

July 1969

B Troop Moves to Camp Enari

About the 2nd, B Troop started moving from Phan Thiet to Camp Enari. B Troop had been told that this relocation would happen several weeks in advance, so it did not happen on a single day as other troop moves had been done in the past. SP5 Donald Storm recalls:

Based upon my memory right now of a letter I wrote home that I re-read last month, I will venture the official date will be July 2. My helicopter, 023, another slick, two LOHs and two Cobras were sent up the last full week in June 1969 as the advanced part to the move. The rest of the troop was to follow over the next 7-10 days from when we departed Phan Thiet for the last time. At Enari the two lift ships, mine and the other, were used for familiarization flights to places like Kontum and the Ira Drang Valley several times over the next week or so. I even remembering having a tussle with CPT Schissell over which of us would have that last mike cord on one of those flights, and I won! There was also a day that week when it was just my ship, a LOH and a Cobra, working as a single unit. The three of us reconned the Mang Yang Pass all by ourselves. I also remember having to do a 25-hour oil change, and approaching A Troop maintenance for a case of oil, and being laughed out the supply room for my insolence. They felt that if B Troop wanted to have the oil changed on their ship, well then, they should have shipped some oil along for me to use.

On the 4th, the VHPA Helicopter database has battle damage records for two C Troop OH-6As both flown by an unnamed crews while on recon missions. (1) #66-07875 took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the bottom engine comp. (2) #67-16573 took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the bottom engine comp. Both continued flying and were repaired in theater.

On the 5th, 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 on target, they took two hits 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 6th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15616 flown by WO1 P.G. Fogg. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads: Pilot attempted take off to a hover in revetment. The aircraft tail swung to the right and the tail rotor made contact with the revetment. Investigation continues to determine damages.

On the 7th, a D Troop jeep struck a mine while returning from a mounted mission killing **SSG Charles E. Smith, SP4 Colon D. Young, PFC Paul Edward Johnson, and SP5 Dana Leroy Mace**. The Wall database gives the following tour start and MOS data: Johnson, 12 Apr 1969, 11D10; Mace, 2 Aug 1968, 11B40; Smith, 11 Mar 1969, 11B40; Young, 17 Oct 1968, 11B10. This data clearly supports the idea the SP5 Mace was a short-timer when he volunteered for this mission.

SGT Dick Jones recalls: I served with D Troop from Nov 1968 until Jan 1970. I was on a 106-RR jeep until June 1969 and then was a sergeant in the motor pool. I'll never forget the day these four gave their lives when their jeep hit an anti-tank mine. I was in the motor pool at this time. I remember a Huey returning the mine-damaged jeep to our area. While it was a mess, this was also a salvage opportunity for us. We took anything that was still good off it and replaced it with junk. Then we loaded it in the back of 2 ½ and took it to the 704th TC. We told them we needed to DX it. I remember walking in to talk to one of the sergeants. 'Oh, we can't do that,' he told me. I asked him to come out and look at it. 'Oh, my God – of course!' It was about this same time, July 1969, that Delta Troop adopted the Snoopy Patch. I am pretty certain it was CPT Bruegger's driver (but I don't know his name) who first drew the Snoopy Patch in color on a piece of card board. He bunked with the Headquarters section guys including Dally, the supply clerk. I remember I got drunk on

night and came into the room where he bunked. I not only woke him up but managed to put a footprint in the middle of his drawing. Not one of my better moments. The Troop had some shield shaped patches made. There was a button hole in a thin, rectangular tab at that top of the shield that we used to attach it to our fatigue shirts. He also painted one on his jeep. I wish I could remember his name.

SP5 Bob Chase recalls: I served with the 568th TC Detachment with A Troop from July 1968 until July 1969. Dana Mace was a Medic with A Troop who was killed when he was on patrol with D Troop. SGT Dick Jones helped me with information that led me to Dana's hometown and eventually I talked with his mother. He had five years of service with the Army when he died. He was a married man with two children. He was due to DEROS in August but still went on this patrol. I heard that he knew a short-cut back from their patrol area and this was why he was in the lead vehicle. He was always a top-notch soldier in my eyes.

SSG Tom Wells wrote the following piece he calls 'The worst of times and the best of times:' D Troop was out in our AO when one of the worst incidents happened. We had been out for about three or four days and had two more to go when we got a call on our radios of an incident happening with the 3rd platoon. I was about 20 miles away with the 2nd platoon working by ourselves, as usual, in our own AO. The other two platoons were closer into Camp Enari working their own AO. We had just found a cache of ammunition, but it was old stuff. We were digging it out of the ground and loading it onto our ¾ ton truck. There was a lot of commotion on the radio but we couldn't make out all that was going on. The CO radioed me and informed me of a problem and to pack it in and head back to Enari. We finished getting the ammo out and headed for the red ball. We weren't exactly sure what happened until we got back to camp and found out the tragedy that hit the 3rd platoon. Four personnel were killed instantly when the lead vehicle ran over an anti-tank mine. Running over an anti-tank mine with a jeep would be devastating, with no survivors. The platoon sergeant was killed, SSG Charles E. Smith, his driver and gunner and the headquarters medic. SSG Smith was a young, intelligent NCO who could have advanced far in the Army. We normally only had one medic in the troop, and he would stay where most of the troops were deployed. I really don't ever remember having a medic in my platoon. I had an SOP if anything serious happened to immediately call a Medivac. The loss of four men at one time was quite a tragedy in itself. With the way we operated in conducting ourselves to cover the AO in so many days, we didn't have the time to look for mines. It was just a matter of time before something like this would happen. Later that month the best thing that happened to Delta Troop was that we received a lot of higher ranking personnel, such as Lieutenants and E7 Platoon Sergeants. We were working for a long time with just, I believe, one Officer, CPT Bruegger. We were authorized five Officers and three E7s and were always short about 1/3 of the troop strength. We even got a new First Sergeant, SGT Richie. He was a terrific First Sergeant. Later on, when it was my turn to be a First Sergeant I always tried to emulate how he would run the troops. He had an open-door policy 24 hours a day, whether in the Orderly Room or after hours in his hooch. I would often go down to see him, even after I left the troop. I was always welcomed. He was far from being a REMF which meant Rear Echelon Mother F---er. He spent time out in the field where a lot of First Sergeants stay hidden in their Ivory Tower orderly room and never leave the base. He was interested in how we operated, and why. I showed him how we operated in the field and pointed out things that would tell us of the enemy situation. I could honestly say that I never had a finer First Sergeant who was always thinking of his men. He was a real professional soldier. One of the E7s we received came from A Troop. He was the Scout Platoon Sergeant. As the story goes, he was shot through his chicken plate one day so he decided that his flying days were over. He was not a young guy and I guess he wanted to collect his pension. He was a tough old bird who could handle himself in a fight. I don't recall his name, but he was a Turk who had lived in Russia. When he was 17 years of age the German army attacked Russia and he joined them to fight against the Russians. At war's end he

landed up in a German Special Forces unit in the Italian Alps and said his unit surrendered the day after Hitler's birthday in 1945. He made his way to the United States where he joined the American army and fought in the Korean War, and now in Vietnam. Most people didn't like him. He was tough on his platoon. I found him interesting and we got along well together. We would sit around for hours with him telling me about WWII and the Korean War and me telling him about my first tour in Vietnam in which he seemed very interested.

Also on the 7th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop OH-6A #66-17829 flown by WO1 G.L. Biermann 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 returned to Vietnam in May 1971 to serve with C/3/17th Cav. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

At Artillery Hill Airstrip approximately 2 miles NW of Pleiku Air Base, 1LT Pospisil, OH-6A IP, was giving WO1 Biermann transition training. The IP demonstrated two running landings to the pilot and then turned control of the aircraft over to him. WO Biermann was preparing to execute a running landing and the IP was talking him through the maneuver. They were flying a relatively wide traffic pattern as this allowed the pilot more time to set himself up for the maneuver and also did not force the IP to rush through his instruction. They had just turned on base leg which placed them 50 meters north of the shore of Lake Bien Ho. They were at 200 feet AGL with an airspeed of 60 knots. The engine suddenly quit accompanied by a loud noise in the engine compartment. The IP immediately took the controls and lowered the collective. A steep tree-covered ridgeline lay immediately to their front. The IP elected to pull pitch and clear the ridge rather than putting the aircraft down in the trees as the area afforded no suitable landing areas. (Their high rate of descent necessitated the pulling of additional pitch to clear the ridge). After clearing the ridge they then were over a heavily wooded area with low airspeed and rotor RPM (Due to the application of pitch in clearing the ridgeline). The IP dove the aircraft to the left in an attempt to gain airspeed and reach a clear landing area on the lake shore. The flight path took them over a narrow bay of the lake and when it became apparent that their glide would not stretch to the eastern shore of the bay, the IP flared the aircraft and executed a landing in the lake. The aircraft sank immediately in 15 feet of water and both IP and pilot were able to swim to shore which was 15 feet away. There were no injuries. The cause of the engine failure is unknown; the engine has been submitted for analysis.

1LT Pospisil provides: I remember thinking that since we had just refueled any crash into the trees would surely result in a serious fire. Those ideas left me when I realized we were going to land in the water. Trying to swim with all your flying gear on is no easy matter. I remember that our flight helmets gave us some much needed buoyancy. I also remember that it seemed to take us 'forever' to get to the shore.

On the 13th, the VHPA Helicopter database has battle damage records for two B Troop OH-6As flown by unnamed crews while on recon missions. (1) #67-16612 took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the cargo section. (2) #67-16620 took four hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the bottom cockpit, cargo section, and main rotor blade system. Both continued flying and were repaired in theater.

Also on the 13th, the VHPA Helicopter database has accident record for A Troop AH-1G #6715576 flown by WO1 M.J. Sanchez. The accident summary reads as follows: Pilot was hovering the aircraft out of the revetment and noticed strike of the tail rotor on something. He placed the aircraft safely on the ground. Incidental damage.

On the 14th, **SP4 Phillip Chris Petsos** was killed while serving with B Troop's Blues. The Wall database gives his tour start date as 13 Oct 1968 and his MOS as 11B20. B Troop's Morning Report stated he died at grid coordinates ZA1571. Several soldiers state that CPT Charles Bart Murphy was

the leading the Blues in this action. He attended one of the VHPA Reunions in Washington D.C. He stated that he was seriously wounded, was evacuated to Zuma Hospital in Japan on 28 July, and eventually medically retired from the Army. The Morning Report states he was reassigned to the 71st Evac as were E5 Billy Smallwood and PFC Henry Raleigh because of wounds received on this date. Additionally, the VHPA Helicopter database has two battle damage records for B Troop OH-6As flown by unnamed crews while on recon missions. (1) #67-16559 took one hit from grenade type exploding weapon which hit the bottom cockpit. (2) #67-16612 took five hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the left cockpit, main rotor blade system, top tail section, and bottom cockpit. Both continued flying and were repaired in theater.

SP5 Donald Storm recalls: We were staging out of Kontum that day. Apparently, an ARVN unit with an America advisor made contact, the enemy disengaged and started to flee the scene. The advisor requested a blocking force and eventually B Troop was given the mission to insert the Blues. MAJ Lyman was flying C&C. Three Lift ships cranked up and the 21 Blues loaded up. I was the crew chief on the lead ship flown by 1LT Vessey, the platoon leader. [Editor's note: After lots of research we believe this person's correct name is 1LT James M. Keally.] We flew generally southward from Kontum and then arched broadly to the southwest with a short final descent heading north. The selected LZ was a "dream." It was a good ¼ mile wide, with no obstructions of any kind, and was covered with nothing but green flowing grasses. We started to set down in the center of the LZ when MAJ Lyman radioed to move forward some more. We picked up and hopped forward a bit. As we set down again, he radioed to move forward again. So we hopped a short distance more to a point perhaps 200-300 feet from the approaching tree line. As we set down, the Blues began jumping out of the helicopters. At that moment, MAJ Lyman radioed LT Vessey to have the Blues change their radio frequencies. I realized that there was not enough time for Vessey to tell me this over the intercom, so I reached out immediately and grabbed the shoulder of the RTO as he was leaving the ship. I screamed at him that he was to change to the new frequency. A moment later, with the Blues off and deploying, we lifted out of the LZ. The other two ships followed and dropped their Blues. It had been an easy insertion. The three of us flew southward to a larger clearing near a series of Montagnard villages that we had begun to use for staging purposes. We shut down and relaxed a bit. After perhaps 5-10 minutes, LT Vessey set up the portable radio antenna and turned it on. Almost immediately MAJ Lyman was on the radio asking Vessey where he had been! Vessey replied where we were and the Major tersely said, 'Get back up here immediately. Something has happened.' He told Vessey to radio him when we were all airborne and ready for instructions. In a rush and panic, the three ships cranked up and took off. We flew northward in line with Vessey in the lead. When Vessey radioed we were all airborne, MAJ Lyman spoke in his measured way and gave us the details. The Blues had been ambushed, there were heavy casualties including dead and dying, the enemy was still besieging the Blues, and the first ship in to extract would be a medivac that would go directly to the 71st Evac at Pleiku. Since B Troop had only been operating in the Pleiku area for about two weeks, we had a Lift pilot from C Troop flying with us daily as a guide. Vessey radioed to him and asked if he knew how to get to the hospital. He replied 'Affirmative.' Vessey asked if he could take the lead and do the medevac, 'Affirmative.' With that Vessey rolled out to the right and looped to come in behind the second ship so it became the lead. This lead landed and took out seven Blues, all either dead or wounded and flew directly south to the hospital. A moment later Vessey took us into the LZ. MAJ Lyman radioed emphatically that we were not to leave the LZ regardless of what happened in the way of enemy fire until we had seven Blues on board! He repeated this command several times as we approached for touch down. Then in front of us, two arms holding an M-16 rose out of the grass. The arms looked so small and almost insignificant in the sea of flowing grass. MAJ Lyman radioed to set down on top of the arms and not to land short of the mark! This we did. In an instant Blues were hurling into my ship from both sides. I was concentrating on watching for weapons fire from the adjacent tree line. It seemed

like the Blues materialized out of no where! It only took 5-7 seconds to load, I carefully counted seven men and radioed 'We got seven!' to Vessey. The Blues were, of course, screaming, 'We are all here! We're here. Let's go! Get out of here!' There was indeed a look of fear and trauma on all their faces. We had landed in a straight trajectory heading north. Vessey lifted, turned 180 degrees and took off heading south. The image of that green tree line surrounding this LZ still hangs in my memory as I scanned it looking for any in-coming fire. The third ship followed us in and picked up the last seven Blues. Together we flew back to Kontum airfield. After landing, it was time for everyone to vent. It was from listening to the Blues talk among themselves and in answering the questions that Vessey asked that I learned the details about what had happened. Within a minute or two after the insert, the Blues were ambushed by a long line of heavy fire coming from the tree line. The RTO was the first to go with a round through his head. Almost half the Blues were hit or wounded. The only other specific injury I remember was the CPL who had his testicles sliced off by shrapnel. Unfortunately, I can not remember any other names and associated wounds. While the group was waiting at the airfield, one of the Blues discovered that he had a shrapnel slice on his lower leg. Vessey loaded him into our ship and we flew him to an Army Aid Station on the southwest edge of Kontum. We landed on their pad and this Blue went in to get aid. While we waited for him to return, several medics started to load a stretcher with a body bag on our ship. I was in a bit of mild shock and did not react at all to this. Vessey, however, asked them what this was all about. The medics realized their mistake and carried the stretcher back inside the station. A short time later, our Blue came out with his leg bandaged so we flew back to Kontum airfield. What I remember is that while we were gone, MAJ Lyman had ordered everyone to return to Enari. The other ships had departed leaving our load of Blues waiting for us under a nearby tree. It was now close to sunset so we loaded our Blues and flew back to Enari. There was one final pang of sadness as we flew over Holloway and the Evac compound. Looking down at it and knowing that people I knew were down there gave me pause to think about life and death and how it can change so suddenly. After landing back at Enari, it was a somber night. B Troop had indeed taken a hard hit that day. At least one was dead and others wounded. I have always carried the '50% casualty figure' in my head. I must have developed that idea from the remarks of the Blues. I know the first ship took out seven and we had one more, so that would be eight. This is all I can remember about that day. I did not recall SP4 Petsos' name until someone put it on Heycav. Hopefully, others will be able to add to this history.

During the 2001 Reunion, one of the 'docs' stated that SP4 Ed LeGar was the medic with B Troop's Blues when Petsos was killed and is still upset about the events of that day. SP4 Ed LeGar, during the 2011 Squadron Reunion, provided:

1LT Ken Wilson recalls: It has been 36-37 years so my memory may be somewhat fuzzy in some areas. I arrived in Vietnam on 2 April 1969 and 5 days later joined B Troop at Phan Thiet. I flew front seat with CPT Mike Law for my first couple of days and remember some major action at Song Mao where Mike scared the hell out of me. I was out of ammo and was just hanging on for the ride when at times we were as low as 100-200 feet. Due to a shortage of Cobra pilots I went in the back seat at 16 hours and was very fortunate to have CPT Harold Pardew fly my front seat for my first few missions. After a couple of months at Phan Thiet I deployed to An Khe with a team to start operations while the rest of the Troop packed up and moved to Pleiku. We operated out of Pleiku from approximately June to August. I got sick from Typhus around the 1st of July and spent about ten days in the hospital at Pleiku. I had a severe weigh loss and was going to be grounded for 30 days. A couple of days before I was to be released from the hospital MAJ Scott Lyman came into the Quonset hut and told me the Blue Platoon had been ambushed and seven guys were wounded or killed. He asked me if I would take the Blues for 30 days (even though I was Armor) until he got a new Infantry Lieutenant. I said OK. I became Blue 1, which was an honor, and actually got attached to the guys and stayed on as the Blue 1 for about five months. We operated out of Pleiku for a

couple of months but really did our daily operations northwest of An Khe. We flew thru the Mang Yang Pass almost every day and it was one heck of a ride with the buffeting, high winds coming through the pass.

1LT Woody McFarlin recalls: We were working an area southwest of Kontum. We inserted the Blues but I am not certain what circumstances led up to that decision. We didn't have an aircraft down so it had to be some sort of intelligence gathering mission. A pretty heavy firefight developed when they wanted to extract the Blues. I was the third Huey in – the last ship. I had to put a skid on a stump to stabilize it while everyone was getting aboard including the platoon leader that was CPT Murphy. He had been shot in the side and I believe there was another injured person as well. As they got on, my RPM started dropping off. I put on full beep and was only holding 6200 RPM. It was a pretty tight area to get out of. So when everyone got on I went around the inside of the open area to reach translational lift. When we did, I just aimed at the lowest set of trees. The low RPM horn was on but we made it out. The aircraft was starting to wobble as we cleared the trees. In the meantime the Scouts and Guns were yelling don't go there because that was the last place they'd seen the green tracers. Luckily we didn't take any hits as we came out. We took the two WIAs to the 71st Evac at Pleiku. I didn't take the RTO's body bag out – someone else did. I remember calling the medical people to tell them that I didn't want anyone on the PSP pad because I was having problems with the Huey. Naturally when I arrived, everyone was standing on the pad. We landed and when the people got out, we were able make a normal take off.

On the 15th, the following article was published in an unknown source. An Khe – Members of A Troop killed three VC and captured 10 in action near the city of An Khe. The Troop's Scout team (LOHs, piloted by 1LT William Luken of Cincinnati, OH and CPT John Pilote of Wilder, ID) spotted several hooches and livestock. Deciding to get a closer look, the Aero-Rifle Platoon was inserted. The "Blues," led by 1LT Mike Casey from Sallisaw, OK, detained a total of 21 suspects, five of whom were lifted out for interrogation. Later in the afternoon, the Troop was conducting a reconnaissance of an area southeast of Camp Enari, when Scout observer SGT Robert Kunkel from Comfrey, MI spotted a bunker with a single VC standing in it. SGT Kunkel fired his carbine, killing the enemy soldier. 1LT Kuken said, "The bunker was well camouflaged and the enemy was difficult to see. It took an experienced scout like SGT Kunkel to find his position." Later, the other Scout pilot, CPT Pilote, spotted and killed another enemy soldier hiding near the bunker. The Aero-Rifle Platoon was again inserted, and after a brief encounter, one more enemy soldier, a VC, was killed, and five more were detained.

On the 16th, 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 on target, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the right stabilizer, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 20th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16086 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the fuel cell, antenna, they made a forced landing and modified the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater and evacuated.

On the 21st, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #66-07886 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 two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the bubble, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 22nd, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16676" flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon

mission, during the attack on target, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the bubble, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

During the latter part of July, A Troop started working for the 1st Bde against the 18th, K-2, and 95B NVA Regiments during Operation Hines. The primary AO was between the Mang Yang Pass on QL19 and LZ Action. D Troop continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Division's TAOR during this month.

On the 30th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an AVDAC record for A Troop AH-1G #67-15575. The record states this was Operational Incident Damage caused by an accident during a maintenance test flight. There were no casualties. Search and rescue operations were not required. The helicopter was recovered.

Sometime during July an undocumented incident happened to B Troop OH-6A #65-12994. The Goldbook indicates it logged 29 hours in July with B Troop but no more for the next several months until it was involved in a training accident with two pilots from the 604th TC CO at Camp Holloway in January 1970. These Goldbook records suggest something happened to this aircraft and since B Troop could not make the repairs it was turned over to the 604th TC who started flying it after the repairs were complete.

CPT Dick Cross recalls: As mentioned earlier, I started flying LOHs in B Troop in January. B Troop had something of a rule – 6-months in Scouts was ‘enough’ and they’d move you someplace else. I was promoted to Captain about a week after B Troop relocated from Phan Thiet to Camp Enari. Right about that time I was assigned to HHT and served as a Liaison Officer for the Squadron. For some reason or other I stopped using my Super-8 camera about the time we left Phan Thiet. As I got more comfortable flying the OH-6A, I’d give the camera to my Observer/Gunner. I think them for getting me some really good shots of those months at Phan Thiet that are now on my DVD. As the LNO, I spent a lot of my time in the various operations centers of the ground units our Troops supported. One of my last assignments was to go to Ban Me Thuot East in advance of B Troop’s relocation there. I DEROSed just before they made that move. In 1970 and 1971 I served another tour in Vietnam with various units of the 1st Air Cav Division – especially B/1/9th Cav – back flying LOHs!

August 1969

D Troop continued to perform reconnaissance and security missions in the 4th Division's TAOR during August. SSG Tom Wells wrote the following piece he calls ‘Functioning in the Field:’

In August, we did not spend much time in the AO. The 1st and 3rd got new platoon leaders and new E7’s, platoon sergeants and we spent most of the month reorganizing ourselves with the new personnel. I received a new 1LT, but he was like a fish out of water. He was a pilot and I only had him for about three weeks. I don’t know if the CO told him, or if he came up with the idea himself, that when we went to the field I would be in charge of the platoon. When we came back in out of the field, he would take over the maintenance and inspection of the vehicles while we were back in base camp. This did not work out too well. After 10 days the men came to me and complained that he was driving them crazy. Not with only the inspections, but he had them take everything out of the bunkers, paint them white and put everything back in. It looked attractive, but wasn’t necessary. He did such a good job, I told him he didn’t need to be hanging around anymore and that he should go back to where the Officers lived and stay there until the next time we went out. He was moved before we went back to the field. I didn’t understand how things worked. A pilot would get grounded and they would have to find some kind of a job for him. That was like telling me that I needed to go to another troop and fly helicopters without any experience. The way the platoon was organized, our scout section had four jeeps with a 50 caliber in the back, and M-60 where the vehicle commander sat, and a driver. We needed 12 scouts to fill those four jeeps. Our anti-tank section of two 106’s consisted of eight soldiers, a driver, a commander, a gunner and a loader. The

infantry squad consisted of 12 men. We moved the men around OJT in all sections because we never knew where our strength was going to have to be. The infantry section was in charge of the minigun that we had put on the back of their ¾ ton. We had trouble figuring out how to mount it. We took the gun down to Papasan in Pleiku and he made a cradle for the gun for us. We then mounted it in our ¾. We hooked it with batteries when we needed to fire. One day, after I transferred to A Troop, the vehicle was sitting up by the orderly room. As the story goes, no one was around it and all of a sudden it started firing and scared the hell out of the orderly room. 1SG Richie made them get rid of it. The men wanted to put butterflies on our M-60s like the lift ships, but I said no. If we got into a tight situation, we would be able to remove the M-60s from the jeeps and use them on the ground. We didn't have too many Audie Murphys who would stand up and be shooting the 50s in the open while taking enemy fire. At night we would get the troop together and circle the wagons. Sometimes my platoon would meet by ourselves and I would put my 106s and the minigun on the most likeable approaches of the enemy. We would also send out an LP at night and lay out Claymores. Normally we would set up in three man positions in our circle, one man up and two sleeping. We were never attacked at night or really probed because we had so much fire power. Once in a while someone would open up at night, mostly a new guy. I told the LPs if they felt threatened to toss a hand grenade, but not to give away their position. In the daytime, it was scouts up front. Two scout vehicles would cover each end of our front as we moved through the AO, one covering the other in a leap frog fashion looking for the enemy. The 106s would cover our flanks and the infantry section covered the rear. When something was found and it couldn't be handled by the scouts, we would bring up the infantry in good cavalry fashion.

On the 2nd, A Troop was worked to the east of An Khe when they observed numerous high speed trails, structures and over 60 bunkers. Chickens and livestock were seen in the area, so the enemy was near at hand. About 1530, one LOH reported that he was experiencing difficulties with the aircraft. It then lost power, crashed into some trees and burned. The VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record for A Troop OH-6A #66-17788 flown by an unnamed crew that suffered two injuries. The crew was seen departing the area with enemy soldiers following close behind but the foliage was too thick for the Blues to be inserted. At 1610, the downed crew was located in a small clearing about 1000 meters from the crash site and they were extracted by a medevac ship with a jungle penetrator. A series of intensive airstrikes were directed on the enemy positions that killed 23 NVA.

On the 3rd, A Troop found a high speed trail and followed it for eight miles. They found several NVA, bicycles, and bunkers along the way. All total the Guns and airstrikes killed ten NVA that day.

On the 4th, the VHPA Helicopter database has C Troop OH-6A #67-16619 sustaining battle damage to the fuel cell and taking one casualty. We believe this is the aircraft WO1 Bruce Carlson and SGT Scotty Stanton were flying. See the 9th for the details.

On the 6th, A Troop received heavy AW fire from a large NVA complex about 35 KMs northwest of An Khe. When the Scouts returned after the Guns had expended, they found 11 dead NVA. A further VR revealed that the complex was surrounded by numerous man traps that were constructed on 16-foot lengths of bamboo with punji stakes every six inches. Several airstrikes were put into the complex.

Also on the 6th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop AH-1G #67-15592 flown by an unnamed crew that suffered one injury. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission, at an altitude of 500 feet and 100 knots of airspeed, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the right canopy, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

Also on the 6th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15535 flown by CW2 R.L. Tusi and co-pilot WO1 D.G. Decker. The Goldbook database indicates this

aircraft was recovered, turned in to the 79th TC CO, 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 and the accident summary reads:

Aircraft was working an area approximately 15 miles SW of Kontum. The mission at the time was to provide cover for B Troop's slicks on the insertion of their Aero-rifle Platoon. CW2 Tusi picked up and began to parallel the slicks at an altitude of approximately 300 feet AGL. As the slicks touched down in the selected LZ, CW2 Tusi began a climbing left hand turn from approximately 100 feet AGL. During the climbout from the LZ, the cockpit filled with smoke. He gave control of the aircraft to the copilot, WO1 Decker, and began pulling circuit breakers in an attempt to localize what he thought to be an electrical fire. He was pulling circuit breakers when both he and his copilot heard a single loud bang come from the engine compartment. Upon hearing the noise, CW2 Tusi took control of the aircraft and checked his instruments. The tachometer showed the needles to be joined and RPM decaying rapidly. His first action was to reduce collective and initiate an autorotation. He entered the autorotation at approximately 200 feet AGL. The pilot saw that he wasn't going to make the area he had selected for a forced landing so he then made a sharp left turn to go to another area that he could make, CW2 Tusi continued the autorotation to the area, even though it put him mostly downwind. The autorotation was successfully completed into a rice paddy. Upon touchdown, the main rotor blade severed the tail boom approximately 8-12 inches forward of the 42 degree gear box. There are signs of yellow paint from the main rotor blade on the letter "G" in the word "DANGER" (painted on the left side of the tail boom). Also there is yellow paint from the main rotor blade on the right longeron. Upon touchdown, the aircraft did not have any ground run as it settled in 2-3 feet of mud. Both aviators exited the aircraft. CW2 Tusi was unable to shut the aircraft down so he finally removed the screen from the engine oil cooling compartment and shut it down manually.

Also on the 6th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop OH-6A #67-16576 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took three hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the right bottom windshield, right forward skid strut, right bottom fuselage, they continued flying and aborted the mission.

Additional Details: The Cayuse on display at the National Warplane Museum in Elmira, NY was built around #67-16576's basic airframe using components from several OH-6As. #67-16576 was used near the end of its service life at an Army school for repair and maintenance training in Gulfport, Mississippi. It is painted as #67-16668, a Vietnam Era LOH and carries the markings of the U.S. Army 1st Squadron, 4th Air Cavalry (Dark Horses). It was acquired by the museum in 1991 from the Aviation Classification Repair Activity Depot of the Army National Guard of Mississippi.

On the 7th, 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 level flight operations area, they took seven hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the left forward skid, main rotor blade system, and nose, they made a forced landing and modified the mission, the helicopter was recovered to An Khe then repaired in theater and evacuated.

On the 8th, 1LT **Robert Lynn "Bob" Dance** and WO **Samuel Judson Mathis** died in a B Troop LOH #67-16612 that was shot down at BR572672. The Wall database gives the following tour start date and MOS data: Dance, 28 Jan 1969, 61204; Mathis, 26 Jun 1969, 100B.

CWO Don Enselek provides: I was flying in the C&C ship that day with CPT Smith. It was at the beginning of the day. I think Bob's team was the first scout team in the AO that day. They had only worked low level for 20 to 30 minutes when they just spun in and crashed. There was no call that

they were receiving fire or anything. The trees were rather tall in this area but it was easy to see the LOH burning. We inserted the Blues and for some reason or other CPT Smith needed to get back to base, so we flew away.

CPT Eric Lee Holsinger sent the following to the VHPA in 2004: I was a captain and the Platoon Commander of Scout Platoon of Bravo troop. Sam came to us while we were in Phan Thiet at The Morgue that was the name of troop area because we were next to the graveyard for Phan Thiet. He was an instructor pilot, a pilot who gives check rides to other pilots in the OH-6A helicopter, called the LOH. Now, I will tell to the best of my knowledge of Sam and Bob Dance's last flight. They were flying lead aircraft for the 5th Special Forces camps out of Kontum and Dak TO area, near the border up in the mountains. Ben Het was a Special Forces camp in the same area out in the middle of nowhere, but it was the route the North Vietnamese wanted to use to hit the South. Sam and Bob were flying lead at ZERO miles per hour, hovering following a trail and commo line telephone line when they were hit. The tail rotor was lost so the loach had no directional control and corkscrewed into the ground. The guns rolled in hot and the blues Infantry platoon was brought in. Both were dead possibly hit by automatic weapons fire and dead before the loach crashed. Both were recovered and later an Arc-Light was put into the area by B-52s which took out a square kilometer. At this time there was over a division of NVA in that area. I hope you can use some of this and if you look at B717 website under scouts you will see a picture of some men eating in a tent Bob is the one with the plate in his hand Sam is to his right rear and the grinning fool on this side of the ref is me cooking a Chile pot from LRRPS rations that we FOUND, we used my popcorn popper because we were a poor lot.

CPT RJ Schissell provides:

STILL NEED TO GET THIS FROM RJ

SP5 Donald Storm, a Lift Platoon Crew Chief, recalls that there was heavy rains lasting 2-3-4 days each during July and August. On those days, we just sat and slept in the helicopters waiting for the weather to clear. If not, then everyone went to the Officer's Club for drinks and pizza. The officers, of course, went through the front door and the flight crews through the back door window. I remember that flight missions were only occurring about two or three days in any given week. I have pictures of the Blues practicing repelling from the Hueys a day or two after LT Dance's LOH crashed near An Khe. The Blues lack of practice doing repelling became an issue at that time. I was nearing the end of my six-month extension. I can remember working out of An Khe and Kontum again and the Troop being sent to Ban Me Thuot East. After I came back from R&R, I flew a couple more days – once to Duc Lap. I've always thought there was one particularly significant aspect about the UH-1H crew chiefs. There were only eight of us, one draftee and seven RAs. Six of us had already spent a full year in RVN and four had spent that year with another unit. I remember PSG Wilson was the Lift Platoon Sergeant and the other CEs were Vince Turgeon, Eric Johnston, Christian (the US), and 'Shorty' [his full name was Howard 'Shorty' C. Boling]. 1LT Vessey was the platoon leader after the Cuban Captain left in early April, Warrant Officers Bill Christenson, Tim Yost, and Romanov. We called the maintenance officer, CPT 'Shazam' – he was an ROTC guy from South Carolina and in August he became the Blue Platoon Leader. I DEROSed on 15 September.

Also on the 8th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16634 flown by WO1 R.B. Dahl. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads: An unsecured flight jacket blew out of the aircraft struck the tail rotor and caused a tail rotor failure. The pilot autorotated without further damage.

On the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop AH-1G #67-15592 flown by WO1 W.E. Bean at An Khe. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat

mission and the accident summary reads: The RPM bled off to 6000. The AC entered autorotation and switched on emergency con? and applied pitch. RPM bled down again. The AC made an autorotation but landed hard. The main rotor blade flexed into and damaged the tail rotor drive shaft.

Also on the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16676 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the right top bubble, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 13th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop OH-6A #67-16559 flown by WO1 P. Mayer and SP4 S. Bong at Pleiku. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

At approximately 1000 hours, WO1 Paul Mayer and SP4 Scott Bong took off for a test flight. They flew to the Plei Do Lim Airstrip which is approximately six miles east of Hensel Airfield. WO1 Mayer, B Troop OH-6A Test Pilot, selected the airstrip to do autorotations with power recoveries. He had already completed one autorotation. He entered the second autorotation at 500 feet AGL for a straight-in autorotation. The instruments were in the green and he had an adequate area picked out in case of a full engine failure. At 50 feet he started a deceleration which became too steep, and the aircraft went into a high rate of descent. WO1 Mayer then started to roll on throttle, but the aircraft touched down before he could complete the recovery. The aircraft then hit hard on the read of the skids; the main rotor flexed down and struck the tail boom two feet from the tip and severed it from the aircraft. The aircraft then came to a stop with no further damage.

On the 14th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #66-17763 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the right aft cockpit, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 16th, A Troop was called to support a 4-man LRRP in contact. The Guns killed ten NVA and helped extract the LRRPs.

Also on the 16th, C Troop's ARP discovered what one 173rd Abn officer called "one of the most valuable pieces of information of the Vietnam War." In the northern end of the An Lao Valley the Scouts observed a tunnel and bunker complex. The Blues encountered AW fire from the complex but battled their way inside one of the caves. There they met and killed four NVA. It was later determined that two were Russian trained doctors and the other a Russian trained pharmacist. One of the doctors carried a map and information pinpointing the position of the NVA hospitals and medical supply points in the AO. SP4 Jim Yamnitz remembers:

SP4 Jim Yamnitz remembers: I joined the Blues in June but I don't recall being assigned to a specific squad. I served with them until the end of Dec 1969. During my time with the Blues, my primary weapon was an M-79 grenade launcher. I also had a 45 pistol. Once I remember needing to kill a guy at short range. I hit him with a grenade but the distance was too short for it to arm. After that I started carrying an M-16 as well! I remember doing a little 'tunnel rat' stuff. Several of the Blues carried flashlights and ropes in case we needed to go in someplace. I also remember that we had a dog and its handler most of the time. They were not part of C Troop but were attached to us when we'd go on a mission. They were well trained and we were glad to have them with us especially in the areas with caves and boulder fields. I don't remember too much about the senior NCOs in the Blues except a SSG Gunther. He was pretty good. I remember 1LT Dave Flint was our platoon leader for a few months in the Sep/Oct period. He had been a Slick pilot earlier. [After reviewing this material during the 2008 Reunion and after having long conversations with Vito, Jim added the following:] I also remember serving with Vito Flitt. He had an interesting habit that earned him his nickname 'Mother Vito.' You will remember that most of our patches and name

badges were hand-sown onto our fatigues. We hired the Vietnamese to wash our clothes for us and they just pounded them on the rocks in the rivers. They always had tears in them and were coming apart here and there. Anyway whenever you were standing near him talking to him, he'd reach up and remove loose threads from your uniform or straighten your collar for you. It wasn't offensive in any way and we could honestly care less about our fatigues! They'd be almost rags until we'd stop in supply to get replacements. So he was our 'mother' always looking after our appearance!

Vito Flitt recalls: I was drafted into the Army. I went to AIT at Fort Knox to become an Armored Cavalryman, 11D40. I arrived in Vietnam in August 1969 and stayed with C Troop until August 1970. I was assigned to the Scout, but I didn't volunteer. My mentors were SP5 Michael 'Duff' DuFresne, SP4 Gary Phillips, and SP5 Rodney 'Rocky' Conklin. Rocky was in charge of the platoon because we didn't have a platoon sergeant until SSG Pilk arrived. We all stuck together. This was at Lane. The Scouts had the bottom floor of a two-story barracks. We partied a lot but we also did a lot of flying and a lot of maintenance. I never trained to become a LOH CE. During that time our LOH CE's all flew in the AO. Looking back, I don't have any memories of going to the movies or the mess hall – they just weren't important to me. I always liked flying the wing ship. Lots of guys threw up until they got used to be the swing of the LOH flying low and slow on the trees. I didn't have any problem with that. During that time we mounted miniguns on the wing ships. I always liked helping train the new pilots. Whenever I'd train a new EM, we'd put him in the backseat of the lead LOH and I'd fly in the front. I was also an armor – so I maintained the guns. Each of us cleaned our own M-60, M-79, carbine, and 45. I think we had six or seven miniguns, so we had plenty enough for our ships. I didn't use a bullet catcher when I worked on the miniguns. I always disarmed the gun, cleaned it, and put it back together without ammo. Only once did two new pilots hit the switch before they got off the ground. I'd double-check the guns each night before quitting for the day. We had a bungee cord over the door on the left side for the M-60. We strung a wire from the door to the instrument console to hold our grenades – smokes, WP, and HE. We had the same deal in the rear, M-60 and grenades on a wire. We didn't fly with faring on the miniguns. I remember once they wanted us to fly with doors on in the AO, but that didn't work very well. We'd fly to English or someplace, take the doors off than fly in the AO. We made 'mini-bombs' by taking a 105 round without the fuse, packing the nose with C4, adding a blasting cap plus some detonation chord (det chord) for a fuse. We smoked in the LOH whenever we wanted anyway, so it was easy to light the det chord. I can remember doing this only a couple of time because it was frowned upon. I'd guess I flew about every other day. I pulled CQ often and every now and then even Guard Duty. I met SGT Scotty Stanton in the hospital when I first arrived. //FIX THIS with tape recording// This was one of my first missions in the AO so everything was pretty exciting to me. SP4 Jim Yamnitz was flying in the lead LOH because he was training me. I remember taking fire from some caves. The C&C or someone asked for volunteers to go in with the Blues. Jim wanted to go, so we landed and let him out to join the Blues as they checked out the caves. When he was finished, we landed and he flew as a Scout again. He was some kind of soldier!!

Also on the 16th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #66-07886 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the fuel cell, they continued flying and aborted the mission.

On the 17th, A Troop made light contact and inserted the Blues. They found a well equipped base camp and caches of clothes plus a barbershop and destroyed it with fire and explosives.

On the 19th, 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 personnel rescue and recovery mission, during the hover operations area, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW

in the bottom cockpit, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater. Vito Flitt recalls:

SP4 Jim Yamnitz yelled at me for sitting on the floor. The round came up through the radio and out the top. When we refueled I saw the hole in the blade. Yamn wanted me to stand on the skid with my butt on the deck.

On the 25th, MAJ Ronald G. Maxson assumed command of A Troop replacing MAJ Dick Marshall.

Also on the 25th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #66-14403 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the right tail section, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 28th, C Troop worked the upper An Lao valley. What follows is an edited version of the events of this day from an early draft of WO1 Bruce Carlson's book *Red Bird Down*. Later the event was fictionalized when Carlson decided to present it as a novel. WO1 John Hargleroad, White 21, wrote:

C Troop was working the upper An Lao and somebody thought it would be a good idea to drop one of those 15,000-lb LZ cutters out the back of a C130. Only problem was, it left a lot of nasty tree stumps and the slicks couldn't land. So, they repelled in a bunch of engineers to clear the LZ. So far, so good. Finally around the end of the day, they had it cleared enough for a slick to land, so they started extracting, as it was getting close to sunset. You could probably guess what happened next. Last ship is on approach when all hell breaks loose. To make matters worse, it's my first day as Fire Team Lead. Guy on the radio is panicked and is screaming TAKING FIRE! I'm trying to reassure him with a calm voice and ask him to pop smoke and tell me where the NVA are. He pops smoke and screams back THEY'RE EVERYWHERE!! I'm already low on fuel and ammo, but roll in hot and nothing happens. No rockets or turret. Don't think I took much fire though, as the bad guys were probably keeping their heads down. Pulled out of the gun run and checked all circuit breakers and switches. Let's try this one more time as the stuff is hitting the fan for the guys on the ground. This time I take some fire, but still not too bad - I did have a wingman covering me. Third pass. HOLY SH#\$!! Looks like the 4th of July! Meanwhile C&C has called the back-up gun team and the Blues. Now comes WO Bruce Carlson and wingman in their OH-6As. Don't remember which one of them it was. However, one of them hovered in the LZ doing pedal turns and throwing out everything they could muster till the rest of the troop could get there to save the day. Long story short - we got em out about an hour after dark. That's another story in itself. The Engineers wrote us up from Distinguished Flying Crosses for saving their day. These were the first DFCs given out since I arrived in country in March 1969.

Now WO1 Bruce Carlson, RED 14, tell his side of the story. First point of order: The truth is, that was a heck of a day that quickly turned into a first class Rat Copulation. With a little luck, I can give you a bit of the flavor of what it is like when the rats are copulating in the middle of a life or death military operation. Second point of order: As most slick drivers know the concept of an "Instant LZ" was fraught with many strange hazards. Trees without leaves to help you find them comes immediately to mind. Then a REALLY BIG BOMB makes a Gawd awful racket and certainly attracts the unwanted attention of the local residents. Finally, it was a Pioneer team, rather than just engineers, that was sent in to remove the helicopter killers. They are those lovely hardwoods that break off at about the twenty-five foot level. We all know that they can do truly nasty things to a slick trying to hover down into a restricted hover hole! It seemed to me that the obvious problem with sending a Pioneer team into a neighborhood that had been rudely awakened by a loud explosive device is that the neighbors usually get dangerously curious. Well, the pioneers were well armed with chain saws, axes, and C4 explosive, but they were not equipped for was a lengthily running gun battle with NVA regulars. While they have their M-16s and a few magazines

of ammo, that's about it. What John also didn't mention was that this bomb and LZ cutting activity had also attracted the attention of several upper level commanders. Big 6s is what I used to call them. We had more orbiting C&C Huey orbiting the area than at Fort Wolters at prime launch and recovery time. On the positive side, we were fortunate that MAJ Joe Tobin was flying our C&C that day. Not only did he have to look out for his Air Cav troop, but also he had to brief and take orders from the assorted Big Sixs who were congesting the limited airspace. As John said, the last slick, I believe it was from the 61st AHC, was coming in to pick up the five or six remaining Pioneers. Suddenly, the dullness of the dusk turned bright as the morning's sun with seemingly countless muzzle flashes. Ole WHITE 21 immediately rolled in however, something was not right because nothing came shooting out of his Cobra. His wingman followed and covered his break. But the Pioneers were in dire straights. Five or six M-16's and a few clips of ammo were not going to save them from a company, or better, of NVA regulars. Complicating the issue, I also knew that the Snakes had already expended most of their stuff and I did not know if John could get his guns working.

Without planning or forethought, I immediately keyed up the intercom. "Scotty (SGT Scott Stanton), Al (SP4 Allen Bowker), how about we go on down that hole and lay down some M-60 to cover those grunts?" [Editor's note: After reviewing this material, SP5 Michael 'Duff' DuFresne is of the opinion the he was on this mission rather than Al.] Their response was automatic and in the tradition of the finest Scout Observers in the whole world. "Sounds good to us, Boss. Give us a second and we'll be ready." Bit an instant passed and they cried out. "Let's Rock and Roll!" Scotty and Al were old hands with lots of experience. We had also been flying as a team for a while so we usually didn't need to debate anything. However, I felt that this was not a call that I could make alone. We were under no illusions about what would happen when we went down into the hole and I believed that they had a right to be in on the decision! The odds seemed clear that we would not come out of the hole in the same helicopter we entered, if at all! Going up on Uniform, I told MAJ Tobin, little Johnnie, and my wingman that I was going down into the hole. Joe responded. "It's your call, One-Four." During this conversation we had countless C&C ships stacked up to the stratosphere. As Big Six's are prone to do, all were yelling orders and generally getting in each other's way. Joe Tobin came on the Uniform, Fox Mike, and I'll bet Victor (OH-6As didn't have VHF radios). "Everyone shut up! I'm sending my Red Birds in." One of the Big Six's got quite put out and indignant. In anger, he started babbling about being in command. Joe curtly responded to his affirmations. "This is Yellow Scarf Six and we'll talk about that later. Clear this frequency NOW!" Joe was a Major who, obviously, had no plans for becoming a LTC. Gawd, it was wonderful working for Joe! Then, a great miracle happened. It got quiet. Maybe they were watching the darn fool going into the hole in his LOH.

Flaring my little bird above the hole, I began to hover down, while Scotty and Al began put down heavy M-60 fire. As I descended below the tree-line, I began doing slow pedal turns. Getting as low as I could, without breaking my bird on the stumps, I pulled in a little collective pitch. This started the little LOH climbing. Not making an adjustment on the tail-rotor pedals allowed the bird to slowly spin about her axis. That became my new, never written up in the "book," LOH combat maneuver. Yo Yo up and down while spinning in circles. It was working more or less as planned. The NVA folk decided that we were a much better target than a handful of Pioneers who weren't going anywhere. At one point I saw a green tracer pass just over my head and under the rotor system and another pass between my butt and the skids! However, the good news was that the guys on the ground WERE NOT being shot at. As I entered the hover hole, I radioed the Pioneers and told them to dig deep because we were going to be raining hot brass down on them. Furthermore, I was going to have the Snakes bring it in very-very-very close. If I live to be a hundred year old, I will never forget their excitement when we began slugging it out on all three hundred and sixty degrees. When the NVA shifted their fire to the better target and bigger threat and with Scotty,

standing on the skids, and Al, leaning out the door matching them punch for punch, they were cheering like Saturday night at the fights. Punching my radio call through their cheering, I confirmed that they were all directly below me and that I had a good eyeball on them. Scotty and Al are busily engaging the NVA with their M-60s, hand thrown grenades, M-79 launched grenades, and simple defiance. "NO! You will not kill these men, on the ground, as long as we live."

It is at this point in history that a Cav Troop running full teams was at her very best. Using my little spinning bird as a reference point, John and his wingman began repeated gun runs firing maybe a pair of rockets and a short burst of mini on each pass. I called it in close - very close - really close. I trusted them with our three lives and the lives of the pioneers on the ground. Time and time again, with low fuel and low ammunition, John would dive down trying to draw fire away from Scotty, Al, and myself and then return a little of his. His wingman would cover him doing the same thing. Then my wingman, WO1 Jeff Borr, would cover John's wingman's break. What I saw, experienced, and was a small part of was a tremendous heart-swelling demonstration of courage and skill. Mind you, had Johnnie been only covering me, I would have chewed him and his wingman out for putting leaves in their rocket pods. I had an iron-clad rule that my Snakes broke at no lower than five hundred feet or they heard nasty things from me. While the Snakes clawed for altitude to make another run, my wing would make very slow, walking speed, passes firing his minigun at two-thousand rounds per minute. I swear that he put it between my skids, through my rotor, and under my tail!

From this point on, my memory gets a little fuzzy. I remember things were getting very "tight. Joe had scrambled the second teams because he knew that we were very quickly running out of bullets and ideas. John and his wing, trying to save what little ammunition that they had, had started making dry runs or runs with just short burst of turret trying to draw fire away from my crew and the pioneers. In sheer desperation, I was getting ready to draw my forty-five and hand it back to Scotty cause we were getting dangerously short of bullets. In the midst of this, I remember talking to four Charley gunbirds that Joe Tobin had drafted from the people who were suppose to make the insertion into the LZ. When the slick who was going to make the extraction of the last pioneers was on about quarter mile final, against all reason and odds, I pulled out of the hover hole without receiving a hit. As I pulled out, the Charley Birds salvoed everything they owned all about the compass. As our Blue bird made its approach my wing man and I maxed out, to the lift ships which were supposed to make the insertion. We were going to steal some of their M-60 ammo. I don't remember if they were 61st or 129th AHC ships. However, I believe that they were 61st birds. Whatever the case, the crew chiefs and gunners were passing us M-60 ammo before we touched down on the sandbar. Joe, being a great guy with the details that made the difference between life and death, had them ready for us. After all, there was no guarantee that we wouldn't be need if the slick got into trouble. John and his wingman flew off to refuel rearm. I think he had to go to LZ Uplift. We had enough fuel to continue for a little while if forced to. I don't remember who was flying our Blue Bird. However, they had been orbiting for a while and had followed the whole drama both by mark-one eyeball and by their radios. Simply stated, there was no fooling them about the nature of the situation. I suspect that the four men on that lift ship sucked it up while on approach and hover down, all the time expecting the worst. In some ways, that took more guts than any of the rest of us displayed. As we red lined it back to the fight, Joe gave us a call and told us to refuel at LZ English and meet him at home base. (Lane Army Heliport) I do believe that those were the sweetest words that I ever heard because I knew that six Pioneers would live another day. At that moment, I was proud to be in the Cav - what a team! Of all my adventures with the best Cav troop in the world, this was the greatest.

During the 2005 Squadron Reunion, SP5 Allen Bowker provided. I reported to C Troop in February 1969 as a PFC with the 67N MOS. I DEROSed in February 1970 as an SP5. I served as a LOH CE,

a Line Chief, an armor, and a Scout Observer. I flew a lot with WO1 Bruce Carlson's and Scotty (SGT Scott Stanton). I felt a special bond with those guys. I remember crashing just three days prior to going on R&R. I hurt my left knee in the crash.

D Troop and HHT Elements Move to Ban Me Thuot East

On the 31st, D Troop moved to Ban Me Thuot East with a contingency from HHT to prepare for operations around the Bu Prang SF camp.

SSG Tom Wells wrote the following piece he calls 'Monkey Business:' Late in August we in Delta Troop were told that we were going to Ban Me Thuot for an extended operation in support of the 23rd ARVN Division. Bravo Troop would also be coming on the 1st of September. Both Delta and Bravo Troops would be based out of the Special Forces compound at Ban Me Thuot East. Prior to this I had put in to transfer to an Air Cav Troop but was still in Delta Troop at this time. With all the new personnel coming in, I felt that I could leave D Troop. I came to Vietnam to fly in the 1st Aviation Brigade. I could be a Scout Observer or be in the Aero Rifle Platoon. Any of the Air Cav Troops were fine with me, but I had hoped to go to C Troop because they supported the 173rd ABN BDE. Being a Jump Master, I had been around paratroopers most of my career. On the 31st of August, a Sunday, we left in a convoy with a contingency of trucks from the Delta and HHT. It was about 100 road miles, or more, to Ban Me Thuot East from Pleiku, about 4½ hours at convoy speed if everything ran smooth. About half way down there was a blown out bridge that we called "no man's land" because we had no communications in the area. The bridge site was filled with dirt. To negotiate it you had to go down a steep grade about 35 feet or so, then a 60-foot run to the other upgrade. Jeeps had no trouble with it in 4-wheel drive. The bigger the vehicle the harder it was to negotiate, especially when the vehicle was loaded. I was the lead platoon in the convoy. Being in the lead was great – no dust to eat. Just before the bridge area I got a call that the HHT trucks were taking fire. I took three scout jeeps and turned around and headed back. When I arrived, HHT trucks were stopped with personnel out of the trucks looking up a hill. We were not taking any fire. I saw movement up the hill and told the troops not to shoot, but kept our 50's and 60's trained up the hill. It looked like ARVN Troops. A tall individual came down toward us with his arms in the air and an ARVN soldier with him carrying a dead monkey. He was quite a site. He had tiger fatigues on with short sleeves and cut-offs and an Australian bush hat and some kind of sneakers. He was carrying an old M-1 30-caliber carbine. I thought this guy was Tarzan of the jungle. He was an American advisor, but had ARVN Officer rank on, with three gold-like crowns. I forget what they called them and am not sure what rank he was. He said they were hunting and that they always hunted monkeys on Sunday, like everyone was supposed to know this. I guess the HHT trucks heard the shooting and stopped. Not a good idea. In a convoy you keep going and get out of the area – always. Well it was his AO and we were passing through it. When one of our LTs showed up I told him of the situation. He started talking to him. I said I was going to start to move the convoy up front. He said OK. As I walked away, I started to think to myself. I knew advisers before, but they always left themselves in some kind of American uniform and rank. I had hoped that this guy was at the end of his tour because he really had gone native. We had no more incidents on the way to Ban Me Thuot. We arrived around 1:30 PM. We started setting up tents for ourselves and the rest of the personnel coming in. I was told that my platoon would be staying in base camp to perform details and general support, including ammo handling. The two other platoons would go to Bu Prang to be an airmobile reaction force for B Troop. The platoon grumbled about it. While in base camp pulling details, I learned we would be getting an E7 for our platoon any day now. I had nothing to do. I sent my NCOs and troops to detail support activities and whatever else needed to be done. The other two platoons moved out at the end of the week. That was the end of our monkey business

Also on the 31st, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16106 flown by an unnamed crew. The record states there was one crew fatality but no name or details

have been associated with C Troop on this date. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, they had multiple hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired.

Gary Spooner, Blue 36, who served with C Troop from June 69 until June 70, describes some of the joys of serving with Trooper Bruce:

WO1 Bruce Carlson pulled off this little explosive disappearing ACT that rocked the whole world (that's what I thought at the time). I remember one late afternoon I was resting for a big night at the O club on the Hill because we had a band playing at the club that night. I somehow had the day off from flying - that was a rare event. So I was stretched out in my bunk up on the hill and as I remember the LARGEST explosion of my life took place. I thought that we were getting hit by INCOMING which was a rare event at Lane Army Heliport. I remember shrapnel hitting up against the hooch and the 4' fluorescent light tubes in the ceiling all came down from the ceiling with a blast when they hit the floor. The sad part of this event was when our bar (made out of high quality pine boards from rocket boxes) took a turn for the worse. ALL of the bottles on our shelf above the bar got blasted off and landed on the concrete floor. We had Scotch, Bourbon, Gin, Canadian Whiskey and lots of special bottles on this shelf that ole Wesley Pearson and I were stocking for medicinal purposes. Well to make a long story short, we had a disaster in our room that I thought was incoming so I was on the floor just about ready to get under my bunk for the next round of incoming when I realized that someone had blown off some ordinance outside of the compound. Trooper Bruce was the responsible party. After I went outside of our hooch I found out that shrapnel had been blown all over Lane. Everyone was coming out of their areas and asking what the hell happened. Later on I found out that our O Club up on the hill had the same problem - every 4' fluorescent light tube came down to the floor and offered a mini explosion which put everyone in the club on the floor because they all thought we were getting INCOMING. In conclusion, no one got hit by any shrapnel, no one got killed, all the ordinance was gone, and Bruce Carlson was all set for his IG Inspection.

SP5 Rocky Conklin also remembers this event and provides: I believe SGT Scott Stanton was the ring leader of this event. We loaded up these explosives in the back of a 2 ½ ton and drove off post. As we stacked it up, someone mentioned that maybe we ought to separate it into four smaller loads. Scotty said - nah, one big explosion is the best. Bruce, I think, came up with the idea to use claymore detonators and wires. After we had rigged the explosion, just for safety's sake we decided to be under the truck. I remember the truck was lifted off the ground about two feet by the blast! Stuff was landing around us for at least ten minutes! We were up wind from the base and big pieces were falling on the base. I'd guess the crater was at least ten feet deep and about 20 yards long. We did not want to drive back to the base. I remember Top getting to us before we were to report to the Old Man. Top just kept telling us - no matter what the Major says to you, don't say anything. We just knew it was Article 15 time for sure. The Major said things like - you guys are supposed to be our best with explosives - we thought you would set a good example to the rest of the Troop. For the next couple of weeks we were on every crap detail there was besides being the brunt of an endless stream of jokes from everyone we knew in the Troop. Looking back, it is amazing that someone didn't get hurt.

WO1 Ron Perryman provides: I was originally from Festus, MO at the time. I was a member of the National Guard unit there. I had spent 22 years in the Guard before going to Vietnam - 11 years as heavy weapons infantry, 5 years of signal and the remainder as engineer. So I was activated with the unit as an engineer with a signal MOS. When I got to Fort Benning, they were levying our guys to go to Vietnam and I had a problem watching them go and me not going; so I called the Pentagon directly. They sent me to Signal Maintenance School at Fort Monmoth and went to Vietnam as a Signal Warrant officer to command the 414th Signal Detachment, attached to B Troop. I was only

there about six month from mid-May to mid-November 1969. I replaced a WO Howard Kennel at Phan Thiet. We had SSG Hummal who was the section NCO or Avionics Chief. After he DEROSed we had SSG Tom Scraggy. I was like a fish out of water because I wasn't totally familiar with what this all involved but I was blessed with a good crew of signal maintenance people who were able to maintain the helicopters and do the job on the radios, antennas, and navigation system. We had five to six people normally in the detachment in addition to myself. Sadly I do not remember all their names and I don't have any documents from that time that might list their names. Each specialized – some in the UHF radios, some in the FM, and different guys specialized in each area. We did a lot of wiring modifications and other things in the helicopters. We saw the helicopters off each morning and inspected them in the evening. We had two or three air-conditioned shop vans with a bench set up so the guys could work on the equipment. We were responsible for putting the KY28s into the aircraft and removing them when the aircraft was finished for the day. The KY28s arrived for B Troop about the time we relocated back to Camp Enari. They were installed on an as needed basis for certain missions. Sometimes we were short a person and had to make adjusted. We stayed busy. I don't remember the guys being bored. One of my disappointments was that I had a young man from Arizona who worked on UHR radios and we were getting a lot of complaints about them. When he got ready to DEROS he said to me that he really didn't know what he was doing. He just adjusted a dial on the back of the radio to make it read the output that he wanted. I didn't realize that this was going on but it explained a lot of the problems we were having. I had one young man that I was really especially thankful for. He was Ralph Shell from Tullahoma TN. He ended up working and retiring for the Tennessee Valley Authority. Ralph had a genius IQ and was tremendous on wiring modifications and radio repair. He was a very good man. On the 4th of July we got on an Army ship, the John U.D. Page, and sailed up the coast to Qui Nhon harbor. Then we went overland to Camp Enari. Once we got there we started supporting the HHT Aviation Section helicopters in addition to B Troop's needs. I did go to Ban Me Thuot East with B Troop. We lived in a big tent. We didn't take the whole detachment. Our shop vans and conex containers stayed with B Troop's Maintenance teams. We took advantage of a shuttle back and forth from Ban Me Thuot East to Camp Enari. MAJ Lyman wanted me to fly with the ships so I could experience some of the problems they were having. I've always been thankful for that. We flew into Bu Prang area one day and right after that the allies no longer controlled that area. We had no affiliation with the Signal people that supported Squadron headquarters. During my time we didn't have anyone injured or get sick and have to leave. The guys did not fly as door gunners. When we were at Phan Thiet we drew parts from AVAL South at Vung Tau. When we were at Camp Enari, we used the AVAL at Pleiku. We did not have any dealing with the 4th Inf Div Signal people. Now we did more actual radio replacement than trying to replace transistors and things like that within the radios. Those were pretty complex operations. So it was just easier to send them down to AVAL for general repair and simply do the replacements. One of my biggest disappoints was when we lost ships that were not flyable anymore, we were not permitted to cannibalize radios out of them and we could have used them. We knew that the next levels were not going to use them. That was a No No for us. On the whole we were not short parts or tools. We had to operate our shop vans with generator. We had these big 10KW generators for that and they were not all that easy to come by. Near the end of my tour I remember checking the property books and the serial numbers of the generators – they didn't match. So obviously they had been traded out at some time prior to my arrival. When they failed, we were in trouble. I'm sorry to say that I can't remember the name of the man who replaced me. I enjoyed my time with B Troop and the friends that I made. There were some awkward moments with the senior leadership of the Troop. One pilots I really liked was a young southern gentleman from Valparaiso, FL named Larry Rabren. We had landed once at Kontum to refuel. I was with the C&C ship. After refueling, it wouldn't lift off. So they divided us up into other aircraft. I ended up in Larry's ship to get back home. He and I got be real good friends. I came home, wrote to him and waited for a long time and didn't get an answer. Then I got a letter from his father with photographs

and newspaper articles with the news that Larry had been killed in April – I'd DEROSed in the previous November. That really affected me. Well, after 26 years I went through that part of Florida and stopped to visit his parents. They kept me for two days. They wouldn't let me leave. They took me out and showed me his tombstone. Then took me to Fort Rucker where a large building is named for Larry. Larry's death was the most touching thing to me about my tour in Vietnam. It took me a long time to get past that.

September 1969

On the 1st, A Troop conducted a BDA in the vicinity of BR452282 and found signs of recent enemy movement through the area. They inserted the Blues briefly into a small enemy complex with negative results. Their gunships destroyed the complex.

B Troop Moves to Ban Me Thuot East

On the 1st, B Troop moved to Ban Me Thuot East and the Squadron set up a "Ruthless Forward" there to support TF Fighter and elements of the 23rd ARVN Division. Weather handicapped tactical operations for parts of the month. Even though various Squadron elements had lived at Ban Me Thuot East prior to this, it was still a lot of work to re-establish a base at old "Camp Bleakness." The "Ruthless Forward" area was set up on the north side of the long runway while the main SF Camp with the artillery pieces was on the south side. Aircraft maintenance was never a pleasant experience at Ban Me Thuot East. Within a few days two of D Troop's platoons were lifted to Bu Prang to serve as an Infantry, security, air-mobile reaction force for B Troop. Bu Prang was a small camp and logistically not prepared for this large American unit. As a result HHT was given the responsibility of flying food, shelter material, and essential supplies to the D Troop elements at Bu Prang. Basically they flew two resupply missions every day to Bu Prang. HHT and D Troop also established an ammo resupply point at Nhon Co for the Squadron. By the end of the month, HHT ships were also making single ship insertions of D Troop personnel and Vietnamese MPs along QL8B. They would question the locals in attempts to learn more about the enemy build up in the surrounding areas. HHT ships also performed medevac missions from the Bu Prang area. B Troop managed to kill ten enemy soldiers and located numerous bunker complexes, routes of infiltration and areas where massive amounts of food were under cultivation by the enemy. Two aircraft were badly damaged by enemy fire and one pilot seriously wounded.

MAJ Scott Lyman, CO of B Troop, DEROSed on 5 September. He was flying right up until almost the last day. He provided the following:

I have a clear recollection of a strong difference of opinion between myself and another senior major in Squadron HQ. The reason for that rather sour-grapes attitude stems from his snide remarks when I arrived back at Squadron HQ en route to DEROS, that I had run out of fuel and had to be rescued by the C.O. B Troop had recently relocated to Ban Me Thuot East and had been assigned an AO on the Cambodian border which ultimately led to a real Donnybrook in the days after I left. I had been en route to the AO early that morning, when my ship started losing engine RPM. When it got down to 5800 and still falling off, I made a precautionary landing. As soon as I got on the ground, with the Blues in a perimeter defense around me, the fog rolled in, and we were locked in until sun down, when LTC Cal Bean, squeaked in under about a 12-foot ceiling, and helped me get out of there. All during the day, my crew chief and I had been playing around with the fuel system, the filters, the governor, and everything either of us could think of to stabilize the engine. Finally we had stabilized it to hold just short of 5800, but, of course, we could not leave until we had visibility enough to pull out the Blues. That occurred just at sundown. Col. Bean had been monitoring the situation by frequent radio communication with me from altitude, and I advised him that my day's experimentation with the engine had depleted my fuel supply to the point that I needed about another 180-lbs. to make it back to base safely, if I could even get it off the ground.

Bless Cal Bean's heart, as the sun set, the fog lifted just enough to permit him to sneak in with six 5-gallon fuel cans to give me a margin of safety. The slicks followed him in, and pulled the Blues out, along with everything we could get out of my ship, including extra flight personnel. I went out with only one other man aboard. Running the engine up to its top RPM of 5750 or so, I jumped the ship off the ground, and half-hovered it much of the way back to Ban Me Thuot, finally getting enough confidence in it to get up to about 100 foot AGL. The next day I went back to Camp Enari to begin processing for DEROS, flying a sick LOH back to the maintenance folks.

On the 4th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16619 flown by WO1 Bruce Carlson, with SGT Scott Neal Stanton as Observer in the back, and 'Pete' (exact name unknown) the CE in the front. The record states there was one injury. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took four hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the bottom fuselage and the fuel cell, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired.

On the 5th, MAJ Billy Bowling assumed command of B Troop replacing MAJ Scott T. Lyman.

Also on the 5th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop AH-1G #67-15806 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, while at an altitude of 100 feet and 130 knots of airspeed, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the bottom fuselage, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

Concerning this time SSG Tom Wells wrote the following story of his tour in D Troop. He names it 'A Sunday Drive.'

After almost a week in Ban Me Thuot, I had nothing to do. On Saturday I was going by the Main Gate and noticed an HHT $\frac{3}{4}$ truck there full of troops in the back and one of the HHT mess sergeants was arguing with the MP at the gate. He was told he couldn't leave without an escort. The mess sergeant came toward the truck. I stopped the jeep, got out to talk to him and asked him what his problem was. He said he was told that he had to get these men up to Pleiku as soon as possible and that there were no flights going out that he could get them on the next few days. Everything was coming in. I said that I could escort him up to Pleiku the next day. The next morning we met at the mess hall around 8 o'clock. We loaded the truck with 11 individuals in the back and the sergeant and his driver in the front. We started heading for the Main Gate on our way up to Pleiku. I stopped about 50 feet from the gate. The MP came toward me. I put up two fingers. I don't know if he thought I gave him the victory sign or the peace sign. What I meant was that there were two vehicles in our group. He stopped dead in his tracks, turned and waved for the gate to be opened. I went by and gave him a salute. He locked up and saluted back. Maybe he thought I was an Officer or something. We are on our way heading north on HWY 14. It was a really nice day for a ride. We were doing about 40 mph when we reached the bad area with the bridge out. I told the sergeant that I would cross first and set up on the west side up the hill. PVT Holycross, my driver, flew across the area and we set up on the other side. The $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton truck took some time getting up the other side. I am sure that the driver was in 4-wheel drive, maybe not. As he got to the top of the grade, a B-40 rocket came out of the jungle on the east side and landed behind the truck. I jumped up behind the 50-caliber that was half cocked. In order to fully arm it you had to pull the handle twice. We always left them half cocked for safety reasons while moving in the vehicle. Maybe that is where that saying comes from – "Don't go off half cocked." I opened fire in the vicinity of where the rocket came from. I shot about 100 rounds as the HHT truck came speeding toward me up the hill. The vehicle stopped dead next to me, the sergeant and driver got out and hit the ground. The rest of the soldiers in the back came piling out of the truck without putting down the tailgate. Out came the clerks, the bakers and the candlestick makers in a 360-degree circle in the back of the truck. I yelled at the sergeant to get his men back in the truck and to get the hell out of there. I was not planning on

a defensive position in no man's land. They all piled back in and took off toward Pleiku. I did not have to ask Holycross to follow. He took his own initiative and got us out of there. I fired about 60 more rounds as we left. The HHT personnel said they saw enemy soldiers and that the bullets were flying all over the place. I don't remember taking any fire but my adrenalin was flying so high firing the 50 caliber that I may not have noticed. Every sixth bullet on the 50 belt was a marker round which looked like a puff of smoke when it hit the target so that you knew where you were hitting. We passed the truck a few miles down the road and took the lead. About five miles later I got off the 50, locked it and got in the front seat behind the M-60. I told Holycross to slow down to 45 mph to make sure we didn't lose the HHT truck behind us. We got to where highways 14 and 19 intersected by The Oasis. I pulled over and told the HHT personnel not to say anything about what happened. All nodded in shock. Except for some bruises from jumping in and out of the truck, they were all ok. We got into Pleiku about 11 o'clock. The HHT Troops did not keep their mouths shut. It was probably the biggest thing that ever happened in their lives, at least in Vietnam. They said that they got ambushed and that I was firing a 50 caliber at lots of enemy soldiers. I don't remember seeing any, just remember firing that 50 as we left. You do get a feeling that nothing can hurt you when you are behind a 50 firing. It's so powerful. Holycross dropped me off at my hooch. I told him to clean the 50 and gas up the jeep. I had my own hooch maid since I got to Delta Troop. We were very friendly, if you get my drift. That was the main reason I wanted to come back. A few hours later the HHT First Sergeant, I think his name was Barber or something like that, came by in a jeep and said CPT Falconio, the HHT CO at that time, wanted me to report to him. I got dressed and went with him. The mess sergeant was already there at parade rest. It looked like he had already been chewed out. CPT Falconio started to read me the riot act. I did not pay too much attention to what he was saying. My mind often wandered in these situations. He finally finished. I looked at my watch, it was 2 o'clock. I said, in so many words, that if he was not happy with me I could leave now and be in Ban Me Thuot before dark. He was not very acceptable to that idea and told me that I was restricted to quarters except to go to the mess hall and the chapel. I had no idea where the chapel was located. I left, and that was the end of my Sunday drive.

On the 9th, SGT **Scott Neal Stanton** died of injuries received on the 4th when his C Troop LOH was shot up. The Wall database gives his tour start date as 24 Mar 1969 and his MOS as 11D40. WO1 Bruce Carlson was the pilot during the mission on the 4th. Bruce can not recall the name of the CE who flew with him that day; see 'Pete' below. He provides the following two descriptions of the events and his feelings:

Bruce E. Carlson, Red 14, was a dear friend of Scotty and was flying the LOH on the day Scotty was wounded. Scotty is the novelized Johnny in Bruce's book *Red Bird Down!* The chapter named Johnny starting on page 300 basically recounts the events. Briefly, this was a standard Scout team leadership with a three-man crew. Scotty was flying in the rear as Observer. In the novel, Kev is Bruce and the real name of Pete, the CE, is unknown. Both were flying in the front. The mission that day was to conduct a VR near Flurry Hill. On their first recon, they didn't see much. As they relieved the second team, those Scouts told Bruce that they had heard a series of single shots possibly from the famous 'One Shot Charlie' but had not been able to get a fix on him. Bruce and his crew decided they would try to flush out 'ole one-shot' and for the next few minutes conducted an active recon to locate him. Finally, Scotty yelled over the intercom that he had heard him again but couldn't identify his location specifically. After a few minutes, Scotty came up with an idea to swing out over the valley and come in toward a big clump of trees. At 150 feet and maybe 40 knots, they started back toward the area where Scotty thought ole one shot was hiding. Scotty began firing his M-60 but abruptly stopped. Bruce asked over the intercom what was happening but Scotty said nothing. Bruce looked back and noticed that Scotty had pulled himself back into the LOH. Bruce called for his wing and the Snakes to fire up the area they had just overflown then had the CE unstrap and check on Scotty. The CE stuck his head and one shoulder past the bulkhead to check on

Scotty then reported that he had been hit and was bleeding all over the place. They would later learn that Scotty sustained a horrific wound in a leg and that a main artery was severed. As Bruce climbed for altitude, he informed MAJ Hahn in the C&C of the situation and said he wanted to fly directly to the aid station. MAJ Hahn agreed and dispatched one of the Snakes, White 23, to go the ten or so miles to the aid station with Bruce. In his novel, Bruce calls the LOH 'Rocinante' and says its tail number was 662; but the VHPA Helicopter database suggests it was #67-16619. Anyway, Bruce red-lined the LOH to the aid station. On the way they talk to Scotty to keep him from going into shock and instructed him to reach one hand into the wound to pinch off the artery. Because of the radio calls, the aid station was prepared when the LOH touched down. Bruce stayed with Scotty for awhile and finally left after he could see that the medical staff was maxed out in their efforts to save Scotty. As best Bruce can remember, Scotty lived another five days. The aid station was able to stabilize him enough to be transported to the field hospital in Nha Trang. Apparently even with a body cast for protection, while being transported in an USAF medevac to Japan, the artery in his leg began bleeding again and Scotty died from the loss of blood. To say that Scotty was loved and respected by all who knew him and to say the Bruce has never gotten over Scotty's death are both serious understatements.

Scotty, my back-seat observer and best friend, had received a red garter from his girlfriend to wear for luck. Well, I was jealous! I didn't have one and it looked quite spiffy to me. Just the perfect accessory to set off a "fighting man's" drab and baggy nomex. It wasn't but a couple of weeks later that I received a matching garter for my own arm. Scotty had told her that his "driver" also needed one of those delightful little accessories for luck. Quite proud were we two brothers. A draftee Buck Sargent and a baby faced Wobblie One. It told everyone that we shared something even if no one understood what exactly it was that we shared. Looking back, I doubt that we understood, either. Those garters, even as they got soiled and slightly tattered were part of our launching ritual. Roll down our nomex sleeves, adjust our garters, and share a silly grin. There was something strange and powerful about that red garter. For all the months that I wore that red garter, no one ever told me to take it off. While I remained a sloppy scout driver and had been crewed out about it gently by my own major upon more than one occasion and not so gently once in Squadron. But, that's another story. The day Scotty was shot, I got covered with his blood. Only my brothers in the Cav can understand what that "baptism" means. As I refused to allow anyone to clean up the aircraft because his blood was mine! As I would have shed mine for him. He shed his for me. So too, I never cleaned up my chicken plate, helmet, or that little red garter. I wore them with their aged brown stains of a life which had once been as a remembrance. When my stuff was packed by the guys at Charley Troop, they did not include the Red Garter. I'm not sure why not, except that they might have feared that the story behind it would embarrass me. Only Scotty and I knew of its sacredness.

Dan Townsend writes: Scotty was my door gunner with A Troop Blues on lucky 013. We ate, slept, flew together and were infused to C Troop Scouts together in July of 68. We continued to be the best of friends until I extended to the 201st for my early out. I tried to get Scotty to come with me, to get away from the war and take it easy for awhile. After 14 months we had served our time. But, he wouldn't have any part of it. He was destined to be the best Scout he could and eventually go to Fiddler's Green as a Scout. Scotty was so full of life, to know him was to love him. It was Scotty who invented the willie pete, frag, transmission fluid bomb! He truly had a knack for scouting!

SP5 Rocky Conklin remembers visiting Scotty in the hospital before he was evacuated. Scotty was joking and was generally himself. But the medical people were still trying to drain his wound, so it was open. I was shocked when I saw it. That was a really ugly, really large wound. I had expected it to be bandaged but it wasn't.

Also on the 9th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss with fatalities record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16108 flown by **WO1 Jeffery Borr** and **WO1 Terry Lee Denney**. The Wall

database gives the following tour start date and MOS data: Borr, 17 Feb 1969, 100B; Denney, 11 May 1969, 100B. Briefly they clipped the top of a palm tree leaving LZ Two Bits near Bong Song, south of LZ English at grid BR862946.

John Hargleroad reports: CPT John Sartor was Jeff Borr's platoon leader and flight lead the day he crashed. John is now in Texas and jogged my memory. It wasn't an alert by some infantry RLO. Somebody from the ville (Bong Son) threw a CS grenade over the wire where the LOH guys were congregated. John thinks it might have been one of the gook kids. We, the gunships, were parked about a hundred yards away because the snakes stirred up so much dust; so we weren't affected by the smoke. In retrospect, I think we may have scrambled ourselves, but since the LOH guys had a head start on us, they had already taken off while we were still cranking. That's when I saw the black smoke from the crash. They probably didn't make it more than a quarter of a mile from the strip before they clipped the top of the palm tree. John also said that Jeff was checking Terry out in the OH-6A and that they had no other observer on-board. It was a minigun ship. He said he doesn't have any pictures of Jeff, but told me a good story about the time Jeff and his observer made a super bomb from a 105 round.

SGT Lew Walters recalls: I served in Vietnam from June 1969 to December 1970. Initially I was in the 412th TC Det, but somewhere along the way, it was absorbed into C Troop, so I ended up in C Troop. I was promoted to SP5 in June of 1970. During early 1970, I was made acting SGT and placed in charge of the LOH maintenance squad. After I extended my tour and came back in August, I was moved into the TI shack and remained a TI until I left in late December. Having a LOH 'go in,' in Vietnam wasn't all that unusual of an event. It wasn't an everyday experience, but due to the hazards involved in low-level reconnaissance, it was an all-too-frequent event. Although the years have dulled my memory of the two men killed and the specific helicopter involved, one instance still stays vivid in my mind and today, some thirty-three years later, I think often about it and wonder. Let me back up a bit here. Although I never felt cocky about it, I was the Honor Graduate of my AIS Class, 188-69, from Fort Eustis, VA. I arrived in Vietnam feeling like I was a pretty good mechanic and was prepared to make whatever contribution was asked of me. Primarily, I looked forward to starting to work on the OH-6As. I was all too happy to listen to and learn from the guys that were there before me. I knew that school didn't teach us everything and the best way to learn was from those who knew. I was still a little green in early September 1969, but performed maintenance and repairs assigned me to the best of my abilities. At this time, I had removed the tail rotor from one of the OH-6As, tail number 67-16108. The reason I had the tail rotor off is lost to my aging memory now, but I will always remember removing and later reinstalling that tail rotor. As usual, after any repair of that nature, we were required to have the job inspected by a TI (Technical Inspector) before it was allowed to lift off the ground. He inspected what I did and signed it off as being proper. Within the next day or two, September 8, 1969, this same helicopter crashed from what appeared to be a tail rotor failure, killing two officers, WO1s Borr and Denney. When word of this got back to Lane, my heart became a huge lump in my throat. Of course, my first thought was that I did something wrong and the TI missed it. After all, they are only human. Realizing I was a newbie PFC, in country little more than a month and seeing where I had the tail rotor removed shortly before the accident, the officers investigating the crash focused squarely on me. Fortunately, the section where the tail rotor is attached to the gearbox was recovered virtually intact. All the attaching and locking hardware was there and properly installed, it was determined. I was cleared. Still, two men died in the crash and I was the last one working on it. Thirty-three years later, I still play it in my mind, wondering if I actually did screw up. The AIT instructors drummed into our heads, "Take your time and fix it right! If something breaks, you cannot pull over to the side of a cloud, get out and fix it!" That is a philosophy I have used in working ever since AIT, even more so since the above mentioned crash. Even though cleared of any wrong doing and knowing in my heart I didn't screw up, my mind has always had at least a sliver of doubt as to my fault. After

that, I silently dedicated myself to give C Troop the very best maintained aircraft that was humanly possible. Footnote: Many months later, we had another LOH lose its tail rotor for no apparent reason. Fortunately, this one was almost into transitional lift when it happened and the pilot was able to recover and land the helicopter safely. We recovered the bird and brought it back to the hangar. We found that the tail rotor gearbox had momentarily seized or tightened up and twisted and heavily damaged the 13-foot long aluminum tail rotor driveshaft. Since we had heard of this same type thing happening to other units, we figured maybe the same thing had happened to the one that crashed above. Still, I will always have that nagging doubt. If those men hadn't have died, I don't think it would have affected me as it has all these years.

The following article titled "Receives Soldiers Medal" appeared in the 30 November 1972 issue the Laurel News Leader newspaper in Laurel, Maryland: "A Baltimore Gas and Electric Company lineman today was awarded one of the Nation's highest medals for his actions while serving as a Army staff sergeant in Vietnam. Merlin L. Neadow of 4024 McDowell Lane, Baltimore, received the Soldier's Medal for his heroism on September 9, 1969, when he attempted to rescue trapped crew members from their burning helicopter. Neadow was leading his squad to the flaming wreckage of the downed Army helicopter, made more dangerous by exploding ammunition, when a phosphorous grenade exploded, burning him severely. He disregarded his own wounds and personal safety and managed to free the trapped crew pulling them from the twisted wreckage, but due to the intense heat, all were dead. The award, presented to Neadow by Colonel John E. Lance, Jr., post commander, is awarded for heroism not involving combat with an enemy force. Neadow, who left the Army in January, 1970, has been with Baltimore Gas and Electric since January, 1972."

SSG Merlin Neadow provides: I joined an Army National Guard unit in 1959 and after a few years requested active duty. I was an 11D. I served in Germany for a few years. In 1966 I went to Vietnam and served with the 170th AHC at Camp Hollaway for two years as a gunner on a UH-1B gunship. When I left that unit I was the NCO over all the gunners in the gun platoon. I wasn't too excited with my state-side unit so I requested to go back to Vietnam and ended up in C Troop's Blues in November 1968. After a short time they promoted me to SSG E-6 and I served as the Blue Platoon Sergeant for many months. Concerning the events of 9 September, I remember getting the call that the Blues was secure the area around the downed LOH. When we got there the ship was on fire. I remember sending squads out in different directions to provide security. There was a water well near-by and we were trying to get water from it to put on the LOH. I remember trying to get the two crew members out. The next thing I remember was waking up in the field hospital. I had burns on my right hand, left arm above the elbow, my back and neck. A WP grenade went off in the LOH and got me good. I remember staying in the hospital a few days and then returning to C Troop. My weapon of choice was a shotgun that I acquired from an MP unit. I wore a cartridge vest that had four rows so I could carry about 40 cartridges. I had friends every where. Some of my Engineer friends helped us mount a 50-cal turret on a connex container. You had to hand-crank the turret but everyone thought that was a hoot. I DEROSSED in January 1970 and ETSed at the same time. I believe I served with C Troop for about 14 months.

C Troop's XO, CPT John S. Davis, wrote Merlin in Midwest City, OK the following letter on C Troop stationary dated 18 February 1970: "Everything is fine in Troop C. We are glad to know that you and your family are doing well. I will be passing through Oklahoma City next month and perhaps I will be able to give you a call. I check on your pending awards and found that you have a Bronze Star for service pending. I wrote and forwarded a recommendation for the Soldier's Medal just a few days ago. You should not expect receipt of either for several months as this is the normal delay involved. I'll continue to look and inquire about a BS "V" recommendation but I've found nothing at this time. You have the best wishes from all those that knew you in C Troop and I would like to congratulate you again on a job truly well done."

CPT John S. Davis provides: I graduated with West Point Class of 1965, was commissioned in Armor Branch, and after flight school served with a Cavalry unit at Fort Knox for about six months before coming to Vietnam on an individual replacement basis. I arrived in C Troop in March 1969 when MAJ Ledford commanded the Troop. I flew with the Lift Platoon once I had my orientation flying in the front seat of the Cobras. I finished my time in C Troop as the XO under MAJs Tobin and Hahn. I know there are many people who liked serving under MAJ Tobin and respected him. I am one of them. I retired from the Army after my twenty years.

Also for the 9th, SSG Tom Wells wrote the following story of his time in D Troop. He named it 'Destroying Government Property.'

On Tuesday the 9th of September, the HHT 1st SGT came by to tell me that there was a convoy leaving early Wednesday morning for Ban Me Thuot and that I had better be on it. I thanked him and went down and told PVT Holycross to get the gun jeep ready to go the next morning. We went outside the gate and observed one of the biggest convoys I ever saw. There were over 100 trucks, tankers and lots of ammo. I asked a SSG who was in charge. He pointed to a jeep with a bunch of high ranking NCOs looking at a map on the hood of the jeep. We drove over and I got out. There was a 1st LT, a blonde haired guy. I saluted and said, "Are you in charge, Sir?" I told him that I was told to join his convoy. He asked what kind of a vehicle I was driving. I pointed to my gun jeep. His eyes got big and he said, "Recon?" He asked me if I had ever been in charge of any convoys. I told him quite a few. He said, "Great sergeant - I need you to bring up the rear for me. Let me know if all personnel make it into Ban Me Thuot." I told him it was no problem. One of the best places to be in a convoy was the last vehicle so that you didn't have to eat the dust in front of you since you can fall back a couple hundred yards or more. They had three tow trucks intermingled with the large convoy in case of breakdowns. We started moving out late, around 10 o'clock, and were moving at a snails pace. It was late afternoon before getting the vehicles across the blown-out bridge area. About two miles passed the bridge site, PVT Holycross noticed a truck off to the left side in the jungle. Since we were the last vehicle in the convoy, we stopped, I got out and walked over to an empty 2-1/2 ton truck. I saw two pair of legs underneath the vehicle. I yelled, "What's going on?" A SP4 came out and said they were trying to fix the truck. The shaft and transmission were not working. I said to him, "I'm the last vehicle in the convoy. You better come with me." Out from under the truck comes a short MSG saying that he could fix this truck in about 15 minutes. I said OK and walked back over to my jeep. Over a half hour went by and still there were no results. I told him again that we had to get going because it was getting dark. He said, "Give me some more time. I think I have about got it." We sat there about another 45 minutes. I then told Holycross to get one of our 5-gallon gas cans from the jeep. I walked over and put an incinerary grenade on the block of the engine to burn through it and render it useless. I said that we had to leave now. The SP4 came out from under the truck and came over to the jeep. The MSG wasn't even budging so I got up behind the 50 and put a few rounds in the tarp. This got his attention and he came scrambling out. Holycross took the 5-gallon can of gas out of the jeep and passed the MSG who came out from under the truck and was coming toward the jeep. He poured the gasoline on the truck tires, in the cab and in the back of the truck. He then set off the grenade which would take a while to burn through and zipped the rest of the truck. He then came back and we got in the vehicle. I gave the MSG the front seat and I stood up behind the 50. As we left, it was burning well. Daylight was just about gone and we still had a ways to go. The MSG kept saying over and over again, "I'm going to court martial you for destroying government property." The SP4 must have been in country longer than the MSG. He kept looking at me with a sh#-eating grin every time he said it to me. We were now flying down the road to try to catch up with the convoy that was long gone. I knew that we would be out there at night. The MSG shut up after it got dark and didn't say any more. We put on our cat eyes on the jeep, but it didn't do much good. We could see the road fairly well as we zoomed along. It seemed like forever before we finally saw lights from Ban Me Thuot about 5 miles

away over the horizon. We came over a rise and could see the last truck of the convoy turning in at the gate about 2 miles away. I told Holycross to turn on his lights. Only one came on – bad maintenance. As we rode up to the gate we turned off our lights and they opened the gate. I told the MPs that we were the last vehicle of the convoy. We drove over to the maintenance area. The MSG didn't say anything. I think his rear end puckered up, as well as his mouth, from driving through the dark. We dropped off the maintenance SGT and the SP4 and headed back toward the gate where I saw the LT's jeep and his crowd of personnel around him looking at a map. I pulled up next to him and half-saluted and said, "All personnel made it in and are accounted for, Sir". He replied, "Thank you sergeant." I then left and headed for the Delta Troop orderly room to face the CO and 1SGT Richie. SGT Richie was by himself. As I walked in he said something like, "The prodigal son returns. How was your little adventure?" I did not say anything about the truck being destroyed. I figured I was in enough trouble as it was. He said that there was a helicopter coming in tomorrow morning to pick me up for An Khe. I thought that if I was going to get court martialed, why wouldn't they be sending me to 17th Group Headquarters in Nha Trang. I looked rather puzzled. Then 1SGT Richie said that I was going to An Khe to be the new Platoon Sergeant for A Troop's Blues. They were sending a helicopter for me in the morning to fly me to Enari to pick up my gear and then take me to An Khe in a few days. He also mentioned that I should stay away from HHT while I am at Camp Enari. He also told me that CPT Falconio would be taking over D Troop some day soon. I then went down to my platoon and told Holycross to take the guns off the jeep and put them under his bed and clean them in the morning. That would be his detail for the day. I then said my goodbyes to my men and went to bed. I was at the air strip early in the morning figuring that I better get out of there before the stuff hits the fan about burning the truck. I never heard any more about the truck. D Troop would make jokes about it every time they went by the old burned out hulk of the truck. It seemed in Vietnam that if you do something stupid, 9 times out of 10 you may get away with it, but it only takes that one time. That was the end of my destroying government property story.

On the 11th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16619 flown by an unnamed crew that had one injury. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the cockpit and tail section, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired. Vito Flitt recalls: I think this was the day that either SP5 Rocky Conklin or Dragon (??) got shot in the foot.

On the 14th, CPT Ken Lininger assumed command of D Troop replacing CPT Bob Bruegger.

Also on the 14th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16116 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target at an altitude of 25 feet and at 30 knots of airspeed, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the bottom of the engine compartment that resulted in fuel system and structural damage. The helicopter was repaired in theater by the 79th TC Company.

Also for the 14th, SSG Tom Wells continues his story about leaving D Troop and joining A Troop. He calls this story 'Welcome to Alpha Troop.'

When I left Ban Me Thuot East on the 11th of September, the A Troop pilot said that he would return to pick me up on Sunday morning at Camp Enari. That was A Troop's down day – meaning they wouldn't have any missions to the AO. I took care of my business and left Enari Sunday, September 14th, for An Khe. It felt strange being in a helicopter without a weapon. We flew over the Mang Yang Pass. As we approached An Khe, which was once the home of the 1st Air Cav Division, we could see that it was an old massive base. I could always tell an old base from 1965 because they always had their airfield in the middle of the cantonment area to keep the aircraft safe. New bases built airfields outside and away from the cantonment area so that the troops were safe when Charlie fired at the airfield. I flew into the Golf Course, as it was called, and got off the chopper in the dust

with my duffle bag and gear by the maintenance hangar. A few minutes passed. A jeep came rolling down the hill. It was the Major's driver to pick me up. He took me to the Orderly Room. I left my gear in the jeep and went inside. A clerk jumped up and said, "The Major will see you now." I went in and saluted Major Maxson who returned a half salute. I always felt that there were four branches of the Army that were very lax with military formality. The Chaplain's Corps was one – he was always your buddy and there to help you. The Medical Corps was another – they were too busy. The Jag – they were lawyers ready to prosecute or defend you. The Aviation Group – there were lots of young Officers and Warrants who didn't care about much other than flying. He said, "You have a very interesting record, SGT Wells." I was wondering if he meant my first tour or up and down on my stripes. Then he said, "You come highly recommended. You will be in charge of the ARP by yourself. There will be no Officer." There was a knock on the door and the 1SGT came in and said, "He's here, Sir." The old Platoon Sergeant came in. He was an E7 older than me. He took me down to the platoon to show me around to meet the men and I never saw him again. He had about 14 days or more to go. One day I was up at the Orderly Room and a clerk called me over to the side and said that the Major had the old Platoon SGT in his office and wondered why he had not seen him in the AO with the platoon. He said that I knew more about how to run an Infantry platoon than he would ever know. He was either giving me a big compliment or he was covering his rear (CYA, as we called it). I believe it was the latter. When some people get short, they stay in base camp until they leave. There is nothing wrong with that. I never did. On my last tour I was out on a mission for about five days. We got a call that they were picking us up. When we got in, I was told to report to the Colonel. I thought it was a change in the mission. He said, "Well, I got a call from Tan Son Nhut that you missed your flight out." I looked puzzled. "You missed your flight out of here by seven days. They wanted to know if you were killed or wounded so get your rear down there and get back to Ft. Bragg."

SSG Tom Wells continues - I didn't see eye to eye with 1SGT Johnnie Robinson from the get-go. I guess he thought that I was a SSG and had no Platoon leader. All the other Platoon SGTs were E7's, like the maintenance and the scouts. Because of this he felt he could use my men on his details. I had an open door to the Major at all times, but I never used it. I felt SGT business was SGT business. I am sure that the Major got an earful from him about me and my Blues. I was never called in by the Majors. I guess they thought the Blues were doing a good job in the field and they left me alone. SGT Wells' rules: Rule number one – I treat my men like I treat my wife. I like no one f---ing around with her, and I like no one f---ing around with my men but me. Rule number two – No drugs in the field. I would often put a guilt trip on them by saying "If you go to the field under the influence and someone gets killed, it may have been his turn, but you would have to live with it for the rest of your life knowing that you might have been able to do something." I made a lot of changes in the platoon that I am sure I was resented for doing so, such as breaking up cliques, changing people around and some tactics. Resentment was expected when you take over a new platoon and change things around. I would have to prove myself to them. My chance came about a month later in an operation which I called "A Short Time in the Bunker." After that, they were all mine. I didn't mind details from the 1SGT when it benefited the whole troop such as when we permanently moved to Camp Hollaway in March 1970. We did not have infantry protection like at the other camps for the bunker line. We were given some of the bunkers to defend, and were about 200 yards behind our hooches that we had to protect. I felt it was better protected having infantry men in there at night rather than some maintenance and cooks. The men didn't mind pulling the bunker duty because they were able to sneak out into town at night between the bunkers. There was a good little path going through there and Dick, my Kit Carson scout, often went to town at night and took them through. They would return back from Pleiku in the early morning and the bunker guards would let them through the wire. I did not say anything about it. The feeling was I was the pot calling the kettle black. When I was in D troop, I often took a jeep from Camp Enari into Pleiku

and stayed at my hooch maid's house on the outskirts of town overnight. Sometimes things got dicey in Pleiku. The smart ones would stay on the base at night and the wild ones would go into town. The 1SGT went over the edge, I think, when we got to Camp Holloway. He built a little house with a shower, a kitchen and a big room and had a white picket fence built around it. Most of the troops resented it and somebody was always messing with his fence. Of course, the Blues were always blamed for everything but quite often I think that the Officers would get drunk and come over from the other side and mess with the fence themselves. That was a welcome to A Troop.

On the 16th, LTC George Murry assumes command of the 7/17th Cav replacing LTC Calvin R. Bean.

On the 17th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident with injuries record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15649 flown by CPT John E. Jennings and co-pilot 1LT Richard L. Peters near An Son. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

CPT Jennings was piloting this AH-1G at LZ English. Upon takeoff from POL, the pilot noticed he could not trim the aircraft and correctly ascertained that he had experienced a fixed left pedal tail rotor failure. The pilot and copilot checked their antitorque pedals for wedged objects and found none. The pilot then decided to proceed to Phu Cat Air Force Base and attempted a running landing. Phu Cat is approximately a 15-minute flight from LZ English and has excellent crash-rescue equipment. During the flight from LZ English to Phu Cat, the pilots discussed the emergency procedure for this type tail rotor failure and practiced rolling off the throttle and then rolling it back on to straighten the aircraft. The pilot radioed Phu Cat Tower, declared an emergency, and requested a running landing. He was cleared to make an approach to the taxiway. The pilot failed to roll off throttle on his approach and at touchdown increased collective in an attempt to straighten the aircraft. The aircraft slid 500-700 meters down the taxiway with the nose pointed slightly to the left. The pilot then decreased the collective to stop the aircraft. The aircraft started turning to the left and began to rock up on the right skid. The pilot countered the action with left cyclic. The aircraft slid off the taxiway and spun 270 degrees to the left. The main rotor struck a large rock and the aircraft sustained major damages. The pilot and copilot exited the aircraft. Smoke was coming from the engine compartment so the Air Force rescue team covered the aircraft with foam. There was no fire. CPT Jennings suffered slight bruises on the nose and thigh and 1LT Peters was not injured.

On the 21st, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16676 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the hover operations area, they took five hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the cargo section and tail section, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired.

On the 22nd, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident and loss record for A Troop OH-6A #66-07886 flown by WO1 R.B. Dahl with SP4 Kirk Snader as Observer. CPT Oilote is listed as a passenger with a code that usually denotes that he was not a member of A Troop. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

At approximately 1010 hours, WO1 Robert Dahl, pilot, and SP4 Kirk Snader, Observer, departed Phu Cat AFB after refueling. They departed for the AO to make a VR. The unit policy to replace on station, but after two hours of flying in the AO the other team had not shown up. At this time, WO1 Dahl noticed the fuel gauge read seventy pounds of fuel. He then called his flight lead and told him of his situation. At approximately 1210 hours the flight departed for Phu Cat AFB to refuel. Ten minutes later they were in sight of Phu Cat to the northwest. WO1 Dahl's fuel low warning light came on; his altitude was 100 feet AGL and his airspeed was 70 knots. After five minutes the flight was to the northeast of Phu Cat and was entering the traffic pattern. No emergency had been declared. After over two hours and fifteen minutes of flight, the engine quit because of fuel exhausting and the pilot entered autorotation. He made a 140-degree turn into the wing. He had a large sandy area below him with few obstructions. At 30 feet he started a steep flare; at five feet he

pulled initial pitch. He then pull cushioning pitch and the aircraft touched down hard with a tail low attitude. The main rotor blades flexed down and severed the tail boom from the aircraft. The aircraft then came to rest with no further damage. There was no fire and neither pilot nor observer sustained injuries.

Also on the 22nd, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop OH-6A #67-16620 flown by WO1 R.L. Hassman and Instructor Pilot WO1 J.H. Robinson. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

WO Robinson was giving WO Hassman transition training. The IP had previously demonstrated five autorotations; while in the traffic pattern on downwind, the IP initiated a simulated forced landing. As the IP rolled off throttle, the engine failed. The IP took control of the aircraft and executed a 180-degree autorotation to an open field. The field was muddy and allowed no ground run. The IP touched down with forward airspeed; instead of sliding, the aircraft pitched forward on the toes of the skids. The IP applied aft cyclic to prevent the rotor blades from striking the ground to the front of the aircraft. The aircraft then rocked back and the main rotor blades flexed into the tailboom severing it from the aircraft.

WO1 John H. Robinson provides: I do remember this day! As I mentioned in an earlier account, I had served with C Troop for the first three months of my tour and was then transferred to B Troop. My duties were OH-6A IP and I worked in maintenance. I'd guess I was with B Troop about four months before being assigned to the IP section in HHT. I came down from Enari periodically to do check rides and transitions.

CW3 Walter Gutsche served with then CPT Billy Bowling in B/1/9th Cav in Vietnam in '66-'67. On this day Walter was refueling his Innkeeper CH-47 at the Ban Me Thuot city airfield. He recalls: While we were waiting for the refueling process, we could hear and see an OH-6 flying the traffic pattern doing some training maneuvers. We heard it call from downwind telling the tower it was practicing a forced landing to an open rice paddy. Shortly there after we heard the same voice inform the tower that they had chopped off their tail boom during the landing and needed the tower to call their home base at Ban Me Thuot East to arrange for a recovery. I broke in and told them we would be coming out of refueling shortly and if they got the aircraft rigged I could recover the aircraft back to Ban Me Thuot East for them. It was agreed. The unit at Ban Me Thuot East launched a Huey with the slings to carry the OH-6 and they rigged the aircraft for recovery. They then removed the rotor blades and took the broken tail boom and put them in the Huey. I came out of refueling and just popped up over the tree line and headed towards the downed aircraft. As I approached the aircraft I saw a familiar baldhead and got the surprise of my life. The man standing on top of the aircraft holding the slings for hook up was none other than Billy Bowling!! Holy cow I haven't seen that guy since my first tour three years ago and he is still recovering aircraft like he did from me so many times. Unfortunately he was being barraged by my rotor wash and busy trying to hook us up to notice that I was flying. I saw him in the 2006 reunion and finally told him I was the one in the Chinook. Since it's a rare occurrence that a Chinook is used to recover a tiny OH-6, he remembered the incident, in fact as I recall the sling loaded aircraft barely changed our hover torque.

On the 25th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop AH-1G #68-15160 flown by an unnamed crew in Cambodia. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the tail rotor system, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

Also on the 25th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16116 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during level flight at an altitude of 10 feet and at 20 knots of airspeed, they took one hit from

7.62mm type SA/AW in the right top of the fuselage, that resulted in engine and structural damage, and necessitated a precautionary landing. The helicopter was repaired in theater by the 79th TC Company. SP4 Gary Phillips recalled:

I joined C Troop, really the 412nd TC Det on May 18th as a 67V20, LOH crew chief. I wanted to fly and about a week later I was in the Scouts. This was the first LOH I was assigned to as a crew chief. I don't remember who was flying it this day. I recall that they took hits but kept flying. When they shut it down they found that they had taken one serious hit in the upper tail section above the cowling that had gone through some of the structural parts of the frame. We turned the aircraft in to our support maintenance unit because we couldn't repair that type of damage.

On the 26th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop AH-1G #66-15313 flown by Aircraft Commander CPT E.L. Spivey. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

While hovering, the tail rotor assembly and the 90-degree gear box separated from the tail boom. The aircraft was landing hard to prevent tail boom from getting in the re-arm area. Further inspection of the 90-degree gear box mount indicated that it was hit by small arm rounds. Inspection continues to determine total damage. The 90-degree gear box mount failed, cause unknown.

On the 28th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record for C Troop OH-6A #66-07875 at grid BS828112 and flown by WO1 Bruce Carlson, with SP4 Floyd Hansen in the front, and SP5 Rocky Conklin in the rear. All three crew members were injured. Bruce provides the following:

I was Red 14. We were Scouting out the east side of the hills that open to the Bong Son plain about fifteen clicks north of LZ North English. It was rare for us to be on that side of the hill as we usually were on the An Lo Valley side, the five fingers, the fishhook and occasionally in Happy Valley. This may have been Floyd's first flight in the AO. I was drifting down the side of the hill looking into caves when all of a sudden all I saw was the strobe light effect of an NVA regular emptying his AK into us. I think that he hit us with all thirty rounds. He took out the engine, knocked the transmission off one of its mounts, got all the radios and actually shot off a blade. With more luck than I deserved, I managed to crash through the trees to the ground. When we hit, I was knocked out for a moment. When I came to, both my observers were gone and the aircraft was burning. I later learned that Rocky was Looking down, I saw fuel flowing past my feet and knew that this was the end. (Months previously, I had used an entrenching tool to place the charred and consumed by fire body of a wing man into a body bag. So I knew what was coming!) All of a sudden I heard a whoosh and explosion sound. Though I know that it is impossible, as I looked toward the back of the bird, I saw the explosion and wall of flame coming at me. Closing my eyes, I waited to die. Obviously, I did not. Miraculously, I escaped with only a few minor Willie Pete burns on my chin and face. We Scouts loved that clear face shield. Mine had lots of dings and scratches on it from previous cockpit hits and the resulting shrapnel. While this was happening, my back-seater, Rocky, who was seen by the Snakes (I learned at VHPA 1999 Reunion that the Snakes had seen him) laying on a rock stunned, rolled over and emptied his 45 into the face of one of the NVA soldiers. Within a couple of minutes, after I had gotten out of the wreckage, we were gathered together with a 45, my 38, and three or four frag grenades. We did the only thing possible, crawled into a crevice in the rocks and hid. We could hear the NVA looking for us and could listen to them signal each other by whistling softly. Two, maybe three times, we could have reached out and touched their feet as they came so close to us. To this day, I have no understanding why we were not found, captured and or killed on the spot. Our XO, and I don't remember his name, inserted the Blues for what they assumed would be a 'gather up the bodies' mission. He led the Blues to our crash site. As God is my witness, when I first saw them, he was walking point. He had landed his C&C bird and went in with the Blues. He was a West Pointer and the best darn soldier I ever worked for or with! When the

ship blew, one of the front-seaters in the Snakes thinking he was on the intercom broadcast to God and everyone else who was on the push: "Well I be damned! They finally got the Son of a Bitch!" – referring to me, of course! The 498th Dustoff was called in to lift Floyd and Rocky out because both of them had dislocated knees or some such thing that they could not walk. To cap the day off, the Dustoff ship also got shot up and showed me what Army Aviation was made of! Being a devout coward, I decided that I would hump out with the Blues and ended up at the Aid Station at LZ English for an overnight observation. The next morning, while hitching a ride back to Lane AHP, I got chewed out by a (Remington Raider) REMF for being dirty and out of uniform. For some reason, my military discipline broke down and I had forgotten to save my hat from the fire. All three of us were back flying Scouts in just a few days. [In Bruce's book *Red Bird Down!* there is a novelized version of these events in chapters named The Ring and Command & Courage.] The story doesn't end here. One of the Blues that day was SP4 Jim Yamnitz who had previously been in the Scouts. It is a bit of an irony that Jim and I were once shot down together over the An Lo! Anyway, Jim took several pictures of 875 just as we got shot down, crashed, burned and exploded as they moved toward the crash site. These pictures were published in the 2004 VHPA Calendar with the title 'The LZ is Marked with the Burning LOH.'

SP4 Floyd Hansen recalls: I was a 67V20, LOH crew chief, joined C Troop in July and was assigned to 086. I really loved that ship and spent a lot of time cleaning and polishing it. Everyone liked 086 because it had a strong engine. I liked flying and being a Scout. I became proficient at seeing things while flying in the wing LOH. This was my first day flying in the front seat of the lead LOH. I recall being told that we were looking for an NVA ammo or medical supplies cache site in this area. I believe Rocky had wounded a person and we were following a blood trail when we took all the AK fire head-on. Both Rocky and I were firing our 60s all the way to the ground. I remember taking some Plexiglass cuts before we crashed. My helmet hit the door-frame and split open during the impact. I was knocked unconscious and suffered a spinal compression. I came to because Bruce was hitting my right shoulder telling me the ship was on fire and we needed to get out. I checked my 60 but it was bent. I managed to grab just one grenade before exiting the ship with my 38 still strapped to me. I remember, in slow-motion, running away from the aircraft and, without much sound at all, feeling the blast and the warmth on my arms and back. We linked up and hide on a rocky ledge. Bruce waved his shirt to attract the attention of the wing LOH who signaled that he saw us by flashing his landing light. I remember that Rocky shot an NVA in the face with his pistol. I remember being able to smell the NVA and they shot at us hoping we would return the fire, but we didn't. We only had two pistols and one grenade, so we were in no position to start a fire-fight. I'd guess we were on the ground about 25 minutes total. The Blues' arrival was our saving grace. Rocky went up on the penetrator first. I remember seeing the NVA shooting at us and the Dustoff ship taking hit after hit after hit as I was going up. All their Plexiglass was gone, their pedals had been hit. I give them a lot of credit for hanging in there when they could have easily flown away. I believe Rocky was hurt worse than I was. I was taken to a MASH unit and stayed with them awhile. I'd guess it was a couple of weeks before I was flying again. I stayed with C Troop the entire year. When I returned for my second tour, I couldn't get into C Troop so I crewed a LOH in the 123rd Aviation and ETS after serving nine months with them. I am still in aviation maintenance. I work for United Technologies in their aircraft engine plant.

SP5 Rocky Conklin recalls: I came to C Troop as a 67N20, AH-1G crew chief in Nov 1968, but there was no slot for me. I worked around the Cobras for a couple months until there was an opening in the Scouts. I flew as an Observer and never became an OH-6A CE. I remember flying with a CPT Ireland a lot. My most serious LOH experience was with Bruce and Floyd on this day. I love to fly and be in the AO. I thought I was pretty good with the M-60 and all the bombs we made to drop out of the LOH. I flew with my legs outside resting on the skids, butt on the floor and attached with a bungy cord. I was firing at the guy who had shot us up as Bruce turned the front of

the LOH away from the rocks. We went down hard and fast. My M60 was jammed between the skid and the LOH. I could see it was bent. When I got out of the wreck, I slipped on this rock and slide about 20 to 30 feet to the bottom. I landed on my hands and knees near a depression in the rock and saw this surprised NVA walking toward me. I shot him with my pistol and then returned to the LOH. Bruce and Floyd were still in it. I got to Floyd's side first. They were both a little out of it. I helped Floyd with his seat belt and when he seemed to be getting his act together, went around to Bruce who was just coming to. Once they were out, the ship was burning and we moved about 50 to 75 yards down this trail until it separated to go around this boulder about as large as a house. We ended up staying on a rocky ledge and that is where we signaled the other aircraft. Naturally we were glad to see the Blues. I remember only one man in the back of the Dustoff – he swung me in from the penetrator. The pilots just seemed to have blinders on. They only watched the instruments as the Huey kept taking hits. I only remember being in the hospital about a week but when I returned to C Troop, he could hardly walk. Not long after this, we had an older NCO, I think an E-8 come to the Scouts. He wasn't with us too long, only a week or two when he got shot in the neck and was evaced. For some reason, I ended up as an acting platoon sergeant for the Scouts until I ETS on 31 Dec 1969.

SP4 Jim Yamnitz comments: Earlier that day, the C&C had wanted the Blues to search an area so we had flown out in the Hueys. Something changed the plans, so they just put us in these dry rice paddies in the valley while the lift ships went to move an ARVN unit. We were still there when the LOH got shot down. I snapped a sequence of about seven pictures including the first small explosion and then the larger one. Sometime during the 1990s I mailed the negatives to someone and have never gotten them back, so I am glad to know some of the prints still exist. After the larger explosion, the Hueys picked us up and took us up the hill. We were very sad. We just knew we were going to retrieve the bodies. I'd guess there were about 25 Blues on this operation. I was completely surprised to see Bruce, Rocky and Floyd still alive when we got there! I also remember watching that Dustoff ship get shot up. During my months in Vietnam I've seen some brave things – but I would NEVER have stayed in that Huey getting hit like they were! It was getting dark by the time the Dustoff pulled away and it was certainly dark by the time we got out. I remember that the Blues went back into the area a day or two later, but the NVA had cleaned out all the caves.

The following article titled “‘Ruthless Rider’ Raise Ruckus in II Corp” by SP4 David R. Wood with photos by SP5 John Stidham appeared on pages 1 through 4 in the September 1969 issue of Hawk, the official newsletter of the 1st Aviation Brigade.

Deep in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, an area reminiscent of the foothills of the Rocky Mountains or the Appalachians, is the headquarters of the 7th Armored Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry at Camp Enari. The ‘Ruthless Riders,’ commanded by LTC Calvin R. Bean, operates in direct combat support of the 4th Infantry Division, also headquartered at Camp Enari. Three strictly airmobile troops and one ground/air mobile troop comprise the squadron. During the recent Ben Het-Dak To offensive, Alpha Troop, commanded by Major Richard H. Marshall, saw much action. A written commendation by LTG Charles A. Corcoran, commanding general of I Field Force (IFFV), supports the success of the troop as they supported the ARVN, Civilian Irregular Defense Group and 5th Special Forces advisors in the 24th Special Tactical Zone (STZ). “Please convey my congratulations to the officers and men of A Troop for their performance while conducting operations in support of TL Lien on 25 June in the Dak To-Ben Het area. The courage and initiative displayed during these contacts resulted in several enemy KIA without casualties in the U.S. ranks. The aggressive manner in which A Troop engaged and defeated the enemy demonstrates a high degree of training and professional ability.” “The scout platoon from A Troop started working the 24th STZ, which includes Ben Het-Dak To west to the Cambodian and Laotian borders, during the early part of May,” explained CPT Larry M. Thompson, squadron liaison with the 24th STZ. Captain

Thompson went on, "The initial purpose of the mission was visual reconnaissance for suspected NVA troop movements east across the 'red line,' the Cambodian and Laotian borders. It wasn't long until the purpose of the mission was changed from VR to actually clearing Rocket Ridge west of Ben Het and opening and securing the road between Dak To and Ben Het." "Starting the first week of May, we flew every day we could get up. Probably about twenty days since then we have been down due to weather," stated WO1 Dale E. House, pilot with A Troop. "We'd set down at New Dak To (or Dak To II) a click west of Old Dak To for a briefing before beginning work in the AO," continued WO House. "Everyone knew the mission and objectives before the briefing. We worked the AO over daily with our Snakes (HueyCobras). We'd mark an enemy position with rockets before turning the marked area over to the FAC and artillery. One of the most impressive sights I saw was when Hueys from the 52nd CAB laid down a cover of red smoke completely surrounding Ben Het so that their Chinooks could resupply the camp." Now that Ben Het is quiet, the Hunter-Killer teams from A Troop, comprised of two OH-6A Light Observation Helicopters (LOH), two AH-1G HueyCobras and a UH-1H Huey Charlie-Charlie (Command and Control) ship, work a circular visual reconnaissance of the 24th STZ). "The scouts have been the most active in A Troop," stated CPT Friedrich K. Rosenburger, executive officer of A Troop. "They have killed many of the enemy since the beginning of the Ben Het offensive. But I don't want to take any credit away from our Blues (aero-rifle platoon) which do a tremendous job when the need arises." "On one occasion," CPT Rosenburger related, "a LOH went down near Dak To in a region of triple-canopied jungle. The Blues were called in to secure the downed helicopter so the pilot and 'oscar' (observer) could be medevaced. A squad of Blues had to rappel from a hovering Huey into the area to clear an LZ. Once the LZ was cleared, the rest of the Blues were inserted. The aircraft was secured and the pilot, CPT Michael W. Hodge, and observer, Sgt Terry L. Heath, were rescued." "I commend my men along with General Corcoran," said MAJ Marshall. "They have done an outstanding job these last couple months and will continue to do so." Bravo Troop, commanded by MAJ Scott T. Lyman, has recently been transferred to Camp Enair from Phan Thiet. While operating in Phan Thiet, B Troop was in direct support of Task Force South, headquartered in Dalat. The troop was moved to their present location in late June to support the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division which works in the region of An Khe. Operating in much the same manner as A Troop, the Hunter-Killer team's mission is visual reconnaissance. The particular area of interest is a region known as VC Valley located west of An Khe. The area is believed a staging and training area for the Viet Cong. "At present, the best way to operation the regions we are in is with the scouts," stated CPT Ronald R. Post, B Troop executive officer. "The jungle canopy is just too thick for inserting our Blues. When the need arises, such as securing a downed aircraft, the Blues will be inserted. To put them in to develop a situation would be suicide considering the size of enemy forces suspected in the area." Headquarters at An Son, west of Qui Nhon, and operating much like Alpha and Bravo Troops, is the last strictly airmobile troop in the squadron. Charlie Troop, commanded by MAJ Joseph A. Tobin, has operated out of Lane Army Airfield/Heliport since the end of May. Working in direct support of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, Charlie Troop has had very good results with their scouts in the An Lau Valley. A typical morning of operation for C Troop begins when LOHs, HueyCobras, Hueys and the Charlie-Charlie depart Lane Heliport for Landing Zone Up Lift. LZ Up Lift is the staging and rearming point for the Snakes and miniguns carried on the LOHs. The Hueys set down with the Blues and a squad from the 173rd to wait for the development of a situation where they can be inserted. After the briefing, LOHs, Cobras and the C&C ship leave for the morning mission in the AO. "We fly in a formation flying from tree top to 4,000 feet depending on the mission," explained CPT Larry F. Miller, executive officer of C Troop. The first team is later relieved by the second team and the AO for the day is fully covered. If the Blues of Charlie Troop are ever scrambled, they take with them an element that the other troops of the Ruthless Riders have yet to put into action. This element is a scout dog and trainer supplied by the 173rd. "The combination of our Blues and the scout or tracking dogs of the 173rd have made our ground

operations much more effective,” said CPT Miller. The ‘grunt’ troop, air/ground mobile, of the Ruthless Riders operates out of Camp Enari in direct combat support of the 4th Infantry Division. Delta Troop is commanded by CPT Robert D. Bruegger. Delta Troop’s mission, to perform reconnaissance and to provide security for designated major combat elements of the 4th Infantry Division; to engage in combat as an economy-of-force units; and so provide limited ground antitank defense for elements of the 4th, is performed within 15 to 25 kilometers of the base camp, Camp Enari. “The men of Delta Troop can be ready to go either by air or ground. They are on a 15-minute standby as a reaction force for the camp and the Dragon Mountain area. They have performed their job to perfection.” Said CPT Bruegger of his men, “and they will continue to do their job whenever the need arise.”

Concerning the ‘life and times at Ban Me Thuot East’ for B Troop, 1LT Ken Wilson recalls: We moved to Ban Me Thuot around the end of August / first of September to begin operations along the Cambodia border from Duc Lap to Bu Prang. Our next four months at Ban Me Thuot would be the worst living conditions of the year I was in the unit. We moved into a mud pit with no facilities at all and literally sat on the ‘sawhorse toilet’ in front of everyone coming and going on the flight line or better put – revetments. We also had to provide our own perimeter security for quite a while and pilots had to pull some shifts. Even though conditions were bad we made the best of it and made a lot of jokes. I remember WO Gerontis made a video, using frames, of himself scooting along on his butt as if he were driving. It turned out to be totally funny. I also remember Gerontis pouring ammo powder down an ant hole at Duc Lap, then lighting it and planting both feet over the hole. He literally blew his ass about 18-24 inches off the ground. It was the funniest thing I saw while in Vietnam. I wonder what he is doing today?

Continuing with the ‘life and times at Ban Me Thuot East’ theme for B Troop, 1LT Woody McFarlin recalls: As I mentioned earlier, even though I was an UH-1H AC in the Lift Platoon, eventually I had a chance to fly in the front seat of the Cobra. I’d guess that was a couple of months after joining B Troop. This was the aircraft I wanted to fly but branch didn’t send me to the transition course prior to Vietnam. I ended up getting a couple hundred hours in the front seat before I got a transition. I remember going to Vung Tau for the AH-1G transition training. When I returned B Troop was at Ban Me Thuot East. I was required to extend my tour for six months in order to go to Cobra school. After I got back from Cobra school, they decided that they were not going to allow people to extend. I only flew about four months in the back seat on that tour. I remember the C-130 strip at East, the USAF Green Hornet helicopter detachment, and some artillery there. For some reason I believe the Lift pilots had two tents but I don’t know why that would be the case. Maybe they had two tents and the XO or some other officers joined them. They didn’t have any ground attacks while I was there, but after I left I understand they had some. I remember a 175-mm gun battery across the runway from us. That was loud. You’d hear BOOM BOOM – the round breaking the sound barrier over us and then the muzzle blast. I remember CW3 or CW4 Carrier who one of our maintenance pilots. [Carl Eugene Carrier was his full name. Believe he is now deceased.] He would give carrier landings qualification. There was a maintenance warrant that did test flights for the Cobras after we moved back to Enari from Phan Thiet. As the story goes, he was out by himself (no one in the front seat) when he hit a flock of parrots. One of them came through the Plexiglas and disintegrated. There were parts of this bird all over this poor guy! I remember we had only a mess tent at East. The only meat that we had to eat for what seemed like forever was ground beef. It had been thawed and refrozen several times before it got to us. Of course we were at the very end of the supply line. The Scouts went out one day and shot 4 or 5 small deer. These were dressed and the mess people cooked them up. This was a welcome change over that ground beef. We normally had Cs for lunch and ground beef for dinner and sometimes breakfast. We were the only unit on the north side of the runway, so we had a B Troop mess. When we first moved down to BMTE, the 4th Inf provided us with a security unit. I believe it was what

was left of a company that was recovering after a major battle. They had little critters with them. I have some pictures of us having to burn the crappers to get rid of the little critters. It was back to basics on that subject. But this was better than the Vietnamese security we had at Phan Thiet. Oh, the shower situation at East wasn't good at all. I believe we went for at least a week once without water for showers. We didn't have hooch maids at East so we had to wash our own clothes. I seem to recall that we went three or four days without drinking water. All we had to drink was Black Label beer (in rusty cans) Dad's Root Beer and Fresca. I still can't drink any of that stuff to this day.

CPT Lou Chirichigno provided the following: I enlisted in the Army in 1960 and served in the 82nd ABN until 1963. While attending college in Alabama, I joined the National Guard and they sent me to OCS. I returned to active duty in 1966 and served with the 1/506th ABN at Fort Campbell. They sent me to Ranger and Pathfinder schools. My first tour in Vietnam lasted two months. I served with the 3rd Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division. I was shot while crossing a creek. I spent one month in Japan recovering from that. I finished that tour with the Special Forces B-51 team outside of Cam Ranh in May 1968. I received my RA commission and went to flight school. In February 1969 I was a company commander in the 82nd AVN BN at Fort Bragg. I volunteered to return to Vietnam and was sent to AH-1G transition en route. It was late August or early September 1969 when I joined B Troop at Ban Me Thuot East. MAJ Bowling was concerned about the Troop's pending IG inspection, so he made me the XO. For the next three weeks or so my only flying was in a Huey to various places as we prepared for the IG inspection. Since we did pretty well on the inspection, Billy asked me what I want to do next – I said I wanted to fly Cobras. That was late September. We were flying everyday. I remember working with a gun team from another unit around Duc Lap. This B model gunship made a gun run and was climbing out when POOF it exploded and completely disappeared! I was flying with WO1 Mike Peterson that day. We looked and looked for them in the sky but never saw them again. We continued making our firing runs to support a unit named CHICKENHAWK on the ground. When we got back to East that night we went to the club and sort of forgot about these events until someone from Operations came in with the news that this CHICKENHAWK unit was in trouble again. Peterson and I volunteered to go there because we were somewhat familiar with the tactical situation. I still hadn't had my Cobra check ride yet and was still learning. We flew out there single ship, firing off our load, got a serious THANK YOU from CHICKENHAWK and returned to East. Peterson and I flew together a lot. Even though he had more experience than I, he let me fly back seat a couple of time.

SP4 Steve Bassett provided the following: I landed in Vietnam on 22 July 1969 as a 67H20 (AH-1G crew chief) straight out of AIT. I liked being a mechanic and was happy with the training the Army gave me. Prior to coming into the Army I worked at Eastern Airlines, so I understood the basic of maintaining aircraft. For some strange reason, I was initially assigned to D Troop. Since I wasn't a combat soldier I felt like a duck out of water. I did a lot of busy work and just sat around. I worked as a mail clerk and even jeep driver for the Troop Commander. I was so new to the Army and to Vietnam that I didn't know any better and since it wasn't too dangerous, I figured 'what the heck?' I remember the Troop Commander wanted to keep me as his driver but was told 'no he's a helicopter mechanic and we need him in that job' so I got ordered to C Troop. I'd guess I'd been in Vietnam about a month when I got to C Troop at An Khe with, I think, two others who had also been in D Troop. They immediately put me in maintenance and I was happy because I started working on the helicopters right away. I believe that the maintenance areas were facing some 'mass DEROSs' at the time. At that time I wasn't assigned a specific Cobra as 'my ship' because at the beginning of each shift we were given specific tasks to accomplish and that could be on any of our aircraft. After a short while I let it be known that I wanted my MOS changed to 67N (Huey) because I didn't feel good about working hard on an aircraft and having someone else fly away in it. As it turned out it would be months before I got my own H Model to crew, but those were my feelings. I guess I'd

proven myself as a good mechanic, so the leadership cut orders changing my MOS. As the more experienced mechanic DEROSed, I sort of stepped in as the 'head of maintenance.' We had a Captain from Germany as the platoon leader and an E7 (a rather large, white guy) as the NCO, so I wasn't in the leadership in a formal way. However, the Sergeant (I don't recall his name) asked me to go from ship to ship after they'd been worked on to see if everything was done that needed to be done and that the work had been done correctly. He also asked me to help the new guys learn the tricks of the trade. For example, it is difficult to connect the servos between the rotor head and the squash plate on a Cobra. I remember several guys working for hours without success. The trick was to extend it to the proper length first and then it would fall into place. My nickname was 'The Dog' – you know as in Bassett Hound – and I was OK with that. So this 'head of maintenance' name certainly applied to my duties rather than any official MOS. I remember we had this one guy who was an 11B assigned as a Crew Chief on a Huey. Remember how we would periodically clean the engine? With the engine running, we would discharge a fire extinguisher into the inlet. This would remove any buildup on the turbine blades and walls. Well, this guy backed up a water truck to his Huey and stuck the hose into the inlet. That destroyed the engine and got him busted out of maintenance. Let me tell a funny story about the Captain from Germany. One day while we were still at An Khe, I and a couple of my friends decided to go visit one of the local villages. I believe the base security officer was trying to discourage this sort of activity because as we were returning to the main gate they started shooting in our direction. We tried approaching the gate from another direction but met with the same results. We decided to give that up and just catch a ride to Qui Nhon so we started walking down the road in that direction. A few minutes later we see this jeep coming with 'Top Wrench' written on it and I immediately recognized that it belonged to our maintenance Captain. I lower my head and kept walking; hoping he would just drive by. He did but stopped and backed up to talk to us because he recognized us. He had a strong accent and was a little difficult to understand. He asked us where we were going – we said Qui Nhon. He asked if we had been shot at while trying to return through the gate – yes. He told us that he was traveling to Qui Nhon to make a MARS call because he had learned that his mother was very ill. Then he said, 'but I didn't see you.' He also said he needed to figure out some way to get back on base. We said OK, he drove off, and we continued walking. A few minutes later we got a ride. Once we got into Qui Nhon we decided we visit this USO club that sold ice cream. When we get there I saw our Captain sitting at a table talking with some pilots. I didn't want to push my luck, so we got our ice cream and sort of tried to be invisible. But he saw us and motioned for us to come to his table. Almost immediately he asked the pilots if they were returning to An Khe? – Yes – And could they take us with them? – Sure. The Captain says – OK guys, go with them; so we did! I remember flying over the gate and looking down at the security guys. We all smiled at ourselves – they may well have been looking for us and we were only 60 feet over their heads! We landed and ran to make roll call. I was about 15 minutes late and the Sergeant says, 'Hey Bassett where were you during roll call?' I made up some story that I was in the crapper. He smiled and walked away.

October 1969

On the 2nd, the A Troop unit history reported that they spent several days searching for an OH-6 reported missing on the 2d but apparently not from their troop.

SSG Tom Wells provides: The Blues were inserted on the 2nd and the 7th. Officially I'd been in A Troop about a week at this point but since I'd been released from D Troop it's possible I had been with A Troop for a little longer. The 2nd was my first time in the field with A Troop's Blues. We had been inserted into an old NVA bunker complex. The NVA were long gone but there was some fresh digging in the area and maybe this is what the Scouts had noticed. We been on the ground about 30 minutes when the C&C Huey lands and out comes MAJ Ron Maxson with his 38 drawn. He asked, 'Have you checked out these bunkers because I think there is something here?' I told him

it was an old complex but he didn't seem to believe me. He walked off and looked into a few bunkers. I was walking behind him. After a few minutes I asked him if he had a round chambered in that pistol? He said, 'No.' I knew that a lot of pilots flew with their 38s that way. So I said, 'Well, Sir, if you are going to poke your head in some of these places, you'd better have a round ready to fire.' Well, that changed his whole outlook on the situation. He looked at the bunkers again and then at me and said, 'Well – you're doing a good job here and I'll let you continue doing it.' He went over to the RTO and called for his Huey. We stayed another 30 minutes or so and then came out.

Let me tell how the Blues were configured. We had 44 on the books but only about 30+ went out with us each day. We had four Lift ships with 5 or 6 grunts on each. The 1st ship had 7 – we called ourselves the Magnificent Seven. They were myself, the RTO, the Kit Carson Scout, the dog and his handler, plus three point men. The point men sometimes rotated. When we were moving on the ground we'd have the Point Squad first with two flank squads. The Kit Carson Scout was first, the point man, me, the RTO, an M-60, and two grunts with at least an M-79 and an M-16. When we came to an objective, I always had the flank squads face out. I didn't want them shooting at us. The Kit Carson Scouts were interesting guys. We used several Kim, Chau, and Dick. They were all good soldiers. They wore tiger fatigues and would talk to the enemy for us. They would look through any documents we'd come across and tell us if it was important or not. We'd get cases of horse meat to feed the dogs and the Kit Carson Scouts liked to eat this too. I'll tell you two Kit Carson Scout stories – one about Chau and the other about Dick.

Chau had been a VC. He was young and he was good. Once we were searching a small position with a bunker behind it. There was an NVA in it with an AK and a machine gun. Chau was trying to talk him out but he wouldn't come. Ten or fifteen minutes went by. We wanted to take him alive. We had an ARVN interpreter with us on that mission. I asked him what was going on. After a few minutes, he said to me words to the effect, 'I don't know how to say in Vietnamese – "Okey, mother f#\$%, if you want me, come in and get me!"' That surprised me a little. Finally, Chau got mad and suddenly runs into the bunker. BANG, BANG, BANG and in a few seconds Chau comes out with the gun. We went in and found this NVA with three bullet holes in his chest.

Dick had been an NVA Captain in the 66th NVA Regiment for six years. He was 30 years old. I was 26 at that time. He lived with the Blues. He didn't like loud music. He had a wife and family in Hanoi, but I guess he got tired of the situation and he knew he wasn't going home again; so he started a new family here in Pleiku. If we were fighting against the 66th NVA, he wouldn't go out with us. We'd give him captured weapons, he'd turn them in as if it was from the VC and they'd give him money so he'd buy steaks with that for us. He walked point with authority. He knew the terrain. He could read signs and see booby traps! When things got hot, Dick would take the door. He was with A Troop when I arrived and he stayed 8 months. He ended up with D Troop. I never saw him fire a weapon but he was a good Scout.

On the 4th, A Troop reported that while searching east of LZ Hardtimes in the vicinity of the 'Oregon Trail,' two of their LOHs received enemy fire. One received one hit and the other received 15. One observer was seriously wounded and required evacuation. Gunships expended on the enemy position, killing the enemy personnel. The VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16293 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 one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired.

On the 5th, A Troop reported working for the 1st Brigade for the next 11 days. Numerous enemy positions were reported with no recent usage. No enemy soldiers were observed or killed.

B Troop's daily reconnaissance provided considerable intelligence data as the enemy movements and activities in the Bu Prang area increased. Numerous bivouac sites and bunker complexes, well used

trails, and crops under harvest were reported. AW fire directed against B Troop's aircraft increased as the month progressed. Weather precluded some operations early and near the middle of the month. During the last week of the month, five B Troop aircraft were damaged by AA fire.

On the 18th, the following article titled "LOH Spots NVA In Foggy Jungle" appeared in October 12th issue the Ivy Leaf. CW2 Connaway provided a copy of this article:

Copied in St. Louis Aug 2010

On the 13th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16293 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the level flight operations area, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the tail section, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

Also on the 13th, A Troop's Blues were inserted. SSG Tom Wells wrote the following piece he calls 'A short time in the Bunker:'

We were inserted northeast of An Khe. All morning the scout platoon was in contact with an NVA unit in a bunker complex. The guns rolled in a few times. We were waiting all day, but finally got word to go in by late afternoon. We landed at what looked like an old firebase on the edge of a cliff overlooking the Bong Song valley. We were inserted about 50 meters from the bunker and advanced on the position. The enemy was holed up in a big bunker about 50 feet around. One side of the bunker was caved in so we advanced toward that side. I deployed the platoon and I moved up on one side of the bunker. As I moved toward the gun position, I noticed the Avionics Sergeant who came along with us was in the line of fire of the machine gun when it opened up. He went down. I moved back toward him out of the line of fire and grabbed him by his web gear and dragged him out of the area. The medic assisted. I left him with the medic and moved back to my position by the bunker. I moved up to the gun position. I then threw a hand grenade in the bunker. When the dust cleared, I noticed the bipod of the machine gun was sticking out. I grabbed the bipod and dragged the gun out and moved to the back of the bunker. At this time SSG Parady was on top of the bunker opening up a hole in the top with some of the other troops. PVT Hasley and Specialist Smith were throwing hand grenades in the hole and the enemy was throwing them back out. They finally got some to go off inside. As we were standing on top of the bunker, an enemy soldier crawled out one of the gun positions and tried to shoot at us on the top of the bunker. SGT Parady spotted him and took him under fire and killed him before he could shoot at us. SP4 McGowan, our radio operator, informed me that the lift ships were on the way in to pick us up because a huge rainstorm was coming in. I told SSG Parady to move the platoon back to the LZ. I would stay there and be on the last lift ship out. We then threw in three more grenades and a concussion grenade. As the dust settled, I dropped my web gear and grabbed a .45 and entered the bunker. I was in about 10 feet when I encountered an NVA. I shot and killed him and then moved 10 more feet into the center of the bunker. I saw three or four more personnel moving around. I emptied my .45 at them and backed out of the bunker, grabbing the AK on the way out. I got outside where it was pouring rain. I couldn't find my web gear or my CAR 15. The men said somebody took it with them. I looked up and saw three ships lifting out. The fourth one was on the ground. We threw two more concussion grenades and a couple of frags into the bunker. We then ran back to the LZ as fast as we could. One door was open and we jumped in. They closed the door behind us. That was the first time we ever left an LZ with the doors closed, but the pilots were able to get us out of there without crashing. The next morning the scouts were working a different AO, but were able to go by the bunker complex. They said they saw at least a dozen drag marks through the mud out of the bunker. That was the end of the short time in the bunker.

On the 16th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #65-12942 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took three hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the main rotor blade system and the cargo section, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired.

On the 17th, A Troop reported while working in the vicinity of BR3135, after uncovering six observation platforms, their Scouts were taken under fire by an enemy .30-cal machine gun, resulting in one US WIA. The ARP was inserted but reported no significant findings. The VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #65-12942 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the battery comp, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 18th, A Troop reported accounting for three more NVA KIAs in scattered incidents.

SSG Tom Wells A Troop's Blue Platoon Leader wrote the following and titled it 'The Dogs of War:' I had worked with scout dogs in 1965 during my first tour in Vietnam, prior to joining the 7/17th Cav, but they were handled by the ARVN soldiers. One exception was an American soldier who had some kind of a sniper mission. He would go out by himself with the dog which was a strange set up – just him and the dog. During my time with A Troop's Blues we often worked with two scout dogs. They were like night and day. Their names were Clipper and Duke. Clipper was a small wiry dog, about 70 pounds, and you had to be careful around him. It depended upon his mood. Duke on the other hand was a huge German Shepherd who weighed about 120 pounds. He was a friendly, likeable dog. Although we liked having the Scout choppers around for our own protection when we were moving through the jungle, we sometimes had to tell the Scouts to back off because the helicopters interfered with the dog's mission. The choppers were noisy and the wind from the blades threw off the scent. The handlers enjoyed working with us because they weren't working day after day, and it gave the dogs a chance to rest before going out again. We would pick them up in the morning at the airstrip. They were part of the 4th Infantry Division and worked with us on a day-by-day basis. The Blues would insert with the dog and handler. They would move out in front of us about 25 yards and circle back. They would often find booby traps in our area. As I said before, Clipper had a split personality. You never knew how he was going to work, but it wasn't his fault. He was trained as a sentry dog back in the states and worked on air force bases in Vietnam. I guess they were short of scout dogs, so they retrained him in country. One day in the AO we had Clipper with us. We came upon an enemy bunker complex. There was only one NVA soldier in a bunker. We were trying to talk him into surrendering. He wanted nothing to do with that. He kept shooting at us with his machine gun. We were just about ready to attack the bunker with hand grenades when Clipper somehow broke loose from his handler and charged into the bunker and engaged the armed enemy soldier in "hand to paw" fighting and killed him. In doing so, Clipper saved many American lives, as I wrote in his citation. Duke was a highly intelligent scout dog, the best I have ever seen. He was playful and gentle, but when it came time to work, he worked. He could find many enemy positions, booby traps and pongee pits. During one stretch, he lived with us for six weeks and the boys enjoyed having him around. On one of our missions we were moving through some thick jungle area and Duke was working okay but his handler said he was acting a little strange. We had moved through the area about 200 yards when Duke went out to cover the next 25 to 50 yards, but he never came back. The handler was worried. He kept blowing on his dog whistle, but Duke wouldn't return. I told the men to spread out and start moving to see if we could find where he was. We thought something might have happened to him. We came upon a small clearing and there was Duke holding the arm of an NVA soldier who had an AK47 lying next to him. Every now and then Duke would just growl as he was holding him. The enemy soldier could

have easily taken his rifle and killed Duke, but he was so afraid of this huge 120-pound animal that he was shaking. I think the NVA was glad to see us. Duke's citation mentioned how he engaged an armed enemy soldier and single-pawedly overpowered and captured him. Although they worked well with us, we only had them for about eight more months on and off and then we never saw them after that. They were most likely reassigned during the Vietnamization. The dogs would never see home again because they would contract a blood disease and were unable to go back to the states. We had a saying "we never leave someone behind," but sad to say we had to leave man's best friend and valorous scout dogs behind.

On the 22nd, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop UH-1H #68-15406 flown by WO1 D.W. Graham. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads: While landing in the LZ, experienced a tree strike. Inspection continues to determine total damage to aircraft.

On the 23rd, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop UH-1H #67-17248 flown by WO1 R.L. Thompson. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads: Aircraft was flying downwind in traffic pattern at 70 knots when right cargo door came off and struck main rotor blade. The door was open however the retaining pin was not inserted. Inspection continues to determine total damage.

On the 24th, while operating 20 miles southwest of An Khe, A Troop Scouts observed five individuals and received light AW fire. Neutralizing fire was immediately placed on the enemy position by Cobra gunships and the Blues were inserted. Although the ARP did not come into contact with the enemy, they did find a small supply cache and were able to capture or destroy 200 pounds of rice, water, ammunition, and tobacco.

Also on the 24th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15609 flown by Instructor Pilot CW2 H.L. Barber. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads: The IP was demonstrating a low level autorotation when the RPM bled off immediately prior to take off and the aircraft experienced a hard landing which resulted in damage to the skids and crosstubes. Inspection continues to determine total damage.

On the 28th, the expected enemy offensive was launched with attacks on CIDG camps all around the Bu Prang area. This action would be known as "The Siege of Bu Prang."

Also on the 28th, A Troop reported their Scouts observed seven NVA soldiers wearing khaki uniforms, tan packs and black pith helmets. The Scouts and Guns engaged them, resulting in six NVA killed.

On the 29th, B Troop thwarted three separate attacks on firebases around Bu Prang. Gun ship attacks destroyed two 12.7-mm AA guns and one 57mm RR. The friendlies began abandoning firebases and consolidating around the main Bu Prang and Duc Lap camps. From actions during this month it was learned that elements of the 28th, 40th, and 66th NVA Regiments were involved in the siege. The VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop OH-6A #66-14393 flown by an unnamed crew in Cambodia. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the left engine comp, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

Also on the 29th, A Troop's Scouts discovered a small enemy bunker complex. One bunker and one structure were destroyed by the gunships.

On the 31st, A Troop's Scouts were once again on the receiving end of enemy fire. While operating in the An Khe area, they received light AW fire, which slightly damaged one LOH and forced the pilot to return to An Khe. Cobra gunships took the area under fire with under results. The VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage records for two A Troop OH-6As flown by an unnamed crews during recon missions. (1) #67-16241 took five hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the main rotor blade

system, fuel cell, and right cockpit. (2) #67-16676 took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the tail section. Both helicopters were repaired in theater.

Joseph Stanco served as a crew chief/gunner on UH-1Hs in A Troop from May to November 1969. Need to add his recollections.

SP5 Chuck Strong provided: I was a 67N20 when I arrived in Vietnam and was assigned to the 568th TC Det with A Troop about June 1969. After AIT I was sent to Korea to work on H-23s for several months – I'd guess seven or eight. I remember about nine guys volunteered for Vietnam from the unit in Korea and we were all sent to Vietnam at about the same time. Only one, Larry Lee, served with me in the Squadron. He and I were very close. I even stayed at his house before and after Vietnam for a few weeks. He called me a few years back but I've lost touch with him. I didn't do much in the 568th. I remember they wanted to give me a desk job – ordering parts for the motor pool. No thank you! Larry was an AH-1G crew chief but he kept bugging people to get the two of us in the Lift Platoon. I believe I was in the 568th about four months when I was assigned to the Lift Platoon. I became the crew chief for 689 (UH-1H #68-15689) and Larry was given another UH-1H. I stayed on 689 until I DEROSed about June 1970. 689 was often flown by the platoon leader. I remember LT Sims very well. My memories of those days are really a collection of "short subjects." For example, I remember watching the snapper attack at An Khe. After the explosions stopped and the flight line was declared secure, they made us sleep in the helicopters the rest of the night to protect them. I didn't think that was such a great idea but we did it. I remember once at the end of our day in the AO the weather was bad so we took off as the lead ship to see if we could get back home. We had a full load of Blues on board and went up through a sucker hole which, of course, closed behind us. Luckily we had some altitude. The AC got vertigo and I felt like we were going straight down. The other pilot took the controls and was able to get the ship straightened out but then he got vertigo too. The AC took the controls back and by a miracle we were able to get back to our staging area. If we hadn't had all that altitude, I'm certain we'd have crashed. I remember once we spent the night in the bush because of the weather. I remember we took a swim a nearby river. I remember once we spent the night at a Special Forces camp again because of weather. I was always taking extra ammo for the M60s. I remember lots of the pilots were on me because of the extra weight. Well, one day I had the day off and someone else flew in my ship. They got into a battle and shot up all the ammo in the other Lift ships. Someone remembered that I always had extra ammo on 689 and they were delighted to have it.

SSG Tom Wells A Troop's Blue Platoon Leader wrote the following and titled it 'The Boys and Their Dog:' Sometime in late October 1969, I had been running the Platoon for about two months. We were out in the AO, sitting in the LZ. The scouts and guns were engaged with a company-size enemy force that morning. Around noon we were inserted about three clicks from the enemy position. It was a well-worn trail up a steep hill. We started moving into the area with flanks on both sides, but after a while we were so hot that everybody could not keep up. I kept getting calls from the C&C trying to find out what was holding us up. We moved our scout dog onto the trail and moved straight up toward the position. We came to a footbridge about 75-feet long, made of bamboo that we had to cross. There was a waterfall a hundred yards up-stream that pooled out underneath the bridge. There were signs that the enemy had used this area. It was about 500 yards from their position. It was a dangerous area to cross. I got the second squad, led by SGT Dion Soliz, across the bridge and they took up position. I started moving the point squad across. The handler was behind me with Clipper, and SGT Smith was on the other side with the third squad. About half way across, Clipper decided he wasn't crossing the bridge. I guess the bamboo slats bothered his feet. He jumped off downstream into the pool of water but was unable to swim across as he got caught in some rapids that were taking him further downstream. At this point his handler jumped in after him and was also caught up in the rapids. SGT Soliz' squad started running down the bank dropping their equipment and also dove in after the dog. What made things worse was that SGT Smith and the third squad, who were on the opposite bank, followed in

pursuit of the dog. As I stood there with the point squad in amazement, yelling for them to get back. It was quite a debacle. The dog swam ashore by himself with no problem and came up on the other side. I guess Clipper felt it was a hot day and needed cooling down. By the time we got the platoon back together, I was beside myself, although I could not stop myself from laughing. We finally got organized and moved up toward the enemy position. The enemy was long gone, probably after the first shots were fired that morning. We found tons of equipment, mostly ammo, and huge storages of rice that were in the ground about 5 feet deep and 10 feet wide. We decided we were not going to be able to move this out so we started destroying it in place. It was a hot day, over 100 degrees, and we had to go another click uphill to get to the new LZ they found for us. The area could accommodate about 75 enemy troops so we set fire to everything, (hooches, lean-tos, rice, etc.) picked up all the ammo and started moving back uphill. I now felt as though we were running a 20-mule team up this hill carrying all this ammo. As we left the area, about half way up the hill, we had secondary explosions behind us from the fires that went up about 100 feet in the air. I guess we didn't get all the ammo. Early evening we finally reached the LZ. Everyone, except the C&C ship, was there. MAJ Maxson had a bad habit of flying his C&C ship like a Scout, always looking for something. It was late and everybody was complaining. They all wanted to go back to base, including the Officers. I then picked up the radio and called his call sign and said, "King, this is God. Get out of the AO." He was confused by the message. I repeated, "King, this is God. Get out of the AO." A few minutes passed and word came down to hook up; we were heading back. There was a lot of hot water used in the Camp that night.

November 1969

During this month, A Troop supported the 1st BDE in operations to the southwest and west of An Khe and occasionally the 3rd BDE west of Enari. A Troop finally completed the construction of their aircraft maintenance hanger at Camp Enari. B Troop continued to support TF Fighter until the 1st BDE started Operation SPREAGINS WHITE during the "Siege of Bu Prang." C Troop worked the An Lao Valley with the 173rd ABN. D Troop worked with B Troop until the 13th when it returned to Camp Enari and started providing convoy security on the Enari to Cheo Reo highway.

On the 2nd, B Troop was working an AO on the edge of the main battle area and 1LT Kirk Curran remembers:

I was a 1LT then and had been flying Cobras with the Undertakers since I joined B Troop in August. MAJ Bowling had asked several RLOs if they were interested in flying the "little birds." So that day I was flying as WO Jim Nowicki's Observer as part of my training to become the Scout platoon leader. Jim was Scalphunter 13, flying wing for Scalphunter 17, CW2 George W. Grega, who had SGT Vernon C. Shepard as his Observer. [The VHPA helicopter database has the tail numbers as 66-17760 and 66-07894.] The area we were working had been defoliated some time prior, so the foliage and trees didn't completely obscure our view of the ground. As we orbited around Grega, Jim and I spotted this huge bunker complex. One of the bunkers had a very large opening that looked like a wide set of stairs going down into the ground. We called Grega to have a look and reported what we'd seen to the C&C and Guns. It was really unusual and Grega moved around for a few seconds and then came to a near hover over the bunker with the large opening. That's when the NVA laced him bad. Even though they took a lot of fire and SGT Shepard was wounded in the foot, he got a Willy Pete out and George moved off. He was streaming fuel like crazy. Jim and I thought he was going to blow up. You could see the fuel atomizing in the rotor wash and forming clouds near the hot exhaust. The Guns rolled in and started beating up the bunkers complex on SGT Shepard's mark. We told George to get it on the ground QUICK and suddenly this large "L" shaped LZ seemed to pop up in front of us; so George just flared and dropped it in. The next thing that happened was just plain good luck. I had a "hot Pete" (a WP grenade without a safety pin) in my hand and told Jim I wanted to throw it out in the trees and not the LZ; so we over-flew George and started to circle back - as we reached the trees where I pitched

the Pete. We quickly got back to the downed ship and landed near them. Our LOH had a minigun and I had an M-60 fed from the back. Grega and Shepard got in the back; I'd guess George was near the center of the compartment and Shepard was closer to the outside. We took off and did not get to 100 feet when the world opened up. I don't know if the NVA had ambushed that LZ or the road that went through it or what. Maybe they hoped to get the relief column for some of the firebase battles that were going on. Anyway, Jim and I saw two 51-cals at our 10 and 2 and later learned of another at our 7 o'clock. Jim hollered over the radio and I worked the 60 against the 2 o'clock gun position until the belt broke. The good part about this was that by that time the Pete I'd thrown was now fully developed; so the Guns and C&C had no trouble finding us even though their attention had been directed toward that bunker complex. The mini was on and I reached back to get the ammo belt, opened the cover of the 60 and was just closing it when I noticed that the front of the little bird was gone and we were going down. There was a big explosion. The fire-ball that went past us took off part of my mustache and burned part of my hand between my gloves and the nomex flight suit. I'm not certain if we tumbled in the air at that point or what; but we hit the ground hard and bounced into the air to land again without any rotor blades or skids or tail boom. Naturally we were hanging upside-down, trapped inside and I remember thinking it was going to blow again. Later I would joke that what caused us to crash was being over-grossed with NVA 51-cal slugs - really a bad joke! Anyway, Jim and I finally got out and started grabbing stuff we thought we might need. I set up the 60, we got some WPs and an AR-15 (you know one of those shorties). I had my 45. The Troop didn't have any more 38s at that time, so I was blessed with a 45. The survival radio was in a net between the seats. We didn't think about it, so it stayed there. About then we noticed SGT Shepard at our 3 o'clock laying face down. He had been thrown from the ship and had a terrible wound from a 51 completely across his buttock. You remember how large the Army field dressings seemed when we were in training? Well I remember thinking it would take half a bed sheet to cover that wound, he was laid open that badly. The fire was still pretty intense all around us and really the position was untenable; so we decided to book. The LOH was still burning and there were small explosions coming from it now and then as the grenades or a WP went off. Anyway, we dumped the 60 back in the LOH and started to move away when we heard George from inside the aircraft. Jim went back to get him but returned saying he couldn't get him out. We moved away and never saw George again. I later learned that the guys in the air had seen figures running toward the trees and determined we were all together and were at least not killed in the crashes. But what they had seen was the NVA running for the trees because we had crashed almost on top of one of their bunkers and they were scared to death. We started moving toward the south because we had received less fire from that direction. Jim was in the lead, then SGT Shepard, then me. SGT Shepard hadn't received any bone hits but he looked terrible. The grass was tall in the LZ. We hadn't moved off very far when we saw this Cobra coming in to land.

SGT Vernon Shepard gives us his point of view. I was a brick layer by trade. When I received my draft notice, I thought - well I don't want to go to Vietnam as an Infantry guy, so I enlisted in the Army as a brick layer. As you might guess, I never saw another brick and ended up in helicopters! After AIT I went to carpenter school, then to Fort Knox as a carpenter, and somehow I ended up in Vietnam assigned to HHT/7/17 as a jeep driver and mail room clerk. That lasted less than two weeks when someone asked me to shine some officer's boots and I thought "that's it - I ain't doing that!" I asked around and was told there were openings in B Troop's Scouts but I'd have to volunteer. They described the job. It sounded OK to me, so I volunteered. I'd been flying as a Scout for about four months and really liked it. I don't think I'd do it again, but I really liked it at the time!! I'd flown with George Grega a few times prior to this day. He seemed to like me and I liked him. We communicated and worked well together as Scouts. I think it was the night before this battle or maybe two nights before, but we were all in one of the Scout tents having a beer and George said to me. "I don't want to scare you or anything, but today when we were returning home from the OA as

a flight of four LOHs I happened to notice there were only three shadows on the ground. At first I thought it was because we were sort of in a cloud or something, so I moved over a bit. Shep, (that was my nickname in B Troop) we didn't have a shadow - we just weren't there!! No matter what I did, we didn't have a shadow." At the time I sort of 'wrote this off' but maybe George had a premonition of things to come. I only remembered it afterwards. Anyway back to the battle, I don't remember the bunker with the large opening Kirk described but I DO REMEMBER the bunker complex and looking 'eye to eye' with an NVA 51-cal crew. I literally could see the whites of their eyes!! I put out the Pete and fired. They fired and did a damned fine job. I used to fly with my feet on the skids. I was hit in the left foot (after a few days this wound wouldn't bother me that much) and in the chin (that wound caused me a lot of discomfort for some time because there was a piece of meat inside my mouth - I finally bit that off and it healed with a big lump of scar tissue.). But I don't think there was much left of the bottom of the LOH. The radios had been shot out and the fuel cell must have been dumping fuel like crazy because it got all over the front bubble and started to obscure our vision. At first I thought it was engine oil but I looked back into the engine compartment and could see that the oil tank level looked normal. Anyway, the other ship flew along side us and with arm and hand signals made it clear that we should land RIGHT NOW! I'd guess we flew for maybe two or three minutes after we were shot. I remember landing, getting into their ship, and getting shot down again pretty much like Kirk described it. I wasn't hurt by the explosion he described but I knew I'd been hit in the butt. I got out of the LOH after it hit and sort of ran down the hill a little ways. I don't think I 'blacked out' during any of that but I might have. I do remember crawling away from the two LOHs because I had a hard time moving. We weren't too far away when we saw the Cobra come in.

WO1 Mike Peterson, who was flying the Snake (#67-15616) they saw trying to land, provides: I had been in B Troop about five months and was in the back seat as AC that day. CPT Lou Chirichigno, who was my platoon leader but hadn't been in that position all that long, was in the front seat. We had flown as the high Gun earlier in the day. Our team was refueling at Bu Prang when we got the word that a LOH was down and that the other team was firing. We left in a hurry. I don't remember the briefing we usually had as one team replaced another on station. It seems to me that we got there first and never even assumed the position of high Gun; just started trying to help our people on the ground. I do remember seeing the LOH burning when we arrived at this huge L-shaped clearing but I don't remember seeing the other LOH. We made a quick, low pass and told the C&C that it certainly didn't look like a survivable crash. On our second pass we were surprised to see someone get out of the wreck and from the way he walked we could tell he was seriously hurt. I believe we were the only ship on station and that we were talking to the C&C who was some distance away. Anyway, Lou and I talked it over and decided to land. The plan was for Lou to get out, put the injured person in his place, and remain on the ground until someone could come get him. Please remember that we were working under the premise that the LOH had received fire from a place 3 or 4 miles away and had managed to fly away from the danger only to crash in this open area that we believed to be safe. Naturally, that assumption got us into lots of trouble later on but at that time we knew nothing of the action that had gone on in this area before we arrived. Lou argued that we should go straight in at that point but I suggested that we make one more low, slow pass to see if we drew any fire. We flew about 50 feet off the trees, rather slow, and right along the edge of the clearing - nothing - or at least nothing that we could tell. I made a turn and started back to land. The NVA maintained great fire discipline and really suckered me in. Suddenly we got hit from everywhere!! I remember the cyclic being shot in two but I still had the grip in my hand. Lou yelled he had been hit in the hand. I was hit in my left leg and foot. We went in inverted and impacted not far from where Grega was. After things stopped flying around, I was able to get out without that much difficulty and went around to help Lou out. He didn't have the use of his hand and it was really hurting him. Anyway, we got out and managed to link up with Grega. I remember he was

badly burned but could speak to us even though he was dazed and incoherent at times. Funny, I felt no pain at the time - the adrenalin must have kept me going because my wounds were really rather serious. We kept telling Grega that help was on the way but we knew he was in bad shape. The only thing I took from the Cobra was a shot gun without any shells -- really smart! We could see the NVA all around us in the trees and knew it was only a matter of time before they'd come after us. After awhile, we came up with a plan for me to move to the southern end of the LZ in such a way as to convince the NVA that all three of us had moved there. Thus Lou and George, who were the most seriously injured, could hide and wait for the rescue ship. That is how we separated. I was successful in moving in a rather obvious way through the tall grass to the southern end of the LZ. Not long after I got there a Huey tried to land to get me.

CPT Lou Chirichigno continues: Concerning the events of November 2nd, I remember Grega receiving fire and moving off. WO1 Mike Peterson and I were in the high Cobra. We made one firing run. Peterson said he thought that the radios in one of the LOHs weren't working but he repeated the instruction for the little birds to move off. We made a second firing pass. The first LOH was on fire, obviously had no radios, and was losing fuel. The priority was to have it land in a safe place to recover the crew. By the time we got over the area, we saw one of the Americans (it turned out to be Grega) running with his shirt off. Peterson and I talked as we turned over the large clearing. We agreed to land and put him in my seat. As we passed, I fired the turret at the tree line and continued firing on the landing approach. It was easy to see the NVA and even easier to see them firing at us. As we got close to landing, suddenly we started taking hits and were shot down. I was hit in the right arm. I lost one finger and had two broken bones on that hand. The knuckle on my left hand was also injured. Peterson had injuries to his left ankle and knee. I think that caused him to push one of the pedals because the aircraft was turning to the left as we crashed. The Cobra was tilted badly on the right side and was almost inverted. Peterson got out rather quickly. My right hand was a mess and I could just barely release my harness. Peterson came around and helped me get out of the aircraft. As we gathered at the bottom of the Cobra, Grega arrived. He was really suffering and smelled bad. His hair, face, and arms were burned. He was screaming 'I'm in pain!' I told him to calm down or the NVA would start firing at us. We stayed near the Cobra all the rest of the afternoon. I remember seeing some of our Cobras return and make firing passes but no LOHs. I didn't realize they had inserted the Blues. After the aircraft left it was quiet for a while. About 6 p.m. it was almost dark when the aircraft returned. I remember the last aircraft made a fast approach and watched a 51 fire at him. Peterson said he wanted to go look for a place to bring in some rescue aircraft. I agreed that he could do this while I stayed with Grega. I couldn't use my knife, so he took it and left me his 38. I had two on me, so with his now we had three. I told him to come back before dark because I didn't want to be all spread out if we spent the night there. I never saw him again until we linked up in the interrogation camp.

1LT Ken Wilson continues: I was on normal '2-minute' standby with the Blues at Duc Lap. About 1430-1500 we received a call to launch and prepare to secure and protect a Scout flown by CW2 George Grega with Observer SGT Shepard who had taken rounds and were losing fuel. We launched and flew out to meet him. George had to set down at the top end of an open field -- toward the smoke. We arrived and were circling the field when CW2 Nowicki and 1LT Kirk Curran picked up Grega and Shepard. As they pulled pitch and started to fly down the LZ they too were shot down and the LOH began to burn and then there was a small explosion. As I recall Grega had been trapped in the wreckage and was burned but also freed by the explosion. There was a report that someone was running up the center of the LZ. I watched as CPT Chirichigno and WO1 Peterson flew into the LZ to try to rescue Grega. As the Cobra came to a hover I saw it hit the ground and roll over throwing the blades and transmission in all directions. MAJ Billy Bowling called and asked where I wanted to be inserted. I can assure you my adrenalin was pretty high but not as high

as it would be later in the day and night. We chose a very narrow road to the north of the LZ that had 75-100 foot trees on each side. We were inserted quickly and moved out.

WO1 Mike Peterson continues with his story about the Huey flown by Rogers and Feeney. Just like they had done when I was trying to land, the NVA held their fire until he had slowed to touch down. Then, all hell broke loose!! My fingers were on the skid and the crew chief was reaching out to get me; but the ship was taking a terrible pounding. I remember dropping to the ground and believing that the Huey would surely be crashing in on top of me any second. I was both surprised and glad to see them get away. It wasn't until after I was released and Philly Fogg visited me in the Pleiku hospital that I learned one of the pilots and one of the guys in the back were wounded seriously in that ship. Anyway, I laid low after that until it got dark and then moved into a thick clump of bamboo in the trees for the night. Everything was quiet that evening from my vantage point, save for a few shots from individual weapons. I heard a Huey return and land later that evening but I couldn't see it from where I was.

1LT Kirk Curran continues. Jim, Shep, and I watched what I later learned was Peterson's and Chirichigno's Snake coming in at an angle and get lower and lower until it was about to be masked from view by the grass. The NVA 51-cals opened up again and you could see the ship shutter with each hit. It sort of stopped in the air, then went straight down and crashed. Soon we heard lots of small arms fire and believed the NVA had killed the crew. I later learned that Lou and Mike were not killed and did link up with George. I learned that they moved in a southern direction as well and must have passed us but we didn't know it at the time. (Editor's note: This is not exactly correct; only Peterson moved to the south, Lou and George remained near the aircraft.) Naturally the guys in the air were doing everything they could to help us. It was a thing of beauty to watch the Blues get inserted. In fact it looked like the Lift was just making a low pass; they were in and out that quickly. Unfortunately we were not that close to them and in the tall grass we would probably have shot each other in the link up.

Editor's note: Early in my research efforts I had a conference call with MAJs Billy Bowling, the B Troop CO, and Leighton Haselgrove, the Squadron S-3. My notes from that call are terrible. But Billy explained that B Troop's Blues and D Troop (-) were inserted in an LZ a couple hundred meters further to the south of the large L-shaped LZ. They destroyed and/or maneuvered around several NVA AW positions as they moved toward the large clearing. At least part of this force did indeed get onto the large clearing but that was a still some distance further to the south of the down air crews. Because no one knew exactly where the downed crews were (survival radios would have made all the difference in the world!) and because the NVA were moving all along their flanks and this was obviously 'their ground,' the Blues could not stay there long. The Blues said that if they were going to stay on the ground overnight, they would need to be reinforced with a 'large force' (specifically one that had its own mortars) and that they would need lots of artillery support. It was getting late in the day and Billy said he couldn't deliver on either of these 'support requirements.' This isn't surprising - Squadron QR-LLs show that the nearest U.S. Infantry and Artillery were some 4th Infantry Division elements near Cheo Reo, the ARVN had their hands full with the fire base battles, and the site may have been outside ARVN Arty range (but no one trusted ARVN Arty!) This area was very near Cambodia and basically was a 'long way from anywhere.' So they pulled the Blues out before the NVA could set a trap for them.

WO Ricky Gerontis was the AC of the lead slick flying with CPT Jim Donohoe as the other pilot. Ricky recalls: After flight school I went to Ft. Hood and helped form an air cav troop there with other guys like Ron Tusi and Dave Bourbon. So I had some experience prior to joining B Troop about 24 March 1969 at Phan Thiet. I served in the Lift Platoon my entire year with B Troop. I admit that I was a little young and foolish because I flew in LOHs and Cobras a little and even went on the ground a few times with the Blues. That scared me enough that I stopped all that and just

flew Hueys. I made AC after about 30 days and was Pallbearer 37. I kept a diary during my year in Vietnam. On 2 Nov I was flying as Pallbearer Lead with CPT Jim Donohoe as the other pilot. We started the day by staging out of Duc Lap. We were called out when the second LOH went down and joined the rest of the aircraft circling high because of the heavy NVA AA fire. I clearly remember seeing the Cobra trying to land near the LOHs. There were two bright flashes on its side. Then it just rolled over and crashed. I also remember listening to one of the Scouts on the radio as the Cobra was coming in. You could hear the NVA weapons' muzzle blasts over the radio and you could certainly see them as well! I remember being absolutely scared to death that MAJ Bowling was going to tell us to insert the Blues in the open area near the three downed aircraft. Blessedly he was smart enough not to order us to do that because it would have been an absolute massacre! The NVA were smart and were using those downed ships as bait for more of us. However, there was another issue – fuel. Fuel would be problem for everyone all day long. I remember some of the Pallbearers had fuel-warning lights when we started to insert the Blues. Billy told us to insert the Blues but allowed us to free wheel on the LZ selection. As Lead, I went down and flew circles around the large open area until we found a small open area on this old road that was off to the side of where the NVA heavy weapons could cover. We inserted our Blues and the rest of the Pallbearers followed suit one or two at a time. Then we flew to Bu Prang for fuel and picked up some more infantry from Delta Troop. We inserted them at a different place from the LZ we'd used for the Blues. We returned to Bu Prang for fuel and really had a difficult time getting enough to make us operational. Finally it was dark when we returned to extract the infantry. I believe the two groups of infantry had linked up on the ground but I can not be 100% sure about this. We had two Stagecoach (#19 and #15) slicks from the 155th AHC out of Ban Me Thuot help with the extraction. I think one of the HHT Hueys also helped. I wrote in my diary that Bob Rogers' ship took 18 hits getting Kirk Curran out that night. I went in first and sort of flew low and slow while talking to the Blues on the radio. We were taking a lot of fire. There were lights flashing and blinking all over the place. Finally I found this one steady light on this thin road. It was not the same place we had inserted them earlier in the day. Naturally everyone jumped on our ship and we literally had to kick some off. I remember it was tight but there was more than one Huey on the road with us. We had to turn on our landing light to take off so we wouldn't hit the trees - it was that dark. Naturally that didn't help and we took a lot of fire. I remember one NVA soldier was killed and his body actually landed on our skid! The fuselage of the Huey did hit the trees as we lifted out. I think we flew directly back to BMTE. The rest of the Lift ships went in groups of two or more at a time to complete the extraction. I remember at least one had a major blade strike but we got all the infantry out and no one else was hurt. That was the scariest day of my life! The next day I was on my way north to Pleiku so I could go on R&R. I DEROSed from B Troop in March 1970.

WO Dale Jacobs, Pallbearer 39, was the AC of the second Lift ship with WO1 Bennie See as the other pilot. When Bennie became an AC he was Pallbearer 32. Bennie believes that WO David Teall, Pallbearer 34, was the AC of the third Lift ship with possibly WO Tim Yost as the other pilot. [Editor's note: Tim, in another interview, said he does not recalling flying this day but was flying on the next day.] Bennie also believes the WO Don Enselek, Pallbearer 39, was the AC and 1LT Doug Stenberg as the other pilot in the fourth Lift ship.

1LT Doug Stenberg was in the Lift platoon and participated in the insert and extract of the Blue. He recalls: I was assigned to the Lift platoon when I joined B Troop in June. By November, I had flown a great deal but was not yet an AC. On the 2nd, I was paired up with an AC, WO Don Enselek, who was a professional with excellent flying skills. This day became like no other day I experienced or would experience in Vietnam. It would demand the utmost of both of our abilities. Our Lift platoon, consisting of six Hueys, was staging out of Duc Lap. Each Huey carried a squad of Infantry Blues. It was early afternoon when we got THE CALL. As best as I can remember it was five minutes flying time from Duc Lap to the downed aircraft site, so I estimate by the time we cranked and got

there it would have been 20 minutes from the time the LOHs first ran into trouble. We were instructed to enter a holding orbit south of where our aircraft went down. While we were orbiting we heard there was also a Snake down at the same crash site. This crash site was a large clearing with jungle all around. We continued the pattern, waiting instructions to insert the Blues. Naturally everyone wanted to help and understood the gravity of the situation with three of our aircraft down. MAJ Bowling was flying C&C, doing a good job of directing the battle but the situation was extremely difficult. The NVA certainly had the clearing well covered. After a number of orbits, the decision was made to insert the Blues on a road relatively close to the site. After inserting our Blues we proceeded to Bu Prang, about 15 miles west, to pick up an element of D Troop and put them down at the same location as our Blues. After completion of these drops, we continued to circle south of the LZ in case we had to immediately extract our Blues, the downed crews, or both. We did this continuously until we got low on fuel when we returned to Duc Lap for a quick refuel. We never topped off our fuel tanks. This insured us of having enough power to lift the Blues out of the jungle at a 2,000 foot elevation. During one of the numerous on-station orbits I could see down to the jungle floor and observed the NVA running from tree to tree. The hours passes, the Blues could not make contact with the down crews. It was getting VERY dark, no moon, no ground lights, truly difficult to make out a distant horizon. When I looked straight up I could faintly make out stars. Everyone was tired, we were running on adrenalin. The day was already long, no end in sight, low on fuel. During the darkness of the night, my AC got vertigo. I told him his speed was slow, his degree of bank was steep and his pitch attitude was nose high. He relinquished the flight controls to me until he got his bearing when he assumed them again. Finally we were instructed to extract the Blues. The extraction was at the same location where we had inserted them. (Editor's note: This is not exactly correct. See SGT Tibby's remarks.) Due to the darkness, it was a single ship PZ to the road with trees reaching 100 to 150 feet on both sides. Luckily the Blues were more than accustomed to us and we to them because any disorganization could have been disastrous. The extraction was going well, with each ship returning to Duc Lap for fuel once they were off the ground. Our helicopter was the last ship in, but when we started to make our vertical descent my AC began to loose control of the aircraft and started to over compensate. We went from side to side, nearly hitting the trees with our rotors blades. I yelled at him saying, "I have the controls, I have the controls." He released them to me, and I managed to regain control of our Huey and set it on the road. The last of the Blues and Blue leader climbed onboard and we immediately took off for Duc Lap. I do not fault my AC in the least for loosing control of the aircraft. It was extremely tense, dark and a long day. The same thing could have happened to anyone. That is why there are two pilots. But as tough as the day was, it was not over yet. Most of the Lift ships were very low on fuel and there was even some concern about making it to Duc Lap, but we did. The refueling area at Duc Lap was down the hill and outside the camp's perimeter, really an unsecured area. We all landed safely but then a problem developed. No matter what anyone did, we could not get the pump started to refuel the aircraft. We sat on the ground at idle while we tried to solve the dilemma. It was getting pretty serious because we knew we could not fly anywhere else. We certainly did not want to spend the night there and we were getting no help from the Duc Lap people. Finally, I came up with the idea of pushing the fuel blivets up the hill and then gravity feed fuel to the ships. It was not easy but there was plenty of manpower to push the blivets. It was a slow process but each aircraft received a minimum amount of fuel to make Ban Me Thuot East. Two of our ships took fire as they left but neither were hit. Anyway, the last aircraft arrived safely back at camp about 0100 on the 3rd, some 19 hours after we started. What a day!! As dramatic as this day was for us, in the Lift, it pales in comparison to the six guys left behind. The following days everybody was very subdued. We did a good job but wished we could have done more. I will always have some very vivid memories of Nov 2, 1969. I stayed in the Lift platoon for the rest of my tour.

1LT Ken Wilson continues: Once on the ground, we moved down the road with our Kit Carson Scout, we called him Nam, and SGT Chasteen on point. We encountered one or more small explosive devices. After a few hundred meters we turned into the woods to try to get to where we could rescue the pilots. We worked our way up to the edge of the woods and I called and asked for someone to try to ID coordinates/location of some of the downed guys. One of the Cobras flew down the center of the LZ at about 100 feet altitude and maximum speed. We looked across the LZ, just over 100 meters, at the edge of the wood line and could see what looked like 100+ NVA firing AK 47s and machine guns at the Cobra. Also we could hear two 51 caliber anti-aircraft weapons – one on each side of our immediate position and not more than 50 meters away. I believe it was myself, SGT Chasteen, my RTO and M60 machine gunner who crawled up to where we could see the 51 caliber position on our right. I lined up WO Dave Bourbon, who was accurate with rockets, on a gun run across the LZ. Sgt Chasteen and I threw WP grenades onto the position and we all ran like hell to get out of the area so we didn't get hit by the rockets. I'm positive Dave's rockets hit the 51 cal position but they had the gun back up and firing in about 15 minutes. At some point during the late afternoon a platoon of 21 more guys from D Troop joined us. We now had a total of 42 guys on the ground. At dusk the same four who crawled up the 51 cal position crawled out into the LZ for a short distance but the grass was too high to see much of anything. We also called out the names of the guys in case they were in earshot. We had no success in finding any of the guys and were extremely disappointed. I really hated to leave our fellow soldiers in the LZ but I also knew we were greatly outnumbered and I didn't want to get 42 more people KIA or WIA. Therefore, I made the decision we would get extracted since I saw no way we could rescue the pilots. I also made the decision that it was too dangerous to go back to the original drop-off point. I asked for the PZ to be 50 meters behind our position on a narrow road with bamboo growth and huge trees on both sides of the narrow road. The Squadron Commander had called earlier for the Hueys and they were circling overhead. As I recall at about 2030 hours the flight of Hueys landed to my strobe light to extract us. We were lined up in groups of seven for the six aircraft. Unfortunately one of the Hueys had run low on fuel and had returned to Duc Lap for fuel. Therefore, I found out that there were only five Hueys on short final so we put eight people on two aircraft and got 37 of the guys out safely. Five of us now remained (Blue 1, RTO, two M60 machine gunners and my Vietnamese interpreter) on the ground and waited on the sixth Huey. We were hoping the NVA thought we all were extracted. When the Huey showed up to extract us I turned on my strobe light and it didn't work. No one had a flashlight. They were being carried by others already extracted, so that left me with the Pen Flares. There was a bend in the road just north of us and another bend just to the south. It was now about 2100 and extremely dark. I believe the pilots were WO Don Enselek and LT Doug Stenberg. They would lose the road every time due to the bend in the road. I couldn't fire the flares until I knew I could get the Huey into our position because of concern of letting the NVA know our position. While they were trying to find us 1LT Curran's strobe light was spotted and he was picked up and rescued. Finally after many attempts to find us the Huey actually followed the curve in the road. I fired a pen flare in front of the Huey and did a ground control approach over the radio. The pilot got vertigo from the pen flare and the co-pilot had to take over. It was an extremely hairy approach/landing with bamboo flying everywhere. I honestly thought the Huey was going to crash but through some miracle it just hit hard and all five of us were onboard in a flash. I've never been so happy in my life and was celebrating with the pilots as green tracers were flying around us. We finally knew we were safe. I felt so bad about leaving my fellow soldiers in the LZ but I also felt a sense of great relief that we had been in the middle of 100s of NVA and made it out alive. We later learned there were two NVA Regiments in the area and somewhere between 1500-3000 NVA. We were extremely fortunate!!!

SGT Eddy 'Tibby' Chasteen prepared the following after the 2000 7/17th Cav Reunion: This report is written from my notes and journal that I kept after everyday's action. On Nov 4th, I took the time

to draw the first versions of the clearing and the log bunker that are included. The details were confirmed and enhanced by members of the Blue Platoon during the 1992, 1993 and 1996 Reunions. First let me describe the make-up of the platoon. On the 22nd and 27th of August we received several DEROS replacements. Some were experienced Infantrymen from the 1st, 9th and 25th Divisions; but they were short-timers. During the Nov 2nd, we had about six to eight men from B Troop on standby at Ban Me Thuot plus some from D Troop. Many of our men still at Ban Me Thuot were short-timers. I'd guess about ten or eleven of the August replacements were straight out of Infantry AIT. This explains why there are so many PFCs involved on Nov 2nd. I believe that only Pop Gilman and I had been in a firefight with B Troop's Blues. Doc Rupp had only been with us about four weeks. By reviewing notes and various sets of orders, we believe the following soldiers were involved on Nov 2nd. This is not 100% accurate. Even the spelling of some the names is not known for sure. For example one set of orders has Daniels, Vernon yet others remember that Daniels was his first name.

First Squad landed in the first slick

CPT	Kenneth E. Wilson **	Blue One
SGT	Eddy 'Tibby' Chasteen **	Pointman
PFC	Doug Renfro **	RTO
PFC	John Rennington **	M60
PFC	Kirby Hollandsworth **	M16
PFC	George Chamblee **	M16

Second Squad landed in the second slick

SSG	Peter Keller (may have been at BMT)	Blue Two
PFC	Weiss	RTO
PFC	Brodnick	M60
PFC	Clifford Verreen	M16
PFC	Francis Donahue **	M16
PFC	Norman Chambers	M79/M16

Third Squad landed in the third slick

SSG	Roger 'Pop' Gilman **	Blue Three
	Unknown	RTO
PFC	Adkins, Jeffery **	M16
SGT?	Green	M16
PFC	Vernon Daniels or Daniels Vernon	M79/M16
PFC	Rupp **	Medic

** denotes we are fairly certain this soldier was involved on Nov 2nd.

SGT Eddy 'Tibby' Chasteen continues: We left our staging area at Duc Lap about one to two hours before dusk for the insertion. I sat with my legs outside the slick on the left side. I saw smoke to our front. Blue One was moving around a lot in the slick to get a better view. He and the pilot were trying to get a clear understanding of what was where on the ground. About this time we saw the crash site. It was at our 9 o'clock position. The Cobra was easy to spot. I only recall seeing one LOH. We watched a Cobra firing rockets. Blue One confirmed we were going to insert, so I began to make a mental note of all I could. The LZ was about 300 meters to the south of the crash site. There was a dirt road in poor condition to the west of the crash site. There was a ridge line that basically paralleled the road. The area to our right between the road and the high ground was steep and heavily wooded. The area to our left included a steep drop. The road had been cut into the side of the hill. The insertion was slower than normal because of the very large, tall trees around this road. George Chamblee and John Rennington were my flankers. I was about 25 meters to the front securing an area where the NVA had blown a few trees across the road. Within a few minutes, we had all three slicks in and out. Our orders were to move to the crash site fast. The area on our right

leading toward the large clearing was dotted with signs of the enemy and we had NVA walking our right flank; however, Blue One ordered us to hold our fire. As we moved out, I saw another NVA following us. I made a jester to George but the NVA never made an effort to raise his weapon - he just stayed in stride with us. After about 200 meters we got to the edge of the clearing and I waited for the rest of the squads to move up. The road made a left and then a right turn at the edge of the clearing. Blue One had the 3rd Squad establish security at that those turns and sent 2nd Squad about 50 meters further down the road. Only the 1st Squad went near the clearing. The bank along the road was steep so they didn't stray far from the road. Blue One was on the horn with the C&C to see if we could get to the crash site. I went out about 25 meters into the clearing while George covered me. Hollandsworth and Pennington with the M60 stayed more in the wood line for cover. In the clearing, I saw part of the Cobra. The grass was thick and tall. The smoke was laying low on the ground rather than rising into the air. I noticed three 51s firing from the top of the ridge or hill around the clearing with another firing short bursts from behind the crash site. George and I got word to Blue One that we could move in from the road. Visibility in the woods was already deteriorating due to darkness and the smoke. Blue One started to remove his equipment and I asked what was going on. He said that he had to mark those 51s so the Guns could have a good target. I dropped my gear, took his WP and told him that I would do it. He told the others that I was going out there. George, Hollandsworth and Pennington moved a few meters out into the clearing to cover me. Let me describe the clearing a little better. It had about a 15% grade with heavy brush and grass. It was about 100 meters across with a heavy woodline at the top and to our right side. About halfway up the hill or ridge was where the large trees started. The road lay just below the clearing on the low ground. The left side of the clearing, nearest the road, had some heavy brush and light trees. I chose my path toward the top left corner of the clearing by going straight for about 25 meters then turning to the right until I was about in the middle of the clearing. I stopped to get my breath at that point. The smoke was heavy. I thought I could see something OD in color near the crash site. It might have been a discarded chicken plate or even a person hunched over. I was almost straight across from the site but the light was fading fast. I saw what I thought was the middle 51 and started out again. All three 51s were firing up and out into nothing at all that I could see. We had helicopters orbiting the area but not overhead at that point, so I don't know what they were firing at. From this position I was able to see NVA standing and walking on the higher ground near the top corner of the clearing. I also saw an NVA standing and the green tracers plus the muzzle flash coming from a bunker or what seemed to be a log structure. I moved directly toward that bunker and threw the WP. In the explosion I saw a pair of arms rise into the air. I had either hit the 51 or just behind it. I turned in a crouch and ran several meters from my original path toward the right wood line. I had gone only a short way when I fell into a hole and heard a sound from someone. I still think that I may have stepped into an occupied spider hole. I saw several in the area. When I got back to the Blues, Blue One said the Guns now had the target identified. We stayed there awhile as Blue One talked with the C&C about our staying there overnight. They decided that we would be extracted. We pulled back onto the road and instead of going back to the insertion LZ, called the Lift in to get us right there. Blue One used a strobe light in the barrel of an M79 and the slicks had to come straight down because the trees were so tall. We got the first two ships out OK without getting into a firefight. Those Hueys must have been heavily loaded because we only used three for the extraction. Naturally, at the time I thought the entire operation was taking FOREVER. As our Huey came down, mortars started falling just beyond our insertion LZ. We lifted out of the trees and didn't take any fire. At altitude we could see the green tracers but they weren't aimed at us. We went to the refuel point. Things were getting bad there as well. We had trouble getting fuel and were told that the area had taken mortar rounds earlier. We also received fire but nothing was hit.

SGT Eddy 'Tibby' Chasteen reflects: I have spent a lot of time thinking and talking about this day, especially at the Reunions. This one day stands out in most of our conversations. In retrospect, I have come to several conclusions. First, I believe the NVA 51s were positioned for anti-aircraft purposes around the clearing either to ambush a combat assault or to defend something else in the area. Clearly those guns could not depress low enough to fire at the Blues. Second, I can only guess as to why the NVA "allowed us" to get into the clearing because they certainly knew exactly where we were and the size of our Infantry on the ground. Possibly they only had a security force for their 51s but no regular Infantry troops in the area. I am grateful they didn't start firing mortars earlier. In closing, speaking for every Blue I knew in Vietnam and have talked with at the Reunions, I want to say THANKS to our gun platoon for their cover and support, THANKS to our Scouts for their added eyes that guided our steps, to MAJ Bowling for knowing most of the situation and extracting the Blues. I am sure that should we have stayed in that night, that the dawn would have been our fate. I am proud to have worn the scarf woven in Blue and thankful to have served with such great men.

CW2 David Bourbon recalls: I joined B Troop in March of 69 as a Cobra pilot. When I became an AC I was UNDERTAKER 24. I stayed with B Troop until March of 70. On Nov 1st, WO Mike Peterson and I had flown in late that night. We had been diverted on the way back to BMT East from Bu Prang to assist with the extraction of the troops from FB Kate, which was on the verge of being overrun. Mike was scheduled to fly on Nov 2nd and I was not. I don't recall why; either I had more hours in the past 30 days or we flipped a coin. On the afternoon of the 2nd, I had just returned from downtown BMT when the ops sergeant ran up to me and said we had a Cobra down in the AO and had to get another ship out immediately. I looked around the compound for another Cobra pilot to fly front seat and couldn't find one, so I asked an armorer, Jaygo Occunzi, I think, to fly. We were ready to crank with Jaygo in the front seat with his helmet and chicken plate when CPT Ron Bath came up. Jaygo got out — I know he was disappointed — and Ron climbed in. I cranked the aircraft and we were off down Highway 19 towards the crash site. We landed at Duc Lap where we usually staged in that AO. Major Bowling briefed everyone and we flew down to the LZ where the aircraft had been shot down. At some point, Major Bowling refused to let the scouts fly in the area. We had already lost two, and it looked like there were at least two .51 cal at the edge of the LZ. I was lead and Ray Christ was on my wing. We orbited and looked for any signs of the crews until dusk, and then returned to Duc Lap. Major Bowling decided to insert the Blues along the highway after dark to do some ground recon. My team didn't cover the insertion, but we had Snakes covering the Blues at all times. At one point, LT Ken Wilson radioed that they were in the LZ and there was a .51 in the tree line. He asked us to take it out. It was really dark, new moon as I recall. I asked for a mark, and one of the Blues threw a WP. I asked the distance and direction of the target from the mark, and Ken said, "That is the target! He put it right on it!" We rolled in and fired about four pair of rockets. The WP in their laps may have distracted the NVA crew, but they still fired at us. I remember the tracers being red — I had always thought they'd be green. Ken radioed and said we'd hit it. Later we heard we'd blown it apart, and they were able to put it back together at some point. The Blues withdrew and were extracted. Ken Wilson has really good memories of that. LT Kirk Curran had made his way over to that side of the LZ and managed to get out with the Blues. [Editor's note: Kirk was rescued that evening but didn't come out of the LZ with the Blues.] On the 3rd, we were back over the LZ early in the morning. I remember it being kind of misty. Again, there were no Scouts, and the Cobras and C&C couldn't see or make contact with the downed crews. The next morning, we supported the insertion of an ARVN unit, probably a battalion, along the highway next to the LZ. I remember rolling in behind an A-1 Skyraider that was making his last pass to prep the landing area. We covered the insertion and then returned to Duc Lap and finally Ban Me Thuot. II Corps command withdrew B Troop from the area, so we stood down for several days of maintenance. We had flown all of our aircraft past their deadlines and had run short of aircraft and pilots. I have

photos of the Scout pilots and Gun pilots taken on November 3 or 4 that I will try to find. I think the only Scouts on duty at that time were Larry Rabren, Greg Fuller, Chris Oelerich and Doug Decker. Gun pilots were Ron Bath, Ray Christ, Ron Tusi, Byron Wilkinson, Tom Lewis and I. Charlie Genova, Ed Hicks, George Schelcher, Carl Stauss, Gary Eldridge, Woody McFarlin and Don Wall were at Ban Me Thuot, but could have been on R&R, already DEROSSED, or in Charlie Genova's case, on liaison duty at Nhon Co.

CPT Harold Pardew recalls: I was flying the C&C ship this day with MAJ Bowling. I believe I took over as the Troop XO after CPT Chirichigno left that position to become the Gun Platoon Leader. I served in the Gun Platoon as well until I became the XO. My memories of this day are not clear other than it was a VERY LONG day. I believe I stayed with Billy until we were finished flying for the day. I certainly remember when the Blues were inserted and extracted. I do not recall that we inserted any other infantry unit other than our Blues. I must also say that Billy was one of the best officers I ever served with but he scared me often because he liked to fly low and slow in the C&C ship. I was a high and fast man myself. I DEROSed from B Troop in March, 1970.

CPT Jim Darr provided: On 11 August 1969 I joined HHT where I served as the Aviation Platoon leader. During most of my tour the Aviation Platoon supported B and D Troops in the Ban Me Thuot area. Generally the Aviation Platoon kept two ships at Ban Me Thuot East for a couple of weeks at a time, then we would rotate the people and aircraft. We lived in tents with B Troop at East. I remember Bob Rogers sleeping next to me. Our EM slept with B Troop's EM. We flew everyday – mostly meals, mail and administrative support. On 2 Nov, I got a call while in the air to join up with B Troop and assist as necessary, but we were not given a specific mission. We always knew the tactical radio frequencies so we checked in and were told to stand-by. We circled around Duc Lap. It was already late in the day. I remember that the fuel pump didn't work. I'd learned a trick in the States, to move the pump downhill then prime it. This worked – so we all got fuel. I remember saying to myself, 'Great now we have fuel, so I can fly into the night. I really don't like night flying!' I recall the fuel blivets were at the end of the runway and there was very little room for aircraft. When we returned to area Blue One was talking and I could tell he was scared. I thought I heard he say something like, 'I'll shoot you down to get you in here.' The aircraft were having a hard time locating the guys on the ground. Finally I called Blue One and said, 'Give me a long count and I'll home in on you.' He did and we started in but on short final Bob Rogers cut me off because he didn't have any operational radios. I had to divert. Anyway, we knew where the Infantry was and while we were making a tight 360 we saw a pen flare and played with that. We turned on our lights and slowly started down through the tall trees. I'd guess they were at least 60 foot tall. We saw the guys on the road and landed. There was space for only one ship at on the road. Seven Blues quickly loaded. CW2 Ray Resendez was the PIC. He wanted to do a hover-check, but I said to heck with that – we are getting out. The problem was that other ships were over-flying the tall trees and I was worried someone would hit us. I called Pallbearer 35 or 38 (Norman Cunningham or Doug Stenberg) and asked if they saw my anti-collision light. When they said yes, we started out. The road was curved, so we didn't have much room to gain forward motion to climb out. About 50 feet up we got a bad blade strike! The sound was like a huge explosion and my heart stopped (literally). We experienced a vibration but it wasn't that bad. When we started seeing tracers and muzzle flashes, I told the other aircraft that we'd had the strike and were turning off our running lights. I'd guess we landed back at East about 10 pm. I don't think we refueled or anything. I remember going to the latrine and throwing up – I was so scared! Soon everyone was back and we gathering in the Operations Tent. Everyone was all keyed up, still running on adrenaline. I remember MAJ Bowling coming up and personally thanking me – that really made me feel good.

1LT Kirk Curran continues: Also I learned that a Huey crew had seen Peterson from the air and had tried to land to get him. I was told that as he ran toward the ship, they watched in horror as the NVA

shot him several times and assumed he was dead. Whoever told me this said that Mike was still wearing his chicken plate which saved him from any serious injuries. He was just knocked down and bruised. (Editor's note: Please refer to Mike Peterson's own account. I asked him specifically about this matter. He said he was not wearing a chicken plate. His normal custom was to sit on it while flying. He was sitting on it that day, so it stayed in the aircraft.) Anyway, it was really something to watch the F100s deliver their airstrikes. Several times they would pass directly overhead. We were on our backs watching. You could see the wings on the rear of the bombs open up as they left the aircraft, follow the line of flight to the other end of the LZ and the explosion. The NVA were taking a pounding from this stuff as best as we could determine. It began to get dark and we started moving again, crawling through the grass. It really got dark and I remember not being able to see anything in front of me; so I just kept touching Shep's foot as we went. We stopped ever now and then. During one stop, I made a dumb mistake and put my 45 down so I could roll over and look behind us. I had look back several times before and knew we were leaving a 'highway wide road' through the grass as we crawled. My mind kept telling me that the NVA would find it and come following after us. I looked back and could see the stars and the wide open path. I turned back and it took me a couple of seconds to find my 45. When I had it and reached for Shepard's foot; THEY WERE GONE! I hadn't heard them crawl off or anything but there was a lot of noise still around the LZ. They were dropping flares and still working with the Blues. I crawled down the "highway" they left and came to a point where I thought it split. I went the wrong way and ended up alone. I could still hear the helicopters overhead so I rolled over on my back and waited for a good moment, then turned on my strobe light. A Huey saw it and shot an approach to an area about 50 to 60 yards away from me. I turned off the light and started towards the ship; but it took off, circled and came back to land on a small two lane road in the LZ. The NVA started turning on and off their flashlights to look like strobes as well but I was told that it really wasn't that difficult to determine the real one. When the Huey landed the second time he had all his lights on. I stood up and started running toward the ship. I got within about 25 yards of it when he turned out the lights - I guess to present that much less of a target to the NVA who without a doubt were also moving toward the helicopter. I was fine while the lights were on as I was running right for the lights. When they went out, I couldn't see a thing! Luckily I kept running blindly for the ship. The crew chief was flying as pilot and, Thank God, had stepped out of the ship. As I went running past, he grabbed me and threw me into the cargo compartment. I was both surprised and pleased to be in the back of a Huey but he had thrown me so hard I almost went out the other side!! I heard him yell GO!! GO!! There was lots of fire all around us as we lifted off and I remember thinking we would be shot down for sure. The ship had been hit several times and was a real mess. We went to some firebase and landed. For some reason this Huey had a VHF radio and all the other radios had been shot out earlier. In fact, I guess the other ships were all calling him on FM and UHF telling him not to go in; but he couldn't hear them. Anyway, we got an FM radio there and were able to talk to the other helicopters. They learned that Jim and Shep weren't far from where they had picked me up and that I believed the Cobra crew had been killed. The poor crewchief "pilot" got sick at the point and went into convulsions; so the medics took him away. A little while later, I was picked up and taken to our camp at Ban Me Thuot East where I could "relax" and have a beer. Needless to say but I had many things to think about that night. The next day, MAJ Bowling put me in the back of his C&C - they didn't want me flying for awhile. We went back into the same area. Again everyone has perfect hindsight, but during one of the gun runs a Pete suddenly went off sort of near where the HE was hitting. I remember we all asked on the radios where that Pete had come from and finally wrote it off with the thought that when someone was stoking rockets into a Cobra they inadvertently added a WP head. As it turned out, the rockets were hitting very near to where Jim and Shep and they were tiring to tell us they were there by throwing the Pete. They also hoped the NVA wouldn't know where they were because the Pete was just another explosion. Anyway, they would E&E for a few more day before the NVA picked them up. I guess Shepard's wounds were really super terrible at that point. Later I talked to

Jim who maintained that he was sad he wasn't able to be a Scout again after walking the trail with the NVA. He said had learned where and how they camped, how they camouflaged themselves, how far they moved between stops, etc. He said he would have been "Mr. Death himself" with that knowledge! I'd like to close by saying what I've said a hundred times before and will probably say another hundred times - I'd just like to thank everyone in B Troop, in D Troop, in HHT, the F100 guys, the Artillery guys, the ARVN Rangers that went in after us and really got chopped up bad, everyone that tried to help us - THANKS. Most of all I'd like to thank Bob Rogers for pulling me out that night.

WO1 Bob Rogers remembers; I arrived in country in early July of 1969 and was assigned to the Aviation Platoon of HHT in Camp Enari. Although we would occasionally fill in for the line troops when needed, our unit's mission was primarily logistical support (mail, food, new personnel pick ups and drop offs, beer runs, etc.) for the rest of the squadron. It was great duty. I got to see a lot of the country and logged a considerable amount of flight time. On 2 November, having been selected as Paymaster for the month, my mission for that day was to fly to points south of Pleiku and pay squadron personnel. I hated that job. When signing for all that cash (over \$40,000), I was told that I would be responsible for every penny, no matter what happened (lost, stolen, etc.). They would keep me in the Army until it was all paid back - what a depressing thought that was. Anyway, I needed a co-pilot so I asked Joe Feeney, the squadron's aircraft maintenance officer, if he wanted to come along to get his flight time for the month. Joe was seriously wounded while serving as a crew chief during a previous tour and wasn't anxious to get shot at, again. I, wrongly, assured him that our mission was going to be a "milk run" and would be an easy day of flying. He agreed, and we departed Pleiku for Ban Me Thuot, where Bravo Troop had established its base of operations. Having paid a number of personnel at BMT, we refueled our ship "233" and continued flying south to Duc Lap, where there was a small contingent of our troops. Our final leg south was to Bu Prang, another Special Forces camp located about 20 minutes out. We never made it to Bu Prang. Shortly after departing Duc Lap, we monitored a Mayday call from Bravo Troop. They were requesting assistance from any Huey in the area to aid in the extraction of downed airmen. If I recall correctly, all of B troops' slicks had already departed their staging area for BMT and were unable to assist at that time. Since our ship was the only Huey in the area, we radioed that we would try to help with the extraction. We hooked up with two Cobras and decided to make one very low & fast pass over the site so we could judge the approach to the LZ. Our three ships flew a tight formation, one cobra at my 11 o'clock and the other Cobra at my 1 o'clock. When we popped up over the trees into the open, the Cobras strafed either side of the field. I wasn't expecting the roar and fire that spewed from those guns and it rattled me. We only had a second to take in the site, but I spotted an airman, I think he was standing near the middle of the LZ. We departed the area and circled around to make our approach. I remember coming in low and fast - a little too fast because I had to flare, severely, to reduce airspeed. So much happened so fast. I didn't hear any gunfire, but I did hear Joe yell "OW!" when he got hit. I remember hearing something like choppy static, which I think had to be the rounds coming through the ship. Also, in that split second, the cockpit seemed to explode into a fog. We failed the attempt and had to abort. Joe was in bad shape, so I flew him over to Duc Lap and left him with the SF medics. I asked my crew chief, Chuck Lund, to come up and take Joe's seat to help monitor what was left of our instruments, gauges and one radio. He did a fantastic job, and he and my door gunner, I believe his name was Sweeney, performed courageously that day and night. [Editor's note: We now believe his name is Allen Sybesma.] By this time, B Troops' Hueys were inserting their Blues into the area but it was getting late in the day. They didn't have much time to rescue the airmen due to fading light and had to be pulled out. We helped with that extraction, but I'm not sure where we dropped them off - Duc Lap, I think. After the extraction, we flew back to the area of the LZ. It was pretty dark by this time and I remember those tracers coming up - very close and very scary. Then, I spotted a strobe and radioed that we were going for an

approach. Someone came back with something like "Be advised, it may be a trap." I hadn't thought of that and, quite frankly, I wish that other guy hadn't either. Anyway, we shot the approach and, luckily, it was Curran. He started to run, but then seemed to hesitate. We were all yelling. Chuck jumped out of his seat and threw Curran into the ship. We took off for BMT. Ever since the first extraction attempt, we had developed a significant vibration throughout the ship. But, on the way back to BMT, it became severe. No one said much. It was a long and dark ride home. I remember falling onto my cot back at BMT. The exhaustion and realization of all that went on that night finally hit home and there I was, shaking like a leaf in the fetal position. The next day we checked out the damage to the ship and counted 20 plus hits. Swiss cheese came to mind. We also found the source of the vibration. The tip of one rotor blade was missing and the skin was shredding backwards. I looked inside the ship, and there was the payroll case, still right next to my seat. I had forgotten all about it.

1LT Joe Feeney was in the HHT Huey that tried to rescue the downed crews that afternoon. He provides: During my first tour in Vietnam I was a crew chief; then I went to flight school and to Maintenance Officer school before my second tour when I was with HHT. I had only been in country a little over a month. Bob Rogers and I used to fly together often. He was a pilot in the Aviation Section and flew a lot, especially with D Troop and the various detachments from HHT scattered all around Quang Duc and Darlac Provinces. On Sunday the 2nd, we had a pay master on board and had flown about six hours since we left Enari that morning. The general offensive had been on for a few days already and as we flew around we saw lots of convoy ambushes and bases taking fire. We were refueling at Duc Lap, which was under mortar and 57mm RR fire most of that day, when B Troop's Blues jumped into their ships and left in a hurry. We followed and asked if we could help. The B Troop C&C asked if we could go to Ban Me Thuot East and get a jungle penetrator because he thought he might need one in a hurry that day. When we returned from East we followed this B Troop Cobra to the site of the battle. B Troop had inserted their Blues and didn't have anyone on station except this Cobra as everyone else was refueling. I think the Cobra had expended already but was just trying to stay over their people on the ground. We both made a low, slow pass over this huge LZ; unfortunately well marked with the three downed aircraft. I remember thinking at the time - we are going too slow, I just know we'll never make it to the other end of this LZ and we didn't even have chicken plates! It was then that I saw one of the Americans standing up under some trees. As Bob circled around, he told the Snake that we were going in to pick him up and started an approach for an area near where I had seen the guy. Almost immediately we started taking lots of fire. As best I can recall, I don't think we got very close to the touch down point when I got hit in the left leg - my side of the Huey took several hits. I do remember my left leg fly up and hit me in the chest from the force of a bullet. As determined as Bob was, we were taking a hell of a beating; so he aborted the approach and we climbed back to altitude where the Snake was. We talked the situation over inside the aircraft for a few minutes and with the Snake. While I didn't have a life threatening wound, I was pretty well unable to function as a pilot. About that time several B Troop aircraft returned and I can remember listening to the C&C on Guard. After further discussions, he released us and we went back to Duc Lap where there was an SF aid station. When we got to Duc Lap, Bob made certain I was in the good hands of the medics; then he put the crew chief in my seat and took off. The SF medics were very good. They treated my wounds as best they could and I got something to eat and drink. Helicopters were coming and going all the time. They called for a Dust-Off and one came but wouldn't land because the camp was really under pretty steady fire. B Troop came back again that night to refuel between 8 and 9. We talked to them and asked if they would come back when they were done to take me to Ban Me Thuot. They said "Sure" but they never came back that night. I guess they got real busy and I really wasn't in any grave danger. Anyway, the next morning I did get a ride to East and was taken to their aid station which consisted of some below ground conex containers. They told me the crew chief was there as well

because he had “flipped out.” Anyway, when he saw me he got very excited and ran over to me and hugged me. He said when they had taken me away at Duc Lap; he just knew I was going to die but now he was very happy to see me again. The medics were glad to see him respond favorably and asked if I would stay with him a little while longer. Anyway, by the end of the day I was in a big hospital in Nha Trang; then on to Japan and finally the States. But you know I never got any of my stuff back from Vietnam!

SP5 Charley Lund remembers: There is not a day that goes by that I don't think about the events of Nov 2nd! My DFC citation reads in part: “SP5 Lund distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions while serving as crewchief on a transport helicopter on a rescue mission 5 miles south of Duc Lap. On the first attempt to rescue six friendly aviators shot down by enemy ground fire, his ship received intense enemy fire which seriously wounded the co-pilot and inflicted heavy damage to this helicopter. With complete disregard for his own safety, SP5 Lund exposed himself to the enemy fire and placed devastating suppressive fire on the positions, silencing them until the pilot cleared the area. After med-evacuating the co-pilot, he volunteered to fly at night in another attempt to rescue the aviators. During the approach to the site of the downed aviators. During the approach to the site, he cleared the left side of the helicopter for dangerous obstacles. On landing his aircraft again came under intense enemy fire. Disregarding the enemy fire, he continued to guide the pilot to the landing zone and directed his gunner's fire at enemy positions.” [HQ 1st Aviation Brigade General Orders 4538, TC 439, dated 2 June 1970.] Let me give you a little background information about how HHT supported B Troop at BMTE. We, HHT, were based out of Camp Enari. Most of our missions were day trips from Enari – out and back in one day. Sometimes we stay the night at Ban Me Thuot East and fly to Bu Prang. We did a lot of admin stuff. Different HHT Hueys would stay at BMTE for multiple days at a time. I had done this with different ships earlier in my tour. We rotated ships a lot. As mentioned earlier, I'd been a UH-1H CE for HHT since Oct 1968 and by this time I was getting short. I crewed 67-19492 from Feb or March 1969 until Nov 1969. They were going to take me off flight status but they needed a CE for 67-17233, so they gave it to me. This was a Paymaster run. I needed my four hours of flight time for the month because I was going home about the 19th of November. So, I thought, why not take the ‘milk run?’ I could get my flight time and be done with that for the month. Now let me tell you what I remember. The gunner was a tall, skinny kid with blond hair. He was a CE qualified guy as were most of us in the Aviation Section. Remember I mentioned earlier that the Aviation Section in HHT had no assigned gunners. All of us were crew chiefs. We would use new guys or volunteers as gunners. He was a new guy. This aircraft had a penetrator/rescue hoist installed on the side. It was the only aircraft in the section with one. It was a beautiful day to fly. We landed at various place, pay the guys and move on. All of a sudden everything starts coming over the radio. The stuff hit the fan. We've got choppers down, we've got people on the ground. They wanted to know if there was a ship in the area that could go in. Well we were empty. The Cav had people down and that was all we cared out. You don't think about yourself in a situation like that. So we got the coordinates and tried to get in the first time. It was getting dusk at that time. That didn't work, so we pulled out of there. There was enough of a clearing that we didn't plan to use the hoist rather we hoped to land on the ground to rescue our people. I recall a lot of people shooting at us! I could see the people on the ground and, of course, the downed aircraft. Was I scared? Damned right I was!! But we decided to make a second attempt to get in. There were lots of muzzle flashes. We made our second approach, low and at a different angle. I saw a person on the ground and I tried to grab him. I was not taking any fire on my side, so I put my arm around the support post for the seat and was reaching down for the man on the ground. However, we were not close enough. I figured if I could have just gotten a hold on his hand, I'd have brought him into the chopper so fast. We just couldn't get close enough and we took several hits. I always thought he got shot but he may have just ducked down. We circled and made another approach. Mr. Bob Rogers was flying in the left seat. We started taking hits again. On the way in

LT Joe Feeney was hit. We broke off immediately to get Joe to the aid station at Duc Lap. We shut down. I remember helping Joe get out of the helicopter. While they were attending to LT Feeney, I looked over the aircraft. The chopper had so many holes in it that it was incredible that it could still fly. At that time the ship still had radios and intercom. There were holes all over especially in the front but there were no leaks. At this time Duc Lap was under fire itself. In our haste to depart, I forgot to latch the engine cowling cover. We noticed this, so we circled, landed and I closed the cover. It was getting dark. Bob told me to get in Joe's seat. The gunner stayed on his side. He gave us what cover he could. Actually I think the M-60 on my side had failed. I would normally fly the left side and I believe that gun was not working. The gunner was still on the ship in his normal position. To this day I cannot remember who that gunner was. The rest of the events are sort of a blur. I remember the gunner firing a little. We saw the strobe light and landed. Bob yelled 'Grab him!' So I stepped out and grabbed him. I can remember his face. We took off and returned to the staging area. I was flipping out. They gave me one shot and that didn't work, so I got a second. I remember waking up the next morning and Joe was there. That day we went back to Enari. I remember the HHT 1st Sergeant said, 'Well you won't be flying anymore.' I DEROSed two weeks later.

WO1 Matt Zuccaro recalls: I joined the Aviation Section in HHT in July 1969. I remember the first person I met from the 7/17th Cav was WO Bob Rogers who flew me to Enari from Cam Ranh. I would soon bunk in his room. Prior to the events of this day I had become a UH-1 IP. On the 2nd, I flew down from Enari with LTC George Murry, the Squadron Commander. Once we got there he got out of the ship I was in and flew with someone else. Another pilot got in my ship and we supported the remainder of the operations that day. Although I did attempt to pick up the downed crews during the daytime I was not successful due to the enemy fire and forces surrounding them. Although I made several other insertions, extractions and evacs that day as part of this operation, and took some hits, the pilot who was actually successful was my roommate, Bob Rogers. He was flying the other HHT aircraft on scene that day and night. I remember that Bob's co-pilot, Joe Feeney, had already been hit and evacuated earlier in the day. Bob stayed on station by putting his crew chief in the co-pilots seat just prior to rescuing Kirk. All he had to go on was Kirk's strobe light and at the time none of us really knew who was holding the light. It could have been tied to the end of a 51 cal for all we knew. But Bob was right overhead and took the chance. After picking up Kirk, Bob landed at some place – I don't recall its name. I distinctly remember him getting out of the Huey and walking down the line of aircraft hugging everyone. Bob was so rattled that he came a passenger in the Huey I'd been flying and went back to Enari. I remember climbing into Bob's Huey and was shocked that it was so badly damaged. It started up and didn't seem to have any serious leaks but it had no radios and no instruments. I don't remember if we took it back to Enari right away, probably not, or some place else for the night. I believe I went back to Enari that night and the next morning returned in another Huey to help out. I DEROSed from the HHT in July 1970. Looking back I thought I had a great tour because I got to fly with the various ATCs. I even gave check-rides in the OA. It was a busy year – exciting most of the time. I worked with lots and lots of great guys doing a great job.

Kirk's short career as a Scalphunter was over. He would finish his tour flying Guns and as the Troop's Operations Officer. But the story is far from over, in fact it would take several weeks and, sadder yet, several years to complete. The night of 2 Nov was a "long night" for many people. LTC George Murry was the Squadron Commander at the time and relates:

We got the call in the late afternoon that B Troop had lost some aircraft and definitely needed some help. You've got to remember at that time I was a Squadron Commander without a Squadron because all the line Troops were opconed out to other units. I only had HHT and it was already committed manning refuel and rearm points and such south of Ban Me Thuot. Anyway, we pulled

together a couple slicks, alerted A and C Troop of the problem, made certain the 17th CAG and the 4th Inf knew of the situation, and left for Ban Me Thuot. We were able to make it out to the site that evening. When all the aircraft finally returned from the OA, we sorted things out. Most of their aircraft had been shot up. I think they had at least six less operational aircraft than they had at the start of the day. They were short three air crews. Everyone was dead tired but wanted to do anything - just anything to get those guys on the ground back. Naturally, the Scout and Gun boys wanted to go back in the next day and "show 'em really Cav stuff." Well, the last thing either Billy or I wanted was to loose even more people to a situation that clearly seemed to be in the NVA's favor. We talked to the Blues that had been on the ground and to Kirk. We talked to Bob Rogers - that kid was a real hero. By God, that ship was a mess!!! I don't think we ever repaired it, it was that bad. Then we went over to the 23rd ARVN Div to see what they could do. They were totally committed but arranged for us to use part of an ARVN Ranger Bn, that was in reality the II Corps Reserve at the time, so long as we could use our Lift to put them in. The next day we inserted about 150 men from this battalion on a road north of the LZ where our aircraft were. The ARVN also ordered a Mech unit to move up and try to help out but that didn't work out too well. Anyway, these Rangers fought very hard but the NVA really had them out-numbered, out-gunned, out-everythinged. For a couple of days we supported them with everything we had and they took a terrible pounding, 40 to 50% casualties as I recall. Several times I went back to the 23rd CP and said we had to pull those guys out; but they wouldn't do it. The 23rd people seemed to have the attitude that that was what the Rangers had coming to them, so they left them in and really didn't reinforce them or support them to the degree I thought they should. Strange conduct - I didn't and don't understand it. Of all the things I remember about that tour, the memory of that Ranger Battalion is one of the most vivid in my mind. If I would have even dreamed that they would have suffered like that, I would never have put them in that day!!

CPT Lou Chirichigno continues: I saw the Huey come in that night. I could see movement near one of the 51 positions and I believed they were moving the gun out into the open to cover the lower part of the clearing. I started shooting the 38 at them. It was 75 to 100 meters away. There was a tree line about 20 meters away that blocked some of my view. I remember the NVA shooting at the Huey the second time it came in and every now and then they would shoot at us. When it came in to land again, I yelled for Grega to run down the hill to get on the Huey and fired the 38 again at the gun position. Grega stayed. The Huey was on the ground a short period of time then took off. After it was about 10 to 15 feet from the ground, it shuttered and I remember thinking the pilot must have been hit. However, the ship nosed down and took off. The tree line protected him until he got some airspeed. The shooting was terrible. Right after that I knew the NVA knew exactly where we were because of my shooting, so I shook Grega and told him we'd have to move. He didn't move. I assumed he was dead and moved down the hill in the direction of the strobe light. I thought maybe the Huey hadn't picked up anyone. When I got near the light, I said 'Peterson?' in a low voice. When the person holding the light squatted down, I realized it wasn't an American. He had no weapon. He went to my right and I went to the left. I waited a few minutes and went about 10 meters when I heard Vietnamese voices talking in the opposite direction. It sounded like they were coming in my direction. It was open to the right but there was a lot of vegetation, mostly elephant grass to the left. I went in there and discovered a ditch. I got in the ditch and saw a bunch of matted grass - it was almost like a blanket. I lifted it up, crawled in feet first and it covered me nicely. A few minutes later these Vietnamese walked up and stopped in front of me. I remember wishing I had a machinegun! They moved toward the downed aircraft. I could hear them digging the ground and beating the aircraft. About 2 a.m. I felt something touch the vegetation near me. I could hear something breathing and smelling. I got scared because I thought the Vietnamese had dogs. I remember thinking, 'Oh, no! They've found me!' I moved a little and this deer took off running. I woke up again about 6 a.m. to the strange noise. I sounded like radio waves. More vegetation was

falling on me. Then I realized a troop of monkeys were coming through the trees. I was pleased with how well this covered me up. I heard the Vietnamese moving around the area and noticed there was a low ceiling, so I thought no one would fly today. About 11 a.m. I saw a US Navy spotter plane overhead and I surprised me. A little later I saw our Cobras overhead. It took me some time to get out of the ditch. They made two or three firing passes then left. I was close enough to where they were shooting that rocks were falling on me. In the afternoon, I decided I'd better leave the area. I saw some fresh graves at the bottom of the hill plus lots of spent casings. It was easy to see where some of the bunkers had been bombed. I wanted to walk past them to the road that I believed would lead to Duc Lap. As I got close the NVA came out and saw me. The Cobras arrived again about this time and the NVA put me in a bunker with two of their people. The minigun rounds were hitting pretty close. On the second pass, I noticed there was only one NVA with me and he was aiming his rifle at the aircraft. I got up and kicked him hard in the rear – he went down and his weapon fell. I grabbed his straw hat and climbed out of the bunker. I hoped the Cobra's firing would cover my exit. However, they didn't fire anymore. Some NVA near by saw me and fired at the ground near my feet. As I threw the hat away, I saw blood on it but knew it wasn't mine. They came over to me and tied my arms behind me. I told them it hurt; but they didn't care. The aircraft were still flying around but we started moving out of the area. It was starting to get back but we walked until midnight. I was put in a nice underground bunker with wood on the floor. They gave me some water but no food. The next day we walked all day through and around a firefight and the next day too. Four or five days later we arrived at camp where we would be interrogated. They covered my face when we got near the camp. I met Nowicki and Shepard in a cage. Peterson arrived a couple of days after that.

WO Mike Peterson's continues: The next morning everything was still quiet but I knew the NVA were still in the area, in force. There was a road to the east of the LZ, I was on the west side on sort of a hill. For the next four days or so I E&Eed successfully. I ate bugs, drank water from leaves and pools in the road. Once I happened upon two NVA near a bunker. One was sitting at a table outside the bunker, writing a letter, I guess. We struggled. I grabbed a knife from the table and killed him. About this time, this other guy comes out of the bunker, sees me and quickly goes back inside! I just knew he was going to get a gun, so I went in after him. We fought in there and I killed him. Needless to say, but those are rather strong impressions in my mind! I was getting weaker mentally and physically with each passing day. I couldn't travel much at all. That last night I completely lost it. I recall going down to the road to drink from the pools of water there that I found so refreshing. Anyway, I started screaming at the NVA to come and get me - real Rambo like. Well, the next morning the place was covered with patrols and they found me along side the road. Like I said, I couldn't walk very well; so they slung me on a pole and we hiked about two or three days. We weren't that far from Cambodia. Even then I wasn't "with it" much of the time and it got worse before it got better. I remember being taken to a camp and just before they took my Seiko watch, I looked at the date - the 9th. Shep, Lou and Jim were there already. I believe it was while we were at this camp but it may have been at a POW Reunion some years later that I learned that **CW2 George W. Grega** died that first night in Lou's arms from the burns he'd received that day. Anyway, the NVA kept us in a pit but we weren't treated badly. I mean they didn't beat us or anything. I'd guess we were there about another week or ten days. Anyway, Shep and I were hardly what anyone could call "escape threats!" My leg was getting gangrenous and wounds on his butt was just terrible. I recall that Lou returned from an interrogation session with the news that in a day or so he and Nowicki would be moving up the trail to the North and that as soon as Shep and my wounds were better, we would follow. Sure enough in a day or so, Lou and Jim left us. I never saw them again until after they were released in 1973. It was about this time that two captured ARVN Rangers arrived at our camp. Let me tell you they were some of the meanest, toughest, nastiest guys I have ever seen or even heard about in my entire life!! They would constantly yell and spit at the NVA

and resist and make life difficult in every way. We called them "Hard Core" - they were impressive. Well very soon after Jim and Lou left, these two ARVN made an escape attempt. We heard some commotion and looked up to see that one of these ARVN Rangers had grabbed an NVA guard and was choking him. The net of it was that at least one of these guys did get away and, I think, the other was killed. Anyway, within three hours of the escape the NVA had us on the move. Later during a debriefing in the Long Binh hospital I learned that there was actually a "special ops" section where these ARVN Rangers were trained and given the job of being captured and then escaping so the good guys could learn something about the POW camps. Apparently the NVA knew a little about this because they had us out of the camp in nothing flat. I also believe someone told me that as a result of the ARVN Ranger's escape, a rescue force did visit that camp within a short period of time. Of course we weren't there. What I'm about to tell you now is pure conjecture on my part - you make up your own mind. I believe the NVA knew we were "goners." I certainly believe I would have died within a short period of time and Shep's long term prognosis was not good. The NVA medical attention and capabilities were primitive at best - at least what they were able to give us. So long as Shep and I were alive, we were valuable to them. I believe they negotiated a prisoner exchange. A day or two before our release they fed us really well, including some sweet pudding I later learned had been made from can milk. They told us it was important that we tell "the world" that our treatment had been good or that Lou and Jim "would pay for our crimes." This is the reason why some of our public statements after our release were "anti-war;" we didn't want Lou and Jim to suffer. Anyway, they took us to a road and told us to stay right there. About two minutes later, an American truck drives us and picked us up. I can remember that there was an American in the back of it because he gave me a cigarette - I really appreciated that! They drove us to a FB and we were evacuated to Pleiku. We weren't there long but during that time several guys from B Troop visited us. I remember before this time LT Eldridge, "Fang" we called him, used to give everyone a hard time because he was "short." Well, I got back at him because I knew I would be home in a few days and he'd still be there.

SGT Shepard finishes his story: I remember these events pretty much as both Kirk and Mike have described but let me add some details. After Jim and I inadvertently moved away from Kirk we hid in some trees. We were so close to the Huey that came in and got Kirk out that I could see the red dash lights. I knew I could not move fast enough to get to the ship before they'd leave and I really "felt safe" in the trees versus out in the open in the clearing. Besides that ship was drawing lots of fire and I didn't want any part of that! After the Huey left, we moved a little deeper into the trees and hid a little better. We heard some rustling in the brush not far away and later discussed this with Mike who heard the same thing that evening. We theorized that we were very close to each other that night, maybe 10 to 15 feet apart, but no one dared call out to investigate the source of the rustling sounds!! The second day we hid out and hoped that the bad guys would go away and the Blues would return. We had an M-16, one clip of ammo, a bayonet, and one pack of Camels but no matches. We ended up chewing the cigarettes and that was pretty good at the time. I still had my nomex gloves. In the morning and evening I'd wipe them across the leaves and grass until they filled with moisture, then I'd suck the water from them. During this time the wound in my mouth was especially troublesome. We had a single WP. Jim didn't want to throw it for fear of compromising our location, so he had me stay hidden and crawled out into the open area. There he waited for an appropriate moment to try to signal the aircraft. I remember we were especially hopeful to attract the attention of a Bird Dog FAC that was putting in the airstrikes. Finally Jim popped the Pete; but the aircraft didn't seem to notice. They moved away and didn't return. We hid again that night. On the third day we watch the NVA going through the LOHs and saw them marching past our location with their weapons slung over their shoulders. We heard the firing associated with the battle the ARVN Rangers were having and knew that it was a long way from us - too far to be of help to us. We concluded that we would have to do something on our own and that

we would start that night. At that time the best I could do was sort of a low crawl. I'd stick the bayonet in the ground and use it as a handle to pull myself along with some assistance from my left leg even though it had been damaged at the very start. We crawled a long time - until we were completely exhausted. We found a hollowed out, dead log and slept in it like sort of a hammock. When the sun came up on the fourth day, Jim had made me a crutch out of bamboo so now we could walk. We didn't exactly know where to go but we heard and saw fixed wing aircraft landing and headed toward that. We walked all day and I was really surprised that I didn't have that much pain. I was uncomfortable and noticed what I thought was a drip from the wound in my buttock - that turned out to be maggots falling out! In the afternoon we came to a clearing that went up a hill. We thought if we could get on that hill, we could see where the aircraft were landing and how to get there. Jim told me to stay in the trees and moved out. He got about half way up the hill and since I didn't see any danger, I started walking after him. I didn't get very far when I heard the AKs open up and saw Jim drop immediately. I literally "tried to hide behind a blade of grass." The next thing I felt was the muzzles of four AKs in my back and people yelling at me. I stood up and they took me over to the edge of the clearing to this 6'2", English speaking non-oriental man. I still think he was a Russian advisor. He definitely spoke with an accent. My impression was that he was treated "like a king" - he had 15 to 20 NVA around him that seemed very interested in doing whatever he asked. At first he didn't speak to me but his look was something like "we've got you now." Finally he asked if he could do anything for me. I said I was hungry, so they gave me a rice ball. He asked if they could look at my wounds. I showed them and they wrapped them for me. Then they started asking about "the other guy" and I lied "what other guy? - I'm alone" because I hadn't seen Jim and didn't know how he'd made out. Eventually they brought Jim over - he was OK and hadn't been hit. They started marching us toward the camp that same day. They put a bamboo pole between our elbows, tied our hands in the front and put a hood over our heads so that we could only see the ground in front of us. The next day, I believe, we passed another group going the opposite direction on the same trail who were carrying a hammock containing an American. They happened to pass by close enough so I could see in even with the hood on. I didn't know Mike Peterson at that time because he was in the Guns and we didn't socialize all that much with Gun pilots; mostly with the Scout pilots. So I asked Jim who that was and he told me it was Mike. Jim and I were the first to arrive at the camp. It was about 75'x75', surrounded by a bamboo fence and had three cages near the middle. Each cage was built over a pit about three feet deep. The structure was about 8x12 along the lean-to design. The roof was made of bamboo poles covered with big leaves. Inside there was a stock like arrangement and we were locked in it each night. The NVA didn't treat our wounds for the first four days we were there. I'd guess the total NVA staff was in the six to eight people range. Lou showed up next and then Peterson - they may have arrived on the same day. I'd guess the four of us were together at least one but not two weeks. Then eight ARVN showed up next and they put four in each pit. The "Hard Cores" came a day or two after Lou and Jim left. I want to say something here and now - Jim was a big, big help to me all during this period. Many times he could have done better by himself but he stayed with me and took care of me. I can't say enough good things about him. They fed us only rice and gave us an American aluminum canteen full of hot water each night. We used this as a hot water bottle to keep warm. We'd rub it over our arms and chest. Then we'd use it as a pillow. The next day we'd drink the water. We didn't have a blanket or mosquito net but I don't remember mosquitoes being a problem. Our interrogator was an oriental that had been educated in the States. Since I was an NCO, I didn't know much about the military situation so they didn't ask many questions about it. Most of the questions were about home, the family, what clothes they wore, etc. They asked me what my 1st SGT did - I didn't know so I answered that all I saw him do was show movies! They asked what was the best place to shoot at on a helicopter - again I told them I wasn't an expert on this but suggested the rotor blades. I warned them that they were hard to hit because they were moving so fast! They came and took pictures of us a couple times. They dug a hole sort of in the center of the three cages. It was 4x4 and about 8 feet deep with a covered lid

almost like you'd put over an animal trap. They used a notched log to get in and out of the hole. This hole was where they kept the Hard Cores. About this time I was able to walk around a little so during the day they'd let me rake leaves and do odd chores. Mike was getting worse and didn't get out much except to relieve himself. This is how I was able to get close to the Hard Core's pit. They seemed like Koreans to me but I don't know for sure. They motioned to me that they wanted me to help choke a guard. Mike and I talked this over, then I let them know I wasn't too interested in trying that. The Hard Cores caused so much trouble that the NVA didn't let them out of the pit - they even had to relieve themselves in the cups their food came in. Those guys were tough!! There was this guard we called "Baby Face" because he was so young. I was out raking leaves or something when the two Hard Cores started making some noise in their pit. Well Baby Face put his AK up against a tree and leaned over to look in the pit. Eventually when he got closer, they grabbed him and pulled him into the pit. The next thing I knew, one of the Hard Cores had jumped out of the pit, grabbed the AK and was pointing it back into the hole. The other Hard Core got out quickly and they motioned for us to join them in their escape. I motioned for them to go without us because I knew Mike couldn't make the trip and I didn't want to leave him. I don't recall that one of the Hard Cores was killed or that they killed anyone but maybe Mike was privy to a conversation in Long Binh that I didn't take part in. It is my impression that one of the debriefers in Long Binh asked if he could bring some guys in to look at us. We said OK and soon these same two Hard Cores came in to ID that we were the same guys they'd seen in the camp. Interesting, huh? I'd guess we didn't stay in Vietnam more than a day after our release and were debriefed a lot. I didn't care so long as they kept bring me food - I was really hungry. We went to Japan for a day then to different hospitals in the States. I stayed in the hospital about 30 days and ended up finishing my enlistment at that installation. Other than the POW dinner we had at the White House and one crewchief that was in B Troop, I haven't had any contact with anyone that was in the 7/17th Cav. Editor's note - much of this story was given by Vernon Shepard at the 1994 VHPA Reunion where he met Billy Bowling again.

MAJ Billy Bowling provides a few more details. When those ARVN Rangers escaped, they turned themselves in an ARVN compound and the senior American advisor called us with the news that they might have some information about our people. I flew over there and was told by this full Colonel that I'd have to wait outside. I sailed past him into the room where they were debriefing these guys. Through them we obtained the first "real information" about SGT Shepard and WO Peterson but nothing on the others. They happened to make a casual statement about the 'one American body near the road.' This, of course, was news to me! We were able to obtain some more specific information from them and within the next couple days worked with an ARVN Cavalry unit to sweep the area. The NVA were long gone by that time but this was how we found and retrieved George Grega's body. The Wall database gives his tour start date as 10 Dec 1969 (obviously an error for the year and should be 1968) and his MOS was 100B.

Tim Yost provides the following: I was the Troop's Motor Officer and was back in the base camp at Enari a lot. I don't remember flying the day the three birds went down but I do remember the next day. We were back at Duc Lap. Based on all the information that Kirk had told us, the Blues had taken an extra, extra load of LAWs to fire at the bunkers. We moved out to Duc Lap again and were all talking over the situation when this Brigadier General came over to us. I'd never seen a general before. He was rather calm about the situation but said we were not going to insert American troops - rather an ARVN Ranger force would go in. I remember seeing the ARVNs arrive and get organized for their insertion. I don't remember whether it was some of our Lift or the 155th AHC that inserted the Rangers. I do remember one humorous thing that happened during this period. One of the Warrants in the Lift, Dale Jacobs, had a pet monkey and we named it Murry. Now the Squadron Co's last name just happened to be Murry also. Well, the Colonel was staying with us during this period - in MAJ Bowling's tent as I remember. In the evenings, some of the guys would

go outside and call the monkey. "Here Murry...Here Murry." After a couple nights of this, the Major called us together and said that we'd have to call the monkey by some other name for awhile because it was rather uncomfortable for them to be hearing us calling in the dark. Naturally we were surprised that this was the case and agreed to call the monkey by some other name!!

SGT Jim Bailey was on the other Scout team during this event. //Need to insert his story//

As a post script to the events of 2 Nov 1969, there was a special awards ceremony a few days later at Camp Enari. Additionally as the POWs were repatriated awards were given. The following is the best list we have for these awards:

CPT Lou Chirichigno - Distinguished Service Cross. An edited version of the citation reads: CPT Chirichigno distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on November 2, 1969, as Platoon Commander of an aero-weapons Platoon while on a reconnaissance mission southwest of Duc Lap, Quang Duc Province. CPT Chirichigno's platoon of two light observation helicopters and two attack helicopters were searching for an enemy force of at least battalion size. One of the helicopters drew unexpectedly intense enemy fire and sustained excessive structural damage, necessitating a crash landing. Its sister ship followed the damaged aircraft down to extract its wounded crew. While attempting takeoff, the second aircraft also was shot down. All four crewmen were wounded. The downed aircraft had come down in an open field directly in the enemy's field of fire and subject to the full force of his reactive capability. CPT Chirichigno arrived overhead at the crash scene and with the other remaining airborne helicopter began to deliver suppressive and protective fire upon the enemy but without much success as the enemy fire both at the circling aircraft and the crash scene continued to increase in intensity. To more fully protect his downed companions, CPT Chirichigno moved his aircraft at low speed and altitude to assault the enemy at the tree-top level, destroying at least one machine gun position and its crew and inflicting significant other casualties among the enemy. Observing that an enemy platoon was advancing to within meters of the crash site, CPT Chirichigno maneuvered his helicopter through the fusillade of ever-increasing enemy fire to hover between the enemy and his comrades. In the presence of devastating enemy fire power and seemingly insurmountable odds and disregarding all personal risk, he challenged the enemy face-to-face at less than 20 meters. He exchanged machine gun and grenade fire with the enemy, killing at least seven of them and forcing the others to withdraw. Although seriously wounded in the exchange, he remained on station to defend his comrades and meet successive onslaughts until his gunship was silenced by overwhelming enemy firepower. Department of the Army, General Orders No. 44 (December 6, 1973).

SP5 Charley Lund - Impact Distinguished Flying Cross. An edited version of the citation appeared earlier with Chuck's first person account.

WO1 Bob Rogers - Impact Silver Star, later upgraded to a Distinguished Service Cross. An edited version of the citation reads: WO1 Rogers distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on 2 November 1969 while commanding a transport helicopter during a rescue operation near the Duc Lap Special Forces camp. Responding to an urgent request to evacuate crewmen from downed United States helicopters, Warrant Officer Rogers and his crew sped to the contact area and discovered that the selected landing zone was vulnerable to fire from enemy positions. Undaunted, Mister Rogers maneuvered his aircraft into the pickup site. Upon receiving intense enemy machine gun and automatic weapons fire which wounded the co-pilot and heavily damaged his helicopter, Warrant Officer Rogers was forced to abort the rescue attempt. Skillfully maintaining control of his crippled aircraft, Mister Rogers flew it back to the friendly camp at Duc Lap where he made an emergency landing. After learning that allied ground troops engaged in bitter fighting with the adversary needed immediate evacuation, Warrant Officer Rogers unhesitatingly volunteered to fly his damaged craft back to the contact area in darkness and without the aid of navigation lights. Although receiving a deluge of hostile anti-aircraft fire as he approached the location of the friendly

troops, Mister Rogers continued into the pickup zone and safely extracted seven infantrymen, transporting them to near facilities. Then the determined Mister Rogers returned once again to the conflict area in search of additional downed airmen. Spotting a flashing strobe light used by comrades on the ground, Warrant Officer Rogers fearlessly descended amid a barrage of enemy bullets and remained on station until the downed crewman was safely aboard. Still under heavy fire, Warrant Officer Rogers took evasive measures, maneuvering his badly crippled ship out of the combat zone. Miraculously, Mister Rogers maintained complete control of this aircraft despite the extensive damage it had sustained and successfully guided it back to his base. Mister Rogers' skill and determined professionalism were instrumental in saving the lives of eight of his compatriots. HQ US Army, Vietnam, General Orders No. 75 (January 8, 1971)

Also on the 2nd, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15626 flown by an unnamed crew in Cambodia. The decoded details of the record state that this was a reconnaissance armed escort mission, during the attack on target, they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the main rotor blade system, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

Also on the 2nd, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16083 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took three hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the fuel cell and right engine comp, they made a forced landing and modified the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater and evacuated.

On the 3rd, CPT Jim Darr continues providing details about B Troop and the HHT detachment at Ban Me Thuot East. We checked the blade (after the blade strike we sustained while extracting the Blue) and it wasn't that bad just a little dent. I also went to check on 1LT Joe Feeney. We got him and took him to the Ban Me Thuot city strip. From there he was taken to the hospital and evaced. Later I saw him in Germany. We were involved in the insert of the ARVN Rangers. We were just one of the ships on this large insert – at least ten ships. I remember the Cobras were firing on both sides of us. Many of us got field impact award at Holloway. I received a DFC. CW2 Ray Resendez received a BS V and our enlisted crew the Air Medal with V. We stayed another couple of weeks at Ban Me Thuot East then B Troop and everyone were relocated back to Enari.

Concerning the events in B Troop, 1LT Ken Wilson continues: On the 3rd, a Vietnamese Ranger Battalion was being inserted and the Blues were going to be inserted with them. Just prior to our joining up with the ARVN unit, a Brigade General from the 4th Inf Div showed up at Duc Lap. He ordered the Blues to stay back and provide security for the forward TOC at Duc Lap. This will turn out to be the best decision a General officer ever made on my behalf. The first ARVN Company of about 150 rangers was inserted and within the first 30 minutes after contact they had approximately 30-50 KIA/WIA and had to pull back. I, and the Blue Platoon, would have been slaughtered had we been inserted since we were supposed to lead them to the position. Shortly thereafter, a second ARVN Ranger Company was inserted and as soon as they made contact they had the same type of casualties. I found out later back at Fort Knox from an ARVN Mechanized Infantry Advisor) that a Mech Infantry unit moved down the road to engage and half of the company was knocked out before they could retreat. All three units were pulled back from the area. The decision was made that we would look for our downed comrades for 3-4 days and then we would start B-52 carpet-bombing. I don't know the details of what happened over the next few weeks in this area. The battle at the downed aircraft LZ area continued on until about 20 December when the ARVN declared the area safe. I do remember that on 10 December a radio call came into the operations facility at Duc Lap. It said that a vehicle should be sent a short distance from Duc Lap and they would find WO1 Peterson and SGT Shepard. Everyone thought it might be a trick but it turned out both of the guys were there. We also found out through their debrief that CPT Chirichigno and CW2 Nowicki had been taken to North Vietnam. I remember

that we started providing a lot of Gun support to Bu Prang, which was under siege. CW2 Ron Tusi was seen as a real hero on one of the days when Bu Prang was almost being over run. He strapped in and flew missions even though one of the “pitch/pull” tubes connecting to the rotor had a bullet hole that had taken out 1/3 of the tubes metal. Ron was killed in an accident in the US after serving three tours in Vietnam.

1LT Gary Eldridge recalls. For the next few days, B Troop worked the area around Bu Prang. I recall that the NVA would jam our FM radios. Once they came up on our FM frequency and said, ‘What are you looking for? Don’t you know that your four pilots are alive and well but they are in Cambodia.’ Those were interesting days for sure.

Also on the 3rd, A Troop was conducting reconnaissance and security operations in the An Khe area. At 1145 hours, near BR2526, the Scout reported one individual, tied and gagged, lying on the floor of a small structure. The Blues were inserted, secured the man who was reported to be an NVA captive. For the next five days, A Troop made numerous observations but no significant contacts.

On the 4th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop AH-1G #68-15047 flown by CPT G.J. Schelcher and co-pilot WO1 Oscar M. Busby. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

The aircraft was armed with 3000 rounds of 7.62 and 200 rounds of 40mm grenades. CPT Schelcher and WO Busby preflighted the ship and flew to Ban Me Thuot airfield and refueled. They then flew to Duc Lap airfield and shut down on the parking apron there. The aircraft had approximately 1300 LBS of fuel remaining and was loaded at Duc Lap with 38 10-pound rockets and 14 fleshette rockets. At 1340 hours the crew received word that they were to relieve another AH-1G on station in the AO. The pilot started the aircraft, brought it to a hover, and initiated a takeoff to the east. The aircraft immediately started spinning to the right as takeoff power was applied. The pilot applied full left pedal however the aircraft continued its spin to the right and the pilot elected to set it down with power rather than executing a hovering autorotation. The aircraft came to rest after completing almost 2 revolutions and sustained minor damage to the right skid. The aircraft was now facing to the north-west. CPT Schelcher, after a momentary delay, applied power a second time to determine if he had experienced a tail rotor malfunction. He increased collective until the aircraft became light on the skids; the aircraft then started turning slowly to the right. He applied first left and then right pedal with negligible effect on the turn. The tail rotor then contacted an engineer stake and the tail rotor assembly, 90 degree gear box, 42 degree gear box, and the drive shaft between the two were separated from the aircraft. The pilot shut down the aircraft and both he and the copilot exited the ship; neither sustained injuries. There was no fire.

Also on the 4th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop UH-1H #66-16017 flown by Instructor Pilot CPT Mike F. McClellan. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary read: While initiating a running landing, a rock flew up from the skids striking and damaging the tail rotor.

About the 8th, WO1 Bob Rogers remembers flying an HHT UH-1H near Ban Me Thuot. The aircraft took a hit from a large caliber anti-aircraft weapons and was damaged enough to be turned in for higher level maintenance. While there is no record of this incident in the VHPA Helicopter database, the Goldbook database suggests that it was #67-17352. According to the Goldbook, 352 was a replacement aircraft that only served with HHT during the month of November. Bob provided the following:

This incident happened about a week after all the action in early November with B Troop.

SP5 Stan Jost describes a detailed conversation he had with Bob Rogers after this mission. Stan believes the wounded gunner was Allen Sybesma. According to Stan, Allen was a tall, thin very

blond-haired kid. He was actually too young to be in the military service but he got in with his parent's consent so long as he would not be involved in direct combat. Allen was a clerk but repeatedly 'begged' Stan to let him fly as a gunner. After OJTing for awhile and working out well, he became part of the 'pool of clerks' that were often called upon to fly as gunners in the Aviation Platoon of HHT.

On the 8th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage records for two B Troop AH-1Gs flown by an unnamed crews. (1) #67-15607 they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the main rotor blade system. (2) #67-15609 at an altitude of 200 feet, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the cockpit and engine compartment. Both helicopters were repaired in theater.

On the 9th, while visually reconnoitering suspected enemy complexes, the A Troop Scouts observed one khaki clad individual. Gunships fired on the area and the Blues were inserted. They captured one NVA soldier and four VC nurses. Three enemy soldiers were killed in the action.

On the 10th, after following a trail through a complex showing recent enemy activity, the A Troop Scouts observed and killed one NVA soldier at BR410231. Moments later, several individuals were observed hiding in a cluster of rocks. Again the area was taken under fire, resulting in one more NVA KIA. Further observation revealed several 50-cal ammunition cans lying on the ground. The Scouts engage the area with miniguns, killing two more NVA. A thorough reconnaissance of the surrounding area revealed numerous structures and bunkers. Several Montagnard children carrying packs were also seen. When observed, the children dropped the packs and fled. High winds prevented inserting the Blues. The VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop UH-1H #67-17750 flown by WO1 R.E. Dahlin. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads: Coming out of the pick-up zone in gusty wind conditions, the aircraft slipped to the left and the blade struck a tree. Investigations continue to determine total damage.

On the 11th, the combat element of A Troop moved to Camp Enari in support of the 3rd Brigade, 4th Inf Div. While operating south of Pleiku, several suspicious individuals were observed supervising Montagnard farmers cutting rice. These individuals were apprehended and, during questioning, one of them revealed that he had a weapon hidden. The prisoner and two guards were returned to the AO, resulting in one MAS-36 rifle being captured.

On the 12th, a small NVA unit was observed and taken under fire by A Troop's gunships resulting in 23 NVA KIAs. There were no other significant sightings reported.

On the 13th, A Troop's Blues were inserted at ZA1921, an area believed to conceal a large enemy weapons cache. The Blues located a large storage structure containing 1,000 lbs of rice. The rice could not be extracted and A Troop was instructed to destroy it in place.

A Troop Moves to An Khe

On the 15th, A Troop moved its operations to An Khe from Camp Enari.

On the 15th, SP5 Howard 'Shorty' C. Boling DEROSes from B Troop after his one year tour. He was the CE in #66-16020 for many months.

Sapper attack at An Khe

On the 16th, early in the morning, Camp Radcliff's perimeter was penetrated by an estimated 20 NVA sappers. The A Troop unit history states that three AH-1Gs and four OH-6As were destroyed in the attack. It would be the 19th before A Troop returned to the AO. The VHPA Helicopter database shows that the 119th AHC lost seven Huey transports and two gunships. It also shows that A Troop lost these five aircraft: AH-1G #67-15592, OH-6A #67-16073, OH-6A #67-16293, OH-6A #67-16676 and OH-6A #67-16653 at grid BR462470.

SGT Leroy 'Arkie' Rutherford recalls: I remember the sapper attack at An Khe very well. It seems to me that A Troop had just moved into An Khe the same day of this attack. The advanced party was there but most of the equipment was still packed up. They had sprayed Pentaprime oil around the maintenance area and all the dusty areas that day. When our helicopters came in from the AO, they landed to this area and then moved into the revetments. I worked with several CEs to clean the oil off the ships until about 2200. We had finished making all the entries in the log books. Even though we were scheduled for a maintenance stand-down day the next day, we worked into the night to be able to have some time off the next day. I remember leaving the flight line and had just finished taking a shower when the explosions started. We spent some time in the bunkers and were not allowed to go down to the flight line in the dark because they didn't know if any of the sappers were still there. In the morning we found that one of our Cobras was burned in the revetment. All that remained was a pile of white ash and the tail boom. Another Cobra had its tail boom blown off. I recall one or two LOHs were damaged and a Huey. Recently I heard from a SSG Dion Soliz who was in the Blues and has pictures of all the ships that were damaged. I believe the helicopter company next to us on the flight line had a lot of ships destroyed in this attack. I seem to remember that 21 helicopters were damaged or destroyed in this attack. I have pictures of A Troop's aircraft the next morning. One clearly shows the only thing remaining of one Cobra was part of the tail boom. Another clearly shows a Cobra with the tail boom blown off. This aircraft was turned in for repairs. [Editor's note: We believe the repaired aircraft was AH-1G #67-15575. The Goldbook database shows this aircraft served with A Troop since July 1968, was turned into the 604th TC Co in Nov. 1969, and returned to log time in A Troop in March 1970. This suggests that the repairs were made from 16 Nov until some time in March 1970.]

SP5 Joe W. Prater was with A Troop during this period of time. He states that he was drafted into the Army and trained at Fort Eustis, then came to Vietnam and joined A Troop as a LOH mechanic. When I first arrived at Camp Enari I was scared – totally scared. I just knew I was not going to live until tomorrow. With each passing day, I learned a little more and finally sort of got over being scared. One of my eyes is weak, so I didn't fly very much. I was at An Khe during the sapper attack. I believe they destroyed 19 aircraft including several lots of our LOHs. I remember seeing a New York Times article on this attack. We worked hard everyday. Most of the time I did aircraft maintenance but I did a little of everything, including riding shotgun on a large truck to get rations. I did a lot of downed aircraft rigging. Sometimes you just back into a job naturally. If you got good at the job, whenever it came up – they looked for you to do it.

SP4 Ryland 'Charlie' Meade provides: I was an 45J20 Armor right out of AIT when I joined A Troop in Jan 1969. I extended once and stayed with them until I DEROSed in Sep 1970. I remember being at An Khe until sometime in late 69 or early 70. I got Malaria, spent about 30 days in a hospital at Qui Nhon and returned to the Troop at An Khe. I worked on the weapons systems for the LOHs and the Cobras. I was flight qualified. I flew about twice a month in a LOH during combat operations and about the same as a Huey doorgunner.

Also on the 16th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15607 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a reconnaissance armed escort mission, during the attack on target, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the cargo section, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 20th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident and loss record with fatalities for C Troop OH-6A #67-16086 flown by **WO1 Fred A. Exner III** as pilot and CW2 G.B. Nelson as co-pilot at grid BS774131. The Wall database gives Exner's tour start date as 13 Jun 1969 and his MOS as 100B. The decoded record states that while doing a VR in the An Lao Valley the pilot crashed into tall trees

after experiencing a tail rotor failure that may have resulted from enemy SA fire. The LOH burned and exploded. The Accident Summary states the following:

Aircraft departed LZ Two Bits approximately 1300 hours and proceeded towards the assigned area of operation, which is at approximate coordinates BS7713. The Troop Commander, MAJ Tobin, was flying the C&C ship. He ordered the aircraft with him to proceed to general location of LZ Tape. WO Exner at this time was following the lead gunship, piloted by WO1 Cook. Subject aircraft crossed the mountainous terrain in a northerly direction passing to the east of LZ Stringer. C&C then informed all aircraft to proceed further to the north due to the numerous friendly units operating around LZ Stinger. WO1 Exner flew up the north-south ridge located to the northeast. Flying north for approximately 2000 meters at which time subject aircraft turned northwest entering a large ravine to the east of LZ Tape. Subject aircraft at this point was flying approximately 20-30 feet above the trees at an airspeed of 80 knots. Subject aircraft made several large orbits at high airspeed approximately 30 feet above the tree top level. The winds were 20 knots gusting to 40 knots. According to Nelson the winds were very gusty and very unpredictable. WO1 Exner called CW2 Nelson's attention several times to the loss of left pedal, running out of both on several occasions. Subject aircraft was headed in a northerly direction, flying at the five o'clock position of the lead aircraft, approximately 200 meters out. Flying in a northerly direction at approximately 1309 hours CW2 Nelson heard a loud but distinct noise, not unlike an AK-47. On intercom CW2 Nelson asked WO1 Exner, "What was that?" WO1 Exner replied with, "Tail rotor failure." At the instant the noise was heard, the aircraft crabbed to the right approximately 60 degrees. WO1 Exner brought the ship back to approximately 20 degrees and continued in a shallow right turn. The aircraft at this time was heading in a southeasterly direction still well clear of the trees. CW2 Nelson keyed the floor mike to ask WO1 Exner his intentions. The turn continued toward the higher ground. WO1 Exner told CW2 Nelson to get off the mike. WO1 Exner then made a blanket call and said "Tail rotor failure, I'm going in." Subject aircraft began to spin violently to the right. WO1 Mitchell flying the lead LOH heard the distress call and immediately turned his aircraft around just in time to see subject aircraft striking the tops of the trees. It was spinning rapidly to the right with a nose low attitude according to WO1 Mitchell. It was at this time that MAJ Tobin flew further up the valley and gained altitude and called for the Aero Rifle Platoon. WO1 Mitchell flew to the crash site and hovered over the area for three to four minutes. He could see no movement around the area. At this time a fire started in the cockpit of the aircraft and he was forced to move away because of the exploding ammunition. It was at this time that the fuel cell caught fire and exploded, throwing out a large cloud of dark smoke. When the medivac arrived at the crash site CW2 Nelson was lying next to the tail boom. A jungle penetrator was dropped to within six feet of CW2 Nelson but he made no attempt to reach it. It was then raised and the medic rode it down through the 150 feet trees to the patient. The medic then helped CW2 Nelson into the rig and they both were taken aboard the hovering aircraft. WO1 Exner was pinned down by the seat and frame structures which were directly behind and above the pilot's seat. The armor plating was lying on top of WO1 Exner's body and all the seat belts were in the way.

CW2 Bob Mitchell describes these events: I was the Scout team leader that day. Fred, an experienced LOH pilot, was flying my wing. He had the additional duty of being the troop Supply Officer. A CW2 Gary B. Nelson had been a Cobra pilot for some time and was in the process of seeing if he wanted to be a Scout. He flew as Fred's Observer and it was his first day in a LOH. That day the AO was the northern part of the An Lao over from LZ English. We were working from the higher ground down toward the valley floor. Fred called that he had just experienced a tail rotor failure. I quickly turned and saw him going into the trees. He must have had rather low forward speed at the time because he should have been able to fly out of the area even without a tail rotor. Just after the LOH hit the trees, the blades folded up and quit turning. The right front side of the ship hit the ground. I was right over the crash site in seconds and even though this area was triple

canopy jungle, I could clearly see the wreck. There was no movement around the wreck and initially there was no fire. We called for the Blues even though the nearest LZ was some distance away. After about ten minutes the wreck started to burn and soon the ammo started cooking off. We had to back off because of the exploding ammo. About this time we saw a pen flare come up through the trees. We dismissed it as part of the burning ammo. A couple minutes later when we saw another pen flare, we knew someone was alive down there. We called for a medevac with a jungle penetrator. It arrived and even though the ammo was still exploding, they pulled right up to the crash site and put the penetrator down. CW2 Nelson was so badly wounded that he was unable to get himself into the contraption; so the medic went down. He was able to complete the evacuation. No one else was hurt during that extraction. Later the Blues did get in and retrieved Fred's body. Years later I saw Nelson again in Germany flying Cobras; so I am glad to say that he recovered from his wounds.

A Troop relocates to Camp Enari from An Khe

On the 22nd, A Troop was given a permanent change of station order back to Camp Enari. They were operation in the vicinity of Pleiku the next day.

From the 23rd through the 27th, A Troop continued to observe numerous suspected enemy locations but reported no significant actions or incidents.

On the 24th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16245 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission, during the attack on target, they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the bottom fuselage and bottom engine compartment, they continued flying and aborted the mission, the helicopter was repaired.

Concerning the recovery of George Grega's body, CPT Jim Donohoe recalls:

My tour was split almost 50-50 between the Pallbearers of B Troop and the Aviation Section of HHT. When I joined B Troop they were very short on commissioned officers and CPT Mark Saum was leaving. This was in October. I'd only been flying a few weeks when we lost all those ships southwest of Ban Me Thout. //details please// I'll never forget Thanksgiving Day! It was about noon when Operations gave us the mission to go pick up George Grega's body. I certainly knew where the LZ was! We were told to go pick up two graves registration people from someplace. It may have been the city strip or the MACV compound. I remember that they had some written instructions and knew exactly where to find his body. I don't know how they received this information. Anyway, we flew out at altitude and let down to clear the LZ. Operations had told us to do it and I just assumed the area was secure. The graves registration guys keep pointing where they wanted to go so we landed. They jumped out and in a few minutes returned with the body bag and we took off. It was then that I started looking around for what I thought was a friendly force on the ground and noticed that was none at all! We had been in a major, major fight just three weeks before! While we didn't draw any fire or see any NVA, I remembering thinking maybe that wasn't the smartest thing I've done! I stayed with the Pallbearers until March when CPT Jim Darr and I switched jobs and I went to HHT.

1LT Ken Wilson recalls: On 24 November I went in with a few Blues, along with MAJ Bowling and others, to pick up CW2 George Grega's body. It is important to note that George had less than 7 days to go and was not supposed to fly another mission. On the night of November 1st George had a couple of drinks and we were talking about the next days mission. George had not taken a round in his year in Vietnam and made the comment, 'When George goes to the AO, God goes to the AO' and further stated that he was going to fly the next day. No one could talk him out of it. After retrieving George's body we were able to walk around the LZ and see where the 51 caliber

positions mentioned above were located. The NVA Regiment was dug in all around the LZ and I still, to this day, don't see how we made it in there; stayed six hours; and made it out alive.

On the 27th, A Troop was instructed to conduct a reconnaissance 20 miles east of Pleiku. The previous evening a LRRP team had conducted a night ambush operation and had killed five NVA. More enemy soldiers were believed to be in the area. The Blues were inserted and conducted a sweep of the area. One heavy blood trail was found and followed to the west to a Montagnard village. A cordon and search operation was conducted resulting in one detainee. The VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop UH-1H #68-15368 flown by Aircraft Commander CW2 R.P. Turnley. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads: The aircraft was landing in a confined area during a combat assault mission. Due to gusting winds, the aircraft yawed unexpectedly to the left and the main rotor blades struck a tree. Investigation continues to determine total damage. Rich Turnley provided the following to the VHPA in January, 1999:

I was picking up a LRRP team that was under fire on a hillside and due to a lack of power I took off down the hill side in an attempt to gain airspeed and altitude. I flew between two trees that were about a foot too close to each other - seemed like a better plan than the alternative (crashing) at the time. Heck, they even gave me an Air Medal with V for it!

From the 28th through the 30th, A Troop was unable to enter the AO due to high winds.

CW2 Ken Meyer provided: I joined A Troop in Jan 1969 after flight school. I started out flying Hueys but really liked the Cobra so I flew front seat for a while. I remember flying with WO1 Mike 'Gogo' Geoghagan often. He gave me my real in-country orientation. Finally an AH-1G transition slot came open and I went to Vung Tau for that. I flew as Knight 29 for about eight or nine months. I had three really good friends and roommates in A Troop: CW2 Jim 'JC' Chapman, Bishop 14, CW2 Gary Enderle who flew LOHs his entire time, and CW2 Marvin 'Rags' Connaway, Bishop 18. There were two bunks to a room in our barracks. We had adjoining rooms. So we put a connecting door between the rooms, moved all the bunks into one room and used the other as our private club. The four of us extended so we could be home for Christmas '69 and then planned to take our extension leave to go to London. Somehow my orders got messed up so I stayed in Vietnam during Christmas while the other three were home. The London trip never happened. After I'd been in-country for about ten months or so, MAJ Marshall was looking for experience pilots to fly LOHs and asked if I'd do it. I said yes and transitioned into the 6. From then on I'd bounce back and forth between the Cobras and the LOHs. I was Bishop 10 when I flew as a Scout. I loved it 'number ten is leaving now' I'd say on the radios.

December 1969

During this month, A Troop would work several different AOs in northwestern II Corp and for the 3rd BDE west of Enari. B Troop would finish up its work for the 1st BDE's Operation SPREAGINS WHITE in the Ban Me Thuot, Bu Prang area. C Troop worked the An Lao Valley and Crows Foot area, weather permitting, else worked the low lands against the VC. D Troop completed the Enari to Cheo Reo convoy security assignments, then conducted search and destroy missions and served as a ready reaction force for A Troop.

On the 4th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15642 flown by WO1 T.S. Mergen and copilot 1LT E.E. Whitehead. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

At approximately 1030 hours, WO Mergen and LT Whitehead started the aircraft and departed LZ Two Bits flying as the wing gunship en route to the AO. Shortly after entering the AO, a FAC received ground to air fire and WO Mergen and his lead fired on the suspected enemy position. WO Mergen expended approximately 2000 rounds of 7.62MM ammunition and two rockets. After

Firing, WO Mergen established a left-hand orbit approximately 4 Kms north of the target area. WO Mergen then heard a loud ‘pop’ and simultaneously felt a slight vibration in the collective. A check of the master caution panel showed nothing wrong. A crosscheck of the instrument panel showed that the engine oil temperature was 110 degrees C and the engine oil pressure had fallen to five PSI. WO Mergen then made the decision to break out of the orbit and return to LZ Two Bits. This was the nearest secure landing area and was approximately 15 Kms to the southeast. The chip detector caution light came on at this time and WO Mergen checked and found it to be the engine chip light. At this time the engine failed and the low RPM audio warning horn sounded. The collective was lowered to the full bottom position and the aircraft entered autorotation. Throughout the past sequence of events WO Mergen had remained over a valley flying south at 90 knots and 2500 feet indicated. Due to the rugged terrain, the stream-bed in the valley floor provided the only forced landing area. WO Mergen allowed the copilot to pick the forced landing area because LT Whitehead had better visibility. When WO Mergen had the forced landing area in sight he took the controls and completed the autorotation. The aircraft touched down on a rough area next to the water with a slight amount of forward airspeed. The landing gear collapsed upon impact and the XM-18 pods and the outboard rocket PODS prevented the aircraft from rolling over. (WO Mergen instructed his copilot to jettison the wing stores but changed his mind because he had seen an OH-6A below him and did not know where the OH-6A was after the engine and failed. WO Mergen also stated that he had remembered that the wing stores often prevented an aircraft from rolling over when autorotating to rough terrain.) Neither pilot received any injuries, there was no fire.

The Goldbook database provides additional information on AH-1G #67-15642. In December 1969 it was transferred to the 79th TC, then to the 303rd TC Company and finally to CONUS for ARADMAC repairs at Corpus Christi. In July 1970 the repairs were completed and it was transferred to the Flight Training Center at Fort Stewart. Later it was converted to a TH-1G and continued to serve in the Aviation Training Command. In 2002 the Army dedicated 179 to the City of Hubbard, TX (northeast of Waco). As of 2009 it is still on display there. We are indebted to Dennis Petteys (younger brother of WO1 Jim Petteys KIA 15 Jan 1969) for the recent information on 642.

Also on the 4th, the Squadron assigned several Instructor Pilots to the Standardization Section within HHT. CPT Marty Martines provided copies of Special Order #302 dated 1 Dec with an effective date of 4 Dec (individuals on the orders denoted by a ‘*’) and another roster of IPs from a later date that provide the following details:

Name	Rank	IP	DEROS	Troop	A/C Type
Barber, Harry*	CW2	SIP	7 Jul 70	B	AH-1G
Bass, Gary*	1LT	SIP	29 Oct 70	C (B)	UH-1H AH-1G
Graham, David*	CW2	IP	19 Mar 70	A	UH-1H
Hobstetter, P	WO1	IP	19 Mar 70	B	OH-6A
Martines, Richard*	CPT	SIP	6 May 70	HHT	OH-6A
McClellan, Mike*	CPT			C	UH-1H
Mitchell, Harry	WO1	IP	19 May 70	C	OH-6A
Mursch, John*	CW2	IP	5 May 70	A	AH-1G
Muse, James*	WO1			A	
Olsen, Alan*	CW2			C	

Roberts, James F. Jr.	CPT	IP	26 Nov 70	HHT	UH-1H
Robinson, John H.*	CW2			B	OH-6A
Rozga, Mike*	CW2	IP	27 May 70	B	UH-1H
Stokes, Ron	WO1	IP	14 Jun 70	B	UH-1H
Whaley, Al	CW2	SIP	14 Apr 70	C	OH-6A UH-1H
Zuccaro, Matt	WO1	IP	3 Jul 70	HHT	UH-1H

CPT Marty Martines also has copies of 17th CAG and USARV orders naming him and others to their Flight Standardization Boards. He also states the CPT James F. Roberts was the Squadron Safety Officer in late 1969 and early 1970.

CW2 J.H. Robinson provides: After my time in C and B Troops, I served in the IP group at HHT and DEROSed on 16 Feb 1970.

On the 10th, WO Peterson and SGT Shepard of B Troop were freed by the NVA relatively near a 45th ARVN Regt site near Duc Lap. They were captured by the NVA during the battle on 2 Nov described earlier. The Pacific Stars and Stripes dated Saturday, Dec 13, 1969 carried pictures of them on the front page. The paper says that Peterson's third and fourth toes on his left foot were missing and he suffered fragmentation wounds in the left knee. Shepard was described as having multiple fragmentation wounds of the right foot and of the buttock. They were the 28th and 29th U.S. prisoners to be released by the Communists.

This paragraph and the next are extracts from the A Troop unit history. The material is undated but is located after the 27 Nov paragraph, so it is assumed to be some time in December. While conducting a first light reconnaissance mission vicinity coordinates BR069254, A Troop's Scouts observed two enemy soldiers. Gunships engaged the area resulting in two NVA KBAs. Minutes later, nine khaki-clad NVA soldiers were engaged by the C&C aircraft resulting in 1 KBA. The Blues and elements of D Troop were inserted to conduct a ground reconnaissance. Numerous enemy hiding and sleeping positions and one heavy blood trail were found. No contact was made with the enemy.

While conducting a VR of a Montagnard village at ZA091339, A Troop's Scouts observed several men, one of which was not Montagnard, and all had fresh haircuts. The village was searched and two individuals were detained by the Blues.

On the 11th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16245 flown by WO1 G.L. Biermann and copilot CPT D. Bare. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

On 8 Dec the aircraft underwent repairs for combat damage. The aircraft had been hit by one bullet through the right rear of the fuel cell and the right side of the engine compartment which severed the engine wiring harness. Upon replacement of the fuel cell, the aircraft was refueled and test flown for 1 hour and 25 minutes and had a 30-minute ground run-up. On 11 Dec, WO Biermann was preparing to go to the AO when his team leader's aircraft would not start. The team leader decided to take WO Biermann's aircraft. WO Biermann then proceeded to get aircraft 245 ready for flight, taking approximately 10 minutes for a preflight inspection. WO Biermann started aircraft 245 at 1300 hours approximately 30 minutes after the lead aircraft, and proceeded to the AO where he notified the lead aircraft that he needed an early replacement due to the fact he took off with less than a full tank of fuel. WO Biermann stated that he had more than 270 LBS upon takeoff. According to the DA 2408-12, -13 from 8 Dec 69, He had 187.5 LBS of fuel in his tanks. His request for early replacement was complied with and after one hour and 15 minutes departed for Hensel Field. He heard a muffled bang from the engine compartment and noticed a loss of power.

WO Biermann stated that immediately prior to his engine failure, he had 56 LBS of torque and the fuel gauge read 120 LBS. He lowered the collective pitch and made a 180-degree turn while calling Mayday on the troop UHF frequency. He made his autorotation into the wing to a dry rice paddy. He flared high and cushioned to the top of the grass and then fell approximately 3-4 feet hitting the ground with forward airspeed. Just prior to ground contact he turned 60 degree to the left. Ground contact was nose low and to the right, almost to the point of turning over. The aircraft bounced approximately three times. The blades contacted the tail boom at least twice. Immediately after the crash, the crew exited and proceeded to remove the minigun, radios, fire extinguisher and ammunition.

On the 16th, A Troop's Blues were inserted to assist in extraction of an indigenous intelligence agent from the Montagnard village of Kon Xalon. The village was believed to be VC controlled. A Government of North Vietnam (GNV) flag was raised over the neatly organized village when A Troop's aircraft arrived in the area. The Blues found 24 rubber soled blank canvas boots, 1 NVA pack, and 3 NVA fatigue shirts. The agent was not located within the village. As the Blues departed, they were applauded by the villagers. SSG Tom Wells A Troop's Blue Platoon Leader wrote the following and titled it 'Handwriting on the Wall:'

The first time I remember the Vietnamization program was in December 1969. We were told that someone in Washington D.C. signed a paper and an executive order which made a big impact on the way the Blues operated. These orders from higher were always difficult and hard to work around at first. All of a sudden the infantry soldier went from being the most expendable, as in all wars, to a precious commodity. We were told that no grunts in the theater could be inserted out of the American artillery fan. We often worked in AOs that were so far out of artillery fans. We found lots of situations where we needed to go in on the ground after the scouts and the gunships would fire up an area to secure important enemy documents, weapons and to kill and take captives. By not being able to insert, we lost a lot of information on the enemy forces. I had hoped that if someone was shot down that we would insert anyway. That was one thing the A Troop pilots knew. If allowed, we would go in on a rescue mission come hell or high water. They knew we would always be there for them. For about ten days we did not insert in these areas. We went to the flight line one day to get ready to go to the AO when a jeep and trailer showed up from the 4th Division with four soldiers. They were told that they were to go out with the Blues. This was the first that I heard of it. They pulled back the tarp on the jeep trailer and had an 81-millimeter mortar. I don't know who devised this idea but it sounded like something Major Maxson would come up with. This was our artillery to be inserted with us which technically would put us in the fan of the 81 which was our artillery indirect fire. I had to rearrange my men on the choppers. I put the 4th Division soldiers and their mortar on the last ship in and first ship out. I had to get rid of some of my Blues to make room. There was lots of weight with the four men and their mortar. They only had six rounds with them. I told them that was all that they needed. I would never use them when I had the guns I could call in if need be. When we inserted a few times how it worked was that they set up in the LZ. I showed them which direction we were going in. They would aim the tube in that direction. I then told them to lie down in four different directions. They would be alone in the open LZ until we got back. This went on for about a week when the higher ups were finally convinced that we did not need it with all the fire power of our cobras and protection of the scouts or, if need be, the lift ships with their M-60's. We were much better off. I don't think I ever called in 81s. We had bad experiences with them in the Big Red One. They were under-trained. You could not depend on them. I often called in 4.2 inch mortars and artillery when needed. This was our first introduction to the Vietnamization. There were many more incidents as time passed in 1970. This was the beginning of the handwriting on the wall.

On the 18th, C Troop's Blues were involved in an operation. SP4 Jim Yamnitz remembers:

I had been in the Blues since June and I had just finished the extension paper work to be in the Scouts again and to start OJT to be a LOH crew chief. I was walking behind the dog handler when this VC threw a grenade at us from a spider hole. The dog and the handler took most of the blast. I don't believe they were killed but I got some blow back from them. The VC moved to another hole and that's where we killed him. Later when we returned from the field, Top came to look us over. He came up to me and asked if I was OK since I had blood and stuff on my uniform. When I told him what had happened. Naturally, he knew about my extension, so he said – I don't want you going in with the Blues anymore – you are too short. I departed on my extension leave on 31 Dec and wouldn't return to C Troop until February.

On the 19th, a squad-size enemy element was engaged by A Troop's gunship, resulting in 1 NVA KIA. Scouts reported seeing numerous blood trails leading in all directions. A Troop reported no significant actions for the remainder of the month.

On the 23th, Louis Belanger was part of a small team sent in to recover B Troop's Cobra and two LOHs shot down on 2 November plus the body of WO George Grega. He posted several pictures on the B Troop website and comments: As you will see, there wasn't much left of the two LOHs except the weapons. I flew in with B Troop Commander MAJ Billy Bowling and Specialists Craig Carmean and Mike Ware. The pictures also show a Chinook lifting out the Cobra plus several photos of it once it was back at Ban Me Thuot East.

On the 25th, SGT Eddy 'Tibby' Chasteen remembers: On Christmas Day, I was told to report to MAJ Bowling's tent. He asked if I would fly with his crew back to the clearing for reasons I never ever asked. Once over the clearing, I remember thinking that everything was all so different now. The battle that had taken place after we left had changed the site so much. We landed at the top of the clearing and were greeted by a couple of Special Forces officers. MAJ Bowling talked with them and then one came over to ask a few questions about the locations of the 51s and the structures I'd seen. I couldn't help them much because of all the changes. We walked down to the road. I showed them where we had entered the clearing and the path I thought I had taken. There were signs of many spider holes and bunkers along the right side in the woods. A few large logs still were in place that once was a large bunker at the top right of the clearing. Perhaps this was the right most 51 position in my drawing. The left side was dotted with holes as well.

On the 26th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident and loss record for C Troop OH-6A #66-17753 flown by CPT Mike G. Halby, observer SP5 J.P. Sullivan, and crew chief SP4 G.A. Phillips at grid BS900204. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

The aircraft departed for the AO at 0845 hours. He refueled at LZ English and departed with his wingman at 1020 hours to perform a VR of an area south of LZ English. They returned to LZ English at 1205 hours and refueled. After lunch they returned to the same area departing LZ English at 1415 hours. They received a mission change 30 minutes later. They were to move to an area north of LZ English. At 1500 hours, en route to the new location, they stopped at LZ English for fuel. The area to recon was wooded with many varying contours. The weather was good with the winds generally out of the north at about 12 knots with some gusts (light). The density altitude was +1750 feet. CPT Halby was working at a low altitude over terrain that reassembled a large bowl covered with trees. He was continually moving in a northerly direction indicating 15 to 20 knots and was in the lower section of the bowl 4-8 feet above the trees. He was continually moving forward and upward. At 1615 hours, while making a left turn, the aircraft's nose lowered and the pilot applied aft cyclic to correct its attitude. The aircraft started to descent and the pilot applied collective pitch but before the aircraft responded it hit the trees. The aircraft contacted the ground in a skids level attitude and incurred major damage. There was no fire and no injuries.

SP4 Gary Phillips recalls: I'm not surprised to read that this event was written up in this way – CPT Halby being the platoon leader and all. However, let me tell you what really happened. The area we were working that day was a DEAD AREA – no movement, no signs of the bad guys, no nothing. I happened to see this deer in the trees and mentioned this to CPT Halby. Well everyone, including the C&C talked it over and decided that C Troop needed this deer for a “Christmas meal” so I shot it. CPT Halby put me on the ground and the plan was for the C&C Huey could haul the deer out. The Huey crew must have dropped me a sling because we didn't carry that in a LOH. I'd guess the deer weighed about 300 pounds. Well, the Huey came in but couldn't get near enough to hook the sling because of the tall trees. I seem to remember that we were on a ridgeline or the side of a hill. Anyway, CPT Halby brings the LOH back in and signals for me to loop the strap of the sling over the skid, so I did it. When he pulled in power to fly away, the strap tightens and the full weight of the deer is now near the front toe of the skid. The LOH is badly out of CG!! I watched helplessly as the LOH flies (but really flips through the air) about 30 feet before it crashed. I remember thinking – Yikes, my LOH just crashed! So I ran through the trees to help them get out. I remember the Blues came in and I think they dragged the deer some place down the hill so no one was make the connection. I remember riding out in a Huey with the Blues and being told that I needed to go be examined by the medics for “crash injuries.” I said – but I wasn't in the crash. They said, “Oh Yes you were – shut-up and go get examined!” Thirty years later it is now perfectly clear why I as the third crew member of the LOH that crashed in the trees because of some unusual winds needed a medical examination!

Vito Flitt recalls: We went back with a Huey and got that deer. We butchered it and ate it. I also remember them bringing the LOH back but it was a total loss.

On the 30th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident and loss with injuries record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16250 near Pleiku. It was flown by CPT G.B. Robinson and Observer PFC R.D. Joel with two passengers SGT B.J. Mawhinney and SGT A.L. Gonzalez. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the accident summary reads:

The aircraft was the lead for a second team of OH-6A's. The mission was to locate a cache and an unexploded artillery round that a recon patrol had found earlier. There were two AH-1G's from A Troop overhead. CPT Robinson contacted the element on the ground and together they continued the search. When their search discovered nothing it was decided that one of the recon personnel might be able to locate the area from the air. CPT Robinson landed in an LZ and talked to SGT Mawhinney who then got into the aircraft and sat in the seat in the right rear. CPT Robinson then picked the aircraft up to a hover. The torque indicator went into the red momentarily, then stabilized in the middle yellow. He then did a 90 degree pedal turn to the right, with no difficulty. A few minutes later after climb-out he noticed a fourth man sitting in the left rear. This was the first time he knew the man was there. The man was SGT Gonzalez. The flight continued for ten minutes. At that time, the infantry contacted CPT Robinson and asked him to locate their position on the ground. CPT Robinson was trying to direct them to a new LZ. When the infantry called him, he made a steep right turn. The aircraft began to descend. He leveled the aircraft and it stopped descending. He then began a shallow right turn, and lost no altitude. At that time he was flying downwind. He then started another right turn, and the aircraft started to descend. At that time he had a wind from the right rear. He added power, but the aircraft continued to descent. His airspeed was slow. He then pulled in all the power he had, and pulled aft cyclic as far as he could. The aircraft struck a tree in a slight right bank, slightly nose high attitude and under full power. It was moving down slope. CPT Robinson and PFC Joel closed their eyes and braced themselves. The tail rotor and 90 degree gear box were torn from the aircraft as it hit the trees. The aircraft continued down slope. The tail boom left the aircraft. The aircraft came to rest on its right side.

CW2 Marvin Connaway DEROSed just before Christmas after spending nine months in A Troop's LOHs. The following people are listed on his departure plaque:

Pilots		Scouts		Crew Chiefs
CPT Autry	W1 Turner	PSG Gearsy	SP4 Snader	SP5 Sparks
CPT Gibson	W1 Turley	PSG Smith	SP4 Nelson	SP5 Schuchardt
CPT Pilote	W1 Wolchech	SSG Evander	SP4 McKinley	SP5 Christopher
CPT Holbrook	W1 Bahl	SSG Woodruff	PFC Chappell	SP5 Vega
CPT Divito	W1 Connaway	SSG Peterson	PVT Robinson	SP5 Lcothrop
CPT Worcester	W1 Glessner	SSG Looney	PVT Cressman	SP5 Smith
1LT Luken	W1 Bierman	SGT Heath		SP4 Becker
1LT Pospisil	W1 Klaeger	SGT Dague		SP4 Sindel
1LT Bishop	W1 Enderle	SGT Canter		SP4 Loveday
1LT Hubert		SGT Nickels		SP4 Gray
W2 Bates		SGT Kunkel		PFC Nolette
W2 Wilder		SGT Jock		PFC Davis
W1 Muse		SGT Gordon		PFC Luke
W1 Chapman		SGT Sanchez		PFC Kiewel

CW2 Sam Patriacca recalls: I was a CW2 when I arrived in Vietnam on 29 Nov 1969 and was assigned to B Troop. I had been stationed at Gray AAF, Fort Hood, TX since Nov 1968. I served with the 2/17th Cav that was getting ready to deploy to Vietnam. I dislocated my left shoulder and didn't go with that unit. Instead I volunteered for Vietnam service a year later. While at Hood, I went through a local AH-1G transition. En route to Vietnam I was trained as an OH-6A IP and received some gunnery training. B Troop was still at Camp Enari. For some reason or other I was assigned staff duty officer duties for two solid weeks. I remember CW2 Ron Tusi and CPT Ron Bath. I hit it off with both of them early on. I got an in-country check-ride with Tusi and was soon flying back seat. I was flying rather steadily just before Christmas. I remember once walking into a hotch and hearing someone say something about a new guy getting to fly back seat. Naturally, I was pretty sure they were talking about me so I didn't say anything. Then I believe it was Tusi made the comment, 'Yeah, but that guy is a good pilot so he'll stay there.' That made me feel pretty good. Then I got stuck being the paymaster the last couple days of the month. I'd stay with the guns until 22 July 1970 when I'd flew with the Scouts for two months, then I returned to the Guns. I went to Australia on R&R on 7 December for 10 days. Thanks to a Christmas drop, I DEROSed some after that.

CPT Tom Lewis, Undertaker 22, recalls: Prior to coming to Vietnam I'd been an instructor with Southern Airways. I reported into B Troop about 10 Nov 1969 – a few days after that big battle. CW2 Ron Tusi and some others remembered me from my instructor days. As I recall B Troop was short Cobra pilots. I believe I flew front seat for about 15 hours before moving to the back seat. Then I'd guess I flew about 50 hours as an AC before I became a team lead. Ron Tusi was Undertaker 22 and I considered it an honor to take that call sign after he left. Ron was special to everyone that knew him. He'd been a Navy Seal with a previous tour in Vietnam. I also remember that he had been a card dealer at a casino in Tahoe. His card tricks were amazing. While I was an experienced Captain, he was not senior enough to be the Gun Platoon leader.

Sometime during December an undocumented incident happened to C Troop UH-1H #67-17722. The Goldbook indicates it logged 27 hours in December and then was turned in to the 79th TC and hence to E/704th MTN for repairs that required about four months to complete. Anyone with details about this incident is encouraged to contact Mike Law.

SP5 Michael Ronsiek provides: I was in HHT during 1969-70 but served with A Troop most of my 14 months over there. I remember being in Kontum, Dak To (76 Days), Ben Het, Plei Jurang, Polie Kleng, Ban Me Thout, and Bu Prang. I was 11B then they made me an 11D after I made Spec 5. My job was Liason Agent. I actively assisted activities in the AO on a daily basis. I brought in Arty, Air Strikes with FAC, etc. and kept records, collected Intel stuff off the enemy, blew up their Chicom grenades, went through their packs and pockets, papers and any other Intel info we could get from them. Have contacted a few of our brothers over the years. [Extracted from an August 2010 email.]

Year End Summary - During most of this year, the line troops were OPCONNed outside the Squadron. The Squadron remained based at Enari and continued to make improvements to the facilities there especially in the aircraft maintenance area. A Troop spent about half its time working the Dak To / Kontum area and provided considerable support for the 24th STZ. The other half of its time would be given to the 4th Inf. Div. especially in the An Khe and Pleiku areas. B Troop supported TF South from Phan Thiet for the first half of the year, worked out of Camp Enari for a few months before moving to Ban Me Thuot East for basically the rest of the year to support the 23rd ARVN interests in that area now that the 4th Inf. Div. no longer operated there. C Troop worked out of Camp Enari for the first four months, then moved to An Son to support the 173rd and the 4th Inf. Div. for the rest of the year. Basically the Squadron controlled HHT and D Troop for most of the year. The situation of having the ACTs opconned out was seriously reviewed after the 2 Nov battle and changes were made to return to the traditional ACS configuration.