

# The History of the 7th Armored Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry

The reader is encouraged to review the list of abbreviations as well as the list of References and Credits presented at the end of this narrative. In connection with this narrative, the reader can benefit by using the two page chronology, the list of awards and citations, the leadership roster, the Honor Roll of all the KIA/MIA, the illustrations of the base camp, and the alphabetic roster of every pilot known to have served in the 7/17th Cav.

## Background Information - The Lineage of Air Cavalry

The legacy of the Air Cavalry concept is available from several sources. Lawrence "Hank" Johnson's "Winged Sabers" contains a very concise rendition, so we will quote liberally from it for the benefit of those that have not yet had the pleasure of reading this fine book.

Led by vertical envelopment proponents such as LTG James M. Gavin, World War II commander of the 82nd Abn Div, the army continued to experiment with refinements to the concept. During 1955-56 tests were conducted with an experimental unit known as "Sky Cav". This unit combined light tanks, reinforced infantry, and helicopters in function as a cohesive, three-dimensional unit. The test results proved less effective than the army had hoped, but in 1956 each of two airborne divisions was authorized an airborne reconnaissance troop (Sky Cav). With the advent of the Combat Arms Regimental System (CARS) in 1957, these embryonic air cavalry units were designated A Troop (Reconnaissance) (Aviation), 17th Cavalry, 82nd Abn Div; and B Troop (Reconnaissance) (Aviation), 17th Cavalry, 101st Abn Div. The term "Sky Cav" was nebulous, with no standardized Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E). On 26 Feb 1957, the Sky Cavalry Platoon (Provisional) was activated at Ft. Rucker. Its stated mission was to function as a test vehicle for the development of aerial reconnaissance concepts and systems for the army.

Far from the glory of prestigious line units, in an obscure "think tank" at Ft. Rucker, a group of incredibly far-sighted "madmen" were at work. Assigned to the Army Aviation Center's Combat Developments Office (CDO) in the late 1950s, the group labored intensively to develop an armed helicopter strike force within the army. With outstanding leadership from COL Jay D. Vanderpool, and later from COL Delk M. Oden, "Vanderpool's Fools" of CDO fought a tough, uphill battle. Utilizing the assets and experience of the Sky Cavalry Platoon (Prov.), the 7292nd Aerial Combat Reconnaissance Company was formed at Tiger Port, Ft. Rucker, on 24 Mar 1958. Referred to as "the ACT Company", the unit was intended to serve as a test bed for all CDO concepts. Through both continued experimentation and the influence of former cavalry officers at CDO, the unit would evolve in structure and would come to resemble the highly successful armored reconnaissance troop of World War II. It contained aero-weapons, aero-scouts, and airmobile infantry, all combined to form a heliborne strike force. Its resemblance to the future air cavalry troop was more than coincidence.

In 1959 the Continental Army Command (CONARC) directed the Armor and Aviation Schools to develop the mission statement and TO&E for an Aerial Reconnaissance and Security Troop (ARST). The first ARST was activated at Ft. Rucker, on 24 Sep 1962, using the assets and expertise of the 8305th ACR, formerly the 7292nd ACR. This ARST was designated D Trp (Air), 17th Cav, and would further be redesignated B Trp 3/17th Cav on 7 Feb 1963. As part of an army-wide move to update tactical effectiveness, the Reorganization Objective Army Division (ROAD) program was initiated in 1962. A major provision of ROAD was to authorize an air cavalry troop (ACT) in each division's armored cavalry squadron. Unfortunately, time has blurred which unit was the first air cavalry troop. Some sources credit the ACR/ARST, others D Trp (Air), 4th Sqdn, 12th Cav at Ft. Carson, and others D Trp (Air), 2nd Sqdn, 15th Cav which was part of the 4th Armored Div in Germany. For the first time in its history, the army possessed a self-contained airmobile combined arms strike force. From its inception, the ACT was designed to be the only combat aviation unit tailored specifically for aggressive, offensive tactical operations. There was no doubt in the minds of Vanderpool's Fools that they had created the most tactically innovative and efficient organization to appear on the battlefield in decades.

Concurrent with the developments occurring at Ft. Rucker, a select group of officers with expertise in airmobile concepts was convened in 1962. Though formally designated the Army Tactical Mobility Requirements Board, it soon came to be known as the Howze Board, after its chairman, GEN Hamilton H. Howze. Perhaps the most significant contribution of the Howze Board was the recommendation that the army field a "test" airmobile division, and that a sub-element of that organization be an air cavalry squadron (ACS). On 19 Mar 1964, 3rd Sqdn, 17th Air Cav was activated at Ft. Benning, as a portion of the incremental build-up of the 11th Air Assault Div. On 3 Jul 1965, the 11th Air Assault was redesignated the 1st Cavalry Div, and the 3/17th Cav became the 1/9th Cav.

## Background Information - Air Cavalry in Vietnam

The first ACS to deploy to Vietnam was, of course, the 1/9th Cav with the 1st Cav Div in Sep, 1965. The first divisional ACT to deploy was D/1/4 Cav with the 1st Inf Div in Oct, 1965. Their experiences and combat contributions in Vietnam during 1965 and 1966 are part of "air cavalry sacred scripture". Their successes led the army to authorize more ACSs. In Nov, 1966, the 3/17 and the 7/17 ACSs were activated at Ft. Knox. In the Spring of 1967, the 7/1 ACS was activated at Ft. Knox. During the transformation of the 101st Airborne Div to an airmobile division, the 2/17 was converted to an ACS. Each of the 28 ACTs and 5 ACSs that served in Vietnam added honorable and glorious chapters to all cavalry history. It is no coincidence that seven ACTs were the last U.S. combat elements to depart Vietnam on 26 Feb 1973.

1966

### Activation

Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 7th Armored Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry was activated on 25 Nov by General Order 249, Headquarters, US Army Armor Center, Ft Knox, KY dated 25 Nov 1966 under TOE 17-9 Oct. The photo shows LTC Lawrence H. Johnson, Jr., received the squadron's colors from MG A.D. Surles, Jr., then CG of the US Army Armor Center. Godman Army Air Field at Ft. Knox would be "home" for both the 3/17 and the 7/17 for the next nine months. Retired COL and VHPA Member "Pete" Johnson provides some extra details.

Armor Branch knew they were going to activate the two squadrons so they began positioning critical personnel and equipment at Ft. Knox during the Fall. I arrived in October and by late November it was getting cold and there were too many leaves covering the golf course; so we had to go to work. Most of the Hueys were already at Godman. At that time Ft. Knox was still "locked in the CONUS mentality" but we were a combat unit most likely destined for Vietnam so I wanted to be different. We started wearing subdued insignia and name tags. I wanted a unit patch that would help build esprit de corps like the units in Vietnam.



The 7/17th Cav is reactivated



LTC Johnson's son, Hank Johnson, (mentioned above as the author of "Winged Sabers"), designed the Ruthless Riders patch. LTC Johnson liked the 17th Cavalry crest and wanted the 7/17 patch to show a clear relationship. Hank drew several variations and LTC Johnson submitted the one he liked to various patch makers. The spur centered in the patch was taken from the 17th Cavalry crest and represents the horse cavalry heritage as well the concept of flying cavalry because the 17th Cav crest also has wings. The superimposed lightning bolt came from the Ft. Knox armored triangle patch and symbolized the speed, power, and strength that air and ground vehicles give to the modern cavalry. The flasher with the words RUTHLESS RIDERS appears beneath the circular patch. LTC Johnson believed that RUTHLESS RIDERS was a fitting handle for a unit that was going to kick butt. The history of the patch and how the 7/17th used it is also interesting. Initially it was only available on OD cloth with black lines and letters. When painted on aircraft, it was called the "electric horseshoe" with a white or silver spur and a yellow lightning bolt on a black background. Hank prepared the master stencil and still maintains that it should be the "electric spur". The "electric horseshoe" stayed on the nose for some years but photos from the 1970-1971 period show the 7 and 17 numerals on the large crossed sabers (made popular by the 1 Cav folks) on the nose of the Hueys and LOHs and on the front of the doghouse on the Cobras. About that same time a colored patch was made in Vietnam as well as those metal "beer can" crests that people liked to wear. Anyway, if you want to get into this subject more, contact Hank - he loves it and can go on for hours.

## 1967

The primary source materials for this year are: For HHT, the 14 page initial Annual Unit History (AUH) prepared by CPT Michael G. Law. For A Trp, the 18 page AUH prepared by 1LT Robert J. Gibson. For B Trp, the 31 page AUH prepared by 1LT Richard L. Montgomery. For C Trp three documents: the 12 page AUNS prepared by CPT Cornelius C. Holcomb, Jr., a single page history submitted as part of the 14th CAB's Yearbook, and the 21 page 1967-1968 1/1st Cav yearbook. For D Trp, the 18 page AUH prepared by LT Brack Jones, Jr. For the Sqdn, nothing.

### Deployment Preparations

February - The sqdn's line troops were all officially activated on 4 Feb though they physically existed prior to that. Prior to this date, HHT carried everyone in the sqdn on its morning reports and other administrative documents. Each of the five troop AUHs for the pre-deployment period contains various details about the building refurbishment they had to do at Ft. Knox, the equipment they received almost on a daily basis, the groups of Warrant Officer flight class and various enlisted class graduates they received, etc., etc. Richard Montgomery, who prepared B Troop's initial unit history, provided over ten pages detailing the training activities. What follows is an attempt to summarize the hard work and long hours expended during this period.

The S-3 organized the Squadron Master Training Schedule as personnel from the various schools began to arrive. The four letter Troops were assigned areas of responsibility and appointed committees to develop the training lessons. For example, A Trp was responsible for all scout personnel, B Trp for repelling techniques, and D Trp for infantry and rifle platoons. The scout training, conducted from 13 Mar to 6 May, included extensive map reading, types of reconnaissance, observer and gunner training, pilot qualifications and standardization in the OH-6A, XM-27 weapons system familiarization, etc. Not only did each individual need refresher and specialized skill training, but also squads, crews, and teams had to be trained as units. Then SOPs were written, practiced, debugged and learned. Platoon IPs and ACs were selected and trained. There were several "horror stories" from this period; like weapons systems issued with missing components, the non-availability of OH-6As, last minute qualifications for the M-5 grenade launcher, not enough support of some types of training, not enough time for the Troops to conduct advanced unit training, etc. A good example was the "long round" problem. The XM-21 systems for the UH-1Cs were plagued with excessive stoppages. Repeated "communications" with the Army Weapons Command resulted in having two DA civilians spend some time at Ft. Knox. The team discovered that many of the problems were due to a poorly designed ammunition box adapter and the misalignment of ammunition trays and crossover drives. A field modification was developed and the Ft. Knox machine-shop provided the equipment that solved this problem. The histories contain many "bright spots" which illustrates the resourcefulness and determination of these men. Examples are: the use of training facilities outside of Ft. Knox such as Camp Atterbury, IN and the Mountain Ranger Camp at Dahlonega, GA; insuring maintenance personnel were enrolled in many speciality courses, using Charlie Models to train Scouts until enough OH-6As arrived, putting observers in any aircraft that was going anywhere just so they could gain the experience, etc.

June - The individual Troops emphasized field training exercises in the Green River area.

VHPA Member Randy Bresnik provides: Early in January, Bob Young, Jim Jackson, and I went to Rucker and became the Sqdn's first LOH IPs. I really enjoyed that aircraft and being an IP! In fact, my last three months in Vietnam I was sent TDY from the Sqdn to the OH-6A NETT in Vung Tau. But in those early days, I worked in the S-3 shop as the Assistant S-3 until MAJ Hefford took that slot, then I was a Liaison Officer. Besides working on the Master Training Schedule, I had the responsibility to go to areas of land that the local farmers had registered in the soil bank. Assigned with me was a fine civilian from the Army Corps of Engineers to handle the necessary paperwork and between the two of us, we managed to obtain approximately 5,000 acres of unused farm fields and wooded areas, very willingly, for the training of the "boys goin' to Vietnam". These six to eight sites were used by our helicopters as landing and field training areas. By the time we were through with this task, I could talk about how poor the strawberries were doing this year because of the abundance of rain, how Uncle Luke's lumbago has been giving him fits for months, and a myriad of other important topics. It was a very heartwarming experience to find the "Quiet Majority" willing to do most anything for the men going to war.

July - Advanced sqdn level training began with road and air movement to Camp Dawson, WV. During the last half of July the emphasis was on weapons qualifications. For example, XM-27 qualifications at Wilcox Lake Range 13 - 19 Jul. The Infantry qualified in their primary weapons plus an alternate.

August - Sqdn level ATTs were conducted in the Green River area near Campbellsville, KY. Personnel from the forming 7/1st Cav served as aggressors. The tests were administered by the US Army Aviation Group (PROV) at Ft. Knox. There was also an Air Cavalry demonstration to the US Military Academy corps. About mid-month the equipment started moving to Mobile, AL for ship loading. On the 28th the 87 organic sqdn aircraft departed Ft. Knox for Sharp Army Depot in Lathrop, CA. While the aircraft were being prepared for overseas shipment, the soldiers took personal leave.

October - On the 9th the sqdn's main body was airlifted from Standford Field, Louisville, KY to Oakland Army Terminal, Oakland, CA.

VHCA Member Don Oliver provides some interesting details. I completed turbine helicopter mechanic school at Ft. Eustis during July and was assigned to B Trp just a few weeks prior to the Sqdn ATT in early August. While at Ft. Eustis I was told that I would spend at least several months in a maintenance facility before I had even a chance to join a flight crew; on arrival at Ft. Know I was promptly assigned to a new UH-1H as the crewchief! To this day I am mildly surprised that I didn't kill myself or someone else while acquiring my "OJT" with the Bravo Trp Blues!! But what I have to say about our airlift to California might be interesting. What really happened was that we loaded onto contract air carriers, flying 707s, at Louisville airport with full webgear, packs and weapons. When we got off our airplane at San Francisco International, you guessed it, we were at the wrong end of the terminal from where our busses waited to take us to the ship. The obvious answer - march the troops to the busses. I will never forget the spectacle of several hundred combat troops marching down the main concourse of SFO in a column of fours!! Remember that the "Summer of Love" was in full swing there. The place was packed with hippies, earth mothers, flower children and acid rockers, all of whom flat panicked. They thought someone had flipped out and declared martial law. We saw several break for the bathrooms to flush their dope or just make for the nearest exit as fast as they could. We tried to tell them to relax because we were just passing through, but nobody listened to us. Even the regular citizens and business passengers seemed pretty blown away by this sight.

On the 10th they boarded the USNS General Nelson M. Walker and departed for Vietnam. On the 27th the Sqdn came ashore at Qui Nhon, RVN and was trucked to Camp Enari, near Pleiku. It was assigned to the 17th CAG of the 1st Avn Bde and attached to the 4th Infantry Div based at Camp Enari. Almost to the man anyone that went over with the Sqdn will gladly tell you at least two "war stories"; so we will let VHCA Member Don Williams tell them for everyone:

There were about 5,000 guys on the Walker and early in the voyage they had us turn in all our American money for MPC script. Well most everyone I knew kept a \$20 bill or something back. The boat was not scheduled to stop enroute but broke a shaft or something and needed to put into Subic Bay. We got the word that there wouldn't be anyone allowed ashore but finally in the late afternoon we were told we could leave at 1800 and had to return at 2400. Needless to say but there was a mad rush to the bars and everyone "found" some American money to spend. The object of the game seemed to be to drink as much as you could as quickly as you could. The poor O Club took a serious hit that night. It wasn't long before guys were dancing on top of the piano and when its legs broke, breaking other things seemed to be the next logic step. Furniture ended up through the windows and into the pool. They had several one armed bandits and guys were playing them. If the machine didn't work "correctly" after a coin was inserted, it was taken off the wall and deposited someplace. Anyway, it seems that the base commander's cap was on the top rack and someone in C Trp decided "we needed it" as a memento of the "battle of Subic Bay". The next morning there were several reasons why the boat wasn't allowed to sail. It seems there was at least one good hearted Navy guy that trying to join the Army ... at least he was sleeping it off with lots of his drinking buddies. The Sqdn's XO was the senior officer on the boat so he was the lucky guy to receive the "good news" from the Navy guys. Then the word went down that either we gave the hat back or paid for it or else. Jack Burden, the Gun Plat Ldr, heard this and "figured" his people probably had the hat; so he wrote a \$45 check and the Admiral's hat became a C Trp treasure. The second story is not so parochial to C Trp but can heard from most anyone that deployed with the Sqdn. It relates to the trip from Qui Nhon to Enari. The main body was loaded into trucks with their personal gear and weapons and convoyed over the Mang Yang Pass to Pleiku. Everyone had heard all the stories about the 1st Cav and the famous ambush of the French Mobile Group 100. Being aviators, they really didn't trust trucks. To top everything off, they were not given any ammo. Luckily the bad guys didn't take advantage of this because even a rather small force could have had themselves an entire ACS that day!

## First Base Camp

Upon arrival the 7/17th was housed in WABTOCs tents in the northeast corner of the Camp Enari base camp. The 4th Div Engineers had built a new perimeter road about 1.5 meters east of the former line and along the entire east end of Enari. They assigned the Sqdn this "large track of mud" laid out for a billeting area and motor park as well as the Ruthless Helipad for aircraft parking and maintenance areas. For the next several weeks everyone helped build the new camp while conducting in- country training and setting up shop. The tents were wired for electricity and priority given to building a mess hall, latrines, and showers. As most everyone can remember, we were always building something and nothing was ever finished in Vietnam. The camp diagrams at the end of this history was included in the HHT unit history for the period ending 1968 and may help us remember the relative position of some of the places we helped build, where we lived or worked.

VHPA Member Al Iller remembers: I joined the 7/17th in late Jan from Ft. Rucker and commanded B Trp from the time it was formed. I really loved B Trp and the men who served in it. I took considerable joy in the fact that it matured into a top notch ACT. Not only did we start with brand new flight officers but I remember all our Infantry people were right out of AIT except for PSG Crites. In fact, we had to get special DA authorization to make SGT E-5 squad leaders because there were no other EM in these units. Three B Trp senior officers (Doty, Earwood, and Longhoffer) would serve as Trp Cmdrs which says something about how we'd progressed. I'd say I had a good relationship with LTC 'Pete' Johnson but he really shocked me one day in mid-Dec. B Trp had only been conducting its own combat operations for five weeks or so and I really enjoyed leading and experiencing those operations. Anyway, one evening he came into my office and said: "You're relieved of your command!" Well for a career soldier and because I couldn't think of anything I'd done, or hadn't done, to hear those words was really terrible! He smiled and said that he was "kicking me upstairs"; so that's how I got the job as Sqdn XO. There was a rather sad note to this. I replaced Owen Haxton who was a fine TC officer but 'Pete' wanted only Armor officers in the primary leadership positions in the Sqdn, so he had Haxton transferred to a CAB someplace. Prior to all this happening, I was in the Sqdn's advanced party which consisted of the CO, S-1 through S-4, Maintenance Officer, all Trp COs, the TAC FAC Party and certain key EM. We left Standiford Field, Louisville, KY in a C-141 a day or two after the main body had departed. Within 48 hours we landed at Saigon and transferred to C-130s for the flight to Pleiku. We arrived there in the middle of the night and were met by MAJ 'Pete' Kendrick, the CO of D/1/10th CAV; they were our "host unit". They took us by helicopter to Enari. The 4th INF was prepared for us but our final base camp area was not quite ready at that time so they assigned us an area on the extreme northeast side of the camp that contained enough WABTOCs for our group. During the ensuing time, prior to the arrival of the main body, we were briefed on in country operations and the friendly forces' locations, missions, road net work as well as the enemy dispositions. Additionally, the Sqdn and Trp Cos were further 'oriented' by participation in various ops with the 1/10th CAV. Planning for the arrival of the main body and our equipment to include route security of the convoys occupied the S2, S3, and S4 folks. The HHT CO began initial coordination with the Division Engineer on the eventual siting for the Sqdn along the East side of Camp Enari. This project ultimately became to Sqdn XO's and the construction of the Sqdn's base camp facilities by our troops with some assistance from the 4th Eng Bn. Construction of aircraft revetments, landing and refueling/rearm areas were performed by the 4th Eng Bn assisted by other engineer units from the Pleiku area. We worked hard at maintaining a good relationship with the Division Engineer and the 4th ENG Bn. We had a party for them about Jan and they made me an 'Honorary Engineer' for the Sqdn's efforts over those months. This paid off because I believe we were the only unit allowed to use their large cement mixer to pour our own concrete slabs. This was still true when the replacement C Trp arrived the next summer. I can specifically remember that concrete pouring project because it continued well into the wee hours of the morning and was probably the first totally beer can reinforce slab in country! Between the time the main body arrived and some time in Dec, the building of the Sqdn facilities commenced with each Trp providing a work party that was consolidated under the Sqdn control and followed the "base camp development plan". For some reason the number 54 sticks in my mind as the number of structures including billets, mess halls, latrines, showers, clubs, PX, Chapel, Dispensary, Orderly and Ops, maintenance facilities, etc. I might add that there is a story for just about each one! Waiting for building supplies created many delays, however, through the resourcefulness of many, shortages in these were somehow made up through begging, borrowing and bribery (to name but a few). Of particular note was one WO Walter Riddle, a former USAF EM, a scrounger "par excellence". As the 7/17th "Liaison Officer" to Cam Ranh Bay he accounted for fluorescent light, hot water heaters, nails - whatever he could bargain for. A constant supply of AK-47s, Montagnard cross bows, baskets, and other crafts were directed to him for barter.

VHCMC Member Don Oliver provides some interesting details. After 19 days at sea and a memorable visit with the Navy at Subic Bay, we reached Qui Nhon late in the afternoon. All night long patrol boats circled the ship dropping grenades in the water to discourage marxist frogmen from bagging a shipload of Americans. The noise, especially below decks, was something else. The next days we offloaded and the bulk of our personnel were trucked up the road through the Mang Yang Pass to Camp Enari. While other may recall that we were not armed for the trip, the Bravo Troop Blues certainly were. Our platoon sergeant, SFC Crites, promoted a basic ammunition issue from a local Nha Trang source for our personal weapons, mainly M-16s and M-60s as well as M-79 rounds, grenades and smokes. Crites was not about to let his people go up the road that was the site of one of the most famous ambushes in history without live ammo. After we got to Camp Enari, I got tapped to crew a UH-1D we borrowed from another unit. This aircraft was mainly piloted by CPT Peterson, whom I believe was the XO of C Trp. We were mainly tasked with a variety of "ash & trash" and liaison missions between Qui Nhon, Camp Enari and Camp Holloway during the next few days as our equipment started coming off the Walker. Meanwhile, an old Navy jeep carrier converted to MSTS service arrived with our aircraft and a lucky few of our people who had been detailed to ride with them. These poor folks had the misfortune to get stuck in Honolulu for a few days while their ship got some emergency repairs. Meanwhile back at Qui Nhon, a B Trp gunship crewchief got out on the economy and gained the distinction of becoming the first 7/17er to come down with a dose. For the rest of our tour he proudly bore the appropriate nickname, "Clap". As it happened, my own aircraft, 66-16022, was the very first on the carrier. CPT Pete and I returned the old Delta to its own outfit and my bird became the 'eyes of the squadron' (but with no doorguns or a full crew as yet). Before leaving Ft. Knox, all our conexes had been coded on their tops with color patches and unit letters so they could be seen from the air, but not from ground level. It seems our leaders had known we would be sending our gear right past a certain well-known air cavalry division's base camp. While I cannot remember the name of the officer, I spent several days with a light colonel flying up and down the highway between Qui Nhon and Pleiku keeping track of our conexes. When we saw a truckload of our conexes parked off the road, we landed as close as possible and the colonel made his position crystal clear to the personnel responsible for the delay. As it happened, we got the all the sqdn's gear past An Khe with the loss of but a single conex containing B Trp's light sets. In August of 1968, we occupied some of the 1st Cav's old barracks near the Golf Course after that division had moved north to support the Marines. We found a conex built into a sandbag structure at the end of a supply room with a brass padlock hanging from a hasp that had been cut through with a torch. Sure enough, our former supply officer (CW2 Schulte, then a scout) still had the key that fit the lock! The light sets, however, were long gone and the conex was quite empty. (Editor's note: During a phone conversation, Al Iller mentioned many of the same things Don just described. Al said that all the second tour guys in the Sqdn were well aware that the "real enemy", so far as equipment was concerned, would be other American units; especially those with connections with the TC and QM folks that ran the convoys and could "siphoned off" conex containers. Hence, the scheme to paint something distinctive on the top.)

## Becoming Operational

November - At the beginning of the month, the Sqdn's aircraft were still being off loaded at Qui Nhon and Vung Tau. These activities were not without some interesting events. Several VHPAers remember the first LOH to leave the carrier. We'll listen to Randy Bresnik:

I was on deck with LTC Johnson and CPT Bob Young at the time. LTC Johnson really loved the OH-6A! We watched as CPT Skip Holcomb from C Trp lifted off to the south and started his right 180 turn back toward Qui Nhon. Even though there was a major storm to the north of us, it was very calm around us that day. What little wind there was came from the south. As he continued his turn, however, he was in a steady, slow descent and impacted on the absolutely smooth water abeam the carrier's island about 100 yards west of us. We were shocked with what had happened, because there was never any change in his flight path. Just as we thought we had lost him (and his wife had just had their first baby while we were sailing across the Pacific), he miraculously popped to the surface. The ship's motor launch was already making way and recovered him in short order. We all breathed a great sigh of relief. Skip was ok but I think he broke his arm during this accident.

There are several versions as to the cause of this accident. One has it that Skip put his briefcase next to the seat and being a little nervous, forgot to strap it down. When he nosed over during take off, the case fell over and wedged between the seat and the cyclic - much to his horror! Another says that they had loaded the ship with its weapons system, some spare parts, and extra gear to the extent that it was out of CG. The day was hot and the wind was calm; so the DA was high. Hopefully, Skip will eventually come to a VHPA Reunion; we'll buy him a beer and all listen to his side of the story!

1/10 Cav, the 4th Div's organic ACT, provided much of the orientation but each ACT deployed north to Chu Lai for about a week for further operational combat training with an ACT from the 1/9th CAV. By the end of the month, the Sqdn was conducting operational missions.

Again VHCMA Member Don Oliver provides some interesting insights: While we were scheduled to do a gradual workup once we got in-country (we did, indeed, learn some valuable lessons during joint operations with the 1/9th Cav), some elements of the 4th Inf got into some serious action at Dak To during Nov and needed our lift capacity. While I do not think we were conducting troop operations at this point, we certainly did make some hilltop re-supply missions under fire in support of an AHC that was equipped with Deltas. These guys were favorably impressed with the performance of our Hotels with the Dash-13 engine and its ability to drop into an LZ on a high DA day without suddenly spreading the skids. One of their crewchiefs asked me where he could buy one! We also met our first door gunners, who were mostly infantry types transferred in from line units that had been wounded in action at least three times in order to qualify for doorgunner duty. There was "Simon Split" who had been in the infantry for eight months when he joined us (and later got a well-deserved gig as the colonel's driver) and Marvin White who was a major league, stone cold natural with an M-60 from the ground or the air!! These guys, Thank God, taught us a lot, including the fact that, for the most part, the average Charlie was a terrible shot.

16 Nov - First OH-6A Shot Down - C Troop had been flying some "ash & trash" but today was their first operational mission. VHPA member Tom Pearcy provides the following:

Fred Nicely, Blue Ghost 17, was the scout with the first team. When I arrived on station, he briefed me that they had seen nothing and were basically screening ahead of the 2/1 Armored Cav pushing toward a village reported to be an enemy base camp. The terrain was rolling hills covered by thick, tall trees. Periodically there were clearings which held several rice paddies and a small village with 10 to 12 houses. There was a reinforced trail or road leading through the area from village to village and the armored folks basically followed this road. I was Blue Ghost 18, flying scout in an OH-6A for the second team and Greg Ross and "Wild Bill" Owens were flying a C model gun. I made my initial pass over the open terrain toward the village at a fairly high rate of speed because that is what we had been told to do to save our butt. As I neared the village I noticed what I'd never seen before but had heard about, spider holes. There were four or five of them running along this path leading toward the village. I pointed this out to my gunner, Ed Gay, and turned the ship around for a second look. As we came back around, they threw open the covers, came up out of the holes and started shooting at us with AK-47s and bolt action rifles. There were four or five of them. Of course my voice goes up several octaves and I'm screaming "Receiving Fire". My gunner was so excited that he threw the smoke out without pulling the safety pin. Greg's saying "Where's the fire coming from?" I'm saying "Back there! Back there!" And not giving him very good directions at all. I made a sort of U turn at the end of this open area and started back toward the village so we could mark. I did a little zigging and zagging this time and we took some hits. Again my voice is up at least six octaves and out goes the smoke. But for some reason or other, it may have been a dud or it sank in some water before it could completely ignite, there was just a little trickle of smoke from the grenade. So I turned around just before the village and started back again. This time the smoke did get out in the correct area. I'm flying with my head looking left and adjusting Greg's rockets. You know - "A little more to the left. Add 50 to that pair." And Ed says "Mr. Pearcy ... ah ... tree!!" I looked up and saw the biggest tree I've ever seen almost dead in my flight path!! So I hit left everything and miss the tree by what seemed like inches but was most likely a couple of yards. This, however, was part of the VC plan as they had a claymore mine or something hanging in the tree. The explosion went off and sheared the tail rotor drive shaft. Just as the ship was starting to yaw, the engine made this terrible winding sound and quit. That corrected the yaw and I went straight another 50 or so meters before running out of most everything. The words of my civilian flight instructor at Wolters came into my ears: "There will always be a place to put the aircraft down in time of emergency." I remember thinking - "Yah, if you're so right you #@%&\* - why am I going right into these trees?" So I did a zero airspeed autorotation and pulled everything I had at tree top level. We fell about 30 or 40 feet through the trees and then went inverted with the rotor blades sort of chopping a hole as we came down. When we came to a stop, I turned off the electrical system and started working with my harness. Unfortunately the seat belt part had been installed in the aircraft backwards and I am hanging upside down in it worrying that the ship would catch fire and explode. The maintenance people later said that I almost had the webbing worked in two. My fingers were sure bloody I remember that. The cyclic had banged my shin up a little, my observer had wet his pants, and the gunner had been scratched by the M-60 as it banged around; so we really weren't hurt at all. We took just a few smokes (I think we had lost a few on the way down or something) and our weapons. I remembered the E&E training from Rucker to move away from the aircraft about 50 yards so if the VC came and shot up the aircraft, we wouldn't be hurt. We let off the smokes and were sad to see they were all green which didn't do much under the tall trees in this area!! Greg did see this smoke. About this time a few shots were fired in our direction and we were definitely scared. A little later I heard an APC moving up the trail about 50 to 75 meters away from us. The foliage was so thick we certainly couldn't see each other. I waited until it got just about even with us and fired a clip from an M-16 into the air. The APC kept going toward the village, turned around and came back. When they were again close to us, I fired in the air again. They kept going down the trail, turned around again and started back. I fired the third time and was surprised to hear their 50 open up all around us!! I was just trying to signal them but they were scaring the hell out of us!! They later told us they thought they were taking fire. That thought had never occurred to me!! Greg saw this and screamed at them to "cease fire" which they did. We heard them let the rear ramp down, so we knew we'd be seeing their infantry pretty soon. The thought now occurred to me: How am I going to make contact with these guys? If I stood up and yelled "Hi Guy! Over here!" I figured they blow me away. Anyway they had this black guy as point and we could see and hear them working towards us. Finally when the point man was about 20 yards away I said "Psst! We're over here!" Anyway, we made contact after a while were extracted and the LOH was retrieved.

The VHPAers who attended the Unit History luncheon during the Long Beach Reunion in 1987 will long remember the slide show. Greg had just finished telling the story about Iom getting shot down and shooting "at the armored column" to get their attention. Greg played the story for all it was worth by carefully pointing out the small holes in the LOH made by the VC AK-47 and the large holes made by the American 50 cal. Naturally, the whole room was in tears with laughter!! It was easy to laugh then because we could see Iom and knew he had survived. However, no one was in the Cav for long without learning that being in a LOH was a serious and dangerous occupation.

On the 26th C Trp was told to move to Chu Lai to be attached to the 14th CAB and opconed to the 196th Lt Inf Bde of the Americal Div. The unit moved its personnel and equipment by organic aircraft, C-130 aircraft and by LSTs. The base camp building process began anew. The unit installed showers, renovated existing buildings, put up latrines and constructed new bunkers for the perimeter defense. By 4 Dec the aircraft maintenance area was well enough established to allow the C Trp to support tactical missions. VHPA member Jack Burden provides some important background information about these times:

The Americal Div had only been officially reactivated in Sep from TF OREGON. It was a collection of many formerly independent units such as the 196th Inf Bde and the recently arrived 198th Inf Bde. In fact until the 11th Inf Bde arrived and became operational, one Bde of the 1st Cav with an ACT from the 1/9th worked with the Americal Div. The Americal's armored cav units were F Trp 17th Cav and the 1st Sqdn 1st Cav. The 1/1st had deployed without its ACT, so even though the Americal had cavalry support, they didn't have an ACT. For the next few months, C Trp would basically be their ACT. I was part of C Trp's advanced party on the move to Chu Lai. Basically Army units were taking over bases and AOs from the Marines to allow their units to move further north. We were glad to see buildings when we arrived at Chu Lai but the Marines had taken everything that wasn't nailed down and even somethings that were. I selected two buildings for the Gun pilots that were separated by about a 20 foot space. Soon after everyone arrived, we decided to build a Gun pilots' club in that space between the two buildings. On the night we officially open the club I walked in and smiled when I saw the Admiral's cap nailed to the wall as a decoration. It is true I had written a check for \$45 to pay for that hat. But the Navy guys were really good about the whole thing. They returned my check and said we could keep the hat since we were going to Vietnam. They even wished us "God Speed" (or maybe it was "good speed" after seeing what we'd done to their club); I can't remember which! Anyway, nailing hats to the wall became a tradition. I lost mine to the wall that night and most everyone else did as well. When I was promoted to Major a few weeks later, my first hat was also taken from my head and nailed to the wall. They were a fun bunch of Gun pilots!!

On the 27th, A Trp received its first "solo" operational mission to support the 2nd Bde, 4th Div with a series of cordon and search missions around Ban Blech which is on QL 14 about half way from Pleiku to Ban Me Thuot. During these missions Chieu Hoi's and families would be relocated to either Ban Me Thuot or Pleiku. Near the end of the month the

approximately 200 man 40th IC Maintenance Detachment was attached to the Sqdn and individual platoons to each of the ACTs. For example, the 2nd Platoon was assigned to C Trp.

December - A Trp's Blues with B Trp's and most of D Troop swept large areas of the Chu Prong Mountains until mid-Dec. Two of their ambushes netted four NVA killed and captured along with 1,500 lbs of rice and several document packets. On the 18th, A Trp began supporting the 1st Bde, 4th Inf out of Dak To. They worked the hills around the Ben Het SF Camp near the Laotian border and found a small enemy base camp. From the 27th through the 31st, A Trp supported the 173rd Abn Bde by inserting the Blues in the De Bodral Plantation area. A unit of the NVA 95-B Regiment was found and six were killed. A Trp captured 4,000 lbs of rice, two weapons, six B-40 rockets, seven anti-tank mines, 2,700 rounds of SA ammo, plus 200 documents.

There were lots of other duties as VHPA Member Randy Bresnik tells us: Most of the teams that worked the AOs will have to search the back of their minds for members of liaison officers. For three months starting in December I spent most of my time at "the Oasis", or Plei Mrong, or Kontum as part of small group of HHT people positioned there to support the ACTs. I got along real well with these 4th Div folks and often attended their briefings for the CG. I learned a lot about the war and saw lots of the captured NVA equipment. When I was at Enari I also attended the daily briefings at the Div TOC. It was really interesting to be able to watch the entire war effort for most of western II Corps! I also manned the radio relays on several occasions. I'll bet most everyone can remember how good it was to talk to a radio relay while operating in a distance and needing to get a message back to the base camp. I can remember sleeping next to a 155 SP howitzer that fired H&I most nights. But after awhile, you can sleep through most of it. I didn't mind living at Kontum with the 57th AHC folks. It was pretty quiet until one night, some VC sappers got in and wrecked quite a bit of equipment before they were turned away. They left a number of their buddies behind, to my great joy.

As mentioned earlier, C Trp became operational in Chu Lai on the 4th. On the 13th, they conducted a detailed recon of a four grid square block that included the village of Tich Au (2). After working the area for about an hour they noticed several camouflaged bunkers around the village and decided to insert the Blues to the east of the village. A mixed team (one Scout and one Gun), screening ahead of the Blues as they moved to the south and west, sighted several VC attempting to leave the western side of the village. The Scouts killed one, two sets of Guns killed three more and even the C&C killed two more. About the same time, another mixed team sighted about six VC attempting to hide in a hedgegrown to the south of the village. The Lift moved one of the Blue squads further to the south as a blocking force and the Blues came under intense sniper fire. As the squad closed on the VC, SP4 Richard Dubois was hit in the face by a grenade. Before it exploded, he pushed his Pit Sgt and another member of his squad behind a hedgegrown. The Blues killed two and the Scouts killed three more as they tried to escape from the Infantry. One OH-6A was damaged by hostile fire. The Infantry completed a sweep of the village and blew up all significant bunkers. Total for the day: 12 VC killed. On the 15th, a C Trp mixed team found and sank 28 VC sampans on an inland waterway. On the 16th, C Trp had a mixed team working with the 1/1 Cav. VHPA member Tom Pearcey was shot down in a LOH and his crew chief/door gunner PFC James Goodman was wounded. The ground Cav quickly put a perimeter around the LOH until the ready reaction force from C Trp arrived. By the end of the day they claimed 20 VC killed and 15 structures destroyed. On the 17th, a C Trp Scout spotted several VC hiding in camouflaged sampans about 4Ks north of Tam Ky. All had weapons and packs. He killed three with the mini and gunner one with the M-60 and one more with a .45 and the observers one more with a .38. They destroyed eight sampans with grenades and hovered over the site to recover some weapons, ammo, web gear and packs. During this same time frame, the C Trp C&C was flying over a village just north of Lake Song Darn when an estimated 150 lb bomb detonated under the ship and they received SAs and AWs fire. The door gunner killed one VC and another Gun ship killed four more trying to evade into a bunker. After an airstrike, a friendly ground unit swept this area. C Trp returned to the site where they'd found the sampans earlier in the day only to find some VC trying to recover some equipment. Three more died and even more equipment was recovered during this visit. A little further from this scene they found and sank 25 more sampans. On the 21st, C Trp worked with the F/17th Cav and A/1/1 Cav in the 196th Bde's AO. F Trp made contact and C Trp inserted their Blues which captured two suspects. The C&C found another hiding underwater breathing through a reed. It was easy to keep him covered until F Trp came over to capture him. Later in the day, a mixed team was screening for A/1/1 and spotted ten NVA. Before the battle could be joined, an A/1/1 APC sank while crossing a river. A LOH hovered over it while the crew chief hung on the skid and saved three guys from the APC but two others were lost. A little while later, A/1/1 made contact with an estimated NVA Co and C Trp helped screen the flanks and provided Gun support. The Scouts removed several Americans from a sick APC and with the reduced load, it was able to cross the river. The Scouts then killed a few NVA attempting to get into positions to fire on the APCs. C Trp was credited with 20 killed before the airstrikes were called in and darkness forced everyone to halt. On the 28th, C Trp started screening for two platoons of B/2/1 Inf that had been inserted to look for a VC Bn. A mixed team spotted and killed a VC in uniform, with a weapon about 2,000 meters southeast of the Infantry. The Infantry commander inserted B Co's other platoon at the sight of the kill to exploit any further findings. The next Cav team discovered some new bunkers further to the south. While working these, they discovered a small VC force camouflaged with trees on their backs moving through a wooded area. The Infantry arrived in time to collect two VC wounded and verified four killed by C Trp. The Infantry commander changed the direction of attack for both of B Co's units and had an armored Cav platoon establish a block to the west. B Co was able to advance quickly under C Trp's screen. Soon another Cav team had found several camouflaged bunkers and the Infantry commander made further adjustments to the armored Cav and advancing Infantry. By the end of the day, 17 VC with weapons were killed (12 by B Co and five by C Trp), five more were captured along with numerous weapons and military equipment, 23,000 lbs of rice and six lbs of documents.

**Year End Summary** - The squadron had "started from scratch", was equipped, trained, and deployed to Vietnam. With the exception of C Trp who was living in Chu Lai and attached to the 14th CAB and supporting the Americal Div, the rest of the sqdn was based at Camp Enari while supporting primarily the 4th Inf Div but also the 173rd Abn Bde and the ARVN 23rd Div in western II Corps. They had learned to work with and support their higher headquarters. They were successful in killing and capturing the enemy and though several Ruthless Riders had been wounded, none died this year.

## 1968

The primary source materials for this year are: For HHT, the 14 page initial AUH prepared by CPT Michael G. Law. For A Trp, the 18 page AUH prepared by 1LT Robert J. Gibson. For B Trp, the 31 page AUH prepared by 1LT Richard L. Montgomery. For the original C Trp, the same three documents mentioned for last year. The 1/1st Cav's history has a good map that shows the relative location of the various FBs and LZ base camps. For the replacement C Trp, a 14 page AUNS prepared by CPT Edward F. Johnson plus a Yearbook. For D Trp, the 18 page AUH prepared by LT Brack Jones, Jr. For the Sqdn: a 37 page Recommendation for Presidential Unit Citation, a 20 page Operational Report - Lessons Learned (OR-LL) for the period 1 FEB through 30 APR, a 28 page OR-LL for the period 1 AUG through 31 OCT, and extracts from a 30 page OR-LL for 1 NOV through 31 DEC.

**January** - A and D Trps worked out of Kontum for the first ten days of the month. Together they killed 14 NVA and captured one. For the next ten days, A Trp worked out of Dak To. On the 9th, WO1 James L. Phipps, WO1 Rainier S. Ramos, and their Gunners SP4 Warren E. Newton and PFC Fred J. Sechrist, all from C Trp, were in a UH-1C that received intense enemy fire and crashed. They are thought to be the first air crew members to be killed from the 7/17th and VHPA members Don Williamson and Jack Burden provide some details:

Jack says that it is important to remember that the battles associated with Tet of '68 started about one month earlier in this part of I Corps because the 2nd NVA had become very aggressive since right after Christmas and had been pushing towards the Coast. The Americal folks were still pretty new in-country and were giving up ground in "no man's land". Most of the time C Trp would stage out of Hawk Hill as it supported the 1/1st Cav based there. Hawk Hill was about a mile from the ocean, west of QL 1 and about halfway between Chu Lai and Da Nang. Most every day C Trp would send teams looking to see how far the NVA had advanced in a given sector. The Americal instructions were for C Trp not to fly into NVA Country because the Division was not in a position to provide the extensive support that even a downed bird could generate. C Trp had a different operational configuration than either A or B Trp. We would take our Lift with the Blues and several sets of Guns and Scouts to Hawk Hill. We didn't fly a C&C per se. We would send out one or two mixed teams (one LOH and one UH-1C Gun) to recon by themselves knowing that the rest of the troop was literally standing by for them. If a team made contact or wanted to put the Blues in, then we would try to pull the other mixed team into the same general area to minimize the risk of having two birds down in two different areas. It was really neat when one team would find something and ask for Gun support; because most times we would send four Charlie Models to answer the call. That was a real "heavy, heavy team" and usually did a bang up job on the bad guys! Billy Williams and I were Majors and used to take turns directing the operations from Hawk Hill or in a C&C when we got into a fight. I was on the hill on the 9th.

Don continues. I was the ranking officer and the leader of the mixed team on the 9th. We had been briefed and given an AO on the west side of FB Ross and another little outpost just beyond it. They were the last friendly positions and most everything to their west was NVA Country. We called that a "no fly line" because of the Division support policy Jack just described. I remember spreading out the maps on some sand bags and we all talked about our route to the AO. Naturally, running a map and flying a LOH low level doesn't make much sense; so I gave my maps to Phipps and Ramos. I still believe we missed a turn and flew west too far. Anyway, I remember passing over a small pond and receiving fire. I broke and called the Gunship to warn them about the fire. I hadn't even made a complete circle yet when I heard them say that they were taking fire and had been hit. They continued flying on the same heading, so I finished the circle and climbed up behind them. I told them I was "right on them" so if they

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needed to land or whatever I was in a position to support them. Anyway, they kept flying straight and flew right into the side of this mountain doing at least 90 knots!! We had just refueled and rearm. Brother, what an explosion and a fire!! I made several passes hoping to see someone get out but they really didn't have a chance. On my second pass I was REALLY RECEIVING FIRE. I called for help and remember talking with everyone that evening. They all agreed it was the WORST FIRE they had ever received.

Jack finishes the story. When we received Don's call, we launched everything we had a Hawk Hill. I was calling back to Chu Lai and coordinating things; but was really desperate to get out there. One ACT of the 1/9th Cav was living at Hawk Hill at the time. They came over and looked at the crash point on the map. They agreed it was certainly bad guy country but said if our troop was going in (meaning putting the Blues on the ground); that they would go as well. At first I really felt good about this and was ready to commit both troops. Finally, I displaced some poor Gun pilot and flew out there in Greg Ross's gunship. They must have picked the base camp for a heavy weapons units of an NVA Regt; the fire was really bad!! It didn't take long to realize that we would doom both troops if we tried to go in there. Their ship was still burning like mad when I got there with ammo, especially WPs going off. I made a couple of passes at about 50 knots about 20 feet over the site but certainly saw nothing that was encouraging at all. We tried to go back the next day but it was still too hot. There was a small OP about 300 meters up the steep hill from the crash site. About a week and a half later, these friendly called us to say that the area was secured. I took a special team in to inspect the site. We found some human remains and the team was pretty positive they had identified four left legs. Even so they were officially carried as MIA for many years; but I have no doubt that they died.

The official Defense Intelligence Agency material (refer to Phipps or Ramos in the KIA section in a VHPA Directory) states that only PFC Secrist's remains were recovered; the others (Newton, Phipps, and Ramos) were listed as MIA because their remains could not be identified. On the 11th, an A Trp LOH took nine hits but was able to make it back to Dak To. Their Blues and a D Trp platoon were inserted and made heavy contact with the NVA who withdrew leaving 15 dead. On the 15th, A Trp went to the rescue of an armored column that had been ambushed. The Cav broke the ambushed and killed 12. Three days later, while working the same area the Scouts suddenly came under heavy AWs fire and one pilot was wounded. Airstrikes and artillery were used to silence the NVA who lost 7 killed and had two recoilless rifles destroyed. During the last part of the month A Trp worked around Pleiku. On the 20th A Trp's Scouts found six NVA taking evasive action and killed four but then an LOH was shot down. The Blues were inserted to protect the crew. In the action that followed, the Blues killed five more and captured some medical supplies and a weapon. On the 22th, A Trp found five NVA in a bunker and the Guns killed three. When the Scouts returned to check out the area, SP4 Dale S. Puishis was killed when his LOH was shot down, crashed and burned. The other two crew members were wounded but were successfully extracted. B Trp's unit history contains a single paragraph covering operations prior to TET which is why we had very little on this ACT during the last two months 1967. Basically they considered those pre-TET operations as "on the job" training for the days that followed. Operating out of Camp Enari, B Trp used Plei Djereng, Plei Kleng, Kontum, Dak To, the Oasis, Ban Me Thot, Ben Het and An Khe as staging areas for daily operations. They supported the 173rd ABN Bde, all three 4th Div Bdes, various SF units and LRRPs, plus units of the 101st Abn. They accounted for 37 VC and NVA killed, 26 captured, 4 weapons captured, 5 tons of rice recovered or destroyed plus over 100 documents captured. D Trp provided vehicular reconnaissance and fire base security at Ban Me Thot for most of the month.

VHCMC Member Don Oliver provides: One of the funniest incident of my tour involved another B Trp Huey crewchief named Sandoval. Sandy was a little moody but was a meticulous and careful technician. One day MAJ Hefford was flying C&C in Sandy's ship during an operation near Plei Kleng. While out in the AO, the main rotor tach generator failed which generated a few choice words from the Major. While Sandy took offense to the comments about his aircraft, Hefford's attention quickly returned to the war. He flew back to the staging area and set down to discuss something face to face with another officer, and Sandy thought he was going to be on the ground for awhile. As soon as they landed, Sandy got out, opened the engine and transmission cowls, and got up on the engine deck to start removing the tach generator (with the engine still running). Maybe Sandy should have thought through this one better? Meanwhile, Hefford finishes his conversation and takes off with Sandy still on the engine deck. Ever a resourceful fellow, Sandy crawls forward by hanging on to antennas and ventilator cups until he is above the pilot's windshield. He then leans forward with his head down in front of the Major and starts banging on the windshield. Meanwhile the rest of the Lift had been trying frantically to raise the CO, but he was on another freq. Hefford always looked at Sandy a little funny after that!

## TET of '68

February - The HHT unit history sums it all up "During TET the entire Sqdn's activities and energies were devoted to the Kontum area which was nearly occupied by the NVA." During the first week, Sqdn elements killed 24 NVA/VC in operations near Kontum, Dak To, and northwest of Pleiku. These operations were either to clear the NVA/VC from the sites and immediate areas around military base camps or to escort critical convoys since portions of the road between Pleiku and Kontum were in enemy hands. For the rest of the month, with D Trp still based out of the Kontum air field, the Sqdn supported TF 1/22 which consisted of the augmented 1/22 Inf Bn. The ACTs found numerous trails and bunker complexes near Plei Mrong (about seven kms west of QL14 and about half way between Pleiku and Kontum). This proved to be "home" for the large enemy force that had hit QL14 at the start of Tet and had sent units against both cities. For the period 8 - 29 Feb, the Sqdn killed 51 NVA/VC, captured 7 POWs, 4,250 rounds of small arms ammo, 15 rounds of crew served ammo, 5 individual and 6 crew weapons, and 41 packs which contained documents and over 100 lbs of medical supplies. The Sqdn did its Cavalry job of "finding and fixing the enemy" well because the 4th Inf moved the 173rd Abn Bde to Kontum to work the Plei Mrong area and returned the 7/17th to work its traditional AOs from Ban Me Thot to Dak Pek. The unit histories record specific days and events in a little more detail.

In the 1st, B Trp was sent to Dak To but diverted to Kontum because Dak To was under a heavy mortar attack. NVA gun positions inside the city greeted them as they approached the Kontum air strip. The Guns started surgically working on the NVA guns and the Lift started carrying friendly wounded to the 71st Evac at Pleiku. About the time the Lift section turned, the C&C learned that Dak To was "clear" and "needed the Cav". The first priority at Dak To was to find the NVA mortar teams and the Scouts did this quickly. First the guns were used then several airstrikes. During the post-strike screen, the Scouts found an extensive complex of tunnels and bunkers. They marked the area so accurately that the next series of airstrikes were accompanied by numerous secondary explosions. Back over the area, the Scouts found some NVA trying to leave and the Guns killed four but received intense 50 cal fire. One UH-1C took several hits. The co-pilot received facial wounds from the shattered windows so they flew back to Pleiku Air Force Base. The Kontum situation was so bad that the Brigade at Dak To used B Trp to lift and CA C-1/22 Inf from Dak To to Kontum which required 20 sorties. The troop killed four more NVA during the A. Just after the CA, B Trp received a change of mission to support A Trp in a critical convoy escort. Both Trps finally departed the AO at 2045 to return to Enari.

VHPA Member Charlie Rayl describes these times as follows: Some time before TET actually started, A Trp had killed an NVA LT, his SGT, and a body guard who were carrying a courier packet containing the Tet Offensive NVA battle plans for the Central Highlands. I firmly believe the military intelligence community chose to discount these documents, disbelieving that the NVA had the capability to carry out such a large scale attack. For two weeks prior to Tet, we repeatedly reported NVA construction of new roads, battle positions, fortifications and even new unused graves as we flew the Pleiku, Kontum, Dak To area. We were very concerned about not only the number of sightings but also the fact that we were not getting shot at during our VRs. We were criticized for not getting the kills we had in the past; but the vital information we were providing was either not believed or ignored. For me, the Tet Offensive began while on an early morning VR out towards the Ia Drang Valley. I spotted some Montagnards with larger than normal baskets on their backs traveling down a trail. They didn't wave, smile, or look up at us as we hovered by. Unusual. The Montagnards were always friendly to the Scouts and would voluntarily open their baskets to show us what was in them, indicating they meant no harm. I decided to herd them down the path to a flat, open area where we could bring the Blues in and called for the Blues. About that time Ops called and requested that I return to base. I argued that I had just made a significant find. MAJ Inglett, Tornado 6, got on the radio and with language I clearly understood, ordered me back to camp. When I got there, he briefed us that a MAJOR attack was under way at Kontum and that the airfield and SF camp were in danger of being overrun. As we flew by Pleiku, we noticed some of it was ablaze. A major fire fight was in progress about 12 Ks north of Camp Holloway. We arrived at Kontum with only one team of Scouts and Guns plus the C&C. We orbited east of Kontum while the CO sorted things out in Kontum. We could see a few little fire fights going on; but nothing like the fires and destruction going on at Pleiku! My observer, Dennis Carlin, and I always liked the Dak Bla River that ran east to west, south of Kontum. The river valley had always been a friendly place as opposed to the mountains and jungle nearby. We were snooping along low level over the "friendly river" when we over-flew a squad of ARVN engaged in a fire fight. They were obviously in a heap of trouble. They were caught out in the open on a sand bar on the east bank of the river. The NVA were pumping a heavy volume of rifle fire at them. One ARVN frantically waved and pointed to the tree line to his west as I flew by. I rolled in hot with the mini, spraying the bursts as close as 15 feet from the ARVN into the tree line. Instantly, the ARVN stood up, started firing and attacked the NVA position! Gutsy little rascals, or, with my shooting that close to them, dumb? I made one more pass but they were already in the tree line, so I couldn't shoot. On my third pass, some of the ARVN were back out on the sand bar waving and smiling as friendly as I had ever seen them towards an American. A few days later I flew by the same location and several NVA bodies had been drug out on the sand and left to rot. A dog was chewing on them. I was offended, so we shot the dog. Anyway, by this time MAJ Inglett had things figured out. The SF camp was under siege by mortar fire they believed was coming from the rifle range located to the northeast of Kontum; so we sent two Scouts and two Guns up there. We made a high speed, low level pass near the rifle range. There they were - first valid intelligence we had been given all day. The NVA had a bunch of mortars set up, so our Guns opened up. It was a turkey shoot! As we did not have another Gun team on station yet, we decided to refuel at Kontum. When we got to the refuel point, we noticed there was no one to operate the pump. We always refueled "hot" (with the engine running and

the rotors turning), so Dennis got out to go start the pump. I called the tower and asked where the refueler was. He responded that he didn't know. I asked why he didn't know. He answered that the tower was closed, that he was in a bunker with a PRC 25 and that the field was under attack! News to me!! Dennis was struggling to crank up the gas powered fuel pump when I happened to glance toward the 57th AVN's compound and saw a flight school classmate of mine, CPT C.D. Rogers, crouched behind a revet. He was frantically waving at me to get the hell out of there. C.D. was a big guy, had been a football player in college and I knew he had more than his share of courage. His acting scared and crouched behind a revet definitely got my attention! I looked over my right shoulder and saw dust being kicked up to my right rear by AW fire. Dennis was still at the fuel pump about 20 meters away. He had it running but was not facing towards me. With the noise of the LOH and the fuel pump, he could not hear the incoming fire. I couldn't leave him and I couldn't leave the aircraft. After what seemed like two eternities, he turned around and saw the dust flying from the bullet strikes and me frantically signaling him to get back to the ship. Dennis won the 20 meter dash. I pulled pitch while he was still strapping in. I wasn't helping much by flying in what I called "making it dance" so as not to give the NVA a steady target. My wing was steadily firing into an area south of the fueling pits. Still no fuel and not enough in the tank to make it back to base. But ole lady luck was with us as we spotted a 5,000 gal tanker parked inside the 57th's compound. We landed next to the tanker and a soldier came running over while trying to make himself a small target. He gets the fuel pump started and we start refueling. Soon a pilot appears and tells me that all of the 57th's helicopters have been hit and that they had been receiving enemy fire in the compound most of the day. I waved goodbye to C.D. with a thumbs up. He was a hell of a guy. He later extended so that his younger brother wouldn't have to serve in Vietnam and was killed during the extension. We got married up with our second Gun team and started working the northern perimeter of the 57th's area. The Scouts searched and marked enemy positions and the Guns shot them up. The minigun and rocket fire dampened the spirits of the NVA attackers! Apparently the situation at the SF camp deteriorated, because our CO called for the Blues to be inserted in or near the camp. Our Guns were dispatched to cover the insertion. Since they didn't need Scouts for that, my team kept working the 57th's northern perimeter. I recall finding an ARVN position just north of the perimeter. He was surrounded and had his hands full but was making a menace of himself in the NVA rear. We made a couple of firing passes at the NVA along a tree line and I called for some Guns. The response: "Kill them yourself, Red; we've got to get the Blues in!" As luck would have it, another Gun team showed up and I got them to shoot up the area around this lone ARVN. After that, the NVA activity on the northern side quieted down and my team went back to base camp to rearm. The fires and fire fights were still going on at Pleiku. The airfield was a beehive of activity. When we returned to Kontum, we set up an aerial screen to watch for NVA reinforcements into this battle. Shortly a 122mm rocket fired from a distant mountain to the northeast, scored a direct hit on the 5,000 gal tanker we had used earlier that day. An instantaneous explosion ensued with a towering black fuel fire of smoke billowing skyward in sharp contrast to the other brown smoke in the battle area. As a result, we were sent to look for the rocket launch positions. We found the remains of where it had been launched but searched the deep mountain side jungle in vain for any unfired rockets. It is a tough job to hover a helicopter right on top of the trees trying to blow the branches aside in the hopes of getting a glimpse of the camouflaged rocket site. Mountain flying at that altitude is a challenge as the ship reacts to every little up and down draft and the wind currents are always tricky. It finally got too dark to work anymore, so we went home. For the next six days, the Scouts were grounded because our Blues were embroiled in a fight at the SF camp. Without the quick reaction force provided by our Blues, the CO wouldn't risk using the Scouts. Besides the NVA were easy to find all around Kontum. I felt sorry for the Blues. They had not been exposed to fighting from a fixed position and we were unable to extract them for several days.

Kontum was desperate for Infantry even though the entire 1/22 Inf Bn and everything that the Special Forces B-24 command could scrape together were totally committed. D Trp quickly returned from Ban Me Thuot and consolidated with A and B Trp's Blues. These combined forces flushed any known or suspected VC or NVA from buildings within the city. Intense sniper and automatic weapons fire was received as they moved from house to house. D Trp was directly responsible for the successful defense of the SF camp and portions for the city during the Tet Offensive and was officially commended on several occasions by the B-24 commander. In 1970 the Rifle Platoons of A and B Trps plus all of D Trp were awarded a Valorous Unit Award for the period 30 Jan to 12 Feb. Al iller provided a copy of the Recommendation for Presidential Unit Citation for the period 30 Jan - 3 Feb prepared by MAJ Bruce Wilder. This document describes these events in considerable detail but has not been included in this history due to publishing deadlines. Finally, pages 157 and 158 in Winged Sabers contains several photos of these Infantry units during this period.

After finishing its mission on the 15th, A Trp was directed to help a LRRP in contact that had one prisoner. They inserted the Blues and with the screen of aircraft quickly brought the situation under control. The Lift section then extracted all the ground elements. On the 20th, while on a platoon size, aero-rifle mission, SP4 James L. West, of D Trp was killed while on flank security. On the 21st, A Trp's Scouts found a network of caves with clothing laying outside. The Blues were inserted and made contact. After a few airstrikes, the enemy broke contact and the Blues found two dead NVA and captured two weapons and twelve packs. On the 22nd, the Sqdn's combined Infantry force was inserted to sweep a bunker complex. They killed one NVA and captured an impressive amount of ammunition including land mines, B-40 rockets, mortar round, 75mm recoilless round, etc. The Scouts that screened for the Infantry killed two NVA attempting to get away. On the 23rd, D Trp was inserted to reinforce A Trp's Blues and they made contact with an estimated NVA Battalion. Six airstrikes were employed and the Guns expended several times that day. By the time the Lift inserted 4th Division units as further reinforcement, the Sqdn elements had confirmed 23 NVA killed, had captured 7 more with 31 packs plus some weapons and ammunition. The 7/17 Infantry remained on the ground that night. On the 24th, an A Trp Scout was forced down, crashed and burned while covering for the Infantry. SP5 Joseph McCloyn, flying as gunner on the LOH, was killed. A Trp's Blues and D Trp started moving toward the crash site and B Trp's Blues were inserted to reinforce them. Enroute the Infantry made contact, returned fire, and killed 4 NVA and destroyed a machine gun. Contact was soon broken and the Infantry extracted. On the 26th, B Trp did a pre-planned insertion of the Blues who made light contact and killed 5 NVA. The Blues were extracted and the search continued. The Scouts discovered an area with 8 hootches plus some tunnels and laundry drying. The Blues went in again and found a hospital complex with 2 operating tables, some medical supplies and documents plus 1 dead and 1 wounded NVA. The wounded man said the complex was a 35 man hospital and thought there were 10 more wounded in the area. The Scouts found and killed one of the guards. Everything was lifted out and the complex destroyed.

**March** - The tactical situation had generally returned to "normal" and the Sqdn continued to support the 4th Div's Operation MacArthur, specifically the 1st and 2nd Bdes, the 173rd Abn Bde, and TF 1/12. During the month the Sqdn would report 71 NVA killed and one captured. On the 4th, A Trp inserted its Blues and D Trp to clear a VC village and rest area. They destroyed 20 hootches and a quantity of food and live stock while capturing two VC (one proved to be a 1LT). As the scouts screened around the village, they received heavy AW fire. Two airstrikes were called in, resulting in three VC killed. On the 7th, A Trp supported TF 1/12 in the Ban Me Thuot area. The Scouts found a small system of 20 bunkers containing some people. They used artillery to keep the enemy fixed while they inserted their Blues with D Trp. The Infantry captured four NVA. As a Scout team was returned to refuel, they spotted about ten NVA carrying stretchers along a trail. They were able to kill one and wound another before having to leave the area. On the 8th, A Trp's AO was northwest of Kontum and B Trp supported the 173rd Abn near Kontum. At 0925 B Trp observed about 15 NVA and killed four. By 1100 the Blues were in and made contact with an estimated company. In the fight that followed, three Infantry were wounded (two evaded) but ten NVA were killed. Some weapons (including 18 122mm rockets), ammunition, and food were captured. Later in the afternoon, A Trp's Scouts killed one of a group of five to ten NVA taking evasive action. B Trp was told to extract their Blues and support A Trp. A and B Trp's Blues with D Trp were inserted, found a bunker complex, and made heavy contact with an estimated company. The firing was so intense that the medevac ship could not land. PFC John D. Beaver from A and ? from B Trp's Blues were killed during this battle. With support from the Guns, the Infantry advanced through the bunker complex and killed 15 NVA. The Scouts killed another NVA while screening the flanks. The Infantry was extracted at 1745. The air units then directed airstrikes at the enemy positions until darkness and lack of fuel forced them to depart. The next day, an A Trp LOH was shot down in the same area. The Blues secured the crew and aircraft and everyone was successfully extracted. On the 15th, D Trp engaged a company sized unit north of Pleiku. Contact was broken late in the day. The next day a sweep of the battlefield revealed three dead NVA, two AKs plus some ammunition, documents and about a ton of rice. A Trp worked southwest of Dak To for the next two days and killed two NVA. The rest of the month was "one of the slowest periods encountered by the Sqdn". The ACTs worked the area west of Kontum and around the Polei Keng SF Camp but nothing serious was reported.

**April** - The Sqdn spent most of this month working the familiar AOs from Dak To south to Polei Keng and southwest to the long Plei Trap valley that basically paralleled the Cambodian border. The 4th Div's 3rd Bde was moving into the Plei Trap and the Sqdn spent many days screening ahead of them. A few days were spent near Dak Pek and north of Ban Me Thuot. The Sqdn would report 24 NVA killed during the month. B Trp's unit history for the 2nd is a classic for the period. "The morning began as usual. The Scouts were receiving light AW fire. The Guns returned the fire silencing the enemy weapons. The Scouts continued to work the area initiating light contact through-out the morning. They acquired only 1 extra hole in the LOHs and no casualties. Airstrikes were called for, received, and directed in upon the enemy position. BDA's were conducted following each strike and the Air Force credited with the destruction of many bunkers with interconnecting tunnels." This clearly described a "usual" day in an ACT! However, it got ugly just after noon. CPT Archie A. Hayman, the Scout Platoon Leader, was conducting the recon of a suspected NVA base camp with PSG M.C. Hood as his observer. The LOH received intense anti-aircraft and automatic weapons fire from 360 degrees and was downed. The LOH burst into flames. PSG Hood, though wounded, crawled around the opposite side and pulled CPT Hayman's body from the burning wreckage. The Guns expended and the C&C got two flights of fighters to unload around the downed bird. Artillery was used to keep the enemy away from PSG Hood and the Blues were inserted about 800 meters to the west. Just prior to the Blues reaching the LOH, two individuals were repelled in and extracted PSG Hood. The Blues extracted CPT Hayman's body, collected some equipment from the LOH and destroyed it. On the 4th, A Trp found an NVA soldier hiding in a foxhole near a fresh trail. Firing into the area, they killed seven. The Trp received a change of mission and when they returned in the afternoon they noted that four of the bodies had been removed and the others stripped of their equipment. No further contact was made. On the 9th, A Trp was working north of Ban Me Thuot when the Scouts found some NVA near an

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abandoned village. The Guns killed three. On the 10th, A Trp had a Gun shot down by heavy automatic weapons fire while covering the emergency extraction of a LRRP team. D Trp was inserted to protect the downed aircraft while the injured crew was evaced. Due to the enemy situation, the aircraft was stripped and destroyed in place. On the 18th about noon B-Trp found a large underground storage area exposed by a B-52 strike. A LOH was shot up and burst into flames prior to reaching the ground. The Guns covering the downed LOH receive 50 cal from three positions but continued firing until the first of seven airstrikes were ready to go in. Finally another Scout was able to make a quick pass over the area and reported that the downed crew was alive. Dust-off was unable to get into the small area and reported renewed enemy fire. At 1540 the Lift started this insertion. The NVA allowed the first Lift ship to unload and depart; but when the second was on short final, they opened up on the Infantry and the Huey. One more LOH was hit by a 50 wounding the pilot. He made another pass over the LZ and silencing one machine gun with his mini-gun before departing for Polei Kleng and hence the 71st Evac. By 1645 the Blues reached the LOH which was a total loss. All personnel were extracted by 1715 after counting seven dead NVA and capturing three machine guns. At the end of the day B Trp had 5 men in the 71st Evac. On the 24th, B Trp was working west of Kontum and observed many new bridges and a wide, hard packed trail. Closer examination determined that the trail was a road for 5-ton trucks! Air strikes and artillery were directed against the bridges. During the BDA, 15 to 20 NVA were seen and taken under fire. The Blues were inserted to develop the situation and had just made contact with an estimated platoon when the 4th Division's G-3 sent specific instructions to extract the Blues. Contact was broken and though three Lift ships were hit, the extraction was successful. B Trp had five wounded, none seriously. Airstrikes were called in and artillery registered for effective H&I. On the 26th, A Trp's C&C was hit by 50 cal fire which wounded four of the crew and knocked out all of the ship's commo. They were able to return safely to Kontum. On the 29th, B Trp was conducting BDAs west of Kontum when they found seven NVA and killed two. Ten hootches were destroyed. At 1600, the 3rd Bde CO directed MAJ Heford to insert a seven man squad into an area where four US KIAs, some weapons and radios were located. The area was a small LZ on the side of a hill. The bodies were scattered and the equipment had been left by a unit of the 3rd Bde when the LZ came under heavy mortar and automatic weapons fire during the extraction. During the inserting, the LZ once again came under heavy mortar fire and the Lift ship was damaged. B Trp put artillery on the mortar position and the insertion was completed. The seven men spent almost two hours on the ground before reaching a PZ with two US KIA, 15 weapons and three radios. They were unable to retrieve two other US KIA. Once again the NVA mortars opened up and B Trp replied. The squad, KIAs and equipment were extracted to the Bde HQ and B Trp went home for the night.

May - On 1 May, C/2/17 Cav 101st Abn Div was redesignated C/7/17 and alerted to deploy to Vietnam in early July. C Trp had not been able to deploy to Vietnam with the 101st in Dec, 1967 because it's total compliment of aircraft consisted of five OH-23Gs. It had received nearly a full compliment of officers and enlisted men as the Division was brought up to full strength and was the only 101st element to remain at Ft. Campbell for the New Years party. In January, C Trp received what is believed to be the last Charlie Model "504" from the Bell production line. During the next month, CONUS stripped every unit, including Mother Rucker, of every last UH-1C and was able to scrape enough gun systems from the Atlanta depot to outfit C Trp. During March they trained in the snow on all of Ft. Campbell's empty firing ranges and Drop Zones. With virtually no one to "supervise" them and with "considerable relaxation" of the aerial gunnery range regulations, MAJ Robert "Jack" Frost and a hand full of other Vietnam vets taught the basic arts of Combat Assault, aerial reconnaissance, convey escort, etc. VHPA Member Jack Frost provides:

Trp C was being filled to combat strength when I arrived to assume command. Both "First Shirt" Harry L. Turner and I often wondered how in hell we were ever going to turn all this green stuff into first rate soldiers. Somehow with constant doses of esprit, cunning, mischievous intent and humor, combined with the three serious oldies who had been to Vietnam, we got ourselves "trained" to the point of being called, quite rightly, an ACT. Getting ready was certainly a challenge. Things I remember include, but by no means are limited to, the following: First, Wilson "B" (Harry called each of the seven enlisted Wilsons by a letter) loaded out a 2 1/2 with fuel bladders and used the fuel pump to "hold" them in place on the bed of the truck. But in his earnest response to "Alert! Alert! Alert!", he forgot to raise the tailgate and when he took off from the hanger area, drag energy took over. The bladders moved to the rear and simply knocked the pump to the ramp where it automatically turned into a bladder impaling device for the rubber drums that followed. Second, some enlisted "leg" from the airfield unit placed a disturbance call from his barracks to complain about the noise emanating from the Troop C barracks. When the MPs arrived they discovered the noise had stopped because our entire barracks had emptied out to greet the MP sedan! The Blues then proceeded to surround the car and lift it off the ground with the MPs still inside. Under escort from the entire unit, the sedan was carried from the Troop area and place gently back on the street headed toward Main Post. The Troopers than "thanked" the MPs for their visit and returned to their barracks. Third, with the 101st gone to Vietnam and Troop C left behind to wait for engines and other "critical" parts of our TO&E, we were fair game for all the BS details all the admin stay-behind weenies could dream up. Among the greatest of these was the Airfield Commander, COL "Whatever". He and I were cross threaded from day 1 and we both knew it! He was trying to retire without a blemish to the grass in front of his headquarters and I was trying to dig foxholes in it to train the Blues!! When we were finally ready to fly our birds to Sharpe Army Depot in CA, our takeoff was delayed when this COL observed a "thunderstorm" in the radar quadrant of our route of flight. It took some deft, politically astute, well chosen words from my great XO, Terry Glover, to point out that the "thunderstorm" blip was in reality the southwest corner of the hanger!! Finally we were permitted to takeoff. At one point, I was an ace away from his slapping either an Article 15 or Court-Martial on me for insubordination to a superior officer, because I was insistent that the Troop would not deploy as scheduled unless the crews and pilots were issued their chicken plates, groin protectors and shin guards. I refused to accept any promises of "shipment enroute" or "in-country issue" because I knew these lifesaving items were in short supply. He was livid and I was equally firm in my demand that my good Supply Officer, Glenn Hartman, would be available 24 hours a day to cooperate with his Logistics Officer. All it would take was a phone call that our chicken plates were on Post. WO Hartman would then gladly pick them up, place them in our conexes, under my supervision and then the COL would have in return, my guarantee that both the Troop and I would gladly get out of his face. Finally, I never lost sight of the fact that being a Commanding Officer was a terrible responsibility and an extremely lonely position. If our country was sending us to war; it was important that I do my best with the Youth of America and the trust of the mothers and fathers whose sons we were making into soldiers that would survive combat. If I could impart a fear of myself, which exceeded his own fears of what the enemy could do to him, then each man stood a decent chance of living. Only long, hard, miserable, hot/cold/wet boondock conditions living in smelly, muddy, filthy clothes without one second for kids, wives, girl friends, buddies, cars, stereos, TV, beer, etc. can bring us to that point. When we went to Camp Afterbury and half the Blues made a parachute jump while the rest assaulted by Huey and the Scouts and Guns made their attack which proceeded to set the range entirely ablaze in 15 minutes; I knew that Troop C had arrived!! More than 200 dead VC and NVA in five months proved our readiness! A damn good Troop you were bar none! But most important for me now, some 20+ years later, is the knowledge that not one of the pilots that deployed with Troop C died during that tour and that they were able to return to families and loved one -- for that I am very, very thankful.

VHPA Member Vic Rose adds the following: MAJ Frost really drove us hard. Even though we had virtually the entire air field to ourselves, he decided we could learn more in the field. So after we had trained as platoons and were basically "dangerous", he took the entire troop out to one of the old DZs and we set up camp just like we would do later in Vietnam when we had to move to a new area. While half of us were setting up tents and "learning how to build furniture from the rocket box wood", he had the other half shooting up some range and inserting the Infantry. We stayed out there for two weeks in the snow and dirt. But we learned to keep the important parts of the helicopters and the weapons systems clean. And we flew lots of hours to get the experience of being very tired and still having to be mentally alert for another mission. We called ourselves The Chaparrals. We even designed a Trp patch that we wore on our flight jackets and had made into decals for the aircraft. Most of us were from the same officer and warrant officer flight classes, so we had friends from the minute we walked in the door. Over the months that we trained together, we became very close. I think most everyone remembers the manner MAJ Frost was able to apportion all the LSDs (little sh\_tty details). He assembled all the officers in the flight planning room and gave us this proposition, "We have a long way to go and much to get done. Now I could assign these duties without regard, but I want volunteers for these jobs before I have to stick someone with a duty he does not want." There may have been some grumbling at the end of that meeting, but I was satisfied. I did learn; however, that being the training officer for a unit deploying to combat was a lot different than being the training NCO in an AMNT Det in Italy. I still think we all learned a lot and it was fun doing it. To the best of my knowledge not one Chaparral pilot died in Vietnam. A lot of the credit goes to the training we received at Rucker and from the units we flew with in Vietnam; but a lot of credit also goes to Jack Frost.

VHPA Member Glenn Hartman recalls: I had several years of service as an EM before going to flight school and becoming a Warrant. So I was older than most new pilots when I joined C Trp at Ft. Campbell. For some reason MAJ Frost decided that I would be the supply officer and that started a friendship that continues to the present day. His first tour in Vietnam had been at Ban Me Thuot, so he knew what it was like for an aviation unit to live and maintain their equipment a long way from anyone else. Naturally he wanted to acquire as much equipment as possible while in the States to fill the 63 conex containers we would take to Vietnam. He showed me how to use "considerable creativity" with the DD Form 444 (Inventory Adjustment Report) to return some extra typewriters we had some how "acquired" and to draw an extra 3/4 ton truck. Our unit had a self service account of about \$3,000 per month to cover such items as light bulbs, mops, etc. The procedure was - if you spent all the money in your account; you would be considered for more next month. To this day I still feel sorry for the young LT from the Air Field Command. Either he was being very, very generous or he wasn't too quick; because he counted the same set of bunks, mattresses, and kitchen trays at least three times when we hand received our equipment back to him!! Needless to say, but we spent it all and then some in the months leading up to our deployment and we were well provisioned when we left for Vietnam. But Frost had more vision than I could deliver. For example, he was bound and determined to get a 5 1/2 ton wrecker so we could pull rotorheads in the field. There is no way an Air Cav Troop was authorized a 5 1/2 ton wrecker!! Try as we may, we never got one. We did have two 2 1/2 ton trucks and Frost wanted to get 50 cal MG rings mounted on them before we left. He knew we could "find" the 50s once we got to Vietnam. Well, those mounts were WW II or Korean War issue and we never got them either. Later when we got

to Vietnam I was still the supply officer and I used to fly C&C with Frost rather frequently. He was a brave man and a hard charger. More than once he scared me half to death with some of the things we did.

A Trp spent the entire month working around Dak To. On the 4th, A Trp's Scouts found a trail that had recently been used by an estimated NVA company with bicycles. While covering the LOHs, the Guns received fire and returned it. During the BDA after the airstrike, the Scout received intense fire; so the Gun unloaded again and more airstrikes were employed with unknown results. On the 7th, A Trp found 12 NVA killed during a BDA of a B-52 strike. The Scouts saw three NVA near a bomb crater and quickly dispatched them. On the 13th, southwest of Dak To, A Trp's Scouts took six NVA under fire. They scattered in all directions. While searching for the scattered enemy, the Scouts found a small machine gun on wheels, 17 packs and about eight soldiers. In the quick exchange of fire, one NVA was killed. A Trp used their guns, artillery, and airstrikes to kill eight more. The search continued; and when the Scouts found an estimated platoon, six were killed. The Guns rolled in and before the enemy escaped they left 15 more dead. On the 14th, A Trp worked northwest of Dak To and had the Guns fire up a suspected NVA position. The Scouts confirmed one killed but had to quickly leave the area when the artillery was ready. The Scouts returned and found that the artillery had killed one more; then they killed a third who was attempting to flee. The Guns spotted three enemy walking along a trail and killed two. When the Scouts came to check this out they found four more and took them under fire. Bad weather forced A Trp from the AO but it had been a good day's work. On the 18th, A Trp did a BDA from a B-52 strike west of Dak To. CW2 Douglas W. Walker's LOH received heavy AW fire, crashed and burned on impact. His wing landed and endeavored to rescue the crew. He quickly came under enemy fire. The second LOH was disabled and part of the crew wounded. A Dust Off ship was called in and rescued the three men. Due to the large NVA force in this area, neither aircraft were extracted. Several airstrikes were directed into the area but no BDA. On the 22th, another A Trp LOH was shot down and burned north of Dak To. One NVA was killed by the airstrikes put in after the crew was extracted with only minor wounds. On the 24th, A Trp's Scouts checked out a small bunker complex, found an NVA soldier hiding in a foxhole, and killed him. On the 29th, A Trp's Gun noticed the blast from a mortar. Luckily a set of jets were "on station" and were quickly directed again the mortar position. The position was destroyed and three secondary explosions observed. Finally, still in the States, C Trp had completed its ATTs and prepared its aircraft and vehicles for shipment by the end of May. The aircraft were flown to Sharp Army Depot. Those who took part in that "operation" have many fond memories. If you see a Chaparral ask him about the close-up pictures of the "O" on the Goodyear blimp or the fat lady's poodle at the pool in Tucson used as a "ball" for water polo!

VHPA Members Bill Irock and Rob Woodside flew Guns for B Trp during this period. They met each other for the first time in years at the Atlanta VHPA Reunion. Together they provided the following story: It was late in the afternoon after work about the May time frame. Most everyone was back in the hootches but the maintenance crews were taking advantage of the last of the sunlight on the flight line. Suddenly there was the unmistakable SWOOCCH sound of a rocket motor and a loud explosion. Everyone hit the dirt believing it was enemy incoming. After a few minutes of calm, people started coming out from under cover and moved toward the flight line where the sounds had come from. As it turns out someone in B Trp's maintenance was making an adjustment to the electrical components of the weapon system on a UH-1C. He had powered up the system and accidentally touched off a pair of rockets. One rocket went up the tail pipe of an A Trp H model while two guys had the rear cowling open working in the engine compartment. If the rocket had not actually gone into the engine cone before exploding, it could have been much more serious for these men. The explosion knocked them from the Huey and though they were dazed and shaken, they were otherwise unhurt. The Huey burned completely and kept everyone away when the ammo started cooking off. The revet was also badly burned and became a long term reminder to everyone of this event. The second rocket hit a jeep just after the front wheel well, before the driver's compartment, and embedded its warhead in the engine block. Rob has some good pictures of both the jeep with the white rocket tube clearly protruding from its side and the roped off revet containing what little was left of the Huey the next morning. Rob said the next day, a Skycrane came in with a long, long cable to sling the jeep from the flight line and drop it someplace far away.

June - On the 3rd, while operating southwest of Kontum, A Trp found four large openings with stairs going into the ground. The Blues were inserted and discovered that the bunkers had been used for ammunition storage. While screening around the Blues, the Scouts found two NVA and killed them. Sadly B Trp's Unit History does not provide any detail concerning their involvement in the famous "Hill Fights" that took place south of Dak To during this period. This battle was, of course, one of those very bloody affairs where the 173rd Abn and elements of the 4th Inf covered themselves with considerable well earned glory.

Luckily VHCMA Member Don Oliver provides us with a very good insight. It wasn't long after the 173rd got into their hilltop positions on three hills overlooking Dak Pek and a couple of klicks to the west that the NVA opened up from the entire length of the higher ridge line that ran north and south a few more klicks to the west. Resupply to the 173rd hilltops became very dangerous and I remember that the 179th lost a Chinook that was shot down from above by 12.7 mm fire. The battle for the hilltops became a three-day exercise in close air support for which I had a ringside seat as my ship was MAJ Longhoffer's C&C. Longhoffer worked very closely with the Air Force FAC to alternate gunship runs with airstrikes. After three full days of nearly continuous air attack the NVA were still at it - Scouts reported seeing them launching their 122mm rockets from gaps in the tree line at the top of the ridge. The FAC driver even got a good secondary with a smoke rocket. Finally, the powers that decide such things had had enough. Normal "Arc Light" rules were set aside and a flight of six B-52s made a daylight drop at about 15,000 feet. When the smoke cleared, the battle was over. The ridge line became a tomb for that NVA force. When the B-52s came in, all other aircraft except our C&C were ordered out. Flying with Jim Longhoffer was a real experience. He had deployed as the Scout Plt Cmdr, then moved to Opsn, XO and finally CO. As CO he was more careful than most to make sure the whole crew knew what we were up to and why we were doing it. Longhoffer's style was to get his chin bubbles right down in the weeds like a Scout ship; he apparently never forgot his "redbird" heritage. On the other hand, he was not a cowboy, and we never lost people or aircraft because of an ill-considered risk. He was an excellent combat officer who led by a quiet, intelligent example and respected his people for who they were and what they could do when allowed to take the initiative.

On the 7th, while still working southwest of Kontum, A Trp received a change of mission to support a friendly unit that had been surrounded and had several casualties. While the Guns laid down suppressive fire, the Scout got the unit to a hasty PZ where the Lift picked them up. On the 12th, while performing a VR mission west of Kontum a LOH exploded in mid-air killing WO1 Herbert W. Scott and SGT John T. O'Donnell. The Blues were inserted and recovered the bodies. Working west of Camp Enari on the 21th, A Trp's Scouts received intense small arms fire and observed about 30 individuals and ten bunkers. Artillery and airstrikes were called in and killed three NVA. On the 26th, A Trp Scouts received intense AW fire. The post airstrike analysis revealed six dead NVA. On the 27th, the 568th TC Detachment was attached to A Trp to augment their maintenance capability. On the 27th, B Trp started moving from Camp Enari to an area just south of LZ Betty near Phan Thiet and was opconed to Task Force South. Briefly TF South was organized in July 1968 to provide a joint American Vietnamese command for the four southern Provinces (Binh Thuan, Lam Dong, Tuyen Duc, and Ninh Thuan) of II Corps. It was headquartered in Dalat. The major units were two ARVN Regiments (located at Bao Loc and Song Mao), the 3/503 Abn (detached from the 101st Abn) located at Phan Thiet, a few American artillery batteries, and an ACT. B Trp was the first ACT to work for TF South. Additionally the 192th AHC (the Polecats) lived at Phan Thiet and provided general aviation support for this entire area. When B Trp moved to Phan Thiet, they were assigned an open area of sand south of the POL area since the 192th and the Abn Bn already had all the good real estate around the airfield. Another construction effort began. The perimeter consisted of a 6 foot tall barrier of sand hastily scrapped into one long, basically circular dune. They lived in tents and filled sand bags. Gradually the "ammo box" floors were installed under the tents. D Trp's unit history simply says that from June through October it was based in the Ban Me Thuot area. They stayed at Ban Me Thuot East, at two other bases about 4 kms west of Ban Me Thuot, and at LZ Phillip which was 10 kms northeast of the city. They did a lot of base camp security but also had SRP, LRRP, cordon and search, road convoy escort, mine sweeping, vehicular/mounted and dismounted reconnaissance, and ambush missions. D Trp was frequently used by especially A Trp to supplement their ARP and their history indicates they enjoyed this work.

VHCMA Member Don Oliver provides another story about this period: Soon after B Trp had moved to Phan Thiet another Lift crewchief, Bill Hahn, was walking toward his aircraft through some tall grass when he saw a little snake that seemed to be following him along the ground. The snake was about 18 to 20 inches long and, as I recall, sort of lime green in color. Bill started walking faster, and the snake started following faster. The damn thing was stalking him! As soon as he got to his aircraft, Bill grabbed his survival machete and dropped back to the ground just as the snake arrived. After chopping the snake into neat two-inch pieces, we took it to the flight surgeon who was visiting from Pleiku. He checked his snake book and discovered that the fellow with the big appetite was a krait, one of the most dangerous in Asia, often called a 'two-step' snake by the infantry because you can only go two steps before you're dead if one bites you.

July - On the 1st, B Trp began operating for TF South. During the month they would cover an area from the Cambodian border to the south China Sea, from almost as far south as Saigon to almost Ban Me Thuot in the north. They staged from Dalat, Bao Loc, Song Mao, Loung Son, Ling Conh, and many FSBs. B Trp made contact with the enemy 21 times and killed 27 VC, captured six AK-47s, one 60mm mortar with eight rounds, one ChiCom pistol, 11 lbs of documents, and captured or destroyed 3.5 tons of rice and three 5-ton trucks.

VHPA Member Rob Woodside provides the following lively story about life in Vietnam: One day B Trp had four Charlie Model Guns going someplace out of Phan Thiet. I was near the end of this gaggle and was really surprised when Dave "Mad Dog" Olson announces over the radio that he has an emergency and needs to land. He makes a fast running landing at some field and jumps from the cockpit even before the ship almost comes to a halt. The rest of us are following him and landing around his ship.

Adding further to the mystery, we watch as he drops his pants and draws his 38. With his pants at his feet and pointing the pistol at that some invisible evil between his boots, he starts removing his feet completely from his pants. By this time most of us have exited our helicopters and have gathered around him - still not knowing the identity of his private enemy. We were a little concerning for a few minutes that he was trying to shoot himself. Once he got out of his pants, he kept the weapon trained on them; so we at least knew that the threat was localized. About this time a big old centipede, at least 6 inches long, with a really ugly head comes crawling out of Dave's pants. Everyone jumped back and immediately understood the full significance of Dave's previous actions. Someone ran up and stomped the thing to death. Then we started laughing. Dave still had that scared-to-death look on his face but the rest of us were almost in tears! It took a few minutes before Dave could laugh again. Soon Dave got back into his pants and we were off to the war again. Needless to say but that centipede was one much discussed guy in the Club for a long time after that!!

On the 2nd, A Trp worked an AO southwest of Pleiku and destroyed 34 new camouflaged hootches and killed one VC. On the 6th, northwest of Dak To, A Trp's Scouts killed nine NVA during a day described as "sporadic contact with the enemy". On the 6th, C Trp's advanced party arrived at Pleiku direct from Ft. Campbell. On the 9th, A Trp's Scouts were harmless burning four hootches in a enemy base when they noticed an NVA soldier observing them from a tree. After killing him, the Scouts asked for the Blues. While screening the selected LZ, the Scouts discovered that the NVA had it nicely surrounded. Two airstrikes later, the Blues were inserted. The Scouts reported heavy movement around the LZ. Then the Blues killed one sniper. Prudently, the C&C called for the Blues' extraction and ordered up some more airstrikes and artillery. On the 10th, C Trp's aircraft were taken off the Kula Gulf and were flown to Enari by pilots from other ACTs in the Sqdn. VHPA Members Bill Irock and Rob Woodside provided the following sad description about how WO1 Eric R. Koeppen of B Trp died on the 11th:

Bill relates that the Troop had just returned to Phan Thiet from the day's operations. Eric flew that day in the left seat of Bill's UH-1C. The right side mini-gun was jammed, so Bill had radioed for the line sergeant to meet him at the revet to work on the gun. At that time, the revets at Phan Thiet were simply 'L' shaped mounts of sand that had been pushed up by the engineers' bulldozers. Bill put the ship in the revet, shut down the engine, and got out to work with the crew chief and line sergeant who had pushed the barrel of the mini-gun down to point into the ground. They opened up the gun to start clearing it. Eric had taken off his flight helmet, gathered his things, left the aircraft and walked around the front to the ship to the right side where everyone was working on the gun. Eric said that since they had all the help they needed he was going back to the hootches and started walking up the side of the revetment ... the direct path to the hootches. The rotor system was still milling down and Bill yelled "The Blade. The Blade". Rob had parked another Gun in a revet immediately behind Bill's ship and was working on that ship. Rob says: "I think everyone on that part of the flight line must have heard Bill yell. I certainly did and looked up to see what was going on." Apparently Eric did not hear or wasn't paying attention because a blade hit him in the back of his head about half way up his skull and knocked him over the other side of the revet with considerable force. Bill and the people with him ran over to Eric and saw that he was seriously injured. Someone ran to get a blanket so they could carry Eric. Bill remembered there was a stripped down UH-1C near by, so he yelled for his crewchief to go until it's blade. Within seconds Bill had this other UH-1C running and Rob and several others loaded Eric into the back. Bill flew a closed pattern around the POL to the medical pad near the main Phan Thiet stripe. He remembers everyone jumped out and abandoned the running UH-1C while they carried Eric into the medical facility. (Someone from the 192 AHC was kind enough to shut the ship down for them.) They were in there some time while the medical team worked on Eric. After treating him as best they could, they arranged for a Dustoff to take him to Bien Hoa. B Trp learned that Eric died that evening. Bill says he can still remember his feelings at that time. "We'd been flying all day out in the AO, taking our chances against the enemy. Then to return home and have Eric died that way ... what a waste! What a waste of a good human being!"

On the 15th, C Trp's main party arrived on a C-141 with their mascot "Groovy Louie" and on the 20th, the last of their elements arrived. Also on the 15th, A Trp received a change of mission to find a recoilless rifle position to the west of Plei Mrong that was firing on the CIDG camp. The Guns noticed the back blast from the rifles and expended on the positions. Results: no more RR fire and six dead NVA. On the 20th, A Trp moved to Ban Me Thuot East for a period of two months. On the same day, A Trp's Scouts found four NVA with weapons moving along a trail. Three were killed and the Blues inserted to pick up their equipment. On the 22th, A Trp's Scouts observed some NVA in a bunker complex. The Guns, artillery, and an airstrike were employed and killed five NVA. On the 26th, A Trp's Guns were called to help a company in heavy contact. They were credited with five NVA killed by the grateful company. On the 29th, Task Force 1/22 consisted of A Trp, two ground cav troops (D Trp and B/1/10 Cav), the 1/22nd Inf, and D/2/35th Inf. A Trp's CO was the Mission Commander of a sweep. When the lead APC was hit with a B-40 rocket, D/7/17 quickly deployed and returned fire with their 106mm RR and machine guns. The NVA unit withdrew to the east carrying their dead and wounded. A Trp's Scouts discovered the fleeing enemy and killed five more. As the TF elements sweep the battlefield, they found 17 dead NVA and captured 16 packs, two 57mm RRs, nine 57mm RR rounds plus some other ammo and some documents.

August - August was the last month that B Trp logged any UH-1C time, 88 hours. They had logged 60 hours of AH-1G time in July. These were tough times for the Charlie Model crews. One day an Aircraft Commander, the next a "sand bag" in the front seat of a Snake because you weren't qualified to fly in the back. Everyone had lots of learn about the new gunship. Consider the following from VHPA Member Larry Vieley:

After flight school I went to Germany for several months. Finally the Army caught up with me and sent me to Cobra IP school enroute to Vietnam. You can imagine my surprise when I arrived in-country in May, was assigned to the 7/17th, and learned they didn't have any Cobras! So I flew Charlie Models for about three months. We started turning in UH-1Cs and receiving the brand new Cobras just before we moved to An Khe. The AH-1Gs had a relatively serious defect that could "make a true believer" out of anyone! If you picked one up to a hover in even a light quartering tail wind, the ship started a spin and you didn't have enough left peddle to stop it. It was especially pronounced if the Snake was at gross weight or overgrossed - like just after refueling. One day a good Charlie Model pilot and friend of mine, Paul Uster, talked me into letting him fly back seat and we got into a spin. With each successive revolution it became a little faster until at last we had no choice but to chop the throttle. We came down fully loaded, bent the skids good but didn't tip over! It looked a lot like a '57 Chevy that had been raked and lowered. MAJ McCracken chewed my butt hard for letting an unqualified guy fly back seat.

On the 1st, A Trp reconnoitered an abandoned village and took five NVA under fire, killing three. The Blues were inserted to collect two AKs and six new packs. Also on the 1st, B Trp conducted a screening operation which netted a large VC force. The 3/506 was notified and lifted units into positions surrounding the VC. The combined effort resulted in 14 VC killed and 11 weapons captured. On the 9th and 10th, A Trp worked an area that had tunnels and fresh bamboo camouflage. Eventually the Scouts found three NVA to kill. On the 10th, C Trp's vehicles and conexes with the weapons arrived. Prior to this time the ACT had been taking compulsory in-country training from the 4th Div, receiving initial in-country check rides and orientations, constructing building, etc. The Sqdn decided that the best way to get C Trp operational was to have it fly with first A Trp and then B Trp. VHPA Member Bob Reyna provides some insight as to what was going on at this time:

I was an AC in A Trp's gun platoon until they turned in their Charlie Models in July. Man I hated to see them go! Because I was short and because C Trp needed experienced gun pilots, I was transferred from A Trp. We knew C Trp would be getting their Cobras in a few weeks; so everything was changing for them. New to Vietnam and just about the time we became operational, exchange people and gunship; so we'd get to start all over again. When they came to Ban Me Thuot it was like "mama I'm home" because I was flying a Charlie gun again. Man, did we have Air Cavalry!! A Trp would fly with their full compliment of Scouts and Cobra guns plus their Lift and Infantry and so would C Trp. We staged out of the Ban Me Thuot city strip and the refuel was crowded with the 155th and all of us! We lived at the SF Camp at Ban Me Thuot East. We called it "Camp Bleakness" because of the mud, the cold water showers, the mud, the lanterns in the tents, the mud, the 175s that fired HI all night long, the mud, and the mud. It was really rough on the maintenance guys and crew chiefs. What little PSP we could scrounge we'd put out where we parked the aircraft so at least the maintenance guys could stay out of the mud some while working. D Trp was also working the road between Ban Me Thuot and Duc Lap. And this day, the NVA decided to ambush D Trp's convoy. D Trp calls for help and both ACTs come running. I can still see it!! D Trp's 106 RRs shooting up the front of the ambush and a solid stream of Cobras and Charlie Models pouring s\_\_t from above with more LOHs then you could count screening the flanks looking for guys trying to get away. It was beautiful!! Finally the ceiling was almost on the trees and it was getting dark, so we left; but I'll bet the NVA were sad that day for having ambushed that convoy.

On the 15th, B Trp moved to An Khe and was opconed to the 173rd Abn Bde based at Bong Song (LZ English). This cut short C Trp's training time with B Trp. C Trp went back to Enari and because B Trp could occupy some former 1st CAV billets and maintenance areas, they became operational in only 30 hours. For the next two weeks they conducted area reconnaissance, road convoy coverage, BDAs, and acted as a quick reaction force for the 173rd. On the 21st, A Trp's Blues and D Trp were conducting a cordon and search of a village. A LOH was shot down while screening the flanks but no one was injured. Higher added A/1/10 Cav to the "fun" and soon everyone had made contact. By the end of the day, the NVA had lost 22 men, 12 packs, over 300 pounds of explosive and some weapons.

September - On the 1st, C Trp became operational and started working the same 4th Div AOs from the Ia Drang Valley to Dak Sang that both A and B Trps had "enjoyed" earlier in the year. On the 9th, B Trp was reassigned to TF South and moved back to the "sun and surf" of Phan Thiet. Since someone had been kind enough to completely bulldoze "The Morgue", they started over and built "The Second Morgue" which is illustrated in the camp diagrams section. A Trp had plenty to do during battles that started about the 10th around the SF camp at Duc Lap. The Scouts found a bunker complex and received intense AW fire. The Guns and two airstrikes results in 12 NVA killed and approximately 30 bunkers destroyed. On the 12th, A Trp's Guns were called to support a recon platoon. One ship took five 50 cal AA hits which damaged the tail rotor controls. The pilot was able

to make a safe emergency landing at Ban Me Thuot. On the 13th, both of LOHs on an A Trp team were hit by AA fire. One crashed and WO1 Thomas C. Jacobs and WO1 Curtis L. Andersen died and the other made a safe emergency landing. The Lift ships were used to take the wounded to the hospital at Ban Me Thuot. On the 14th, while working near the Ban Don SF camp, A Trp spotted about 100 NVA on top of a mountain. The Gun ships and numerous airstrikes were expended until dark. The next day a CIDG element swept the area and estimated from the blood and flesh left there that at least 30 people were killed or wounded. The Scouts followed the trail and found 30 to 40 NVA. Two airstrikes were put in resulting in six secondary explosions that sent smoke rising for more than 100 feet. Later intelligence revealed this was an NVA heavy weapons company. On the 18th, A Trp's Scouts found an NVA rest area complete with ponchos and fresh sleeping mats. Then one NVA was killed as three tried to flee the area. On the 21st, a friendly unit made contact near Duc Lap and had three wounded. The only PZ was not large enough for a UH-1; but the OH-6As were able to hover down and perform an emergency medevac. During this month, the 412th TC Det deployed to Vietnam and would team with the C Trp for many months to come. VHPA Member Paul Kunkel provides the following details:

The 412th was one of several dozen small but important aircraft maintenance detachments raised in the States and sent to Vietnam because the Army had learned the hard way that the aviation units needs more maintenance support. CWO William Olds was the officer charged with forming the 412th at Ft. Benning during the summer of 1968. The unit deployed by air to Pleiku without its weapons! Their weapons arrived two days. Really no one in the Pleiku area was expecting them - nice to know the Army was only a little disorganized in those days! Anyway, somehow the 412th got passed to the 7/17th and to C Trp. I joined the detachment just as many of the "originals" were leaving and would spend most of my tour at An Son with C Troop.

October - On the 4th, A Trp's ARP performed a cordon and search of a village. The Scouts noticed two NVA escaping and killed one and wounded the other. The Blues captured the wounded man, both weapons and their packs. Later in the day, the Guns fired on four NVA, killing one. The airstrike killed another and during the post strike, the Scouts killed a third. On the 9th, A Trp performed a VR and found some people harvesting rice. Suddenly they produced AKs and started shooting at the Scouts. One LOH took five hits but three rice harvesters died. On the 14th, A Trp's Scouts observed three VC in a camouflaged hootch. Only one managed to escape. On the 25th, A Trp left Ban Me Thuot and returned to Camp Enari. Meanwhile, the Monsoons ended at the beginning of the month, and B Trp supported elements of the 173rd Abn, 3/506 Abn, and the 44th ARVN Regiment during the month. They made contact with the enemy 21 times and inserted the Blues nine times. The coordinated efforts between B Trp and supporting units resulted in 11 VC killed, two VC and six weapons captured. On the 26th, B Trp was grounded for two days due to fuel contamination. Their maintenance crews worked day and night to flush all aircraft fuel cells and lines with grain alcohol. By the afternoon of the 27th, B Trp was mission ready again. On the 27th, C Trp was screening an area east of the Ia Drang between the Oasis and Plei Me. VHPA Member John Kawa remembers the battle this way:

C Trp had been in country several months and until this day had experienced very little actual enemy contact. I was beginning to wonder when and if heavy contact would happen. I can remember being concerned that if this routine continued we would all fall into complacency and someone would get hurt. We were working out of the Oasis which was a small strip with minimal refuel and rearm facilities. At that time the 2nd Bde had its HQ there. It was located on the northern side of the famous Ia Drang valley along QL19 that continued west to Duc Co near the Cambodian border. Our AO that day was on the eastern edge of the valley; the countryside was basically flat and covered with scrub. As was our custom, the lead LOH had a Gunner and an Observer while my ship had a mini-gun and an Observer. I believe Hub Roberts flew lead that day. He was a GREAT Scout pilot and a FUNNY, FUNNY person. We were following a dirt road looking for any signs of recent crossings. As usual, I made my search in random patterns mentally keeping track of which areas were covered and which still needed checking. I often overlapped my searches approaching likely hiding places or travel routes from several different directions in an attempt to pickup something that I might have missed on a previous pass. The VC and NVA were very clever but like all humans they needed food, water, and a safe place to rest. As a Scout we were trained to understand these needs and to look at the terrain in those terms. On one pass I skirted the edge of a village and noticed piles of freshly harvested rice. The lay of the land was perfect for concealed movement as the village was located on the edge of a small bluff next to a shallow draw forested with single canopy trees and heavy undergrowth. In the open areas, tall grass grew everywhere. There was a small stand of trees between the village and the entrance down into the draw and we started our search there. On the first pass, I discovered some freshly dug trenches for both personnel and AWs. I slowed down and on the second pass, saw some satchels and tools laying around the base of the trees. Subsequent passes at even slower speeds did not solicit any response or movement and I passed all this up to the Guns and MAJ Frost in the C&C. MAJ Frost decided to have one LOH land near the edge of the trees to capture as many of the satchels as possible. We all felt that they could contain valuable intelligence information. I covered Hub's landing in a clear open area next to the trees. I watched the Gunner jump out, pistol in hand, and dash into the trees. As I circled I could see him gathering several satchels and then all hell broke loose. Hub reported AW fire coming from the trees. I could see the Gunner sprinting back to the LOH with one of the satchels. It must have been very heavy because it seemed to take him forever to reach his ship. I know everyone in the air was willing him to run faster. I immediately rolled back around onto the trees and laid down a burst of mini into the tree line. My adrenalin jumped up a bunch. There was so much to watch for: enemy movement, the position of the other helicopters, the tree lines, the village, the status of my ship, and on and on. Many things, however, were second nature: listening for instructions from the C&C, staying out of easy lines of fire, keep moving and altering flight patterns, watching for the enemy. The situation was complicated by the fact that the village was so close to the contact area. The C&C had to get permission to engage in full contact and sometimes this could take forever. The Guns were getting impatient. They had a score to settle. Someone was shooting at the people they were supposed to protect and this could not continue. Everyone got safely back into the air without any injuries. Hub quickly reported that the satchel was a two man carry job, weighed about 120 lbs and was filled with plastic explosives! Ed's team arrived, was briefed and we departed for the Oasis.

We continue the story from the front seat of a Cobra and VHPA Member Bob Mitchell tells us: The second team had Sterling Cox and R.A. Jones in the lead Gun, Danny Norman and myself as wing, Ed Johnson piloted the lead LOH with LT Pat Murphy as an observer and SP4 Vosine as gunner, and Bill Nichols as wing. Apparently MAJ Frost had ordered up the Blues because one of the first things we did after relieving the first team was to insert the Blues. They quickly moved in and picked up about 60 packs. MAJ Frost split the team about that time; Ed and Sterling covered the Blues and Bill and Danny started tracking the escaping NVA force. It wasn't very long or very far, maybe 7 - 800 meters to the northeast when Bill drew fire. We immediately rolled in and fired the area up with rockets, minigun and 40mm. The jungle wasn't very high or dense here and our munitions were very effective. Our ship was functioning perfectly, something that had taken a lot of personal interest by all of the Gun pilots to make happen. We ask Bill to go back in and check the area out. At this point, Danny and I used an unusual tactic, I suppose, in that we dropped down low and flew a tactical right wing on the Scout ship. We went in fast as we expected it to be hot. I had the action switches depressed and the turret weapons aimed under the LOH. As he passed over the bottom of the draw I saw two sets of muzzle flashes coming out of a bush; I was on the mini and literally tore down the bush even as Bill was calling "receiving fire". He followed that with "there's a bunch of them running up that trail to the left". I came off the mini onto the 40mm and just ate up the trail. We later found two dead in the bush and five on the trail. We went back to altitude and made some more runs. I think Sterling came over and helped us. We took the LOH / Gun team back down again but couldn't draw any more fire. So Bill started to slow down and take a good look. It wasn't very long before he had a body count up in the 20 and was not taking any fire at all. About this time, the Blues were ready to be extracted. Their PZ was about 400 meters to the west and MAJ Frost had the last slick reinsert a Blue Squad in a single ship LZ to search the bodies. The LZ wasn't much - high grass surrounded by scrub with a few 100 - 150 foot trees. It seemed relatively safe as we had not been able to provoke a response in about 20 minutes. In reality the NVA had hunkered down hoping we would go away. As the Blues started down the trail toward the dead NVA, their point man, SP4 Edward J. Maslyn, was shot and killed by a 51 that penetrated his flak jacket front and back. The remaining six Blues scurried back to 50 meters or so to their LZ where they were taking fire from three sides. They were calling for help saying they had left their point man down the trail and didn't know if he was dead or alive. The air teams were back in normal configuration again. Ed was talking to the Blues and said he would hover down the trail, to see if he could find the soldier and make a determination. I watched almost in fascination as he hovered high (about 150 foot) over the LZ. The enemy were so close in on the Blues that we were not shooting. I saw the muzzle flashes shift from firing at the Blues towards Ed's LOH. These scenes are brazened in my mind. I can see them as clearly as if I was still sitting in the front seat of that Snake. I watched as the aircraft started taking hits, then started to spin violently, struck the largest tree which ripped off the tailboom, and then tumble down the side of the tree to the ground on the side away from the Blues. It immediately started to burn. The smokes, WPs, and frags added to the burning jet fuel. My stomach sank as I was sure no one could have lived through such a crash. My first thoughts were -- why him, his wife had just had a baby about a month before. They were dead (so we thought) and we couldn't dwell on that; we had the Blues to save. The other team came back on station and we departed to rearm and refuel but we felt terrible, just terrible.

We now return to John Kawa's story. The call came about one hour into our rest period and we knew something was up because that was shorter than normal. I had heard many stories about what a downed helicopter scene looked like but until you actually see one laying on the ground, on its side, a long column of smoke rising from its shell; you will never understand the emotion of that sight. The rest of the Blues were inserted and was pushing down into the draw and had taken up a position on the opposite slope. They had set up a 51 cal on this ridge and commanded a good position over the entire area. The first attempt to rescue Ed was made by a Dust-Off from Pleiku. As it hovered over the crash site, I could see the 51 firing at it and the Huey shuddered with each impact. Finally, he had to break away. How it flew back to the Oasis is still a mystery to me? Later we had a chance to look at this ship and confirm the fact that it was a miracle it wasn't shot down. All of this was taking place as I circled the area looking for signs of movement and trying to keep out of the way of the enemy guns. The sun was getting low in the sky and it would be dark in about an hour. I was so intent on watching the ground that I did not see the

one large tree that stood on the edge of the draw until my Observer screamed with terror. I had just enough time to clear the main body of the LOH over the top of the tree. The skids, unfortunately, went through the tree and were well camouflaged with foliage when I emerged on the other side. I also realized that a change of clothes was in order when we got back to base. All through this time, MAJ Frost had been working with the mech inf unit that was sneaking up on the rear of the NVA position. The objective was to trap them between our Blues in the draw and this unit. To make a long story short, the plan worked fairly well. The NVA position was overrun, although many managed to sneak off into the valley under the cover of the approaching darkness. The mech unit linked up with our Blues and were able to transport Ed to an open area where he was evaced to Pleiku. The 51 was captured and we displayed it outside our mess hall as a memorial to SP4 Maslyn who died that day.

We'll let Bob Mitchell provide some more to the story. As we were rearming the first time, a Medevac ship came limping into the Oasis and made a hydraulics out landing. They had been really shot up attempting to get our guys out. I remember they were shot through the red cross on the right side and the medic in the back had been shot in the "chicken plate" right over his heart. He was a very happy camper, however, it knocked him down but other than that he wasn't hurt. The team I was with were back in and out of the fight several more times that day. It was a real mess as we had leadership stacked up over the battle, some talking on the freq we were used with the Blues. I remember Hub Roberts yelling at the Bde Cmdr to stay off the net as we had a fight in progress. The "Colonel" whoever he was came back with "I'm the boss and will talk on whatever net I please". I remember wishing I knew which Huey was his because I had the sudden urge to shoot his ass down!! Anyway, the mech inf folks had been working our way ever since we started getting into the fight. They were a lifesaver - literally!! They rolled through the enemy, on line, as we continued to pound them from above. The NVA pretty much gave up and ran when the APCs showed up. They found LT Murphy (Ed's left seat) in a dazed condition standing in the middle of a small stream right in the middle of the fire fight. How he got there from the crash site, through the middle of the fire fight, without getting captured or killed remains a mystery! It was starting to get dark when they finally had the place relatively secure. MAJ Frost then directed the Blues to "get dog tags or whatever you can recover" from Ed's ship. Ed had miraculously escaped the crash and with an injured back, had lifted the burning LOH off Murphy and pulled him to safety. Ed later said he thought it was the NVA approaching him and he had a very difficult time holding his fire as the Blues approach. He was armed with his 38 and Murphy's 45. He did hold his fire until the first face appeared through the brush; it was an American. C Trp killed over 40 NVA that day and we continued to pursue them down that draw to the southeast for the next two days. From the documents we recovered, we were able to learn that we had been the reception party for an NVC sapper Bn that had just arrived from Cambodia.

**November** - On the 1st, B Trp reconed the Le Hong Fong forest which is north of Phan Thiet and is basically several square miles of uninhabited area bounded by QL1 to the south, west, and north and the sea on the east. The VC considered this "home" and B Trp would work this AO many, many times during its stay at Phan Thiet. On this day, the Scouts located a VC training area. The Blues were inserted and found a small hospital as well. On the 2nd, while enroute to an AO west of the Oasis, A Trp's Scouts spotted approximately eight men traveling along a trail. As the helicopters passed, the men took cover. After determining that there were no friendlies in the area, A Trp's Scouts and Guns engaged the NVA. During one exchange SP4 Moe Tameyozza an observer on a LOH was killed. An airstrike was called in before an infantry unit moved to sweep the battlefield. They found eight dead NVA and captured one AK-50, 20 grenades, four 82mm mortar rounds, 25 packs and several bags and rolls of rice. During the rest of the month, A Trp only made contact once and killed but two VC. From the 4th through the 10th, B Trp staged out of Bao Loc and supported the 3/503rd Abn and the 2nd ARVN Rangers on an area sweep. The operation was disappointing in that it netted only a dozen detainees and some captured rice, ammo, and clothes. On the 10th, C Trp started an eight day period where they made heavy enemy contact most every day while working the Cambodian Border near Duc Co. VHPA Member Jim Cunningham vividly recalls:

Nothing ever seemed to phase MAJ Frost and when we flew together I could count on almost anything happening. The 14th was no exception. We had a sniffer kit installed in the back of our regular C&C ship. The Troop had deployed to the Oasis for the day. We would be flying a sniffer mission near the Cambodian border as the low ship with a Red and White team as back up. Anyway, we had just flown over an area with numerous trails and the sniffer unit registered a response. We made a 360 to come back for another look and as we completed the turn, we were inbound on our original ground track - a bad idea! The cockpit seemed to explode when a 12.7mm round came through the lower right corner of the windshield and exited through the 1st Aid kit above the MAJ's head. The second round took out the number 3 hanger bearing and severed the tail rotor drive shaft. We also took several hits from SA fire. As we cleared the area, we found that it was difficult to maintain both airspeed and altitude. I was the only one able to transmit to outside world, so Frost was busy providing me with information to pass on to our Red and White teams and to the Oasis TOC. We sort of flew, really more of a side slip, toward LZ Vera which, Thank God, had just been opened a few days prior to this. But there was no area available for a running landing, so from about 75 feet up Frost chopped the throttle and we spun in. The Huey stayed upright after we hit although we managed to bend the skids and tail boom. Amazingly enough, no one was hurt from either the enemy fire or the crash. I did learn the lesson that if you didn't have your survival gear strapped to you - it stayed in the aircraft. Frost moved to my position and kept directing the operation until we were picked up by one of our slicks and flown back to the Oasis. I was sent back to Enari to fill out the paper work on our crash landing while Frost took off in another Huey to continue with the mission. By the end of the day the second C&C had received several hits from two 51 Cals! Like I said, flying with MAJ Frost was always an experience!!

On the 12th, B Trp worked out of Long Song North, a FSB occupied by two 175s. The Blues were inserted at 1300 in a small clearing at the mouth of a canyon. In the narrow canyon, they found some caves and a cache of 100 entrenching tools, 28 knives, some claymore mines and grenades, and 75 100 lb. demolition charges. The 101st reinforced with another platoon and both spent the night securing the area. At 0545 the next morning B Trp's aircraft were overhead and the Infantry moved out. By 0730 they had found another cache. While one squad worked with the cache, the rest came under heavy AWs fire. The enemy guns were quickly flanked and five VC killed. The second cache yielded more demo charges, mines and grenades, some weapons and a blacksmith's forge. All the Infantry was extracted that evening. On the 21st, during a recon about 35 miles northwest of Phan Thiet, enemy ground fire downed a LOH killing 1LT Clifford Welding and badly wounding the observer, SGT Stanley Green. All flyable aircraft were scrambled. The Lift ships received heavy AW fire on final to the LZ but completed the insertion about 15 minutes after the LOH went down. Within six minutes after the insertion, the Blues reached the still burning LOH and found SGT Green badly wounded and burned. Sadly he died on a Dust Off enroute to the aid station. After securing 1LT Welding's body, the Blues pursued the VC but were unable to establish contact and were extracted. On the 24th, A Trp found and partially destroyed a large bunker complex near Polei Kleng. On the 26th, C Trp held the famous "Last Meeting of the Original Chaparrals" as a farewell to MAJ Jack Frost. During November, D Trp moved from the Ban Me Thout area to LZ Mary Lou which was 3 kms south of Kontum and was the headquarters for the 2nd Bde. Their duties were daily convoy escorts to Polei Kleng and firebase security.

**December** - There are certain ironies in writing history. A classic is the section of B Trp's Unit History that covers this period. It says: "The month ... was a busy one for all members. The Blues were inserted a total of 15 times. Twice they received sniper fire and only three occasions actually engaged the enemy in extremely heavy fire fights." It continues with an account of the enemy equipment captured or destroyed along with 15 VC killed and 6 captured. The unit history ends by saying that the ACT suffered one KIA, four WIA, and had one LOH destroyed. Time now gives us some advantages the unit historian never had. The soldier that died was SGT Ray McKibben and this is a record of his actions:

The Felton, GA native was serving as a team leader of a 16 man recon patrol near Song Mao in southern II Corps on 6 Dec 1968, in an area of known enemy personnel and equipment. He was a team leader of the point element and the third man in the formation maneuvering along a well traveled trail, when the men came under heavy AW fire from a fortified bunker. SGT McKibben, assessing the situation, charged through the bamboo and heavy brush to the armed position, killed the enemy gunner, secured his weapon and directed the patrol forward. Later, his patrol again came under heavy fire from bunkers and as the men took cover one fell wounded. SGT McKibben sprang to his comrade's side and under fire, pulled him to safety behind the cover of some rocks and administered first aid. Seeing that his patrol was pinned down, he charged through the brush against a hail of AW fire, killed the enemy with a rifle shot and captured the weapon. He then continued his assault against the next bunker, firing his weapons as he charged. But as he approached this position, his own rifle ran out of ammunition so he switched to the captured weapon. When that was emptied, SGT McKibben silenced the enemy position with two hand grenades. As his men moved forward another position opened fire. He reloaded his M-16, and as he single handedly attacked the position, he was hit by enemy fire. Though mortally wounded, he was able to fire a final burst from his weapon which killed another enemy soldier and enabled the patrol to continue the operation. In the end the patrol totaled eight enemy dead, five killed by SGT McKibben. On 7 Apr 1970, SGT Ray McKibben of B Trp's Blues was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

On the 6th, A Trp worked southeast of Kontum to check out an area of freshly cultivated fields when they discovered approximately 75 well camouflaged huts in a valley. The Scouts drew intense fire with one ship taking four hits. Air strikes were called in with unknown results as the enemy continued to stay hidden. During the period 18 to 26 Dec, A Trp was given down time for aircraft maintenance and to conduct annual training requirements. On the 27th, A Trp worked out of FB Blackhawk and when the Scouts received fire from an area with a large number of bunkers, one VC was killed. The Blues were inserted and by the end of the day 28 detainees were taken out of the bunkers. During the last two days of the year, A Trp's Blues worked with a 4th Div LRRP to secure and extract over 12,000 pounds of rice from an area not far the Camp Enari. During December, after being released from duties around LZ Mary Lou, D Trp was given a true cavalry assignment; namely an egg shaped TAOR of approximately 20 kms centered on Camp Enari. D Trp conducted from three to seven day operations throughout their TAOR.

Year End Summary - On the tactical side, the Sqdn, especially the Infantry, fought extremely well during Tet and earned the respect and gratitude of many commands. On the equipment side, the venerable UH-1Cs were replaced with AH-1Gs. On the organization side, C Trp's designation was permanently changed to F/8th Cav but a new C Trp replacement arrived from the States. Also an aircraft maintenance TC Detachments was attached to each ACT.

## 1969

The primary source materials for this year are: For HHT, a 12 page AUHS prepared by WO Robert Rogers. For A Trp, a 28 page AUHS prepared by CPT George E. Snyder II who follows the style but does not provide nearly as much detail as the previous year's. It still includes a few sentences for each significant event. For B Trp, a 16 page AUHS prepared by WO Byron M. Wilkinson that unfortunately devotes the majority of its volume to abridging material that we already have from the previous year's. In fact only two pages actually cover 1969 operations and they, for some reason, start in September. For C Trp, a six page AUHS prepared by 1LT John L. Davis. For D Trp, a ten page AUHS prepared by 1LT Thomas K. Baldenweck. For the Sqdn, a 48 page Operational Report - Lessons Learned (OR-LL) for the period 1 NOV through 31 JAN, a 45 page OR-LL for the period 1 FEB through 30 APR, a 40 page OR-LL for the period 1 MAY through 31 JUL, a 32 page OR-LL for the period 1 AUG through 31 OCT, and a 48 page OR-LL for the period 1 NOV through 31 JAN 70.

January - For the first week of the year, A Trp continued to work the area around FB Blackhawk. The Blues were inserted almost every day as they worked through bunker complexes and small NVA base camp areas. They usually captured some equipment, clothing, rice, etc., would destroy any huts and bunkers they found; but they did not make contact. On the 15th, A Trp's Scouts observed an enemy force on a former US FB and had the Guns fire them up. The Blues were inserted, resulting in nine NVA killed and four captured. They also captured some ammo packs containing 57mm projectiles. Also on the 15th, C Trp worked an AO north of Plei Djereng. A Cobra flown by 1LT Sterling E. Cox and WO1 James B. Petteys crashed while making a gun run and both pilots were killed. The NVA demonstrated great fire control discipline until the Blues were inserted. Then a huge battle developed that would last for several days. What follows is one account of that battle:

On the 15th, PFC Garfield Langhorn, an RTO in C Trp's Blues accompanied his unit on a search and rescue mission north of Plei Djereng. The platoon was inserted about 300 meters from a downed Cobra. After hacking their way to the crash site, they retrieved the bodies of the two pilots. Because of the additional load and the terrain, the Blues were forced to travel down the mountain side to the river where a better PZ was located. As the point lead the way down to the stream bed, less than 50 meters from the PZ, the entire visible length of the river bed erupted with a holocaust of weapons fire. As the platoon leader hurriedly directed his men into a hasty perimeter, PFC Langhorn had already radioed the platoon's critical situation to the orbiting gunships and the C&C ship. The Guns provided supporting fire but darkness soon intervened, prohibiting accurate aerial support. Realizing this, the NVA began to probe the perimeter, lobbing hand grenades inside. PFC Langhorn was lying between his platoon leader and a rifleman, providing cover fire for them and his wounded comrades in addition to controlling the radio. Suddenly, a hand grenade sailed into the perimeter, rolling to a stop on Langhorn's left side, a few feet from some of his wounded comrades. Without hesitation, PFC Langhorn chose to protect the lives of his buddies. Thrusting his body in front of the grenade, he scooped the object beneath himself and absorbed the explosion. Smothering the blast with his body, Langhorn, in devotion to his fellow comrades, rendered the final ultimate act above and beyond the call of duty. On Apr 7, 1970, PFC Langhorn was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

VHPA Member Bob Mitchell provides another account of this battle. The story really starts the night before. There was a real argument in the Doug Hammond's (the duty plldr) room over who would fly with Sterling Cox. Cox was known as a "cowboy" and a young WO we nicknamed "hayseed" (because he was a blonde towheaded young kid) was refusing to fly with him. He would not be persuaded as he insisted Sterling was going to kill someone, and it wasn't going to be him. The argument stopped when Jim Petteys, another AH-1G AC, said: "stop the argument, I'll fly with him." Hayseed flew wing the next day and lived; Petteys and Cox did not. I was flying lead Scout; I would fly lead if the schedule dictated, but I much preferred the wing position because it had the minigun. I think that was probably a carry over from my days flying Guns; I wanted a trigger under my finger. The morning was pretty much uneventful as we were searching the river west of Kontum for crossing sites. There were major trail networks coming in from the west to the river, about 30 to 50 meters wide at the point of our search. They picked up on the east side and continued east. We stopped at a small SF Camp, Polei Keng I think, for lunch. We were sitting around on a bunch of old 175mm barrels eating Cs and shooting our 38s at tin cans. In the process we discovered if you took real careful aim you could shoot the barbed wire fence in half. Well, shortly after we had broken the second strand of a three strand fence, a jeep came flying up and a young SF CPT got out and ripped us a new one. He wanted to know who was in charge. We were all WOs or enlisted, so we pointed to 1LT Cox. The CPT raved about how they had put up the fence to keep the cows off the blanketly blank airstrip to make it better for the aviators and now here were the aviators shooting down his fence. Well, Sterling just took the heat and gave us that little grin of his as the CPT drove off. We finished lunch and headed for our aircraft when I remembered I had not crossed the date off my "short timers calendar"; something I did every morning without fail. I mentioned it to Jim Petteys, who was climbing into the front of Cox's Snake. He made the hex sign at me with his fingers and said "stay away from me, something bad's going to happen." We all laughed and started out on the mission. I was hovering around down on the river searching the banks when we discovered several dugout canoes sunk close along the bank. They had large rocks in them to hold them under water until they were needed to ferry supplies across the river. I informed the Guns and asked if they wanted to shoot them up. Dumb question! Gun pilots live to shoot! Sterling called for us to mark the target, which I did. We hovered in close, let a smoke start to burn and then dropped it in the water. It dyed the water and made a good aim point. I said, "Smokes out" and started a climbing left turn watching the first Cobra (Cox) inbound out the left door looking across in front of the observer. The river was being made perpendicular to the valley with fairly high terrain to the rear (east) and a more gentle, but rapidly rising terrain to the front (west). The first rockets were long, impacting on the shore west of the boats. The Cobra's dive steepened sharply, too low, as I can only assume Cox knew we would raze him for missing the target. I could see the mini raking the water as Jim worked the turret. Too late Cox pulled the Cobra up sharply. The aircraft responded and was in a nose up attitude, but continued to "mush" through. It started hitting trees, the blades coned incredibly as branches and large limbs flew. I started down, knowing they were going to crash. The Cobra staggered and started to rise -- they were going to make it -- but then exploded!! The explosion was as a napalm strike and Cox and Petteys died instantly. MAJ Ledford told me to go in to look for survivors. I did, but knew there was no hope. The fire was intense and the onboard ammunition was exploding everywhere. It was dangerous to stay too close, but I tried. The CO was beside himself! He called and launched the blues; then landed about 150 meters away and let his crewchief and gunner out -- telling me to guide them to the wreckage. I did this by hovering slowly backward down the hill, guiding them through the thick jungle with hand signals. As I neared the wreck, a huge explosion rocked my ship. I can only assume it was the 40mm drum going up all at once. I was thankful the two guys on the ground weren't that close to the site yet. The Lift arrived and a Scout escorted them into the LZ as the Gun team on station was a composed of two very inexperienced wingmen. As the Blues started walking down toward the wreck, we had to break for fuel. When we arrived back on station, there was big trouble!! The NVA had allowed our Blues to get the bodies (they were too hot to handle and the slicks had hovered in one by one dropping fire extinguishers which the Blues used to cool the bodies enough to get them in the bags) and then ambushed them as they worked their way down to the river where a sandbar was to be their PZ. I found the Blues laying in a small clearing, in a small circle, almost feet to feet, facing out. I think there were 18 of them. The NVA was very close in on them. So close in fact, that we had to use the Scouts for fire support as the Guns couldn't shoot that close. We made pass after pass with 60 door guns shooting within ten meters of our guys and them all the while telling us to move it in. It was beginning to get very dark when the our Lift arrived with the ready reaction force. A night insertion, time and time again, into hot LZs -- who ever said "slicks are for kids". Bob Parker, one of the original Chaparrals and a great slick driver, put seven guys in the wrong LZ. On climb out, he realized he had put them in short and called that he was going back to get them. The Bn Cmdr said to leave them; they would marry up later. They turned out to be the luckiest group as they were in the NVA's rear and the NVA didn't seem to know it!! They watched, counted, and killed when they could for the next two days. The first night was probably the worst. The NVA had our guys surrounded, calling to them in the night as in the old Japanese war movies. Grenades rained in all night. I remember talking to the LT over a game of pool some time later. He was still rattled by those days; but he did a GREAT job during that battle. He said you'd hear a thud and only have a split second to decide if the grenade was in the hole with you or had just landed nearby. Once or twice he had jumped out of the hole and laid flat on the ground when the blast went off. Once he didn't move and nothing happened. The next morning almost everyone found a dud grenade near them; his was in the hole with him!! It was during this period the PFC Langhorn covered a grenade as noted above. The LT also said there were holes in the Cobra's mast and that crash site was in close proximity to an NVA bunker complex. He said it seemed possible to him for the NVA gunners to believe the Cobra was firing at them and that they had opened up on Cox as he was coming through the trees! Anyway, finally it was too dark and the Scouts were of no more use; we were ordered home. I gave the controls to my observer and hung my head and cried. Sterling was a very good friend. I didn't fly the next two days as the battle raged. I don't know why. I think because I was so close to Cox. Instead I paced the Trp area waiting for word from the front. The NVA finally withdrew and we got everyone out. I believe there were five US dead. C Trp lost PFC Langhorn and the two pilots, but I also think almost every one of our Blues were wounded.

February - Through out the last half of Jan and most of Feb, A Trp worked the area between FB Blackhawk and Kontum. Their reconnaissance efforts confirmed intelligence estimates that the enemy was building a large base in the area. While they did not make any significant contact, they were directly responsible for capturing large quantities of enemy medical and food supplies. About this time TF South had worked out a "routine" for B Trp and VHPA Member Claude-Michael Quigley provides some details to help us with the gap in the official history.

The duty wasn't too bad at all while B Trp was at Phan Thiet. With some rare exceptions we only fought the VC which did not have the AA weapons the NVA had to do so in the Pleiku area. I was the Gun Platoon leader during part of the first half of 1969. We'd stage out of Phan Rang, Dalat (Cam Ly), and Bao Loc, about one day, one two weeks, then some new place like Dalat (Lien Khuong) every now and then. But I'd guess about half the time we staged either out of our own base camp or along the Mekong. Naturally we went where ever TF South sent us. Most of the time it was that large hilly region bounded by Phan Rang, the valley south of Dalat, Bao Loc, then south to the II Corps boundary. That was some really beautiful country. We worked with the 3/506th Abn a lot as they were also based at Phan Thiet. We really had an excellent relationship with them. Their commander seem to understand how to use Air Cavalry and as a result would ask South for us almost on a daily basis. If we ever got in trouble, or maybe it would be better to say, if we ever got our Blues into more trouble than we had "planned" (as if you can plan a battle), the Abn guys always backed us up. Many a day ended with B Trp having extracted and inserted a couple of their platoons or even a company. The Bn CO always liked us. He knew that if one of his units hit the s---, he could call us and, unless we had our Blues in, we'd haul ass to support them. The Abn guys loved to work with the LOHs and often called Gun runs virtually in their laps. They trusted us and we trusted them; so it was great. TF South used to keep an American or Australian Destroyer or Light Cruiser along the coast. If our AO was on the coast, our C&C would carry a Marine to call in Naval Gun fire. Let me tell you, 5" and 8" Naval Gun fire is extremely accurate and truly impressive! The Air Force had a FAC team based at Phan Thiet and those guys seemed to like our O Club, so we were always on good terms with them. We could get an airstrike most any time with about 30 minutes notice.

March - From 1 Mar through 14 Apr, A Trp was opconed to the 1st Bde participating in Operation Wayne Grey. The 1st Bde started from areas around Plei Keng and followed A Trp into the Plei Trap Valley. On the 1st, A Trp conducted a VR of LZ Swinger prior to a battalion CA and determined that at least an NVA company occupied this abandoned LZ. Armed with this knowledge, the Guns provided escort as the Lift made the insertion. The Scouts provided close fire support for the Infantry and killed three NVA. Two LOHs received battle damage.

After VHPA Member Dick Marshall reviewed a draft of the history for his period, he wrote: Looking over the names of the pilots that flew for our Sqdn really brought back a flood of memories. MAJ Wilder was an excellent pilot; extremely brave and a real team player. While he was the S-1 he often found some reason to escape the desk and fly in the AO. MAJ Glover commanded A Trp while I ran TF Ruthless at Ban Me Thuot during Oct-Nov 68. He was an outstanding troop leader and very dynamic when executing combat missions. He always had great concern for his troops. It was an honor and a privilege to succeed him as Trp Cmdr because A Trp was really an outstanding unit. Rosy Rosenberger and Paul Pennington were both excellent XOs. They often lead combat operations. After CPT Bob Autry completed his tour as Scout Platoon Leader, he flew with the Lift Platoon but his heart was always with the Scouts. Once during Operation Wayne Grey, CW2 Bates was shot down in the middle of the NVA while bravely worked his LOH to prevent some friendlies from being over-run. Bob landed a Huey virtually on top of the dazed Scouts and pulled them out safely even though the NVA were almost ready to board the ship as well and were directing unbelievably heavy fire at them. I can't say enough for the Scouts. I'd flown with the 1/9 Cav during my first tour; but A Trp's Scouts were the best I've ever seen! CPT John Pilote was an extremely cool and professional Scout leader. CPT Holbrook had three LOHs shot out from under him while defending a fire base insertion during Operation Wayne Grey. He flew from bunker to bunker destroying the enemy. 1LT Pospisel (we called him "Pop-Sicle") was among the bravest of the Scouts - truly a totally fearless pilot. CPT Carl King was a really outstanding Gun pilot and leader. His "Gun Bunnies" were great; they could hit a dime from 500 yards out. CPT Joe Laehu was a mission oriented maintenance officer with the heart of a true cavalryman. Once we were afraid of losing an aircraft severely damaged in a mortar attack. He came and flew it out but could only achieve about 30 knots max because the entire canopy had been shot away. LT Mike Casey was the Blue Platoon Leader during the last part of 68 and the first half of 69. He was fearless and everyone loved him. He extended so he could be discharged when he DEROsed and we assigned him to manage the Sqdn's O Club for his last few months. He had seen more than enough combat. Sometime after I returned to the States, I learned that he had volunteered to lead a team of Blues inserted to help a LRRP team that was pinned down. While he was bending over to pick up a wounded LRRP, an NVA came out of a spider hole and shot Mike through the heart. I will never forget "old Blue" - just 21 when he died. The history of Vietnam and of A Trp will never reflect the many acts of bravery by the pilots, crews, and men of this Trp. Combat units such as A Trp do not have the time nor the talent to write the award recommendations that these men so rightly deserved. Their acts of bravery were so common that they became routine - simply, "that is what I am expected to do as an air cavalryman." This nation may never know what super human things these men achieved; but we that were there do. I wish I could somehow express the love and pride and respect I hold in my heart for the wonderful men who served so well in A Trp. May God always bless each and every one of them.

On the 2nd, northwest of Swinger, A Trp found a road under the triple canopy jungle and followed it for about a mile until they found two NVA 2 1/2 ton trucks. The Guns and strikes killed five NVA and destroyed the trucks. During the next three days, A Trp killed eight NVA while supporting 1st Bde elements. On the 6th, A Trp was sent to help a 1st side unit in heavy contact. The Scouts quickly found the two NVA mortars which the Guns destroyed. A Trp diverted to a help A-3/8 Inf which was being overrun. The ground unit adjusted the Gunship fire extremely close to his own men and they expended faster than the other teams could reload. The Scouts and Guns literally flew into the enemy tanks to keep them off the friendly unit. Eventually the enemy advance slowed and A Trp's Lift brought in supplies and reinforcements. When the battle finally ended, 280 NVA bodies were found. During the next week, A Trp continued working the Plei Trap, killed 16 NVA, destroyed four 2 1/2 ton trucks and one mortar, plus captured two 105mm howitzers. The Lift provided emergency medevacs for 14 wounded.

Dick Marshall provides some insights that will warm the heart of any good cav man: One interesting aspect happened during Wayne Grey when we found and destroyed numerous 2 1/2 ton trucks and several 105 howitzers. The Bde Ops just would not believe our "SPOT" reports, so we inserted our Blues and called in a Chinook. We lifted out an NVA 2 1/2 ton truck and a 105 gun and literally dropped them at the door of their CP. From that day forward, they never questioned our reports! By the end of the Operation, we were still able to fly our missions but literally every ship had combat damage. During this Operation, the Scouts literally flew down and in front of the Infantry. There is no doubt they saved hundred of American lives. Those Scouts were "above the rest and the very, very best".

On the 8th, WO1 Wally Carpenter and his observer, SGT David J. Phillips, of B Trp were killed while working a ridge line almost due west of Phan Thiet. VHPA Member Larry Wiley recalls:

I don't know anyone that didn't like Wally. He was one funny human being!! He and Gary Brydges had been through flight school together and flew Snakes with me in the Undertakers. Both Wally and Gary decided they are bored, flying monotonous circles watching two small LOHs for hours; so they volunteered for the Scouts. After some time Wally became a Scalaphunter. He had been flying with them for a month or so. There is a good picture of us in "Winged Sabers". About this time I remember Headquarters thought we were getting too sloppy in our appearance, and ordered that we at least shine our boots. As we left for our aircraft that morning, I scuffed Wally's shiny boots and ran for the revetments. Wally told my front seat not to walk with when we came back because he had put an entrenching tool full of sand behind a tent and was going to throw it on me when we returned. My gunner didn't tell me this until after we had returned and Wally was dead.

VHPA Member Mike Law provides a few more details: Most everyone I know that flew in Vietnam has certain days or events that are embossed in their minds. One of mine is the day Wally died. I can still play it back with clarity that rivals something from my VCR. MAJ Scott Lyman, while still the Sqdn XO, had asked if I wanted to be his Ops Officer or Gun Plt Ldr when he assumed command of B Trp. I jumped at the chance to leave the Sqdn staff and return to a line trooper. I'd been flying with B Trp a little less than a month and was thrilled to be soldiering with some truly OUTSTANDING men. B Trp had a WO, I can't remember his name, who had flown the C&C ship "forever" with MAJ McCracken and other officers. In fact, he was so good that if we were short senior RLOs, he'd fly with another pilot and command the trooper's operation. I never heard anyone complain about his skill or his judgment. He taught me how to fly C&C. Poor Scott was buried with admin functions and what little flying he did during those few weeks was when the Sqdn CO or some other senior guy came to visit us. Anyway, Scott had asked me to teach him how to run the trooper in the AO and today was his first lesson! What a day to start out! As was mentioned before, most of the time TF South had us work for the Abn Bn at Phan Thiet. The Abn had asked us to do a short VR on one or two of the prominent terrain features near Phan Thiet each morning before we moved on the our assigned AO, usually deeper inland. I had the Scouts work this "T" shaped set of tall hills because the base of the "T" pointed almost at Phan Thiet. It was covered with tall grass and showed no recent signs of use. As Wally finished working the base, he came upon this high speed trail we knew crossed the base almost at the top of the "T". He got excited because some of the steps in the trail had been recently repaired and he told his Wing to watch out. A few seconds later he announced "We have people down here!" in a calm, professional voice. To this day, I still wish to high heaven that they'd have kicked out a smoke and backed off; but they didn't. I was in a wide orbit just about on the same level as the low Gun and had a clear view of Wally, the trail, and his Wing. I waited a few seconds, fully expecting to see a smoke or to hear something from Wally. Suddenly, Wally's ship seemed to jump and we hear "-ire" on the radio in a high pitched voice. He immediately peeled off and started flying towards the valley floor. We called him but he wouldn't or couldn't answer, so I asked his Wing to fly along side him and tell us what was going on. Wally wasn't flying too fast so it was relatively easy for his Wing to catch up. He reported that both men looked as if they had been hit pretty bad; the Oscar was slumped over toward the front of the ship. I told him to fly ahead of Wally and put a smoke in an open area where he could land. I was afraid that Wally might pass out from the loss of blood and crash before he could make it to Phan Thiet. As the Wing sped off, Wally's ship nosed over, struck this large, mostly dead tree at the base of the hill and exploded. The Guns were shooting up the hill and trail where Wally had been. I called back to our base camp for the

Blues and announced that we had a LOH down. B Trp had a special bell just outside the Ops TOC they'd ring if a bird went down so everyone would know a super emergency had been declared. The Wing came back and with deep emotion said "Lead - it doesn't look good at all". I'd guess the Blues were on the ground in about 10 minutes and main body reached the wreck in another 20 minutes. Our Blues were good at repelling, so we put four guys right onto the wreck from the first Slick. They reported the bodies were too hot to handle. A couple of the LOHs dropped their fire extinguishers but that didn't do any good. So I went back to Phan Thiet POL, "borrowed" two large fire extinguishers and lowered them down to the Blues. I'd say we had the Blues and the two bodies back at camp in about an hour. Needless to say, but everyone was pretty upset! MAJ Lyman told everyone to "take a break until after lunch". Not too many people were hungry as I remember. We gathered in the Mess Hall, drank kool-aid, and consoled one another. I called TF South and asked if we could be released from our assigned AO so we could work that trail some more; they agreed. That afternoon we looked long and hard for the bad guys but never found them. I didn't know Wally very well; but to this day, he symbolizes everything that is honorable or endearing about the people in B Trp I loved so much.

On the 26th, 1LT Joseph F. Willis, pilot, and WO1 John M. Turner, observers, were killed when their A Trp LOH was shot down, crashed and burned. Little is known about D Trp during the first quarter of the year. Their unit history simply states that they continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Division's TAOR.

April - D Trp's history records that during this month they were used primarily in an airmobile status by the Sqdn. They were also opconed at various times to 2/1 CAV and 1/10 CAV. By the 6th week of "Wayne Grey", A Trp had accounted for 57 NVA killed not counting any from the battle around A-3/8 Inf, seven NVA trucks destroyed and three 105mm howitzers captured. The following is taken from 1st Bde's after action report:

The Air Cavalry proved to be the most versatile force available to the Brigade Commander. Due to its capacity to react to any situation, it was most valuable in the shift of combat assets from one AO to another. In the execution of the normal reconnaissance role, the Air Cavalry was responsible for the aerial interdiction of enemy troop and logistical moves. It located and helped to destroy two 105mm howitzers and seven enemy trucks. While working in support of ground engagements, the screening of flanks and engagement of enemy indirect fire weapons, saved many lives and contributed to the success of the infantry attacks. The courage, aggressiveness, and flexibility of the Air Cavalry made it a very valuable asset. That where brave acts were common, their acts of bravery were uncommon.

On the 12th, D Trp was inserted as part of a Sqdn operation that reacted to information from an informer. D Trp captured a VC District HQ. On the 22nd, C Trp started moving from Camp Enari to Lane AHP. It would take them about a week to relocate and become operational for the 173rd Abn Bde whose primary AO was the An Lao Valley. On the 23rd, A Trp was assigned an AO near Ban Me Thout and immediately made contact with a large force. Heavy AW fire was received and the Scouts and Guns repeatedly expended. Finally, the Blues were inserted and found 30 dead NVA and captured one. From the 25th until the 5th of May, A Trp was under the direct control of B-23 of the 5th SFG at Bu Prang. On the 25th, A Trp encountered an NVA Regiment. All aircraft received extremely heavy AW fire, six took hits and one LOH was destroyed killing WO1 Richard L. Turley and SSG Alton D. Woodruff. The "Honor Roll" section of A Trp's Unit History contains a few more details. Apparently Turley and Woodruff were both wounded but chose to remain in the AO due to the urgency of the mission. After the LOH came under fire for a second time, Woodruff made a radio call saying that his pilot was dead and that he was going down.

At this point, we will pause from the day to day operations to let some B Trpers describe their base camp at Phan Thiet. VHPA Member Paul Uster remember:

Like almost every unit in Vietnam, we were always building or refurbishing something at "The Morgue". I know from the time we returned from An Khe until I left in May, I and several other pilots were building the O club, the showers, or something after we finished the WABTOCs for our hootches. With the sun and wind, the tents became thread bare and leaked. We used tar to make a roof which was fine until we had to move that tent. Many an hour was spent in our underground O club. The club started with a conex container, but that was shored up with timbers and covered with PSP. After it was completed and sand backfilled around the sides, a Quonset hut was built over the underground Club. Just after Tet, B Trp killed a large Tiger and we had that skin hanging on the walls. About April we finished a great new shower with elevated water tanks atop some poles. Everything was great for about a week; but one day the water tank structure collapsed and fell over into an open area. We also had a sauna bath for a short while. But it blew up one night when it got too low on water. The movie screen was the 1st SGT's and the "projection room" was a cool back deck on the Orderly Room/living area. Most every evening guys would bring out lawn chairs or whatever on the large open sandy area to watch the movie, eat pop corn, drink beer, whatever. Several of the pilots built a weight training area we dubbed "Flexes Muscle Farm".

May - C Trp began using LZ English, LZ Pony, LZ Uplift, and LZ Two Bits as primary staging areas to support the 173rd Abn Bde. On the 3rd, A Trp was still working the Bu Prang area for the SF when the lead LOH took 15 to 20 hits and crashed. Both injured crew members were immediately evacuated. Airstrikes and artillery were directed at the enemy but darkness prevented a BDA. On the 4th, A Trp returned to Sqdn control briefly before being opconed to the 24th Special Tactical Zone (STZ) and began working extensively around the Dak To, Ben Het area. "Rocket Ridge", located approximately three miles southwest of Dak To was a favorite NVA firing position and A Trp worked it frequently. Again Dick Marshall helps us understand the challenges A Trp faced at this time:

The 24th Special Tactical Zone (STZ) was a first attempt in northern II Corps to let the ARVN fight the main battles with only limited American support. We were based out of Dak To and the only other American support was an Eng Bn, an Arty Bn, plus the normal American unit advisors. Later some SF Strike Forces joined us. The ARVN CO who commanded the 24th was the finest I would ever know in my two tours. Although history will never tell it this way, A Trp became a TF command since we had to hook up and run every operation. We were plagued with the ARVN artillery firing in our AO on a "continue to observe" spot report. I am convinced that the NVA had infiltrated the 24th. One day when the American staff and the ARVN CO were gone, I received a call to come to the HQs to receive an ARVN award. I reported, but one hour later no one showed. Finally, I was furnished a jeep to transport me back to my unit, but the driver headed north up a jungle road. I told him to turn around, but he acted as if he did not understand my instructions. I drew my 38, put it in his ear, and he immediately understood where my unit was and took me there! Too often when we made heavy contact and were really kicking tail, the ARVN artillery, without request, begin firing into our AO. A Trp had been in almost constant combat since late Feb; however, nothing can compare to what we were faced with while working for the 24th. With the exception of the Ia Drang battle in 66, I will always remember this as the most painful and the hardest of combat. The fighting was intense. Ben Het was surrounded. Once we were working a near-by hill when we received intense fire from 360 degrees around the hill. We called for some American artillery on a large bunker area and registered with 105s. Before we called for the fire mission, I asked the FO if he could take an eight digit coordinate; but he said he wanted ten. We gave him the ten digit coordinates and requested 8" with delay fuses and 155 and 105 for airbursts. I have never seen artillery so totally destroy an area in my entire life! Relief came to Ben Het.

On the 14th, A Trp made contact with a large enemy force about 1100 near Dak To. The Guns expended several times and numerous airstrikes and artillery barrages were directed into the area. The ARP was inserted and made contact. By the end of the day, A Trp claimed seven NVA killed and captured a Chicom radio, some commo wire and a few documents. VHPA Member David Graham has a vivid memory of one action during this period.

I had been in-country since March and had been assigned to a couple of units before finally ending up in A Trp's Lift platoon. I had flown with them for a few weeks but was still rather new. This particular day the Scouts had found and killed some NVA. We put the Blues in to retrieve some of the equipment from the bodies and to see what could develop. The NVA carefully pulled them up a ravine into an ambush even with the air cover we provided. The Trp supported them with everything we could get our hands on and they were finally able to move back to the insertion LZ. I was flying with CPT Billy Joe ?, the Lift Pit Ldr. The other aircraft had warned us that the NVA were all around the LZ so we came in low level and sort of popped up over a ridge to drop into this single ship LZ. Our ship was the lead but we came in too hot and had to fly around, so we became number 4. By the time we got in the bad guys were very well prepared for yet another Huey. In my mind I can still see several NVA in the trees up my side of the ship while we were on final. The door gunner behind me shot at least one and it was truly a pleasure to watch him die and fall out of the tree! Anyways, I got VERY CONCERNED because this was the first time I'd really been involved in any serious action. I remember asking the CPT: "What do you want me to do?" He was cool and replied: "Just lock your shoulder harness so if you get hit you won't fall on the controls and wreck the ship." I did what he said but those were certainly NOT words that calmed me down or provided any peace of mind!! As I remember the Blues lost at least two dead and about three or four wounded; but we put some serious hurt on the bad guys that day. I would fly with the Lift most of the rest of my tour; a little in the front seat of a Cobra. I worked hard and became a Huey IP and for the last few months was one of the Sqdn IPs.

On the 15th, A Trp had a LOH shot down wounding both crew members. From the 25th until the end of the month, A Trp received a remarkable amount of ground fire including 51 cal. A Trp found several fresh bunker complexes and camp sites as it worked the Ben Het area which was basically surrounded by the 28th NVA Regiment. A Trp continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Div's TAOR during this month.

VHPA Member Gary Brydges provide some details about B Trp during this period: I flew Cobras with the Undertakers and had several interesting experiences. The first was flying a Snake into Dalat's Cam Ly airfield. As a platoon we were always careful with any new guys that flew to Dalat for the first time. It was about 5,000 feet and even though it was always cooler up there, the DA wasn't kind on a mostly overgrossed Cobra. The first time you tried to land like a helicopter but coming to a hover was a real experience!! Lots of guys landed much harder than they wished! Then we would "hop" the Snake over to refuel. Once we had even about 45 minutes worth of fuel left we'd have to take off like a fixed wing using the runway. Then I remember when the 2/1 Armored Cav came to Phan Thiet. They escorted a Home Plow unit that was "widening" QL1. The spooky thing was that about two weeks before we had captured some folks and turned them over to the MI people with the ARVN command at Phan Thiet. A day or so later, an MI guy came by our place and said that they had learned a lot from those VC we'd captured. He said the VC told them that an Armored Cav unit was due in the area soon and that they were reconning for ambush sites. We knew nothing about any Armored Cav unit coming but sure enough, in a week or so they arrived. We screened ahead of them for a couple of days and told them about the ambush story. They seemed to be very thorough tankers to us. Every night they'd circle up in a different place and it seemed to me that no one in their right mind would mess with them. They'd been at Phan Thiet about four days when they must have camped right on top of the VC ambush. Just after dark, we get this call to go help them. They had lost a couple of APCs and had some guys wounded pretty bad. While the Guns worked the backs and top of the VC, their 90mm and 50s worked the front. After awhile Puff came on station to drop flares; then our Lift evaced their wounded to Vung Tau. The VC decided that they had had enough and Puff walked minigun around the perimeter ever few minutes for the rest of the night. Finally, I'll never forget the three days we fired the Battleship New Jersey as it sailed down the coast for what proved to be its last visit to Vietnam. This Marine radio team arrived early each morning with some circles on the map where they wanted us to check out before and after their barrages. The first two days weren't too exciting once you got used to seeing what a 16" round with a ton of HE or canister could do to almost an entire grid square! We had to watch our orbits, however. The shot would land on the target and really make all the trees shutter; but the canister part which weighted a hundred pounds or more would continue on the gun line another quarter of a mile or so. We couldn't figure out what the 'second cloud of smoke' was after each shot until the Marines explained it to us. Anyway, late in the morning on the third day, the Scouts screened an area we hadn't worked in some time and reported some well camouflaged bunkers. The Marines alternated between HE and canister for about ten rounds then asked us to look the area over. No sooner did the Scouts get over the bunker complex then they started yelling that they had people down there coming out of the ground. After working it for awhile, they said that no one seemed to be armed; so they wanted the Blues. Well, the Battleship folk are going crazy with joy because we'd previously told them we thought the area was cold. The Blues get in and report that it is a small hospital unit. They found a couple of armed guards and after killing one; the other decided there was little point in being brave, so he surrendered. So we load about a dozen VC medical people on a few Lift ships for the short ride to the MI guys and the Blues haul out some equipment, a small ammo cache with B-40 rockets, and an American typewriter that had been converted for the Vietnamese. We all played with the typewriter for days after that.

Now VHPA Member Mike Law relates: As the other B Trpers have mentioned, we used to stage from Song Mao quite often. We developed a good rapport with the American advisors attached to the ARVN Regt based there. Several times we were able to give them some 'extra effort' while reacting when some of their units had gotten into a good fight. Anyway very early (like 2 am!) one morning the Duty Officer woke me up with the news that Song Mao was under attack and one of the advisors was on the phone wanting help. This advisor explained to me that their Regt compound had been attacked since midnight by a good sized force, that one of the advisors was dead and two others were wounded, and that 'things were not going well for our side'. It was raining like mad outside with a pretty low ceiling, so I asked what the weather was like at his place - the same. I told him we'd do what we could but if the weather didn't break we'd have to wait until it started getting light. We got the Trp up and decided we'd take everything we had that was flyable. We launched and followed the coast line north until we got even with Song Mao then started in land. To our surprise the bad guys hadn't broken contact and started for the hills. The weather had gotten better and we could clearly see where several fire fights were going on. After checking with the advisors, we started firing. The first few gun runs were really special because you could actually see the bad guys and watch the ARVN maneuver while we were shooting (the bad guys directed their attention at the aircraft, so the guys on the ground took advantage of that). The attack was halted in a matter of minutes but the bad guys withdrew into the town itself! Naturally, we couldn't go shooting up the town so we had to wait for the ARVN to get ready to sweep their own hometown. I remember we were a little concerned about a stage field since we'd left that morning without a sure knowledge of which one we'd be using. We were somewhat grateful that this enemy force had directed most of their interests toward the ARVN compound and didn't even bother with the landing stripe at Song Mao. Because we staged from that stripe so often, B Trp had a bunker there that contained some ammo and usually a couple of fuel blivets with JP4. The ARVN's always told us they 'secured it every night' but we always had our Blues check it for booby traps each morning. Anyway, we were able to stage 'on the edge of the action', so to speak! An ARVN mech unit had been ordered down from some place further to the north but they had drawn some fire a few miles out of town and lost a track or two. We started shooting into those areas and the ARVN were able to maneuver around this problem. Thus the north side of the town was closed as an escape route. We inserted our Blues on the southern side and they linked up with some ARVN to start sweeping the town. By mid-morning we escorted some Chinooks in with some ARVN reinforcements. I'll never forget that sight - the rear ramps lowered and what seemed like a hundred little people came out! That took care of most of the western side of the town. A team of Charlie Model guns from Dong Ba Thin had been supporting the ARVN most of the morning. While escorting a Dustoff ship trying to reach some ARVN wounded on the southern side, one was shot down. It landed in the center of a wide sandy area that had the town on one side and a wooded area on the other. We could clearly see this downed ship and saw that all four of them were walking around their ship and that they'd set up their M-60s to defend themselves. We could also see the AW positions that had fired on the gunship and started firing into them. Maybe the bad guys had left or maybe they didn't like Cobras, but we didn't have any trouble getting two Dustoff ships in and out. A really funny thing happened at this point. One of the downed UH-1C pilots was WO Gene Russell (we called him "Adobe" because he was ugly as a mud fence). He had been in my gun platoon with C Trp when we formed at Ft. Campbell. He recognized my voice on the radios and using my old Ft. Campbell radio callsign said: "Colt 6 - we are taking a lot of fire from those woods - come get us out right now!" I asked if anyone was wounded and he said no. I told him we were a little busy at the moment (working with the Dustoff, our Blues, the ARVN, the Mech unit to the north) and that because they were in the middle of a open area no Charlie in his right mind would come bother them and that they should sit tight. The C&C did call back to Phan Thiet and our maintenance team was on the way to rig their ship so it could be hooked out. Anyway, Gene would have none of this 'be patient stuff' and keep telling me they wanted out. I finally asked Scott Lyman (who was flying C&C that day and had a back end full of the ARVN Regimental staff plus an advisor) if he could go get them. As I remember he did take them out but when our maintenance team arrived, he put them back in to help get their ship ready for extraction. Anyway, our Blues and their ARVN friends were stopped by several enemy AWs firing from a couple of houses. We couldn't tell which house was good and which was bad from the air, so initially we weren't much help. Finally one of the Blues 'marked' the house with an M-79 round. I don't remember who was flying my Wing that day but we both were making steep angle attacks from relatively high up to guarantee our rockets only hit one building at a time. His first pass 'surgically removed' the roofing. A 17 lb warhead does wonderful things!! I was able to put my rockets inside the building and the bodies of two enemy gunners literally flew out the windows. The Blues yelled their approval and within seconds were throwing grenades in the windows and were moving again. I watched with some satisfaction as one of the Blues threw what was left of the enemy weapon along side the dead owner. Several bad guys succeeded in finding temporary 'sanctuary' in a temple. An equal application of CS gas and the approaching infantry gave them the courage to try to run about 200 yards to some trees. They never made it. I loved to fire those minis on the wings! The folks in the town didn't seem to need our help anymore so we started screening the most likely escape routes. We had worked our way to the hills to the northwest of the town when it got too dark for anymore of this fun. Just as we were leaving, a team of Navy F4s (Bobcat 55 I think was the lead's callsign) came up on our UHF freq (we had worked with aircraft from so many different units that day that I'll bet everyone in Vietnam knew our UHF freq!) and said they'd heard we'd been in a good sized battle that day. They had been unable to unload their bombs at two previous locations and were either going to 'kill fish' (I guess they would just unload in the ocean rather than land on the carrier with armed bombs still on the wings) or 'knock down trees' some place. They only had a few minutes of gas left. I fired a pair of rockets into the side of the hill and told them it was all their's from that point to the top of the hill. They made two passes with napalm and HE. The next morning the Scouts decided to start their VR by looking to see if the Navy had hit anything. Almost immediately the two Scouts started complaining about the smell of burned flesh. As it turned out, the Navy boys had put their load smack-dab on top of the NVA Bn Cmdr and what was left of his mortar platoon! We inserted the Blues at the top of the hill and they were able to retrieve some interesting intelligence items from the packs and pockets of about 15 NVA. We later learned that two local force VC companies had escorted this NVA Bn and helped with the attack on Song Mao. While the ARVN and Song Mao were hurt in this attack, the NVA and VC took a serious hit as well. I was especially proud of B Trp during that battle. We were a combined arms team of the first magnitude!!

June - D Trp continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Div's TAOR during this month. On the 8th, A Trp's Scouts observed several trails leading from different directions to a heavily wooded area. They drew fire from the area and the Guns, airstrikes, and artillery worked it thoroughly until an ARVN unit was inserted. Ground contact was minimal. A Trp was credited with seven NVA killed, the artillery and airstrikes with 14 more; and three AKs were captured. On the 14th, A Trp made contact with an enemy unit in a bunker complex. They directed artillery fire into the area and rearmed the Guns with flechette rockets. A Trp lifted the artillery and let the enemy come out of the bunkers; then "nailed them to the ground". The Scouts found 34 dead NVA and bagged four more attempting to flee.

Again VHPA Member Dick Marshall provides some more details: In late June, we inserted the Blues in an area almost due east of Dak To and overlooking the road from Kontum. An ARVN unit had been wiped out in this area just a few days before. The Blues found the ARVN dead and began to sweep from there. They found bunkers with hot rice left behind, Chicom radios, weapons, ammo, etc. They gathered up the equipment and began moving to their PZ. Then they reported an NVA in a shallow foxhole

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 mortar, 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 River on QL 19 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 Scouts 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 into 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 doctors 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 moved 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 26th, 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's 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.

VHICMA Member Vernon Shepard gives us his point of view. I was a brick layer by trade. When I received my orders, I was 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 openings 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 Dariac 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 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

usually to waiting blues yet inserted. It took a long time and the two just running a few paces, they were running away.

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 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 opconed 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 were 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

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 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 finishing 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 Emilia 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 - "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 Da 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.

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and Pleiku TAORs as well as providing periodic convoy escorts. From the 12th through the 15th, B Trp supported the 24th STZ southwest of Kontum and made contact with an NVA company killing 33. Several mortars, rifles, radios and quantities of munitions were captured. For the rest of the month, B Trp supported the 4th Div who had ground elements operating in the mountains near the Suoi Kon river north of An Khe. On the 28th, A Trp's first LOH team had the lead shot down and the wing forced down by a fire in the ship. The crews were pulled to safety with a jungle penetrator. While working this area later in the day they found a Bn sized training area southwest of An Khe.

VHPA Member Barry Speare provides a little color of life in C Trp about this time: I arrived for my third tour in late Dec 69. My other tours were with Airborne Infantry. This was my first as an Aviator. I told the Squadron that I wanted to fly Scouts for Charlie Trp and the next morning I was on the courier to Lane. After I completed my 15 hours under the watchful eyes of Marty Martinez (by this time I believe he was the Sqdn Safety Officer and SIP), I was assigned the callsign of RED 12. Because of aircraft availability and the need for pilots, my transition took about two weeks. During that time I also flew about 40 plus hours in the front of the lead Snakes to learn the AO and to observe how the experienced Scouts worked. Now, the standard FNG initiation drink was the GMF (Green Mother...) which was administered whenever the Lane O Club had a visiting stage show band. Those of us not flying on the day of the stage show went to the club early in the afternoon to assure that our Trp got the tables directly in front and to one side of the stage. The other side of the stage was reserved for the 498th Dustoff. We started drinking the minute we arrived at the club and this went on into the evening. The stage show started about 7:30 and the GMFs were brought out during the 9 PM break. Like the rest of the FNGs I got on stage and chugged my GMF while everyone cheered. I thought I was going to die and later hung over the hootch maids' clothesline ralphing my guts out for what seemed like forever. Bill Hesse was found passed out cold, lying next to his hootch the following morning. Besides drinking, the major pastime at Lane after returning from the AO was jungle rules volleyball. C Trp had a good team and was a serious challenge to the other aviation units. I was never very good at the game so I was only allowed to guard our war/beer chest and provide verbal support when a challenger turned up. During the eight months I was in C Trp we never lost a single challenge match. The stakes were our war chest against their's and we always went home with ours after drinking their's. In early February orders came for Charlie Trp to move to Camp Radcliff by early March. Our new mission was to support three major combat elements: our friends in the 173rd Abn Bde, the 4th Inf, and the 22d ARVN. Our AO was expanded from the South China Sea to the Cambodian tri-border area northwest of Kontum. We completed the move without incident and on time but two days after we arrived we were hit by sappers. They destroyed the two LOHs closest to the billet area and attempted to destroy two snakes and a slick. To the best of my memory the others were repairable; but the LOHs were nothing more than piles of white magnesium with vertical stabilizers. Our officers' quadrangle and billeting area turned out very nice. We all did some work on our own rooms and pitched in to finish our small club that included a beer cooler obtained from an old PX Snack Bar and a highly shined, varnished bar.

March - On the 1st the Squadron was released from opcon to the 4th Inf and returned to the 17th CAG for control. During this entire month, C Trp continued to support the 173rd Abn in the An Loa valley area. D Trp worked the Pleiku TAOR conducting sweeps to the south of Camp Holloway in search of the mortars that had been hitting the post from the south. They were unable to locate these mortars even though an intensive effort was made that included the use of mine sweepers. On the 5th, B Trp started supporting the 24th STZ west of Pleiku and in the 6th found an arms and munitions cache. From the 10th until the 27th B Trp moved from Camp Enari to Phan Rang and returned to Camp Holloway. While working in the Dalat area, B Trp found several very large bunker (one with over 200) complexes and screens for the ARVN forces that worked several cache sites. From the 13th until the 1st of April, the Squadron (-) moved from Camp Enari to Camp Holloway. From the 23rd until the 28th, C Trp completed the move from Lane at An Son to Camp Radcliff at An Khe. On the 30th, A Trp and C/75 Ranger (which were opconed to the Squadron from the 30th until 19 April) formed TF Dagger which operated to the southwest of Plei Me and to the southwest of Plei Mrong. No significant findings were made by TF Dagger as the NVA are not operating in its AO.

VHPA Member Ray Connolly remembers these times: I was in A Trp's Gun platoon from Sep until Jan of 1970. It seemed like there was about a million Captains in the platoon at that time and I wasn't all that senior. About the beginning of the year I ended up in HHT as the Asst S-4 though I really wanted to be flying Cobras. It was during the period that the 7/17th moved from Enari to Holloway and I was given the general assignment to acquire all the construction materials I could get my hands on, to make living there more comfortable. The Sqdn had a number of 40 ft S&P (Stake and Platform) trailers that were pulled by big diesel tractors. We made many trips from Plei over the Mang Yang Pass to Qui Nhon empty and returned with 2x4s, plywood, wiring, lights, etc. At that time the 75th Ranger Company was attached to the 7/17th, so we could draw LRRP rations through normal supply. I am still amazed at how much stuff we acquired simply by trading for a couple of cases of LRRPs!! We even made one trip all the way to Phan Rang to get materials. My other duty was to establish ammo and refuel points. The evening before, the HHT CO would tell us where to go; we'd load up a 2 1/2 ton with mini-gun ammo and another with rockets plus a 5,000 gal tankers. Early in the morning we head out to Kontum, Plei Me, Plei Djereng, places like that. We mostly supported A Trp because even after B Trp returned to the Pleiku area, they still flow down south a lot and someone else supported them. We rarely were part of a convoy and we didn't have any escort from D Trp or the MPs. We'd just drive out the gate and head to the forward base. We carried a PRC 77 to call in case something happened. We never got hit but I can remember riding in a jeep many of time and thinking "Why am I in a jeep and not a helicopter?" We used the Chinooks to lift fuel and ammo whenever we could but when they weren't available we'd drive. Rarely would we spend the night at these places. We'd drive back every evening. In July, I guess someone had decided that I'd paid my dues because I returned to A Trp's Gun platoon. I flew with them until I DEROSED in Sep.

April - For most of this month B Trp worked the Dak Seang area and south to Dak To along Rocket Ridge. Intense AW was received on nearly every mission. They were very successful in locating the 122mm rocket positions along Rocket Ridge that had been firing on Dak To and Tan Canh. Their Guns and tac air were used to destroy several launch positions and storage areas. A large number of bunker complexes, mortar positions, and MG positions were reported. On the 6th, A Trp stopped working with TF Dagger and worked the Dak Seang and Ben Het areas for the rest of the month. From the 6th to the 10th, C Trp replaced A Trp as part of TF Dagger and worked around Plei Mrong but only made light contact. With all the ACTs working basically north and west of Pleiku and making contact with squad and platoon sized units on almost a daily basis, D Trp was alerted to maintain a standby airmobile reaction force for most of the month. Everyone still remembered the B Trp's battle in November near Bu Prang and the general lack of ARVN support. On the 7th, A Trp found a heavily used trail and about 1100 engaged a large enemy force southwest of Dak Seang. Their Guns received intense fire and their Scouts were repeatedly driven from the area by AW fire. It took several attempts and working against lots of AA fire before the Lift could get the Blues inserted. The NVA avoided contact with the Blues who found ten dead NVA and captured several rifles and mortar rounds. On the 11th, an A Trp LOH was shot down and the crew quickly extracted. Before they could explore the situation further, they received a change of mission to cover a CIDG force of 110 men trying to break contact with a superior NVA force. Their Lift ships were able to complete the extraction successfully. From the 11th to the last week of the month, C Trp returned to support the 173rd Abn in its efforts against the 3rd NVA Div. On the 11th, SP4 Alonso Garrett was killed while flying in a C Trp LOH piloted by WO Chick Harrington in the Soui Cow Valley. VHPA Member Berry Speare may be able to provide some details about this incident. On the 12th, near Hill 763 the A Trp lead LOH flown by CPT Gus Robinson, was shot down and the wing took numerous hits. Because of the terrain, heavy fighting, and other forces in the area; A Trp could not complete the search for the downed crew. It wasn't until the 14th and then only after many of the Lift ships were hit that 14 Blues were inserted. They found Gus' body in the wreckage but the observer SP4 Robert E. Tabb was not found. They also came upon an NVA AA team in a bunker and quickly killed them. Tabb was listed as MIA and was, indeed, captured. He was kept by the NVA and released in March, 1973.

VHPA Member Gary Downs recalls: Gus and I were West Point Classmates and had been through a lot together. The events surrounding his death are some of the strongest memories I have of Vietnam. Two NVA Regts had had the SF camp at Dak Seang under siege for some time. During that period NOTHING was getting in and out of the camp without getting shot down. I remember when things quieted down that there was a med evac, another Huey and two wrecked Caribou on the runway. We worked the flanks of the battle most of the time. We are always putting in airstrikes or shooting lots of Arty and doing BDAs for Arcights. I wasn't flying the day Gus was shot down but I was the next two days. It took us that long to get our Blues into the area. They had to blow an LZ with a 5,000 Daisy Cutter near the top of Hill 763 for us to get the Blues in. They found an NVA AA crew in a bunker and killed them before they could get the gun operational again. We displayed it outside our place at Holloway for some time after that. They found that Gus' LOH had rolled down the hill and that he was still strapped inside. He had two bullets in the head, so it was no wonder that it crashed. The Blues also found Tabb's shirt in a tree, so we figured he had been captured. I'll never forget that valley north of Dak To. It was very beautiful, but you never had any trouble drawing fire there!

On the 15th, A Trp was still working the area looking for Tabb when another LOH was shot down, killing the observer (name unknown at this time) and badly wounding the pilot. The bravery of their Blues was totally unquestioned as they rappelled into a hot LZ to cut a hasty area for extraction. Even though the Infantry's mission was not reconnaissance, they found six NVA bodies, numerous packs and 12 weapons. After destroying all the enemy equipment and obtaining the body of the observer, all the men on the ground were extracted. Additional ordnance was expended in the area and secondary explosions were recorded. During the last week of the month, C Trp joined TF Pursuit which was a 4th Div effort against enemy base camps south of the Mang Yang Pass. A large number of bunkers and structures were spotted by C Trp that had recent usage and many were destroyed. C Trp also worked with C/75 Rangers. On the 30th, A and B Trps were in direct support of the 24th STZ and C Trp was opconed to TF Pursuit, so only D Trp remained under Squadron control.

May - Starting on the 5th and ending on the 25th of June, various Squadron elements supported the 4th Div and the 22nd and 23rd ARVN in their Cambodian incursion. C Trp, from the 5th to the 25th, B Trp, from the 5th to the 16th, and A Trp, on the 6th and 7th, worked in Ratankiri Province to the west of Plei Djereng for first the 4th Div and then the

structure complexes with light enemy contacts save for the ground to air fire which was intense during many days. On the 6th, D Trp moved two platoons via roads to assist the 4th Div by securing the Plei Djereng airfield. This operation lasted until the 16th. On the 7th, C Trp found several sets of tracks made by NVA tanks and indications that the vehicles had moved to the south. On the 8th, A Trp began support of the 22nd ARVN operating in Base Area 702 to the west of Duc Co. Several structures and two tons of rice were destroyed during those three days and four NVA were killed. That same day the lead A Trp LOH was shot down and the observer killed. On the 9th, C Trp located two M-8 scout cars and a dump truck; all were destroyed by an air strike. From the 12th to the 17th, A Trp supported the 4th Div and found an airfield with a POL storage area. On the 17th and 18th, B Trp took a break from the Cambodian operations and worked around Pleiku with no significant findings. On the 19th, A Trp and one platoon from D Trp moved to Ban Me Thuot, became operational on the 20th to support the 23rd ARVN in Mondol Kiri Province to the west of Ban Me Thuot. The most significant activity was the destruction of several (at least seven) enemy 2 1/2 ton trucks plus the locations and destruction of at least three, huge enemy base camps complete with permanent buildings and very large bunker complexes and ammo caches. From the 19th to the 26th, B Trp supported the 22nd ARVN in Operation Binh Tay II as it conducted a search of Base Area 702. Large bunker complexes were located and destroyed by air strikes. On several occasions bombs were delivered within 15 minutes of request. This was the result of the personal interest and rapport of USAF LTC Hyland, the Senior FAC supporting the 22nd ARVN, with B Trp. From the 27th to the end of the month, B Trp worked northeast of Pleiku and killed one NVA and detained another. From the 29th to the 31st, C Trp supported the 22nd ARVN in the Ben Het and Dak To area and reported receiving 37mm AA fire for the first time. Their Guns and an air strike were employed on the position resulting in several secondary explosions.

June - During the last part of May and all of June, D Trp provided a ready reaction force for the ACTs and provided convoy escorts from Camp Holloway to Duc Co, the Oasis, and FSB Blackhawk. From the 1st to the 3rd, C Trp worked for the 1st Bde south of FSB Blackhawk and killed one NVA. On the 5th, A Trp moved back to Camp Holloway and until the 23rd was in direct support of MR II while working the Dak To, Ben Het, and south area. From the 5th to the end of the month, C Trp supported the 173rd Abn near LZ English save for the 24th to the 28th when they worked for the 4th Div north of An Khe. Activities throughout the area were characterized by moderate enemy contact. Ground to air fire was sporadically intense. Numerous caves and bunkers were destroyed by combined arms firepower. C Trp was credited with 24 NVA killed during this period. From the 6th to the 23rd, B Trp supported the 1st Bde, 4th Div in Operation Wayne Hurdle to the south of FSB Blackhawk. Light enemy contact typified the operation but numerous new bunker and structure complexes were found and destroyed by the Scouts and Guns. On the 10th, A Trp did a "day trip" back to Dan Me Thuot and found a large enemy complex under construction. After the Guns prep the area, the Blues were inserted and found a sizable quantity of food and NVA clothes and medical supplies. This was destroyed. The Scouts then had the ARP sweep a second complex but this one was extensively booby trapped. The ARP and the Guns destroyed both complexes. Near Dak To on the 17th, A Trp's Scouts observed five men with weapons running toward a bunker complex. The Guns killed three and a little later, during a running battle, the Scouts killed three more. On the 19th, SFC Robert H. Pilik was killed by flying as a back seat from WO Dick Bradley and SP4 Ron Streckland. The LOH took several hits, crashed and burned. Both Bradley and Streckland were evaced to the States because of burns they received in this wreck. VHPA member Berry Speare can provide some details about this incident. On the 21st, A Trp worked with a group of Pathfinders northwest of Dak To on the remains of five downed aircraft (one USAF Jolly Green Giant and four UH-1Cs). Even though the area was infested by NVA, they avoided contact with A Trp during the day long effort to extract bodies and equipment. On the 24th, A Trp screened for the 22nd ARVN and B Trp for the 2/8 Mech Inf in Operation Binh Tay IV whose objective was to evacuate approximately 12,000 Cambodian military personnel and their dependents, with all their equipment and personal belongings, from the towns of Ba Kev and Labang Siek. For the rest of the month, A Trp supported MR II working AO around Pleiku and north of Kontum with few significant activities and light enemy contact.

Many 7/17ers may remember working on various Civil Affairs Projects during their tour. All battalion sized units were assigned one or more local villages. During this period, the Squadron had a number of Montagnard villages with names like Plei Poo Ngo, La Son, and Tu Tam. D Trp seemed to work frequently with the orphanage at Tu Tam. The OR-LL reports that the NVA left a mine for the Squadron's S-5 team; but the villagers found it and showed it to the team who had it destroyed.

July - During this month, A Trp supported MR II and Co B, 5th SF while B Trp supported the 4th Div to the north of An Khe and C Trp continued to support the 173rd Abn. Operations were significantly restricted during the first half of the month by the monsoon weather. On the 2nd, A Trp's Scouts observed armed people in new hootches wearing uniforms. Their Guns and Scouts killed five. On the 5th, while conducting a search and destroy operation to the west of Pleiku, D Trp sustained one KIA //name// and 2 WIA from a command detonated mine. On the 8th, Berry Speare was flying a C Trp LOH with WO1 Michael Dickus as his observer and SGT Lassiter as the back seater. Berry was giving Dickus his orientation as a Scout in an AO near LZ English. The LOH took intense ground fire, crashed and burned. Berry and SGT Lassiter were not hurt but Dickus was badly burned. He was evaced to Japan and died on the 18th as a result of these burns. On the 15th, southwest of Pleiku, A Trp found a very large supply of food, equipment, and clothing in some structures by a bunker system. The Blues were inserted to gather equipment and documents for destruction and extraction. On the 20th, B Trp WO1 Edgar F. Crouse, Jr., and WO1 Mark J. Webb were killed. On the 21st, while working northeast of Pleiku, A Trp made contact with elements of an NVA sapper battalion. For three days, A Trp employed their Guns, artillery, and airstrikes on this unit. The battle started when both LOHs in a Scout team were shot down and burned. The official histories are somewhat at odds on this point. The Sqdn OR-LL said a Huey went down while the unit history says two LOHs. Anyway, 1LT Lanny J. Wallace, CW2 Marvin L. Wagner, WO1 Phillip G. Wright, and SP4 Walter J. Kaccock died that day. VHPA Member Gary Downs remembers:

That day we were staging out of Holloway because our AO was the Ia Krom and southern Dak Bla valleys. I remember one LOH had been shot up pretty good, so we sent them back to camp and called for the other team. This area was hot because the NVA had been moving units around Kontum, through these valleys and on toward the Mang Yang Pass. I also remember being like a traffic cop during those days; constantly coordinating airstrikes, gunships, arty, etc., etc. There were lots of targets. We even used the 361st Guns and that was sort of rare. Anyway, one of the Guns or maybe it was Ops back at Holloway mentioned that the first team hadn't checked in yet. We got to looking around and saw a column of smoke between us and Holloway. We hurried over there and found the two burning hulks of the LOHs. It was really sad. The only thing we could figure is that one had flown up to get a close look at the other and they had had a mid-air. We put the Blues in quickly and secured their bodies.

On the 24th, B Trp discovered a large enemy force northwest of An Khe and used their Scouts, Guns, artillery and air strikes to kill 39. On the 30th, A Trp made contact with an enemy unit north of the Plei Me SF Camp and during a six hour massive firepower demonstration killed 44 NVA. It started when the Scouts discovered a large enemy concentration. After an airstrike, the Lift inserted an ARVN company through a maze of small arms fire. When the Lift returned with their Blues, they found the ARVN still huddled in the LZ. The Blues got the ground force moving and killed six NVA on the way to a downed aircraft. The Guns then spotted 10 NVA moving out area. They killed six. Then while the Scouts screened, the ARP moved over to the site and captured four more with their weapons.

August - For the first half of the month, B Trp supported the 4th Div southwest of An Khe but reported nothing of significance. For the first half of the month, C Trp supported the 173rd Abn south of LZ English and observed numerous caves, bunkers and structures. During this month, D Trp provided convoy escort to the Oasis, Blackhawk, Kontum, and Enari plus provided a ready reaction force for the Sqdn elements at Camp Holloway. On the 8th, A Trp's Scouts found a large enemy force northeast of Pleiku. The Sqdn OR-LL provides scant details of this engagement and records a familiar scenario: Scouts find, Guns shoot, airstrike, ARP insertion, count the dead, gather the equipment and documents for destruction and extraction, capture a few, etc. Score for the day: the aircraft killed 20, the Blues took six prisoners plus 3,000 lbs of NVA equipment including 122mm rockets and launchers without suffering any losses. Fortunately, VHPA Member Tom Galyean was part of this battle and provides the following:

I was the Lift platoon leader in A Trp. As I read a draft version of this history suddenly a flood of memories came back to me. A Trp saw considerable action during those days, some of it planned and orchestrated in true Cav style; some of it completely by accident. I believe I can provide some interesting details about the engagement on 8 August. It was near the end of the day. We were returning to Holloway from Kontum where we had staged that day. The whole Trp was enroute when a Cobra developed a mechanical problem that required an immediate landing; something like a tail rotor chip detector light, I think. They selected a fairly good sized, open area. The Scouts gave it a quick look and declared it clear, so the Cobra landed. My Lift ships, with the Blues onboard, were only a minute or so behind the Guns, so we inserted around the Cobra to provide security until the maintenance folks could either fix it or hook it out. We had both pair of Scouts and three Guns in the air. Naturally, with both the Blues and a ship on the ground, no one was going home. The Scouts began looking around, widening their search area and soon reported some fresh digging. My memory is a little fuzzy on the next point. I think an NVA soldier jumped from cover and the Blues killed him; but maybe someone fired at a LOH. Anyway, in short order, a fairly large sized NVA unit was forced from cover. I remember the Scouts and the Blues worked the area well. The Guns were armed with flechettes; not good news for bad guys in the open. Our Blues had a "Kit Carson" scout who had been an NVA 1LT. This guy grabs a bullhorn and tells the NVA they are surrounded and should surrender. As soon as they give up, we start treating their wounded. We hauled several to hospitals in Pleiku that had wounds from the nails. There were lots of dead too. Our "Kit Carson" spent some time talking with one of their officers; a platoon leader, I think. He learned that this was, indeed, one unlucky NVA battalion. They had moved down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and were trying to move to their assigned area some where southeast of Pleiku without being noticed. While they were crossing into Vietnam, they happened to be near the center of an "Arc Light" that wiped out a considerable portion of the battalion. After recovering from that, they moved through the mountains east of Kontum. One of their bivouac sites was hit by a series of H&I barrages that further reduced their ranks. This unit was composed mostly of young guys, new to the military. Having

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been hit twice pretty hard without even being involved in a battle had really stressed these guys. This may explain why the first guy jumped at the beginning of this engagement. Anyway, they had recovered from this second loss and were moving carefully when they accidentally came into contact with A Trp. The third time was "the charm". It was our understanding that after the final casualties inflicted by our Cobras and Scouts and those prisoners taken by the Blues, that this new NVA battalion ceased to exist before it ever engaged any of our friendly forces. All this because of their incredibly bad luck of being in the wrong place at the wrong time on three successive occasions!!

During the second half of the month, B Trp supported MR II in the Pleiku and Kontum areas but reported nothing of significance. On the 14th, C Trp's Scouts followed a well used trail to a large bunker complex; one having a radio antenna. Guns and air strikes were employed and several secondary explosions were observed. During a BDA, C Trp's Blues discovered four NVA KBA and captured one RR and two RPGs. On the 15th, D Trp was tasked to provide a 15 man force to Lane to augment the security. On the 16th, pilot Henrikian in an A Trp LOH experienced a loss of tail rotor and quit. The pilot autorotated and severed the tailboom on touchdown. Unable the shut down the violently vibrating aircraft, the crew exited safely. The tail rotor gear box was sent in for analysis but the tail rotor blades were not recovered even after D Trp spent three days searching for them. From the 17th through the 27th, C Trp supported the 4th Div southeast of An Khe with no significant findings. On the 22nd, pilot Farrell in an A Trp LOH experienced a loss of rotor RPM while in slow flight in the AO. The pilot turned into the wind and landed hard in a sloped clearing. The observer was injured when he immediately exited and ran into the main rotor blades. The cause of the loss of power was unknown, pending fuel control teardown analysis. On the 25th, A Trp inserted the Infantry on a storage complex and recovered some US equipment while capturing some NVA rucksacks and weapons. The lone NVA security guard died at his post. They inserted their Blues in another area and found numerous military and religious documents. During the extraction, a Huey piloted by Cughton crashed and turned over in the PZ. The PZ was on sloping ground with two foot deep furrows. One skid hung up, the co-pilot over controlled the aircraft, and the pilot was unable to save the aircraft. Even though the aircraft turned up-side down, no one was seriously injured. On the 31st, pilot Caraker in an A Trp Huey experienced an engine failure and landed on sloping terrain. The aircraft fell on its right side causing structural damage. None of the crew was injured.

September - We will start this period by quoting liberally from a debrief conducted by Army historical personnel of Rudy De France who was the Sqdn Cmdr until the 7th. This debriefing took the form of 20 questions (surrounded by "0" in the paragraph to follow) and Rudy's answers.

(The interviewer asked for background information.) I graduated from fixed wing flight school in 1957 and served several years in both air and ground assignments with the 14th Armored Cav in Germany. I was really glad to command the 7/17th on my second tour in Vietnam. During most the six months I commanded the Sqdn, A Trp supported the 4th Div, B Trp supported the ARVN's primary in the Pleiku and Kontum area, and C Trp supported the 173rd Abn. Only twice during that period did I have the entire Sqdn all together. On 21 July, we were able to reorganize under a new TO&E that had a LT as the infantry rifle platoon leader in each ARP. It also integrated the former direct support maintenance and avionics detachments into each ACT. (The interviewer had heard comments from other units that their MAJs and CPTs had less experience than in "the old days" and that the warrant and commissioned officers coming out of flight school were not adequately trained for Vietnam duty.) I certainly did not find either of these cases in the 7/17th. The senior officers were all on their second tours, were experienced aviators and did an outstanding job. Because we always operated as a team and because the morale and esprit was so high, the new pilots quickly learned from the experienced ones and built on what they had learned in flight school. We had a number of experienced people extend their tour which helped us with needed skills. There may have been isolated areas where a good maintenance NCO's DEROS came and there was no one to replace him; but overall we were staffed at adequate levels with appropriately skilled people. (He was asked how he influenced troop operations.) I tried very hard not to intercede or to take over and run the troop for the Trp Cmdr, while they were in an AO. I would say that my influence in troop operations was on the nature of advice, prior to an operation. On occasion, after an operation, I would have a commander come to my office where we could critique the actions; particularly if we lost some aircraft or something went wrong. The Trp Cmdrs were knowledgeable and proficient in their operations. (He was asked do the ground commanders understand and properly utilize your unit.) I can say that without many exceptions, the ground commanders did not understand and did not know how to properly use Air Cav. Air Cav is still a new operation and it took continual education, coordination and orientation of ground commanders to teach them how to get the best results. The key was to get them to see that Air Cav has a mission to perform and that it is not just an aviation asset for them to use. They had to realize that if an ACT is not used as a team, it is not effective. (Concerning the accident rate.) Unfortunately all ACSs have an above average accident rate and ours was high. I think there are several reasons for this. First and foremost is the very mission of Air Cav, particularly with the LOHs, because the pilot has to neglect the helicopter in order to perform his mission. This is something you have to see to understand; something many a senior aviation commander didn't do first hand. This is especially true in MR II because of the terrain. Going up and down those mountains caused many accidents. We were criticized for being too mission oriented and for not being safety oriented. We had excellent safety and training programs that I believe were equal to and in many instances surpassed other aviation units. I am happy to say that during the rainy season we didn't have any accidents as a result of weather. During the dry season, dust did present a problem during landings, takeoffs, and hovering. We had a Cobra go IFR while hovering into a revetment and crash. The reason for this was a lack of instrument proficiency time in this area. There were three requests for panel time put in where the specific action occurred. If there had been a command emphasis from a higher headquarters for instrument time, the accident would never have happened. The density altitude up at Dalat was very often above 7,000 feet yet our units operated there without any accidents. This is a result of command emphasis by the commanders and a continual evaluation of the environment. Because of the organization of the ACTs and the Sqdn and because of the maintenance and supply support we have and received, we had enough aircraft at all times to perform our mission. I would venture to say that in each ACT there were only three or four aviators who reached the Bde limit of 140 flying hours per month. We usually had sufficient men to fly in that man's place and the Flight Surgeons watched for aviator fatigue. (He was asked to describe his favorite accomplishment.) When I look back at my tour I especially appreciate the Sqdn's efforts during the month of April in the Dak Seang, Dak To area. The reason for this was because it was the heaviest area of enemy contact and we were supporting the ARVN's with D Trp and two ACTs. We developed the situation to the extent that the ARVN's could no longer react to it because they were completely committed. It was also our period of heaviest contact and especially the ACTs responded in a maximum effort for the entire month. I look back with pride at the job everyone in the Sqdn did and not just the air crews but the maintenance personnel as well. The maintenance people had to perform at about 125 percent extra effort, working all night long, mess halls being open until 1 a.m. and everyone just really pitched in to help out. (He was asked to assess the effectiveness of the Vietnamization program.) I would have to say that in our AO, often the ACTs would develop a situation and call on the ARVN's for the reactionary force. They are still a little hesitant to react to a situation we develop and at periods of time when we had an aircraft shot down and our men inserted and in contact, it would be a day and a half before we could get the reaction force. This is not a satisfactory situation to be in. We did train some ARVN Infantry men and they responded very well to what we developed.

During this entire month, C Trp supported the 173rd Abn around LZ English. On the 7th, while observing a large cave complex a C Trp LOH received heavy small arms fire and crashed. The crew was extracted by the C&C. After this extraction, C Trp was diverted to help a friendly unit in heavy contact. They provided close air support and used artillery and airstrikes until darkness. On the way home, they received intense 51 cal fire and observed an air burst. Airstrikes were called in but darkness prevented any follow-up. On the 9th, pilot Hafner in a B Trp Huey experienced a hard landing due to low rotor RPM during a check ride. The pilot initially saw that he was going to land short of the runway on an autorotation. The IP took control and attempted a power recovery, but the throttle was binding. The IP stretched the glide losing RPM, which resulted in a hard landing. The throttle linkage was found to be excessively dirty and the throttle bearing was sent in for analysis. From the 10th for the rest of the month, A Trp supported the 4th Div. On the 10th, a LOH was shot down and the crew evacuated with minor injuries. On the 13th, A Trp's Scouts found NVA soldiers in a bunker complex south of An Khe but didn't draw any fire. The Guns expended and on the way back one piloted by Clausen experienced an engine failure. Having no suitable force landing area, the pilot crashed into the trees. The crew was extracted and the Scouts observed an NVA squad moving toward the downed Cobra. They killed six before bad weather chased A Trp from the area. Due to enemy presence, the aircraft was not recovered and the cause of the engine failure could not be determined. On the 15th, A Trp had a LOH shot down and extracted the crew. On the 15th, the Squadron assumed operational control of D/2/1 Cav stationed at Phan Thiet and supporting the 23rd ARVN. On the 15th, B Trp started training ARPs from the 22nd ARVN in the Dak To and Kontum area. On the 18th, pilot Thorpe in a C Trp AH-1G had a tail rotor strike a conex container. The pilot picked the aircraft up to a hover, turned approximately 90 degrees in the L-shaped revetment and the tail rotor struck a conex container the Post Engineers had placed near the revetment while working on the airfield drainage. The result was a hard landing and damage to the tail rotor drive train; but no injuries. On the 19th, pilot Hebert in a B Trp LOH experienced an engine failure on take off and the aircraft landed hard. The pilot received back injuries when the collapsible seat failed to collapse due to a tech manual under the seat. The co-pilot was struck in the head by the turning rotor blades after exiting the helicopter. The cause of the engine failure would be determined by teardown analysis. On the 24th, A Trp was working an AO near FB Crystal when they were alerted to help break an attack on FB Digger. A few minutes after A Trp arrived over Digger, the enemy ended the battle. A Trp's Lift and the Medevac ships spent much of the rest of the day removing the wounded and restoring the FB to normal. On the 24th, B Trp was sent to Phu Hiep to support the 22nd ARVN in an area northwest of Tuy Hoa. Enemy activity was heavy and they killed two NVA when they found a large training site complete with bleachers and eight hootches. From the 26th until 2 Oct, B Trp supported the 3rd ARVN Cav and the 47th ARVN Inf in the Pleiku area. These operations results in three enemy KBA and sightings of stepped up enemy activity. On the 27th, A Trp's Scouts observed one individual. The Guns expended and the Blues were inserted. They found two killed and approximately 14 structures destroyed. On the 30th, A Trp observed eight enemy soldiers taking evasive action and killed them.

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 receive 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 lose 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 QL 19 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 dog 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. One, 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 holsters 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 of 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 that 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 122

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 heliopad 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 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 though 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 - forget 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

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 Slaon 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 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 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 trail 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 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 rear area 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 live 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 LOH 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 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 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, 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 laiger 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 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:

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It wasn't long after the Sqdn had moved to Qui Nhon airfield that we learned that that decision was flawed! Things were getting "ugly" in the city itself to the point where it was not safe to have our soldiers off the airfield after dark. The poor LTC airfield commander at Lane had lots of responsibility but no authority to address the security, race, drugs, and prostitution problems that had become acute. Most of the aviation units based at Lane were now attached to the 7/17th and it made a lot of sense for the HQ and HHT functions to be closer. I finally told the 17th CAG that we had to move to An Son and bring some of the "wild times there" under control. The good news is that we had indeed established a good working relationship with the ROKs. We understood and appreciated their no non-sense approach to combat operations and to the issues of drugs as well. So the Sqdn HQ and HHT moved to An Son about June. Some of our first steps were to take over the perimeter and to man the gates. Basically the Koreans manned the southern half and my command, the northern half. Times were hard for the girls that had been "living on the inside" for so long. We also started having meetings among the EM by rank. We'd gathered all the Privates together and listened to what they had to say, then the Specialists, junior SGTs, etc. One of the things we learned, for example, was that the Privates were unhappy with the way their club was being run. I said: "Fine, you run your club." They were shocked that we would do this. They picked the people and we cut the orders giving them the jobs. Things like that really helped improve morale and mitigate some of the problems. We also found that we had several people that really caused a lot of trouble and didn't belong there; so we quickly "helped them move on". We also coordinated with the ROKs to put our units to work. Basically when a man is in a combat situation, he generally isn't bored and the racial differences were put aside. So we tried working people harder. Of course by that time the 7/17 HQ was operating more like a CAB. We had two AHCs, a Chinook Company, a fixed wing unit and provides support for the dust-off guys. Thank God for the Koreans and the good relationship we had developed with them! The ARVN, especially the 23rd Div guys we worked with a lot, were not good at using aviation assets correctly. And with some rare, rare exceptions, they didn't have a clue what Air Cavalry was all about! People have often asked me why I commanded the 7/17th for an entire year versus the normal six months. I tell them that about the time my six months were up, we had some definite ideas in place and specific interests in addressing "the wild times". I really felt we were doing some good and I personally thought it was the right thing to do. The commanders above me agreed enough to go to bat for me. So I extended in the job and they supported me. Now, anyone that was there during those days will readily tell you that we were hardly "pure as the driven snow" when I turned the Sqdn over to Jack Anderson. But we had "stemmed the tide" and "corrected" many of the abuses, while buying time for more American units to stand down and go home.

July - On the 6th, A Trp moved back to Phan Rang and were down from the 7th to the 17th awaiting the arrival of the maintenance section. The rest of the month was spent working the Song Mao area. Many cultivated fields, bunkers and trails were sighted. Further investigations of these sightings produced negative results. From July thru early Nov, C Trp remained at Lane, worked its traditional AOs north and west of Phu Cat, supported the 173rd Abn until it stood down in August. After that C Trp would support the Korean Divisions. VHPA Member Billy Miller provides a few more details about A Trp.

I joined A Trp in early July for my second tour in Vietnam. I flew with the 3/17th CAV during the first one, so I was familiar with Air Cav operations. One of the first questions I had was "where are the Blues" because I hadn't seen any American Infantry and no one had mentioned them. I learned that while the TO&E still authorized the Blues - A Trp had none and that had been the situation for some time. They were not putting security details some place else - they simply did not exist. A Trp's "normal operational mode" would be to support one of the ARVN Regts based at Dalat, Bao Loc, or Song Mao for a 5-6 days in a row, have a maintenance down day, then go support the next unit in the rotation. The Province Senior Advisor would furnish an ARVN ARP each time we supported his unit. Some times it was the same unit. Don't get me wrong - these weren't bad or poor units at all - it's just that they weren't nearly as good as Americans would have been. We had an unpublished practice of putting one of our Infantry officer types on the ground with this ARP just to make certain we had radio contact with them. You could never trust the ARVN Artillery, there was no American Artillery in the area any more, airstrikes were hard to come by; so the only support these guys would have came from our Guns. The rest of the unpublished practice went something like this - no matter what happens on the ground, we had to get that American out! There was a very strong dictate against Americans being on the ground during this period. We knew we would have more than a little hell to pay for "bending" that rule if knowledge of our practice got to some higher headquarters. To no one's big surprise, we didn't insert the ARP nearly as frequently as we did when we had American Blues. I'd guess we put them in about twice a week and most of these were little more than stepped up training exercises. I'd say we would only have three or four "real" insertions during an average month. The absence of American Blues did effect the way we flew. However, I'd say the Scouts and Guns were still very aggressive; but more "demands" were placed on the C&C to get any downed crews out and to provide support faster. Near the later part of the year the Phan Rang CO asked us to do first and last night VRs especially in the "alleys" where the bad guys fired mortars and 122s. That was even an interesting situation. Phan Rang wasn't bothered all that much with mortars and rockets but in other areas we suggested to higher that we mount night operations (incremental to the Nighthawks we would later fly) to try to catch these guys. These requests were all denied because of the risk factor. Even around Phan Rang the enemy seemed to be waiting for the Americans to leave. So long as our first and last night VRs stayed within a certain area, Phan Rang was rarely hit. A few times we'd send our teams deeper into the hills to the west and at evening we would get a rocket or two. Their favorite target was the O Club on top of a small hill within the camp. To the best of my knowledge no one was hurt and there was no major equipment damage from any of these attacks. Interesting times when you think about it.

August - On the 2nd, A Trp responded to contact by a recon company at FSB Nora. Two teams of Guns fired on what was thought to be the 40th NVA Bn. Later they were credited with 25 confirmed kills and two secondary explosions believed to be the ammo for the 82mm mortars. One Cobra was hit by fire but there were no casualties. From the 17th for the rest of the month, A Trp staged from Bao Loc to provide security during the upcoming Vietnamese elections. This operation consisted mainly of a road recon from Dalat to Bao Loc. The ARP remained at the Bao Loc strip on standby with American advisors and ground forces as a reaction force.

September - No activities were recorded in A Trp's unit history for this month.

October - On the 5th, a team of one LOH and one Gun were assigned to provide route security for a convoy from Phan Rang. The LOH experienced a tail rotor failure but no one was injured. On the 13th, a Gun team expended in support of an ARVN element in contact near Song Mao. After contact was broken, the ground force swept the area, found 1 dead and captured two weapons. Later in the day, A Trp sent some Guns to support the Recon Co of the 44th Regt that was in contact.

November - During this month, C Trp again moved its operations base to Holloway and would stay there for the rest of the year. On the 7th, A Trp was told to move to Pleiku for an undetermined period of time. On the 15th, a suspected NVA Bn base camp west of Phu Nhon was taken under fire by airstrikes, artillery and A Trp's Guns. 23rd ARVN elements were inserted and immediately made contact. At 1100 the observer in an LOH was wounded and evaced to Pleiku. Later in the day, another Scout spotted 10-15 people staying under a tree near some bunkers. Upon further investigation, they had disappeared. The Guns fired up the bunkers with unknown results. On the 22nd, A Trp was told to move back to Phan Rang. On the 19th, A Trp's Scouts fired on two men walking and the Guns also fired with unknown results. The Scouts returned to the same location again that day and received fire. The Guns expended with unknown results.

December - For the first few days, A Trp worked around Phan Rang as an ACT. The rest of the month was spent working the area between Dalat and Bao Loc. With the stand down of the 92nd and the 192nd AHCs, A Trp picked up their gun support and resupply missions. For example, two Guns were sent to Bao Loc for security of the surrounding engineer camps and two to Dong Ba Thin for the security of the Cam Ranh Bay area. VHPA Member Ron Logan describes what was going on with B Trp:

December was a not a good month for being a Scout and especially bad for Scout Pit Ldrs. Mike Trees had been our leader for several months. He got shot down and "shaken up" pretty good, so they made him the Ops Officer. Next a LT Sullivan was the Ldr for a few days until he was evaced after his LOH was destroyed by a tree branch. Then a CPT from C Trp came over as the Ldr for a few days. He too was shot down and evaced with a broken tail bone plus he had a finger shot off. Finally, CPT Mark Finch took over the platoon. Needless to say but the NVA were getting stronger and stronger in the Kontum / Dak To area!! As more and more aviation units stood down things got less and less organized. I certainly believe that about this time the Trp's name was just B/17th Cav. I saw Trp orders cut during this period with just B/17 versus the old name B/7/17.

Year End Summary - The Sqdn HQ and HHT were at Qui Nhon for half the year and at Lane for the rest and basically functioned as a CAB versus an ACS. For most of the year A Trp was assigned to the 10th CAB and cooperated with the program to minimize American losses while supporting the ARVN. They also had the opportunity to move between Phan Rang and Pleiku several times. B Trp was assigned to the 52th CAB, was based at Holloway the entire year, and spent the majority of their time working the familiar AOs in the Dak To / Kontum areas. C Trp spent about three months in MR I supporting Lam Son 719, returned to Lane for two months, was in Kontum for the month of June, with Lane until November when it moved to Holloway again. When C Trp was at Lane, they received their missions from the Sqdn; but when they operated from bases other than Lane they received missions for other headquarters. D Trp was assigned to the 52nd CAB and was used for convoy escort and the security of Holloway.

1972

The primary source materials for this year are: For HHT, a Yearbook titled "71 - 72 Anson, Vietnam" which has ten significant pages. For A Trp, a 15 page 1971 AUHS prepared by 1LT Dan P. Sloha. For B Trp, nothing. For C Trp and H Trp, 10th Cav, a Yearbook titled "1972 Anson" which has ten significant pages. For D Trp, nothing. For the Sqdn, nothing.

**January** - On the 1st, A Trp was reassigned to the Squadron from the 10th CAB and supported the last elements of the 101st Abn Div located at Cam Ranh. Poor weather hampered A Trp's activities from the 4th to the 6th. On the 8th, A Trp was chased from an AO near Bao Loc by high winds and friendly artillery. The C&C was asked to evac two ARVN wounded from a FSB to Phan Rang. For the remainder of the month and for February, A Trp's assignments would change again. The thinning of American forces in MR II, A Trp's resources were deployed on a piece meal basis, making it virtually ineffective as an ACT. For the first half of the month, C Trp was operating from Camp Holloway but about mid-month they returned to Lane. On the 25th, A Trp sent three AH-1Gs and two Hueys to An Khe due to a heavy enemy build-up in the central highlands. At the same time, two LOHs were sent to An Son for convoy cover. On the 29th, an A Trp LOH performing VR for the 101st Abn saw seven enemy near Cam Ranh. The LOH took fire and was hit, but the Guns killed five. On the 30th, A Trp found a small enemy force in the same area as yesterday's action. The Guns fired on this force with unknown results. VHPA Member Billy Miller provides the following comments on life in A Trp during this time.

After the 10th CAB stood down, A Trp reverted back to Sqdn control but really the 17th CAG in Nha Trang was calling the shots. We made several trips to both An Son and Nha Trang to see who we would be working for and to determine what future plans they might have in mind for us. As it turned out for the first couple months we were THE aviation resource for the southern half of MR II. We actually picked up resources from former 10th CAB units as they stood down. I'd guess we got up to about 50 aircraft plus crews which was about double our normal TO&E compliment. About 20 of these were Hueys but we picked up some Cobras too. This information may help explain how we were able to send three or four ships a day to the various Province Senior Advisors, have a Scout and Gun team at Dong Be Thin as a quick reaction - ready reserve, send a couple LOHs to do road recons in the Dalat, Boc Loc, and Song Mao areas, and still conduct relatively normal Air Cavalry operations. It might make reading the Ops reports from that period a little easier to understand. There were rumors that A Trp had 58s instead of OH-6s. This is not true. A Trp had only 6s right up until the end. I must admit that the NVA did not have a major presence in that area and the most of the opposition came from the VC who had been hunted and hurt for a long time. This made our operations less dangerous. We rarely experience large cal AA fire. But, whenever we went back to Pleiku or other northern areas in MR II we quickly changed tactics as we flew against the NVA. As more units stood down, Phan Rang was one of the few places where helicopters could refuel. I know this sounds strange, but the days of going most any place and being able to get fuel were gone. We often called ahead to make certain we could get fuel. Because Phan Rang had fuel, we got lots of visitors. Many of them brought rumors that we would be standing down as well.

**February** - On the 1st, A Trp supported elements from Phan Rang to An Khe. Each day the pilots were forced to become more flexible. They were now doubling as resupply for the 101st as well as base security for Cam Ranh. Two Cobras and two LOHs performed a daily VR of the Cam Ranh area. Each night a Huey Night Hawk patrolled the Cam Ranh perimeter. The LOHs also doubled as VIP couriers. On the 3rd, A Trp began construction of defense bunkers and fighting positions in anticipation of a coming offensive. On the 9th, elements of A Trp at An Khe came under sapper attack during the night. The Guns launched and expended onto the perimeter. Ten enemy were killed and the gunstrike helped the capture of two more. B Trp was still operating out of Holloway. Again Billy Miller provides us with a good insight for this period.

I am not certain when Tet was that year but it was a pivotal date. Many of the military leaders believed there would be a major enemy push before or near Tet that year, so we stayed in the overstrengheted situation I described earlier. But Tet was a non-event that year and I guess that by mid-Feb we started receiving disposition instructions to turn in equipment and to swap or turnover aircraft. I was pretty busy during those days because I was a Cobra IP and was in good demand giving 90 day check-rides. We actually started having problems keeping guys current. At that time we worked under the 179 day rule. If you had been in-country 179 days or more, then that would count as a full tour and you would DEROS with the unit; else you were reassigned to another unit. We started sending people out in February and this made many people very unhappy. MAJ Turecek was a master at organization. He broke the disposition instructions down into a series of tasks then assigned an officer and an NCO to each task. As pilots came of flying status because they were no longer current, they were given these tasks. We got a lot done in a very short period of time. I remember we made lots of trips to III Corps areas to drop off aircraft, equipment and/or people. We had a couple "turn over teams" that included a maintenance officer, a senior crew chief, plus the crew to bring them back. We'd TI the ship before it was sent and fix everything we could. Many of the receiving units were really surprised that we weren't giving them "dogs" but we went to extra effort to give them the best we could.

**March** - C Trp had been told they would be standing down and since late in February they had really ceased operating as an ACT. On a daily basis, they had ships all over MR II in addition to having standing commitments. For example, Rich Sheppard says they had a Scout and two Guns stationed at An Khe for at least a month. They had LOHs flying as VIP ships and Lift ships flying Nighthawk missions around the larger airbases. All this changed near the every end of the month when C Trp was told they would be staying in Vietnam. On the 30th, the general assault called the Easter Offensive officially began up in MR I. In MR II the situation had been getting worse and several ARVN FSBs along Rocket Ridge were already under siege. Neil Sheehan's "A Bright Shining Lie" provides a good overall summary of the Easter Offensive in MR II and often refers to aircraft and tactics that could only be ACTs. There is also a good map in the front of Sheehan's book that shows the line of ARVN FBs that ran in a line basically from Den Het to the river junction west of Kontum. They were in order: FB 6, FB 5, FB Charlie, and FB Delta. Also the town of Tan Canh basically south of Dak To on QL14 and would be the center of lots of activity in the weeks to come. VHPA Member Ron Logan describes this battle:

That day we were working out of Dak To in an area between FB 5 and FB 6. My Scout team was in the staging area while this action was going on. Apparently Finch's team had discovered some bunkers and they decided to insert the ARVN Blues. The ARVN Blue platoon leader at that time was an American advisor, an E7 or E8, Ranger type. He was good and the ARVN performed rather well under his leadership. I understand they were using a single ship LZ. Unfortunately, the American Sergeant was shot in the head and killed almost as he stepped off the first Lift ship. The rest of the insertion was made in rapid order but the leaderless ARVN never got organized and couldn't hold the LZ. The ARVN panicked and Finch tried to secure the LZ with his LOH. By then the NVA had set up an even stronger position and shot Finch down. Later that afternoon we were able to get the Observer, a guy named Black I think, out. He was a very brave man!! He said that Finch received a pretty bad head wound before or during the crash. Both men were able to exit the LOH and for some reason Finch had it in his mind that they needed to get into the trees. Black told him the NVA were in those trees and even tackled him as he starting running in that direction. Nothing, however, would stop him. When he was able to get free of Black, he was last seen making his way into the trees. Black went back to the LOH and grabbed a supply of grenades. The C&C was trying to get the ARVN out and get to the Scout crew as well. It was just too hot. We later learned that the LZ was almost on top of an NVA Bn CP!! Anyway, Black realized that no one could come and get him unless the NVA guns in the bunkers could be silenced. He started at one end and worked down the line of bunkers, dropping grenades into each. After a few minutes, he ran out into the open and a LOH snatched him out. A brave and cool headed man!! The next day, we inserted a large ARVN force into a different LZ and they performed very well. We looked all day for Finch. We found lots of bad guys but we never found him. Years later I learned that he was indeed captured by the NVA, taken to Hanoi and died there. During that day CPT David Keating was flying a LOH with another ROL. They were shot down and one of their WPs blew which burned Dave pretty badly. They were both evaced to the States. I can remember we used to do a lot of BDAs for B52s and airstrikes. The AF were dropping bombs that would spread gas over a wide area and even seep into bunkers, then an igniter would blow the whole thing. Very effective! I remember lots of discussion among the Scouts and worries that our engine exhaust might ignite some unexploded gas. I don't think it ever happened but we were worried about it. I can also remember a few times in late 71 when all three ACTs were operating at Holloway. There was no place to put all the people. People shared tents and bunks, etc. Some of my classmates were in the other troops, so whenever they would move in; we'd just make space for cots and hold small class reunions!

The official MIA records the VHPA Data Base Committee uses provide some more information about CPT Melvin W. Finch. An ARVN soldier captured by the NVA was being moved north at the same time as Finch and reported that he died of dysentery on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. His remains were returned to America in 1985.

Again we hear from Billy Miller for A Trp: Very early in March or maybe the end of Feb, A Trp received word that maybe we wouldn't be standing down after all. The increased enemy activity leading up to the Easter Offensive had some people worried. After a day or so, MAJ Turecek flew to Long Binh to "talk to the boss" (he and the CO of the 1st Avn Bde were very good friends). This didn't make the 17th CAG folks too happy. Basically, he wanted to make certain that if A Trp was going to stay, then someone with some serious authority had been see to it that we get our equipment and people back. As it turned out, went he talked to the staff at Long Binh they reasoned that we were already too far down the path toward standing down to reverse the process, so he came back with a copy of the General Order sending us out of the country not later than 18 Mar. From that point on we really had to hustle. It was about this same time (end of Feb or very early in March) that a party from B Trp visited us. They had heard that we seemed to be pretty well organized for standing down and wanted to see if they could learn from us. As I recall, they stayed a day or so, took lots of notes and returned to Pleiku to start standing down themselves. I'd guess they were about 3 weeks behind us in the schedule and were just starting to turn in equipment. It is also my recollection that before the 10th of March, someone put a stop to B Trp standing down because of the enemy build up for the Easter Offensive. In short order, B Trp got all the equipment

and people back. Anyway, by the 8th we were down to just a couple of ships to haul supplies around and these were being manned by crews from other units that would take them from us. We had turned in about four Cobras and just a few LOHs and Hueys, less than half our authorized TO&E for shipment back to the States. We knew we'd never see those aircraft again as the procedure called from them to be sent to Corpus Christy to be rebuilt. A Trp's Colors, some equipment, and just a few people were sent to Ft. Hood. About 50% of our TO&E equipment, mostly maintenance stuff, was sent to Ft. Bragg. I believe 17 Os and 35 EM reported to Cam Rang and we were out of there on the 15th heading for Bragg as well. The Army had plans to convert the 1/17th CAV into an ACS. This is a story and a half by itself. Many a former 7/17er (Dick Marshall, Bob Hefford, Lou Hennies, myself) would command this Sqdn and many more served in it. When MAJ Turecek arrived at Bragg after his leave, there was a small detachment there with B Models armed with SS-11s, the old pre-TOW French made anti-tank missile. He had an interview with the senior Aviation officer there and either volunteered or was volunteered to take this detachment back to Vietnam to serve as a SS-11 NETT. So he went back for 6 weeks TDY while the rest of us formed D Trp (Prov) 1/17th CAV. He was an Infantry officer and when we returned from TDY we had to get him to branch transfer to Armor so we could keep D Trp alive. Oh, the joys of the peace time Army!! As a final note concerning A Trp and to make certain the record is straight, I joined them on July 4, 1971. From that time until we stood down, no one was killed in the Troop. Now during this time we reassigned guys to other units and they died there, but no one died in A Trp during those nine months.

**April** - Early in the month, C Trp moved its operational base from Lane to the old medevac barracks at Camp Holloway and began working the area around Ben Het and Dak To because of the NVA build-up in the area. They knew the move was temporary, so they left their admin and maintenance support at Lane. All scheduled or heavy maintenance was done at Lane; but if they needed something in a hurry they worked with B Trp at Camp Holloway. On the 3rd, C Trp helped defeat the NVA force that had overrun part of FB Delta. On the 18th, the Squadron Headquarters, HHT and A Trp officially stood down and departed Vietnam. A Trp, as mentioned earlier, actually left on the March 15th. B Trp was redesignated H Trp 17 Cav. On the 19th, the ARVN abandoned Hoai An, a district headquarters on QL506 south of Bong Son, very hastily and left the American advisors to their own fate. Sheehan's book contains a glowing account of how LTC Jack Anderson, still flying the Ruthless 6 C&C with 50 cal doorguns, rescued the advisors as the doorgunners killed NVA on 25 yards from the ship. The problem began on the 9th when the NVA finally took LZ Pony (famous from the 1st Cav days) and the ARVN kept falling back to Hoai An. By the end of the month the whole of northern Binh Dinh Province, including LZ English, fell to the NVA. On the 19th, C Trp was sent southwest of Pleiku to work around a FB that had been mortared pretty bad for the last few nights. The Scouts hadn't been on the VR longer than 30 seconds when the Scout Platoon Ldr started yelling: "We've got people down here ... taking fire". The LOH was shot down and started to burn. CW2 Steward was the wing and hovered over the wreck doing 360s to keep the flames down so the crew could get out. He hung in there and hung in there; but CPT Thomas S. Powell died in the LOH. On the 30th, C Trp was officially redesignated H Trp 10 Cav. VHPA Member Sidney Lyons, the last C Trp Cmdr and the only CO H/10 would know in Vietnam, recalls:

For a time during the month, C Trp had been known as Air Cav Troop II, MR II but we were finally named H/10th Cav. To many guys, however, it was still Charlie Troop. Even though we were one of the last aviation units to leave Vietnam, he continued to function as an ACT until the very end. We "lost" our ARP due to a moratorium about putting the Blues on the ground. Basically, they could only be inserted to help rescue a downed crew. They were bored out of their minds and were sadly misused by our higher. When we did need them and used them I was lucky to get two squads assembled. Sometimes we would use them to protect an LZ while we inserted a larger ARVN force just to keep them trained. Basically we supported two organizations; the 9th ARVN Div from north of Anson all the way to LZ English and the American Consulate in Qui Nhon which was basically the CIA. They had a number of mercenary forces that use to operate all over MR II and across the fence. At first we only inserted them and let them walk out. They were oriental, mostly Chinese, dressed like VC and NVA and carried their weapons. It took us a long time to work up the courage to land in a PZ and let those sort of folk come running at you and climb in your ship!! We had a good relationship with the CIA folk - they really liked us and did us lots of favors.

**May** - We have very little in the way of official historical information for this month. Luckily we have VHPA Member Rick Sheppard who remembers:

I can remember flying Gun cover for the B Model TOW ships. They had six missiles on a side and had to fly a pretty steady line toward the target. We took a lot of hits while covering those guys; they were so slow. They shot a lot of tanks. Some were US made that the ARVN had abandoned, some were NVA that were not fully functional, and some were very operational and did everything they could to avoid these ships. At one point the NVA had set up a 51 cal in a tower and nothing could take it out. A TOW ship came in on almost a flat approach and blew it away. That was a thing of beauty!! Let me tell you a little about the two guys that were killed about this time. Daryl was an Infantry type and for 30 to 60 days had been on one of the FBs on Rocket Ridge they were that short of American advisors. He had returned to the Trp, gotten checked out again and was flying as a Scout again. Wilcoxson had previously flown in the Lift for about 8 months and had volunteered for the Scouts because he felt "he was not contributing enough". On the 25th, 1LT Daryl R. Kunzler was the pilot of an H/10 LOH and 1LT Robert F. Wilcoxson was the observer on a mission south of Kontum. They reported NVA troops and volunteered to make a second pass. They were shot down and both died.

**June** - On the 2nd, H/10 was working at the Rockpile by QL14 south of Kontum. VHPA Member Rick Sheppard remembers:

A 57th AHC Cobra went down and was burning. One of the main blades had cut into the pilot's compartment and was trapping the pilot. CPT Suttle, H Trp's XO at the time, was flying C&C and was on short final to land and help rescue the Cougar crew. The ship started taking 51 cal fire and CPT Frederick N. Suttle, Jr. was hit and died of these wounds.

**July** - On the 26th, while working the LZ Crystal and Tam Quan area an H/10 Cobra crashed and burned. WO1 Harold McCaslin, Jr. died of a broken neck in this crash. Larry Richards was also a pilot in this aircraft. He tried to get out of the wreck but fell back into the burning ship. The C&C landed, the EM got out to try to help and the pilots hovered the Huey over the burning Snake to try to control the flames. They were able to get Larry out but he was badly burned.

**August** - Need lots of help here!!

**September** - Need lots of help here!!

**October** - Need lots of help here!!

**November** - Need lots of help here!!

**December** - Need lots of help here!!

**Year End Summary** - After four and a half years, the Sqdn officially left Vietnam and was stationed back to Ft. Knox. The HQ and HHT personnel had been functioning like an Aviation Battalion or even a Group than an ACS during its last few months in Vietnam. A Trp stood down with most of its personnel going to Ft. Bragg and some of its equipment going with the colors to Ft. Hood. B and C Trps remained in Vietnam but had their names changed.

## 1973

The primary source materials for this year are: For H Troop, 10th Cav, a Yearbook titled "1972 Anson" which has ten significant pages. For H Troop, 17th Cav, nothing.

**January** - During the last few weeks, H/10 split its operation by sending about two thirds of the Trp to Xuan Loc. This was during the "landgrab" or "war of the flags" period when both sides attempted to occupy as much territory as possible in anticipation of the Cease Fire being signed. H Trp helped keep this area in ARVN hands as the NVA attempted to seize it.

**February** - On the 26th, both H Trps stood down and departed Vietnam. Several of their pilots went on to fly for the Joint Military Commission (JMC) for the next couple months until all American troops were withdrawn.

### A salute to the 7/17th Cav

There are many reasons why I set out to present the history of one Air Cavalry Squadron from its deployment to its departure from Vietnam. First, I believe that collecting and publishing the histories of Vietnam Era aviation units is something that the VHPA can do second to none. I hope this history of the 7/17th illustrates that point! Second, previous VHPA Directories included the history of Army aviations companies and Marines squadrons for selected periods of time. It seemed logical that we should try a larger unit for the entire time it was in Vietnam. Like most VHPAers, I was proud of the units I served with in Vietnam. So the third reason is that I wanted to see the history of my Squadron recorded somewhere for anyone and everyone to read. The sad part is that, no story is ever COMPLETE. Every time I call another 7/17er, I learned something new. I am well aware that

there are many, many untold stories still "locked in people's heads"; but at least I took the time and made the effort to record a few of them! Please see the References and Credits page for a complete list of contributors. All corrections, additions, deletions, comments, etc. should be sent to VHPA Headquarters or directly to Mike Law or Bill Greenhalgh.

Respectfully presented to the VHPA by Mike Law.

## 7/17 Cavalry Honor Roll

What follows is the roster of all those who died in Vietnam while serving in the 7/17 Cav.

Unit	Name	Rank	Platoon	Date	Status	Unit	Name	Rank	Platoon	Date	Status
A	Andersen, Curtis L.	WO1	Scout	13SEP68		C	Newton, Warren E.	SP4	Gun	9JAN68	BNR
A	Beaver, John D.	PFC	Inf	8MAR68		A	O'Donnell, John	SGT	Scout	12JUN68	
C	Borr, Jeffrey	WO1	Scout	9SEP69		C	Petteys, James B.	WO1	Gun	15JAN69	
A	Bruce, Robert G.	WO1	Scout	20MAY71		B	Phillips, David J.	SGT	Scout	8MAR69	
A	Bryant, John D.	WO1	Scout	8DEC70		C	Phipps, James L.	WO1	Gun	9JAN68	BNR
B	Carpenter, Walter A.	WO1	Scout	8MAR69		C	Pilk, Robert H.	SFC	Scout	19JUN70	
C	Cox, Sterling E.	1LT	Gun	15JAN69		C	Powell, Thomas S.	CPT	Scout	19APR72	
A	Craig, James H.	SP5		23MAY70		A	Pulish, Dale S.	SP4	Scout	20FEB68	
B	Crouse, Edgar F. Jr.	WO1	Scout	20JUL70		B	Rabren, Larry W.	WO	Scout	30APR70	
B	Dance, Robert L.	1LT	Scout	8AUG69		C	Ramos, Ranier S.	WO1	Gun	9JAN68	BNR
C	Denney, Terry L.	WO1	Scout	9SEP69		A	Robinson, Gus	CPT	Scout	12APR70	
C	Dewey, Danny L.	WO1		5JUN70		A	Schultz, Ronnie B.	SP4		29FEB68	
C	Dickus, Michael J.	WO1	Scout	18JUL70		A	Scott, Herbert W.	WO1	Scout	12JUN68	
B	Dugan, Edward M.	SP5	Scout	3JUN70		C	Sechrist, Fred J.	PFC	Gun	9JAN68	
B	Evans, Ronald L.	CW2		29APR71		D	Smith, Charles E.	SSG	Inf	7JUL69	
B	Everts, Jack C.	SP5	Scout	30APR70		A	Smith, Gregory A.	WO1	Scout	20MAY71	
C	Exner, Fred A. III	WO1	Scout	20NOV69		H/10	Suttle, Frederick N. Jr.	CPT	C&C	2JUL72	
B	Finch, Melvin W.	CPT	Scout	30MAR72	MK	A	Tameyozza, Noe	SP4	Scout	2NOV68	
C	Flurry, James D.	1LT	Scout	5FEB69		A	Turley, Richard L.	SSG	Scout	25APR69	
C	Garrett, Alonzo	SP4	Scout	11APR70		A	Turner, John M.	WO1	Scout	26MAR69	
B	Grega, George W.	CW2	Scout	2NOV69		A	Wagner, Marvin L.	CW2	Scout	21JUL70	
B	Green, Stanley	SGT	Scout	21NOV68		A	Walter, Douglas A.	CW2	Scout	18MAY68	
A	Jackson, Herman H.	SGT	Scout	3MAY68		A	Wallace, Lanny J.	1LT	Scout	21JUL70	
A	Jacobs, Thomas C.	WO1	Scout	13SEP68		B	Webb, Earl R. Jr.	SP4		3JUN70	
C	?Johnson, Edward A.	SP4	C&C	25FEB71		B	Webb, Mark J.	WO1	Scout	20JUL70	
D	Johnson, Paul E.	PFC	Inf	7JUL69		B	Welding, Clifford K.	1LT	Scout	21NOV68	
A	Kacsock, Walter J.	SP4	Scout	21JUL70		D	West, James L.	SP4	Inf	20FEB68	
B	Koeppen, Eric R.	WO1	Gun	11JUL68		B	Westra, Leroy J.	WO1		25MAY71	
H/10	Kunzler, Daryl R.	WO1	Scout	25MAY72		H/10	Wilcoxson, Robert F.	WO1	Scout	25MAY72	
C	Lancaster, David C.	WO1	Gun	21MAY71		A	Willis, Joseph F.	1LT	Scout	26MAR69	
C	Langhorn, Garfield	PFC	Inf	15JAN69		A	Woodruff, Alton D.	SSG	Scout	25APR69	
C	Low, James B.	WO1	Gun	3APR71		A	Wright, Philip G.	WO1	Scout	21JUL70	
A	Mallette, Avon N.	WO	Scout	19DEC70		D	Young, Colon D.	SP4	Inf	7JUL69	
C	Manthel, James W.	WO1	Gun	21MAR71		?	1st KIA	EM	Inf	?NOV67	
C	Mastyn, Edward J.	SP4	Inf	27OCT68		A	?, ?	EM	Scout	15APR70	
B	Mathis, Samuel J.	WO1	?	8AUG69		A	?, ?	EM	Scout	8MAY70	
H/10	McCaslin, Harold Jr.	WO1	Gun	26JUL72		A	?, ?	EM	Scout	19NOV70	
A	McCloyn, Joseph	SP5	Scout	24FEB68		C	Skinny New Guy	EM	?	2?FEB71	
B	McKibben, Ray	SGT	Inf	6DEC68							
C	Moden, Richard S.	SP4		16MAY70							

### Abbreviations used in this narrative:

AA	Anti-Aircraft	ATT	Advanced Tactical Training	Cmdr	Commander
ABN	Airborne	AUH	Annual Unit History	CO	Company
AC	Aircraft Commander	AUHS	Annual Unit History Supplement	CONARC	Continental Army Command
ACR	Armored Cavalry Regiment	AVN	Aviation	CONUS	Continental United States
ACS	Air Cavalry Squadron	AW	Aerial Weapons	CP	Command Post
ACT	Air Cavalry Troop	AWC	Aerial Weapons Company	CRID	ROK Capital Infantry Division
AH	Attack Helicopter	BDA	Damage Assessment	CS	Composite Service (a/cav clas)
AHC	Assault Helicopter Company	BDE	Brigade	CSAB	Combat Support Aviation Battalion
AHP	Army Helicopter	Bn	Battalion	DA	Department of the Army
AIT	Advanced Individual Training	Bt	Battery	DEROS	Date Eligible for Return from Overseas
AM	Aluminum Matting	C&C	Command and Control	Det	Detachment
AO	Area of Operations	CAB	Combat Aviation Battalion	Div	Division
ARP	Aerial Rifle Platoon	CAG	Combat Aviation Group	EM	Enlisted Men
ARST	Aerial Reconnaissance and Security Troop	CARS	Combat Arms Regimental System	ENG	Engineer
ARTY	Artillery	CAV	Cavalry	E&E	Escape and Evade
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam	CDO	Combat Developments Office	FB	Fire Base
ASHC	Assault Support Helicopter Company	CG	Commanding General	FM	Frequency Modulated
AAP	Asphalt Aluminum Plank	CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group	FNG	Fu__ing New Guy

FSB	Fire Support Base	Ops	Operations	SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
H&I	Harassment and Interdiction	OR-LL	Operations Report - Lessons Learned	SP	Self Propelled
HHT	Headquarters and Headquarters Troop	POL	Petroleum Oil and Lubricants	Sqdn	Squadron
HQ	Headquarters	POW	Prisoner of War	STZ	Special Tactical Zone
IFR	Instrument Flight Rules	PROV	Provisional	SVAF	South Vietnamese Air Force
INF	Infantry	PSP	Pierced Steel Plank	TAC	Tactical Air Control
IP	Instructor Pilot	PZ	Pickup Zone	TC	Transportation Corps
LOH	Light Observation Helicopter	Regt	Regiment	TDY	Temporary Duty
LRRP	Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol	Reg	Regiment	TF	Task Force
LZ	Landing Zone	RLO	Real Live Officer	TOC	Tactical Operations Center
MPC	Military Paper Currency(?)	ROAD	Reorganized Army Division	TO&E	Table of Organization and Equipment
MED	Medical	ROK	Republic of Korea	TOE	Same as TO&E
MI	Military Intelligence	RON	Remain over night	Trp	Troop
MIA	Missing In Action	RR	Recoilless Rifle	UH	Utility Helicopter
NETT	New Equipment Training Team	RTO	Radio Telephone Operator	USAF	United States Air Force
NVA	North Vietnamese Army	S-1	Sqdn or Bn Personnel Officer	VC	Vietnamese Communist
OBS	Observation	S-2	Sqdn or Bn Intelligence Officer	VHF	Very High Frequency
O Club	Officers' Club	S-3	Sqdn or Bn Operations Officer	VR	Visual Reconnaissance
OD	olive drab	S-4	Sqdn or Bn Logcial Officer	WABTOC	When Authorized By Theater of Operations Commander
OH	Observation Helicopter	S-5	Sqdn or Bn Civil Affairs Officer	WP	White Phosphorus
OJT	On the job training	SA	Small Arms	XM	Experimental
OP	Observation Post	SF	Special Forces	XO	Executive Officer



"... WHEN WE BREAK OUT ... YOU'LL SEE ... WHAM !  
RIGHT ON TARGET !!! "

# The History of the 7th Armored Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry

The reader is encouraged to review the list of abbreviations as well as the list of References and Credits presented at the end of this narrative. In connection with this narrative, the reader can benefit by using the two page chronology, the list of awards and citations, the leadership roster, the Honor Roll of all the KIA/MIA, the illustrations of the base camp and the alphabetic roster of every pilot known to have served in the 7/17th Cav.

## Background Information - The Lineage of Air Cavalry

The legacy of the Air Cavalry concept is available from several sources. Lawrence "Hank" Johnson's "Winged Sabers" contains a very concise rendition, so we will quote liberally from it for the benefit of those that have not yet had the pleasure of reading this fine book.

Led by vertical envelopment proponents such as LTG James M. Gavin, World War II commander of the 82nd Abn Div, the army continued to experiment with refinements to the concept. During 1955-56 tests were conducted with an experimental unit known as "Sky Cav". This unit combined light tanks, reinforced infantry, and helicopters in function as a cohesive, three-dimensional unit. The test results proved less effective than the army had hoped, but in 1956 each of two airborne divisions was authorized an airborne reconnaissance troop (Sky Cav). With the advent of the Combat Arms Regimental System (CARS) in 1957, these embryonic air cavalry units were designated A Troop (Reconnaissance) (Aviation), 17th Cavalry, 82nd Abn Div; and B Troop (Reconnaissance) (Aviation), 17th Cavalry, 101st Abn Div. The term "Sky Cav" was nebulous with no standardized Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E). On 26 Feb 1957, the Sky Cavalry Platoon (Provisional) was activated at Ft. Rucker. Its stated mission was to function as a test vehicle for the development of aerial reconnaissance concepts and systems for the army.

Far from the glory of prestigious line units, in an obscure "think tank" at Ft. Rucker, a group of incredibly far-sighted "madmen" were at work. Assigned to the Army Aviation Center's Combat Developments Office (CDO) in the late 1950s, the group labored intensively to develop an armed helicopter strike force within the army. With outstanding leadership from COL Jay D. Vanderpool, and later from COL Delk M. Oden, "Vanderpool's Fools" of CDO fought a tough, uphill battle. Utilizing the assets and experience of the Sky Cavalry Platoon (Prov.), the 7292nd Aerial Combat Reconnaissance Company was formed at Tiger Port, Ft. Rucker, on 24 Mar 1958. Referred to as "the ACT Company", the unit was intended to serve as a test bed for all CDO concepts. Through both continued experimentation and the influence of former cavalry officers at CDO, the unit would evolve in structure and would come to resemble the highly successful armored reconnaissance troop of World War II. It contained aero-weapons, aero-scouts, and airmobile infantry, all combined to form a heliborne strike force. Its resemblance to the future air cavalry troop was more than coincidence.

In 1959 the Continental Army Command (CONARC) directed the Armor and Aviation Schools to develop the mission statement and TO&E for an Aerial Reconnaissance and Security Troop (ARST). The first ARST was activated at Ft. Rucker, on 24 Sep 1962, using the assets and expertise of the 8305th ACR, formerly the 7292nd ACR. This ARST was designated D Trp (Air), 17th Cav, and would further be redesignated B Trp 3/17th Cav on 7 Feb 1963. As part of an army-wide move to update tactical effectiveness, the Reorganization Objective Army Division (ROAD) program was initiated in 1962. A major provision of ROAD was to authorize an air cavalry troop (ACT) in each division's armored cavalry squadron. Unfortunately, time has blurred which unit was the first air cavalry troop. Some sources credit the ACR/ARST, others D Trp (Air), 4th Sqdn, 12th Cav at Ft. Carson, and others D Trp (Air), 2nd Sqdn, 15th Cav which was part of the 4th Armored Div in Germany. For the first time in its history, the army possessed a self-contained airmobile combined arms strike force. From its inception, the ACT was designed to be the only combat aviation unit tailored specifically for aggressive, offensive tactical operations. There was no doubt in the minds of Vanderpool's Fools that they had created the most tactically innovative and efficient organization to appear on the battlefield in decades.

Concurrent with the developments occurring at Ft. Rucker, a select group of officers with expertise in airmobile concepts was convened in 1962. Though formally designated the Army Tactical Mobility Requirements Board, it soon came to be known as the Howze Board, after its chairman, GEN Hamilton H. Howze. Perhaps the most significant contribution of the Howze Board was the recommendation that the army field a "test" airmobile division, and that a sub-element of that organization be an air cavalry squadron (ACS). On 19 Mar 1964, 3rd Sqdn, 17th Air Cav was activated at Ft. Benning, as a portion of the incremental build-up of the 11th Air Assault Div. On 3 Jul 1965, the 11th Air Assault was redesignated the 1st Cavalry Div, and the 3/17th Cav became the 1/9th Cav.

## Background Information - Air Cavalry in Vietnam

The first ACS to deploy to Vietnam was, of course, the 1/9th Cav with the 1st Cav Div in Sep, 1965. The first divisional ACT to deploy was D/1/4 Cav with the 1st Inf Div in Oct, 1965. Their experiences and combat contributions in Vietnam during 1965 and 1966 are part of "air cavalry sacred scripture". Their successes led the army to authorize more ACSs. In Nov, 1966, the 3/17 and the 7/17 ACSs were activated at Ft. Knox. In the Spring of 1967, the 7/1 ACS was activated at Ft. Knox. During the transformation of the 101st Airborne Div to an airmobile division, the 2/17 was converted to an ACS. Each of the 28 ACTs and 5 ACSs that served in Vietnam added honorable and glorious chapters to air cavalry history. It is no coincidence that seven ACTs were the last U.S. combat elements to depart Vietnam on 26 Feb 1973.

1966

## Activation

Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 7th Armored Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry was activated on 25 Nov by General Order 249, Headquarters, US Army Armor Center, Ft Knox, KY dated 25 Nov 1966 under TOE 17-9 Oct. The photo shows LTC Lawrence H. Johnson, Jr., received the squadron's colors from MG A.D. Surles, Jr., then CG of the US Army Armor Center. Godman Army Air Field at Ft. Knox would be "home" for both the 3/17 and the 7/17 for the next nine months. Retired COL and VHPA Member "Pete" Johnson provides some extra details.

Armor Branch knew they were going to activate the two squadrons so they began positioning critical personnel and equipment at Ft. Knox during the Fall. I arrived in October and by late November it was getting cold and there were too many leaves covering the golf course; so we had to go to work. Most of the Hueys were already at Godman. At that time Ft. Knox was still "locked in the CONUS mentality" but we were a combat unit most likely destined for Vietnam so I wanted to be different. We started wearing subdued insignia and name tags. I wanted a unit patch that would help build esprit de corps like the units in Vietnam.



The 7/17th Cav is reactivated



LTC Johnson's son, Hank Johnson, (mentioned above as the author of "Winged Sabers"), designed the Ruthless Riders patch. LTC Johnson liked the 17th Cavalry crest and wanted the 7/17 patch to show a clear relationship. Hank drew several variations and LTC Johnson submitted the one he liked to various patch makers. The spur centered in the patch was taken from the 17th Cavalry crest and represents the horse cavalry heritage as well the concept of flying cavalry because the 17th Cav crest also has wings. The superimposed lightning bolt came from the Ft. Knox armored triangle patch and symbolized the speed, power, and strength that air and ground vehicles give to the modern cavalry. The flasher with the words RUTHLESS RIDERS appears beneath the circular patch. LTC Johnson believed that RUTHLESS RIDERS was a fitting handle for a unit that was going to kick butt. The history of the patch and how the 7/17th used it is also interesting. Initially it was only available on OD cloth with black lines and letters. When painted on aircraft, it was called the "electric horseshoe" with a white or silver spur and a yellow lightning bolt on a black background. Hank prepared the master stencil and still maintains that it should be the "electric spur". The "electric horseshoe" stayed on the nose for some years but photos from the 1970-1971 period show the 7 and 17 numerals on the large crossed sabers (made popular by the 1 Cav folks) on the nose of the Hueys and LOHs and on the front of the doghouse on the Cobras. About that same time a colored patch was made in Vietnam as well as those metal "beer can" crests that people liked to wear. Anyway, if you want to get into this subject more, contact Hank - he loves it and can go on for hours.

## 1967

The primary source materials for this year are: For HHT, the 14 page initial Annual Unit History (AUH) prepared by CPT Michael G. Law. For A Trp, the 18 page AUH prepared by 1LT Robert J. Gibson. For B Trp, the 31 page AUH prepared by 1LT Richard L. Montgomery. For C Trp three documents: the 12 page AUNS prepared by CPT Cornelius C. Holcomb, Jr., a single page history submitted as part of the 14th CAB's Yearbook, and the 21 page 1967-1968 1/1st Cav yearbook. For D Trp, the 18 page AUH prepared by LT Brack Jones, Jr. For the Sqdn, nothing.

### Deployment Preparations

February - The sqdn's line troops were all officially activated on 4 Feb though they physically existed prior to that. Prior to this date, HHT carried everyone in the sqdn on its morning reports and other administrative documents. Each of the five troop AUHs for the pre-deployment period contains various details about the building refurbishment they had to do at Ft. Knox, the equipment they received almost on a daily basis, the groups of Warrant Officer flight class and various enlisted class graduates they received, etc., etc. Richard Montgomery, who prepared B Troop's initial unit history, provided over ten pages detailing the training activities. What follows is an attempt to summarize the hard work and long hours expended during this period.

The S-3 organized the Squadron Master Training Schedule as personnel from the various schools began to arrive. The four letter Troops were assigned areas of responsibility and appointed committees to develop the training lessons. For example, A Trp was responsible for all scout personnel, B Trp for repelling techniques, and D Trp for infantry and rifle platoons. The scout training, conducted from 13 Mar to 6 May, included extensive map reading, types of reconnaissance, observer and gunner training, pilot qualifications and standardization in the OH-6A, XM-27 weapons system familiarization, etc. Not only did each individual need refresher and specialized skill training, but also squads, crews, and teams had to be trained as units. Then SOPs were written, practiced, debugged and learned. Platoon IPs and ACs were selected and trained. There were several "horror stories" from this period; like weapons systems issued with missing components, the non-availability of OH-6As, last minute qualifications for the M-5 grenade launcher, not enough support of some types of training, not enough time for the Troops to conduct advanced unit training, etc. A good example was the "long round" problem. The XM-21 systems for the UH-1Cs were plagued with excessive stoppages. Repeated "communications" with the Army Weapons Command resulted in having two DA civilians spend some time at Ft. Knox. The team discovered that many of the problems were due to a poorly designed ammunition box adapter and the misalignment of ammunition trays and crossover drives. A field modification was developed and the Ft. Knox machine-shop provided the equipment that solved this problem. The histories contain many "bright spots" which illustrates the resourcefulness and determination of these men. Examples are: the use of training facilities outside of Ft. Knox such as Camp Atterbury, IN and the Mountain Ranger Camp at Dahlonega, GA; insuring maintenance personnel were enrolled in many specialty courses, using Charlie Models to train Scouts until enough OH-6As arrived, putting observers on any aircraft that was going anywhere just so they could gain the experience, etc.

June - The individual Troops emphasized field training exercises in the Green River area.

VHPA Member Randy Bresnik provides: Early in January, Bob Young, Jim Jackson, and I went to Rucker and became the Sqdn's first LOH IPs. I really enjoyed that aircraft and being an IP! In fact, my last three months in Vietnam I was sent TDY from the Sqdn to the OH-6A NETT in Vung Tau. But in those early days, I worked in the S-3 shop as the Assistant S-3 until MAJ Hefford took that slot, then I was a Liaison Officer. Besides working on the Master Training Schedule, I had the responsibility to go to areas of land that the local farmers had registered in the soil bank. Assigned with me was a fine civilian from the Army Corps of Engineers to handle the necessary paperwork and between the two of us, we managed to obtain approximately 5,000 acres of unused farm fields and wooded areas, very willingly, for the training of the "boys goin' to Vietnam". These six to eight sites were used by our helicopters as landing and field training areas. By the time we were through with this task, I could talk about how poor the strawberries were doing this year because of the abundance of rain, how Uncle Luke's lumbago has been giving him fits for months, and a myriad of other important topics. It was a very heartwarming experience to find the "Quiet Majority" willing to do most anything for the men going to war.

July - Advanced sqdn level training began with road and air movement to Camp Dawson, WV. During the last half of July the emphasis was on weapons qualifications. For example, XM-27 qualifications at Wilcox Lake Range 13 - 19 Jul. The Infantry qualified in their primary weapons plus an alternate.

August - Sqdn level ATTs were conducted in the Green River area near Campbellsville, KY. Personnel from the forming 7/1st Cav served as aggressors. The tests were administered by the US Army Aviation Group (PROV) at Ft. Knox. There was also an Air Cavalry demonstration to the US Military Academy corps. About mid-month the equipment started moving to Mobile, AL for ship loading. On the 28th the 87 organic sqdn aircraft departed Ft. Knox for Sharp Army Depot in Lathrop, CA. While the aircraft were being prepared for overseas shipment, the soldiers took personal leave.

October - On the 9th the sqdn's main body was airlifted from Standford Field, Louisville, KY to Oakland Army Terminal, Oakland, CA.

VHCMC Member Don Oliver provides some interesting details. I completed turbine helicopter mechanic school at Ft. Eustis during July and was assigned to B Trp just a few weeks prior to the Sqdn ATT in early August. While at Ft. Eustis I was told that I would spend at least several months in a maintenance facility before I had even a chance to join a flight crew; on arrival at Ft. Know I was promptly assigned to a new UH-1H as the crewchief! To this day I am mildly surprised that I didn't kill myself or someone else while acquiring my "OJT" with the Bravo Trp Blues!! But what I have to say about our airlift to California might be interesting. What really happened was that we loaded onto contract air carriers, flying 707s, at Louisville airport with full webgear, packs and weapons. When we got off our airplane at San Francisco International, you guessed it, we were at the wrong end of the terminal from where our busses waited to take us to the ship. The obvious answer - march the troops to the busses. I will never forget the spectacle of several hundred combat troops marching down the main concourse of SFO in a column of fours!! Remember that the "Summer of Love" was in full swing there. The place was packed with hippies, earth mothers, flower children and acid rockers, all of whom flat panicked. They thought someone had flipped out and declared martial law. We saw several break for the bathrooms to flush their dope or just make for the nearest exit as fast as they could. We tried to tell them to relax because we were just passing through, but nobody listened to us. Even the regular citizens and business passengers seemed pretty blown away by this sight.

On the 10th they boarded the USNS General Nelson M. Walker and departed for Vietnam. On the 27th the Sqdn came ashore at Qui Nhon, RVN and was trucked to Camp Enari, near Pleiku. It was assigned to the 17th CAG of the 1st Avn Bde and attached to the 4th Infantry Div based at Camp Enari. Almost to the man anyone that went over with the Sqdn will gladly tell you at least two "war stories"; so we will let VHCMC Member Don Williams tell them for everyone:

There were about 5,000 guys on the Walker and early in the voyage they had us turn in all our American money for MPC script. Well most everyone I knew kept a \$20 bill or something back. The boat was not scheduled to stop enroute but broke a shaft or something and needed to put into Subic Bay. We got the word that there wouldn't be anyone allowed ashore but finally in the late afternoon we were told we could leave at 1800 and had to return at 2400. Needless to say but there was a mad rush to the bars and everyone "found" some American money to spend. The object of the game seemed to be to drink as much as you could as quickly as you could. The poor O Club took a serious hit that night. It wasn't long before guys were dancing on top of the piano and when its legs broke, breaking other things seemed to be the next logic step. Furniture ended up through the windows and into the pool. They had several one armed bandits and guys were playing them. If the machine didn't work "correctly" after a coin was inserted, it was taken off the wall and deposited someplace. Anyway, it seems that the base commander's cap was on the top rack and someone in C Trp decided "we needed it" as a memento of the "battle of Subic Bay". The next morning there were several reasons why the boat wasn't allowed to sail. It seems there was at least one good hearted Navy guy that trying to join the Army ... at least he was sleeping it off with lots of his drinking buddies. The Sqdn's XO was the senior officer on the boat so he was the lucky guy to receive the "good news" from the Navy guys. Then the word went down that either we gave the hat back or paid for it or else. Jack Burden, the Gun Plat Ldr, heard this and "figured" his people probably had the hat; so he wrote a \$45 check and the Admiral's hat became a C Trp treasure. The second story is not so parochial to C Trp but can heard from most anyone that deployed with the Sqdn. It relates to the trip from Qui Nhon to Enari. The main body was loaded into trucks with their personal gear and weapons and convoyed over the Mang Yang Pass to Pleiku. Everyone had heard all the stories about the 1st Cav and the famous ambush of the French Mobile Group 100. Being aviators, they really didn't trust trucks. To top everything off, they were not given any ammo. Luckily the bad guys didn't take advantage of this because even a rather small force could have had themselves an entire ACS that day!

## First Base Camp

Upon arrival the 7/17th was housed in WABTOCs tents in the northeast corner of the Camp Enari base camp. The 4th Div Engineers had built a new perimeter road about 150 meters east of the former line and along the entire east end of Enari. They assigned the Sqdn this "large track of mud" laid out for a billeting area and motor park as well as the Ruthless Heliport for aircraft parking and maintenance areas. For the next several weeks everyone helped build the new camp while conducting in-country training and setting up shop. The tents were wired for electricity and priority given to building a mess hall, latrines, and showers. As most everyone can remember, we were always building something and nothing was ever finished in Vietnam. The camp diagrams at the end of this history was included in the HHT unit history for the period ending 1968 and may help us remember the relative position of some of the places we helped build, where we lived or worked.

VHPA Member Al Iller remembers: I joined the 7/17th in late Jan from Ft. Rucker and commanded B Trp from the time it was formed. I really loved B Trp and the men who served in it. I took considerable joy in the fact that it matured into a top notch ACT. Not only did we start with brand new flight officers but I remember all our Infantry people were right out of AIT except for PSG Crites. In fact, we had to get special DA authorization to make SGT E-5 squad leaders because there were no other EM in these units. Three B Trp senior officers (Doty, Earwood, and Longhofer) would serve as Trp Cmdrs which says something about how we'd progressed. I'd say I had a good relationship with LTC 'Pete' Johnson but he really shocked me one day in mid-Dec. B Trp had only been conducting its own combat operations for five weeks or so and I really enjoyed leading and experiencing those operations. Anyway, one evening he came into my office and said: "You're relieved of your command!" Well for a career soldier and because I couldn't think of anything I'd done, or hadn't done, to hear those words was really terrible! He smiled and said that he was "kicking me upstairs"; so that's how I got the job as Sqdn XO. There was a rather sad note to this. I replaced Owen Haxton who was a fine TC officer but 'Pete' wanted only Armor officers in the primary leadership positions in the Sqdn, so he had Haxton transferred to a CAB someplace. Prior to all this happening, I was in the Sqdn's advanced party which consisted of the CO, S-1 through S-4, Maintenance Officer, all Trp COs, the TAC FAC Party and certain key EM. We left Standiford Field, Louisville, KY in a C-141 a day or two after the main body had departed. Within 48 hours we landed at Saigon and transferred to C-130s for the flight to Pleiku. We arrived there in the middle of the night and were met by MAJ 'Pete' Kendrick, the CO of D/1/10th CAV; they were our "host unit". They took us by helicopter to Enari. The 4th INF was prepared for us but our final base camp area was not quite ready at that time so they assigned us an area on the extreme northeast side of the camp that contained enough WABTOCs for our group. During the ensuing time prior to the arrival of the main body, we were briefed on in country operations and the friendly forces' locations, missions, road net work as well as the enemy dispositions. Additionally, the Sqdn and Trp Cos were further 'oriented' by participation in various ops with the 1/10th CAV. Planning for the arrival of the main body and our equipment to include route security of the convoys occupied the S2, S3, and S4 folks. The HHT CO began initial coordination with the Division Engineer on the eventual siting for the Sqdn along the East side of Camp Enari. This project ultimately became to Sqdn XO's and the construction of the Sqdn's base camp facilities by our troops with some assistance from the 4th Eng Bn. Construction of aircraft revetments, landing and refueling/rearm areas were performed by the 4th Eng Bn assisted by other engineer units from the Pleiku area. We worked hard at maintaining a good relationship with the Division Engineer and the 4th ENG Bn. We had a party for them about Jan and they made me an 'Honorary Engineer' for the Sqdn's efforts over those months. This paid off because I believe we were the only unit allowed to use their large cement mixer to pour our own concrete slabs. This was still true when the replacement C Trp arrived the next summer. I can specifically remember that concrete pouring project because it continued well into the wee hours of the morning and was probably the first totally beer can reinforce slab in country! Between the time the main body arrived and some time in Dec, the building of the Sqdn facilities commenced with each Trp providing a work party that was consolidated under the Sqdn control and followed the "base camp development plan". For some reason the number 54 sticks in my mind as the number of structures including billets, mess halls, latrines, showers, clubs, PX, Chapel, Dispensary, Orderly and Ops, maintenance facilities, etc. I might add that there is a story for just about each one! Waiting for building supplies created many delays; however, through the resourcefulness of many, shortages in these were somehow made up through begging, borrowing and bribery (to name a few). Of particular note was one WO Walter Riddle, a former USAF EM, a scrounger "par excellence". As the 7/17th "Liaison Officer" to Cam Ranh Bay he accounted for fluorescent light, hot water heaters, nails - whatever he could bargain for. A constant supply of AK-47s, Montagnard cross bows, baskets, and other crafts were directed to him for barter.

VHCA Member Don Oliver provides some interesting details. After 19 days at sea and a memorable visit with the Navy at Subic Bay, we reached Qui Nhon late in the afternoon. All night long patrol boats circled the ship dropping grenades in the water to discourage marauding frogmen from bagging a shipload of Americans. The noise, especially below decks, was something else. The next days we offloaded and the bulk of our personnel were trucked up the road through the Mang Yang Pass to Camp Enari. While others may recall that we were not armed for the trip, the Bravo Troop Blues certainly were. Our platoon sergeant, SFC Crites, promoted a basic ammunition issue from a local Nha Trang source for our personal weapons, mainly M-16s and M-60s as well as M-79 rounds, grenades and smokes. Crites was not about to let his people go up the road that was the site of one of the most famous ambushes in history without live ammo. After we got to Camp Enari, I got tapped to crew a UH-1D we borrowed from another unit. This aircraft was mainly piloted by CPT Peterson, whom I believe was the XO of C Trp. We were mainly tasked with a variety of "ash & trash" and liaison missions between Qui Nhon, Camp Enari and Camp Holloway during the next few days as our equipment started coming off the Walker. Meanwhile, an old Navy jeep carrier converted to MSTS service arrived with our aircraft and a lucky few of our people who had been detailed to ride with them. These poor folks had the misfortune to get stuck in Honolulu for a few days while their ship got some emergency repairs. Meanwhile back at Qui Nhon, a B Trp gunship crewchief got out on the economy and gained the distinction of becoming the first 7/17er to come down with a dose. For the rest of our tour he proudly bore the appropriate nickname, "Clap". As it happened, my own aircraft, 66-16022, was the very first on the carrier. CPT Pete and I returned the old Delta to its own outfit and my bird became the 'eyes of the squadron' (but with no doorguns or a full crew as yet). Before leaving Ft. Knox, all our conexes had been coded on their tops with color patches and unit letters so they could be seen from the air, but not from ground level. It seems our leaders had known we would be sending our gear right past a certain well-known air cavalry division's base camp. While I cannot remember the name of the officer, I spent several days with a light colonel flying up and down the highway between Qui Nhon and Pleiku keeping track of our conexes. When we saw a truckload of our conexes parked off the road, we landed as close as possible and the colonel made his position crystal clear to the personnel responsible for the delay. As it happened, we got the all the sqdn's gear past An Khe with the loss of but a single conex containing B Trp's light sets. In August of 1968, we occupied some of the 1st Cav's old barracks near the Golf Course after that division had moved north to support the Marines. We found a conex built into a sandbag structure at the end of a supply room with a brass padlock hanging from a hasp that had been cut through with a torch. Sure enough, our former supply officer (CW2 Schulte, then a scout) still had the key that fit the lock! The light sets, however, were long gone and the conex was quite empty. (Editor's note: During a phone conversation, Al Iller mentioned many of the same things Don just described. Al said that all the second tour guys in the Sqdn were well aware that the "real enemy", so far as equipment was concerned, would be other American units; especially those with connections with the TC and QM folks that ran the convoys and could "siphoned off" conex containers. Hence, the scheme to paint something distinctive on the top.)

## Becoming Operational

November - At the beginning of the month, the Sqdn's aircraft were still being off loaded at Qui Nhon and Vung Tau. These activities were not without some interesting events. Several VHPAers remember the first LOH to leave the carrier. We'll listen to Randy Bresnik:

I was on deck with LTC Johnson and CPT Bob Young at the time. LTC Johnson really loved the OH-6A! We watched as CPT Skip Holcomb from C Trp lifted off to the south and started his right 180 turn back toward Qui Nhon. Even though there was a major storm to the north of us, it was very calm around us that day. What little wind there was came from the south. As he continued his turn, however, he was in a steady, slow descent and impacted on the absolutely smooth water abeam the carrier's island about 100 yards west of us. We were shocked with what had happened, because there was never any change in his flight path. Just as we thought we had lost him (and his wife had just had their first baby while we were sailing across the Pacific), he miraculously popped to the surface. The ship's motor launch was already making way and recovered him in short order. We all breathed a great sigh of relief. Skip was ok but I think he broke his arm during this accident.

There are several versions as to the cause of this accident. One has it that Skip put his briefcase next to the seat and being a little nervous, forgot to strap it down. When he nosed over during take off, the case fell over and wedged between the seat and the cyclic - much to his horror! Another says that they had loaded the ship with its weapons system, some spare parts, and extra gear to the extent that it was out of CG. The day was hot and the wind was calm; so the DA was high. Hopefully, Skip will eventually come to a VHPA Reunion; we'll buy him a beer and all listen to his side of the story!

1/10 Cav, the 4th Div's organic ACT, provided much of the orientation but each ACT deployed north to Chu Lai for about a week for further operational combat training with an ACT from the 1/9th CAV. By the end of the month, the Sqdn was conducting operational missions.

Again VHCMA Member Don Oliver provides some interesting insights: While we were scheduled to do a gradual workup once we got in-country (we did, indeed, learn some valuable lessons during joint operations with the 1/9th Cav), some elements of the 4th Inf got into some serious action at Dak To during Nov and needed our lift capacity. While I do not think we were conducting troop operations at this point, we certainly did make some hilltop re-supply missions under fire in support of an AHC that was equipped with Deltas. These guys were favorably impressed with the performance of our Hotels with the Dash-13 engine and its ability to drop into an LZ on a high DA day without suddenly spreading the skids. One of their crewchiefs asked me where he could buy one! We also met our first door gunners, who were mostly infantry types transferred in from line units that had been wounded in action at least three times in order to qualify for doorgunner duty. There was "Simon Split" who had been in the infantry for eight months when he joined us (and later got a well-deserved gig as the colonel's driver) and Marvin White who was a major league, stone cold natural with an M-60 from the ground or the air! These guys, Thank God, taught us a lot, including the fact that, for the most part, the average Charlie was a terrible shot.

16 Nov - First OH-6A Shot Down - C Troop had been flying some "ash & trash" but today was their first operational mission. VHPA member Tom Pearcy provides the following:

Fred Nicely, Blue Ghost 17, was the scout with the first team. When I arrived on station, he briefed me that they had seen nothing and were basically screening ahead of the 2/1 Armored Cav pushing toward a village reported to be an enemy base camp. The terrain was rolling hills covered by thick, tall trees. Periodically there were clearings which held several rice paddies and a small village with 10 to 12 houses. There was a reinforced trail or road leading through the area from village to village and the armored folks basically followed this road. I was Blue Ghost 18, flying scout in an OH-6A for the second team and Greg Ross and "Wild Bill" Owens were flying a C model gun. I made my initial pass over the open terrain toward the village at a fairly high rate of speed because that is what we had been told to do to save our butt. As I neared the village I noticed what I'd never seen before but had heard about, spider holes. There were four or five of them running along this path leading toward the village. I pointed this out to my gunner, Ed Gay, and turned the ship around for a second look. As we came back around, they threw open the covers, came up out of the holes and started shooting at us with AK-47s and bolt action rifles. There were four or five of them. Of course my voice goes up several octaves and I'm screaming "Receiving Fire". My gunner was so excited that he threw the smoke out without pulling the safety pin. Greg's saying "Where's the fire coming from?" I'm saying "Back there! Back there!" And not giving him very good directions at all. I made a sort of U turn at the end of this open area and started back toward the village so we could mark. I did a little zigging and zagging this time and we took some hits. Again my voice is up at least six octaves and out goes the smoke. But for some reason or other, it may have been a dud or it sank in some water before it could completely ignite, there was just a little trickle of smoke from the grenade. So I turned around just before the village and started back again. This time the smoke did get out in the correct area. I'm flying with my head looking left and adjusting Greg's rockets. You know - "A little more to the left. Add 50 to that pair." And Ed says "Mr. Pearcy ... ah ... tree!!" I looked up and saw the biggest tree I've ever seen almost dead in my flight path!! So I hit left everything and miss the tree by what seemed like inches but was most likely a couple of yards. This, however, was part of the VC plan as they had a claymore mine or something hanging in the tree. The explosion went off and sheared the tail rotor drive shaft. Just as the ship was starting to yaw, the engine made this terrible winding sound and quit. That corrected the yaw and I went straight another 50 or so meters before running out of most everything. The words of my civilian flight instructor at Wolters came into my ears: "There will always be a place to put the aircraft down in time of emergency." I remember thinking - "Yah, if you're so right you #@%&\* - why am I going right into these trees?" So I did a zero airspeed autorotation and pulled everything I had at tree top level. We fell about 30 or 40 feet through the trees and then went inverted with the rotor blades sort of chopping a hole as we came down. When we came to a stop, I turned off the electrical system and started working with my harness. Unfortunately the seat belt part had been installed in the aircraft backwards and I am hanging upside down in it worrying that the ship would catch fire and explode. The maintenance people later said that I almost had the webbing worked in two. My fingers were sure bloody I remember that. The cyclic had banged my shin up a little, my observer had wet his pants, and the gunner had been scratched by the M-60 as it banged around; so we really weren't hurt at all. We took just a few smokes (I think we had lost a few on the way down or something) and our weapons. I remembered the E&E training from Rucker to move away from the aircraft about 50 yards so if the VC came and shot up the aircraft, we wouldn't be hurt. We let off the smokes and were sad to see they were all green which didn't do much under the tall trees in this area!! Greg did see this smoke. About this time a few shots were fired in our direction and we were definitely scared. A little later I heard an APC moving up the trail about 50 to 75 meters away from us. The foliage was so thick we certainly couldn't see each other. I waited until it got just about even with us and fired a clip from an M-16 into the air. The APC kept going toward the village, turned around and came back. When they were again close to us, I fired in the air again. They kept going down the trail, turned around again and started back. I fired the third time and was surprised to hear their 50 open up all around us!! I was just trying to signal them but they were scaring the hell out of us!! They later told us they thought they were taking fire. That thought had never occurred to me!! Greg saw this and screamed at them to "cease fire" which they did. We heard them let the rear ramp down, so we knew we'd be seeing their infantry pretty soon. The thought now occurred to me: How am I going to make contact with these guys? If I stood up and yelled "Hi Guy! Over here!" I figured they blow me away. Anyway they had this black guy as point and we could see and hear them working towards us. Finally when the point man was about 20 yards away I said "Psst! We've over here!" Anyway, we made contact after a while were extracted and the LOH was retrieved.

The VHPAers who attended the Unit History luncheon during the Long Beach Reunion in 1987 will long remember the slide show. Greg had just finished telling the story about Tom getting shot down and shooting "at the armored column" to get their attention. Greg played the story for all it was worth by carefully pointing out the small holes in the LOH made by the VC AK-47 and the large holes made by the American 50 cal. Naturally, the whole room was in tears with laughter!! It was easy to laugh then because we could see Tom and knew he had survived. However, no one was in the Cav for long without learning that being in a LOH was a serious and dangerous occupation.

On the 26th C Trp was told to move to Chu Lai to be attached to the 14th CAB and opconed to the 196th Lt Inf Bde of the Americal Div. The unit moved its personnel and equipment by organic aircraft, C-130 aircraft and by LSTs. The base camp building process began anew. The unit installed showers, renovated existing buildings, put up latrines and constructed new bunkers for the perimeter defense. By 4 Dec the aircraft maintenance area was well enough established to allow the C Trp to support tactical missions. VHPA member Jack Burden provides some important background information about these times:

The Americal Div had only been officially reactivated in Sep from TF OREGON. It was a collection of many formerly independent units such as the 196th Inf Bde and the recently arrived 198th Inf Bde. In fact until the 11th Inf Bde arrived and became operational, one Bde of the 1st Cav with an ACT from the 1/9th worked with the Americal Div. The Americal's armored cav units were F Trp 17th Cav and the 1st Sqdn 1st Cav. The 1/1st had deployed without its ACT, so even though the Americal had cavalry support; they didn't have an ACT. For the next few months, C Trp would basically be their ACT. I was part of C Trp's advanced party on the move to Chu Lai. Basically Army units were taking over bases and AOs from the Marines to allow their units to move further north. We were glad to see buildings when we arrived at Chu Lai but the Marines had taken everything that wasn't nailed down and even somethings that were. I selected two buildings for the Gun pilots that were separated by about a 20 foot space. Soon after everyone arrived, we decided to build a Gun pilots' club in that space between the two buildings. On the night we officially open the club I walked in and smiled when I saw the Admiral's cap nailed to the wall as a decoration. It is true I had written a check for \$45 to pay for that hat. But the Navy guys were really good about the whole thing. They returned my check and said we could keep the hat since we were going to Vietnam. They even wished us "God Speed" (or maybe it was "good speed" after seeing what we'd done to their club); I can't remember which! Anyway, nailing hats to the wall became a tradition. I lost mine to the wall that night and most everyone else did as well. When I was promoted to Major a few weeks later, my first hat was also taken from my head and nailed to the wall. They were a fun bunch of Gun pilots!!

On the 27th, A Trp received its first "solo" operational mission to support the 2nd Bde, 4th Div with a series of cordon and search missions around Ban Blech which is on QL 14 about half way from Pleiku to Ban Me Thuot. During these missions Chieu Hoi's and families would be relocated to either Ban Me Thuot or Pleiku. Near the end of the month the

approximately 200 man 40th TC Maintenance Detachment was attached to the Sqdn and individual platoons to each of the ACTs. For example, the 2nd Platoon was assigned to C Trp.

December - A Trp's Blues with B Trp's and most of D Troop swept large areas of the Chu Prong Mountains until mid-Dec. Two of their ambushes netted four NVA killed and captured along with 1,500 lbs of rice and several document packets. On the 18th, A Trp began supporting the 1st Bde, 4th Inf out of Dak To. They worked the hills around Ben Het SF Camp near the Laotian border and found a small enemy base camp. From the 27th through the 31st, A Trp supported the 173rd Abn Bde by inserting the Blues into De Bodral Plantation area. A unit of the NVA 95-B Regiment was found and six were killed. A Trp captured 4,000 lbs of rice, two weapons, six B-40 rockets, seven anti-tank mines, 2,700 rounds of SA ammo, plus 200 documents.

There were lots of other duties as VHPA Member Randy Bresnik tells us: Most of the teams that worked the AOs will have to search the back of their minds for memory of liaison officers. For three months starting in December I spent most of my time at "the Oasis", or Plei Mrong, or Kontum as part of small group of HHT people positioned there to support the ACTs. I got along real well with these 4th Div folks and often attended their briefings for the CG. I learned a lot about the war and saw lots of the captured NVA equipment. When I was at Enari I also attended the daily briefings at the Div TOC. It was really interesting to be able to watch the entire war effort for most of western II Corps! I also manned the radio relays on several occasions. I'll bet most everyone can remember how good it was to talk to a radio relay while operating in a distance and needing to get a message back to the base camp. I can remember sleeping next to a 155 SP howitzer that fired H&I most nights. But after awhile, you can sleep through most of it. I didn't mind living at Kontum with the 57th AHC folks. It was pretty quiet until one night, some VC sappers got in and wrecked quite a bit of equipment before they were turned away. They left a number of their buddies behind, to my great joy.

As mentioned earlier, C Trp became operational in Chu Lai on the 4th. On the 13th, they conducted a detailed recon of a four grid square block that included the village of Tich (2). After working the area for about an hour they noticed several camouflaged bunkers around the village and decided to insert the Blues to the east of the village. A mixed team (one Scout and one Gun), screening ahead of the Blues as they moved to the south and west, sighted several VC attempting to leave the western side of the village. The Scouts killed one, two sets of Guns killed three more and even the C&C killed two more. About the same time, another mixed team sighted about six VC attempting to hide in a hedge to the south of the village. The Lift moved one of the Blue squads further to the south as a blocking force and the Blues came under intense sniper fire. As the squad closed on the VC, SP4 Richard Dubois was hit in the face by a grenade. Before it exploded, he pushed his Pit Sgt and another member of his squad behind a hedgegrow. The Blues killed two and the Scouts killed three more as they tried to escape from the Infantry. One OH-6A was damaged by hostile fire. The Infantry completed a sweep of the village and blew up all significant bunkers. Total for the day: 12 VC killed. On the 15th, a C Trp mixed team found and sank 28 VC sampans on an inland waterway. On the 16th, C Trp had a mixed team working with the 1/1 Cav. VHPA member Tom Pearcey was shot down in a LOH and his crew chief/door gunner PFC James Goodman was wounded. The ground Cav quickly put a perimeter around the LOH until the ready reaction force from C Trp arrived. By the end of the day they claimed 20 VC killed and 15 structures destroyed. On the 17th, a C Trp Scout spotted several VC hiding in camouflaged sampans about 4Ks north of Tam Ky. All had weapons and packs. He killed three with the mini and gunner one with the M-60 and one more with a .45 and the observers one more with a .38. They destroyed eight sampans with grenades and hovered over the site to recover some weapons, ammo, weapons gear and packs. During this same time frame, the C Trp C&C was flying over a village just north of Lake Song Dam when an estimated 150 lb bomb detonated under the ship and they received SAs and AWs fire. The door gunner killed one VC and another Gun ship killed four more trying to evade into a bunker. After an airstrike, a friendly ground unit swept this area. C Trp returned to the site where they'd found the sampans earlier in the day only to find some VC trying to recover some equipment. Three more died and even more equipment was recovered during this visit. A little further from this scene they found and sank 25 more sampans. On the 21st, C Trp worked with the F/17th Cav and A/1/1 Cav in the 196th Bde's AO. F Trp made contact and C Trp inserted their Blues which captured two suspects. The C&C found another hiding underwater breathing through a reed. It was easy to keep him covered until F Trp came over to capture him. Later in the day, a mixed team was screening for A/1/1 and spotted ten NVA. Before the battle could be joined, an A/1/1 APC sank while crossing a river. A LOH hovered over it while the crew chief hung on the skid and saved three guys from the APC but two others were lost. A little while later, A/1/1 made contact with an estimated NVA Co and C Trp helped screen the flanks and provided Gun support. The Scouts removed several Americans from a sick APC and with the reduced load, it was able to cross the river. The Scouts then killed a few NVA attempting to get into positions to fire on the APCs. C Trp was credited with 20 killed before the airstrikes were called in and darkness forced everyone to halt. On the 28th, C Trp started screening for two platoons of B/2/1 Inf that had been inserted to look for a VC Bn. A mixed team spotted and killed a VC in uniform, with a weapon about 2,000 meters southeast of the Infantry. The Infantry commander inserted B Co's other platoon at the site of the kill to exploit any further findings. The next Cav team discovered some new bunkers further to the south. While working these, they discovered a small VC force camouflaged with trees on their backs moving through a wooded area. The Infantry arrived in time to collect two VC wounded and verified four killed by C Trp. The Infantry commander changed the direction of attack for both of B Co's units and had an armored Cav platoon establish a block to the west. B Co was able to advance quickly under C Trp's screen. Soon another Cav team had found several camouflaged bunkers and the Infantry commander made further adjustments to the armored Cav and advancing Infantry. By the end of the day, 17 VC with weapons were killed (12 by B Co and five by C Trp), five more were captured along with numerous weapons and military equipment, 23,000 lbs of rice and six lbs of documents.

**Year End Summary** - The squadron had "started from scratch", was equipped, trained, and deployed to Vietnam. With the exception of C Trp who was living in Chu Lai and attached to the 14th CAB and supporting the Americal Div, the rest of the sqdn was based at Camp Enari while supporting primarily the 4th Inf Div but also the 173rd Abn Bde and the ARVN 23rd Div in western II Corps. They had learned to work with and support their higher headquarters. They were successful in killing and capturing the enemy and though several Ruthless Riders had been wounded, none died this year.

## 1968

The primary source materials for this year are: For HHT, the 14 page initial AUH prepared by CPT Michael G. Law. For A Trp, the 18 page AUH prepared by 1LT Robert J. Gibson. For B Trp, the 31 page AUH prepared by 1LT Richard L. Montgomery. For the original C Trp, the same three documents mentioned for last year. The 1/1st Cav's history has a good map that shows the relative location of the various FBs and LZ base camps. For the replacement C Trp, a 14 page AUNS prepared by CPT Edward F. Johnson plus a Yearbook. For D Trp, the 18 page AUH prepared by LT Brack Jones, Jr. For the Sqdn: a 37 page Recommendation for Presidential Unit Citation, a 20 page Operational Report - Lessons Learned (OR-LL) for the period 1 FEB through 30 APR, a 28 page OR-LL for the period 1 AUG through 31 OCT, and extracts from a 30 page OR-LL for 1 NOV through 31 DEC.

**January** - A and D Trps worked out of Kontum for the first ten days of the month. Together they killed 14 NVA and captured one. For the next ten days, A Trp worked out of Dak To. On the 9th, WO1 James L. Phipps, WO1 Rainier S. Ramos, and their Gunners SP4 Warren E. Newton and PFC Fred J. Secret, all from C Trp, were in a UH-1C that received intense enemy fire and crashed. They are thought to be the first air crew members to be killed from the 7/17th and VHPA members Don Williamson and Jack Burden provide some details:

Jack says that it is important to remember that the battles associated with Tet of '68 started about one month earlier in this part of I Corps because the 2nd NVA had become very aggressive since right after Christmas and had been pushing towards the Coast. The Americal folks were still pretty new in-country and were giving up ground in "no man's land". Most of the time C Trp would stage out of Hawk Hill as it supported the 1/1st Cav based there. Hawk Hill was about a mile from the ocean, west of QL 1 and about halfway between Chu Lai and Da Nang. Most every day C Trp would send teams looking to see how far the NVA had advanced in a given sector. The Americal instructions were for C Trp not to fly into NVA Country because the Division was not in a position to provide the extensive support that even a downed bird could generate. C Trp had a different operational configuration than either A or B Trp. We would take our Lift with the Blues and several sets of Guns and Scouts to Hawk Hill. We didn't fly a C&C per se. We would send out one or two mixed teams (one LOH and one UH-1C Gun) to recon by themselves knowing that the rest of the troop was literally standing by for them. If a team made contact or wanted to put the Blues in, then we would try to pull the other mixed team into the same general area to minimize the risk of having two birds down in two different areas. It was really neat when one team would find something and ask for Gun support; because most times we would send four Charlie Models to answer the call. That was a real "heavy, heavy team" and usually did a bang up job on the bad guys! Billy Williams and I were Majors and used to take turns directing the operations from Hawk Hill or in a C&C when we got into a fight. I was on the hill on the 9th.

Don continues. I was the ranking officer and the leader of the mixed team on the 9th. We had been briefed and given an AO on the west side of FB Ross and another little outpost just beyond it. They were the last friendly positions and most everything to their west was NVA Country. We called that a "no fly line" because of the Division support policy Jack just described. I remember spreading out the maps on some sand bags and we all talked about our route to the AO. Naturally, running a map and flying a LOH low level doesn't make much sense; so I gave my maps to Phipps and Ramos. I still believe we missed a turn and flew west too far. Anyway, I remember passing over a small pond and receiving fire. I broke and called the Gunship to warn them about the fire. I hadn't even made a complete circle yet when I heard them say that they were taking fire and had been hit. They continued flying on the same heading, so I finished the circle and climbed up behind them. I told them I was "right on them" so if they

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needed to land or whatever I was in a position to support them. Anyway, they kept flying straight and flew right into the side of this mountain doing at least 90 knots!! We had just refueled and rearm. Brother, what an explosion and a fire!! I made several passes hoping to see someone get out but they really didn't have a chance. On my second pass I was REALLY RECEIVING FIRE. I called for help and remember talking with everyone that evening. They all agreed it was the WORST FIRE they had ever received.

Jack finishes the story. When we received Don's call, we launched everything we had a Hawk Hill. I was calling back to Chu Lai and coordinating things; but was really desperate to get out there. One ACT of the 1/9th Cav was living at Hawk Hill at the time. They came over and looked at the crash point on the map. They agreed it was certainly bad guy country but said if our troop was going in (meaning putting the Blues on the ground); that they would go as well. At first I really felt good about this and was ready to commit both troops. Finally, I displaced some poor Gun pilot and flew out there in Greg Ross's gunship. They must have picked the base camp for a heavy weapons unit of an NVA Regt; the fire was really bad!! It didn't take long to realize that we would doom both troops if we tried to go in there. Their ship was still burning like mad when I got there with ammo, especially WPs going off. I made a couple of passes at about 50 knots about 20 feet over the site but certainly saw nothing that was encouraging at all. We tried to go back the next day but it was still too hot. There was a small OP about 300 meters up the steep hill from the crash site. About a week and a half later, these friendly called us to say that the area was secured. I took a special team in to inspect the site. We found some human remains and the team was pretty positive they had identified four left legs. Even so they were officially carried as MIA for many years; but I have no doubt that they died.

The official Defense Intelligence Agency material (refer to Phipps or Ramos in the KIA section in a VHPA Directory) states that only PFC Secrist's remains were recovered; the others (Newton, Phipps, and Ramos) were listed as MIA because their remains could not be identified. On the 11th, an A Trp LOH took nine hits but was able to make it back to Dak To. Their Blues and a D Trp platoon were inserted and made heavy contact with the NVA who withdrew leaving 15 dead. On the 15th, A Trp went to the rescue of an armored column that had been ambushed. The Cav broke the ambushed and killed 12. Three days later, while working the same area the Scouts suddenly came under heavy AAWs fire and one pilot was wounded. Airstrikes and artillery were used to silence the NVA who lost 7 killed and had two recoilless rifles destroyed. During the last part of the month A Trp worked around Pleiku. On the 20th A Trp's Scouts found six NVA taking evasive action and killed four but then an LOH was shot down. The Blues were inserted to protect the crew. In the action that followed, the Blues killed five more and captured some medical supplies and a weapon. On the 22th, A Trp found five NVA in a bunker and the Guns killed three. When the Scouts returned to check out the area, SP4 Dale S. Puishis was killed when his LOH was shot down, crashed and burned. The other two crew members were wounded but were successfully extracted. B Trp's unit history contains a single paragraph covering operations prior to TET which is why we had very little on this ACT during the last two months 1967. Basically they considered those pre-TET operations as "on the job" training for the days that followed. Operating out of Camp Enari, B Trp used Plei Djereng, Polei Keng, Kontum, Dak To, the Oasis, Ban Me Thot, Ben Het and An Khe as staging areas for daily operations. They supported the 173rd A BN Bde, all three 4th Div Bdes, various SF units and LRRPs, plus units of the 101st Abn. They accounted for 37 VC and NVA killed, 26 captured, 4 weapons captured, 5 tons of rice recovered or destroyed plus over 100 documents captured. D Trp provided vehicular reconnaissance and fire base security at Ban Me Thot for most of the month.

VHCMC Member Don Oliver provides: One of the funniest incident of my tour involved another B Trp Huey crewchief named Sandoval. Sandy was a little moody but was a meticulous and careful technician. One day MAJ Hefford was flying C&C in Sandy's ship during an operation near Polei Keng. While out in the AO, the main rotor tach generator failed which generated a few choice words from the Major. While Sandy took offense to the comments about his aircraft, Hefford's attention quickly returned to the war. He flew back to the staging area and set down to discuss something face to face with another officer, and Sandy thought he was going to be on the ground for awhile. As soon as they landed, Sandy got out, opened the engine and transmission cowls, and got up on the engine deck to start removing the tach generator (with the engine still running). Maybe Sandy should have thought through this one better? Meanwhile, Hefford finishes his conversation and takes off with Sandy still on the engine deck. Ever a resourceful fellow, Sandy crawls forward by hanging on to antennas and ventilator cups until he is above the pilot's windshield. He then leans forward with his head down in front of the Major and starts banging on the windshield. Meanwhile the rest of the Lift had been trying frantically to raise the CO, but he was on another freq. Hefford always looked at Sandy a little funny after that!

## TET of '68

February - The HHT unit history sums it all up "During TET the entire Sqdn's activities and energies were devoted to the Kontum area which was nearly occupied by the NVA." During the first week, Sqdn elements killed 24 NVA/VC in operations near Kontum, Dak To, and northwest of Pleiku. These operations were either to clear the NVA/VC from the cities and immediate areas around military base camps or to escort critical convoys since portions of the road between Pleiku and Kontum were in enemy hands. For the rest of the month, with D Trp still based out of the Kontum air field, the Sqdn supported TF 1/22 which consisted of the augmented 1/22 Inf Bn. The ACTs found numerous trails and bunker complexes near Plei Mrong (about seven kms west of QL14 and about half way between Pleiku and Kontum). This proved to be "home" for the large enemy force that had held QL14 at the start of Tet and had sent units against both cities. For the period 8 - 29 Feb, the Sqdn killed 51 NVA/VC, captured 7 POWs, 4,250 rounds of small arms ammo, 15 rounds of crew served ammo, 5 individual and 6 crew weapons, and 41 packs which contained documents and over 100 lbs of medical supplies. The Sqdn did its Cavalry job of "finding and fixing the enemy" well because the 4th Inf moved the 173rd Abn Bde to Kontum to work the Plei Mrong area and returned the 7/17th to work its traditional AOs from Ban Me Thot to Dak Pek. The unit histories record specific days and events in a little more detail.

In the 1st, B Trp was sent to Dak To but diverted to Kontum because Dak To was under a heavy mortar attack. NVA gun positions inside the city greeted them as they approached the Kontum air strip. The Guns started surgically working on the NVA guns and the Lift started carrying friendly wounded to the 71st Evac at Pleiku. About the time the Lift section turned, the C&C learned that Dak To was "clear" and "needed the Cav". The first priority at Dak To was to find the NVA mortar teams and the Scouts did this quickly. First the guns were used then several airstrikes. During the post-strike screen, the Scouts found an extensive complex of tunnels and bunkers. They marked the area so accurately that the next series of airstrikes were accompanied by numerous secondary explosions. Back over the area, the Scouts found some NVA trying to leave and the Guns killed four but received intense 50 cal fire. One UH-1C took several hits. The co-pilot received facial wounds from the shattered windows so they flew back to Pleiku Air Force Base. The Kontum situation was so bad that the Brigade at Dak To used B Trp to lift and CA C-1/22 Inf from Dak To to Kontum which required 20 sorties. The troop killed four more NVA during the A. Just after the CA, B Trp received a change of mission to support A Trp in a critical convoy escort. Both Trps finally departed the AO at 2045 to return to Enari.

VHPA Member Charlie Rayl describes these times as follows: Some time before TET actually started, A Trp had killed an NVA LT, his SGT, and a body guard who were carrying a courier packet containing the Tet Offensive NVA battle plans for the Central Highlands. I firmly believe the military intelligence community chose to discount these documents, disbelieving that the NVA had the capability to carry out such a large scale attack. For two weeks prior to Tet, we repeatedly reported NVA construction of new roads, battle positions, fortifications and even new unused graves as we flew the Pleiku, Kontum, Dak To area. We were very concerned about not only the number of sightings but also the fact that we were not getting shot at during our VRs. We were criticized for not getting the kills we had in the past; but the vital information we were providing was either not believed or ignored. For me, the Tet Offensive began while on an early morning VR out towards the Ia Drang Valley. I spotted some Montagnards with larger than normal baskets on their backs traveling down a trail. They didn't wave, smile, or look up at us as we hovered by. Unusual. The Montagnards were always friendly to the Scouts and would voluntarily open their baskets to show us what was in them, indicating they meant no harm. I decided to herd them down the path to a flat, open area where we could bring the Blues in and called for the Blues. About that time Ops called and requested that I return to base. I argued that I had just made a significance find. MAJ Inglett, Tornado 6, got on the radio and with language I clearly understood, ordered me back to camp. When I got there, he briefed us that a MAJOR attack was under way at Kontum and that the airfield and SF camp were in danger of being overrun. As we flew by Pleiku, we noticed some of it was ablaze. A major fire fight was in progress about 12 Ks north of Camp Holloway. We arrived at Kontum with only one team of Scouts and Guns plus the C&C. We orbited east of Kontum while the CO sorted things out in Kontum. We could see a few little fire fights going on; but nothing like the fires and destruction going on at Pleiku! My observer, Dennis Carlin, and I always liked the Dak Bla River that ran east to west, south of Kontum. The river valley had always been a friendly place as opposed to the mountains and jungle nearby. We were snooping along low level over the "friendly river" when we over-flew a squad of ARVN engaged in a fire fight. They were obviously in a heap of trouble. They were caught out in the open on a sand bar on the east bank of the river. The NVA were pumping a heavy volume of rifle fire at them. One ARVN frantically waved and pointed to the tree line to his west as I flew by. I rolled in hot with the mini, spraying the bursts as close as 15 feet from the ARVN into the tree line. Instantly, the ARVN stood up, started firing and attacked the NVA position! Gutsy little rascals, or, with my shooting that close to them, dumb? I made one more pass but they were already in the tree line, so I couldn't shoot. On my third pass, some of the ARVN were back out on the sand bar waving and smiling as friendly as I had ever seen them towards an American. A few days later I flew by the same location and several NVA bodies had been drug out on the sand and left to rot. A dog was chewing on them. I was offended, so we shot the dog. Anyway, by this time MAJ Inglett had things figured out. The SF camp was under siege by mortar fire they believed was coming from the rifle range located to the northeast of Kontum; so we sent two Scouts and two Guns up there. We made a high speed, low level pass near the rifle range. There they were - first valid intelligence we had been given all day. The NVA had a bunch of mortars set up, so our Guns opened up. It was a turkey shoot! As we did not have another Gun team on station yet, we decided to refuel at Kontum. When we got to the refuel point, we noticed there was no one to operate the pump. We always refueled "hot" (with the engine running and

the rotors turning), so Dennis got out to go start the pump. I called the tower and asked where the refueler was. He responded that he didn't know. I asked why he didn't know. He answered that the tower was closed, that he was in a bunker with a PRC 25 and that the field was under attack! News to me!! Dennis was struggling to crank up the gas powered fuel pump when I happened to glance toward the 57th AVN's compound and saw a flight school classmate of mine, CPT C.D. Rogers, crouched behind a revet. He was frantically waving at me to get the hell out of there. C.D. was a big guy, had been a football player in college and I knew he had more than his share of courage. His acting scared and crouched behind a revet definitely got my attention! I looked over my right shoulder and saw dust being kicked up to my right rear by AW fire. Dennis was still at the fuel pump about 20 meters away. He had it running but was not facing towards me. With the noise of the LOH and the fuel pump, he could not hear the incoming fire. I couldn't leave him and I couldn't leave the aircraft. After what seemed like two eternities, he turned around and saw the dust flying from the bullet strikes and me frantically signaling him to get back to the ship. Dennis won the 20 meter dash. I pulled pitch while he was still strapping in. I wasn't helping much by flying in what I called "making it dance" so as not to give the NVA a steady target. My wing was steadily firing into an area south of the fueling pits. Still no fuel and not enough in the tank to make it back to base. But ole lady luck was with us as we spotted a 5,000 gal tanker parked inside the 57th's compound. We landed next to the tanker and a soldier came running over while trying to make himself a small target. He gets the fuel pump started and we start refueling. Soon a pilot appears and tells me that all of the 57th's helicopters have been hit and that they had been receiving enemy fire in the compound most of the day. I waved goodbye to C.D. with a thumbs up. He was a hell of a guy. He later extended so that his younger brother wouldn't have to serve in Vietnam and was killed during the extension. We got married up with our second Gun team and started working the northern perimeter of the 57th's area. The Scouts searched and marked enemy positions and the Guns shot them up. The minigun and rocket fire dampened the spirits of the NVA attackers! Apparently the situation at the SF camp deteriorated, because our CO called for the Blues to be inserted in or near the camp. Our Guns were dispatched to cover the insertion. Since they didn't need Scouts for that, my team kept working the 57th's northern perimeter. I recall finding an ARVN position just north of the perimeter. He was surrounded and had his hands full but was making a menace of himself in the NVA rear. We made a couple of firing passes at the NVA along a tree line and I called for some Guns. The response: "kill them yourself, Red; we've got to get the Blues in!" As luck would have it, another Gun team showed up and I got them to shoot up the area around this lone ARVN. After that, the NVA activity on the northern side quieted down and my team went back to base camp to rearm. The fires and fire fights were still going on at Pleiku. The airfield was a beehive of activity. When we returned to Kontum, we set up an aerial screen to watch for NVA reinforcements into this battle. Shortly a 122mm rocket fired from a distant mountain to the northeast, scored a direct hit on the 5,000 gal tanker we had used earlier that day. An instantaneous explosion ensued with a towering black fuel fire of smoke billowing skyward in sharp contrast to the other brown smoke in the battle area. As a result, we were sent to look for the rocket launch positions. We found the remains of where it had been launched but searched the deep mountain side jungle in vain for any unfired rockets. It is a tough job to hover a helicopter right on top of the trees trying to blow the branches aside in the hopes of getting a glimpse of the camouflaged rocket site. Mountain flying at that altitude is a challenge as the ship reacts to every little up and down draft and the wind currents are always tricky. It finally got too dark to work anymore, so we went home. For the next six days, the Scouts were grounded because our Blues were embroiled in a fight at the SF camp. Without the quick reaction force provided by our Blues, the CO wouldn't risk using the Scouts. Besides the NVA were easy to find all around Kontum. I felt sorry for the Blues. They had not been exposed to fighting from a fixed position and we were unable to extract them for several days.

Kontum was desperate for Infantry even though the entire 1/22 Inf Bn and everything that the Special Forces B-24 command could scrape together were totally committed. D Trp quickly returned from Ban Me Thuot and consolidated with A and B Trp's Blues. These combined forces flushed any known or suspected VC or NVA from buildings within the city. Intense sniper and automatic weapons fire was received as they moved from house to house. D Trp was directly responsible for the successful defense of the SF camp and portions for the city during the Tet Offensive and was officially commended on several occasions by the B-24 commander. In 1970 the Rifle Platoons of A and B Trps plus all of D Trp were awarded a Valorous Unit Award for the period 30 Jan to 12 Feb. Al Iller provided a copy of the Recommendation for Presidential Unit Citation for the period 30 Jan - 3 Feb prepared by MAJ Bruce Wilder. This document describes these events in considerable detail but has not been included in this history due to publishing deadlines. Finally, pages 157 and 158 in Winged Sabers contains several photos of these Infantry units during this period.

After finishing its mission on the 15th, A Trp was directed to help a LRRP in contact that had one prisoner. They inserted the Blues and with the screen of aircraft quickly brought the situation under control. The Lift section then extracted all the ground elements. On the 20th, while on a platoon size, aero-rifle mission, SP4 James L. West, of D Trp was killed while on flank security. On the 21st, A Trp's Scouts found a network of caves with clothing laying outside. The Blues were inserted and made contact. After a few airstrikes, the enemy broke contact and the Blues found two dead NVA and captured two weapons and twelve packs. On the 22nd, the Sqdn's combined Infantry force was inserted to sweep a bunker complex. They killed one NVA and captured an impressive amount of ammunition including land mines, B-40 rockets, mortar round, 75mm recoilless round, etc. The Scouts that screened for the Infantry killed two NVA attempting to get away. On the 23rd, D Trp was inserted to reinforce A Trp's Blues and they made contact with an estimated NVA Battalion. Six airstrikes were employed and the Guns expended several times that day. By the time the Lift inserted 4th Division units as further reinforcement, the Sqdn elements had confirmed 23 NVA killed, had captured 7 more with 31 packs plus some weapons and ammunition. The 7/17 Infantry remained on the ground that night. On the 24th, an A Trp Scout was forced down, crashed and burned while covering for the Infantry. SP5 Joseph McCloyn, flying as gunner on the LOH, was killed. A Trp's Blues and D Trp started moving toward the crash site and B Trp's Blues were inserted to reinforce them. Enroute the Infantry made contact, returned fire, and killed 4 NVA and destroyed a machine gun. Contact was soon broken and the Infantry extracted. On the 26th, B Trp did a pre-planned insertion of the Blues who made light contact and killed 5 NVA. The Blues were extracted and the search continued. The Scouts discovered an area with 8 hootches plus some tunnels and laundry drying. The Blues went in again and found a hospital complex with 2 operating tables, some medical supplies and documents plus 1 dead and 1 wounded NVA. The wounded man said the complex was a 35 man hospital and thought there were 10 more wounded in the area. The Scouts found and killed one of the guards. Everything was lifted out and the complex destroyed.

March - The tactical situation had generally returned to "normal" and the Sqdn continued to support the 4th Div's Operation MacArthur; specifically the 1st and 2nd Bdes, the 173rd Abn Bde, and TF 1/12. During the month the Sqdn would report 71 NVA killed and one captured. On the 4th, A Trp inserted its Blues and D Trp to clear a VC village and rest area. They destroyed 20 hootches and a quantity of food and live stock while capturing two VC (one proved to be a 1LT). As the scouts screened around the village, they received heavy AW fire. Two airstrikes were called in, resulting in three VC killed. On the 7th, A Trp supported TF 1/12 in the Ban Me Thuot area. The Scouts found a small system of 20 bunkers containing some people. They used artillery to keep the enemy fixed while they inserted their Blues with D Trp. The Infantry captured four NVA. As a Scout team was returned to refuel, they spotted about ten NVA carrying stretchers along a trail. They were able to kill one and wound another before having to leave the area. On the 8th, A Trp's AO was northwest of Kontum and B Trp supported the 173rd Abn near Kontum. At 0925 B Trp observed about 15 NVA and killed four. By 1100 the Blues were in and made contact with an estimated company. In the fight that followed, three Infantry were wounded (two evaded) but ten NVA were killed. Some weapons (including 18 122mm rockets), ammunition, and food were captured. Later in the afternoon, A Trp's Scouts killed one of a group of five to ten NVA taking evasive action. B Trp was told to extract their Blues and support A Trp. A and B Trp's Blues with D Trp were inserted, found a bunker complex, and made heavy contact with an estimated company. The firing was so intense that the medevac ship could not land. PFC John D. Beaver from A and ? from B Trp's Blues were killed during this battle. With support from the Guns, the Infantry advanced through the bunker complex and killed 15 NVA. The Scouts killed another NVA while screening the flanks. The Infantry was extracted at 1745. The air units then directed airstrikes at the enemy positions until darkness and lack of fuel forced them to depart. The next day, an A Trp LOH was shot down in the same area. The Blues secured the crew and aircraft and everyone was successfully extracted. On the 15th, D Trp engaged a company sized unit north of Pleiku. Contact was broken late in the day. The next day a sweep of the battlefield revealed three dead NVA, two AKs plus some ammunition, documents and about a ton of rice. A Trp worked southwest of Dak To for the next two days and killed two NVA. The rest of the month was "one of the slowest periods encountered by the Sqdn". The ACTs worked the area west of Kontum and around the Polei Kleng SF Camp but nothing serious was reported.

April - The Sqdn spent most of this month working the familiar AOs from Dak To south to Polei Kleng and southwest to the long Plei Trap valley that basically paralleled the Cambodian border. The 4th Div's 3rd Bde was moving into the Plei Trap and the Sqdn spent many days screening ahead of them. A few days were spent near Dak Pek and north of Ban Me Thuot. The Sqdn would report 24 NVA killed during the month. B Trp's unit history for the 2nd is a classic for the period. "The morning began as usual. The Scouts were receiving light AW fire. The Guns returned the fire silencing the enemy weapons. The Scouts continued to work the area initiating light contact through-out the morning. They acquired only 1 extra hole in the LOHs and no casualties. Airstrikes were called for, received, and directed in upon the enemy position. BDAs were conducted following each strike and the Air Force credited with the destruction of many bunkers with interconnecting tunnels." This clearly described a "usual" day in an ACT! However, it got ugly just after noon. CPT Archie A. Hayman, the Scout Platoon Leader, was conducting the recon of a suspected NVA base camp with PSG M.C. Hood as his observer. The LOH received intense anti-aircraft and automatic weapons fire from 360 degrees and was downed. The LOH burst into flames. PSG Hood, though wounded, crawled around the opposite side and pulled CPT Hayman's body from the burning wreckage. The Guns expended and the C&C got two flights of fighters to unload around the downed bird. Artillery was used to keep the enemy away from PSG Hood and the Blues were inserted about 800 meters to the west. Just prior to the Blues reaching the LOH, two individuals were repelled in and extracted PSG Hood. The Blues extracted CPT Hayman's body, collected some equipment from the LOH and destroyed it. On the 4th, A Trp found an NVA soldier hiding in a foxhole near a fresh trail. Firing into the area, they killed seven. The Trp received a change of mission and when they returned in the afternoon they noted that four of the bodies had been removed and the others stripped of their equipment. No further contact was made. On the 9th, A Trp was working north of Ban Me Thuot when the Scouts found some NVA near an

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abandoned village. The Guns killed three. On the 10th, A Trp had a Gun shot down by heavy automatic weapons fire while covering the emergency extraction of a LRRP team. D Trp was inserted to protect the downed aircraft while the injured crew was evaced. Due to the enemy situation, the aircraft was stripped and destroyed in place. On the 18th about noon B Trp found a large underground storage area exposed by a B-52 strike. A LOH was shot up and burst into flames prior to reaching the ground. The Guns covering the downed LOH receive 50 cal from three positions but continued firing until the first of seven airstrikes were ready to go in. Finally another Scout was able to make a quick pass over the area and reported that the downed crew was alive. Dust-off was unable to get into the small area and reported renewed enemy fire. At 1540 the Lift started this insertion. The NVA allowed the first Lift ship to unload and depart; but when the second was on short final, they opened up on the Infantry and the Huey. One more LOH was hit by a 50 wounding the pilot. He made another pass over the LZ and silencing one machine gun with his mini-gun before departing for Plei Kleeng and hence the 71st Evac. By 1645 the Blues reached the LOH which was a total loss. All personnel were extracted by 1715 after counting seven dead NVA and capturing three machine guns. At the end of the day B Trp had 5 men in the 71st Evac. On the 24th, B Trp was working west of Kontum and observed many new bridges and a wide, hard packed trail. Closer examination determined that the trail was a road for 5-ton trucks! Air strikes and artillery were directed against the bridges. During the BDA, 15 to 20 NVA were seen and taken under fire. The Blues were inserted to develop the situation and had just made contact with an estimated platoon when the 4th Division's G-3 sent specific instructions to extract the Blues. Contact was broken and though three Lift ships were hit, the extraction was successful. B Trp had five wounded, none seriously. Airstrikes were called in and artillery registered for effective H&I. On the 26th, A Trp's C&C was hit by 50 cal fire which wounded four of the crew and knocked out all of the ship's commo. They were able to return safely to Kontum. On the 29th, B Trp was conducting BDAs west of Kontum when they found seven NVA and killed two. Ten hootches were destroyed. At 1600, the 3rd Bde CO directed MAJ Hefford to insert a seven man squad into an area where four US KIAs, some weapons and radios were located. The area was a small LZ on the side of a hill. The bodies were scattered and the equipment had been left by a unit of the 3rd Bde when the LZ came under heavy mortar and automatic weapons fire during the extraction. During the inserting, the LZ once again came under heavy mortar fire and the Lift ship was damaged. B Trp put artillery on the mortar position and the insertion was completed. The seven men spent almost two hours on the ground before reaching a PZ with two US KIA, 15 weapons and three radios. They were unable to retrieve two other US KIA. Once again the NVA mortars opened up and B Trp replied. The squad, KIAs and equipment were extracted to the Bde HQ and B Trp went home for the night.

May - On 1 May, C/2/17 Cav 101st Abn Div was redesignated C/7/17 and alerted to deploy to Vietnam in early July. C Trp had not been able to deploy to Vietnam with the 101st in Dec, 1967 because it's total compliment of aircraft consisted of five OH-23Gs. It had received nearly a full compliment of officers and enlisted men as the Division was brought up to full strength and was the only 101st element to remain at Ft. Campbell for the New Years party. In January, C Trp received what is believed to be the last Charlie Model "504" from the Bell production line. During the next month, CONUS stripped every unit, including Mother Rucker, of every last UH-1C and was able to scrape enough gun systems from the Atlanta depot to outfit C Trp. During March they trained in the snow on all of Ft. Campbell's empty firing ranges and Drop Zones. With virtually no one to "supervise" them and with "considerable relaxation" of the aerial gunnery range regulations, MAJ Robert "Jack" Frost and a hand full of other Vietnam vets taught the basic arts of Combat Assault, aerial reconnaissance, convey escort, etc. VHPA Member Jack Frost provides:

Trp C was being filled to combat strength when I arrived to assume command. Both "First Shirt" Harry L. Turner and I often wondered how in hell we were ever going to turn all this green stuff into first rate soldiers. Somehow with constant doses of esprit, cunning, mischievous intent and humor, combined with the three serious oldies who had been to Vietnam, we got ourselves "trained" to the point of being called, quite rightly, an ACT. Getting ready was certainly a challenge. Things I remember include, but by no means are limited to, the following: First, Wilson "B" (Harry called each of the seven enlisted Wilsons by a letter) loaded out a 2 1/2 with fuel bladders and used the fuel pump to "hold" them in place on the bed of the truck. But in his earnest response to "Alert! Alert! Alert!", he forgot to raise the tailgate and when he took off from the hanger area, drag energy took over. The bladders moved to the rear and simply knocked the pump to the ramp where it automatically turned into a bladder impaling device for the rubber drums that followed. Second, some enlisted "leg" from the airfield unit placed a disturbance call from his barracks to complain about the noise emanating from the Troop C barracks. When the MPs arrived they discovered the noise had stopped because our entire barracks had emptied out to greet the MP sedan! The Blues then proceeded to surround the car and lift it off the ground with the MPs still inside. Under escort from the entire unit, the sedan was carried from the Troop area and place gently back on the street headed toward Main Post. The Troopers than "thanked" the MPs for their visit and returned to their barracks. Third, with the 101st gone to Vietnam and Troop C left behind to wait for engines and other "critical" parts of our TO&E, we were fair game for all the BS details all the admin stay-behind weenies could dream up. Among the greatest of these was the Airfield Commander, COL "Whatever". He and I were cross threaded from day 1 and we both knew it!! He was trying to retire without a blemish to the grass in front of his headquarters and I was trying to dig foxholes in it to train the Blues!! When we were finally ready to fly our birds to Sharpe Army Depot in CA, our takeoff was delayed when this COL observed a "thunderstorm" in the radar quadrant of our route of flight. It took some deft, politically astute, well chosen words from my great XO, Terry Glover, to point out that the "thunderstorm" blip was in reality the southwest corner of the hanger!! Finally we were permitted to takeoff. At one point, I was an ace away from his slapping either an Article 15 or Court-Martial on me for insubordination to a superior officer, because I was insistent that the Troop would not deploy as scheduled unless the crews and pilots were issued their chicken plates, groin protectors and shin guards. I refused to accept any promises of "shipment enroute" or "in-country issue" because I knew these lifesaving items were in short supply. He was livid and I was equally firm in my demand that my good Supply Officer, Glenn Hartman, would be available 24 hours a day to cooperate with his Logistics Officer. All it would take was a phone call that our chicken plates were on Post. WO Hartman would then gladly pick them up, place them in our conexes, under my supervision and then the COL would have in return, my guarantee that both the Troop and I would gladly get out of his face. Finally, I never lost sight of the fact that being a Commanding Officer was a terrible responsibility and an extremely lonely position. If our country was sending us to war, it was important that I do my best with the Youth of America and the trust of the mothers and fathers whose sons we were making into soldiers that would survive combat. If I could impart a fear of myself, which exceeded his own fears of what the enemy could do to him, then each man stood a decent chance of living. Only long, hard, miserable, hot/cold/wet boondock conditions living in smelly, muddy, filthy clothes without one second for kids, wives, girl friends, buddies, cars, stereos, TV, beer, etc. can bring us to that point. When we went to Camp Afterbury and half the Blues made a parachute jump while the rest assaulted by Huey and the Scouts and Guns made their attack which proceeded to set the range entirely ablaze in 15 minutes; I knew that Troop C had arrived!! More than 200 dead VC and NVA in five months proved our readiness! A damn good Troop you were bar none! But most important for me now, some 20+ years later, is the knowledge that not one of the pilots that deployed with Troop C died during that tour and that they were able to return to families and loved one -- for that I am very, very thankful.

VHPA Member Vic Rose adds the following: MAJ Frost really drove us hard. Even though we had virtually the entire air field to ourselves, he decided we could learn more in the field. So after we had trained as platoons and were basically "dangerous", he took the entire troop out to one of the old DZs and we set up camp just like we would do later in Vietnam when we had to move to a new area. While half of us were setting up tents and "learning how to build furniture from the rocket box wood", he had the other half shooting up some range and inserting the Infantry. We stayed out there for two weeks in the snow and dirt. But we learned to keep the important parts of the helicopters and the weapons systems clean. And we flew lots of hours to get the experience of being very tired and still having to be mentally alert for another mission. We called ourselves The Chaparrals. We even designed a Trp patch that we wore on our flight jackets and had made into decals for the aircraft. Most of us were from the same officer and warrant officer flight classes, so we had friends from the minute we walked in the door. Over the months that we trained together, we became very close. I think most everyone remembers the manner MAJ Frost was able to apportion all the LSDs (little sh\_tty details). He assembled all the officers in the flight planning room and gave us this proposition, "We have a long way to go and much to get done. Now I could assign these duties without regard, but I want volunteers for these jobs before I have to stick someone with a duty he does not want." There may have been some grumbling at the end of that meeting, but I was satisfied. I did learn; however, that being the training officer for a unit deploying to combat was a lot different than being the training NCO in an AMNT Det in Italy. I still think we all learned a lot and it was fun doing it. To the best of my knowledge not one Chaparral pilot died in Vietnam. A lot of the credit goes to the training we received at Rucker and from the units we flew with in Vietnam; but a lot of credit also goes to Jack Frost.

VHPA Member Glenn Hartman recalls: I had several years of service as an EM before going to flight school and becoming a Warrant. So I was older than most new pilots when I joined C Trp at Ft. Campbell. For some reason MAJ Frost decided that I would be the supply officer and that started a friendship that continues to the present day. His first tour in Vietnam had been at Ban Me Thuot, so he knew what it was like for an aviation unit to live and maintain their equipment a long way from anyone else. Naturally he wanted to acquire as much equipment as possible while in the States to fill the 63 conex containers we would take to Vietnam. He showed me how to use "considerable creativity" with the DD Form 444 (Inventory Adjustment Report) to return some extra typewriters we had some how "acquired" and to draw an extra 3/4 ton truck. Our unit had a self service account of about \$3,000 per month to cover such items as light bulbs, mops, etc. The procedure was - if you spent all the money in your account, you would be considered for more next month. To this day I still feel sorry for the young LT from the Air Field Command. Either he was being very, very generous or he wasn't too quick; because he counted the same set of bunks, mattresses, and kitchen trays at least three times when we hand received our equipment back to him!! Needless to say, but we spent it all and then some in the months leading up to our deployment and we were well provisioned when we left for Vietnam. But Frost had more vision than I could deliver. For example, he was bound and determined to get a 5 1/2 ton wrecker so we could pull rotorheads in the field. There is no way an Air Cav Troop was authorized a 5 1/2 ton wrecker!! Try as we may, we never got one. We did have two 2 1/2 ton trucks and Frost wanted to get 50 cal MG rings mounted on them before we left. He knew we could "find" the 50s once we got to Vietnam. Well, those mounts were WW II or Korean War issue and we never got them either. Later when we got

to Vietnam I was still the supply officer and I used to fly C&C with Frost rather frequently. He was a brave man and a hard charger. More than once he scared me half to death with some of the things we did.

A Trp spent the entire month working around Dak To. On the 4th, A Trp's Scouts found a trail that had recently been used by an estimated NVA company with bicycles. While covering the LOHs, the Guns received fire and returned it. During the BDA after the airstrike, the Scout received intense fire; so the Gun unloaded again and more airstrikes were employed with unknown results. On the 7th, A Trp found 12 NVA killed during a BDA of a B-52 strike. The Scouts saw three NVA near a bomb crater and quickly dispatched them. On the 13th, southwest of Dak To, A Trp's Scouts took six NVA under fire. They scattered in all directions. While searching for the scattered enemy, the Scouts found a small machine gun on wheels, 17 packs and about eight soldiers. In the quick exchange of fire, one NVA was killed. A Trp used their guns, artillery, and airstrikes to kill eight more. The search continued; and when the Scouts found an estimated platoon, six were killed. The Guns rolled in and before the enemy escaped they left 15 more dead. On the 14th, A Trp worked northwest of Dak To and had the Guns fire up a suspected NVA position. The Scouts confirmed one killed but had to quickly leave the area when the artillery was ready. The Scouts returned and found that the artillery had killed one more; then they killed a third who was attempting to flee. The Guns spotted three enemy walking along a trail and killed two. When the Scouts came to check this out they found four more and took them under fire. Bad weather forced A Trp from the AO but it had been a good day's work. On the 18th, A Trp did a BDA from a B-52 strike west of Dak To. CW2 Douglas W. Walker's LOH received heavy AW fire, crashed and burned on impact. His wing landed and endeavored to rescue the crew. He quickly came under enemy fire. The second LOH was disabled and part of the crew wounded. A Dust Off ship was called in and rescued the three men. Due to the large NVA force in this area, neither aircraft were extracted. Several airstrikes were directed into the area but no BDA. On the 22th, another A Trp LOH was shot down and burned north of Dak To. One NVA was killed by the airstrikes put in after the crew was extracted with only minor wounds. On the 24th, A Trp's Scouts checked out a small bunker complex, found an NVA soldier hiding in a foxhole, and killed him. On the 29th, A Trp's Gun noticed the blast from a mortar. Luckily a set of jets were "on station" and were quickly directed against the mortar position. The position was destroyed and three secondary explosions observed. Finally, still in the States, C Trp had completed its ATTs and prepared its aircraft and vehicles for shipment by the end of May. The aircraft were flown to Sharp Army Depot. Those who took part in that "operation" have many fond memories. If you see a Chaparral ask him about the close-up pictures of the "O" on the Goodyear blimp or the fat lady's poodle at the pool in Tucson used as a "ball" for water polo!

VHPA Members Bill Irock and Rob Woodside flew Guns for B Trp during this period. They met each other for the first time in years at the Atlanta VHPA Reunion. Together they provided the following story: It was late in the afternoon after work about the May time frame. Most everyone was back in the hootches but the maintenance crews were taking advantage of the last of the sunlight on the flight line. Suddenly there was the unmistakable SWOOCCH sound of a rocket motor and a loud explosion. Everyone hit the dirt believing it was enemy incoming. After a few minutes of calm, people started coming out from under cover and moved toward the flight line where the sounds had come from. As it turns out someone in B Trp's maintenance was making an adjustment to the electrical components of the weapon system on a UH-1C. He had powered up the system and accidentally touched off a pair of rockets. One rocket went up the tail pipe of an A Trp H model while two guys had the rear cowling open working in the engine compartment. If the rocket had not actually gone into the engine cone before exploding, it could have been much more serious for these men. The explosion knocked them from the Huey and though they were dazed and shaken, they were otherwise unhurt. The Huey burned completely and kept everyone away when the ammo started cooking off. The revet was also badly burned and became a long term reminder to everyone of this event. The second rocket hit a jeep just after the front wheel well, before the driver's compartment, and embedded its warhead in the engine block. Rob has some good pictures of both the jeep with the white rocket tube clearly protruding from its side and the roped off revet containing what little was left of the Huey the next morning. Rob said the next day, a Skycrane came in with a long, long cable to sling the jeep from the flight line and drop it someplace far away.

June - On the 3rd, while operating southwest of Kontum, A Trp found four large openings with stairs going into the ground. The Blues were inserted and discovered that the bunkers had been used for ammunition storage. While screening around the Blues, the Scouts found two NVA and killed them. Sadly B Trp's Unit History does not provide any detail concerning their involvement in the famous "Hill Fights" that took place south of Dak To during this period. This battle was, of course, one of those very bloody affairs where the 173rd Abn and elements of the 4th Inf covered themselves with considerable well earned glory.

Luckily VHCMA Member Don Oliver provides us with a very good insight. It wasn't long after the 173rd got into their hilltop positions on three hills overlooking Dak Pek and a couple of klicks to the west that the NVA opened up from the entire length of the higher ridge line that ran north and south a few more klicks to the west. Resupply to the 173rd hilltops became very dangerous and I remember that the 179th lost a Chinook that was shot down from above by 12.7 mm fire. The battle for the hilltops became a three-day exercise in close air support for which I had a ringside seat as my ship was MAJ Longhoffer's C&C. Longhoffer worked very closely with the Air Force FAC to alternate gunship runs with airstrikes. After three full days of nearly continuous air attack the NVA were still at it - Scouts reported seeing them launching their 122mm rockets from gaps in the tree line at the top of the ridge. The FAC driver even got a good secondary with a smoke rocket. Finally, the powers that decide such things had had enough. Normal "Arc Light" rules were set aside and a flight of six B-52s made a daylight drop at about 15,000 feet. When the smoke cleared, the battle was over. The ridge line became a tomb for that NVA force. When the B-52s came in, all other aircraft except our C&C were ordered out. Flying with Jim Longhoffer was a real experience. He had deployed as the Scout Pt Cmdr, then moved to Ops, XO and finally CO. As CO he was more careful than most to make sure the whole crew knew what we were up to and why we were doing it. Longhoffer's style was to get his chin bubbles right down in the weeds like a Scout ship; he apparently never forgot his "redbird" heritage. On the other hand, he was not a cowboy, and we never lost people or aircraft because of an ill-considered risk. He was an excellent combat officer who led by a quiet, intelligent example and respected his people for who they were and what they could do when allowed to take the initiative.

On the 7th, while still working southwest of Kontum, A Trp received a change of mission to support a friendly unit that had been surrounded and had several casualties. While the Guns laid down suppressive fire, the Scout got the unit to a hasty PZ where the Lift picked them up. On the 12th, while performing a VR mission west of Kontum a LOH exploded in mid-air killing WO1 Herbert W. Scott and SGT John T. O'Donnell. The Blues were inserted and recovered the bodies. Working west of Camp Enari on the 21th, A Trp's Scouts received intense small arms fire and observed about 30 individuals and ten bunkers. Artillery and airstrikes were called in and killed three NVA. On the 26th, A Trp Scouts received intense AW fire. The post airstrike analysis revealed six dead NVA. On the 27th, the 568th TC Detachment was attached to A Trp to augment their maintenance capability. On the 27th, B Trp started moving from Camp Enari to an area just south of LZ Betty near Phan Thiet and was opconed to Task Force South. Briefly TF South was organized in July 1968 to provide a joint American Vietnamese command for the four southern Provinces (Binh Thuan, Lam Dong, Tuyen Duc, and Ninh Thuan) of II Corps. It was headquartered in Dalat. The major units were two ARVN Regiments (located at Bao Loc and Song Mao), the 3/503 Abn (detached from the 101st Abn) located at Phan Thiet, a few American artillery batteries, and an ACT. B Trp was the first ACT to work for TF South. Additionally the 192th AHC (the Polecats) lived at Phan Thiet and provided general aviation support for this entire area. When B Trp moved to Phan Thiet, they were assigned an open area of sand south of the POL area since the 192th and the Abn Bn already had all the good real estate around the airfield. Another construction effort began. The perimeter consisted of a 6 foot tall barrier of sand hastily scrapped into one long, basically circular dune. They lived in tents and filled sand bags. Gradually the "ammo box" floors were installed under the tents. D Trp's unit history simply says that from June through October it was based in the Ban Me Thuot area. They stayed at Ban Me Thuot East, at two other bases about 4 kms west of Ban Me Thuot, and at LZ Phillip which was 10 kms northeast of the city. They did a lot of base camp security but also had SRP, LRRP, cordon and search, road convoy escort, mine sweeping, vehicular/mounted and dismounted reconnaissance, and ambush missions. D Trp was frequently used by especially A Trp to supplement their ARP and their history indicates they enjoyed this work.

VHCMA Member Don Oliver provides another story about this period: Soon after B Trp had moved to Phan Thiet another Lift crewchief, Bill Hahn, was walking toward his aircraft through some tall grass when he saw a little snake that seemed to be following him along the ground. The snake was about 18 to 20 inches long and, as I recall, sort of lime green in color. Bill started walking faster, and the snake started following faster. The damn thing was stalking him! As soon as he got to his aircraft, Bill grabbed his survival machete and dropped back to the ground just as the snake arrived. After chopping the snake into neat two-inch pieces, we took it to the flight surgeon who was visiting from Pleiku. He checked his snake book and discovered that the fellow with the big appetite was a krait, one of the most dangerous in Asia, often called a 'two-step' snake by the infantry because you can only go two steps before you're dead if one bites you.

July - On the 1st, B Trp began operating for TF South. During the month they would cover an area from the Cambodian border to the south China Sea, from almost as far south as Saigon to almost Ban Me Thuot in the north. They staged from Dalat, Bao Loc, Song Mao, Loung Son, Ling Conh, and many FSBs. B Trp made contact with the enemy 21 times and killed 27 VC, captured six AK-47s, one 60mm mortar with eight rounds, one ChiCom pistol, 11 lbs of documents, and captured or destroyed 3.5 tons of rice and three 5-ton trucks.

VHPA Member Rob Woodside provides the following lively story about life in Vietnam: One day B Trp had four Charlie Model Guns going someplace out of Phan Thiet. I was near of the end of this gaggle and was really surprised when Dave "Mad Dog" Olson announces over the radio that he has an emergency and needs to land. He makes a fast running landing at some field and jumps from the cockpit even before the ship almost comes to a halt. The rest of us are following him and landing around his ship.

Adding further to the mystery, we watch as he drops his pants and draws his 38. With his pants at his feet and pointing the pistol at that some invisible evil between his boots, he starts removing his feet completely from his pants. By this time most of us have exited our helicopters and have gathered around him - still not knowing the identity of his private enemy. We were a little concerning for a few minutes that he was trying to shoot himself. Once he got out of his pants, he kept the weapon trained on them; so we at least knew that the threat was localized. About this time a big old centipede, at least 6 inches long, with a really ugly head comes crawling out of Dave's pants. Everyone jumped back and immediately understood the full significance of Dave's previous actions. Someone ran up and stomped the thing to death. Then we started laughing. Dave still had that scared-to-death look on his face but the rest of us were almost in tears! It took a few minutes before Dave could laugh again. Soon Dave got back into his pants and we were off to the war again. Needless to say but that centipede was one much discussed guy in the Club for a long time after that!

On the 2nd, A Trp worked an AO southwest of Pleiku and destroyed 34 new camouflaged hootches and killed one VC. On the 6th, northwest of Dak To, A Trp's Scouts killed nine NVA during a day described as "sporadic contact with the enemy". On the 6th, C Trp's advanced party arrived at Pleiku direct from Ft. Campbell. On the 9th, A Trp's Scouts were harmless burning four hootches in a enemy base when they noticed an NVA soldier observing them from a tree. After killing him, the Scouts asked for the Blues. While screening the selected LZ, the Scouts discovered that the NVA had it nicely surrounded. Two airstrikes later, the Blues were inserted. The Scouts reported heavy movement around the LZ. Then the Blues killed one sniper. Prudently, the C&C called for the Blues' extraction and ordered up some more airstrikes and artillery. On the 10th, C Trp's aircraft were taken off the Kula Gulf and were flown to Enari by pilots from other ACTs in the Sqdn. VHPA Members Bill Ipock and Rob Woodside provided the following sad description about how WO1 Eric R. Koeppen of B Trp died on the 11th:

Bill relates that the Troop had just returned to Phan Thiet from the day's operations. Eric flew that day in the left seat of Bill's UH-1C. The right side mini-gun was jammed, so Bill had radioed for the line sergeant to meet him at the revet to work on the gun. At that time, the revets at Phan Thiet were simply "L" shaped mounts of sand that had been pushed up by the engineers' bulldozers. Bill put the ship in the revet, shut down the engine, and got out to work with the crew chief and line sergeant who had pushed the barrel of the mini-gun down to point into the ground. They opened up the gun to start clearing it. Eric had taken off his flight helmet, gathered his things, left the aircraft and walked around the front to the ship to the right side where everyone was working on the gun. Eric said that since they had all the help they needed he was going back to the hootches and started walking up the side of the revetment ... the direct path to the hootches. The rotor system was still milling down and Bill yelled "The Blade. The Blade". Rob had parked another Gun in a revet immediately behind Bill's ship and was working on that ship. Rob says: "I think everyone on that part of the flight line must have heard Bill yell. I certainly did and looked up to see what was going on." Apparently Eric did not hear or wasn't paying attention because a blade hit him in the back of his head about half way up his skull and knocked him over the other side of the revet with considerable force. Bill and the people with him ran over to Eric and saw that he was seriously injured. Someone ran to get a blanket so they could carry Eric. Bill remembered there was a stripped down UH-1C near by, so he yelled for his crewchief to go untie it's blade. Within seconds Bill had this other UH-1C running and Rob and several others loaded Eric into the back. Bill flew a closed pattern around the POL to the medical pad near the main Phan Thiet stripe. He remembers everyone jumped out and abandoned the running UH-1C while they carried Eric into the medical facility. (Someone from the 192 AHC was kind enough to shut the ship down for them.) They were in there some time while the medical team worked on Eric. After treating him as best they could, they arranged for a Dustoff to take him to Bien Hoa. B Trp learned that Eric died that evening. Bill says he can still remember his feelings at that time. "We'd been flying all day out in the AO, taking our chances against the enemy. Then to return home and have Eric died that way ... what a waste! What a waste of a good human being!"

On the 15th, C Trp's main party arrived on a C-141 with their mascot "Groovy Louie" and on the 20th, the last of their elements arrived. Also on the 15th, A Trp received a change of mission to find a recoilless rifle position to the west of Plei Mrong that was firing on the CIDG camp. The Guns noticed the back blast from the rifles and expended on the positions. Results: no more RR fire and six dead NVA. On the 20th, A Trp moved to Ban Me Thuot East for a period of two months. On the same day, A Trp's Scouts found four NVA with weapons moving along a trail. Three were killed and the Blues inserted to pick up their equipment. On the 22th, A Trp's Scouts observed some NVA in a bunker complex. The Guns, artillery, and an airstrike were employed and killed five NVA. On the 26th, A Trp's Guns were called to help a company in heavy contact. They were credited with five NVA killed by the grateful company. On the 29th, Task Force 1/22 consisted of A Trp, two ground cav troops (D Trp and B/10 Cav), the 1/22nd Inf, and D/2/35th Inf. A Trp's CO was the Mission Commander of a sweep. When the lead APC was hit with a B-40 rocket, D/7/17 quickly deployed and returned fire with their 106mm RR and machine guns. The NVA unit withdrew to the east carrying their dead and wounded. A Trp's Scouts discovered the fleeing enemy and killed five more. As the TF elements sweep the battlefield, they found 17 dead NVA and captured 16 packs, two 57mm RRs, nine 57mm RR rounds plus some other ammo and some documents.

**August - August** was the last month that B Trp logged any UH-1C time, 88 hours. They had logged 60 hours of AH-1G time in July. These were tough times for the Charlie Model crews. One day an Aircraft Commander, the next a "sand bag" in the front seat of a Snake because you weren't qualified to fly in the back. Everyone had lots of learn about the new gunship. Consider the following from VHPA Member Larry Viley:

After flight school I went to Germany for several months. Finally the Army caught up with me and sent me to Cobra IP school enroute to Vietnam. You can imagine my surprise when I arrived in-country in May, was assigned to the 7/17th, and learned they didn't have any Cobras! So I flew Charlie Models for about three months. We started turning in UH-1Cs and receiving the brand new Cobras just before we moved to An Khe. The AH-1Gs had a relatively serious defect that could "make a true believer" out of anyone! If you picked one up to a hover in even a light quartering tail wind, the ship started a spin and you didn't have enough left peddle to stop it. It was especially pronounced if the Snake was at gross weight or overgrossed - like just after refueling. One day a good Charlie Model pilot and friend of mine, Paul Uster, talked me into letting him fly back seat and we got into a spin. With each successive revolution it became a little faster until at last we had no choice but to chop the throttle. We came down fully loaded, bent the skids good but didn't tip over! It looked a lot like a '57 Chevy that had been raked and lowered. MAJ McCracken chewed my butt hard for letting an unqualified guy fly back seat.

On the 1st, A Trp reconnoitered an abandoned village and took five NVA under fire, killing three. The Blues were inserted to collect two AKs and six new packs. Also on the 1st, B Trp conducted a screening operation which netted a large VC force. The 3/506 was notified and lifted units into positions surrounding the VC. The combined effort resulted in 14 VC killed and 11 weapons captured. On the 9th and 10th, A Trp worked an area that had tunnels and fresh bamboo camouflage. Eventually the Scouts found three NVA to kill. On the 10th, C Trp's vehicles and conexes with the weapons arrived. Prior to this time the ACT had been taking compulsory in-country training from the 4th Div, receiving initial in-country check rides and orientations, constructing building, etc. The Sqdn decided that the best way to get C Trp operational was to have it fly with first A Trp and then B Trp. VHPA Member Bob Reyna provides some insight as to what was going on at this time:

I was an AC in A Trp's gun platoon until they turned in their Charlie Models in July. Man I hated to see them go! Because I was short and because C Trp needed experienced gun pilots, I was transferred from A Trp. We knew C Trp would be getting their Cobras in a few weeks; so everything was changing for them. New to Vietnam and just about the time we became operational, exchange people and gunship; so we'd get to start all over again. When they came to Ban Me Thuot it was like "mama I'm home" because I was flying a Charlie gun again. Man, did we have Air Cavalry!! A Trp would fly with their full compliment of Scouts and Cobra guns plus their Lift and Infantry and so would C Trp. We staged out of the Ban Me Thuot city strip and the refuel was crowded with the 155th and all of us! We lived at the SF Camp at Ban Me Thuot East. We called it "Camp Bleakness" because of the mud, the cold water showers, the mud, the lanterns in the tents, the mud, the 175s that fired HI all night long, the mud, and the mud. It was really rough on the maintenance guys and crew chiefs. What little PSP we could scrounge we'd put out where we parked the aircraft so at least the maintenance guys could stay out of the mud some while working. D Trp was also working the road between Ban Me Thuot and Duc Lap. And this day, the NVA decided to ambush D Trp's convoy. D Trp calls for help and both ACTs come running. I can still see it!! D Trp's 106 RRs shooting up the front of the ambush and a solid stream of Cobras and Charlie Models pouring s\_t from above with more LOHs then you could count screening the flanks looking for guys trying to get away. It was beautiful!! Finally the ceiling was almost on the trees and it was getting dark, so we left; but I'll bet the NVA were sad that day for having ambushed that convoy.

On the 15th, B Trp moved to An Khe and was opconed to the 173rd Abn Bde based at Bong Song (LZ English). This cut short C Trp's training time with B Trp. C Trp went back to Enari and because B Trp could occupy some former 1st CAV billets and maintenance areas, they became operational in only 30 hours. For the next two weeks they conducted area reconnaissance, road convoy coverage, BDAs, and acted as a quick reaction force for the 173rd. On the 21st, A Trp's Blues and D Trp were conducting a cordon and search of a village. A LOH was shot down while screening the flanks but no one was injured. Higher added A/1/10 Cav to the "fun" and soon everyone had made contact. By the end of the day, the NVA had lost 22 men, 12 packs, over 300 pounds of explosive and some weapons.

**September - September** On the 1st, C Trp became operational and started working the same 4th Div AOs from the Ia Drang Valley to Dak Sang that both A and B Trps had "enjoyed" earlier in the year. On the 9th, B Trp was reassigned to TF South and moved back to the "sun and surf" of Phan Thiet. Since someone had been kind enough to completely bulldoze "The Morgue", they started over and built "The Second Morgue" which is illustrated in the camp diagrams section. A Trp had plenty to do during battles that started about the 10th around the SF camp at Duc Lap. The Scouts found a bunker complex and received intense AW fire. The Guns and two airstrikes results in 12 NVA killed and approximately 30 bunkers destroyed. On the 12th, A Trp's Guns were called to support a recon platoon. One ship took five 50 cal AA hits which damaged the tail rotor controls. The pilot was able

to make a safe emergency landing at Ban Me Thuot. On the 13th, both of LOHs on an A Trp team were hit by AA fire. One crashed and WO1 Thomas C. Jacobs and WO1 Curtis L. Andersen died and the other made a safe emergency landing. The Lift ships were used to take the wounded to the hospital at Ban Me Thuot. On the 14th, while working near the Ban Don SF camp, A Trp spotted about 100 NVA on top of a mountain. The Guns ships and numerous airstrikes were expended until dark. The next day a CIDG element swept the area and estimated from the blood and flesh left there that at least 30 people were killed or wounded. The Scouts followed the trail and found 30 to 40 NVA. Two airstrikes were put in resulting in six secondary explosions that sent smoke rising for more than 100 feet. Later intelligence revealed this was an NVA heavy weapons company. On the 18th, A Trp's Scouts found an NVA rest area complete with ponchos and fresh sleeping mats. Then one NVA was killed as three tried to flee the area. On the 21th, a friendly unit made contact near Duc Lap and had three wounded. The only PZ was not large enough for a UH-1; but the OH-6As were able to hover down and perform an emergency medevac. During this month, the 412th TC Det deployed to Vietnam and would team with the C Trp for many months to come. VHPA Member Paul Kunkel provides the following details:

The 412th was one of several dozen small but important aircraft maintenance detachments raised in the States and sent to Vietnam because the Army had learned the hard way that the aviation units needs more maintenance support. CWO William Olds was the officer charged with forming the 412th at Ft. Benning during the summer of 1968. The unit deployed by air to Pleiku without its weapons! Their weapons arrived two days. Really no one in the Pleiku area was expecting them - nice to know the Army was only a little disorganized in those days! Anyway, somehow the 412th got passed to the 7/17th and to C Trp. I joined the detachment just as many of the "originals" were leaving and would spend most of my tour at An Son with C Troop.

**October** - On the 4th, A Trp's ARP performed a cordon and search of a village. The Scouts noticed two NVA escaping and killed one and wounded the other. The Blues captured the wounded man, both weapons and their packs. Later in the day, the Guns fired on four NVA, killing one. The airstrike killed another and during the post strike, the Scouts killed a third. On the 9th, A Trp performed a VR and found some people harvesting rice. Suddenly they produced AKs and started shooting at the Scouts. One LOH took five hits but three rice harvesters died. On the 14th, A Trp's Scouts observed three VC in a camouflaged hootch. Only one managed to escape. On the 25th, A Trp left Ban Me Thuot and returned to Camp Enari. Meanwhile, the Monsoons ended at the beginning of the month, and B Trp supported elements of the 173rd Abn, 3/506 Abn, and the 44th ARVN Regiment during the month. They made contact with the enemy 21 times and inserted the Blues nine times. The coordinated efforts between B Trp and supporting units resulted in 11 VC killed, two VC and six weapons captured. On the 26th, B Trp was grounded for two days due to fuel contamination. Their maintenance crews worked day and night to flush all aircraft fuel cells and lines with grain alcohol. By the afternoon of the 27th, B Trp was mission ready again. On the 27th, C Trp was screening an area east of the Ia Drang between the Oasis and Plei Me. VHPA Member John Kawa remembers the battle this way:

C Trp had been in country several months and until this day had experienced very little actual enemy contact. I was beginning to wonder when and if heavy contact would happen. I can remember being concerned that if this routine continued we would all fall into complacency and someone would get hurt. We were working out of the Oasis which was a small strip with minimal refuel and rearm facilities. At that time the 2nd Bde had its HQ there. It was located on the northern side of the famous Ia Drang valley along QL 19 that continued west to Duc Co near the Cambodian border. Our AO that day was on the eastern edge of the valley; the countryside was basically flat and covered with scrub. As was our custom, the lead LOH had a Gunner and an Observer while my ship had a mini-gun and an Observer. I believe Hub Roberts flew lead that day. He was a GREAT Scout pilot and a FUNNY, FUNNY person. We were following a dirt road looking for any signs of recent crossings. As usual, I made my search in random patterns mentally keeping track of which areas were covered and which still needed checking. I often overlapped my searches approaching likely hiding places or travel routes from several different directions in an attempt to pickup something that I might have missed on a previous pass. The VC and NVA were very clever but like all humans they needed food, water, and a safe place to rest. As a Scout we were trained to understand these needs and to look at the terrain in those terms. On one pass I skirted the edge of a village and noticed piles of freshly harvested rice. The lay of the land was perfect for concealed movement as the village was located on the edge of a small bluff next to a shallow draw forested with single canopy trees and heavy undergrowth. In the open areas, tall grass grew everywhere. There was a small stand of trees between the village and the entrance down into the draw and we started our search there. On the first pass, I discovered some freshly dug trenches for both personnel and AWs. I slowed down and on the second pass, saw some satchels and tools laying around the base of the trees. Subsequent passes at even slower speeds did not solicit any response or movement and I passed all this up to the Guns and MAJ Frost in the C&C. MAJ Frost decided to have one LOH land near the edge of the trees to capture as many of the satchels as possible. We all felt that they could contain valuable intelligence information. I covered Hub's landing in a clear open area next to the trees. I watched the Gunner jump out, pistol in hand, and dash into the trees. As I circled I could see him gathering several satchels and then all hell broke loose. Hub reported AW fire coming from the trees. I could see the Gunner sprinting back to the LOH with one of the satchels. It must have been very heavy because it seemed to take him forever to reach his ship. I know everyone in the air was willing him to run faster. I immediately rolled back around onto the trees and laid down a burst of mini into the tree line. My adrenalin jumped up a bunch. There was so much to watch for: enemy movement, the position of the other helicopters, the tree lines, the village, the status of my ship, and on and on. Many things, however, were second nature: listening for instructions from the C&C, staying out of easy lines of fire, keep moving and altering flight patterns, watching for the enemy. The situation was complicated by the fact that the village was so close to the contact area. The C&C had to get permission to engage in full contact and sometimes this could take forever. The Guns were getting impatient. They had a score to settle. Someone was shooting at the people they were supposed to protect and this could not continue. Everyone got safely back into the air without any injuries. Hub quickly reported that the satchel was a two man carry job, weighed about 120 lbs and was filled with plastic explosives! Ed's team arrived, was briefed and we departed for the Oasis.

We continue the story from the front seat of a Cobra and VHPA Member Bob Mitchell tells us: The second team had Sterling Cox and R.A. Jones in the lead Gun, Danny Norman and myself as wing, Ed Johnson piloted the lead LOH with LT Pat Murphy as a observer and SP4 Vosine as gunner, and Bill Nichols as wing. Apparently MAJ Frost had ordered up the Blues because one of the first things we did after relieving the first team was to insert the Blues. They quickly moved in and picked up about 60 packs. MAJ Frost split the team about that time; Ed and Sterling covered the Blues and Bill and Danny started tracking the escaping NVA force. It wasn't very long or very far, maybe 7 - 800 meters to the northeast when Bill drew fire. We immediately rolled in and fired the area up with rockets, minigun and 40mm. The jungle wasn't very high or dense here and our munitions were very effective. Our ship was functioning perfectly, something that had taken a lot of personal interest by all of the Gun pilots to make happen. We ask Bill to go back in and check the area out. At this point, Danny and I used an unusual tactic, I suppose, in that we dropped down low and flew a tactical right wing on the Scout ship. We went in fast as we expected it to be hot. I had the action switches depressed and the turret weapons aimed under the LOH. As he passed over the bottom of the draw I saw two sets of muzzle flashes coming out of a bush; I was on the mini and literally tore down the bush even as Bill was calling "receiving fire". He followed that with "there's a bunch of them running up that trail to the left". I came off the mini onto the 40mm and just ate up the trail. We later found two dead in the bush and five on the trail. We went back to altitude and made some more runs. I think Sterling came over and helped us. We took the LOH / Gun team back down again but couldn't draw any more fire. So Bill started to slow down and take a good look. It wasn't very long before he had a body count up in the 20 and was not taking any fire at all. About this time, the Blues were ready to be extracted. Their PZ was about 400 meters to the west and MAJ Frost had the last slick reinsert a Blue Squad in a single ship LZ to search the bodies. The LZ wasn't much - high grass surrounded by scrub with a few 100 - 150 foot trees. It seemed relatively safe as we had not been able to provoke a response in about 20 minutes. In reality the NVA had hunkered down hoping we would go away. As the Blues started down the trail toward the dead NVA, their point man, SP4 Edward J. Maslyn, was shot and killed by a 51 that penetrated his flak jacket front and back. The remaining six Blues scurried back to 50 meters or so to their LZ where they were taking fire from three side. They were calling for help saying they had left their point man down the trail and didn't know if he was dead or alive. The air teams were back in normal configuration again. Ed was talking to the Blues and said he would hover down the trail, to see if he could find the soldier and make a determination. I watched almost in fascination as he hovered high (about 150 foot) over the LZ. The enemy were so close in on the Blues that we were not shooting. I saw the muzzle flashes shift from firing at the Blues towards Ed's LOH. These scenes are brazened in my mind. I can see them as clearly as if I was still sitting in the front seat of that Snake. I watched as the aircraft started taking hits, then started to spin violently, struck the largest tree which ripped off the tailboom, and then tumble down the side of the tree to the ground on the side away from the Blues. It immediately started to burn. The smokes, WP, and frags added to the burning jet fuel. My stomach sank as I was sure no one could have lived through such a crash. My first thoughts were -- why him, his wife had just had a baby about a month before. They were dead (so we thought) and we couldn't dwell on that; we had the Blues to save. The other team came back on station and we departed to rearm and refuel but we felt terrible, just terrible.

We now return to John Kawa's story. The call came about one hour into our rest period and we knew something was up because that was shorter than normal. I had heard many stories about what a downed helicopter scene looked like but until you actually see one laying on the ground, on its side, a long column of smoke rising from its shell, you will never understand the emotion of that sight. The rest of the Blues were inserted and was pushing toward the downed crew but not making much progress. The C&C told me we were up against an NVA unit that had been pushed down into the draw and had taken up a position on the opposite slope. They had set up a 51 cal on this ridge and commanded a good position over the entire area. The first attempt to rescue Ed was made by a Dust-Off from Pleiku. As it hovered over the crash site, I could see the 51 firing at it and the Huey shuddered with each impact. Finally, he had to break away. How it flew back to the Oasis is still a mystery to me? Later we had a chance to look at this ship and confirm the fact that it was a miracle it wasn't shot down. All of this was taking place as I circled the area looking for signs of movement and trying to keep out of the way of the enemy guns. The sun was getting low in the sky and it would be dark in about an hour. I was so intent on watching the ground that I did not see the

one large tree that stood on the edge of the draw until my Observer screamed with terror. I had just enough time to clear the main body of the LOH over the top of the tree. The skids, unfortunately, went through the tree and were well camouflaged with foliage when I emerged on the other side. I also realized that a change of clothes was in order when we got back to base. All through this time, MAJ Frost had been working with the mech inf unit that was sneaking up on the rear of the NVA position. The objective was to trap them between our Blues in the draw and this unit. To make a long story short, the plan worked fairly well. The NVA position was overrun, although many managed to sneak off into the valley under the cover of the approaching darkness. The mech unit linked up with our Blues and were able to transport Ed to an open area where he was evaced to Pleiku. The 51 was captured and we displayed it outside our mess hall as a memorial to SP4 Mastyn who died that day.

We'll let Bob Mitchell provide some more to the story. As we were rearming the first time, a Medevac ship came limping into the Oasis and made a hydraulics out landing. They had been really shot up attempting to get our guys out. I remember they were shot through the red cross on the right side and the medic in the back had been shot in the "chicken plate" right over his heart. He was a very happy camper, however, it knocked him down but other than that he wasn't hurt. The team I was with were back in and out of the fight several more times that day. It was a real mess as we had leadership stacked up over the battle, some talking on the freq we were used with the Blues. I remember Hub Roberts yelling at the Bde Cmdr to stay off the net as we had a fight in progress. The "Colonel" whoever he was came back with "I'm the boss and will talk on whatever net I please". I remember wishing I knew which Huey was his because I had the sudden urge to shoot his ass down!! Anyway, the mech inf folks had been working our way ever since we started getting into the fight. They were a lifesaver - literally!! They rolled through the enemy, on line, as we continued to pound them from above. The NVA pretty much gave up and ran when the APCs showed up. They found LT Murphy (Ed's left seat) in a dazed condition standing in the middle of a small stream right in the middle of the fire fight. How he got there from the crash site, through the middle of the fire fight, without getting captured or killed remains a mystery! It was starting to get dark when they finally had the place relatively secure. MAJ Frost then directed the Blues to "get dog tags or whatever you can recover" from Ed's ship. Ed had miraculously escaped the crash and with an injured back, had lifted the burning LOH off Murphy and pulled him to safety. Ed later said he thought it was the NVA approaching him and he had a very difficult time holding his fire as the Blues approach. He was armed with his 38 and Murphy's 45. He did hold his fire until the first face appeared through the brush; it was an American. C Trp killed over 40 NVA that day and we continued to pursue them down that draw to the southeast for the next two days. From the documents we recovered, we were able to learn that we had been the reception party for an NVC sapper Bn that had just arrived from Cambodia.

**November** - On the 1st, B Trp reconed the Le Hong Fong forest which is north of Phan Thiet and is basically several square miles of uninhabited area bounded by QL1 to the south, west, and north and the sea on the east. The VC considered this "home" and B Trp would work this AO many, many times during its stay at Phan Thiet. On this day, the Scouts located a VC training area. The Blues were inserted and found a small hospital as well. On the 2nd, while enroute to an AO west of the Oasis, A Trp's Scouts spotted approximately eight men traveling along a trail. As the helicopters passed, the men took cover. After determining that there were no friendlies in the area, A Trp's Scouts and Guns engaged the NVA. During one exchange SP4 Moe Tameyoza an observer on a LOH was killed. An airstrike was called in before an infantry unit moved to sweep the battlefield. They found eight dead NVA and captured one AK-50, 20 grenades, four 82mm mortar rounds, 25 packs and several bags and rolls of rice. During the rest of the month, A Trp only made contact once and killed but two VC. From the 4th through the 10th, B Trp staged out of Bao Loc and supported the 3/503rd Abn and the 2nd ARVN Rangers on an area sweep. The operation was disappointing in that it netted only a dozen detainees and some captured rice, ammo, and clothes. On the 10th, C Trp started an eight day period where they made heavy enemy contact most every day while working the Cambodian Border near Duc Co. VHPA Member Jim Cunningham vividly recalls:

Nothing ever seemed to phase MAJ Frost and when we flew together I could count on almost anything happening. The 14th was no exception. We had a sniffer kit installed in the back of our regular C&C ship. The Troop had deployed to the Oasis for the day. We would be flying a sniffer mission near the Cambodian border as the low ship with a Red and White team as back up. Anyway, we had just flown over an area with numerous trails and the sniffer unit registered a response. We made a 360 to come back for another look and as we completed the turn, we were inbound on our original ground track - a bad idea! The cockpit seemed to explode when a 12.7mm round came through the lower right corner of the windshield and exited through the 1st Aid kit above the MAJ's head. The second round took out the number 3 hanger bearing and severed the tail rotor drive shaft. We also took several hits from SA fire. As we cleared the area, we found that it was difficult to maintain both airspeed and altitude. I was the only one able to transmit to outside world, so Frost was busy providing me with information to pass on to our Red and White teams and to the Oasis TOC. We sort of flew, really more of a side slip, toward LZ Vera which, Thank God, had just been opened a few days prior to this. But there was no area available for a running landing, so from about 75 feet up Frost chopped the throttle and we spun in. The Huey stayed upright after we hit although we managed to bend the skids and tail boom. Amazingly enough, no one was hurt from either the enemy fire or the crash. I did learn the lesson that if you didn't have your survival gear strapped to you - it stayed in the aircraft. Frost moved to my position and kept directing the operation until we were picked up by one of our slicks and flown back to the Oasis. I was sent back to Enari to fill out the paper work on our crash landing while Frost took off in another Huey to continue with the mission. By the end of the day the second C&C had received several hits from two 51 Cals! Like I said, flying with MAJ Frost was always an experience!!

On the 12th, B Trp worked out of Long Song North, a FSB occupied by two 175s. The Blues were inserted at 1300 in a small clearing at the mouth of a canyon. In the narrow canyon, they found some caves and a cache of 100 entrenching tools, 28 knives, some claymore mines and grenades, and 75 100 lb. demolition charges. The 101st reinforced with another platoon and both spent the night securing the area. At 0545 the next morning B Trp's aircraft were overhead and the Infantry moved out. By 0730 they had found another cache. While one squad worked with the cache, the rest came under heavy AWs fire. The enemy guns were quickly flanked and five VC killed. The second cache yielded more demo charges, mines and grenades, some weapons and a blacksmith's forge. All the Infantry was extracted that evening. On the 21st, during a recon about 35 miles northwest of Phan Thiet, enemy ground fire downed a LOH killing 1LT Clifford Welding and badly wounding the observer, SGT Stanley Green. All flyable aircraft were scrambled. The lift ships received heavy AW fire on final to the LZ but completed the insertion about 15 minutes after the LOH went down. Within six minutes after the insertion, the Blues reached the still burning LOH and found SGT Green badly wounded and burned. Sadly he died on a Dust Off enroute to the aid station. After securing 1LT Welding's body, the Blues pursued the VC but were unable to establish contact and were extracted. On the 24th, A Trp found and partially destroyed a large bunker complex near Polei Keng. On the 26th, C Trp held the famous "Last Meeting of the Original Chaparrals" as a farewell to MAJ Jack Frost. During November, D Trp moved from the Ban Me Thuot area to LZ Mary Lou which was 3 kms south of Kontum and was the headquarters for the 2nd Bde. Their duties were daily convoy escorts to Polei Keng and firebase security.

**December** - There are certain ironies in writing history. A classic is the section of B Trp's Unit History that covers this period. It says: "The month ... was a busy one for all members. The Blues were inserted a total of 15 times. Twice they received sniper fire and only three occasions actually engaged the enemy in extremely heavy fire fights." It continues with an account of the enemy equipment captured or destroyed along with 15 VC killed and 6 captured. The unit history ends by saying that the ACT suffered one KIA, four WIA, and had one LOH destroyed. Time now gives us some advantages the unit historian never had. The soldier that died was SGT Ray McKibben and this is a record of his actions:

The Felton, GA native was serving as a team leader of a 16 man recon patrol near Song Mao in southern II Corps on 6 Dec 1968, in an area of known enemy personnel and equipment. He was a team leader of the point element and the third man in the formation maneuvering along a well traveled trail, when the men came under heavy AW fire from a fortified bunker. SGT McKibben, assessing the situation, charged through the bamboo and heavy brush to the armed position, killed the enemy gunner, secured his weapon and directed the patrol forward. Later, his patrol again came under heavy fire from bunkers and as the men took cover one fell wounded. SGT McKibben sprang to his comrade's side and under fire, pulled him to safety behind the cover of some rocks and administered first aid. Seeing that his patrol was pinned down, he charged through the brush against a hail of AW fire, killed the enemy with a rifle shot and captured the weapon. He then continued his assault against the next bunker, firing his weapons as he charged. But as he approached this position, his own rifle ran out of ammunition so he switched to the captured weapon. When that was emptied, SGT McKibben silenced the enemy position with two hand grenades. As his men moved forward another position opened fire. He reloaded his M-16, and as he single handedly attacked the position, he was hit by enemy fire. Though mortally wounded, he was able to fire a final burst from his weapon which killed another enemy soldier and enabled the patrol to continue the operation. In the end the patrol totaled eight enemy dead, five killed by SGT McKibben. On 7 Apr 1970, SGT Ray McKibben of B Trp's Blues was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

On the 6th, A Trp worked southeast of Kontum to check out an area of freshly cultivated fields when they discovered approximately 75 well camouflaged huts in a valley. The Scouts drew intense fire with one ship taking four hits. Air strikes were called in with unknown results as the enemy continued to stay hidden. During the period 18 to 26 Dec, A Trp was given down time for aircraft maintenance and to conduct annual training requirements. On the 27th, A Trp worked out of FB Blackhawk and when the Scouts received fire from an area with a large number of bunkers, one VC was killed. The Blues were inserted and by the end of the day 28 detainees were taken out of the bunkers. During the last two days of the year, A Trp's Blues worked with a 4th Div LRRP to secure and extract over 12,000 pounds of rice from an area not far the Camp Enari. During December, D Trp conducted from three to seven day operations throughout their TAOR.

**Year End Summary** - On the tactical side, the Sqdn, especially the Infantry, fought extremely well during Tet and earned the respect and gratitude of many commands. On the equipment side, the venerable UH-1Cs were replaced with AH-1Gs. On the organization side, C Trp's designation was permanently changed to F/8th Cav but a new C Trp replacement arrived from the States. Also an aircraft maintenance TC Detachments was attached to each ACT.

## 1969

The primary source materials for this year are: For HHT, a 12 page AUHS prepared by WO Robert Rogers. For A Trp, a 28 page AUHS prepared by CPT George E. Snyder II which follows the style but does not provide nearly as much detail as the previous year's. It still includes a few sentences for each significant event. For B Trp, a 16 page AUHS prepared by WO Byron M. Wilkinson that unfortunately devotes the majority of its volume to abridging material that we already have from the previous year's. In fact only two pages actually cover 1969 operations and they, for some reason, start in September. For C Trp, a six page AUHS prepared by 1LT John L. Davis. For D Trp, a ten page AUHS prepared by 1LT Thomas K. Balderweck. For the Sqdn, a 48 page Operational Report - Lessons Learned (OR-LL) for the period 1 NOV through 31 JAN, a 45 page OR-LL for the period 1 FEB through 30 APR, a 40 page OR-LL for the period 1 MAY through 31 JUL, a 32 page OR-LL for the period 1 AUG through 31 OCT, and a 48 page OR-LL for the period 1 NOV through 31 JAN 70.

**January** - For the first week of the year, A Trp continued to work the area around FB Blackhawk. The Blues were inserted almost every day as they worked through bunker complexes and small NVA base camp areas. They usually captured some equipment, clothing, rice, etc., would destroy any huts and bunkers they found; but they did not make contact. On the 15th, A Trp's Scouts observed an enemy force on a former US FB and had the Guns fire them up. The Blues were inserted, resulting in nine NVA killed and two captured. They also captured some ammo packs containing 57mm projectiles. Also on the 15th, C Trp worked an AO north of Plei Djereng. A Cobra flown by 1LT Sterling E. Cox and WO1 James B. Petteys crashed while making a gun run and both pilots were killed. The NVA demonstrated great fire control discipline until the Blues were inserted. That huge battle developed that would last for several days. What follows is one account of that battle:

On the 15th, PFC Garfield Langhorn, an RTO in C Trp's Blues accompanied his unit on a search and rescue mission north of Plei Djereng. The platoon was inserted about 300 meters from a downed Cobra. After hacking their way to the crash site, they retrieved the bodies of the two pilots. Because of the additional load and the terrain, the Blues were forced to travel down the mountain side to the river where a better PZ was located. As the point lead the way down to the stream bed, less than 50 meters from the PZ, the entire visible length of the river bed erupted with a holocaust of weapons fire. As the platoon leader hurriedly directed his men into a hasty perimeter, PFC Langhorn had already radioed the platoon's critical situation to the orbiting gunships and the C&C ship. The Guns provided supporting fire but darkness soon intervened, prohibiting accurate aerial support. Realizing this, the NVA began to probe the perimeter, lobbing hand grenades inside. PFC Langhorn was lying between his platoon leader and a rifleman, providing cover fire for them and his wounded comrades in addition to controlling the radio. Suddenly, a hand grenade sailed into the perimeter, rolling to a stop on Langhorn's left side, a few feet from some of his wounded comrades. Without hesitation, PFC Langhorn chose to protect the lives of his buddies. Thrusting his body in front of the grenade, he scooped the object beneath himself and absorbed the explosion. Smothering the blast with his body, Langhorn, in devotion to his fellow comrades, rendered the final ultimate act above and beyond the call of duty. On Apr 7, 1970, PFC Langhorn was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

VHPA Member Bob Mitchell provides another account of this battle. The story really starts the night before. There was a real argument in the Doug Hammond's (the Gun platoon leader) room over who would fly with Sterling Cox. Cox was known as a "cowboy" and a young WO we nicknamed "hayseed" (because he was a blonde towheaded young kid) was refusing to fly with him. He would not be persuaded as he insisted Sterling was going to kill someone, and it wasn't going to be him. The argument stopped when Jim Petteys, another AH-1G AC, said: "stop the argument, I'll fly with him." Hayseed flew wing the next day and lived; Petteys and Cox did not. I was flying lead Scout. I wanted to fly lead if the schedule dictated, but I much preferred the wing position because it had the minigun. I think that was probably a carry over from my days flying Gunship. I wanted a trigger under my finger. The morning was pretty much uneventful as we were searching the river west of Kontum for crossing sites. There were major networks coming in from the west to the river, about 30 to 50 meters wide at the point of our search. They picked up on the east side and continued east. We stopped at a small SF Camp, Polei Kleng I think, for lunch. We were sitting around on a bunch of old 175mm barrels eating Cs and shooting our 38s at tin cans. In the process we discovered if you took real careful aim you could shoot the barbed wire fence in half. Well, shortly after we had broken the second strand of a three strand fence, a jeep came flying up and a young SF CPT got out and ripped us a new one. He wanted to know who was in charge. We were all WOs or enlisted, so we pointed to 1LT Cox. The CPT raved about how they had put up the fence to keep the cows off the blanket airstrip to make it better for the aviators and now here were the aviators shooting down his fence. Well, Sterling just took the heat and gave us that little grin of his as the CPT drove off. We finished lunch and headed for our aircraft when I remembered I had not crossed the date off my "short timers calendar", something I did every morning without fail. I mentioned it to Jim Petteys, who was climbing into the front of Cox's Snake. He made the hex sign at me with his fingers and said "stay away from me, something bad's going to happen." We all laughed and started out on the mission. I was hovering around down on the river searching the banks when we discovered several dugout canoes sunk close along the bank. They had large rocks in them to hold them under water until they were needed to ferry supplies across the river. I informed the Guns and asked if they wanted to shoot them up. Dumb question! Gun pilots live to shoot! Sterling called for us to mark the target, which I did. We hovered in close, let a smoke start to burn and then dropped it in the water. It dyed the water and made a good aim point. I said, "Smokes out" and started a climbing left turn watching the first Cobra (Cox) inbound out the left door looking across in front of the observer. The river was being made perpendicular to the valley with fairly high terrain to the rear (east) and a more gentle, but rapidly rising terrain to the front (west). The first rockets were long, impacting on the shore west of the boats. The Cobra's dive steepened sharply, too low, as I can only assume Cox knew we would raze him for missing the target. I could see the mini raking the water as Jim worked the turret. Too late Cox pulled the Cobra up sharply. The aircraft responded and was in a nose up attitude, but continued to "mush" through. It started hitting trees, the blades coned incredibly as branches and large limbs flew. I started down, knowing they were going to crash. The Cobra staggered and started to rise - they were going to make it -- but then exploded!! The explosion was as a napalm strike and Cox and Petteys died instantly. MAJ Ledford told me to go in to look for survivors. I did, but knew there was no hope. The fire was intense and the onboard ammunition was exploding everywhere. It was dangerous to stay too close, but I tried. The CO was beside himself! He called and launched the blues; then landed about 150 meters away and let his crewchief and gunner out telling me to guide them to the wreckage. I did this by hovering slowly backward down the hill, guiding them through the thick jungle with hand signals. As I neared the wreck, a huge explosion rocked my ship. I can only assume it was the 40mm drum going up all at once. I was thankful the two guys on the ground weren't that close to the site yet. The Lift arrived and a Scout escorted them into the LZ as the Gun team on station was a composed of two very inexperienced wingmen. As the Blues started walking down toward the wreck, we had to break for fuel. When we arrived back on station, there was big trouble!! The NVA had allowed our Blues to get the bodies (they were too hot to handle and the slicks had hovered in one by one dropping fire extinguishers which the Blues used to cool the bodies enough to get them in the bags) and then ambushed them as they worked their way down to the river where a sandbar was to be their PZ. I found the Blues laying in a small clearing, in a small circle, almost feet to feet, facing out. I think there were 18 of them. The NVA was very close in on them. So close in fact, that we had to use the Scouts for fire support as the Guns couldn't shoot that close. We made pass after pass with 60 door guns shooting within ten meters of our guys and them all the while telling us to move it in. It was beginning to get very dark when our Lift arrived with the ready reaction force. A night insertion, time and time again, into hot LZs - who ever said "slicks are for kids". Bob Parker, one of the original Chaparrals and a great slick driver, put seven guys in the wrong LZ. On climb out, he realized he had put them in short and called that he was going back to get them. The Bn Cmdr said to leave them; they would marry up later. They turned out to be the luckiest group as they were in the NVA's rear and the NVA didn't seem to know it!! They watched, counted, and killed when they could for the next two days. The first night was probably the worst. The NVA had our guys surrounded, calling to them in the night as in the old Japanese war movies. Grenades rained in all night. I remember talking to the LT over a game of pool some time later. He was still "rattled" by those days; but he did a GREAT job during that battle. He said you'd hear a thud and only have a split second to decide if the grenade was in the hole with you or had just landed nearby. Once or twice he had jumped out of the hole and laid flat on the ground when the blast went off. Once he didn't move and nothing happened. The next morning almost everyone found a dud grenade near them; his was in the hole with him!! It was during this period the PFC Langhorn covered a grenade as noted above. The LT also said there were holes in the Cobra's mast and that crash site was in close proximity to an NVA bunker complex. He said it seemed possible to him for the NVA gunners to believe the Cobra was firing at them and that they had opened up on Cox as he was coming through the trees! Anyway, finally it was too dark and the Scouts were of no more use; we were ordered home. I gave the controls to my observer and hung my head and cried. Sterling was a very good friend. I didn't fly the next two days as the battle raged. I don't know why. I think because I was so close to Cox. Instead I paced the Trp area waiting for word from the front. The NVA finally withdrew and we got everyone out. I believe there were five US dead. C Trp lost PFC Langhorn and the two pilots, but I also think almost every one of our Blues were wounded.

**February** - Through out the last half of Jan and most of Feb, A Trp worked the area between FB Blackhawk and Kontum. Their reconnaissance efforts confirmed intelligence estimates that the enemy was building a large base in the area. While they did not make any significant contact, they were directly responsible for capturing large quantities of enemy medical and food supplies. About this time TF South had worked out a "routine" for B Trp and VHPA Member Claude-Michael Quigley provides some details to help us with the gap in the official history.

The duty wasn't too bad at all while B Trp was at Phan Thiet. With some rare exceptions we only fought the VC which did not have the AA weapon; the NVA had one or two in the Pleiku area. I was the Gun Platoon leader during part of the first half of 1969. We'd stage out of Phan Rang, Dalat (Cam Ly), and Bao Loc, about one day, one to two weeks, then some new place like Dalat (Lien Khuong) every now and then. But I'd guess about half the time we staged either out of our own base camp or Camp Mac. Naturally we went where ever TF South sent us. Most of the time it was that large hilly region bounded by Phan Rang, the valley south of Dalat, Bao Loc, then south to the II Corps boundary. That was some really beautiful country. We worked with the 3/506th Abn a lot as they were also based at Phan Thiet. We really had an excellent relationship with them. Their commander seem to understand how to use Air Cavalry and as a result would ask South for us almost on a daily basis. If we ever got in trouble, or maybe it would be better to say, if we ever got our Blues into more trouble than we had "planned" (as if you can plan a battle), the Abn guys always backed us up. Many a day ended with B Trp having extracted and inserted a couple of their platoons or even a company. The Bn CO always liked us. He knew that if one of his units hit the s---, he could call us and, unless we had our Blues in, we'd haul ass to support them. The Abn guys loved to work with the LOHs and often called Gun runs virtually in their laps. They trusted us and we trusted them; so it was great. TF South used to keep an American or Australian Destroyer or Light Cruiser along the coast. If our AO was on the coast, our C&C would carry a Marine to call in Naval Gun fire. Let me tell you, 5" and 8" Naval Gun fire is extremely accurate and truly impressive! The Air Force had a FAC team based at Phan Thiet and those guys seemed to like our O Club, so we were always on good terms with them. We could get an airstrike most any time with about 30 minutes notice.

**March -** From 1 Mar through 14 Apr, A Trp was opconed to the 1st Bde participating in Operation Wayne Grey. The 1st Bde started from areas around Plei Kleng and followed A Trp into the Plei Trap Valley. On the 1st, A Trp conducted a VR of LZ Swinger prior to a battalion CA and determined that at least an NVA company occupied this abandoned LZ. Armed with this knowledge, the Guns provided escort as the Lift made the insertion. The Scouts provided close fire support for the Infantry and killed three NVA. Two LOHs received battle damage.

After VHPA Member Dick Marshall reviewed a draft of the history for his period, he wrote: Looking over the names of the pilots that flew for our Sqdn really brought back a flood of memories. MAJ Wilder was an excellent pilot; extremely brave and a real team player. While he was the S-1 he often found some reason to escape the desk and fly in the AO. MAJ Glover commanded A Trp while I ran TF Ruthless at Ban Me Thuot during Oct-Nov 68. He was an outstanding troop leader and very dynamic when executing combat missions. He always had great concern for his troops. It was an honor and a privilege to succeed him as Trp Cmdr because A Trp was really an outstanding unit. Rosy Rosenberger and Paul Pennington were both excellent XOs. They often lead combat operations. After CPT Bob Autry completed his tour as Scout Platoon Leader, he flew with the Lift Platoon but his heart was always with the Scouts. Once during Operation Wayne Grey, CW2 Bates was shot down in the middle of the NVA while bravely worked his LOH to prevent some friendlies from being over-run. Bob landed a Huey virtually on top of the dazed Scouts and pulled them out safely even though the NVA were almost ready to board the ship as well and were directing unbelievably heavy fire at them. I can't say enough for the Scouts. I'd flown with the 1/9 Cav during my first tour; but A Trp's Scouts were the best I've ever seen! CPT John Pilote was an extremely cool and professional Scout leader. CPT Holbrook had three LOHs shot out from under him while defending a fire base insertion during Operation Wayne Grey. He flew from bunker to bunker destroying the enemy. 1LT Pospisal (we called him "Pop-Sickle" was among the bravest of the Scouts - truly a totally fearless pilot. CPT Carl King was a really outstanding Gun pilot and leader. His "Gun Bunnies" were great; they could hit a dime from 500 yards out. CPT Joe Laehu was a mission oriented maintenance officer with the heart of a true cavalryman. Once we were afraid of losing an aircraft severely damaged in a mortar attack. He came and flew it out but could only achieve about 30 knots max because the entire canopy had been shot away. LT Mike Casey was the Blue Platoon Leader during the last part of 68 and the first half of 69. He was fearless and everyone loved him. He extended so he could be discharged when he DEROSED and we assigned him to manage the Sqdn's O Club for his last few months. He had seen more than enough combat. Sometime after I returned to the States, I learned that he had volunteered to lead a team of Blues inserted to help a LRRP team that was pinned down. While he was bending over to pick up a wounded LRRP, an NVA came out of a spider hole and shot Mike through the heart. I will never forget "old Blue" - just 21 when he died. The history of Vietnam and of A Trp will never reflect the many acts of bravery by the pilots, crews, and men of this Trp. Combat units such as A Trp do not have the time nor the talent to write the award recommendations that these men so rightly deserved. Their acts of bravery were so common that they became routine - simply, "that is what I am expected to do as an air cavalryman." This nation may never know what super human things these men achieved; but we that were there do. I wish I could somehow express the love and pride and respect I hold in my heart for the wonderful men who served so well in A Trp. May God always bless each and every one of them.

**On the 2nd, northwest of Swinger, A Trp found a road under the triple canopy jungle and followed it for about a mile until they found two NVA 2 1/2 ton trucks. The Guns and strikes killed five NVA and destroyed the trucks. During the next three days, A Trp killed eight NVA while supporting 1st Bde elements. On the 6th, A Trp was sent to help a 1st Bde unit in heavy contact. The Scouts quickly found the two NVA mortars which the Guns destroyed. A Trp diverted to a help A-3/8 Inf which was being overrun. The ground unit adjusted the Gunship fire extremely close to his own men and they expended faster than the other teams could reload. The Scouts and Guns literally flew into the enemy tanks to keep them off the friendly unit. Eventually the enemy advance slowed and A Trp's Lift brought in supplies and reinforcements. When the battle finally ended, 280 NVA bodies were found. During the next week, A Trp continued working the Plei Trap, killed 16 NVA, destroyed four 2 1/2 ton trucks and one mortar, plus captured two 105mm howitzers. The Lift provided emergency medevacs for 14 wounded.**

Dick Marshall provides some insights that will warm the heart of any good cav man: One interesting aspect happened during Wayne Grey when we found and destroyed numerous 2 1/2 ton trucks and several 105 howitzers. The Bde Ops just would not believe our "SPOT" reports, so we inserted our Blues and called in a Chinook. We lifted out an NVA 2 1/2 ton truck and a 105 gun and literally dropped them at the door of their CP. From that day forward, they never questioned our reports! By the end of the Operation, we were still able to fly our missions but literally every ship had combat damage. During this Operation, the Scouts literally flew down and in front of the Infantry. There is no doubt they saved hundred of American lives. Those Scouts were "above the rest and the very, very best".

**On the 8th, WO1 Wally Carpenter and his observer, SGT David J. Phillips, of B Trp were killed while working a ridge line almost due west of Phan Thiet. VHPA Member Larry Foley recalls:**

I don't know anyone that didn't like Wally. He was one funny human being!! He and Gary Brydges had been through flight school together and flew Snakes with me in the Undertakers. Both Wally and Gary decided they are bored, flying monotonous circles watching two small LOHs for hours; so they volunteered for the Scouts. After some time Wally became a Scalaphunter. He had been flying with them for a month or so. There is a good picture of us in "Winged Sabers". About this time I remember Headquarters thought we were getting too sloppy in our appearance, and ordered that we at least shine our boots. As we left for our aircraft that morning, I scuffed Wally's shiny boots and ran for the revetments. Wally told my front seat not to walk with when we came back because he had put an entrenching tool full of sand behind a tent and was going to throw it on me when we returned. My gunner didn't tell me this until after we had returned and Wally was dead.

VHPA Member Mike Law provides a few more details: Most everyone I know that flew in Vietnam has certain days or events that are embossed in their minds. One of mine is the day Wally died. I can still play it back with clarity that rivals something from my VCR. MAJ Scott Lyman, while still the Sqdn XO, had asked if I wanted to be his Ops Officer or Gun Pit Ldr when he assumed command of B Trp. I jumped at the chance to leave the Sqdn staff and return to a line troop. I'd been flying with B Trp a little less than a month and was thrilled to be soldiering with some truly OUTSTANDING men. B Trp had a WO, I can't remember his name, who had flown the C&C ship "forever" with MAJ McCracken and other officers. In fact, he was so good that if we were short senior RLOs, he'd fly with another pilot and command the troop's operation. I never heard anyone complain about his skill or his judgment. He taught me how to fly C&C. Poor Scott was buried with admin functions and what little flying he did during those few weeks was when the Sqdn CO or some other senior guy came to visit us. Anyway, Scott had asked me to teach him how to run the troop in the AO and today was his first lesson! What a day to start out! As was mentioned before, most of the time TF South had us work for the Abn Bn at Phan Thiet. The Abn had asked us to do a short VR on one or two of the prominent terrain features near Phan Thiet each morning before we moved on to our assigned AO, usually deeper inland. I had the Scouts work this "T" shaped set of tall hills because the base of the "T" pointed almost at Phan Thiet. It was covered with tall grass and showed no recent signs of use. As Wally finished working the base, he came upon this high speed trail we knew crossed the base almost at the top of the "T". He got excited because some of the steps in the trail had been recently repaired and he told his Wing to watch out. A few seconds later he announced "We have people down here!" in a calm, professional voice. To this day, I still wish to high heaven that they'd have kicked out a smoke and backed off; but they didn't. I was in a wide orbit just about on the same level as the low Gun and had a clear view of Wally, the trail, and his Wing. I waited a few seconds, fully expecting to see a smoke or to hear something from Wally. Suddenly, Wally's ship seemed to jump and we hear "fire" on the radio in a high pitched voice. He immediately peeled off and started flying towards the valley floor. We called him but he wouldn't or couldn't answer, so I asked his Wing to fly along side him and tell us what was going on. Wally wasn't flying too fast so it was relatively easy for his Wing to catch up. He reported that both men looked as if they had been hit pretty bad; the Oscar was slumped over toward the front of the ship. I told him to fly ahead of Wally and put a smoke in an open area where he could land. I was afraid that Wally might pass out from the loss of blood and crash before he could make it to Phan Thiet. As the Wing sped off, Wally's ship nosed over, struck this large, mostly dead tree at the base of the hill and exploded. The Guns were shooting up the hill and trail where Wally had been. I called back to our base camp for the

Blues and announced that we had a LOH down. B Trp had a special bell just outside the Ops TOC they'd ring if a bird went down so everyone would know a super emergency had been declared. The Wing came back and with deep emotion said "Lead - it doesn't look good at all". I'd guess the Blues were on the ground in about 10 minutes and main body reached the wreck in another 20 minutes. Our Blues were good at repelling, so we put four guys right onto the wreck from the first Slick. They reported the bodies were too hot to handle. A couple of the LOHs dropped their fire extinguishers but that didn't do any good. So I went back to Phan Thiet POL, "borrowed" two large fire extinguishers and lowered them down to the Blues. I'd say we had the Blues and the two bodies back at camp in about an hour. Needless to say, but everyone was pretty upset! MAJ Lyman told everyone to "take a break until after lunch". Not too many people were hungry as I remember. We gathered in the Mess Hall, drank kool-aid, and consoled one another. I called TF South and asked if we could be released from our assigned AO so we could work that trail some more; they agreed. That afternoon we looked long and hard for the bad guys but never found them. I didn't know Wally very well; but to this day, he symbolizes everything that is honorable or endearing about the people in B Trp I loved so much.

On the 26th, 1LT Joseph F. Wills, pilot, and WO1 John M. Turner, observers, were killed when their A Trp LOH was shot down, crashed and burned. Little is known about D Trp during the first quarter of the year. Their unit history simply states that they continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Division's TAOR.

April - D Trp's history records that during this month they were used primarily in an airmobile status by the Sqdn. They were also opconed at various times to 2/1 CAV and 1/10 CAV. By the 6th week of "Wayne Grey", A Trp had accounted for 57 NVA killed not counting any from the battle around A-3/8 Inf, seven NVA trucks destroyed and three 105mm howitzers captured. The following is taken from 1st Bde's after action report:

The Air Cavalry proved to be the most versatile force available to the Brigade Commander. Due to its capacity to react to any situation, it was most valuable in the shift of combat assets from one AO to another. In the execution of the normal reconnaissance role, the Air Cavalry was responsible for the aerial interdiction of enemy troop and logistical moves. It located and helped to destroy two 105mm howitzers and seven enemy trucks. While working in support of ground engagements, the screening of flanks and engagement of enemy indirect fire weapons, saved many lives and contributed to the success of the infantry attacks. The courage, aggressiveness, and flexibility of the Air Cavalry made it a very valuable asset. That where brave acts were common, their acts of bravery were uncommon.

On the 12th, D Trp was inserted as part of a Sqdn operation that reacted to information from an informer. D Trp captured a VC District HQ. On the 22nd, C Trp started moving from Camp Enari to Lane AHP. It would take them about a week to relocate and become operational for the 173rd Abn Bde whose primary AO was the An Lao Valley. On the 23rd, A Trp was assigned an AO near Ban Me Thut and immediately made contact with a large force. Heavy AW fire was received and the Scouts and Guns repeatedly expended. Finally, the Blues were inserted and found 30 dead NVA and captured one. From the 25th until the 5th of May, A Trp was under the direct control of B-23 of the 5th SFG at Ba Prang. On the 25th, A Trp encountered an NVA Regiment. All aircraft received extremely heavy AW fire, six took hits and one LOH was destroyed killing WO1 Richard L. Turley and SSG Alton D. Woodruff. The "Honor Roll" section of A Trp's Unit History contains a few more details. Apparently Turley and Woodruff were both wounded but chose to remain in the AO due to the urgency of the mission. After the LOH came under fire for a second time, Woodruff made a radio call saying that his pilot was dead and that he was going down.

At this point, we will pause from the day to day operations to let some B Trpers describe their base camp at Phan Thiet. VHPA Member Paul Uster remember:

Like almost every unit in Vietnam, we were always building or refurbishing something at "The Morgue". I know from the time we returned from An Khe until I left in May, I and several other pilots were building the O club, the showers, or something after we finished the WABTOCs for our hootches. With the sun and wind, the tents became thread bare and leaked. We used tar to make a roof which was fine until we had to move that tent. Many an hour was spent in our underground O club. The club started with a conex container, but that was shored up with timbers and covered with PSP. After it was completed and sand backfilled around the sides, a Quonset hut was built over the underground Club. Just after Tet, B Trp killed a large Tiger and we had that skin hanging on the walls. About April we finished a great new shower with elevated water tanks atop some poles. Everything was great for about a week; but one day the water tank structure collapsed and fell over into an open area. We also had a sauna bath for a short while. But it blew up one night when it got too low on water. The movie screen was the 1st SGT's and the "projection room" was a cool back deck on the Orderly Room/living area. Most every evening guys would bring out lawn chairs or whatever on the large open sandy area to watch the movie, eat pop corn, drink beer, whatever. Several of the pilots built a weight training area we dubbed "Flexes Muscle Farm".

May - C Trp began using LZ English, LZ Pony, LZ Uplift, and LZ Two Bits as primary staging areas to support the 173rd Abn Bde. On the 3rd, A Trp was still working the Bu Prang area for the SF when the lead LOH took 15 to 20 hits and crashed. Both injured crew members were immediately evacuated. Airstrikes and artillery were directed at the enemy but darkness prevented a BDA. On the 4th, A Trp returned to Sqdn control briefly before being opconed to the 24th Special Tactical Zone (STZ) and began working extensively around the Dak To, Ben Het area. "Rocket Ridge", located approximately three miles southwest of Dak To was a favorite NVA firing position and A Trp worked it frequently. Again, Dick Marshall helps us understand the challenges A Trp faced at this time:

The 24th Special Tactical Zone (STZ) was a first attempt in northern II Corps to let the ARVN fight the main battles with only limited American support. We were based out of Dak To and the only other American support was an Eng Bn, an Arty Bn, plus the normal American unit advisors. Later some SF Strike Forces joined us. The ARVN CO who commanded the 24th was the finest I would ever know in my two tours. Although history will never tell it this way, A Trp became a TF command since we had to hook up and run every operation. We were plagued with the ARVN artillery firing in our AO on a "continue to observe" spot report. I am convinced that the NVA had infiltrated the 24th. One day when the American staff and the ARVN CO were gone, I received a call to come to the HQs to receive an ARVN award. I reported, but one hour later no one showed. Finally, I was furnished a jeep to transport me back to my unit, but the driver headed north up a jungle road. I told him to turn around, but he acted as if he didn't understand my instructions. I drew my 38, put it in his ear, and he immediately understood where my unit was and took me there! Too often when we made heavy contact, and were really kicking tail, the ARVN artillery, without request, begin firing into our AO. A Trp had been in almost constant combat since late Feb; however, nothing can compare to what we were faced with while working for the 24th. With the exception of the Ia Drang battle in 66, I will always remember this as the most painful and hardest of combat. The fighting was intense. Ben Het was surrounded. Once we were working a near-by hill when we received intense fire from 360 degrees around the hill. We called for some American artillery on a large bunker area and registered with 105s. Before we called for the fire mission, I asked the FO if he could take an eight digit coordinate; but he said he wanted ten. We gave him the ten digit coordinates and requested 8" with delay fuses and 155 and 105 for airbursts. I have never seen artillery so totally destroy an area in my entire life! Relief came to Ben Het.

On the 14th, A Trp made contact with a large enemy force about 1100 near Dak To. The Guns expended several times and numerous airstrikes and artillery barrages were directed into the area. The ARP was inserted and made contact. By the end of the day, A Trp claimed seven NVA killed and captured a Chicom radio, some commo wire and a few documents. VHPA Member David Graham has a vivid memory of one action during this period.

I had been in-country since March and had been assigned to a couple of units before finally ending up in A Trp's Lift platoon. I had flown with them for a few weeks but was still rather new. This particular day the Scouts had found and killed some NVA. We put the Blues in to retrieve some of the equipment from the bodies and to see what could develop. The NVA carefully pulled them up a ravine into an ambush even with the air cover we provided. The Trp supported them with everything we could get on hands on and they were finally able to move back to the insertion LZ. I was flying with CPT Billy Joe ?, the Lift Plt Ldr. The other aircraft had warned us that the NVA were all around the LZ so we came in low level and sort of popped up over a ridge to drop into this single ship LZ. Our ship was the lead but we came in too hot and had to land around, so we became number 4. By the time we got in the bad guys were very well prepared for yet another Huey. In my mind I can still see several NVA in the trees up my side of the ship while we were on final. The door gunner behind me shot at least one and it was truly a pleasure to watch him die and fall out of the tree! Anyways, I got VERY CONCERNED because this was the first time I'd really been involved in any serious action. I remember asking the CPT: "What do you want me to do?" He was cool and replied: "Just lock your shoulder harness so if you get hit you won't fall on the controls and wreck the ship." I did what he said but those were certainly NOT what that calmed me down or provided any peace of mind!! As I remember the Blues lost at least two dead and about three or four wounded; but we put some serious holes in the bad guys that day. I would fly with the Lift most of the rest of my tour; a little in the front seat of a Cobra. I worked hard and became a Huey IP and for the last few months was one of the Sqdn IPs.

On the 15th, A Trp had a LOH shot down wounding both crew members. From the 25th until the end of the month, A Trp received a remarkable amount of ground fire including 51 cal. A Trp found several fresh bunker complexes and camp sites as it worked the Ben Het area which was basically surrounded by the 28th NVA Regiment. D Trp continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Div's TAOR during this month.

VHPA Member Gary Brydges provide some details about B Trp during this period: I flew Cobras with the Undertakers and had several interesting experiences. The first was flying a Snake into Dalat's Cam Ly airfield. As a platoon we were always careful with any new guys that flew to Dalat for the first time. It was about 10,000 feet and even though it was always cooler up there, the DA wasn't kind on a mostly overgrossed Cobra. The first time you tried to land like a helicopter but coming to a hover, it was a true experience!! Lots of guys landed much harder than they wished! Then we would "hop" the Snake over to refuel. Once we had even about 45 minutes. Worth of fuel so we'd have to take off like a fixed wing using the runway. Then I remember when the 2/1 Armored Cav came to Phan Thiet. They escorted a Rome Plow unit that was "widening" QL1. The spooky thing was that about two weeks before we had captured some folks and turned them over to the MI people with the ARVN command at Phan Thiet. A day or so later, an MI guy came by our place and said that they had learned a lot from those VC we'd captured. He said the VC told them that an Armored Cav unit was due in the area soon and that they were reconning for ambush sites. We knew nothing about any Armored Cav unit coming but sure enough, in a week or so they arrived. We screened ahead of them for a couple of days and told them about the ambush story. They seemed to be very thorough tankers to us. Every night they'd circle up in a different place and it seemed to me that no one in their right mind would mess with them. They'd been at Phan Thiet about four days when they must have camped right on top of the VC ambush. Just after dark, we get this call to go help them. They had lost a couple of APCs and had some guys wounded pretty bad. While the Guns worked the backs and top of the VC, their 90mm and 50s worked the front. After awhile Puff came on station to drop flares; then our Lift evaced their wounded to Vung Tau. The VC decided that they had had enough and Puff walked minigun around the perimeter ever few minutes for the rest of the night. Finally, I'll never forget the three days we fired the Battleship New Jersey as it sailed down the coast for what proved to be its last visit to Vietnam. This Marine radio team arrived early each morning with some circles on the map where they wanted us to check out before and after their barrages. The first two days weren't too exciting once you got used to seeing what a 16" round with a ton of HE or canister could do to almost an entire grid square! We had to watch our orbits, however. The shot would land on the target and really make all the trees shutter; but the canister part which weighted a hundred pounds or more would continue on the gun line another quarter of a mile or so. We couldn't figure out what the 'second cloud of smoke' was after each shot until the Marines explained it to us. Anyway, late in the morning on the third day, the Scouts screened an area we hadn't worked in some time and reported some well camouflaged bunkers. The Marines alternated between HE and canister for about ten rounds then asked us to look the area over. No sooner did the Scouts get over the bunker complex then they started yelling that they had people down there coming out of the ground. After working it for awhile, they said that no one seemed to be armed; so they wanted the Blues. Well, the Battleship folk are going crazy with joy because we'd previously told them we thought the area was cold. The Blues get in and report that it is a small hospital unit. They found a couple of armed guards and after killing one; the other decided there was little point in being brave, so he surrendered. So we load about a dozen VC medical people on a few Lift ships for the short ride to the MI guys and the Blues haul out some equipment, a small ammo cache with B-40 rockets, and an American typewriter that had been converted for the Vietnamese. We all played with the typewriter for days after that.

Now VHPA Member Mike Law relates: As the other B Trpers have mentioned, we used to stage from Song Mao quite often. We developed a good rapport with the American advisors attached to the ARVN Regt based there. Several times we were able to give them some 'extra effort' while reacting when some of their units had gotten into a good fight. Anyway very early (like 2 am!) one morning the Duty Officer woke me up with the news that Song Mao was under attack and one of the advisors was on the phone wanting help. This advisor explained to me that their Regt compound had been attacked since midnight by a good sized force, that one of the advisors was dead and two others were wounded, and that 'things were not going well for our side'. It was raining like mad outside with a pretty low ceiling, so I asked what the weather was like at his place - the same. I told him we'd do what we could but if the weather didn't break we'd have to wait until it started getting light. We got the Trp up and decided we'd take everything we had that was flyable. We launched and followed the coast line north until we got even with Song Mao then started in land. To our surprise the bad guys hadn't broken contact and started for the hills. The weather had gotten better and we could clearly see where several fire fights were going on. After checking with the advisors, we started firing. The first few gun runs were really special because you could actually see the bad guys and watch the ARVN maneuver while we were shooting (the bad guys directed their attention at the aircraft, so the guys on the ground took advantage of that). The attack was halted in a matter of minutes but the bad guys withdrew into the town itself! Naturally, we couldn't go shooting up the town so we had to wait for the ARVN to get ready to sweep their own hometown. I remember we were a little concerned about a stage field since we'd left that morning without a sure knowledge of which one we'd be using. We were somewhat grateful that this enemy force had directed most of their interests toward the ARVN compound and didn't even bother with the landing stripe at Song Mao. Because we staged from that stripe so often, B Trp had a bunker there that contained some ammo and usually a couple of fuel blivets with JP4. The ARVN's always told us they 'secured it every night' but we always had our Blues check it for booby traps each morning. Anyway, we were able to stage 'on the edge of the action', so to speak! An ARVN mech unit had been ordered down from some place further to the north but they had drawn some fire a few miles out of town and lost a track or two. We started shooting into those areas and the ARVN were able to maneuver around this problem. Thus the north side of the town was closed as an escape route. We inserted our Blues on the southern side and they linked up with some ARVN to start sweeping the town. By mid-morning we escorted some Chinooks in with some ARVN reinforcements. I'll never forget that sight - the rear ramps lowered and what seemed like a hundred little people came out! That took care of most of the western side of the town. A team of Charlie Model guns from Dong Ba Thin had been supporting the ARVN most of the morning. While escorting a Dustoff ship trying to reach some ARVN wounded on the southern side, one was shot down. It landed in the center of a wide sandy area that had the town on one side and a wooded area on the other. We could clearly see this downed ship and saw that all four of them were walking around their ship and that they'd set up their M-60s to defend themselves. We could also see the AW positions that had fired on the gunship and started firing into them. Maybe the bad guys had left or maybe they didn't like Cobras, but we didn't have any trouble getting two Dustoff ships in and out. A really funny thing happened at this point. One of the downed UH-1C pilots was WO Gene Russell (we called him "Adobe" because he was ugly as a mud fence). He had been in my gun platoon with C Trp when we formed at Ft. Campbell. He recognized my voice on the radios and using my old Ft. Campbell radio callsign said: "Colt 6 - we are taking a lot of fire from those woods - come get us out right now!" I asked if anyone was wounded and he said no. I told him we were a little busy at the moment (working with the Dustoff, our Blues, the ARVN, the Mech unit to the north) and that because they were in the middle of a open area no Charlie in his right mind would come bother them and that they should sit tight. The C&C did call back to Phan Thiet and our maintenance team was on the way to rig their ship so it could be hooked out. Anyway, Gene would have none of this 'be patient stuff' and keep telling me they wanted out. I finally asked Scott Lyman (who was flying C&C that day and had a back end full of the ARVN Regimental staff plus an advisor) if he could go get them. As I remember he did take them out but when our maintenance team arrived, he put them back in to help get their ship ready for extraction. Anyway, our Blues and their ARVN friends were stopped by several enemy AWs firing from a couple of houses. We couldn't tell which house was good and which was bad from the air, so initially we weren't much help. Finally one of the Blues 'marked' the house with an M-79 round. I don't remember who was flying my Wing that day but we both were making steep angle attacks from relatively high up to guarantee our rockets only hit one building at a time. His first pass 'surgically removed' the roofing. A 17 lb warhead does wonderful things!! I was able to put my rockets inside the building and the bodies of two enemy gunners literally flew out the windows. The Blues yelled their approval and within seconds were throwing grenades in the windows and were moving again. I watched with some satisfaction as one of the Blues threw what was left of the enemy weapon along side the dead owner. Several bad guys succeeded in finding temporary 'sanctuary' in a temple. An equal application of CS gas and the approaching infantry gave them the courage to try to run about 200 yards to some trees. They never made it. I loved to fire those minis on the wings! The folks in the town didn't seem to need our help anymore so we started screening the most likely escape routes. We had worked our way to the hills to the northwest of the town when it got too dark for anymore of this fun. Just as we were leaving, a team of Navy F4s (Bobcat 55 I think was the lead's callsign) came up on our UHF freq (we had worked with aircraft from so many different units that day that I'll bet everyone in Vietnam knew our UHF freq!) and said they'd heard we'd been in a good sized battle that day. They had been unable to unload their bombs at two previous locations and were either going to 'kill fish' (I guess they would just unload in the ocean rather than land on the carrier with armed bombs still on the wings) or 'knock down trees' some place. They only had a few minutes of gas left. I fired a pair of rockets into the side of the hill and told them it was all their's from that point to the top of the hill. They made two passes with nape and HE. The next morning the Scouts decided to start their VR by looking to see if the Navy had hit anything. Almost immediately the two Scouts started complaining about the smell of burned flesh. As it turned out, the Navy boys had put their load smack-dab on top of the NVA Bn Cmdr and what was left of his mortar platoon! We inserted the Blues at the top of the hill and they were able to retrieve some interesting intelligence items from the packs and pockets of about 15 NVA. We later learned that two local force VC companies had escorted this NVA Bn and helped with the attack on Song Mao. While the ARVN and Song Mao were hurt in this attack, the NVA and VC took a serious hit as well. I was especially proud of B Trp during that battle. We were a combined arms team of the first magnitude!!

June - D Trp continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Div's TAOR during this month. On the 8th, A Trp's Scouts observed several trails leading from different directions to a heavily wooded area. They drew fire from the area and the Guns, airstrikes, and artillery worked it thoroughly until an ARVN unit was inserted. Ground contact was minimal. A Trp was credited with seven NVA killed, the artillery and airstrikes with 14 more; and three AKs were captured. On the 14th, A Trp made contact with an enemy unit in a bunker complex. They directed artillery fire into the area and rearmed the Guns with flechette rockets. A Trp lifted the artillery and let the enemy come out of the bunkers; then "nailed them to the ground". The Scouts found 34 dead NVA and bagged four more attempting to flee.

Again VHPA Member Dick Marshall provides some more details: In late June, we inserted the Blues in an area almost due east of Dak To and overlooking the road from Kontum. An ARVN unit had been wiped out in this area just a few days before. The Blues found the ARVN dead and began to sweep from there. They found bunkers with hot rice left behind, Chicom radios, weapons, ammo, etc. They gathered up the equipment and began moving to their PZ. Then they reported an NVA in a shallow foxhole

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 all 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 recoilless rifle, 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 and the 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 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 trail. 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-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 C Trp killed ten NVA and helped extract the LRRPs. On the 17th, 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 into 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 dead 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 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 moved 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 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 bunker 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.

VIICMA Member Vernon Shepard gives us his point of view. I was a brick layer by trade. When I received my orders, I was 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 openings 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 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 L11 was just making a low pass, they were in and out real 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 Cmndr) 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 from 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 ScalpHunter 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 Cmndr 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 Cmndr without Sqdn because all the line Trps were opconed 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 down 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 I 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 but were 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

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.

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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.

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**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 Emilia 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.

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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 - "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) (dead 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 was proud to have been there.

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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 Del Sorn 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

and Pleiku TAORs as well as providing periodic convoy escorts. From the 12th through the 15th, B Trp supported the 24th STZ southwest of Kontum and made contact with an NVA company killing 33. Several mortars, rifles, radios and quantities of munitions were captured. For the rest of the month, B Trp supported the 4th Div who had ground elements operating in the mountains near the Suoi Kon river north of An Khe. On the 28th, A Trp's first LOH team had the lead shot down and the wing forced down by a fire in the ship. The crews were pulled to safety with a jungle penetrator. While working this area later in the day they found a Bn sized training area southwest of An Khe.

VHPA Member Barry Speare provides a little color of life in C Trp about this time: I arrived for my third tour in late Dec 69. My other tours were with Airborne Infantry. This was my first as an Aviator. I told the Squadron that I wanted to fly Scouts for Charlie Trp and the next morning I was on the courier to Lane. After I completed my 15 hours under the watchful eyes of Marty Martinez (by this time I believe he was the Sqdn Safety Officer and SIP), I was assigned the callsign of RED 12. Because of aircraft availability and the need for pilots, my transition took about two weeks. During that time I also flew about 40 plus hours in the front of the lead Snakes to learn the AO and to observe how the experienced Scouts worked. Now, the standard FNG initiation drink was the GMF (Green Mother) which was administered whenever the Lane O Club had a visiting stage show band. Those of us not flying on the day of the stage show went to the club early in the afternoon to assure that our Trp got the tables directly in front and to one side of the stage. The other side of the stage was reserved for the 498th Dustoff. We started drinking the minute we arrived at the club and this went on into the evening. The stage show started about 7:30 and the GMFs were brought out during the 9 PM break. Like the rest of the FNGs I got on stage and chugged my GMF while everyone cheered. I thought I was going to die and later hung over the hootch maids' clothesline ralphing my guts out for what seemed like forever. Bill Hesse was found passed out cold, lying next to his hootch the following morning. Besides drinking, the major pastime at Lane after returning from the AO was jungle rules volleyball. C Trp had a good team and was a serious challenge to the other aviation units. I was never very good at the game so I was only allowed to guard our war/beer chest and provide verbal support when a challenger turned up. During the eight months I was in C Trp we never lost a single challenge match. The stakes were our war chest against their's and we always went home with ours after drinking their's. In early February orders came for Charlie Trp to move to Camp Radcliff by early March. Our new mission was to support three major combat elements: our friends in the 173rd Abn Bde, the 4th Inf, and the 22d ARVN. Our AO was expanded from the South China Sea to the Cambodian tri-border area northwest of Kontum. We completed the move without incident and on time but two days after we arrived we were hit by sappers. They destroyed the two LOHs closest to the billet area and attempted to destroy two snakes and a slick. To the best of my memory the others were repairable; but the LOHs were nothing more than piles of white magnesium with vertical stabilizers. Our officers' quadrangle and billeting area turned out very nice. We all did some work on our own rooms and pitched in to finish our small club that included a beer cooler obtained from an old PX Snack Bar and a highly shined, varnished bar.

March - On the 1st the Squadron was released from opcon to the 4th Inf and returned to the 17th CAG for control. During this entire month, C Trp continued to support the 173rd Abn in the An Loa valley area. D Trp worked the Pleiku TAOR conducting sweeps to the south of Camp Holloway in search of the mortars that had been hitting the post from the south. They were unable to locate these mortars even though an intensive effort was made that included the use of mine sweepers. On the 5th, B Trp started supporting the 24th STZ west of Pleiku and on the 6th found an arms and munitions cache. From the 10th until the 27th B Trp moved from Camp Enari to Phan Rang and returned to Camp Holloway. While working in the Dalat area, B Trp found several very large bunker (one with over 200) complexes and screens for the ARVN forces that worked several cache sites. From the 13th until the 1st of April, the Squadron (-) moved from Camp Enari to Camp Holloway. From the 23rd until the 28th, C Trp completed the move from Lane at An Son to Camp Radcliff at An Khe. On the 30th, A Trp and C/75 Ranger (which were opconed to the Squadron from the 30th until 19 April) formed TF Dagger which operated to the southwest of Plei Me and to the southwest of Plei Mrong. No significant findings were made by TF Dagger as the NVA are not operating in its AO.

VHPA Member Ray Connolly remembers these times: I was in A Trp's Gun platoon from Sep until Jan of 1970. It seemed like there was about a million Captains in the platoon at that time and I wasn't all that senior. About the beginning of the year I ended up in HHT as the Asst S-4 though I really wanted to be flying Cobras. It was during the period that the 7/17th moved from Enari to Holloway and I was given the general assignment to acquire all the construction materials I could get my hands on, to make living there more comfortable. The Sqdn had a number of 40 ft S&P (Stake and Platform) trailers that were pulled by big diesel tractors. We made many trips from Pleiku over the Mang Yang Pass to Qui Nhon empty and returned with 2x4s, plywood, wiring, lights, etc. At that time the 75th Ranger Company was attached to the 7/17th, so we could draw LRRP rations through normal supply. I am still amazed at how much stuff we acquired simply by trading for a couple of cases of LRRPs!! We even made one trip all the way to Phan Rang to get materials. My other duty was to establish ammo and refuel points. The evening before, the HHT CO would tell us where to go; we'd load up a 2 1/2 ton with mini-gun ammo and another with rockets plus a 5,000 gal tankers. Early in the morning we head out to Kontum, Plei Me, Plei Djereng, places like that. We mostly supported A Trp because even after B Trp returned to the Pleiku area, they still flow down south a lot and someone else supported them. We rarely were part of a convoy and we didn't have any escort from D Trp or the MPs. We'd just drive out the gate and head to the forward base. We carried a PRC 77 to call in case something happened. We never got hit but I can remember riding in a jeep many of time and thinking "Why am I in a jeep and not a helicopter?" We used the Chinooks to lift fuel and ammo whenever we could but when they weren't available we'd drive. Rarely would we spend the night at these places. We'd drive back every evening. In July, I guess someone had decided that I'd paid my dues because I returned to A Trp's Gun platoon. I flew with them until I DEROSED in Sep.

April - For most of this month B Trp worked the Dak Seang area and south to Dak To along Rocket Ridge. Intense AW was received on nearly every mission. They were very successful in locating the 122mm rocket positions along Rocket Ridge that had been firing on Dak To and Tan Canh. Their Guns and tac air were used to destroy several launch positions and storage areas. A large number of bunker complexes, mortar positions, and MG positions were reported. On the 6th, A Trp stopped working with TF Dagger and worked the Dak Seang and Ben Het areas for the rest of the month. From the 6th to the 10th, C Trp replaced A Trp as part of TF Dagger and worked around Plei Mrong but only made light contact. With all the ACTs working basically north and west of Pleiku and making contact with squad and platoon sized units on almost a daily basis, D Trp was alerted to maintain a standby airmobile reaction force for most of the month. Everyone still remembered the B Trp's battle in November near Bu Prang and the general lack of ARVN support. On the 7th, A Trp found a heavily used trail and about 1100 engaged a large enemy force southwest of Dak Seang. Their Guns received intense fire and their Scouts were repeatedly driven from the area by AW fire. It took several attempts and working against lots of AA fire before the Lift could get the Blues inserted. The NVA avoided contact with the Blues who found ten dead NVA and captured several rifles and mortar rounds. On the 11th, an A Trp LOH was shot down and the crew quickly extracted. Before they could explore the situation further, they received a change of mission to cover a CIDG force of 110 men trying to break contact with a superior NVA force. Their Lift ships were able to complete the extraction successfully. From the 11th to the last week of the month, C Trp returned to support the 173rd Abn in its efforts against the 3rd NVA Div. On the 11th, SP4 Alonso Garrett was killed while flying in a C Trp LOH piloted by WO Chick Harrington in the Soui Cow Valley. VHPA Member Barry Speare may be able to provide some details about this incident. On the 12th, near Hill 763 the A Trp lead LOH flown by CPT Gus Robinson, was shot down and the wing took numerous hits. Because of the terrain, heavy fighting, and other forces in the area; A Trp could not complete the search for the downed crew. It wasn't until the 14th and then only after many of the Lift ships were hit that 14 Blues were inserted. They found Gus's body in the wreckage but the observer SP4 Robert E. Tabb was not found. They also came upon an NVA AA team in a bunker and quickly killed them. Tabb was listed as MIA and was, indeed, captured. He was kept by the NVA and released in March, 1973.

VHPA Member Gary Downs recalls: Gus and I were West Point Classmates and had been through a lot together. The events surrounding his death are some of the strongest memories I have of Vietnam. Two NVA Regts had had the SF camp at Dak Seang under siege for some time. During that period NOTHING was getting in and out of the camp without getting shot down. I remember when things quieted down that there was a med evac, another Huey and two wrecked Caribou on the runway. We worked the flanks of the battle most of the time. We are always putting in airstrikes or shooting lots of Arty and doing BDAs for Arclights. I wasn't flying the day Gus was shot down but I was the next two days. It took us that long to get our Blues into the area. They had to blow an LZ with a 5,000 Daisy Cutter near the top of Hill 763 for us to get the Blues in. They found an NVA AA crew in a bunker and killed them before they could get the gun operational again. We displayed it outside our place at Holloway for some time after that. They found that Gus' LOH had rolled down the hill and that he was still strapped inside. He had two bullets in the head, so it was no wonder that it crashed. The Blues also found Tabb's shirt in a tree, so we figured he had been captured. I'll never forget that valley north of Dak To. It was very beautiful, but you never had any trouble drawing fire there!

On the 15th, A Trp was still working the area looking for Tabb when another LOH was shot down, killing the observer (name unknown at this time) and badly wounding the pilot. The bravery of their Blues was totally unquestioned as they rappelled into a hot LZ to cut a hasty area for extraction. Even though the Infantry's mission was not reconnaissance, they found six NVA bodies, numerous packs and 12 weapons. After destroying all the enemy equipment and obtaining the body of the observer, all the men on the ground were extracted. Additional ordinance was expended in the area and secondary explosions were recorded. During the last week of the month, C Trp joined TF Pursuit which was a 4th Div effort against enemy base camps south of the Mang Yang Pass. A large number of bunkers and structures were spotted by C Trp that had recent usage and many were destroyed. C Trp also worked with C/75 Rangers. On the 30th, A and B Trps were in direct support of the 24th STZ and C Trp was opconed to TF Pursuit, so only D Trp remained under Squadron control.

May - Starting on the 5th and ending on the 25th of June, various Squadron elements supported the 4th Div and the 22nd and 23rd ARVN in their Cambodian incursion. C Trp, from the 5th to the 25th, B Trp, from the 5th to the 16th, and A Trp, on the 6th and 7th, worked in Ratankiri Province to the west of Plei Djereng for first the 4th Div and then the

structure complexes with light enemy contacts save for the ground to air fire which was intense during many days. On the 6th, D Trp moved two platoons via roads to assist the 4th Div by securing the Plei Djereng airfield. This operation lasted until the 16th. On the 7th, C Trp found several sets of tracks made by NVA tanks and indications that the vehicles had moved to the south. On the 8th, A Trp began support of the 22nd ARVN operating in Base Area 702 to the west of Duc Co. Several structures and two tons of rice were destroyed during those three days and four NVA were killed. That same day the lead A Trp LOH was shot down and the observer killed. On the 9th, C Trp located two M-8 scout cars and a dump truck; all were destroyed by an air strike. From the 12th to the 17th, A Trp supported the 4th Div and found an airfield with a POL storage area. On the 17th and 18th, B Trp took a break from the Cambodian operations and worked around Pleiku with no significant findings. On the 19th, A Trp and one platoon from D Trp moved to Ban Me Thuot, became operational on the 20th to support the 23rd ARVN in Mondol Kiri Province to the west of Ban Me Thuot. The most significant activity was the destruction of several (at least seven) enemy 2 1/2 ton trucks plus the locations and destruction of at least three, huge enemy base camps complete with permanent buildings and very large bunker complexes and ammo caches. From the 19th to the 26th, B Trp supported the 22nd ARVN in Operation Binh Tay II as it conducted a search of Base Area 702. Large bunker complexes were located and destroyed by air strikes. On several occasions bombs were delivered within 15 minutes of request. This was the result of the personal interest and rapport of USAF LTC Hyland, the Senior FAC supporting the 22nd ARVN, with B Trp. From the 27th to the end of the month, B Trp worked northeast of Pleiku and killed one NVA and detained another. From the 29th to the 31st, C Trp supported the 22nd ARVN in the Ben Het and Dak To area and reported receiving 37mm AA fire for the first time. Their Guns and an air strike were employed on the position resulting in several secondary explosions.

June - During the last part of May and all of June, D Trp provided a ready reaction force for the ACTs and provided convoy escorts from Camp Holloway to Duc Co, the Oasis, and FSB Blackhawk. From the 1st to the 3rd, C Trp worked for the 1st Bde south of FSB Blackhawk and killed one NVA. On the 5th, A Trp moved back to Camp Holloway and until the 23rd was in direct support of MR II while working the Dak To, Ben Het, and south area. From the 5th to the end of the month, C Trp supported the 173rd Abn near LZ English save for the 24th to the 28th when they worked for the 4th Div north of An Khe. Activities throughout the area were characterized by moderate enemy contact. Ground to air fire was sporadically intense. Numerous caves and bunkers were destroyed by combined arms firepower. C Trp was credited with 24 NVA killed during this period. From the 6th to the 23rd, B Trp supported the 1st Bde, 4th Div in Operation Wayne Hurdle to the south of FSB Blackhawk. Light enemy contact typified the operation but numerous new bunker and structure complexes were found and destroyed by the Scouts and Guns. On the 10th, A Trp did a "day trip" back to Ban Me Thuot and found a large enemy complex under construction. After the Guns prep the area, the Blues were inserted and found a sizable quantity of food and NVA clothes and medical supplies. This was destroyed. The Scouts then had the ARP sweep a second complex but this one was extensively booby trapped. The ARP and the Guns destroyed both complexes. Near Dak To on the 17th, A Trp's Scouts observed five men with weapons running toward a bunker complex. The Guns killed three and a little later, during a running battle, the Scouts killed three more. On the 19th, SFC Robert H. Pilik was killed by flying as a back seat from WO Dick Bradley and SP4 Ron Streckland. The LOH took several hits, crashed and burned. Both Bradley and Streckland were evaced to the States because of burns they received in this wreck. VHPA member Berry Speare can provide some details about this incident. On the 21st, A Trp worked with a group of Pathfinders northwest of Dak To on the remains of five downed aircraft (one USAF Jolly Green Giant and four UH-1Cs). Even though the area was infested by NVA, they avoided contact with A Trp during the day long effort to extract bodies and equipment. On the 24th, A Trp screened for the 22nd ARVN and B Trp for the 2/8 Mech Inf in Operation Binh Tay IV whose objective was to evacuate approximately 12,000 Cambodian military personnel and their dependents, with all their equipment and personal belongings, from the towns of Ba Kev and Labang Siek. For the rest of the month, A Trp supported MR II working AO's around Pleiku and north of Kontum with few significant activities and light enemy contact.

Many 7/17ers may remember working on various Civil Affairs Projects during their tour. All battalion sized units were assigned one or more local villages. During this period, the Squadron had a number of Montagnard villages with names like Plei Poo Ngo, La Son, and Tu Tam. D Trp seemed to work frequently with the orphanage at Tu Tam. The OR-LL reports that the NVA left a mine for the Squadron's S-5 team; but the villagers found it and showed it to the team who had it destroyed.

July - During this month, A Trp supported MR II and Co B, 5th SF while B Trp supported the 4th Div to the north of An Khe and C Trp continued to support the 173rd Abn. Operations were significantly restricted during the first half of the month by the monsoon weather. On the 2nd, A Trp's Scouts observed armed people in new hootches wearing uniforms. Their Guns and Scouts killed five. On the 5th, while conducting a search and destroy operation to the west of Pleiku, D Trp sustained one KIA //name// and 2 WIA from a command detonated mine. On the 8th, Berry Speare was flying a C Trp LOH with WO1 Michael Dickus as his observer and SGT Lassiter as the back seater. Berry was giving Dickus his orientation as a Scout in an AO near LZ English. The LOH took intense ground fire, crashed and burned. Berry and SGT Lassiter were not hurt but Dickus was badly burned. He was evaced to Japan and died on the 18th as a result of these burns. On the 15th, southwest of Pleiku, A Trp found a very large supply of food, equipment, and clothing in some structures by a bunker system. The Blues were inserted to gather equipment and documents for destruction and extraction. On the 20th, B Trp WO1 Edgar F. Crouse, Jr., and WO1 Mark J. Webb were killed. On the 21st, while working northeast of Pleiku, A Trp made contact with elements of an NVA sapper battalion. For three days, A Trp employed their Guns, artillery, and airstrikes on this unit. The battle started when both LOHs in a Scout team were shot down and burned. The official histories are somewhat at odds on this point. The Sqdn OR-LL said a Huey went down while the unit history says two LOHs. Anyway, 1LT Lanny J. Wallace, CW2 Marvin L. Wagner, WO1 Phillip G. Wright, and SP4 Walter J. Kaccock died that day. VHPA Member Gary Downs remembers:

That day we were staging out of Holloway because our AO was the Ia Krom and southern Dak Bla valleys. I remember one LOH had been shot up pretty good, so we sent them back to camp and called for the other team. This area was hot because the NVA had been moving units around Kontum, through these valleys and on toward the Mang Yang Pass. I also remember being like a traffic cop during those days; constantly coordinating airstrikes, gunships, arty, etc., etc. There were lots of targets. We even used the 361st Guns and that was sort of rare. Anyway, one of the Guns or maybe it was Ops back at Holloway mentioned that the first team hadn't checked in yet. We got to looking around and saw a column of smoke between us and Holloway. We hurried over there and found the two burning hulks of the LOHs. It was really sad. The only thing we could figure is that one had flown up to get a close look at the other and they had had a mid-air. We put the Blues in quickly and secured their bodies.

On the 24th, B Trp discovered a large enemy force northwest of An Khe and used their Scouts, Guns, artillery and air strikes to kill 39. On the 30th, A Trp made contact with an enemy unit north of the Plei Me SF Camp and during a six hour massive firepower demonstration killed 44 NVA. It started when the Scouts discovered a large enemy concentration. After an airstrike, the Lift inserted an ARVN company through a maze of small arms fire. When the Lift returned with their Blues, they found the ARVN still huddled in the LZ. The Blues got the ground force moving and killed six NVA on the way to a downed aircraft. The Guns then spotted 10 NVA moving out area. They killed six. Then while the Scouts screened, the ARP moved over to the site and captured four more with their weapons.

August - For the first half of the month, B Trp supported the 4th Div southwest of An Khe but reported nothing of significance. For the first half of the month, C Trp supported the 173rd Abn south of LZ English and observed numerous caves, bunkers and structures. During this month, D Trp provided convoy escort to the Oasis, Blackhawk, Kontum, and Enari plus provided a ready reaction force for the Sqdn elements at Camp Holloway. On the 8th, A Trp's Scouts found a large enemy force northeast of Pleiku. The Sqdn OR-LL provides scant details of this engagement and records a familiar scenario: Scouts find, Guns shoot, airstrike, ARP insertion, count the dead, gather the equipment and documents for destruction and extraction, capture a few, etc. Score for the day: the aircraft killed 20, the Blues took six prisoners plus 3,000 lbs of NVA equipment including 122mm rockets and launchers without suffering any losses. Fortunately, VHPA Member Tom Galyean was part of this battle and provides the following:

I was the Lift platoon leader in A Trp. As I read a draft version of this history suddenly a flood of memories came back to me. A Trp saw considerable action during those days, some of it planned and orchestrated in true Cav style; some of it completely by accident. I believe I can provide some interesting details about the engagement on 8 August. It was near the end of the day. We were returning to Holloway from Kontum where we had staged that day. The whole Trp was enroute when a Cobra developed a mechanical problem that required an immediate landing; something like a tail rotor chip detector light, I think. They selected a fairly good sized, open area. The Scouts gave it a quick look and declared it clear, so the Cobra landed. My Lift ships, with the Blues onboard, were only a minute or so behind the Guns, so we inserted around the Cobra to provide security until the maintenance folks could either fix it or hook it out. We had both pair of Scouts and three Guns in the air. Naturally, with both the Blues and a ship on the ground, no one was going home. The Scouts began looking around, widening their search area and soon reported some fresh digging. My memory is a little fuzzy on the next point. I think an NVA soldier jumped from cover and the Blues killed him; but maybe someone fired at a LOH. Anyway, in short order, a fairly large sized NVA unit was forced from cover. I remember the Scouts and the Guns worked the area well. The Guns were armed with flechettes; not good news for bad guys in the open. Our Blues had a "Kit Carson" scout who had been an NVA 1LT. This guy grabs a bugle horn and tells the NVA they are surrounded and should surrender. As soon as they give up, we start treating their wounded. We hauled several to hospitals in Pleiku that had wounds from the nails. There were lots of dead too. Our "Kit Carson" spent some time talking with one of their officers; a platoon leader, I think. He learned that this was, indeed, one unlucky NVA battalion. They had moved down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and were trying to move to their assigned area some where southeast of Pleiku without being noticed. While they were crossing into Vietnam, they happened to be near the center of an "Arc Light" that wiped out a considerable portion of the battalion. After recovering from that, they moved through the mountains east of Kontum. One of their bivouac sites was hit by a series of H&I barrages that further reduced their ranks. This unit was composed mostly of young guys, new to the military. Having

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been hit twice pretty hard without even being involved in a battle had really stressed these guys. This may explain why the first guy jumped at the beginning of this engagement. Anyway, they had recovered from this second loss and were moving carefully when they accidentally came into contact with A Trp. The third time was "the charm". It was our understanding that after the final casualties inflicted by our Cobras and Scouts and those prisoners taken by the Blues, that this new NVA battalion ceased to exist before it ever engaged any of our friendly forces. All this because of their incredibly bad luck of being in the wrong place at the wrong time on three successive occasions!!

During the second half of the month, B Trp supported MR II in the Pleiku and Kontum areas but reported nothing of significance. On the 14th, C Trp's Scouts followed a well used trail to a large bunker complex; one having a radio antenna. Guns and air strikes were employed and several secondary explosions were observed. During a BDA, C Trp's Blues discovered four NVA KBA and captured one RR and two RPGs. On the 15th, D Trp was tasked to provide a 15 man force to Lane to augment the security. On the 16th, pilot Flennikan in an A Trp LOH experienced a loss of tail rotor and quill. The pilot autorotated and severed the tailboom on touchdown. Unable to shut down the violently vibrating aircraft, the crew exited safely. The tail rotor gear box was sent in for analysis but the tail rotor blades were not recovered even after D Trp spent three days searching for them. From the 17th through the 27th, C Trp supported the 4th Div southeast of An Khe with no significant findings. On the 22th, pilot Farrell in an A Trp LOH experienced a loss of rotor RPM while in slow flight in the AO. The pilot turned into the wind and landed hard in a sloped clearing. The observer was injured when he immediately exited and ran into the main rotor blades. The cause of the loss of power was unknown, pending fuel control teardown analysis. On the 25th, A Trp inserted the Infantry on a storage complex and recovered some US equipment while capturing some NVA rucksacks and weapons. The lone NVA security guard died at his post. They inserted their Blues in another area and found numerous military and religious documents. During the extraction, a Huey piloted by Cughton crashed and turned over in the PZ. The PZ was on sloping ground with two foot deep furrows. One skid hung up, the co-pilot over controlled the aircraft, and the pilot was unable to save the aircraft. Even though the aircraft turned up-side down, no one was seriously injured. On the 31st, pilot Caraker in an A Trp Huey experienced an engine failure and landed on sloping terrain. The aircraft fell on its right side causing structural damage. None of the crew was injured.

September - We will start this period by quoting liberally from a debrief conducted by Army historical personnel of Rudy De France who was the Sqdn Cmdr until the 7th. This debriefing took the form of 20 questions (surrounded by "0" in the paragraph to follow) and Rudy's answers.

(The interviewer asked for background information.) I graduated from fixed wing flight school in 1957 and served several years in both air and ground assignments with the 14th Armored Cav in Germany. I was really glad to command the 7/17th on my second tour in Vietnam. During most the six months I commanded the Sqdn, A Trp supported the 4th Div, B Trp supported the ARVN's primary in the Pleiku and Kontum area, and C Trp supported the 173rd Abn. Only twice during that period did I have the entire Sqdn all together. On 21 July, we were able to reorganize under a new TO&E that had a LT as the infantry rifle platoon leader in each ARP. It also integrated the former direct support maintenance and avionics detachments into each ACT. (The interviewer had heard comments from other units that their MAJs and CPTs had less experience than in "the old days" and that the warrant and commissioned officers coming out of flight school were not adequately trained for Vietnam duty.) I certainly did not find either of these cases in the 7/17th. The senior officers were all on their second tours, were experienced aviators and did an outstanding job. Because we always operated as a team and because the morale and esprit was so high, the new pilots quickly learned from the experienced ones and built on what they had learned in flight school. We had a number of experienced people extend their tour which helped us with needed skills. There may have been isolated areas where a good maintenance NCO's DEROS came and there was no one to replace him; but overall we were staffed at adequate levels with appropriately skilled people. (He was asked how he influenced troop operations.) I tried very hard not to intercede or to take over and run the troop for the Trp Cmdr, while they were in an AO. I would say that my influence in troop operations was on the nature of advice, prior to an operation. On occasion, after an operation, I would have a commander come to my office where we could critique the actions; particularly if we lost some aircraft or something went wrong. The Trp Cmdrs were knowledgeable and proficient in their operations. (He was asked do the ground commanders understand and properly utilize your unit.) I can say that without many exceptions, the ground commanders did not understand and did not know how to properly use Air Cav. Air Cav is still a new operation and it took continual education, coordination and orientation of ground commanders to teach them how to get the best results. The key was to get them to see that Air Cav has a mission to perform and that it is not just an aviation asset for them to use. They had to realize that if an ACT is not used as a team, it is not effective. (Concerning the accident rate.) Unfortunately all ACs have an above average accident rate and ours was high. I think there are several reasons for this. First and foremost is the very mission of Air Cav, particularly with the LOHs, because the pilot has to neglect the helicopter in order to perform his mission. This is something you have to see to understand; something many a senior aviation commander didn't do first hand. This is especially true in MR II because of the terrain. Going up and down those mountains caused many accidents. We were criticized for being too mission oriented and for not being safety oriented. We had excellent safety and training programs that I believe were equal to and in many instances surpassed other aviation units. I am happy to say that during the rainy season we didn't have any accidents as a result of weather. During the dry season, dust did present a problem during landings, takeoffs, and hovering. We had a Cobra go IFR while hovering into a revetment and crash. The reason for this was a lack of instrument proficiency time in this area. There were three requests for panel time put in where the specific action occurred. If there had been a command emphasis from a higher headquarters for instrument time, the accident would never have happened. The density altitude up at Dalat was very often above 7,000 feet yet our units operated there without any accidents. This is a result of command emphasis by the commanders and a continual evaluation of the environment. Because of the organization of the ACTs and the Sqdn and because of the maintenance and supply support we have and received, we had enough aircraft at all times to perform our mission. I would venture to say that in each ACT there were only three or four aviators who reached the Bde limit of 140 flying hours per month. We usually had sufficient men to fly in that man's place and the Flight Surgeons watched for aviator fatigue. (He was asked to describe his favorite accomplishment.) When I look back at my tour I especially appreciate the Sqdn's efforts during the month of April in the Dak Seang, Dak To area. The reason for this was because it was the heaviest area of enemy contact and we were supporting the ARVN's with D Trp and two ACTs. We developed the situation to the extent that the ARVN's could no longer react to it because they were completely committed. It was also our period of heaviest contact and especially the ACTs responded in a maximum effort for the entire month. I look back with pride at the job everyone in the Sqdn did and not just the air crews but the maintenance personnel as well. The maintenance people had to perform at about 125 percent extra effort, working all night long, mess halls being open until 1 a.m. and everyone just really pitched in to help out. (He was asked to assess the effectiveness of the Vietnamization program.) I would have to say that in our AO, often the ACTs would develop a situation and call on the ARVN's for the reactionary force. They are still a little hesitant to react to a situation we develop and at periods of time when we had an aircraft shot down and our men inserted and in contact, it would be a day and a half before we could get the reaction force. This is not a satisfactory situation to be in. We did train some ARVN infantry men and they responded very well to what we developed.

During this entire month, C Trp supported the 173rd Abn around LZ English. On the 7th, while observing a large cave complex a C Trp LOH received heavy small arms fire and crashed. The crew was extracted by the C&C. After this extraction, C Trp was diverted to help a friendly unit in heavy contact. They provided close air support and used artillery and airstrikes until darkness. On the way home, they received intense 51 cal fire and observed an air burst. Airstrikes were called in but darkness prevented any follow-up. On the 9th, pilot Hafner in a B Trp Huey experienced a hard landing due to low rotor RPM during a check ride. The pilot initially saw that he was going to land short of the runway on an autorotation. The IP took control and attempted a power recovery, but the throttle was binding. The IP stretched the glide losing RPM, which resulted in a hard landing. The throttle linkage was found to be excessively dirty and the throttle bearing was sent in for analysis. From the 10th for the rest of the month, A Trp supported the 4th Div. On the 10th, a LOH was shot down and the crew evacuated with minor injuries. On the 13th, A Trp's Scouts found NVA soldiers in a bunker complex south of An Khe but didn't draw any fire. The Guns expended and on the way back one piloted by Clausen experienced an engine failure. Having no suitable force landing area, the pilot crashed into the trees. The crew was extracted and the Scouts observed an NVA squad moving toward the downed Cobra. They killed six before bad weather chased A Trp from the area. Due to enemy presence, the aircraft was not recovered and the cause of the engine failure could not be determined. On the 15th, A Trp had a LOH shot down and extracted the crew. On the 15th, the Squadron assumed operational control of D/2/1 Cav stationed at Phan Thiet and supporting the 23rd ARVN. On the 15th, B Trp started training ARPs from the 22nd ARVN in the Dak To and Kontum area. On the 18th, pilot Thorpe in a C Trp AH-1G had a tail rotor strike a conex container. The pilot picked the aircraft up to a hover, turned approximately 90 degrees in the L-shaped revetment and the tail rotor struck a conex container the Post Engineers had placed near the revetment while working on the airfield drainage. The result was a hard landing and damage to the tail rotor drive train; but no injuries. On the 19th, pilot Hebert in a B Trp LOH experienced an engine failure on take off and the aircraft landed hard. The pilot received back injuries when the collapsible seat failed to collapse due to a tech manual under the seat. The co-pilot was struck in the head by the turning rotor blades after exiting the helicopter. The cause of the engine failure would be determined by teardown analysis. On the 24th, A Trp was working an AO near FB Crystal when they were alerted to help break an attack on FB Digger. A few minutes after A Trp arrived over Digger, the enemy ended the battle. A Trp's Lift and the Medevac ships spent much of the rest of the day removing the wounded and restoring the FB to normal. On the 24th, B Trp was sent to Phu Hiep to support the 22nd ARVN in an area northwest of Tuy Hoa. Enemy activity was heavy and they killed two NVA when they found a large training site complete with bleachers and eight hootches. From the 26th until 2 Oct, B Trp supported the 3rd ARVN Cav and the 47th ARVN Inf in the Pleiku area. These operations results in three enemy KBA and sightings of stepped up enemy activity. On the 27th, A Trp's Scouts observed one individual. The Guns expended and the Blues were inserted. They found two killed and approximately 14 structures destroyed. On the 30th, A Trp observed eight enemy soldiers taking evasive action and killed them.

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 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 receive 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 CAO. 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 lose 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 Dykhous 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 gallon 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 dog 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. One 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 pulls 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 mission 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 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 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

WING M MIGU ORGOD TOW YUNG, SO WE DUNG ICIL. THE TURKIE DIED SONG TOWNUED US DUL DUNG HYL. TWIN, AN OI A SODA 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 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 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 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, 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 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 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 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 live 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 LOH 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 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 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, 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 laiger 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 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:

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It wasn't long after the Sqdn had moved to Qui Nhon airfield that we learned that that decision was flawed! Things were getting "ugly" in the city itself to the point where it was not safe to have our soldiers off the airfield after dark. The poor LTC airfield commander at Lane had lots of responsibility but no authority to address the security, race, drugs, and prostitution problems that had become acute. Most of the aviation units based at Lane were now attached to the 7/17th and it made a lot of sense for the HQ and HHT functions to be closer. I finally told the 17th CAG that we had to move to An Son and bring some of the "wild times there" under control. The good news is that we had indeed established a good working relationship with the ROKs. We understood and appreciated their no non-sense approach to combat operations and to the issues of drugs as well. So the Sqdn HQ and HHT moved to An Son about June. Some of our first steps were to take over the perimeter and to man the gates. Basically the Koreans manned the southern half and my command, the northern half. Times were hard for the girls that had been "living on the inside" for so long. We also started having meetings among the EM by rank. We'd gathered all the Privates together and listened to what they had to say, then the Specialists, Junior SGTs, etc. One of the things we learned, for example, was that the Privates were unhappy with the way their club was being run. I said: "Fine, you run your club." They were shocked that we would do this. They picked the people and we cut the orders giving them the jobs. Things like that really helped improve morale and mitigate some of the problems. We also found that we had several people that really caused a lot of trouble and didn't belong there; so we quickly "helped them move on". We also coordinated with the ROKs to put our units to work. Basically when a man is in a combat situation, he generally isn't bored and the racial differences were put aside. So we tried working people harder. Of course by that time the 7/17 HQ was operating more like a CAB. We had two AHCs, a Chinook Company, a fixed wing unit and provides support for the dust-off guys. Thank God for the Koreans and the good relationship we had developed with them! The ARVN, especially the 23rd Div guys we worked with a lot, were not good at using aviation assets correctly. And with some rare, rare exceptions, they didn't have a clue what Air Cavalry was all about! People have often asked me why I commanded the 7/17th for an entire year versus the normal six months. I tell them that about the time my six months were up, we had some definite ideas in place and specific interests in addressing "the wild times". I really felt we were doing some good and I personally thought it was the right thing to do. The commanders above me agreed enough to go to bat for me. So I extended in the job and they supported me. Now, anyone that was there during those days will readily tell you that we were hardly "pure as the driven snow" when I turned the Sqdn over to Jack Anderson. But we had "stemmed the tide" and "corrected" many of the abuses, while buying time for more American units to stand down and go home.

**July** - On the 6th, A Trp moved back to Phan Rang and were down from the 7th to the 17th awaiting the arrival of the maintenance section. The rest of the month was spent working the Song Mao area. Many cultivated fields, bunkers and trails were sighted. Further investigations of these sightings produced negative results. From July thru early Nov, C Trp remained at Lane, worked its traditional AOs north and west of Phu Cat, supported the 173rd Abn until it stood down in August. After that C Trp would support the Korean Divisions. VHPA Member Billy Miller provides a few more details about A Trp.

I joined A Trp in early July for my second tour in Vietnam. I flew with the 3/17th CAV during the first one, so I was familiar with Air Cav operations. One of the first questions I had was "where are the Blues" because I hadn't seen any American Infantry and no one had mentioned them. I learned that while the TO&E still authorized the Blues - A Trp had none and that had been the situation for some time. They were not putting security details some place else - they simply did not exist. A Trp's "normal operational mode" would be to support one of the ARVN Regts based at Dalat, Bao Loc, or Song Mao for a 5-6 days in a row, have a maintenance down day, then go support the next unit in the rotation. The Province Senior Advisor would furnish an ARVN ARP each time we supported his unit. Some times it was the same unit. Don't get me wrong - these weren't bad or poor units at all - it's just that they weren't nearly as good as Americans would have been. We had an unpublished practice of putting one of our Infantry officer types on the ground with this ARP just to make certain we had radio contact with them. You could never trust the ARVN Artillery, there was no American Artillery in the area any more, airstrikes were hard to come by; so the only support these guys would have came from our Guns. The rest of the unpublished practice went something like this - no matter what happens on the ground, we had to get that American out! There was a very strong dictate against Americans being on the ground during this period. We knew we would have more than a little hell to pay for "bending" that rule if knowledge of our practice got to some higher headquarters. To no one's big surprise, we didn't insert the ARP nearly as frequently as we did when we had American Blues. I'd guess we put them in about twice a week and most of these were little more than stepped up training exercises. I'd say we would only have three or four "real" insertions during an average month. The absence of American Blues did effect the way we flew. However, I'd say the Scouts and Guns were still very aggressive; but more "demands" were placed on the C&C to get any downed crews out and to provide support faster. Near the later part of the year the Phan Rang CO asked us to do first and last night VRs especially in the "alleys" where the bad guys fired mortars and 122s. That was even an interesting situation. Phan Rang wasn't bothered all that much with mortars and rockets but in other areas we suggested to higher that we mount night operations (incremental to the Nighthawks we would later fly) to try to catch these guys. These requests were all denied because of the risk factor. Even around Phan Rang the enemy seemed to be waiting for the Americans to leave. So long as our first and last light VRs stayed within a certain area, Phan Rang was rarely hit. A few times we'd send our teams deeper into the hills to the west and at evening we would get a rocket or two. Their favorite target was the O Club on top of a small hill within the camp. To the best of my knowledge no one was hurt and there was no major equipment damage from any of these attacks. Interesting times when you think about it.

**August** - On the 2nd, A Trp responded to contact by a recon company at FSB NORA. Two teams of Guns fired on what was thought to be the 40th NVA Bn. Later they were credited with 25 confirmed kills and two secondary explosions believed to be the ammo for the 82mm mortars. One Cobra was hit by fire but there were no casualties. From the 17th to the rest of the month, A Trp staged from Bao Loc to provide security during the upcoming Vietnamese elections. This operation consisted mainly of a road recon from Dalat to Bao Loc. The ARP remained at the Bao Loc strip on standby with American advisors and ground forces as a reaction force.

**September** - No activities were recorded in A Trp's unit history for this month.

**October** - On the 5th, a team of one LOH and one Gun were assigned to provide route security for a convoy from Phan Rang. The LOH experienced a tail rotor failure but no one was injured. On the 13th, a Gun team expended in support of an ARVN element in contact near Song Mao. After contact was broken, the ground force swept the area, found the dead and captured two weapons. Later in the day, A Trp sent some Guns to support the Recon Co of the 44th Regt that was in contact.

**November** - During this month, C Trp again moved its operations base to Holloway and would stay there for the rest of the year. On the 7th, A Trp was told to move to Pleiku for an undetermined period of time. On the 15th, a suspected NVA Bn base camp west of Phu Nhon was taken under fire by airstrikes, artillery and A Trp's Guns. 23rd ARVN element were inserted and immediately made contact. At 1100 the observer in an LOH was wounded and evaced to Pleiku. Later in the day, another Scout spotted 10-15 people sitting under a tree near some bunkers. Upon further investigation, they had disappeared. The Guns fired up the bunkers with unknown results. On the 22nd, A Trp was told to move back to Phan Rang. On the 19th, A Trp's Scouts fired on two men walking and the Guns also fired with unknown results. The Scouts returned to the same location again that day and received fire. The Guns expended with unknown results.

**December** - For the first few days, A Trp worked around Phan Rang as an ACT. The rest of the month was spent working the area between Dalat and Bao Loc. With the stand down of the 92nd and the 192nd AHCs, A Trp picked up their gun support and resupply missions. For example, two Guns were sent to Bao Loc for security of the surrounding engineer camps and two to Dong Ba Thin for the security of the Cam Ranh Bay area. VHPA Member Ron Logan describes what was going on with B Trp:

December was a not a good month for being a Scout and especially bad for Scout Plt Ldrs. Mike Trees had been our leader for several months. He got shot down and "shaken up" pretty good, so they made him the Ops Officer. Next a LT Sullivan was the Ldr for a few days until he was evaced after his LOH was destroyed by a tree. Then a CPT from C Trp came over as the Ldr for a few days. He too was shot down and evaced with a broken tail bone plus he had a finger shot off. Finally, CPT Mike Finch took over the platoon. Needless to say but the NVA were getting stronger and stronger in the Kontum / Dak To area!! As more and more aviation units stood down things got less and less organized. I certainly believe that about this time the Trp's name was just B/17th Cav. I saw Trp orders cut during this period with just B/17 versus the old name B/7/17.

**Year End Summary** - The Sqdn HQ and HHT were at Qui Nhon for half the year and at Lane for the rest and basically functioned as a CAB versus an ACS. For most of the year A Trp was assigned to the 10th CAB and cooperated with the program to minimize American losses while supporting the ARVN. They also had the opportunity to move between Phan Rang and Pleiku several times. B Trp was assigned to the 52nd CAB, was based at Holloway the entire year, and spent the majority of their time working the familiar AOs in the Dak To / Kontum areas. C Trp spent about three months in MR I supporting Lam Son 719, returned to Lane for two months, was in Kontum for the month of June, worked at Lane until November when it moved to Holloway again. When C Trp was at Lane, they received their missions from the Sqdn; but when they operated from bases other than Lane they received missions for other headquarters. D Trp was assigned to the 52nd CAB and was used for convoy escort and the security of Holloway.

The primary source materials for this year are: For HHT, a Yearbook titled "71 - 72 Anson, Vietnam" which has ten significant pages. For A Trp, a 15 page 1971 AUHS prepared by 1LT Dan P. Slona. For B Trp, nothing. For C Trp and H Trp, 10th Cav, a Yearbook titled "1972 Anson" which has ten significant pages. For D Trp, nothing. For the Sqdn, nothing.

**January** - On the 1st, A Trp was reassigned to the Squadron from the 10th CAB and supported the last elements of the 101st Abn Div located at Cam Ranh. Poor weather hampered A Trp's activities from the 4th to the 6th. On the 8th, A Trp was chased from an AO near Bao Loc by high winds and friendly artillery. The C&C was asked to evac two ARVN wounded from a FSB to Phan Rang. For the remainder of the month and for February, A Trp's assignments would change again. The thinning of American forces in MR II, A Trp's resources were deployed on a piece meal basis, making it virtually ineffective as an ACT. For the first half of the month, C Trp was operating from Camp Holloway but about mid-month they returned to Lane. On the 25th, A Trp sent three AH-1Gs and two Hueys to An Khe due to a heavy enemy build-up in the central highlands. At the same time, two LOHs were sent to An Son for convoy cover. On the 29th, an A Trp LOH performing VR for the 101st Abn saw seven enemy near Cam Ranh. The LOH took fire and was hit, but the Guns killed five. On the 30th, A Trp found a small enemy force in the same area as yesterday's action. The Guns fired on this force with unknown results. VHPA Member Billy Miller provides the following comments on life in A Trp during this time.

After the 10th CAB stood down, A Trp reverted back to Sqdn control but really the 17th CAG in Nha Trang was calling the shots. We made several trips to both An Son and Nha Trang to see who we would be working for and to determine what future plans they might have in mind for us. As it turned out for the first couple months we were THE aviation resource for the southern half of MR II. We actually picked up resources from former 10th CAB units as they stood down. I'd guess we got up to about 50 aircraft plus crews which was about double our normal TO&E compliment. About 20 of these were Hueys but we picked up some Cobras too. This information may help explain how we were able to send three or four ships a day to the various Province Senior Advisors, have a Scout and Gun team at Dong Be Thin as a quick reaction - ready reserve, send a couple LOHs to do road recons in the Dakat, Boc Loc, and Song Mao areas, and still conduct relatively normal Air Cavalry operations. It might make reading the Ops reports from that period a little easier to understand. There were rumors that A Trp had 58s instead of OH-6s. This is not true. A Trp had only 6s right up until the end. I must admit that the NVA did not have a major presence in that area and the most of the opposition came from the VC who had been hunted and hurt for a long time. This made our operations less dangerous. We rarely experience large cal AA fire. But, whenever we went back to Pleiku or other northern areas in MR II we quickly changed tactics as we flew against the NVA. As more units stood down, Phan Rang was one of the few places where helicopters could refuel. I know this sounds strange, but the days of going most any place and being able to get fuel were gone. We often called ahead to make certain we could get fuel. Because Phan Rang had fuel, we got lots of visitors. Many of them brought rumors that we would be standing down as well.

**February** - On the 1st, A Trp supported elements from Phan Rang to An Khe. Each day the pilots were forced to become more flexible. They were now doubling as resupply for the 101st as well as base security for Cam Ranh. Two Cobras and two LOHs performed a daily VR of the Cam Ranh area. Each night a Huey Night Hawk patrolled the Cam Ranh perimeter. The LOHs also doubled as VIP couriers. On the 3rd, A Trp began construction of defense bunkers and fighting positions in anticipation of a coming offensive. On the 9th, elements of A Trp at An Khe came under sapper attack during the night. The Guns launched and expended onto the perimeter. Ten enemy were killed and the gunstrike helped the capture of two more. B Trp was still operating out of Holloway. Again Billy Miller provides us with a good insight for this period.

I am not certain when Tet was that year but it was a pivotal date. Many of the military leaders believed there would be a major enemy push before or near Tet that year, so we stayed in the overstrength situation I described earlier. But Tet was a non-event that year and I guess that by mid-Feb we started receiving disposition instructions to turn in equipment and to swap or turnover aircraft. I was pretty busy during those days because I was a Cobra IP and was in good demand giving 90 day check-rides. We actually started having problems keeping guys current. At that time we worked under the 179 day rule. If you had been in-country 179 days or more, then that would count as a full tour and you would DEROS with the unit; else you were reassigned to another unit. We started sending people out in February and this made many people very unhappy. MAJ Turecek was a master at organization. He broke the disposition instructions down into a series of tasks then assigned an officer and an NCO to each task. As pilots came of flying status because they were no longer current, they were given these tasks. We got a lot done in a very short period of time. I remember we made lots of trips to III Corps areas to drop off aircraft, equipment and/or people. We had a couple "turn over teams" that included a maintenance officer, a senior crew chief, plus the crew to bring them back. We'd TI the ship before it was sent and fix everything we could. Many of the receiving units were really surprised that we weren't giving them "dogs" but we went to extra effort to give them the best we could.

**March** - C Trp had been told they would be standing down and since late in February they had really ceased operating as an ACT. On a daily basis, they had ships all over MR II in addition to having standing commitments. For example, Rich Sheppard says they had a Scout and two Guns stationed at An Khe for at least a month. They had LOHs flying as VIP ships and Lift ships flying Nighthawk missions around the larger airbases. All this changed near the end of the month when C Trp was told they would be staying in Vietnam. On the 30th, the general assault called the Easter Offensive officially began up in MR I. In MR II the situation had been getting worse and several ARVN FSBs along Rocket Ridge were already under siege. Neil Sheehan's "A Bright Shining Lie" provides a good overall summary of the Easter Offensive in MR II and often refers to aircraft and tactics that could only be ACTs. There is also a good map in the front of Sheehan's book that shows the line of ARVN FBs that ran in a line basically from Den Het to the river junction west of Kontum. They were in order: FB 6, FB 5, FB Charlie, and FB Delta. Also the town of Tan Canh basically south of Dak To on QL14 and would be the center of lots of activity in the weeks to come. VHPA Member Ron Logan describes this battle:

That day we were working out of Dak To in an area between FB 5 and FB 6. My Scout team was in the staging area while this action was going on. Apparently Finch's team had discovered some bunkers and they decided to insert the ARVN Blues. The ARVN Blue platoon leader at that time was an American advisor, an E7 or E8, Ranger type. He was good and the ARVN performed rather well under his leadership. I understand they were using a single ship LZ. Unfortunately, the American Sergeant was shot in the head and killed almost as he stepped off the first Lift ship. The rest of the insertion was made in rapid order but the leaderless ARVN never got organized and couldn't hold the LZ. The ARVN panicked and Finch tried to secure the LZ with his LOH. By then the NVA had set up an even stronger position and shot Finch down. Later that afternoon we were able to get the Observer, a guy named Black I think, out. He was a very brave man!! He said that Finch received a pretty bad head wound before or during the crash. Both men were able to exit the LOH and for some reason Finch had it in his mind that they needed to get into the trees. Black told him the NVA were in those trees and even tackled him as he started running in that direction. Nothing, however, would stop him. When he was able to get free of Black, he was last seen making his way into the trees. Black went back to the LOH and grabbed a supply of grenades. The C&C was trying to get the ARVN out and get to the Scout crew as well. It was just too hot. We later learned that the LZ was almost on top of an NVA Bn CP!! Anyway, Black realized that no one could come and get him unless the NVA guns in the bunkers could be silenced. He started at one end and worked down the line of bunkers, dropping grenades into each. After a few minutes, he ran out into the open and a LOH snatched him out. A brave and cool headed man!! The next day, we inserted a large ARVN force into a different LZ and they performed very well. We looked all day for Finch. We found lots of bad guys but we never found him. Years later I learned that he was indeed captured by the NVA, taken to Hanoi and died there. During that day CPT David Keating was flying a LOH with another ROL. They were shot down and one of their WPs blew which burned Dave pretty badly. They were both evaced to the States. I can remember we used to do a lot of BDAs for B52s and airstrikes. The AF were dropping bombs that would spread gas over a wide area and even seep into bunkers, then an igniter would blow the whole thing. Very effective! I remember lots of discussion among the Scouts and worries that our engine exhaust might ignite some unexploded gas. I don't think it ever happened but we were worried about it. I can also remember a few times in late 71 when all three ACTs were operating at Holloway. There was no place to put all the people. People shared tents and bunks, etc. Some of my classmates were in the other troops, so whenever they would move in; we'd just make space for cots and hold small class reunions!

The official MIA records the VHPA Data Base Committee uses provide some more information about CPT Melvin W. Finch. An ARVN soldier captured by the NVA was being moved north at the same time as Finch and reported that he died of dysentery on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. His remains were returned to America in 1985.

Again we hear from Billy Miller for A Trp: Very early in March or maybe the end of Feb, A Trp received word that maybe we wouldn't be standing down after all. The increased enemy activity leading up to the Easter Offensive had some people worried. After a day or so, MAJ Turecek flew to Long Binh to "talk to the boss" (he and the CO of the 1st Avn Bde were very good friends). This didn't make the 17th CAG folks too happy. Basically, he wanted to make certain that if A Trp was going to stay, then someone with some serious authority had been seen to it that we get our equipment and people back. As it turned out, went he talked to the staff at Long Binh they reasoned that we were already too far down the path toward standing down to reverse the process, so he came back with a copy of the General Order sending us out of the country not later than 18 Mar. From that point on we really had to hustle. It was about this same time (end of Feb or very early in March) that a party from B Trp visited us. They had heard that we seemed to be pretty well organized for standing down and wanted to see if they could learn from us. As I recall, they stayed a day or so, took lots of notes and returned to Pleiku to start standing down themselves. I'd guess they were about 3 weeks behind us in the schedule and were just starting to turn in equipment. It is also my recollection that before the 10th of March, someone put a stop to B Trp standing down because of the enemy build up for the Easter Offensive. In short order, B Trp got all the equipment

and people back. Anyway, by the 8th we were down to just a couple of ships to haul supplies around and these were being manned by crews from other units that would take them from us. We had turned in about four Cobras and just a few LOHs and Hueys, less than half our authorized TO&E for shipment back to the States. We knew we'd never see those aircraft again as the procedure called from them to be sent to Corpus Christy to be rebuilt. A Trp's Colors, some equipment, and just a few people were sent to Ft. Hood. About 50% of our TO&E equipment, mostly maintenance stuff, was sent to Ft. Bragg. I believe 17 Os and 35 EM reported to Cam Rang and we were out of there on the 15th heading for Bragg as well. The Army had plans to convert the 1/17th CAV into an ACS. This is a story and a half by itself. Many a former 7/17er (Dick Marshall, Bob Hefford, Lou Hennies, myself) would command this Sqdn and many more served in it. When MAJ Turecek arrived at Bragg after his leave, there was a small detachment there with B Models armed with SS-11s, the old pre-TOW French made anti-tank missile. He had an interview with the senior Aviation officer there and either volunteered or was volunteered to take this detachment back to Vietnam to serve as a SS-11 NETT. So he went back for 6 weeks TDY while the rest of us formed D Trp (Prov) 1/17th CAV. He was an Infantry officer and when we returned from TDY we had to get him to branch transfer to Armor so we could keep D Trp alive. Oh, the joys of the peace time Army!! As a final note concerning A Trp and to make certain the record is straight, I joined them on July 4, 1971. From that time until we stood down, no one was killed in the Troop. Now during this time we reassigned guys to other units and they died there, but no one died in A Trp during those nine months.

April - Early in the month, C Trp moved its operational base from Lane to the old medevac barracks at Camp Holloway and began working the area around Ben Het and Dak To because of the NVA build-up in the area. They knew the move was temporary, so they left their admin and maintenance support at Lane. All scheduled or heavy maintenance was done at Lane; but if they needed something in a hurry they worked with B Trp at Camp Holloway. On the 3rd, C Trp helped defeat the NVA force that had overrun part of FB Delta. On the 18th, the Squadron Headquarters, HHT and A Trp officially stood down and departed Vietnam. A Trp, as mentioned earlier, actually left on the March 15th. B Trp was redesignated H Trp 17 Cav. On the 19th, the ARVN abandoned Hoai An, a district headquarters on QL506 south of Bong Son, very hastily and left the American advisors to their own fate. Sheehan's book contains a glowing account of how LTC Jack Anderson, still flying the Ruthless 6 C&C with 50 cal doorguns, rescued the advisors as the doorgunners killed NVA on 25 yards from the ship. The problem began on the 9th when the NVA finally took LZ Pony (famous from the 1st Cav days) and the ARVN kept falling back to Hoai An. By the end of the month the whole of northern Binh Dinh Province, including LZ English, fell to the NVA. On the 19th, C Trp was sent southwest of Pleiku to work around a FB that had been mortared pretty bad for the last few nights. The Scouts hadn't been on the VR longer than 30 seconds when the Scout Platoon Ldr started yelling: "We've got people down here ... taking fire". The LOH was shot down and started to burn. CW2 Steward was the wing and hovered over the wreck doing 360s to keep the flames down so the crew could get out. He hung in there and hung in there; but CPT Thomas S. Powell died in the LOH. On the 30th, C Trp was officially redesignated H Trp 10 Cav. VHPA Member Sidney Lyons, the last C Trp Cmdr and the only CO H/10 would know in Vietnam, recalls:

For a time during the month, C Trp had been known as Air Cav Troop II, MR II but we were finally named H/10th Cav. To many guys, however, it was still Charlie Troop. Even though we were one of the last aviation units to leave Vietnam, he continued to function as an ACT until the very end. We "lost" our ARP due to a moratorium about putting the Blues on the ground. Basically, they could only be inserted to help rescue a downed crew. They were bored out of their minds and were sadly misused by our higher. When we did need them and used them I was lucky to get two squads assembled. Sometimes we would use them to protect an LZ while we inserted a larger ARVN force just to keep them trained. Basically we supported two organizations; the 9th ARVN Div from north of Anson all the way to LZ English and the American Consulate in Qui Nhon which was basically the CIA. They had a number of mercenary forces that use to operate all over MR II and across the fence. At first we only inserted them and let them walk out. They were oriental, mostly Chinese, dressed like VC and NVA and carried their weapons. It took us a long time to work up the courage to land in a PZ and let those sort of folk come running at you and climb in your ship!! We had a good relationship with the CIA folk - they really liked us and did us lots of favors.

May - We have very little in the way of official historical information for this month. Luckily we have VHPA Member Rick Sheppard who remembers:

I can remember flying Gun cover for the B Model TOW ships. They had six missiles on a side and had to fly a pretty steady line toward the target. We took a lot of hits while covering those guys; they were so slow. They shot a lot of tanks. Some were US made that the ARVN had abandoned, some were NVA that were not fully functional, and some were very operational and did everything they could to avoid these ships. At one point the NVA had set up a 51 cal in a tower and nothing could take it out. A TOW ship came in on almost a flat approach and blew it away. That was a thing of beauty!! Let me tell you a little about the two guys that were killed about this time. Daryl was an Infantry type and for 30 to 60 days had been on one of the FBs on Rocket Ridge they were that short of American advisors. He had returned to the Trp, gotten checked out again and was flying as a Scout again. Wilcoxson had previously flown in the Lift for about 8 months and had volunteered for the Scouts because he felt "he was not contributing enough". On the 25th, 1LT Daryl R. Kunzler was the pilot of an H/10 LOH and 1LT Robert F. Wilcoxson was the observer on a mission south of Kontum. They reported NVA troops and volunteered to make a second pass. They were shot down and both died.

June - On the 2nd, H/10 was working at the Rockpile by QL14 south of Kontum. VHPA Member Rick Sheppard remembers:

A 57th AHC Cobra went down and was burning. One of the main blades had cut into the pilot's compartment and was trapping the pilot. CPT Suttle, H Trp's XO at the time, was flying C&C and was on short final to land and help rescue the Cougar crew. The ship started taking 51 cal fire and CPT Frederick N. Suttle, Jr. was hit and died of these wounds.

July - On the 26th, while working the LZ Crystal and Tarn Quan area an H/10 Cobra crashed and burned. WO1 Harold McCaslin, Jr. died of a broken neck in this crash. Larry Richards was also a pilot in this aircraft. He tried to get out of the wreck but fell back into the burning ship. The C&C landed, the EM got out to try to help and the pilots hovered the Huey over the burning Snake to try to control the flames. They were able to get Larry out but he was badly burned.

August - Need lots of help here!!

September - Need lots of help here!!

October - Need lots of help here!!

November - Need lots of help here!!

December - Need lots of help here!!

**Year End Summary** - After four and a half years, the Sqdn officially left Vietnam and was stationed back to Ft. Knox. The HQ and HHT personnel had been functioning like an Aviation Battalion or even a Group than an ACS during its last few months in Vietnam. A Trp stood down with most of its personnel going to Ft. Bragg and some of its equipment going with the colors to Ft. Hood. B and C Trps remained in Vietnam but had their names changed.

## 1973

The primary source materials for this year are: For H Troop, 10th Cav, a Yearbook titled "1972 Anson" which has ten significant pages. For H Troop, 17th Cav, nothing.

January - During the last few weeks, H/10 split its operation by sending about two thirds of the Trp to Xuan Loc. This was during the "landgrab" or "war of the flags" period when both sides attempted to occupy as much territory as possible in anticipation of the Cease Fire being signed. H Trp helped keep this area in ARVN hands as the NVA attempted to seize it.

February - On the 26th, both H Trps stood down and departed Vietnam. Several of their pilots went on to fly for the Joint Military Commission (JMC) for the next couple months until all American troops were withdrawn.

## A salute to the 7/17th Cav

There are many reasons why I set out to present the history of one Air Cavalry Squadron from its deployment to its departure from Vietnam. First, I believe that collecting and publishing the histories of Vietnam Era aviation units is something that the VHPA can do second to none. I hope this history of the 7/17th illustrates that point! Second, previous VHPA Directories included the history of Army aviation companies and Marines squadrons for selected periods of time. It seemed logical that we should try a larger unit for the entire time it was in Vietnam. Like most VHPAers, I was proud of the units I served with in Vietnam. So the third reason is that I wanted to see the history of my Squadron recorded somewhere for anyone and everyone to read. The sad part is that, no story is ever COMPLETE. Every time I call another 7/17er, I learned something new. I am well aware that

There are many, many untold stories still "locked in people's heads"; but at least I took the time and made the effort to record a few of them! Please see the References and Credits page for a complete list of contributors. All corrections, additions, deletions, comments, etc. should be sent to VHPA Headquarters or directly to Mike Law or Bill Greenhalgh.

Respectfully presented to the VHPA by Mike Law.

## 7/17 Cavalry Honor Roll

What follows is the roster of all those who died in Vietnam while serving in the 7/17 Cav.

Unit	Name	Rank	Platoon	Date	Status	Unit	Name	Rank	Platoon	Date	Status
A	Anderson, Curtis L.	WO1	Scout	13SEP68		C	Newton, Warren E.	SP4	Gun	9JAN68	BNR
A	Beaver, John D.	PFC	Inf	8MAR68		A	O'Donnell, John	SGT	Scout	12JUN68	
C	Borr, Jeffrey	WO1	Scout	9SEP69		C	Petteys, James B.	W01	Gun	15JAN69	
A	Bruce, Robert G.	WO1	Scout	20MAY71		B	Phillips, David J.	SGT	Scout	8MAR69	
A	Bryant, John D.	WO1	Scout	8DEC70		C	Phipps, James L.	W01	Gun	9JAN68	BNR
B	Carpenter, Walter A.	WO1	Scout	8MAR69		C	Pilk, Robert H.	SFC	Scout	19JUN70	
C	Cox, Sterling E.	1LT	Gun	15JAN69		C	Powell, Thomas S.	CPT	Scout	19APR72	
A	Craig, James H.	SP5		23MAY70		A	Puishi, Dale S.	SP4	Scout	20FEB68	
B	Crouse, Edgar F. Jr.	WO1	Scout	20JUL70		B	Rabren, Larry W.	W0	Scout	30APR70	
B	Dance, Robert L.	1LT	Scout	8AUG69		C	Ramos, Ranier S.	W01	Gun	9JAN68	BNR
C	Denney, Terry L.	WO1	Scout	9SEP69		A	Robinson, Gus	CPT	Scout	12APR70	
C	Dewey, Danny L.	WO1		5JUN70		A	Schultz, Ronnie B.	SP4		29FEB68	
C	Dickus, Michael J.	WO1	Scout	18JUL70		A	Scott, Herbert W.	W01	Scout	12JUN68	
B	Dugan, Edward M.	SP5	Scout	3JUN70		C	Sechrist, Fred J.	PFC	Gun	9JAN68	
B	Evans, Ronald L.	CW2		29APR71,		D	Smith, Charles E.	SSG	Inf	7JUL69	
B	Everts, Jack C.	SP5	Scout	30APR70,		A	Smith, Gregory A.	W01	Scout	20MAY71	
C	Exner, Fred A. III	W01	Scout	20NOV69		H/10	Suttle, Frederick N. Jr.	CPT	C&C	2JUL72	
B	Finch, Melvin W.	CPT	Scout	30MAR72	MK	A	Tameyozza, Noe	SP4	Scout	2NOV68	
C	Flurry, James D.	1LT	Scout	5FEB69		A	Turley, Richard L.	SSG	Scout	25APR69	
C	Garrett, Alonzo	SP4	Scout	11APR70		A	Turner, John M.	W01	Scout	26MAR69	
B	Grega, George W.	CW2	Scout	2NOV69		A	Wagner, Marvin L.	CW2	Scout	21JUL70	
B	Green, Stanley	SGT	Scout	21NOV68		A	Walker, Douglas A.	CW2	Scout	18MAY68	
A	Jackson, Herman H.	SGT	Scout	3MAY68		A	Wallace, Lanny J.	1LT	Scout	21JUL70	
A	Jacobs, Thomas C.	WO1	Scout	13SEP68,		B	Webb, Earl R. Jr.	SP4		3JUN70	
C	?Johnson, Edward A.	SP4	C&C	25FEB71		B	Webb, Mark J.	W01	Scout	20JUL70	
D	Johnson, Paul E.	PFC	Inf	7JUL69		B	Welding, Clifford K.	1LT	Scout	21NOV68	
A	Kaccock, Walter J.	SP4	Scout	21JUL70		D	West, James L.	SP4	Inf	20FEB68	
B	Koepken, Eric R.	WO1	Gun	11JUL68		B	Westra, Leroy J.	W01	?	25MAY71	
H/10	Kunzler, Daryl R.	WO1	Scout	25MAY72		H/10	Wilcoxon, Robert F.	W01	Scout	25MAY72	
C	Lancaster, David C.	WO1	Gun	21MAR71		A	Willis, Joseph F.	1LT	Scout	26MAR69	
C	Langhorn, Garfield	PFC	Inf	15JAN69		A	Woodruff, Alton D.	SSG	Scout	25APR69	
C	Low, James B.	WO1	Gun	3APR71		A	Wright, Phillip G.	W01	Scout	21JUL70	
A	Mallette, Avon N.	WO	Scout	19DEC70		D	Young, Colon D.	SP4	Inf	7JUL69	
C	Manthel, James W.	WO1	Gun	21MAR71		?	1st KIA	EM	Inf	?NOV67	
C	Mastyn, Edward J.	SP4	Inf	27OCT68		A	?, ?	EM	Scout	15APR70	
B	Mathis, Samuel J.	WO1	?	8AUG69		A	?, ?	EM	Scout	8MAY70	
H/10	McCaslin, Harold Jr.	WO1	Gun	26JUL72		A	?, ?	EM	Scout	19NOV70	
A	McCloyn, Joseph	SP5	Scout	24FEB68		C	Skinny New Guy	EM	?	2?FEB71	
B	McKibben, Ray	SGT	Inf	6DEC68							
C	Moden, Richard S.	SP4		16MAY70							

### Abbreviations used in this narrative:

AA	Anti-Aircraft	ATT	Advanced Tactical Training	Cmdr	Commander
ABN	Airborne	AUH	Annual Unit History	CO	Company
AC	Aircraft Commander	AUHS	Annual Unit History Supplement	CONARC	Continental Army Command
ACR	Armored Cavalry Regiment	AVN	Aviation	CONUS	Continental United States
ACS	Air Cavalry Squadron	AW	Aerial Weapons	CP	Command Post
ACT	Air Cavalry Troop	AWC	Aerial Weapons Company	CRID	ROK Capital Infantry Division
AH	Attack Helicopter	BDA	Borne Damage Assessment	CS	Composite Service (a tear gas)
AHC	Assault Helicopter Company	BDE	Brigade	CSAB	Combat Support Aviation Battalion
AHP	Army Heliport	Bn	Battalion	DA	Department of the Army
AIT	Advanced Individual Training	Bt	Battery	DEROS	Date Eligible for Return from Overseas
AM	Aluminum Matting	C&C	Command and Control	Det	Detachment
AO	Area of Operations	CAB	Combat Aviation Battalion	Div	Division
ARP	Aerial Rifle Platoon	CAG	Combat Aviation Group	EM	Enlisted Men
ARST	Aerial Reconnaissance and Security Troop	CARS	Combat Arms Regimental System	ENG	Engineer
ARTY	Artillery	CAV	Cavalry	E&E	Escape and Evade
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam	CDO	Combat Developments Office	FB	Fire Base
ASHC	Assault Support Helicopter Company	CG	Commanding General	FM	Frequency Modulated
AAP	Asphalt Aluminum Plank	CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group	FNG	Fu__ing New Guy

FSB	Fire Support Base	Ops	Operations	SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
H&I	Harassment and Interdiction	OR-LL	Operations Report - Lessons Learned	SP	Self Propelled
HHT	Headquarters and Headquarters Troop	POL	Petroleum Oil and Lubricants	Sqdn	Squadron
HQ	Headquarters	POW	Prisoner of War	STZ	Special Tactical Zone
IFR	Instrument Flight Rules	PROV	Provisional	SVAF	South Vietnamese Air Force
INF	Infantry	PSP	Pierced Steel Plank	TAC	Tactical Air Control
IP	Instructor Pilot	PZ	Pickup Zone	TC	Transportation Corps
LOH	Light Observation Helicopter	Regt	Regiment	TDY	Temporary Duty
LRRP	Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol	Reg	Regiment	TF	Task Force
LZ	Landing Zone	RLO	Real Live Officer	TOC	Tactical Operations Center
MPC	Military Paper Currency(?)	ROAD	Reorganized Army Division	TO&E	Table of Organization and Equipment
MED	Medical	ROK	Republic of Korea	TOE	Same as TO&E
MI	Military Intelligence	RON	Remain over night	Trp	Troop
MIA	Missing In Action	RR	Recoilless Rifle	UH	Utility Helicopter
NETT	New Equipment Training Team	RTO	Radio Telephone Operator	USAF	United States Air Force
NVA	North Vietnamese Army	S-1	Sqdn or Bn Personnel Officer	VC	Vietnamese Communist
OBS	Observation	S-2	Sqdn or Bn Intelligence Officer	VHF	Very High Frequency
O Club	Officers' Club	S-3	Sqdn or Bn Operations Officer	VR	Visual Reconnaissance
OD	olive drab	S-4	Sqdn or Bn Logcial Officer	WABTOC	When Authorized By Theater of Operations Commander
OH	Observation Helicopter	S-5	Sqdn or Bn Civil Affairs Officer	WP	White Phosphorus
OJT	On the job training	SA	Small Arms	XM	Experimental
OP	Observation Post	SF	Special Forces	XO	Executive Officer



"... WHEN WE BREAK OUT ... YOU'LL SEE ... WHAM !  
RIGHT ON TARGET !!! "