

## AN LOC. SOME MORE OF THE REST OF THE STORY

The article titled "Tales of the Blue Max A.R.A. and the Battle of An Loc" in the first 2009 edition of "The VHPA Aviator" brought back memories of the high intensity warfare brought on when the North Vietnamese came south with Chinese and Russian supplied tanks, APC's and anti-aircraft weapons the likes of which we had not seen before. This was known as the Easter Offensive which started on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1972. The NVA's initial objective in the south was to capture the provincial capital of An Loc. At times it was estimated that up to 8,000 rounds a day were falling on An Loc and that once beautiful city was reduced to rubble and to a one kilometer perimeter. The Vietnamese Airborne Brigade and the 5<sup>th</sup> ARVN Division fought valiantly sometimes with enemy tanks inside the perimeter. B-52's, TAC-AIR and our Cobras were employed skillfully to kill thousands of the enemy. Air force C-130's were doing their best to air drop supplies but after losing three C-130's, air drops from high altitude resulted in many bundles off target to the delight of the NVA. According to Cpt. J.H. Wilbanks, an advisor to the ARVN in An Loc, a captured NVA officer asked his interrogators if he might have a c-ration fruit cocktail, he had developed a taste for it. Through all this the ARVN held on and while still surrounded with rounds continuing to fall on An Loc, on July 7<sup>th</sup> the 229<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Battalion had the honor of escorting President Thieu into An Loc so he could have a short visit with his people. The mission was handled in complete secrecy so that very few people ever heard of the mission. Provided below is an account of that mission.

By April 1972, the U.S. presence in Vietnam had been reduced to just a few units whose main mission was to support the South Vietnamese Army. The 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division (airmobile) which deployed to Vietnam in 1965 had been reduced to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade (separate). The Brigade was stationed at Bien Hoa and commanded by B.G. James Hamlet, a man who was greatly admired. The 229<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Bn. was a major part of the Brigade. As of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1972, the Battalion had 1,850 people and 142 aircraft. The Presidential Unit Citation DA GO. 19,18 June 1974. (The second PUC to be awarded to the 229<sup>th</sup>) lists the following units: Detachment 1, HQS and HQS Company, 229<sup>th</sup> Assault Helicopter Battalion, Companies A,B and D, Assault Helicopter Battalion, Troop F, 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, Battery F-79 Aerial Field Artillery and the 362 Aviation Company (ASHC). Companies A and B were lift Companies and D was an Air Cavalry Troop. There were other detachments assigned to the Battalion but they were not included in the PUC.. The Brigade and the 229<sup>th</sup> continued to reduce strength through April and May and in early June the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade became Task Force Gary Owen under the command of Col. John Brandenburg (later LTG. Brandenburg and Commander of the USA 3<sup>rd</sup> Corp, Fort Lewis, Washington).

Most of the actions that occurred from April 7<sup>th</sup> through July 7, 1972 are documented in the daily log and in an 11 page Summary of Action submitted with the nomination for the 229<sup>th</sup> Presidential Unit Citation. All units and particularly the F-79th ARA served valiantly during that period. Articles by some of the units are most interesting but I do not think we have heard from all the units. It would make interesting reading if we could put together a compendium with a chapter for each unit to tell their story. It could be titled, "The Battle of An Loc According to

Those Who Lived It".

Around mid June 1972 the Vietnamese Army decided to send the Airborne Division north to assist the forces in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corp areas. The Third Regional Assistance Command (TRAC) commanded by MG Hollingsworth was requested to provide the helicopter support to pull out the Airborne Brigade and insert a brigade into An Loc from another division. All this while An Loc was still surrounded by a very active NVA Force that exercised their extensive anti aircraft systems at every opportunity. The mission was given to the 229<sup>th</sup>. At that point in time, the 229<sup>th</sup> who had a lot of experience hauling ARVN troops into An Loc, was the only unit with enough assets to do the mission. Concurrently, we had other mission requirements besides An Loc. For the An Loc operation the 229<sup>th</sup> was to be assisted by ten UH-1's from the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) supported by Huey gunships that the USAF had given the VNAF. They did not like the Huey gunships and they wanted our Cobra support. Then, the day before the lift was to begin, the Vietnamese decided to have the Airborne Brigade move south and clear QL-13. Clearing QL-13 proved to be a major obstacle. The 21<sup>st</sup> ARVN Division had been stalled for some time trying to clear QL-13 from the south. The NVA was in bunkers mainly on the west side of QL-13 and air power was unsuccessful in dislodging them. Before this mission began, I had insisted that Col. Le Quong Tuong, the Airborne Brigade Commander, one of the finest ARVN officers, and his U.S. advisor be on my C&C so we could coordinate the operation. We could not start the lift operation until the road was cleared and in spite of all efforts the NVA still controlled the road. Under great pressure I turned to the ARVN commander and said:"What are you going to do now?" Cpt .Clarence Donaldson, the advisor, passed me a note from the Brigade Commander with two words, "we charge". They did charge and it was bloody but they did dislodge the NVA. One of the specific actions that I will always remember was the heroics of a U.S. advisor who we were communicating with. He was close to the enemy in a B-52 shell crater and calling in air strikes. We had hopes of rescuing him but it was not to be. He fought to the bitter end.

By the time the ARVN had cleared the road it was mid-afternoon on June 19<sup>th</sup>. It was decided to postpone the airlift to 0800 June 20<sup>th</sup>. At 8:12 on the 20<sup>th</sup> just as we were starting the lift, a F/9 AH1G was hit by an SA-7 missile just to the east of QL-13 near Tan Khai.. I was at about the same altitude and about 100 meters west of him over the highway, apparently looking NW when I heard "Cobra down". It was a ball of flames and not recognizable as a Cobra. Apparently the missile had hit the tail pipe and engine. There was a white trail all the way back to where the missile was fired which was on the west side of QL-13. A F-79 heavy fire team attacked the launch point but the enemy was ready. It was a well planned ambush. One F-79 Cobra was shot down and a second sustained numerous hits and was escorted back to Lai Khe. The damage was so extensive that it was evacuated to Vung Tau for shipment back to the states. Fortunately, the third Cobra sustained little if any damage and it escorted the damaged Cobra to Lai Khe. From what we were able to determine the crew from the Cobra that was shot down got the aircraft on the ground but before they could be located and evacuated, the NVA got there first.

As I recall their bodies were found in a B-52 shell crater. However, the daily log reports the bodies were seen outside the aircraft.

With all this, the lift was called off at 1345. That night I received a message from Danger 79, MG Hollingsworth, that if we did not get the lift going the next day, that we would have a night operation. That really concerned me and I knew he was serious. On my previous tour with the 11<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion supporting the 1<sup>st</sup> Inf. Division when BG Hollingsworth was ADC under MG De Puy, it seemed like we started half of the missions at night. Anyway, I knew we had to get the operation going the next day. We had no defense against the SA-7 missile and we had no idea how many they had or where they would be launched from. The only location for the LZ/PZ was on QL-13 south of An Loc in the rubber trees. Coming out of the PZ with a load of troops the aircraft would be passing within a few hundred meters of where the SA-7 was previously fired. The available intelligence was not encouraging. The SA-7 was a shoulder fired weapon with a one pound warhead that locked on to a heat source like a tail pipe and was effective up to seven thousand feet. We knew the missile always left a white trail. Conceivably, if the missile was coming at your aircraft you might escape by heading directly at it thus breaking lock and then making an evasive maneuver. It was also conveyed to me that in theory the missile might be decoyed by a round from a vari pistol. We had a mission to do and we had to have some hope of surviving more attacks. Therefore, at the mission briefing on June 21<sup>st</sup> at Lai Khe I told all attending (to include the VNAF crews) to monitor a common VHF frequency. If anyone saw a white trail yell "MISSILE" over the VHF. They were further informed that if you do not see the white trail, kick your aircraft around because it may be coming after you and if it is, do an evasive maneuver and hope for the best. The 362<sup>nd</sup> ASHC Chinooks were always available to recover downed aircraft or to be used to haul troops. However, I never used Chinooks to haul troops during this period because I figured if the NVA had any SA-7's left they could not resist shooting down a Chinook with 30-40 troops on board. Therefore, the Chinooks that were used extensively on previous missions were used sparingly. The survival plan for the Chinooks was a crewman on the rear ramp with a vari pistol. I was glad we never had to test the validity of that theory.

As you might expect there is a whole lot to tell about the Army air support for the Battle of An Loc.. Therefore, I will jump to the first known survival of an SA-7 hit that was brought out in the VHPA Aviator. On the morning of June 21<sup>st</sup> the 229<sup>th</sup> and the ten VNAF UH-1's were on station at Lai Khe and ready to go at 0800. However, there were delays which could have been more airstrikes or problems routing the NVA out of the LZ/PZ which as mentioned above was to be on QL-13 south of An Loc with mature rubber trees on both sides of the road. Those rubber trees proved to be a blessing because the lift flights were able to come in over the clouds, spiral down through the clouds over An Loc which was still surrounded by NVA and land on QL-13 south of An Loc. The NVA never knew just where we were landing and when the artillery and mortar rounds started getting close we would shift the LZ/PZ. Our pathfinders did a miraculous job of coordinating the LZ/PZ operation and keeping the South Vietnamese from overloading the outgoing Huey's. But with almost every flight going out I heard the dreaded words "taking fire".

At this point we had 30, 229<sup>th</sup> UH-1's and 10, VNAF UH-1's in the five ship lifts escorted by Cobra's. By mid-afternoon the clouds had dissipated which eliminated some of our cover but the lifts were going good. Most flights were taking some small arms fire on the way out but no one had been shot down. The Cobra's were doing a good job of keeping the NVA's heads down. After our experience the day before and with the reported range of the SA-7 I had decided to fly a little higher. The NVA had shot down several USAF and VNAF aircraft with anti-aircraft and missiles to include Air Force Forward Air Controllers(FAC). Apparently the enemy figured out that those aircraft loitering above were not on a sight seeing trip. The FAC's took all that seriously and were always above me. Locating targets from that altitude was obviously difficult as was keeping tract of eight flights of five coming and going. Assisting me during those flights to include monitoring the five radios with multiple frequencies were either Bn. S-3 Maj. John Hatcher or Asst. S-3 Cpt. Harry C. Small, both outstanding officers. We always got a chuckle over high altitude battle damage assessment by the FAC for fast movers going off station. It sounded more like a negotiation or auction. The FAC would often throw in a 105 Howitzer (captured) just for good measure.

Then about 1500 I heard "missile, missile" and saw the missile heading toward a Cobra. The crew later reported that they were at 4000' and I was probably at around 6-7000 and just northeast of their location. Just before the missile got to the Cobra, the Cobra appeared to kick right. Instead of going up the tail it hit the tailboom just aft of the engine. I saw the tailboom fall away and the Cobra in a nose down decent slowly turning and heading in a southerly direction. My first response to my crew was: "they are going to make it". It was obvious that they would go into the trees because that was about all there was under them. I called to my crew to see if we had a rope or anything we could use to pull them out of the trees. The answer was nothing on board but I continued the decent. Within minutes I got the word that one of the lift ships coming out of the PZ with a load of Vietnamese was going to attempt a rescue. I was somewhat relieved when I heard that because my aircraft with several people on board, and that humongous secure radio console in the middle of the floor was not a good choice for chopping trees. It may have seemed to Cpt. Brown and Cpt. Cordon that they were on the ground for 10-15 minutes before they were pulled to safety as stated in their debrief (thanks to someone the debrief is available at [www.vhnfcn.org/missile.html](http://www.vhnfcn.org/missile.html)). However, even with the "B" Company Huey having to chop trees to get low enough to pull them in, I think it was probably under 10 minutes. While the pilots were chopping trees in order to get low enough to pull the pilots up, the crew was pushing out body bags to lighten the load. We were very fortunate to get the Cobra crew out because the NVA had gotten to a Cobra crew the day before at a nearby location before we could locate and rescue them. The success in getting the Cobra down and surviving with not much left to work with reminds me of an old adage I often heard in flight school and put to use several times since: "when in trouble, first fly the airplane". Mike and Marco did a masterful job getting the helicopter down and surviving with what they had left.

The heroics of the "B" company crew is a story in itself. While all this was happening, "B"

company yellow flight with Maj. Ernie Isbell, the Company Commander in the lead helicopter was coming out of the PZ with a load of ARVN. Ernie had heard the "missile" call and saw the missile hit the Cobra. Ernie said part of the action was observed through the "greenhouse" so he must have been close. He called to chalk five, who was just coming out of the PZ with four ARVN 's and five body bags to try to rescue the Cobra crew. With total disregard for their own safety in an area known to be infested with enemy, they descended over the downed Cobra and crew. When they could not reach the pilots, they began chopping trees. Time was not on their side. I am sure they knew that they had only minutes to get the pilots on board before the NVA would arrive. Chop trees they did until they could finally reach the two captains. With the pilots on board they headed to Lai Khe. This episode of surviving an SA-7 strike and recovering the crew was a truly inspiring time for everyone. Up to this point in time, with maybe one or two exceptions, with every known firing of an SA-7 missile, the NVA had destroyed an aircraft and killed a crew..

That night I got a call from Ernie Isbell that he had a crew who was concerned about intentionally damaging an aircraft. Ernie was obviously joking. He invited me over to see the rotor blades that had been removed from the Huey. The swaths on the blades looked to be up to four inches wide. It was miraculous that the Huey stayed together with all that punishment. The vibrations must have been enough to jar ones teeth loose. Thank goodness those Vietnamese trees were not as tough as our oaks to maples or this rescue attempt have ended differently. Anyway, I was impressed with what these pilots had done. I recommended that Ernie write the pilots up for Silver Stars. With the war winding down most all awards were down-graded and the crew received Distinguished Flying Crosses. I have been in contact with Ernie (retired as an O-6 and the owner of a Brokerage Business and living in Dallas, Texas) and he does not recall the names of the pilots. As I remember, it was a Lt. and a WO. Mike Sloniker, the Operations Officer for A Company and very much involved in this operation, thinks one of the pilots name was Wright. It sure would be good if they could be located and get them to write their version of this event. Wouldn't it be most appropriate Mike and Marco had the opportunity to buy these two gents a beer at some future convention?

Now for the 229<sup>th</sup> mission to take President Thieu into An Loc. Late on the afternoon of July 6<sup>th</sup> I received a call from Col Brandenburg that President Thieu wanted to visit his people in An Loc. He was quick to tell me that this mission would be carried out in complete secrecy. Only MG Hollingsworth, he and I would know who we were taking into An Loc. The President made up a story for his staff about where he was going because he was afraid of leaks to the NVA. I called together my staff for the planning and told them we had a mission to take a VIP into An Loc. I am glad no one asked me who. We had taken several VIP's into An Loc before including LTG Minh, CG of MR III and counter guerilla warfare consultant Sir Robert Thompson. However, making a run into An Loc was always a hazardous business. On 7 Jun 72 BG Richard Tallman, Deputy Commander of TRAC, his aide, Lt. John Todd and two others were killed and two wounded by artillery as they ran from the helicopter LZ to a bunker. The 120<sup>th</sup> Avn. Co., part of the 12<sup>th</sup> Aviation Group commanded by LTC. Jack Dugan, provided support to TRAC

Headquarters so it was one of their helicopters that carried General Tallman's party. President Thieu and his party would be landing in the same area providing they did not get shot down on the way in. It was not a comforting thought that we could be involved in the President getting killed or captured.

The plan we developed was for a heavy fire team to escort the UH-1 into An Loc with as always, the delivered party getting away from the LZ as quickly as possible. The Cobra's and the lift ship would go to Lai Khe and refuel and return as quickly as possible to be ready to extract the President's party. In case the party needed to be extracted before the crews got back from refueling, we would have a light fire team and a Huey over An Loc to make the extraction.

The next morning before daylight we sent a weather bird north to check on the weather. About 0630 they called to advise that they had gotten to Lai Khe but it was socked in to the north. I immediately advised Col Brandenburg of the situation and within minutes I received a call back stating we have to go now otherwise the Presidents intentions will be known and he will not be able to go to An Loc. I told Col. Brandenburg that I would head to Lai Khe and search for a way to get into An Loc. When I reached Lai Khe it was definitely socked in to the north so I decided to go east and look for another route. I had had some success in the past by going east and then north along the Song Be River and then turning west to An Loc. It was touch and go but I did make it into An Loc without getting shot up. The NVA was probably not expecting someone to be flying in such miserable weather. I then climbed to altitude and called headquarters on the secret secure radio and described the route I had taken. I asked them to give me time to get back to Lai Khe to refuel so I would be ready to lead the party to An Loc.

While this conversation was going on some big stuff started going off and so I did as I had done many times before, I headed for the nearest cloud. I stayed in the clouds most of the way back to Lai Khe. Within minutes after I had reported finding a way into An Loc I received a call that Danger 79 had launched the flight and was heading to An Loc. General Hollingsworth was a very impulsive man who was not inclined to wait on anything or anybody. A lot of thoughts were going through my mind as I headed to Lai Khe and none of it was good. The NVA hated Cobras and three Cobras and a Huey would be great target. Flying around under the clouds possibly at reduced speed was not a comforting thought and what a prize for enemy gunners. I had made it into An Loc without getting shot up but I was not sure they would.. Well, the Cobra guys did get the President's party into An Loc and I was tremendously relieved. Next, we had to get them out. Before the three Cobras and the Huey could get back from refueling, the President decided to come out. According to members of his party about 40 rounds had landed on An Loc while he was on the ground. That may have influenced his decision to leave early. According to reports, his visit to An Loc brought tears to everyone's eyes. Those poor souls in An Loc, military and civilians, had been under fire for over three months and now their President was there to congratulate them for their heroic defense of An Loc. By this time I was back over An Loc. The back up team was sent in to make the extraction. The extraction went well. We had been tremendously fortunate to get in and out without casualties. On the way back to Lai Khe I was

notified that the President had called ahead and ordered the ARVN's on station to prepare a "field lunch". I did not know what that was but I was sure anxious to get on the ground and put this mission behind us. The festivities at Lai Khe turned out to be a celebration and a nice time to converse with the President's party (I think they all spoke English). As the events played out I am not sure I ever got to thank those cobra guys who got the President into An Loc through all that cruddy weather. The Cobra crews would have been from either F-9 or D-229th because at that point in time, F-79 and part of "B" company had been deployed north.

The 229<sup>th</sup> stayed in Vietnam until the end of August 1972 when I took the Battalion colors to Fort Hood to rejoin the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division. MG James Smith, a great friend to many of us, was the Division Commander. The 229<sup>th</sup> Battalion while continuing to conduct missions up to the end began standing down units in late July and into August. While the 229<sup>th</sup> can be very proud of its accomplishments during this long sustained period of combat, it did not come without substantial losses in personnel and equipment. There were 8 KIA, 13 WIA and two MIA later confirmed KIA. There were 52 aircraft damaged and 17 losses. During the last year of operation F-79 ARA (Blue Max) turned over its' entire fleet of Cobras due to damage and combat losses. USAF losses were: 1, F-4D; 3, C130's; 2, A-37's; 1, AC119 and 4, 02's. The VNAF lost several helicopters and some fixed wing. During the period 7 April to 7 July 1972 the Battalion flew 9,851 hours, 13,458 sorties, transported 16,712 PAX and evacuated 68 casualties. There was over 200 tons of cargo hauled mostly by the 362<sup>nd</sup> ASHC. As with the TET offensive in 1968 the NVA losses were devastating. There were three NVA Divisions in the Battle for An Loc with a combined strength of over 27,000. The artillery command had just under 5,000. It was estimated that 90% of these forces were destroyed.. The South Vietnamese lost an estimated 8,000 troops. The North Vietnamese later admitted that their forces were decimated in both TET and the Easter Offensive. The sad part is that our weak, liberal, poorly informed Congress supported by a liberal press and others cut off supplies to the South Vietnamese while they faced the combined resources of China, Russia and North Vietnamese. By 1972 the South Vietnamese, with a lot of our equipment, were a strong fighting force but they had no chance to survive. Had we kept air support in South Vietnam and continued with supply support, millions of lives in the region would have been saved and a beautiful country would not have sat stagnate for 25 years. Thank God and President George W. Bush that we did not make that mistake again.

For you adventurous types the AH-1G Cobra flown by Cpt. Mike Brown and Cpt. Marco Cordon may be still be sitting in the trees south of An Loc at coordinates XT758773. I had fully intended to recover the Cobra for its' historical significance and museum value. However, another recovery event changed my mind. In June 1972 the Battalion was issued six new UH-1H's. My staff strongly recommended that I take one because my aircraft had a lot of hours. I finally agreed and since I was flying dawn to dusk every day they switched out the C&C console overnight. I had to agree that the staff was right when we learned that my aircraft had been transferred to a Delta unit and had an engine failure with a safe forced landing two days later. A second new UH-1H was issued to F-9 Cav Troop. Major George Hewlett, Commander of F-9, replaced me on C&C when I went for fuel.. Two days later while flying the C&C mission.

George's helicopter was hit with ground fire that set up a severe vibration. George landed the crippled helicopter on the air strip inside the An Loc perimeter. He and his crew were quickly evacuated and left behind a new Huey with less than thirty hours. I wanted to recover the helicopter so for the next few mornings I briefed the aircraft recovery crew at Lai Khe to be ready when conditions were right. About three days later we had broken to overcast clouds at 2,000' and I could see the Huey sitting on the An Loc airstrip. I called the crew forward. Having served as Operations Officer and Commander of the 178<sup>th</sup> ASHC on my previous tour, where we recovered 103 aircraft our first year in country, I had done a lot of aircraft recovery and was very familiar with the procedure. The Huey with the rigging crew made its' decent through the clouds and within about two minutes they had the helicopter rigged and ready for lift. The Chinook was on its' way in and by the time the rigger was ready to make the hook-up the Chinook was overhead. It was absolute precision. The hook-up was made and the hook-up man jumped off the Huey and ran for his helicopter while the Chinook was on the way out at full power. Before the hook-up man got to the helicopter a round landed exactly where the downed helicopter had been sitting. Flying laterite hit the hook-up man and the other Huey but with no serious damage. As I recall the Chinook took some small arms on the way out but nothing real serious. As a result of this experience I decided that there would be no more recovery of downed aircraft even though there were plenty of candidates.

Now for a challenge. Many Vietnam veterans have returned to Vietnam on tours and many of the tours include An Loc. With a GPS it just might be possible to find the Cobra even though it may not be very visible after 37 years of growth. If the fuselage could be found the tailboom would probably be about 1/4 mile to the north. If someone would like to take on this project, I would like to make the first donation. Wouldn't it make a great addition to the Army Aviation Museum at Fort Rucker?

While this was an extremely busy time for everyone throughout the Battalion, we emphasized nominating deserving people for awards. Through July 7, 1972 the total count for awards received or pending was: Medal of Honor one pending, Distinguished Service Cross three pending, Silver Star, seven received and five pending, Distinguished Flying Cross 14 received and 67 pending, Soldier's Medal one received and one pending, Bronze Star for Valor six received and nine pending, Bronze Star 204 received and 22 pending, Air Medal with V 180 received 13 pending, Air Medal 210 received and nine pending, Purple Heart 40 received, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry w/Gold Star 8, w/Silver Star 56, w/Bronze Star 157 and Vietnamese Honor Medal 1<sup>st</sup> Class 48, all pending. As you might imagine writing up these awards in sufficient detail was a monumental task and a tribute to commanders and staff. The Presidential Unit Citation from which much of this data is derived was researched and compiled by Cpt. Thomas Lewis Patterson. What a masterful job. Thank you Tom wherever you are. The 229<sup>th</sup> Aviation Bn .was previously awarded the Presidential Unit Citation during period 23 Oct 65-26 Nov 65 for action in the Ira Drang Valley, the Meritorious Unit Citation for the period

1 Sep 65-30 Nov 66 and the Cross of Gallantry with Palm for the period 9 Aug 65-17 May 69. Battery F, ARA, 79<sup>th</sup> Artillery (Blue Max) was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for the 23 Oct 65-26 Nov 65 and was selected as the Army Aviation Association of America Unit of the Year for 1972.

Now for a little on the lighter side. During my time with the Brigade and with Task Force Gary Owen, I got along well with both General Hamlet and Col Brandenburg. However, General Hamlet was really hard over about policing the area. Since the 229<sup>th</sup> was the largest unit, we had the largest area to police and much of that included perimeter barbwire. I am glad the troops enjoyed their beer but why the beer cans always wound up in the barbwire where they were hard to retrieve was beyond me. Anyway, on numerous occasions General Hamlet let me know how great the 229<sup>th</sup> was as an aviation unit but how deficient they were on police call. As we all know, Army Aviators are known for working hard and playing hard. The Cavalry Black Hats were particularly well known for both. One of their favorite haunts was the Bien Hoa Air Force Officer's Club. I kept receiving reports that their antics ranged from entertaining to bordering on terrorizing the blue suit patrons. Fortunately, I never received anything through channels and I made it a point to never visit the Officer's Club. On one occasion just after midnight I received a call from Col Brandenburg. Some of the F-9 Cavalry Troop guys had been arrested by the Air Police at an off-limits place in Bien Hoa. There was a pause on the phone. Then Col. Brandenburg said: "Don't call the Troop Commander because he is there with them". We managed to get the troops and their 2 1/2 ton released and nothing more was ever said. My boss, Col. Brandenburg, was a great commander and a joy to work for. Always around, always in charge but never interfering. He was definitely not a micro-manager which made a difficult time more bearable. As for unit pocket patches, the prize for the most humorous one has to go to the 362<sup>nd</sup> ASHC. I do not think anyone can look at the "Fly United" patch without a laugh.

#### A Tribute to Army Aviation Crews

This was obviously one of many difficult times in the history of Army Aviation. The SA-7 missile and the abundance of anti-aircraft presented a new situation. We had no choice as to where we would drop off and pick-up troops. The enemy was there and at anytime they could down an aircraft. With all this, I privately harbored concerns that some crew members might want to shy away from the mission. My concerns were unfounded. I never heard of any excuses to avoid a mission. Further, when the 362<sup>nd</sup> ASHC Chinook shed a blade while transporting a load of troops to Vung Tau for R & R they rechecked their blade inspection procedures, inspected blades and without pause they continued the mission. This was the second Chinook blade failure in less than two years. The first failure occurred in Germany with the loss of 32 Army personnel. I was the medium and heavy lift logistics manager on the Army Staff at the time and was very familiar with the incident. When I received the call that a Chinook was down with a mid-air explosion, I suspected a blade failure. Upon reaching the scene I sent a crew back along the flight path to look for a blade. It took less than a hour to find the blade. There were 35 crew and passengers on

board. After the blade departed and the helicopter began to disintegrate, twenty of those on board were flung out probably from two to three thousand feet. The remaining fifteen were in the front section which burned for two days. Eighteen months later they still had not identified all of the remains. It was one of those scenes that one never forgets. I flew with the unit two days later and there did not seem to be any reservations about flying Chinooks even though they had a recent history of slinging blades, the cause of which was unknown and everyone knew it could happen again. As most everyone knows, whenever there was a hazardous mission there were plenty of volunteers. Army Aviation can be counted on in the toughest of times. As always—Above the Best!!!

One extremely important part of this lengthy period of continuous combat operations was the part the support personnel played in making this operation successful. As mentioned earlier there were over 1,800 people in the battalion in early April with 142 aircraft and a lot of other equipment and facilities to maintain. As I recall, there were 285 officers which meant there were over 1,500 enlisted personnel led by a strong Command Sergeants Major and some excellent NCO's. LTC. Ike Jones, the previous Commander of the 229<sup>th</sup> had left a smooth functioning battalion that was actually over-strength and it was good because we needed the extra help during this trying period. One of my most enjoyable evening events, when I could get away from the massive paper work, was to visit the night crews working under lights to get aircraft ready for the next day. Their positive attitudes were truly inspiring. Unit and battalion staffs are always busy but in this combat situation they really had a load and they did a super job. While all members of the 229<sup>th</sup> can be proud of their service I would like to point out an event that was typical of the great work that our support personnel did. When reviewing the log entries, the rearm/refuel crews under the able leadership of S-4 CPT. Stewart were frequently called on with short notice to set up rearm/refuel points to facilitate the mission. An event that exemplified the "can do" attitude of these people occurred as the Lai Khe/An Loc troop exchange was winding down. The distance from Lai Khe to An Loc was just far enough that we could not get two round trips on a bag of fuel with sufficient reserve for contingencies. By this time the ARVN had cleared the road to Chon Thanh which was about 30 miles north of Lai Khe. I coordinated with the ARVN's and they agreed to move the troops up QL-13 to Chon Thanh so we could get two round trips on a refueling. This meant that we could complete the remaining troop lift in one day instead of two. There was a problem. We needed 20,000 gallons of JP-4 at Chon Thanh along with armament. Having completed all coordination by about 1400, I called CPT. Stewart on the secure radio and explained what we needed. With the 362ASHC hauling the fuel and ammo, the operation may have gone into the night but there was 20,000 gallons of JP-4 and ~~ammo~~ at Chon Thanh the next morning. We finished the lift that day. We needed that. We were all tired.

In Memory of Those 229<sup>th</sup> Pilots Who Gave the Ultimate Sacrifice in the Service  
to Their Country

On April 5, 1972 at 1530 hours a F-79 ARA Cobra was reported as a mid-air explosion with Cpt. Henry Spangler and CW2 Charles Windeler as crew. The loss initially was reported as MIA

and later changed to KIA.

On May 11, 1972 at 1215 hours a F-79 ARA Cobra was shot down north of An Loc with Cpt Rodney Strobridge and Cpt Robert Williams as crew. An Air Force F-4 pilot reported seeing one of the pilots dragging the other away from the wreckage. There were no survivors.

On May 22, 1972 at 1040 hours a F-79 ARA Cobra was shot down by an SA-7 missile with CW2 Isaac Hosaka and CW2 Henn as crew.

On June 20, 1972 at 0820 hours a F-9 Cavalry Troop Cobra was shot down by an SA-7 missile south of An Loc. CWO Burdette Townsend and Lt. Louis Breuer were on board.

On June 20, 1972 at 0825 hours an F-79 ARA Cobra was shot down by ground fire (51 cal and other) while attacking the firing point of the SA-7 that downed the F-9 Cavalry Troop Cobra.. First Lt. Stephan Shields and Cpt. Edwin Northrup survived the crash but not the NVA.

There were a total of 50 Americans lost their lives during the Battle of An Loc. There was a Memorial Service for Fallen Warriors held at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. on 20 September 2008

We can never do enough to remember those who did not make it back. However, our VHPA Historian, Mike Sloniker, has made a valiant effort. Since 1992 Mike has been leaving memorials at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Veterans Day and Memorial Day. This wonderful tribute has caught on with others and there are now about 40 memorials being placed. Mike has also placed memorials for lost ones other than the 229<sup>th</sup>. From all veterans: thanks, Mike.

Lewis J. McConnell  
Colonel USA ( retired)  
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