Editor's note: Early in my research efforts I had a conference call with VHPA Members Billy Bowling (the B Trp Cmdr) and Leighton Haselgrave (the Sqdn S-3). My notes from that call are terrible. But Billy explained that B Trp's Blues and D Trp (-) were inserted in an LZ a couple hundred meters further to the south of the large L shaped LZ. They destroyed and/or maneuvered around several NVA AW positions as they moved toward the large LZ. At least part of this force did indeed get onto the large LZ but that was a still some distance further to the south of Jim, Shep, Kirk or Mike. Because no one knew exactly where the downed crews were (survival radios would have made all the difference in the world!) and because the NVA were moving all along their flanks and this was obviously "their ground", the Blues could not stay there long. The Blues said that if they were going to stay on the ground overnight, they would need to be reinforced with a "large force" (specifically one that had its own mortars) and that they would need lots of artillery support. It was getting late in the day and Billy said he couldn't deliver on either of these "support requirements". This isn't surprising - Sqdn OR-LLs show that the nearest U.S. Inf and Arty were some 4th Inf elements near Cheo Reo, the ARVN had their hands full with the fire base battles, the site may have been outside ARVN Arty range (but no one trusted ARVN Arty!), this area was very near Cambodia and a "long way from anywhere". So they pulled the Blues out before the NVA could set a trap for them.)

Kirk continues. Also I learned that a Huey crew had seen Peterson from the air and had tried to land to get him. I was told that as he ran toward the ship, they watched in horror as the NVA shot him several times and assumed he was dead. Whoever told me this said that Mike was still wearing his chicken plate which saved him was any serious injuries. He was just knocked down and bruised. (Editor's note: Please refer to Mike's own account. I asked him specifically about this matter. He said he was not wearing a chicken plate. His normal custom was to sit on it while flying. He was sitting on it that day, so it stayed in the aircraft.) Anyway, it was really something to watch the F100s deliver their airstrikes. Several times they would pass directly overhead. We were on our backs watching. You could see the wings on the rear of the bombs open up as they left the aircraft, follow the line of flight to the other end of the LZ and the explosion. The NVA were taking a pounding from this stuff as best as we could determine. It began to get dark and we started moving again, crawling through the grass. It really got dark and I remember not being able to see anything in front of me; so I just kept touching Shep's foot as we went. We stopped ever now and then. During one stop, I made a dumb mistake and put my 45 down so I could roll over and look behind us. I had look back several times before and knew we were leaving a "highway wide road" through the grass as we crawled. My mind kept telling me that the NVA would find it and come following after us. I looked back and could see the stars and the wide open path. I turned back and it took me a couple of seconds to find my 45. When I had it and reached for Shepard's foot; THEY WERE GONE! I hadn't heard them crawl off or anything but there was a lot of noise still around the LZ. They were dropping flares and still working with the Blues. I crawled down the "highway" they left and came to a point where I thought it split. I went the wrong way and ended up alone. I could still hear the helicopters overhead so I rolled over on my back and waited for a good moment, then turned on my strobe light. A Huey saw it and shot an approach to an area about 50 to 60 yards away from me. I turned off the light and started towards the ship; but it took off, circled and came back to land on a small two lane road in the LZ. The NVA started turning on and off their flashlights to look like strobes as well but I was told that it really wasn't that difficult to determine the real one. When the Huey landed the second time he had all his lights on. I stood up and started running toward the ship. I got within about 25 yards of it when he turned out the lights - I guess to present that much less of a target to the NVA who without a doubt were also moving toward the helicopter. I was fine while the lights were on as I was running right for the lights. When they went out, I couldn't see a thing! Luckily I kept running blindly for the ship. The crew chief was flying as pilot and, Thank God, had stepped out of the ship. As I went running past, he grabbed me and threw me into the cargo compartment. I was both surprised and pleased to be in the back of a Huey but he had thrown me so hard I almost went out the other side!! I heard him yell GO!! GO!! There was lots of fire all around us as we lifted off and I remember thinking we would be shot down for sure. The ship had been hit several times and was a real mess. We went to some firebase and landed. For some reason this Huey had a VHF radio and all the other radios had been shot out earlier. In fact, I guess the other ships were all calling him on FM and UHF telling him not to go in; but he couldn't hear them. Anyway, we got an FM radio there and were able to talk to the other helicopters. They learned that Jim and Shep weren't far from where they had picked me up and that I believed the Cobra crew had been killed. The poor crewchief "pilot" got sick at the point and went into convulsions; so the medics took him away. A little while later, I was picked up and taken to our camp at Ban Me Thuot East where I could "relax" and have a beer. Needless to say but I had many things to think about that night. The next day, MAJ Bowling put me in the back of his C&C - they didn't want me flying for awhile. We went back into the same area. Again everyone has perfect hindsight, but during one of the gun runs a Pete suddenly went off sort of near where the HE was hitting. I remember we all asked on the radios where that Pete had come from and finally wrote it off with the thought that when someone was stoking rockets into a Cobra they inadvertently added a WP head. As it turned out, the rockets were hitting very near to where Jim and Shep and they were trying to tell us they were there by throwing the Pete. They also hoped the NVA wouldn't know where they were because the Pete was just another explosion. Anyway, they would E&E for a few more days before the NVA picked them up. I guess Shepard's wounds were really super terrible at that point. Later I talked to Jim who maintained that he was sad he wasn't able to be a Scout again after walking the trail with the NVA. He said he had learned where and how they camped, how they camouflaged themselves, how far they moved between stops, etc. He said he would have been "Mr. Death himself" with that knowledge! I'd like to close by saying what I've said a hundred times before and will probably say another hundred times - I'd just like to thank everyone in B Trp, in D Trp, in HHT, the F100 guys, the Artillery guys, the ARVN Rangers that went in after us and really got chopped up bad, everyone that tried to help us - THANKS. Most of all I'd like to thank Bob Rogers for pulling me out that night.

Kirk's short career as a Scalaphunter was over. He would finish his tour flying Guns and as the Ops Officer. But the story is far from over, in fact it would take several weeks and, sadder yet, several years to complete. The night of 2 Nov was a "long night" for many people. VHPA Member George Muny was the Sqdn Cmdr at the time and relates:

We got the call in the late afternoon that B Trp had lost some aircraft and definitely needed some help. You've got to remember at that time I was a Sqdn Cmdr without a Sqdn because all the line Trps were optioned out to other units. I only had HHT and it was already committed manning refuel and rearm points and such south of Ban Me Thuot. Anyway, we pulled together a couple slicks, alerted A and C Trp of the problem, made certain the 17th CAG and the 4th Inf knew of the situation, and left for Ban Me Thuot. We were able to make it out to the site that evening. When all the aircraft finally returned from the AO, we sorted things out. Most of their aircraft had been shot up. I think they had at least six less operational aircraft than they had at the start of the day. They were short three air crews. Everyone was dead tired but wanted to do anything - just anything to get those guys on the ground back. Naturally, the Scout and Gun boys wanted to go back in the next day and "show 'em really Cav stuff". Well, the last thing either Billy or I wanted was to lose even more people to a situation that clearly seemed to be in the NVA's favor. We talked to the Blues that had been on the ground and to Kirk. We talked to Bob Rogers - that kid was a real hero. By God, that ship was a mess!!! I don't think we ever repaired it, it was that bad. Then we went over to the 23rd ARVN to see what they could do. They were totally committed but arranged for us to use part of an ARVN Ranger Bn, that was in reality the II Corps Reserve at the time, so long as we could use our Lift to put them in. The next day we inserted about 150 men from this Bn on a road north of the LZ where our aircraft were. The ARVN also ordered a Mech unit to move up and try to help out but that didn't work out too well. Anyway, these Rangers fought very hard but the NVA really had them out-numbered, out-gunned, out-everythinged. For a couple of days we supported them with everything we had and they took a terrible pounding, 40 to 50% casualties as I recall. Several times I went back to the 23rd CP and said we had to pull those guys out; but they wouldn't do it. The 23rd people seemed to have the attitude that that was what the Rangers had coming to them, so they left them in and really didn't reinforce them or support them to the degree I thought they should. Strange conduct - I didn't and don't understand it. Of all the things I remember about that tour, the memory of that Ranger Bn is one of the most vivid in my mind. If I would have even dreamed that they would have suffered like that, I would never have put them in that day!!

We return to Mike Peterson's account. The next morning everything was still quiet but I knew the NVA were still in the area, in force. There was a road to the east of the LZ. I was on the west side on sort of a hill. For the next four days or so I E&Ed successfully. I ate bugs, drank water from leaves and pools in the road. Once I happened upon two NVA near a bunker. One was sitting at a table outside the bunker, writing a letter, I guess. We struggled. I grabbed a knife from the table and killed him. About this time, this other guy comes out of the bunker, sees me and quickly goes back inside! I just knew he was going to get a gun, so I went in after him. We fought in there and I killed him. Needless to say, but those are rather strong impressions in my mind! I was getting weaker mentally and physically with each passing day. I couldn't travel much at all. That last night I completely lost it. I recall going down to the road to drink from the pools of water there that I found so refreshing. Anyway, I started screaming at the NVA to come and get me - real Rambo like. Well, the next morning the place was covered with patrols and they found me along side the road. Like I said, I couldn't walk very well; so they slung me on a pole and we hiked about two or three days. We've weren't that far from Cambodia. Even then I wasn't "with it" much of the time and it got worse before it got better. I remember being taken to a camp and just before they took my Seiko watch, I looked at the date - the 9th. Shep, Lou and Jim were there already. I believe it was while we were at this camp but it may have been at a POW Reunion some years later that I learned that CW2 George W. Grega died that first night in Lou's arms from the burns he'd received that day. Anyway, the NVA kept us in a pit but we weren't treated badly. I mean they didn't beat us or anything. I'd guess we were there about another week or ten days. Anyway, Shep and I were hardly what anyone could call "escape threats"! My leg was getting gangrenous and wounds on his butt was just terrible. I recall that Lou returned from an interrogation session with the news that in a day or so he and Norwicki would be moving up the trail to the North and that as

soon as Shep and my wounds were better, we would follow. Sure enough in a day or so, Lou and Jim left us. I never saw them again until after they were released in 1973. It was about this time that two captured ARVN Rangers arrived at our camp. Let me tell you they were some of the meanest, toughest, nastiest guys I have ever seen or even heard about in my entire life!! They would constantly yell and spit at the NVA and resist and make life difficult in every way. We called them "Hard Core" - they were impressive. Well very soon after Jim and Lou left, these two ARVN made an escape attempt. We heard some commotion and looked up to see that one of these ARVN Rangers had grab an NVA guard and choking him. The net of it was that at least one of these guys did get away and, I think, the other was killed. Anyway, within three hours of the escape the NVA had us on the move. Later during a debriefing in the Long Binh hospital I learned that there was actually a "special ops" section where these ARVN Rangers were trained and given the job of being captured and then escaping so the good guys could learn something about the POW camps. Apparently the NVA knew a little about this because they had us out of the camp in nothing flat. I also believe someone told me that as a result of the ARVN Ranger's escape, a rescue force did visit that camp within a short period of time - of course we weren't there. What I'm about to tell you now is pure conjecture on my part - you make up your own mind. I believe the NVA knew we were "goners". I certainly believe I would have died within a short period of time and Shep's long term prognosis was not good. The NVA medical attention and capabilities were primitive at best - at least what they were able to give us. So long as Shep and I were alive, we were valuable to them. I believe they negotiated a prisoner exchange. A day or two before our release they fed us really well, including some sweet pudding I later learned had been made from can milk. They told us it was important that we tell "the world" that our treatment had been good or that Lou and Jim "would pay for our crimes". This is the reason why some of our public statements after our release were "anti-war"; we didn't want Lou and Jim to suffer. Anyway, they took us to a road and told us to stay right there. About two minutes later an American truck drives us and picked us up. I can remember that there was an American in the back of it because he gave me a cigarette - I really appreciated that! They drove us to a FB and we were evaced to Pleiku. We weren't there long but during that time several guys from B Trp visited us. I remember before this time LT Eldridge, "Fang" we called him, used to give everyone a hard time because he was "short". Well, I got back at him because I knew I would be home in a few days and he'd still be there.

Now, finally, we let Vernon Shepard finish his story. I remember these events pretty much as both Kirk and Mike have described but let me add some details. After Jim and I inadvertently moved away from Kirk we hid in some trees. We were so close to the Huey that came in and got Kirk out that I could see the red dash lights. I knew I could move fast enough to get to the ship before it left and I really "felt safe" in the trees versus out in the open in the clearing. Besides that ship was drawing lots of fire and I didn't want any part of that! After the Huey left, we moved a little deeper into the trees and hid a little better. We heard some rustling in the brush not far away and later discussed this with Mike who heard the same thing that evening. We theorized that we were very close to each other that night, maybe 10 to 15 feet apart, but no one dared call out to investigate the source of the rustling sounds!! The second day we hid out and hoped that the bad guys would go away and the Blues would return. We had an M-16, one clip of ammo, a bayonet, and one pack of Camels but no matches. We ended up chewing the cigarettes and that was pretty good at the time. I still had my nomex gloves. In the morning and evening I'd wipe them across the leaves and grass until they filled with moisture, then I'd suck the water from them. During this time the wound in my mouth was especially troublesome. We had a single WP. Jim didn't want to throw it for fear of compromising our location, so he had me stay hidden and crawled out into the open area. There he waited for an appropriate moment to try to signal the aircraft. I remember we were especially hopeful to attract the attention of a Bird Dog FAC that was putting in the airstrikes. Finally Jim popped the Pete; but the aircraft didn't seem to notice. They moved away and didn't return. We hid again that night. On the third day we watch the NVA going through the LOHS and saw them marching past our location with their weapons slung over their shoulders. We heard the firing associated with the battle the ARVN Rangers were having and knew that it was a long way from us - too far to be of help to us. We concluded that we would have to do something on our own and that we would start the night. At that time the best I could do was sort of a low crawl. I'd stick the bayonet in the ground and use it as a handle to pull myself along with some assistance from my left leg even though it had been damaged at the very start. We crawled a long time - until we were completely exhausted. We found a hollowed out, dead log and slept in it like sort of a hammock. When the sun came up on the fourth day, Jim had made me a crutch out of bamboo so now we could walk. We didn't exactly know where to go but we heard and saw fixed wing aircraft landing and headed toward that. We walked all day and I was really surprised that I didn't have that much pain. I was uncomfortable and noticed what I thought was a drip from the wound in my buttock - that turned out to be maggots falling out! In the afternoon we came to a clearing that went up a hill. We thought if we could get on that hill, we could see where the aircraft were landing and how to get there. Jim told me to stay in the trees and moved out. He got about half way up the hill and since I didn't see any danger, I started walking after him. I didn't get very far when I heard the AKs open up and saw Jim drop immediately. I literally "tried to hide behind a blade of grass". The next thing I felt was the muzzles of four AKs in my back and people yelling at me. I stood up and they took me over to the edge of the clearing to this 6'2", English speaking non-oriental man. I still think he was a Russian advisor. He definitely spoke with an accent. My impression was that he was treated "like a king" - he had 15 to 20 NVA around him that seemed very interested in doing whatever he asked. At first he didn't speak to me but his look was something like "we've got you now". Finally he asked if he could do anything for me. I said I was hungry, so they gave me a rice ball. He asked if they could look at my wounds. I showed them and they wrapped them for me. Then they started asking about "the other guy" and I lied "what other guy? - I'm alone" because I hadn't seen Jim and didn't know how he'd made out. Eventually they brought Jim over - he was OK and hadn't been hit.

They started marching us toward the camp that same day. They put a bamboo pole between our elbows, tied our hands in the front and put a hood over our heads so that we could only see the ground in front of us. The next day, I believe, we passed another group going the opposite direction on the same trail who were carrying a hammock containing an American. They happened to pass by close enough so I could see in even with the hood on. I didn't know Mike Peterson at that time because he was in the Guns and we didn't socialize all that much with Gun pilots; mostly with the Scout pilots. So I asked Jim what that was and he told me it was Mike. Jim and I were the first to arrive at the camp. It was about 75'x75', surrounded by a bamboo fence and had three cages near the middle. Each cage was built over a pit about three feet deep. The structure was about 8x12 along the lean-to design. The roof was made of bamboo poles covered with big leaves. Inside there was a stock like arrangement and we were locked in it each night. The NVA didn't treat our wounds for the first four days we were there. I'd guess to total NVA staff was in the six to eight people range. Lou showed up next and then Mike - they may have arrived on the same day. I'd guess the four of us were together at least one but not two weeks. After eight ARVM showed up next and they put four in each pit. The "Hard Cores" came a day or two after Lou and Jim left. I want to say something here and now - Jim was a big, big help to me all during this period. Many times he could have done better by himself but he stayed with me and took care of me. I can't say enough good things about him. They fed us only rice and gave us an American aluminum canteen full of hot water each night. We used this as a hot water bottle to keep warm. We'd rub it over our arms and chest then use it as a pillow. The next day we'd drink the water. We didn't have a blanket or mosquito net but I don't remember mosquitoes being a problem. Our interrogator was an oriental that had been educated in the States. Since I was an NCO, I didn't know much about the military situation so they didn't ask many questions about it. Most of the questions were about home, the family, what clothes they wore, etc. They asked me what my 1st SGT did - I didn't know so I answered that all I saw him do was show movies! They asked what was the best place to shoot at on a helicopter - again I told them I wasn't an expert on this but suggested the rotor blades. I warned them that they were hard to hit because they were moving so fast! They came and took pictures of us a couple times. They dug a hole sort of in the center of the three cages. It was 4x4 and about 8 feet deep with a covered lid almost like you'd put over an animal trap. They used a notched log to get in and out of the hole. This hole was where they kept the Hard Cores. About this time I was able to walk around a little so during the day they'd let me rake leaves and do odd chores. Mike was getting worse and didn't get out much except to relieve himself. This is how I was able to get close to the Hard Core's pit. They seemed like Koreans to me but I don't know for sure. They motioned to me that they wanted me to help choke a guard. Mike and I talked this over, then I let them know I wasn't too interested in trying that. The Hard Cores caused so much trouble that the NVA didn't let them out of the pit - they even had to relieve themselves in the cups their food came in. Those guys were tough!! There was this guard we called "Baby Face" because he was so young. I was out raking leaves or something when the two Hard Cores started making some noise in their pit. Well Baby Face put his AK up against a tree and leaned over to look in the pit. Eventually when he got closer, they grabbed him and pulled him into the pit. The next thing I knew, one of the Hard Cores had jumped out of the pit, grabbed the AK and was pointing it back into the hole. The other Hard Core got out quickly and they motioned for us to join them in their escape. I motioned for them to go without us because I knew Mike couldn't make the trip and I didn't want to leave him. I don't recall that one of the Hard Cores was killed or that they killed anyone but maybe Mike was privy to a conversation in Long Binh that I didn't take part in. It my impression that one of the debriefers in Long Binh asked if he could bring some guys in to look at us. We said OK and soon these same two Hard Cores came in to identify that we were the same guys they'd seen in the camp. Interesting, huh? I'd guess we didn't stay in Vietnam more than a day after our release and were debriefed a lot. I didn't care so long as they kept bring me food - I was really hungry. We went to Japan for a day then to different hospitals in the States. I stayed in the hospital about 30 days and ended up finishing my enlistment at that installation. Other than the POW dinner we had at the White House and one crewchief that was in B Trp, I haven't had any contact with anyone that was in the 7/17th CAV.

VHPA Member Billy Bowling provides a few more details. When these ARVN Rangers escaped, they turned themselves in an ARVN compound and the senior American advisor called us with the news that they might have some information about our people. I flew over there and was told by this full Colonel that I'd have to wait outside. I sailed past him into the room where they were debriefing these guys. Through them we obtained the first "real information" about SGT Shepard and WO Peterson but nothing on the others. They happened to make a casual statement about the "one American body near the road". This, of course, was news to me. We were able to obtain some more specific information from them and within the next couple days worked with an ARVN Cavalry unit to sweep the area. The NVA were long gone by that time but this was how we found and retrieved George Grega's body.

On the 20th, while doing a VR in the An Lao Valley, WO1 Fred A. Exner III of C Trp was killed when his LOH crashed after experiencing a tail rotor failure. VHPA Member Harry Mitchell describes these events:

I was the Scout team leader that day. Fred, an experienced LOH pilot, was flying my wing. He had the additional duty of being the troop Supply Officer. A LT Gary (?) Nelson had been a Cobra pilot for some time and was in the process of seeing if he wanted to be a Scout. He flew as Fred's Observer and it was his first day in a LOH. That day the AO was the northern part of the An Lao over from LZ English. We were working from the higher ground down toward the valley floor. Fred called that he had just experienced a tail rotor failure. I quickly turned and saw him going into the trees. He must have had rather low forward speed at the time because he should have been able to fly out of the area even without a tail rotor. Just after the LOH hit the trees, the blades folded up and quit turning. The right front side of the ship hit the ground. I was right over the crash site in seconds and even though this area was triple canopy jungle, I could clearly see the wreck. There was no movement around the wreck and initially there was no fire. We called for the Blues even though the nearest LZ was some distance away. After about ten minutes the wreck started to burn and soon the ammo started cooking off. We had to back off because of the exploding ammo. About this time we saw a pen flare come up through the trees. We dismissed it as part of the burning ammo. A couple minutes later when we saw another pen flare, we knew someone was alive down there. We called for a med evac with a jungle penetrator. It arrived and even though the ammo was still exploding, they pulled right up to the crash site and put the penetrator down. LT Nelson was so badly wounded that he was unable to get himself into the contraption; so the medic went down. He was able to complete the evacuation. No one else was hurt during that extraction. Later the Blues did get in and retrieved Fred's body. Years later I saw LT Nelson again in Germany flying Cobras; so I am glad to say that he recovered from his wounds.

December - During this month, A Trp would work several different AOs in northwestern II Corps and for the 3rd Bde west of Enari. B Trp would finish up its work for the 1st Bde's Operation SPREAGINS WHITE in the Ban Me Thuot, Bu Prang area. C Trp worked the An Lao Valley and Crows Foot area, weather permitting, or else they worked the low lands against the VC. D Trp completed the Enari to Cheo Reo convoy security assignments, then conducted search and destroy missions and served as a ready reaction force for A Trp. On the 10th, WO Peterson and SGT Shepard of B Trp were freed by the NVA relatively near a 45th ARVN Regt site near Duc Lap. They were captured by the NVA during the battle on 2 Nov described earlier. The Pacific Stars and Stripes dated Saturday, Dec 13, 1969 carried pictures of them on the front page. The paper says that Peterson's third and fourth toes on his left foot were missing and he suffered fragmentation wounds in the left knee. Shepard was described as having multiple fragmentation wounds of the right foot and of the buttock. They were the 28th and 29th U.S. prisoners to be released by the Communists.

Year End Summary - During most of this year, the line troops were opconed outside the Sqdn. The Sqdn remained based at Enari and continued to make improvements to the facilities there especially in the aircraft maintenance area. A Trp spent about half its time working the Dak To / Kontum area and provided considerable support for the 24th STZ. The other half of its time would be given to the 4th Inf especially in the An Khe area. B Trp supported TF South for the first half of the year, worked out of Camp Enari for a few months before moving to Ban Me Thuot for basically the rest of the year to support the 23rd ARVN interests in that area now that the 4th Inf no longer operated there. C Trp worked out of Camp Enari for the first four months, then moved to An Son to support the 173rd and the 4th Inf for the rest of the year. Basically the Sqdn controlled HHT and D Trp for most of the year. The situation of having the ACTs opconed out was seriously reviewed after the 2 Nov battle and changes were made to return to the traditional ACS configuration.

1970

The primary source materials for this year are: For A Trp, a 29 page AUHS prepared by WO1 Charles E. Smith, III. For B, C, and D Trps; nothing. For the Squadron: a 48 page OR-LL for the period 1 NOV through 31 JAN, a 43 page OR-LL for the period 1 FEB through 30 APR, a 32 page OR-LL for 1 MAY through 31 JUL, and a 32 page OR-LL for 1 AUG through 31 OCT. The last two OR-LLs contained some accident summaries which are included in this narrative. An 8 page transcript of the debriefing of LTC De France in Sep, 1970 for historical purpose.

January - During this month, A and B Trps supported the 2nd Bde in Operation PUTNAM POWER northeast of An Khe. C Trp worked the An Lao Valley and Crows Foot area, weather permitting, else worked the low lands against the VC. D Trp also supported the 4th Div with road security assignments between Camp Radcliff at An Khe and Firebase Emeia as well as working the Camp Enari TAOR. On the 5th, A Trp's Scouts found and engaged a large enemy element; killing five and capturing four AKs. On the 7th, A Trp inserted their Blues into a fortified living area. They captured some clothes, medical supplies, AK ammo, and food plus 11 suspects; then the Guns destroyed the structures. On the 8th, an A Trp LOH was shot down, crashed and totally burned. The pilot and observer escaped and were medevaced. The Guns worked the area, then the Trp screened for a rifle company already in the area. They found a large bunker complex and made contact with an estimated NVA company. The C&C's crew chief was wounded and evaced when the ship suddenly took a volley of enemy fire. The Blues were inserted and found numerous caves and signs of recently enemy living there. One NVA was captured. On the 11th, A Trp's Blues were inserted after the Scouts and Guns made contact with an estimated NVA platoon in their base camp. The Blues killed five NVA and captured two AKs, one pistol, and one 51 cal. They swept thru the area again prior to extraction and found a large quantity of raw cotton, a weaving machine, some food and a 30 cal. On the 12th, A Trp's Blues were inserted in another base camp, complete with hidden buildings and detained 28 people plus an M-1 and some food. On the 20th, A Trp found a large sleeping area occupied by an NVA platoon. The Gun killed four and the Scouts killed three. On the 26th, A Trp found another NVA platoon's camp and killed four. On the 29th, A Trp made an assessment of a large artillery strike and found four more NVA to kill.

VHPA Member Tom Pember remembers: Some Vietnam events stand out in our minds more than others. The account I am about to relate is VIVIDLY ETCHED in my memory. I was a Gun team leader for C Trp at the time and used the name "The Pacemaker" on the radios. We habitually stage out of LZ Two Bits and would refuel and rearm at LZ Uplift. This was late 69 or early 70 when C Trp's main AOs were in and around the An Loa Valley. My wing that day was CWO Charles Alexander - "Sobe Charlie" we called him. I liked having him on my wing because you could always depend on him to be at the right place at the right time and you didn't have to spend a lot of time explaining how to handle a situation. We were returning from covering a LRRP that had been in contact well up in the valley. While covering these LRRPs, we had expended everything except for the outboard 'seven shot' pods which contained nails. It was quiet - eerily quiet when a faint sound suddenly came on the radio. It was so faint in fact, that I asked Charlie if he could make it out? Negative. Then, in a little louder whisper, a voice filled with tears and fear pleaded for help. GOD! What a sound. Once you've heard that whisper you know someone has bad guys very close by; but the tears and fear tell you they are in very serious trouble! It was from another LRRP team surrounded on three sides by a VC company and a sheer cliff to the west. The LRRPs couldn't move in any direction and the bad guys were closing in slowly but surely. I explained to them in a whisper that all we had were nails. I'll never know why it is when you receive a whisper, you transmit with a whisper! The LRRP said they were holed up in some rocks at the top of the cliff and couldn't move. I explained that we weren't supposed to use nails close to friendlies. They said: "The bad guys are within 50 meters and closing - so we're dead if you don't and may be dead if you do. We'd rather take our chances with you." I asked Charlie what he thought and he said he'd do whatever I decided. So I told the LRRPs to get behind and under the rocks and report when they were ready. They said: "My men are already under the rocks but taking fire from all sides - smoke is out!" I said we'd make our runs at tree top level from the southwest to northeast, break left and try to pop the nails just over the rocks and into the tree line. I reminded them that the red airborne smoke would indicate the nails had popped. I thought my first pass was too long and asked them about it. They said: "Couldn't tell. Heard some nails tinkle across the rocks. The VC quit shooting at us and started shooting at you though." I said we'd continue as long as we could, firing only one pair each run, so they should stay low, and that this time we'd try the east and south half. We adjusted for the next run and asked how we'd done. "You're doing great but there's a bunch working along the cliffs from the north towards us." So we adjust again and asked how'd that look? "It looks - OH #@\$& (he yelled in pain) good. (silence) (deep deafening silence)" I asked if they were hit and almost dreaded the answer. "No - the damned smoke got ticked by a nail - rolled down the rock against my leg and burned the hell out of me!" Boy, I was relieved to hear that. Then I asked if they were ready to move because we had just enough ammo left to cover their break and we couldn't raise anymore Guns. We suggested they try to move SSW along the top of the cliff. They called when they were ready to move. Charlie made a hot pass and I made a dummy. Then we made some more hot and dummy passes but saved one last pair each 'just in case'. Finally we asked how they were doing. "We're doing fine. We'll continue down the hill to the south." We continued to play dummy and asked for them to report when they were clear. A few minutes later they said: "We're clear now. THANKS. We would have been dead if you hadn't stopped to help us." We were both 10 minutes into the 20 minute light, so we fired the last pair and when home. You know, we never heard from that LRRP team again. Perhaps they made it home. I hope so. I do know they made it through one more day due to a C Trp Cobra team and I was proud to have been there.

February - During this month A Trp supported with 4th Div in the general vicinity north of An Khe along the Suoi Kon river and northwest in the Song Ba valley. On the 1st, a prisoner escaped from a nearby NVA POW camp and gave himself up to A Trp's Blues that had been inserted to recon an area shot up by the Guns. The intelligence this prisoner provided led to the location of two NVA POW camps, an NCO training school, and a medical training school. For the first ten days, B Trp worked to the north of An Khe in the Dak Som and Song Con river areas. Extremely thick vegetation and rough terrain hampered observation efforts but the troop was able to find several enemy complexes and infiltration routes. Several contacts were made with squad sized elements. During this entire month, C Trp supported the 173rd Abn in the general An Loa valley area. Their primary mission was to interdict enemy movement from the mountain base areas to the populated coastal plains. D Trp continued conducting search and clear operations around the Camp Enari.

October - On the 1st, D/2/1 Cav was redesignated K Trp, 17th Air Cav and for the first half of the month continued to work out of Phan Thiet. During this entire month, C Trp again supported the 173rd Abn around LZ English. From the 3rd through the 9th, B Trp worked the Kontum Tan Can area but weather restricted their operations. On the 4th, C Trp had a LOH shot down by 51 cal while observing a large bunker complex. During the crew extraction, the Guns observed seven NVA fleeing the area and killed them. On the 10th, B Trp worked out of Phu Hiep again for the day. Enemy activity in the area was heavy as evidenced by the heavily traveled trails and farming in the remote areas. 22 enemy structures were destroyed by B Trp elements and the ARVN ARP was inserted to secure a downed LOH. This platoon worked very well and the only difficulty encountered was that they had some difficulty re-entering the Lift ships during the extraction. This problem was alleviated by adding straps to the Hueys as hand holds to expedite re-entry. On the 10th, A Trp worked west of Tuy Hoa and found a large bunker complex. The Guns and Scouts worked the area all day, destroyed the complex and killed one NVA. On the 11th, K Trp's LOHs received fire and their Guns expended resulting in three KBA. On the 13th, while supporting the 1/50 Mech, K Trp received fire during an LZ prep. From the 15th through the 25th, B Trp killed ten NVA while supporting the 47th ARVN Inf south and southwest of FSB Oasis in search of elements of the 958 NVA Reg. On the 15th, a B Trp Cobra was shot down and they used A Trp's Blues initially to secure the aircraft. D Trp sent four gun jeeps to relieve the ARP's and they guarded the aircraft until it was lifted out the next morning. On the 15th, an A Trp LOH received heavy AW fire. Air strikes were employed resulting in a secondary explosion rising 2000 feet above the ground. The Blues were inserted but could find only scattered documents in the area. Later in the month, A Trp inserted its Blues to recover the bodies from a 4th Div aircraft that had been shot down on the 20th. From the 17th until the end of the month, K Trp worked north of Dakat. On the 22nd, A Trp's Scouts observed an enemy squad. The Blues were inserted, made contact and exchanged fire. Due to bad weather, the Blues were extract after they had swept the area and destroyed some equipment and rice. On the 30th K Trp stood down for redeployment.

November - On the 2nd, A Trp's C&C received fire while they were working on AO southeast of Pleiku. After the Guns and Scouts worked the area, the Blues were inserted but no further enemy contact was made. On the 3rd, A Trp's Scouts found a bunkered storage complex west of Camp Enari. The Scouts took fire and the Guns fired up the area. One NVA was killed then an airstrike was used. There were secondary explosions and during the BDA, ten more bodies were counted. On the 5th, A Trp's C&C received fire from a large enemy compound. Their Guns destroyed 14 hootches in one compound and 12 more in another plus some clothes and rice. Soon after this, A Trp moved to Phan Rang to begin operations in the Dalat, Song Mao, Phan Rang area. December - On the 4th, A Trp found numerous bunkers and secure fighting positions near Song Mao. The Guns fired up the area and killed two. On the 8th, A Trp worked an area just south of Song Mao when a Scout ship crashed into 150 foot trees. WO1 John Bryant was pinned under the aircraft and died. The copilot, though injured, was seen out walking around. One man was inserted to help the downed crew. They estimated the LOH was doing about 90 knots when it crashed. A small ARVN force was inserted to check the area. They reported the LOH had been hit by small arms fire and was a total loss. The body, radios, weapons, etc. were extracted during a heavy rain storm. Still near Song Mao on the 11th, A Trp's Scouts received small arms fire and uncovered several fox holes, trails, fighting positions and clothing. The C&C received fire as well and the Guns shot up the area. From all existing evidence a platoon size VC had been used this area but no confirmed enemy bodies were found. On the 19th, during a VR, an A Trp LOH took a direct hit from a B40 rocket. The subsequent explosion killed WO Avon N. Mallette and his observer. All equipment was secured by an ARVN ground unit. The enemy was engaged on the ground and by the Guns. The bodies were extracted by the C&C and by the end of the day the ARVN unit was also extracted under extremely hazardous conditions.

Year End Summary - 1970 could be summed up in one word, Vietnamization. The ACTs were increasingly involved in helping the ARVN learn about Air Cavalry and in supporting ARVN operations. The battles around Dak To, Ben Het, and Dak Seang plus the Cambodian operations were clear examples of Vietnamization.

1971

The primary source materials for this year are: For HHT, a Yearbook titled 71-72 An Son which includes about ten significant pages. For A Trp, a 15 page AUHS prepared by 1LT Dan P. Slona. For B, C, and D Trps, nothing. For the Sqdn, a 16 page Combat Operation After Action Report for the period 20-24 Apr and 3-14 May for the air assault portion of Operation MANG HO.

January - During this month, A Trp supported the 45th Regt 23rd ARVN at Ban Me Thuot. There were no significant sighting or reports in the early part of the year. On the 25th, CPT Alfred Hite was forced to make a precautionary landing 14 miles southwest of Ban Me Thuot while on a VR. Late in the month, the Sqdn HQ was split from its line troops. The troops were assigned to various battalions within the 17th CAG while HQ and HHT moved from Camp Holloway to Qui Nhon city air field. VHPA Member Ernie Smart provides a critical insight to these events:

Those were challenging times for everyone in the 7/17 Cav. Let me sort of paint a picture of what was going through my mind and COL Joe Starker's, the CO of the 17 CAG. First, since the Sqdn had been in Vietnam it had always enjoyed a close working relationship with the 4th Div. They included us in most of their operations, generally used Air Cavalry in an appropriate manner, and provided us with Infantry and Artillery support when we needed it. We certainly provided them with "eyes" plus a very flexible, ready reaction force. They, in turn, "saved our collective asses" several times when we "bit off much more than we could chew". When the 4th Div stood down in early Dec, "our big friend" was gone and with it the old status quo. Second, since the 7/17th and the 4th had been good for each other, it seemed natural to believe that putting the 7/17th and with another large unit would be a very good idea. The Koreans had the last major Allied combat units in II Corps. They still required, and received, considerable air support. We knew it would take considerable "training" and "patience" on both parts for the 7/17th and the ROKs to fit together well, but that is what we set out to do. Third, many senior American commanders in II Corps and the 1st Avn Bde believed the ARVN would have a difficult time holding their own. We wanted to pull down our presence (and therefore vulnerability) in the "outlying areas" such as Pleiku. We were determined to support the Vietnamization effort and we were still under orders to "fight hard - just don't loose people". Fourth, the Sqdn was already "split up" and had really become an ACS for all of II Corps. A Trp was at Phan Rang and seemed destined to stay in southern II Corps. One ACT had to stay at Pleiku and that proved to be B Trp. C Trp was already at An Son, so they were our northeastern II Corps "representatives". Poor D Trp couldn't be used as a ground Cavalry troop any more; an infrequent convoy escort and emergency "bird down" ready reaction force were the best missions they could hope for. They were basically all Holloway had for perimeter security and drew all sorts of crappy little details. Anyway, initially Qui Nhon airfield looked good because it had lots of room there adjacent to the 223rd CAB. There was already a space problem at An Son. So we moved to Qui Nhon city.

The 61st AHC and its sister AHC, the 129th, were attached to the 7/7th during January as part of the move to Qui Nhon. Both AHCs had been based at Lane for some time. VHPA Member Rod Dykhouse describes these times as follows:

I DEROSED in May and recall that the 61st was attached to the 7/17th in January. At first it was primarily for admin purposes. The 61st was basically unchanged in the operational sense except that we started supporting units other than the 173rd Abn. We had primarily supported them during 1970. We started supporting Korean and ARVN units, and doing a lot more work in the Central Highlands around Pleiku, the tri-border area, and even into Cambodia. We still operated primarily with other 61st aircraft but not exclusively. Officially we were "CAV" but on a unit level, not much changed. I'm sure you know what I mean when I say that a person either loved the hats and sabers or thought they were a bunch of gun ho idiots. Suddenly the 61st, who had never been "CAV" before, was attached to an ACS and was "part of the 'CAV'". We developed a saying "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em". The 61st sent about 50% of our assets north to support LAM SON 719. The senior ACs with less than 90 days, along with an equal number of peter pilots, stayed at Lane and covered all the missions that the entire company had covered before. We flew our butts off - putting in 15-18 hour days! The 61st's primary AO was from Qui Nhon north to about the I Corps line along the coastal plains and along QL19 to An Khe, the area around Pleiku and the Tri-border area during early 1971. The two Lift platoons were stationed at and flew from Lane with an occasional RON at Pleiku. The Gun platoon was stationed at and flew from LZ English, about 60 NM north. I remember one good story from this time frame. I was flying C&C with a LTC and his RTO in the back. We were dropping phougas (eighteen 55 gal drums at a time) from a Chinook on suspected VC locations. We'd let it soak into the holes, caves, hiding places, etc. for a couple minutes; then fly over it and have the door gunner light it with tracers. We put the fifth drop that day into some elephant grass and right on about 12-15 hiding dinks. Well, they'd already seen our previous drops and knew exactly what was coming next; so they jumped up and started running. I immediately dove on them and told the crewchief to light it RIGHT NOW, which he did. Only two got out of the fire ball and one of them was just covered with blazing phougas. He only made it about 25 feet before collapsing. The other guy was running down this trail so I started hovering down the trail behind him while we took turns with our 38s. The colonel grabs his RTO's 16 and hollers for the RTO to hold on to his belt. He puts one foot out on the skid, the other knee on the floor and starts shooting at the dink. He runs out of ammo, so the RTO gives him another clip and he puts both feet out on the skid. He runs out again, gets another clip and moves further forward. This guy is so excited to actually see a dink out in the open and have an M16 in his hands. Well after a few more clips he is actually standing on the skid cap outside my door shooting!! He turns to me and says, through my window with a big grin on his face, "isn't this great!!" Well, we managed to shoot the dink and get the Colonel back inside the aircraft; then we went back to base for lunch.

February - On the 3rd, A Trp was attached to the 10th CAB located at Dong Ba Thin and shifted its support to the 23rd ARVN's elements in the Song Mao area. The missions assigned to the ACT also changed. While they would still perform regular Air Cav VR type missions, they were assigned more base camp night security and reaction force type missions. The 11th was scheduled as a maintenance down day for A Trp; but at noon Phan Rang Base Ops requested fire support when two rocket launchers and one 122mm

rocket were reported by intelligence sources. Two Cobras were sent and destroyed the rocket site. On the 15th, A Trp was forced to work the flat lands northwest of Song Mao because of high winds. One LOH received fire and the Guns fired in the area with unknown results. On the 27th, A Trp's Guns provided armed escort for an extraction done by the 247th Med. Both the medevacs and the Guns took fire but no damage. The Guns expended under the control of the MACV advisors on the ground.

The Sqdn staff was getting accustomed to their new role and VHPA Member Tom Galyean provides this insight: In late Feb or early Mar I worked primarily in the mission control center of the Sqdn S-3 at Qui Nhon airfield. As a result of the fall out from the Mai Lai fiasco, there was a command policy to fully investigate the circumstances whenever there were civilian injuries alleged to have been caused by American forces. As I recall, a Cobra had accidentally fired a rocket near a little village on the beach somewhere generally north of Qui Nhon and east of Bear Cat. I can no longer recall the exact reason for the accidental misfire. Unfortunately, the rocket landed near where a young boy, about four years old, was playing and he received a shrapnel laceration on one of his calves. I was assigned to help investigate this matter. To help me interview witnesses, I was assigned with the same "Kit Carson" Scout that served with A Trp during the 8 Aug 1970 engagement. By this time A Trp's Blues no longer needed him in their primary mission and we had developed a good friendship. When I interviewed the child's mother about what had happened, she was surprised that I was doing an investigation. Through the interpreter, she told me in substance: that she knew that what had happened was an accident; that the pilot didn't mean to shoot the rocket; and that she hoped that we wouldn't punish or make the pilot angry for what had happened because if we did, she was afraid that the pilot might not come back and help protect them from the VC. I have no reason to believe the "Kit Carson" Scout was saying words I wanted to hear. The look on that woman's face and the circumstances of that discussion, are among those events of my tour in Vietnam that are indelibly etched in my recollection. Even though I had previously supported wholeheartedly both the general mission of our armed forces in Vietnam, and the specific missions of the 7/7th Cav, I knew what we were doing in Vietnam was right.

Lam Song 719 / Dewey Canyon II - We have been able to learn that three different units from the 7/17th supported this operation. The most visible was C Trp and their exploits will be described in some detail. B Trp, from Pleiku, supported numerous ARVN operations several miles into Laos as sort of a "southern flank / NVA distraction effort" for the main thrust along QL 9. Currently details of B Trp's activities are not well known. Finally, HHT sent at least one, and maybe more, small detachments to Dong Ha to provide S-3 and S-4 type support. Again details of these HHT activities are not currently well known. Anyway, early in the month, C Trp moved to Quang Tri and was attached to the 223rd CSAB as part of the build-up for LAM SONG 719 / Dewey Canyon II. For those that know or care, the 223rd was a fixed wing CSAB. As part of the build-up to support this large operation, the 1st Avn Bde didn't want too many of its assets given to the 101st Abn for several reasons. So this is how, C Trp and several other 1st Avn Bde helicopter units were assigned to a starched wing command. At least two weeks prior to the move, C Trp had been given a warning order that they could be moving from Lane. C Trp still had a "rear det" at Lane, and their maintenance and "forward (rear)" would be at Quang Tri, while their "forward (forward)" would be at Khe Sanh when that base was re-established. VHPA Members Don Purser and Dave Ferrell give us a good picture of this period.

Don provides: As mentioned previously, C Trp had known for some time we would be moving our operations and maintenance bases from Lane for a temporary, but none the less extended, period of time. We were even told what to take and how to pack. Finally the orders came down and we moved to Quang Tri using both ground and air convoys. I remember putting our duffel bags in the LOHs plus our weapons but very little ammo. We were assigned a partially constructed children's hospital to live in. There was a helipad for this hospital just off the airfield at Quang Tri. Our flight line and maintenance area was on the airfield, within walking distance from this hospital. The concrete floors, the half walls on the exterior and the wooden roof were finished but not much else. Over the next few days, C Trp would rig up a lighting system with power supplied by a generator outside, move in some cots and a little furniture, and use a water buffalo parked out front for water. It wasn't heaven, but it was better than at Khe Sanh! Once the Khe Sanh base was re-established, C Trp was assigned a small area on the very northern edge of the perimeter. It was right off the active runway - only a few feet separated our aircraft parking area from the main fixed wing runway. When we got there, they had just finished clearing that section of mines and unexploded ordinance. I doubt the runway was unusable because there were many holes in it. There was wreckage and junk everywhere! It was a scary place!! Wendell Moore and I were assigned a sorry two man bunker. We put some wood from rocket boxes down to keep us off the mud, set up our cots and slept there in our sleeping bags. We were part of the perimeter defense - another scary thought! No one was happy with these living conditions so I joined several other Scouts to dig a new six man bunker. We didn't have much more space per person, but we were able to get our cots in there. I especially remember the rats that lived under the pallets on the floor - they were big as house cats!! We sandbagged our bunker walls to keep the mud in place. At night we'd "borrow" some of the asphalt covered aluminum panels from the runway for the floor and the roof. In the next day or so the engineers would replace the ones we'd "borrowed" and we couldn't get it through normal supply channels, so what the heck. We put the aluminum panels on the sandbagged walls, then a tent to keep the rain out and finally lots of sandbags. By morning we hoped no one could find those panels if they came looking for them. The weather was bad much of the time and it was cold there. From my point of view, I'd say most of C Trp's missions were traditional VRs on the Vietnamese side around Lan Vien, Khe Sanh and back to Dong Ha or along the two main roads used to support these bases. We occasionally saw AA fire and even flak in Vietnam. Naturally we were trying to keep the NVA away and looked for their rocket units. Whenever we'd find something interesting, it received an Arc Light or something appropriate. I have several pictures taken from atop our bunker of a line of B-52 delivered bombs. After the third day of operations in Laos, the 6s weren't used there much anymore. That is a long story by itself - how the higher arrived at that decision and who paid for it. Anyway, that was fine with me. I know our Guns provided considerable support in Laos but I don't have any details of that. Oh, yes, while at Khe Sanh I had just lifted off on an ash & trash mission when I lost the tail rotor. I put the aircraft down just outside the perimeter, in a mine field; but luckily no one was hurt. I really liked being a Scout and loved flying the 6. I was known as "Shaky" because I was always nervous in the morning. I couldn't eat breakfast on the mornings I would fly - it just didn't stay down. Funny, though, when I got to the aircraft and started the preflight, I settled right down and felt fine again. I would fly Scout for 10 months total.

Now we'll hear from Dave Ferrell: I think I was C Trp's first new pilot after they moved up north to support Lam Song 719. I was processed through Dong Ha by the 223rd with about 5 guys and assigned to C Trp with this tall 6'6", skinny EM. We got a ride to Quang Tri and went to C Trp's hospital building described by Don Pusher. I didn't have any TA50 gear (sleeping bag, etc.) at the time. They told me to just sleep in someone's cot and if they came back, go to another one. Anyway, about my second night there I heard this loud, single shot just outside the building. It was dark and I certainly didn't go investigate the noise. The next morning at breakfast, I learned that this tall, skinny, new guy had shot himself! Welcome to Vietnam, Dave!! About the 25th of Feb, I got to Khe Sanh and my first day there was hardly uneventful. I'd guess C Trp had already been there about a week or ten days. C Trp's area was relatively near the ATC tower and they had a loud speaker attached to the tower that carried the tower communications. I sort of wandered down there to see what was going on. A Cobra was coming in that had been shot up pretty bad and landed on the runway. A med team came over and took the wounded back seater away. I watched the co-pilot get out of the front seat and into the back seat. The tower wanted the Cobra moved off the runway right away so they could land the fixed wing traffic. C-130s were landing and unloading ARVN at regular intervals. There were trucks waiting to pick them up and drive them to where ever. I remember seeing one 2 1/2 ton with about 10 guys in the back and another 20 waiting to load. It had no canvas top, just the wooden sides and seats. Anyway, as this wounded Cobra moved along side this truck, he must have lost the tail rotor or something, because it crashed. One of the main rotor blades sliced through these ARVN. Khe Sanh was always a dusty place and I can remember running towards this great ball of dust to see if I could help. Lots of others came as well. Funny, at the Atlanta Reunion, Don and I were talking this over and he said he also went to help, but I didn't see him there. The first thing I came on was the lower half of an ARVN soldier, so I passed that up and found several more dead and injured. My thoughts were to try to give 1st Aid to anyone who needed it but I was shocked to see that the live ARVN were busy helping themselves to whatever was in the pockets and belongings of the dead! I decided that maybe the ARVN didn't need any help from me. Welcome to Vietnam, Dave!! Someone helped this LT pilot from the wrecked Cobra. I don't think he was injured in this crash. Some years later I believe I learned that this LT died later in his tour. This same day, I flew my first mission - forgot about an orientation flight or a check-ride; I was Cobra qualified and that was good enough. I was the front seater for Dave Lancaster. He was on his second tour and had been in C Trp for some time. He was a good Gun pilot and human being. I liked flying with him. On that mission, we were still using the little birds in Laos. We flew past LZ 31, which was the western most LZ down the highway into Laos. I remember looking down and seeing a burned out Huey but no one else on the LZ. I asked Dave why there weren't any people on the LZ. He explained they were all under cover because the NVA had it surrounded and were shooting at the ARVN continually. We flew on another mile or so and started working. The 6s found some hootches that contained 55 gal drums. We spent the rest of our time blowing these up and got several nice secondary explosions. We went back to Khe Sanh to refuel and rearm. Just as we were leaving, we got this call that LZ 31 was being overrun with tanks. As I recall we had three Guns, two 6s and the C&C; so we left the 6s there and flew to LZ 31. When we got there, two F4s were putting in an airstrike so we were told to hold off and orbit about half a mile away. We had good seats, so we watched the show! On one pass, this F4 came in low and as he put his stuff down I saw several streams of 51 cal tracers arch up toward him. As he pulled up, the F4 started smoking and soon the two pilots ejected. The jet tumbled through the sky and crashed into a hill. Our C&C, some distance from us, announced that he was going to try to pick up the two Air Force guys. The lead snake said why don't you wait a minute and we'll cover you, but he didn't. I have to give you a little more background information here. The Americans had already lost a lot of helicopters supporting Lam Song, so we had received instructions to try some different tactics. Today's was 50 feet off the trees and keep your speed up! We had to fly up this valley to get to where our C&C was going. The NVA were everywhere. As we went, I could easily see them walking around on the ground and we took A LOT of SA fire that day! Unbeknownst to us, some of this fire had cut the cables leading from our radios; so we couldn't talk to anyone. We still had intercom and it would be a few minutes before we figured out what was wrong. We were the second Snake. As we passed over this small ridge and dropped into another valley, we couldn't determine

where the lead Snake had gone; so we broke left. The number three Snake followed us but broke right. Well, all of a sudden we are alone and no one is talking to us. We were convinced that everyone else had been shot down! After a few minutes, Dave decided it is best to go back home and started back East. We are still low level and, as luck would have it, we came upon our C&C that had, indeed, been shot down. They had made a controlled, forced landing in a good sized area covered by elephant grass. It is easy to recognize your own people at 50 feet, but we couldn't talk to them. Dave decided he is going to land and just as he sets up to do this, another C Trp Gun landed near the C&C; so they wave us off. We head back for Khe Sanh. Later I learn that they replaced Dave Nelson, the front seat in the Snake, with ?, the wounded C&C pilot and the Snake medevaced him. He was the Gun Plat Ldr at the time; just flying C&C at day. I never saw him again, so he must have been wounded seriously. I was also told that the gunner on the C&C had been shot through a leg; the bullet cut a main artery. He bled to death from that wound. Sorry, I don't know any more details about this. We got back to Khe Sanh and learn that our radios were shot out, so no more flying today. That was fine with me! One day like that day was more than enough for an entire life time! Welcome to Vietnam, Dave!!

Dave Ferrell goes on to provide a few more details to help us understand the conditions at the time since we have no official records or history for C Trp during this period. A few days into the battle, I remember we stopped sending the 6s into Laos. I believe the following is true. One of our sister ACTs, B/7/1st, had lost so many ships that it was hardly combat effective anymore. The Trp Cmdr had gone on record that he wouldn't send his 6s there anymore and was relieved. There was a big stink about this because most of the line pilots agreed with this Major. In just a few days, the powers that be agreed with him and we were told not to take our 6s there anymore. Another aspect of Lam Song was that there were aircraft everywhere most of the time. The common thread in most of my memories is in being able to look out and see a hook or a crane putting in something, several slicks and sets of guns working on an insertion or a resupply, jets above, below and along side you, C&C ships in all sorts of orbits, on and on. It was like watching the entire inventory of American war birds playing in one large production! This was both good and bad. Good because if you had an emergency of some sort and could complete a mission, there was usually a backup that could be diverted to help out. Bad because you didn't feel personally involved in the effort, you just had a bit routine for a huge dance team. Another impression that comes to mind is that there were a lot of constants - the NVA were constantly rocketing our bases with 122s or 130 mm guns, there was fog around Khe Sanh constantly in the mornings and most evenings, there was constant movement of aircraft into and out of Khe Sanh, there was constant movement of supplies and vehicles on the roads, there was constant AA fire on the Laotian side, dust was universal constant anywhere near the ground, it was constantly noisy, we were constantly changing tactics to stay alive while performing our missions, we consistently expended every time we launched, etc., etc. Some examples to support these statements are: Concerning changing tactics, I can remember times when my Cobra team started a gun run from 10,000 feet - we were 5 or 6,000 AGL! The rockets would burn out and gravity would pull them down to the target. Concerning constant AA fire, I already talked about SA and 51 cal but twice I can remember receiving flack - naturally we changed altitudes in a hurry. Another time we were supporting the ARVN's defense of a FB and started shooting at the side of the hill just below the FB. We were some distance out when I noticed hundreds and hundreds of these "twinkling stars" in the trees on this hill. My mind played a trick on me. For a second I thought how neat it was that someone had put Christmas tree lights all along this hill. Then reality returned - My God! Those are NVA rifles firing at us! Finally I remember two C Trp Cobras landed too close to each other at Khe Sanh. For a few moments the blades intermeshed but inevitably, they finally collided and ripped the main rotor and transmissions from both aircraft. One rotor system traveled three quarters of a mile before coming to rest! No one was seriously hurt but the aircraft were destroyed. Oh, we didn't have any American Blues during this period. We had our Lift ships and they received missions sort of a la cart like the Guns. An elite unit from Siagon called the Hoc Bao were used to retrieve downed air crews. We certainly had no complaints about them or their performance and I didn't hear of any from the other aviation units. The Hoc Bao did their job well!

About the first week of April, C Trp moved from Khe Sanh back to Quang Tri and regrouped there. A few days later, they loaded up everything and returned to Lane the same way they had arrived - via air and ground convoys. The 7/17th's participation in Lam Song 719 was over at this point.

March - On the 1st, A Trp's Guns supported a single ship medevac by the 247th Med of one US and three enemy wounded. The situation began when the enemy ambushed a 23rd ARVN unit with a 51 cal. After the enemy were dispersed by artillery, A Trp's Guns searched the area and found no remaining enemy activity. On the 3rd, A Trp provided security for President Thieu's visit to Lam Son. During the screen, the Scouts found five bunkers which were destroyed by the Guns. No contact was made and the mission ended at 1600 hours when the President left. At 1300 on the 6th, A Trp was working an AO near Dalat and received a frag movement order to move to An Son. They arrived at An Son at 1945 hours. On the 7th, A Trp worked the Suoi Cau Valley. One LOH took three hits in the rotor blades, landed and was slung back to camp. A little later, a Scout found a squad-size enemy unit walking down a trail. About 20-25 rounds were fired at the Guns as they killed two. During the remainder of the day, the Scouts found numerous trails, hootches, and bunkers indicating recent enemy usage. All hootches and bunkers were destroyed by the Guns but no contact was made. On the 8th, A Trp returned to Phan Rang. The 10th was scheduled as a maintenance down day but A Trp was called to support a TAC E for an 53rd REGt unit in contact with a platoon size VC force. The Guns screened for three hours during which only one expended ordnance. On the 17th, A Trp was told to move to Pleiku and closed there at 1130 hours. On the 18th, A Trp supported the 47th Regt near Pleiku. The Scouts found ten uniformed people without weapons in a village and insert the ARP with negative results. Later the Scouts found one armed person and the Guns killed him while destroying four hootches. On the 21st, CW2 David C. Lancaster and WO1 James W. Manthei of C Trp were killed and VHPA Member Dave Ferrell describes the situation.

I was flying Dave's wing that day and we were the only two ships from C Trp assigned to this mission. The ARVN were withdrawing from Laos. We had been sent out to support an ARVN armored unit that had been ambushed. There was this horseshoe shaped bomb in the road pointing to the south. From low hills on the west and east side, the NVA were shooting at the ARVN. I watched an RPG or B40 come out of the trees and hit the 113 which blew just like in the movies. A few seconds later, another hit a tank and the turret flew up into the air. Things aren't going well for the ARVN. About that time we get everyone sorted out enough to start shooting at the ambishers. The NVA were squared away and had positioned at least three 51 cals in a nice triangle to cover their forces. These 51 cals start in on us. We stop shooting at the ambishers and start in on the 51 cals. We must have made some progress because their fire dropped off about the time my Snake was empty. I told Dave I was out of ammo and wanted to leave. Dave said he wanted to make one more pass. I told him I could not cover his break; but he said he was going in anyway. He made his run and emptied the ship. We watched in horror as he took a full broadside of 51 cal. He called that they had been hit, lost the tail rotor and that Jim was wounded. He continued on to the south looking for any place along the highway to land the Cobra. They didn't get too far when their airspeed went to nothing and they went twirling into the ground. We later talked to the med evac team that retrieved their bodies. They said they believed both men died of broken necks caused by their chicken plates and this twirling fall. I remember being really upset about losing Dave. We had become good friends. That very morning he had shown me a picture of his wife and the card she had sent him - today was their anniversary!

On the 23rd, A Trp worked an AO near Chec Beo and found a large rice cache. The Blues were inserted and destroyed some of it before bad weather forced the Trp from the AO. On the 24th, A Trp found and destroyed a company minus size staging area. A Trp was told to leave Pleiku on the 25th to return to Phan Rang but could not because of bad weather. On the 26th, one A Trp AH-1G was damaged in a mortar attack and was sent to the 604th TC for a tail boom change. The remainder of the Trp closed at Phan Rang at 1330 hours. During 28-31, A Trp worked AOs around Song Mao. The Scouts found signs of enemy activity but no contact was made. In late March, the exact date is unknown, WO1 James Bernard Low of C Trp was in a Cobra that took fire and crashed while supporting operations in Laos. VHPA Members Don Purser and Dave Ferrell provided some details of this event while attending the VHPA Reunion in Atlanta:

They reported receiving fire and the Cobra may well have been burning before they crashed into a river bottom. The hydraulics caught fire and this really burned Jim before he could be removed from the wreck. Eventually both pilots were evaced. Don remembers going with several other C Trpers to visit Jim in the hospital. Don said his face and upper body were so badly burned that they couldn't recognize him at all. Only after Jim started speaking did they recognize his voice. They understood he lived about a week or so before dying on April 3rd. The other pilot, name unknown at this time, was wounded but survived.

April - On the 1st, A Trp was placed on stand-by for movement to Pleiku. The order was finally received at 2230 hours. A Trp closed at Pleiku at noon and at 1500 received a TAC E support request from FSB Lonely where the US 62nd Arty camp was under attack by a VC force. A Trp sent four Cobras and the VC immediately broke contact. Though the Guns received fire, none were hit and they believed they killed four VC. Later the Arty camp credited A Trp with 20 kills. From the 3rd through the 5th, A Trp supported the 47th Regt, 22nd ARVN. On the 4th, A Trp was involved in some undocumented action and were credited with 17 kills. On the 7th, A Trp sent two AH-1Gs on a TAC E to FSB 6; but after an hour the returned to base as they were unable to contact the friendly forces on the ground. On the 15th, while working around Cheo Beo, a LOH drew fire from three or four hootches surrounded by spider holes. Two elephants and one OP were also found. All were taken under fire and destroyed and one person was killed. The Blues determined this was a company-size base camp, so artillery was adjusted and the camp completely destroyed. On the 16th, A Trp's ARP uncovered a small aid station. Several fresh footprints were followed into a tree line which the Guns fired up killing one. On the 17th, A Trp's Scouts reported a parachute with harness next to a tunnel opening and a flight suit, underwear, and a flight helmet were found on the ground. Two people were observed hiding in the bushes with a 51 cal which hit a LOH four times. The Guns expended with unknown results but an airstrike was called in. On the 21st, A Trp's Gun saw several people in an open area. When attempts to ID them produced fire, the Guns opened fire with unknown results.

Later an enemy squad was observed walking a trail. The Guns fired; six were killed, two wounded and two captured. Upon further investigation a bunker complex was uncovered. Airstrikes were called in with unknown results. The Blues and a reaction force were inserted and found 500 lbs of rice which was turned over to the 45th Reg. On the 23rd, A Trp was screening an area 20 miles west of SHODE III when the 3rd Bn, 45th Regt, 22nd ARVN made heavy contact with an NVA Reg. A Trp was requested to provide support. During the mission, one LOH was engaging a mortar position when it was hit by 30 cal AW fire. The observer was hit in the left groin but continued to engage his target. Another round returned to the Phu Nhon rearm point where they discovered two more rounds had hit the observer's chicken plate. Both were evaced to the 71st Evac. Meanwhile the C&C had discovered a 51 cal position and took one round through a rotor blade. On the 26th, A Trp's Scout discovered approximately 20 people in a base camp with five hootches and bunkers. The Scouts received fire so the Guns opened up and killed one. The Blues were inserted and immediately came under heavy fire. A reaction force was inserted to support the ARP. Both units began receiving heavy fire and mortar rounds. When the fire lifted, the ground forces found a training area. The area was destroyed by the Guns. The LOHs received fire two more times and the Guns expended with unknown results. When the Infantry was extracted, it was found that they had suffered four WIA.

MANG HO 16 - For the period 20-24 Apr and 3-14 May, the 7/17th provided command and control for the air assault portions of this operation conducted by the Capital Republic of Korea Infantry Division (CRID) and the 173rd ABn to the northwest and west of Phu Cat AFB; specifically the Suoi Cau, Soui Tre, and Soui La Tinh Valleys, and Base Area 226. The following units participated: the 61st and 129th AHCs assigned to the 7/17 and C/7/17; the 92th and 8/227 AHCs and D/227 AWC from the 10th CAB; the 134th AHC, the 238th AWC, and the 180th ASHC from the 268th CAB; the A/227th AHC and the C/228th ASHC from the 52nd CAB; the 268th Pathfinder Det from the 268th CAB; and the 10th Pathfinder Det from the 10th CAB. Intelligence indicated that elements of the 3rd NVA division were regrouping and retraining in or near Base Area 226. The terrain was described as a valley floor at about 100 meters elevation, steep mountains rise to 700 meters on the east and 800 meters on the western side. Dense vegetation offered excellent overhead concealment for enemy movement. Rugged ridges and pinnacles, encompassed by vegetation, offered concealed AA weapons positions with extremely good fields of fire. Very few adequate LZs existed in the area and most were one or two ship LZs on the surrounding pinnacles while those on the valley floor that could accommodate four or five ships were very vulnerable to AA fire from positions on the mountains above. The concept of the operation was for the Sqdn to provide air recon and tactical mobility for the Infantry units primarily via the two organic AHCs (the 61st and the 129th) and C Trp. They would reconnoiter, prepare and insert the Infantry elements into numerous LZs simultaneously to surround and cordon off Base Area 226. This was accomplished by inserting the ROK units to the south and east and the 173rd to the north and west as blocking forces on the 20th, 21st, and 22nd. Then two ROK Regts assaulted the mountain tops and valley floor to engage the enemy. During the period 3 - 14 May numerous assaults and extractions were conducted for tactical redeployment of the ROK units to further engage the enemy units. Elements from the 10th, 52nd, and 268th CABs were opconed on a daily basis. On the 20th (D-3), five companies and one Bn CP were inserted into five LZs. On the 21th (D-2), 105 ROK and 663 US troops were inserted. On the 22th (D-1), two ROK companies were inserted into two more LZs. On the 23th (D Day), the Sqdn and opconed elements assembled at two PZs. The slicks were broken down into ten flights of five ships each with supporting gunships. C Trp provided the initial recon and prep of the proposed LZs. Pathfinders were assigned to slick flights to each LZ to assist the CH-47s flights to follow. POL and rearming points were operational at both PZs. After a artillery prep, C Trp started a VR around the proposed LZs at 0930. At 0945 the assault forces were airborne and at 1000 they put 12 companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs, and one Arty Btry into ten LZs simultaneously. On the 24th (D+1), they again used two PZs and the same schedule. C Trp reconed the LZs and at 1000 the Sqdn inserted nine companies and three Bn CPs into seven LZs simultaneously. On 3 May (D+10), they began the extraction of the ROK Cavalry Regt with eight companies and two Bn CPs from nine PZs. On 4 May (D+11), they extracted the 1st ROK Regt consisting of ten companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs and one Arty Btry from ten PZs. On 5 May (D+12), they used one PZ to reinsert the ROK Cavalry Regt with eight companies into six LZs. The Blue flight received some SA fire and the guns engaged the targets. Two Hueys received hits. On the 6th (D+13), they inserted 11 companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs and one Arty Btry from the ROK 1st Regt into 15 LZs. On the 10th (D+17), they began the final phase by extracting eight company and one Arty Btry of the ROK 1st Regt from nine PZs. On the 12th (D+19), they extracted one company from the ROK Cavalry Regt from one PZ. On the 13th (D+20), they extracted seven companies and 2 Bn CPs from eight PZs. The Yellow flight received SA and B-40 fire and the Guns engaged. One Huey and one UH-1C were hit. Enemy personnel and bunkers were discovered and attacked by the Guns. The day's operations claimed 10 KBAs. On the 14th (D+21), they completed the extraction of nine companies and one Bn CP from seven PZs. The totals for the entire operation were for UH-1Hs: 2696 hours, 4009 sorties, 11,176 passengers using 351 aircraft and for CH- 47s: 252 hours, 300 sorties, 1428 passengers, 706 tons using 45 aircraft. The analysis section in the After Action Report provides some insight into this operation. Apparently the CRID was very security conscious because it provided only fragmentary information in advance for planning purposes and denied preparation air recons of their AO. They also did not put their G-3 or Regt Cmdrs in a C&C yet demanded simultaneous insertions. The lack of airborne decision makers caused delays in LZ selection as everyone had to wait for the information to be radioed back to the ROK CPs. All the opconed air units could not laager in the Lane area, so they had to fly in every morning and home every night. This, of course, delayed the air assaults about one hour. Temporary refuel and rearm points had to be established for several days outside fixed facilities which taxed the Sqdn's S-4 and HHT personnel and added a security problem. Finally, the CRID wanted their elements extracted from the field and returned to their base camp. This required extra "air taxi" time that could have been eliminated if they had used some ground convoys. The operation claimed 252 enemy killed, 110 individual weapons, 35 crew weapons, and 7 radios captured against 13 Koreans killed and 60 wounded with no US losses and no aircraft losses.

May - During the first week, A Trp's operations were weather restricted. On the 11th, A Trp destroyed a small base camp west of Phu Nhon. On the 19th, an A Trp Cobra crashed at Phu Nhon while hovering from the POL to the parking area. The pilot had gone IFR in the dust and the ship came to rest in an inverted position. Neither pilot was injured. At 1105 hours on the 20th, WO1 Gregory A. Smith and WO1 Robert Bruce died in the crash of an A Trp LOH west of Dragon Mountain near Camp Enari. The ARP was inserted to secure the crash site. The cause of the crash was never determined. C Trp moved their operations base to An Khe for two weeks during this period.

D Trp 1/10th CAV - About this time, D/1/10th CAV, the ACT for the 1/10th Cavalry Squadron that had been part of the 4th Div was attached to the 7/17th. VHPA Member Mike Lovett explains:

As the 4th Div was standing down, the 1/10 Cav Sqdn was still based out of Camp Radcliff near An Khe with the primary mission of keeping a good percentage of QL19 open between the coast and Pleiku. D/1/10 was the Sqdn's organic ACT and we lived at Radcliff as well. In fact I can remember we had a very nice New Years Eve party not too long after we occupied the buildings formerly used by the 4th Avn Bn. Our Sqdn was part of TF Ivy and then TF 1/9 as the stand down continued. Aviation support became a serious problem by late 1970 because we were not part of the 1st Avn Bde. When we needed parts or IPs or anything aviation related, we had to go all the way to Nha Trang and even then it wasn't good. We still flew most of our missions for the 1/10 Cav but they really couldn't support us like E/704 AMNT used to do. Our commanders made a lot of noise and about Jan/Feb 1971 we moved to Lane. Within a short period we were attached to the 7/17 Cav and the support was much better. Initially, we had no billets or other facilities. We shared some space with C/7/17, got an old Korean building and even had some built for us and lived in tents too. That part wasn't too great. Our ARP was still at An Khe and we always had two Guns plus two or three 58s (we didn't use OH-6As for Scouts after ?) at An Khe as a quick reaction force to keep the road open. That arrangement was hardly normal for an ACT but I don't think there were any normal units left in Vietnam at that time. Even when we were in the 7/17th, we still flew missions for the 1/10th most of the time. Like other ACTs during that period, we were not allowed to put our American ARP on the ground. When we supported the 1/10th, there were American ground forces near at hand. But we often sent pink teams up and down the coast, especially when C/7/17 was up north during Lam Son 719, without any hope of Infantry back-up. Basically we did a lot of aerial recon with the Scouts just marking targets as best they could for the Guns. We were also lucky during those days that we didn't have many birds go down and I can't remember anyone getting killed during the first half of 1972.

VHPA Member Earl Ewing remembers these times as follows: When I joined D/1/10th Cav in June, they had been living at An Son for some time because their operations were well established. They were living in wooden buildings but there wasn't enough room for everyone. For the first few weeks I moved from bunk to bunk while guys were on R&R. I had gone to AMOC and Cobra school after flight school, so I was in the Service Platoon and the 518th TC Det during my three months with D Trp. I recall we used to take Cobras we couldn't fix to our support at Tuy Hoa which was a very large facility. D Trp did keep operational teams at An Khe and more than once we had to go there to fix something or to take in parts. I can also remember going to Pleiku for the same reason but maybe that was when I was with the Sqdn. In September, I became the Maintenance Officer for the 7/17th. We were always very busy because the Sqdn was a collection of all sorts of aviation units and the ARVN had our units scatter ships all over the place just like trucks. I believe a lot of people got hurt and a lot of equipment was damaged and misused under this "scatter deployment" concept. In early '72 I can remember over flying Tuy Hoa on the way to Vung Tau so we could have our Cobras modified to switch the tail rotor to the other side. It was really impressive to see that Tuy Hoa had "turned to nothing". By then we were getting most of our parts and some support from Nha Trang but blades and engines were in short supply. I finished up my tour with the 129th in March.

June - A Trp spent 15 days down due to weather this month. Its missions included several convoy escort missions from Pleiku to Phu Nhon and two SAR operations in an attempt to locate a civilian Cessna 180 which disappeared between Cheo Reo and Pleiku. On or near the 1st, C Trp moved its operation base to Kontum from Lane and would support operations in this area for the entire month. On or near the end of the month, C Trp returned its operations base to Lane. During this month, the Sqdn HQ and HHT moved from Qui Nhon to An Son. VHPA Member Ernie Smart continues providing some important background information about this period:

SECTION XII - AFTER ACTION REPORTS

These "After Action Reports" are a continuation of the last two year's compilations of eye witness accounts, accident reports, official documentation, and special interest groups. Sources of the information range from the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Joint Casualty Resolution Center, the State Department, the POW Network (Task Force of Illinois, Inc.), to direct inputs from VHPA members. It is an attempt to accurately document specific events that involved loss of life and/or destruction of helicopters during the Vietnam war. It is not an attempt to incite or promote political issues. Some of the information used for this section contains opinions that may not accurately describe the events as they occurred. We have tried to remove these when they are obvious. Like everything in this Directory, this information is only as accurate as the members of the VHPA can make it, so please send in your additions and corrections to the VHPA Headquarters. Gary Roush has put this section together and would appreciate your help and feedback.

This information is in order by date of the event and contains all new material which has never appeared in a VHPA directory.

After Action Report for: 5 September 1965

LA GRAND, WILLIAM JOHN

REFNO: R0137
Name: William John LaGrand
Rank/Branch: W2/US Army
Unit: 197th Aviation Company 145th Aviation Battalion
Date of Birth: 11 May 1941
Home City of Record: Portland, OR
Date of Loss: 05 September 1965
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 110655N 106551E
Status (in 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: A-1G

Other Personnel In Incident: (none missing)

SYNOPSIS: William La Grand was a passenger aboard an A-1G aircraft on a flight which departed Bien Hoa on September 5, 1965. The aircraft was seen to crash and no ejections were observed from the aircraft prior to impact.

The area in which the aircraft went down was under hostile control at the time, and recovery and excavation attempts at the time were thwarted because of heavy enemy activity in the area and hostile presence.

Getting a ride in a Skyraider from a friend right after arriving in country.

After Action Report for: 18 June 1967

LEMMONS, WILLIAM E.

REFNO: R0734
Name: William E. Lemmons
Rank/Branch: O2/US Army
Unit: HHC, 196th Infantry Brigade (Light)
Date of Birth: 12 January 1942
Home City of Record: Pocatello, ID
Date of Loss: 18 June 1967
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 143303N 108301E
Status (in 1973): Missing In Action
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: OH-23

Other Personnel In Incident: Edward Guillory; James McKittrick (both missing)

SYNOPSIS: SFC Edward Guillory, Lt. William Lemmons and Maj. James McKittrick were aboard an OH-23 Raven helicopter on a visual recon mission operating in Quang Tin Province on June 18, 1967. They were to spot artillery targets for the Artillery Battery that McKittrick and Guillory were attached to.

At 1845 hours, the helicopter was declared missing. Extensive searches were conducted that night aided by artillery flares and aircraft mounted searchlights, but no trace of the aircraft or crew was found. In the next few days several crash sites were reported and searches made, but all efforts were fruitless.

After Action Report for: 30 June 1967

HOUSE, JOHN ALEXANDER II

REFNO: R0746
Name: John Alexander House II
Rank/Branch: O3/USMC
Unit: HMM 265, MAG 16
Date of Birth: 16 April 1939
Home City of Record: Pelham, NY
Date of Loss: 30 June 1967
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 161349N 107430E
Status (in 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: CH-46A

Other Personnel In Incident: Merlin Allen; Michael Judd; John Killen; Glyn Runnels (all missing)

SYNOPSIS: John House was the pilot of an CH-46A helicopter carrying personnel assigned to Company A, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, when the aircraft was hit by small arms fire near the city of Phu Bai, South Vietnam, exploded and crashed. Although some of the personnel aboard survived, House was never found, nor were remains recovered that could be identified as his. He was listed as killed in action, body not recovered.

The co-pilot Ted Pittman survived.

After Action Report for: 08 February 1968

ZIEGLER, ROY E. II

Name: Roy E. Ziegler II (Dick)
Rank/Branch: WO1/US Army
Unit: 58th Aviation Detachment Qui Nhon
Date of Birth: 1 September 1941
Home City of Record: Springfield, IL
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 164424N 107194E (YD471521)
Status (in 1973): Released from Captivity from North Vietnam
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH-1D

Other Personnel In Incident: WO1 Joseph Rose, E4 Michael Lenker, E5 Robert Chenowith, E4 James George, Jr. (MIA), and LTC Benjamin Purcell.

SYNOPSIS: All of the people on this helicopter were captured, served as POWs, and then released except for E4 George who was killed while in captivity. The following is a first person account by Dick Ziegler:

"On February 8, 1968 I was assigned to fly LTC Ben Purcell up to Dong Ha with high frequency radio parts. The other pilot was Joe Rose. My crew chief was SP5 Robert Chenowith and the door gunner was SP4 Mike Lenker. George was a refrigerator mechanic and went along to fix some refrigerators at Dong Ha. We took off from Danang and proceeded to Hue where we landed so LTC Purcell could be briefed by the Marine General on what the

situation in I Corps was and what equipment they needed. After he was briefed, we departed Hue for Dong Ha. The weather was just a little shitty. Ceilings were about 400-500 feet. I flew along the coast to avoid the enemy and then when we were about even with Quang Tri, I headed inland until I reached highway 1. We then flew north to Dong Ha.

After delivering the radio parts and LTC Purcell being briefed, we took off and headed back to Danang. Joe was flying. We decided to head back the same way we came up. After we left highway 1 to head back to the coast, we flew over an enemy unit that had moved into the area after we had passed that spot going to Dong Ha. There must have been a gallon of them. Well, they just pointed their weapons skyward and fired. We flew right through the ground fire. I was wounded in the left thigh and belly. The Huey was on fire. Joe crashed the helicopter in a grave yard. What a hell of a place to crash.

Once on the ground and out of the burning helicopter we tried to E & E out of the area. I was wounded and kind of in shock. One passenger, SP4 George, was badly burned from the crash and we had one runaway M60 machine gun, 45 cal pistols, and an M14 rifle. We walked for about 30 minutes to an hour when the VC came up from behind us and started firing. Guess what? We were in another grave yard! Damn things are all over the place. Well, I hid behind a grave and watched LTC Purcell wave his olive drab handkerchief and say we were surrendering. I didn't want to do that. I thought that the VC would torture and murder us. So I crawled out of the grave yard and hid in some bushes near by. All of the crew and passengers were taken prisoner at that time.

I waited in my hiding place until night fall and then I tried to find some friendly faces. I don't think there were any in I Corps that night. I found some armored vehicle tracks in the sand and tried to follow them. I lost them in some marshes. I continued to walk most of the night.

About 2 hours after dawn came, I was hiding behind some more bushes and I observed a combat assault (CA) coming in about 5 kilometers from my position. All that CA did was push the enemy towards me. In a little while, a group of VC (nine little boys with big guns) came up over the sand dunes. At the same time, a Huey flew over my position so close that if I would have had a rock I could have hit the door gunner with it. The VC had heard the Huey and had gone into hiding and the Huey never saw them or me.

After the Huey left they started towards me again. I was laying on my back with my 45 on my chest saying, 'God if you get me out of this I'll never sin again.' God had me on hold and never answered my call. One of the VC saw me, yelled and started firing his weapon. They all started firing their weapons in every direction. I raised up to one knee with my weapon in my hand and for some strange reason before I knew it, both of my arms were above my head in the, 'Don't shoot I surrender' mode.

It took about 5 days of walking to get to my jungle camp where I first got medical attention for my wounds. To my surprise all of my crew and LTC Purcell were also in that camp. The VC had executed SP4 George the day after he surrendered because of his burns. At this camp, I also met an American POW by the name of King Rafford. He had been captured in 1967 looking for a whore house in Hue. He didn't find it, but he got screwed. There was also a VC medic in the camp and he treated my wounds and probably saved my life. Credit where credit's due.

I made my last escape attempt in this camp with King Rafford. We saved our meager ration of rice and I exercised my leg in the hooch out of sight of the guards. Then one night, King and I just walked out of the camp. It gets mighty dark in triple canopy jungle at night. We had to navigate by the light from fire flies. Otherwise, we would just keep bumping into trees. Those trees are hard too in the jungle. The next day King and I were recaptured about 5 kilometers from the camp. I spent the next 10 days in a hole in the ground with reduced rations.

Shortly after my escape attempt, we were moved out of our camp and moved to North Vietnam. It took us 11 days of marching to reach the Ho Chi Mein trail and another 11 days of riding trucks up the trail before we got to our first camp in North Vietnam.

I spent approximately 5 months in this camp, that was located in a Vietnamese village, in solitary confinement. I was housed in a thatched roofed hooch and my room was the size of a closet. That is, it was 6 feet long by 2.5 feet wide by 6 feet high with stocks at the end of the room. I'm 6'2" tall. I hit my head a lot.

After 5 months we were moved to a camp that was not far from Hanoi and I spent until November of 1970 in this camp. I had my other pilot, that was shot down with me, in the room with me from then on. His name is Joe Rose. At times I also had another Warrant Officer helicopter pilot in the room with me. His name is Michael O'Conner.

After the Sun Tay raid, we were moved to the metropolitan area of Hanoi to a camp that was named the 'Plantation Gardens'.

After the B52's came to Hanoi in Christmas of 1972, we were finally moved to the infamous prison called 'The Hanoi Hilton'. We stayed there until the end of the war and I was released on 5 March 1973. And boy was I glad to leave!

After Action Report for: 09 August 1969

JANOUSEK, RONALD JAMES

REFNO:	R1478
Name:	Ronald James Janousek
Rank/Branch:	O2/US Marine Corps
Unit:	HML 367; MAG 36
Date of Birth:	21 July 1945
Home City of Record:	Posen IL
Date of Loss:	09 August 1969
Country of Loss:	South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates:	163819N 1064643E (XD960180)
Status (in 1973):	Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground:	UH-1E

Other Personnel in Incident: Bruce E. Kane (missing)

SYNOPSIS: 1LT. Ronald J. Janousek and Cpl. Bruce E. Kane were U.S. Marines attached to units of the 36th and 11th Marine Aircraft Groups, respectively. On August 9, 1969, the two were killed in the crash of a UH-1E helicopter.

Defense Department records indicate that Janousek and Kane were lost at Khe Sanh, in Quang Tri Province. The U.S. Marines state that Janousek's helicopter was hit by heavy enemy fire and crashed and burned. The U.S. Marines state that Kane's helicopter disappeared on a night reconnaissance mission. Joint Casualty Resolution Center records (considered by some analysts to be the most accurate of all records), indicate that the loss occurred in central South Vietnam.

Information obtained from family and other sources indicate that Kane and Janousek's aircraft crashed and burned in the Se Kong River near the border of Laos and South Vietnam north of the A Shau Valley, and that they had been on a secret mission in Laos. The U.S. State Department lists both men as killed in a hostile action, and further lists Kane as drowned and Janousek as a crew member of the aircraft.

Maj. Hill crash landed in water to put out the fire. Maj. Hill survived.

After Action Report for: 05 February 1970

LYON, JAMES MICHAEL

REFNO: R1556
 Name: James Michael Lyon
 Rank/Branch: O3/US Army
 Unit: HHC, 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division
 Date of Birth: 08 March 1948
 Home City of Record: Indianapolis IN
 Date of Loss: 05 February 1970
 Country of Loss: South Vietnam
 Loss Coordinates: 163045N 1072824E (YD494093)
 Status (in 1973): Prisoner of War (killed in captivity)
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH-1H

Capt. Lyon moaned and then a shot was heard from his position about 30 feet from the aircraft wreckage. No other outcry from Capt. Lyon was heard, and the others believed that he had been killed by the guard.

Two weeks later, Capt. Parsels was told by 1Lt. Lee Van Mac (an NVA commander at "Camp Farnsworth") that Capt. Lyon died from his wounds and was buried at the crash site. 1Lt. Lee Van Mac gave Capt. Parsels the personal effects of Capt. Lyon, including his ID card and several photos which appeared to be of Lyon's wife.

In late March, 1973, Parsels, Hefel and Kobashigawa were released from prisons in North Vietnam. In their debriefings, all three concurred on the story that Lyon had apparently been shot. They considered it a mercy killing, because their pilot had been so seriously injured that they doubted that he could survive.

After Action Report for: 24 March 1970

HOSKEN, JOHN CHARLES

REFNO: R1578
 Name: John Charles Hosken
 Rank/Branch: W1/US Army
 Unit: 170 AHC 17 CAG 52 CAB 1 Aviation Brigade
 Date of Birth: 23 August 1947 (Cleveland OH)
 Home City of Record: Chagrin Falls OH
 Date of Loss: 24 March 1970
 Country of Loss: Cambodia
 Loss Coordinates: 142750N 1071816E (YB484003)
 Status (in 1973): Missing In Action
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH-1H

Other Personnel in Incident: Berman Ganoe; Rudy M. Becerra; John Boronski; Gary A. Harned, Jerry L. Pool (all missing)

SYNOPSIS: On March 24, 1970, WO John C. Hoskins, pilot; Capt. Michael D. O'Donnell, aircraft commander; SP4 Rudy M. Becerra, crew chief; and SP4 Berman Ganoe, gunner, were the crew of a UH-1H helicopter (serial #68-15262) on an emergency extraction of a MACV-SOG long-range reconnaissance patrol (LRRP) from a landing zone in Ratanokiri Province Cambodia, near the tri-border area. The team included 1Lt. Jerry L. Pool, team leader and team members SSGt. John A. Boronsky and Sgt. Gary A. Harned.

The team had been in heavy contact with the enemy and had requested an immediate extraction. Capt. O'Donnell evaluated the situation and decided to pick them up. He landed on the LZ and was on the ground for about 4 minutes, and then transmitted that he had the entire team on board. The aircraft was beginning its ascent when it was hit by enemy fire, and an explosion in the aircraft was seen. The helicopter continued in flight for about 300 meters, then another explosion occurred, causing the aircraft to crash in the jungle.

No one was observed to have been thrown from the aircraft during either explosion. The aircraft began to burn immediately upon impact. Aerial search and rescue efforts began immediately; however, no signs of life could be seen around the crash site. Because of the enemy situation, attempts to insert search teams into the area were futile. SAR efforts were discontinued on April 18. Search and rescue teams who surveyed the site reported that they did not hold much hope for survival for the men aboard, but lacking proof that they were dead, the Army declared all 7 missing in action.

The Special Forces team aboard the chopper was working with Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observation Group (MACV-SOG), a joint service, high command, unconventional warfare task force engaged in highly classified operations throughout Southeast Asia. The 5th Special Forces channeled personnel into MACV-SOG (though it was not a Special Forces group) through Special Operations Augmentation (SOA) which provided their "cover" while under secret orders to MACV-SOG. These teams performed deep penetration missions of strategic reconnaissance and interdiction which were called, depending on the time frame, "Shining Brass" or "Prairie Fire" missions.

After Action Report for: 23 April 1970

EADS, DENNIS KEITH

REFNO: R1603
 Name: Dennis Keith Eads
 Rank/Branch: W01/US Army
 Unit: F/8 Cav 123 CAB 16 CAG 23 Inf (America), Chu Lai, South Vietnam
 Date of Birth: 04 May 1947 (Glendale CA)
 Home City of Record: Prophetstown, IL
 Date of Loss: 23 April 1970
 Country of Loss: South Vietnam
 Loss Coordinates: 153607N 1075801E (ZC180270)
 Status (in 1973): Missing In Action (Declared dead 08/28/78)
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: AH1G

Other Personnel in Incident: Larron D. Murphy (missing)

Other Personnel in Incident: Tom Y. Kobashigawa, John W. Parsels, Daniel H. Hefel (returned POWs)

SYNOPSIS: At 1530 hours on February 5, 1970, Capt. James M. Lyon, pilot, Capt. John W. Parsels, copilot, SP5 Tom Y. Kobashigawa, crew chief, and SP4 Daniel Hefel, door gunner, were flying a UH-1H helicopter (serial #68-16441) on a maintenance mission from Hue to Phu Bai, South Vietnam.

When the aircraft was about 18 miles northwest of Hue City, the helicopter caught fire and crashed (due to a malfunction). Capt. Lyon was thrown clear of the aircraft and was burned extensively over his body and part of his right leg. His leg was severed four inches below the knee. The other crew members were also injured and could not take evasive action. They were captured at 1630 hours by NVA troops and spent the night near the crash site.

Throughout the night, the crew members heard their pilot yelling and moaning in pain. At 0600 hours, Capt. Lyon moaned and then a shot was heard from his position about 30 feet from the aircraft wreckage. No other outcry from Capt. Lyon was heard, and the others believed that he had been killed by the guard.

O'DONNELL, MICHAEL DAVIS

Name: Michael Davis O'Donnell
 Rank/Branch: O3/US Army
 Unit: 170 AHC 17 CAG 52 CAB 1 Aviation Brigade
 Date of Birth: 13 August 1945 (Columbus OH)
 Home City of Record: Springfield IL
 Date of Loss: 24 March 1970
 Country of Loss: Cambodia
 Loss Coordinates: 142750N 1071816E (YB484003)
 Status (in 1973): Missing In Action
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH-1H

The helicopter departed to the northwest from Dak To, but was apparently hit by enemy fire, as it crashed and burned on a small island in the Dak Poko River about 500 meters from the end of the dock to the runway. Because of the rolling terrain, personnel at the airfield did not see the aircraft impact. A pilot flying over the wreckage reported that the helicopter was burning, but they could see no survivors. It was later discovered that five people did survive the crash - Warmath, Keller, Bogle, Ward and Lea. According to their statements, Hunsicker, Ellen, Zollicoffer, Jones and Carter were all dead.

Two other Team 22, MACV Advisors, LtCol. Robert W. Brownlee and Capt. Charles W. Gordon, and their ARVN Interpreter, Sgt. Cao Ky Chi, were in a bunker near the airstrip approximately 4 kilometers to the west of the base camp when they were forced to withdraw under heavy enemy attack. They proceeded south of the compound across the Dak Poko River, but LtCol. Brownlee became separated from the others as they were advancing up a hill. Sgt. Chi and Capt. Gordon called out to him, but received no response. From the top of the hill, Sgt. Chi heard the enemy call out to someone in Vietnamese to halt and raise their hands. Sgt. Chi believed the Viet Cong were speaking to LtCol. Brownlee. Gordon and Chi evaded capture and eventually made their way to safety.

A Vietnamese who was captured and subsequently released reported that he had talked to another prisoner who had witnessed LtCol. Brownlee's death. He was told that LtCol. Brownlee had killed himself with his own pistol when communist soldiers told him to raise his hands in an attempt to capture him. Additional hearsay reports of his suicide were reported by another ARVN source.

Yonan never caught up with the others. For three days, helicopter searches were made of the area with no success. Ground search, because of the hostile threat in the area, was not practical.

In April 1988, the Vietnamese "discovered" the remains of Capt. Kenneth J. Yonan and returned them to the U.S. in a spirit of stepped-up cooperation on the POW/MIA issue.

After Action Report for: 24 May 1972

HENN, JOHN ROBERT, JR.

REFNO: R1865
Name: John Robert Henn, Jr.
Rank/Branch: W2/US Army
Unit: F/79 ARA 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division
Date of Birth: 11 February 1948 (Worchester MA)
Home City of Record: Sutton MA
Date of Loss: 24 May 1972
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 113345N 1063717E (XT768786)
Status (in 1973): Missing in Action
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: AH-1G

Other Personnel in Incident: (none)

SYNOPSIS: On May 24, 1972, WO2 Isaac Y. Hosaka, pilot, and WO2 John R. Henn, aircraft commander, were flying an AH-1G Cobra helicopter (tail #67-15836) which was participating in a medivac operation about 8 kilometers south of An Loc, South Vietnam. WO2 Henn's helicopter was in a flight of three Cobras at 4800 feet when the helicopter appeared to break in half.

The aircraft then went into a flat spin, exploded and burst into flames upon impact. The other helicopter pilots concluded that the Cobra had been hit by a SAM (surface to air missile), as they had seen a trail of white smoke from the ground to the aircraft.

The other two Cobras remained over the site, but observed no one leaving the crash. An immediate search in the area was not possible because of the enemy situation, but on June 2 and June 5, brief surface searches were conducted and remains were found which were identified as those of WO2 Hosaka.

A refugee reported that he had witnessed a Cobra helicopter crash and burn near Tan Khai village. Fifteen days later, he saw the bodies of two individuals who had apparently died in the crash. The U.S. Army believes this report may correlate to Henn and Hosaka.

After Action Report for: 11 June 1972

HOLM, ARNOLD EDWARD, JR.

REFNO: R1874
Name: Arnold Edward Holm, Jr.
Rank/Branch: O3/US Army
Unit: F/8 CAV 11 CAG 1 Aviation Battalion
Date of Birth: 05 March 1944 (New London CT)
Home City of Record: Waterford CT
Date of Loss: 11 June 1972
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 162326N 1072407E (YD565135)
Status (in 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: OH-6A

Other Personnel in Incident: Wayne Bibbs; Robin R. Yeakley (missing from one OH-6A); James E. Hackett; Richard D. Wiley (missing from second OH-6A).

SYNOPSIS: By December 1971, U.S. troops in-country had declined dramatically - from the 1968 peak of nearly 55,000 to less than 30,000. The enemy, temporarily on the defensive by the moves into Cambodia in 1970 and Laos in 1971, began deploying new NVA forces southward in preparation for another major offensive.

In March 1972, the Vietnamese launched a three-pronged invasion of the South. One NVA force swept south across the DMZ, its goal apparently the conquest of the northern provinces and the seizure of Hue. A second NVA force drove from Laos into the Central Highlands, and a third effort involved a drive from Cambodia into provinces northwest of Saigon.

Fierce fighting ensued on all three fronts, with NVA success the greatest in the northern provinces. Fighting continued until by June, the North Vietnamese began withdrawing from some of their advance positions, still holding considerable amounts of South Vietnamese territory in the northern provinces.

HOSAKA, ISAAC YOSHIRO

REFNO: R1865
Name: Isaac Yoshiro Hosaka
Rank/Branch: W2/US Army
Unit: F/79 ARA 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division
Date of Birth: 7 February 1949
Home City of Record: Gardena, CA
Date of Loss: 24 May 1972
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 113345N 1063717E (XT768786)
Status (in 1973): Killed in Action
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: AH-1G

McQUADE, JAMES RUSSELL

REFNO: R1873
Name: James Russell McQuade
Rank/Branch: O2/US Army
Unit: F/8 CAV 11 CAG 1 Aviation Battalion
Date of Birth: 03 June 1949 (Pasco WA)
Home City of Record: Hoquiam WA
Date of Loss: 11 June 1972
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 162336N 1072357E (YD562138)
Status (in 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: OH-6A

that appeared ready to surrender. The "Kit Carson" scout called for him to stand up and come forward, but he didn't move. Our Scouts had returned for fuel and we were short LOHs due to combat damage, so I hovered the C&C ship just behind the NVA. Suddenly we came under intense fire from a large force to his rear - a trap had been planned for the Blues. I called for the Guns and they were already in-bound. They put every rocket right on top of the NVA. It was a thing of beauty!! I climbed to altitude and called from some artillery. About that time, Dak To received another attack from Rocket Ridge. Just as the artillery got registered for us, the ARVN canceled our mission and our stand-by reserve. I tried to tell them the rocket attack was just a diversion and that we had their NVA Regimental folks located. No luck, so we had to withdraw. However, we called in TAC air and they did a fine job on that target! From that day on, the battle of Dak To - Ben Het was over and the NVA withdrew. I am convinced we had found and hit a major headquarters.

For May and June, A Trp claimed 124 NVA killed, 66 more by airstrikes and artillery, one captured plus 93 bunkers destroyed. They also captured one AK-50, a 122mm rocket, three AKs and an assortment of ammos.

July - On the 7th, a D Trp jeep struck a mine while returning from a mounted mission killing SSG Charles E. Smith, SP4 Colon D. Young, and PFC Paul E. Johnson. During the latter part of July, A Trp started working for the 1st Bde against the 18th, K-2, and 95B NVA Regiments during Operation Hines. The primary AO was between the Mang Gang Pass on QL19 and LZ Action. D Trp continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Division's TAOR during this month.

August - On the 2nd, A Trp was worked to the east of An Khe when they observed numerous high speed trails, structures and over 60 bunkers. Chickens and livestock were seen in the area, so the enemy was near at hand. About 1530, one LOH reported that he was experiencing difficulties with the aircraft. It then lost power, crashed into some trees and burned. The crew were seen departing the area with enemy soldiers following close behind but the foliage was too thick for the ARP to be inserted. At 1610, the downed crew were located in a small clearing about 1000 meters from the crash site and were extracted by a med evac ship with a jungle penetrator. A series of intensive airstrikes were directed on the enemy positions that killed 23 NVA. On the 3rd, A Trp found a high speed trail and followed it for eight miles. They found several NVA, bicycles, and bunkers along the way. All total the Guns and airstrikes killed ten NVA that day. On the 6th, A Trp received heavy AW fire from a large NVA complex about 35 KMs northwest of An Khe. When the Scouts returned after the Guns had expended, they found 11 dead NVA. A further VR revealed that the complex was surrounded by numerous man traps that were constructed on 16-foot lengths of bamboo with punji stakes every six inches. Several airstrikes were put into the complex. On the 16th, A Trp was called to support a 4-man LRRP in contact. The Guns killed ten NVA and helped extract the LRRPs. On the 16th, C Trp's ARP discovered what one 173rd Abn officer called "one of the most valuable pieces of information of the Vietnam War". In the northern end of the An Lao Valley the Scouts observed a tunnel and bunker complex. The Blues encountered AW fire from the complex but battled their way inside one of the caves. There they met and killed four NVA. It was later determined that two were Russian trained doctors and the other a Russian trained pharmacist. One of the doctor carried a map and information pinpointing the position of the NVA hospitals and medical supply points in the AO. On the 17th, A Trp made light contact and inserted the Blues. They found a well equipped base camp and caches of clothes plus a barbershop and destroyed it with fire and explosives. D Trp continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Division's TAOR during this month; but on the 31st they moved to Ban Me Thuot East with a contingency from HHT to prepare for operations around the Bu Prang SF camp.

September - On the 1st, B Trp moved to Ban Me Thuot East and the Squadron set up a "Ruthless Forward" there to support TF Fighter and elements of the 23rd ARVN Division. Weather handicapped tactical operations for parts of the month. Even though various Squadron elements had lived at Ban Me Thuot East prior to this, it was still a lot of work to re-establish a base at old "Camp Bleakness". Aircraft maintenance was never a pleasant experience at Ban Me Thuot East. Within a few days two of D Trp's platoons were lifted to Bu Prang in an Infantry, security, air-mobile reaction force for B Trp. Bu Prang was a small camp and logically not prepared for this large American unit. As a result HHT was given the responsibility of flying food, shelter material, and essential supplies to the D Trp elements at Bu Prang. Basically they flew two resupply missions every day to Bu Prang. HHT and D Trp also established an ammo resupply point at Nhon Co for the Sqdn. By the end of the month, HHT ships were also making single ship insertions of D Trp personnel and Vietnamese MPs along QL88. They would question the locals in attempts to learn more about the enemy build up in the surrounding areas. HHT ships also performed medevac missions from the Bu Prang area. B Trp managed to kill ten enemy soldiers and located numerous bunker complexes, routes of infiltration and areas where massive amounts of food were under cultivation by the enemy. Two aircraft were badly damaged by enemy fire and one pilot seriously wounded.

October - B Trp's daily reconnaissance provided considerable intelligence data as the enemy movements and activities in the Bu Prang area increased. Numerous bivouac sites and bunker complexes, well used trails, and crops under harvest were reported. AW fire directed against B Trp's aircraft increased as the month progressed. Weather precluded some operations early and near the middle of the month. During the last week of the month, five B Trp aircraft were damaged by AA fire. On the 28th, the expected enemy offensive was launched with attacks on CIDG camps all around the Bu Prang area. This action would be known as "The Siege of Bu Prang". On the 29th, B Trp thwarted three separate attacks on firebases around Bu Prang. Gun ship attacks destroyed two 12.7 mm AA guns and one 57mm RR. The friendlies began abandoning firebases and consolidating around the main Bu Prang and Duc Lap camps. From actions during this month it was learned that elements of the 28th, 40th, and 66th NVA Regiments were involved in the siege.

November - During this month, A Trp supported the 1st Bde in operations to the southwest and west of An Khe and occasionally the 3rd Bde west of Enari. A Trp finally completed the construction of their aircraft maintenance hanger at Camp Enari. B Trp continued to support TF Fighter until the 1st Bde started Operation SPREAGINS WHITE during the "Siege of Bu Prang". C Trp worked the An Lao Valley with the 173rd Abn. D Trp worked with B Trp until the 13th when it returned to Camp Enari and started providing convoy security on the Enari to Cheo Reo highway. On the 2nd, B Trp was working an AO on the edge of the main battle area and VHPA Member Kirk Curran remembers:

I was a 1LT then and had been flying Cobras with the Undertakers since I joined B Trp in August. MAJ Bowling had asked several RLOs if they were interested in flying the "little birds". So that day I was flying as Jim Nowicki's Observer as part of my training to become the Scout platoon leader. Jim was ScalpHunter 13, flying wing for ScalpHunter 17, CW2 George W. Grega, who had SGT Vernon C. Shepard as his Observer. The area we were working had been defoliated some time prior, so the foliage and trees didn't completely obscure our view of the ground. As we orbited around Grega, Jim and I spotted this huge bunker complex. One of the bunkers had a very large opening that looked like a wide set of stairs going down into the ground. We called Grega to have a look and reported what we'd seen to the C&C and Guns. It was really unusual and Grega moved around for a few seconds and then came to a near hover over the bunker with the large opening. That's when the NVA faced him bad. Even though they took a lot of fire and SGT Shepard was wounded in the foot, he got a Pete out and George moved off. He was streaming fuel like crazy and Jim and I thought he was going to blow up. You could see the fuel atomizing in the rotor wash and forming clouds near the hot exhaust. The Guns rolled in and started beating up the bunkers complex on SGT Shepard's mark. We told George to get it on the ground QUICK and suddenly this large "L" shaped LZ seemed to pop up in front of us; so George just flared and dropped it in. The next thing that happened was just plain good luck. I had a "hot Pete" (a WP grenade without a safety pin) in my hand and told Jim I wanted to throw it out in the trees and not the LZ; so we overflew George and started to circle back - as we reached the trees where I pitched the Pete. We quickly got back to the downed ship and landed near them. Our LOH had a Mini and I had an M-60 fed from the back. Grega and Shepard got in the back; I'd guess George was near the center of the compartment and Shepard was closer to the outside. We took off and didn't get to 100' when the world opened up. I don't know if the NVA had ambushed that LZ or the road that went through it or what. Maybe they hoped to get the relief column for some of the firebase battles that were going on. Anyway, Jim and I saw two 51 cal at our 10 and 2 and later learned of another at our 7 o'clock. Jim hollered over the radio and I worked the 60 against the 2 o'clock gun position until the belt broke. The good part about this was that by that time the Pete I'd thrown was now fully developed; so the Guns and C&C had no trouble finding us even though their attention had been directed toward that bunker complex. The Mini was on and I reached back to get the ammo belt, opened the cover of the 60 and was just closing it when I noticed that the front of the little bird was gone and we were going down. There was big explosion. The fire ball that went past us taking off part of my mustache and burned part of my hand between my gloves and the nomex flight suit. I'm not certain if we tumbled in the air at that point or what; but we hit the ground hard and bounced into the air to land again without any rotor blades or slides or tail boom. Naturally we were hanging upside-down, trapped inside and I remember thinking it was going to blow again. Later I would joke that what caused us to crash was being overgrossed with NVA 51 cal - really a bad joke! Anyway, Jim and I finally got out and started grabbing stuff we thought we might need. I set up the 60, we got some WPs and an AR-15 (you know one of those shorties). I had my 45 (the Trp didn't have any more 38s at that time, so I was blessed with a 45). The survival radio was in a net between the seats. We didn't think about it, so it stayed there. About then we noticed SGT Shepard at our 3 o'clock laying face down. He had been thrown from the ship and had a terrible wound from a 51 completely across his buttock. You remember how large the Army field dressings seemed when we were in training? Well I remember thinking it would take half a bed sheet to cover that wound, he was laid open that badly. The fire was still pretty intense all around us and really the position was untenable; so we decided to book. The LOH was still burning and there were small explosions coming from it now and then as the grenades or a WP went off. Anyway, we dumped the 60 back in the LOH and started to move away when we heard George from inside the aircraft. Jim went back to get him but returned saying he couldn't get him out. We moved away and never saw George again. I later learned that the guys in the air had seen figures running toward the trees and determined we were all together and were at least not killed in the crashes. But what they had seen was the NVA running for the trees because we had crashed almost on top of one of their bunkers and they were scared to death. We started moving toward the south because we had received less fire from that direction. Jim was in the lead, then SGT Shepard, then me. SGT Shepard hadn't received any bone hits but he looked terrible. The grass was tall in the LZ. We hadn't moved off very far when we saw this Cobra coming in to land.

an Infantry guy, so I enlisted in the Army as a brick layer. As you might guess, I never saw another brick and ended up in helicopters! After AIT I went to carpenter school, then to Ft. Knox as a carpenter, and somehow I ended up in Vietnam assigned to HHT/7/17 as a jeep driver and mail room clerk. That lasted less than two weeks when someone asked me to shine some officer's boots and I thought "that's it - I ain't doing that!" I asked around and was told there were opening in B Trp's Scouts but I'd have to volunteer. They decided the job. It sounded OK to me, so I volunteered. I'd been flying as a Scout for about four months and really liked it. I don't think I'd do it again, but I really liked it at the time! I'd flown with George Grega a few times prior to this day. He seemed to like me and I liked him. We communicated and worked well together as Scouts. I think it was the night before this battle or maybe two nights before, but we were all in one of the Scout tents having a beer and George said to me. "I don't want to scare you or anything, but today when we were returning home from the AO as a flight of four LOHs I happened to notice there were only three shadows on the ground. At first I thought it was because we were sort of in a cloud or something, so I moved over a bit. Shep, (that was my nickname in B Trp) we didn't have a shadow - we just weren't there!! No matter what I did, we didn't have a shadow." At the time I sort of "wrote this off" but maybe George had a premonition of things to come. I only remembered it afterwards. Anyway back to the battle, I don't remember the bunker with the large opening Kirk described but I DO REMEMBER the bunker complex and looking "eye to eye" with an NVA 51-cal crew. I literally could see the whites of their eyes!! I put out the Pete and fired. They fired and did a damned fine job. I used to fly with my feet on the skids. I was hit in the left foot (after a few days this wound wouldn't bother me that much) and in the chin (that wound caused me a lot of discomfort for some time because there was a piece of meat inside my mouth - I finally bit that off and it healed with a big lump of scar tissue.). But I don't think there was much left of the bottom of the LOH. The radios had been shot out and the fuel cell must have been dumping fuel like crazy because it got all over the front bubble and started to obscure our vision. At first I thought it was engine oil but I looked back into the engine compartment and could see that the oil tank level looked normal. Anyway, the other ship flew along side us and with arm and hand signals made it clear that we should land RIGHT NOW. I'd guess we fly for maybe two or three minutes after we were shot. I remember landing, getting into their ship, and getting shot down again pretty much like Kirk described it. I wasn't hurt by the explosion he described but I knew I'd been hit in the butt. I got out of the LOH after it hit and sort of ran down the hill a little ways. I don't think I "blacked out" during any of that but I might have. I do remember crawling away from the two LOHs because I had a hard time moving. We weren't too far away when we saw the Cobra come in.

We interrupt both Kirk and Shep at this point to hear from VHPA Member Mike Peterson who was flying the Snake they saw trying to land. I had been in B Trp about 5 months and was in the back seat as AC that day. CPT Lou Chirichigno, who was my platoon leader but hadn't been in that position all that long, was in the front seat. We had flown as the high Gun earlier in the day. Our team was refueling at Bu Prang when we got the word that a LOH was down and that the other team was firing. We left in a hurry. I don't remember the briefing we usually had as one team replaced another on station. It seems to me that we got there first and never even assumed the position of high Gun; just started trying to help our people on the ground. I do remember seeing the LOH burning when we arrived at this huge L shaped clearing but I don't remember seeing the other LOH. We made a quick, low pass and told the C&C that it certainly didn't look like a survivable crash. On our second pass we were surprised to see someone get out of the wreck and from the way he walked we could tell he was seriously hurt. I believe we were the only ship on station and that we were talking to the C&C who was some distance away. Anyway, Lou and I talked it over and decided to land. The plan was for Lou to get out, put the injured person in his place, and remain on the ground until someone could come get him. Please remember that we were working under the premise that the LOH had receive fire from a place 3 or 4 miles away and had managed to fly away from the danger only to crash in this open area that we believed to be safe. Naturally, that assumption got us into lots of trouble later on but at that time we knew nothing of the action that had gone on in this area before we arrived. Lou argued that we should go straight in at that point but I suggested that we make one more low, slow pass to see if we drew any fire. We flew about 50 feet off the trees, rather slow, and right along the edge of the clearing - nothing - or at least nothing that we could tell. I made a turn and started back to land. The NVA maintained great fire discipline and really suckered me in. Suddenly we got hit from everywhere!! I remember the cyclic being shot in two but I still had the grip in my hand. Lou yelled he had been hit in the hand. I was hit in my left leg and foot. We went in inverted and impacted not far from where Grega was. After things stopped flying around, I was able to get out without that much difficulty and went around to help Lou out. He didn't have the use of his hand and it was really hurting him. Anyway, we got out and managed to link up with Grega. I remember he was badly burned but could speak to us even though he was dazed and incoherent at times. Funny, I felt no pain at the time - the adrenalin must have kept me going because my wounds were really rather serious. We kept telling Grega that help was on the way but he knew he was in bad shape. The only thing I took from the Cobra was a shot gun without any shells - really smart! We could see the NVA all around us in the trees and knew it was only a matter of time before they'd come after us. After awhile we came up with a plan for me to move to the southern end of the LZ in such a way as to convince the NVA that all three of us had moved there and thus Lou and George, who were the most seriously injured, could hide and wait for the rescue ship. That is how we separated. I was successful in moving in a rather obvious way through the tall grass to the southern end of the LZ. Not long after I got there a Huey tried to land to get me.

We interrupt Kirk, Shep, and Mike at this point to insert some comments from VHPA Member Joe Feeney who was in the Huey that tried to get Mike out that afternoon. During my first tour in Vietnam I was a crew chief; then I went to flight school and to Maintenance Officer school before my second tour when I was with HHT. I had only been in country a little over a month. Bob Rogers and I used to fly together often. He was a pilot in the Aviation Section and flew a lot, especially with D Trp and the various detachments from HHT scattered all around Quang Duc and Darlac Provinces. On Sunday the 2nd, we had a pay master on board and had flown about six hours since we left Enari that morning. The general offensive had been on for a few days already and as we flew around we saw lots of convoy ambushes and bases taking fire. We were refueling at Duc Lap, which was under mortar and 57mm RR fire most of that day, when B Trp's Blues jumped into their ships and left in a hurry. We followed and asked if we could help. The B Trp C&C asked if we could go to Ban Me Thuot East and get a jungle penetrator because he thought he might need one in a hurry that day. When we returned from East we followed this B Trp Cobra to the site of the battle. B Trp had inserted their Blues and didn't have anyone on station except this Cobra as everyone else was refueling. I think the Cobra had expended already but was just trying to stay over their people on the ground. We both made a low, slow pass over this huge LZ; unfortunately well marked with the three downed aircraft. I remember thinking at the time - we are going too slow, I just know we'll never make it to the other end of this LZ and we didn't even have chicken plates! It was then that I saw one of the Americans standing up under some trees. As Bob circled around, he told the Snake that we were going in to pick him up and started an approach for an area near where I had seen the guy. Almost immediately we started taking lots of fire. As best I can recall, I don't think we got very close to the touch down point when I got hit in the left leg - my side of the Huey took several hits. I do remember my left leg fly up and hit me in the chest from the force of a bullet. As determined as Bob was, we were taking a hell of a beating; so he aborted the approach and we climbed back to altitude where the Snake was. We talked the situation over inside the aircraft for a few minutes and with the Snake. While I didn't have a life threatening wound, I was pretty well unable to function as a pilot. About that time several B Trp aircraft returned and I can remember listening to the C&C on Guard. After further discussions, he released us and we went back to Duc Lap where there was an SF aid station. When we got to Duc Lap, Bob made certain I was in the good hands of the medics; then he put the crew chief in my seat and took off. The SF medics were very good. They treated my wounds as best they could and I got something to eat and drink. Helicopters were coming and going all the time. They called for a Dust-Off and one came but wouldn't land because the camp was really under pretty steady fire. B Trp came back again that night to refuel between 8 and 9. We talked to them and asked if they would come back when they were done to take me to Ban Me Thuot. They said "Sure" but they never came back that night. I guess they got real busy and I really wasn't in any grave danger. Anyway, the next morning I did get a ride to East and was taken to their aid station which consisted of some below ground conex containers. They told me the crew chief was there as well because he had "flipped out". Anyway, when he saw me he got very excited and ran over to me and hugged me. He said when they had taken me away at Duc Lap; he just knew I was going to die but now he was very happy to see me again. The medics were glad to see him respond favorably and asked if I would stay with him a little while longer. Anyway, by the end of the day I was in a big hospital in Nha Trang; then on to Japan and finally the States. But you know I never got any of my stuff back from Vietnam!

Mike Peterson continues with his story about the Huey flown by Rogers and Feeney. Just like they had done when I was trying to land, the NVA held their fire until he had slowed to touch down. Then, all hell broke loose!! My fingers were on the skid and the crew chief was reaching out to get me; but the ship was taking a terrible pounding. I remember dropping to the ground and believing that the Huey would surely be crashing in on top of me any second. I was both surprised and glad to see them get away. It wasn't until after I was released and Philly Fogg visited me in the Pleiku hospital that I learned one of the pilots and one of the guys in the back were wounded seriously in that ship. Anyway, I laid low after that until it got dark and then moved into a thick clump of bamboo in the trees for the night. Everything was quiet that evening from my vantage point, save for a few shots from individual weapons. I heard a Huey return and land later that evening but I couldn't see it from where I was.

Kirk Curran continues. Jim, Shep, and I watched what I later learned was Peterson's and Chirichigno's Snake coming in at an angle and get lower and lower until it was about to be masked from view by the grass. The NVA 51 cal's opened up again and you could see the ship shutter with each hit. It sort of stopped in the air, then went straight down and crashed. Soon we heard lots of small arms fire and believed the NVA had killed the crew. I later learned that Lou and Mike were not killed and did link up with George. I learned that they moved in a southern direction as well and must have passed us but we didn't know it at the time. (Editor's note: This is not exactly correct; only Peterson moved to the south, Lou and George remained near the aircraft.) Naturally the guys in the air were doing everything they could to help us. It was a thing of

beauty to watch the Blues get inserted. In fact it looked like the Lift was just making a low pass; they were in and out that quickly. Unfortunately we were not that close to them and in the tall grass we would probably have shot each other in the link up.

(Editor's note: Early in my research efforts I had a conference call with VHPA Members Billy Bowling (the B Trp Cmdr) and Leighton Haselgrave (the Sqdn S-3). My notes from that call are terrible. But Billy explained that B Trp's Blues and D Trp (-) were inserted in an LZ a couple hundred meters further to the south of the large L shaped LZ. They destroyed and/or maneuvered around several NVA AW positions as they moved toward the large LZ. At least part of this force did indeed get onto the large LZ but that was a still some distance further to the south of Jim, Shep, Kirk or Mike. Because no one knew exactly where the downed crews were (survival radios would have made all the difference in the world!) and because the NVA were moving all along their flanks and this was obviously "their ground", the Blues could not stay there long. The Blues said that if they were going to stay on the ground overnight, they would need to be reinforced with a "large force" (specifically one that had its own mortars) and that they would need lots of artillery support. It was getting late in the day and Billy said he couldn't deliver on either of these "support requirements". This isn't surprising - Sqdn OR-1s show that the nearest U.S. Inf and Arty were some 4th Inf elements near Cheo Reo, the ARVN had their hands full with the fire base battles, the site may have been outside ARVN Arty range (but no one trusted ARVN Arty!), this area was very near Cambodia and a "long way from anywhere". So they pulled the Blues out before the NVA could set a trap for them.)

Kirk continues. Also I learned that a Huey crew had seen Peterson from the air and had tried to land to get him. I was told that as he ran toward the ship, they watched in horror as the NVA shot him several times and assumed he was dead. Whoever told me this said that Mike was still wearing his chicken plate which saved him was any serious injuries. He was just knocked down and bruised. (Editor's note: Please refer to Mike's own account. I asked him specifically about this matter. He said he was not wearing a chicken plate. His normal custom was to sit on it while flying. He was sitting on it that day, so it stayed in the aircraft.) Anyway, it was really something to watch the F100s deliver their airstrikes. Several times they would pass directly overhead. We were on our backs watching. You could see the wings on the rear of the bombs open up as they left the aircraft, follow the line of flight to the other end of the LZ and the explosion. The NVA were taking a pounding from this stuff as best as we could determine. It began to get dark and we started moving again, crawling through the grass. It really got dark and I remember not being able to see anything in front of me; so I just kept touching Shep's foot as we went. We stopped ever now and then. During one stop, I made a dumb mistake and put my 45 down so I could roll over and look behind us. I had look back several times before and knew we were leaving a "highway wide road" through the grass as we crawled. My mind kept telling me that the NVA would find it and come following after us. I looked back and could see the stars and the wide open path. I turned back and it took me a couple of seconds to find my 45. When I had it and reached for Shepard's foot; THEY WERE GONE! I hadn't heard them crawl off or anything but there was a lot of noise still around the LZ. They were dropping flares and still working with the Blues. I crawled down the "highway" they left and came to a point where I thought it split. I went the wrong way and ended up alone. I could still hear the helicopters overhead so I rolled over on my back and waited for a good moment, then turned on my strobe light. A Huey saw it and shot an approach to an area about 50 to 60 yards away from me. I turned off the light and started towards the ship; but it took off, circled and came back to land on a small two lane road in the LZ. The NVA started turning on and off their flashlights to look like strobes as well but I was told that it really wasn't that difficult to determine the real one. When the Huey landed the second time he had all his lights on. I stood up and started running toward the ship. I got within about 25 yards of it when he turned out the lights - I guess to present that much less of a target to the NVA who without a doubt were also moving toward the helicopter. I was fine while the lights were on as I was running right for the lights. When they went out, I couldn't see a thing! Luckily I kept running blindly for the ship. The crew chief was flying as pilot and, Thank God, had stepped out of the ship. As I went running past, he grabbed me and threw me into the cargo compartment. I was both surprised and pleased to be in the back of a Huey but he had thrown me so hard I almost went out the other side!! I heard him yell GO!! GO!! There was lots of fire all around us as we lifted off and I remember thinking we would be shot down for sure. The ship had been hit several times and was a real mess. We went to some firebase and landed. For some reason this Huey had a VHF radio and all the other radios had been shot out earlier. In fact, I guess the other ships were all calling him on FM and UHF telling him not to go in; but he couldn't hear them. Anyway, we got an FM radio there and were able to talk to the other helicopters. They learned that Jim and Shep weren't far from where they had picked me up and that I believed the Cobra crew had been killed. The poor crewchief "pilot" got sick at the point and went into convulsions; so the medics took him away. A little while later, I was picked up and taken to our camp at Ban Me Thuot East where I could "relax" and have a beer. Needless to say but I had many things to think about that night. The next day, MAJ Bowling put me in the back of his C&C - they didn't want me flying for awhile. We went back into the same area. Again everyone has perfect hindsight, but during one of the gun runs a Pete suddenly went off sort of near where the HE was hitting. I remember we all asked on the radios where that Pete had come from and finally wrote it off with the thought that when someone was stoking rockets into a Cobra they inadvertently added a WP head. As it turned out, the rockets were hitting very near to where Jim and Shep and they were tiring to tell us they were there by throwing the Pete. They also hoped the NVA wouldn't know where they were because the Pete was just another explosion. Anyway, they would E&E for a few more day before the NVA picked them up. I guess Shepard's wounds were really super terrible at that point. Later I talked to Jim who maintained that he was sad he wasn't able to be a Scout again after walking the trail with the NVA. He said had learned where and how they camped, how they camouflaged themselves, how far they moved between stops, etc. He said he would have been "Mr. Death himself" with that knowledge! I'd like to close by saying what I've said a hundred times before and will probably say another hundred times - I'd just like to thank everyone in B Trp, in D Trp, in HHT, the F100 guys, the Artillery guys, the ARVN Rangers that went in after us and really got chopped up bad, everyone that tried to help us - THANKS. Most of all I'd like to thank Bob Rogers for pulling me out that night.

Kirk's short career as a Scalaphunter was over. He would finish his tour flying Guns and as the Ops Officer. But the story is far from over, in fact it would take several weeks and, sadder yet, several years to complete. The night of 2 Nov was a "long night" for many people. VHPA Member George Murry was the Sqdn Cmdr at the time and relates:

We got the call in the late afternoon that B Trp had lost some aircraft and definitely needed some help. You've got to remember at that time I was a Sqdn Cmdr without a Sqdn because all the line Trps were optioned out to other units. I only had HHT and it was already committed manning refuel and rearm points and such south of Ban Me Thuot. Anyway, we pulled together a couple slicks, alerted A and C Trp of the problem, made certain the 17th CAG and the 4th Inf knew of the situation, and left for Ban Me Thuot. We were able to make it out to the site that evening. When all the aircraft finally returned from the AO, we sorted things out. Most of their aircraft had been shot up. I think they had at least six less operational aircraft than they had at the start of the day. They were short three air crews. Everyone was dead tired but wanted to do anything - just anything to get those guys on the ground back. Naturally, the Scout and Gun boys wanted to go back in the next day and "show 'em really Cav stuff". Well, the last thing either Billy or I wanted was to loose even more people to a situation that clearly seemed to be in the NVA's favor. We talked to the Blues that had been on the ground and to Kirk. We talked to Bob Rogers - that kid was a real hero. By God, that ship was a mess!!! I don't think we ever repaired it, it was that bad. Then we went over to the 23rd ARVN to see what they could do. They were totally committed but arranged for us to use part of an ARVN Ranger Bn, that was in reality the II Corps Reserve at the time, so long as we could use our Lift to put them in. The next day we inserted about 150 men from this Bn on a road north of the LZ where our aircraft were. The ARVN also ordered a Mech unit to move up and try to help out but that didn't work out too well. Anyway, these Rangers fought very hard but the NVA really had them out-numbered, out-gunned, out-everythinged. For a couple of days we supported them with everything we had and they took a terrible pounding, 40 to 50% casualties as I recall. Several times I went back to the 23rd CP and said we had to pull those guys out; but they wouldn't do it. The 23rd people seemed to have the attitude that that was what the Rangers had coming to them, so they left them in and really didn't reinforce them or support them to the degree I thought they should. Strange conduct - I didn't and don't understand it. Of all the things I remember about that tour, the memory of that Ranger Bn is one of the most vivid in my mind. If I would have even dreamed that they would have suffered like that, I would never have put them in that day!!

We return to Mike Peterson's account. The next morning everything was still quiet but I knew the NVA were still in the area, in force. There was a road to the east of the LZ. I was on the west side on sort of a hill. For the next four days or so I E&Ed successfully. I ate bugs, drank water from leaves and pools in the road. Once I happened upon two NVA near a bunker. One was sitting at a table outside the bunker, writing a letter, I guess. We struggled. I grabbed a knife from the table and killed him. About this time, this other guy comes out of the bunker, sees me and quickly goes back inside! I just knew he was going to get a gun, so I went in after him. We fought in there and I killed him. Needless to say, but those are rather strong impressions in my mind! I was getting weaker mentally and physically with each passing day. I couldn't travel much at all. That last night I completely lost it. I recall going down to the road to drink from the pools of water there that I found so refreshing. Anyway, I started screaming at the NVA to come and get me - real Rambo like. Well, the next morning the place was covered with patrols and they found me along side the road. Like I said, I couldn't walk very well; so they slung me on a pole and we hiked about two or three days. We've weren't that far from Cambodia. Even then I wasn't "with it" much of the time and it got worse before it got better. I remember being taken to a camp and just before they took my Seiko watch, I looked at the date - the 9th. Shep, Lou and Jim were there already. I believe it was while we were at this camp but it may have been at a POW Reunion some years later that I learned that CW2 George W. Grega died that first night in Lou's arms from the burns he'd received that day. Anyway, the NVA kept us in a pit but we weren't treated badly. I mean they didn't beat us or anything. I'd guess we were there about another week or ten days. Anyway, Shep and I were hardly what anyone could call "escape threats"! My leg was getting gangrenous and wounds on his butt was just terrible. I recall that Lou returned from an interrogation session with the news that in a day or so he and Norwick would be moving up the trail to the North and that as

soon as Shep and my wounds were better, we would follow. Sure enough in a day or so, Lou and Jim left us. I never saw them again until after they were released in 1973. It was about this time that two captured ARVN Rangers arrived at our camp. Let me tell you they were some of the meanest, toughest, nastiest guys I have ever seen or even heard about in my entire life!! They would constantly yell and spit at the NVA and resist and make life difficult in every way. We called them 'Hard Core' - they were impressive. Well very soon after Jim and Lou left, these two ARVN made an escape attempt. We heard some commotion and looked up to see that one of these ARVN Rangers had grab an NVA guard and choking him. The net of it was that at least one of these guys did get away and, I think, the other was killed. Anyway, within three hours of the escape the NVA had us on the move. Later during a debriefing in the Long Binh hospital I learned that there was actually a 'special ops' section where these ARVN Rangers were trained and given the job of being captured and then escaping so the good guys could learn something about the POW camps. Apparently the NVA knew a little about this because they had us out of the camp in nothing flat. I also believe someone told me that as a result of the ARVN Ranger's escape, a rescue force did visit that camp within a short period of time - of course we weren't there. What I'm about to tell you now is pure conjecture on my part - you make up your own mind. I believe the NVA knew we were 'goners'. I certainly believe I would have died within a short period of time and Shep's long term prognosis was not good. The NVA medical attention and capabilities were primitive at best - at least what they were able to give us. So long as Shep and I were alive, we were valuable to them. I believe they negotiated a prisoner exchange. A day or two before our release they fed us really well, including some sweet pudding I later learned had been made from can milk. They told us it was important that we tell 'the world' that our treatment had been good or that Lou and Jim 'would pay for our crimes'. This is the reason why some of our public statements after our release were 'anti-war'; we didn't want Lou and Jim to suffer. Anyway, they took us to a road and told us to stay right there. About two minutes later an American truck drives us and picked us up. I can remember that there was an American in the back of it because he gave me a cigarette - I really appreciated that! They drove us to a FB and we were evaced to Pleiku. We weren't there long but during that time several guys from B Trp visited us. I remember before this time LT Eldridge, 'Fang' we called him, used to give everyone a hard time because he was 'short'. Well, I got back at him because I knew I would be home in a few days and he'd still be there.

Now, finally, we let Vernon Shepard finish his story. I remember these events pretty much as both Kirk and Mike have described but let me add some details. After Jim and I inadvertently moved away from Kirk we hid in some trees. We were so close to the Huey that came in and got Kirk out that I could see the red dash lights. I knew I could move fast enough to get to the ship before it left and I really 'felt safe' in the trees versus out in the open in the clearing. Besides that ship was drawing lots of fire and I didn't want any part of that! After the Huey left, we moved a little deeper into the trees and hid a little better. We heard some rustling in the brush not far away and later discussed this with Mike who heard the same thing that evening. We theorized that we were very close to each other that night, maybe 10 to 15 feet apart, but no one dared call out to investigate the source of the rustling sounds!! The second day we hid out and hoped that the bad guys would go away and the Blues would return. We had an M-16, one clip of ammo, a bayonet, and one pack of Camels but no matches. We ended up chewing the cigarettes and that was pretty good at the time. I still had my nomex gloves. In the morning and evening I'd wipe them across the leaves and grass until they filled with moisture, then I'd suck the water from them. During this time the wound in my mouth was especially troublesome. We had a single WP. Jim didn't want to throw it for fear of compromising our location, so he had me stay hidden and crawled out into the open area. There he waited for an appropriate moment to try to signal the aircraft. I remember we were especially hopeful to attract the attention of a Bird Dog FAC that was putting in the airstrikes. Finally Jim popped the Pete; but the aircraft didn't seem to notice. They moved away and didn't return. We hid again that night. On the third day we watch the NVA going through the LOHS and saw them marching past our location with their weapons slung over their shoulders. We heard the firing associated with the battle the ARVN Rangers were having and knew that it was a long way from us - too far to be of help to us. We concluded that we would have to do something on our own and that we would start the night. At that time the best I could do was sort of a low crawl. I'd stick the bayonet in the ground and use it as a handle to pull myself along with some assistance from my left leg even though it had been damaged at the very start. We crawled a long time - until we were completely exhausted. We found a hollowed out, dead log and slept in it like sort of a hammock. When the sun came up on the fourth day, Jim had made me a crutch out of bamboo so now we could walk. We didn't exactly know where to go but we heard and saw fixed wing aircraft landing and headed toward that. We walked all day and I was really surprised that I didn't have that much pain. I was uncomfortable and noticed what I thought was a drip from the wound in my buttock - that turned out to be maggots falling out! In the afternoon we came to a clearing that went up a hill. We thought if we could get on that hill, we could see where the aircraft were landing and how to get there. Jim told me to stay in the trees and moved out. He got about half way up the hill and since I didn't see any danger, I started walking after him. I didn't get very far when I heard the AKs open up and saw Jim drop immediately. I literally 'tried to hide behind a blade of grass'. The next thing I felt was the muzzles of four AKs in my back and people yelling at me. I stood up and they took me over to the edge of the clearing to this 6'2", English speaking non-oriental man. I still think he was a Russian advisor. He definitely spoke with an accident. My impression was that he was treated 'like a king' - he had 15 to 20 NVA around him that seemed very interested in doing whatever he asked. At first he didn't speak to me but his look was something like 'we've got you now'. Finally he asked if he could do anything for me. I said I was hungry, so they gave me a rice ball. He asked if they could look at my wounds. I showed them and they wrapped them for me. Then they started asking about 'the other guy' and I lied 'what other guy? - I'm alone' because I hadn't seen Jim and didn't know how he'd made out. Eventually they brought Jim over - he was OK and hadn't been hit.

They started marching us toward the camp that same day. They put a bamboo pole between our elbows, tied our hands in the front and put a hood over our heads so that we could only see the ground in front of us. The next day, I believe, we passed another group going the opposite direction on the same trail who were carrying a hammock containing an American. They happened to pass by close enough so I could see in even with the hood on. I didn't know Mike Peterson at that time because he was in the Guns and we didn't socialize all that much with Gun pilots; mostly with the Scout pilots. So I asked Jim what that was and he told me it was Mike. Jim and I were the first to arrive at the camp. It was about 75'x75', surrounded by a bamboo fence and had three cages near the middle. Each cage was built over a pit about three feet deep. The structure was about 8x12 along the lean-to design. The roof was made of bamboo poles covered with big leaves. Inside there was a stock like arrangement and we were locked in it each night. The NVA didn't treat our wounds for the first four days we were there. I'd guess to total NVA staff was in the six to eight people range. Lou showed up next and then Mike - they may have arrived on the same day. I'd guess the four of us were together at least one but not two weeks. After eight ARVN showed up next and they put four in each pit. The 'Hard Cores' came a day or two after Lou and Jim left. I want to say something here and now - Jim was a big, big help to me all during this period. Many times he could have done better by himself but he stayed with me and took care of me. I can't say enough good things about him. They fed us only rice and gave us an American aluminum canteen full of hot water each night. We used this as a hot water bottle to keep warm. We'd rub it over our arms and chest then use it as a pillow. The next day we'd drink the water. We didn't have a blanket or mosquito net but I don't remember mosquitoes being a problem. Our interrogator was an oriental that had been educated in the States. Since I was an NCO, I didn't know much about the military situation so they didn't ask many questions about it. Most of the questions were about home, the family, what clothes they wore, etc. They asked me what my 1st SGT did - I didn't know so I answered that all I saw him do was show movies! They asked what was the best place to shoot at on a helicopter - again I told them I wasn't an expert on this but suggested the rotor blades. I warned them that they were hard to hit because they were moving so fast! They came and took pictures of us a couple times. They dug a hole sort of in the center of the three cages. It was 4x4 and about 8 feet deep with a covered lid almost like you'd put over an animal trap. They used a notched log to get in and out of the hole. This hole was where they kept the Hard Cores. About this time I was able to walk around a little so during the day they'd let me rake leaves and do odd chores. Mike was getting worse and didn't get out much except to relieve himself. This is how I was able to get close to the Hard Core's pit. They seemed like Koreans to me but I don't know for sure. They motioned to me that they wanted me to help choke a guard. Mike and I talked this over, then I let them know I wasn't too interested in trying that. The Hard Cores caused so much trouble that the NVA didn't let them out of the pit - they even had to relieve themselves in the cups their food came in. Those guys were tough!! There was this guard we called 'Baby Face' because he was so young. I was out raking leaves or something when the two Hard Cores started making some noise in their pit. Well Baby Face put his AK up against a tree and leaned over to look in the pit. Eventually when he got closer, they grabbed him and pulled him into the pit. The next thing I knew, one of the Hard Cores had jumped out of the pit, grabbed the AK and was pointing it back into the hole. The other Hard Core got out quickly and they motioned for us to join them in their escape. I motioned for them to go without us because I knew Mike couldn't make the trip and I didn't want to leave him. I don't recall that one of the Hard Cores was killed or that they killed anyone but maybe Mike was privy to a conversation in Long Binh that I didn't take part in. It my impression that one of the debriefers in Long Binh asked if he could bring some guys in to look at us. We said OK and soon these same two Hard Cores came in to identify that we were the same guys they'd seen in the camp. Interesting, huh? I'd guess we didn't stay in Vietnam more than a day after our release and were debriefed a lot. I didn't care so long as they kept bring me food - I was really hungry. We went to Japan for a day then to different hospitals in the States. I stayed in the hospital about 30 days and ended up finishing my enlistment at that installation. Other than the POW dinner we had at the White House and one crewchief that was in B Trp, I haven't had any contact with anyone that was in the 7/17th CAV.

VHPA Member Billy Bowling provides a few more details. When these ARVN Rangers escaped, they turned themselves in an ARVN compound and the senior American advisor called us with the news that they might have some information about our people. I flew over there and was told by this full Colonel that I'd have to wait outside. I sailed past him into the room where they were debriefing these guys. Through them we obtained the first 'real information' about SGT Shepard and WO Peterson but nothing on the others. They happened to make a casual statement about the 'one American body near the road'. This, of course, was news to me. We were able to obtain some more specific information from them and within the next couple days worked with an ARVN Cavalry unit to sweep the area. The NVA were long gone by that time but this was how we found and retrieved George Grega's body.

On the 20th, while doing a VR in the An Lao Valley, WO1 Fred A. Exner III of C Trp was killed when his LOH crashed after experiencing a tail rotor failure. VHPA Member Harry Mitchell describes these events:

I was the Scout team leader that day. Fred, an experienced LOH pilot, was flying my wing. He had the additional duty of being the troop Supply Officer. A LT Gary (?) Nelson had been a Cobra pilot for some time and was in the process of seeing if he wanted to be a Scout. He flew as Fred's Observer and it was his first day in a LOH. That day the AO was the northern part of the An Lao over from LZ English. We were working from the higher ground down toward the valley floor. Fred called that he had just experienced a tail rotor failure. I quickly turned and saw him going into the trees. He must have had rather low forward speed at the time because he should have been able to fly out of the area even without a tail rotor. Just after the LOH hit the trees, the blades folded up and quit turning. The right front side of the ship hit the ground. I was right over the crash site in seconds and even though this area was triple canopy jungle, I could clearly see the wreck. There was no movement around the wreck and initially there was no fire. We called for the Blues even though the nearest LZ was some distance away. After about ten minutes the wreck started to burn and soon the ammo started cooking off. We had to back off because of the exploding ammo. About this time we saw a pen flare come up through the trees. We dismissed it as part of the burning ammo. A couple minutes later when we saw another pen flare, we knew someone was alive down there. We called for a med evac with a jungle penetrator. It arrived and even though the ammo was still exploding, they pulled right up to the crash site and put the penetrator down. LT Nelson was so badly wounded that he was unable to get himself into the contraption; so the medic went down. He was able to complete the evacuation. No one else was hurt during that extraction. Later the Blues did get in and retrieved Fred's body. Years later I saw LT Nelson again in Germany flying Cobras; so I am glad to say that he recovered from his wounds.

December - During this month, A Trp would work several different AOs in northwestern II Corps and for the 3rd Bde west of Enari. B Trp would finish up its work for the 1st Bde's Operation SPREAGINS WHITE in the Ban Me Thuot, Bu Prang area. C Trp worked the An Lao Valley and Crows Foot area, weather permitting, or else they worked the low lands against the VC. D Trp completed the Enari to Cheo Reo convoy security assignments, then conducted search and destroy missions and served as a ready reaction force for A Trp. On the 10th, WO Peterson and SGT Shepard of B Trp were freed by the NVA relatively near a 45th ARVN Regt site near Duc Lap. They were captured by the NVA during the battle on 2 Nov described earlier. The Pacific Stars and Stripes dated Saturday, Dec 13, 1969 carried pictures of them on the front page. The paper says that Peterson's third and fourth toes on his left foot were missing and he suffered fragmentation wounds in the left knee. Shepard was described as having multiple fragmentation wounds of the right foot and of the buttock. They were the 28th and 29th U.S. prisoners to be released by the Communists.

Year End Summary - During most of this year, the line troops were opconed outside the Sqdn. The Sqdn remained based at Enari and continued to make improvements to the facilities there especially in the aircraft maintenance area. A Trp spent about half its time working the Dak To / Kontum area and provided considerable support for the 24th STZ. The other half of its time would be given to the 4th Inf especially in the An Khe area. B Trp supported TF South for the first half of the year, worked out of Camp Enari for a few months before moving to Ban Me Thuot for basically the rest of the year to support the 23rd ARVN interests in that area now that the 4th Inf no longer operated there. C Trp worked out of Camp Enari for the first four months, then moved to An Son to support the 173rd and the 4th Inf for the rest of the year. Basically the Sqdn controlled HHT and D Trp for most of the year. The situation of having the ACTs opconed out was seriously reviewed after the 2 Nov battle and changes were made to return to the traditional ACS configuration.

1970

The primary source materials for this year are: For A Trp, a 29 page AUHS prepared by WO1 Charles E. Smith, III. For B, C, and D Trps; nothing. For the Squadron: a 48 page OR-LL for the period 1 NOV through 31 JAN, a 43 page OR-LL for the period 1 FEB through 30 APR, a 32 page OR-LL for 1 MAY through 31 JUL, and a 32 page OR-LL for 1 AUG through 31 OCT. The last two OR-LLs contained some accident summaries which are included in this narrative. An 8 page transcript of the debriefing of LTC De France in Sep, 1970 for historical purpose.

January - During this month, A and B Trps supported the 2nd Bde in Operation PUTNAM POWER northeast of An Khe. C Trp worked the An Lao Valley and Crows Foot area, weather permitting, else worked the low lands against the VC. D Trp also supported the 4th Div with road security assignments between Camp Radcliff at An Khe and Firebase Emeia as well as working the Camp Enari TAOR. On the 5th, A Trp's Scouts found and engaged a large enemy element; killing five and capturing four AKs. On the 7th, A Trp inserted their Blues into a fortified living area. They captured some clothes, medical supplies, AK ammo, and food plus 11 suspects; then the Guns destroyed the structures. On the 8th, an A Trp LOH was shot down, crashed and totally burned. The pilot and observer escaped and were medevaced. The Guns worked the area, then the Trp screened for a rifle company already in the area. They found a large bunker complex and made contact with an estimated NVA company. The C&C's crew chief was wounded and evaced when the ship suddenly took a volley of enemy fire. The Blues were inserted and found numerous caves and signs of recently enemy living there. One NVA was captured. On the 11th, A Trp's Blues were inserted after the Scouts and Guns made contact with an estimated NVA platoon in their base camp. The Blues killed five NVA and captured two AKs, one pistol, and one 51 cal. They swept thru the area again prior to extraction and found a large quantity of raw cotton, a weaving machine, some food and a 30 cal. On the 12th, A Trp's Blues were inserted in another base camp, complete with hidden buildings and detained 28 people plus an M-1 and some food. On the 20th, A Trp found a large sleeping area occupied by an NVA platoon. The Gun killed four and the Scouts killed three. On the 26th, A Trp found another NVA platoon's camp and killed four. On the 29th, A Trp made an assessment of a large artillery strike and found four more NVA to kill.

VHPA Member Tom Pember remembers: Some Vietnam events stand out in our minds more than others. The account I am about to relate is VIVIDLY ETCHED in my memory. I was a Gun team leader for C Trp at the time and used the name "The Pacemaker" on the radios. We habitually stage out of LZ Two Bits and would refuel and rearm at LZ Uplift. This was late 69 or early 70 when C Trp's main AOs were in and around the An Lao Valley. My wing that day was CWO Charles Alexander - "Sober Charlie" we called him. I liked having him on my wing because you could always depend on him to be at the right place at the right time and you didn't have to spend a lot of time explaining how to handle a situation. We were returning from covering a LRRP that had been in contact well up in the valley. While covering these LRRPs, we had expended everything except for the outboard 'seven shot' pods which contained nails. It was quiet - eerily quiet when a faint sound suddenly came on the radio. It was so faint in fact, that I asked Charlie if he could make it out? Negative. Then, in a little louder whisper, a voice filled with tears and fear pleaded for help. GOD! What a sound. Once you've heard that whisper you know someone has bad guys very close by; but the tears and fear tell you they are in very serious trouble! It was from another LRRP team surrounded on three sides by a VC company and a sheer cliff to the west. The LRRPs couldn't move in any direction and the bad guys were closing in slowly but surely. I explained to them in a whisper that all we had were nails. I'll never know why it is when you receive a whisper, you transmit with a whisper!! The LRRP said they were holed up in some rocks at the top of the cliff and couldn't move. I explained that we weren't supposed to use nails close to friendlies. They said: "The bad guys are within 50 meters and closing - so we're dead if you don't and may be dead if you do. We'd rather take our chances with you." I asked Charlie what he thought and he said he'd do whatever I decided. So I told the LRRPs to get behind and under the rocks and report when they were ready. They said: "My men are already under the rocks but taking fire from all sides - smoke is out!" I said we'd make our runs at tree top level from the southwest to northeast, break left and try to pop the nails just over the rocks and into the tree line. I reminded them that the red airborne smoke would indicate the nails had popped. I thought my first pass was too long and asked them about it. They said: "Couldn't tell. Heard some nails tinkle across the rocks. The VC quit shooting at us and started shooting at you though." I said we'd continue as long as we could, firing only one pair each run, so they should stay low, and that this time we'd try the east and south half. We adjusted for the next run and asked how we'd done. "You're doing great but there's a bunch working along the cliffs from the north towards us." So we adjust again and asked how'd that look? "It looks - OH #@\$& (he yelled in pain) good. (silence) (deep deafening silence!)" I asked if they were hit and almost dreaded the answer. "No - the damned smoke got ticked by a nail - rolled down the rock against my leg and burned the hell out of me!" Boy, I was relieved to hear that. Then I asked if they were ready to move because we had just enough ammo left to cover their break and we couldn't raise anymore Guns. We suggested they try to move SSW along the top of the cliff. They called when they were ready to move. Charlie made a hot pass and I made a dummy. Then we made some more hot and dummy passes but saved one last pair each 'just in case'. Finally we asked how they were doing. "We're doing fine. We'll continue down the hill to the south." We continued to play dummy and asked for them to report when they were clear. A few minutes later they said: "We're clear now. THANKS. We would have been dead if you hadn't stopped to help us." We were both 10 minutes into the 20 minute light, so we fired the last pair and when home. You know, we never heard from that LRRP team again. Perhaps they made it home. I hope so. I do know they made it through one more day due to a C Trp Cobra team and I was proud to have been there.

February - During this month A Trp supported with 4th Div in the general vicinity north of An Khe along the Suoi Kon river and northwest in the Song Ba valley. On the 1st, a prisoner escaped from a nearby NVA POW camp and gave himself up to A Trp's Blues that had been inserted to recon an area shot up by the Guns. The intelligence this prisoner provided led to the location of two NVA POW camps, an NCO training school, and a medical training school. For the first ten days, B Trp worked to the north of An Khe in the Dak Son and Song Con river areas. Extremely thick vegetation and rough terrain hampered observation efforts but the troop was able to find several enemy complexes and infiltration routes. Several contacts were made with squad sized elements. During this entire month, C Trp supported the 173rd Abn in the general An Lao valley area. Their primary mission was to interdict enemy movement from the mountain base areas to the populated coastal plains. D Trp continued conducting search and clear operations around the Camp Enari.

October - On the 1st, D/2/1 Cav was redesignated K Trp, 17th Air Cav and for the first half of the month continued to work out of Phan Thiet. During this entire month, C Trp again supported the 173rd Abn around LZ English. From the 3rd through the 9th, B Trp worked the Kontum Tan Can area but weather restricted their operations. On the 4th, C Trp had a LOH shot down by 51 cal while observing a large bunker complex. During the crew extraction, the Guns observed seven NVA fleeing the area and killed them. On the 10th, B Trp worked out of Phu Hiep again for the day. Enemy activity in the area was heavy as evidenced by the heavily traveled trails and farming in the remote areas. 22 enemy structures were destroyed by B Trp elements and the ARVN ARP was inserted to secure a downed LOH. This platoon worked very well and the only difficulty encountered was that they had some difficulty re-entering the Lift ships during the extraction. This problem was alleviated by adding straps to the Hueys as hand holds to expedite re-entry. On the 10th, A Trp worked west of Tuy Hoa and found a large bunker complex. The Guns and Scouts worked the area all day, destroyed the complex and killed one NVA. On the 11th, K Trp's LOHs received fire and their Guns expended resulting in three KBA. On the 13th, while supporting the 1/50 Mech, K Trp received fire during an LZ prep. From the 15th through the 25th, B Trp killed ten NVA while supporting the 47th ARVN Inf south and southwest of FSB Oasis in search of elements of the 95B NVA Reg. On the 15th, a B Trp Cobra was shot down and they used A Trp's Blues initially to secure the aircraft. D Trp sent four gun jeeps to relieve the ARPs and they guarded the aircraft until it was lifted out the next morning. On the 15th, an A Trp LOH received heavy AW fire. Air strikes were employed resulting in a secondary explosion rising 2000 feet above the ground. The Blues were inserted but could find only scattered documents in the area. Later in the month, A Trp inserted its Blues to recover the bodies from a 4th Div aircraft that had been shot down on the 20th. From the 17th until the end of the month, K Trp worked north of Dakat. On the 22nd, A Trp's Scouts observed an enemy squad. The Blues were inserted, made contact and exchanged fire. Due to bad weather, the Blues were extract after they had swept the area and destroyed some equipment and rice. On the 30th K Trp stood down for redeployment.

November - On the 2nd, A Trp's C&C received fire while they were working on AO southeast of Pleiku. After the Guns and Scouts worked the area, the Blues were inserted but no further enemy contact was made. On the 3rd, A Trp's Scouts found a bunkered storage complex west of Camp Enari. The Scouts took fire and the Guns fired up the area. One NVA was killed then an airstrike was used. There were secondary explosions and during the BDA, ten more bodies were counted. On the 5th, A Trp's C&C received fire from a large enemy compound. Their Guns destroyed 14 hootches in one compound and 12 more in another plus some clothes and rice. Soon after this, A Trp moved to Phan Rang to begin operations in the Datal, Song Mao, Phan Rang area. December - On the 4th, A Trp found numerous bunkers and secure fighting positions near Song Mao. The Guns fired up the area and killed two. On the 8th, A Trp worked an area just south of Song Mao when a Scout ship crashed into 150 foot trees. WO1 John Bryant was pinned under the aircraft and died. The copilot, though injured, was seen out walking around. One man was inserted to help the downed crew. They estimated the LOH was doing about 90 knots when it crashed. A small ARVN force was inserted to check the area. They reported the LOH had been hit by small arms fire and was a total loss. The body, radios, weapons, etc. were extracted during a heavy rain storm. Still near Song Mao on the 11th, A Trp's Scouts received small arms fire and uncovered several fox holes, trails, fighting positions and clothing. The C&C received fire as well and the Guns shot up the area. From all existing evidence a platoon size VC had been used this area but no confirmed enemy bodies were found. On the 19th, during a VR, an A Trp LOH took a direct hit from a B40 rocket. The subsequent explosion killed WO Avon M. Mallette and his observer. All equipment was secured by an ARVN ground unit. The enemy was engaged on the ground and by the Guns. The bodies were extracted by the C&C and by the end of the day the ARVN unit was also extracted under extremely hazardous conditions.

Year End Summary - 1970 could be summed up in one word, Vietnamization. The ACTs were increasingly involved in helping the ARVN learn about Air Cavalry and in supporting ARVN operations. The battles around Dak To, Ben Het, and Dak Seang plus the Cambodian operations were clear examples of Vietnamization.

1971

The primary source materials for this year are: For HHT, a Yearbook titled 71-72 An Son which includes about ten significant pages. For A Trp, a 15 page AUHS prepared by 1LT Dan P. Stoma. For B, C, and D Trps, nothing. For the Sqdn, a 16 page Combat Operation After Action Report for the period 20-24 Apr and 3-14 May for the air assault portion of Operation MANG HO.

January - During this month, A Trp supported the 45th Regt 23rd ARVN at Ban Me Thuot. There were no significant sighting or reports in the early part of the year. On the 25th, CPT Alfred Hite was forced to make a precautionary landing 14 miles southwest of Ban Me Thuot while on a VR. Late in the month, the Sqdn HQ was split from its line troops. The troops were assigned to various battalions within the 17th CAG while HQ and HHT moved from Camp Holloway to Qui Nhon city air field. VHPA Member Ernie Smart provides a critical insight to these events:

Those were challenging times for everyone in the 7/17 Cav. Let me sort of paint a picture of what was going through my mind and COL Joe Starker's, the CO of the 17 CAG. First, since the Sqdn had been in Vietnam it had always enjoyed a close working relationship with the 4th Div. They included us in most of their operations, generally used Air Cavalry in an appropriate manner, and provided us with Infantry and Artillery support when we needed it. We certainly provided them with "eyes" plus a very flexible, ready reaction force. They, in turn, "saved our collective asses" several times when we "bit off much more than we could chew". When the 4th Div stood down in early Dec, "our big friend" was gone and with it the old status quo. Second, since the 7/17th and the 4th had been good for each other, it seemed natural to believe that putting the 7/17th and with another large unit would be a very good idea. The Koreans had the last major Allied combat units in II Corps. They still required, and received, considerable air support. We knew it would take considerable "training" and "patience" on both parts for the 7/17th and the ROKs to fit together well, but that is what we set out to do. Third, many senior American commanders in II Corps and the 1st Avn Bde believed the ARVN would have a difficult time holding their own. We wanted to pull down our presence (and therefore vulnerability) in the "outlying areas" such as Pleiku. We were determined to support the Vietnamization effort and we were still under orders to "fight hard - just don't loose people". Fourth, the Sqdn was already "split up" and had really become an ACS for all of II Corps. A Trp was at Phan Rang and seemed destined to stay in southern II Corps. One ACT had to stay at Pleiku and that proved to be B Trp. C Trp was already at An Son, so they were our northeastern II Corps "representatives". Poor D Trp couldn't be used as a ground Cavalry troop any more; an infrequent convoy escort and emergency "bird down" ready reaction force were the best missions they could hope for. They were basically all Holloway had for perimeter security and drew all sorts of crappy little details. Anyway, initially Qui Nhon airfield looked good because it had lots of room there adjacent to the 223rd CAB. There was already a space problem at An Son. So we moved to Qui Nhon city.

The 61st AHC and its sister AHC, the 129th, were attached to the 7/7th during January as part of the move to Qui Nhon. Both AHCs had been based at Lane for some time. VHPA Member Rod Dylhouse describes these times as follows:

I DEROSED in May and recall that the 61st was attached to the 7/17th in January. At first it was primarily for admin purposes. The 61st was basically unchanged in the operational sense except that we started supporting units other than the 173rd Abn. We had primarily supported them during 1970. We started supporting Korean and ARVN units, and doing a lot more work in the Central Highlands around Pleiku, the tri-border area, and even into Cambodia. We still operated primarily with other 61st aircraft but not exclusively. Officially we were 'CAV' but on a unit level, not much changed. I'm sure you know what I mean when I say that a person either loved the hats and sabers or thought they were a bunch of gun ho idiots. Suddenly the 61st, who had never been 'CAV' before, was attached to an ACS and was "part of the 'CAV'". We developed a saying "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em". The 61st sent about 50% of our assets north to support LAM SON 719. The senior ACs with less than 90 days, along with an equal number of peter pilots, stayed at Lane and covered all the missions that the entire company had covered before. We flew our butts off - putting in 15-18 hour days! The 61st's primary AO was from Qui Nhon north to about the I Corps line along the coastal plains and along QL19 to An Khe, the area around Pleiku and the Tri-border area during early 1971. The two Lift platoons were stationed at and flew from Lane with an occasional RON at Pleiku. The Gun platoon was stationed at and flew from LZ English, about 60 NM north. I remember one good story from this time frame. I was flying C&C with a LTC and his RTO in the back. We were dropping phougas (eighteen 55 gal drums at a time) from a Chinook on suspected VC locations. We'd let it soak into the holes, caves, hiding places, etc. for a couple minutes; then fly over it and have the door gunner light it with tracers. We put the fifth drop that day into some elephant grass and right on about 12-15 hiding dinks. Well, they'd already seen our previous drops and knew exactly what was coming next; so they jumped up and started running. I immediately dove on them and told the crewchief to light it RIGHT NOW, which he did. Only two got out of the fire ball and one of them was just covered with blazing phougas. He only made it about 25 feet before collapsing. The other guy was running down the trail so I started hovering down the trail behind him while we took turns with our 38s. The colonel grabs his RTO's 16 and hollers for the RTO to hold on to his belt. He puts one foot out on the skid, the other knee on the floor and starts shooting at the dink. He runs out of ammo, so the RTO gives him another clip and he puts both feet out on the skid. He runs out again, gets another clip and moves further forward. This guy is so excited to actually see a dink out in the open and have an M16 in his hands. Well after a few more clips he is actually standing on the skid cap outside my door shooting!! He turns to me and says, through my window with a big grin on his face, "isn't this great!!" Well, we managed to shoot the dink and get the Colonel back inside the aircraft; then we went back to base for lunch.

February - On the 3rd, A Trp was attached to the 10th CAB located at Dong Ba Thin and shifted its support to the 23rd ARVN's elements in the Song Mao area. The missions assigned to the ACT also changed. While they would still perform regular Air Cav VR type missions, they were assigned more base camp night security and reaction force type missions. The 11th was scheduled as a maintenance down day for A Trp; but at noon Phan Rang Base Ops requested fire support when two rocket launchers and one 122mm

rocket were reported by intelligence sources. Two Cobras were sent and destroyed the rocket site. On the 15th, A Trp was forced to work the flat lands northwest of Song Mao because of high winds. One LOH received fire and the Guns fired in the area with unknown results. On the 27th, A Trp's Guns provided armed escort for an extraction done by the 247th Med. Both the medevacs and the Guns took fire but no damage. The Guns expended under the control of the MACV advisors on the ground.

The Sqdn staff was getting accustomed to their new role and VHPA Member Tom Galyean provides this insight: In late Feb or early Mar I worked primarily in the mission control center of the Sqdn S-3 at Qui Nhon airfield. As a result of the fall out from the Mal Lai fiasco, there was a command policy to fully investigate the circumstances whenever there were civilian injuries alleged to have been caused by American forces. As I recall, a Cobra had accidentally fired a rocket near a little village on the beach somewhere generally north of Qui Nhon and east of Bear Cat. I can no longer recall the exact reason for the accidental misfire. Unfortunately, the rocket landed near where a young boy, about four years old, was playing and he received a shrapnel laceration on one of his calves. I was assigned to help investigate this matter. To help me interview witnesses, I was assigned with the same "Kit Carson" Scout that served with A Trp during the 8 Aug 1970 engagement. By this time A Trp's Blues no longer needed him in their primary mission and we had developed a good friendship. When I interviewed the child's mother about what had happened, she was surprised that I was doing an investigation. Through the interpreter, she told me in substance: that she knew that what had happened was an accident; that the pilot didn't mean to shoot the rocket; and that she hoped that we wouldn't punish or make the pilot angry for what had happened because if we did, she was afraid that the pilot might not come back and help protect them from the VC. I have no reason to believe the "Kit Carson" Scout was saying words I wanted to hear. The look on that woman's face and the circumstances of that discussion, are among those events of my tour in Vietnam that are indelibly etched in my recollection. Even though I had previously supported wholeheartedly both the general mission of our armed forces in Vietnam, and the specific missions of the 7/7th Cav, I knew what we were doing in Vietnam was right.

Lam Song 719 / Dewey Canyon II - We have been able to learn that three different units from the 7/17th supported this operation. The most visible was C Trp and their exploits will be described in some detail. B Trp, from Pleiku, supported numerous ARVN operations several miles into Laos as sort of a "southern flank / NVA distraction effort" for the main thrust along QL 9. Currently details of B Trp's activities are not well known. Finally, HHT sent at least one, and maybe more, small detachments to Dong Ha to provide S-3 and S-4 type support. Again details of these HHT activities are not currently well known. Anyway, early in the month, C Trp moved to Quang Tri and was attached to the 223rd CSAB as part of the build-up for LAM SONG 719 / Dewey Canyon II. For those that know or care, the 223rd was a fixed wing CSAB. As part of the build-up to support this large operation, the 1st Avn Bde didn't want too many of its assets given to the 101st Abn for several reasons. So this is how, C Trp and several other 1st Avn Bde helicopter units were assigned to a starched wing command. At least two weeks prior to the move, C Trp had been given a warning order that they could be moving from Lane. C Trp still had a "rear de" at Lane, and their maintenance and "forward (rear)" would be at Quang Tri, while their "forward (forward)" would be at Khe Sanh when that base was re-established. VHPA Members Don Pusher and Dave Ferrell give us a good picture of this period.

Don provides: As mentioned previously, C Trp had known for some time we would be moving our operations and maintenance bases from Lane for a temporary, but none the less extended, period of time. We were even told what to take and how to pack. Finally the orders came down and we moved to Quang Tri using both ground and air convoys. I remember putting our duffel bags in the LOHs plus our weapons but very little ammo. We were assigned a partially constructed children's hospital to live in. There was a helipad for this hospital just off the airfield at Quang Tri. Our flight line and maintenance area was on the airfield, within walking distance from this hospital. The concrete floors, the half walls on the exterior and the wooden roof were finished but not much else. Over the next few days, C Trp would rig up a lighting system with power supplied by a generator outside, move in some cots and a little furniture, and use a water buffalo parked out front for water. It wasn't heaven, but it was better than at Khe Sanh. Once the Khe Sanh base was re-established, C Trp was assigned a small area on the very northern edge of the perimeter. It was right off the active runway - only a few feet separated our aircraft parking area from the main fixed wing runway. When we got there, they had just finished clearing that section of mines and unexploded ordinance. I doubt the runway was unusable because there were many holes in it. There was wreckage and junk everywhere! It was a scary place! Wendell Moore and I were assigned a sorry two man bunker. We put some wood from rocket boxes down to keep us off the mud, set up our cots and slept there in our sleeping bags. We were part of the perimeter defense - another scary thought! No one was happy with these living conditions so I joined several other Scouts to dig a new six man bunker. We didn't have much more space per person, but we were able to get our cots in there. I especially remember the rats that lived under the pallets on the floor - they were big as house cats!! We sandbagged our bunker walls to keep the mud in place. At night we'd "borrow" some of the asphalt covered aluminum panels from the runway for the floor and the roof. In the next day or so the engineers would replace the ones we'd "borrowed" and we couldn't get it through normal supply channels, so what the heck. We put the aluminum panels on the sandbagged walls, then a tent to keep the rain out and finally lots of sandbags. By morning we hoped no one could find those panels if they came looking for them. The weather was bad much of the time and it was cold there. From my point of view, I'd say most of C Trp's missions were traditional VRs on the Vietnamese side around Lan Vieng, Khe Sanh and back to Dong Ha or along the two main roads used to support these bases. We occasionally saw AA fire and even flak in Vietnam. Naturally we were trying to keep the NVA away and looked for their rocket units. Whenever we'd find something interesting, it received an Arc Light or something appropriate. I have several pictures taken from atop our bunker of a line of B-52 delivered bombs. After the third day of operations in Laos, the 6s weren't used there much anymore. That is a long story by itself - how the higher arrived at that decision and who paid for it. Anyway, that was fine with me. I know our Guns provided considerable support in Laos but I don't have any details of that. Oh, yes, while at Khe Sanh I had just lifted off on an ash & trash mission when I lost the tail rotor. I put the aircraft down just outside the perimeter, in a mine field; but luckily no one was hurt. I really liked being a Scout and loved flying the 6. I was known as "Shaky" because I was always nervous in the morning. I couldn't eat breakfast on the mornings I would fly - it just didn't stay down. Funny, though, when I got to the aircraft and started the preflight, I settled right down and felt fine again. I would fly Scout for 10 months total.

Now we'll hear from Dave Ferrell: I think I was C Trp's first new pilot after they moved up north to support Lam Song 719. I was processed through Dong Ha by the 223rd with about 5 guys and assigned to C Trp with this tall 6'6", skinny EM. We got a ride to Quang Tri and went to C Trp's hospital building described by Don Pusher. I didn't have any T450 gear (sleeping bag, etc.) at the time. They told me to just sleep in someone's cot and if they came back, go to another one. Anyway, about my second night there I heard this loud, single shot just outside the building. It was dark and I certainly didn't go investigate the noise. The next morning at breakfast, I learned that this tall, skinny, new guy had shot himself! Welcome to Vietnam, Dave!! About the 25th of Feb, I got to Khe Sanh and my first day there was hardly uneventful. I'd guess C Trp had already been there about a week or ten days. C Trp's area was relatively near the ATC tower and they had a loud speaker attached to the tower that carried the tower communications. I sort of wandered down there to see what was going on. A Cobra was coming in that had been shot up pretty bad and landed on the runway. A med team came over and took the wounded back seater away. I watched the co-pilot get out of the front seat and into the back seat. The tower wanted the Cobra moved off the runway right away so they could land the fixed wing traffic. C-130s were landing and unloading ARVN at regular intervals. There were trucks waiting to pick them up and drive them to where ever. I remember seeing one 2 1/2 ton with about 10 guys in the back and another 20 waiting to load. It had no canvas top, just the wooden sides and seats. Anyway, as this wounded Cobra moved along side this truck, he must have lost the tail rotor or something, because it crashed. One of the main rotor blades sliced through these ARVN. Khe Sanh was always a dusty place and I can remember running towards this great ball of dust to see if I could help. Lots of others came as well. Funny, at the Atlanta Reunion, Don and I were talking this over and he said he also went to help, but I didn't see him there. The first thing I came on was the lower half of an ARVN soldier, so I passed that up and found several more dead and injured. My thoughts were to try to give 1st Aid to anyone who needed it but I was shocked to see that the live ARVN were busy helping themselves to whatever was in the pockets and belongings of the dead! I decided that maybe the ARVN didn't need any help from me. Welcome to Vietnam, Dave!! Someone helped this LT pilot from the wrecked Cobra. I don't think he was injured in this crash. Some years later I believe I learned that this LT died later in his tour. This same day, I flew my first mission - forgot about an orientation flight or a check-ride; I was Cobra qualified and that was good enough. I was the front seater for Dave Lancaster. He was on his second tour and had been in C Trp for some time. He was a good Gun pilot and human being. I liked flying with him. On that mission, we were still using the little birds in Laos. We flew past LZ 31, which was the western most LZ down the highway into Laos. I remember looking down and seeing a burned out Huey but no one else on the LZ. I asked Dave why there weren't any people on the LZ. He explained they were all under cover because the NVA had it surrounded and were shooting at the ARVN continually. We flew on another mile or so and started working. The 6s found some hootches that contained 55 gal drums. We spent the rest of our time blowing these up and got several nice secondary explosions. We went back to Khe Sanh to refuel and rearm. Just as we were leaving, we got this call that LZ 31 was being overrun with tanks. As I recall we had three Guns, two 6s and the C&C; so we left the 6s there and flew to LZ 31. When we got there, two F4s were putting in an airstrike so we were told to hold off and orbit about half a mile away. We had good seats, so we watched the show! On one pass, this F4 came in low and as he put his stuff down I saw several streams of 51 cal tracers arch up toward him. As he pulled up, the F4 started smoking and soon the two pilots ejected. The jet tumbled through the sky and crashed into a hill. Our C&C, some distance from us, announced that he was going to try to pick up the two Air Force guys. The lead snake said why don't you wait a minute and we'll cover you, but he didn't. I have to give you a little more background information here. The Americans had already lost a lot of helicopters supporting Lam Song, so we had received instructions to try some different tactics. Today's was 50 feet off the trees and keep your speed up! We had to fly up this valley to get to where our C&C was going. The NVA were everywhere. As we went, I could easily see them walking around on the ground and we took A LOT of SA fire that day! Unbeknownst to us, some of this fire had cut the cables leading from our radios; so we couldn't talk to anyone. We still had intercom and it would be a few minutes before we figured out what was wrong. We were the second Snake. As we passed over this small ridge and dropped into another valley, we couldn't determine

where the lead Snake had gone; so we broke left. The number three Snake followed us but broke right. Well, all of a sudden we are alone and no one is talking to us. We were convinced that everyone else had been shot down! After a few minutes, Dave decided it is best to go back home and started back East. We are still low level and, as luck would have it, we came upon our C&C that had, indeed, been shot down. They had made a controlled, forced landing in a good sized area covered by elephant grass. It is easy to recognize your own people at 50 feet, but we couldn't talk to them. Dave decided he is going to land and just as he sets up to do this, another C Trp Gun landed near the C&C; so they wave us off. We head back for Khe Sanh. Later I learn that they replaced Dave Nelson, the front seat in the Snake, with ?, the wounded C&C pilot and the Snake medevac'd him. He was the Gun Plat Ldr at the time; just flying C&C at day. I never saw him again, so he must have been wounded seriously. I was also told that the gunner on the C&C had been shot though a leg; the bullet cut a main artery. He bled to death from that wound. Sorry, I don't know any more details about this. We got back to Khe Sanh and learn that our radios were shot out, so no more flying today. That was fine with me! One day like that day was more than enough for an entire life time! Welcome to Vietnam, Dave!!

Dave Ferrell goes on to provide a few more details to help us understand the conditions at the time since we have no official records or history for C Trp during this period. A few days into the battle, I remember we stopped sending the 6s into Laos. I believe the following is true. One of our sister ACTs, B/7/1st, had lost so many ships that it was hardly combat effective anymore. The Trp Cmdr had gone on record that he wouldn't send his 6s there anymore and was relieved. There was a big stink about this because most of the line pilots agreed with this Major. In just a few days, the powers that be agreed with him and we were told not to take our 6s there anymore. Another aspect of Lam Song was that there were aircraft everywhere most of the time. The common thread in most of my memories is in being able to look out and see a hook or a crane putting in something, several slicks and sets of guns working on an insertion or a resupply, jets above, below and along side you, C&C ships in all sorts of orbits, on and on. It was like watching the entire inventory of American war birds playing in one large production! This was both good and bad. Good because if you had an emergency of some sort and could complete a mission, there was usually a backup that could be diverted to help out. Bad because you didn't feel personally involved in the effort, you just had a bit routine for a huge dance team. Another impression that comes to mind is that there were a lot of constants - the NVA were constantly rocketing our bases with 122s or 130 mm guns, there was fog around Khe Sanh constantly in the mornings and most evenings, there was constant movement of aircraft into and out of Khe Sanh, there was constant movement of supplies and vehicles on the roads, there was constant AA fire on the Laotian side, dust was universal constant anywhere near the ground, it was constantly noisy, we were constantly changing tactics to stay alive while performing our missions, we consistently expended every time we launched, etc., etc. Some examples to support these statements are: Concerning changing tactics, I can remember times when my Cobra team started a gun run from 10,000 feet - we were 5 or 6,000 AGL! The rockets would burn out and gravity would pull them down to the target. Concerning constant AA fire, I already talked about SA and 51 cal but twice I can remember receiving flack - naturally we changed altitudes in a hurry. Another time we were supporting the ARVN's defense of a FB and started shooting at the side of the hill just below the FB. We were some distance out when I noticed hundreds and hundreds of these 'twinkling stars' in the trees on this hill. My mind played a trick on me. For a second I thought how neat it was that someone had put Christmas tree lights all along this hill. Then reality returned - My God! Those are NVA rifles firing at us! Finally I remember two C Trp Cobras landed too close to each other at Khe Sanh. For a few moments the blades intermeshed but inevitably, they finally collided and ripped the main rotor and transmissions from both aircraft. One rotor system traveled three quarters of a mile before coming to rest! No one was seriously hurt but the aircraft were destroyed. Oh, we didn't have any American Blues during this period. We had our Lift ships and they received missions sort of a la cart like the Guns. An elite unit from Siagon called the Hoc Bao were used to retrieve downed air crews. We certainly had no complaints about them or their performance and I didn't hear of any from the other aviation units. The Hoc Bao did their job well!

About the first week of April, C Trp moved from Khe Sanh back to Quang Tri and regrouped there. A few days later, they loaded up everything and returned to Lane the same way they had arrived - via air and ground convoys. The 7/17th's participation in Lam Song 719 was over at this point.

March - On the 1st, A Trp's Guns supported a single ship medevac by the 247th Med of one US and three enemy wounded. The situation began when the enemy ambushed a 23rd ARVN unit with a 51 cal. After the enemy were dispersed by artillery, A Trp's Guns searched the area and found no remaining enemy activity. On the 3rd, A Trp provided security for President Thieu's visit to Lam Son. During the screen, the Scouts found five bunkers which were destroyed by the Guns. No contact was made and the mission ended at 1600 hours when the President left. At 1300 on the 6th, A Trp was working an AO near Dalat and received a frag movement order to move to An Son. They arrived at An Son at 1945 hours. On the 7th, A Trp worked the Suoi Cau Valley. One LOH took three hits in the rotor blades, landed and was slung back to camp. A little later, a Scout found a squad-size enemy unit walking down a trail. About 20-25 rounds were fired at the Guns as they killed two. During the remainder of the day, the Scouts found numerous trails, hootches, and bunkers indicating recent enemy usage. All hootches and bunkers were destroyed by the Guns but no contact was made. On the 8th, A Trp returned to Phan Rang. The 10th was scheduled as a maintenance down day but A Trp was called to support a TAC E for an 53rd REGT unit in contact with a platoon size VC force. The Guns screened for three hours during which only one expended ordnance. On the 17th, A Trp was told to move to Pleiku and closed there at 1130 hours. On the 19th, A Trp supported the 47th Regt near Pleiku. The Scouts found ten uniformed people without weapons in a village and insert the ARP with negative results. Later the Scouts found one armed person and the Guns killed him while destroying four hootches. On the 21st, CW2 David C. Lancaster and WD1 James W. Manthel of C Trp were killed and VHPA Member Dave Ferrell describes the situation.

I was flying Dave's wing that day and we were the only two ships from C Trp assigned to this mission. The ARVN were withdrawing from Laos. We had been sent out to support an ARVN armored unit that had been ambushed. There was this horseshoe shaped bend in the road pointing to the south. From low hills on the west and east side, the NVA were shooting at the ARVN. I watched an RPG or B40 come out of the trees and hit the 113 which blew just like in the movies. A few seconds later, another hit a tank and the turret flew up into the air. Things aren't going well for the ARVN. About that time we get everyone sorted out enough to start shooting at the ambushers. The NVA were squared away and had positioned at least three 51 cals in a nice triangle to cover their forces. These 51 cals start in on us. We stop shooting at the ambushers and start in on the 51 cals. We must have made some progress because their fire dropped off about the time my Snake was empty. I told Dave I was out of ammo and wanted to leave. Dave said he wanted to make one more pass. I told him I could not cover his break; but he said he was going in anyway. He made his run and emptied the ship. We watched in horror as he took a full broadside of 51 cal. He called that they had been hit, lost the tail rotor and that Jim was wounded. He continued on to the south looking for any place along the highway to land the Cobra. They didn't get too far when their airspeed went to nothing and they went twirling into the ground. We later talked to the med evac team that retrieved their bodies. They said they believed both men died of broken necks caused by their chicken plates and this twirling fall. I remember being really upset about losing Dave. We had become good friends. That very morning he had shown me a picture of his wife and the card she had sent him - today was their anniversary!

On the 23rd, A Trp worked an AO near Chec Beo and found a large rice cache. The Blues were inserted and destroyed some of it before bad weather forced the Trp from the AO. On the 24th, A Trp found and destroyed a company minus size staging area. A Trp was told to leave Pleiku on the 25th to return to Phan Rang but could not because of bad weather. On the 26th, one A Trp AH-1G was damaged in a mortar attack and was sent to the 604th TC for a tail boom change. The remainder of the Trp closed at Phan Rang at 1330 hours. During 28-31, A Trp worked AOs around Song Mao. The Scouts found signs of enemy activity but no contact was made. In late March, the exact date is unknown, WD1 James Bernard Low of C Trp was in a Cobra that took fire and crashed while supporting operations in Laos. VHPA Members Don Purser and Dave Ferrell provided some details of this event while attending the VHPA Reunion in Atlanta:

They reported receiving fire and the Cobra may well have been burning before they crashed into a river bottom. The hydraulics caught fire and this really burned Jim before he could be removed from the wreck. Eventually both pilots were evaced. Don remembers going with several other C Trpers to visit Jim in the hospital. Don said his face and upper body were so badly burned that they couldn't recognize him at all. Only after Jim started speaking did they recognize his voice. They understood he lived about a week or so before dying on April 3rd. The other pilot, name unknown at this time, was wounded but survived.

April - On the 1st, A Trp was placed on stand-by for movement to Pleiku. The order was finally received at 2230 hours. A Trp closed at Pleiku at noon and at 1500 received a TAC E support request from FSB Lonely where the US 62nd Arty camp was under attack by a VC force. A Trp sent four Cobras and the VC immediately broke contact. Though the Guns received fire, none were hit and they believed they killed four VC. Later the Arty camp credited A Trp with 20 kills. From the 3rd through the 5th, A Trp supported the 47th Regt, 22nd ARVN. On the 4th, A Trp was involved in some undocumented action and were credited with 17 kills. On the 7th, A Trp sent two AH-1Gs on a TAC E to FSB 6; but after an hour the returned to base as they were unable to contact the friendly forces on the ground. On the 15th, while working around Cheo Beo, a LOH drew fire from three or four hootches surrounded by spider holes. Two elephants and one OP were also found. All were taken under fire and destroyed and one person was killed. The Blues determined this was a company-size base camp, so artillery was adjusted and the camp completely destroyed. On the 16th, A Trp's ARP uncovered a small aid station. Several fresh footprints were followed into a tree line which the Guns fired up killing one. On the 17th, A Trp's Scouts reported a parachute with harness next to a tunnel opening and a flight suit, underwear, and a flight helmet were found on the ground. Two people were observed hiding in the bushes with a 51 cal which hit a LOH four times. The Guns expended with unknown results but an airstrike was called in. On the 21st, A Trp's Gun saw several people in an open area. When attempts to ID them produced fire, the Guns opened fire with unknown results.

Later an enemy squad was observed walking a trail. The Guns fired; six were killed, two wounded and two captured. Upon further investigation a bunker complex was uncovered. Air strikes were called in with unknown results. The Blues and a reaction force were inserted and found 500 lbs of rice which was turned over to the 45th Reg. On the 23rd, A Trp was screening an area 20 miles west of SHODE III when the 3rd Bn, 45th Regt, 22nd ARVN made heavy contact with an NVA Reg. A Trp was requested to provide support. During the mission, one LOH was engaging a mortar position when it was hit by 30 cal AW fire. The observer was hit in the left groin but continued to engage his target. Another round of the ship, shattered and sent shrapnel inside, wounding the pilot in the left leg. Both pilot and observer continued to support the mission for about ten minutes before they returned to the Phu Nhon rearm point where they discovered two more rounds had hit the observer's chicken plate. Both were evaced to the 71st Evac. Meanwhile the C&C had discovered a 51 cal position and took one round through a rotor blade. On the 26th, A Trp's Scout discovered approximately 20 people in a base camp with five hootches and bunkers. The Scouts received fire so the Guns opened up and killed one. The Blues were inserted and immediately came under heavy fire. A reaction force was inserted to support the ARP. Both units began receiving heavy fire and mortar rounds. When the fire lifted, the ground forces found a training area. The area was destroyed by the Guns. The LOHs received fire two more times and the Guns expended with unknown results. When the Infantry was extracted, it was found that they had suffered four WIA.

MANG HO 16 - For the period 20-24 Apr and 3-14 May, the 7/17th provided command and control for the air assault portions of this operation conducted by the Capital Republic of Korea Infantry Division (CRID) and the 173rd Abn to the northwest and west of Phu Cat AFB, specifically the Suoi Cau, Suoi Tre, and Suoi La Tinh Valleys, and Base Area 226. The following units participated: the 61st and 129th AHCs assigned to the 7/17 and C/7/17; the 92nd and B/227th AHCs and D/227th AWC from the 10th CAB; the 134th AHC, the 238th AWC, and the 180th ASHC from the 268th CAB; the A/227th AHC and the C/228th ASHC from the 52nd CAB; the 268th Pathfinder Det from the 268th CAB; and the 10th Pathfinder Det from the 10th CAB. Intelligence indicated that elements of the 3rd NVA division were regrouping and retraining in or near Base Area 226. The terrain was described as a valley floor at about 100 meters elevation, steep mountains rise to 700 meters on the east and 800 meters on the western side. Dense vegetation offered excellent overhead concealment for enemy movement. Rugged ridges and pinnacles, encompassed by vegetation, offered concealed AA weapons positions with extremely good fields of fire. Very few adequate LZs existed in the area and most were one or two ship LZs on the surrounding pinnacles while those on the valley floor that could accommodate four or five ships were very vulnerable to AA fire from positions on the mountains above. The concept of the operation was for the Sqdn to provide air recon and tactical mobility for the Infantry units primarily via the two organic AHCs (the 61st and the 129th) and C Trp. They would reconnoiter, prepare and insert the Infantry elements into numerous LZs simultaneously to surround and cordon off Base Area 226. This was accomplished by inserting the ROK units to the south and east and the 173rd to the north and west as blocking forces on the 20th, 21st, and 22nd. Then two ROK Regts assaulted the mountain tops and valley floor to engage the enemy. During the period 3 - 14 May numerous assaults and extractions were conducted for tactical redeployment of the ROK units to further engage the enemy units. Elements from the 10th, 52nd, and 268th CABs were opconed on a daily basis. On the 20th (D-3), five companies and one Bn CP were inserted into five LZs. On the 21st (D-2), 105 ROK and 663 US troops were inserted. On the 22nd (D-1), two ROK companies were inserted into two more LZs. On the 23rd (D Day), the Sqdn and opconed elements assembled at two PZs. The slicks were broken down into ten flights of five ships each with supporting gunships. C Trp provided the initial recon and prep of the proposed LZs. Pathfinders were assigned to slick flights to each LZ to assist the CH-47s flights to follow. POL and rearming points were operational at both PZs. After a artillery prep, C Trp started a VR around the proposed LZs at 0930. At 0945 the assault forces were airborne and at 1000 they put 12 companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs, and one Arty Btry into ten LZs simultaneously. On the 24th (D+1), they again used two PZs and the same schedule. C Trp reconed the LZs and at 1000 the Sqdn inserted nine companies and three Bn CPs into seven LZs simultaneously. On 3 May (D+10), they began the extraction of the ROK Cavalry Regt with eight companies and two Bn CPs from nine PZs. On 4 May (D+11), they extracted the 1st ROK Regt consisting of ten companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs and one Arty Btry from ten PZs. On 5 May (D+12), they used one PZ to reinsert the ROK Cavalry Regt with eight companies into six LZs. The Blue flight received some SA fire and the guns engaged the targets. Two Hueys received hits. On the 6th (D+13), they inserted 11 companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs and one Arty Btry from the ROK 1st Regt into 15 LZs. On the 10th (D+17), they began the final phase by extracting eight company and one Arty Btry of the ROK 1st Regt from nine PZs. On the 12th (D+19), they extracted one company from the ROK Cavalry Regt from one PZ. On the 13th (D+20), they extracted seven companies and 2 Bn CPs from eight PZs. The Yellow flight received SA and B-40 fire and the Guns engaged. One Huey and one UH-1C were hit. Enemy personnel and bunkers were discovered and attacked by the Guns. The day's operations claimed 10 KBAs. On the 14th (D+21), they completed the extraction of nine companies and one Bn CP from seven PZs. The totals for the entire operation were for UH-1Hs: 2696 hours, 4099 sorties, 11,176 passengers using 351 aircraft and for CH-47s: 252 hours, 300 sorties, 1,428 passengers, 706 tons using 45 aircraft. The analysis section in the After Action Report provides some insight into this operation. Apparently the CRID was very security conscious because it provided only fragmentary information in advance for planning purposes and denied preparation air recons of their AO. They also did not put their G-3 or Regt Cmdrs in a C&C yet demanded simultaneous insertions. The lack of airborne decision makers caused delays in LZ selection as everyone had to wait for the information to be radioed back to the ROK CPs. All the opconed air units could not land in the Lane area, so they had to fly in every morning and home every night. This, of course, delayed the air assaults about one hour. Temporary refuel and rearm points had to be established for several days outside fixed facilities which taxed the Sqdn's S-4 and HHT personnel and added a security problem. Finally, the CRID wanted their elements extracted from the field and returned to their base camp. This required extra "air tax" time that could have been eliminated if they had used some ground convoys. The operation claimed 252 enemy killed, 110 individual weapons, 35 crew weapons, and 7 radios captured against 13 Koreans killed and 60 wounded with no US losses and no aircraft losses.

May - During the first week, A Trp's operations were weather restricted. On the 11th, A Trp destroyed a small base camp west of Phu Nhon. On the 19th, an A Trp Cobra crashed at Phu Nhon while hovering from the POL to the parking area. The pilot had gone IFR in the dust and the ship came to rest in an inverted position. Neither pilot was injured. At 1105 hours on the 20th, WO1 Gregory A. Smith and WO1 Robert Bruce died in the crash of an A Trp LOH west of Dragon Mountain near Camp Enari. The ARP was inserted to secure the crash site. The cause of the crash was never determined. C Trp moved their operations base to An Khe for two weeks during this period.

D Trp 1/10th CAV - About this time, D/1/10th CAV, the ACT for the 1/10th Cavalry Squadron that had been part of the 4th Div was attached to the 7/17th. VHPA Member Mike Lovett explains:

As the 4th Div was standing down, the 1/10 Cav Sqdn was still based out of Camp Radcliff near An Khe with the primary mission of keeping a good percentage of QL19 open between the coast and Pleiku. D/1/10 was the Sqdn's organic ACT and we lived at Radcliff as well. In fact I can remember we had a very nice New Years Eve party not too long after we occupied the buildings formerly used by the 4th Avn Bn. Our Sqdn was part of TF 1/4 and then TF 1/9 as the stand down continued. Aviation support became a serious problem by late 1970 because we were not part of the 1st Avn Bde. When we needed parts or IPs or anything aviation related, we had to go all the way to Nha Trang and even then it wasn't good. We still flew most of our missions for the 1/10 Cav but they really couldn't support us like E/704 AMNT used to do. Our commanders made a lot of noise and about Jan/Feb 1971 we moved to Lane. Within a short period we were attached to the 7/17 Cav and the support was much better. Initially, we had no billets or other facilities. We shared some space with C/7/17, got an old Korean building and even had some built for us and lived in tents too. That part wasn't too great. Our ARP was still at An Khe and we always had two Guns plus two or three 58s (we didn't use OH-6As for Scouts after?) at An Khe as a quick reaction force to keep the road open. That arrangement was hardly normal for an ACT but I don't think there were any normal units left in Vietnam at that time. Even when we were in the 7/17th, we still flew missions for the 1/10th most of the time. Like other ACTs during that period, we were not allowed to put our American ARP on the ground. When we supported the 1/10th, there were American ground forces near at hand. But we often sent pink teams up and down the coast, especially when when C/7/17 was up north during Lam Son 719, without any hope of Infantry back-up. Basically we did a lot of aerial recon with the Scouts just marking targets as best they could for the Guns. We were also lucky during those days that we didn't have many birds go down and I can't remember anyone getting killed during the first half of 1972.

VHPA Member Earl Ewing remembers these times as follows: When I joined D/1/10th Cav in June, they had been living at An Son for some time because their operations were well established. They were living in wooden buildings but there wasn't enough room for everyone. For the first few weeks I moved from bunk to bunk while guys were on R&R. I had gone to AMOC and Cobra school after flight school, so I was in the Service Platoon and the 518th TC Det during my three months with D Trp. I recall we used to take Cobras we couldn't fix to our support at Tuy Hoa which was a very large facility. D Trp did keep operational teams at An Khe and more than once we had to go there to fix something or to take in parts. I can also remember going to Pleiku for the same reason but maybe that was when I was with the Sqdn. In September, I became the Maintenance Officer for the 7/17th. We were always very busy because the Sqdn was a collection of all sorts of aviation units and the ARVN had our units scatter ships all over the place just like trucks. I believe a lot of people got hurt and a lot of equipment was damaged and misused under this "scatter deployment" concept. In early '72 I can remember over flying Tuy Hoa on the way to Vung Tau so we could have our Cobras modified to switch the tail rotor to the other side. It was really impressive to see that Tuy Hoa had "turned to nothing". By then we were getting most of our parts and some support from Nha Trang but blades and engines were in short supply. I finished up my tour with the 129th in March.

June - A Trp spent 15 days down due to weather this month. Its missions included several convoy escort missions from Pleiku to Phu Nhon and two SAR operations in an attempt to locate a civilian Cessna 180 which disappeared between Cheo Reo and Pleiku. On or near the 1st, C Trp moved its operation base to Kontum from Lane and would support operations in this area for the entire month. On or near the end of the month, C Trp returned its operations base to Lane. During this month, the Sqdn HQ and HHT moved from Qui Nhon to An Son. VHPA Member Ernie Smart continues providing some important background information about this period:

SECTION XII - AFTER ACTION REPORTS

These "After Action Reports" are a continuation of the last two year's compilations of eye witness accounts, accident reports, official documentation, and special interest groups. Sources of the information range from the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Joint Casualty Resolution Center, the State Department, the POW Network (Task Force of Illinois, Inc.), to direct inputs from VHPA members. It is an attempt to accurately document specific events that involved loss of life and/or destruction of helicopters during the Vietnam war. It is not an attempt to incite or promote political issues. Some of the information used for this section contains opinions that may not accurately describe the events as they occurred. We have tried to remove these when they are obvious. Like everything in this Directory, this information is only as accurate as the members of the VHPA can make it, so please send in your additions and corrections to the VHPA Headquarters. Gary Roush has put this section together and would appreciate your help and feedback.

This information is in order by date of the event and contains all new material which has never appeared in a VHPA directory.

After Action Report for: 5 September 1965

LA GRAND, WILLIAM JOHN

REFNO: R0137
Name: William John LaGrand
Rank/Branch: W2/US Army
Unit: 197th Aviation Company 145th Aviation Battalion
Date of Birth: 11 May 1941
Home City of Record: Portland, OR
Date of Loss: 05 September 1965
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 110655N 1065516E
Status (in 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: A-1G

Other Personnel In Incident: (none missing)

SYNOPSIS: William La Grand was a passenger aboard an A-1G aircraft on a flight which departed Bien Hoa on September 5, 1965. The aircraft was seen to crash and no ejections were observed from the aircraft prior to impact.

The area in which the aircraft went down was under hostile control at the time, and recovery and excavation attempts at the time were thwarted because of heavy enemy activity in the area and hostile presence.

Getting a ride in a Skyrider from a friend right after arriving in country.

After Action Report for: 18 June 1967

LEMMONS, WILLIAM E.

REFNO: R0734
Name: William E. Lemmons
Rank/Branch: O2/US Army
Unit: HHC, 196th Infantry Brigade (Light)
Date of Birth: 12 January 1942
Home City of Record: Pocatello, ID
Date of Loss: 18 June 1967
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 143303N 1083012E
Status (in 1973): Missing In Action
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: OH-23

Other Personnel In Incident: Edward Guillory; James McKittrick (both missing)

SYNOPSIS: SFC Edward Guillory, Lt. William Lemmons and Maj. James McKittrick were aboard an OH-23 Raven helicopter on a visual recon mission operating in Quang Tin Province on June 18, 1967. They were to spot artillery targets for the Artillery Battery that McKittrick and Guillory were attached to.

At 1845 hours, the helicopter was declared missing. Extensive searches were conducted that night aided by artillery flares and aircraft mounted searchlights, but no trace of the aircraft or crew was found. In the next few days several crash sites were reported and searches made, but all efforts were fruitless.

After Action Report for: 30 June 1967

HOUSE, JOHN ALEXANDER II

REFNO: R0746
Name: John Alexander House II
Rank/Branch: O3/USMC
Unit: HHM 265, MAG 16
Date of Birth: 16 April 1939
Home City of Record: Pelham, NY
Date of Loss: 30 June 1967
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 161349N 1074301E
Status (in 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: CH-46A

Other Personnel In Incident: Merlin Allen; Michael Judd; John Kilen; Glyn Runnels (all missing)

SYNOPSIS: John House was the pilot of an CH-46A helicopter carrying personnel assigned to Company A, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, when the aircraft was hit by small arms fire near the city of Phu Bai, South Vietnam, exploded and crashed. Although some of the personnel aboard survived, House was never found, nor were remains recovered that could be identified as his. He was listed as killed in action, body not recovered.

The co-pilot Ted Pittman survived.

After Action Report for: 08 February 1968

ZIEGLER, ROY E. II

Name: Roy E. Ziegler II (Dick)
Rank/Branch: WO1/US Army
Unit: 58th Aviation Detachment Qui Nhon
Date of Birth: 1 September 1941
Home City of Record: Springfield, IL
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 164424N 1071941E (YD471521)
Status (in 1973): Released from Captivity from North Vietnam
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH-1D

Other Personnel In Incident: WO1 Joseph Rose, E4 Michael Lenker, E5 Robert Chenowith, E4 James George, Jr. (MIA), and LTC Benjamin Purcell.

SYNOPSIS: All of the people on this helicopter were captured, served as POWs, and then released except for E4 George who was killed while in captivity. The following is a first person account by Dick Ziegler:

"On February 8, 1968 I was assigned to fly LTC Ben Purcell up to Dong Ha with high frequency radio parts. The other pilot was Joe Rose. My crew chief was SP5 Robert Chenowith and the door gunner was SP4 Mike Lenker. George was a refrigerator mechanic and went along to fix some refrigerators at Dong Ha. We took off from Danang and proceeded to Hue where we landed so LTC Purcell could be briefed by the Marine General on what the

situation in I Corps was and what equipment they needed. After he was briefed, we departed Hue for Dong Ha. The weather was just a little shitty. Ceilings were about 400-500 feet. I flew along the coast to avoid the enemy and then when we were about even with Quang Tri, I headed inland until I reached highway 1. We then flew north to Dong Ha.

After delivering the radio parts and LTC Purcell being briefed, we took off and headed back to Danang. Joe was flying. We decided to head back the same way we came up. After we left highway 1 to head back to the coast, we flew over an enemy unit that had moved into the area after we had passed that spot going to Dong Ha. There must have been a million of them. Well, they just pointed their weapons skyward and fired. We flew right through the ground fire. I was wounded in the left thigh and belly. The Huey was on fire. Joe crashed the helicopter in a grave yard. What a hell of a place to crash.

Once on the ground and out of the burning helicopter we tried to E & E out of the area. I was wounded and kind of in shock. One passenger, SP4 George, was badly burned from the crash and we had one runaway M60 machine gun, 45 cal pistols, and an M14 rifle. We walked for about 30 minutes to an hour when the VC came up from behind us and started firing. Guess what? We were in another grave yard! Damn things are all over the place. Well, I hid behind a grave and watched LTC Purcell wave his olive drab handkerchief and say we were surrendering. I didn't want to do that. I thought that the VC would torture and murder us. So I crawled out of the grave yard and hid in some bushes near by. All of the crew and passengers were taken prisoner at that time.

I waited in my hiding place until night fall and then I tried to find some friendly faces. I don't think there were any in I Corps that night. I found some armored vehicle tracks in the sand and tried to follow them. I lost them in some marshes. I continued to walk most of the night.

About 2 hours after dawn came, I was hiding behind some more bushes and I observed a combat assault (CA) coming in about 5 kilometers from my position. All that CA did was push the enemy towards me. In a little while, a group of VC (nine little boys with big guns) came up over the sand dunes. At the same time, a Huey flew over my position so close that if I would have had a rock I could have hit the door gunner with it. The VC had heard the Huey and had gone into hiding and the Huey never saw them or me.

After the Huey left they started towards me again. I was laying on my back with my 45 on my chest saying, 'God if you get me out of this I'll never sin again.' God had me on hold and never answered my call. One of the VC saw me, yelled and started firing his weapon. They all started firing their weapons in every direction. I raised up to one knee with my weapon in my hand and for some strange reason before I knew it, both of my arms were above my head in the, 'Don't shoot I surrender' mode.

It took about 5 days of walking to get to my jungle camp where I first got medical attention for my wounds. To my surprise all of my crew and LTC Purcell were also in that camp. The VC had executed SP4 George the day after he surrendered because of his burns. At this camp, I also met an American POW by the name of King Rafford. He had been captured in 1967 looking for a whore house in Hue. He didn't find it, but he got screwed. There was also a VC medic in the camp and he treated my wounds and probably saved my life. Credit where credit's due.

I made my last escape attempt in this camp with King Rafford. We saved our meager ration of rice and I exercised my leg in the hooch out of sight of the guards. Then one night, King and I just walked out of the camp. It gets mighty dark in triple canopy jungle at night. We had to navigate by the light from fire flies. Otherwise, we would just keep bumping into trees. Those trees are hard too in the jungle. The next day King and I were recaptured about 5 kilometers from the camp. I spent the next 10 days in a hole in the ground with reduced rations.

Shortly after my escape attempt, we were moved out of our camp and moved to North Vietnam. It took us 11 days of marching to reach the Ho Chi Mein trail and another 11 days of riding trucks up the trail before we got to our first camp in North Vietnam.

I spent approximately 5 months in this camp, that was located in a Vietnamese village, in solitary confinement. I was housed in a thatched roofed hooch and my room was the size of a closet. That is, it was 6 feet long by 2.5 feet wide by 6 feet high with stocks at the end of the room. I'm 6'2" tall. I hit my head a lot.

After 5 months we were moved to a camp that was not far from Hanoi and I spent until November of 1970 in this camp. I had my other pilot, that was shot down with me, in the room with me from then on. His name is Joe Rose. At times I also had another Warrant Officer helicopter pilot in the room with me. His name is Michael O'Conner.

After the Sun Tay raid, we were moved to the metropolitan area of Hanoi to a camp that was named the 'Plantation Gardens'.

After the BS2's came to Hanoi in Christmas of 1972, we were finally moved to the infamous prison called 'The Hanoi Hilton'. We stayed there until the end of the war and I was released on 5 March 1973. And boy was I glad to leave!

After Action Report for: 09 August 1969

JANOUSEK, RONALD JAMES

REFNO:	R1478
Name:	Ronald James Janousek
Rank/Branch:	O2/US Marine Corps
Unit:	HML 367; MAG 36
Date of Birth:	21 July 1945
Home City of Record:	Posen IL
Date of Loss:	09 August 1969
Country of Loss:	South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates:	163819N 1064643E (XD960180)
Status (in 1973):	Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground:	UH-1E

Other Personnel in Incident: Bruce E. Kane (missing)

SYNOPSIS: 1Lt. Ronald J. Janousek and Cpl. Bruce E. Kane were U.S. Marines attached to units of the 36th and 11th Marine Aircraft Groups, respectively. On August 9, 1969, the two were killed in the crash of a UH-1E helicopter.

Defense Department records indicate that Janousek and Kane were lost at Khe Sanh, in Quang Tri Province. The U.S. Marines state that Janousek's helicopter was hit by heavy enemy fire and crashed and burned. The U.S. Marines state that Kane's helicopter disappeared on a night reconnaissance mission. Joint Casualty Resolution Center records (considered by some analysts to be the most accurate of all records), indicate that the loss occurred in central South Vietnam.

Information obtained from family and other sources indicate that Kane and Janousek's aircraft crashed and burned in the Se Kong River near the border of Laos and South Vietnam north of the A Shau Valley, and that they had been on a secret mission in Laos. The U.S. State Department lists both men as killed in a hostile action, and further lists Kane as drowned and Janousek as a crew member of the aircraft.

Maj. Hill crash landed in water to put out the fire. Maj. Hill survived.

After Action Report for: 05 February 1970

LYON, JAMES MICHAEL

REFNO: R1556
 Name: James Michael Lyon
 Rank/Branch: O3/US Army
 Unit: HHC, 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division
 Date of Birth: 08 March 1948
 Home City of Record: Indianapolis IN
 Date of Loss: 05 February 1970
 Country of Loss: South Vietnam
 Loss Coordinates: 163045N 1072824E (YD494093)
 Status (in 1973): Prisoner of War (killed in captivity)
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH-1H

Capt. Lyon moaned and then a shot was heard from his position about 30 feet from the aircraft wreckage. No other outcry from Capt. Lyon was heard, and the others believed that he had been killed by the guard.

Two weeks later, Capt. Parsels was told by 1 Lt. Lee Van Mac (an NVA commander at 'Camp Farnsworth') that Capt. Lyon died from his wounds and was buried at the crash site. 1 Lt. Lee Van Mac gave Capt. Parsels the personal effects of Capt. Lyon, including his ID card and several photos which appeared to be of Lyon's wife.

In late March, 1973, Parsels, Hefel and Kobashigawa were released from prisons in North Vietnam. In their debriefings, all three concurred on the story that Lyon had apparently been shot. They considered it a mercy killing, because their pilot had been so seriously injured that they doubted that he could survive.

After Action Report for: 24 March 1970

HOSKEN, JOHN CHARLES

REFNO: R1578
 Name: John Charles Hosken
 Rank/Branch: W1/US Army
 Unit: 170 AHC 17 CAG 52 CAB 1 Aviation Brigade
 Date of Birth: 23 August 1947 (Cleveland OH)
 Home City of Record: Chagrin Falls OH
 Date of Loss: 24 March 1970
 Country of Loss: Cambodia
 Loss Coordinates: 142750N 1071816E (YB484003)
 Status (in 1973): Missing in Action
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH-1H

Other Personnel in Incident: Berman Ganoe; Rudy M. Becerra; John Boronski; Gary A. Hamed; Jerry L. Pool (all missing)

SYNOPSIS: On March 24, 1970, WO John C. Hoskins, pilot; Capt. Michael D. O'Donnell, aircraft commander; SP4 Rudy M. Becerra, crew chief; and SP4 Berman Ganoe, gunner, were the crew of a UH-1H helicopter (serial #68-15262) on an emergency extraction of a MACV-SOG long-range reconnaissance patrol (LRRP) from a landing zone in Ratanakiri Province Cambodia, near the tri-border area. The team included 1 Lt. Jerry L. Pool, team leader and team members SSGt. John A. Boronski and Sgt. Gary A. Hamed.

The team had been in heavy contact with the enemy and had requested an immediate extraction. Capt. O'Donnell evaluated the situation and decided to pick them up. He landed on the LZ and was on the ground for about 4 minutes, and then transmitted that he had the entire team on board. The aircraft was beginning its ascent when it was hit by enemy fire, and an explosion in the aircraft was seen. The helicopter continued in flight for about 300 meters, then another explosion occurred, causing the aircraft to crash in the jungle.

No one was observed to have been thrown from the aircraft during either explosion. The aircraft began to burn immediately upon impact. Aerial search and rescue efforts began immediately; however, no signs of life could be seen around the crash site. Because of the enemy situation, attempts to insert search teams into the area were futile. SAR efforts were discontinued on April 18. Search and rescue teams who surveyed the site reported that they did not hold much hope for survival for the men aboard, but lacking proof that they were dead, the Army declared all 7 missing in action.

The Special Forces team aboard the chopper was working with Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observation Group (MACV-SOG), a joint service, high command, unconventional warfare task force engaged in highly classified operations throughout Southeast Asia. The 5th Special Forces channeled personnel into MACV-SOG (though it was not a Special Forces group) through Special Operations Augmentation (SOA) which provided their "cover" while under secret orders to MACV-SOG. These teams performed deep penetration missions of strategic reconnaissance and interdiction which were called, depending on the time frame, "Shining Brass" or "Prarie Fire" missions.

After Action Report for: 23 April 1970

EADS, DENNIS KEITH

REFNO: R1603
 Name: Dennis Keith Eads
 Rank/Branch: WO1/US Army
 Unit: F/8 Cav 123 CAB 16 CAG 23 Inf (America), Chu Lai, South Vietnam
 Date of Birth: 04 May 1947 (Glendale CA)
 Home City of Record: Prophetstown, IL
 Date of Loss: 23 April 1970
 Country of Loss: South Vietnam
 Loss Coordinates: 153607N 1075801E (ZC180270)
 Status (in 1973): Missing in Action (Declared dead 08/28/78)
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: AH1G

Other Personnel in Incident: Larron D. Murphy (missing)

Other Personnel in Incident: Tom Y. Kobashigawa, John W. Parsels, Daniel H. Hefel (returned POWs)

SYNOPSIS: At 1530 hours on February 5, 1970, Capt. James M. Lyon, pilot, Capt. John W. Parsels, copilot, SP5 Tom Y. Kobashigawa, crew chief, and SP4 Daniel Hefel, door gunner, were flying a UH-1H helicopter (serial #68-16441) on a maintenance mission from Hue to Phu Bai, South Vietnam.

When the aircraft was about 18 miles northwest of Hue City, the helicopter caught fire and crashed (due to a malfunction). Capt. Lyon was thrown clear of the aircraft and was burned extensively over his body and part of his right leg. His leg was severed four inches below the knee. The other crew members were also injured and could not take evasive action. They were captured at 1630 hours by NVA troops and spent the night near the crash site.

Throughout the night, the crew members heard their pilot yelling and moaning in pain. At 0600 hours, Capt. Lyon moaned and then a shot was heard from his position about 30 feet from the aircraft wreckage. No other outcry from Capt. Lyon was heard, and the others believed that he had been killed by the guard.

Two weeks later, Capt. Parsels was told by 1 Lt. Lee Van Mac (an NVA commander at 'Camp Farnsworth') that Capt. Lyon died from his wounds and was buried at the crash site. 1 Lt. Lee Van Mac gave Capt. Parsels the personal effects of Capt. Lyon, including his ID card and several photos which appeared to be of Lyon's wife.

In late March, 1973, Parsels, Hefel and Kobashigawa were released from prisons in North Vietnam. In their debriefings, all three concurred on the story that Lyon had apparently been shot. They considered it a mercy killing, because their pilot had been so seriously injured that they doubted that he could survive.

O'DONNELL, MICHAEL DAVIS

Name: Michael Davis O'Donnell
 Rank/Branch: O3/US Army
 Unit: 170 AHC 17 CAG 52 CAB 1 Aviation Brigade
 Date of Birth: 13 August 1945 (Columbus OH)
 Home City of Record: Springfield IL
 Date of Loss: 24 March 1970
 Country of Loss: Cambodia
 Loss Coordinates: 142750N 1071816E (YB484003)
 Status (in 1973): Missing in Action
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH-1H

Other Personnel in Incident: Berman Ganoe; Rudy M. Becerra; John Boronski; Gary A. Hamed; Jerry L. Pool (all missing)

SYNOPSIS: On March 24, 1970, WO John C. Hoskins, pilot; Capt. Michael D. O'Donnell, aircraft commander; SP4 Rudy M. Becerra, crew chief; and SP4 Berman Ganoe, gunner, were the crew of a UH-1H helicopter (serial #68-15262) on an emergency extraction of a MACV-SOG long-range reconnaissance patrol (LRRP) from a landing zone in Ratanakiri Province Cambodia, near the tri-border area. The team included 1 Lt. Jerry L. Pool, team leader and team members SSGt. John A. Boronski and Sgt. Gary A. Hamed.

The team had been in heavy contact with the enemy and had requested an immediate extraction. Capt. O'Donnell evaluated the situation and decided to pick them up. He landed on the LZ and was on the ground for about 4 minutes, and then transmitted that he had the entire team on board. The aircraft was beginning its ascent when it was hit by enemy fire, and an explosion in the aircraft was seen. The helicopter continued in flight for about 300 meters, then another explosion occurred, causing the aircraft to crash in the jungle.

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The Special Forces team aboard the chopper was working with Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observation Group (MACV-SOG), a joint service, high command, unconventional warfare task force engaged in highly classified operations throughout Southeast Asia. The 5th Special Forces channeled personnel into MACV-SOG (though it was not a Special Forces group) through Special Operations Augmentation (SOA) which provided their "cover" while under secret orders to MACV-SOG. These teams performed deep penetration missions of strategic reconnaissance and interdiction which were called, depending on the time frame, "Shining Brass" or "Prarie Fire" missions.

MURPHY, LARRON DAVID

Name: Larron David Murphy
 Rank/Branch: O3/US Army
 Unit: F/8 Cav 123 CAB 16 CAG 23 Inf (America), Chu Lai, South Vietnam
 Date of Birth: 05 October 1944 (Atlanta GA)
 Home City of Record: Dalton GA
 Date of Loss: 23 April 1970
 Country of Loss: South Vietnam
 Loss Coordinates: 153607N 1075801E (ZC180270)
 Status (in 1973): Missing in Action (Declared dead 10/11/73)
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: AH1G

Other Personnel in Incident: Larron D. Murphy (missing)

The helicopter departed to the northwest from Dak To, but was apparently hit by enemy fire, as it crashed and burned on a small island in the Dak Poco River about 500 meters from the end of the dock to the runway. Because of the rolling terrain, personnel at the airfield did not see the aircraft impact. A pilot flying over the wreckage reported that the helicopter was burning, but they could see no survivors. It was later discovered that five people did survive the crash - Warmath, Keller, Bogle, Ward and Lea. According to their statements, Hunsicker, Ellen, Zollicoffer, Jones and Carter were all dead.

Two other Team 22, MACV Advisors, LtCol. Robert W. Brownlee and Capt. Charles W. Gordon, and their ARVN interpreter, Sgt. Cao Ky Chi, were in a bunker near the airstrip approximately 4 kilometers to the west of the base camp when they were forced to withdraw under heavy enemy attack. They proceeded south of the compound across the Dak Poco River, but LtCol. Brownlee became separated from the others as they were advancing up a hill. Sgt. Chi and Capt. Gordon called out to him, but received no response. From the top of the hill, Sgt. Chi heard the enemy call out to someone in Vietnamese to halt and raise their hands. Sgt. Chi believed the Viet Cong were speaking to LtCol. Brownlee. Gordon and Chi evaded capture and eventually made their way to safety.

A Vietnamese who was captured and subsequently released reported that he had talked to another prisoner who had witnessed LtCol. Brownlee's death. He was told that LtCol. Brownlee had killed himself with his own pistol when communist soldiers told him to raise his hands in an attempt to capture him. Additional hearsay reports of his suicide were reported by another ARVN source.

Yonan never caught up with the others. For three days, helicopter searches were made of the area with no success. Ground search, because of the hostile threat in the area, was not practical.

In April 1988, the Vietnamese "discovered" the remains of Capt. Kenneth J. Yonan and returned them to the U.S. in a spirit of stepped-up cooperation on the POW/MIA issue.

After Action Report for: 24 May 1972

HENN, JOHN ROBERT, JR.

REFNO: R1865
Name: John Robert Henn, Jr.
Rank/Branch: W2/US Army
Unit: F/79 ARA 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division
Date of Birth: 11 February 1948 (Worchester MA)
Home City of Record: Sutton MA
Date of Loss: 24 May 1972
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 113345N 1063717E (XT768786)
Status (In 1973): Missing in Action
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: AH-1G

HOSAKA, ISAAC YOSHIRO

REFNO: R1865
Name: Isaac Yoshiro Hosaka
Rank/Branch: W2/US Army
Unit: F/79 ARA 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division
Date of Birth: 7 February 1949
Home City of Record: Gardena, CA
Date of Loss: 24 May 1972
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 113345N 1063717E (XT768786)
Status (In 1973): Killed in Action
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: AH-1G

Other Personnel in Incident: (none)

SYNOPSIS: On May 24, 1972, WO2 Isaac Y. Hosaka, pilot, and WO2 John R. Henn, aircraft commander, were flying an AH-1G Cobra helicopter (tail #67-15836) which was participating in a medevac operation about 8 kilometers south of An Loc, South Vietnam. WO2 Henn's helicopter was in a flight of three Cobras at 4800 feet when the helicopter appeared to break in half.

The aircraft then went into a flat spin, exploded and burst into flames upon impact. The other helicopter pilots concluded that the Cobra had been hit by a SAM (surface to air missile), as they had seen a trail of white smoke from the ground to the aircraft.

The other two Cobras remained over the site, but observed no one leaving the crash. An immediate search in the area was not possible because of the enemy situation, but on June 2 and June 5, brief surface searches were conducted and remains were found which were identified as those of WO2 Hosaka.

A refugee reported that he had witnessed a Cobra helicopter crash and burn near Tan Khai village. Fifteen days later, he saw the bodies of two individuals who had apparently died in the crash. The U.S. Army believes this report may correlate to Henn and Hosaka.

After Action Report for: 11 June 1972

HOLM, ARNOLD EDWARD, JR.

REFNO: R1874
Name: Arnold Edward Holm, Jr.
Rank/Branch: O3/US Army
Unit: F/8 CAV 11 CAG 1 Aviation Battalion
Date of Birth: 05 March 1944 (New London CT)
Home City of Record: Waterford CT
Date of Loss: 11 June 1972
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 162326N 1072407E (YD565135)
Status (In 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: OH-6A

McQUADE, JAMES RUSSELL

REFNO: R1873
Name: James Russell McQuade
Rank/Branch: O2/US Army
Unit: F/8 CAV 11 CAG 1 Aviation Battalion
Date of Birth: 03 June 1949 (Pasco WA)
Home City of Record: Hoquiam WA
Date of Loss: 11 June 1972
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 162336N 1072357E (YD562138)
Status (In 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: OH-6A

Other Personnel in Incident: Wayne Bibbs; Robin R. Yeakley (missing from one OH-6A); James E. Hackett; Richard D. Wiley (missing from second OH-6A).

SYNOPSIS: By December 1971, U.S. troops in-country had declined dramatically - from the 1968 peak of nearly 55,000 to less than 30,000. The enemy, temporarily on the defensive by the moves into Cambodia in 1970 and Laos in 1971, began deploying new NVA forces southward in preparation for another major offensive.

In March 1972, the Vietnamese launched a three-pronged invasion of the South. One NVA force swept south across the DMZ, its goal apparently the conquest of the northern provinces and the seizure of Hue. A second NVA force drove from Laos into the Central Highlands, and a third effort involved a drive from Cambodia into provinces northwest of Saigon.

Fierce fighting ensued on all three fronts, with NVA success the greatest in the northern provinces. Fighting continued until by June, the North Vietnamese began withdrawing from some of their advance positions, still holding considerable amounts of South Vietnamese territory in the northern provinces.

that appeared ready to surrender. The "Kit Carson" scout called for him to stand up and come forward, but he didn't move. Our Scouts had returned for fuel and we were short LOHs due to combat damage, so I hovered the C&C ship just behind the NVA. Suddenly we came under intense fire from a large force to his rear - a trap had been planned for the Blues. I called for the Guns and they were already in-bound. They put every rocket right on top of the NVA. It was a thing of beauty!! I climbed to altitude and called from some artillery. About that time, Dak To received another attack from Rocket Ridge. Just as the artillery got registered for us, the ARVN canceled our mission and our stand-by reserve. I tried to tell them the rocket attack was just a diversion and that we had their NVA Regimental folks located. No luck, so we had to withdraw. However, we called in TAC air and they did a fine job on that target! From that day on, the battle of Dak To - Ben Het was over and the NVA withdrew. I am convinced we had found and hit a major headquarters.

For May and June, A Trp claimed 124 NVA killed, 66 more by airstrikes and artillery, one captured plus 93 bunkers destroyed. They also captured one AK-50, a 122mm rocket, three AKs and an assortment of ammos.

July - On the 7th, a D Trp jeep struck a mine while returning from a mounted mission killing SSG Charles E. Smith, SP4 Colon D. Young, and PFC Paul E. Johnson. During the latter part of July, A Trp started working for the 1st Bde against the 18th, K-2, and 958 NVA Regiments during Operation Hines. The primary AO was between the Mang Gang Pass on QL19 and LZ Action. D Trp continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Division's TAOR during this month.

August - On the 2nd, A Trp was worked to the east of An Khe when they observed numerous high speed trails, structures and over 60 bunkers. Chickens and livestock were seen in the area, so the enemy was near at hand. About 1530, one LOH reported that he was experiencing difficulties with the aircraft. It then lost power, crashed into some trees and burned. The crew were seen departing the area with enemy soldiers following close behind but the foliage was too thick for the ARP to be inserted. At 1610, the downed crew were located in a small clearing about 1000 meters from the crash site and were extracted by a med evac ship with a jungle penetrator. A series of intensive airstrikes were directed on the enemy positions that killed 23 NVA. On the 3rd, A Trp found a high speed trail and followed it for eight miles. They found several NVA, bicycles, and bunkers along the way. All total the Guns and airstrikes killed ten NVA that day. On the 6th, A Trp received heavy AW fire from a large NVA complex about 35 KMs northwest of An Khe. When the Scouts returned after the Guns had expended, they found 11 dead NVA. A further VR revealed that the complex was surrounded by numerous man traps that were constructed on 16-foot lengths of bamboo with punji stakes every six inches. Several airstrikes were put into the complex. On the 16th, A Trp was called to support a 4-man LRRP in contact. The Guns killed ten NVA and helped extract the LRRPs. On the 16th, C Trp's ARP discovered what one 173rd Abn officer called "one of the most valuable pieces of information of the Vietnam War". In the northern end of the An Lao Valley the Scouts observed a tunnel and bunker complex. The Blues encountered AW fire from the complex but battled their way inside one of the caves. There they met and killed four NVA. It was later determined that two were Russian trained doctors and the other a Russian trained pharmacist. One of the doctor carried a map and information pinpointing the position of the NVA hospitals and medical supply points in the AO. On the 17th, A Trp made light contact and inserted the Blues. They found a well equipped base camp and caches of clothes plus a barbershop and destroyed it with fire and explosives. D Trp continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Division's TAOR during this month; but on the 31st they moved to Ban Me Thuot East with a contingency from HHT to prepare for operations around the Bu Prang SF camp.

September - On the 1st, B Trp moved to Ban Me Thuot East and the Squadron set up a "Ruthless Forward" there to support TF Fighter and elements of the 23rd ARVN Division. Weather handicapped tactical operations for parts of the month. Even though various Squadron elements had lived at Ban Me Thuot East prior to this, it was still a lot of work to re-establish a base at old "Camp Bleakness". Aircraft maintenance was never a pleasant experience at Ban Me Thuot East. Within a few days two of D Trp's platoons were lifted to Bu Prang in an Infantry, security, air-mobile reaction force for B Trp. Bu Prang was a small camp and logically not prepared for this large American unit. As a result HHT was given the responsibility of flying food, shelter material, and essential supplies to the D Trp elements at Bu Prang. Basically they flew two resupply missions every day to Bu Prang. HHT and D Trp also established an ammo resupply point at Nhon Co for the Sqdn. By the end of the month, HHT ships were also making single ship insertions of D Trp personnel and Vietnamese MPs along QL88. They would question the locals in attempts to learn more about the enemy build up in the surrounding areas. HHT ships also performed medevac missions from the Bu Prang area. B Trp managed to kill ten enemy soldiers and located numerous bunker complexes, routes of infiltration and areas where massive amounts of food were under cultivation by the enemy. Two aircraft were badly damaged by enemy fire and one pilot seriously wounded.

October - B Trp's daily reconnaissance provided considerable intelligence data as the enemy movements and activities in the Bu Prang area increased. Numerous bivouac sites and bunker complexes, well used trails, and crops under harvest were reported. AW fire directed against B Trp's aircraft increased as the month progressed. Weather precluded some operations early and near the middle of the month. During the last week of the month, five B Trp aircraft were damaged by AA fire. On the 28th, the expected enemy offensive was launched with attacks on CIDG camps all around the Bu Prang area. This action would be known as "The Siege of Bu Prang". On the 29th, B Trp thwarted three separate attacks on firebases around Bu Prang. Gun ship attacks destroyed two 12.7 mm AA guns and one 57mm RR. The friendlies began abandoning firebases and consolidating around the main Bu Prang and Duc Lap camps. From actions during this month it was learned that elements of the 28th, 40th, and 66th NVA Regiments were involved in the siege.

November - During this month, A Trp supported the 1st Bde in operations to the southwest and west of An Khe and occasionally the 3rd Bde west of Enari. A Trp finally completed the construction of their aircraft maintenance hanger at Camp Enari. B Trp continued to support TF Fighter until the 1st Bde started Operation SPREAGINS WHITE during the "Siege of Bu Prang". C Trp worked the An Lao Valley with the 173rd Abn. D Trp worked with B Trp until the 13th when it returned to Camp Enari and started providing convoy security on the Enari to Cheo Reo highway. On the 2nd, B Trp was working an AO on the edge of the main battle area and VHPA Member Kirk Curran remembers:

I was a 1LT then and had been flying Cobras with the Undertakers since I joined B Trp in August. MAJ Bowling had asked several RLOs if they were interested in flying the "little birds". So that day I was flying as Jim Nowicki's Observer as part of my training to become the Scout platoon leader. Jim was Scalaphunter 13, flying wing for Scalaphunter 17, CW2 George W. Grega, who had SGT Vernon C. Shepard as his Observer. The area we were working had been defoliated some time prior, so the foliage and trees didn't completely obscure our view of the ground. As we orbited around Grega, Jim and I spotted this huge bunker complex. One of the bunkers had a very large opening that looked like a wide set of stairs going down into the ground. We called Grega to have a look and reported what we'd seen to the C&C and Guns. It was really unusual and Grega moved around for a few seconds and then came to a near hover over the bunker with the large opening. That's when the NVA laced him bad. Even though they took a lot of fire and SGT Shepard was wounded in the foot, he got a Pete out and George moved off. He was streaming fuel like crazy and Jim and I thought he was going to blow up. You could see the fuel atomizing in the rotor wash and forming clouds near the hot exhaust. The Guns rolled in and started beating up the bunkers complex on SGT Shepard's mark. We told George to get it on the ground QUICK and suddenly this large "L" shaped LZ seemed to pop up in front of us; so George just flared and dropped it in. The next thing that happened was just plain good luck. I had a "hot Pete" (a WP grenade without a safety pin) in my hand and told Jim I wanted to throw it out in the trees and not the LZ; so we overflew George and started to circle back - as we reached the trees where I pitched the Pete. We quickly got back to the downed ship and landed near them. Our LOH had a Mini and I had an M-60 fed from the back. Grega and Shepard got in the back; I'd guess George was near the center of the compartment and Shepard was closer to the outside. We took off and didn't get to 100' when the world opened up. I don't know if the NVA had ambushed that LZ or the road that went through it or what. Maybe they hoped to get the relief column for some of the firebase battles that were going on. Anyway, Jim and I saw two 51 cals at our 10 and 2 and later learned of another at our 7 o'clock. Jim hollered over the radio and I worked the 60 against the 2 o'clock gun position until the belt broke. The good part about this was that by that time the Pete I'd thrown was now fully developed; so the Guns and C&C had no trouble finding us even though their attention had been directed toward that bunker complex. The Mini was on and I reached back to get the ammo belt, opened the cover of the 60 and was just closing it when I noticed that the front of the little bird was gone and we were going down. There was big explosion. The fire ball that went past us taking off part of my mustache and burned part of my hand between my gloves and the nomex flight suit. I'm not certain if we tumbled in the air at that point or what; but we hit the ground hard and bounced into the air to land again without any rotor blades or skids or tail boom. Naturally we were hanging upside-down, trapped inside and I remember thinking it was going to blow again. Later I would joke that what caused us to crash was being overgrossed with NVA 51 cal - really a bad joke! Anyway, Jim and I finally got out and started grabbing stuff we thought we might need. I set up the 60, we got some WPs and an AR-15 (you know one of those shorties). I had my 45 (the Trp didn't have any more 38s at that time, so I was blessed with a 45). The survival radio was in a net between the seats. We didn't think about it, so it stayed there. About then we noticed SGT Shepard at our 3 o'clock laying face down. He had been thrown from the ship and had a terrible wound from a 51 completely across his buttock. You remember how large the Army field dressings seemed when we were in training? Well I remember thinking it would take half a bed sheet to cover that wound, he was laid open that badly. The fire was still pretty intense all around us and really the position was untenable; so we decided to book. The LOH was still burning and there were small explosions coming from it now and then as the grenades or a WP went off. Anyway, we dumped the 60 back in the LOH and started to move away when we heard George from inside the aircraft. Jim went back to get him but returned saying he couldn't get him out. We moved away and never saw George again. I later learned that the guys in the air had seen figures running toward the trees and determined we were all together and were at least not killed in the crashes. But what they had seen was the NVA running for the trees because we had crashed almost on top of one of their bunkers and they were scared to death. We started moving toward the south because we had received less fire from that direction. Jim was in the lead, then SGT Shepard, then me. SGT Shepard hadn't received any bone hits but he looked terrible. The grass was tall in the LZ. We hadn't moved off very far when we saw this Cobra coming in to land.

WOW! When I first dropped out of the Army, I was a carpenter, an infantry guy, so I enlisted in the Army as a brick layer. As you might guess, I never saw another brick and ended up in helicopters! After all I went to carpenter school, then to Ft. Knox as a carpenter, and somehow I ended up in Vietnam assigned to HHT/7/17 as a jeep driver and mail room clerk. That lasted less than two weeks when someone asked me to shine some officer's boots and I thought "that's it - I ain't doing that!" I asked around and was told there were opening in B Trp's Scouts but I'd have to volunteer. They decided the job. It sounded OK to me, so I volunteered. I'd been flying as a Scout for about four months and really liked it. I don't think I'd do it again, but I really liked it at the time! I'd flown with George Grega a few times prior to this day. He seemed to like me and I liked him. We communicated and worked well together as Scouts. I think it was the night before this battle or maybe two nights before, but we were all in one of the Scout tents having a beer and George said to me, "I don't want to scare you or anything, but today when we were returning home from the AO as a flight of four LOHs I happened to notice there were only three shadows on the ground. At first I thought it was because we were sort of in a cloud or something, so I moved over a bit. Shep, (that was my nickname in B Trp) we didn't have a shadow - we just weren't there!! No matter what I did, we didn't have a shadow." At the time I sort of "wrote this off" but maybe George had a premonition of things to come. I only remembered it afterwards. Anyway back to the battle, I don't remember the bunker with the large opening Kirk described but I DO REMEMBER the bunker complex and looking "eye to eye" with an NVA 51-cal crew. I literally could see the whites of their eyes!! I put out the Peta and fired. They fired and did a damned fine job. I used to fly with my feet on the skids. I was hit in the left foot (after a few days this wound wouldn't bother me that much) and in the chin (that wound caused me a lot of discomfort for some time because there was a piece of meat inside my mouth - I finally bit that off and it healed with a big lump of scar tissue.). But I don't think there was much left of the bottom of the LOH. The radios had been shot out and the fuel cell must have been dumping fuel like crazy because it got all over the front bubble and started to obscure our vision. At first I thought it was engine oil but I looked back into the engine compartment and could see that the oil tank level looked normal. Anyway, the other ship flew along side us and with arm and hand signals made it clear that we should land RIGHT NOW. I'd guess we flew for maybe two or three minutes after we were shot. I remember landing, getting into their ship, and getting shot down again pretty much like Kirk described it. I wasn't hurt by the explosion he described but I knew I'd been hit in the butt. I got out of the LOH after it hit and sort of ran down the hill a little ways. I don't think I "blacked out" during any of that but I might have. I do remember crawling away from the two LOHs because I had a hard time moving. We weren't too far away when we saw the Cobra come in.

We interrupt both Kirk and Shep at this point to hear from VHPA Member Mike Peterson who was flying the Snake they saw trying to land. I had been in B Trp about 5 months and was in the back seat as AC that day. CPT Lou Chirchigno, who was my platoon leader but hadn't been in that position all that long, was in the front seat. We had flown as the high Gun earlier in the day. Our team was refueling at Bu Prang when we got the word that a LOH was down and that the other team was firing. We left in a hurry. I don't remember the briefing we usually had as one team replaced another on station. It seems to me that we got there first and never even assumed the position of high Gun; just started trying to help our people on the ground. I do remember seeing the LOH burning when we arrived at this huge L-shaped clearing but I don't remember seeing the other LOH. We made a quick, low pass and told the C&C that it certainly didn't look like a survivable crash. On our second pass we were surprised to see someone get out of the wreck and from the way he walked we could tell he was seriously hurt. I believe we were the only ship on station and that we were talking to the C&C who was some distance away. Anyway, Lou and I talked it over and decided to land. The plan was for Lou to get out, put the injured person in his place, and remain on the ground until someone could come get him. Please remember that we were working under the premise that the LOH had received fire from a place 3 or 4 miles away and had managed to fly away from the danger only to crash in this open area that we believed to be safe. Naturally, that assumption got us into lots of trouble later on but at that time we knew nothing of the action that had gone on in this area before we arrived. Lou argued that we should go straight in at that point but I suggested that we make one more low, slow pass to see if we drew any fire. We flew about 50 feet off the trees, rather slow, and right along the edge of the clearing - nothing - or at least nothing that we could tell. I made a turn and started back to land. The NVA maintained great fire discipline and really suckered me in. Suddenly we got hit from everywhere!! I remember the cyclic being shot in two but I still had the grip in my hand. Lou yelled he had been hit in the hand. I was hit in my left leg and foot. We went in inverted and impacted not far from where Grega was. After things stopped flying around, I was able to get out without that much difficulty and went around to help Lou out. He didn't have the use of his hand and it was really hurting him. Anyway, we got out and managed to link up with Grega. I remember he was badly burned but could speak to us even though he was dazed and incoherent at times. Funny, I felt no pain at the time - the adrenalin must have kept me going because my wounds were really rather serious. We kept telling Grega that help was on the way but he knew he was in bad shape. The only thing I took from the Cobra was a shot gun without any shells - really smart! We could see the NVA all around us in the trees and knew it was only a matter of time before they'd come after us. After awhile we came up with a plan for me to move to the southern end of the LZ. In such a way as to convince the NVA that all three of us had moved there and thus Lou and George, who were the most seriously injured, could hide and wait for the rescue ship. That is how we separated. I was successful in moving in a rather obvious way through the tall grass to the southern end of the LZ. Not long after I got there a Huey tried to land to get me.

We interrupt Kirk, Shep, and Mike at this point to insert some comments from VHPA Member Joe Feeney who was in the Huey that tried to get Mike out that afternoon. During my first tour in Vietnam I was a crew chief; then I went to flight school and to Maintenance Officer school before my second tour when I was with HHT. I had only been in country a little over a month. Bob Rogers and I used to fly together often. He was a pilot in the Aviation Section and flew a lot, especially with D Trp and the various detachments from HHT scattered all around Quang Duc and Darlac Provinces. On Sunday the 2nd, we had a pay master on board and had flown about six hours since we left Enari that morning. The general offensive had been on for a few days already and as we flew around we saw lots of convoy ambushes and bases taking fire. We were refueling at Duc Lap, which was under mortar and 57mm RR fire most of that day, when B Trp's Blues jumped into their ships and left in a hurry. We followed and asked if we could help. The B Trp C&C asked if we could go to Ban Me Thuot East and get a jungle penetrator because he thought he might need one in a hurry that day. When we returned from East we followed this B Trp Cobra to the site of the battle. B Trp had inserted their Blues and didn't have anyone on station except this Cobra as everyone else was refueling. I think the Cobra had expended already but was just trying to stay over their people on the ground. We both made a low, slow pass over this huge LZ; unfortunately well marked with the three downed aircraft. I remember thinking at the time - we are going too slow, I just know we'll never make it to the other end of this LZ and we didn't even have chicken plates! It was then that I saw one of the Americans standing up under some trees. As Bob circled around, he told the Snake that we were going in to pick him up and started an approach for an area near where I had seen the guy. Almost immediately we started taking lots of fire. As best I can recall, I don't think we got very close to the touch down point when I got hit in the left leg - my side of the Huey took several hits. I do remember my left leg fly up and hit me in the chest from the force of a bullet. As determined as Bob was, we were taking a hell of a beating; so he aborted the approach and we climbed back to altitude where the Snake was. We talked the situation over inside the aircraft for a few minutes and with the Snake. While I didn't have a life threatening wound, I was pretty well unable to function as a pilot. About that time several B Trp aircraft returned and I can remember listening to the C&C on Guard. After further discussions, he released us and we went back to Duc Lap where there was an SF aid station. When we got to Duc Lap, Bob made certain I was in the good hands of the medics; then he put the crew chief in my seat and took off. The SF medics were very good. They treated my wounds as best they could and I got something to eat and drink. Helicopters were coming and going all the time. They called for a Dust-Off and one came but wouldn't land because the camp was really under pretty steady fire. B Trp came back again that night to refuel between 8 and 9. We talked to them and asked if they would come back when they were done to take me to Ban Me Thuot. They said "Sure" but they never came back that night. I guess they got real busy and I really wasn't in any grave danger. Anyway, the next morning I did get a ride to East and was taken to their aid station which consisted of some below ground conex containers. They told me the crew chief was there as well because he had "flipped out". Anyway, when he saw me he got very excited and ran over to me and hugged me. He said when they had taken me away at Duc Lap; he just knew I was going to die but now he was very happy to see me again. The medics were glad to see him respond favorably and asked if I would stay with him a little while longer. Anyway, by the end of the day I was in a big hospital in Nha Trang; then on to Japan and finally the States. But you know I never got any of my stuff back from Vietnam!

Mike Peterson continues with his story about the Huey flown by Rogers and Feeney. Just like they had done when I was trying to land, the NVA held their fire until he had slowed to touch down. Then, all hell broke loose!! My fingers were on the skid and the crew chief was reaching out to get me; but the ship was taking a terrible pounding. I remember dropping to the ground and believing that the Huey would surely be crashing in on top of me any second. I was both surprised and glad to see them get away. It wasn't until after I was released and Philly Fogg visited me in the Pleiku hospital that I learned one of the pilots and one of the guys in the back were wounded seriously in that ship. Anyway, I laid low after that until it got dark and then moved into a thick clump of bamboo in the trees for the night. Everything was quiet that evening from my vantage point, save for a few shots from individual weapons. I heard a Huey return and land later that evening but I couldn't see it from where I was.

Kirk Curran continues. Jim, Shep, and I watched what I later learned was Peterson's and Chirchigno's Snake coming in at an angle and get lower and lower until it was about to be masked from view by the grass. The NVA 51 cal's opened up again and you could see the ship shudder with each hit. It sort of stopped in the air, then went straight down and crashed. Soon we heard lots of small arms fire and believed the NVA had killed the crew. I later learned that Lou and Mike were not killed and did link up with George. I learned that they moved in a southern direction as well and must have passed us but we didn't know it at the time. (Editor's note: This is not exactly correct; only Peterson moved to the south, Lou and George remained near the aircraft.) Naturally the guys in the air were doing everything they could to help us. It was a thing of

beauty to watch the Blues get inserted. In fact it looked like the Lift was just making a low pass; they were in and out that quickly. Unfortunately we were not that close to them and in the tall grass we would probably have shot each other in the link up.

(Editor's note: Early in my research efforts I had a conference call with VHPA Members Billy Bowling (the B Trp Cmdr) and Leighton Haselgrave (the Sqdn S-3). My notes from that call are terrible. But Billy explained that B Trp's Blues and D Trp (-) were inserted in an LZ a couple hundred meters further to the south of the large L shaped LZ. They destroyed and/or maneuvered around several NVA AW positions as they moved toward the large LZ. At least part of this force did indeed get onto the large LZ but that was a still some distance further to the south of Jim, Shep, Kirk or Mike. Because no one knew exactly where the downed crews were (survival radios would have made all the difference in the world!) and because the NVA were moving all along their flanks and this was obviously "their ground", the Blues could not stay there long. The Blues said that if they were going to stay on the ground overnight, they would need to be reinforced with a "large force" (specifically one that had its own mortars) and that they would need lots of artillery support. It was getting late in the day and Billy said he couldn't deliver on either of these "support requirements". This isn't surprising - Sqdn OR-LLs show that the nearest U.S. Inf and Arty were some 4th Inf elements near Cheo Reo, the ARVN had their hands full with the fire base battles, the site may have been outside ARVN Arty range (but no one trusted ARVN Arty!), this area was very near Cambodia and a "long way from anywhere". So they pulled the Blues out before the NVA could set a trap for them.)

Kirk continues. Also I learned that a Huey crew had seen Peterson from the air and had tried to land to get him. I was told that as he ran toward the ship, they watched in horror as the NVA shot him several times and assumed he was dead. Whoever told me this said that Mike was still wearing his chicken plate which saved him was any serious injuries. He was just knocked down and bruised. (Editor's note: Please refer to Mike's own account. I asked him specifically about this matter. He said he was not wearing a chicken plate. His normal custom was to sit on it while flying. He was sitting on it that day, so it stayed in the aircraft.) Anyway, it was really something to watch the F100s deliver their airstrikes. Several times they would pass directly overhead. We were on our backs watching. You could see the wings on the rear of the bombs open up as they left the aircraft, follow the line of flight to the other end of the LZ and the explosion. The NVA were taking a pounding from this stuff as best as we could determine. It began to get dark and we started moving again, crawling through the grass. It really got dark and I remember not being able to see anything in front of me, so I just kept touching Shep's foot as we went. We stopped ever now and then. During one stop, I made a dumb mistake and put my 45 down so I could roll over and look behind us. I had look back several times before and knew we were leaving a "highway wide road" through the grass as we crawled. My mind kept telling me that the NVA would find it and come following after us. I looked back and could see the stars and the wide open path. I turned back and it took me a couple of seconds to find my 45. When I had it and reached for Shepard's foot; THEY WERE GONE! I hadn't heard them crawl off or anything but there was a lot of noise still around the LZ. They were dropping flares and still working with the Blues. I crawled down the "highway" they left and came to a point where I thought it split. I went the wrong way and ended up alone. I could still hear the helicopters overhead so I rolled over on my back and waited for a good moment, then turned on my strobe light. A Huey saw it and shot an approach to an area about 50 to 60 yards away from me. I turned off the light and started towards the ship; but it took off, circled and came back to land on a small two lane road in the LZ. The NVA started turning on and off their flashlights to look like strobes as well but I was told that it really wasn't that difficult to determine the real one. When the Huey landed the second time he had all his lights on. I stood up and started running toward the ship. I got within about 25 yards of it when he turned out the lights - I guess to present that much less of a target to the NVA who without a doubt were also moving toward the helicopter. I was fine while the lights were on as I was running right for the lights. When they went out, I couldn't see a thing! Luckily I kept running blindly for the ship. The crew chief was flying as pilot and, Thank God, had stepped out of the ship. As I went running past, he grabbed me and threw me into the cargo compartment. I was both surprised and pleased to be in the back of a Huey but he had thrown me so hard I almost went out the other side!! I heard him yell GO!! GO!! There was lots of fire all around us as we lifted off and I remember thinking we would be shot down for sure. The ship had been hit several times and was a real mess. We went to some firebase and landed. For some reason this Huey had a VHF radio and all the other radios had been shot out earlier. In fact, I guess the other ships were all calling him on FM and UHF telling him not to go in; but he couldn't hear them. Anyway, we got an FM radio there and were able to talk to the other helicopters. They learned that Jim and Shep weren't far from where they had picked me up and that I believed the Cobra crew had been killed. The poor crewchief "pilot" got sick at the point and went into convulsions; so the medics took him away. A little while later, I was picked up and taken to our camp at Ban Me Thuot East where I could "relax" and have a beer. Needless to say but I had many things to think about that night. The next day, MAJ Bowling put me in the back of his C&C - they didn't want me flying for awhile. We went back into the same area. Again everyone has perfect hindsight, but during one of the gun runs a Pete suddenly went off sort of near where the HE was hitting. I remember we all asked on the radios where that Pete had come from and finally wrote it off with the thought that when someone was stoking rockets into a Cobra they inadvertently added a WP head. As it turned out, the rockets were hitting very near to where Jim and Shep and they were trying to tell us they were there by throwing the Pete. They also hoped the NVA wouldn't know where they were because the Pete was just another explosion. Anyway, they would E&E for a few more days before the NVA picked them up. I guess Shepard's wounds were really super terrible at that point. Later I talked to Jim who maintained that he was sad he wasn't able to be a Scout again after walking the trail with the NVA. He said he had learned where and how they camped, how they camouflaged themselves, how far they moved between stops, etc. He said he would have been "Mr. Death himself" with that knowledge! I'd like to close by saying what I've said a hundred times before and will probably say another hundred times - I'd just like to thank everyone in B Trp, in D Trp, in HHT, the F100 guys, the Artillery guys, the ARVN Rangers that went in after us and really got chopped up bad, everyone that tried to help us - THANKS. Most of all I'd like to thank Bob Rogers for pulling me out that night.

Kirk's short career as a Scalaphunter was over. He would finish his tour flying Guns and as the Ops Officer. But the story is far from over, in fact it would take several weeks and, sadder yet, several years to complete. The night of 2 Nov was a "long night" for many people. VHPA Member George Murry was the Sqdn Cmdr at the time and relates:

We got the call in the late afternoon that B Trp had lost some aircraft and definitely needed some help. You've got to remember at that time I was a Sqdn Cmdr without a Sqdn because all the line Trps were opocened out to other units. I only had HHT and it was already committed manning refuel and rearm points and such south of Ban Me Thuot. Anyway, we pulled together a couple slicks, alerted A and C Trp of the problem, made certain the 17th CAG and the 4th Inf knew of the situation, and left for Ban Me Thuot. We were able to make it out to the site that evening. When all the aircraft finally returned from the AO, we sorted things out. Most of their aircraft had been shot up. I think they had at least six less operational aircraft than they had at the start of the day. They were short three air crews. Everyone was dead tired but wanted to do anything - just anything to get those guys on the ground back. Naturally, the Scout and Gun boys wanted to go back in the next day and "show 'em really Cav stuff". Well, the last thing either Billy or I wanted was to loose even more people to a situation that clearly seemed to be in the NVA's favor. We talked to the Blues that had been on the ground and to Kirk. We talked to Bob Rogers - that kid was a real hero. By God, that ship was a mess!!! I don't think we ever repaired it, it was that bad. Then we went over to the 23rd ARVN to see what they could do. They were totally committed but arranged for us to use part of an ARVN Ranger Bn, that was in reality the II Corps Reserve at the time, so long as we could use our Lift to put them in. The next day we inserted about 150 men from this Bn on a road north of the LZ where our aircraft were. The ARVN also ordered a Mech unit to move up and try to help out but that didn't work out too well. Anyway, these Rangers fought very hard but the NVA really had them out-numbered, out-gunned, out-everythinged. For a couple of days we supported them with everything we had and they took a terrible pounding, 40 to 50% casualties as I recall. Several times I went back to the 23rd CP and said we had to pull those guys out, but they wouldn't do it. The 23rd people seemed to have the attitude that that was what the Rangers had coming to them, so they left them in and really didn't reinforce them or support them to the degree I thought they should. Strange conduct - I didn't and don't understand it. Of all the things I remember about that tour, the memory of that Ranger Bn is one of the most vivid in my mind. If I would have even dreamed that they would have suffered like that, I would never have put them in that day!!

We return to Mike Peterson's account. The next morning everything was still quiet but I knew the NVA were still in the area, in force. There was a road to the east of the LZ. I was on the west side on sort of a hill. For the next four days or so I E&Ed successfully. I ate bugs, drank water from leaves and pools in the road. Once I happened upon two NVA near a bunker. One was sitting at a table outside the bunker, writing a letter, I guess. We struggled. I grabbed a knife from the table and killed him. About this time, this other guy comes out of the bunker, sees me and quickly goes back inside! I just knew he was going to get a gun, so I went in after him. We fought in there and I killed him. Needless to say, but those are rather strong impressions in my mind! I was getting weaker mentally and physically with each passing day. I couldn't travel much at all. That last night I completely lost it. I recall going down to the road to drink from the pools of water there that I found so refreshing. Anyway, I started screaming at the NVA to come and get me - real Rambo like. Well, the next morning the place was covered with patrols and they found me along side the road. Like I said, I couldn't walk very well, so they slung me on a pole and we hiked about two or three days. We've weren't that far from Cambodia. Even then I wasn't "with it" much of the time and it got worse before it got better. I remember being taken to a camp and just before they took my Seiko watch, I looked at the date - the 9th. Shep, Lou and Jim were there already. I believe it was while we were at this camp but it may have been at a POW Reunion some years later that I learned that CW2 George W. Grega died that first night in Lou's arms from the burns he'd received that day. Anyway, the NVA kept us in a pit but we weren't treated badly. I mean they didn't beat us or anything. I'd guess we were there about another week or ten days. Anyway, Shep and I were hardly what anyone could call "escape threats". My leg was getting gangrenous and wounds on his butt was just terrible. I recall that Lou returned from an interrogation session with the news that in a day or so he and Norwicki would be moving up the trail to the North and that as

soon as Shep and my wounds were better, we would follow. Sure enough in a day or so, Lou and Jim left us. I never saw them again until after they were released in 1973. It was about this time that two captured ARVN Rangers arrived at our camp. Let me tell you they were some of the meanest, toughest, nastiest guys I have ever seen or even heard about in my entire life! They would constantly yell and spit at the NVA and resist and make life difficult in every way. We called them "Hard Core" - they were impressive. Well very soon after Jim and Lou left, these two ARVN made an escape attempt. We heard some commotion and looked up to see that one of these ARVN Rangers had grab an NVA guard and choking him. The net of it was that at least one of these guys did get away and, I think, the other was killed. Anyway, within three hours of the escape the NVA had us on the move. Later during a debriefing in the Long Binh hospital I learned that there was actually a "special ops" section where these ARVN Rangers were trained and given the job of being captured and then escaping so the good guys could learn something about the POW camps. Apparently the NVA knew a little about this because they had us out of the camp in nothing flat. I also believe someone told me that as a result of the ARVN Ranger's escape, a rescue force did visit that camp within a short period of time - of course we weren't there. What I'm about to tell you now is pure conjecture on my part - you make up your own mind. I believe the NVA knew we were "goners". I certainly believe I would have died within a short period of time and Shep's long term prognosis was not good. The NVA medical attention and capabilities were primitive at best - at least what they were able to give us. So long as Shep and I were alive, we were valuable to them. I believe they negotiated a prisoner exchange. A day or two before our release they fed us really well, including some sweet pudding I later learned had been made from can milk. They told us it was important that we tell "the world" that our treatment had been good or that Lou and Jim "would pay for our crimes". This is the reason why some of our public statements after our release were "anti-war"; we didn't want Lou and Jim to suffer. Anyway, they took us to a road and told us to stay right there. About two minutes later an American truck drives us and picked us up. I can remember that there was an American in the back of it because he gave me a cigarette - I really appreciated that! They drove us to a FB and we were evacuated to Pleiku. We weren't there long but during that time several guys from B Trp visited us. I remember before this time LT Eldridge, "Fang" we called him, used to give everyone a hard time because he was "short". Well, I got back at him because I knew I would be home in a few days and he'd still be there.

Now, finally, we let Vernon Shepard finish his story. I remember these events pretty much as both Kirk and Mike have described but let me add some details. After Jim and I inadvertently moved away from Kirk we hid in some trees. We were so close to the Huey that came in and got Kirk out that I could see the red dash lights. I knew I could move fast enough to get to the ship before it left and I really "felt safe" in the trees versus out in the open in the clearing. Besides that ship was drawing lots of fire and I didn't want any part of that! After the Huey left, we moved a little deeper into the trees and hid a little better. We heard some rustling in the brush not far away and later discussed this with Mike who heard the same thing that evening. We theorized that we were very close to each other that night, maybe 10 to 15 feet apart, but no one dared call out to investigate the source of the rustling sounds!! The second day we hid out and hoped that the bad guys would go away and the Blues would return. We had an M-16, one clip of ammo, a bayonet, and one pack of Camels but no matches. We ended up chewing the cigarettes and that was pretty good at the time. I still had my nomex gloves. In the morning and evening I'd wipe them across the leaves and grass until they filled with moisture, then I'd suck the water from them. During this time the wound in my mouth was especially troublesome. We had a single WP. Jim didn't want to throw it for fear of compromising our location, so he had me stay hidden and crawled out into the open area. There he waited for an appropriate moment to try to signal the aircraft. I remember we were especially hopeful to attract the attention of a Bird Dog FAC that was putting in the airstrikes. Finally Jim popped the Pete, but the aircraft didn't seem to notice. They moved away and didn't return. We hid again that night. On the third day we watch the NVA going through the LOHS and saw them marching past our location with their weapons slung over their shoulders. We heard the firing associated with the battle the ARVN Rangers were having and knew that it was a long way from us - too far to be of help to us. We concluded that we would have to do something on our own and that we would start the night. At that time the best I could do was sort of a low crawl. I'd stick the bayonet in the ground and use it as a handle to pull myself along with some assistance from my left leg even though it had been damaged at the very start. We crawled a long time - until we were completely exhausted. We found a hollowed out, dead log and slept in it like sort of a hammock. When the sun came up on the fourth day, Jim had made me a crutch out of bamboo so now we could walk. We didn't exactly know where to go but we heard and saw fixed wing aircraft landing and headed toward that. We walked all day and I was really surprised that I didn't have that much pain. I was uncomfortable and noticed what I thought was a drip from the wound in my buttock - that turned out to be maggots falling out! In the afternoon we came to a clearing that went up a hill. We thought if we could get on that hill, we could see where the aircraft were landing and how to get there. Jim told me to stay in the trees and moved out. He got about half way up the hill and since I didn't see any danger, I started walking after him. I didn't get very far when I heard the AKs open up and saw Jim drop immediately. I literally "tried to hide behind a blade of grass". The next thing I felt was the muzzles of four AKs in my back and people yelling at me. I stood up and they took me over to the edge of the clearing to this 6'2", English speaking non-oriental man. I still think he was a Russian advisor. He definitely spoke with an accent. My impression was that he was treated "like a king" - he had 15 to 20 NVA around him that seemed very interested in doing whatever he asked. At first he didn't speak to me but his look was something like "we've got you now". Finally he asked if he could do anything for me. I said I was hungry, so they gave me a rice ball. He asked if they could look at my wounds. I showed them and they wrapped them for me. Then they started asking about "the other guy" and I fled "what other guy? - I'm alone" because I hadn't seen Jim and didn't know how he'd made out. Eventually they brought Jim over - he was OK and hadn't been hit.

They started marching us toward the camp that same day. They put a bamboo pole between our elbows, tied our hands in the front and put a hood over our heads so that we could only see the ground in front of us. The next day, I believe, we passed another group going the opposite direction on the same trail who were carrying a hammock containing an American. They happened to pass by close enough so I could see in even with the hood on. I didn't know Mike Peterson at that time because he was in the Guns and we didn't socialize all that much with Gun pilots; mostly with the Scout pilots. So I asked Jim what that was and he told me it was Mike. Jim and I were the first to arrive at the camp. It was about 75x75', surrounded by a bamboo fence and had three cages near the middle. Each cage was built over a pit about three feet deep. The structure was about 8x12 along the lean-to design. The roof was made of bamboo poles covered with big leaves. Inside there was a stock like arrangement and we were locked in it each night. The NVA didn't treat our wounds for the first four days we were there. I'd guess to total NVA staff was in the six to eight people range. Lou showed up next and then Mike - they may have arrived on the same day. I'd guess the four of us were together at least one but not two weeks. After eight ARVN showed up next and they put four in each pit. The "Hard Cores" came a day or two after Lou and Jim left. I want to say something here and now - Jim was a big, big help to me all during this period. Many times he could have done better by himself but he stayed with me and took care of me. I can't say enough good things about him. They fed us only rice and gave us an American aluminum canteen full of hot water each night. We used this as a hot water bottle to keep warm. We'd rub it over our arms and chest then use it as a pillow. The next day we'd drink the water. We didn't have a blanket or mosquito net but I don't remember mosquitoes being a problem. Our interrogator was an oriental that had been educated in the States. Since I was an NCO, I didn't know much about the military situation so they didn't ask many questions about it. Most of the questions were about home, the family, what clothes they wore, etc. They asked me what my 1st SGT did - I didn't know so I answered that all I saw him do was show movies! They asked what was the best place to shoot at on a helicopter - again I told them I wasn't an expert on this but suggested the rotor blades. I warned them that they were hard to hit because they were moving so fast! They came and took pictures of us a couple times. They dug a hole sort of in the center of the three cages. It was 4x4 and about 8 feet deep with a covered lid almost like you'd put over an animal trap. They used a notched log to get in and out of the hole. This hole was where they kept the Hard Cores. About this time I was able to walk around a little so during the day they'd let me rake leaves and do odd chores. Mike was getting worse and didn't get out much except to relieve himself. This is how I was able to get close to the Hard Core's pit. They seemed like Koreans to me but I don't know for sure. They motioned to me that they wanted me to help choke a guard. Mike and I talked this over, then I let them know I wasn't too interested in trying that. The Hard Cores caused so much trouble that the NVA didn't let them out of the pit - they even had to relieve themselves in the cups their food came in. Those guys were tough!! There was this guard we called "Baby Face" because he was so young. I was out raking leaves or something when the two Hard Cores started making some noise in their pit. Well Baby Face put his AK up against a tree and leaned over to look in the pit. Eventually when he got closer, they grabbed him and pulled him into the pit. The next thing I knew, one of the Hard Cores had jumped out of the pit, grabbed the AK and was pointing it back into the hole. The other Hard Core got out quickly and they motioned for us to join them in their escape. I motioned for them to go without us because I knew Mike couldn't make the trip and I didn't want to leave him. I don't recall that one of the Hard Cores was killed or that they killed anyone but maybe Mike was privy to a conversation in Long Binh that I didn't take part in. It my impression that one of the debriefers in Long Binh asked if he could bring some guys in to look at us. We said OK and soon these same two Hard Cores came in to identify that we were the same guys they'd seen in the camp. Interesting, huh? I'd guess we didn't stay in Vietnam more than a day after our release and were debriefed a lot. I didn't care so long as they kept bring me food - I was really hungry. We went to Japan for a day then to different hospitals in the States. I stayed in the hospital about 30 days and ended up finishing my enlistment at that installation. Other than the POW dinner we had at the White House and one crewchief that was in B Trp, I haven't had any contact with anyone that was in the 7/17th CAV.

VHPA Member Billy Bowling provides a few more details. When these ARVN Rangers escaped, they turned themselves in an ARVN compound and the senior American advisor called us with the news that they might have some information about our people. I flew over there and was told by this full Colonel that I'd have to wait outside. I sailed past him into the room where they were debriefing these guys. Through them we obtained the first "real information" about SGT Shepard and WO Peterson but nothing on the others. They happened to make a casual statement about the "one American body near the road". This, of course, was news to me. We were able to obtain some more specific information from them and within the next couple days worked with an ARVN Cavalry unit to sweep the area. The NVA were long gone by that time but this was how we found and retrieved George Grega's body.

On the 20th, while doing a VR in the An Lao Valley, WO1 Fred A. Exner III of C Trp was killed when his LOH crashed after experiencing a tail rotor failure. VHPA Member Harry Mitchell describes these events:

I was the Scout team leader that day. Fred, an experienced LOH pilot, was flying my wing. He had the additional duty of being the troop Supply Officer. A LT Gary (?) Nelson had been a Cobra pilot for some time and was in the process of seeing if he wanted to be a Scout. He flew as Fred's Observer and it was his first day in a LOH. That day the AO was the northern part of the An Lao over from LZ English. We were working from the higher ground down toward the valley floor. Fred called that he had just experienced a tail rotor failure. I quickly turned and saw him going into the trees. He must have had rather low forward speed at the time because he should have been able to fly out of the area even without a tail rotor. Just after the LOH hit the trees, the blades folded up and quit turning. The right front side of the ship hit the ground. I was right over the crash site in seconds and even though this area was triple canopy jungle, I could clearly see the wreck. There was no movement around the wreck and initially there was no fire. We called for the Blues even though the nearest LZ was some distance away. After about ten minutes the wreck started to burn and soon the ammo started cooking off. We had to back off because of the exploding ammo. About this time we saw a pen flare come up through the trees. We dismissed it as part of the burning ammo. A couple minutes later when we saw another pen flare, we knew someone was alive down there. We called for a med evac with a jungle penetrator. It arrived and even though the ammo was still exploding, they pulled right up to the crash site and put the penetrator down. LT Nelson was so badly wounded that he was unable to get himself into the contraption; so the medic went down. He was able to complete the evacuation. No one else was hurt during that extraction. Later the Blues did get in and retrieved Fred's body. Years later I saw LT Nelson again in Germany flying Cobras; so I am glad to say that he recovered from his wounds.

December - During this month, A Trp would work several different AOs in northwestern II Corps and for the 3rd Bde west of Enarl. B Trp would finish up its work for the 1st Bde's Operation SPREAGINS WHITE in the Ban Me Thuot, Bu Prang area. C Trp worked the An Lao Valley and Crows Foot area, weather permitting, or else they worked the low lands against the VC. D Trp completed the Enarl to Cheo Reo convoy security assignments, then conducted search and destroy missions and served as a ready reaction force for A Trp. On the 10th, WO Peterson and SGT Shepard of B Trp were freed by the NVA relatively near a 45th ARVN Regt site near Duc Lap. They were captured by the NVA during the battle on 2 Nov described earlier. The Pacific Stars and Stripes dated Saturday, Dec 13, 1969 carried pictures of them on the front page. The paper says that Peterson's third and fourth toes on his left foot were missing and he suffered fragmentation wounds in the left knee. Shepard was described as having multiple fragmentation wounds of the right foot and of the buttock. They were the 28th and 29th U.S. prisoners to be released by the Communists.

Year End Summary - During most of this year, the line troops were opconed outside the Sqdn. The Sqdn remained based at Enarl and continued to make improvements to the facilities there especially in the aircraft maintenance area. A Trp spent about half its time working the Dak To / Kontum area and provided considerable support for the 24th STZ. The other half of its time would be given to the 4th Inf especially in the An Khe area. B Trp supported TF South for the first half of the year, worked out of Camp Enarl for a few months before moving to Ban Me Thuot for basically the rest of the year to support the 23rd ARVN interests in that area now that the 4th Inf no longer operated there. C Trp worked out of Camp Enarl for the first four months, then moved to An Son to support the 173rd and the 4th Inf for the rest of the year. Basically the Sqdn controlled HHT and D Trp for most of the year. The situation of having the ACTs opconed out was seriously reviewed after the 2 Nov battle and changes were made to return to the traditional ACS configuration.

1970

The primary source materials for this year are: For A Trp, a 29 page AUHS prepared by WO1 Charles E. Smith, III. For B, C, and D Trps; nothing. For the Squadron: a 48 page OR-LL for the period 1 NOV through 31 JAN, a 43 page OR-LL for the period 1 FEB through 30 APR, a 32 page OR-LL for 1 MAY through 31 JUL, and a 32 page OR-LL for 1 AUG through 31 OCT. The last two OR-LLs contained some accident summaries which are included in this narrative. An 8 page transcript of the debriefing of LTC De France in Sep, 1970 for historical purpose.

January - During this month, A and B Trps supported the 2nd Bde in Operation PUTNAM POWER northeast of An Khe. C Trp worked the An Lao Valley and Crows Foot area, weather permitting, else worked the low lands against the VC. D Trp also supported the 4th Div with road security assignments between Camp Radcliff at An Khe and Firebase Emeia as well as working the Camp Enarl TAOR. On the 5th, A Trp's Scouts found and engaged a large enemy element; killing five and capturing four AKs. On the 7th, A Trp inserted their Blues into a fortified living area. They captured some clothes, medical supplies, AK ammo, and food plus 11 suspects; then the Guns destroyed the structures. On the 8th, an A Trp LOH was shot down, crashed and totally burned. The pilot and observer escaped and were medevaced. The Guns worked the area, then the Trp screened for a rifle company already in the area. They found a large bunker complex and made contact with an estimated NVA company. The C&C's crew chief was wounded and evaced when the ship suddenly took a volley of enemy fire. The Blues were inserted and found numerous caves and signs of recently enemy living there. One NVA was captured. On the 11th, A Trp's Blues were inserted after the Scouts and Guns made contact with an estimated NVA platoon in their base camp. The Blues killed five NVA and captured two AKs, one pistol, and one 51 cal. They swept thru the area again prior to extraction and found a large quantity of raw cotton, a weaving machine, some food and a 30 cal. On the 12th, A Trp's Blues were inserted in another base camp, complete with hidden buildings and detained 28 people plus an M-1 and some food. On the 20th, A Trp found a large sleeping area occupied by an NVA platoon. The Gun killed four and the Scouts killed three. On the 26th, A Trp found another NVA platoon's camp and killed four. On the 29th, A Trp made an assessment of a large artillery strike and found four more NVA to kill.

VHPA Member Tom Pember remembers: Some Vietnam events stand out in our minds more than others. The account I am about to relate is VIVIDLY ETCHED in my memory. I was a Gun team leader for C Trp at the time and used the name "The Pacermaker" on the radios. We habitually stage out of LZ Two Bits and would refuel and rearm at LZ Uplift. This was late 69 or early 70 when C Trp's main AOs were in and around the An Lao Valley. My wing that day was CWO Charles Alexander - "Sober Charlie" we called him. I liked having him on my wing because you could always depend on him to be at the right place at the right time and you didn't have to spend a lot of time explaining how to handle a situation. We were returning from covering a LRRP that had been in contact well up in the valley. While covering these LRRPs, we had expended everything except for the outboard 'seven shot' pods which contained nails. It was quiet - eerily quiet when a faint sound suddenly came on the radio. It was so faint in fact, that I asked Charlie if he could make it out? Negative. Then, in a little louder whisper, a voice filled with tears and fear pleaded for help. GOD! What a sound. Once you've heard that whisper you know someone has bad guys very close by; but the tears and fear tell you they are in very serious trouble! It was from another LRRP team surrounded on three sides by a VC company and a sheer cliff to the west. The LRRPs couldn't move in any direction and the bad guys were closing in slowly but surely. I explained to them in a whisper that all we had were nails. I'll never know why it is when you receive a whisper, you transmit with a whisper! The LRRP said they were holed up in some rocks at the top of the cliff and couldn't move. I explained that we weren't supposed to use nails close to friendlies. They said: "The bad guys are within 50 meters and closing - so we're dead if you don't and may be dead if you do. We'd rather take our chances with you." I asked Charlie what he thought and he said he'd do whatever I decided. So I told the LRRPs to get behind and under the rocks and report when they were ready. They said: "My men are already under the rocks but taking fire from all sides - smoke is out!" I said we'd make our runs at tree top level from the southwest to northeast, break left and try to pop the nails just over the rocks and into the tree line. I reminded them that the red airborne smoke would indicate the nails had popped. I thought my first pass was too long and asked them about it. They said: "Couldn't tell. Heard some nails tinke across the rocks. The VC quit shooting at us and started shooting at you though." I said we'd continue as long as we could, firing only one pair each run, so they should stay low, and that this time we'd try the east and south half. We adjusted for the next run and asked how we'd done. "You're doing great but there's a bunch working along the cliffs from the north towards us." So we adjust again and asked how'd that look? "It looks - OH #@\$& (he yelled in pain) good. (silence) (deep deafening silence)" I asked if they were hit and almost dreaded the answer. "No - the damned smoke got ticked by a nail - rolled down the rock against my leg and burned the hell out of me!" Boy, I was relieved to hear that. Then I asked if they were ready to move because we had just enough ammo left to cover their break and we couldn't raise anymore Guns. We suggested they try to move SSW along the top of the cliff. They called when they were ready to move. Charlie made a hot pass and I made a dummy. Then we made some more hot and dummy passes but saved one last pair each 'just in case'. Finally we asked how they were doing. "We're doing fine. We'll continue down the hill to the south." We continued to play dummy and asked for them to report when they were clear. A few minutes later they said: "We're clear now. THANKS. We would have been dead if you hadn't stopped to help us." We were both 10 minutes into the 20 minute light, so we fired the last pair and when home. You know, we never heard from that LRRP team again. Perhaps they made it home. I hope so. I do know they made it through one more day due to a C Trp Cobra team and I was proud to have been there.

February - During this month A Trp supported with 4th Div in the general vicinity north of An Khe along the Suoi Kon river and northwest in the Song Ba valley. On the 1st, a prisoner escaped from a nearby NVA POW camp and gave himself up to A Trp's Blues that had been inserted to recon an area shot up by the Guns. The intelligence this prisoner provided led to the location of two NVA POW camps, an NCO training school, and a medical training school. For the first ten days, B Trp worked to the north of An Khe in the Dak Som and Song Con river areas. Extremely thick vegetation and rough terrain hampered observation efforts but the troop was able to find several enemy complexes and infiltration routes. Several contacts were made with squad sized elements. During this entire month, C Trp supported the 173rd Abn in the general An Lao valley area. Their primary mission was to interdict enemy movement from the mountain base areas to the populated coastal plains. D Trp continued conducting search and clear operations around the Camp Enarl.

October - On the 1st, D/2/1 Cav was redesignated K Trp, 17th Air Cav and for the first half of the month continued to work out of Phan Thiet. During this entire month, C Trp again supported the 173rd Abn around LZ English. From the 3rd through the 9th, B Trp worked the Kontum Tan Can area but weather restricted their operations. On the 4th, C Trp had a LOH shot down by 51 cal while observing a large bunker complex. During the crew extraction, the Guns observed seven NVA fleeing the area and killed them. On the 10th, B Trp worked out of Phu Hiep again for the day. Enemy activity in the area was heavy as evidenced by the heavily traveled trails and farming in the remote areas. 22 enemy structures were destroyed by B Trp elements and the ARVN ARP was inserted to secure a downed LOH. This platoon worked very well and the only difficulty encountered was that they had some difficulty re-entering the Lift ships during the extraction. This problem was alleviated by adding straps to the Hueys as hand holds to expedite re-entry. On the 10th, A Trp worked west of Tuy Hoa and found a large bunker complex. The Guns and Scouts worked the area all day, destroyed the complex and killed one NVA. On the 11th, K Trp's LOHs received fire and their Guns expended resulting in three KBA. On the 13th, while supporting the 1/50 Mech, K Trp received fire during an LZ prep. From the 15th through the 25th, B Trp killed ten NVA while supporting the 47th ARVN Inf south and southwest of FSB Oasis in search of elements of the 958 NVA Reg. On the 15th, a B Trp Cobra was shot down and they used A Trp's Blues initially to secure the aircraft. D Trp sent four gun jeeps to relieve the ARPs and they guarded the aircraft until it was lifted out the next morning. On the 15th, an A Trp LOH received heavy AW fire. Air strikes were employed resulting in a secondary explosion rising 2000 feet above the ground. The Blues were inserted but could find only scattered documents in the area. Later in the month, A Trp inserted its Blues to recover the bodies from a 4th Div aircraft that had been shot down on the 20th. From the 17th until the end of the month, K Trp worked north of Dalat. On the 22nd, A Trp's Scouts observed an enemy squad. The Blues were inserted, made contact and exchanged fire. Due to bad weather, the Blues were extract after they had swept the area and destroyed some equipment and rice. On the 30th K Trp stood down for redeployment.

November - On the 2nd, A Trp's C&C received fire while they were working on AO southeast of Pleiku. After the Guns and Scouts worked the area, the Blues were inserted but no further enemy contact was made. On the 3rd, A Trp's Scouts found a bunkered storage complex west of Camp Enari. The Scouts took fire and the Guns fired up the area. One NVA was killed then an airstrike was used. There were secondary explosions and during the BDA, ten more bodies were counted. On the 5th, A Trp's C&C received fire from a large enemy compound. Their Guns destroyed 14 hootches in one compound and 12 more in another plus some clothes and rice. Soon after this, A Trp moved to Phan Rang to begin operations in the Dalat, Song Mao, Phan Rang area. December - On the 4th, A Trp found numerous bunkers and secure fighting positions near Song Mao. The Guns fired up the area and killed two. On the 8th, A Trp worked an area just south of Song Mao when a Scout ship crashed into 150 foot trees. WO1 John Bryant was pinned under the aircraft and died. The copilot, though injured, was seen out walking around. One man was inserted to help the downed crew. They estimated the LOH was doing about 90 knots when it crashed. A small ARVN force was inserted to check the area. They reported the LOH had been hit by small arms fire and was a total loss. The body, radios, weapons, etc. were extracted during a heavy rain storm. Still near Song Mao on the 11th, A Trp's Scouts received small arms fire and uncovered several fox holes, trails, fighting positions and clothing. The C&C received fire as well and the Guns shot up the area. From all existing evidence a platoon size VC had been used this area but no confirmed enemy bodies were found. On the 19th, during a VR, an A Trp LOH took a direct hit from a B40 rocket. The subsequent explosion killed WO Avon N. Mallette and his observer. All equipment was secured by an ARVN ground unit. The enemy was engaged on the ground and by the Guns. The bodies were extracted by the C&C and by the end of the day the ARVN unit was also extracted under extremely hazardous conditions.

Year End Summary - 1970 could be summed up in one word, Vietnamization. The ACTs were increasingly involved in helping the ARVN learn about Air Cavalry and in supporting ARVN operations. The battles around Dak To, Ben Het, and Dak Seang plus the Cambodian operations were clear examples of Vietnamization.

1971

The primary source materials for this year are: For HHT, a Yearbook titled 71-72 An Son which includes about ten significant pages. For A Trp, a 15 page AUHS prepared by 1LT Dan P. Slona. For B, C, and D Trps, nothing. For the Sqdn, a 16 page Combat Operation After Action Report for the period 20-24 Apr and 3-14 May for the air assault portion of Operation MANG HO.

January - During this month, A Trp supported the 45th Regt 23rd ARVN at Ban Me Thuot. There were no significant sighting or reports in the early part of the year. On the 25th, CPT Alfred Hite was forced to make a precautionary landing 14 miles southwest of Ban Me Thuot while on a VR. Late in the month, the Sqdn HQ was split from its line troops. The troops were assigned to various battalions within the 17th CAG while HQ and HHT moved from Camp Holloway to Qui Nhon city air field. VHPA Member Ernie Smart provides a critical insight to these events:

Those were challenging times for everyone in the 7/17 Cav. Let me sort of paint a picture of what was going through my mind and COL Joe Starker's, the CO of the 17 CAG. First, since the Sqdn had been in Vietnam it had always enjoyed a close working relationship with the 4th Div. They included us in most of their operations, generally used Air Cavalry in an appropriate manner, and provided us with Infantry and Artillery support when we needed it. We certainly provided them with "eyes" plus a very flexible, ready reaction force. They, in turn, "saved our collective asses" several times when we "bit off much more than we could chew". When the 4th Div stood down in early Dec, "our big friend" was gone and with it the old status quo. Second, since the 7/17th and the 4th had been good for each other, it seemed natural to believe that putting the 7/17th and with another large unit would be a very good idea. The Koreans had the last major Allied combat units in II Corps. They still required, and received, considerable air support. We knew it would take considerable "training" and "patience" on both parts for the 7/17th and the ROKs to fit together well, but that is what we set out to do. Third, many senior American commanders in II Corps and the 1st Avn Bde believed the ARVN would have a difficult time holding their own. We wanted to pull down our presence (and therefore vulnerability) in the "outlying areas" such as Pleiku. We were determined to support the Vietnamization effort and we were still under orders to "fight hard - just don't loose people". Fourth, the Sqdn was already "split up" and had really become an ACS for all of II Corps. A Trp was at Phan Rang and seemed destined to stay in southern II Corps. One ACT had to stay at Pleiku and that proved to be B Trp. C Trp was already at An Son, so they were our northeastern II Corps "representatives". Poor D Trp couldn't be used as a ground Cavalry troop any more; an infrequent convoy escort and emergency "bird down" ready reaction force were the best missions they could hope for. They were basically all Holloway had for perimeter security and drew all sorts of crappy little details. Anyway, initially Qui Nhon airfield looked good because it had lots of room there adjacent to the 223rd CAB. There was already a space problem at An Son. So we moved to Qui Nhon city.

The 61st AHC and its sister AHC, the 129th, were attached to the 7/7th during January as part of the move to Qui Nhon. Both AHCs had been based at Lane for some time. VHPA Member Rod Dykhouse describes these times as follows:

I DEROSED in May and recall that the 61st was attached to the 7/17th in January. At first it was primarily for admin purposes. The 61st was basically unchanged in the operational sense except that we started supporting units other than the 173rd Abn. We had primarily supported them during 1970. We started supporting Korean and ARVN units, and doing a lot more work in the Central Highlands around Pleiku, the tri-border area, and even into Cambodia. We still operated primarily with other 61st aircraft but not exclusively. Officially we were 'CAV' but on a unit level, not much changed. I'm sure you know what I mean when I say that a person either loved the hats and sabers or thought they were a bunch of gun ho idiots. Suddenly the 61st, who had never been 'CAV' before, was attached to an ACS and was "part of the 'CAV'". We developed a saying "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em". The 61st sent about 50% of our assets north to support LAM SON 719. The senior ACs with less than 90 days, along with an equal number of peter pilots, stayed at Lane and covered all the missions that the entire company had covered before. We flew our butts off - putting in 15-18 hour days! The 61st's primary AO was from Qui Nhon north to about the I Corps line along the coastal plains and along QL19 to An Khe, the area around Pleiku and the Tri-border area during early 1971. The two Lift platoons were stationed at and flew from Lane with an occasional RON at Pleiku. The Gun platoon was stationed at and flew from LZ English, about 60 NM north. I remember one good story from this time frame. I was flying C&C with a LTC and his RTO in the back. We were dropping phougas (eighteen 55 gal drums at a time) from a Chinook on suspected VC locations. We'd let it soak into the holes, caves, hiding places, etc. for a couple minutes; then fly over it and have the door gunner light it with tracers. We put the fifth drop that day into some elephant grass and right on about 12-15 hiding dinks. Well, they'd already seen our previous drops and knew exactly what was coming next; so they jumped up and started running. I immediately dove on them and told the crewchief to light it RIGHT NOW, which he did. Only two got out of the fire ball and one of them was just covered with blazing phougas. He only made it about 25 feet before collapsing. The other guy was running down this trail so I started hovering down the trail behind him while we took turns with our 38s. The colonel grabs his RTO's 16 and hollers for the RTO to hold on to his belt. He puts one foot out on the skid, the other knee on the floor and starts shooting at the dink. He runs out of ammo, so the RTO gives him another clip and he puts both feet out on the skid. He runs out again, gets another clip and moves further forward. This guy is so excited to actually see a dink out in the open and have an M16 in his hands. Well after a few more clips he is actually standing on the skid cap outside my door shooting!! He turns to me and says, through my window with a big grin on his face, "isn't this great!!" Well, we managed to shoot the dink and get the Colonel back inside the aircraft; then we went back to base for lunch.

February - On the 3rd, A Trp was attached to the 10th CAB located at Dong Ba Thin and shifted its support to the 23rd ARVN's elements in the Song Mao area. The missions assigned to the ACT also changed. While they would still perform regular Air Cav VR type missions, they were assigned more base camp night security and reaction force type missions. The 11th was scheduled as a maintenance down day for A Trp; but at noon Phan Rang Base Ops requested fire support when two rocket launchers and one 122mm

rocket were reported by intelligence sources. Two Cobras were sent and destroyed the rocket site. On the 15th, A Trp was forced to work the flat lands northwest of Song Mao because of high winds. One LOH received fire and the Guns fired in the area with unknown results. On the 27th, A Trp's Guns provided armed escort for an extraction done by the 247th Med. Both the medevacs and the Guns took fire but no damage. The Guns expended under the control of the MACV advisors on the ground.

The Sqdn staff was getting accustomed to their new role and VHPA Member Tom Galyean provides this insight: In late Feb or early Mar I worked primarily in the mission control center of the Sqdn S-3 at Qui Nhon airfield. As a result of the fall out from the Mai Lai fiasco, there was a command policy to fully investigate the circumstances whenever there were civilian injuries alleged to have been caused by American forces. As I recall, a Cobra had accidentally fired a rocket near a little village on the beach somewhere generally north of Qui Nhon and east of Bear Cat. I can no longer recall the exact reason for the accidental misfire. Unfortunately, the rocket landed near where a young boy, about four years old, was playing and he received a shrapnel laceration on one of his calves. I was assigned to help investigate this matter. To help me interview witnesses, I was assigned with the same "Kit Carson" Scout that served with A Trp during the 8 Aug 1970 engagement. By this time A Trp's Blues no longer needed him in their primary mission and we had developed a good friendship. When I interviewed the child's mother about what had happened, she was surprised that I was doing an investigation. Through the interpreter, she told me in substance: that she knew that what had happened was an accident; that the pilot didn't mean to shoot the rocket; and that she hoped that we wouldn't punish or make the pilot angry for what had happened because if we did, she was afraid that the pilot might not come back and help protect them from the VC. I have no reason to believe the "Kit Carson" Scout was saying words I wanted to hear. The look on that woman's face and the circumstances of that discussion, are among those events of my tour in Vietnam that are indelibly etched in my recollection. Even though I had previously supported wholeheartedly both the general mission of our armed forces in Vietnam, and the specific missions of the 7/7th Cav, I knew what we were doing in Vietnam was right.

Lam Song 719 / Dewey Canyon II - We have been able to learn that three different units from the 7/17th supported this operation. The most visible was C Trp and their exploits will be described in some detail. B Trp, from Pleiku, supported numerous ARVN operations several miles into Laos as sort of a "southern flank / NVA distraction effort" for the main thrust along QL 9. Currently details of B Trp's activities are not well known. Finally, HHT sent at least one, and maybe more, small detachments to Dong Ha to provide S-3 and S-4 type support. Again details of these HHT activities are not currently well known. Anyway, early in the month, C Trp moved to Quang Tri and was attached to the 223rd CSAB as part of the build-up for LAM SONG 719 / Dewey Canyon II. For those that know or care, the 223rd was a fixed wing CSAB. As part of the build-up to support this large operation, the 1st Avn Bde didn't want too many of its assets given to the 101st Abn for several reasons. So this is how, C Trp and several other 1st Avn Bde helicopter units were assigned to a starched wing command. At least two weeks prior to the move, C Trp had been given a warning order that they could be moving from Lane. C Trp still had a "rear det" at Lane, and their maintenance and "forward (rear)" would be at Quang Tri, while their "forward (forward)" would be at Khe Sanh when that base was re-established. VHPA Members Don Purser and Dave Ferrell give us a good picture of this period.

Don provides: As mentioned previously, C Trp had known for some time we would be moving our operations and maintenance bases from Lane for a temporary, but none the less extended, period of time. We were even told what to take and how to pack. Finally the orders came down and we moved to Quang Tri using both ground and air convoys. I remember putting our duffel bags in the LOHs plus our weapons but very little ammo. We were assigned a partially constructed children's hospital to live in. There was a helipad for this hospital just off the airfield at Quang Tri. Our flight line and maintenance area was on the airfield, within walking distance from this hospital. The concrete floors, the half walls on the exterior and the wooden roof were finished but not much else. Over the next few days, C Trp would rig up a lighting system with power supplied by a generator outside, move in some cots and a little furniture, and use a water buffalo parked out front for water. It wasn't heaven, but it was better than at Khe Sanh! Once the Khe Sanh base was re-established, C Trp was assigned a small area on the very northern edge of the perimeter. It was right off the active runway - only a few feet separated our aircraft parking area from the main fixed wing runway. When we got there, they had just finished clearing that section of mines and unexploded ordinance. I doubt the runway was unusable because there were many holes in it. There was wreckage and junk everywhere! It was a scary place!! Wendell Moore and I were assigned a sorry two man bunker. We put some wood from rocket boxes down to keep us off the mud, set up our cots and slept there in our sleeping bags. We were part of the perimeter defense - another scary thought! No one was happy with these living conditions so I joined several other Scouts to dig a new six man bunker. We didn't have much more space per person, but we were able to get our cots in there. I especially remember the rats that lived under the pallets on the floor - they were big as house cats!! We sandbagged our bunker walls to keep the mud in place. At night we'd "borrow" some of the asphalt covered aluminum panels from the runway for the floor and the roof. In the next day or so the engineers would replace the ones we'd "borrowed" and we couldn't get it through normal supply channels, so what the heck. We put the aluminum panels on the sandbagged walls, then a tent to keep the rain out and finally lots of sandbags. By morning we hoped no one could find those panels if they came looking for them. The weather was bad much of the time and it was cold there. From my point of view, I'd say most of C Trp's missions were traditional VRs on the Vietnamese side around Lan Vieng, Khe Sanh and back to Dong Ha or along the two main roads used to support these bases. We occasionally saw AA fire and even flak in Vietnam. Naturally we were trying to keep the NVA away and looked for their rocket units. Whenever we'd find something interesting, it received an Arc Light or something appropriate. I have several pictures taken from atop our bunker of a line of B-52 delivered bombs. After the third day of operations in Laos, the 6s weren't used there much anymore. That is a long story by itself - how the higher arrived at that decision and who paid for it. Anyway, that was fine with me. I know our Guns provided considerable support in Laos but I don't have any details of that. Oh, yes, while at Khe Sanh I had just lifted off on an ash & trash mission when I lost the tail rotor. I put the aircraft down just outside the perimeter, in a mine field; but luckily no one was hurt. I really liked being a Scout and loved flying the 6. I was known as "Shaky" because I was always nervous in the morning. I couldn't eat breakfast on the mornings I would fly - it just didn't stay down. Funny, though, when I got to the aircraft and started the preflight, I settled right down and felt fine again. I would fly Scout for 10 months total.

Now we'll hear from Dave Ferrell: I think I was C Trp's first new pilot after they moved up north to support Lam Song 719. I was processed through Dong Ha by the 223rd with about 5 guys and assigned to C Trp with this tall 6'6", skinny EM. We got a ride to Quang Tri and went to C Trp's hospital building described by Don Purser. I didn't have any TA50 gear (sleeping bag, etc.) at the time. They told me to just sleep in someone's cot and if they came back, go to another one. Anyway, about my second night there I heard this loud, single shot just outside the building. It was dark and I certainly didn't go investigate the noise. The next morning at breakfast, I learned that this tall, skinny, new guy had shot himself! Welcome to Vietnam, Dave!! About the 25th of Feb, I got to Khe Sanh and my first day there was hardly uneventful. I'd guess C Trp had already been there about a week or ten days. C Trp's area was relatively near the ATC tower and they had a loud speaker attached to the tower that carried the tower communications. I sort of wandered down there to see what was going on. A Cobra was coming in that had been shot up pretty bad and landed on the runway. A med team came over and took the wounded back seater away. I watched the co-pilot get out of the front seat and into the back seat. The tower wanted the Cobra moved off the runway right away so they could land the fixed wing traffic. C-130s were landing and unloading ARVN at regular intervals. There were trucks waiting to pick them up and drive them to where ever. I remember seeing one 2 1/2 ton with about 10 guys in the back and another 20 waiting to load. It had no canvas top, just the wooden sides and seats. Anyway, as this wounded Cobra moved along side this truck, he must have lost the tail rotor or something, because it crashed. One of the main rotor blades sliced through these ARVN. Khe Sanh was always a dusty place and I can remember running towards this great ball of dust to see if I could help. Lots of others came as well. Funny, at the Atlanta Reunion, Don and I were talking this over and he said he also went to help, but I didn't see him there. The first thing I came on was the lower half of an ARVN soldier, so I passed that up and found several more dead and injured. My thoughts were to try to give 1st Aid to anyone who needed it but I was shocked to see that the live ARVN were busy helping themselves to whatever was in the pockets and belongings of the dead! I decided that maybe the ARVN didn't need any help from me. Welcome to Vietnam, Dave!! Someone helped this LT pilot from the wrecked Cobra. I don't think he was injured in this crash. Some years later I believe I learned that this LT died later in his tour. This same day, I flew my first mission - forgot about an orientation flight or a check-ride, I was Cobra qualified and that was good enough. I was the front seater for Dave Lancaster. He was on his second tour and had been in C Trp for some time. He was a good Gun pilot and human being. I liked flying with him. On that mission, we were still using the little birds in Laos. We flew past LZ 31, which was the western most LZ down the highway into Laos. I remember looking down and seeing a burned out Huey but no one else on the LZ. I asked Dave why there weren't any people on the LZ. He explained they were all under cover because the NVA had it surrounded and were shooting at the ARVN continually. We flew on another mile or so and started working. The 6s found some hootches that contained 55 gal drums. We spent the rest of our time blowing these up and got several nice secondary explosions. We went back to Khe Sanh to refuel and rearm. Just as we were leaving, we got this call that LZ 31 was being overrun with tanks. As I recall we had three Guns, two 6s and the C&C; so we left the 6s there and flew to LZ 31. When we got there, two F4s were putting in an airstrike so we were told to hold off and orbit about half a mile away. We had good seats, so we watched the show! On one pass, this F4 came in low and as he put his stuff down I saw several streams of 51 cal tracers arch up toward him. As he pulled up, the F4 started smoking and soon the two pilots ejected. The jet tumbled through the sky and crashed into a hill. Our C&C, some distance from us, announced that he was going to try to pick up the two Air Force guys. The lead snake said why don't you wait a minute and we'll cover you, but he didn't. I have to give you a little more background information here. The Americans had already lost a lot of helicopters supporting Lam Song, so we had received instructions to try some different tactics. Today's was 50 feet off the trees and keep your speed up! We had to fly up this valley to get to where our C&C was going. The NVA were everywhere. As we went, I could easily see them walking around on the ground and we took A LOT of SA fire that day! Unbeknownst to us, some of this fire had cut the cables leading from our radios; so we couldn't talk to anyone. We still had intercom and it would be a few minutes before we figured out what was wrong. We were the second Snake. As we passed over this small ridge and dropped into another valley, we couldn't determine

where the lead Snake had gone; so we broke left. The number three Snake followed us but broke right. Well, all of a sudden we are alone and no one is talking to us. We were convinced that everyone else had been shot down! After a few minutes, Dave decided it is best to go back home and started back East. We are still low level and, as luck would have it, we came upon our C&C that had, indeed, been shot down. They had made a controlled, forced landing in a good sized area covered by elephant grass. It is easy to recognize your own people at 50 feet, but we couldn't talk to them. Dave decided he is going to land and just as he sets up to do this, another C Trp Gun landed near the C&C; so they wave us off. We head back for Khe Sanh. Later I learn that they replaced Dave Nelson, the front seat in the Snake, with ?, the wounded C&C pilot and the Snake medevaced him. He was the Gun Plat Ldr at the time; just flying C&C at day. I never saw him again, so he must have been wounded seriously. I was also told that the gunner on the C&C had been shot though a leg; the bullet cut a main artery. He bled to death from that wound. Sorry, I don't know any more details about this. We got back to Khe Sanh and learn that our radios were shot out, so no more flying today. That was fine with me! One day like that day was more than enough for an entire life time! Welcome to Vietnam, Dave!!

Dave Ferrell goes on to provide a few more details to help us understand the conditions at the time since we have no official records or history for C Trp during this period. A few days into the battle, I remember we stopped sending the 6s into Laos. I believe the following is true. One of our sister ACTs, B/7/1st, had lost so many ships that it was hardly combat effective anymore. The Trp Cmdr had gone on record that he wouldn't send his 6s there anymore and was relieved. There was a big stink about this because most of the line pilots agreed with this Major. In just a few days, the powers that be agreed with him and we were told not to take our 6s there anymore. Another aspect of Lam Song was that there were aircraft everywhere most of the time. The common thread in most of my memories is in being able to look out and see a hook or a crane putting in something, several slicks and sets of guns working on an insertion or a resupply, jets above, below and along side you, C&C ships in all sorts of orbits, on and on. It was like watching the entire inventory of American war birds playing in one large production! This was both good and bad. Good because if you had an emergency of some sort and could complete a mission, there was usually a backup that could be diverted to help out. Bad because you didn't feel personally involved in the effort, you just had a bit routine for a huge dance team. Another impression that comes to mind is that there were a lot of constants - the NVA were constantly rocketing our bases with 122s or 130 mm guns, there was fog around Khe Sanh constantly in the mornings and most evenings, there was constant movement of aircraft into and out of Khe Sanh, there was constant movement of supplies and vehicles on the roads, there was constant AA fire on the Laotian side, dust was universal constant anywhere near the ground, it was constantly noisy, we were constantly changing tactics to stay alive while performing our missions, we consistently expended every time we launched, etc., etc. Some examples to support these statements are: Concerning changing tactics, I can remember times when my Cobra team started a gun run from 10,000 feet - we were 5 or 6,000 AGL! The rockets would burn out and gravity would pull them down to the target. Concerning constant AA fire, I already talked about SA and 51 cal but twice I can remember receiving flack - naturally we changed altitudes in a hurry. Another time we were supporting the ARVN's defense of a FB and started shooting at the side of the hill just below the FB. We were some distance out when I noticed hundreds and hundreds of these "twinkling stars" in the trees on this hill. My mind played a trick on me. For a second I thought how neat it was that someone had put Christmas tree lights all along this hill. Then reality returned - My God! Those are NVA rifles firing at us! Finally I remember two C Trp Cobras landed too close to each other at Khe Sanh. For a few moments the blades intermeshed but inevitably, they finally collided and ripped the main rotor and transmissions from both aircraft. One rotor system traveled three quarters of a mile before coming to rest! No one was seriously hurt but the aircraft were destroyed. Oh, we didn't have any American Blues during this period. We had our Lift ships and they received missions sort of a la cart like the Guns. An elite unit from Siagon called the Hoc Bao were used to retrieve downed air crews. We certainly had no complaints about them or their performance and I didn't hear of any from the other aviation units. The Hoc Bao did their job well!

About the first week of April, C Trp moved from Khe Sanh back to Quang Tri and regrouped there. A few days later, they loaded up everything and returned to Lane the same way they had arrived - via air and ground convoys. The 7/17th's participation in Lam Song 719 was over at this point.

March - On the 1st, A Trp's Guns supported a single ship medevac by the 247th Med of one US and three enemy wounded. The situation began when the enemy ambushed a 23rd ARVN unit with a 51 cal. After the enemy were dispersed by artillery, A Trp's Guns searched the area and found no remaining enemy activity. On the 3rd, A Trp provided security for President Thieu's visit to Lam Son. During the screen, the Scouts found five bunkers which were destroyed by the Guns. No contact was made and the mission ended at 1600 hours when the President left. At 1300 on the 6th, A Trp was working an AO near Dalat and received a frag movement order to move to An Son. They arrived at An Son at 1945 hours. On the 7th, A Trp worked the Suoi Cau Valley. One LOH took three hits in the rotor blades, landed and was slung back to camp. A little later, a Scout found a squad-size enemy unit walking down a trail. About 20-25 rounds were fired at the Guns as they killed two. During the remainder of the day, the Scouts found numerous trails, hootches, and bunkers indicating recent enemy usage. All hootches and bunkers were destroyed by the Guns but no contact was made. On the 8th, A Trp returned to Phan Rang. The 10th was scheduled as a maintenance down day but A Trp was called to support a TAC E for an 53rd REG unit in contact with a platoon size VC force. The Guns screened for three hours during which only one expended ordinance. On the 17th, A Trp was told to move to Pleiku and closed there at 1130 hours. On the 19th, A Trp supported the 47th Regt near Pleiku. The Scouts found ten uniformed people without weapons in a village and insert the ARP with negative results. Later the Scouts found one armed person and the Guns killed him while destroying four hootches. On the 21st, CW2 David C. Lancaster and WO1 James W. Manthel of C Trp were killed and VHPA Member Dave Ferrell describes the situation.

I was flying Dave's wing that day and we were the only two ships from C Trp assigned to this mission. The ARVN were withdrawing from Laos. We had been sent out to support an ARVN armored unit that had been ambushed. There was this horseshoe shaped bend in the road pointing to the south. From low hills on the west and east side, the NVA were shooting at the ARVN. I watched an RPG or B40 come out of the trees and hit the 113 which blew just like in the movies. A few seconds later, another hit a tank and the turret flew up into the air. Things aren't going well for the ARVN. About that time we get everyone sorted out enough to start shooting at the ambishers. The NVA were squared away and had positioned at least three 51 cals in a nice triangle to cover their forces. These 51 cals start in on us. We stop shooting at the ambishers and start in on the 51 cals. We must have made some progress because their fire dropped off about the time my Snake was empty. I told Dave I was out of ammo and wanted to leave. Dave said he wanted to make one more pass. I told him I could not cover his break; but he said he was going in anyway. He made his run and emptied the ship. We watched in horror as he took a full broadside of 51 cal. He called that they had been hit, lost the tail rotor and that Jim was wounded. He continued on to the south looking for any place along the highway to land the Cobra. They didn't get too far when their airspeed went to nothing and they went twirling into the ground. We later talked to the med evac team that retrieved their bodies. They said they believed both men died of broken necks caused by their chicken plates and this twirling fall. I remember being really upset about loosing Dave. We had become good friends. That very morning he had shown me a picture of his wife and the card she had sent him - today was their anniversary!

On the 23rd, A Trp worked an AO near Chec Bo and found a large rice cache. The Blues were inserted and destroyed some of it before bad weather forced the Trp from the AO. On the 24th, A Trp found and destroyed a company minus size staging area. A Trp was told to leave Pleiku on the 25th to return to Phan Rang but could not because of bad weather. On the 26th, one A Trp AH-1G was damaged in a mortar attack and was sent to the 604th TC for a tail boom change. The remainder of the Trp closed at Phan Rang at 1330 hours. During 28-31, A Trp worked AOs around Song Mao. The Scouts found signs of enemy activity but no contact was made. In late March, the exact date is unknown, WO1 James Bernard Low of C Trp was in a Cobra that took fire and crashed while supporting operations in Laos. VHPA Members Don Purser and Dave Ferrell provided some details of this event while attending the VHPA Reunion in Atlanta:

They reported receiving fire and the Cobra may well have been burning before they crashed into a river bottom. The hydraulics caught fire and this really burned Jim before he could be removed from the wreck. Eventually both pilots were evaced. Don remembers going with several other C Trpers to visit Jim in the hospital. Don said his face and upper body were so badly burned that they couldn't recognize him at all. Only after Jim started speaking did they recognize his voice. They understood he lived about a week or so before dying on April 3rd. The other pilot, name unknown at this time, was wounded but survived.

April - On the 1st, A Trp was placed on stand-by for movement to Pleiku. The order was finally received at 2230 hours. A Trp closed at Pleiku at noon and at 1500 received a TAC E support request from FSB Lonely where the US 62nd Arty camp was under attack by a VC force. A Trp sent four Cobras and the VC immediately broke contact. Though the Guns received fire, none were hit and they believed they killed four VC. Later the Arty camp credited A Trp with 20 kills. From the 3rd through the 5th, A Trp supported the 47th Regt, 22nd ARVN. On the 4th, A Trp was involved in some undocumented action and were credited with 17 kills. On the 7th, A Trp sent two AH-1Gs on a TAC E to FSB 6; but after an hour the returned to base as they were unable to contact the friendly forces on the ground. On the 15th, while working around Cheo Bo, a LOH drew fire from three or four hootches surrounded by spider holes. Two elephants and one OP were also found. All were taken under fire and destroyed and one person was killed. The Blues determined this was a company-size base camp, so artillery was adjusted and the camp completely destroyed. On the 16th, A Trp's ARP uncovered a small aid station. Several fresh footprints were followed into a tree line which the Guns fired up killing one. On the 17th, A Trp's Scouts reported a parachute with harness next to a tunnel opening and a flight suit, underwear, and a flight helmet were found on the ground. Two people were observed hiding in the bushes with a 51 cal which hit a LOH four times. The Guns expended with unknown results but an airstrike was called in. On the 21st, A Trp's Gun saw several people in an open area. When attempts to ID them produced fire, the Guns opened fire with unknown results.

Later an enemy squad was observed walking a trail. The Guns fired; six were killed, two wounded and two captured. Upon further investigation a bunker complex was uncovered. Airstrikes were called in with unknown results. The Blues and a reaction force were inserted and found 500 lbs of rice which was turned over to the 45th Regt. On the 23rd, A Trp was screening an area 20 miles west of SHOEE III when the 3rd Bn, 45th Regt, 22nd ARVN made heavy contact with an NVA Regt. A Trp was requested to provide support. During the mission, one LOH was engaging a mortar position when it was hit by 30 cal AW fire. The observer was hit in the left groin but continued to engage his target. Another round hit the ship, shattered and sent shrapnel inside, wounding the pilot in the left leg. Both pilot and observer continued to support the mission for about ten minutes before they returned to the Phu Nhon rearm point where they discovered two more rounds had hit the observer's chicken plate. Both were evaced to the 71st Evac. Meanwhile the C&C had discovered a 51 cal position and took one round through a rotor blade. On the 26th, A Trp's Scout discovered approximately 20 people in a base camp with five hootches and bunkers. The Scouts received fire so the Guns opened up and killed one. The Blues were inserted and immediately came under heavy fire. A reaction force was inserted to support the ARP. Both units began receiving heavy fire and mortar rounds. When the fire lifted, the ground forces found a training area. The area was destroyed by the Guns. The LOHs received fire two more times and the Guns expended with unknown results. When the Infantry was extracted, it was found that they had suffered four WIA.

MANG HO 18 - For the period 20-24 Apr and 3-14 May, the 7/17th provided command and control for the air assault portions of this operation conducted by the Capital Republic of Korea Infantry Division (CRID) and the 173rd Abn to the northwest and west of Phu Cat AFB; specifically the Suoi Cau, Soui Tre, and Soui La Tinh Valleys, and Base Area 226. The following units participated: the 61st and 129th AHCs assigned to the 7/17 and C/7/17; the 92nd and B/227 AHCs and D/227 AWC from the 10th CAB; the 134th AHC, the 238th AWC, and the 180th ASHC from the 268th CAB; the A/227th AHC and the C/228th ASHC from the 52nd CAB; the 268th Pathfinder Det from the 268th CAB; and the 10th Pathfinder Det from the 10th CAB. Intelligence indicated that elements of the 3rd NVA division were regrouping and retraining in or near Base Area 226. The terrain was described as a valley floor at about 100 meters elevation, steep mountains rise to 700 meters on the east and 800 meters on the western side. Dense vegetation offered excellent overhead concealment for enemy movement. Rugged ridges and pinnacles, encompassed by vegetation, offered concealed AA weapons positions with extremely good fields of fire. Very few adequate LZs existed in the area and most were one or two ship LZs on the surrounding pinnacles while those on the valley floor that could accommodate four or five ships were very vulnerable to AA fire from positions on the mountains above. The concept of the operation was for the Sqdn to provide air recon and tactical mobility for the Infantry units primarily via the two organic AHCs (the 61st and the 129th) and C Trp. They would reconnoiter, prepare and insert the Infantry elements into numerous LZs simultaneously to surround and cordon off Base Area 226. This was accomplished by inserting the ROK units to the south and east and the 173rd to the north and west as blocking forces on the 20th, 21st, and 22nd. Then two ROK Regts assaulted the mountain tops and valley floor to engage the enemy. During the period 3 - 14 May numerous assaults and extractions were conducted for tactical redeployment of the ROK units to further engage the enemy units. Elements from the 10th, 52nd, and 268th CABs were opconed on a daily basis. On the 20th (D-3), five companies and one Bn CP were inserted into five LZs. On the 21st (D-2), 105 ROK and 663 US troops were inserted. On the 22nd (D-1), two ROK companies were inserted into two more LZs. On the 23rd (D Day), the Sqdn and opconed elements assembled at two PZs. The slicks were broken down into ten flights of five ships each with supporting gunships. C Trp provided the initial recon and prep of the proposed LZs. Pathfinders were assigned to slick flights to each LZ to assist the CH-47s flights to follow. PZL and rearming points were operational at both PZs. After a artillery prep, C Trp started a VR around the proposed LZs at 0930. At 0945 the assault forces were airborne and at 1000 they put 12 companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs, and one Arty Btry into ten LZs simultaneously. On the 24th (D+1), they again used two PZs and the same schedule. C Trp reconed the LZs and at 1000 the Sqdn inserted nine companies and three Bn CPs into seven LZs simultaneously. On 3 May (D+10), they began the extraction of the ROK Cavalry Regt with eight companies and two Bn CPs from nine PZs. On 4 May (D+11), they extracted the 1st ROK Regt consisting of ten companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs and one Arty Btry from ten PZs. On 5 May (D+12), they used one PZ to reinsert the ROK Cavalry Regt with eight companies into six LZs. The Blue flight received some SA fire and the guns engaged the targets. Two Hueys received hits. On the 6th (D+13), they inserted 11 companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs and one Arty Btry from the ROK 1st Regt into 15 LZs. On the 10th (D+17), they began the final phase by extracting eight company and one Arty Btry of the ROK 1st Regt from nine PZs. On the 12th (D+19), they extracted one company from the ROK Cavalry Regt from one PZ. On the 13th (D+20), they extracted seven companies and 2 Bn CPs from eight PZs. The Yellow flight received SA and B-40 fire and the Guns engaged. One Huey and one UH-1C were hit. Enemy personnel and bunkers were discovered and attacked by the Guns. The day's operations claimed 10 KBAs. On the 14th (D+21), they completed the extraction of nine companies and one Bn CP from seven PZs. The totals for the entire operation were for UH-1Hs: 2696 hours, 4099 sorties, 11,176 passengers using 351 aircraft and for CH-47s: 252 hours, 300 sorties, 1428 passengers, 706 tons using 45 aircraft. The analysis section in the After Action Report provides some insight into this operation. Apparently the CRID was very security conscious because it provided only fragmentary information in advance for planning purposes and denied preparation air recons of their AO. They also did not put their G-3 or Regt Cmdrs in a C&C yet demanded simultaneous insertions. The lack of airborne decision makers caused delays in LZ selection as everyone had to wait for the information to be radioed back to the ROK CPs. All the opconed air units could not linger in the Lane area, so they had to fly in every morning and home every night. This, of course, delayed the air assaults about one hour. Temporary refuel and rearm points had to be established for several days outside fixed facilities which taxed the Sqdn's S-4 and HHT personnel and added a security problem. Finally, the CRID wanted their elements extracted from the field and returned to their base camp. This required extra "air tax" time that could have been eliminated if they had used some ground convoys. The operation claimed 252 enemy killed, 110 individual weapons, 35 crew weapons, and 7 radios captured against 13 Koreans killed and 60 wounded with no US losses and no aircraft losses.

May - During the first week, A Trp's operations were weather restricted. On the 11th, A Trp destroyed a small base camp west of Phu Nhon. On the 19th, an A Trp Cobra crashed at Phu Nhon while hovering from the PZL to the parking area. The pilot had gone IFR in the dust and the ship came to rest in an inverted position. Neither pilot was injured. At 1105 hours on the 20th, WO1 Gregory A. Smith and WO1 Robert Bruce died in the crash of an A Trp LOH west of Dragon Mountain near Camp Enar. The ARP was inserted to secure the crash site. The cause of the crash was never determined. C Trp moved their operations base to An Khe for two weeks during this period.

D Trp 1/10th CAV - About this time, D/1/10th CAV, the ACT for the 1/10th Cavalry Squadron that had been part of the 4th Div was attached to the 7/17th. VHPA Member Mike Lovett explains:

As the 4th Div was standing down, the 1/10 Cav Sqdn was still based out of Camp Radcliff near An Khe with the primary mission of keeping a good percentage of QL19 open between the coast and Pleiku. D/1/10 was the Sqdn's organic ACT and we lived at Radcliff as well. In fact I can remember we had a very nice New Years Eve party not too long after we occupied the buildings formerly used by the 4th Avn Bn. Our Sqdn was part of TF Ivy and then TF 1/9 as the stand down continued. Aviation support became a serious problem by late 1970 because we were not part of the 1st Avn Bde. When we needed parts or IPs or anything aviation related, we had to go all the way to Nha Trang and even then it wasn't good. We still flew most of our missions for the 1/10 Cav but they really couldn't support us like E/704 AMNT used to do. Our commanders made a lot of noise and about Jan/Feb 1971 we moved to Lane. Within a short period we were attached to the 7/17 Cav and the support was much better. Initially, we had no billets or other facilities. We shared some space with C/7/17, got an old Korean building and even had some built for us and lived in tents too. That part wasn't too great. Our ARP was still at An Khe and we always had two Guns plus two or three 58s (we didn't use OH-6As for Scouts after?) at An Khe as a quick reaction force to keep the road open. That arrangement was hardly normal for an ACT but I don't think there were any normal units left in Vietnam at that time. Even when we were in the 7/17th, we still flew missions for the 1/10th most of the time. Like other ACTs during that period, we were not allowed to put our American ARP on the ground. When we supported the 1/10th, there were American ground forces near at hand. But we often sent pink teams up and down the coast, especially when C/7/17 was up north during Lam Son 719, without any hope of Infantry back-up. Basically we did a lot of aerial recon with the Scouts just marking targets as best they could for the Guns. We were also lucky during those days that we didn't have many birds go down and I can't remember anyone getting killed during the first half of 1972.

VHPA Member Earl Ewing remembers these times as follows: When I joined D/1/10th Cav in June, they had been living at An Son for some time because their operations were well established. They were living in wooden buildings but there wasn't enough room for everyone. For the first few weeks I moved from bunk to bunk while guys were on R&R. I had gone to AMOC and Cobra school after flight school, so I was in the Service Platoon and the 518th TC Det during my three months with D Trp. I recall we used to take Cobras we couldn't fix to our support at Tuy Hoa which was a very large facility. D Trp did keep operational teams at An Khe and more than once we had to go there to fix something or to take in parts. I can also remember going to Pleiku for the same reason but maybe that was when I was with the Sqdn. In September, I became the Maintenance Officer for the 7/17th. We were always very busy because the Sqdn was a collection of all sorts of aviation units and the ARVN had our units scatter ships all over the place just like trucks. I believe a lot of people got hurt and a lot of equipment was damaged and misused under this "scatter deployment" concept. In early '72 I can remember over flying Tuy Hoa on the way to Vung Tau so we could have our Cobras modified to switch the tail rotor to the other side. It was really impressive to see that Tuy Hoa had "turned to nothing". By then we were getting most of our parts and some support from Nha Trang but blades and engines were in short supply. I finished up my tour with the 129th in March.

June - A Trp spent 15 days down due to weather this month. Its missions included several convoy escort missions from Pleiku to Phu Nhon and two SAR operations in an attempt to locate a civilian Cessna 180 which disappeared between Cheo Reo and Pleiku. On or near the 1st, C Trp moved its operation base to Kontum from Lane and would support operations in this area for the entire month. On or near the end of the month, C Trp returned its operations base to Lane. During this month, the Sqdn HQ and HHT moved from Qui Nhon to An Son. VHPA Member Ernie Smart continues providing some important background information about this period:

SECTION XII - AFTER ACTION REPORTS

These "After Action Reports" are a continuation of the last two year's compilations of eye witness accounts, accident reports, official documentation, and special interest groups. Sources of the information range from the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Joint Casualty Resolution Center, the State Department, the POW Network (Task Force of Illinois, Inc.), to direct inputs from VHPA members. It is an attempt to accurately document specific events that involved loss of life and/or destruction of helicopters during the Vietnam war. It is not an attempt to incite or promote political issues. Some of the information used for this section contains opinions that may not accurately describe the events as they occurred. We have tried to remove these when they are obvious. Like everything in this Directory, this information is only as accurate as the members of the VHPA can make it, so please send in your additions and corrections to the VHPA Headquarters. Gary Roush has put this section together and would appreciate your help and feedback.

This information is in order by date of the event and contains all new material which has never appeared in a VHPA directory.

After Action Report for: 5 September 1965

LA GRAND, WILLIAM JOHN

REFNO: R0134
Name: William John LaGrand
Rank/Branch: W2/US Army
Unit: 197th Aviation Company 145th Aviation Battalion
Date of Birth: 11 May 1941
Home City of Record: Portland, OR
Date of Loss: 05 September 1965
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 110655N 106551E
Status (in 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: A-1G

Other Personnel in Incident: (none missing)

SYNOPSIS: William La Grand was a passenger aboard an A-1G aircraft on a flight which departed Bien Hoa on September 5, 1965. The aircraft was seen to crash and no ejections were observed from the aircraft prior to impact.

The area in which the aircraft went down was under hostile control at the time, and recovery and excavation attempts at the time were thwarted because of heavy enemy activity in the area and hostile presence.

Getting a ride in a Skyrider from a friend right after arriving in country.

After Action Report for: 18 June 1967

LEMMONS, WILLIAM E.

REFNO: R0734
Name: William E. Lemmons
Rank/Branch: O2/US Army
Unit: HHC, 196th Infantry Brigade (Light)
Date of Birth: 12 January 1942
Home City of Record: Pocatello, ID
Date of Loss: 18 June 1967
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 143303N 1083012E
Status (in 1973): Missing in Action
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: OH-23

Other Personnel in Incident: Edward Guillory; James McKittrick (both missing)

SYNOPSIS: SFC Edward Guillory, Lt. William Lemmons and Maj. James McKittrick were aboard an OH-23 Raven helicopter on a visual recon mission operating in Quang Tin Province on June 18, 1967. They were to spot artillery targets for the Artillery Battery that McKittrick and Guillory were attached to.

At 1845 hours, the helicopter was declared missing. Extensive searches were conducted that night aided by artillery flares and aircraft mounted searchlights, but no trace of the aircraft or crew was found. In the next few days several crash sites were reported and searches made, but all efforts were fruitless.

After Action Report for: 30 June 1967

HOUSE, JOHN ALEXANDER II

REFNO: R0746
Name: John Alexander House II
Rank/Branch: O3/USMC
Unit: HMM 265, MAG 16
Date of Birth: 16 April 1939
Home City of Record: Pelham, NY
Date of Loss: 30 June 1967
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 161349N 1074301E
Status (in 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: CH-46A

Other Personnel in Incident: Merlin Allen; Michael Judd; John Killen; Glyn Runnels (all missing)

SYNOPSIS: John House was the pilot of an CH-46A helicopter carrying personnel assigned to Company A, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, when the aircraft was hit by small arms fire near the city of Phu Bai, South Vietnam, exploded and crashed. Although some of the personnel aboard survived, House was never found, nor were remains recovered that could be identified as his. He was listed as killed in action, body not recovered.

The co-pilot Ted Pittman survived.

After Action Report for: 08 February 1968

ZIEGLER, ROY E. II

Name: Roy E. Ziegler II (Dick)
Rank/Branch: WO1/US Army
Unit: 58th Aviation Detachment Qui Nhon
Date of Birth: 1 September 1941
Home City of Record: Springfield, IL
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 164424N 1071941E (YD471521)
Status (in 1973): Released from Captivity from North Vietnam
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH-1D

Other Personnel in Incident: WO1 Joseph Rose, E4 Michael Lenker, E5 Robert Chenowith, E4 James George, Jr. (MIA), and LTC Benjamin Purcell.

SYNOPSIS: All of the people on this helicopter were captured, served as POWs, and then released except for E4 George who was killed while in captivity. The following is a first person account by Dick Ziegler.

"On February 8, 1968 I was assigned to fly LTC Ben Purcell up to Dong Ha with high frequency radio parts. The other pilot was Joe Rose. My crew chief was SP5 Robert Chenowith and the door gunner was SP4 Mike Lenker. George was a refrigerator mechanic and went along to fix some refrigerators at Dong Ha. We took off from Danang and proceeded to Hue where we landed so LTC Purcell could be briefed by the Marine General on what the situation in I Corps was and what equipment they needed. After he was briefed, we departed Hue for Dong Ha. The weather was just a little shitty. Ceilings were about 400-500 feet. I flew along the coast to avoid the enemy and then when we were about even with Quang Tri, I headed inland until I reached highway 1. We then flew north to Dong Ha.

After delivering the radio parts and LTC Purcell being briefed, we took off and headed back to Danang. Joe was flying. We decided to head back the same way we came up. After we left highway 1 to head back to the coast, we flew over an enemy unit that had moved into the area after we had passed that spot going to Dong Ha. There must have been a million of them. Well, they just pointed their weapons skyward and fired. We flew right through the ground fire. I was wounded in the left thigh and belly. The Huey was on fire. Joe crashed the helicopter in a grave yard. What a hell of a place to crash.

Once on the ground and out of the burning helicopter we tried to E & E out of the area. I was wounded and kind of in shock. One passenger, SP4 George, was badly burned from the crash and we had one runaway M60 machine gun, 45 cal pistols, and an M14 rifle. We walked for about 30 minutes to an hour when the VC came up from behind us and started firing. Guess what? We were in another grave yard! Damn things are all over the place. Well, I hid behind a grave and watched LTC Purcell wave his olive drab handkerchief and say we were surrendering. I didn't want to do that. I thought that the VC would torture and murder us. So I crawled out of the grave yard and hid in some bushes near by. All of the crew and passengers were taken prisoner at that time.

I waited in my hiding place until night fall and then I tried to find some friendly faces. I don't think there were any in I Corps that night. I found some armored vehicle tracks in the sand and tried to follow them. I lost them in some marshes. I continued to walk most of the night.

About 2 hours after dawn came, I was hiding behind some more bushes and I observed a combat assault (CA) coming in about 5 kilometers from my position. All that CA did was push the enemy towards me. In a little while, a group of VC (nine little boys with big guns) came up over the sand dunes. At the same time, a Huey flew over my position so close that if I would have had a rock I could have hit the door gunner with it. The VC had heard the Huey and had gone into hiding and the Huey never saw them or me.

After the Huey left they started towards me again. I was laying on my back with my 45 on my chest saying, 'God if you get me out of this I'll never sin again.' God had me on hold and never answered my call. One of the VC saw me, yelled and started firing his weapon. They all started firing their weapons in every direction. I raised up to one knee with my weapon in my hand and for some strange reason before I knew it, both of my arms were above my head in the, 'Don't shoot I surrender' mode.

I took about 5 days of walking to get to my jungle camp where I first got medical attention for my wounds. To my surprise all of my crew and LTC Purcell were also in that camp. The VC had executed SP4 George the day after he surrendered because of his burns. At this camp, I also met an American POW by the name of King Rafford. He had been captured in 1967 looking for a whore house in Hué. He didn't find it, but he got screwed. There was also a VC medic in the camp and he treated my wounds and probably saved my life. Credit where credit's due.

I made my last escape attempt in this camp with King Rafford. We saved our meager ration of rice and I exercised my leg in the hooch out of sight of the guards. Then one night, King and I just walked out of the camp. It gets mighty dark in triple canopy jungle at night. We had to navigate by the light from fire flies. Otherwise, we would just keep bumping into trees. Those trees are hard too in the jungle. The next day King and I were recaptured about 5 kilometers from the camp. I spent the next 10 days in a hole in the ground with reduced rations.

Shortly after my escape attempt, we were moved out of our camp and moved to North Vietnam. It took us 11 days of marching to reach the Ho Chi Mein trail and another 11 days of riding trucks up the trail before we got to our first camp in North Vietnam.

I spent approximately 5 months in this camp, that was located in a Vietnamese village, in solitary confinement. I was housed in a thatched roofed hooch and my room was the size of a closet. That is, it was 6 feet long by 2.5 feet wide by 6 feet high with stocks at the end of the room. I'm 6'2" tall. I hit my head a lot.

After 5 months we were moved to a camp that was not far from Hanoi and I spent until November of 1970 in this camp. I had my other pilot, that was shot down with me, in the room with me from then on. His name is Joe Rose. At times I also had another Warrant Officer helicopter pilot in the room with me. His name is Michael O'Connor.

After the Sun Tay raid, we were moved to the metropolitan area of Hanoi to a camp that was named the 'Plantation Gardens'.

After the B52's came to Hanoi in Christmas of 1972, we were finally moved to the infamous prison called 'The Hanoi Hilton'. We stayed there until the end of the war and I was released on 5 March 1973. And boy was I glad to leave!

After Action Report for: 09 August 1969

JANOUSEK, RONALD JAMES

REFNO:	R1478
Name:	Ronald James Janousek
Rank/Branch:	O2/US Marine Corps
Unit:	HML 367; MAG 36
Date of Birth:	21 July 1945
Home City of Record:	Posen IL
Date of Loss:	09 August 1969
Country of Loss:	South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates:	163819N 1064643E (XD960180)
Status (in 1973):	Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground:	UH-1E

Other Personnel in Incident: Bruce E. Kane (missing)

SYNOPSIS: 1LT. Ronald J. Janousek and Cpl. Bruce E. Kane were U.S. Marines attached to units of the 36th and 11th Marine Aircraft Groups, respectively. On August 9, 1969, the two were killed in the crash of a UH-1E helicopter.

Defense Department records indicate that Janousek and Kane were lost at Khe Sanh, in Quang Tri Province. The U.S. Marines state that Janousek's helicopter was hit by heavy enemy fire and crashed and burned. The U.S. Marines state that Kane's helicopter disappeared on a night reconnaissance mission. Joint Casualty Resolution Center records (considered by some analysts to be the most accurate of all records), indicate that the loss occurred in central South Vietnam.

Information obtained from family and other sources indicate that Kane and Janousek's aircraft crashed and burned in the Se Kong River near the border of Laos and South Vietnam north of the A Shau Valley, and that they had been on a secret mission in Laos. The U.S. State Department lists both men as killed in a hostile action, and further lists Kane as drowned and Janousek as a crew member of the aircraft.

Maj. Hill crash landed in water to put out the fire. Maj. Hill survived.

After Action Report for: 05 February 1970

LYON, JAMES MICHAEL

REFNO: R1556
 Name: James Michael Lyon
 Rank/Branch: 03/US Army
 Unit: HHC, 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division
 Date of Birth: 08 March 1948
 Home City of Record: Indianapolis IN
 Date of Loss: 05 February 1970
 Country of Loss: South Vietnam
 Loss Coordinates: 163045N 1072824E (YD494093)
 Status (In 1973): Prisoner of War (killed in captivity)
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH-1H

Capt. Lyon moaned and then a shot was heard from his position about 30 feet from the aircraft wreckage. No other outcry from Capt. Lyon was heard, and the others believed that he had been killed by the guard.

Two weeks later, Capt. Parsels was told by 1LL Lee Van Mac (an NVA commander at "Camp Farnsworth") that Capt. Lyon died from his wounds and was buried at the crash site. 1LL Lee Van Mac gave Capt. Parsels the personal effects of Capt. Lyon, including his ID card and several photos which appeared to be of Lyon's wife.

In late March, 1973, Parsels, Hefel and Kobashigawa were released from prisons in North Vietnam. In their debriefings, all three concurred on the story that Lyon had apparently been shot. They considered it a mercy killing, because their pilot had been so seriously injured that they doubted that he could survive.

After Action Report for: 24 March 1970

HOSKEN, JOHN CHARLES

REFNO: R1578
 Name: John Charles Hosken
 Rank/Branch: W1/US Army
 Unit: 170 AHC 17 CAG 52 CAB 1 Aviation Brigade
 Date of Birth: 23 August 1947 (Cleveland OH)
 Home City of Record: Chagrin Falls OH
 Date of Loss: 24 March 1970
 Country of Loss: Cambodia
 Loss Coordinates: 142750N 1071816E (YB484003)
 Status (In 1973): Missing In Action
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH-1H

Other Personnel in Incident: Berman Ganoe; Rudy M. Becerra; John Boronski; Gary A. Harned; Jerry L. Pool (all missing)

SYNOPSIS: On March 24, 1970, WO John C. Hoskins, pilot; Capt. Michael D. O'Donnell, aircraft commander; SP4 Rudy M. Becerra, crew chief; and SP4 Berman Ganoe, gunner, were the crew of a UH-1H helicopter (serial #68-15262) on an emergency extraction of a MACV-SOG long-range reconnaissance patrol (LRRP) from a landing zone in Ratanakiri Province Cambodia, near the tri-border area. The team included 1LL Jerry L. Pool, team leader and team members SSgt. John A. Boronski and Sgt. Gary A. Harned.

The team had been in heavy contact with the enemy and had requested an immediate extraction. Capt. O'Donnell evaluated the situation and decided to pick them up. He landed on the LZ and was on the ground for about 4 minutes, and then transmitted that he had the entire team on board. The aircraft was beginning its ascent when it was hit by enemy fire, and an explosion in the aircraft was seen. The helicopter continued in flight for about 300 meters, then another explosion occurred, causing the aircraft to crash in the jungle.

No one was observed to have been thrown from the aircraft during either explosion. The aircraft began to burn immediately upon impact. Aerial search and rescue efforts began immediately; however, no signs of life could be seen around the crash site. Because of the enemy situation, attempts to insert search teams into the area were futile. SAR efforts were discontinued on April 18. Search and rescue teams who surveyed the site reported that they did not hold much hope for survival for the men aboard, but lacking proof that they were dead, the Army declared all 7 missing in action.

The Special Forces team aboard the chopper was working with Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observation Group (MACV-SOG), a joint service, high command, unconventional warfare task force engaged in highly classified operations throughout Southeast Asia. The 5th Special Forces channeled personnel into MACV-SOG (though it was not a Special Forces group) through Special Operations Augmentation (SOA) which provided their "cover" while under secret orders to MACV-SOG. These teams performed deep penetration missions of strategic reconnaissance and interdiction which were called, depending on the time frame, "Shining Brass" or "Prairie Fire" missions.

After Action Report for: 23 April 1970

EADS, DENNIS KEITH

REFNO: R1603
 Name: Dennis Keith Eads
 Rank/Branch: W01/US Army
 Unit: F/8 Cav 123 CAB 16 CAG 23 Inf (America), Chu Lai, South Vietnam
 Date of Birth: 04 May 1947 (Glendale CA)
 Home City of Record: Prophetstown, IL
 Date of Loss: 23 April 1970
 Country of Loss: South Vietnam
 Loss Coordinates: 153607N 1075801E (ZC180270)
 Status (In 1973): Missing In Action (Declared dead 08/28/78)
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: AH1G

Other Personnel in Incident: Larron D. Murphy (missing)

Other Personnel in Incident: Tom Y. Kobashigawa, John W. Parsels, Daniel H. Hefel (returned POWs)

SYNOPSIS: At 1530 hours on February 5, 1970, Capt. James M. Lyon, pilot, Capt. John W. Parsels, copilot, SP5 Tom Y. Kobashigawa, crew chief, and SP4 Daniel Hefel, door gunner, were flying a UH-1H helicopter (serial #68-16441) on a maintenance mission from Hue to Phu Bai, South Vietnam.

When the aircraft was about 18 miles northwest of Hue City, the helicopter caught fire and crashed (due to a malfunction). Capt. Lyon was thrown clear of the aircraft and was burned extensively over his body and part of his right leg. His leg was severed four inches below the knee. The other crew members were also injured and could not take evasive action. They were captured at 1630 hours by NVA troops and spent the night near the crash site.

Throughout the night, the crew members heard their pilot yelling and moaning in pain. At 0600 hours,

Capt. Lyon moaned and then a shot was heard from his position about 30 feet from the aircraft wreckage. No other outcry from Capt. Lyon was heard, and the others believed that he had been killed by the guard.

Two weeks later, Capt. Parsels was told by 1LL Lee Van Mac (an NVA commander at "Camp Farnsworth") that Capt. Lyon died from his wounds and was buried at the crash site. 1LL Lee Van Mac gave Capt. Parsels the personal effects of Capt. Lyon, including his ID card and several photos which appeared to be of Lyon's wife.

In late March, 1973, Parsels, Hefel and Kobashigawa were released from prisons in North Vietnam. In their debriefings, all three concurred on the story that Lyon had apparently been shot. They considered it a mercy killing, because their pilot had been so seriously injured that they doubted that he could survive.

O'DONNELL, MICHAEL DAVIS

Name: Michael Davis O'Donnell
 Rank/Branch: 03/US Army
 Unit: 170 AHC 17 CAG 52 CAB 1 Aviation Brigade
 Date of Birth: 13 August 1945 (Columbus OH)
 Home City of Record: Springfield IL
 Date of Loss: 24 March 1970
 Country of Loss: Cambodia
 Loss Coordinates: 142750N 1071816E (YB484003)
 Status (In 1973): Missing In Action
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH-1H

SYNOPSIS: On March 24, 1970, WO John C. Hoskins, pilot; Capt. Michael D. O'Donnell, aircraft commander; SP4 Rudy M. Becerra, crew chief; and SP4 Berman Ganoe, gunner, were the crew of a UH-1H helicopter (serial #68-15262) on an emergency extraction of a MACV-SOG long-range reconnaissance patrol (LRRP) from a landing zone in Ratanakiri Province Cambodia, near the tri-border area. The team included 1LL Jerry L. Pool, team leader and team members SSgt. John A. Boronski and Sgt. Gary A. Harned.

The team had been in heavy contact with the enemy and had requested an immediate extraction. Capt. O'Donnell evaluated the situation and decided to pick them up. He landed on the LZ and was on the ground for about 4 minutes, and then transmitted that he had the entire team on board. The aircraft was beginning its ascent when it was hit by enemy fire, and an explosion in the aircraft was seen. The helicopter continued in flight for about 300 meters, then another explosion occurred, causing the aircraft to crash in the jungle.

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The Special Forces team aboard the chopper was working with Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observation Group (MACV-SOG), a joint service, high command, unconventional warfare task force engaged in highly classified operations throughout Southeast Asia. The 5th Special Forces channeled personnel into MACV-SOG (though it was not a Special Forces group) through Special Operations Augmentation (SOA) which provided their "cover" while under secret orders to MACV-SOG. These teams performed deep penetration missions of strategic reconnaissance and interdiction which were called, depending on the time frame, "Shining Brass" or "Prairie Fire" missions.

After Action Report for: 23 April 1970

MURPHY, LARRON DAVID

Name: Larron David Murphy
 Rank/Branch: 03/US Army
 Unit: F/8 Cav 123 CAB 16 CAG 23 Inf (America), Chu Lai, South Vietnam
 Date of Birth: 05 October 1944 (Atlanta GA)
 Home City of Record: Dalton GA
 Date of Loss: 23 April 1970
 Country of Loss: South Vietnam
 Loss Coordinates: 153607N 1075801E (ZC180270)
 Status (In 1973): Missing In Action (Declared dead 10/11/73)
 Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: AH1G

The helicopter departed to the northwest from Dak To, but was apparently hit by enemy fire, as it crashed and burned on a small island in the Dak Poco River about 500 meters from the end of the dock to the runway. Because of the rolling terrain, personnel at the airfield did not see the aircraft impact. A pilot flying over the wreckage reported that the helicopter was burning, but they could see no survivors. It was later discovered that five people did survive the crash - Warmath, Keller, Bogle, Ward and Lea. According to their statements, Hunsicker, Ellen, Zollicoffer, Jones and Carter were all dead.

Two other Team 22, MACV Advisors, LtCol. Robert W. Brownlee and Capt. Charles W. Gordon, and their ARVN interpreter, Sgt. Cao Ky Chi, were in a bunker near the airstrip approximately 4 kilometers to the west of the base camp when they were forced to withdraw under heavy enemy attack. They proceeded south of the compound across the Dak Poco River, but LtCol. Brownlee became separated from the others as they were advancing up a hill. Sgt. Chi and Capt. Gordon called out to him, but received no response. From the top of the hill, Sgt. Chi heard the enemy call out to someone in Vietnamese to halt and raise their hands. Sgt. Chi believed the Viet Cong were speaking to LtCol. Brownlee. Gordon and Chi evaded capture and eventually made their way to safety.

A Vietnamese who was captured and subsequently released reported that he had talked to another prisoner who had witnessed LtCol. Brownlee's death. He was told that LtCol. Brownlee had killed himself with his own pistol when communist soldiers told him to raise his hands in an attempt to capture him. Additional hearsay reports of his suicide were reported by another ARVN source.

Yonan never caught up with the others. For three days, helicopter searches were made of the area with no success. Ground search, because of the hostile threat in the area, was not practical.

In April 1988, the Vietnamese "discovered" the remains of Capt. Kenneth J. Yonan and returned them to the U.S. in a spirit of stepped-up cooperation on the POW/MIA issue.

After Action Report for: 24 May 1972

HENN, JOHN ROBERT, JR.

REFNO: R1865
Name: John Robert Henn, Jr.
Rank/Branch: W2/US Army
Unit: F/79 ARA 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division
Date of Birth: 11 February 1948 (Worchester MA)
Home City of Record: Sutton MA
Date of Loss: 24 May 1972
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 113345N 1063717E (XT768786)
Status (in 1973): Missing in Action
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: AH-1G

HOSAKA, ISAAC YOSHIRO

REFNO: R1865
Name: Isaac Yoshiro Hosaka
Rank/Branch: W2/US Army
Unit: F/79 ARA 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division
Date of Birth: 7 February 1949
Home City of Record: Gardena, CA
Date of Loss: 24 May 1972
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 113345N 1063717E (XT768786)
Status (in 1973): Killed in Action
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: AH-1G

Other Personnel in Incident: (none)

SYNOPSIS: On May 24, 1972, WO2 Isaac Y. Hosaka, pilot, and WO2 John R. Henn, aircraft commander, were flying an AH-1G Cobra helicopter (tail #67-15836) which was participating in a medevac operation about 8 kilometers south of An Loc, South Vietnam. WO2 Henn's helicopter was in a flight of three Cobras at 4800 feet when the helicopter appeared to break in half.

The aircraft then went into a flat spin, exploded and burst into flames upon impact. The other helicopter pilots concluded that the Cobra had been hit by a SAM (surface to air missile), as they had seen a trail of white smoke from the ground to the aircraft.

The other two Cobras remained over the site, but observed no one leaving the crash. An immediate search in the area was not possible because of the enemy situation, but on June 2 and June 5, brief surface searches were conducted and remains were found which were identified as those of WO2 Hosaka.

A refugee reported that he had witnessed a Cobra helicopter crash and burn near Tan Khai village. Fifteen days later, he saw the bodies of two individuals who had apparently died in the crash. The U.S. Army believes this report may correlate to Henn and Hosaka.

After Action Report for: 11 June 1972

HOLM, ARNOLD EDWARD, JR.

REFNO: R1874
Name: Arnold Edward Holm, Jr.
Rank/Branch: O3/US Army
Unit: F/8 CAV 11 CAG 1 Aviation Battalion
Date of Birth: 05 March 1944 (New London CT)
Home City of Record: Waterford CT
Date of Loss: 11 June 1972
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 162326N 1072407E (YD565135)
Status (in 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: OH-6A

McQUADE, JAMES RUSSELL

REFNO: R1873
Name: James Russell McQuade
Rank/Branch: O2/US Army
Unit: F/8 CAV 11 CAG 1 Aviation Battalion
Date of Birth: 03 June 1949 (Pasco WA)
Home City of Record: Hoquiam WA
Date of Loss: 11 June 1972
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 162336N 1072357E (YD562138)
Status (in 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: OH-6A

Other Personnel in Incident: Wayne Bibbs; Robin R. Yealdey (missing from one OH-6A); James E. Hackett; Richard D. Wiley (missing from second OH-6A).

SYNOPSIS: By December 1971, U.S. troops in-country had declined dramatically - from the 1968 peak of nearly 55,000 to less than 30,000. The enemy, temporarily on the defensive by the moves into Cambodia in 1970 and Laos in 1971, began deploying new NVA forces southward in preparation for another major offensive.

In March 1972, the Vietnamese launched a three-pronged invasion of the South. One NVA force swept south across the DMZ, its goal apparently the conquest of the northern provinces and the seizure of Hue. A second NVA force drove from Laos into the Central Highlands, and a third effort involved a drive from Cambodia into provinces northwest of Saigon.

Fierce fighting ensued on all three fronts, with NVA success the greatest in the northern provinces. Fighting continued until by June, the North Vietnamese began withdrawing from some of their advance positions, still holding considerable amounts of South Vietnamese territory in the northern provinces.

rocket were reported by intelligence sources. Two Cobras were sent and destroyed the rocket site. On the 15th, A Trp was forced to work the flat lands northwest of Song Mau because of high winds. One LOH received fire and the Guns fired in the area with unknown results. On the 27th, A Trp's Guns provided armed escort for an extraction done by the 247th Med. Both the medevacs and the Guns took fire but no damage. The Guns expended under the control of the MACV advisors on the ground.

The Sqdn staff was getting accustomed to their new role and VHPA Member Tom Galyean provides this insight: In late Feb or early Mar I worked primarily in the mission control center of the Sqdn S-3 at Qui Nhon airfield. As a result of the fall out from the Mai Lai fiasco, there was a command policy to fully investigate the circumstances whenever there were civilian injuries alleged to have been caused by American forces. As I recall, a Cobra had accidentally fired a rocket near a little village on the beach somewhere generally north of Qui Nhon and east of Bear Cat. I can no longer recall the exact reason for the accidental misfire. Unfortunately, the rocket landed near where a young boy, about four years old, was playing and he received a shrapnel laceration on one of his calves. I was assigned to help investigate this matter. To help me interview witnesses, I was assigned with the same "Kit Carson" Scout that served with A Trp during the 8 Aug 1970 engagement. By this time A Trp's Blues no longer needed him in their primary mission and we had developed a good friendship. When I interviewed the child's mother about what had happened, she was surprised that I was doing an investigation. Through the interpreter, she told me in substance: that she knew that what had happened was an accident; that the pilot didn't mean to shoot the rocket; and that she hoped that we wouldn't punish or make the pilot angry for what had happened because if we did, she was afraid that the pilot might not come back and help protect them from the VC. I have no reason to believe the "Kit Carson" Scout was saying words I wanted to hear. The look on that woman's face and the circumstances of that discussion, are among those events of my tour in Vietnam that are indelibly etched in my recollection. Even though I had previously supported wholeheartedly both the general mission of our armed forces in Vietnam, and the specific missions of the 7/7th Cav, I knew what we were doing in Vietnam was right.

Lam Song 719 / Dewey Canyon II - We have been able to learn that three different units from the 7/17th supported this operation. The most visible was C Trp and their exploits will be described in some detail. B Trp, from Pleiku, supported numerous ARVN operations several miles into Laos as sort of a "southern flank / NVA distraction effort" for the main thrust along QL 9. Currently details of B Trp's activities are not well known. Finally, HHT sent at least one, and maybe more, small detachments to Dong Ha to provide S-3 and S-4 type support. Again details of these HHT activities are not currently well known. Anyway, early in the month, C Trp moved to Quang Tri and was attached to the 223rd CSAB as part of the build-up for LAM SONG 719 / Dewey Canyon II. For those that know or care, the 223rd was a fixed wing CSAB. As part of the build-up to support this large operation, the 1st Avn Bde didn't want too many of its assets given to the 101st Abn for several reasons. So this is how, C Trp and several other 1st Avn Bde helicopter units were assigned to a starched wing command. At least two weeks prior to the move, C Trp had been given a warning order that they could be moving from Lane. C Trp still had a "rear det" at Lane, and their maintenance and "forward (rear)" would be at Quang Tri, while their "forward (forward)" would be at Khe Sanh when that base was re-established. VHPA Members Don Pusher and Dave Ferrell give us a good picture of this period.

Don provides: As mentioned previously, C Trp had known for some time we would be moving our operations and maintenance bases from Lane for a temporary, but none the less extended, period of time. We were even told what to take and how to pack. Finally the orders came down and we moved to Quang Tri using both ground and air convoys. I remember putting our duffel bags in the LOHs plus our weapons but very little ammo. We were assigned a partially constructed children's hospital to live in. There was a helipad for this hospital just off the airfield at Quang Tri. Our flight line and maintenance area was on the airfield, within walking distance from this hospital. The concrete floors, the half walls on the exterior and the wooden roof were finished but not much else. Over the next few days, C Trp would rig up a lighting system with power supplied by a generator outside, move in some cots and a little furniture, and use a water buffalo parked out front for water. It wasn't heaven, but it was better than at Khe Sanh! Once the Khe Sanh base was re-established, C Trp was assigned a small area on the very northern edge of the perimeter. It was right off the active runway - only a few feet separated our aircraft parking area from the main fixed wing runway. When we got there, they had just finished clearing that section of mines and unexploded ordinance. I doubt the runway was unusable because there were many holes in it. There was wreckage and junk everywhere! It was a scary place!! Wendell Moore and I were assigned a sorry two man bunker. We put some wood from rocket boxes down to keep us off the mud, set up our cots and slept there in our sleeping bags. We were part of the perimeter defense - another scary thought! No one was happy with these living conditions so I joined several other Scouts to dig a new six man bunker. We didn't have much more space per person, but we were able to get our cots in there. I especially remember the rats that lived under the pallets on the floor - they were big as house cats!! We sandbagged our bunker walls to keep the mud in place. At night we'd "borrow" some of the asphalt covered aluminum panels from the runway for the floor and the roof. In the next day or so the engineers would replace the ones we'd "borrowed" and we couldn't get it through normal supply channels, so what the heck. We put the aluminum panels on the sandbagged walls, then a tent to keep the rain out and finally lots of sandbags. By morning we hoped no one could find those panels if they came looking for them. The weather was bad much of the time and it was cold there. From my point of view, I'd say most of C Trp's missions were traditional VPs on the Vietnamese side around Lan Vieng, Khe Sanh and back to Dong Ha or along the two main roads used to support these bases. We occasionally saw AA fire and even flak in Vietnam. Naturally we were trying to keep the NVA away and looked for their rocket units. Whenever we'd find something interesting, it received an Arc Light or something appropriate. I have several pictures taken from atop our bunker of a line of B-52 delivered bombs. After the third day of operations in Laos, the 6s weren't used there much anymore. That is a long story by itself - how the higher arrived at that decision and who paid for it. Anyway, that was fine with me. I know our Guns provided considerable support in Laos but I don't have any details of that. Oh, yes, while at Khe Sanh I had just lifted off on an ash & trash mission when I lost the tail rotor. I put the aircraft down just outside the perimeter, in a mine field; but luckily no one was hurt. I really liked being a Scout and loved flying the 6. I was known as "Shaky" because I was always nervous in the morning. I couldn't eat breakfast on the mornings I would fly - it just didn't stay down. Funny, though, when I got to the aircraft and started the preflight, I settled right down and felt fine again. I would fly Scout for 10 months total.

Now we'll hear from Dave Ferrell: I think I was C Trp's first new pilot after they moved up north to support Lam Song 719. I was processed through Dong Ha by the 223rd with about 5 guys and assigned to C Trp with this tall 6'6", skinny EM. We got a ride to Quang Tri and went to C Trp's hospital building described by Don Pusher. I didn't have any TA50 gear (sleeping bag, etc.) at the time. They told me to just sleep in someone's cot and if they came back, go to another one. Anyway, about my second night there I heard this loud, single shot just outside the building. It was dark and I certainly didn't go investigate the noise. The next morning at breakfast, I learned that this tall, skinny, new guy had shot himself! Welcome to Vietnam, Dave!! About the 25th of Feb, I got to Khe Sanh and my first day there was hardly uneventful. I'd guess C Trp had already been there about a week or ten days. C Trp's area was relatively near the ATC tower and they had a loud speaker attached to the tower that carried the tower communications. I sort of wandered down there to see what was going on. A Cobra was coming in that had been shot up pretty bad and landed on the runway. A med team came over and took the wounded back seater away. I watched the co-pilot get out of the front seat and into the back seat. The tower wanted the Cobra moved off the runway right away so they could land the fixed wing traffic. C-130s were landing and unloading ARVN at regular intervals. There were trucks waiting to pick them up and drive them to where ever. I remember seeing one 2 1/2 ton with about 10 guys in the back and another 20 waiting to load. It had no canvas top, just the wooden sides and seats. Anyway, as this wounded Cobra moved along side this truck, he must have lost the tail rotor or something, because it crashed. One of the main rotor blades sliced through these ARVN. Khe Sanh was always a dusty place and I can remember running towards this great ball of dust to see if I could help. Lots of others came as well. Funny, at the Atlanta Reunion, Don and I were talking this over and he said he also went to help, but I didn't see him there. The first thing I came on was the lower half of an ARVN soldier, so I passed that up and found several more dead and injured. My thoughts were to try to give 1st Aid to anyone who needed it but I was shocked to see that the live ARVN were busy helping themselves to whatever was in the pockets and belongings of the dead! I decided that maybe the ARVN didn't need any help from me. Welcome to Vietnam, Dave!! Someone helped this LT pilot from the wrecked Cobra. I don't think he was injured in this crash. Some years later I believe I learned that this LT died later in his tour. This same day, I flew my first mission - forgot about an orientation flight or a check-ride; I was Cobra qualified and that was good enough. I was the front seater for Dave Lancaster. He was on his second tour and had been in C Trp for some time. He was a good Gun pilot and human being. I liked flying with him. On that mission, we were still using the little birds in Laos. We flew past LZ 31, which was the western most LZ down the highway into Laos. I remember looking down and seeing a burned out Huey but no one else on the LZ. I asked Dave why there weren't any people on the LZ. He explained they were all under cover because the NVA had it surrounded and were shooting at the ARVN continually. We flew on another mile or so and started working. The 6s found some hootches that contained 55 gal drums. We spent the rest of our time blowing these up and got several nice secondary explosions. We went back to Khe Sanh to refuel and rearm. Just as we were leaving, we got this call that LZ 31 was being overrun with tanks. As I recall we had three Guns, two 6s and the C&C; so we left the 6s there and flew to LZ 31. When we got there, two F4s were putting in an airstrike so we were told to hold off and orbit about half a mile away. We had good seats, so we watched the show! On one pass, this F4 came in low and as he put his stuff down I saw several streams of 51 cal tracers arch up toward him. As he pulled up, the F4 started smoking and soon the two pilots ejected. The jet tumbled through the sky and crashed into a hill. Our C&C, some distance from us, announced that he was going to try to pick up the two Air Force guys. The lead snake said why don't you wait a minute and we'll cover you, but he didn't. I have to give you a little more background information here. The Americans had already lost a lot of helicopters supporting Lam Song, so we had received instructions to try some different tactics. Today's was 50 feet off the trees and keep your speed up! We had to fly up this valley to get to where our C&C was going. The NVA were everywhere. As we went, I could easily see them walking around on the ground and we took A LOT of SA fire that day! Unbeknownst to us, some of this fire had cut the cables leading from our radios; so we couldn't talk to anyone. We still had intercom and it would be a few minutes before we figured out what was wrong. We were the second Snake. As we passed over this small ridge and dropped into another valley, we couldn't determine

where the lead Snake had gone; so we broke left. The number three Snake followed us but broke right. Well, all of a sudden we are alone and no one is talking to us. We were convinced that everyone else had been shot down! After a few minutes, Dave decided it is best to go back home and started back East. We are still low level and, as luck would have it, we came upon our C&C that had, indeed, been shot down. They had made a controlled, forced landing in a good sized area covered by elephant grass. It is easy to recognize your own people at 50 feet, but we couldn't talk to them. Dave decided he is going to land and just as he sets up to do this, another C Trp Gun landed near the C&C; so they wave us off. We head back for Khe Sanh. Later I learn that they replaced Dave Nelson, the front seat in the Snake, with ?, the wounded C&C pilot and the Snake medevaced him. He was the Gun Plat Ldr at the time; just flying C&C at day. I never saw him again, so he must have been wounded seriously. I was also told that the gunner on the C&C had been shot though a leg; the bullet cut a main artery. He bled to death from that wound. Sorry, I don't know any more details about this. We got back to Khe Sanh and learn that our radios were shot out, so no more flying today. That was fine with me! One day like that day was more than enough for an entire life time! Welcome to Vietnam, Dave!!

Dave Ferrell goes on to provide a few more details to help us understand the conditions at the time since we have no official records or history for C Trp during this period. A few days into the battle, I remember we stopped sending the 6s into Laos. I believe the following is true. One of our sister ACTs, B/7/1st, had lost so many ships that it was hardly combat effective anymore. The Trp Cmdr had gone on record that he wouldn't send his 6s there anymore and was relieved. There was a big stink about this because most of the line pilots agreed with this Major. In just a few days, the powers that be agreed with him and we were told not to take our 6s there anymore. Another aspect of Lam Song was that there were aircraft everywhere most of the time. The common thread in most of my memories is in being able to look out and see a hook or a crane putting in something, several slicks and sets of guns working on an insertion or a resupply, jets above, below and along side you, C&C ships in all sorts of orbits, on and on. It was like watching the entire inventory of American war birds playing in one large production! This was both good and bad. Good because if you had an emergency of some sort and could complete a mission, there was usually a backup that could be diverted to help out. Bad because you didn't feel personally involved in the effort, you just had a bit routine for a huge dance team. Another impression that comes to mind is that there were a lot of constants - the NVA were constantly rocketing our bases with 122s or 130 mm guns, there was fog around Khe Sanh constantly in the mornings and most evenings, there was constant movement of aircraft into and out of Khe Sanh, there was constant movement of supplies and vehicles on the roads, there was constant AA fire on the Laotian side, dust was universal constant anywhere near the ground, it was constantly noisy, we were constantly changing tactics to stay alive while performing our missions, we consistently expended every time we launched, etc., etc. Some examples to support these statements are: Concerning changing tactics, I can remember times when my Cobra team started a gun run from 10,000 feet - we were 5 or 6,000 AGL! The rockets would burn out and gravity would pull them down to the target. Concerning constant AA fire, I already talked about SA and 51 cal but twice I can remember receiving flack - naturally we changed altitudes in a hurry. Another time we were supporting the ARVN's defense of a FB and started shooting at the side of the hill just below the FB. We were some distance out when I noticed hundreds and hundreds of these "twinkling stars" in the trees on this hill. My mind played a trick on me. For a second I thought how neat it was that someone had put Christmas tree lights all along this hill. Then reality returned - My God! Those are NVA rifles firing at us! Finally I remember two C Trp Cobras landed too close to each other at Khe Sanh. For a few moments the blades intermeshed but inevitably, they finally collided and ripped the main rotor and transmissions from both aircraft. One rotor system traveled three quarters of a mile before coming to rest! No one was seriously hurt but the aircraft were destroyed. Oh, we didn't have any American Blues during this period. We had our Lift ships and they received missions sort of a la cart like the Guns. An elite unit from Siagon called the Hoc Bao were used to retrieve downed air crews. We certainly had no complaints about them or their performance and I didn't hear of any from the other aviation units. The Hoc Bao did their job well!

About the first week of April, C Trp moved from Khe Sanh back to Quang Tri and regrouped there. A few days later, they loaded up everything and returned to Lane the same way they had arrived - via air and ground convoys. The 7/17th's participation in Lam Song 719 was over at this point.

March - On the 1st, A Trp's Guns supported a single ship medevac by the 247th Med of one US and three enemy wounded. The situation began when the enemy ambushed a 23rd ARVN unit with a 51 cal. After the enemy were dispersed by artillery, A Trp's Guns searched the area and found no remaining enemy activity. On the 3rd, A Trp provided security for President Thieu's visit to Lam Son. During the screen, the Scouts found five bunkers which were destroyed by the Guns. No contact was made and the mission ended at 1600 hours when the President left. At 1300 on the 6th, A Trp was working an AO near Dakat and received a frag movement order to move to An Son. They arrived at An Son at 1945 hours. On the 7th, A Trp worked the Suoi Cau Valley. One LOH took three hits in the rotor blades, landed and was slung back to camp. A little later, a Scout found a squad-size enemy unit walking down a trail. About 20-25 rounds were fired at the Guns as they killed two. During the remainder of the day, the Scouts found numerous trails, hootches, and bunkers indicating recent enemy usage. All hootches and bunkers were destroyed by the Guns but no contact was made. On the 8th, A Trp returned to Phan Rang. The 10th was scheduled as a maintenance down day but A Trp was called to support a TAC E for an 53rd REGT unit in contact with a platoon size VC force. The Guns screened for three hours during which only one expended ordnance. On the 17th, A Trp was told to move to Pleiku and closed there at 1130 hours. On the 19th, A Trp supported the 47th Regt near Pleiku. The Scouts found ten uniformed people without weapons in a village and insert the ARP with negative results. Later the Scouts found one armed person and the Guns killed him while destroying four hootches. On the 21st, CW2 David C. Lancaster and WO1 James W. Manthel of C Trp were killed and VHPA Member Dave Ferrell describes the situation.

I was flying Dave's wing that day and we were the only two ships from C Trp assigned to this mission. The ARVN were withdrawing from Laos. We had been sent out to support an ARVN armored unit that had been ambushed. There was this horseshoe shaped bend in the road pointing to the south. From low hills on the west and east side, the NVA were shooting at the ARVN. I watched an RPG or B40 come out of the trees and hit the 113 which blew just like in the movies. A few seconds later, another hit a tank and the turret flew up into the air. Things aren't going well for the ARVN. About that time we get everyone sorted out enough to start shooting at the ambushers. The NVA were squared away and had positioned at least three 51 cal in a nice triangle to cover their forces. These 51 cal start in on us. We stop shooting at the ambushers and start in on the 51 cal. We must have made some progress because their fire dropped off about the time my Snake was empty. I told Dave I was out of ammo and wanted to leave. Dave said he wanted to make one more pass. I told him I could not cover his break; but he said he was going in anyway. He made his run and emptied the ship. We watched in horror as he took a full broadside of 51 cal. He called that they had been hit, lost the tail rotor and that Jim was wounded. He continued on to the south looking for any place along the highway to land the Cobra. They didn't get too far when their airspeed went to nothing and they went twirling into the ground. We later talked to the med evac team that retrieved their bodies. They said they believed both men died of broken necks caused by their chicken plates and this twirling fall. I remember being really upset about losing Dave. We had become good friends. That very morning he had shown me a picture of his wife and the card she had sent him - today was their anniversary!

On the 23rd, A Trp worked an AO near Chec Bo and found a large rice cache. The Blues were inserted and destroyed some of it before bad weather forced the Trp from the AO. On the 24th, A Trp found and destroyed a company minus size staging area. A Trp was told to leave Pleiku on the 25th to return to Phan Rang but could not because of bad weather. On the 26th, one A Trp AH-1G was damaged in a mortar attack and was sent to the 604th TC for a tail boom change. The remainder of the Trp closed at Phan Rang at 1330 hours. During 28-31, A Trp worked AOs around Song Mao. The Scouts found signs of enemy activity but no contact was made. In late March, the exact date is unknown, WO1 James Bernard Low of C Trp was in a Cobra that took fire and crashed while supporting operations in Laos. VHPA Members Don Purser and Dave Ferrell provided some details of this event while attending the VHPA Reunion in Atlanta:

They reported receiving fire and the Cobra may well have been burning before they crashed into a river bottom. The hydraulics caught fire and this really burned Jim before he could be removed from the wreck. Eventually both pilots were evaced. Don remembers going with several other C Trpers to visit Jim in the hospital. Don said his face and upper body were so badly burned that they couldn't recognize him at all. Only after Jim started speaking did they recognize his voice. They understood he lived about a week or so before dying on April 3rd. The other pilot, name unknown at this time, was wounded but survived.

April - On the 1st, A Trp was placed on stand-by for movement to Pleiku. The order was finally received at 2230 hours. A Trp closed at Pleiku at noon and at 1500 received a TAC E support request from FSB Lonely where the US 62nd Arty camp was under attack by a VC force. A Trp sent four Cobras and the VC immediately broke contact. Though the Guns received fire, none were hit and they believed they killed four VC. Later the Arty camp credited A Trp with 20 kills. From the 3rd through the 5th, A Trp supported the 47th Regt, 22nd ARVN. On the 4th, A Trp was involved in some undocumented action and were credited with 17 kills. On the 7th, A Trp sent two AH-1Gs on a TAC E to FSB 6; but after an hour the returned to base as they were unable to contact the friendly forces on the ground. On the 15th, while working around Cheo Bo, a LOH drew fire from three or four hootches surrounded by spider holes. Two elephants and one OP were also found. All were taken under fire and destroyed and one person was killed. The Blues determined this was a company-size base camp, so artillery was adjusted and the camp completely destroyed. On the 16th, A Trp's ARP uncovered a small aid station. Several fresh footprints were followed into a tree line which the Guns fired up killing one. On the 17th, A Trp's Scouts reported a parachute with harness next to a tunnel opening and a flight suit, underwear, and a flight helmet were found on the ground. Two people were observed hiding in the bushes with a 51 cal which hit a LOH four times. The Guns expended with unknown results but an airstrike was called in. On the 21st, A Trp's Gun saw several people in an open area. When attempts to ID them produced fire, the Guns opened fire with unknown results.

Later an enemy squad was observed walking a trail. The Guns fired; six were killed, two wounded and two captured. Upon further investigation a bunker complex was uncovered. Art strikes were called in with unknown results. The Blues and a reaction force were inserted and found 500 lbs of rice which was turned over to the 45th Regt. On the 23rd, A Trp was screening an area 20 miles west of SHODE III when the 3rd Bn, 45th Regt, 22nd ARVN made heavy contact with an NVA Regt. A Trp was requested to provide support. During the mission, one LOH was engaging a mortar position when it was hit by 30 cal AW fire. The observer was hit in the left groin but continued to engage his target. Another round returned to the Phu Nhon rear point where they discovered two more rounds had hit the observer's chicken plate. Both were evaced to the 71st Evac. Meanwhile the C&C had discovered a 51 cal position and took one round through a rotor blade. On the 26th, A Trp's Scout discovered approximately 20 people in a base camp with five hootches and bunkers. The Scouts received fire so the Guns opened up and killed one. The Blues were inserted and immediately came under heavy fire. A reaction force was inserted to support the ARP. Both units began receiving heavy fire and mortar rounds. When the fire lifted, the ground forces found a training area. The area was destroyed by the Guns. The LOHs received fire two more times and the Guns expended with unknown results. When the Infantry was extracted, it was found that they had suffered four WIA.

BAIANG HO 16 - For the period 20-24 Apr and 3-14 May, the 7/17th provided command and control for the air assault portions of this operation conducted by the Capital Republic of Korea Infantry Division (CRID) and the 173rd Abn to the northwest and west of Phu Cat AFB; specifically the Suoi Cau, Suoi Tre, and Suoi La Tinh Valleys, and Base Area 226. The following units participated: the 61st and 129th AHCs assigned to the 7/17 and C/7/17; the 92th and B/227 AHCs and D/227 AWC from the 10th CAB; the 134th AHC, the 230th AWC, and the 180th ASHC from the 268th CAB; the A/227th AHC and the C/228th ASHC from the 52nd CAB; the 268th Pathfinder Det from the 268th CAB; and the 10th Pathfinder Det from the 10th CAB. Intelligence indicated that elements of the 3rd NVA division were regrouping and retraining in or near Base Area 226. The terrain was described as a valley floor at about 100 meters elevation, steep mountains rise to 700 meters on the east and 800 meters on the western side. Dense vegetation offered excellent overhead concealment for enemy movement. Rugged ridges and pinnacles, encompassed by vegetation, offered concealed AA weapons positions with extremely good fields of fire. Very few adequate LZs existed in the area and most were one or two ship LZs on the surrounding pinnacles while those on the valley floor that could accommodate four or five ships were very vulnerable to AA fire from positions on the mountains above. The concept of the operation was for the Sqdn to provide air recon and tactical mobility for the Infantry units primarily via the two organic AHCs (the 61st and the 129th) and C Trp. They would reconnoiter, prepare and insert the Infantry elements into numerous LZs simultaneously to surround and cordon off Base Area 226. This was accomplished by inserting the ROK units to the south and east and the 173rd to the north and west as blocking forces on the 20th, 21st, and 22nd. Then two ROK Regts assaulted the mountain tops and valley floor to engage the enemy. During the period 3 - 14 May numerous assaults and extractions were conducted for tactical redeployment of the ROK units to further engage the enemy units. Elements from the 10th, 52nd, and 268th CABs were opconed on a daily basis. On the 20th (D-3), five companies and one Bn CP were inserted into five LZs. On the 21st (D-2), 105 ROK and 663 US troops were inserted. On the 22nd (D-1), two ROK companies were inserted into two more LZs. On the 23rd (D Day), the Sqdn and opconed elements assembled at two PZs. The slicks were broken down into ten flights of five ships each with supporting gunships. C Trp provided the initial recon and prep of the proposed LZs. Pathfinders were assigned to slick flights to each LZ to assist the CH-47s flights to follow. POL and rearming points were operational at both PZs. After a artillery prep, C Trp started a VR around the proposed LZs at 0930. At 0945 the assault forces were airborne and at 1000 they put 12 companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs, and one Arty Btry into ten LZs simultaneously. On the 24th (D+1), they again used two PZs and the same schedule. C Trp reconed the LZs and at 1000 the Sqdn inserted nine companies and three Bn CPs into seven LZs simultaneously. On 3 May (D+10), they began the extraction of the ROK Cavalry Regt with eight companies and two Bn CPs from nine PZs. On 4 May (D+11), they extracted the 1st ROK Regt consisting of ten companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs and one Arty Btry from ten PZs. On 5 May (D+12), they used one PZ to reinsert the ROK Cavalry Regt with eight companies into six LZs. The Blue flight received some SA fire and the guns engaged the targets. Two Hueys received hits. On the 6th (D+13), they inserted 11 companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs and one Arty Btry from the ROK 1st Regt into 15 LZs. On the 10th (D+17), they began the final phase by extracting eight company and one Arty Btry of the ROK 1st Regt from nine PZs. On the 12th (D+19), they extracted one company from the ROK Cavalry Regt from one PZ. On the 13th (D+20), they extracted seven companies and 2 Bn CPs from eight PZs. The Yellow flight received SA and B-40 fire and the Guns engaged. One Huey and one UH-1C were hit. Enemy personnel and bunkers were discovered and attacked by the Guns. The day's operations claimed 10 KBA. On the 14th (D+21), they completed the extraction of nine companies and one Bn CP from seven PZs. The totals for the entire operation were for UH-1Hs: 2696 hours, 4099 sorties, 11,176 passengers using 351 aircraft and for CH-47s: 252 hours, 300 sorties, 1428 passengers, 706 tons using 45 aircraft. The analysis section in the After Action Report provides some insight into this operation. Apparently the CRID was very security conscious because it provided only fragmentary information in advance for planning purposes and denied preparation air recons of their AO. They also did not put their G-3 or Regt Cmdrs in a C&C yet demanded simultaneous insertions. The lack of airborne decision makers caused delays in LZ selection as everyone had to wait for the information to be radioed back to the ROK CPs. All the opconed air units could not laager in the Lane area, so they had to fly in every morning and home every night. This, of course, delayed the air assaults about one hour. Temporary refuel and rearm points had to be established for several days outside fixed facilities which taxed the Sqdn's S-4 and HHT personnel and added a security problem. Finally, the CRID wanted their elements extracted from the field and returned to their base camp. This required extra 'air tax' time that could have been eliminated if they had used some ground convoys. The operation claimed 252 enemy killed, 110 individual weapons, 35 crew weapons, and 7 radios captured against 13 Koreans killed and 60 wounded with no US losses and no aircraft losses.

May - During the first week, A Trp's operations were weather restricted. On the 11th, A Trp destroyed a small base camp west of Phu Nhon. On the 19th, an A Trp Cobra crashed at Phu Nhon while hovering from the POL to the parking area. The pilot had gone IFR in the dust and the ship came to rest in an inverted position. Neither pilot was injured. At 1105 hours on the 20th, WO1 Gregory A. Smith and WO1 Robert Bruce died in the crash of an A Trp LOH west of Dragon Mountain near Camp Enari. The ARP was inserted to secure the crash site. The cause of the crash was never determined. C Trp moved their operations base to An Khe for two weeks during this period.

D Trp 1/10th CAV - About this time, D/1/10th CAV, the ACT for the 1/10th Cavalry Squadron that had been part of the 4th Div was attached to the 7/17th. VHPA Member Mike Lovett explains:

As the 4th Div was standing down, the 1/10 Cav Sqdn was still based out of Camp Radcliff near An Khe with the primary mission of keeping a good percentage of QL19 open between the coast and Pleiku. D/1/10 was the Sqdn's organic ACT and we lived at Radcliff as well. In fact I can remember we had a very nice New Years Eve party not too long after we occupied the buildings formerly used by the 4th Avn Bn. Our Sqdn was part of TF 1/4 and then TF 1/9 as the stand down continued. Aviation support became a serious problem by late 1970 because we were not part of the 1st Avn Bde. When we needed parts or IPs or anything aviation related, we had to go all the way to Nha Trang and even then it wasn't good. We still flew most of our missions for the 1/10 Cav but they really couldn't support us like E/704 AMNT used to do. Our commanders made a lot of noise and about Jan/Feb 1971 we moved to Lane. Within a short period we were attached to the 7/17 Cav and the support was much better. Initially, we had no billets or other facilities. We shared some space with C/7/17, got an old Korean building and even had some built for us and lived in tents too. That part wasn't too great. Our ARP was still at An Khe and we always had two Guns plus two or three 58s (we didn't use OH-6As for Scouts after?) at An Khe as a quick reaction force to keep the road open. That arrangement was hardly normal for an ACT but I don't think there were any normal units left in Vietnam at that time. Even when we were in the 7/17th, we still flew missions for the 1/10th most of the time. Like other ACTs during that period, we were not allowed to put our American ARP on the ground. When we supported the 1/10th, there were American ground forces near at hand. But we often sent pink teams up and down the coast, especially when C/7/17 was up north during Lam Son 719, without any hope of Infantry back-up. Basically we did a lot of aerial recon with the Scouts just marking targets as best they could for the Guns. We were also lucky during those days that we didn't have many birds go down and I can't remember anyone getting killed during the first half of 1972.

VHPA Member Earl Ewing remembers these times as follows: When I joined D/1/10th Cav in June, they had been living at An Son for some time because their operations were well established. They were living in wooden buildings but there wasn't enough room for everyone. For the first few weeks I moved from bunk to bunk while guys were on R&R. I had gone to AMOC and Cobra school after flight school, so I was in the Service Platoon and the 518th TC Det during my three months with D Trp. I recall we used to take Cobras we couldn't fix to our support at Tuy Hoi which was a very large facility. D Trp did keep operational teams at An Khe and more than once we had to go there to fix something or to take in parts. I can also remember going to Pleiku for the same reason but maybe that was when I was with the Sqdn. In September, I became the Maintenance Officer for the 7/17th. We were always very busy because the Sqdn was a collection of all sorts of aviation units and the ARVN had our units scatter ships all over the place just like trucks. I believe a lot of people got hurt and a lot of equipment was damaged and misused under this "scatter deployment" concept. In early '72 I can remember over flying Tuy Hoa on the way to Vung Tau so we could have our Cobras modified to switch the tail rotor to the other side. It was really impressive to see that Tuy Hoa had "turned to nothing". By then we were getting most of our parts and some support from Nha Trang but blades and engines were in short supply. I finished up my tour with the 129th in March.

June - A Trp spent 15 days down due to weather this month. Its missions included several convoy escort missions from Pleiku to Phu Nhon and two SAR operations in an attempt to locate a civilian Cessna 180 which disappeared between Cheo Reo and Pleiku. On or near the 1st, C Trp moved its operation base to Kontum from Lane and would support operations in this area for the entire month. On or near the end of the month, C Trp returned its operations base to Lane. During this month, the Sqdn HQ and HHT moved from Qui Nhon to An Son. VHPA Member Ernie Smart continues providing some important background information about this period: