



174th Assault Helicopter Company

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Two Shark Teams Down In Three days

Lam Son 719- March 3rd and 5th, 1971

*Assistant Webmaster note: The accounts of these two days for the Shark Platoon are only what we know thus far. On March 3rd, the Sharks were involved in the major insertion into LZ Lolo. On March 5th, the Sharks were involved in a major insertion into LZ Sophia. Please keep in mind, that these are only two days of events during Lam Son 719, which was a horrifying time in 1971- 174th AHC History, as was with many Aviation Units... and US Army Aviation History. See [The 101st List of Units Involved During Lam Son 719](#). The Operation lasted from 30 Jan 1971 to 9 April 1971. Colonel Mike Sloniker (Ret) has spent thousands of hours researching aviation related history for various units and Vietnam Veterans. He is the foremost Historian of the Lam Son 719/Laos Invasion. Email [Mike Sloniker](#) anytime. We encourage anyone viewing this page to make comments, updates, corrections to the information on this page. Other email options would be [Warren Hewetson](#) or [Jim McDaniel](#).

The First Shark Team Down- March 3rd, 1971

The late Fred Thompson speaks about Wednesday, March 3rd 1971 (in an email to Warren Hewetson- 9/25/99, which is in abbreviation in [Fred's Biography](#) on the website):

"A Shark fire team of Shark #170 (UH-1C #64-14170) 'Ace of Spades' and a replacement Shark #092 (UH-1C #66-15092, which arrived in Feb.'71. Only one month in the Unit!), were both shot down on this day in Laos. Though their mission was to fly escort for some News People, they were supposedly in support of the insertion into LZ Lolo as well. CPT Greg Smith (the late) was in the 'lead' aircraft (#092) and Gary Harter was flying as his 'wing' (#170). Multiple automatic weapons in the same area, near LZ Lolo, brought both of the aircraft down in a clearing beside QL9. Some witness reports of them being the only gunship support that day, during the insertion, and flying over the LZ (Lolo) with rockets and guns. Thus would explain the confusion of the team going down in in LZ Lolo or the escarpment". - Fred Thompson

Bob Jansen speaks about that day (to Warren Hewetson in a letter- 3/20/99. This excerpt is included in his, very vivid, full story "[Retirement of a Shark Gun](#)"):

"On March 3rd at about 4:00PM while at Khe Sanh, we got a Shark gunship fire team mission to escort two slicks with CBS reporters into Laos. We all had a bad feeling about this one. We headed for Laos.

After escorting the CBS reporters into LZ Lolo, where they would spend the night with the ARVNS, we flew around

waiting for the two slicks to come out. This is when I spotted black smoke coming out of the jungle a ways off. I told my Pilot, Mr. Gary Harter, what I saw and he relayed it to the lead Shark. At that time we didn't know it a burning helicopter – it was Capt. John Bishop's ship that was down. The crew included Bishop, 1LT Carl Flemmer, C/E Larry Rhodes, and doorgunner Gary Padilla. Padilla did not survive. See "[Cpt. John Bishop's Shootdown](#)".

The lead Gunship made a pass near the smoke and was shot down that quick! They were able to set down in a small clearing where somebody had been, because it was surrounded with foxholes. We made several circles around them and all was quiet.

Then, all at once, it seemed like every tree, bush and blade of grass had NVA behind them, and 'all hell broke loose' around us. It seemed like everything was in a fast, but slow motion. We were about 50 feet up and in a right hand circling turn. Either P.J. Roths or Bennie Holmes was our other pilot (Assistant Webmaster note: Actually neither of these pilots were there). I was flying left side and Pat Wade was right.

I could see NVA everywhere I looked and it felt like our M-60s were firing faster than they ever fired before, and on target. There were so many NVA that no matter where you fired you would kill one, but two would take his place. On the second circle, I was hit by a .51 Cal. bullet that came up through the ship, hit me in the bottom of my back and came out by my shoulder. It definitely caused me to take a minute and re-group. I could still function.

By the third time around, I had my M-60 back and we flew over the .51 cal. again. This time they weren't as lucky as before. I can vividly remember it – like I was there again. One by one they knew their time had come. Then it was my turn again.

I remember my M-60 getting shot out of my hands at the same time I got hit again – this time by an AK-47, and once again in the back, but that bullet stayed with me and really knocked me over. Pat tried to help me, but we were already going down from an unbelievable amount of hits to the ship. Luckily, Mr. Harter was flying. He flew half of a chopper into the same small LZ that the other Shark was in. Landing with a sort thump and a cloud of dust. Mr. Harter remembers the story from here, because I was out of it for a while

According to Gary, he and Pat pulled me out of the ship and were carrying me. They kept dropping me because I was so slippery from all the blood I was losing. The third time I was dropped, they say I got up and said, 'Lets get out of here.' I took off running, and Pat tackled me and put me in a hole. He got next to me and put his fingers in the bullet holes and tried to slow the bleeding. I remember lying there and watching the NVA moving in on us. I could hear mortars being dropped in those tubes, and coming in on us. Small arms fire kicked dirt in my face a couple times. Somehow, on the second attempt, (two slicks?) they made it in and my buddies got me on the first ship.

[*Assistant webmaster note: The 14th CAB Daily Staff Journal/Log from March 3, 1971 (also courtesy of Fred Thompson) reads: (Entry#:) 50, (Time:) 1800 (Incident:) "Boats 30 on PIO inbound to 18th SURG with one crew member of Shark teams- also states both Sharks down in Laos". This would mean that Boats 30 (a Dolphin call sign) was diverted from the "press people" on the ground and had picked up Jansen and was in route to the 18th Surgical at Quang Tri.]

I understand that all seven of the other Sharks got on the second ship, and we all made it out of Hell that day. When the ship I was on took off, I could feel and hear several hits the ship was taking as we were coming out".- Bob Jansen

Gary Harter's recollection of that day (to Warren Hewetson- 11/6/04 email):

"I was A/C of one of the aircraft that was lost on March 3, 1971, the day Bob Jansen was shot. I will defer dates and tail numbers to those who can verify those details, I have no documentation and my memory is probably not good enough to take to the bank. That being said, here is what I believe are a few "facts" as best that I recall. Both aircraft were lost on the day- that those newsmen were stranded on LZ Delta. That date can probably be confirmed easily, I know there have been articles regarding the incident. Our fire team and one Dolphin delivered them where they wanted to go. I won't speak for the other involved crews, but just between you and me it was what I considered a Romeo Foxtrot mission (If you need translation, Warren, I'll provide it).

Our lead gunship left the immediate area of the escarpment (that the LZ was sitting atop of). Where the Dolphin went- I have absolutely no recollection; I know we weren't covering them. I followed our lead aircraft low level onto the flat terrain between the river, the road (QL 9) and probably somewhere very near Lolo. Bad idea. I strongly suggested we not pursue this course of action any longer, it was quite simply- DANGEROUS territory. We turned east, roughly following QL 9 when our lead aircraft flew towards and directly over the site of what was a downed

aircraft. They were instantly under fire from the same NVA guns, took hits and landed in small clearing astride the road. No crewmen of the other Shark were injured; I don't know how much damage there was to the aircraft.

We circled their position, I called for our Dolphin to come to their rescue, I saw people moving across the road a hundred yards or so east of the downed Shark, and then Bob Jansen was shot and our transmission was apparently hit. I only remember the gauges being screwed up, and so I landed next to our lead aircraft. Bob tells it like it was. When the Dolphin came in, myself and our door gunner shoved him on the Slick and I told him to GO. Did anyone else get onboard you might well ask? No... the only concern that was in my mind was getting Bob out of there. I do recall talking to the rescue pilot later that day; he figured I knew what I was doing, and that we were going to fly the Sharks out. Seconds after he lifted off, and standing there like an idiot, it became obvious that we were all so worried about Bob, that we didn't even think to get ourselves rescued. I got in my aircraft and started calling for help, by now very scared.

We were picked up by what was a command ship from the 101st (158th?); I remember the pilots shoulder patch and all the radio consoles, and a very unhappy looking field grade officer whose day was probably going from bad to worse. They dropped us off at Khe Sahn, we found out that Bob was already on his way to Quang Tri's hospital; how we got home I don't remember.

My co-pilot that day was a captain, certain of that, new to the unit. Anybody know? Sorry, I can't remember that, or who was co-pilot (Pilot was Cpt. Greg Smith), or crew of the other Shark. I do believe that Bill Wilder was on the ground with us that day but you'd have to ask him. Neither of the aircraft were recovered to the best of my knowledge. And as a side note, a few days later I saw what I believe was an airstrike near the location the ships were left at. Any way to confirm that? This isn't to be confused with the Arclight that I also witnessed on top of the area where Marshall's and Souder's aircraft (#161) went down.

Does this help you out or does it only restate or contradict events you already know? I have been silent and uninvolved over the years about these things. I did give my recollections about the day Bruce Marshall and Lt. Souders were wounded... to the VHPA years ago. That was when I realized how foggy my memory is of what I thought I remember and how others remembered the same events differed". - Gary Harter Shark 14

The late Pat Wade wrote (12/28/99 email to Warren Hewetson):

"We were shot down on 03 March 1971. At this time the campaign was not going so well. We (Shark #170) were escorting some newspaper people into a LZ near Lolo, and after we dropped them off, we either picked up an SOS or we saw smoke and investigated, and then all hell broke loose. We saw a lot of NVA in the open and engaged, but later, we saw that they were in a big defensive position.

At this time all maneuvers were flown at low level because of the quad 50s and 20 mm. My gunner (Bob Jansen) took a hit through the back and grazed me, then we took 5-10 rounds of 50 into the engine and transmission. Simultaneously our sister ship (#092) took hits too and we sort of landed in formation, the place we landed was an old clearing/defensive position with a lot of foxholes around. I grabbed Jansen and threw him in a foxhole and dove on top of him. We had 4 sixties and 1000 rounds with us. So we set up a perimeter (halfass).

Wilder (C/E on the other Shark) was cracking me up, cuz he was pulling the radios out and shooting them. One of our Dolphin ships tried to pick us up and was taking hits. It came in so fast that we couldn't decide who was going out with him, so as we loaded Jansen, the ship took off with only him on it. So, after the Dolphin pilot swore at us, and dropped him off, another slick came in (a Dolphin? I don't remember) and picked the rest of us up.

It was not til 30 years later that I talked to him (Bob) about me trying to clean his back wound. I hadn't seen the second wound... it came up through his back and out through his shoulder. He said he loved me. And we still laugh about that".- Pat Wade

So, we now know that on Wednesday March 3rd, 1971; UH-1C #64-14170 (pictured below) was crewed by A/C Gary Harter, Co-Pilot unknown (Gary says "He was a Capt. new to the Unit.), Pat Wade (right Door Gunner) and Bob Jansen C/E.

The other Gunship UH-1C #66-15092 (pictured with #170 in NVA photo second below) was piloted by Capt. Greg Smith flying "lead" for the fire team (C/E was Bill Wilder we believe. Other of the crew unknown at this time). Can anybody help here? That would place Wilder on the ground during both events (3/3/71 & 3/5/71)!



The above photo provided through research by Warren Hewetson



In this bottom picture, an NVA soldier is clearly approaching the Shark with his rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) at the ready. Note the 19-shot rocket pod laying on the ground. While it is very difficult to see on this scanned photo, the dark spots directly above the aft end of the rocket pod, on the side of the engine cowling in front of the exhaust stack, are several rather large holes from a .51 Caliber antiaircraft gun- Mike Sloniker/Jim McDaniel

The below Xerox photos are from A Japanese 1973 publication showing Shark #092 on exhibit somewhere. Provided by Mike A. Campbell... to Ted Saunders... to Warren Hewetson . With some research by Warren Hewetson, we now know that the aircraft in question is actually in Vientiane, Laos. Warren is in contact with the US Embassy there to gather info. and graphics.

The Japanese Issue is: The KOKU-FAN (JAPANESE TEXT)

Can anyone translate the text on this photo?

THE NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES IN THE SOUTHEAST ASIA WAR

JAN. 1973 Page 89.

NO ISBN / NO LCCN

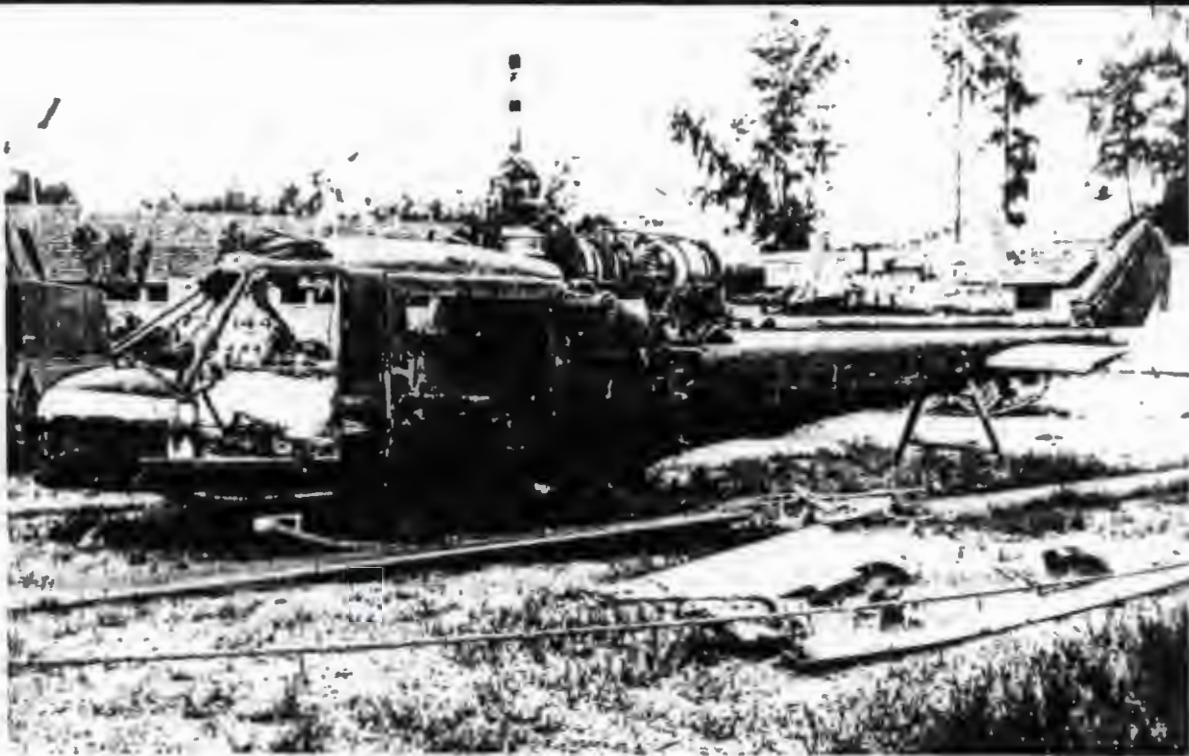
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▲▼ハノイ市にある「北ベトナムにおけるアメリカの戦争犯罪調査委員会」が主催して開かれた「イントシナ 国戦場展」(1971年夏) 写真は1971年春、米軍と南ベトナム政府軍のラオス南部侵襲作戦で、解放勢力側に捕獲されたものである



ハノイに展示された車両。

The Second Shark Team Down- March 5th, 1971

Fred Thompson speaks about Friday, March 5, 1971 (email to Warren Hewetson, 9/26/99):

“ On 5 March, the 174th (as many other supporting units.. too many to mention here honorably, see the page intro above this page) inserted the 1st ARVN Division into LZ Sophia. The insertion met with fierce anti-aircraft fire. Shark replacement aircraft both UH-1C #66-15169 (left foreground of first picture below) and UH-1C #66-15094 (second photo below) were shot down (again within vicinity of each other). Through conversation with Fred Thompson and research by Warren Hewetson; we know that #094 was crewed by Neal Varner, Chuck Blake and Bill Wilder and Yogi Reaves.(Both photos courtesy of Robert Brackenhoff)





Yogi Reaves recollection of 3/5/71 (email to Warren Hewetson 9/25/99):

“ Warren, I was flying with Wilder (in #094) on the day in question, There was six (174th and 71st) gunships flying low level. (Assistant Webmaster note: The 71st? Can anyone confirm that?) Our operations told us where to fly and how high. Seems they forgot to tell us they were flying us over an NVA base!

The trail ship (wasn't a Shark, probably the 71st) took a RPG through the chin bubble. I remember the radio call, 'TAKING HITS, GOING DOWN, MAYDAY'. We turned just in time to see the ship go up at about a 45 degree angle then fall through the trees. We circled around to cover the downed bird and saw NVA everywhere. We shot everything we had, along with the other five ships. I remember shooting at NVA in semi bunkers with their auto-weapons shooting at us. We lost both SHARKS that day. When we were hit, smoke filled the cabin. My pilots that day were Chuck Blake and Neil Varner. I remember when we went down (#094), we hit right beside the other Shark (#169) that was already down. I remember the medevac trying to get in and taking heavy fire. It was a slick that finally got us out... after many attempts and much enemy fire EVERYWHERE. I remember this day because I was awarded a Distinguish Flying Cross for knocking out a few enemy bunkers before going down. Believe me I will near forget that day”. - Yogi Reaves

Both the Shark crews on March 5th were extracted uninjured. This was the second Shark team to be downed in three days. It is disputed that none of the four aircraft were to be recovered due to intense enemy fire (but please see above). It was this day (March 5th) that Dolphin Cpt Don Peterson was cassette taping radio transmissions and captured the sequence of the shoot down and Mayday call by 1Lt Ralph "Butch" Elliot and the crew of "Witchdoctor 5, the 174th's aircraft recovery bird. See ["Witchdoctor 5 is Down"](#)

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