

1969

The primary source materials for this year are: For HHT, a 12 page AUH prepared by WO Robert Rogers. For A Troop, a 28 page AUH 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 Troop, a 16 page AUH 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 Troop, a six page AUH prepared by 1LT John L. Davis and a Yearbook that covered MAJ Ledford's period of command. For D Troop, a ten page AUH prepared by LT Thomas K. Baldenweck. For the Squadron, 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 1969

The 1st was the beginning period for the RVN Gallantry Cross with Palm Award for HHT. In 1974 via DA General Order #6, HHT was awarded the RVN Gallantry Cross for the period 1 Jan 1969 to 30 Sep 1970.

Also on the 1st, the A Troop AUH states that they re-inserted their Blues into a complex which had been discovered on 27 Dec 1968. Eleven huts, five sleeping mats, fifty bunkers, with overhead cover, nine tunnels, six US armed helicopter rocket tubes, plus numerous foxholes were found and destroyed.

On the 2nd, the A Troop AUH states that they inserted the Blues two more times into enemy base camp areas. Early in the morning the Scouts had observed three smoldering camp fires and two tunnels. The Blues moved into the area, captured several khaki uniforms and NVA mess kits and found several blood trails leading from the area. Six huts and numerous bunkers were destroyed before they departed. Later in the afternoon, the Blues and a four-man LRP team were inserted into an NVA classroom complex which they destroyed. In the complex they captured 400 lbs of rice, 120 lbs of salt and destroyed six gun positions. Although no enemy personnel were found in the area, at least a company-size unit had used the complex in the very recent past.

On the 5th, the VHPA Helicopter database has helicopter lost record with two injuries for B Troop OH-6A #67-16222 at BN673720. 1LT Joe Shepherd provides the details:

I was Scalphunter 15 in 222 on this day. I had been in B Troop since August. My co-pilot/observer was WO1 Tom Sweet who was getting his LOH co-pilot time. We were doing a VR southwest of Phan Rang looking for the infamous "arms cache" that we spent so much time hunting. Because of maintenance problems we only had one Cobra covering two LOHs. The Cobra driver was CW2 Bill Christenson; later infused to the 2/17th Cav and killed. My wingman was 1LT "Rick" Richard, Scalphunter 18. His co-pilot was WO1 George Grega, also later KIA. The Blues were staging out of Phan Rang, but because it was the fifth of the month, and frequencies changed, they never got the call. The weather was great, and the AO was perfect - flat, open terrain, scattered trees and brush; no wind, birds chirping, bees buzzing - you get the idea. Anyway, Tom spotted some guys trying to hide in a clump of trees. We dropped a canister of CS and armed people started running in all directions. The terrain was so open that Rick and I were able to confine them to a small group of trees. We called Chris and told him to get the Blues out so we could capture them. Of course he got no response - the frequency thing! Rick and I played cat and mouse with about twenty of these guys for at least 15-20 minutes. At times I was hovering within 10 feet of armed VC, who for whatever reason did not shoot. Finally, they all burst out of the tree line on Rick's side and he fired on them.

They retreated, and obviously regrouped, and all came out on my side, on line, firing. I was at about a 30 to 50 foot hover, and lit them up with my minigun. I could see rounds impacting people. Then Tom yelled that he was hit, the wind screen blew apart, and my leg flew off the pedal. I pulled power and radioed that we were taking hits. Then I got a low RPM audio and the "Engine Out" light came on. We had enough power to almost clear the tree line. We hit the last large tree and crashed at the bottom; upright, but hard. We got out and down behind the tree just as the VC came back through the trees. We had a grenade, pistol, AK-47 dual for about 30 minutes. Chris put rockets right around us, and Rick and George dropped grenades almost on top of us. A slick from the 48th AHC heard Chris call on Guard and tried to get in to get us. They got shot all to hell. Finally, Rick could see that we were about to be overrun and he came in. I threw Tom in the back, returned to my aircraft for the CAR-15 and jumped in the other side. As we cleared the ground George and I were shooting at guys at very close range. Rick flew us to the aid station at Phan Rang and then went to notify the Blues. Around the aircraft they found 11 dead VC. One was an officer with a pistol, and that is another whole story. By the way, Rick Richard got the Silver Star for his actions that day. Tom was shot three times: ribs, fore arm and upper arm. He was medevaced to Camp Drake Japan and back home never to fly again. I have never talked to Tom Sweet since we landed in Japan on an air force medivac because we went to different hospitals. I was hit once in the thigh; hair-line fracture. I spent six weeks at Camp Zama and then returned to B Troop. I stayed with the troop until some time in March when I went to C Troop. I believe it was Tom's praying that made the difference that day. I have never sat down and written this out like this before. I must tell you that it was not easy. It brings back many old and deeply buried memories.

Also on the 5th, one of the perimeter towers at B Troop's base camp at Phan Thiet fellover injuring several troopers. SP4 Robert 'Mike' Haselgrove wrote a letter home that evening and recorded most of the details not captured in several photos taken of the tower laying on its side. This event was a much discussed item during the B Troop 2011 Reunion in Las Vegas. According to Mike, after lunch a detail of about six men started putting sandbags onto the flat platform near the top of the tower. Two guys, SP5 Carman Forke and SP4 Frank Treskolasky, were on the ground using a wrecker to lift filled sandbags up to the platform about 25 feet above the ground. SGTs Eddie Lee and Johnnie Griffitts and PFC Jim Pinkston were on the platform with Mike. Mike wrote they had finished one side and were starting on another when the tower started over. He said that he snapped out of it and when he came too he started helping free Eddie and Jim who were buried under sandbags and parts from the platform. An ambulance arrived from the dispensary at Phan Thiet's airfield. They were able to free Eddie and Jim. Jim had a bad cut on his head, hip and leg. Later that day he would be evaced to the 568th Med Co in Cam Ranh Bay. No one recalls that he returned to B Troop. Eddie had injuries to his head, left arm, and left leg. After his injuries were bandaged, he returned to B Troop and was on light duty for several weeks. Pictures taken of his during the next few days remind us of someone in the zombie movie. Mike had a chipped tooth and got four stitches on his chin but he slept in his own bunk that night. Johnnie believes he jumped or was just fortunate enough to avoid being hit by parts from the tower. He had a sort neck. This tower was built in the southeast corner of the perimeter by the local engineering unit that helped B Troop on several occasions in 1968 and 1969. There is general consensus that there were no guy-wires on the tower and that the four corner posts were not put into concrete base. This was one of four towers built around the perimeter.

SP4 Robert 'Mike' Haselgrove recalls: I arrived in Vietnam after AIT with a combat engineer MOS and joined B Troop in Oct 1968. Carman Forke and Johnnie Griffitts helped me stay in B Troop even though the unit had no slots for my MOS. I was assigned to the motor pool with Carman. I stayed in B Troop until I DEROSed in Nov 1969. I estimate we had at least 12 vehicles at Phan Thiet including a couple of mules, about three jeeps, plus three jeeps with 106mm recoilless rifles, one water truck, two 2½ ton trucks, and one wrecker. Our initial vehicle maintenance area at Phan Thiet had some PSP on the sand, a conex on one side and a canvas tent for shade and rain

protection. Then the engineers helped us install one of those canvas covered quonset huts. I remember we had one heck of a beer party when the hut was finished. In fact we had to drive those guys back to Phan Thiet the next morning – they were in bad shape! I slept in the maintenance area. Later when B Troop was at BMTE a guy named John Mike Stewart worked in the motor pool with me.

On the 10th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident and loss record for A Troop OH-6A #66-07801 at grid AP902797, location An Khe, flown by WO1 L.J. Wolchuk who had minor injuries and Aerial Observer SP4 J.E. Nickels had minor injuries. The accident summary reads as follows:

At approximately 1230 hours the flight departed Ban Me Thuot on a single ship training mission. At approximately 1300 hours while hovering to the west approximately 5-10 feet over a small wooded and bamboo area a loud noise was heard and the aircraft began spinning to the right and descending into the bamboo (estimated to be 30-50 feet high). After turning through 720 degrees WO1 Wolchuk cut the throttle off and lowered the collective in an attempt to stop the spin. These actions had little or no effect and the aircraft continued to spin and fall through the bamboo. During the descent one of the main rotor blades flexed down and severed the tail boom approximately 18 inches from the end. Prior to making ground contact WO1 Wolchuk shut the fuel shut off valve off. After ground contact the aircraft remained upright with three main rotor blades broken off. WO1 Wolchuk and SP4 Nickels were uninjured.

Also on the 10th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15620 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the right bottom cockpit, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 15th, the A Troop AUH states while operating 15 miles NW of Pleiku, their Scouts observed an enemy force on a former US firebase. Their Guns fired on the enemy and 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 Troop worked an AO north of Plei Djereng. The VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss with fatalities record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15651 at grid YA878677 flown by **1LT Sterling E. Cox** and **WO1 James B. Petteys**. The Wall database gives the following tour start date and MOS data: Cox, 10 Sep 1968, 1204; Petteys, 26 Aug 1968, 062B. They 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 a series of accounts from various individuals of this battle:

The following is an edited version of the DA form 638 (Recommendation for Award) undated but signed by MAJ Jerry G. Ledford:

Block 1: Langhorn, Garfield. Block 2: US52768385. Block 3: PFC E3. Block 4: MOS: 12A10. Block 9: Next of Kin: father Garfield Langhorn, 356 Maple Ave, Riverhead NY 11901. Block 19: blank. Block 20: Persons in immediate proximity or who assisted in act or shared in same hazard: 1LT Charles L. Campbell awarded the Silver Star, SSG E6 Freddy B. Murdock awarded the Bronze Star with 'V', SGT E5 Michael J. Wernert awarded the Bronze Star with 'V', PFC E3 Gus Kaplan. [Hand written in Block 21 SP4 Douglas P. Dahl awarded the Bronze Star with 'V'. On the summary page (Incl 7), SP4 Dahl's award appears in the typed material.] Block 22a: Location: 12 miles north of Plei Djereng. Block 22c: Time: 1900. Block 22d: Terrain: The terrain consisted of ridges and gullies sloping generally to the river. The area was covered with thick jungle undergrowth with occasional clearings. The sky was clear but the sun had set making the light very dim on the jungle floor. Block 23: Description of enemy conditions: The enemy was lying in reinforced bunkers

and prepared positions. They had excellent fields of fire and realized their advantage. They were well disciplined in their tactics as displayed by how efficiently they closed the jaws of the ambush. They were well equipped with automatic weapons, hand grenades, and complete uniforms with web gear. Block 24: Unit morale, casualties and mission: The aero-rifle platoon was enroute to this river for extraction after securing the bodies of two pilots who were burned in their crashed AH-1G cobra. All were in good health, and well equipped; however, spirits were low because many had known the two aviators. Block 25: What were comrades who were in immediate proximity doing: Two categories of people lay close to Private Langhorn: The wounded were lying immobile in the center of the perimeter, and the able bodied were firing their weapons at the enemy. Block 30: Narrative description: [On another sheet]. Block 31: Describe effects or results: Private Langhorn's sacrifice resulted in every man lying in the proximity of the tossed grenade being alive today. Block 32: Commanding Officer. Block 33. Mr. & Mrs. Garfield Langhorn, 356 Maple Ave., Riverhead, NY 11901. Block 34: Blank. Block 35: Jerry G. Ledford, Major, Commanding. Block 36: Signature /signed/

Summary of Recommendation for Award of Medal of Honor (Posthumous) Name: Garfield Langhorn Status: Private First Class, Radio-Telephone Operator, United States Army. Organization: Troop C, 7th Armored Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry, 1st Aviation Brigade, Republic of Vietnam. Next of Kin: Mr. Garfield Langhorn (father) 356 Maple Avenue, Riverhead, New York 11901. Persons who assisted: 1LT Charles L. Campbell, USA Awarded the Silver Star. SSG Freddy B. Murdock, USA Awarded the Bronze Star with 'V' device for heroism. SP4 Douglas P. Dahl, USA Awarded the Bronze Star with 'V' device for heroism. SGT Michael J. Wernert, USA Awarded the Bronze Star with 'V' device for heroism. PFC Gus Kaplan, USA Not recommended for an award.

Conditions under which act performed: Location: Twelve miles north of Plei Djereng, Republic of Vietnam. Date: 1900 hours, 15 January 1969. Terrain: Ridges and gullies sloping toward the Ya Krong Bolah River. Terrain covered with thick jungle undergrowth with occasional clearings. Weather: Good. Enemy Conditions: Morale high. The enemy soldiers occupied reinforced bunkers and prepared positions. They had excellent fields of fire and were well disciplined in their tactics as displayed by the efficiency with which they executed the ambush. They were well-equipped with automatic weapons, hand grenades and wore complete uniforms with web gear. Defender's Condition: Morale high. The aero-rifle platoon was enroute to the Ya Krong Bolah River for extraction after securing the bodies of two pilots who had been burned in the crash of their gunship. All were in good health and well equipped, however, spirits were momentarily despressed because many had known the two pilots.

Narrative Description of Gallant Conduct: At 1900 hours, 15 January 1969, the aero-rifle platoon of Troop C, 7th Armored Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry was on a search and rescue mission twelve miles north of Plei Djerent. The mission was to rescue two pilots whose AH-1G Cobra gunship had crashed some three hours earlier. Langhorn was radio-telephone operator of the aero-rifle platoon. Upon exiting from the ships, the members of the aero-rifle platoon had to hack their way through approximately 300 meters of dense jungle undergrowth in order to reach the downed aircraft. When they reached their destination, they discovered the burned bodies of the two pilots and various parts of the aircraft. As they secured the bodies in bags and were preparing to return to the position from which they had originally entered the area, they received instructions from the mission commander to travel down to the Ya Krong Bolah River, where their extraction could be accomplished more easily. Moving out in a good secure formation, they were suddenly ambushed as they approached the river. A holocaust of screams and gunfire completely enveloped them on all sides. As the platoon leader directed the men into an oblong perimeter defense, Langhorn radioed for aerial support. Immediately, the orbiting gunships responded and saturated the area with intense minigun and rocket fire. However, it soon became too dark for accurate aerial gunship supporting fire.

Taking advantage of the darkness and the inability of the gunships to fire upon them, the North Vietnamese force began lobbing hand grenades into the center of the perimeter where the wounded had been secured to provide maximum safety. Langhorn was lying prone in order to afford covering fire for the wounded. He observed that a grenade had landed directly in front of him.

Unhesitatingly, he thrust himself at the grenade and scooped the deadly missile beneath him, absorbing the full impact of the blast with his body and saving the lives of several men at his position at the sacrifice of his own. The facts as contained in the proposed citation and this narrative account have been substantiated by the statements of eyewitnesses.

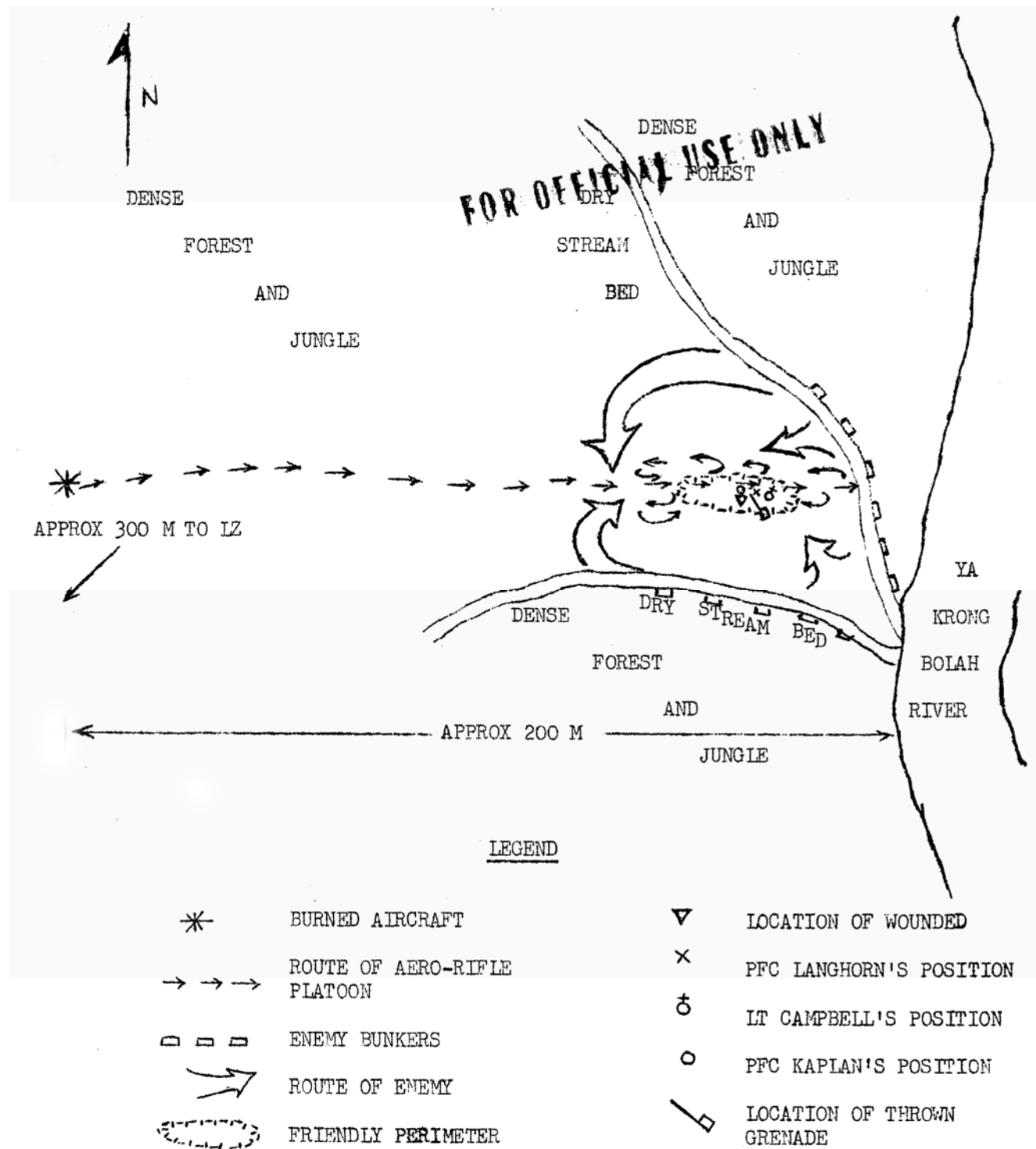
Narrative: Incl 1: On the 15th of January 1969, Private First Class Garfield Langhorn, radio-telephone operator in the aero-rifle platoon, Troop C, 7th Armored Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry accompanied his unit on a search and rescue mission twelve miles north of Plei Djereng in the rugged central highland mountains of the Republic of Vietnam. At approximately 1600 Private First Class Garfield Langhorn was on standby at Plei Djereng airfield when an urgent call for the ground unit came from the command and control ship in the area of operation explaining that an AH-1G Cobra had gone down on a heavily timbered slope near the Ya Krong Bolah River. Minutes later the aero-rifle platoon was jumping from C Troop's UH-1H lift helicopters into a steep elephant grass and stump infested landing zone, approximately three hundred (300) meters to the south west of the downed aircraft. Even though the terrain sloped down to the crash site the platoon had to hack their way and rely on directions from the OH-6A aero scouts who monitored their progress by the smoke popped by the leading elements. When they arrived all that remained of the Cobra was portions of the transmission, main rotor head, and the still smoking bodies of the two pilots. Extinguishing them with fire extinguishers dropped by the overhead helicopters, the ground element secured the bodies in bags and prepared to move out. Because of the additional load, the terrain, and the waning sunlight, the aero-rifle platoon was instructed to travel down slope to the river where rock ledges and sand bars in the water itself would permit an earlier extraction time than returning uphill to the original more distant landing zone. The platoon moved out in an extended column led by two men, one with a machete and the other with an M-60 machine gun to provide point security. Private First Class Langhorn who had been conducting much of the coordinating radio communications with the helicopter elements aloft stationed himself next to Lt Charles Campbell, the platoon leader, who was the fourth man from the front. Behind them were the remainder of the twenty-one member unit carrying the bodies and providing flank and rear security. As the point men made their way down into a dimly lit dry stream bed less than fifty (50) meters from the pick-up zone, the entire visible length of the creek bed and the right flank erupted into blood-curdling screams and a holocaust of gunfire. Hit but still able to move and fire, the point men immediately returned fire covering the withdrawing column; however the jaws of the ambush had already closed cutting off the attempt to break contact. As LT Campbell hurriedly directed his men into a roughly oblong perimeter Private First Class Langhorn had already radioed the platoon's critical situation to the orbiting gunships and command and control helicopter. Popping smoke to mark their position, the ambushed men fought to keep the advancing North Vietnamese at bay while overhead the gunships began rolling in saturated the area around them with minigun and rocket fire. Soon, however, it became too dark for accurate aerial support and realizing this the North Vietnamese Army began to probe the perimeter lobbing hand grenades into the midst of the prone men of the aero-rifle platoon. The wounded had been moved to the center of the small perimeter which afforded them better protection and where their wounds could be treated by the platoon medic. Private First Class Langhorn was lying between Private First Class Gus Kaplan and LT Campbell providing covering fire for the wounded men in addition to performing his radio-telephone operating duties. Suddenly a hand grenade sailed hominously into the perimeter rolling to a stop on Private First Class Langhorn's left side, few short feet from his wounded comrades. Without hesitation Private First Class Langhorn chose to protect the lives of his friends. Thrusting his body at the grenade, he scooped the deadly object beneath

himself and absorbed the full brunt of the explosion. By smothering the blast with his own body, Private First Class Langhorn, in devotion to his comrades, rendered a final ultimate act far above and beyond the call of duty.

Statement: Incl 2: Private Garfield Langhorn was the radio-telephone operator for the aero-rifle platoon, Troop C, 7th Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry on the 15th day of January, 1969. The aero-rifle platoon was inserted a few hundred meters from the downed Cobra. Our mission was to determine the condition of the pilots and secure the armament aboard the aircraft. We moved to the aircraft, but found it reduced to useless twisted metal and ashes and the pilots charred almost beyond recognition. We recovered the bodies and started to move toward our extracted point on the river bank. After our column had moved a short distance we came to a dried creek bed which, when the point element attempted to cross, erupted into a volley of enemy gunfire from camouflaged bunkers to our front and right flank. When we attempted to break contact we discovered that the enemy force had us surrounded. We began to fight to keep the enemy off until reinforcements could arrive. Private Langhorn had initially radioed our critical situation to the support helicopters overhead and he was providing covering fire for me as I sought to coordinate with the gunships to guide their supporting attacks. The enemy bombarded us with automatic weapons fire and grenades causing us considerable casualties. In an effort to provide these men with more protection I had them brought to the center of our perimeter where they had more cover. Private Langhorn was providing suppressive fire covering them when a grenade landed about a foot from Private Langhorn next to the wounded men. Realizing the situation, Private Langhorn smothered the grenade with his own body. In giving up his life Private Garfield Langhorn preserved the lives of all who lay around him, myself, Private Gus Kaplan, and those men who were wounded. Signed 1LT Charles L. Campbell O5343362.

Statement: Incl 3: On the afternoon of 15 January 1969, the aero-rifle platoon from Troop C, 7th Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry was on stand-by at Plei Djerent air strip, Republic of Viet Name; when one of our AH-1G aircraft crashed and burned as a result of hostile fire approximately twelve (12) miles north of our location. We were immediately inserted in order to recover the bodies of the pilots. After hacking our way through the jungle, we retrieved the bodies and moved toward the river for extraction, which was the closest suitable pick-up zone the oncoming darkness and dense jungle vegetation would permit. A dry stream bed was finally reached, and three men began checking it out when the enemy ambushed our column from the front and right. At this point we tried to break contact by withdrawing, but we began receiving machine gun and automatic weapons fire from our rear and flanks. A small circular perimeter was established and we fought to stay in tact until reinforcements could arrive. A severe fire fight, lasting approximately an hour and a half, inflicted numerous casualties from automatic weapons and grenades. The wounded had been brought to the center of the perimeter and Private First Class Garfield Langhorn and I were lying next to them returning fire. Suddenly a grenade landed about a foot in front of us. Private First Class Langhorn immediately lunged on top of the grenade and smothered the explosion with his body. It was a split second decision and Private First Class Langhorn's ultimately unselfish act preserved the platoon leader's, my own, and the lives of those already wounded. Signed Gus L. Kaplan, PFC US52769639.

Sketch of the terrain, enemy and friendly positions:



Statement: Incl 5: Private First Class Garfield Langhorn was an outstanding soldier. He exhibited bravery in the face of enemy fire on numerous occasions and he constantly displayed excellent leadership ability. If he had not thrown himself on the enemy grenade on 15 January 1969, his platoon leader and another men would have been killed. Five men who were already injured would have in all probability been killed or certainly would have been seriously wounded. It was clearly indicated that PFC Langhorn deliberately smothered the blast in order to save his wounded comrades. He had already shown considerable concern for those men and was fighting to protect

them. Several grenades had been thrown into the area and he knew that the result of his action would almost certainly result in his death. There was no time for any oral or verbal indications of his intent. It is impossible to determine whether or not PFC Langhorn could have escaped the blast of the grenade. It is doubtful that he could have escaped serious injury. He knew that the wounded would have no chance to escape. His peers were stunned by his ultimate sacrifice. They deeply felt the loss of this man and often speak of his bravery. PFC Langhorn's morale was always high and he always gave his best for his unit. His supreme sacrifice was congruent with his past actions of his fine character. He was a fine man and a superb soldier. His motivation was definitely in keeping with the highest traditions of military service. The gratitude of the United States for his actions should be expressed by the award of the Medal of Honor. /Signed/ Jerry G. Ledford, O5302440, Maj, Ar.

The Wall database gives Langhorn's tour start date as 26 Oct 1968 and his MOS as 11B10. The following is the Congressional Medal of Honor citation: **PFC Garfield Langhorn**, an RTO in C Troop'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 at 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.

PFC Tony Harris recalls: I was part of a group of eight guys who joined C Troop's Blues in mid-October 1968. Most were fresh out of AIT. I was almost 24 at the time and had been married for five years, but the rules changed and I was drafted. Garfield Langhorn, James Jenkins and I became good friends. We did lots of things together. I had a camera and Garfield was the 'photographer' for our group. This is the reason I only have a one picture of him - he was behind the camera for most of my pictures. James was not with the Blues on the 15th but we continued to exchange letters after I was evaced. I believe he is now deceased. The Blues were inserted about 20-25 times during the 90 or so days I was with them. Most of the time there were 18+ in a staging area waiting for a call to be inserted. We would search and provide support in different areas. I remember once we went in to help some LRRPs who had ambushed some NVA the night before. We helped them gather up some intelligence material. We found one dead NVA soldier and a blood trail that led to where another one had been buried. Another time we found some several rockets in a river. One of the Blues stepped on a punji stack and was medavaced. One day we went in to help some Montagnards. I may have been assigned to a certain squad but I don't remember - too many years ago. Normally we would complete our mission and return to the staging area or Camp Enari, but that all changed on 15 Jan 69. I usually carried a M16 but on the 15th I carried the M-60. Looking back, I should have had a 45 as well. Garfield was serving as the RTO. We were inserted late in the afternoon on the 15th. I knew that one of our choppers was down but I did not know if it had mechanical problems or had been shot down. I didn't learn about the Cobra or the two dead pilots

until after we are on the ground. I remember that we were inserted by three slicks. It didn't take us long to reach the wreckage. The biggest problem was cooling the bodies enough to put them in the body bags. A fire extinguisher was used but that didn't work, so we poured water from our canteens on the bodies. We could have used that water later on that night. On our way to the river for extraction, I don't think we had gone more than 50 yards, when we were ambushed. I don't recall anyone else immediately around me being wounded. I was hit in my left hand which also disabled the M-60. I wasn't in much pain even though there was a lot of damage to my hand. I remember SGT Eugene Cramer being next to me. He told me that I'd better get the machine gun going. SGT Cramer and I both tried but it still wouldn't fire. Unfortunately that was the only M-60 we carried that day and we only had one M-79. A perimeter was quickly setup. I remember the medic came over and dressed my wound. He asked me if I wanted some morphine. I told him no - in case we had to move out or someone might eventually need it. After it got dark the NVA started probing our perimeter. You could hear the grenades landing. I was wounded a second time. We were surrounded and I didn't think we would make it through the night. SGT Cramer was also wounded twice. I don't know the status of the others until I overheard talking on the radio saying we had 3 KIA and many wounded. I asked who was the 3rd KIA, and was told me it was Garfield. My friend was gone, I was wounded and the M-60 was disabled. I have struggled with this for the last 37 years. I blocked so many of these events out of my mind. I remember the M-79 firing and it must have been effective because we heard screaming. We knew help was to the way. I believe they linked up with us about midnight. I learned later it was a ready reaction force from the 4th Infantry Division, D Company, 1/35th Infantry. I don't remember much about the next day. The medevac choppers tried to come in but received too much fire. But we did receive some supplies. The soldiers from the 4th Infantry helped us with the body bags. I recall they had one KIA and many wounded themselves. It was late in the afternoon when we moved down to the river and were extracted. There was no hostile fire at the time. I was taken to the 71st Evac hospital at Pleiku. I stayed there a couple of days then went to Cam Ranh Bay before going to Japan. I stayed in the Fort Leonard Wood hospital for five months. Then the Army, for some unknown reason, sent me a Military Intelligence School. I returned to Fort Leonard Wood to work in G2 office. Eventually I ended up back at the Fort Leonard Wood hospital for more reconstructive work on my hand. I had two more operations there before I was finally short enough to get an early discharge. As something of a postscript, over the years I thought a lot about Garfield; but it wasn't until 2001 that I found out that he had been awarded the Medal of Honor. I attended the Squadron Reunion in 2003 because I had learned the Garfield's family would attend. His sister, Yvonne Reid, told me his hometown of Riverhead New York had erected a monument to Garfield. Rodney Eve, one of the Blues, spoke at the dedication ceremony.

CW2 Bob Mitchell provides another account of this battle. The story really starts the night before. There was a real argument in 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 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 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 blankety-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 run 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." CW2 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 battalion CO 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 ragged. I don't know why. I think because I was so close to Cox. Instead I paced the Troop area waiting for word from the front. The NVA finally withdrew and we got everyone out. I believe there were five US dead. C Troop lost PFC Langhorn and the two pilots, but I also think almost every one of our Blues were wounded.

CW2 Danny Norman provides: I was flying in the other Cobra on this mission. I made the first firing run, broke off and started outbound as gunships do. After a few seconds I knew I'd have to turn quickly to be in position to cover Cox's break. When I got turned around I could see that Cox was way too steep and way too close to the target. I watched helplessly as the Cobra staggered through the trees with the blades coned up to the max. Then BANG and my heart dropped to my feet.

LT Marty Martines provides: By this time I am fairly certain I was the Scout Platoon leader. CPT David 'Cash' Register, my mentor and predecessor, had moved on to another assignment. I was also flying the lead scout on the first team that day. CW2 Bob Mitchell was flying lead scout on the other team. We were shut down at the staging area – the Blues, the Lift, the Cobras for our team were all parked some distance from our two Scout birds. I remember CPT ___ came running towards us yelling that a Cobra was down. This was a shock because we just didn't lose Cobras. When we arrived in the AO, the Lift was still behind us. I remember Bob Mitchell briefed us over the radio. He was really shook up! He and Sterling Cox were good friends. When we passed over the Cobra we could see that it was burning but hadn't completely burned yet. I have a good mental picture of the crashed snake – the front part hadn't burned yet and I remember noticing that the canopies were still closed. The area around the Cobra had several large diameter trees about 18" in diameter. I'd guess they were at least 100 feet tall. The Blues were inserted about the time Mitch finished his briefing but they were a fair distance from the crash site. I remember flying over the Blues and then over-flying the crash site. We continued this racetrack for some time. Once while we were over the Blues there was another large explosion – I'm guessing the accumulator blew up. The next time we looked at the Cobra the entire cockpit area was burned. We were about out of fuel when the Blues reached the crash site. I never saw the NVA or smelled them during this period. We briefed Mitch and departed. We refueled quickly and returned. The Blues were still calling for fire extinguishers – we dropped ours, our wing LOH dropped his, I know the C&C dropped theirs. As it turns out aircraft fire extinguishers are designed to smother a fire rather than cool things off; hence the Blues had to use their canteens. I remember LT Charlie Campbell coming on the radio saying that he could positively identify Cox and Petteys because their faces had not burned. Before the Blues started moving out, one of the LOHs (I don't really remember the pilot's name) had a mechanical problem and left for Enari. So now we were back to a round-robin technique. The Blues started moving and Mitch returned, we briefed him and departed. We refueled and waited a few minutes, then headed back out. When we returned it was after 2 p.m. and I relieved Mitch. It was starting to get dark in the valley and I remember talking with the other aircraft about the idea that

we wanted the Lift ships to arrive at exactly the right time for the Blues to start their extraction. I remember hovering over the Blues and then down their route-of-march. I also remember LT Campbell saying on the radio – you are right over us but we couldn't see them – the trees were that tall and the shadows were already forming. I also remember him saying – you're way ahead of us, so we'd go back. I can clearly remember when the NVA sprung the ambush on the Blues and on the LOHs at the same time. Literally all hell broke loose! We could not see the NVA on the ground. We could see the green traces going into the Blues and coming up at us at the same time. I have always been impressed with the volume of NVA fire – at least 100 weapons or more! Initially we couldn't fire back was of the green coming in and the red going out. I was hovering most of the time so I was low on fuel when the shooting started. Mitch came out and I returned. Mitch would shoot at point targets firing at the aircraft or at specific weapons firing into the Blues. Luckily the Blues were consolidated. When I returned I did the same thing. I believe it was about this time that we lost the LOH due to mechanical problems. The NVA were tight in on the Blues. The 4th Infantry Division's reaction force was inserted into the same LZ where the Blues had gone in. About this time, the Cobras couldn't see us anymore because of the darkness and their tinted canopies. I remember there was a problem inserting the reaction force. They arrived in single ships or what seemed that way to me. I remember our three LOHs were firing on both sides of the LZ to make certain the NVA didn't move into that area. How we didn't have a mid-air I'll never know!! I remember that the only lights we saw were from the traces. We actually wanted to take fire to keep it off the Blues and the transports. When we finally had to pull out of the area – it was past the point of being dangerous to keep flying that many aircraft in that valley – I talked to Langhorn, the Blue's RTO, on the radio. We certainly knew they were surrounded and so did they. The Blues wanted the Cobras to fire and they'd adjust. We had to explain to him that we couldn't see them well enough to fire. We finally left after it got so dark. I just knew any second we were going to have a mid-air. I remember the really hopeless feeling that if you turned north, you got instant vertigo because you had absolutely no horizon. You could see the lights at The Oasis to the south. We just had this terrible feeling that we would lose all the Blues that night, so we didn't want to leave. Finally the C&C told us to leave because we just weren't going any good. I don't remember any artillery or Puff (the USAF fixed wing gunships).

On the 16th, LT Marty Martines continues: We left Enari at first light. We couldn't go any sooner because of the Cobra's blue canopy. My team went straight to the Blues. We learned that Puff had been over them all night. There was this gray donut all around their position with this green interior, so it was easy to find their location. With proper daylight it was easy to see them. We waved to them and saw them carrying the body bags. They were still taking fire. After a few minutes I remember LT Campbell yelling for us to get the hell away from them. 'Every time you come in, we take fire.' I also remember the big circles of Hueys overhead. The 4th Infantry Division guys were still in control and told us to back off. All of C Troop's LOHs and Cobras when to Plei ___ and shut down. We were all lined up facing the direction of the battle. Not long after we shut down, here comes this Huey running flat out and low level trailing smoke coming right at us. He lands and everyone jumps out. It had holes and leaks everywhere! I was sitting in one of the Lift ships listening to the radio. The Blues were running out of water and ammo. There was discussion about having a Huey deliver these items to them and then it was decided to use a LOH. I remember we had a yellow net and a red rope that we pulled through the D-rings. The idea was for the CE to cut the rope when we got over the Blues. I'd guess the load weighed about 350 lbs and we were full of fuel. The net contained cans of M-60 and M-16 ammo plus some water canteens only. We didn't have anything else that would hold water and survive the drop. I took off and dropped that load to the Blues. When I returned, the Lift ships were gone. About an hour after that we heard that they had all the Infantry out. The Blues went straight to the Evac Hospital. I remember that C Troop was

down for about a week after that because we had no Blues. I also don't remember that any of our aircraft took hits during this battle.

MAJ Bruce Wilder recalls: This was one of the longest days of my life. MAJ Jerry Ledford was a good friend of mine and for awhile we were even roommates at Camp Enari. MAJ Dick Marshall asked me to fly with him on the 16th to support the extraction of the units. 1LT Jim DeWitt was the Assistant S-1. He liked to fly and I let him do that often because 'flying a deck in the Squadron Headquarters' isn't all that exciting. My hold baggage was already gone and I even had to borrow a flight helmet and chicken plate so I could go with Dick. //Finish this story and insert DeWitt's tape recorded interview here.////

There are a number of interesting post-scripts to this event. Each in its way is a tribute to PFC Garfield Langhorn. First, the DAV Chapter in Riverhead, NY bears his name. Second, the 7/17th Squadron returned to active duty in 200? ////FIX THIS//// At Fort Campbell, KY. When the unit dedicated their newly remodeled museum area, they named their conference room after PFC Langhorn and SGT McKibben. Many Langhorn family members attended that ceremony. Third, what follows is an edited version of material that appeared in the VHPA Newsletter from active duty (in 1996) MAJ David M. Blackburn of the 1/17th Cav at Fort Bragg, NC.

We are in the process of completing a 17th Cavalry Regimental Room to honor the entire Regiment. There are three Squadrons of the 17th Cavalry Regiment on active duty: the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. As the lowest numbered, CONUS resident Squadron of the 17th Cav, we have the Regimental Colors. I am the XO of the 1/17th Cav at Ft Bragg and am working with several very good people to complete the Regimental Room in our Squadron headquarters. We decided that the center piece of the Room will be a piece of art that honors the Regiment. After doing some research, we discovered that members of the various 17th Cav units in Vietnam were awarded five Medals of Honor. After considerable discussion and more research, we selected the events surrounding PFC Garfield Langhorn's Medal of Honor as the theme for the piece of art. PFC Langhorn served as an RTO in C/7/17th Cav's Blues and died on 15 January 1969 north of Plei Djereng, in Pleiku Province, II Corps. We knew that C Troop had inserted their Blues to retrieve the bodies of two AH-1G pilots, 1LT Sterling E. Cox and WO1 James B. Petteys. With this scant information, we started calling for more details that could help us build a piece of art that will make the whole Regiment proud. The trail soon led to the VHPA and to the Directory Committee. I was shocked that even during my first phone call, I was talking to someone who not only knew about these events in considerable detail but also knew how I could contact eye witnesses! Incredible, absolutely incredible! My next phone call was to active duty COL Bob Mitchell at Fort Rucker who as a Warrant Officer, OH-6A pilot, actually watched Cox's Cobra crash! Pictures of 7/17th Cav 1969 period helicopters? Sure no problem - the 1995 VHPA Calendar has a LOH and a Snake! Printed documents? Sure no problem - the 1992 ship Directory contained a wonderful history of the 7/17th Cav in Vietnam with almost a full page devoted to the events we are interested in! Details about this AH-1G? Sure no problem - the Database Committee provided the tail number, history of the aircraft, hours flown, date of purchase, and grid coordinates of the crash site! Incredible! The VHPA is absolutely incredible! We have commissioned an artist, Joe Kline, to prepare this piece of art and have been researching everything we can about the crash site. We are starting to draw pencil sketches of the terrain and the events as we imagine them. We want this painting to be as realistic as possible. Our problem, of course, is that none of us have seen an AH-1G crash site and certainly not in II Corps. The last thing we want is for Vietnam veterans to point out errors in the painting. Our job is to honor the Regiment not have people disappointed. With everything the VHPA has already done for us, I hate to ask for more but I think we could use help in three specific areas. First, if anyone has photos of AH-1G crash sites, especially in the mountains of Southeast Asia - please share them with us. For example we don't know how a Cobra folds up when it crashing into the trees. We have a good map of the

terrain and we think we know what the river and rolling hills “look like.” We know the Montagnards had cleared an area not far from the crash site and that it still contained tree stumps but we don’t have any details about how this should look. Second, we would really like to talk to anyone who served in C Troop’s Blues during that period. We believe the platoon leader’s name was LT Steven L. Campbell from the witness statements for the Medal of Honor. Any help in locating him would be wonderful. We believe the Blues should be wearing steel pots versus boonie hats - correct? We don’t think the Blue had rucks, only their web gear with ammo, canteens, and towels - correct? Third, we need experts to critic the pencil sketches for errors. Clearly Cav guys familiar with the Plei Djereng area would be good but so would DUSTOFF and any of the Huey crews that supported the 4th Infantry Division or even the 1st Air Cav Division - they both worked that area. In closing I’d like to mention the obvious - there is a lot of respect for what you guys did many year ago in the ranks of active duty units today! We know you had a tough job to do, for a long time, and a long way from home without enough support from our country! We have grown up and almost take for granted the machines, tactics, and procedures you all developed. But we know who did them first and it was not us; it was you. Sincerely, MAJ David M. Blackburn, Fort Bragg, NC

A limited edition print was made of the original art work copywrited by Joe Kline in 1998. The print is titled “Leave No One Behind.”

In early 2009 Denny Petteys, a younger brother of WO1 Jim Petteys, contacted the Ruthless Riders Association. Mike Law contacted Denny with the goal of adding to this history some details about how the family of a KIA was notified and treated by the Army during those sad days. This history provides details of the more than 100 KIAs but it is important to document “the other side of history” as well. There is no “hidden message” here. WO1 Jim Petteys is not the “most important” KIA. Everyone listed on the Honor Roll paid the ultimate sacrifice. We wish to thank the Petteys family for providing a brief summary of their experiences. We can only assume those pains and sufferings were duplicated by other families of KIAs.

Kathy Miller, WO1 Jim Petteys' youngest sister and youngest of the Petteys children, provides: I remember being at home from school (I think it was a Friday) and 1 or 2 soldiers knocked on the front door. They asked to speak to Mom or Dad. I told them Dad worked at the army depot. It wasn't long after that that Dad came home, in tears, and called our neighbor who was a pastor. They were seated in the living room, and reading Psalm 23. Sometime after that we were told that Jim had been shot down and that's all I remember knowing at this time. I know in the next day or two we got a letter from Jim. I remember my Mom sitting at the kitchen table with letter in her hand, sobbing her heart out. I'm a mom now too, and I hope my kids never have to witness something like this. I went to school on Monday, knowing that he had been shot down but that's all. While I was sitting in biology class , the secretary knocked on the door of the classroom and asked for me. She said, "Kathy, you can go home now." I started to cry, gathered up my books, met my brother Denny at the office and we drove home. I can only imagine how hard this must have been for the teachers and other staff who knew and taught Jim to have to continue through their day for the other students. He was a really likable dynamic young man but struggled with school. But he really found his niche when he learned to fly the copters. I'm sure he would be doing it today if he were alive. When we got home, we met my crying Dad at the door, and said without expecting an answer, "What do we do now?" I remember the visitation and telling some of the visitors that he was OK - it was a mistake. He'll be home someday. They were very kind and just said nice things. I remember the day of the funeral. It was bitter cold but beautiful and with a lot of people at the cemetery. I remember the presentation of the medals at the army depot, and that I was a mess. I couldn't stop crying. I think we took a break in the ceremony at one point - just to let me get control of myself, which really didn't help much. I know everyone was just wishing I would get a grip on myself

because it was making hard on everyone else; but I think my emotions were just overwhelming that I couldn't. I felt bad about it but I didn't have the coping skills to deal with it. I remember Mom and Dad crying as they counted the things in the chest that was sent to us of Jim's things, having to compare what was in the chest with what was on the list. That's most of what I can remember of the events surrounding our notification of his death. I am providing pictures of the gravestone for our parents and Jim. As you can see, our parents spared no expense in honoring Jim by having the Cobra engraved in the stone and also the DFC medal that he received. Denny said he thought some of the cost was covered by ?, but I'm sure they would have paid it anyway.

The following article titled "Sledgehammer Kills 180" with a subtitle "Seize Tons of Enemy Arms" by SP5 Hans J. Lange appeared in the 9 Feb 1969 issue of the Ivy Leaf Famous Fourth. The date assigned to this event is mid-January 1969. Anyone with more information about this event, especially better dates, should contact Mike Law.

Highlander Heights - In a boldly executed highland sweep 15 miles southwest of Kontum, ARVN Rangers and infantrymen dealt a crushing blow to communist infiltrators in the Central Highlands, killing 180 of the enemy and seizing tons of equipment, including weapons, ammunition, foodstuff and medical supplies. ARVN casualties were described as light. The two-week sweep, named Binh Tay 48 - Sledgehammer - the 48th in a series of similar sweeps in the highlands - was carried out by the 24th Special Tactical Zone's 42nd ARVN Regiment and the 2nd ARVN Ranger Group, with support from Famous 4th Division helicopter gunships and artillery batteries. Starting early in January, the 1st and 3rd Battalions, 42nd Regimental Headquarters and the 11th Ranger Battalion Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) Camp and north of the Punchbowl, where the Ivy 2nd Brigade had its 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry, conducting its own sweeps. The ARVN pushed through the craggy mountain ranges and heavily overgrown valleys, searching caves and stumbling onto enemy tunnel complexes and bunkers, most of them loaded with equipment and supplies left behind by the fleeing enemy. Resistance was initially light. But as the ARVN advanced deeper into the communist infested area, frequent firefights ensued. Huey Cobras from Charlie Troop, 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry, were used to rout the enemy. Two batteries from the 221st ARVN Artillery moved steadily forward with the foot soldiers to provide 105mm howitzer support. Bravo Battery, 4th Battalion, 42nd Artillery, and Charlie Battery, 1st Battalion, 92nd Artillery, also fired their pieces in support of the ARVNs. Tactical air support was brought in by the Elliot FACs (Forward Air Controllers) who fly for the 24th STZ. One of the 750-pound bombs dropped by two F100 Super Sabres on a suspected enemy bunker complex raised a secondary explosion which spiraled smoke more than 1,200 feet into the clear highland sky. The FAC, flying an O-1 Bird Dog, witnessed smaller explosions, bursting in rapid succession for about one hour after the fighter-bombers had dropped their ordnance. When the sweep was a few day old, the 22nd ARVN Range Battalion and 2nd ARVN Ranger Group Headquarters moved in to add their punch against the communists. Major Russell C. John of Kansas City, MO, the 4th Division Liaison Officer to the 24th Special Tactical Zone, called the sweep "one of the largest" for the 24 STZ in recent months. "It was also one of the most successful," he added. The success of the sweep was told of more pointedly in a conference for the Saigon Press at the 24th STZ, the first since November 1967 following the battle of Dak To. Colonel Nguyen Ba Lien, commander of the 24th STZ, who directed the highland sweep, said it was a "major victory" for the ARVN and allied forces. Surrounding him, as he spoke, was an impressive haul of seized enemy weapons, equipment and supplies. He attributed much of the success of the sweep to the increased morale of his troops. They are now fully equipped with M16 rifles, M60 machine guns and 106mm recoilless rifles. All Regional and Popular Forces troops have been retrained, adding to their combat readiness. Lieutenant Colonel Vernon Peel of Pawhuska, OK, senior advisor to the 24th STZ, felt that Binh Tay 48 - Sledgehammer was a genuine test of the effectiveness of the ARVN soldiers with their new equipment. Seized enemy weapons included one 57mm recoilless rifle, four complete 60mm mortars, three anti-aircraft pieces - one 30 caliber and

two 12.75mm, one 30 caliber machine gun, two Chico light machine guns, 34 RPGs, 10 AK47s, 15 SKS carbines, six AK50s, seven assorted carbines and three B40 rocket launchers. Ammunition and explosives seized included 209,000 rounds of AK47 ammunition, 60,000 rounds of 12.75mm ammunition, 302 rounds of 82mm mortar ammunition, 125 rounds of 60mm mortar ammunition, 180 B40 rockets and 25 B41 rockets. Also 13 122mm rockets, 22 75mm recoilless rifle rounds, 111 57mm recoilless rifle rounds, 1,000 82mm mortar primers, 1,300 pounds of TNT, 240 charges for B40 rockets, 36 Chicom grenades, 17 Chicom AT and AP mines, and 100 rifle grenades. Seized foodstuff included 101,200 pounds of rice, 800 kilos of dried milk, 500 kilos of sugar and canned cooking oil, canned dried fish, canned whole eggs and canned meat. The medical supply haul totaled two and one-half tons and included the most modern drugs and first aid items. Also 57 khaki uniforms and four duffle bags full of black uniforms were uncovered.

On the 23rd, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop AH-1G #67-15595 flown by WO1 M.S. Geoghagan who had minor injuries and Crew Chief SP5 C. Caudillo who had minor injuries. The Army Goldbook database indicates this helicopter was turned in to the 79th TC CO for repairs in CONUS and returned to serve with another unit in Vietnam in Dec 1969. The accident summary reads:

WO Michael Geoghagen was the aircraft commander. At 0840 hours he departed the Ruthless maintenance area for a test flight. The test flight was to complete the requirements for the installation of a 90-degree gearbox. The front seat of the aircraft was occupied by SP5 Christobal Caudillo, the crew chief of the aircraft. After about ten minutes of powered flight a "growling" noise was reported by WO Geoghagan and SP5 Caudillo. WO Geoghagan decided to fly to Plei Do Lim and check out the growling noise. He was at 3500 feet heading 090 degrees when he rolled the throttle to flight idle to see what effect this had on the noise. He stated the noise quieted down and at this time he rolled the throttle back on to set-up a normal approach, this is at 250 to 300 feet above the ground. As power was applied to slow the aircraft from autorotative rate of descent to a normal approach there was an insufficient left pedal to keep the aircraft aligned with the strip. As more power was applied the aircraft yawed further to the right. At 20 feet above the strip WO Geoghagan again entered autorotation. As he rolled off the throttle the nose of the aircraft swung left back to 090 degrees. Zero nine zero was the heading the aircraft touched down with. The aircraft fell through at the bottom of the autorotation, striking the ground first with the tail stinger and then the skids. The aircraft hit with enough impact to spread both skids and cause the main rotor to flex down and sever the tail rotor drive shaft. The aircraft then bounced into the air. As the aircraft made contact with the ground it turned 120 degrees to the right (heading 210 degrees) and came to rest on the fuselage. CW3 Robert Kinlaw made a visual inspection of the tail rotor system from the 42-degree gearbox to the tail rotor and found no material or maintenance failure. The chip detector was pulled on the 90-degree gearbox and the particles found were a result of normal wear. CW3 Kinlaw is the maintenance officer for C Troop.

On the 26th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop OH-6A #66-07915 flown by an unnamed crew. One crew member was injured. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took five hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the skid, cockpit, cargo section, and equipment section. They made a forced landing and modified the mission, the helicopter took-off and was repaired in theater.

On the 27th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15610 flown by Aircraft Commander WO1 G.R. Brydges who had minor injuries and WO1 J.E. Bosch who had minor injuries. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission. The accident summary reads:

At approximately 1400 hours WO1 Brydges and WO1 Bosch both assigned to B Troop, entered the POL point at Bao Loc. After refueling and receiving clearance to depart to the east, WO1 Brydges

picked the aircraft up to a hover and selected his intended takeoff path down the southern most lane to the east. After starting to move forward on the intended takeoff path, three Infantry men of the 173rd Abn Bde waiting to board an unknown UH-1H that was refueling, walked into the takeoff path. Upon seeing the three persons, WO1 Brydges elected to try to clear them overhead because of a fence and a ditch to his right and four aircraft refueling to his left and 5 to 10 knots forward airspeed making it virtually impossible to terminate before striking the troops. At this time WO1 Brydges pulled in an estimated 45 to 48 pounds of torque and climbed to ten feet over the troops heads. Engine and rotor RPM started to bleed and the aircraft started to yaw to the right as he lost tail rotor control. WO1 Brydges lowered the collective attempting to gain RPM and tail rotor control. This maneuver did not succeed and the aircraft started descending and continued to yaw to the right. Using cyclic control WO1 Brydges maintained forward movement of 90 degrees to avoid striking the fence to his right and any of the UH-1H models to his left. As the aircraft's nose came to an approximate heading of 130 degrees, the aircraft struck the ground on the rear portion of the left skid. The aircraft bounded and continued to yaw to the right and came to rest on a heading of 270 degrees. Mast bumping was caused by the hard landing and both skids were bent approximately 45 degrees out from their original position. Loaded aircraft are unable to hover to the runway because excessive torque would be needed to span a five foot ditch between POL and the runway and he would have had to hover downwind. WO1 Brydges exited the aircraft to examine the damage. Upon seeing the damage and noting the area was not secure, he flew the aircraft to base camp located near Phan Thiet.

WO1 Gary Brydges provided: While this accident summary general agrees with what I remember about this incident, I will add a few more details. This was an unfortunate situation. Maybe it could have been avoided and maybe I could have done something different, but at least those three infantrymen were not injured. I was already committed and gaining speed to take off after refueling in POL. The three men were near a fence parallel to my flight path waiting for a Huey in POL. There was a take-off lane between them and the Huey and it was down hill. At the far end of it there was another fence and beyond that was a ravine. So when I started my take-off, I was out in this lane and I was moving with several knots of airspeed when all of sudden these guys started across the lane toward their Huey. I believe they didn't realize I was moving fast enough to be a danger to them or a problem for me. They didn't know. I don't blame them. They literally walked out in front of me. Well, I didn't have a lot of choices. I didn't have enough RPM or air speed to hop this fence to the right. To the left were the aircraft in POL. Then in front of me were these three guys. Like I said, this didn't leave me a lot of options. I guess I could have tried slamming it on the ground but I probably would have damaged the aircraft that way. I thought that, well, I am moving, and I haven't gone through translational lift yet; maybe I can hop over them. Well, that is tough to do and that wasn't successful either. That maneuver resulted in the loss of tail rotor control, then it started to spin resulting in the ultimate hard landing. It was just timing, bad timing. There was an investigation. Someone came down from headquarters as I recall. He might have been from one of the other Troops. He interviewed me afterwards - it may have been the next day - to get my side of the story. I know he must have talked to someone on the Huey flight that was in POL at the time. They had been hauling the infantry guys around. That was part of the investigation as well. I was not reprimanded in any way nor was I grounded. I did have a post-accident check-ride but I was back flying missions in a couple of days. So there were no negative repercussions there. To be honest, the accident investigator was probably generous in my regard because if that kind of situation would have happened today, I really think that me as the Aircraft Commander would have taken more heat for what happened because it might have been avoidable. Like I said, I've thought about this a lot and have asked myself what could I have done to do something different here. I saw those infantry guys. They were there and I certainly didn't expect them to walk out in front on me. Maybe I should have expected that. I don't know. There was a mission going. My team was on the

move already, so there was a sense of urgency. There are things that could have been done differently. I don't know what is right or what is wrong in this case. I sat there for a little bit and burned off enough fuel so I could fly it. We were fully loaded with ammo. I got out of the aircraft and it was still running. I could see that the skids were spread – no questions about that. That seemed to be the only damage with the aircraft running. No warning lights. I thought I'm not going to shut it down and have maintenance come up here to Bao Loc. So I called the C&C and told him what happened generally and that I wanted to fly it back. They said OK, so John Bosch and I flew it back. I called ahead and said I've got spread skids and get the sand bags ready. So they had the sand bags pretty well ready when we got there. I landed on the sand bags and shut it down. When the rotor blades stopped, the maintenance guys were crawling all over it. They pointed out that the mast was pretty much crimped on both sides because the rotor blades had flexed down and crimped the mast. There was a pretty good dent on both sides in the mast. So maybe in retrospect it wasn't such a good idea to fly it back. But I made it and that's what counted. I think that's one that they sent me the cost of repair on that particular one. I don't remember the details but it was itemized in some detail and totaled several thousand dollars. [Editor's note: the VHPA Helicopter database record shows the cost of repairs at \$41,089.]

The following was collected during the 2001 Reunion from the several "docs" in attendance. Many who had served in the medical section of HHT had gone the extra mile to get as many of their colleges as possible to attend this Reunion. CPT Barry Kellogg, believed to be the Squadron's first Flight Surgeon, DEROSed in late August or early September 1968 because there was about a six-week gap before CPT David Wallack reported to the Squadron to replace him. Many of the medics have photos of Doc Kellogg who is remembered as a good person and a good doctor. As best we can tell from 'the originals,' the Squadron did not deploy with a Flight Surgeon because no one can remember any medics at Fort Knox or on the boat. We believe Doc Kellogg and the men that would become the medical section of HHT were assigned from the 17th CAG soon after the Squadron arrived at Camp Enari. We believe SSG (E-6) John Fuzak was the first section sergeant. From Doc Wallack's Vietnam notebook and the collective memory of the "docs" at the 2001 Reunion, we believe the medical section had an authorized strength of eleven men based on an intended distribution of two men per troop plus the section sergeant. By the time Doc Wallack arrived in early October 1968, the distribution was one medic for each of D Troop's three combat platoons, one medic for each of the ACT's Blue platoons, a three-man HHT dispensary team with the rest being OJTs or 'float replacements' to cover R&Rs, etc. The following 'medical section roster' resulted from the Reunion:

Name	Troop	DEROS	Duties	Comments
SSG John Fuzak	HHT	15 Nov 68	Section Sergeant	
SGT Huey Long	HHT	30 May 69	Section Sergeant	
SP5 Sandy Lowe	HHT	22 Sep 69	Medical Assistant	
SP4 Tim Park	HHT	15 Jun 69	Ambulance Driver	Also D Troop 3 rd Plt
SP4 Joe McCalvy	HHT	22 Mar 69	Ambulance Driver	Joined 15 Oct 68. Also served with C Troop.
SP4 Larry Franklin	HHT	1 Jan 69	Aidman	Joined 11 May 68. No weapon
SP4 Kurtis Jackson	D 1 st P	8 Jun 69	Aidman	Joined 15 Sep 68 from 185 RAC. Served with C Troop for about a month and then with D Troop.
SP4 Robert Kilpatrick	A	May 69	Aidman	
SP4 Robert Sterken	B	May 69	Aidman	

SP4 Charles Branham	C	Jan 69	Aidman	
SP5 Dana Mace	D 2 nd P	Aug 69	Medical Assistant	KIA 7 July 1969
SP4 Lloyd Mitchell	HHT	12 Aug 69	Medical Assistant	Joined 5 Sep 69
SP5 Donald Leaym		Apr 69	Sn Aidman	Went to a DUSTOFF unit
SP4 Ed LeGar	D 3 rd P	Nov 69		Joined 2 Nov 68. Also served with B Troop
PFC Jim Winter	HHT			Joined 4 Oct 68
PFC Rich Messich	HHT	15 Aug 69		Joined 15 Sep 68 from 185 RAC at Ban Me Thuot.

Others believed to have served in this section: Kirk Williams, Gerald Landry, Joel Grimmer, Ernest Tapia, Burr Ives, Albert Hawkaluk, Frank Musalek (now deceased), Paul Courson, and Richard Handel.

CPT David Wallack provided the following: I joined the Army and went on active duty under the 'Barry Plan' in July 1968 with 5-weeks of training at Fort Sam and then another 6-weeks at Fort Rucker to become a Flight Surgeon. Basically they made certain we could give flight physicals and understand the ramifications of various medicines on aircrews. At Nha Trang I met MAJ Ward, the 17th CAG Flight Surgeon, and was given some Vietnam specific training. I just couldn't believe how hot and humid it was. I remember that I felt like I just couldn't move and wanted to lay on my bunk the first few days in-country. Since the Dispensary occupied one end of the field grade officers' BOQ immediately across the street from the Squadron HQ, I bunked in that building. As I introduced myself around the Squadron, I remember how impressed I was with everyone I met – especially the people in the line troops. I still recall the feelings I had and wrote notes about the underlying spirit of bravery, of dedication and professionalism to duty that I saw on any given day. I saw that basically my job was a strong supporting role. While I must say that my year was fulfilling to me medically, it was very interesting to me as a person and as an American. Here was this New Yorker getting to work with guys from all over America, especially from the South, in life and death situations. I immediately took my job of 'looking after the me' as a serious responsibility and spent whatever time it took to do a good job. If I knew we had injured people at the evac hospital, I visited them and made certain they were not forgotten and received whatever attention I could provide. It was a 12-mile trip to the visit the hospital. I remember many of the senior officers and pilots offering to fly me over there but I thought that was both expense and sort of a waste of time, especially since I had a jeep and a driver. We did sick call with the Yards rather often. I got a lot of satisfaction from helping them and I know EM in the med section enjoyed that as well. The Yards seemed to express a sincere appreciate for our visits. Once we were done with the medical stuff, we played with them. They liked ping-pong and I remember the smiles when I would dance with their children. Of course, they'd try to get us drunk on their rice wine. I wrote lots of things down in a yellow spiral notebook from my Army years and that has helped refresh a lot of memories at this Reunion. I remember our Squadron Chaplin, CPT Martin Books, a good man. After the Army, I completed my medical schooling and have a successful practice in south-Denver. I've stayed in touch with Sandy Lowe and am glad I convinced me to come to this Reunion. I also got to see Mike Law again – he lived in the same BOQ with me for a few months at Enari and took me for a helicopter ride once.

SP4 Tim Park remembers joining D Troop's 3rd Platoon as a replacement in May 69 and stayed with them during their tour at Ban Me Thuot through most of that year. Just before Christmas he rotated

to HHT and started working with the Yards at Plei Do Lim. He helped build a few dispensaries and found a lot of fulfillment working with them.

SP4 Paul Courson provided: My real first name is Richard but to my family and in Vietnam I was Paul. I attended a two week LPC (leadership) course after AIT and arrived in Vietnam on 23 Jan 1969 as a PFC Medic. I was assigned to HHT and started to get my feet on the ground. I went out with B Troop's Blue not long after I arrived. A few days later an article appeared in the Stars and Stripes. All the medics pointed it out to me saying, 'This was the operation you were on with B Troop.' So I cut it out and saved it. The article's title is '7 Rockets Slam Into Hue.' I served most of my time in D Troop. I was on R&R and SP5 Dana Mace was serving in my place when he was killed. I DEROSed in Jan 1970.

The Pacific Stars and Stripes exact date unknown, January 1969: '7 Rockets Slam Into Hue. Reds Shell 40 More S. Viet Targets by SP5 Tom Gable. SAIGON – A wave of Communist rocket and mortar attacks swept Vietnam overnight Monday and Tuesday as more than 40 civilian and military targets were hit, including the old imperial capital of Hue. [Editor's note – skipped the next seven paragraphs.] In Kontum Province, U.S. 4th Inf. Div. soldiers captured two U.S.-made 105mm howitzers which had been partially destroyed by air and artillery strikes on an enemy staging area 31 miles west-northwest of Kontum City. The age and condition of the weapons, plus a serial number check, led military sources to believe that the guns had been captured by the Communists during the French-Indochinese war. Several expended 105mm ammunition casings were found nearby. Seventeen miles west of Kontum City, other 4th Div. troops and supporting tanks battled a determined enemy force for four hours, killing 13 before contact was broken. Four individual and two crew-served weapons were captured. U.S. casualties were six killed and 28 wounded.'

CPT William Wilkin attended the 1995 Reunion and provided: I was a Captain in Armor Branch and went to Vietnam in late 1968. I was a little surprised to be assigned to the 7/17th since I knew it was an air cav unit and I was not a pilot. I served as the XO of HHT in 1969 and then as the Squadron Motor Officer. In ? 1969, I was sent to the 155 AHC at Bam Me Thuot where I served as the Security Officer for the airfield.

CPT Mark Holbrook of A Troop recalls: In January CPT Bob Autry completed his time in Scouts and moved to the Lift Platoon. I became the Scout platoon leader at that time and stayed in that job until about April of 1969 when I became a liaison officer with the squadron.

SGT Terry L. Heath provides: I started my first tour in Vietnam about September 1967. I was right out of AIT. I worked in supply and was a truck driver in the 514th Quartermaster Company based at Qui Nhon. I wanted to extend to be a doorgunner on a helicopter. My hearing wasn't good enough to pass the flight physical. I went to have the physical three different times and each time they'd tell me – "It isn't gon' a happen." Finally on the fourth trip the doctor and his clerk were so upset with me that they ran me out of their office. I was sitting in my jeep trying to figure out my next excuse to get back in when the clerk comes out and hands me the signed papers. He said something like, "Here's what you want! Make the best of it!" After my 30-day leave I was assigned to A Troop at Camp Enari. I think this was October 1968. I flew as a Huey doorgunner two or three weeks before I volunteered to fly in the Scouts. It was just too boring for me. Before they accepted me into the Scouts they took me for a couple of check rides to see if I'd get sick and if I could pay attention to the right things. Luckily my Huey time had prepared me mentally and physically for these check rides. Learning to be a Scout is mostly OJT. LT Pospisil was also a new guy with the Scouts at this time, so they put us together in the wing ship. We learned together and survived. I really liked flying with LT Pospisil – he was a great pilot and a good guy. He was always calm even when things got hairy. I also flew with and around Bill Luken. He is very tall. I still don't know how he even fit into an OH-6A. He pushed his fuel to the limits quite often. I think he actually ran out of gas at least twice in the AO and had to set down somplace. We had a joke about making him carry a

5-gal can of fuel in the rear of his LOH. SSG Bob Evander was the lead scout at this time. He'd spent 18 months in Vietnam in the LOHs. He was very knowledgeable and very professional besides being a good teacher. Once I was flying with LT Pospisil and we picked out a mortar tube. We had learned that if we didn't make any sudden moves after we'd first spotted them, that they might not open fire or run and hide. LT Pospisil asked, 'What are we going to do?' Clearly we needed to make a high speed pass and get a smoke out. I said, 'Let's make a wide loop, act like we didn't see them, and sneak up on them.' Good idea – but it didn't work! They shot the crud out of us on that high speed pass. Neither of us were hit but we counted 28 hits when we landed hastily on an abandoned firebase. LT Pospisil laughed at me and said, 'Well, we aren't going to 'sneak up on them' that way anymore!' Like I said LT Pospisil was a very good pilot. He has ice water in his veins – a real cool hand Luke. On another occasion CPT Holbrook had us stow his flight jacket in the back of our LOH for our flight to Camp Enari. I don't recall why he asked us to do that – even if he was in a Cobra, he could have put it behind his seat. As you might guess, the jacket came out and tangled up in the tail rotor which caused a tail rotor failure. I remember one of the other aircraft told us that they had seen something in the tail rotor. At first LT Pospisil had a very difficult time getting control of the aircraft and we kept losing altitude I'd guess if the jacket had come out a few minutes later, this story would have had a different ending. Finally he could fly the aircraft but he had decided we needed to do a running landing. Since the PSP covered runway at Hensey field at Camp Enari wasn't long enough, he flew it to the hard surface runway at Pleiku. He slowed it down until it wanted to spin then put it on the ground nice and easy. We slid for a little while. I remember we were going sideways for the last 10 to 15 feet. Like I said, I felt good (well as good as you could get being shot at in a LOH in Vietnam) flying with LT Pospisil. Once I got proficient as a Scout Observer, I really got into it! My speciality was homemade bombs that I'd drop from the LOH. I made them with Army green tape and by putting 'good stuff' in ammo cans. Once I was working on one and MAJ Marshall saw what I was doing. He came up to me and was rather upset. I tried to reassure him that on my first tour with the Quartermaster guys I'd gotten EOD qualified, so I was OK doing this. Not long after that, he told me that he'd checked my records – I was only qualified for gas flammables – not high explosives. I was impressed that he'd made the effort to check out my EOD qualifications. After that I didn't work on them where he could see me and nothing more was said on that subject. However, I know that he knew I was still doing it because of the way things would blow up nicely after our LOH passed over that spot. Several times MAJ Marshall encouraged me to submit my flight school application. I refused because I knew it was just a waste of time – I couldn't pass the hearing test. I liked A Troop, so I extended a second time. I was just two days from leaving for an R&R in Australia when my luck ran out. Let me give you some background information. LT Pospisil had stopped flying in the AO – he'd become an IP and did some crew scheduling. CPT Hodge was the Scout platoon leader. He wanted me to fly with him in the lead aircraft. I was superstitiously uncomfortable with this. I remembered watching Turley & Woodruff, Luken & Looney go in. To me their names sort of rhyme – so I just knew two guys with an H in their last names would be bad luck. You know how you have a gut feeling things might not work out right. Well, I should have listened to my guts! If someone asks me, 'What'd you experience flying in A Troop?' I answer that I went down in a LOH five times. But I think two of them were a precautionary landings when we stayed on station too long in the AO. Maybe I shouldn't count them. But, I think it is OK to count the 28 holes and the tail rotor failure events. And I certainly have to count my last flight in A Troop. CPT Hodge had been flying Scouts in A Troop about three weeks and was upset because I wouldn't fly with him. Finally I said OK. Not long after that we spotted a guy in a spider hole near some tall trees. We hovered around until I got a clean view of him and shot him. The next thing I recall is a huge blast near the left side of the LOH – my side. The LOH hits the tree and crashed to the ground. This was a minigun ship and I was riding in the front. I took a lot of shrapnel in my legs and thyme. My left leg was broken and so was my back. CPT Hodge's face had shrapnel wounds and he lost the hearing in his left ear. I remember hearing

the medical people say that he'd never fly again, but he did fly a third tour in Vietnam. I heard the official report said pilot error but to my thinking that large of an explosion could only have come from a tree-mounted booby trap. I remember noticing that CPT Hodge was knocked out. I have always been afraid of fire; so I banged up as I was I was still conscience that we'd start burning soon. [NEED TO FINISH THIS MATERIAL and move it to the crash date.]

About this period of time B Troop was involved in a few Navy Seal operations. While the official records are silent about these operations, several B Troopers have mentioned participating.

1LT Woody McFarlin recalls: I was with WO Conrad Hamp another time during one of those Seal insertions. He was getting real short about that time. Once again the river was on my side so I could see and he couldn't, so I was flying. We were Chalk 3, I believe, of a flight of four. No lights. No gun cover. Two or three am. When we dropped down below the horizon, there was no light at all. All you could see was the instrument panel of the guy in front of you and the reflection off the water. We went in and dropped our guys off. I could see that Hamp was just "eating the seat." Now and then you'd see the trail rotor of the aircraft in front of us get between us and the instrument panel lights. It was rather hairy. I made AC in the Lift platoon. Later on when we moved back to Pleiku there were two 1LT ACs – myself and 1LT James M. Keally who was the lift platoon leader. I would occasionally come back and fly with the Lift Platoon so that he could take a day off or whatever.

February 1969

The A Troop AUH states that although for the last half of Jan and most of Feb the troop had no significant enemy contact, their reconnaissance efforts confirmed intelligence estimates that the enemy was building a large base between FB Blackhawk and Kontum. A Troop, working in conjunction with elements of the 4th Inf Div, was directly responsible for capturing large quantities of enemy medical and food supplies and thwarting enemy combat plans in the vicinity of FB Blackhawk.

The following article titled "Cav Kills Nine VC in Valley" appeared in the 16 Feb 1969 issue of the Ivy Leaf Famous Fourth. The date assigned to this event is early February 1969. Anyone with more information about this event, especially better dates, should contact Mike Law.

Firebase Blackhawk – Gunships from the 7th Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry (Air Mobile) swept over a section of VC Valley 14 miles southeast of Camp Enari, killing nine enemy and detaining four. Alpha Troop gunships, working with the Famous 4th Division's 1st Brigade, flew over an abandoned firebase and spotted 10-15 enemy soldiers. On seeing the choppers they scattered – but not fast enough. The two Cobra gunships, directed by Captain Joe Laehu of Columbus, OH, moved in for the kill. Within minutes, they eliminated five of the enemy with their accurate fire. Immediately, the troop's two scout ships (LOHs) joined the battle. Deadly miniguns and fire from the air observers' M16s cut down another three. Another VC was eliminated when he decided to play "quickdraw" with Lieutenant Mark Holbrook's scout ship. The little chopper was hovering just above him after he came out of hiding with hands raised, apparently giving up the fight. Suddenly, the VC drew a hidden pistol and fired at the LOH – he lost the contact to a minigun. The remaining four enemy took cover in the rocks where the choppers couldn't get them. A call went out for the troop's aero-rifle platoon. The platoon was inserted and went to work ferreting out the last four VC. After a brief exchange and a sweep of the area, they added four detainees to Alpha Troop's nine kills.

About this time TF South had worked out a "routine" for B Troop and CPT 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 Troop was at Phan Thiet. With some rare exceptions we only fought the VC which did not have the AA weapons the NVA had used on us 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 every 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 Song Mao. Naturally we went wherever 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 Airborne guys always backed us up. Many a day ended with B Troop 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__t, he could call us and, unless we had our Blues in, we'd haul ass to support them. The Airborne 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.

The following article titled "Ivy Units Kill 41, Detail 56" with a subtitle "Ruthless Riders Take Toll" appeared in the 23 Feb 1969 issue of the Ivy Leaf Famous Fourth. The date assigned to this event is early February 1969 because of the specific dates mentioned in the article.

Camp Enari – Aggressive units of the Famous 4th Infantry Division, intent upon uprooting firmly entrenched enemy forces from the division area of operations, were credited this week with 41 enemy kills and 56 detainees. Attention was focused on the hotly-contested area near a bend in the Ya Krong Bosah River, 18 kilometers north of Plei Djereng, where American units reported heavy contact throughout the week. On Saturday, Feb. 1, Company B, 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry found one enemy body in the area of last week's heavy fight. A sweep [editor's note: the source material for this two column article is damaged in two places so the sentences may not make good sense in these places] ... morning. During the afternoon, a Short Range Patrol (SRP) of the company exchanged heavy small arms fire with several small enemy units. Following these exchanges, sweeps turned up another NVA body. The following morning, C Troop, 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry detected from the air four huts and one bunker complex which they judged had been used within two hours prior to detection. An aero-rifle platoon was inserted to destroy the complex, and in the process, two sampans, one raft, and three enemy packs containing documents were captured. Nearby, another enemy body was found. Elements of the 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry continued to bear the brunt of the fighting north of Plei Djereng throughout the remainder of the week. They reported another incident near a bend in the river on Feb 3. One of the unit's aircraft commanders spotted an NVA soldier moving cautiously over open terrain. Minutes later an aero-rifle platoon was inserted to scour the area. By afternoon, heavy contact was established as gunships from Troop A combined fire power with the ground unit to take suspected enemy positions. After a thorough sweep, 13 NVA bodies were tallied. On Friday, an LOH from Troop A drew heavy automatic weapons fire from fortified ground positions while on a routine mission. Although the aircraft took two hits, the crew members kept the aircraft aloft and returned fire, killing two NVA soldiers. Gunships were quickly called on station and expended in the area, directing air strikes which killed nine more enemy soldiers and destroyed at least 40 of the bunkers. Several significant contacts were reported in other sections of the division area of operation. On Feb. 1, 20 kilometers southwest of Camp Enari, Company C, 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry reported sporadic contact with an estimated

platoon of Viet Cong. When the fighting subsided, one enemy soldier was detained. Later in the day, two contacts were reported about 50 kilometers east of Camp Enari. A LRP team observed 15 three-man bunkers showing signs of recent use. The bunkers were well-stocked with rice, tobacco and rice wine. The team waited patiently in the area and four hours later their suspicions were confirmed as they drew fire from a band of Viet Cong. One enemy was killed and his [the second damaged area] ... fire, killing two. LRP activity continued on Feb. 2 as a team working an area 40 kilometers east of Camp Enari made contact with 20 Viet Cong. The enemy fled, leaving behind two dead after the brief, but heavy exchange of small arms fire. Meanwhile, Troop D, 1st Squadron, 10th Cavalry observed from the air three huts and 50-55 bunkers joined by interlocking trench networks. Gunships peppered the area, but enemy casualties remained unknown. Four substantial rice caches were found during the week. On Feb. 3, Company D, 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry, operating 25 kilometers southwest of the Oasis, secured nearly a ton of rice stored in baskets. Three days later, Company C, 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry detained one Viet Cong suspect south of Camp Enari while uncovering a rice horde weighing 1,000 pounds. A total of 1,800 pounds of rice was found on Feb. 6 and 7 by two companies of the 3rd Battalion, 8th Infantry in separate caches southwest of Camp Enari. On Feb. 4, 18 kilometers northwest of Plei Mrong, Delta Company, 3rd Battalion, 12th Infantry engaged an enemy unit of unknown size. A LOH of Troop A, 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry was on the scene for support, as four NVA soldiers were killed and two detained in action. Two days later, Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry, engaged four NVA soldiers in the same location, killing one and capturing his AK47 and personal documents before contact was broken. In a cordon and search mission of a village 45 kilometers from Ban Me Thuot, one company of the 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry and National Police detained 39 suspects on Feb. 4. The week's total for detainees was raised to 56 on Feb. 7 as Company C, 2nd Battalion (Mechanized), 8th Infantry, in cordon and search with National Police missions of three small villages in the Plei Mrong area, detained 12 more enemy suspects.

On the 7th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #66-17829 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the fuel cell, cargo section, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 8th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16003 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the cargo section, engine comp, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 9th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16108 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the armament, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 11th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident and loss record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16305 at grid YA984844 flown by WO1 T.G. Rice, SP5 Daniel Townsend, and SP4 Timothy Chalfin. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

At approximately 1030 hours, WO1 Rice, SP5 Daniel Townsend, and SP4 Timothy Chalfin, all assigned to Troop C, departed Kontum in an OH-6A on a combat reconnaissance mission in the area of Polei Kleng. At approximately 1100 hours, WO1 Rice entered a left bank to mark an enemy position. As he returned to level flight and slowed the aircraft to approximately 5-10 knots and just about treetop level, the aircraft went into a tail spin to the right. In attempting to fly out of the spin by lowering the collective, the tail boom struck a tree stopping the spin abruptly, but also causing one of the main rotor blades to flex down, severing the tail boom aft of the ADF sensing antenna

attachment. This left the pilot no option other than to cut the throttle and enter a hovering autorotation. This he did and the aircraft settled into the trees causing extensive damage to the skids, the bubble, and the main rotors, in addition to the already severed tail boom. Neither the pilot, his gunner, or the observer sustained any injuries. The aircraft was slinglifted from the crash site, coordinates YA975840, by a UH-1H and delivered to Camp Enari for further investigation.

For the 12th, the Currahee (3/506th Airborne Infantry) website hosts details about an enemy attack on Outpost Saha located on QL-1 about 15 km northeast of Phan Thiet with sapper and infantry units in the early morning hours. It states gunships from B Troop were diverted to the contact to conduct reconnaissance of known enemy locations and routes of withdrawal. The Currahees maneuvered and CAed elements most of the day and were still in contact when Spooky arrived after dark.

Also on the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage records for four B Troop OH-6As as follows: (1) OH-6A #65-12992. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the nose, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater. (2) #66-14402 flown by an unnamed crews. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the cockpit, tail section, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater. (3) #66-07817 flown by an unnamed crews. One was injured. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the forward main rotor system, fuel cell, radio, bubble, cargo section, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired. (4) #67-16498 flown by an unnamed crews. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the forward main rotor system, skid, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

For the 22nd, the Currahee (3/506th Airborne Infantry, 101st Abn) website hosts details about an enemy attack on LZ Betty starting at 0200 hours. Enemy sappers breached the perimeter and B-40 rockets detonated an ammo bunker for the 4.2” mortar section. There were 3 US KIAs and 29 WHAs versus 21 enemy KIAs and one POW. B Troop’s basecamp also received incoming fire and the Troop was on high alert the rest of the night and several nights later.

Also on the 22nd, the VHPA Helicopter database has an AVDAC record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15607. The record states this was Combat Incident Damage caused by other combat by ground fire while the aircraft was on an armed escort mission. There were no casualties. Search and rescue operations were not required. The helicopter was recovered.

On the 24th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15645 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a reconnaissance armed escort other aircraft mission, they took six hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the cockpit, equipment section, tail section, skid, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater. The damage to this aircraft must have been extensive because the Goldbook database indicates this aircraft was turned in to the 79th TC CO and hence to ARADMAC for repairs. After its repairs it continued to serve with various CONUS unit but did not return to Vietnam.

Also on the 24th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16107 flown by an unnamed crews. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, while with 20 knots of airspeed, they took three hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the cargo door, horizontal stabilizer, skid, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 25th, MAJ Dick Marshall assumed command of A Troop replacing MAJ Terry Glover.

Also the 25th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop AH-1G #67-15592 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a direct combat support close air support mission, during the attack approach target area, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the equipment section, they made a forced landing and modified the mission, the helicopter was evacuated and repaired in theater.

On the 26th, B Troop's Blues were involved in an operation yet to be documented in this history. Via the 7th Surgical Hospital GO 23, TC 320 dated 27 Feb 1969 the following were awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received in action on the 26th: SP4 Robert W. Burgess, SP4 George Gonzales, SP4 Viridel Pearle, and Second Oak Leaf Cluster for SP4 Dale R. Fatchet.

On the 28th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop OH-6A #67-16072 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the transmission, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired.

SFC Les Montgomery came to C Troop as the Blue Platoon Sergeant from the Commo Platoon in HHT when SFC Joe Alicea-Aguayo DEROSed. Les would stay with the Blues until he DEROSed in October. During this period some of the other senior NCOs in C Troop were 1SG Joe Peoples as the First Sergeant, SFC Jack Keys, and SSG Doyle Shipman

SGT Dick Jones of D Troop recalls: After we returned to Enari in late 1968, I remember we were inserted following some air strikes to check out the damage done. Later I learned they had a name for this – bomb damage assessment (BDA). I remember during one of these mission CPT Falconio picked up one of those cluster bomblets. I can only guess that he didn't know what it was. Anyway it exploded when he threw it to one side. Our RTO, a guy named Riffenberg, was wounded in the grone and evaced with CPT Falconio who was also wounded. During this time I remember the following 2nd Platoon men: SSG Jones – the platoon sergeant, an older man, spent a lot of time in the field. SGT Campbell – played the guitar very well. SGT Wright – a country boy who also played the guitar and sing. A guy named Brown plus the clerk Dally – they went on R&R with me. There was a guy named White, another named Smith, and also a guy named Mackintas. We had two riflemen. One was Ken Ferguson and the other was Tim Gore. We called Tim 'yellow eyes' because he didn't sleep much at night and was very good with the star light scope. In Jan and Feb we did a lot of cordon and search operations in the Tea Plantation. I don't remember a lot of fire fights. I do remember we got mortared from a hill during these operations and we fired the RR at them. I remember we killed our pet dog, Ralph, with the back blast. SP4 Darrel Blak was hit by a mortar shard that blew part of his bone away. Only his skin was holding the wounded limb on.

Concerning 'life and times at Phan Thiet' with B Troop WO1 Gary Brydges recalls: In Phan Thiet we lived in GP-Medium tents for months. Floors were initially a combination of wood pallets and broken-down ammo boxes. About the first of April we got semi-permanent buildings with plywood floors, wood siding and screens. They still used tents for the roof, pending arrival of tin roofs. The tin roofs never did arrive – at least not while I was there. I believe there were four guys to one side, so eight men to a tent. I lived in the gun tent and it was next to the operations tent. Let me tell you how we got most of stuff to make living at Phan Thiet better. It was via the 'Oglesby system.' Warrant Officer Richard James Oglesby was the dedicated scrounger. He was given a Cobra to go up to Cam Ranh, I believe, or maybe Nha Trang. He was gone like two or three weeks with a perfectly good Cobra, stripped as I recall, and giving rides to Air Force supply people in return for certain favors. And one day, a couple or three weeks later, two or three LSTs pulled up to the landing area just off Phan Thiet in the South China Sea loaded with supplies. That is where our

shower came from, some hard floors for the tents, and lots of other stuff. That wasn't through the normal supply system; that was through the 'Oglesby system'.

March 1969

From 1 Mar through 14 Apr, A Troop was opconed to the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division participating in Operation Wayne Grey. The 1st Bde started from areas around Plei Kleng and followed A Troop into the Plei Trap Valley.

On the 1st, A Troop 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.

For his actions on March 1st and 2nd, CPT Mark Holbrook of A Troop received the Distinguished Service Cross via Department of the Army General Order 568 dated 1 Mar 1970. An edited version of the citation reads: CPT Holbrook (then 1LT) distinguished himself with exceptionally valorous actions while flying in support of FSB Swinger. Despite devastating enemy fire directed at his aircraft, CPT Holbrook began close-range firing passes over the enemy positions, destroying their anti-aircraft weapons emplacement. He then reported the location of each wounded American soldier to expedite their medical evacuation. After leaving the contact area to replace his badly damaged airplane, CPT Holbrook returned to the battlefield to aid a second unit under hostile attack. Flying into the middle of the enemy fire, he began to mark positions for air strikes. When he discovered a large enemy element maneuvering to surround friendly ground troops, he initiated low passes and halted their forward movement. With the hostile element pinned down, he flew to another area of contact where he stopped two enemy vehicles, which he marked as well as the surrounded enemy positions. Despite sustaining numerous hits to the craft, he ran marking passes which resulted in the destruction of the vehicles, an ammunition depot and much of the enemy force.

CPT Mark Holbrook reports that the real hero that day was SSG Bob Evander. Bob could fire his M60 with great accuracy with one hand and he was a fearless warrior.

After MAJ Dick Marshall reviewed a draft of the history for his period, he wrote: Looking over the names of the pilots that flew for our Squadron 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 Troop 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 Troop Commander because A Troop was really an outstanding unit. CPTs 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 Troop'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 Pospisil (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 Squadron'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 Troop will never reflect the many acts of bravery by the pilots, crews, and men of this Troop. Combat units such as A Troop 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 Troop. May God always bless each and every one of them.

The following article titled "Shattered Watch Prompts Bombs, Destroying Forts" by SP5 Peter Call appeared on page 6 in the Vol. 3, No 9 issue dated March 2, 1969 of the 4th Infantry Division's Ivy Leaf:

Highlander Heights - A shattered wrist watch started two days of action west of Kontum that saw Air Force fighters and Army helicopters team up to inflict heavy damage to an estimated battalion-size staging area in one location and gun emplacements in another. The first action started when two scout helicopters from Troop A, 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry spotted four North Vietnamese soldiers while conducting a visual reconnaissance and brought them under fire. Suddenly, one of the scout pilots, Warrant Officer Paul Redhead of Chicago, felt a tug at his arm and saw that his watch had been shattered by a bullet which continued through the plexiglass canopy. Cobra gunships overhead rolled in and pounded the area with rockets and miniguns, but still received heavy fire from the well-fortified area. Major Weston Smith of Bowling Green, Ohio, one of the 2nd Brigade's Forward Air Controllers (FACs) monitored the action and rushed to the scene. "I knew our jets would be less vulnerable to the concentrated fire because of their high speed so I called for an immediate air strike," Major Smith explained. The Highlander FAC put in fighters until his rapidly-diminishing supply of fuel and rockets forced him to be replaced by Captain Bradley Van Sant of Davis, Calif. "The Cav' proved to be a tremendous help by giving us accurate bomb damage assessments after each set of fighters had made their runs and locating new targets," said Major Le Roi Butler of Lansing, Mich., who joined the action later with Captain Thomas A. Landron of Puerto Rico. Together, Air Force and Army pilots received credit for 8 enemy kills and destroying or damaging 15 two-man bunkers, five sampans and trench and machine gun positions. Two days later, the Ruthless Riders, conducting a similar mission near the Cambodian border, received fire from enemy .50 caliber anti-aircraft guns. Major Smith and Captain David Loveless of Westport, Conn., joined the action in the twin-engine spotter planes and directed Skyraiders and Super Sabres to destroy three of the well-fortified positions. "During both operations, we put our bombs right on target thanks to the daring of those low flying scout pilots," said Major Butler, the Highlander Air Liaison Officer.

On the 2nd, northwest of LZ Swinger, A Troop 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 airstrikes killed five NVA and destroyed the trucks. During the next three days, A Troop killed eight NVA while supporting 1st Bde elements.

Also on the 2nd, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16241 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon

mission, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the cargo section, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

The following article titled "Ruthless Riders Pound NVA" with a subtitle "Capture Ammunition Truck" appeared in the 23 Mar 1969 issue of the Ivy Leaf Famous Fourth. The date assigned to this event is 2 Mar 1969 because of the A Troop unit history provides details for this date that match the article.

Polei Kleng – Operating 50 kilometers west, northwest of Kontum City, Alpha Troop, 7th Battalion, 17th Cavalry, with the help of Air Force F100 Super Sabres successfully hit an enemy supply route. The action resulted in six NVA killed and the capture of a truck loaded with 60 CHICOM 105mm rounds. Troop A, working with the Famous 4th Division's 1st Brigade, had been flying an air reconnaissance mission over suspected enemy positions and infiltration routes, when one of their ships spotted something suspicious. The Light Observation Helicopter (LOH) made a low sweeping pass over the area and sighted what appeared to be two trucks in the dense bamboo along a well-concealed road. A second pass brought automatic weapons fire from an estimated 10 hidden positions. An air observer, Sergeant Robert Evander of Minneapolis, Minn., saw one NVA immediately. He recalled, "I was looking out one side and as we passed over the area I noticed one of them moving through the clearing, so I let go with my M16 and he went down." Major Dick Marshall, Alpha Troop commander, directed the scout ships to mark the enemy position with smoke. The troop's Cobras quickly blasted the enemy targets with relentless rocket fire. Following the Cobras, the scout ships checked the area again. They found that the enemy was still determined to fight back. As they swooped down, the jungle thicket came alive with heavy fire. Minutes after a call for an Air Force tactical air strike, the F100 Super Sabres were overhead, making a devastating strike on the immediate area. Five secondary explosions were reported. Again Alpha Troop scout ships returned, and were greeted with still more enemy fire. Two additional air strikes were needed to finally silence the enemy, and three more secondary explosions were reported. Following the air strike, elements of the 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry swept through the area. They reported six enemy dead and the damaged truck was found further up the road; its driver had been killed by shrapnel. The following day a "flying crane" retrieved the unique 4th Division war trophy. Aboard the Russian-made, one and a half ton vehicle were 60 CHICOM rounds and 1,200 pounds of rice.

The following article titled "Alpha Troop Takes Big Guns" by Cpt David R. Fabian also appeared in the 30 Mar 1969 issue of the Ivy Leaf Famous Fourth. The date assigned to this event is 2 Mar 1969 because of the A Troop unit history provides details for this date that match the article.

Polei Kleng – Aircraft of Alpha Troop, 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry observed two suspected enemy 105 artillery emplacements, in a vine entangled area 28 kilometers northwest of Polei Kleng. The Ruthless Riders called in immediate gunship and artillery fires on the suspected locations. An air strike followed, and it was reported that the positions were destroyed. Several days later Famous 4th Division troops from Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry, supported by elements of the 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry made a combat assault into the area to assess damage to the emplacements. Closing in on the location, Delta company received periodic sniper fire from the south. Countering with small arms fire, they silenced the sniper and captured one AK47. Once the ground units made their way to the artillery pieces, a Hook was called in to make the extraction. "The howitzers were firmly entrenched," reported Specialist 5 Robert Frechette of Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., "and extraction was cumbersome. The pilot of the hook had to do some fancy manipulating to lift out the first gun." The wreckage of both artillery pieces was taken back to Polei Kleng. An assistant Operations Officer, Captain James J. D'Ambrosio Jr, of Downers Grove, Ill, commented on the condition of the weapons. "It has been reported to me," said Captain D'Ambrosio, "that the guns were U.S. manufactured 105 howitzers. One was a 1942 model, the other a 1945 model. Neither was operational, although both remained somewhat intact. Firing mechanisms were destroyed by

the combination of gunship expenditures and the air strikes. Both guns were extremely charred.” Some military spokesmen at Polei Kleng believed that the pieces had been captured by the Communist during the French-Indochinese war. Spent casings littering the emplacement area suggested the weapons were firing CHICOM 105mm artillery rounds.

On the 3rd, CPT Bob Bruegger assumed command of D Troop replacing CPT David ‘Mike’ Hennessy. Also for the 3rd, the Currahee (3/506th Airborne Infantry) website states that during this month the battalion operated in the mountains north of Phan Thiet as part of Operation Hancock Queen. B Troop also worked these mountains.

On the 4th, MAJ Scott T. Lyman assumed command of B Troop replacing MAJ James A. McCracken who became the Squadron XO.

On the 5th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop OH-6A #67-16498 flown by 1LT Dick Cross who had minor injuries. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission. The accident summary reads: While at a hover in a confined area, the enlisted personnel stepped out on the skids and the additional weight caused the aircraft to swing to the left. The tail rotor struck a tree.

Dick, “Tricky” to most of us, remembers: I wrote a short-story about the events of this day called *A Tale of Two Tail Rotors*. Our teams for the day had either already been in the AO doing an area recon, or we had been launched to support a grunt unit (3/506th Abn) that either was in contact with a good sized VC/NVA force, or had just broken off the contact and was in need of re-supply. The location of the contact was on the NW side of the Toilet Bowl, near or on the top of the hill. The grunts were in the process of cutting out an LZ on the down slope side of the hill, not too far from the point of contact. The problem they were having is that all they had for cutting tools were a few machetes and E-tools. Someone on their end had gotten in touch with the rear, who then decided that there was an engineer unit (plt?) located some clicks to the south that could and would provide two men with chain saws to open up the small LZ in rather short order. I flew over the LZ in progress, and at that point in time it was big enough for a LOH, with some feet to spare on all sides. The LZ ran slightly down hill, from the NE towards the SW, and still had plenty of small stumps and debris that would have to be removed before a Huey could get in. Our C&C that day I believe was Wild Bill Ipock, but then again could be wrong. He called down and advised me of what was in the works, and that I should head over to a small hill located to the SW of our present location. At that position I was to link up with the engineers, pick up the man with the chain saw and his equipment then return to the LZ for drop-off. He KAK’d up the frequency as I was en route. (I have to assume, as I don’t recall, that my wing went with me). I arrived at the site, talked to the people there, then dropped in to pick up the engineer. Here comes this kid, loaded with a full ruck, rifle, chainsaw, and 5-gallon can of gas. On seeing him I was beginning to wonder if I was going to be able to get the LOH off the small hill I was on, let alone have enough power to get into the LZ on the higher terrain, as we were still fairly fuel heavy. I believe my gunner that day was in fact SGT Philips, who was KIA on the 8th with Wally. At any rate, he un-strapped then went around to help the engineer get his stuff in the back. I had told him to brief the engineer to stay in the aircraft until we told him it was OK to unstrap and get out, how to avoid the main rotor, and the tail rotor.

We took off from the hill and headed back to the LZ. On arrival we advised the ground troops to clear the area as we were coming in to drop off the pack with the chain saw. I shot the approach from the NE to the SW, taking advantage of what little wind there was, and the long axis of the LZ. The troops had done a bit more work on the site since we had first seen it, but it was still no beauty. I pulled in the power to try to keep us about 10 feet above the LZ, as SGT Philips checked his side of the aircraft for any obstacles. Getting an OK from him I started to land, slowly, as I could see we were picking up and throwing small bits of debris into the rotor system. SGT Philips advised me

that there looked like a small stump on his side, and to move the tail rotor more to the right to avoid it. We were about 1 ½ ft. off the ground, still trying to get a firm landing done, when the engineer in the back decided it must be time for him to unload. Neither SGT Philips nor I had said anything to him yet, as we were concentrating on getting on the ground without hitting the stump. He stepped off the skid in the back, tilting the aircraft to the right, and pushing the tail rotor to the left before I had the time to realize what he was doing, let alone react to the sudden inputs. Immediately there was a loud “WHUNK” noise, followed by severe vibrations throughout the aircraft. At the same time I managed to get us on the ground, I thought for sure we had torn the tail rotor off, as I had never felt these kind of vibrations before. SGT Philips looked out to the rear and said that it looked like we still had a tail rotor. Right away I was in conversation with the C&C about what was going on and what our options appeared to be. After a brief discussion it was decided that I could attempt a take-off, then, if I still had control of the bird, push the nose down hill to pick up speed to control heading without the tail rotor, should that be necessary. If I could maintain the in-flight control of the aircraft, then I was to fly it home to maintenance, pick up another bird and return. If none of the above mentioned worked, I was to try to keep from killing us in the LZ, further screwing up the works. Philips and I talked about what we were about to do, and he reached over and locked my harness, followed by locking his own. I brought the engine back to full power, and with it the vibrations that made talking next to impossible. I slowly brought in the collective, trying to see if the nose was going to spin on me, but, as it didn't, I made a smooth (as the situation allowed) takeoff, heading towards the top of the trees. As we picked up a little airspeed and cleared the first tree tops the vibration seemed to die off a little. I still nosed the aircraft over to pick up the airspeed and maintain trim. The C&C was right behind and above us, trying to provide help and commentary (more likely trying to get an accurate location of where we went down should this ploy fail ...) until it was determined we could probably fly it home. I think we had an escort, probably my wing, but then again it could have been one of the high birds too. We landed back at the Corral, with maintenance and opns having been advised of our coming. I filled out the log as Philips went over to the new LOH and started transferring gear. Doing a quick post flight I could see that we had caught the tip of the tail rotor on the stump, splitting the end of the tail rotor and throwing off the tip weight. I did a quick pre-flight, then we were back in the air headed back to the LZ. As we were en route, C&C let us know that the other engineer was ready for pick-up and that I should go to the PZ, get him, and drop him in the LZ too. Philips and I discussed the past LZ encounter and he said he would give this one a more thorough brief. Landing on the small hill and picking up this engineer was a repeat of the first trip. We took off heading to the LZ, and, once we arrived, did a few circles of the area to look at it, as well as burn off a little more fuel. I made the approach from the same direction as before, careful to try landing a little more forward of the last spot, which, oddly enough, still had the remnants of the stump standing. Again I was making a slow, controlled landing from a hover, with SGT Philips checking his side for obstacles. Again we had a stump or tree limb close to the tail rotor, so I was moving the ship slightly forward, and to the right to avoid it. Again we were under 2 feet from the ground when the engineer decided it was close enough for him, so out he went, chainsaw, 5-gallon can and all. Needless to say the aircraft responded in the exact same manner, hitting something sticking up from the ground with the tail rotor! Once again Philips and I were on the ground being shaken to pieces by the vibrations. I'm not sure the C&C believed the next transmission. At any rate, after a discussion similar to the first, Philips and I locked down the harnesses and made the same type of take-off as the first. Again back to the Corral, this time to be met by some really unhappy maintenance types. I did the post flight, and sure enough we had the exact same type of damage to the tail rotor.

A very unhappy “Lazy” Smith, the Scout platoon leader, met us at the flight line, and after I tried to explain what had happened, said MAJ Mac wanted to see me ASAP. I sent SGT Philips off to his area, as “Lazy” said we were done for the day, then I headed for MAJ Mac's tent after dropping my

gear. I reported to a VERY unhappy MAJ Mac and went through the entire day's events, explaining actions and answering questions. He dismissed me, saying that I had to take a check ride the next day with "Uncle" Newt Richard, the Troop Scout IP. My flight records show that on the 5th we flew a total of 2.8 hours. On the 6th, I guess with Newt, I had 3.3 hours. So that, in essence, is the Tale of Two Tail Rotors.

On the 6th, A Troop was sent to help a 1st Bde unit in heavy contact. The Scouts quickly found the two NVA mortars which the Guns destroyed. A Troop diverted to a help A-3/8 Inf which was being overrun. The ground commander 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 ranks to keep them off the friendly unit. Eventually the enemy advance slowed and A Troop's Lift brought in supplies and reinforcements. When the battle finally ended, 280 NVA bodies were found. During the next week, A Troop 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.

MAJ 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 Opns 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 the Infantry. There is no doubt they saved hundred of American lives. Those Scouts were "above the rest and the very, very best".

Also on the 6th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16505 at grid YA822879 flown by an unnamed crew. There were 2 crew injuries. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, they had more than 99 holes from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the fuselage, they crashed and terminated the mission, the helicopter was lost to inventory and destroyed.

On the 8th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record for B Troop OH-6A #66-07823 at grid AN759286 flown by **WO1 Walter Andrew "Wally" Carpenter** and his observer, **SGT David Jeffery Phillips**. The Wall database gives the following tour start and MOS data: Carpenter, 10 Jun 1968, 062B; Phillips, 16 Jul 1968, 11D40. They were killed while working a ridge line almost due west of Phan Thiet.

CW2 Larry Vieley 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 were bored, flying monotonous circles watching two small LOHs for hours; so they volunteered for the Scouts. After some time Wally became a Scalphunter. He had been flying with them for a month or so. There is a good picture of us in 'Hank' Johnson's *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 purposely scuffed up Wally's shiny boots after he had polished them the night before. He tried to scuff mine, but I was able to successfully ward off all his attempts and ran for the revetments. He then found an entrenching tool somewhere near the revetments and unbeknown to me, loaded the spade with sand. Wally told my front seat guy, I believe it was Dave Marks, not to be walking with me when we came back in to rearm and refuel because he was going to throw the sand on me in retaliation. Dave showed me later where the shovel was placed. Wally never got the chance to throw it on me because he was killed in the OA that same morning and

never returned for fuel. Dave told me about the shovel only after we had returned from the AO and recovered the bodies. I think about Wally often – especially on Memorial Day.

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 Squadron XO, had asked if I wanted to be his Opns Officer or Gun Plt Ldr when he assumed command of B Troop. I jumped at the chance to leave the Squadron staff and return to a line troop. I'd been flying with B Troop a little less than a month and was thrilled to be soldiering with some truly OUTSTANDING men. B Troop had a Warrant Officer, 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 Squadron 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 Task Force South had us work for the Airborne Battalion 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 that 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. That was all he said of the all too familiar expression 'Receiving Fire' 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 Troop had a special bell just outside the Opns 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 their main force 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 Task Force 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 all that well; but to this day, he symbolizes everything that is honorable or endearing about the people in B Troop I loved so much.

1LT Joe Shepherd recalls: I was flying in the front-seat of the low Cobra on this day with, I believe, WO Dave Russell in the back-seat. I remember hearing Wally's taking fire call. I had the turret sight in my lap. I put a long burst of minigun fire right on his smoke as he was still turning to fly into 'The Toilet Bowl.' I remember Wally saying that he was bleeding badly and was afraid he'd pass out. His wing asked if the Observer could fly it for him but Wally said that he was slumped over and he thought he was already dead. That was the last we heard from him. The LOH just flew toward the bottom of the bowl and crashed into a old dead tree.

WO1 Gary Brydges recalls: I was not flying the day Walt was killed. As Larry Vieley mentioned in his paragraph above, Walt had been a Cobra pilot but he got bored and volunteered to become a Scout. As Larry mentioned, we weren't seeing a whole lot of action – maybe just enough to keep things interesting. We described it as boring holes in the sky flying circles around the LOHs while they were seeing enough action to keep it really interesting. Walt and I had talked some time prior to this, 'Well, maybe we'll go to LOHs because that's where the action is.' I'm certain that if we had been flying in some other parts of the country we wouldn't have been saying that – but at that time and place, we did. And we both asked if we could go to LOHs. For whatever reason, he was the one that got picked instead of me. We figured that we would have roughly two months of good flying left in our tours from March until the end of May when we'd be short. We figured if we both went to LOHs that would be fine too. I'm not certain how long he had been flying as an team leader in the LOHs – probably not long - I don't think it was more than a couple three weeks if that. It was less than a month for certain. He was doing well. He was still learning some things but he was certainly a good pilot – there was no question there. Just from watching LOHs in the past and flying over them almost a year, you certainly knew what their tactics were; so it was just a matter of learning how to do it. You knew what they did; now you just had to learn to do it. He may have been rusty in that area but who is to say. I have often thought about this because it could have been me instead of him because we both applied. I've thought about whether he moved to live with the Scouts or if he was still in the gun tent. I think he moved, but I can't say that for certain. I went through Basic Training with Wally. We went through Wolters together. We were in the same class at Wolters but I didn't know him well then. We were in the same class at Rucker, and then went to Cobra school together with John Stafslie. John was in B Troop for awhile but then was infused to another Cav unit. We ended up at B Troop together at Pleiku. So I'd known Walt from the time we started Basic until B Troop. We were on the same track together. He was one of my closest friends over there. Our close friendship really started in An Khe when we roomed together. Somehow we ended up in the same room there. He was flying guns then. We had a lot of things in common and seemed to hit it off, so we became good friends. He had gotten married in flight school. After he was killed, his wife sent me his wings. Walt had mentioned me and some of the others in letters to her. I still have the envelope and the items it contained. She sent a very nice letter and said that these were Walt's wings and she wanted me to have them, which I still do. That was a nice touch to a sad situation. I would DEROS from Phan Thiet, so I'd guess I spent about 10 months of my tour at Phan Thiet even though it was split up with time in other places.

On the 10th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident and loss with injuries record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16003 at grid AR764884 flown by 1LT W.A. Luken and Observer SP5 R.M. Evander who had minor injuries. The record indicates there was a passenger whose name is unknown; this could be the second observer/gunner. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

At approximately 1150 hours, the aircraft departed FBS Mary Lou on a VR mission. At approximately 1345 hours, LT Luken checked the amount of fuel on board with his wingman. Both gauges registered 110 lbs. Approximately 5 minutes later, LT Luken's team was relieved on station. En route to Kontum, LT Luken called Playboy Control at Polei Kleng three times. He received no response, and recalling a negative fuel situation there the day before, decided to continue to Kontum. Minutes after passing Polei Kleng, the fuel quantity gauge began to fluctuate and finally dropped to empty. LT Luken radioed Kontum tower of his fuel status about five miles out. Kontum tower cleared him for landing and told him to report a two mile final. LT Luken reported a two mile final. The tower had negative sight but cleared him to land. Approximately 1 1/2 miles out the engine quit due to fuel exhaustion. LT Luken entered autorotation at 2,300 feet indicated, 500 feet AGL, and 100 Kts. LT Luken began his flare at approximately 75 feet. He ran out of collective at approximately three feet causing the aircraft to land extremely hard. The main rotor blades flexed down severing the tail boom in two places. The aircraft bounced two to three feet into the air, turned left 90 degrees and landed nose low. After landing, the aircraft remained upright. SGT Evander sustained minor bruises to his left arm and left knee caused by his seat belt being loose which allowed him to bump against the console.

Also on the 10th, the VHPA Helicopter database has battle damage records for two C Troop OH-6As flown by an unnamed crews. #66-14403 took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the fuel cell, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater. #67-16108 took three hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the skid, cockpit. In both situations they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16573 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the cargo section, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

The following article titled "Fighting Increases, 289 NVA Fall" appeared in the 30 Mar 1969 issue of the Ivy Leaf Famous Fourth. The article provided a summary of the significant events for the period 8 – 14 March but only mentions the 7/17th Cav on the 12th.

Camp Enari – Aggressive Ivy units were credited with 289 kills this week (March 8-14), bringing their overall total since arriving in country in August 1966 to a confirmed enemy body count of 10,075. [Editor's note: skipped the next ten paragraphs printed in this article.] On March 12, elements of the 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry, teamed with C Troop, 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry to beat back an estimated NVA company. Together, the Bullets and the Ruthless Riders killed 23 of the enemy.

On the 13th, the following material was taken from a NARA document marked Confidential and appears to be an S-3 Journal from either a Brigade or the 4th Inf Div based on the details in the other entries. 13 March. 0745 hrs, ZA059976, Rcn (Reconnaissance Platoon) 1-69 (the 1/69th Armor battalion was attached to the 4th Infantry Division) made contact with an unknown size enemy force. S/A, artillery and gunships were employed. 2 APCs were hit by B-40 rockets - 5 US KIA and 1 APC destroyed. C-7/17 supported contact and gunships had 4 NVA KBA. An APC from A/1-69 and 1 from A/2-8 hit mines in the contact area - 6 US were WIA and 1 APC was destroyed.

Also on the 13th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15630 flown by Aircraft Commander 1LT D.G. Coates and co-pilot 1LT W.L. McFarlin. The Goldbook database indicates this aircraft was recovered, turned in to ARADMAC, taken to the Bell Helicopter plant in Texas for repairs, and returned to Vietnam in July 1970 to serve in another unit. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission. The accident summary reads:

1LT Daniel G. Coates was the aircraft commander and the co-pilot was 1LT Woodsen L. McFarlin who is not qualified in the AH-1G helicopter. During the preflight inspection of the helicopter no mechanical deficiencies were found. At 0730 hours LT Coates took off from the parking area of Troop B in Phan Thiet. He climbed to 1,500 feet absolute altitude and assumed level flight. Over the area of operations LT Coates flew the helicopter at 60 to 80 knots and in a left orbit. Suddenly the cyclic control was forced to the full aft position where it remained. The helicopter went into a cyclic climb and airspeed decreased to zero. All instruments read normal and there were no caution lights. LT Coates turned off the SAS power switch, but the cyclic control remained in the aft position. LT Coates instructed LT McFarlin to control the collective while he attempted with both hands and placing one foot on the cyclic to force the cyclic forward; however, this was to no avail. As the nose pitched up, the helicopter turned to the left. Eyewitnesses flying in the same area stated that the helicopter made two 360 degree turns; however, the pilot is not aware of this. In order to slow the rate of climb, the co-pilot reduced the collective until the torque meter indicated 10 PSI. Now the aircraft settled in a rearward descent. LT Coates performed a sharp left cyclic turn and accomplished a forward descent which appeared to be that of a normal approach. Upon application of power, LT Coates experienced increased feed back in cyclic control and the nose of the helicopter pitched upward. LT Coates could not maintain level flight and selected the river bed as the place of intended landing. There were no other potential forced landing areas in the immediate vicinity. Prior to touchdown the forward airspeed was approximately 15 knots. In order to decrease the airspeed, rate of descent, and to avoid hitting trees on the river bank, LT McFarlin increased power causing cyclic feed back and strong vibrations of the helicopter. Again to avoid hitting the trees, LT McFarlin bottomed collective pitch causing the helicopter to hit hard on large boulders in the river bed and turning 90 degrees to the right. This resulted in damage to the turret, skids, air frame and tail rotor servo mount. The helicopter remained upright and the crew performed normal shut down procedures. They exited the helicopter and swam to the river bank. The water depth was approximately four feet. The helicopter was slung to the Troop B maintenance area. Inspection revealed mechanical failure of the nut assembly, FSN 1680-786-1610, of the fore and aft cylinder assembly, hydraulic, part number 209-076-021-3, which was forced out of the bearing housing, FSN 1680-872-1144. This caused the cylinder assembly to move up, forcing the cyclic aft and tilting the swash plate. The bushing set did not seat itself back into the bearing housing, keeping the cylinder assembly in the up position.

1LT Woody McFarlin recalls: Everything in the accident summary looks good to me with some exceptions. I didn't realize that we'd turned two 360s as the write-up states. It could very well have happened. It was really a hairy ride at that point in time. We were trying everything to get it back under semi-control. Dan gave me the collective and the pedals so he could use both hands on the cyclic. He bent the cyclic all the way up to the instrument panel but even that didn't do any good. I'd guess while we were doing this is probably when we were doing all the turning. He learned that left and right cyclic movements worked but fore and aft did not. So he lined us up on the streambed. As I recall I had control of the collective all the way down. Where the write-up says we had turned 90-degrees to the right, what we had actually done was try to set the aircraft down on a big flat rocky area in the middle of the stream. But when we lowered the pitch, we'd actually picked up forward airspeed so we hit the rock hard and this turned us to the right toward the bank. When I added power we sort of came to a stop over the water. Our options were to either let it setting down into the stream, crash it into the embankment, or hold power and start moving backwards. I lowered the pitch and we hit some rocks going in. I had on a chicken plate with my camera in the front pouch plus a ballistic helmet and naturally my pistol. Remember they always warned us about leaving Secret stuff in an aircraft. I had two maps out at the time. I gathered up the maps plus the aircraft log book and stuffed them under my arm as I was getting out. Dan was in the back shutting everything off. When I came around in front of the aircraft, I suddenly I found myself upside down

in the water because the rocks were slick. When I got to my feet, the water was just above chest high on me. I'd take a couple steps and down I'd go again. All that top weight would try to turn me upside down. Anyway, I finally struggled into shallower water near the rocks in the middle of the river. Dan saw my struggles and assumed that he would have to swim. When he got out of the cockpit, he opened up the cowling to see if he could determine what had gone wrong. I remember getting out of the water just in time to hear his chicken plate hit the rocks as he took a swan dive from the Cobra's wing. The C&C Huey landed on the rocks in the middle of the river and we worked our way to it. It seemed to me that all this took about half an hour, but I can remember that as both Dan and I were sitting in the Huey as it lifted off. I looked back and noticed the Cobra's rotor blades were just coming to a stop. So we weren't down there all that long. I had clutched that logbook so tightly under my arm that when I opened it to write up the 'suspected hard landing' note, the pages weren't even wet! They were only damp around the outside. That was an interesting day for sure. The aircraft's name was "Widow Maker" but both of us were single at the time. I remember that many of the nine Cobras had names for a while. Then the names seemed to go away and I don't recall that they came back. 1LT Richard was flying a LOH that day. He had his observer hover while he took pictures of the action with an instamatic camera. There are lots of pictures of the cobra being slung back to our maintenance area. I remember CPT Ted Bidigare was the maintenance officer. He was standing there watching the Chinook bring it back to us with his hands on his hips as if to say, 'You done broke my helicopter!' Then ten days later we had a second one go down. I don't recall who was flying it. It may have been Gary Brydges – blond haired warrant officer. We were up on the coast near Phan Rang AFB. Once again it was the high Cobra. I was in the low Cobra that day. They had exactly the same problem Dan and I had. They tried the same maneuver we'd done except when they get it down to about ten feet off the ground, they added power that caused the nose to rise. The aircraft came down on the tail boom, and then spread the skids. I remember some tail boom damage but I don't think the main rotor actually chopped the tail boom off. A Chinook lifted it out as well. This was during the time when the USS New Jersey was off the coast firing into our area. It was ten days after our 13 March incident. There was a worldwide grounding of the Cobras for three or four days until they figured out what was happening to the servos. As I recall either the Army or Bell had changed suppliers of that servo. The manual for the old one called for the nut on top of the servo to be torqued to a certain foot-pound then safety wired. The new one required a sequence of torques to various foot-pounds, then installing the safety wire. Our guys had found broken safety wires and slippage marks out of alignment on preflight inspections prior to our accident. The nuts were re-torqued and re-wired then we'd go fly. Apparently these fixes were somewhat curing our problems and not realizing there was a bigger issue. After using the new torque sequence procedure, I don't remember anyone else having a problem.

On the 14th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage records for two A Troop OH-6As. (1) #67-16399 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details state that this was a recon mission, while at an altitude of 30 feet, they took seven hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the forward main rotor system, cargo section, cockpit, fuselage, they made a forced landing and modified the mission, the helicopter took-off and was repaired in theater. (2) #67-16513 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details state that this was a recon mission, while at an altitude of 30 feet, they took three hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the passenger-cargo area, the tail section, and the main rotor system. There was structural damage to the helicopter plus damaged to the fuel system. They continued flying but aborted the mission. The Army Goldbook database indicates this helicopter was turned into the 79th TC CO and hence to Hughes Aircraft in California for repairs. When the repairs were complete this aircraft returned to Vietnam in December 1969 to serve with C/2/17th Cav 101st Abn Div.

On the 15th, LTC Calvin R. Bean assumes command of the 7/17th Cav replacing LTC Bob Reuter. LTC Bean recalls:

Bob Reuter and I were old friends. We even served together in Vietnam with the UTT. So I arrived at Camp Enari a few days prior to the change of command and stayed in the CO's hooch near Squadron HQ. Several of the officers put on a bash for Bob a couple days before he left for his assignment at Nha Trang. I recall during the party Bob was looking for his SGM who was suppose to be there but had not shown up. Bob sent a couple officers out to locate him and found him beat up badly and left in one of those drainage ditches at Enari. The SGM was evacuated to the hospital and SGM Robert M. Couch was appointed to replace him. SGM Couch served as my Sergeant Major the entire time I was with the Squadron after I assumed command. I don't recall where he came from in Vietnam – maybe somewhere in the 4th Infantry Division; but he arrived quickly. He was an outstanding Sergeant Major.

Also on the 15th, Volume One Number Two of *Spurs & Lightning* was published. This issue was prepared by 1LT Brac Jones, Jr, Information Officer, PFC Thomas Baker, Editor – writer, PFC Ronald A. Pahnke, illustrator. The following articles appeared in this issue:

LTC Reuter Departs – The men of the 7/17th Cav bid a fond farewell to retiring Commanding Officer, LTC Robert M. Reuter. Highlighted by an informal in his honor, the ceremony was culminated by an impressive formal Change of Command. The ceremony was attended by many friends and associates of the 7/17th. LTC Reuter took command 15 Sep and led the Ruthless Riders through many heavy encounters with the NVA and VC, all the way from Ban Me Thuot to Dak To. Convinced that the Air Cavalry tactic is an effective new tactic for combating guerrilla insurgents, he felt men of the Cav must have open minds to new ideas. Open minds are necessary, he often said, to being adaptable to improved methods of doing the same thing. He said the Cav must stay responsive to new findings and courageous enough to try them. “We are still learning,” he liked to remind his men. As a part of finding new and better ideas, LTC Reuter worked at the Pentagon researching and developing the new gunship, the Cheyenne, which will prove even more lethal and effective than the ruthless Cobra. LTC Reuter will join IFFV in Nha Trang. He should prove to be of valuable assistance in helping form and guide allied tactics against the enemy to gain peace for the people of Vietnam. “He was truly respected here. I enjoyed serving under him,” said MAJ Roger D. Winslow, Jr., Adjutant of the 7/17th.

LTC Bean Arrives – The men of the 7/17th Cav welcomed their new Commanding Officer, LTC Calvin R. Bean. Verifying his preparedness, the bulk of his experience in the US Army has been in aviation, as well as, other assignment in Cavalry related duties. LTC Bean has been flying fixed and rotary winged aircraft since 1956, accumulating well over 3000 hours. After entering the University of Maryland in 1952, LTC Bean went on active duty with 80 semester hours of military science credit. He has now completed the baccalaureate requirements and holds a valid degree. The degree is certainly valid, as he has had a varied and extensive career in the Army, and his associates believe him quite worthy of their respect. He has been awarded the DFC and the Gallantry Cross. Fresh from college, LTC Bean comes to the Cav for his third tour of duty in Vietnam and his second with the 17th Air Cavalry. During the ceremony, LTC Bean expressed his awareness of the outstanding success of the 7/17th in its endeavors in Vietnam. He said he was quite proud to be able to join the Cav to carry on its fine traditions. LTC Bean and LTC Reuter have been acquainted for many years, and aware of each other's admirable careers. LTC Reuter said, “the choice of new commander could not have been better made. He would have been my personal choice.”

Alpha Troop to the Rescue – Polei Kleng – A Troop gave vital assistance to a unit of the 4th Infantry Division March 4th near Polei Kleng. A/3/8th Inf, 1st Brigade was sweeping the area in response to information that it was heavily infested with North Vietnamese. They had encountered an element of NVA too big for them to handle, unless assistance was rendered soon. Indeed, with wounded

men, little ammunition, and such a large element in contract, assistance was crucially needed. The LOHs and Cobras with CPT Joseph Laehu in C&C were reconning the area when A/3/8th Inf's frantic call came over the radio. "ASAP, ASAP, ASAP, assistance needed ASAP!" CPT Laehu asked his pilots if the call had been monitored, "Roger," they replied, but where is he? The jungle was so very thick it filtered the smoke grenade's fog so thin its origin was uncertain. CPT Laehu told the man to listen for the sounds of LOHs and Cobras. "Can you hear them?" There was a pause as the pilot in each helicopter waited for an answer. And as they waited they could hear the intense crackle of gunfire. The fighting was so brutal, and they needed assistance so badly. Finally, an answer, "I hear one now; it sounds west of me; it just passed over!" "Did you monitor?" CPT Laehu asked a LOH pilot. "Did you?" he demanded of the Air Force observer just arrived on the scene. The Cobras scrambled to the point, clouds of black smoke spewing from beneath them as they zammed all their rockets in, then miniguns, but still the fighting raged. The Cobras, now unable to defend themselves, hovered over the enemy's position, and circled it low and slow, as if full of ammunition, all just for a senseless NVA who exposed himself to all its horrid wrath. And it worked. Now, the heavy barrage on the infantry unit had stopped, as they moved as fast as terrain would permit. The balance had suddenly swung against the NVA as empty Cobra hovered completely vulnerable. Jets were only coming on the scene as A/3/8 was guided by the C&C, than a LOH dropped down and nosed about like the but it's called. It made eye-to-eye contact and led the men to the PZ. The Air Force struck several strikes, clouding the enemy position in thick, black smoke. Six slicks came to the PZ, one at a time, inching into the tiny zone, loading up with the mean, and rushing them to Polei Kleng and the 71st Evac. When asked if he had many days like the one just finished, the C&C pilot, 1LT Robert G. Botnen calmly smiled, "Everyday."

Delta Troop Provides Security – Southeast of Pleiku – Delta Troop operated for three days southeast of Pleiku and Camp Enari to insure Montagnards an unmolested exercise of the right to vote. The Montagnard villages in that vicinity are frequently harassed brutally by Viet Cong. It was feared that election day would be a vulnerable time for Viet Cong tactics. Both platoon, in the 7/17th Air Cav tradition were well-armed, well-trained, and quite formidable, using jeeps and ¾-ton trucks to move rapidly through area of operations. Villages were informed that Delta Troop would be in the area, and that they were to be called on should any disturbances arise. South Vietnamese government officials were also made aware. "If a village is getting harassed, we move in and 'politely' ask Charlie to leave," was the mission according to PSG Clinton Eckley. He and Commanding Officer Bruegger each led a platoon. That the enemy may be encountered was a possibility of considerable likelihood. Only a few days before, Delta had confronted the enemy and they're still in the area we're headed for," said PSG Eckley. The group slowly made their way out of Camp Enari, past the village of Plei Do Lim, across the bridge there, then several move villages, purposely keeping clear to avoid any possibility of influencing the people or inciting VC harassment, and on to a hilltop where NL was to be. All coordinated between PSG Eckley and his men, between his unit and Delta HQ, the unit pulled out with lightened loads to the essential: weapons, ammo, and water. They sauntered warily relaxed toward the area where the enemy had last been encountered. Moving through a valley, just north of a village, the lead vehicle radioman reported he had found bootprints. The platoon halted and PSG Eckley joined the lead men. He said they looked like ARVN prints, but the last time such prints were found, "they had been left by the NVA." Twelve men made a thorough search of the area, a deep, water-cut ditch between two gently sloping hills while the rest of the platoon readied for action. SGT Robert L. Pepe found several punji sticks at the intersection of the ditch and the road. PFC Jerry Neal found more footprints. And that was all. SGT Pepe said the punji sticks were usually poisoned with human excrement, "the worst kind of poison there is." In the sitrep, it was also noted that the village just passed did not greet them with the usual friendly adults waving. "No one seemed to be there."

The Troop moved out further down the road where Delta had most recently made contact with the NVA. More footprints were found. "I'd say the marks were made this morning," said SP4 George Lance. They had been made by at least five men. The men in the front three vehicles dismounted, weapons in hand and jogged up the road following the footprints. "Ho sandals," said PSG Eckley, "and several barefoot prints." They followed the marks up the road to the same spot where the previous encounter had occurred, and the footprints turned off the road onto a path. PSG Eckley, upon returning to this jeep, radioed Delta HQ. The men began getting ready for a soon-to-come trek down the path by wrapping ammunition about their chests, loading canteens and hooking grenades to their belts. It was decided that PSG Eckley's unit would move down the path to draw fire while the second platoon would move to an adjacent hill to set up a mortar position. The men walked down the path, keeping distance between them to lessen the size of the target, all keeping silent, ready to crash to the ground and dart for cover. Moving through thick foliage, the men scanned the surrounding growth, watching for enemy movement. They moved into an open area quite large, extremely vulnerable to attack, since there only was the unprotective cover of tall grass, and the area was bordered by thick bushes which would be good cover for an attacking force. All was still quite hushed, except for the occasional chattering of uninvolved birds. PSG Eckley stopped, took the radio handset, and conferred with CPT Bruegger and the second platoon. All the men knelt to be hidden by the tall grass, motionless awaiting their Sergeant's next command. He then led them across a rice paddy, up a short, steep hill to the top of a ridge, in good cover, until they were parallel with the open area, in good sighting position, and waited. It was decided the element they had been tracking headed on to the river Dak Ay Unh, "and we just didn't have enough men to risk a confrontation with them," explained PSG Eckley. He said that the enemy go across the river to abandoned villages. That if the path had not been spotted, he said, they would have gone to a point where they could have sighted the river's edge to determine a strategy for quelling enemy concentration at that point. Back at the NL the men set claymores all about their perimeter, aimed mortars, ran first echelon maintenance on their vehicles, cleaned their weapons, and dug foxholes. Then, after taking care of protecting themselves, they washed, ate, and read mail. The next day would start before dawn, as now dusk settled upon them like a bulb switched off and fading to darkness. Though the enemy had not been encountered it was felt that Delta's presence in the area had accomplished the necessary guarantee of peace for carrying on the election. It was another SOP day, lacking the exciting tales of repelling another enemy assault. Yet it was full of expertise.

"The guns are coming, the guns ..." LZ Swinger – A bleeding, limping, blinded NVA soldier staggered in a total state of shock into the barbed wire surrounding LZ Swinger. His unit had been smashed ruthlessly by gunship, 7/17th Air Cavalry and air strikes by the Air Force. He had been wandering in his agony for several days. And all he could say was, "The guns are coming. The guns are coming. The guns are coming."

On the 18th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16361 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission, with 50 knots of airspeed, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the transmission, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired.

SP5 Dale Lorenzana remembers: As mentioned earlier I joined A Troop in June 1968 and was the assignee CE for AH-1G #67-15572. My other friends in the weapons platoon were all SP5s: Roy Damon Morris, Neil Stamp, and Steve Silva. Neil really loved aviation. Even then he had his private pilot's license. After Vietnam he got out of the Army but kept flying. Several years ago I learned that he was killed when a B17 crashed into a mountain. I loved to take pictures in Vietnam. I attend my first reunion in 2011 in St Louis. I've been working to restore some of my boxes of slides. I have vivid memories of the night of 21 March. I was on guard duty on the flight line at Camp Enair. My post was near a revetment some distance for the large maintenance hangers.

Suddenly BANG! I see this large fireball near our maintenance hanger and a Cobra is silhouetted by the blast. I remember thinking someone will be doing a lot of work on that. Later I learned that was my Cobra!! I don't recall anything else significant about the attack itself – it was just an “attack by fire” that happened to do some serious damage to our aircraft. The round landed immediately behind my ship. The blast disintegrated the tail boom. Another A Troop Cobra parked next to my ship was also heavily damaged. I seem to recall another helicopter, maybe a LOH, parked on the other side of my ship. It was damaged as well. My friend Damon Morris was one lucky guy that night! I'll let him tell his own story. Now it looks in my pictures as if someone is cannibalizing parts from the damaged aircraft. This was a standard practice at the time especially when we knew we were going to turn an aircraft in to our Direct Support unit for repairs we couldn't do or for replacement. The point being that while we were required to turn in an aircraft with all of its normal parts on or with it to be best of our ability; there was no requirement that those parts actually belonged to that specific aircraft prior to the incident that resulted in the damage. This is how, for example, we could get rid of an old battery for a new one. I DEROSed from A Troop in June 1969.



SP5 Dale Lorenzana & AH-1G #67-15572.

On the 21st, the VHPA Helicopter database has an AVDAC record for A Troop AH-1G #67-15572. The decoded details of the record state the aircraft sustain major combat damage from a mortar round while parked in an unprotected area. The Goldbook database indicates this Cobra was turned in to ARADMAC and hence repaired by Bell Helicopter. It returned to Vietnam in July 1970 and served with the 101st Abn Div.

Also on the 21st, the VHPA Helicopter database has an AVDAC record for A Troop AH-1G #67-15485. The decoded details of the record state the aircraft sustain major combat damage from a mortar round while parked in an unprotected area. The Goldbook database indicates this Cobra was turned in to ARADMAC and hence repaired by Bell Helicopter. It returned to Vietnam in May 1970 and served with A Troop again.

SP5 Roy Damon Morris recalls: As Dale Lorenzana mentioned in his description of the events of 21 March, I was also on guard duty that night. I don't recall what my exact duties were but I was in a 3/4-ton truck parked about 20 feet from the blast. I think I was waiting to pick someone up. The blast peppered the truck on the passenger's side but I wasn't hit by any of the shrapnel. I remember exiting the truck and getting into the drainage ditch near-by. I tell people that I didn't know I could move that fast! After everything quieted down, we inspected the truck. The canvas was badly tattered, some tires were flat, etc. I remember one of the NCOs recording my statements for the investigation. After I told him where I was sitting and how quickly I got into the ditch, he simply looked at me and said, “F#\$%ing Clark Kent couldn't have done it better!” Clearly I was one lucky guy that night!

On the 22nd, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop OH-6A #67-16498 flown by an unnamed crews. There were two injuries. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission, during the attack approach target area, they took five hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the cockpit, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired.

On the 24th, a B Troop UH-1H flown by 1LT Ken Philley as AC, CPT Ken Daniel as pilot, and SP5 William H. McGaigan as CE made the 500th safe landing on the battleship New Jersey. This event was recorded in several US Navy photographs. Ken received several copies and distributed them liberally to all involved. The ship's captain ordered a beautiful white sheet cake made and decorated for the event. MAJ Scott Lyman is also in some of the pictures. Ken's favorite one shows the Navy Captain cutting the first piece of cake and handing it to Ken. The Captain arranged for a tour of the ship with special emphasis on the fire control center and the guns. After this was complete, the Captain asked if there was anything the Army guys needed. The always quiet and reserved (maybe in his next life!) Ken said, "Something to eat would be nice." The Captain directed one of his officers to look into that. He lead Ken and the others down to a dinning room. They asked what the Army guys wanted to eat. Ken said a T-bone steak and a baked potatoe would be very nice – and the Navy provided it! The battleship would stay off Phan Thiet for several days. Ken and others landed on the ship. The ship was especially interested in having their mail taken to shore which was an easy task for the Army.

On the 25th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop, AH-1G #67-15611 flown by Aircraft Commander CW2 M.L. Sadler and 1LT H.E. Hodge. The Army Goldbook database indicates this helicopter was turned in for ARADMAC repairs in CONUS. After the reparts were completed, it continued to serve in the Army but did not return to Vietnam. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

The aircraft had flown a total of 9.4 hours of which approximately 9 hours were flown in the AO. On release from the AO, the aircraft was returned to base camp. The pilot stopped in the Ruthless POL and topped the aircraft off with approximately 1200 to 1250 lbs. CW2 Sadler, then made a closed left traffic landing back to the Ruthless revetment area, via lane five. CW2 Sadler made his approach to the Ruthless rearming point, after landing at the rearming point CW2 Sadler then decided to move his aircraft to the revetment. He initiated a high hover from lane five to lane four moving west. At the time the winds were from 110 degrees at 14 knots, gusting to 21 knots. As the aircraft started moving CW2 Sadler, began to experience a loss of left pedal control and loss of engine and rotor RPM. As he approached lane four, the aircraft began to move in a broadside manner down the lane to the south while still maintaining a westerly heading with the nose of the aircraft as the RPM began to drop, the aircraft began to start rotating in a clockwise direction. CW2 Sadler rolled the throttle off to stop the rotation, applied full right cyclic to stop his movement down lane four to avoid hitting aircraft sitting in the lane, and attempted to make a hovering autorotation. Upon initial contact with the ground the aircraft experienced a hard landing, breaking the forward and aft crosstubes off at the fuselage on the left side. The co-pilot then exited the aircraft and stood by with the fire extinguisher while the pilot shut down the aircraft. Neither pilot nor co-pilot were injured.

On the 26th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record for A Troop OH-6A #66-17789 at grid YA337767 flown by **1LT Joseph F. Willis**, pilot, and **WO1 John Michael Turner**, observer. Both were killed when their LOH was shot down, crashed and burned. The Wall database gives the following tour start and MOS data: Turner, 28 Dec 1968, 062B; Willis, 28 Jan 1969, 1981. This would indicate that WO1 Turner was the more experienced pilot and possibly he was helping train 1LT Willis.

On the 27th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16108 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission,

during the attack approach target area, they took three hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the forward main rotor system, fuel cell, battery comp, they made a forced landing and modified the mission, the helicopter took-off and was repaired in theater.

On the 28th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15620 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission, during the attack approach target area, they took three hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the top cockpit, top engine comp, left engine comp, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

During the last week in March SP5 Donald Storm joined the Squadron. His orders initially assigned him to the 569th TC Det then he became a Huey Crew Chief with B Troop. He recalls:

About two weeks after Tet of 1968, I arrived in Vietnam and was assigned to the maintenance platoon of D/3/4th Cav, 25th Infantry Division at Cu Chi. I served there one year and via a six month extension requested to be a Huey Crew Chief with the 7/17th Cav. After my month's leave, I out-processed from the 25th ID and caught a flight to Pleiku. The specialist from the Squadron who picked me up at the airport asked me flat out if I had extended to join the Cav. I said 'yes.' He then put his hand to his forehead, looked straight ahead, and didn't say another word to me! I arrived at Squadron HQ and reported in. As I was waiting for the clerk to in-process me an officer approached me and asked if I had extended for the Cav. There was that question again! I paused and as manly as I could said, 'Yes sir.' But just what was I now getting into? It seemed as though this was the 'in-group' question and I had passed. A moment later the clerk told me I was being assigned to B Troop and to go report to their Orderly Room. I was welcomed there, learned that the troop was in Phan Thiet, and the next regularly scheduled flight was in three day, so I wait for it. I and four others flew down to Phan Thiet. There I was introduced to the compound, assigned to the Lift Platoon, and was assigned to UH-1H #66-16023, 023 to me. I remember the Lift Platoon's tent was next to the sand berm-bunker line. We had five regular staging locations: Song Mao, Phan Rang, Bao Loc, Dalat, and on stand-by at Phan Thiet. On maintenance stand-down days, the Maintenance Officers like to take my ship to Vung Tau and other base camps to trade for parts and other items.

1LT Joe Longueira recalls: I joined B Troop at Phan Thiet in late December 1968 right out of flight school. I served with the Pallbearers until mid-March 1969 when I was infused to C/2/17th Cav. I remember flying with WO Conrad Hamp and Plumber??. I remember WO Shaky Shakallis built a model airplane and crashed it all to pieces the first time he tried to fly it. I think the Infantry guys built a sailboat out of the wooden rocket boxes and painted it red. They used some of the parachutes from an expended flare dropped from an aircraft as a sail. Somehow the convinced the US Navy LAC based at Phan Thiet to take them out into the ocean. After sailing just a little ways back toward land it broke apart.

On the 30th, Volume One Number Three of *Spurs & Lightning* was published. This issue was prepared by 1LT Brac Jones, Jr, Information Officer, PFC Thomas Baker, Editor – writer, PFC Ronald A. Pahnke, illustrator. The following articles appeared in this issue: [Editor's note: The left side of some pages is difficult to read. Words that can not be read are denoted by "???" in the text.]

D Troop Steals Rice – Beaucoup Found by Mohn – De Hor Rho – “We were sweeping through this creek bed when I found this hole, cut three feet by three feet. I went inside, and it was a big hole,” said SP4 David Hohn, Reading PA, as he stretched his arms out to illustrate the size of the hole, and there was a hut inside. We scraped off the leaves and branches after pulling the top off, and there was all this rice, over six tons.” Delta Troop was working with 2d Squadron, 1st Cavalry of the 4th Infantry Division. So far the two units have found 51,000 pounds in the area around De Hor Rho, a Montagnard village southeast of Camp Enari, in VC Valley. That much rice would feed ??? men for a full year, 544 for a month, 2720 men for a day – that's Delta's rice haul, the six tons. “The total

cache steal so far is a simple mathematical duration, astounding VC stomachs,” said 1LT Smith. While First Platoon was hauling stealing enemy rice, Second Platoon was warding off foes – they fired on a group of VC, scaring them away. Seventeen men of 1st Platoon spread across the creek six on a side, five in the middle, while the remainder of them stayed with the vehicles, providing cover by firing them, driving the bank tops. The hole was so well camouflaged, covered by bushes, and natural growth, that PSG Clinton Eckley almost drove over it. The angle of vision added to hiding the hole. “We found about twenty holes, some underground hooches, but only this one had any rice,” SP4 Mohn said. The 2/1st Cav discovered a total of two tons in many such underground caches. “The creek bed was a rice paddy,” CPT Robert D. Bruegger explained. “It’s a good way for the villagers to get as much moisture as they can for their rice crop. The bed was dry, of course, but when the rains start, the bed will be a natural paddy.” “It took us all day to load the bags onto Hueys,” said 1LT Smith. The rice was taken to Le Truong. (Editor’s note: After we went to press, more reports came in on Delta’s activities. The following day, they captured 2 more tons, and yesterday, 30 March, they captured 9 more tons, for a total this week of 17 tons!)

Alpha Troop Has Sad Day, GI Used as Live Bait – near LZ Swinger – Running a routine BDA, looking for enemy presence, A Troop White 23, Cobra, spotted an American soldier, standing on the edge of a bomb crater frantically waving a white shirt. CW2 Marion Sadler “couldn’t believe it.” He lowered his Cobra to check the man out. “I got about 50 meters from him and suddenly automatic weapons fire came bursting out of the bushes.” “We’d been sucked,” said CPT Autry, C&C. “I’ve heard of that happening before, but that’s the first time it’s happened to me. The NVA were using a captured GI as a decoy!” CW2 Sadler immediately returned fire as did CW2 Dennis Phillips. The team had just moved into the area, spotted a platoon size unit on the ground. “The Cobras expended 50%, killing ten of the element. The Redbirds (LOHs) went down and confirmed the kills. “We were circling to go back when CW2 Sadler spotted the GI. A ‘suck’ is the use of a captured GI as a decoy to trap and kill more GIs,” CPT Autry went on, telling of the day’s happening. He said the weapons fire was intense, signaling that a large element of NVA were there. He called the Air Force to get air strikes, and the 1/8th Inf sent an element out to recon the area and discover what was down there. The 1/8th Inf moved out and found two MIAs on the way. F-100s ran an air strike on the area and LOHs confirmed 14 more kills by the air strike. “If anyone lived through the air strike they didn’t live through the night.” “What a saddening thing to get involved in,” said CPT Joseph Laehu, “But it’s a fact of this war.”

A – USAF Co-op – Northwest of Polei Kleng – US Air Force F-100s added to the impact of A Troop’s lambasting assault of two NVA camps March 8th. Gunships and LOHs killed four NVA, destroyed a deuce-and-a-half, and destroyed several bunkers. F-100 air strikes destroyed five more trucks damaged another, killed four NVA, two mortar pit complexes, and several more bunkers. LOHs, piloted by 1LT Holbrook and WO Burnette discovered the trucks and 11 NVA in foxholes with AK-47s at ready. Immediately they fired the minigun received fire, called C&C. 1LT Wagoner and WO Phillips in one Cobra, WOs Tamm and Rodgers in the other, expended rockets killing one and destroying one of the trucks. F-100s arrived for the first air strike, destroying another truck and killing another NVA. LOHs moved up a hill, after spotting a trail of recent use, and found four more trucks. The jets returned and bombed them into pieces, killing three NVA. A howitzer position was destroyed, too, it was determined by 1LT Pospisil’s observer, SSG Peterson. The F-100s got several secondary explosions, thus the area, obviously, was a supply station, but not so good anymore.

A Day in the Life of C Troop – Polei Kleng – Crew and gunners wiped the dew from the front, side, and top Plexiglas of Hueys, mounted their 50 calibers, checked oil levels, while Warrant Officers and Lieutenants readied their LOHs and Cobras for flight. Pilots and crew climbed in and turbines began the familiar whine, as the rotor blades began slowly to turn, circling over the heads of the pilots, a black blade sweeping overhead, casting flashing shadows. Pilots watched the needles on

the dials of the panel of instruments as the while became a scream, then a roar, and the blades whirled faster and faster, becoming invisible. They lifted themselves up, and another day in the life of C/7/17th Cav had begun. The AO for March 24th was to be northwest of Polei Kleng, near, almost on, the Cambodian border. For the past month, enemy concentration had been heavy, and contact with them had been frequent. This particular AO was a prime point on the route into Vietnam of enemy men and supplies. The Cambodian border and Ho Chi Minh Trail were same-same here. Indeed, activity was heavy. The 4th had greatly increased its manpower concentration in the area, the whole of Kontum Province, to thwart whatever objectives the NVA had, with the 7/17th playing a vitally useful role in gunrunning kills, destruction of enemy positions, and providing intelligence information. MAJ Jerry G. Ledford sat head down, concentrating on maps in his lap as his pilot, 1LT Richard D. Sherman scooted truck-top high along the highway to Kontum. The road turned away to the right and C&C took altitude, passing over a team of tanks with high, thick trails of red dust following them like race driver's silk scarves. There would be a briefing for MAJ Ledford and other commanders of the day's missions at Polei Kleng. The morning was still softly hazy and cool. The four Cobras and four LOHs were already headed for Dak To, where they would rearm and refuel as needed periodically during the day. The fast Cobras, heavily armed with rockets and miniguns, had two man crews, a pilot and observer. The LOHs, low observation helicopters, with - room for four, would be carrying one pilot and two observers. Armed with miniguns and the observers' light weapons they were covered by the Cobras, which the enemy fear. Both were in teams of two which would alternate duty, keeping constant pressure on whatever was below. Riflemen rested in their Hueys, which would take them to the area in which they were to be inserted if they were needed. All choppers were parked in a single line, nose in. They would lift up and back out when it was time to go. MAJ Ledford arrived at Polei Kleng, still resting after a wary night in a light gray haze. There were holes in the runway, bordered by twisted pieces of pierced steel planking, arching straight up, several feet high. The NVA had not mortared the base in several days, the last and most serious having come March 10th, two weeks ago. Apparently, strength of 4th Infantry Division had moved effectively keeping the enemy away. C&C set down and all disembarked. The crew chief and gunner stayed with the Huey while the other passengers took care of their business there. The Liaison Officer and his assistant set up shot outside a van under a roof of sandbags. MAJ Ledford attended a briefing held in the van, grabbed a cup of coffee, made some notes about the information, marked his map, strolled back out to his airship, and took off for Dak To. It was as sunny there as it had been hazy at Polei Kleng, ten minutes south. Picking an arbitrary setting in the middle of the parking ramp, MAJ Ledford dispensed essential information, sharing familiar facts, observations and occurrences with his pilots. "Were you all out there when we had two damage assessments northwest of Swinger? Yesterday they found APC, tank tracks heading west." He gave coordinates from the map of sighted enemy happenings, encounters, and places they were looking at today. "We'll return to that area and see if we can find the tracks," they had run an assessment on twice before. He directed the gunships to go in first and then the slicks if called on. It was all SOP, only difference was what particularly to look for. The tracks and a suspected 105-mm howitzer position 1000 meters, a little over a half mile from the Cambodian border, was to be checked. Not far from that spot a Mohawk and Huey had gone down, crashed. C Troop had rescued the pilots and crew. The briefing was over. The men stood and began moving to their birds, smiling, laughing, noise hushed by wind of other helicopters. The LOH team, 1LT Mitchell with SP Larry Slagle, WO Tom Rice with SP Wesley and SP5 Yamnitz, escorted by the Cobra team, 1LT Latshaw with WO Harrington and WO Schuler with CPT King, chased each other under the watchful eyes of MAJ Ledford and 1LT Sherman in the C&C ship. MAJ Ledford intentionally flew Cobra-high, just above the LOHs, to the AO. Flying so low makes his bird pop up and quickly by any enemy elements. Over the AO, C&C would stay high for the same reasons, to make himself a target harder to hit. The jungle was extremely thick, like a massive carpet thrown carelessly, viciously onto the ground, with peaks, ridges, ripples, plateaus, hills, and valleys all over it. C&C flew contour, rising

along the side of a ridge which suddenly stopped, blocking sight of all on the other side, except for another distance wall-like ridge. The NVA were all over the province. Conversations monitored over the airship's radios told of several fights in process already. During the night, 4th Division artillery and Air Force B-52s had assaulted spots and they still smoldered as C Troop flew by. Elements of 4th Division's 1st and 2d Brigades were camped out, sweeping the province, fighting NVA soldiers, cornered and fighting like trapped tigers. C Troop arrived at their AO. C&C took altitude making lazy, wide circles as MAJ Ledford peered down, radio mike in one hand, maps in the other. The LOHs hovered in tree tops, reconning the area while Cobra hung just outside of them, ready to scramble to their aid should they be needed. This area was a suspected 105mm howitzer site, judged by the angle of the shells' strike. But, the area looked not at all recently used. It was sprayed with bomb crater holes, a maze of devastation. Convinced that no use had been made of the area, the team moved on to the second AO, the one they had VRed twice before. But where were the artillery shells coming from? The other side of the Cambodian border? "It's happened before," said 1LT Sherman. The second site had also been hit by 4th Infantry artillery and Air Force earth-shatterers, fighter and B-52s. At one time, the first time C Troop had been there, the foliage was thick, triple canopy. Now it was quite clear. Bunker complexes could be seen, charred to gray, and tree stumps protruded. CW2 Mitchells made a hasty check before cutting speed, hovering over the area for scrutinized reconnaissance. WO Rice, with his two observers, hovered about the perimeter where hard vehicle tracks were reported to be. They saw them, two sets. One moved to a crater, stopped, moving from crater to crater, like parallel lines spotted with huge dots. The second set moved around the craters. Mitchells made a second sweep, slower, then suddenly stopped, pivoted, and let fly with his minigun, then forward, firing again. The roar, convulsing roar of the gun, could be heard all the way up to the C&C, over the vibrating rumble of the Huey's engine and the rushing air. 1LT Latshaw scurried to Mitchell's side, firing rockets. "We saw four NVA dodging for cover. I expended and got three, maybe a fourth. Cobra got one," reported CW2 Mithcell. "They didn't fire on us," 1LT Latshaw said. "Probably under strict orders not to. They're hiding something." WO Harrington said later that it wasn't unusual for them not to fire, for to do so would expose their position, "letting us know for sure that they are there. This way they have reason to hope they weren't seen at all." MAJ Ledford was on the radio to "Snider," the code name for the Air Force FAC, who was flying above C&C in a light, twin-engined Cessna. Snider marks the target precisely and then guides fighter-bombers in. "Spads are on the way with lots of nap-nap," he said. "Spads" are propeller-driven fighters of World War II vintage. Not as fast or exciting as jets, they pack a wallop same-same, and did leave the AO in towering, billowing clouds of black. The second teams were on the AO, piloted by WOs McMills and Everhart, Hugert and Robinson. They made a quick assessment and moved on to debriefing, then the second AO. It was a valley surrounded by peaks and clouds of smoke were all around, like mythical towers holding the sky over Grecian ruins, when, actually, they were earthling officering of penance. And the smell of burning wood and flesh filled the area. A large bunker complex lay gray and desolate. LOHs moved south along the ravine, dropping grenades in targets, foxholes. The sun was dropping to the other side, casting exhausted shadows, and the haze was grayer, tireder. And another day in the life of C Troop had yawned to a close.

7/17 Honors Thirteen – Camp Enari – The Change of Command Ceremony symbolized more than a fond adieu to retiring Commanding Officer LTC Robert M. Reuter and a graciously hospitable welcome to new Commanding Officer LTC C.R. Bean. It also symbolized the men of 7/17th's respect and honored appreciation of thirteen compatriots for the valorously heroic performance of their responsibilities. The DFC (2nd OLC) is awarded to LTC Robert M. Reuter for heroism while participating in aerial flight evidenced by voluntary actions above and beyond the call of duty. Serving as C&C, LTC Reuter directed a mission against an enemy force which had a CIDG force pinned down. His actions resulted in the total destruction of the hostile forces with no damage to

friendly personnel or equipment. The LM (1st OLC) is awarded to LTC Robert M. Reuter for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services while serving in the Office of Chief of Research and Development of the AH-56A Cheyenne. The SS is awarded to MAJ Richard H. Marshall for exceptional gallantry in action while serving as C&C on 16 Jan 1969. MAJ Marshall medevaced wounded personnel from a tight one-ship LZ, which was under extreme enemy fire, after making a vertical descent, he hovered long enough to load ? wounded men. He then made a precarious vertical ascent, and rushed the men to the 71st Evac Hospital, saving their lives. The BSM (2nd OLC) is awarded to MAJ Richard H. Marshall for meritorious achievement in connection with military operations against a hostile force. MAJ Marshall commanded forces which thwarted an anticipated attack on Ban Me Thuot. He directed a series of air and ground sweeps, uncovering and crippling an enemy camp, forcing the entire NVA regiment to withdraw from Vietnam. The DFC is awarded to MAJ Scott T. Lyman for heroism while participating in aerial flight evidenced by voluntary actions above and beyond the call of duty while serving as AC of a UH-1H helicopter in the Plei Do Lim area. Unescorted and with no support, MAJ Lyman flew at low level, determined the enemy's position, dispensed CS gas cannisters and smoke grenades. He then circled the site until all his gunners' ammunition was expended. Unarmed now, he remained on station to guide artillery fire on the enemy. The DFC is awarded to CPT Claude V. Quigley for heroism while participating in aerial flight west of Polei Kleng. The BSM for heroism is awarded to SFC Jose R. Alicea-Aguayo for heroism in connection with military operations against a hostile force. SFC Alicea-Aguayo was inserted with a team of seven men. The area of operation was receiving intense automatic weapons fire, too intense for helicopters to enter. SFC Alicea-Aguayo led his men through the area and linked up with a larger element in APCs. The DFC is awarded to CPT Douglas P. Hammond for heroism evidenced as an aero-scout team leader, in a mission to find a missing member of a reconnaissance patrol. The BSM for heroism is awarded to SSG Gregory L. Martin for heroism in connection with military operations against a hostile force. He assisted SFC Alicea-Aguayo in the intense contact aforementioned. His valorous behavior was in vain but persistent efforts to retrieve the body of a killed member of his unit. The BSM for heroism is awarded to SGT Michael G. Atchinson for heroism in connection with military operations against a hostile force. SGT Atchinson exposes himself to enemy fire in vain attempts to recover the body of a member of his unit. The BSM is awarded to CPT Douglas W. Bryd for outstanding meritorious service in connection with military operations against a hostile force. The BSM is awarded to SSG Otis L. Brown for outstandingly meritorious service in connection with military operations against a hostile force. The AM for heroism is awarded to SP5 Raymond D. Hunter and SP4 Frank R. Leech for heroism while engaged in aerial flight in connection with military operations against a hostile force. They exposed themselves to enemy fire, and persisted in the ordeal of settling their Huey into a hover over water, to extract wounded and exhausted men and rush them to attention.

Former SGT Larry Massoletti who was a ranger with the 2nd Brigade, 4th ID visited the 7/17th website in early 2000. He provides the following:

From the fall of 68 until May of 69, I ran 21 missions west of Kontum and Dak To into the Cambodian and Laos borders. I was in the LRRPs. We were based at Camp Mary Lou at Kontum. My callsign was 2ECHO. I was in two contacts with the NVA and both times the Ruthless Riders came to my rescue. Cobras came in so close I could see the pilots' faces. I received awards in both contacts, so I am certain of the dates. When I got in from the last mission I gave the pilots an AK47. If it were not for the 7/17th cavalry I would not be here today with three great kids and some grandchildren. Thank you gentlemen.

The citation for his first Bronze Star with 'V' was for action on 13 Mar 1969 and reads: SGT Massoletti was the leader of a team checking an area for a rocket and mortar site when they observed an enemy force about to engage a friendly column of APCs and a mine sweep team.

Reacting immediately, SGT Massoletti called for and adjusted artillery support along the enemy's position. Through his quick action the column was able to attain fire superiority and rout the enemy force. As the enemy force retreated, they spotted SGT Massoletti's team and engaged them with AWs. Again using his initiative, SGT Massoletti called in artillery support, blocking the enemy's avenue of escape.

The citation for his second Bronze Star with 'V' was for action on 31 Mar 1969 and reads: SGT Massoletti's team encountered an enemy artillery element west of Polei Kleng. Remaining undetected for 5 to 6 hours, the team hoped that a platoon of NVA soldiers would not spot them as they waited to ambush a larger main force. When the ambush was initiated, Claymore mines were detonated killing 3 of the enemy. Without regard for his personal safety, SGT Massoletti crawled out to the 3 enemy soldiers and recovered their packs. Covering the area with heavy suppressive fire, he allowed his team to withdraw while he called in artillery and gunship support. Subsequent checking of the enemy packs yielded information vital to the Allied Forces.

The following article titled "Ranger's Patience Costs NVA" appeared in the 27 Apr 1969 issue of the Ivy Leaf Famous Fourth. This article validates SGT Massoletti's ideas mentioned above.

Highlander Heights - What seemed to be a routine reconnaissance mission for a 2nd Brigade ranger team suddenly became involved, netting the team four enemy killed and numerous pieces of equipments recovered. On the morning of the fourth day of their mission, the team located a freshly used sleeping area. Continuing through the area in search of more evidence the team found a heavily used trail. The well-camouflaged trail weaved itself through natural breaks in the jungle. Setting up about 20 feet off the trail, the team waited with Claymores for some unsuspected NVA regulars. "I was leaning against a tree when I spotted four NVA moving past our position toward Superstition Mountain (Chu Mom Ray)," said Sergeant Larry Massoletti of Fort Worth, Tex., team leader. "They were carrying heavy packs and AK47s at sling arms which seemed to indicate a point element, so we let them pass," explained Sergeant Massoletti. When the lead force was about 300 meters away, the rangers called in artillery on the NVA with unknown results. Later, the team leader again spotted a group of NVA moving up the trail and he alerted his men. "Sergeant Massoletti snapped his fingers to attract my attention and then whispered 'NVA'," said Specialist 4 Thomas P. Reed of Pacific, Mo. "I grabbed both detonators connected to my Claymores and waited." When the enemy point man was even with the range team, he suddenly stopped and looked right into the eyes of Specialist Reed. The two stared at each other for what seemed a minute. "He started to point and at the same time unsling his AK47, I decided it was time to blow my Claymores," recalled Specialist Reed. Unobserved, Massolette crawled out to where the two NVA had fallen. He moved beside a huge log, parted some of the bushes, and heard a round fly by his head. "I had gone out along with Sergeant Massoletti and when he was shot at, I returned fire and killed the NVA," Specialist 4 Robert (Cookie) Plaskett of New Washington, Ind. The Ranger team, realizing it was outnumbered, decided to withdraw. As the team headed for the nearest clearing, a O-1 Birddog could be heard overhead. "My aerial observer spotted Cobra gunships off in the distance. I notified the 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry, that a Ranger team was in contact and badly needed their help," explained 1st Lieutenant Bernard Serafrnowicz. The Ruthless Riders from Alpha Troop screamed in and began delivering their overpowering ordnance. Reinforcements were on their way as the 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry dispatched its air mobile platoon to bolster the Rangers. "We were to lead the platoon from Bravo Company back to the contact sight," said Specialist Reed. A sweep of the area indicated that the NVA had dragged off all but one of the casualties.

About the end of March, several C Troop Blues were involved in an incident in a river with a senior officer. SSG Tommy Thompson has an undated photo of himself at an awards ceremony. Tommy believes he received the Soldier's Medal for this incident. Other members of the Blues either

remember this incident or talk about this incident for some time afterwards. Everyone is certain that it happened prior to C Troop's move to An Son.

LTC Bean reviewed Tommy's photo and provided the following: I believe LTC Bob Reuter is presenting the medal. The officer in the picture is wearing sun glasses and I have always avoid wearing them! I do not recall awarding a Soldier's Medal to anyone during my time with the 7/17th Cav. The Sergeant Major with the presenter is SGM Robert M. Couch. He served as my Sergeant Major the entire time I commanded the Squadron. While I was in command I made it a policy to secure someone from the 17th CAG, the 1st Aviation Bde or 4th Infantry to present most of the awards. Since the Soldier's Medal is a relatively high award I am almost positive I would have obtained a senior officer from one of those organizations to make the presentation. It is possible that Bob Reuter returned to Camp Enari to do this for us. With regard to the "River Incident," on one of the days that C Troop was operating near Enari I was over watching the operation to evaluate the troop's performance. In the middle of the afternoon MAJ Jerry Ledford reported his scouts had made contact with four or five VC or NVA. They had made a run for it and jumped into a nearby river. In Texas we would call it a creek. In 1963-64 when I was in the UTT we often supported ARVN troops in the Delta and frequently the VC down there would do the same thing. Jump in a canal and hide under water using a reed to breath or in some cases crawl up under the bank and hide. Frequently the Army Advisor would have the ARVN wade into the canal and attempt to flush the VC out. Remembering that, I told Jerry to have his Blues get in the creek and see if they could locate the VC. I think Jerry and his Blues thought the "old man" has lost it. At any rate nothing was going on along the creek bank. After a couple minutes of commands and frustrations, I decided to land my Huey and show the Blues how it was done. I walked up to the bank, found a rifleman with a rope, tied it around my waist and told him to hang on and if I went in over my head to haul me out. The water was pretty muddy and I was not sure how deep it would be. When I jumped in I found it was between waist and chest deep with a solid base. I untied the rope and started down stream. About that time a buck sergeant jumped in with me. He said he hoped we didn't get snake bit and I told him if they bit me they would die on the spot. As we began wading down stream the rest of his fire team or squad jumped in with us. I instructed the guys on the bank to keep us covered in case we took fire from the water line. By that time there were Blues on both sides of the creek. We moved down stream about 100 meters without locating the VC/NVA. We would have gone further but about then we reached a real deep water hole. The bottom of the creek had become smooth rock. We discovered the water hole when we started sliding down the side of the water hole on the slippery rock bottom. The guy beside me slid in first and yelled that he didn't know how to swim. As he started under I grabbed his M16 to hold him but he let loose of the weapon and went under. About the same time another guy began to slide into the hole and threw me his weapon. At this point I had two M16s one in each hand and decided I was not going to tread water too well in that condition. I tried to toss the weapon in my right hand to the guys on the bank. They didn't quite make the catch and the M16 went in the water. About that time the non swimmer came up and I was able to grab him. I was able to tread water and get close enough to the bank for the Blues on shore to grab me, the M16 and then haul out the non swimmer. By now most of the other guys had either got pulled out or had stopped up stream before they reached the water hole. Not wanting to lose the M16 that didn't get caught we spent about a half hour diving in the water hole in an attempt to retrieve the weapon without success. I remember thinking that if the dinks were watching the circus they probably were laughing their collective asses off. I also remember dreading the fact that I was going to have to report a lost weapon to the group commander. I sincerely hoped that no NVA/VC would find it. I reported the weapon, got a butt chewing along with more than my share of horse laughs from the other unit commanders and 17th CAG staff. I think I signed a statement of charges but I don't recall having the cost of the weapon deducted from my salary. In summary, no one saved my life in the river incident. I was and still am a pretty good swimmer. As I remember the incident I

have always believed the hero in the whole thing was the buck sergeant who jumped in right after I did. He was really afraid of water snakes and I might add with good reason. They don't call those little rascals 'half a cigarette' snakes for nothing. But he showed a lot of leadership and his men all responded in kind. If I had awarded a medal for action in the incident it would have gone to him and of course it would not have been the Soldier's Medal. I kept an eye on the sergeant all the time I was there and was always proud of what I saw. The Squadron was one of the first units to employ the Kit Carson Scouts. Some time later C Troop's Blues came across an NVA unit that ran into a cave. [LTC Bean is now talking about the 1 June 1969 incident in which PFC Sigworth and SGT An were killed.] In the action that followed as it was related to me, one of the Kit Carson Scouts ran to the mouth of the cave and yelled for the NVA troops to come out and surrender. He got shot for his trouble. One of the Blues went up to try to pull the Kit Carson Scout out and he was shot and killed. At that point another Kit Carson Scout ran up to try and save the GI and he was also shot and killed. At that point the platoon leader hauled up some C4 and blew the mouth of the cave shut. After the memorial service for the three I was watching the troops leave the chapel with the Chaplain. I saw the buck sergeant from the river incident come out of the chapel wiping tears from his eyes. I remarked that I did not know he and the dead NCO were that close. The Chaplain said, "They weren't. He is mourning the loss of the Kit Carson Scouts." Anyone with more information (especially helpful would be a set of award orders) about this matter is encouraged to contact Mike Law so we can update this history.

The following article titled "End For 24 NVA" appeared in the 6 Apr 1969 issue of the Ivy Leaf Famous Fourth. The date assigned to this event is the end of March 1969. Anyone with more information about this event, especially better dates, should contact Mike Law.

Polei Kleng – Gunships from A Troop, 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry added 10 NVA to their rapidly growing total of enemy kills during a mission with the Famous Fighting 4th Division's 1st Brigade, 20 kilometers west of Polei Kleng. Alpha Troop was conducting a bomb damage assessment in an area 4 kilometers northeast of LZ Swinger when one of the troop's scout Light Observation Helicopters (LOH), piloted by First Lieutenant Mark Holbrook of Sheboygan, Wis., reported spotting 10 NVA on a well hidden road. Cobra gunship circling overhead went in for the kill. All 10 NVA were confirmed dead. Later in the day, Cav ships and an Air Force Forward Air Control (FAC) plan directed F100 air strikes on suspected enemy locations a short distance from where the 10 NVA were killed earlier. The air strike resulted in an additional 14 NVA killed, six bunkers and a 12.7 anti-aircraft gun destroyed.

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

SSG Jim Littlejohn provides some interesting details about D Troop's radar section during this period: I extended for another tour after my year with A Troop and was assigned to D Troop about April 1969. I was the NCOIC of a radar detachment at Enari. This was a Captain's slot and there was talk of seeing if I could get a commission but I told them I wanted to remain an NCO. I stayed in this job about six to eight months. It was boring. I didn't like it and wanted to get back to the boonies with either A Troop or D Troop's grunts but they wouldn't let me transfer. As I recall, there were some sort of radar devices in several bunkers and D Troop or maybe the Squadron had responsibility for that stretch of the Enari perimeter. Then about a quarter mile out there were these false bushes. The radar was designed to detect movement between the perimeter and these false bushes. We also had infrared scopes in the bunkers.

The following article titled "Allies in No Man's Land" by SP4 John Uhlar appeared in the 13 Apr 1969 issue of the Ivy Leaf Famous Fourth. The date assigned to this event is early April. Anyone who can provide a better date for this even should contact Mike Law. [The source document was both wrinkled and smudged in several places. When the text is not readable ?? marks are inserted.]

Firebase Blackhawk – The ?? is described as "No Man's Land." Sparsely settled by nomadic Montagnard tribes, the area is dominated by mile upon mile of rice paddies interspersed throughout the rocky terrain. A cryptic network of tributaries feeding the Dak Pyunh – Dak T?? river systems ?? sanctuary from allied intrusion. This week, the low rumble of Famous Fighting Fourth Division tanks and armored assault vehicles from Charlie Troop, 2nd Squadron, 1st Cavalry; Delta Troop, 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry; and Popular Force units from Le Trung District signaled the ominous tones of allied encroachment into No Man's Land. Lieutenant Colonel Richard A. Miller of Linsay, Okla., 2nd Squadron, 1st Cavalry commander, pinpointed from the air suspected areas of enemy encampments and food supply depots. Nearing their target areas, the armored column, which had began scratching the surface two days before, now was stripping bare what had been a major supply and training facility for Communist personnel. At least a score of hastily evacuated basecamps, more than 100 bunkers and numerous food supply points were uncovered. ?? and platoon size sleeping quarters used within the past two days. They also uncovered a huge quantity of rice and bananas concealed in trees, in thickets, and below ground. Contact was brief but furious. Small enemy units assigned to impede the Famous Fighting Fourth's progress remained behind to salvage what supplies they could and to mine American avenues of approach. To date, 61,000 pounds of rice, 150 pounds of corn, 100 pounds of bananas, 250 pounds of medical cotton, in addition to assorted military clothing and a small amount of ammo, have been seized.

On the 1st, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15620 flown by Aircraft Commander WO1 G.R. Brydges and WO1 R.T. Pillion. The Goldbook database indicates this aircraft was turned in to the 605th TC CO, repaired, and then issued to another unit in Vietnam in August. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

WO1 Gary R. Brydges was the aircraft commander of the AH-1G helicopter. The co-pilot, WO1 Robert T. Pillion, was not qualified in the AH-1G helicopter. During the preflight no mechanical deficiencies were noted on the aircraft. At 0730, WO Brydges took off from Phan Thiet en route to Phan Rang to refuel and then proceed to the area of operations. While in the AO, WO Brydges flew the helicopter in a left orbit of 60-80 knots. After approximately one hour the aircraft commander began receiving extreme fore and aft feedback through the cyclic control during level flight. The feedback was intense enough to require the aircraft commander to use both hands while attempting to control the cyclic. The co-pilot was ordered to control the collective. There were no caution lights or Abnormal indications on the aircraft's instrument panel. The nose of the aircraft began to pitch up and the airspeed began to decrease. Descent was established with a normal approach angle. As airspeed decreased, cyclic feedback increased. Power was increased to slow the descent and the

aircraft terminated descent at approximately ten feet of altitude. The ground cushion was lost due to cyclic movement and the aircraft began to settle to the ground. As the aircraft impacted, the main rotor blades flexed down into the 42 degree box area which caused the tail rotor drive shaft, which connects the gearboxes together and the 90 degree gearbox to separate from the aircraft. This resulted in damage to the skids, tail boom, sink elevators, engine, transmissions, tail rotor drive shaft, 42 degree gearbox, 90 degree gearbox, tail rotor blades and main rotor blades. The helicopter was slung loaded to the B Troop maintenance area. Inspection revealed that mechanical failure of the nut assembly, hydraulic, part #209-076-021-3, was forced out of the bearing housing, FSN 1680-872-1144. This caused the cylinder assembly to move up, forcing the cyclic into the aft position. The bushing set would not seat itself back into the bearing housing, keeping the cylinder assembly fully extended in the aft position.

WO Gary Brydges provided: There was an antidote to my 1 April 1969 landing in #620 in the sand out there – the same problem that 1LT Dan Coats and 1LT Woody McFarlin had when the fore and aft servo broke loose from the mount and the cyclic wasn't effective. It is in here but the end – really prior to the post-script almost. The Cobra had, as you recall, a smoke dispenser located near the tail. It was like a six-cylinder revolver in the vertical position. So when you hit the smoke dispenser button, it rotated around and dropped out the smoke grenade (with the pin already removed) to mark a position. It was a great idea but it never worked. We never could get those things to work. The crew chiefs were playing with those things all the time. That day when I went out to fly, the crew chief guaranteed me that it would work. He had been playing with it, getting it lined up, etc. The problem was there was a hole in the bottom of the – I don't know how to describe this – skin of the tail boom that was below this dispenser. So when the dispenser rotated around, if the cylinder didn't line up with the hole in the bottom of the fuselage, the smoke wouldn't fall out; it would just hang up in there. It didn't go off in the cylinder because the spoon hadn't released. He guaranteed me, and I said I'd try it. So while we were out flying, I tried it and, naturally, it didn't work. I didn't give it another thought. Well this incident happened and I do this hard landing in the sand on the beach out there near Phan Rang and, trying to be the great guy here, I'm grabbing the logbook. I had an emergency bag in the back that had my camera in it and I grabbed that too. The guy in the front seat was Bob Pillion who was already into the tree line by this time. The trees were on the left side, his side when he exited the Cobra. We had landed downwind. That was the only choice I had. It was the way the aircraft was going, so that's the way I'm taking it in. So when we hit, I'm reaching in the back and grabbing these things and I'm engulfed in smoke. It smelled bad. I'm thinking, "Oh, my God, we're on fire!" It was white smoke. If it had been any other color I probably would have known right away what it was, but the white made me think it was going to blow up any second, so I'm getting out of there quick. So I move around the nose of the aircraft and start heading for the tree line but not looking back. I get to the tree line and look back and the smoke is still coming out. In the meantime, the C&C ship had already landed behind me. The Huey was on the ground behind the Cobra. The crew chief was out with the fire extinguisher and he's under the tail putting out this smoke grenade which finally fell out of the smoke dispenser during this hard landing. So that is the antidote to this story. The hard landing had finally shook it loose since I'd activated it earlier. The tail rotor and gear boxes were lying out in the sand along with other various parts. That white smoke did scare me. I know I have a couple good pictures of the aircraft on the ground and the Huey behind it.

Also on the 1st, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #66-17788 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the bottom cockpit, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

The following article titled "Change Mission" by PFC Thomas W. Baker with a subtitle "Kill 4 NVA" appeared in the 13 Apr 1969 issue of the Ivy Leaf Famous Fourth. Anyone with more information about this event, especially a better date, should contact Mike Law. [Note: The following names are not spelled correctly in this article: MAJ Jerry Ledford, CWO Bob Mitchell.]

Camp Enari – It was mid-morning when Charlie Troop, 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry, under the operational control of the Famous Fighting Fourth Infantry Division, was momentarily sidetracked from its primary mission. The Ruthless Riders were initially slated to perform a routine bomb damage assessment mission over an area 38 kilometers northwest of Kontum. The temporary diversion, however, paid off in a handsome dividend for the air troop as they chalked up four quick kills. As the command and control ship from Charlie Troop, commanded by Major Jerry G. Ledford of Kingsport, Tenn., winged toward a suspected enemy 105mm artillery emplacement which had been pounded earlier by air strikes and Fourth Division artillery fire. Chief Warrant Officer Robert Michells of Xenia, Ohio., spotted seven NVA soldiers moving through the open terrain. "On the first pass," said CWO Mitchells, "I noticed they were armed with AK47s and dressed in short pants and khaki shirts." Mr. Mitchells then made a circular swoop over the clearing while Major Ledford double-checked to insure that friendly troops were not in the area. On the second pass only two NVA were spotted. They were lurking behind trees at the edge of the clearing and did not fire on the aircraft. Ledford directed another quick visual recon of the area and then decided to call in Cobra gunships and air strikes. Four Cobras, piloted by 1st Lieutenant Royal Latshaw and Warrant Officer John Everhart, Charles McMills and Rick Schuler, made several passes over the area, raking the tree line with rockets and minigun fire. Major Ledford continued to direct the Cobra strikes. Mr. Mitchells finally noticed an NVA body. "I see one NVA near the edge of the clearing," CWO Mitchells reported. "You're looking real good, Cobras; make one more pass," coaxed Major Ledford. Another pass followed, and four NVA bodies were spotted. Specialist 4 Arthur Rielly of Bellerose, N.Y., then noticed what appeared to be cave entrances near the point of contact. He pointed them out to Major Ledford, who called in Skyriders to drop their payload on the area. The Cav Troop then went on to perform their primary mission. For good measure they spotted not only the destroyed 105mm artillery piece, but some vehicle tracks which had been made within the past 48 hours.

For the 6th, the following is an extract from an article titled "Easter Brings Thoughts Of Peace" that appeared in the 27 Apr 1969 issue of the Ivy Leaf Famous Fourth. The date assigned to this event is Sunday, 6 April.

Camp Enari – For a third Easter Sunday in the Central Highlands, soldiers from the Famous Fighting Fourth Division paid tribute to the Prince of Peace in sunrise services at Camp Enari. As the sun stretched shadows from three symbolic crosses, the 4th Division band and trumpets heralded the call to worship and to the opening message of Major General Donn R. Pepke, division commander. ... The invocation was read by Chaplain (Major) Allen Brown of the 1st Brigade. Following the Invocation, the worshipers sang a hymn led by Chaplain (Captain) Clarence Brooks, 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry. ... The service ended, following a hymn sung by the congregation, and the Benediction, by Chaplain Brown.

On the 7th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop, AH-1G #67-15626 flown by 1LT G.W. Eldridge and co-pilot CPT H.L. Pardew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads: Hard landing caused by no left pedal. Included damage, extent unknown. CPT Pardew recalls:

I arrived in Vietnam as a Captain after finishing flight school and joined B Troop at Phan Thiet in March. I remember CPT Bill Ipock. was still the Gun Platoon leader when I got there. I went to Vung Tau to get my AH-1G transition and flew Cobras with the Undertakers for some time.

On the 10th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16361 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 12th, D Troop was inserted as part of a Squadron operation that reacted to information from an informer. D Troop captured a VC District HQ.

The following article titled "Action Slows in Division's AO" appeared in the 4 May 1969 issue of the Ivy Leaf Famous Fourth and is inserted here because of the dates mentioned in the article.

Camp Enari – Activity slackened throughout the Central Highlands during the past two weeks (April 6-17) as troops of the Famous Fighting Fourth Division were credited with 50 NVA kills. Meanwhile there were several indicators in the divisional area of operations which suggested that the enemy has terminated the Spring Offensive and is now enroute to Cambodian sanctuaries, where it is expected that he will regroup and retrain. One indication seems to be the heavy contact in the Central Plei Trap Valley area, where for the past two weeks, two American infantry battalions have fought sharp battles with NVA soldiers moving westward. Another hint is the increased number of high speed westerly trails which have been observed by air cav troops operating in the upper Plei Trap. And finally, there has been a marked decrease in the enemy's 105mm artillery shellings near the tri-border area; now only periodic 82mm mortar fire is being employed, apparently to cover the enemy withdrawal. Shortly after midnight, April 7, local guerrillas fired approximately fifteen 60mm mortar rounds at the 8th Psyops Battalion radio station in Pleiku City. No casualties or damages were reported. This was the only attack by indirect fire launched against an urban allied installation in Pleiku Province during the week. Earlier in the Spring Offensive, shellings of urban areas were much more frequent. On April 8, elements of the 1st Squadron, 10th Cavalry, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Roderick O. Rencik of Fairfax, Va., turned up over 2,000 pounds of rice and miscellaneous NVA equipment, including grenades and small arms ammunition, during a day-long operation 16 kilometers east southeast of Plei Djereng. The rice was later evacuated to the village of Thanh An, where GVN official will distribute it to the local civilian population. During the remainder of the week the Bisons added at least four more tons of rice to their tally, destroyed numerous enemy structures and captured assorted enemy equipment during operations 20 kilometers west, southwest of Pleiku City. Delta Troop, 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry, confiscated 39,000 pounds of rice from 19 huts located 24 kilometers southeast of Camp Enari on April 9. Meanwhile, Ruthless Riders from the Squadron's Alpha Troop were credited with 18 NVA kills in scattered contacts between April 6-12. Under the cover of darkness on the morning of April 11, a Viet Cong platoon terrorized a family of lepers dwelling four kilometers northeast of the Oasis. Three adults were killed and one child was wounded in the attack. Shortly afterward a VC platoon entered the village of Plei Xo and kidnapped the village chieftain. The purposeless acts of terror were the first such incidents reported near the Oasis. A short range patrol from Alpha Troop, 1st Squadron, 10th Cavalry, exchanged small arms fire with a small enemy force 17 kilometers northwest of the Oasis on April 14. After the brief firefight, the NVA, clad in green fatigues and armed with AK47s fled to the west, leaving behind two dead. On the same day, Charlie Troop, 2nd Squadron, 1st Cavalry, flushed out 2 NVA soldiers from a thickly wooded area 20 kilometers east southeast of Pleiku City. The bodies were found near three empty rice storage huts. The Fourth Division Base Camp received 13 rounds of 122mm rocket fire on April 15. Damage and casualties were reported as light. Artillery and gunships were expended on suspected enemy locations, and within an hour an aircraft from Charlie Troop, 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry detected and detained as a possible suspect an individual hiding in brush near one of the suspected enemy launching sites. Two VC cadres turned themselves over to National Police accompanying elements of the 2nd Squadron, 1st Cavalry during a cordon and search of Plei Bring Kotu, 22 kilometers east, southeast

of Camp Enari. The Hoi Chanh rallied on April 16 and were evacuated by National Policy to Pleiku Section that morning. A friendly Montagnard pointed out the location of a mine along the north side of Highway 19 East. The incident occurred 40 kilometers east of Pleiku, where Bravo Troop, 2nd Squadron, 1st Cavalry had been on a minesweeping operation. The Blackhawks destroyed the pressure detonated twenty pound mine in place.

On the 13th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15624 flown by 1LT G.W. Eldridge and co-pilot WO1 C.L. Genova. The Goldbook database indicates this aircraft was turned in to the 388th TC CO and hence to ARADMAC for CONUS repairs, and then returned to Vietnam in June 1970. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

1LT Gary W. Eldridge was flying as pilot in the AH-1G with WO Charles L. Genova as co-pilot. At 0700 they departed Phan Thiet for the area of operations in the vicinity of Bao Loc. After flying for 3 hours and 35 minutes, they returned to Bao Loc for POL. LT Eldridge stated that the winds were constantly changing all morning and he was cleared to land 090. Bao Loc airfield was uncontrolled and had only an advisory. Upon completion of refueling LT Eldridge called for departure clearance and was advised that the wind had shifted and was out of the west at approximately 2 knots. At 1045, he picked up to a 3-inch hover and began a slow left turn on to the runway for a 270 departure, and was again advised that the winds were calm. After lining up on the runway, he began to slowly increase his airspeed. WO Genova reported 40 PSI of torque and 6500 engine RPM when they ran out of left pedal and the aircraft began to yaw to the right. LT Eldridge continued his takeoff and kept increasing airspeed and was now heading 300. As his airspeed picked up, he lowered the collective slightly and regained full pedal control. At this time, both LT Eldridge and WO Genova heard the low RPM audio come on. WO Genova checked the engine tachometer and noticed the RPM was 6200 and decreasing. LT Eldridge stated the ship then began to fall through from an altitude of 25 to 30 feet. Directly in front of the ship was a four-foot wire fence and beyond it a small 10 foot building. In order to miss the building, LT Eldridge pulled pitch. WO Genova reported the aircraft yawed further to the right and the RPM dropped to 5500. Beyond the building was the Bao Loc ammo dump. To avoid crashing inside the ammo dump, LT Eldridge applied full aft cyclic, used full right pedal, and lowered the collective. He again pulled pitch prior to impact. When the aircraft impacted, both skids collapsed and the turret hit the ground. As the aircraft came down, the tailboom struck a 5-foot engineer stake. The stake severed the tailboom in the center and separated it from the rest of the aircraft. On impact, the transmission broke away from the mounts, forcing the short shaft to strike the transmission mount brace. The sudden stoppage of the transmission by the damaged short shaft caused the main rotor system to break off at the mast and separate from the aircraft. The main rotor landed 35 yards to the north in the ammo dump. The aircraft came to rest on a fence and with a heading of 120. WO Genova exited the aircraft with the fire extinguisher while LT Eldridge shut down the aircraft. WO Genova found no fire, fuel leaks, or oil leaks. There were no injuries.

On the 16th, the VHPA Helicopter database has battle damage records for three B Troop OH-6As flown by an unnamed crews as follows: (1) #66-07915 took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the cargo section and forward main rotor system. (2) #67-16492 took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the cargo section. (3) #67-16559 took three hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the cockpit. All three aircraft continued flying and completed the mission, then were repaired in theater.

C Troop Moves to Lane AHP

On the 22nd, C Troop 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 Troop was assigned an AO near Ban Me Thuot 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.

Also on the 23rd, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #66-17815 flown by an unnamed crew. One crewmember was injured. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission, while at an altitude of 50 feet and 40 knots of airspeed, they took 15 hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the engine door, cargo section, cockpit, skid, cockpit, they made an emergency landing and terminated the mission, the helicopter was recovered and repaired in theater. The Army Goldbook database indicates this helicopter had previously served with the 7/17th Cav, was damaged after flying only 12 hours, was repaired by Hughes Aircraft in California and returned to Vietnam. It served with A Troop for just the month of April when it was badly damaged on the 23rd. This time it was turned in and again repaired by Hughes Aircraft. In March 1970 it returned to flying status with the Army in CONUS but did not return to Vietnam.

Also on the 23rd, the S-3 daily journals of the 1/10th Cav, as researched by Bob Patsfield who served with the First Platoon of C Troop 1/10th Cav, state that C Troop moved its location to Ban Blech and was OPCON to 7/17th Cav in Ban Me Thuot area. Bob states that no information was recorded in 10th Cav S-3 logs for his platoon during this period and that he could not find any recordings in 7/17th Cav S-3 logs. He states: "We conducted recon in this area, patrols, Yellow Eyes, and thunder runs. I do not remember any significant events occurring." On 1 May his platoon conducted recon in Ban Me Thuot area. On 5 May Bob states that his platoon moved back into area around LZ Diane and his C Troop CP moved into LZ Panzer where they conducted recon and screening actions. No further reference is made to the 7/17th Cav so we can assume that the OPCON terminated on May 5.

On the 24th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop UH-1H #67-17750 flown by CW2 D.J. Hayes. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads: The engine caught fire inflight. The pilot landed hard at a forward airfield. Incidental damage.

From the 25th until the 5th of May, A Troop was under the direct control of B-23 of the 5th SFG at Bu Prang.

On the 26th, the A Troop AUH states their Scout spotted one 105mm howitzer and all aircraft received intense ground to air fire. An edited version of the "Honor Roll" section in the AUH states **WO1 Richard Lynn Turley** and **SSG Alton D. Woodruff** were wounded at grid YU386338 in a LOH. Despite their wounds they 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. The LOH then crashed into the trees. The Wall database gives their tour start and MOS data as follows: Turley, 8 Dec 1968, 062B; Woodruff, 7 Dec 1968, 67V4F. They were killed in Phouc Long Province which is in III Corps near the Cambodian border. For the 26th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record with fatalities for A Troop OH-6A #67-16640 flown by Turley and Woodruff at grid XU347378. A decoded version of this record states that this was an armed recon combat mission and while attacking a target in Cambodia from an altitude of 50 feet with an airspeed of 40 knots they were hit by an RPG, crashed and burned. The crew was killed. The helicopter destroyed and lost to inventory. The record indicates that CW2 Jose Martinez provided statement about the RPG.

As mentioned earlier, during this period A Troop was under the direct control of B-23 of the 5th SFG at Bu Prang. From an historical point of view it is important to remember that the Special Force border camp at Bu Dop was technically located in Phouc Long Province but received a lot of support from II Corps assets (possibly B-23). The northeastern part of Phouc Long Province was considered far out in 'indian country' during this period.

CW2 Jose L. Martinez recalls: My memory is sketchy. I remember we were south working out of Ban Me Thuot. I don't remember if we were working with 4th Division Troops or what, but Scouts were working an area of suspected enemy activity and had found several compounds that day. They were flying back from the area when Turley spotted something and circled to investigate, the other LOH came back with him to cover. He started to report his findings when his LOH exploded. It was later determined that an RPG hit him, or at least its the gossip I heard. I don't remember what I was flying that day, during that time I was bouncing around, scouts-guns-lift. But when the report went to Enari via radio, it was misunderstood and the Troop listed me as the casualty initially, that was corrected the next day when we arrived at Enari. Rick got to the unit right before Christmas 1968 and I think someone from his flight school class arrived with him. I do not remember who. He was assigned to scouts upon arrival. I developed a relationship because he was from Chicago. I had spent some summers there and I was curious to know if he was from the area of Chicago I was familiar with. He was kind of quiet, did not participate much in war story sessions. We were roommates (hoochmates) for a little while but not very close friends. We did get along. You know that situation, you get friendly but not too close cause you don't want to hurt if something happens. It did not work in this case, it hurt and hurt bad, still does at times. While not close as friends, I did like the guy and had a lot of respect for him. It is not something I can explain, just what happens between men, some you respect for who they are and some you just don't. Rick was one of those that smiled most of the time. Sometimes it was a noncommittal smile at others it was infectious. I don't remember him ever drinking or being involved in the poker games and other activities in the club, I don't think he drank at all, but I am not sure. Guess the only thing I can really say that would sum it up is that he was a good guy. One of those decent young men that can be surrounded by vice and corruption and never be effected by it. His strong sense of self and confidence in his principles shielded him from the temptations. Maybe someone else can add to this. I am going just on emotions and a very sketchy memory. I barely knew Woodruff, but do remember that Rick thought the world of him. We were in the AO that day and did not return to Enari until the following day. I had been numb all the rest of the day and all night after that damn RPG hit his LOH, but when I got back to Enari and I entered the hooch. Just as I had done when Noe Tameyoza died, I again locked the door and cried for a while. I don't really know why I locked the door both times. I don't believe it was because I was ashamed to cry, I think (hope) it was because I wanted privacy to be with my thoughts and feelings. Maybe I just did not want to share my private grief. Anyway, I moved out of that hooch the next day and never entered it again. What is it about us that makes our emotions so strong that it seems to fill our breast and feels like its will burst out and engulf everything and everyone near us? Is it our experience in a combat zone?

Also on the 26th, the VHPA Helicopter database has battle damage records for two A Troop AH-1Gs flown by unnamed crews. (1) #67-15806 took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the tail rotor system. (2) #68-15047 took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the main rotor blade system. Both aircraft continued flying and completed the mission, and were repaired in theater.

Also on the 26th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16399 flown by an unnamed crews. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, while at an altitude of 50 feet, they took three hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the cargo section, stabilizer, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

In late April, SSG Thomas (Tommy) Frank Thompson was awarded the Soldier's Medal at Bong Son while serving with C Troop's Blues. He has a photo of the ceremony and he recalls a Major from the 173d pinning on the medal, but he never received a copy of the orders.

The following article titled “Deadly And Mobile ‘Minibrute’ Terror To NVA” by 1LT Robert Janosko appeared on page 3 in the Vol. 3, No 17 issue dated 27 April 27, 1969 of the 4th Infantry Division’s Ivy Leaf:

Firebase McNerney - The enemy in the Famous Fighting Fourth Division’s Central Highland area of operations is painfully learning not to tangle with the 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry’s “minibrutes.” The “minibrutes” are the small, agile LOHs that pack a deadly minigun and a sharpshooting air observer manning either an M16, CAR 15, or M60 machine gun. Working in hunter-killer teams, consisting of two LOHs and two Cobra gunships, the scout ships skim the tree tops ferreting the enemy from his hidden positions. Generally the scout ships will work section of a specified area, calling in periodic reports to their Cobra teammates above. When a target is spotted, the scout ship will first mark the position, then engage it. If the target is a small group of enemy soldiers in the open the pilot will position the ship to give the observer a clear field of fire. If the scout is receiving heavy ground fire from a hidden position, the pilot will open up on the area with the minigun. After the scouts have made several quick passes at the target, the Cobras will drop down and hit the area with rockets and more minigun fire. When it appears the target has been eliminated, the scouts will check the area and report the results of the strike. “Just the sound of the minigun has a tremendous psychological effect on the enemy,” said CWO Paul Redhead of Hinsdale, IL, an ex-pilot of a scout. “We’ve learned from detainees that enemy soldiers have standing orders not to fire at the scouts until they positively know they have been spotted by them.” The scout’s minigun fires at a selected rate of either 2000 or 4000 rounds per minute. Three-second bursts are regulated automatically and the trigger must be released then pressed again for another three-second burst. The ship carries 2,100 rounds of 7.62mm ammo and 700 rounds of M60 or 40 magazines of CAR15 or M16 ammo. The nimble little helicopters, hovering at tree top level, must be tempting targets to a new enemy recruit, but the old veterans have learned you can get stung when you swat a hornet’s nest. Photo caption - Charlie’s Demise - A LOH mounted with a minigun and carrying an armed air observer hovers over the dense jungle of the Central Highlands waiting for the enemy to make a foolish move. USA Photo by 1LT Robert Janosko.

The following article titled “Riders’ Eyes Open” with subtitle ‘Find Charlie’ appeared on page 8 in the Vol. 3, No 17 issue dated 27 Apr 1969 of the 4th Infantry Division’s Ivy Leaf:

Firebase McNerney - Alpha Troop, 7th Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry’s sharp eyes and accurate fire decreased the local NVA leadership ranks by killing a first lieutenant, a sergeant major, a corporal and a private first class. Operating with the Famous Fighting Four’s 1st Brigade 10 kilometers southeast of Polei Kleng, Alpha Troop had been conducting an air recon mission when Major Richard Marshall of Columbia, S.C., troop commander, spotted what appeared to be soldier’s packs along a trail. The command and control ship quickly swung around and flew back over the area for another look, but the packs were gone. Major Marshall called for the Troop’s scouts (LOHs) and soon the nimble little helicopters were over the area. As the first scout ship, piloted by Warrant Officer Bill F. Bates of Denver, made a pass over the trail it was greeted by a stream of AK47 fire. The ship’s observergunner let loose with a burst from his M16 and downed two NVA. Then the team’s Cobra gunships moved in and riddled the area with rockets and minigun fire, killing one more NVA. The ground fire silenced by the gunships enabled Alpha Troop’s Aero-Rifle Platoon to be inserted to assess the damage. On the ground they found four bodies. A subsequent search of the bodies and equipment revealed the four NVA were probably a forward observation team. A field phone and a large quantity of comms wire were found in the packs. Charlie, at least for a while, may have some trouble adjusting artillery fire around Polei Kleng.

At this point, we will pause from the day to day operations to let some B Troopers describe their base camp at Phan Thiet.

CW2 Paul Uster remembers: 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 hooches. 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 Troop 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 his 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."

SP4 Paul McGoran served with in the Aviation Section of HHT states: I enlisted rather than be drafted, when the helicopter crew training at Fort Rucker for my AIT and had the 67N20 MOS when I arrived in HHT through the replacement pipeline about 1 Aug 1968. My father was a police officer in San Fran and I used to receive the San Francisco Chronological newspaper. In early-May 1969, I read that my father's partner had been killed and my father shot in the line of duty. I was granted emergency leave and never returned to RVN, so I only had a 10 and a half month tour. When I first reported in, I did lots of odd jobs like helping with the water truck and driving a 5-ton with a 40-foot lowboy to Qui Nhon for supplies. Several times they loaded 10 palets for aerial rockets on the lowboy and we'd form with a small convey to head back over the Mang Yang Pass to Camp Enari. I remember thinking, 'Well if I get hit by an RPG I'll never know it because I'll be blown to bits by all these rockets.' Once after returning from one of those long trips, I parted the tractor and the empty trailer in the motor pool, set the brake and went to the mess hall. While I was eating, the air bleed from the brakes, the truck rolled down the slight incline, crossed the road, jumped the ditch and hit the mess hall. I don't think it did any real damage but I had a real surprise when I walked outside! I ran over to the truck and had one of my friends take a picture of me with my head on the steering wheel like I was asleep. I also flew as a gunner on the Hueys in HHT. I especially remember flying on 030 with Mr. Glomb and SP5 Vernie Ball. Eventually Mr. Glomb made Ernie a SGT to take over the line, then I started crewing 030. When I was the CE, I remember Frank Leach and Frank Lopez being my gunners. I remember doing a lot of recovery missions for the air troops based at Enari. For example, I helped unload all the rockets and extra equipment from a Cobra that crashed prior to lifting it out. Once we went with some LRRPs to recover some of their KIAs. Even though they were in body bags, it really bothered me returning to base knowing those guys on the deck were my age and their lives were over. Once we had to resupply a unit in some tall trees. First we lowered down chain saws and after they cut down several trees, we went down into the hole. We still got a tree strike while delivering the supplies, so we landed as soon as we could to inspect the blades. We flew back to Enari after applying some 100 MPH speed tape. I remember two potentially serious incidents involving 030. We had completed a PI on it the night before and a Tech named Bance handed us a short shaft, so we installed it. The next day we flew to Qui Nhon and back – which was a couple of hours of flying. We landed back at Enari but didn't shut down. I got out to go into the maintenance shop for some reason and the pilots with the gunner took off to go refuel. They had just cleared the perimeter and weren't very high at all when the short shaft failed. The pilot whipped it around and put it back on the PSP just as pretty as you please. Those guys were LUCKY! The other time was when Ernie was still the CE. We experienced a tail rotor

failure and ended up running it on at either An Khe or New Pleiku without any further problem. I think it was about March, that I was assigned to one of the air troops at Enari. They wanted me to crew a Cobra. I told them that I would rather not do that because they were always getting them shot-up. A few days later I was back in HHT on 030 which suited me just fine. In closing, I'd like to comment on one idea we've kicked around at the Reunion – UH-1C gunships in HHT. My earliest memories are of the five UH-1Hs in the Aviation Section. The air troops had Charles Model gunships and I don't recall any in HHT. I wasn't really close to many people in Vietnam – but I really liked serving with Mr. Glomb and the others in the Aviation Section and I like seeing them at the Reunions.

SP5 Breck Chabreck recalls: When I arrived in Vietnam in November 1968, I was with the 412th TC Det and did aircraft maintenance for C Troop. In April 1969 I joined the Scouts as a crewchief / observer and stayed with them through June 1970.

Several Heycav (an on-line chat group within the Ruthless Riders suite of groups) participates comments about crying, as in shedding tears, either in Vietnam or afterwards.

CW3 Bill C Walton provided the following: One of the saddest things I saw during my tour with B Troop, other than the death and destruction, was a young soldier sitting on top of a helicopter and crying his eyes out. Sorry, I cannot remember his name but he was an aircraft mechanic that came to B Troop from the 40th TC Det. We had been waiting "forever" on a H model generator O ring so we could finally quit using it for cannibalization and start flying it again. The O ring arrived and this young mechanic was going to install it. Bad luck-the O ring got pinched and cut in two. He started crying (bawling is more like it) and saying, "I wanted so bad to fix this helicopter and now I have screwed it up!" or loud words to that effect. I told him to just cool it, these things happen and we could still use this hangar queen for parts until the new O ring arrived. He took him several minutes to calm down but I will never forget his intensity.

CW2 Bob Glomb stated that he could surely relate to the comments about crying. I too never shed tears there. Of my class of 12 new warrant officers in Maintenance Officer School that went over with me, only four of us got back alive. One was like me, a father with five children. One I met with and talked with for hours in Ban Me Thuot two weeks before he flew into the ground outside Pleiku. I have never tried to reason why some of us experienced Vietnam one way and others another. I have never thought there was a right or wrong way, just different. I have talked with some guys who go bananas watching "Apocalypse Now." I think it is like science fiction. But the one thing that holds our brotherhood together is that we all experienced it and regardless of how we reacted, we can feel for one another because of the reality of it all. We know that whatever one did for another would have been done for him because we were and are a special family. My most precious memory from the 2000 reunion was that feeling of brotherhood, even for those I met for the first time. Every man a hero whether decorated or not, every man wounded whether the wounds show or not, every man a brother.

SGT Dick Jones of D Troop recalls: About six months into my tour, I replaced SGT Wild as the motor sergeant when he was about to be discharged. Later I got a wonderful letter of commendation from CPT Bruegger when he left the Troop in September. Delta and Charlie Troops had a joint motor pool. I remember HHT had a 5-ton wrecker that came in handy now and then. The guys I worked with were: SGT Paul Burns - he signed out vehicles and also ran the EM club. SGT Paul Burns could do wonders. If you needed something that wasn't on the PLL, just get Paul a bottle of whiskey and he'd get it for you. SP4 Herndon – he was a wheel vehicle mechanic. SP4 Steffon – he was a mechanic. They were good guys. SP4 Steffon expected to be the motor sergeant and felt he had been promised the E-5 position. Why I got it instead of him, I don't know. He went to An Khe or Qui Nhon for three or four months. He was a good soldier. When he returned to Enari he let it be known that his father promised to buy him a car if he came home with at least the rank of E-5. I was

in the room when the Troop Commander learned this. I remember he turned to the Troop clerk and said, 'Make him an E-5 tomorrow' and it was done. I remember Dennis Sanders and a guy named Maher – both were mechanics. When I DEROSed in December 1969 I was still the motor sergeant.

SSG Tom Wells wrote the following piece he calls 'My Adventures in D Troop:' I joined the Army in 1961, went to Jump School and then onto the Special Forces. In 1963 I served in the 187th Airborne Battalion of the 11th Air Assault test division which became the 1st Air Cavalry. I reenlisted in 1964 and was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry's recon platoon. We shipped out to Vietnam in 1965 as part of the Big Red One. After 9 months in country they decided that I had to go to recon school at Nha Trang. It met some old friends there. They asked me to stay as an instructor. I extended 6 more months. My last three months in country they formed a new team and called it Surveillance and Observation Group (SOG). It was a glorified LRRP team, but you got to go to different countries on missions. I got bored with state side duty, so I volunteered for the 1st Aviation Brigade in Vietnam and drew the 17th Combat Aviation Group at Nha Trang. I arrived there on April 2nd. While waiting orders, the SGM called me into his office and said "I see you have a Silver Star and a couple of Bronze Stars. How would you like to take over the Top Three NCO Club here." I was surprised. We went over to the Club and had a few drinks and met the Manager, an E7, who said he was leaving in six weeks and could show me everything I needed to know. I looked around and saw the slot machines and all the beautiful women. It just didn't feel right to me. I would probably get myself in a whole lot of trouble so I declined. The SGM said "Well, I'll send you to Dragon Mountain." It sounded cool. I arrived in Camp Enari. I was disappointed in Dragon Mountain, which was a small mountain outside the post where they had communications and a TV station. Things certainly had changed since 1965. On April 8th I was assigned to Delta Troop where I met the Troop Commander, CPT Bruegger, and the 1SG, whose name I don't recall. He said he was giving me the 2nd Platoon because they needed someone with experience. I think I was the only combat veteran in the troop at that time. I did not like to hang around the Orderly Room. They had a bad experience right after I arrived there. One of the troop clerks was told that he was going back to a line platoon, but he had other ideas. He took a 45-caliber pistol, put it under his chin and pulled the trigger. How he survived I will never know. I am sure he had plenty of dental work done for the rest of his life. The platoon was full of young buck sergeants who seemed to know how to take care of the equipment but not much on tactics. I gave them some classes on SOPs, map reading and calling in fire support. They learned quickly. They showed me their weapons bunker, which was very large. You could drive a jeep in to load our 106RRs. We had 50-caliber machine guns and M60s for our gun jeeps. They pulled back a tarp and showed me a minigun. Where they got it, I don't know. They were having trouble trying to fit it on our infantry ¾ ton. More about the gun later.

May 1969

C Troop began using LZ English, LZ Pony, LZ Uplift, and LZ Two Bits as primary staging areas to support the 173rd Abn Bde.

On the 2nd, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss with fatalities record for C Troop OH-6A #66-07914 flown by **1LT James (Fred) Durward Flurry** with observer **SP4 William A. Mansergh, Jr.** and gunner/observer SP4 Jack Wesley in the back. The Wall database gives the following tour start date and MOS data: Flurry, 18 Nov 1968, 1951; Mansergh, 21 Oct 1968, 67N20.

1LT Marty Martines, Red 6, at the time, reports: Eye witnesses reported that the LOH was at a hover when it started moving slowly backwards and crashed into the trees. When LT Flurry's body was found he had been shot in the head. SP4 Mansergh was in the front seat and died in the crash. Another EM, named Wesley, was riding in the back and survived the crash. The Blues were inserted and Wesley was extracted quickly. Jim came into our troop Oct 68. He was well liked. CPT Hammond (gunship leader) renamed Jim to Fred. (Hammond said "You do not look like a Jim, you

are a Fred.") When Fred was killed most of the troop did not know his real name, he was always Fred to us. Fred was my room mate. I miss him. Bye Fred. This area was renamed by C Troop as Flurry's hill and the legend of the 'ole one-shot Charlie' was established.

1LT Joe Shepherd recalls: /Insert his material here./

WO1 John H. Robinson recalls: After flight school I went to OH-6A IP school. When I arrived in Vietnam in Feb 1969 I was assigned to C Troop. I stayed with them about three months before being transferred to B Troop. I was Fred's wing. I had been in country two and a half months. We were flying a scouting mission to the west of Bong Son maybe. It was up in a small valley. I don't remember which side of the hill but it was the side of a hill and Fred found a group of hooches. I would circle him. Fred would go up the hill and while coming down he would drop WP grenades or something to burn these hooches. On one of those passes the aircraft crashed. It went literally from hovering down the hill over these hooches to 90-degrees nose down instantaneously and he crashed into the trees. Now he crashed into the hooches that he was burning or in amongst the hoochs he was burning. He disappeared and I was circling the crash site but it was very difficult to see the aircraft either in the undergrowth or in my confusion or in the fire. There was also a hooch on fire there. I didn't hear any burst of gunfire. There could have been just one shot. He had a gunner in front and a gunner in back and apparently they hit on a rock or a set of rocks. The gunner in the back survived. A Huey landed in an opening maybe 100 or 200 meters away and this gunner streaked out and jumped in the back of the Huey and was extracted. The gunner with Fred died on impact. I always hear Fred was shot. And then there was the mess and organized confusion of trying to get their bodies out. I was obviously pretty confused. I don't remember much more about the day. I don't remember the name of the observer I was flying with. I don't remember who the gun pilots were that day or the C&C guys. I do remember watching the aircraft. To me it was like it stopped about 45-degrees nose low before it hit the trees. The rest of that whole day I mean getting back to I think we were at LZ English - maybe where we staged getting refueled getting back. I do remember helping package his stuff. That was the first time I'd seen we only need one tube of toothpaste. Don't send his parents or his family the extra stuff. So we went through his shaving kit. You don't need to send muddy boots - clean them out because we all lived in that same hooch there at An Son. That was the first person I saw die. This was the only incident like this that I experienced on this tour. Not long after this incident I was transferred to B Troop and then to HHT.

On the 3rd, A Troop 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 Troop returned to Squadron 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 Troop worked it frequently. Again MAJ Dick Marshall helps us understand the challenges A Troop 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 COL who commanded the 24th was the finest I would ever know in my two tours. Although history will never tell it this way, A Troop became a TF command since we had to head 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 COL 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 Troop had been in almost constant combat since late Feb; however, nothing could 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.

Also on the 4th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16399 flown by an unnamed crew at grid YU322347. There were two injuries. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, at an altitude of 30 feet and 30 knots of airspeed, they took several 7.62mm type SA/AW hits the engine comp, crashed and the helicopter was lost to inventory and destroyed.

On the 5th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15653 flown by CW2 W.J. Old and Instructor Pilot CW3 R.L. Kinlaw. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

The aircraft and crew took off to give Mr. Old an opportunity to train as an AH-1G Instructor Pilot. Mr. Kinlaw was flying as IP in the rear seat and Mr. Old was flying from the gunner's station. After flying for approximately 20 minutes they entered the traffic pattern at south stage field which is approximately 1 mile south of Lane AHP. Mr. Kinlaw demonstrated 3 touchdown autorotations. Mr. Old then took control of the aircraft. After flying a normal traffic pattern, he entered a straight-in autorotation at 500 feet AGL. The autorotation was normal through the deceleration and initial pitch pull stage. However, just prior to the touchdown, the rear portion of the right skid struck a mound of dirt approximately 12 to 15 inches high, which was not detectable from the air. Immediately following this contact, the aircraft rolled hard left and pitched nose down. Mr. Kinlaw took the controls and applied aft right cyclic in an effort to level the aircraft. At this time, a main rotor blade struck the tail boom causing a dent approximately 1-inch deep, destroyed a section of the drive shafting, and damaged the drive shaft cover beyond repair. Mr. Kinlaw's cyclic application resulted in the leveling of the aircraft which landed approximately 20 feet beyond the mound of dirt with no further damage.

On the 8th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #66-17788 flown by an unnamed crew in Laos. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the forward main rotor system, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired.

On the 9th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #66-17829 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, while at an altitude of 40 feet and 40 knots of airspeed, they took three hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the cargo section, forward main rotor system, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

Also on the 9th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop OH-6A #66-07817 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took seven hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which

hit the cockpit, engine comp, tail section, forward main rotor system, they made a precautionary landing and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired and evacuated.

Also on the 9th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop OH-6A #67-16498 flown by WO1 G.D. Fuller at Phan Thiet. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and accident summary reads: Tail rotor struck tall bamboo while hovering. This caused incidental damage.

On the 10th, the following 7/17th Cav personnel were awarded the Air Medal via HQ 1st Aviation Brigade General Orders 2251, TC 320, dated 10 May 1969:

SGT Burgess, Robert W. – B Troop – 9 Nov 1968 to 11 Dec 1968
SP4 Davis, Robert B. – B Troop – 3 Dec 1968 to 4 Jan 1969
PFC Desjarlais, Ronald G. – B Troop – 12 Nov 1968 to 30 Dec 1968
SGT Elkins, Ronald A. – B Troop – 9 Nov 1968 to 22 Dec 1968
SGT Fatchet, Dale R. - B Troop – 9 Nov 1968 to 20 Dec 1968
SP4 Gonzales, George - B Troop – 9 Nov 1968 to 5 Jan 1969
SP4 Hammil, Louis M. - B Troop – 4 Sep 1968 to 20 Feb 1969
PVT Lewis, Floyd L. - B Troop – 12 Nov 1968 to 29 Dec 1968
SP4 Matteini, Frank - B Troop – 3 Dec 1968 to 7 Jan 1969
SP4 McGoran, Paul - HHT – 29 Oct 1968 to 7 Dec 1968.

As a point of reference, on the 11th the large 4th Inf Div base at The Oasis was attacked and partially overrun by NVA sappers. US losses were 25 KIA and 3 MIA (returned after the war). Enemy dead were estimated at 400 of the 600+ attackers.

The following headline "Ruthless Riders Smash Infiltrators 30 NVA Killed As Cav Shows Power" appeared in the Vol. 3, No 19 issue dated May 11, 1969 of the 4th Infantry Division's Ivy Leaf:

Camp Enari - Thirty NVA soldiers, part of a large enemy infiltration force, were killed 40 kilometers north of Ban Me Thuot when they were spotted by alert men of men of Alpha Troop, 7th Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry. The Ruthless Riders were winging their way over sparsely vegetate terrain when a single, armed NVA soldier was spotted by LOH pilot 1LT John W. Pospisil of Mammoth, PA and his observer-gunner, SGT Terry L. Heath of Cleves, Ohio. As the enemy was taken under fire and killed, the men observed four additional NVA sitting in a field. Cavalry gunships entered the action and received heavy ground to air fire. The Ruthless Riders countered with M60 and minigun fire. As the fighting died down, Alpha Troop's Aero-Rifle Platoon was inserted to sweep the battlefield. The cautious ground troops confirmed 30 NVA kills. They also discovered a wounded NVA, stripped of his weapon and left behind by his fleeing comrades. He was soon evacuated for medical treatment. The ground troops reported that all the enemy soldiers were young and clean shaven with fresh haircuts and were wearing new khaki uniforms and pith helmets. Three AK47s, two SKSs, one light machine gun, 45 packs and assorted pieces of equipment were also found strewn about the battlefield. The Fourth Division air cav unit suffered no casualties in the nine hour operation.

On the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop AH-1G #67-15603 flown by an unnamed crew in Laos. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the main rotor blade system, they continued flying and aborted the mission.

Also on the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage records for two A Troop OH-6As flown by unnamed crews in Laos. (1) #67-16241 took four hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the bottom cockpit, bottom engine comp, forward main rotor system, and cargo section. (2) #67-16653

took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the bubble. Both ships continued flying, completed the mission and were repaired in theater.

Also on the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop OH-6A #66-17788 flown by WO1 J.R. Muse. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads: Aircraft came out of altitude and did not see a tall dead tree. It struck the tree with the bubble and nicked the main rotor blades. Incidental damage.

Also on the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16612 flown by an unnamed crew. One crewmember was injured. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the hover on target, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the cargo section, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired.

On the 13th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record for B Troop OH-6A #67-16492 at grid AN813211, west of Phan Thiet. CPT Ted L. Bidigare, B Troop's maintenance officer, was flying as the Scout observer. Both the pilot, name unknown, and Ted were injured. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the hover on target, they took several hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the cockpit, they crashed, the helicopter was lost to inventory and destroyed. CPT Mike Law recalls:

Ted and I were hooch-mates. He was the 569th TC Detachment commander and was a fine maintenance officer. I taught me a ton during the months I served with him. However, like many maintenance types, he got bored from time to time. While he flew the UH-1H on parts runs and did a lot of test flights, this wasn't as exciting as flying combat. Naturally we'd eat with the other pilots, the platoon leaders, and the senior officers who were flying the C&C and running the Troop. Periodically, about once every couple-three weeks, Ted would fly with the Scouts as an Observer. He loved to shoot. I remember questioning his sanity on this matter and reminding him the flying Scouts could be hazardous to one's health.

Also on the 13th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop OH-6A #67-16559 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a rescue and recovery medevac mission, during the landing pickup zone, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the cockpit and cargo section, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired.

Also on the 13th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident with injuries record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16107 flown by CW2 P.J. Kahl, Observer SP4 G. Kaplan, and Crew Chief PFC Jim Yamnitz. All three were injured. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

CW2 Patrick J. Kahl was flying the OH-6A. At 1210 hours he initiated a normal takeoff from LZ Two Bits. The pilot reported the N2 was 103% when he was at a hover and then as he lowered the nose and started forward the N2 dropped below 100%. He decided to abort the takeoff and pushed down slightly on the collective allowing the aircraft to slowly descent from an altitude of approximately 3 feet AGL and with 5-10 knots forward airspeed and keeping the same 160 degrees heading initiated at takeoff. After traveling approximately 10 feet from the point the takeoff was aborted, the toe of the left skid caught on a smashed 55 gallon oil drum which was filled with dirt. Due to the inertia of forward movement, the aircraft began to pitch forward and to the left as it pivoted on the left skid toe; the main rotor blades contacted the ground and continued around and severed the tail boom. The aircraft came to rest on its left side. The crew sustained minor injuries.

PFC Jim Yamnitz recalls: I was drafted in Aug 1968 and came to C Troop in early Feb 1969 as an 11B infantryman. I had been told that C Troop's Blues had been "wiped out" in late January, but

when I got to C Troop there was no room for me in the Blues. There was an empty bunk with the Scouts, so I went there. SGT Scotty Stanton sort of took me under his wing and I started flying as an Observer. I continued doing this until about June when, as a reaction to someone complaining politically that this person wasn't serving in their MOS in Vietnam, the leadership told me I'd have to go to the Blues because I was an infantryman. In 1970 I would return to the Scouts.

On the 14th, A Troop 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 Troop claimed seven NVA killed and captured a Chicom radio, some commo wire and assorted documents. CW2 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 Troop'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 they could develop. The NVA carefully pulled them up a ravine into an ambush even with the air cover we provided. The Troop 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 Platoon Leader. 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 go 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 firing 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! Anyway, 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 three months was one of the Squadron IPs.

On the 14th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a loss record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16107 flown by an unnamed crew at grid BR837061. SP5 Jim Yamnitz has photos of this aircraft taken prior to this incident plus at least two after it was recovered to the maintenance area.

Also for the 14th, SSG Tom Wells wrote the following piece he dates for 14 May and titled it 'A Live Sapper:' In May, on Mother's Day evening, we heard huge explosions down the road in the vicinity of The Oasis, which was a large 4th Division firebase. It was near the intersection of Highways 14 and 19 as a deterrent to infiltration routes. The next morning I got my jeep with my gunner and driver. I don't remember my first driver because he was a short timer and left within a few weeks. My gunner's name was SP4 Tamis. He was from Guam, and a very good soldier. I used to kid him when we went to the AO that he should bring black pajamas and a pit helmet and if we got overrun at night he could take me captive. One time we went to the AO and he showed up with them as a joke, maybe. We arrived at the Oasis about 10:30 a.m. They had been hit pretty hard and were in the process of recovering. I was talking to a Platoon Sergeant about the attack. I noticed a 2-1/2 ton truck to the rear of the bunkers. They said that they had combed the area well, but I still wandered over to the truck. As I was standing at the rear of the truck, I suddenly looked up and saw a sapper, half naked with grease all over him, hanging from the bows of the truck. His arms and legs were locked between the canvas and the bows. His eyes were bulging. I yelled "Sapper" and the 4th Infantry guys came running. They dragged him off the truck. He looked half dead. He must have

been hanging there all night, but because it was much lighter now I was able to see him. It was getting near lunch and I knew we weren't going to get anything there so we jumped back into our gun jeep and drove back to Enari. We never had trouble getting in and out of the gates with the gun jeep, but they always stopped everyone else to check on their authorization. I guess they figured we were armed to the teeth and were on some kind of mission. We went to the mess hall and had lunch. That was the first and only time in Vietnam that I ever saw a live sapper.

On the 15th, A Troop had a LOH shot down wounding both crew members. Editor's note: This statement in the unit history most likely correlates with the loss of #67-16028 on the 16th which had two injured crew members.

On the 16th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16028 at grid ZB088196 flown by an unnamed crew. The record state two crew members were injured. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, while hover at an altitude of 15 feet, they took several hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the engine comp, they crashed and the helicopter was lost to inventory and destroyed. Mike Hodge and Terry Heath show /insert their material here/

On the 21st, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop AH-1G #67-15806 flown by 1LT C.J. Randolph. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads: As the aircraft hovered forward, RPM bled rapidly and the pilot ran out of left pedal. The aircraft began spinning to the right. As the RPM was falling through 5800, the pilot dropped the throttle and attempted a hovering autorotation. The aircraft landed hard which resulted in component damage. An inspection of the turbine revealed the turbine blades were coated with oil and dirt.

On the 22nd, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop AH-1G #68-15047 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a direct combat support close air support mission, during the attack approach target area, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the main rotor blade system, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 24th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16604 flown by WO1 M.P. Connaway and Instructor Pilot 1LT J.W. Pospisil. The damage to this aircraft must have been extensive because the Goldbook database indicates this aircraft was turned in to the 79th TC CO and hence to Hughes Aircraft for repairs. After its repairs it continued returned to serve in Vietnam in October 1970. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

At approximately 0915 hours 1LT John W. Pospisil and WO1 Marvin P. Connaway took off to give WO Connaway his first transition ride in an OH-6A. LT Pospisil was flying as instructor pilot in the left seat and WO Connaway was flying from the right seat. After flying for approximately 15 minutes they were in the area of the Plei Do Lim air strip which is approximately 6 miles east of Hensel Field. The IP selected a hill to the west of the airstrip to demonstrate autorotations because the airstrip had a clay surface that was wet with rain and it did not allow the aircraft to slide. The area he selected was an emergency procedures area approved by Squadron Standardization and the 17th Group Standardization Office. The Instructor Pilot made a reconnaissance of the area at a hover and proceeded with his demonstration. The Instructor Pilot had already demonstrated two autorotations with the pilot following through on the controls. He entered the third autorotation at 500 feet AGL for a straight in; instruments were in the green and he had an area picked out for landing. At 50 feet he started a gradual deceleration and decided to take the aircraft to the ground. The area he picked sloped downhill; 5 feet from the ground he pulled initial pitch. He then saw a dirt mound in his flight path and was correcting to the left, he failed to pull cushioning pitch and

while he believed he was 2 feet from the ground, the right rear skid hit a mound of dirt about 8 inches in height which was not detectable from the air. The force of impact snapped the skid in front of the right rear landing strut. The strut dragged on the ground for 3 feet, then the aircraft pitched forward, collapsing the right front landing strut, and causing the aircraft to end up in a nose low attitude. At impact, the main rotor blades struck the tail boom 2 feet from the end and severed it from the aircraft. As the aircraft came to a stop, the main rotor blades made contact with the ground causing them to deflect, take an erratic flight path and sever the remaining portion of the tail boom.

From the 25th until the end of the month, A Troop received a remarkable amount of ground fire each day including 51 cal. A Troop 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 Troop continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Div's TAOR during this month.

On the 30th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16348 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took three hits from 12.7mm type SA/AW which hit the tail section, cockpit, and forward main rotor system, they continued flying but aborted the mission. The Army Goldbook database indicates this was a replacement aircraft that only served with A Troop for the month of May. This aircraft was turned in to the 79th TC Co and returned to Hughes Aircraft for repairs. After it was repaired it returned to Vietnam in October 1970 to serve with A/1/9th Cav.

The history section of the C Troop 1968 - 69 Yearbook reads as follows: From September 1, 1968, until December 31, 1968, Troop C provided support for the Fourth Infantry Division. During this time, the Troop activity consisted mainly of visual reconnaissance in the Division AO in support of the First and Third Brigades. Activity during this time was extremely light and contacts were few and far between, consisting mainly of assisting LRP's in contact and a few LRP extractions and medical missions. Trp C had its first major contact and lost its first aircraft an LOH piloted by LT Edward F. Johnson and LT Patrick T. Murphy, on 27 October 1968. The Troop made contact with a platoon sized force and killed twelve enemy with their AH-1G's and Scout OH-6A's. A squad from the troop's Aero-Rifle Platoon was inserted to search the bodies for intelligence purpose, but they immediately came under intense automatic weapons fire. After several hours of heavy contact, during which to LOH was shot down: the rest of the Aero-Rifle Platoon was inserted along with an infantry company from the Third Brigade. A mechanized Infantry platoon, also from the Third Brigade, later arrived on the scene and contact was broken by the enemy around 1800 hours. The Aero Rifle Platoon and the downed aircraft crew were extracted leaving the mechanized infantry platoon and the infantry company to secure the area. Troop C was credited with thirty-six confirmed kills and later intelligence maintained that Troop C had made contact with a battalion sized force. During the week of 10 to 17 November, Troop C encountered heavy enemy contact on an almost daily basis along the Cambodian Border near Duc Co. During this week Major Frost had one Command and Control Helicopter shut up causing him to crash land at LZ Vera and a second Command and Control Helicopter received several hits from two fifty caliber positions. Although Troop C aircraft were receiving intense anti-aircraft fire and aircraft hits, they were able to maintain its mission ready status and half the enemy advance, which turned into a retreat toward Cambodia. On 24 November Major Robert Frost turned over his command to Major Jerry G. Ledford. From this period until 31 December Troop continued its reconnaissance in support of the First and Third Brigades, but enemy activity in the area was extremely light. During the month of January 1969 action in C Troop's area of responsibility began to increase daily, consummating with discovery of an large enemy force on January 15 1969 15 miles north of Plei Djerang. In the ensuing action, a Cobra Gun Ship was downed after making gun runs on the fortified enemy position. The Blue Platoon, led by 1LT Charles Campbell, was inserted and remained on station all night in an effort to recover the two pilots. Late during the day of 16 January 1969, the ground

element was finally extracted, their mission complete. From January 16, 1969 to January 22, 1969 the Troop had a quarterly training week when numerous classes were conducted and maintenance on the Troop's aircraft was performed. During the months of February and March, Troop C roamed the 4th Division's area of operation searching out the enemy and inflicting heavy casualties on him. On 24 April 1969 Troop C was released from the support of the 4th Division and moved to Lane Army Air Field where they are now under the operational control of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. During the month of May 1969 the troop operated in the An Lho Valley fifteen miles northwest of LZ English, where they have harassed and interdicted the enemy supply system.

The following individuals are listed with pictures in this yearbook:

Ledford, Jerry G. MAJ	Miller, Larry F. CPT	Cummer, William F. CPT
Latshaw, Royal K. CPT	Halby, Mike G. CPT	Hammond, Douglas P. CPT
Johnson, Edward F. CPT	Mazzuca, Jack CPT	Springthorpe, Robert CPT
Shepherd, Joseph A. CPT	Goforth, James T. LT	Barton, Jack LT
McClellan, Michael G. LT	Henbest, David M. LT	Pedersen, Lloyd W. LT
Busby, Oscar M. LT	Bragg, David W. WO1	Hubert, Dawson T. LT
Marshall, Norman F. LT	Parker, Robert W. CW2	Whaley, Albert P. CW2
Everhart, John H. CW2	Norman, Daniel CW2	Kahl, Patrick CW2
Schaefer, William D. CW2	Lavigne, Norbert CW2	Mettler, Glenn E. WO1
Evans, Robert I. WO1	Kinlaw, Robert L. CW3	Flint, David M. 1LT
Smith, Larry E. WO1	Brown, Thomas H. WO1	Cook, Robert C. WO1
Hargleroad, John P. WO1	McKnight, John H. III WO1	Resendez, Reynaldo WO1
Carlson, Bruce E. WO1	Couch, Robert M. SGM	Turner, Harry L. 1SG
Lassiter, Emery F. SFC	Dakin, Earl SFC	Alicea-Aguayo, Jose R. SFC
Powers, Francis E. SSG	Pilk, Robert H. SSG	Montgomery, Lester M. SSG
Martin, Gregory SSG	Shipman, Doyle H. SSG	Kibbles, Robert SSG
Blackburn, John H. SSG	Ballant, August A. SSG	Herring, Charles D. SSG
Zentz, Rodney SP6	Ryan, Thomas SGT	Yurconis, Edward SGT
Guthrie, Michael SGT	Terrell, Richard SGT	Leaym, Donald R. SGT
Stroehle, Otto X. SGT	Lewis, Larry K. SGT	Dahl, Gerald SGT
Palacios, Jose R. SGT	Jenkins, James Y. SGT	Brewester, Richard SP6
Beggs, William SP5	Bonnett, Charles D. SP5	Edens, Richard SP5
Miller, Larry J. SP5	Duncan, Robert SP5	Dibernado, Louis SP5
Conklin, Rodney SP5	Davis, Everett SP5	Falcone, Michael SP5
Wright, Marvin SP5	Beshel, Herbert SP5	Gall, William C. SP5
Boone, Samuel SP5	Benzing, Norman SP5	Stianche, Richard SP5
Salacinski, Chester SP5	Wooley, Jerry SP5	Johnson, Roger PFC
Maxwell, Harry J. SP6	Whaley, Larry A. SP5	Bergman, Brayton SP5
Miller, Ronald SP5	Stanton, Scott SGT	Toumi, David SP5
Crenshaw, Ernest SP5	Charbeck, Breck SP5	Bowker, Allen SP4
Dishman, Harold SP5	Cobb, Harold SP5	Danforth, Danny SP4
Zolzer, Gerald SP4	Meade, Joseph SP4	Kaplan, Gus SP4
Prendergast, James SP4	Robinson, Reginald SP5	Lininger, Michael SP4
Polliforne, Vinecnzo SP4	McKee, Howard SP4	Rydel, Thomas SP4
Droll, Michael SP4	Stover, Jerry SP4	Lucado, Jimmy SP4
Kaleel, Samuel SP4	Doppler, Kenneth SP4	Byrant, Harry PFC
Richards, Bruce SP5	Hermann, Dennis SP5	Hawkaluk, Albert SP4
Thomas, Kenneth SP4	Roth, Edward SP4	Bembala, Gary SP5
Dunaway, James PFC	Burns, Thomas E. SP5	Smith, Robert SP4

Goodwin, Richard SP5
Gill, Gary SP4
Plassman, Gary SP5
Carter, Edward SP5
Martin, Allen SP5
Wadsworth, Lloyd SP5
Keeling, Donald SP4
Jenkins, Delmus PFC
Seigner, Bruce PFC
Chorley, Stephen SP5
Lindsay, Edward SP4
Garcia, Daniel SP4
Sweitzer, Joseph SP5
Jarboe, Thomas PFC
Riley, Archie SP4
McElory, Jerry SP4
Richards, Albert SP5
Littrell, Kenneth SP4
Cropp, Myron SP4
Jollie, William SP5
Johnson, John PFC
Strickland, Ronald PFC
Jones, Van R. PFC

De Vasure, John SP5
Moreau, Kenneth SP4
Hancock, Tommy SP4
Brown, James SP4
Gregg, Harold SP5
Stahl, Daniel SP4
Raney, William SP4
Miller, Robert SP5
Crawford, John SP4
Csaszar, Louis SP5
Kanaga, Darrell PFC
Morris, Wendell SP4
Di Maria, Ralph PFC
Milby, Walter PFC
McDonald, Charles PFC
Sullivan, James PFC
Gallaway, Allen SP5
Mobley, Willie J. PFC
Mayville, Curtis SP4
Alvarado, Daniel SP5
Manley, Raymond SP5
Thuoug SSG

Oliver, Stanley SP4
Jung, John SP4
Lopresti, Roger SP4
Newby, Harold SP4
Sims, Albert SP4
Bump, Gerald SP5
Walters, Richard PFC
Anthony, Raymond PFC
Blevins, George SP4
West, James SP4
Roberg, Ernest SP5
Nagle, Douglas SP5
Massey, James SP5
Lanyate, Hesser PFC
Wilson, George SP4
Krupka, Louis SP5
Harris, John SP4
Farnsworth, Michael SP4
Benjamin, Benniet SP5
Hobart, Daniel SP4
Wade, David SP4
An

WO Jeff Heritage recalls: I served with C Troop from Feb. 1969 until Feb. 1970. For the first six months I flew front seat in the Snakes and then switched to Hueys. The mention of Flurry Hill brought on a memory of a sort of tragic-comedy that I will relate. It occurred over that complex of large rock boulders on the south slope of the hill where Freddy took it from the NVA or VC who we in C Troop at the time had taken to referring to as "One Shot Charlie." This moniker having been given as he supposedly stood up, or otherwise took aim with supposedly a single action something, and was want to take just one well placed shot at a time. If your collective recollections are the same as mine, I believe that was how Freddy bought it, in the forehead, one shot. Well, least I digress, I was flying a Snake front seat for CPT Doug Hammond, about 2 - 4 weeks afterwards, when we were circling that rock pile, and in fact, were looking specifically for this particular chap. The LOHs, I believe, were working the slope a little further to the east. As we made a pass from east to west, in a fairly tight circle, one of the LOHs had drifted up the slope a bit, and reported taking a single round pop. Doug sort of absent mindedly made the comment that he thought that was One Shot Charley again, and went on to opine that it would surely make for a good day if we could waste the little f---r, sort of 'mark paid' for Freddy, if you know what I mean. Any way, as we continued through a left hand turn, I equally absent mindedly glanced down to the rocks in the vicinity that were a little higher than the rest and saw very distinctly a man jump from one rock to another, with a weapon. I excitedly informed Doug what I saw, and we both collectively focused on what we had just shared about it being nice to get him. At that point, I know we were both convinced we knew exactly where "he" was! Hell, it could have been anybody, but we were convinced. Doug was busy arming what he had in the wing pods, and getting permission to fire from C&C. We got permission, and as we were already in position for a turn in, I started to fire the nose mounted minigun, only to run out of ammo after a very short burst. Doug, bless his heart, had already armed the rocket pods, and, gleefully lowered the nose to launch what he thought would be one pair. Unfortunately, he had in his excitement, forgotten two very important items: (1) all we had left on board was Willy Pete; and (2) he had put the arming switch to (I believe) "Salvo" which was

the setting to let the whole pod empty in rotation. The long and short of it was that we wound up on a run letting off about 9 pair of White Phosphorous rockets and lite the rock complex up with so much white smoke you could have seen it from LZ English! You might say it was a bit of a surprise, but we were laughing our asses off ten minutes later, when the LOHs went in and found some bodies with serious sun tans. Also, if memory serves, the one shot incidents decreased considerably from that particular complex, at least for awhile. Talk about pulling it out of your rear.

Pilot Gary Brydges provide some details about B Troop 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 on it, 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 CPT Mike Law relates: As the other B Troopers 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 Troop 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 Troop had a bunker there that contained some ammo and usually a couple of fuel blivets with JP4. The ARVNs 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 Troop when we formed at Fort Campbell. He recognized my voice on the radios and using my old Fort 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 theirs 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 Troop during that battle. We were a combined arms team of the first magnitude!!

CPT Mike Law recalls: I'd like to relate one event that I experienced in B Troop that I still recall with relish. It happened about May 1969. I believe the Troop was supposed to have the day off as a Maintenance Day. About mid-morning some friendly force working between LZ Betty (the Airborne Infantry main base at Phan Thiet) and Firebase Sandy (the artillery position west of Phan Thiet near where the mountains started) found some bad guys in some bunkers built into the dikes between the rice paddies. We all said – "What fun! Bad guys in a relatively open area about a mile or so from home!" Then we added – "Wouldn't it be great if these are the same boys who keep mortaring us almost every night?" The first team launched from The Morgue (the name of B Troop's base camp at Phan Thiet). The Blues started getting ready and assembled down near their Lift ships. About ten minutes later, the Scouts started yelling that there really were bad guys in bunkers because they'd blown up a few; so we put the Blues in a safe distance away while the Cobras pounded the bunkers during the insertion. The Blues moved out to work the vegetation along the dikes because moving across the open, dried rice paddy wasn't a good idea. I was flying a Cobra about 500 feet off the deck in a wide orbit. I'd watch the Blues maneuver and the LOHs dart in and out. Then someone put out a Willy Pete and said, "OK Undertaker make that part of the dike disappear!" The Blues were flat on the ground as I started firing four 17 lb. HE rockets at a time. I

remembering thinking, “Damn, those guys really trust the helicopter crews – they were CLOSE to the target they wanted us to hit.” This was the first combat flight in Vietnam for the young Warrant Officer in the front seat. What fun when you knew they couldn’t shoot back. The guys back in The Morgue were standing on the bunkers watching the show. When the Cobra was empty, I landed back near the ammo bunker in the revetment area. Out of habit, I started to shut down and get out to help rearm the ship. Normally, when the Blues had been inserted and we had to rearm a Cobra in a staging area, there was no help whatsoever. But this time there were lines of guys holding rockets - wide grins on their faces. Someone climbed up as I opened the hatch and yelled: “Captain that was great – we’ll have you rearmed in a second – do you need something to drink?” Wow! I felt like a race car driver at the Indy 500! But I also felt great pride in the team I was part of – the Blues were GREAT, the Maintenance people were GREAT, the Support people were GREAT, the Scouts were GREAT, the Lift crews were GREAT, I loved being an Undertaker, I loved being able to contribute to the success of this small battle. When I got back out to the battle, the Blues had moved through the area I’d blown up and found another bunker they wanted disappeared. This time I almost blew myself up because the rockets were exploding that close to the front of the Cobra. In fact, I think one of the main blades had a dent in it from the blast debris. In the 1990s I stepped into an elevator during a VHPA Reunion and this voice said – “Damn, Mike, my first flight in Vietnam and you nearly killed the two of us!” No – Hey, glad to see you! No – welcome home! Oh, well – that’s what happens at a Reunion! Yeah, I had almost killed us but I’ll never forget B Troop that day. It was GREAT!!

1LT Woody McFarlin recalls: I have lots of memories of our time at Phan Thiet. For example, I recall during the MAJ McCracken days there were centerfolds displayed in most all the hooches. Then MAJ Lyman came in and the displays were forbidden. After some time I remember someone going on R&R to Hong Kong and they came back with about 50 of those ‘fat girl’ pin-ups. I think the smallest one would have weighted about 400 pounds. Those all went up and after a while the normal centerfolds returned. I don’t remember which CO it was but think it was MAJ McCracken who put out the order that you had to at least wear under-shorts when you went through the chow line. Guys getting short were working on their DEROS tan and would be standing there with nothing on! I remember 1LT John Haberlien was the Blue Platoon leader for the first part of my tour. He was good and everyone loved the man. He was not a helicopter pilot and was a fine Infantry officer. Then we got an older guy – a CPT Bert Diaz who was a Cuban national and had been involved in the Bay of Pigs invasion. His full name was Lomberto Diaz-Perez but everyone called him Bert. He was a hard drinker. He was a rater helicopter pilot but no one liked to fly with him. He just sort of moved on rather quickly. The Blue’s Platoon Sergeant was a big Puerto Rican SFC named Vidro [his full name is Miguel Vidro Santiago]. He was well respected especially in the field. He had served with John Haberlien for several months. I remember that a local Vietnamese military unit provided security for us at Phan Thiet. There was a little cage out in a sandy area. The Vietnamese leader put his people in it when they misbehaved. It was only two or three foot tall. I also remember the sauna we had at Phan Thiet for a while. It was up in one corner of the shower. They had it sandbagged in. It was made from some immersion heaters. Then it blew up! And ‘the chapel’ was a little 10-foot tent with the officers club underground beneath it. ‘The chapel’ was sort of a façade. As I recall you had to go down about three tall steps to get into the club. WO George Grega was rather short legged guy. He’d get down there, get a belly full of beer and couldn’t get out. There were two tables down there, so he’d sleep on them. The closest I ever knowingly came to being killed was by artillery while we were at Phan Thiet. You know when you can hear something outside of a Cobra while you’re in it – it has to be close. I was in the front seat and heard this tumbling artillery round sound, then this explosion beneath us. I could not see the explosion because it was already behind us. It must have been a short round. To this day I still believe it had to have

passed through our rotor system – it was that close. It was a loud sound and then, of course, the main explosion was loud because we are so close to it.

SP5 Dennis McMillan recalls: I got in country on 20 January 1969. Prior to that I'd been at Aberdeen Proving Grounds. My MOS was 45J20. I joined B Troop at Phan Thiet. We stayed there for 6 or more months leaving in August or September and going to Ban Me Thuot after a some time at Camp Enari. After BMT we returned to Pleiku. I DEROSed 20 January 1970 traveling via Cam Rang Bay, Seattle, and then Chicago. There was a 100-degrees of temperature difference between Vietnam and Chicago. I'll never forget that. I was an Armor. We traveled out to the staging area on a daily basis to work on the Cobras. We worked on the armament systems and loaded ammunition. We went to places like Dalat and Song Mao. That place was just wide, open field with fuel blivets and a bunch of Vietnamese helping us do some things. The airfield was unsecured during the day and night. We stored rockets in a sandbag bunker and the Blues always checked it out for booby traps before we went in it. For those of us who stayed there while everyone else flew away – it always made me wonder about our security. There was always a group of Montagnards around to help. Those guys mostly adults used to like to play games where they'd slap you on the hand and stuff like that. There were some young kids around. One thing I'll never forget. Up near Dalat we found some Montagnard families down near a creek. I have pictures of this. There was a group of twins, their sister and brother about eight kids total. I had them all give the peace sign, took a picture and sent that out as a Christmas card in December 1969. I still have one of those cards. We used to take candy to them. They were neat people to be with. There were only three or four guys in the Armament Section at any given time, mostly three. A guy by the name of Hammill (possibly Louis Hammil MOS 67N20 now deceased) from Oregon or some place out in that area. There was a Louis Belanger. Our "office" was a relatively larger sandbagged bunker out near the center of the revetment area lined with wood from the ammo boxes. Sometimes we slept there but we had our own tent and by March/April had scrounged enough wood to put in the floors and walls. I'm trying to think. I believe Belanger and I were the only two trained Armors there for a while. I remember there were complaints about mini-guns jamming. I remember going up in a Cobra but I can't remember who was flying. The Warrant Officer who was complaining and who normally flew in the front seat stayed back, so I was in the front seat. We flew outside of Phan Thiet and we emptied the grenades in an abandoned rice paddy area. Everything worked fine. All you had to do was hit the bottom of the sight now and then and it worked fine. The mini-gun in the pods on the wings worked great but not many people wanted to fly them. Only a few liked the dual mini-guns in the nose turret. Most preferred a mini-gun and a grenade launcher. It would take at least two hours to change a weapon in the turret. That grenade launcher was heavy and difficult to deal with. You could put a grenade launcher in either position or a mini-gun in either position, so they were not just a right or a left position weapon. We had one "double chunker" ship. I thought Phan Thiet was a beautiful place. A guy by the name of Mike Maher was a crew chief. Remember where the showers were at Phan Thiet? Well our tent was all the way down at the end. When it rained – well I have a picture of Mike standing in water up to his knees. There was a real lake down near the perimeter! I remember one night "Fang" came out to the flight line. We taped up his numbers. We put mini-guns on the inside and rockets on the outside plus dual minis in the front. He flew over to an NVA R&R center across the border and shot it up. The next day General Westmoreland came and wanted to know if we had been involved in any trans-border operations. Fang told him no. Westmoreland got into his helicopter and left. This was later in 1969. I remember returning to Phan Thiet one night as the fog started coming in. I'm riding in an H Model with a guy named Vince Turgeon was the crew chief. All the aircraft got into a line and were flying low and slow when we saw these tracers coming at us. You always wondered where in the heck they came from? As I remember we were busy all the time. We were always cleaning guns. I remember going to Vung Tau or Phan Rang to visit the Air Force 'shadow' crews. The Air Force clubs at Phan Rang were wonderful. Their

refrigerators were filled with six or seven different kinds of beer. It was really wonderful that they thought a poncho liner was the end of the world. I'd trade poncho liners for extra mini-guns – the whole gun. I'd guess in our Armament Shop we had at least six to eight extra guns. I remember the kid who did the IG inspection had been in class with me at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, so we didn't even talk about it. I remember we went swimming one day. We always got a high ranking in those inspections. Whenever a ship was down for maintenance we'd go through all the pods, all the guns, everything. I remember we always had to bore sight the weapons when the ship came out of maintenance. Basically bore sighting the rockets was just a wild guess. We had a little tube for the middle but that was about it. I remember once CPT Ipock came up to me and said that two rockets had smacked together right in front of him and that he didn't want that to happen again. Remember our CO was MAJ Scott Lyman. He was a Mormon and so was the First Sergeant. I remember being on guard duty and the radio was say, "The Mormon group is on the way." This meant that Top and the CO might visit your bunker. Remember everyone in the Troop had a scarf? I had one but never wore it. The only time I can remember wearing it was when I drove a truck from Phan Thiet to Ban Me Thuot. It took five days. I've got pictures of that. We saw elephants and kids from orphanages. It was a beautiful drive. I made a DVD at Christmas. I have a picture of my dad in front of his tent in 1943 and a picture of me in front of mine in 1969 and I gave it to my kids. At BMT there was a guy named Gary Moore, an Armor, Hammil, myself and Belanger were all in the Armament Shop at the same time. We shared space with some of the Cobra crew chiefs. Lon and I can't remember his full name now. One armament guy always went out with each mission so we could help load, especially rockets, but also fill the mini-gun trays. We went to Duc Lap. Most of the time we'd ride out in an H model but sometimes in the back of a LOH. I loved that because I'd take pictures. Once I remember going in a LOH low level from Phan Thiet to Phan Rang. He let me fly a little. He stayed right over that road. Scared the living daylights out of me! Honest to God – I did not look at my slides until just last year. And I don't know why it took me so long to do that. Concerning the events in early November 1969, I remember talking to George Grega just before he went out. I remember he had less than two weeks to go and asked him why he was going out. He seemed to think he needed one more trip out. I remember the rifles in the ground and the fly over during the memorial. I remember our Kit Carson Scout – about 5' 10" real skinny little devil. He'd been in the NVA. Once we captured some guys and he was tough on them. He was just the meanest thing you'd ever see. On my DVD I have this picture of an NVA flag we captured two or three guys. If the Scouts had problems with their mini-guns we'd work on them as well. We'd replace barrels and put firing pins in. We could also replace the whole gun if need be. Really those systems were very easy to work on. We used the bullet catcher all the time. That was really a good way to clear the gun before you started working on it. I remember when I first got in-country, I was standing over a gun with the barrels pointed between my legs. I turned the barrels and there was a round still in the chamber. It fired and I was a true believer of the bullet catcher immediately after that! There was another kid by the name of Scott Vaughn from Deacon, Illinois. He was in maintenance. I forgot the pilot he went up with in an H model, no it was a Cobra. Something serious happened, they autorotated down, landed on the skids and were not injured. He didn't want to fly after that. There was a Warrant Officer in our unit who had an uncle in the Air Force at Cam Ranh.

June 1969

D Troop continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Div's TAOR during this month.

On the 1st, **PFC Richard Jacob Sigworth**, Richie to those who served with him, and the Vietnamese Kit Carson Scout **SGT An**, his complete name is not known, were killed during a ground sweep by C Troop Blues. SGT An's photo appears on the last page of the 1968-69 C Troop Yearbook. The Wall database gives Sigworth's tour start date as 16 Jul 1968 and his MOS as 11B10.

SSG Tom Thompson describes the events as follows: I completed the MACV Recondo School on 29 March and returned to C Troop where I began to work on LRRP tactics with one squad from the Blues. The idea of having 'real LRRPs' in an Air Cav Troop did not catch-on. But we worked on helicopter repelling techniques and became sort of a 'special squad.' On this day, my squad of five, including the Vietnamese Kit Carson Scout, was inserted on the top of a hill in the Bong Son area while the rest of the Blues went in a different LZ not far from us. The Scout had once been in the NVA. He hadn't been with C Troop more than about three weeks. I got to know him pretty well. I remember once drinking a beer and he'd just drink coke. There was a village at the bottom of the hill and we followed a heavily worn trail down the hill toward the village. I was walking point. The trail passed through a boulder field. As we moved around and over the large rocks, I saw a cave opening out of the corner of my eye. When I focused on it, I saw the naked skin of a person's knee in the cave and I quickly fired my M-16 into the opening. My squad moved up as did 1LT Joe Shepherd with the rest of the platoon. We inspected the cave and saw a small hole to the right. Richie Sigworth was the smallest guy we had, so he dropped his gear, took out his pistol and flashlight and went into the hole. I remember seeing just his feet sticking out. He shouted back that he couldn't see anyone. When I told him to look up above him, he let out a big scream but didn't fire. He'd seen the Vietnamese who apparently didn't have a weapon. Richie grabbed the guy and came out of the hole. This guy could have been a tax collector or a pay officer because of the money and documents we found with him. Our Scout came up and started talking with this guy. This lasted maybe 10 to 15 minutes. Richie was still calming down from the adrenaline surge of going into the cave. Suddenly, the Scout grabs his M-16 and starts running down to a cave area. We stayed with the VC. We trusted the Scout because he had saved us from booby traps and enemy bunkers before. We hear some AK-47s firing and looked down to see the Scout running away from the cave. The Scout almost made it clear when he was shot in the back and went down. I started moving toward the firing. Richie was right behind me. The rest of my squad and LT Sheperd were also moving with us. We came to some more boulders and paused for a second. I moved through a gap in the rocks first and as Richie came though it, he was shot and went down yelling that he'd been hit in the back. I moved to him and rolled him over. He had a sucking chest wound and just died in my arms. He was a young guy, I'd guess about 18. He had blond hair and some tattoos. He was basically a street-wise kid from Ohio but I considered him a very good soldier. As I remember, LT Shepherd moved up and the aircraft shot up the area where the AK fire had come from but I don't know if they hit anyone. After a while, we collected up the two bodies and our tax collector, moved to a clear area and were extracted. We turned the VC over to the white mice and I never heard any more about him. Since I've been active in Heycav, I learned that Rod Eve was also on this operation. Note: The Wall database indicates that Richie started his tour on 16 July 1968 but he did not deploy with C Troop from Fort Campbell.

On the 3rd, MAJ Joseph A. Tobin assume command of C Troop replacing MAJ Jerry G. Ledford.

Also for the 3rd, SSG Tom Wells wrote the following piece he dates 3 June and titles 'The Keystone Cops:' In June we were going on an operation as a blocking force for an armored cavalry unit south of Camp Enari. They heard that there was a company of NVA in the area. The blocking force would consist of three platoons, but my 2nd platoon would be on the other side of a river. I didn't think we had a big enough force to cover our side of the river, but was told by the armored cavalry that most of the enemy was on the other side where the CO and the other two platoons were. I felt that the terrain was too thick and their armor would never get through it. We set up anyway, from the river to the top of the hill, with about eight positions of three men each – and waited. By mid-afternoon, CPT Bruegger informed me that they had broken through on his side without any results. About an hour and a half later he called to say that the armored cavalry was bogged down and wouldn't be able to get through to me. I asked if they were coming on foot because I would have to let the men know that there were friendlies on foot coming through. He said "Are you kidding? This is armored

cavalry. They are not coming on foot. They are too busy pulling their vehicles out, so get the platoon together and meet me on the red ball.” A few minutes passed and one of my positions opened fire up the hill. I drove up and was told that they saw NVA moving up the slope about a hundred yards down a trail. I drove down the trail and found a couple of ruck sacks but no NVA. I went back and informed the CO about the situation. He said to pull out and move up to the red ball. We got organized and started driving up the hill. My vehicle was always in the lead. When my driver, whose name was PVT Holycross, spotted an NVA in the bush, he started yelling “Dink in the bush.” Two thirds of the platoon jumped off their vehicles and looked like the Keystone Cops chasing him. I then told Holycross to drive after them over the rough terrain to try to catch up with them. They were firing their weapons on fully automatic and never hitting him. I finally caught up with them at the edge of an open rice paddy where they were still shooting at him. I then grabbed a megaphone and started instructing them to get on semi-automatic and to take well-aimed shots. I felt like I was back at Ft. Bragg on a firing range – Are you ready on the left and right. The NVA made it across the rice paddy about 300 yards when somebody finally dropped him. SGT Nye ran across the rice paddy to check him out. I was worried about the vehicles back on the road so I sent half of them back. He checked the body out and found out he was a Captain in the NVA. SGT Nye, who later landed in the ARP platoon in A troop with me before he DEROS, took a pistol and holster off of him. I told him it would make a nice souvenir and for him to keep it. I had the platoon file by the body a few at a time. It could be the only one they ever saw. I called the CO and told him of the situation. There may have been a whole company of NVA in the area. The most we could account for was maybe a platoon size element. With the armored cavalry bogged down, we couldn’t exploit the situation any more. We then went back to the red ball and back to Camp Enari. That was the end of the Keystone Cops. PVT Holycross was a big guy, 6’4”, and had been in a lot of trouble in the troop. He had been in two other platoons and I guess it was my turn to get him. I made him my driver rather than send him to one of my young sergeants. I explained to him that people disappear in Vietnam all the time. I think he got my drift and settled in. Tamis, my gunner, would help to influence him to be a good soldier. After I left D Troop, he went back to his old ways and landed up in LBJ as we called the Long Binh Jail just north of Saigon. You had to be in big trouble to get there.

On the 8th, A Troop'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 Troop was credited with seven NVA killed, the artillery and airstrikes with 14 more; and three AKs were captured.

On the 9th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop AH-1G #68-15047 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took three hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the top of the engine compartment and the main rotor blade system, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16241 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took five hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the tail section, engine compartment, and cockpit, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired.

Also on the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an AVDAC record for A Troop AH-1G #67-15575. The record states this was Combat Incident Damage caused by other combat by ground fire less than .50 cal in size while the aircraft was on an armed escort mission. There were no casualties. Search and rescue operations were not required. The helicopter was recovered.

Also for action on the 12th, the following HHT/7/17th Cav personnel were awarded the Air Medal via HQ 1st Aviation Brigade General Orders 5480, TC 320, dated 29 Oct 1969: SP5 Lund, Charles A. and SP5 Ball, Vernie C. Jr.. The citation reads in part - these men distinguished themselves by exceptionally valorous actions while serving as crewmen on a helicopter during a medical evacuation mission. A civic action team came under heavy enemy attack. Two units had attempted to reach the team and been forced back. Most of the team members were critically wounded. When it was decided to make another attempt they immediately volunteered. Because of the lack of visibility the aircraft was forced to hover out of ground effect down a faint dirt trail. They were an invaluable aid in keeping the pilot oriented, guiding the pilot around the numerous obstacles and mines near the LZ. Twice they made the perilous journey to evacuate the wounded soldiers. SP5 Ball in an email to SP5 Lund wrote: LTC Bean was one pilot and WO Philip was the other. Looking for volunteers. This was Ball's. I just volunteered!

On the 13th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16653 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the cargo section and cockpit, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

Also on the 13th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop OH-6A #67-16559 flown by CPT N.M. Richard and co-pilot CPT C.B. Murphy [his full name is Charles Bart Murphy]. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and accident summary reads: While hovering the tail rotor struck a steel post in POL causing damage to the tail rotor system.

On the 14th, A Troop 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 Troop 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 MAJ 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 that appeared ready to surrender. The "Kit Carson" scout called for him to stand up and come forward, but he didn't move. Our Scouts had returned for fuel and we were 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.

On the 19th, the following 7/17th Cav personnel were awarded the Air Medal via HQ 1st Aviation Brigade General Orders 2832, TC 320, dated 19 Jun 1969:

SGT Clark, Thernell S. – HHT – 28 Jul 1968 to 17 Oct 1968
SP4 Glass, Ralph V. II – HHT – 15 Jun 1968 to 5 Dec 1968
SP4 Jost, Stanley – HHT – 17 Dec 1968 to 10 Jan 1969
SP5 Lund, Charles A. – HHT Troop – 29 Oct 1968 to 18 Nov 1968

PFC Masi, Andrew – B Troop – 18 Mar 1969 to 20 Apr 1969
SP4 Snow, John C. – HHT Troop – 10 Dec 1968 to 1 Mar 1969
SP4 Sumpter, Mitchell – HHT Troop – 12 Dec 1968 to 30 Dec 1968.

SP5 Charley Lund provides: The Aviation Section in HHT had no assigned gunners. All of us were crew chiefs. We would use new guys or volunteers as gunners. We would rotate ships a lot. I remember Mitch Sumpter being a crew chief //insert material from TAPE 1 A//.

On the 20th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for Headquarters Troop OH-6A #66-17829 flown by 1LT J.W. Pilote. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads: An AH-1G hovering by caused the main rotor blades of this OH-6A to flex down and strike the tail boom as the OH-6A was shutting down with all switches and fuel off and very low rotor RPM. Inspection continues to determine all the damage.

On the 21st, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16653 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the cockpit, they continued flying but aborted the mission.

Also on the 21st, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop OH-6A #65-12994 flown by an unnamed crew. One crew member was injured. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took four hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the cockpit, tail section, and forward main rotor system, they continued flying but aborted the mission.

On the 24th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #66-17788 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack approach target area, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the forward main rotor system, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 25th, A Troop was staging out of Dak To. The Blues had some guys who need to qualify at rappelling from a helicopter. This was the third phase of their training. The first would be to take advantage of the 30-foot tower near the NCO Academy at Enari and the second was showing them how to hook-up and exit from a parked Huey. SSG Bob Billman recalls:

I had been in the Army almost 15 years at that time and with A Troop's Blues since Oct 1968. I was the 3rd Squad leader and occasionally the Blue Platoon Sergeant. I had rappelled from a helicopter dozens of times. Normally I was the last guy to exit because I was checking all the others before they jumped out. Today I hooked up and went out first. The last thing I remember was being in that Huey. LT Casey later told me that the rope broke and that I fell between 35 and 50 feet. We were just on the side of the runway and the recent rains had made the ground soft, but I woke up in the hospital with multiple broken bones. My right heel was fractured and crushed, my pelvis was broken in two places and my lower back in six. My tailbone was knocked sideways so even today my X-rays look strange. After 11 months at Walter Reed, I was medically retired.

On the 26th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop OH-6A #66-07817 flown by WO1 A.M. Enochs. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and accident summary reads: Flying low level through Phan Rang Pass under orders from the flight leader and hit tree with chin bubble. Inspection continues to determine damages.

For May and June, A Troop claimed 124 NVA killed, 66 more by airstrikes and artillery, one captured plus 93 bunkers destroyed. They also captured one AK-50, a 122mm rocket, three AKs and an assortment of munitions.

CPT Roger Black summarizes his tour as follows: As for my jobs, I was only in C Troop for a few weeks and then went to A Troop as Snake platoon leader - the best job anyone could have asked for. I loved it. Had good, no, exceptional people in the platoon. Never had felt the comradeship before, nor since. The brotherhood of the Snake drivers was beyond comprehension. Close as brothers. The trust in one another, the caring, all of it was an experience like no other. This was my biggest thrill and greatest job. Just being associated with these guys. Next I went to Maintenance to replace CPT Joe Laehu. Only after I got that job, did I realize what the word relief meant. Joe really needed that break. It was the hardest, longest, least respected, most critical, maddening, adventure I ever undertook. Every morning you had all the pilots, crew chiefs, gunners, and infantry weighing heavily on your shoulders. It was quite different than being in a Snake leader and only worrying about four kamikaze pilots on the deck all day. It was a job I had no regrets giving up to someone else. Middle of the night engine checks were about as exciting as getting shot at. Then I had a stint as in the S-3 shop. Very low key job, can't remember really doing anything useful during that time. Did get to keep flying Snakes during that time, just not as often as I would have liked. Did fly C&C a bit, but nothing was akin to the Snakes. That was where my heart and soul was. Still is. I recently retired after 28 years with RJ Reynolds due to my hearing loss. Thank God for this computer as it has become my ear to the world.

The following is an edited version of article titled "Ganging Up, 7/17th Air Cavalry moves fast and hits hard" by SP4 Gerhard S. Bartmann that appeared in the June 1969 issue of Typhoon from I Field Force Vietnam. Editor's Note: The date for this operation was in April.

From afar, they look like ants shinnying down a thin thread dangling from a bird's belly. In fact, the silhouettes were a squad of air cavalymen from the 7th Armored Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry rappelling from choppers onto a hilltop late in the afternoon. They were the vanguard of a two-day reconnaissance-in-force operation in the highlands 40 miles south of Pleiku. The operation, which included an artillery platoon and an infantry company from the 4th Infantry Division, was placed under the operation control of the 7/17th commander, LTC Calvin R. Bean, Muskegon, Mich.

He explained that the squadron was the principal element, "because of the large area that must be covered, and the fact that we have the men and means to conduct this mission." Proficient through practice, the squad rappelled quickly onto the tree-covered hilltop. The faces of the men tensed as their eyes cautiously searched the surrounding terrain for signs of the enemy. After a brief orientation with the squad leader, called Littlejohn, the men set to work clearing a landing zone for the troopers who would come later. VC and NVA forces were using the surrounding hillsides as a staging and resting area. The 7/17th was sent to locate the enemy, destroy supplies and camping areas and gather intelligence. The hot mid-afternoon sun drenched the fast-working team in sweat, changing the color of their fatigue jackets from olive to black-green. Occasionally, a branch snapped loudly and unexpectedly, causing the men to freeze momentarily, and then grab for their M-16s. Within an hour, the ruddy, sun-burned faces of the squad had relaxed. The radio telephone operator called the rest of the troops in the rear staging area to say the LZ was ready. It was already late in the afternoon, but the operation had to begin. Colonel Bean gave the order to move out. Equipped with several canteens of water, light field gear, food, ammo, and weapons, the men of Alpha and Delta troops piled into the choppers and deployed to the landing zone. Two Cobras and Light Observation Helicopters (called Loaches) kept constant surveillance over the troop movement into the landing zone, drowning out the initial noise of cracking twigs and branches as the men started patrolling. One troop headed south; the other moved east down the slopes from the LZ. The noise of the choppers died away as the ships returned to base camp.

Nightfall came soon, forcing Alpha Troop to find a suitable night location quickly. Pausing a couple hundred yards from the crest of the hill, the troop rested on one of the slopes in the darkening forest. Deciding it was too dark to proceed further, they set up defensive positions, ate their Cs and began

bedding down. Sitting in small groups, the dust-covered infantrymen talked quietly about the mission, terrain and weather. Voices floated in whispers among the men until the last traces of light slipped behind the hills and the myriad sounds of lizards, insects and birds filled the night. Each man settled into position. Except for the shifting of guard duty, the Blues – the infantrymen – slept peacefully. As the sun rose, Alpha Troop shrugged off the initial chill of morning and headed down the slope and through the underbrush in search of enemy locations. Initial reports alleged that the enemy had evacuated the area a day or two before. Still, each man inched along cautiously, trying to minimize noise. The lead man, trained in long-range patrolling, walked in a crouch, eyes shifting constantly to study each tree and bush. Within an hour the point man called for a halt as he spotted the first sign of an enemy camp: a wad of dirty rags. He took a squad forward to investigate and found the enemy camp 100 feet away. It seemed to be a platoon-size camp, apparently abandoned. Squads fanned out immediately for security. Two well-concealed, hastily-built shelters and several underground bunkers pockmarked the forested slope over a 100-yard radius. Tension eased as it became clear that the enemy had evacuated, leaving canteens, cooking utensils, food and documents.

One squad located a pen of clucking chickens, but visions of roast chicken dinner faded as the troop commander ordered his men to move out. Before leaving they destroyed the shelters and bunkers and gathered documents to take back for intelligence analysis. Throughout the morning, they marched through the brush and forest along VC trails. Late in the afternoon they were lifted out of the landing zone to begin reconnaissance somewhere else. For the Blues, this mission differed from many others only in location. Working in the same area of operations as the 4th Infantry Division, the 7/17th provides reconnaissance and security to all elements there. Another element supports Task Force South nearly 200 miles to the southeast. Yet another element fights for the 173rd Airborne Brigade along the northern coast of II Corps. Besides infantrymen, the 7/17th boasts two other backbones: the Cobras and Loaches. On a wall outside the squadron's offices hangs a plaque which indicates the feeling the pilots of Slicks, Cobras and Loaches have for their part of the mission:

HIGH FLIGHT

Oh, I have slipped the surly bounds of earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings,
Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth,
The sun-split clouds, and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of; wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hovering there,
I've chased the shouting wind along,
And flung my eager craft through footless halls of air,
Up, up, delirious along burning blue,
I've topped the windswept heights with easy grace
Where never lark or even eagle flew,
And while with silent lifting mind, I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space
Put out my hand and touched the face of God. By John Gillespie McGee Jr.

Because of its versatility, the 7/17th is often called on to perform operations that have stymied others. "It seems that whenever a unit we support wants something done in a hurry," said a soldier of Delta Troop, "they give it to us." The unit was called on recently to search an area in the highlands west of Kontum. An American patrol had been ambushed there and no subsequent reconnaissance of the area had been possible. Other units had tried but had been driven back by enemy concentrations. The missions began early in the morning with the men, the pilots and the choppers

standing by at Camp Enari helipads, waiting for the weather to clear in Kontum. The Blues, carrying light field gear, sat around the choppers waiting for the word to move out. “It’s the boring wait before a mission that really wears us out,” said a squad leader as he sat in the shade of his chopper. “When we’re out there, we really don’t have much time to think about being tired.” The Slick pilots talked with their crew chiefs and door gunners while the Cobra and Loach pilots checked last minute details. An hour before noon the Slicks flew Alpha and Delta Troops to a landing pad outside outside Kontum. There, in a short briefing, the operation commander said: “There are no friendlies out there. If something moves, get it.”

Delta Troop remained behind as a reaction force, while Alpha Troop went out to scout the site for equipment and traces of the enemy. As the first troop-carrying Slicks arrived at the landing zone in the middle of a field of elephant grass 10-feet high, the Loaches and the Cobras continued their constant surveillance of the area. The Cobras circled widely, several hundred feet about the jungle, while the Loaches hovered like insects, darting here and there a few feet above the treetops. As the infantry patrol gathered in a clearing, the Loaches’ responsibilities increased. They are primarily reconnaissance aircraft, usually carrying one or two observers plus the pilot. Initially they were to scout the entire path the infantry was to take that afternoon, attempting to draw fire if the enemy was still hiding in the area. They did this before the Blues landed. Now the Loaches began the second part of their mission – guiding the infantrymen along the safest, most accessible route to their destination. Capable of flying along the contours of the land, seeming to barely avoid crashing, the Loaches have developed a remarkable record for reconnaissance. “Once,” recalls Colonel Bean, “I was with one of my company commanders in the field when a Loach observer reported spotting a Chinese grenade on the ground near an abandoned hut. Within 45 minutes we came to the reported site, and sure enough, we picked up the Chi-Com grenade. If they can spot things that small, they’re uptight. It’s a pretty effective way to fight a war.”

“We have three main elements in conducting our mission,” said Colonel Bean. “The Blues, the Loaches and the Cobras. Without any one of them we couldn’t accomplish our mission. Each depends on the other.” As the patrol moved along a wide path that reportedly was a major VC infiltration route, the two Cobras circling high overhead opened up with a barrage of rocket and heavy weapons fire on an area about 300 yards away. “That’s to make sure nobody’ll be waiting for us where the patrol got hit last time,” said the veteran platoon sergeant acting as point man. “Those Cobras can spray an area the size of a football field and leave nothing alive.” “If our Blues or our scouts run into trouble, we rely heavily on our gunships,” said Colonel Bean. “In fact, the enemy is more reluctant to fire on our scouts because of the Cobras. If he does fire at the Loaches and the pilot or observers drop a flare, the Cobras could wipe out any number of the enemy. He knows this. And he knows that if he cuts loose on us, he’s going to get those Cobras right down his teeth.” The patrol continued late into the afternoon. The Loaches kept circling and weaving ahead of the column of moving soldiers. As the infantrymen neared the ambush site, the Cobras moved closer to the ground, prepared to fire. On a steep-sloped hill, covered with heavy underbrush, the patrol halted. A member of the unit that was ambushed here identified the spot. A thorough search turned up numerous empty magazines, empty cartridges, a burned field pack and a steel helmet. Nothing else. The patrol returned home. Twice before other units had attempted to penetrate the area but had failed each time. “Even though we didn’t find anything significant, we consider the mission a success,” said MAJ James McCracken, the executive officer of the 7/17th. “No one else had been able to go into that region, and reach the ambush site. The 7/17th went in there and proved it could be done.”

A Troop Adopts the Checkmate Callsigns

1LT David Sims and CW2 Richard Turnley provided: Shortly before MAJ Maxson assumed command, A Troop adopted the Checkmate callsigns. Prior to that we used ‘Ruthless Red’ (Scouts),

White (Guns), and Blue (Lift). David suspects young CPT Holbrook was very involved, as he was the one that presented the decision and a detailed narrative to us. We became the Checkmate element with these subdivisions: Pawn (ARP), Bishop (Scouts), Knight (Guns), Rook (Lift), King (the Troop CO), Queen (the XO), and when we had a designated landing pad, it was Chessboard. The numeric parts of the callsign were generally decided by the aircraft commanders picking from the available options. The Scouts used 10-19, the Guns used 20-29, the Lift used 30-39, the ARP used Pawn 6 or X-ray. So when David came a Huey AC, he took the callsign Rook 35 and Rich was Rook 34.

CPT Holbrook provided: Actually it was CPT Carl King of the Gun Platoon and I who came up with this idea. I think it was the word 'checkmate' that fascinated us. We thought that A Troop was a pretty good combat unit and that when the NVA messed with us, it was checkmate time - as in game over! I think this was actually near the end of MAJ Dick Marshall's tour. I remember when Carl and I talked it over with Dick, he was OK with the idea. We told him his call sign would be 'King.' The only person that wasn't excited about the idea was the XO, CPT Fred Rosenberger, and that was because he would be 'Queen' in the AO. He was OK with the 'checkmate' call signs but he didn't like the word 'Queen.' He didn't fly in the AO all that much so this wasn't that big an issue. I remember that the Squadron CO wasn't too happy with these call signs either; maybe because we would not be Ruthless Riders anymore - I'm not certain. Whenever he was flying in the AO with us, we didn't use the Checkmate call signs. There was one of detail worth mentioning - we didn't use the traditional Army '6' convention. For example, the Scout Platoon Leader was just Bishop but not Bishop 6. This was actually a throw back to the earlier days in A Troop when the Scout Platoon Leader was simply Red but not Red 16 or any number. When I started playing Scouts my call sign was Red 17. When I became the Platoon Leader, I still used Red 17 because everyone knew that was me. Well, MAJ Marshall one day in the AO said over the radios, 'You are not Red 17; you are Red. Got it?' That ending my Red 17 era! I have a flight helmet with a Bishop painted on the front visor cover. I remember many people painted chess pieces on their helmets. In my mind's eye, I didn't think the Checkmate call signs caught on all the well during my time; but it seems that A Troopers were still using it in the 1970s so I guess it survived the test of time.

SP4 Donald E. Barlow recalls: I joined A Troop's Blues in Sep 1968 and served with them until Sep 1969. My nickname was Killer.

SFC Glendon Bates recalls: I joined B Troop in March as the Mess Sergeant even though my real MOS was 'Club Manager.' When I got there the Mess Hall had a concrete floor and was really in pretty good physical condition with screens on the windows. I'd heard tales of the old days with lots of sand, wooden floors, etc. I have pictures of two black men who were the cooks at the time. One was an SP5 Bagley. I don't recall the name of the other man. He was a SP4 and a tall man. They were good cooks and worked hard. I stayed with B Troop until I DEROSed in January 1970 while we were still at Ban Me Thuot. The mess at Ban Me Thuot was a tent picked in the dirt but lots of time it was just a muddy area.

WO Gary Brydges, who served with B Troop at Phan Thiet, recalls: I don't like chicken to this day. I just remember having chicken every other day it seemed like. I never was all that big a fan of chicken to begin with but it seemed to me that all we had was chicken, chicken, chicken. Powdered eggs and powdered mash potatoes and chicken was about all I remembered. The mess hall was located at the end of that wind tunnel between the pilots' tents and XO's and CO's huts. The wind would suck the sand up through there, at least early on. I think it got better once we got the PSP down and more things to keep the sand down. But you'd go to the mess hall and open the door, and your plate would be full of sand before you could get any food.