

5/6-96

Dear Mike:

Would you please insert these corrections where they are numbered on the typed copy. Thanks

- ① chalk 3 AC Wo Gene Haag, chalk 4 AC Wo Tom Hill.
- ② chalk 5, AC Wo Bruce Sibley was hit by something larger than an RPG as his aircraft swerved and rolled on its side. They crashed short of the PZ.
- ③ After landing Singletary's bird #185 was considered Red X'd due the hits it had taken.
- ④ than
- ⑤ If any of our members can recall this flight, I'd like to know how the guns fared. I can't recall who they were or if any were lost. Our flight of 10 consisted of 7 birds and 3 birds from the Blackwidows C Co. 101<sup>ST</sup> ANN BN, 101<sup>ST</sup>.
- ⑥ "of some" the specifics.

### One KINGSMEN Story from LAMSON 719

On the morning of March 20th, 1971 I was flying #68-16492 as Chalk 2 behind Major Jack Barker, Color 6, in a flight of 10 UH-1H's flying out from Khe Sanh to a PZ near FSB Brown in Laos. B Co, 101st Avn Bn's traditional call sign was KINGSMEN but we were COLOR during LAMSON 719. As was the case in most instances I really didn't know all the details as to what had or what was happening as we headed out to extract more ARVN's that were surrounded. By this time in the operation (six weeks) it seemed every PZ and LZ was hot in Laos, some just hotter than others.

On the way out we got on top of what I thought was smoke from a recent Arc Light. I have since read in Keith Nolan's book "Into Laos" it could have been a Naval smoke screen. As we approached the PZ we kept about a one to two minute separation. We were no longer setting our aircraft down but rather coming to a hover in the PZ's and holding until the crew chief and/or gunner said we were loaded. If we sat down we'd be swarmed by the ARVN's and not be able to take off.

Lead, Major Barker, rolled left off the smoke. It was hard to keep him in sight as the air was hazy from all the bombing. About 90 seconds later I dropped the collective and actually skirted the smoke band on the way down keeping the air speed at about 120. I lost sight of the lead ship but had the PZ in sight. Not long after I started my decent it appeared as if the whole area around the PZ started sparkling - muzzle flashes from everywhere. Lead did not report any information on the PZ. Later I found out that they were receiving heavy fire and made a go around. We didn't receive any hits until we were right at the perimeter of the PZ. Because I was coming in hot, in order to slow down, I stood the bird on its tail and pulled in all the pitch I could. At this time I could see the ARVN's through my chin bubble, crouching in the middle of the PZ with no weapons.

At the same time all hell broke loose inside the bird. It sounded as if every NVA had a hammer and was pounding on the bottom of the bird. My co-pilot, WO Edward R. Cash, jerked back as both of our green house windows shattered. Cash took a round through his flight suit leg, but it never touched his skin. Cash, a former Green Beret for two tours, had his M-16 with scope slung over his seat. A round entered the eye piece and exited the side of the scope. More rounds came through the radio controls and instrument panel. Both the crew chief, SP4 Lyle C. Smith (now deceased), and gunner, SP4 Roger L. Perales, were shooting and hollering to keep moving. Still taking hits, I rolled the nose over and radioed Chalk 3 not to follow my path in as the NVA were right on the edge of the PZ.

Our climb out was to the East. Both Smith and Perales got out on the skids to assess the damage. They reported we were hit numerous times through the tail boom and rounds had come out the tail rotor drive shaft housing. We were also streaming fuel. I called Lead, Major Barker, and told him we would be climbing to altitude and heading back to Khe Sanh with the wounded bird. I don't recall him answering. We lost our UHF and VHF radios as it seemed everything quieted down except for FM. Chalks 3 and 4 went in low level after my call and were both able to pick up troops and get out. Chalk 5, AC WO Bruce Sibley, was hit by an RPG and crashed. I didn't find out about this until they were rescued by CPT Willis E. Wulf, our recovery ship.

Our attention was on our crippled aircraft. We decided we would pick up Route 9 and fly right at the base of the clouds. We crossed our fingers and headed for Khe Sanh.

Just after reaching the cloud base, I believe it to be about 4000 to 4500 AGL, (I couldn't see - everything was smoky), it felt as if someone had punched me between the eyes. As my senses came back I found us in a dive heading what seemed to be straight down. I pulled back on the cyclic and started to pull in power when I noticed most of the instrument panel was gone and all I had was flight idle.

It seemed things were happening faster than I could comprehend. The images impressed on my mind are: My co-pilot, Ed Cash, was slumped over in his seat; I thought he could be dead. The windshield in front of both of us was blown out. Even the center post for the windshield was gone. Wires were dangling and sparking from the upper control panel.

I tried talking to Smith and Perales with no results. I turned to see Smith looking at me wide eyed and talking, but I could not hear him. With the radios all out, shouting became our communication. I noticed a big hole about the size of a football going into the transmission wall, which didn't help my confidence any.

Later Smith said we received an airburst in front of the bird, thought to be from a 37mm radar controlled gun. The blast knocked Cash, Perales and myself out. I slumped forward and pushed the bird into a dive. Smith said he was forced back against the wall and couldn't get forward, and that's when I came too.

There, right in front of us, was a hill top, FSB Delta 1. At the time I thought it was FSB Delta. This later caused a little problem which could have been fatal for us. We were to evacuate this FSB later in the day after we evacuated the first PZ. This fire base had about 400 ARVN's on it and was overrun later in the day. Only a few survivors ever made it back to Vietnam. This count came from "Into Laos".

We were auto rotating. As we crossed over the perimeter, we started receiving heavy small arms fire. This base was surrounded by the NVA that were right up against the perimeter. As soon as the skids touched the ground I bottomed the pitch. I wasn't going to take the chance of floating along and getting shot at anymore than we needed. We slid some but the surface was level. We continued taking heavy fire from the right side of the bird.

Cash and Smith both got out very quickly. Suddenly I heard a burst from an M-16 right behind my head. The ARVN's had rushed the bird from a bunker on the left side and were pinning Perales in the bird. He was able to have them back off when he fired toward them over their heads. Cash had gotten around and helped him take off the M-60 and as much ammo as they could carry. The three of them headed to a trench about 30 or 40 yards away that had been bulldozed out. I was crawling for the trench when I remembered I hadn't pulled the self destruction handle on the scrambler. I didn't think about it not working with all the damage we had taken. I remember shooting it about four or five times with my M-16. Crawling for the trench I rolled in and landed on top of an ARVN soldier with a bandaged, bloody leg. He let out a hell of a yell. Cash had already gotten the CE and gunner set up with the M-60 on the western edge of the 15 yard-long trench. They were suppressing fire from the closest perimeter.

I had my survival vest on with the portable emergency radio that put out a beeping sound on guard. When I listened all I could hear were other beeps from either other downed aircraft or jamming by the NVA. This trench had about 15 or 20 ARVN's in it - with no weapons, except one ARVN officer with a pistol. They had given up fighting and were waiting to be withdrawn. At the far end of the trench was the ARVN officer with a PRC 25 FM radio. Even though I didn't speak Vietnamese I convinced that ARVN that I was going to use the radio for a while. I should have taken his pistol too, as he gave me the impression he may use it to get his radio back.

I called on our company frequency but didn't get a response. Now the mortars started coming in. It was easy to see they were working the hill top to try to take out the bird. After some time I received a response on the radio from Kingsman 69, CWO Bill Singletary, Chalk 6, with crew members WO Joe St. John, CE Sergeant Bill Dillender, and door gunner PFC John Chubb. (Later that day, Dillender and Chubb, Cpt John Dugan and Major Barker were shot down and listed as MIA's. Eventually their status was changed to KIA BNR.) Singletary's bird had also been hit and couldn't make the PZ. I told Singletary and St. John we were on FSB Delta but they couldn't see a helicopter on the ground. He asked for a long count and homed in on us on Delta 1.

I told Bill it was getting very hot with small arms and mortars and that he should break off and not risk it. He replied with a chuckle and said he would come in low level from the north. As he was about to break over the edge of Delta 1 we were to give him a mark. I do distinctively remember hearing both the bird and the shooting increasing steadily as he approached.

As soon as he broke over the edge and came into view, Smith jumped out of the bunker onto his knees holding his M-16 over his head in a "T" fashion to mark our position for Singletary. He couldn't have been in that position for more than a few seconds when the dirt all around him exploded from small arms fire. Thinking the worst, I figured he was dead or wounded badly and that this would cause us not to escape. Pretty selfish of me when I look back at it.

Smith, from a prone position, held his M-16 up again to give a mark - he wasn't hit. Why, I'll never know. I believe our guardian angels were working overtime this day. Either Singletary or St. John said they had marked us. Whether they told us to take off running to the bird that was going to touch about 20 - 30 yards from us or it was instinctively the only thing to do, I can't recall. We did know we had to be the first ones to the bird or it would be overloaded with ARVN's.

The following sounds like something out of a John Wayne movie. As Singletary was flaring hard to slow down all four of us took off running to where we thought we could jump on without the bird stopping. As we ran we were

shooting under the birds path at the far perimeter to suppress the increased fire. Bill never had to stop as we jumped on. I was the last. When I jumped to get on, the bird was going up. My chest hit the floor of the bird and knocked the wind out of me. The very next thing I felt was someone (I think it was the CE Dillender) grab my coat by the back of my shoulders and literally throw me across the bird. I reached out my right arm and caught the back of Singletary's seat or I'd have been back out the other side.

As I came aboard Singletary pulled in all the power he had and nosed over staying as low as possible until we broke free of the small arms fire. All six of us in back were firing with two M-60's and four M-16's. We returned to where the Kingsmen birds were to sit at Khe Sanh. After landing Singletary's bird #185 was Red X-ed due to extensive damage from being hit so many times. Later in the day, Major Baker took 185 since it had better Red Xs than his bird. That ship and crew were lost.

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There is more to this story as half the day was left. Those details will come at another time.

It has only taken me 25 years to put this experience down in writing. It should take a little less time to write down the rest of the days' events. I thought I would remember all the details. Not until I started writing did I find time has taken the edge off of the specifics.

CWO Bill Singletary (now deceased), and CPT Willis E. Wulf both received Silver Stars for their heroic efforts to save CWO Bruce Sibley's crew and my crew that day.

AL FISCHER  
Removed VNCA

B CO 101st AV BN, 101st AMBL DIV  
KINGSMAN "18"  
May '70/Apr '71