

Closure at Christmas

Here is an example of the power of the Internet and the vhfcn listserv coupled with the databases of the VHPA.

Editorial comments will look like this. The rest are actual Internet e-mail messages. First the end result (summary), then a cronological listing of the actual e-mail messages.

SUMMARY

Date: 14-Dec-1995 12:18pm
From: Bill
To: vhfcn list
CC: Hot Mike
CC: Gary
Subject: Closure at Christmas

Flight -- got a story for you guys which will certainly affirm the power of networking. I had the damndest thing happen to me this morning.

In the spring of 1968 I was doing a visual recon a bit to the East of LZ Dottie which was a firebase along Highway 1 about halfway between Chu Lai Airbase and Quang Ngai City. While at a very low altitude, moving at the proverbial "brisk walk" I took fire from a BAR directly out my right door from about 20 feet. I saw the weapon, that's how I know. My rightside observer took a round square in the face, we took no other hits.

This young fellow was flying his first scout mission -- he was a gunship crew chief. I did not really know him and have not been able to remember his name for all these years. I had five enlisted crew who were either under my command or flying with my scouts who died between March and November '68. This fellow is the only one I didn't remember for some reason, mainly because I didn't know him -- but still no excuse. All I can remember about this man is that I had flown his gunship a couple of evenings before.

Anyhow - I ask Gary Roush to look in the database for OH23 incidents in the spring of '68, figuring I can locate the deal by grid. Nothing conclusive comes up.

Les Hines (123d CAB Association) sends me a list of Americal KIA's who were in aviation units, but no record of subordinate units exists. On this list we find a name of a 67N20(UH1 Aircraft Mech) who died on 21 May.

Gary Checks the Aircraft Incident Database and finds one OH23G entry for 21 May which states one individual was killed by small arms fire. No grid coordinates or tail number was listed because the aircraft wasn't damaged. Go figure, it's an aircraft incident data base, the crew is not considered an integral part of the system.

My flight records indicate I was flying an OH23G on 21 May, flew two different aircraft that day, probably had to wash out one of them, I suppose.

Kyle posts the address of the Vietnam Memorial Database on the net last week. I feed my suspect's name in and it reveals he died in Quang Ngai Province and lists his hometown as Humphrey, Nebraska.

Corky Condon at the Friends of the VVM tells me their were no inquiries on this fellow and that all they had was

that he was assigned to the Americal Division.

I called Humphrey, Nebraska and got to the "Humphrey Democrat". The lady who writes obituaries recognized the name immediately, told me she remembered the obituary because she went to school with this fellow and knew his nine brothers and sisters. Told me his oldest sister's name and suggested I call. Now we're getting scary.

I call the sister. Really nice lady (whew!) -- glad to hear from me, says she needs to talk to one of her brothers who was really close to my man, if it is my man, because we still don't know what unit he was assigned to.

Get a call this morning from the sister who has set up a call for me with her brother this evening. This fellow has all the letters home, etc., and is dying to know everything. His brother was assigned to the Aeroscout Company, 123d CAB. There is some trepidation here, but I think this kid's family deserves a call -- it's me I'm worried about, weak knee syndrome. 2200 is H-Hour. Fortunately, there's no gruesome story here, it was over in an instant and the boy never knew what hit him.

So, Victor Roman Heesacker, we found you -- and we'll finally close the loop, there'll be one more person to remember at the Wall.

Skeeter ;Ö; Six

Aeroscout Company/123d CAB

Ky Ha, 1968

Here is how it started.

Date: 24-Oct-1995 10:16am

From: Mike

To: Gary

Subject: After Action Reports (KIA) to Historical Committee (Davies)

Bill told me the attached and I told him to tell Davies, and he sent it this way. We are trying to fire up the net to get others to read the KIA/MIA to get the detail into the document.

****snip (personal)****

hot mike

Subject: After Action Reports (KIA) to Historical Committee (Davies)

Author: Bill

Date: 10/23/95 8:56 PM

To: Historical Committee (Davies)

From: Bill

Subject: Cause of Death of certain helicopter Crewmembers

(02/07/68) CPT Thomas T. Oliver - Platoon Commander in A/123d (Pelicans). Was killed by gunshot wound to head while exiting UH1D after being downed by hostile fire. Peter Pilot was WO Lance Carpenter. Oliver's nickname was "TT" for his initials. He was also wounded, gunshot wound to foot, about two weeks earlier. He was not medically cleared to fly. TT was my Platoon Commander at the time.

(03/20/71) CW2 Billy Royal - Extended to fly scouts. Was serving with C/16th CAV. Took RPG round in cockpit of OH6A while hovering in Indian country. This boy was a heck of a Cobra pilot, I flew with him several times.

(02/18/68) WO1 Jeffrey Byrne/WO1 Noel Williams - Flying UH1D for A/123d (Pelicans). I have picture of burned wreckage. They were on combat assault with several lifts. Apparently the flight lead followed the same axis one too many times. PFC Brian Bates and SP4 David Heck were killed the same day. I don't remember them, but they could have been the crew.

(04/08/68) SP4 Glenn Andreotta/SP5 Charles Dutton. Crewmembers of an OH23G AeroScout piloted by 1LT Barry Lloyd. Shot down by a .51 in an AA trap to the SW of Quang Ngai. B Company (AeroScout), 123d Aviation Battalion. Both were burned badly, as was Lloyd, who exited the aircraft over the console and thru the bubble on impact. Lloyd told grisly story of being overrun by VC who killed one of the crewmen who was screaming in pain. VC looked at Lloyd and apparently decided he wasn't worth wasting a bullet on. CPT Gerald Walker (Scorpion Lead) was shot through the hand while hovering a gunship in to pick them up. (It was his right hand, on cyclic). The CO picked up Lloyd eventually. By the time I got there with another scout team we couldn't find anyone. I was the Scout commander at the time, these were my first casualties.

(11/01/68) SP4 George Kottyan. "Superman" was one of my excellent scout observers. This day he was flying as door gunner on a UH1B piloted by the CO of B Company (AeroScout), 123d CAB, Major Junius Tanner, on a VR west of Quang Ngai along the river just inside the first row of mountains. I was flying the scout, and one of my crew told me he saw a burning gunship on the ground. About the time we came around to look at it the other gun informed us the lead was down. Everybody was in shock, and Kottyan was badly burned. My crew (PFC's Hill and Burns) dismounted with their M-60's to protect the crew, who were in shock, while I medevaced Kottyan to Quang Ngai. It was a little skosh because we just getting ready to call off the VR due to lack of fuel. Fortunately, the relief team was just arriving on station. As I climbed out (OH6A) Kottyan was laying on the floor returning fire with a .45 and screaming at the VC. I believe Kottyan had been a teacher before he was drafted - but don't hold me to that. This action actually happened on 09/23/68. Kottyan died of complications about a month later in Japan. (Kidney failure, I believe) The crewchief on Tanner's ship was SP4 John Christine, who flew gunner for me on a number of occasions. I believe Christine was wounded in this action. My crew were awarded decorations for unassing the scout and looking after the crew.

This one I could be wrong on - (09/21/70) CW2 Grebby and CPT Hodges. I believe this aircraft is the one that was returning to Vinh Long from the NW (Moc Hoa?) at the end of a mission. The crew had put their chickenplates behind the pilots seat and were low leveling (not SOP) home. Two rounds came in through the front windscreen, both pilots were hit in the chest. Landed aircraft - died. No other hits. This happened. I remember seeing the aircraft at Vinh Long (I was CO, A/7/1 Cav, at the time) I'm not sure this was the crew or if it was a Dutchmaster aircraft - but I think it was.

Another maybe. - (03/17/71) CPT Robert C. Green/CW2 DePaul. I believe this was a crew from C/16th Cav. Heard it was a mid-air with a fixed wing at Can Tho. The fixed wing may have been Air America. The serial number of the Cobra sounds familiar.

Now, maybe somebody knows somebody who can help me.

On 26 Sep 68 I was piloting an OH6A on a VR west of Tam Key. I took fire and was wounded. My gunner, PFC

Hill put his foot on the pedals and steadied the aircraft until I could get my right foot off the top off the console where the impact of the round put it.

My crew chief, sitting in the back, took a round which came in his side and bounced back and forth between his front and back chickenplates. He died sometime later. I can't remember his name, but I believe it was a SP4 Brown. Anybody around know how to figure it out? (B/123). This initiated an action where we lost a gunship (WO Gray was AC), another scout CW2 Levy was pilot, and several of our infantry, including the Platoon Leader (2LT Slusser) were killed. One of the grunts won a Silver Star. All because I lifted the roof of a hooch up with the skids and saw some mortars inside.

Sometime in June or July 68 I was piloting an OH23G on a VR west of LZ Dottie, about halfway between Duc Pho and Chu Lai. While I was at a hover, a BAR (it looked as big as a howitzer) came out of a bush about 15' out the left door and opened up. My gunner, who was really new to the unit - was hit in the face and expired. I can't remember this guy's name either, he had only been in the unit a short time. This was B Company (AeroScout), 123d Aviation Bn. Can I figure this one out some way?

Could be I have a mental block about the guys in my own aircraft -- but both these guys were really new. I just feel like I'd like to know who they were -- they probably deserve a personal visit at the wall.

To the historical committee regarding unit organization.

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Regarding the 123d Aviation Battalion. The battalion was activated on 12 Dec 67. A Company was an assault company providing general support to the Division. (Americal) B Company was activated as B Company (AeroScout) on 12 Dec 67. It was an Infantry TOE and was a one of a kind unit. It was actually a slimmed down AirCav Troop. It was never "provisional." Delete the second entry for B Company, which was known as Aeroscout Company, 123d Aviation Battalion, on orders published by the Division from day 1. B Company had as its core the gun platoon (Scorpions) from the 161st AHC, from the 14th CAB. A Company had the two slick platoons from the 161st (Pelicans). A Co retained the callsign "Pelicans". B Company took the callsign "Warlord", which the slicks used. The guns were "Scorpion", the scouts were "Skeeter" and the Infantry Platoon (bless their hearts) went by the callsign "Animal". (And they were proud of it.!)

Bill Staffa (he of the fading memory, ...ya'll write this stuff down quick) Pelican 36, Warlord 16 or Skeeter 6, Apache 16, Apache 5, Apache 6, Darkhorse 35, you pick it...

Bill

Date: 26-Oct-1995 02:31pm

From: Bill

To: Gary

Subject: Query for Database

Gary -

Mike and I have been trading lies, pictures, and other salient information the last couple of weeks and he mentioned you might be able to dig something out of your database for me. Basically I'm looking for the names of two crewmen who died. I just can't remember their names and it's bugging me. I don't have tail numbers and in one case, dates. I don't know how you search the data base but here's what I do have, any help would be appreciated --

Sometime in April, May, June, or July of 1968 I was flying a visual recon out of LZ Dottie south of Chu Lai while assigned to B/123d Avn, Americal Division. I was flying an OH23G. One of my gunners was shot in the face with a BAR and I immediately transferred him to a slick for medevac. I'm sure he was killed. The grid on the incident was probably in the BS600800 or BS700800 grid or thereabouts. I know this isn't much to go on, any help might be appreciated.

On September 26, 1968 I was flying an OH6A on a visual recon West of Tam Ky. I was wounded and my backseat was gravely wounded. I heard he died in the hospital later. In this incident, we lost another OH6 piloted by WO Alan Levy, a B or C model piloted by WO Harold Gray, and three infantry soldiers were killed, including 2LT Slusser, the infantry platoon leader. The grid on this incident should be in the grid BT 100100 or BT 200100. Again, the unit was B/123 Avn, Americal Div.

My serial # was [REDACTED]

Can you do anything with this?

Bill

Date: 26-Oct-1995 04:11pm
From: Gary
Subject: RE: Query for Database

Hi Bill,

You have given me some good leads. I will see what I can come up with and get back to you.

If you can match lies with Mike you are a good man. 8-)

Gary

Date: 28-Oct-1995 11:36pm
From: Gary
Subject: RE: Query for Database

Hi Bill,

This is a long shot but may be a fit.

On 8 Apr 68 OH-23G 62-03813 was hit with 12.7 mm in the swashplate and flight controls killing two and injuring one. The two KIAs were SP4 Glenn U. Andreotta and SP5 Charles M. Dutton with B/123 AVN 23 INF. Records show that the OH-23G was written off as destroyed by fire on 11 Apr 68. The helicopter was hit while in a right bank at 50 feet and 65 knots. The incident happened at BS545631.

Does this look right or should I keep looking?

Gary

Date: 29-Oct-1995 00:04am
From: Gary
Subject: RE: Query for Database

Hi Bill,

This may be the answer to your second question.

On 26 Sep 68, B/123 AVN 23 Inf OH-6A 67-16185 was shot down north of LZ Young BT180190 while operating with D 1/52 Infantry. SP4 Donald Lynn Brown was hit by an AK-47 round near his anus. The round then exited and ricocheted off his chest protector and re-entered causing more severe wounds. He died 23 Oct 68 in Japan. Dennis Chapin helped pull him out of the helicopter. This engagement was with an unknown size enemy force. Seventy six NVA were killed and 13 individual weapons and one crew served weapon was captured. Others from the Aero Scout unit were killed and wounded in this operation. Robert Bressler and Art Reese were wounded in this action.

Does this fit?

Gary

Date: 30-Oct-1995 09:34am
From: Bill
To: Gary
Subject: Re: Query for Database (2)

Right on the money.

I was flying the scout. My front seat was SP4 Hill. We uncovered mortars and weapons while working around a hooch. Took some fire and called in the guns. When we went back there were several bodies around the hooch and some of the weapons were missing. We sniffed around the area for a while and while hovering over one of the "dead" guys we took a mess of AK47 fire from directly underneath. Brown actually shot the guy with his M60 but was hit. I was hit in the right foot and it was actually knocked up on top of the console. Hill put his feet on the pedals and stopped the spin before we touched down. We were less than 200 yards from LZ Young. I landed the aircraft on Young. I don't know if that counts as being shot down. Al Levy relieved me on station and his scout was shot down. The infantry platoon leader, 2LT Slusser, was killed also. The slick that picked us up was piloted or AC'd by WO Marv Stamos. (Probably crewed by Chapin. They pulled us out of the Loach and took us to 2d SURG at Chu Lai. It turned out we had uncovered all these guys less than 200 yards from LZ Young. They had ambushed some engineers on the other side of the LZ earlier in the morning. That's why we were there. We heard it was a battalion lager area later. Bet we spoiled a party for LZ Young that evening.

I have been trying to remember Brown's name for years. I'll be sure to visit him next trip to the wall.

Thanks immensely. I made a pretty good guess on those coordinates, I was looking at an air navigation chart (1:250K) and trying to remember 27 years.

awestruck by your competence

Bill
Skeeter 6

Date: 30-Oct-1995 09:52am
From: Bill
To: Gary
Subject: Re: Query for Database (1)

In a message dated 95-10-28 22:59:41 EST, you write:

Quote from Gary:
On 8 Apr 68 OH-23G 62-03813 was hit with 12.7 mm in the swashplate
and flight controls killing two and injuring one. The two KIAs were
SP4 Glenn U. Andreotta and SP5 Charles M. Dutton with B/I23 AVN

Close. This aircraft was piloted by 1LT Barry Lloyd.

The incident I'm thinking of happened sometime between this time and August 20, when we retired the OH23's. I'm pretty sure the grids I gave you are pretty close

I'd appreciate further digging.

Bill
Skeeter 6

Date: 31-Oct-1995 06:45pm
From: Bill
To: Gary
Subject: Query for Database

Gary -

Thanks again for the help. I have been plotting firebases and incidents involving my unit on a map. I've found that events and places enhances my memory about other events, I guess because I somehow relate these other events and their location to the shootdowns, etc.

On my first query. Looking at your reports, I'm not sure how you search the database. If you can use known locations, this incident happened East of LZ Dottie several miles, which would make it between Dottie and LZ Uptight. I don't know if that helps.

I've one more, shouldn't be too hard. On 23 September 68 we lost a UH1B piloted by MAJ Junius Tanner, about 20 kilometers to the West of Quang Ngai. The grid should be somewhere around BS 400700 maybe 475750 or vicinity. Killed was SP4 Geo. Kottyan, who was gunning for the MAJ on his "day off" from scouts. What I'd really like is whatever data you can find.

On that crash of 26 September in which I was involved, is there further report on a UH1B and an OH6A (Pilots WO Harold Gray and CWO Alan Levy) in that same action. I know we lost two more ships there. I'm wondering if we can find tail numbers and infor on them?

Andreotta, Duttan, Kottyan, Brown, and the fellow we are looking for were all members of my scout platoon. They were all crewmen, we lost no pilots KIA, although there was a lot of Purple Heart action among the rest of us.

I want to write down my recollections of the incidents for the database and the crewmember's association. I wonder if the parents of these boys were told much. My mother just got a telegram that said I was "wounded while pilot of a military aircraft."

Thanks for your help to this point -- I'd really like to close the loop on this last guy.

Skeeter 6

Bill

Date: 01-Nov-1995 01:34pm

From: Bill

To: Gary

Subject: My lost crewman

Gary -

Another thought on that OH23 crewman I lost. Looking through some old stuff I noticed on air medal orders our gunners were assigned to HHC, 196th Light Infantry Brigade. Sounds like the original TO called for just two crewmembers. I'll bet our gunners and infantry platoon were attached instead of assigned. Don't know if that helps. I know that there was a Brigade Aviation Section in the 196th.

Also, on a couple of lists I have two names appear, associated with the Americal. One is SGT Louis L. Bradley killed 5-16-68 and the other is SP5 Victor R. Heesacker, died 5-21-68. Could one of these guys be him -- this didn't bother me for twenty years, and now I'm obsessed by it all of a sudden. He's the last guy I can't account for on my two tours, kind of a personal "unknown soldier."

Thanks,

Skeeter 6

Bill

Date: 01-Nov-1995 10:51pm

From: Gary

Subject: RE: My lost crewman

Hi Bill,

Bradley was with F/8 CAV and was killed in Quang Tin Province in I Corps. (generically listed with the Americal Division)

Heesacker was generically listed with the Americal Division and was killed by small arms fire in a helicopter while acting as crew chief in Quang Ngai Province in I Corps.

I do not currently have either of them connected to a specific helicopter type or other crew members.

Any closer?

Gary

Date: 02-Nov-1995 09:37am
From: Bill
To: Gary
Subject: Re: My lost crewman

Gary-

Bradley is obviously not the guy.

On the other hand, this incident happened about 10-15 kilometers NNW of Quang Ngai province. Heesacker could be the man. Is there some place we can get his unit - any national database - VVA - or somebody like that?

This guy had only been there a short time. And, he was a "B" model crewchief. I distinctly remember flying as peter pilot on a gunship reaction mission a couple of nights earlier and him sitting behind me when we took several hits all around him on the transmission wall. He wouldn't fly again that night. Crewchiefs flew on the left and the peter pilot set on the left in a gun. The day he was killed he volunteered to fly on the scout. Might be this guy - how can I find out. Any ideas?

Good work,

Skeeter 6

Date: 02-Nov-1995 09:48am>br> **From:** Bill
To: Gary
Subject: OH23 Incident

Gary -

The day in question I don't believe the helicopter suffered any damage at all. I remember that I continued the mission after the man was transferred to the Medevac.

Would it show up in the helicopter incident data base if the aircraft was not downed or damaged? Was there any shot up OH23 on the date this Heesacker fellow was killed.

That name is starting to ring a bell, but it may be because I keep saying it over and over trying to remember.

Bill

Skeeter 6

Date: 02-Nov-1995 02:54pm
From: Bill
To: Gary
Subject: Lost Crewman More

Gary -

Was looking at my flight records during lunch and noticed that on May 21, 1968 I flew two different OH23G's on VR's. They normally didn't make two entries for the same day unless you flew different aircraft. Maybe I did have some battle damage. That would be the same day that Heesacker was killed. For some reason, I seem to believe this particular incident was a little later - but if it turns out this fellow was in B/123 - it's got to be the guy. I've accounted for every scout and gun crewmember we had killed in the entire year except for this one.

Any OH23's showing on the incident report for that date?

Thanks,

Bill

Date: 28-Nov-1995 01:36pm

From: Bill

To: Gary

Subject: Lost Crews

Gary -

Thought I'd check back in and see if you might have some time to find my missing crewman from the OH23 in 1968. Could be Victor Heesacker - do you have anything on him in the database?

Also, still like to find the actions on 23 Sep 68 I asked about.

No hurry, it's been 25 years, but you have really helped me, and halfway closed a door on something left undone.

Thanks,

Bill

Skeeter 6

Date: 28-Nov-1995 01:36pm

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No hurry, it's been 25 years, but you have really helped me, and halfway closed a door on something left undone.

Thanks,

Bill
Skeeter 6

Date: 29-Nov-1995 08:35am
From: Gary
Subject: RE: Lost Crews

Hi Bill,

Thanks for your patience. I continue to be really busy. Spent a little time last night on your request.

No record of any OH-23G incidents on 23 Sep 68. There was one destroyed on 22 Sep 68. WO1 M.D. Mitchell had an engine failure in OH-23G 62-03809 on take off from Dau Tieng enroute to Cu Chi that resulted in a hard landing that cut off the tail boom. He was not seriously hurt.

Victor Heesacker, with a crew chief MOS, was killed on 21 May 68 in Quang Ngai Province in I Corps while with the Americal Division. His tour started 6 Dec 67.

Need more information from you to proceed further.

Gary

Date: 29-Nov-1995 12:11pm
From: Bill
To: Gary
Subject: Re: Lost Crews

Gary -

Thanks for getting back. The two incidents I'm still trying to lock down have become slightly confused with all my messages - I'll reclarify them for you, but I think we may be getting somewhere.

1. My mystery man could be Heesacker. The incident I'm thinking of did happen in Quang Ngai Province. Was there an OH23G incident in Quang Ngai Province on or about the same date? The guy I'm thinking of was shot in the head from close range, I'm sure he was dead almost instantly. Can we attach an aircraft to this guy Heesacker? Grid coordinates? It should be in the vicinity of BS 680850 near LZ Dottie or LZ Uptight, and about 10-15 kilometers NNW of Quang Ngai city.

2. The second incident was on 23 September 68. It was a UH1B or C (probably a B as it was the "low" gun) in the vicinity of BS450750, again in Quang Ngai Province about 20 kilometers west of Quang Ngai city. The AC was MAJ Junius Tanner and SP4 George Kottyan was mortally wounded (died 3 NOV in Japan). It would also be an Americal (123d Aviation Bn) aircraft. I'm interested in the writeup and the grid coordinates. I was awarded the DFC for covering, then pulling these guys out.

Thanks for your patience - hope you can find something.

Bill
Skeeter 6

Date: 29-Nov-1995 09:04pm

From: Bill

To: Gary

Subject: Another Name

America had an airman named Louis L. Bradley, Jr. killed on 680516. Anything on an OH23G and him in Quang Ngai province on that date? Another longshot, but they keep creeping in.

Also, I think the gunship I was looking for on 23 September 68 may have had 735 as the last three digits, it disappeared on some documents I have dated 14 September and 25 September. Any luck there?

Bill

Date: 29-Nov-1995 09:44pm

From: Gary

Subject: RE: Another Name

Hi Bill,

OH-23G 64-15234 was destroyed at XS477535 on 16 May 68. Should I connect this one with Louis L. Bradley, Jr.?

On 23 Sep 68 UH-1B 63-08735 took one hit at 300 feet from small arms fire, lost power, crashed and burned at BS383559. One person died from injuries and two others incurred injuries. SP4 George Edward Kottyan died on 1 Nov 68 from injuries received in a helicopter fire in Binh Dinh Province in II Corps.

How does this fit?

Gary

Date: 30-Nov-1995 09:57am

From: Bill

To: Gary

Subject: Nice Shot

Gary -

Good going, you found the crash site of 735, and it actually coincides with what my DFC award says, 25 miles SW of Quang Ngai. Somebody had given me actual copies of operational logs for my company for various days. I had the 14th and the 25th. 735 didn't show up on the 25th so I assumed it was the one that C&B'd. On the 25th a new number showed up and was notated as being in maint for armament fit, an obvious clue to replacement. Well, I'm a regular Sherlock!. Tail numbers simplify the process, don't they? Funny thing, I thought this happened a little closer to Quang Ngai city - I gave you a grid considerably closer I believe - well that's CRS setting in from 27 years ago.

The 16 May OH23G you mentioned went down in XS which is the Saigon Mapsheet, for the most part -- don't think we can connect Louis Bradley to that, he was America.

Bradley may not be the guy since my 759's show 6.6 hours in a UH1B on 680516. I flew OH23G's on the 13th and 14th. If Bradley was the guy, he didn't die on the spot, as I thought. We're talking a BAR round in the face from

about 20 feet here.

Heesacker (680521) could still be a possibility. My 759 shows me flying two different OH23Gs on that date, which generally meant something happened to the first one.

This is maddening - however, you've located and tail numbered the incidents in which 4 of my 5 men who died on my first tour, and pinned down where I was wounded. That's pretty good.

Nothing happened on 680521 with an OH23, huh?

Skeeter 6

Date: 30-Nov-1995 10:02pm

From: Gary

Subject: RE: Nice Shot

Hi Bill,

We have one OH-23G incident on 21 May 68 with very little information. Took 7.62 mm hit in cockpit killing one person. The mission was aborted and the flight continued. There is no tail number or grid coordinance listed. The record IMPLIES either no or very little damage to the helicopter which would explain the lack of tail number.

Heesacker is listed as being killed by small arms fire while acting as a crew chief in a helicopter.

Gary

Date: 01-Dec-1995 10:07am

From: Bill

To: Gary

Subject: Re: Nice Shot Again (tentatively)

Gary -

That would have to be pretty damned close, wouldn't it? Somebody writes you looking for a fix on an incident that happened to an OH23 in Quang Ngai during a 90 day period 27 years ago - and:

* You find that on 21 May 68 an OH23 somewhere in Viet Nam was shot at and a crewman was killed by one round of 7.62. (The round was actually .30 cal from a Browning Automatic Rifle which I can still see clearly, it looked as big as one of those training aid mockups, that is to say slightly smaller than a 105-mm howitzer) I wonder how big my eyes looked to that V.C.?

* You find one Victor Heesacker was killed while acting as a crewchief on a helicopter on 21 May 68.

* The Americal Division reports a Victor Heesacker was killed on an aerial recon in Quang Ngai province.

* In my incident I cannot remember any damage to the helicopter. I aborted the mission long enough to transfer the wounded/dead crewman to a Medevac. We probably switched helicopters in order to clean the first one of blood, etc.

* My flight records indicate my flying an OH23G on 21 May 68. I also remember that the fellow that was killed was my crewchief on a UH1B gunship a few nights before the incident in question where we were called up on a short mission to attack a bridge being overrun just south of the Chu Lai airbase. My flight records show night time in a UH1B on 18 and 20 May of 45 minutes each.

This is not conclusive evidence but I think we can tentatively attach Victor Heesacker to the OH23 incident on 21 May 68. I think we could also put it within three miles to the east of LZ Dottie (BS646856) in the vicinity of (center of mass) BS682852.

I am still thinking about going over to the archives and looking this up, but I have a pretty good starting place. One of the VHCMA members (Les Hines) has the daily journals of B/123d for several dates during which we were in significant actions. It turns out that Donald L. Brown who was mortally wounded on board my aircraft on 26 September was his buddy since AIT.

Amazingly small world.

I will extract incidents from those for the database.

Thanks much so far,

Bill

Date: 01-Dec-1995 11:13am

From: Bill

To: Gary

Subject: Database Input

I was looking at a couple of journal entries that Les Hines sent me and can put a couple of names to aircraft in B/123d. They're scattered and separated but I think its good to be able to find some of this stuff, it's very therapeutic for me anyway.

7 September 1968

Gunship (UH1B or UH1C), last three 030, goes down at BS546757. Pilot was 1LT Brian Livingston (bad head injury). I believe one of the crew was SP4 John Christine (VHCMA member) as he's on my Purple Heart orders and the date of injury is 7 September.

Gunship hit at BS543752. CW2 Percy (VHPA member) wounded in arm and leg, according to operations log.

26 September 1968

Scout 67-16185 hit. Crew CPT Staffa, SP4 Brown, SP4 Hill. Brown dies later of wounds. You have this info.

Scout 67-16172 hit, down in field. Pilot CW2 Alan Levy. Levy told a hilarious story of sitting in a rice paddy waving at all these aircraft going back and forth to the battle and nobody stopping to pick him up.

Gunship (UH1B or UH1C) last three 059 hit, down in field. The pilot, I believe was WO1 Harold Gray. The crewman may have been Robert Bressler.

In this action we had three grunts killed (including the platoon leader, 2LT Slusher) two wounded, two pilots

wounded, and two crewmen wounded.

What I found interesting was the confusion in locations and aircrew assignments with the daily journals. I believe the aircrew assignments were probably made the previous evening and things were always getting switched around - nobody told ops, I suppose.

The journal entries seem to be confused at times because of lack of info or possibly excitement - I wonder how much published history is correct?

Skeeter 6

Date: 14-Dec-1995 12:18pm
From: Bill
To: Gary
Subject: Missing Crewman, Case Closed

Gary -

For our database, please insert.

SP5 Victor R. Heesacker, B/123d Avn was killed while acting as a gunner/observer on an OH23G, piloted by 1LT William J. Staffa, engaged on a visual reconnaissance. The aircraft received fire from a BAR at extremely close range and Specialist Heesacker was killed instantly by a shot to the head. The aircraft itself was not damaged. The incident happened three miles east of LZ Dottie about mid-morning, in the vicinity of grid coordinates BS682852. Bill Staffa spoke to a sister and brother of SP5 Heesacker on 13 and 14 December, 1995.

Man, I feel better,

From: Bill
To: vhfcn list
Subject: Lost Crewman

Flight -

Followup on my conversation with the brother of SP5 Victor Heesacker, who was killed on board my scout (OH23G) on a VR east of LZ Dottie on 21 May 68. This won't be as eloquent as "Hot Mike's" spot reports (I'm just not that enthusiastic by nature.) on Marcie but was rather satisfying because it was personal.

I spoke with a fellow named Virgil Heesacker in Humphrey, Nebraska, Thursday evening. He was 18 months older than Victor, one of ten (count 'em) children, and the two were apparently inseparable. When I called, I was about 98% sure I had identified the right crewman and when Virgil told me they couldn't open the coffin because his brother had been shot in the face and that one of his brother's friends in another unit had written a letter telling him Vic had been killed when his aircraft went down to look at a rifle laying on the ground -- I knew I had my man. While we were speaking, his wife walked into the room with a letter of condolence from our Company Commander.

I've been a little upset over the years because I couldn't identify this fellow in pictures, couldn't remember his name, etc. I had flown with him an evening or two previously while piloting a UH1B -- can remember his face, etc. The day he was killed it was the first mission of the day and we never had that sitting around between missions, doing the daily on the helicopter, kind of time to make small talk -- get to know each other.

Turns out he had been in the unit less than a week. I seemed to remember he had come over from the maintenance detachment. It turns out he had from the Brigade Support Battalion (11th Infantry) at Duc Pho. He wanted to get back on flying status so he could send more money home. His cherry mission was the mission I flew with him in the Huey. We took three hits in the side of the aircraft about three feet away from him, somewhat unnerving him to say the least. Two days later he's dead.

Virgil was a glutton for information. I told him the circumstances of his brother's death, promised to write it all down and recommended he read Brennan's second book, "Headhunters" which has a lot of applicable stuff and Darkhorse One-Six's "Low Level Hell" which, in my mind, describes Divisional Reconnaissance operations very similar to our missions in Americal.

Today I sent him a full writeup on the incident, a map with exact locations of important things in the AO, a packet of newspaper clippings about the unit, and a couple of pictures.

Victor wanted to know how I found him so I told him about VHPA, VHCMA, our net, Friends of the V.V. Memorial, etc. This all started when I asked Gary to search the database for an OH23G incident in Quang Ngai "sometime in the spring of 1968", no name, no grids, no tail number -- nothing. All the organizations say this fellow was assigned to "Americal." It took about a two months.

This guy could have just been lost in the shuffle because he was a new guy in a fast paced environment. I'm glad he's not forgotten.

The most satisfying thing was that Virgil told me he was going to come out and see me so we could talk -- he hasn't gotten over Vic in 27 years, and lost a son of his own at 18 several years ago. His family never really knew exactly what happened, and I'll bet there are a lot of other families like that.

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Blown Away Skeeter Six

To: vhfcn list
From: Chris
Subject: Re: Lost Crewman

Skeeter grabs us with his tale of finding his crewmembers family.

Wow guy. Let me say this and it ain't original. The good pilots always took care of their crew. To me you have gone beyond taking care of your crew. You have gone way beyond that and someone up there is thanking you. The man is watching how you contacted his family and knows everyone who help you to get to them.

Thanks for taking the time.

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The characters in this research and discovery were:

Bill is: Bill Staffa

Hot Mike is: Mike Sloniker

Gary is: Gary Roush ☐ VHPA Databasc. 242 ASHC Mulcskinners, May 68 - May 69