

1971

The primary source materials for this year are: For HHT, a Yearbook titled 71-72 An Son which includes about ten significant pages. For A Troop, a 15 page AUH prepared by 1LT Dan P. Slona. For B and C Troops, nothing. For D Troop, a more than 20 page 1971 – 1972 yearbook showing CPT Arthur H. Trujillo as CO. For the Squadron, a 16 page Combat Operation After Action Report for the period 20-24 Apr and 3-14 May for the air assault portion of Operation MANG HO. The 52nd CAB ORLLs for the period ending 30 April 1971 and for the period ending 31 Oct 1971 provide details about B and D Troops.

January 1971

During this month, A Troop supported the 45th Regt of the 23rd ARVN at Ban Me Thuot. There were no significant sighting or reports in the early part of the year.

On the 11th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record with fatalities for A Troop OH-6A #66-07923 at grid BR232915 flown by **WO1 William Frank Johnson** and his observer **PFC Richard Vincent Blackburn**. The decoded record states this was an armed reconnaissance combat mission, while in level flight at an altitude of 130 feet with an airspeed of 20 knots, they were hit by an unknown type exploding weapon, they crashed, the helicopter exploded, the two crewmembers died, and the aircraft was destroyed and lost to inventory. The Wall database gives the following tour start date and MOS data: Blackburn, 25 Jul 1970, 67A1F; Johnson, 13 Nov 1970, 100B.

Bob Williams, Rook 35, with A Troop from Oct. 1970 to Oct. 1971 recalls: WO Bill Johnson was a scout pilot killed while flying for A Troop. PFC Rick Blackburn was his observer. Rick had just been flying scouts for a month when he was killed. I was back at Phan Rang AFB where we had just been moved, and was told that they were dropping a homemade bomb (a minigun ammo can filled with dynamite and hydraulic fluid, banded tight with a Willie-Pete grenade strapped to it) when it exploded on the aircraft. Speculation was that one of the Ruff-Puff guards at City Field in Ban Me Thout, where we were TDY, changed the detonator for one from a smoke grenade. When Rick got ready to drop it on a bunker and pulled the pin, it blew immediately killing them both. I believe that another pilot and VHPA member, Joe Dobek, was also flying that day. He may be able to correct any errors I've made here or give a more authoritative account of the events of that day. It may seem to be a small thing to some people, but I thought they should be identified by the correct unit. They were both good guys and I was glad to have known them.

Also on the 11th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop AH-1G #67-15715 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was an armed recon mission, during the attack on a target area, at an altitude of 500 feet and an airspeed of 70 knots, they took three hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW which hit the engine compartment, main rotor blades, and the bottom of the cockpit, they continued flying and completed the mission, the helicopter was repaired in theater.

On the 14th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident and loss record with injuries for C Troop AH-1G #69-16419 flown by CPT Tom Gunn as pilot and CPT W. Emil Farr was the co-pilot near An Son. An extract from the official accident report reads as follows:

On 14 January 1971, the pilot and co-pilot were enroute to LZ English on a heading of approximately 300 degrees and 2500 feet AGL. The pilot heard an explosion and was asking his co-pilot what he thought it was when the aircraft yawed to the left. The pilot entered autorotation, immediately diagnosing the problem as tail rotor failure. The pilot then made a call on troop uniform informing them that he had a tail rotor failure. The pilot then decided that LZ Two Bits was an unsatisfactory area because it would have meant a downwind landing to a questionable surface

and the possibility of not being able to make the area. The pilot then turned into the wind to his left, because the aircraft was turning to the left. The pilot then decided on a sandbar in the river as his intended forced landing area. The pilot then made a call on guard stating he was going down at the Bong Song bridges with a tail rotor failure. The pilot then decided not to jettison the rocket pods because the aircraft was equipped with the 20 millimeter cannon system. The pilot figured that if he had jettisoned the rocket pods the aircraft would be out of lateral CG. The pilot then told his co-pilot to lock his shoulder harness while he locked his own. When the aircraft was approximately 300 feet from the landing area he cut off the electrical switches and then went past flight idle stop to full closed. The pilot continued his deceleration to achieve a negative ground run. When he was close to the ground the pilot found it hard to judge his height due to water glare. The pilot then made an initial application of the collective. This initial application of the collective was pulled too high which caused a high sink rate. The pilot then pulled all of his remaining pitch and landed hard. The pilot and co-pilot were medivaced to the 67th Evac Hospital at Qui Nhon, within 15 minutes following impact. Both pilot and co-pilot were not injured fatally. The pilot has been medivaced to the United States with back injuries. The co-pilot also had back injuries but they were minor. He has been released to return to his unit.

David Stinson recalls: CPT Tom Gunn was at this time serving as the gun platoon leader. He was an experienced Cobra pilot who'd transferred in to Charlie Troop for the sole purpose of taking command of the gun platoon. He was only with the troop only a month or so. When he was medivaced, CPT Emil Farr was then the senior snake-qualified RLO and I believe he took over the gun platoon.

On the 15th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record with injuries for A Troop OH-6A #67-16102 flown by an un-named crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission and while hovering in the operational area they took two hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW that resulted in a forced landing. The helicopter was destroyed by friendly fire and lost to inventory.

On the 20th, the following article titled "Just Luck – Not All Bad" appeared on page 7 in the Wednesday January 20 issue of the Pacific Stars & Stripes:

Pleiku (Special) – You can't tell 1LT Steven Moody of Guttenberg, Iowa, or SP5 Timothy Flood of Stockton, Calif., that lightning doesn't strike twice in the same place. You'd probably have an easier time convincing them that the world is flat or the moon is made out of green cheese. A light observation helicopter pilot with the 17th Combat Aviation Group's B Troop, 7th Sq., 17th Air Cav., Moody was on a reconnaissance mission with Flood as observer, when enemy gunfire downed their aircraft 20 miles southeast of here in the central highlands. The lieutenant successfully landed the crippled copter in dense jungle, without injury or damage to the craft. They were immediately rescued by another helicopter. The following day Moody and Flood returned to the same area. Again while flying their tiny aircraft at tree-top level, enemy gunners took aim and forced the helicopter from the sky. Moody was again forced to make an emergency landing less than 20 meters from the previous day's landing site. Rescue teams the scrambling pilot and observer moments later and again flew them to safety, unharmed.

MAJ Glenn Carr recalls: Steve Moody was my Scout Platoon leader. Yes, he was shot down three times in about a week. If memory serves me right I was in the C&C the third day and picked up him and Tim Flood. I then flew his butt back to Holloway, radioed the First Sregeant for an R&R quota, then had to run his butt off before he ran out of luck. Steve was in the troop as late as Aug 71 because he, CPT Joe Riggins, the Lift Platoon Leader, and I were on R&R at the same time I ran into Denny Bartash in Sydney. That's when I rented a car and drove us to the ski resort. There I was in August in summer clothes, low quarter shoes, ass deep in snow riding a ski lift to Australia's highest mountain to take pictures.

On the 21st, C Troop's Blues were inserted and David Stinson recalls:

I believe CPT Pres McGee was the scout platoon leader in late 1970. CPT Ronnie L. Williams served as the gun platoon leader in late 1970 and then became the Blue Platoon leader. His first insertion, which I'm pretty sure was around January 21 or so (the day we found the huge hospital complex in the Tiger Mountains and actually got credit for it in Stars and Stripes), was on a rocky hillside where the slicks couldn't put both skids firmly on the ground. I was flying one of the White Birds covering the insertion. If I recall correctly, Ronnie jumped off the first slick, broke his leg, and was medevaced out on the last slick. It might not have happened just that way, but that's pretty close. He was taken to English to the aid station, then to Qui Nhon to the hospital, then got a ticket home. I never saw him again; BUT, listen to this. Ronnie owed me about \$1,000 as a result of all our gambling activities. He wrote me after he got home and asked for my wife's address. I wrote back and gave it to him. Several weeks later, Ronnie sent Becky a check for \$800 with a really nice letter (the return address was in Lawton, Oklahoma). That tells you what kind of guy Ronnie was. I can verify the authenticity of this improbable story because Becky saved the letter and I still have it.

Also on the 21st, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for C Troop UH-1H #69-15227 flown by WO1 D.C. Wray as pilot. Unlike other accident records in the database, Danny is the only individual named for this event. The Goldbook database indicates this aircraft was repaired by the 142nd TC Co and continued to serve in Vietnam. The official accident report reads as follows:

After landing on a slope in the PZ, forward cyclic was necessary to prevent the aircraft from sliding down the slope. Mast dumping was then encountered. After returning to the forward staging area, a post flight inspection was completed. It revealed incident damage to the aft-cross tube and a small hole in the belly of the aircraft.

Also on the 21st, the following four B Troop Cobra pilots were involved in actions that resulted in the award of the Air Medal with 'V' for heroism via HQ 1st Aviation Brigade General Orders 2258 dated 18 March 1971: CW2 Patrick Keeton, CW2 Ron Tusi, CPT Jon Mitchell, and WO1 Robert L. Long. The citation reads in part – these men distinguished themselves by exceptionally valorous actions while serving aboard attack helicopters which were part of a visual reconnaissance team conducting a search twenty miles northeast of Kontum. The team's LOHs spotted a large complex of enemy bunkers and structures. While attempting to gather more information on the complex, the team came under heavy automatic weapons fire, and one of the helicopters was hit. As the vulnerable observation helicopters departed the area, these men covered their withdrawal by placing devastating fire on the enemy. Throughout the encounter these men provided cover for one another and continued to place deadly fire on the insurgents until their weapons were empty. Although their weapons were expended, they continued to observe and mark enemy gun emplacements for the airstrike that followed.

On the 25th, CPT Alfred Hite of A Troop was forced to make a precautionary landing 14 miles southwest of Ban Me Thuot while on a VR.

On the 26th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop OH-6A #67-16373 flown by an un-named crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission and while attacking a target from an altitude of 20 feet with 30 knots of airspeed they took one hit from a 7.62mm type SA/AW in the left bottom of the fuselage that resulted in structural damage. The crew continued the mission and the damaged was repaired in theater.

On the 29th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record for A Troop OH-6A #69-15968 flown by an un-named crew. The decoded details of the records statethat this was an armed recon mission and while attacking a target from an altitude of 100 fee with 60 knots of airspeed they were hit by an exploding weapons at grid ZV 105-738 that injured one crew member. They crashed and the aircraft was lost to inventory and destroyed. Anyone who can provide details about this incident is asked to contact Mike Law.

Also on the 31st, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop OH-6A #66-14407 flown by WO1 J.A. Shafer. The Goldbook database indicates this aircraft was turned into the 604th TC Company, repaired by Hughes Aircraft in CONUS and returned to serve in a National Guard unit in November 1971 but did not return to Vietnam. An extract from the official accident report reads as follows:

While covering the lead OH-6A on a visual reconnaissance mission the pilot was momentarily blinded by the rays of the sun and flew the aircraft into a tree causing incidental damage to the aircraft.

Someone in B Troop took several photos of WO1 Shafer landing the LOH on some sandbags. After it was shut down, John is shown standing in front of 407 with a big smile on his face. The LOH has three of the four front Plexiglas bubbles broken out.

WO1 John Shafer recalls: My Observer that day was SGT James (Mac) McConnell. I'd been flying LOHs about 3 months at this time and he about 2 months. //Insert details from WAR STORY VHPA 2008 REUNION CD///

Squadron Relocates to Qui Nhon from Camp Holloway

Late in the month, the Squadron HQ was split from its line troops. The troops were assigned to various battalions within the 17th CAG while HQ and HHT moved from Camp Holloway to Qui Nhon city air field. LTC Ernie Smart provides a critical insight to these events:

Those were challenging times for everyone in the 7/17 Cav. Let me sort of paint a picture of what was going through my mind and COL Joe Starker's, the CO of the 17 CAG. First, since the Squadron had been in Vietnam it had always enjoyed a close working relationship with the 4th Div. They included us in most of their operations, generally used Air Cavalry in an appropriate manner, and provided us with Infantry and Artillery support when we needed it. We certainly provided them with "eyes" plus a very flexible, ready reaction force. They, in turn, "saved our collective asses" several times when we "bit off much more than we could chew." When the 4th Div stood down in early Dec, "our big friend" was gone and with it the old status quo. Second, since the 7/17th and the 4th had been good for each other; it seemed natural to believe that putting the 7/17th and with another large unit would be a very good idea. The Korean Infantry Divisions were the last major Allied combat units in II Corps; not to take anything away from the 173rd Airborne guys. The ROKs still required, and received, considerable air support. We knew it would take considerable "training" and "patience" on both parts for the 7/17th and the ROKs to fit together well, but that is what we set out to do. Third, many senior American commanders in II Corps and the 1st Avn Bde believed the ARVN would have a difficult time holding their own. We wanted to pull down our presence (and therefore vulnerability) in the "outlying areas" such as Pleiku. We were determined to support the Vietnamization effort and we were still under orders to "fight hard - just don't loose people." Fourth, the Squadron was already "split up" and had really become an ACS for all of II Corps. A Troop was at Phan Rang and seemed destined to stay in southern II Corps. One ACT had to stay at Pleiku and that proved to be B Troop. C Troop was already at An Son, so they were our northeastern II Corps "representatives." Poor D Troop couldn't be used as a ground Cavalry troop any more; an infrequent convoy escort and emergency "bird down" ready reaction force were the best missions they could hope for. They were basically all Holloway had for perimeter security and drew all sorts of crappy little details. Anyway, initially Qui Nhon airfield looked good because it had lots of room there adjacent to the 223rd CAB. There was already a space problem at An Son. So we moved to Qui Nhon city.

CPT William J. Rand provides: During my second tour with the 7/17th Cav I was a 1LT when I joined HHT in July 1970. Between tours I had taken a direct commission and become an SIP in the OH-6A and the Huey. I was also an Instrument Examiner. I flew with the Squadron Commander,

LTC DeFrance and LTC Smart, whenever they flew. In November I made Captain and was officially an Assistant S-3 but I still flew with the Squadron Commander quite often. I remember flying to An Khe and Phan Thiet often. I was also made XO of HHT under CPT Bill Ginac. I believe we stayed at the Qui Nhon airfield about six to eight weeks. I remember the POL and the billets were nice.

MAJ Glenn Carr the CO of B Troop provides: Other events that weighed heavily on the 'down tempo-ing' of the Cav mission was the break-up and relocation of the 7/17th Squadron. On 1 Feb 71 the Sqdn Hdqs was moved to Qui Nhon to become a retrograding headquarters. By that I mean they picked up fixed wing and all sorts of aviation units to prepare for retrograde. A Troop was attached to 10th Avn Bn and moved to Phan Rang, B and D Troop were attached to 52nd Avn Bn and remained at Camp Holloway, only C Troop remained under the Squadron at Lane Heliport. Don't remember the timing on that. So you can quickly see how things began to come apart. D Troop was full time perimeter guard for Holloway and B Troop grew bored watching 'the back door' around Pleiku.

61st AHC and 129th AHC Assigned to 7/17th Cav

The 61st AHC and its sister AHC, the 129th, were attached to the 7/17th during January as part of the move to Qui Nhon. Both AHCs had been based at Lane for some time. Rod Dykhous describes these times as follows:

I DEROSed in May and recall that the 61st was attached to the 7/17th in January. At first it was primarily for admin purposes. The 61st was basically unchanged in the operational sense except that we started supporting units other than the 173rd Abn. We had primarily supported them during 1970. We started supporting Korean and ARVN units, and doing a lot more work in the Central Highlands around Pleiku, the tri-border area, and even into Cambodia. We still operated primarily with other 61st aircraft but not exclusively. Officially we were 'Cav' but on a unit level, not much changed. I'm sure you know what I mean when I say that a person either loved the hats and sabers or thought they were a bunch of gun ho idiots. Suddenly the 61st, who had never been 'Cav' before, was attached to an ACS and was "part of the 'Cav'"! We developed a saying "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!" The 61st sent about 50% of our assets north to support LAM SON 719. The senior ACs with less than 90 days, along with an equal number of peter pilots, stayed at Lane and covered all the missions that the entire company had covered before. We flew our butts off - putting in 15-18 hour days! The 61st's primary AO was from Qui Nhon north to about the I Corps line along the coastal plains and along QL19 to An Khe, the area around Pleiku and the Tri-border area during early 1971. The two Lift platoons were stationed at and flew from Lane with an occasional RON at Pleiku. The Gun platoon was stationed at and flew from LZ English, about 60 NM north. I remember one good story from this time frame. I was flying C&C with a LTC and his RTO in the back. We were dropping phougas (eighteen 55 gal drums at a time) from a Chinook on suspected VC locations. We'd let it soak into the holes, caves, hiding places, etc. for a couple minutes; then fly over it and have the door gunner light it with tracers. We put the fifth drop that day into some elephant grass and right on about 12-15 hiding dinks. Well, they'd already seen our previous drops and knew exactly what was coming next; so they jumped up and started running. I immediately dove on them and told the crewchief to light it RIGHT NOW, which he did. Only two got out of the fire ball and one of them was just covered with blazing phougas. He only made it about 25 feet before collapsing. The other guy was running down this trail so I started hovering down the trail behind him while we took turns with our 38s. The colonel grabs his RTO's 16 and hollers for the RTO to hold on to his belt. He puts one foot out on the skid, the other knee on the floor and starts shooting at the dink. He runs out of ammo, so the RTO gives him another clip and he puts both feet out on the skid. He runs out again, gets another clip and moves further forward. This guy is so excited to actually see a dink out in the open and have an M16 in his hands. Well after a few more

clips he is actually standing on the skid cap outside my door shooting!! He turns to me and says, through my window with a big grin on his face, "isn't this great!!" Well, we managed to shoot the dink and get the Colonel back inside the aircraft; then we went back to base for lunch.

SP4 Randy Godfrey recalls: I arrived in country 6 Feb 1970 and I left in late Feb 1971 when I was medevaced to Japan. I extended so I could ETS and was evaced during that extension. I was in C Troop until the last month. I was at An Khe with C Troop and I was at An Son. Me and Terry Kahl when to Vietnam at the same time. He slept in the bunk above me. I came into Vietnam with about seven guys. I was an 11B. Sometimes I was the M60 gunner and sometimes I was a regular rifleman. I was a SP4 when I arrived in Vietnam because I'd made rank during training. I transferred units during my extension. At first I was a guard on the main gate at An Son. Greg Papineau and I went together on the extension, then we transferred up to An Khe to the 4th Infantry Division. I got medevaced not long after that. I got a little shrapnel during a mortar attack on the firebase but mostly I got Typhoid Fever. I was very sick.

CPT John D. Black provides: I was a WO on my first tour flying OH-13s in B/1/9th Cav. I got shot and was evaced after five months with them. I took a direct commission and became an OH-6A IP en route to my second tour. I served with IFFV in Nha Trang from April 1970 until October 1970 when I joined B Troop's Scout Platoon. I served as the platoon leader after CPT Horst "Butch" Cleveland who was evaced after being hit in the head with a rotor blade. I remember CPT Jon E Mitchell was the Scout Platoon leader for a while but he wanted out of that job and returned to the Gun platoon. By this time, B Troop had learned its lesson concerning miniguns on LOHs and though people suggested we install them again, I never supported that idea or allowed it to happen. I firmly believe that having a minigun on a LOH 'encourages' the crew to try to 'duke it out' with the bad guys rather than put out a smoke and move off. We flew with two people in each LOH rather than three as some ATCs did. There were two pilots named John Crosby in B Troop at that time. The Gun Platoon leader was CPT John W. Crosby. I remember CPT Joe L. Riggins was the Lift Platoon leader. I DEROSed from B Troop in April 1971.

February 1971

D Troop is assigned to the 52nd CAB

According to the 52nd CAB ORLL dated 7 May 1971, D Troop 'was assigned to the 52nd Avn Bn on 1 Feb 1971. The Troop's primary mission was to provide gunjeep escort for the battalion's Class V convoys to Kontum and Dak To. One platoon provided security for a recent village relocation project of a nearby Montagnard tribe. In April the troop was assigned an AO to the west of Pleiku City, in which they could conduct platoon-size training operations.

The history section of the D Troop 1971 – 1972 Years states that early in 1971 the troop began to take on a new role. The war was slowing down and D Troop turned in its gun jeeps except for the 3rd platoon and settled back to await the end of the war. But the call went out to D Troop again. The 3rd platoon took an active part in Firebases 5 and 6 escorting ammunition convoys during the spring of 1971. The other two ground platoons were also involved in providing security for Montagnard resettlement villages.

Sometime during this month, MAJ George D. Fuller assumed command of A Troop replacing MAJ Jim Trussell.

B Troop is assigned to the 52nd CAB

According to the 52nd CAB ORLL dated 7 Nov 1971, B Troop 'was assigned to the 52nd Avn Bn on 1 Feb 1971. The Troop operates as a package of four OH-6A's, four AH-1G's, and four UH-1H's. They have supported the II Corps forces as their primary mission, conducting reconnaissance missions in the Pleiku-Kontum area. B Trp also maintains two AH-1G's on standby at night, for the defense of the

Pleiku area. B Trp has been utilized for close in first light and evening VR's of Camp Holloway's perimeter and has on several occasions found vital breeches in Holloway's physical perimeter, which would have not been detected otherwise.'

C Troop Moves from Lane to Quang Tri and then Khe Sanh

Lam Son 719 / Dewey Canyon II

We have been able to learn that three different units from the 7/17th supported this operation. The most visible was C Troop and their exploits will be described in some detail. B Troop, from Pleiku, supported numerous ARVN operations several miles into Laos as sort of a "southern flank / NVA distraction effort" for the main thrust along QL 9. Currently details of B Troop's activities are not well known. Finally, HHT sent at least one, and maybe more, small detachments to Dong Ha to provide S-3 and S-4 type support. Again details of these HHT activities are not currently well known.

On the 1st, C Troop moved from Lane to Khe Sanh as part of the package of aviation assets that would support Lam Son 719.

WO Hubert M. "Mike" Cochran recalls: C Troop received orders toward the end of January 1971 to move north. This turned out to be for our participation in Lam Son 719. This was to be a highly classified operation, but I remember a hooch maid telling me that we were going north. So much for operational security. The reception that the ARVNs and we received in Laos indicated that the NVA knew we were coming and had prepared well for our arrival. The movement from Lane AHP at An Son to Quang Tri was accomplished in two days. We established operations and the officer billets in a partially completed children's hospital. The weather was crappy when we arrived at Quang Tri and we were delayed two to three days on moving to Khe Sanh. The weather was unusually cool and we nearly froze our butts off. Supply channels were able to come up with some field jackets for those of us who did not have one or a flight jacket. Who expected this kind of weather in Vietnam? As soon as the weather allowed, we moved on to Khe Sanh.

David Stinson provides: On February 1st we went north on secret (no kidding) orders and took up temporary residence at Quang Tri. We were opcon'd to the 2/17th Cav then under the command of LTC Bob Molinelli. We flew a few familiarization missions with the 2/17th guns out to the area around Khe Sanh and Lang Vei.

C Troop moved to Quang Tri and was attached to the 223rd CSAB as part of the build-up for LAM SON 719 / Dewey Canyon II. For those that know or care, the 223rd was a fixed wing CSAB. As part of the build-up to support this large operation, the 1st Avn Bde didn't want too many of its assets given to the 101st Abn for several reasons. So this is how, C Troop and several other 1st Avn Bde helicopter units were assigned to a "starved wing" command. At least two weeks prior to the move, C Troop had been given a warning order that they could be moving from Lane. C Troop still had a "rear det" at Lane, and their maintenance and "forward (rear)" would be at Quang Tri, while their "forward (forward)" would be at Khe Sanh when that base was re-established. Pilots WO1 Don Purser, Hubert M. "Mike" Cochran, Johnnie E. Garrett, and Dave Ferrell give us a good picture of this period.

Don provides: As mentioned previously, C Troop had known for some time we would be moving our operations and maintenance bases from Lane for a temporary, but none the less extended, period of time. We were even told what to take and how to pack. Finally the orders came down and we moved to Quang Tri using both ground and air convoys. I remember putting our duffel bags in the LOHs plus our weapons but very little ammo. We were assigned a partially constructed children's hospital to live in. There was a heliopad for this hospital just off the airfield at Quang Tri. Our flight line and maintenance area was on the airfield, within walking distance from this hospital. The concrete floors, the half walls on the exterior and the wooden roof were finished but not much else. Over the next few days, C Troop would rig up a lighting system with power supplied by a generator

outside, move in some cots and a little furniture, and use a water buffalo parked out front for water. It wasn't heaven, but it was better than at Khe Sanh! Once the Khe Sanh base was re-established, C Troop was assigned a small area on the very northern edge of the perimeter. It was right off the active runway - only a few feet separated our aircraft parking area from the main fixed wing runway. When we got there, they had just finished clearing that section of mines and unexploded ordinance. I doubt the runway was unusable because there were many holes in it. There was wreckage and junk everywhere! It was a scary place!! WO Wendell Moore and I were assigned a sorry two man bunker. We put some wood from rocket boxes down to keep us off the mud, set up our cots and slept there in our sleeping bags. We were part of the perimeter defense - another scary thought! No one was happy with these living conditions so I joined several other Scouts to dig a new six man bunker. We didn't have much more space per person, but we were able to get our cots in there. I especially remember the rats that lived under the pallets on the floor - they were big as house cats!! We sandbagged our bunker walls to keep the mud in place. At night we'd "borrow" some of the asphalt covered aluminum panels from the runway for the floor and the roof. In the next day or so the engineers would replace the ones we'd "borrowed" and we couldn't get it through normal supply channels, so what the heck. We put the aluminum panels on the sandbagged walls, then a tent to keep the rain out and finally lots of sandbags. By morning we hoped no one could find those panels if they came looking for them. The weather was bad much of the time and it was cold there. From my point of view, I'd say most of C Troop's missions were traditional VRs on the Vietnamese side around Lan Vieng, Khe Sanh and back to Dong Ha or along the two main roads used to support these bases. We occasionally saw AA fire and even flak in Vietnam. Naturally we were trying to keep the NVA away and looked for their rocket units. Whenever we'd find something interesting, it received an Arc Light or something appropriate. I have several pictures taken from atop our bunker of a line of B-52 delivered bombs. After the third day of operations in Laos, the 6s weren't used there much anymore. That is a long story by itself - how the higher arrived at that decision and who paid for it. Anyway, that was fine with me. I know our Guns provided considerable support in Laos but I don't have any details of that. Oh, yes, while at Khe Sanh I had just lifted off on an ash & trash mission when I lost the tail rotor. I put the aircraft down just outside the perimeter, in a mine field; but luckily no one was hurt. I really liked being a Scout and loved flying the 6. I was known as "Shaky" because I was always nervous in the morning. I couldn't eat breakfast on the mornings I would fly - it just didn't stay down. Funny, though, when I got to the aircraft and started the preflight, I settled right down and felt fine again. I would fly Scout for 10 months total.

CPT Bill (William R.) Wilson recalls: I remember this man and this event, but I think it was after we were based at Khe Sanh. MAJ Allen left for R&R during the time we were up north and I was the XO at the time, so CPT Bill Jones had already left C Troop. Bill was on his second tour having been with the 1/9th Cav 1 Cav Div on his first tour. He was an Armor officer. Apparently this new guy had said something to some officers back in Quang Tri and had gotten into some problem. I remember we had really good people (Snappy White in the Maintenance and 1st Sergeant ??). C Troop just didn't have many problems. Once when I was back at Quang Tri the 1st Sergeant had me talk to this man. I recall that he was very concerned about what might happen to him. I also remember telling him that we had lots of work to do, that we just needed for him to do a good job and not to worry about this incident any further. When he took his own life not long after that, I also remember thinking - what more could I have done to help this man?

Now we'll hear from Dave Ferrell: I think I was C Troop's first new pilot after they moved up north to support Lam Song 719. I was processed through Dong Ha by the 223rd with about 5 guys and assigned to C Troop with this tall 6'6", skinny EM. We got a ride to Quang Tri and went to C Troop's hospital building described by Don Purser.. I didn't have any TA50 gear (sleeping bag, etc.) at the time. They told me to just sleep in someone's cot and if they came back, go to another one.

Anyway, about my second night there I heard this loud, single shot just outside the building. It was dark and I certainly didn't go investigate the noise. The next morning at breakfast, I learned that this tall, skinny, new guy had shot himself! [Editor's note: We believe this person's name is PVT Gregory S. Somers].

Dave Ferrell goes on to provide a few more details to help us understand the conditions at the time since we have no official records or history for C Troop during this period.

A few days into the battle, I remember we stopped sending the 6s into Laos. I believe the following is true. One of our sister ACTs, B/7/1st, had lost so many ships that it was hardly combat effective anymore. The Troop Cmdr had gone on record that he wouldn't send his 6s there anymore and was relieved. There was a big stink about this because most of the line pilots agreed with this Major. In just a few days, the powers that be agreed with him and we were told not to take our 6s there anymore. Another aspect of Lam Song was that there were aircraft everywhere most of the time. The common thread in most of my memories is in being able to look out and see a hook or a crane putting in something, several slicks and sets of guns working on an insertion or a resupply, jets above, below and along side you, C&C ships in all sorts of orbits, on and on. It was like watching the entire inventory of American war birds playing in one large production! This was both good and bad. Good because if you had an emergency of some sort and could complete a mission, there was usually a backup that could be diverted to help out. Bad because you didn't feel personally involved in the effort, you just had a bit routine for a huge dance team. Another impression that comes to mind is that there were a lot of constants - the NVA were constantly rocketing our bases with 122s or 130 mm guns, there was fog around Khe Sanh constantly in the mornings and most evenings, there was constant movement of aircraft into and out of Khe Sanh, there was constant movement of supplies and vehicles on the roads, there was constant AA fire on the Laotian side, dust was universal constant anywhere near the ground, it was constantly noisy, we were constantly changing tactics to stay alive while performing our missions, we consistently expended every time we launched, etc., etc. Some examples to support these statements are: Concerning changing tactics, I can remember times when my Cobra team started a gun run from 10,000 feet - we were 5 or 6,000 AGL! The rockets would burn out and gravity would pull them down to the target. Concerning constant AA fire, I already talked about SA and 51 cal but twice I can remember receiving flack - naturally we changed altitudes in a hurry. Another time we were supporting the ARVN's defense of a FB and started shooting at the side of the hill just below the FB. We were some distance out when I noticed hundreds and hundreds of these "twinkling stars" in the trees on this hill. My mind played a trick on me. For a second I thought how neat it was that someone had put Christmas tree lights all along this hill. Then reality returned - My God! Those are NVA rifles firing at us! Finally I remember two C Troop Cobras landed too close to each other at Khe Sanh. For a few moments the blades intermeshed but inevitably, they finally collided and ripped the main rotor and transmissions from both aircraft. One rotor system traveled three quarters of a mile before coming to rest! No one was seriously hurt but the aircraft were destroyed. Oh, we didn't have any American Blues during this period. We had our Lift ships and they received missions sort of a la cart like the Guns. An elite unit from Siagon called the Hoc Bao were used to retrieve downed air crews. We certainly had no complaints about them or their performance and I didn't hear of any from the other aviation units. The Hoc Bao did their job well!

On the 3rd, A Troop was attached to the 10th CAB located at Dong Ba Thin and shifted its support to the 23rd ARVN's elements in the Song Mao area. The missions assigned to the ACT also changed. While they would still perform regular Air Cav VR type missions, they were assigned more base camp night security and reaction force type missions.

CPT William J. Rand wrote: I was part of a detachment from HHT/7/17 Cav that went north to support LAM SON 719. We were told to put a Smoke Kit on a Huey and take it up north. We asked

some questions and were told; just install it and we'll tell you what to do with it later. I remember we tested it a few times before we left Qui Nhon because some of the guys there could show us how to use it. I flew it north and checked in with ???. I was a little surprised about six days when I got a call from LTC Smart saying, leave the aircraft there and return to Qui Nhon.

On the 4th, a sad event happened in C Troop while they were still living in hospital building at Quang Tri. While the exact details are not known several C Troopers from this era independently confirmed the following information. If one applies the known facts to the VHPA copy of The Wall database, only one name comes forward: **PVT Gregory S. Somers**, MOS 11D10, tour start date of 8 Nov 1970.

CPT Johnnie E. Garrett provides: I was the Troop Operations Officer. I was responsible for the ground convey that took our equipment north. While we were still at Quang Tri I remember one night being in the command tent when we heard this single gun shot very close to us. We all jumped and asked, 'What the heck was that?' As we investigated we found this tall, skinny, black enlisted man taken his own life. He hadn't been in the unit but a day or two. We had our Blues pull guard duty around our assigned area which was itself inside a secure compound. Evidently this man was on guard duty. He sat on top of the row of sandbags placed around the tents and put the rifle to his head. Very sad indeed.

Dave Ferrell provides: I think I was C Troop's first new pilot after they moved up north to support Lam Song 719. I was processed through Dong Ha by the 223rd with about 5 guys and assigned to C Troop with this tall 6'6", skinny EM. We got a ride to Quang Tri and went to C Troop's hospital building described by Don Purser. I didn't have any TA50 gear (sleeping bag, etc.) at the time. They told me to just sleep in someone's cot and if they came back, go to another one. Anyway, about my second night there I heard this loud, single shot just outside the building. It was dark and I certainly didn't go investigate the noise. The next morning at breakfast, I learned that this tall, skinny, new guy had shot himself!

Editor's Note: During the VHPA 2010 Reunion in San Diego 1LT John Nelson stated that he had recently completed some research concerning this suicide incident and that he arrived at some different conclusions and certain a different name for this soldier. John's details are presented on 2 March 1971 for **PFC Darrell Keith Heffner**.

On the 5th, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, B Troop expended 50 per cent at AR973940 resulting in two structures destroyed.

On the 7th, C Troop relocated from their temporary area at Quang Tri to Khe Sanh. David Stinson recalls: I think we moved out to Khe Sanh on February 7 because on the next day the Laos invasion kicked off.

WO Hubert M. "Mike" Cochran recalls: Even though I was a Huey pilot, I sometimes flew front seat Cobra as I did on the day we flew to Khe Sanh. We followed a river for a while and flew past some well-known landmarks (The Rockpile, Vandergrift) that I had heard about. We picked up the highway as the weather cleared and climbed to altitude. Khe Sanh sat on a plateau. We were still some distance from the old Marine base, but it was evident where the base was. There was a red cloud hanging over our destination caused by the volume of fixed and rotary wing traffic landing and taking off. Our flight was safely directed to our parking area that was west of the tower next to the old Marine CH-46 revetments by the original runway (a new one had been constructed for Lam Son 719 that paralleled the old one). The first priority as soon as time permitted was to find some place that would offer some semblance of protection from incoming. Don Purser and some of his fellow Scouts had already staked out the best hole that could be made into a decent bunker. The rest of us had to settle for a GP medium inside the revetment area. We lined the outside of the tent with sandbags and placed them between the bunks on the inside of the tent as well. Everyone was on edge since we were all familiar with the Marines' experience at Khe Sanh. The weather at Khe Sanh

was strange. During the day it might be sunny and hot, but by late afternoon or early evening fog and/or low clouds would envelop the base. It would remain socked in for a while, possibly clear up a little and then go to crap again. This would go on most of the night with the mornings usually being socked in for a while. Plain and simple, Khe Sanh was a spooky place at night.

On the 8th, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, B Troop found a VC bunker complex 5 miles NE of Kontum. They inserted their ARPs and two companies from the 42nd Regt at AS825104 with 9 confirmed KBAs, 9 bunkers and 12 structures destroyed.

The 8th was the starting period for the RVN Gallantry Cross with Palm Awards for C Troop. In 1973 via DA General Order #5, the C Troop was awarded the RVN Gallantry Cross for the period 8 Feb 1971 to 8 Apr 1971.

The 8th was also the starting period for the Valorous Unit Award (VUA) for C Troops. In 1975 via DA General Order #24, C Troop was awarded the VUA the period 8 Feb to 24 Mar 1971.

On the 8th, C Troop began operations in Laos. David Stinson recalls: At 0800 on 8 February, a Charlie Troop light pink team (one snake and one loach) screened for the ARVN 1st Armor Brigade as they crossed the border into Laos along Highway 9. I was flying the snake and I'm fairly certain that a warrant officer named Pat Sheehan was flying the little bird. While we were doing that, a Charlie Troop heavy team was reconning and prepping LZs that eventually would become FSB's 30 and 31, about 10 and 20 clicks, respectively, inside Laos and north of Highway 9.

WO Hubert M. "Mike" Cochran recalls: Operations into Laos began using the traditional ATC tactics that we had used down south. The thing was, though, the NVA didn't want to play by our rules. We quickly learned, as did other Cav units, that these tactics would not work. C Troop did not lose any LOHs in Laos though several were lost from other units. I flew front seat on some missions into Laos, and we did receive heavy fire at times. After one mission flying with "Big Al" Marcinak, the Cobra was shut down at the re-arm point to check for hits. We had a nice .51 cal. hole in the leading edge of one of the main rotor blades. The Cobra was slung back to Quang Tri for a blade change. We'd flown back from Laos with a blade that could have separated at any second. This wasn't the first time that I would feel that someone was watching over me.

Also on the 8th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A # 67-16083 flown by an un-named crew. The decoded record states that while on a recon mission, in level flight at an altitude of 25 feet with an airspeed of 80 knots they took one hit in the main rotor system from a SA/AW 7.62mm type weapon. The continued flying, completed the mission and the aircraft was repaired locally.

On or about the 9th, according to CPT Bill (William R.) 'Yosemite Sam' Wilson mentioned that on the second day of C Troop's operations in Laos CPT Bill Jones (his exact full name is unknown to this history) was wounded and medivaced out of Vietnam. CPT Jones was the XO of C Troop at that time. Yosemite Sam became the Troop XO on that date. [Anyone with details about this event and how we can identify Bill Jones from the several dozen William Jones in the VHPA database, is encouraged to contact Mike Law.]

Also on the 9th, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, B Troop continued to scout the bunker complex they found yesterday. At AS878040 they destroyed eight bunkers and three other structures in addition to 2 KBAs. At AS891048 they destroyed 21 bunkers and 10 other structures with 5 KBAs. Three UH-1Hs from the 268th CAB and two UH-1Hs and two UH-1Cs from the 57th conducted a CA into the same location for the 42nd Regt, lifting a total of 190 troops who then swept through the area with unknown results.

On the 10th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A # 67-16083 flown by an un-named crew. The decoded record states that while on a recon mission, in level

flight at an altitude of 25 feet with an airspeed of 80 knots they took one hit in the main rotor system from a SA/AW 7.62mm type weapon. The continued flying, completed the mission and the aircraft was repaired locally.

Also on the 10th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A # 67-16339 flown by an un-named crew. The decoded record states that while on a recon mission, in level flight at an altitude of 25 feet with an airspeed of 80 knots they took one hit from a SA/AW 7.62mm type weapon. The continued flying, completed the mission and the aircraft was repaired locally.

The 11th was scheduled as a maintenance down day for A Troop; but at noon Phan Rang Base Opns requested fire support when two rocket launchers and one 122mm rocket were reported by intelligence sources. Two Cobras were sent and destroyed the rocket site.

Also on the 11th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an AVDAC record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15481. The record states this was Combat Minor Damage caused by other combat by ground fire less than .50 cal to 20-mm in size while the aircraft was on an armed escort mission. There were no casualties. Search and rescue operations were not required. The helicopter was recovered.

Also on the 11th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A # 67-16117 flown by an un-named crew. The decoded record states that while on a recon mission, in level flight at an altitude of 50 feet with an airspeed of 80 knots they took five hits from a SA/AW 7.62mm type weapon. They continued flying, completed the mission and the aircraft was repaired locally.

On the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an AVDAC record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15479. The record states this was Combat Minor Damage caused by other combat by ground fire less than .50 cal in size while the aircraft was on an armed escort mission. There were no casualties. Search and rescue operations were not required. The helicopter was recovered.

Also on the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an AVDAC record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15487. The record states this was Combat Minor Damage caused by other combat by ground fire less than .50 cal to 20-mm in size while the aircraft was on an armed escort mission. There were no casualties. Search and rescue operations were not required. The helicopter was recovered.

Also on the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A # 67-16117 flown by an un-named crew. The decoded record states that while on an armed recon mission, in the AO at an altitude of 50 feet with an airspeed of 100 knots they took two hits from a SA/AW 7.62mm type weapon. They continued flying, completed the mission and the aircraft was repaired locally.

Also on the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A # 67-16216 flown by an un-named crew. The decoded record states that while on a recon mission while en route at an altitude of 50 feet with an airspeed of 100 knots they took two hits from a SA/AW 7.62mm type weapon. They continued flying, completed the mission and the aircraft was repaired locally.

Also on the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A # 67-16579 flown by an un-named crew. The decoded record states that while on a recon mission, in level flight at an altitude of 50 feet with an airspeed of 100 knots they took one hit from a SA/AW 7.62mm type weapon in the main rotor system. They continued flying, completed the mission and the aircraft was repaired locally.

On the 13th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop AH-1G #66-15327 flown by an unknown crew that states they took hits from 12.7 mm weapons in the engine, tail rotor, fuel and hydraulics systems during a combat mission in Laos. The Goldbook database indicates this aircraft was evacuated by the 142nd TC Company and repaired in CONUS. 1LT David Stinson wrote that he was shot down in a Cobra on the 13th, so we can assume this was his aircraft.

Also on the 13th, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, B Troop supported an operation of the 47th Regt getting 6 KBAs and 11 structures destroyed at BR065503. The report also documented that the 52nd CAB S-4 established a refuel/rearm point at Polei Kleng in preparation for an upcoming operation.

On the 14th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident and loss record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15487 in Quang Tri, flown by 1LT C.D. Stinson as pilot and 1LT M.D. Scott as co-pilot. The Goldbook database disputes the loss of this aircraft. It shows that 487 was turned into to the 142nd TC Co and hence to CONUS ARADMAC repairs but it returned to flying status. Also for the 14th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident and loss record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15515 at grid XD796304 flown by WO1 L.M. Marciniak as pilot and WO1 S.H. Wilton as co-pilot also on the 14th. Again the Goldbook database disputes the loss of this aircraft. It shows that 515 was turned into to the 79th TC Co and hence to the Bell factory for repairs but it also returned to flying status. The accident summary for #67-15487 reads as follows:

On the morning of 14 February 1971, aircrafts #67-15487 and #67-15515, both AH-1G's departed Khe Sanh for a combat mission in Laos. After they had engaged the enemy for over an hour, they returned to Khe Sanh for fuel and rearming at about 0850 hours. Aircraft #67-15515, the lead Cobra, made an approach to the eastern most point in the rearming area, and touched down. Aircraft #67-15487 approached the next rearming point just to the west of #67-15515. After the aircraft had landed, 1LT Stinson, the Aircraft Commander, lowered his collective and started to turn on his force trim when his aircraft had a blade strike with the main rotor blades of #67-15515. A fire broke out in the engine compartment of #67-15487, but was quickly extinguished. The main rotor assemblies and transmissions were torn out of both aircraft. All four pilots suffered minor injuries. They were all wearing Nomex flight suits in addition to other required protective gear.

1LT David Stinson wrote: Yes, I am the fellow the Army insisted on calling Charles D. Stinson (instead of David, which I have gone by all my life). On the 13th I was shot down and then on the 14th I crashed two snakes together in rearm at Khe Sanh. There are several 'famous' pictures of these wrecks after the fires were put out. It was my fault - Lawrence ("Big Al") Marciniak was flying lead gun that morning and I simply ran into him. I was a basket case for quite a while after this crash. After that I was detached from C Troop for awhile and serving as Air Cav advisor to the ARVN Airborne Division Headquarters just east of Lang Vei.

Also on the 14th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an battle damage record for B Troop AH-1G #68-17036 flown by an unnamed crew. The record states that while attacking a target during an armed recon mission at an altitude of 700 feet at a speed of 130 knots they took one hit from SA/AW weapons in the bottom of the fuselage. They continued the mission and the aircraft was repaired in theater.

Also on the 14th, the following four B Troop Cobra pilots were involved in actions that resulted in the award of the DFC via HQ 1st Aviation Brigade General Orders 2474 dated 25 March 1971: CPT John Sparks, 1st OLC WO1 Gary Laird, 2nd OLC CPT Jon Mitchell, and 1st OLC WO1 Robert L. Long. The citation reads in part – these men distinguished themselves by exceptionally valorous actions while serving as pilots and co-pilots of attack helicopters which were part of an aerial reconnaissance team conducting operations thirty miles west of Polei Kleng. The team attacked a large, well fortified enemy force through a fusillade of intense automatic weapons fire. Although their aircraft was struck by the hostile enemy fire during one of their attacks, they remained on station. These men continued to devastate the enemy emplacements with superlative marksmanship until lack of fuel and ammunition forced them to coordinate a fighter-bomber attack on the area. These men remained on station until the mission was completed and flew their crippled aircraft to their base camp.

Also on the 14th, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, B Troop scouted the Plei Trap Valley in preparation for a large CA by the 42nd Regt. They got six confirmed KBAs and 29 structures destroyed

at YA775945. The report states that on the 15th, two battalions from the 42nd Regt were CAed into several LZs in the Plei Trap Valley.

Finally on the 14th according to the 52nd CAB ORLL dated 7 Nov 1971, CPT Arthur H. Trujillo assumed command of D Troop replacing CPT John P. Edwards.

On the 15th, A Troop was forced to work the flat lands northwest of Song Mao because of high winds. One LOH received fire and the Guns fired in the area with unknown results.

Also on the 15th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an battle damage record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15822 flown by an unnamed crew. The record states that while on a combat mission in Laos they took an unknown number of hits in the cockpit that wounded one of the pilots. The aircraft was repaired in theater.

Also on the 15th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16027 flown by an unnamed crew. The record states that while on a recon mission in South Vietnam while at an altitude of 50 feet with an airspeed of 100 knots they took six hits from 12.7 mm weapons in the crew and flight controls that wounded one of the crew members. They continued to fly but aborted this mission. The Goldbook database indicates this aircraft was repaired locally and continued to serve with C Troop.

On the 16th, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, an additional battalion from the 42nd Regt was lifted into the Plei Trap Valley and B Troop scened to the west of the 42nd Regt's operation and got ten KBAs at YA772745.

On the 17th, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, the large 42nd Regt operation west of Polei Kleng continued. B Troop scened to the north and west and got 46 confirmed KBAs at YA665740.

On the 18th, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, B Troop worked for the the 47th Regt and got five KBAs at AR789625.

On the 20th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A #68-17141 flown by an unnamed crew. The record states that while on a recon mission in South Vietnam they took an unknown number of hits from SA/AW weapons in the main rotor system. They completed the mission and the aircraft was repaired in theater.

Also on the 20th, WO Hubert M. "Mike" Cochran recalls: I witnessed the crash of Dustoff 30 on or about 20 Feb. It was at night and the weather was crappy as usual with fog and/or clouds moving in and out. I was standing on a bunker in C Troop's area on the northern perimeter when I heard the sound of an approaching Huey. I remember thinking to myself that someone was actually flying in this mess. It was hard to judge the altitude or speed of the Huey since it could not be seen for the fog. However, the sound of the rotor blades led me to believe that he was going flat out. In an instant the sound of the rotor blades stopped and there was a fireball. I remember thinking to myself, 'Damn, he flew it right into the ground.' People immediately began rushing to the burning wreckage. The individual who got on the front-end loader should have received recognition for his bravery. He tried desperately to extinguish the fire and risked his own safety with the flames and especially when rounds in the aircraft began cooking off. His silhouette could be seen against the white hot flames as he unassed the loader the fastest I've ever seen as the rounds began popping. However, he immediately got back on the loader and continued to fight the fire. Moments after the aircraft crashed another Huey could be heard overhead. He could not be seen either, but it sounded as if he was making a spiraling approach to the crash site. The Huey did land safely and provided what assistance he could. The fire was finally extinguished, and we got word that it didn't look good for the crew. This could be understood because it certainly didn't appear to be a survivable crash. The living conditions at Khe Sanh weren't very good. During the day there was the constant red dust stirred up by all the helicopters and C-130s landing and taking off. Showers weren't available and after several days we began to look for some

way to get clean. We did find a running stream with a waterfall that provided some temporary relief. The meal situation was not much better. Hot meals consisted of a 32-gallon garbage can of water heated by an immersion heater to warm the C Rations. One sight burned into my memory involved a Cobra that made an approach into the parking area near the tower. What made this unusual was that there were pilots sitting on rocket pods on either side of the aircraft. I never found out the details of this and do not know if they were flown in from Laos like this. I witnessed the same crash that Dave Ferrell did. The Cobra came in single pilot at a high hover. It also headed to the area in the vicinity of the tower. As it passed my location something happened because the nose yawed to the right and control was apparently lost because he balled it up. The aircraft ended up lying partially on a yellow light set on its right side. I made a couple of pictures of this crash (not the gore). There was a picture of this Cobra in Newsweek. Someone decided that the best place for our Hueys to be on standby was outside the wire about a hundred yards or so north of the perimeter. We were here one day when I looked over and saw a LOH winding down in the mine field. This was Don Purser who'd had an engine failure. A Huey hovered over the sick bird and Don climbed on its top and into the UH-1. It was about this time that Khe Sanh began receiving incoming. We could actually hear the NVA artillery shoot, the round as it passed overhead and see most of the rounds impact. I still don't understand why they didn't drop some rounds on our UH-1s. We were wide open, sitting ducks. Needless to say we had some holes picked out just in case. I speculated that these were the same guns that fired on Khe Sanh in '68 or at least fired from the same positions. Does anyone remember the circumstances about the C Model that crashed taking off from the re-arm point? I was standing on top of a Huey preflighting the head when I heard a loud explosion. Looking up I saw a large mushroom cloud rising. The story we heard was that a C Model got its skids caught in some wire taking off and flipped over. The crew supposedly got out prior to the explosion.

On the 20th, the following four B Troop Cobra pilots were involved in actions that resulted in the award of the Air Medal with 'V' for heroism via HQ 1st Aviation Brigade General Orders 2924 dated 6 April 1971: 3rd award WO1 Robert Van Schoick, 3rd award WO1 Gary Laird, 2nd award CPT Jon Mitchell, and 3rd award WO1 Robert L. Long. The citation reads in part – these men distinguished themselves by exceptionally valorous actions while serving as co-pilots of attack helicopters conducting a visual reconnaissance twenty miles southwest of Plei Kleng in Kontum Province. These men were called upon to relieve a gunship team that had expended its ammunition on a large enemy force. After coordinating an airstrike on the area, the team moved to block the escape of an enemy battalion attempting to move into Cambodia. Not to be denied their escape, the enemy launched a fusillade of automatic weapons fire at the team. Undaunted, they attacked position after position as the enemy threatened the safety of their fellow aviators. They courageously attacked the enemy with devastating minigun and forty millimeter fire time after time until their weapons were expended. After rearming, the team returned to the area and began following signs of enemy movement along a trail until the enemy force was located. Disregarding the barrage of fire directed at their aircraft, they suppressed the fires of numerous enemy positions with deadly accurate fire until their ammunition was again expended.

Also on the 20th, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, an USAF OV-2 FAC crashed NW of Plei Djereng and various aviation units continued to move 42nd Regt in the Plei Trap Valley. B Troop fired 60 per cent at YA764932 and YA756949 resulting in 17 confirmed KBAs.

On the 21st, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, B Troop continued to screen to the NW of the 42nd Regt's operation and got 13 confirmed KBAs at YA751926.

On the 22nd, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, B Troop got 13 KBAs at YB139057 while working for the 42nd Regt's. The report goes on to state: "Two CH-47s from the 179th conducted a village move for Pleiku Sector in the vicinity of LZ Oasis. Forty troops from D Troop provided security for the new village until the RF/PF could take over."

On the 25th, the VHPA database lists **SP4 Edward A. Johnson, Jr.** as a C Troop KIA while serving as a crew member in Laos. The Wall database gives his tour start date as 15 Jul 1970 and his MOS as 67A1F. Based on extensive research using the Goldbook database, it is likely that the UH-1H involved was #67-17328. The Goldbook indicates that this UH-1H was indeed recovered and evacuated to CONUS for repairs. Anyone who has additional details about this incident should contact Mike Law.

1LT John Nelson wrote an article titled *The Incident on Hill 31*. The following is an edited version of that article:

The incident on Hill 31 was a resounding defeat for the 1st ARVN Airborne Division and for the members of C Troop. This battle was a military disaster that took place on 2/25/71 in Laos. The event was in part incorrectly documented in one official paper released by the government. I found an account of the incident written up in a research document on Lam Son 719 in the VHPA Vietnam Helicopter History CD (2001 version) and the official document that was included in the story (aircraft damage report marked with a "classified" notation and later released), didn't support the other information on the CD ROM or the facts of the incident as I saw them. A new pilot in the unit, LT David Ferrell gave his account in the narrative document about the event in question. His view of the incident was close to the way I saw it take place. The difference of opinion that I have with his account may have been due to the perspective from which we were involved in the incident. Ferrell was flying as peter pilot in a gunship that was covering the C&C Huey that was shot down. I, 1LT John C. Nelson, was flying the C&C as the pilot in the attempted rescue that day. I was training as to be a mission commander and CPT W. Emil Farr was the co-pilot and mission commander. SP4 Edward Johnson was the door gunner and SP4 Davidson was the gunner/crew chief for the Huey (the tail number unknown to me and in question in my research.) Two other passengers in the C&C were an ARVN liaison officer and an artillery observer for the corps artillery. Neither of them were injured.

The heavy anti-aircraft fire we had encountered during the past several days forced our Troop to resume flying a heavy reconnaissance team configuration to give maximum protection to the lead LOH. On this day, we flew a slightly altered version of the usual two LOHs, two Cobras and one C&C Huey. We added an extra Cobra, because that was all that the maintenance chief could supply for us. We also flew the mission without the luxury of having a relief recon team from our own troop sitting at the stage field ready to replace us. The Scout's reconnaissance of the forest north of Hill 31 revealed several enemy vehicles covered in heavy camouflage. The lead LOH wasn't able to determine whether the vehicles were trucks or tanks. Sporadic small arms fire from enemy troops kept the LOHs at bay. The resistance from the enemy led us to assume that the NVA were definitely congregating in a tree-covered valley about a kilometer to the north of the firebase. I called the Air Force FAC who was coordinating the mission and told him about our discovery of enemy troops and vehicles and pinpointed their exact location for the anticipated bombing mission. The FAC intended to divert some fast movers into the target area to disrupt the enemy formation. He requested our team to mark the location for the bombing mission he was getting ready to unleash. The lead LOH flew over the enemy position and threw a Willy Pete to give a reference point for the Air Force FAC. A torrent of green tracers flew up in the direction of the LOH as he exited the area. A great plume of white smoke marked the suspected enemy position as he peeled away from the small arms fire. I called the FAC and asked if he had the smoke in sight. When he Tally-Hoed the marking smoke, I asked how long it would be until the bombers arrived. He responded that it would be at least five minutes before the phantom jets would be on station. I told him that I was going to have the Cobras expend their rockets on the truck park to keep the enemy engaged and hopefully hold them in place until the bombing mission was ready to get underway. When the Air Force FAC called his Tally-Ho of our Cobra's rocket attack, he notified our team that the F-4s would be inbound within two minutes. He ordered our team clear out of the target area immediately so his

fast moving jet fighters could go to work. I radioed back that our cavalry team was leaving station to refuel and rearm and would be back in 40 minutes. He informed me that he had four flights of fighter-bombers stacked in the sky above him that needed a good target and we had found the best one so far that day. The FAC promised that he would keep the enemy busy until we returned.

When we lifted off from Khe Sanh with full loads of fuel and ammunitions, I called the FAC to let him know we were headed back to Hill 31. The vulnerable LOHs were left behind for our return engagement. Their presence on the battlefield was no longer necessary; we already knew where the enemy was located. Our flight of choppers planned to fly an ARA mission in support of the struggling firebase. The round trip took only 45 minutes. We arrived back on station, as the last sortie of F-4s was flying their inbound flight leg to drop their ordinance. Our gaggle of choppers set up an orbit about two miles south of the firebase to watch the show as the last flight of F-4s engaged what appeared to be enemy tanks. Four of the vehicles had advanced past the perimeter wire and were inside the base. None of the tanks inside the concertina wire perimeter were moving. I assumed that they had been disabled and were no longer a threat to the defenders of the hill. At least six more tanks could be seen maneuvering in the woods to the north of the base. Smoke was pouring from three of the tanks and lay mangled in the woods. I guess that the Air Force had done its job, at least partially. The F-4's bomb runs were being flown from west to east. I watched the first jet drop its high explosive cargo into the trees north of the base, creating an enormous smoke and dust cloud adding to the haze hanging in the air over the hill. The second jet dropped two oblong canisters of napalm into the exact spot where the first plane had dropped his bombs. Flames shot up into the air and a large secondary explosion sent a billow of smoke high above the treetops. Another tank had been destroyed by the marauding Phantoms. The fighters, flying in a racetrack pattern were set up in position to fly a second strike and finish unloading the remainder of their ordinance on the advancing enemy tank company. The first jet planted its bombs nearer to the wire than it had on the first run. When the second jet released its bombs, we saw tracers fly skyward from the turret-mounted machine guns on two of the four "disabled" tanks inside the wire. The lines of tracers converged on the second plane. I witnessed an explosion to the rear of the cockpit of the F-4 and saw a ball of flames engulf the tail section of the Phantom. The suddenly stricken aircraft careened out of control. A moment later the canopy separated from the fuselage and I saw the pilots eject. I watched the ejection seats fly from the aircraft and separate from the pilots as their chutes opened. The entire scene played like slow motion movie before my eyes. I could see every detail of the disaster as it unfolded. The fighter plane continued on its trajectory burning as it carved a fiery arc through the sky. Five miles from where the plane was struck by the machine gun fire it crashed into a hillside in a ball of coal black smoke and bright orange flames.

Two orange and white striped parachute canopies blossomed above the chaos below on Hill 31. I could see the pilots dangling beneath the parachute umbrellas as they descended back to earth. They were drifting toward the south side of the base where the fighting didn't seem as intense as it did on the other side of the besieged hilltop. I called to the FAC and said that I saw the pilots dangling from their chutes and suspected that they wouldn't make it to safety inside the wire. I thought logically that the attack was coming from the north and I assumed that the south side of the embattled hill where the chutes were headed was not under attack. In my next radio call I said that I was inbound to pick up the downed pilots. The anticipated landing zone was a small clearing just outside the concertina wire of the perimeter. The LZ was at a spot along the approach path in the direction of the drift of the pilot's chutes. The first pilot had landed his chute in the small clearing I had concluded would be our LZ. The place, located about 20 meters outside the wire looked like it would be just large enough to make a fine on helicopter LZ. I called to the Cobra leader and let him know my intentions. He answered my call saying that he didn't have us in sight. I gave him the details of our planned approach for the rescue the downed aviator and suggested that he catch up with me. I began my approach leaving the holding pattern from an altitude of 1500 feet and

approximately a mile from touchdown in the small LZ. We weren't receiving any antiaircraft fire. I was confident that the mission was going to succeed. I hoped that the Cobras would locate us in time to provide covering fire on either side of our line of approach. The ARVN liaison officer who was flying with us today called the commander on Hill 31 to let him know that we were attempting a rescue. He requested from the commander of the garrison a cease-fire by his men. He asked them to not fire to the south of the base while we were in the area. I was maneuvering the Huey into position on short final. The helicopter's altitude was now at 300 feet. Our prospects making our landing exactly on the impromptu marker made by the parachute looked promising. CPT Farr alerted the gunners to be ready to put down suppressing fire. He stressed to them to fire at known targets only. We didn't want to shoot the pilots we were trying to rescue. The American Artillery observer and the ARVN liaison officer were ready to jump from the chopper. They would act as an impromptu rescue team when we touched down. They were to assist the F-4 pilot into the Huey while the door gunners covered their backs. I was hoping to hear the explosion of incoming rockets from the flight of cobras as we neared the ground. There were no explosive reports covering our approach. The cobras called and said that they still weren't able to locate us. At 100 feet we started receiving small arms fire from the direction of the perimeter. I shouted on the intercom to ARVN Interpreter to have him make the defenders on the hill stop shooting. He replied that the ARVN defenders weren't firing at us. It was the enemy who had dug in just outside the perimeter wire that were shooting. The enemy had closed in tight on the perimeter to avoid the bombs and artillery rounds that were falling all around the base. Now these dug in NVA soldiers were firing on us. The door gunners both started firing their M-60s at the NVA as the amount of incoming fire increased. I could hear what sounded like rocks being rattled in a can as the bullets from the enemy weapons impacted on the thin skin of the Huey. The windscreen filled with holes as we neared the F-4 pilot's parachute that now acted as a marking panel. Pandemonium was breaking out all around me. I saw clearly as the tanks in the perimeter fired their main guns at bunkers within the perimeter and their explosions caused huge clouds of dust and debris to fly into the air. I could see tracer fire from machine guns mounted on the tanks as they sprayed their rounds into the friendly positions. The arcs of tracer rounds from the tanks were slowly rising toward us as we approached our LZ. Out the left door, between our LZ and the firebase stood at least fifteen khaki clad NVA soldiers, all leveling their weapons in our direction. I marveled at their audacity and courage as rounds from Davidson's machine gun kicked up dirt around them. A couple of the soldiers fell to the ground while the rest continued to fire their weapons at our hapless aircraft. Somewhere on the right side of the aircraft I heard the staccato report of a large caliber machine gun as it commenced firing. SP4 Johnson's M-60 was firing a continuous stream of bullets in answer to the new threat. I couldn't see what was happening on the right side of the helicopter but knew that it must have been bad. The sounds of the bullets piercing the skin of the chopper were more intense now than ever. Where were the Cobras and their firepower when we needed them?

Both Farr and I had been on the controls together since we began the approach. We knew that as a team and with a little luck we would be able to make the landing, hopefully make the rescue and get back out. Each of us knew that the other pilot would take control if the unthinkable happened. The Huey was nearly at a hover as we approached our goal. We had only another 20 feet until touchdown. I had lost sight of where the second pilot's chute had made landfall. We had only a single marker now and were committed to making the rescue of at least the one pilot. The incoming antiaircraft fires ratcheted up a notch to a higher level as we brought the chopper to a hover over the silken marker. No one had seen the pilot as we made our landing. Then the situation started to turn for the worst. Farr screamed that he was hit and similar calls came from both door gunners. The passengers aimed their M-16s out the door and started firing. There were numerous enemy soldiers attacking, some as close as ten to fifteen feet from the open doors of the chopper. The door gunners took aim at the enemy crews firing the larger automatic weapons that were thwarting our approach

while the two passengers engaged the nearby soldiers with the rifles as best they could. Emil and I were being forced to make an immediate decision. Our choice was to either exit the LZ now or become a burning monument to our failed attempt at the rescue. Farr yanked all the collective power he could find in an attempt to begin the departure from the LZ. As the Huey started to rise above the trees, the chopper ran out of lift and began to settle back to earth. We were settling with power because of the over application of collective by the wounded and adrenaline charged Farr. As the skids hit the trees, I yelled that I was taking over the controls of the aircraft. At the time I didn't know that my intercom was not working, so my words foretelling of my assumption of control fell on deaf ears. I wrestled control away from the Farr and banked the chopper sharply to the right toward the lower ground and the downside slope of the hill. I had performed this maneuver from instinct. I had completed this same maneuver many times before while piloting my LOH, when I was overloaded and short on power. The chopper responded well to my urgings and flew a path straight downhill toward the ever-present highway 9. It seemed like the whole NVA army was shooting at us as we began our departure from the overly hot LZ. At least two other enemy machine gunners began spraying our helicopter with their deadly accurate fire. Both of the additional automatic weapons threats were on the right side of the aircraft. Johnson continued to fire his machine gun all the way out of the LZ and down the hill toward the road. At least one, if not two, of the machine guns firing at us fell silent as we flew over them. Johnson had successfully silenced the latest threat. I heard him say again that he was hit but he continued to fire his M-60 to protect our injured chopper and the rest of us. When the helicopter was no longer the target the intense volume of gunfire that we had endured on short final, Johnson's M-60 fell silent. I thought that he had expended all of his ammunition.

I continued to fly the Huey at treetop level to avoid any additional enemy contact. The helicopter gained speed until we were moving at nearly one hundred twenty knots. I was not at all surprised to see a flashing red master caution light winking at me. The caution panel below the master caution light was an array of yellow warnings telling me that the chopper was flying on a wing and a prayer. All during the flight I heard Farr calling in vane to let others know where we were. For the longest time his calls didn't elicit any response. I watched as he frantically changed the frequencies on the radio to trying to reach anyone who would listen. I watched the instruments carefully as we flew and prayed for the chopper to remain airborne. The engine instruments were either in the green or marginally into the cautionary areas of the gauges. I continued to push the crippled helicopter to its limits in my effort to reach the medevac pad. Johnson's injury was very serious. He wasn't responding and his bleeding was not under control. The Artillery FO wasn't able to get a bandage on the wound and he was still bleeding profusely. The huge mountain that marked the border, The Co Roc, was only about five or so kilometers away now. The engine started to whine at a pitch that was higher in frequency than the manufacturer had ever intended. The needles on the tachometer split with the engine speed indicator flying into the red zone signaling that it would explode if not stopped. Then the rotor speed indicator began retreating from the green arc that indicated a safe flying rpm. The chopper, I knew, was suffering from a short shaft failure, which meant that we were going to be on the ground in a very brief while without power. I instinctively rolled off the throttle to keep the engine from blowing up and killing us all. Then I lowered the collective pitch and flared the helicopter to regain the lost rotor rpm. I had only the briefest moment to see where the bird was headed and select where we were going to crash. I saw a small clearing directly in our flight path that I hoped would accommodate the chopper. I pulled back on the cyclic to slow the helicopter so it would come to zero airspeed just above the ground between the numerous trees that bordered the narrow landing spot. As the chopper began to settle between the boughs of the trees I pulled on the collective one more time to give a cushion to our landing. The helicopter set down softly in the tall grass of the small clearing. The rotor made only a couple of additional revolutions and abruptly came to a screeching halt, the transmission had frozen. A radio operator back at base camp relayed a

message to Farr from our squadron's headquarters that said we shouldn't destroy the chopper because they were going to send a Chinook to recover it. The instructions countermanded the order we had been given to destroy any helicopter downed in Laos.

The rattled crew was out of the broken Huey on the ground with little idea of where the friendly forces were or where the NVA were located. Farr had been shot in the leg as had Davidson. Neither of their wounds was bad enough to require that they be carried. The only one in the chopper in need of immediate attention was Johnson. He was still breathing but he was unconscious and not bleeding as profusely as before. The artilleryman and I bandaged the wounded Johnson's thigh without much success. We needed to move to a larger clearing so we could be rescued. Our Huey used every available inch of space in the narrow landing spot between the trees where it came to rest. There was no place unavailable in the small LZ for a rescue chopper to land. I also wanted to get, as far away from the ruined Huey as possible fearing that the enemy would be drawn to the crash site to exploit their fresh victory. The only thing we knew about our location was that our flight path had taken us to the north of the highway. We hoped to find either another clearing nearby so we could call for help or to stumble onto the road so friendly traffic along the highway to pick us up and take us to safety. We gathered up only the equipment that we thought necessary to defend our small band of survivors. We organized our crew to begin our walk toward the road. I wanted to destroy the broken chopper but dutifully obeyed the order I had been given. We deserted the Huey where it had crashed. Farr pushed the red button on the secure radio to make the encoding pins fall out and render the radio useless. He then spun the dials on the remaining radios so as to not give away the radio frequencies we were using. When our preparations were finished we formed into a column to head south to the road. I was in the middle of the procession carrying the wounded gunner, Johnson. We moved cautiously through the thick grass and around the trees. We were lucky, there didn't appear to be any enemy soldiers in the area. A couple hundred yards into the patrol, I laid Johnson down. He had stopped breathing. When I dropped him on the ground he began to breathe again. A few minutes later we stumbled into a large clearing and halted our progress once again. We debated whether to go directly across the field or skirt around its perimeter. We decided to take the most direct route. We increased our interval and ran one at a time as fast as possible to the other side. Once one person made it to the other side, another man would do the same until we had all traversed the small field. We again paused when we reached the other side of the clearing, this time to catch our breath. Luck had been with us as we made our retreat. I looked skyward and saw a lone Huey flying high in the sky coming from the direction of the hill from which we had recently escaped. I remembered the survival radio tucked in a pocket on my vest. I pulled it out and proceeded to extend the antenna. I was so full of fear and adrenalin that I yanked the antenna completely out of the radio. I thought that I had destroyed my precious communicator. I made the radio call anyway and was shocked when I received a response. I don't know what the respondent said, so I called again. I said, "This is Yellow Scarf, Red 16. Mayday! Mayday!" I used my unit's traditional call sign because I couldn't remember what the assigned mission call sign was. The return call came from someone and comforted me by saying, "Yellow Scarf, rescue will be on the way soon. Please state your location, over." I responded to his acknowledgement with what I felt was our location. "Yellow Scarf Red 16 is about 1 click north of the road and about five clicks short of the border, over." Within five minutes we spotted a Cobra flying low over the trees as if he was looking for us. I grabbed my pen-flare and fired it directly at the oncoming chopper. As I watched the arc of the flare, it resembled a slow motion red tracer bullet. I hoped that the pilot, seeing a red projectile tracing through the air directly at him was not too trigger-happy. I held my breath as the Cobra flared and shot an approach to the field next to where we were squatting.

The Cobra was one of our own gunships with the crossed sabers displayed on the engine cowling and the yellow circle unit designation clearly visible behind the cockpit. The Cobras had finally located us. [Editor's note: we believe George Bivens was the AC in this Cobra.] The front seat pilot

relinquished his seat in the cobra and helped Farr take his place. David Nelson, had volunteered his seat so Farr could be the first one saved. Nelson brought along another survival radio too. His still had his antenna attached so we used it to contact the rest of the flight of orbiting cobras. David requested an immediate medevac for Johnson and the other member of the crew who had been shot. The Cobra team remained on station although low on fuel to supply fire support for the rescue chopper. We sat on the edge of the clearing while the remaining two Cobras flew in a protective orbit around our party's small perimeter. We waited impatiently for the medevac to arrive. After what seemed to be a long time, a chopper arrived to take us to Khe Sanh. The Huey that responded to our medical emergency was from another unit that had just returned from inserting a company of ARVN onto the latest hilltop on the way to Tchepone. He was returning in his empty helicopter to get another load of infantry to put into the fight at whatever firebase they were occupying today. He said that he heard our calls on guard and volunteered to fly the medevac mission. The remainder of the survivors gathered up their gear and jumped on the chopper.

I don't know how long it took for the day's ordeal to play out from being shot up to being rescued. I was certainly elated to still be alive. The anonymous pilot flew to the "B" Medical facility at Khe Sanh as fast as he could. When we arrived, I was told that Farr was already there. A medic said that he was being treated inside and would be OK. A team of stretcher-bearers carried Johnson into the bunker/hospital where a medic directed them to take him. A doctor came to the side of the stretcher immediately to see to the needs of the badly injured man. Immediately after listening to the doctor's instructions, the two medics lifted the stretcher where Johnson lay and took him into the operating room. I was directed to sit outside of the bunker and wait there, if I was going to stay. I waited outside the bunker until the doctor came out and gave me the bad news. He said that he had done everything that he could to save Johnson's life, but excessive blood loss had caused his death. The doctor declared that the femoral artery in his leg had retreated inside his hip girdle, making it impossible to stop the bleeding or to treat him in the field. Johnson had lived for only a few minutes after we arrived at the medical bunker. I was disappointed and angry that I wasn't able to fly him to the hospital in my Huey and give him the extra few minutes that may have saved his life. Please excuse some of the dramatic license I've taken in the narrative. I've tried to record the incident as best as I could. I wish I had kept a diary to detail the events better.

1LT John C. Nelson (1st OLC) and CPT Walter E. Farr were awarded the DFC for heroism via HQ 1st Aviation Brigade General Orders 2412 dated 20 April 1971. An edited version of the citation reads: men distinguished themselves by exceptionally valorous actions while serving as aircraft commander and pilot aboard a utility command and control helicopter. During the afternoon the crew of the command and control helicopter observed an Air Force jet get hit by antiaircraft fire and crash. They immediately turned toward the area to try to rescue the airmen. Braving intense enemy fire they maneuvered to try to locate the downed pilots. Despite the fire they kept up the search until it was impossible to evade the hostile fire any longer. They finally turned for the hospital when their door gunner was fatally wounded. On the way to the hospital the ship's engine failed and they landed it without further damage or injury.

Dave Ferrell: About the 25th of Feb, I got to Khe Sanh and my first day there was hardly uneventful. I'd guess C Troop had already been there about a week or ten days. C Troop's area was relatively near the ATC tower and they had a loud speaker attached to the tower that carried the tower communications. I sort of wandered down there to see what was going on. A Cobra was coming in that had been shot up pretty bad and landed on the runway. A med team came over and took the wounded back seater away. I watched the co-pilot get out of the front seat and into the back seat. The tower wanted the Cobra moved off the runway right away so they could land the fixed wing traffic. C-130s were landing and unloading ARVN at regular intervals. There were trucks waiting to pick them up and drive them to where ever. I remember seeing one 2 1/2 ton with about

10 guys in the back and another 20 waiting to load. It had no canvas top, just the wooden sides and seats. Anyway, as this wounded Cobra moved along side this truck, he must have lost the tail rotor or something, because it crashed. One of the main rotor blades sliced through these ARVN. Khe Sanh was always a dusty place and I can remember running towards this great ball of dust to see if I could help. Lots of others came as well. Funny, at the Atlanta Reunion, Don and I were talking this over and he said he also went to help, but I didn't see him there. The first thing I came on was the lower half of an ARVN soldier, so I passed that up and found several more dead and injured. My thoughts were to try to give 1st Aid to anyone who needed it but I was shocked to see that the live ARVN were busy helping themselves to whatever was in the pockets and belongings of the dead! I decided that maybe the ARVN didn't need any help from me. Welcome to Vietnam, Dave!!

Someone helped this LT pilot from the wrecked Cobra. I don't think he was injured in this crash. Some years later I believe I learned that this LT died later in his tour. This same day, I flew my first mission - forget about an orientation flight or a check-ride; I was Cobra qualified and that was good enough. I was the front seater for Dave Lancaster. He was on his second tour and had been in C Troop for some time. He was a good Gun pilot and human being. I liked flying with him. On that mission, we were still using the little birds in Laos. We flew past LZ 31, which was the western most LZ down the highway into Laos. I remember looking down and seeing a burned out Huey but no one else on the LZ. I asked Dave why there weren't any people on the LZ. He explained they were all under cover because the NVA had it surrounded and were shooting at the ARVN continually. We flew on another mile or so and started working. The 6s found some hooches that contained 55 gal drums. We spent the rest of our time blowing these up and got several nice secondary explosions. We went back to Khe Sanh to refuel and rearm. Just as we were leaving, we got this call that LZ 31 was being overrun with tanks. As I recall we had three Guns, two 6s and the C&C; so we left the 6s there and flew to LZ 31. When we got there, two F4s were putting in an airstrike so we were told to hold off and orbit about half a mile away. We had good seats, so we watched the show! On one pass, this F4 came in low and as he put his stuff down I saw several streams of 51 cal tracers arch up toward him. As he pulled up, the F4 started smoking and soon the two pilots ejected. The jet tumbled through the sky and crashed into a hill. Our C&C, some distance from us, announced that he was going to try to pick up the two Air Force guys. The lead snake said why don't you wait a minute and we'll cover you, but he didn't. I have to give you a little more background information here. The Americans had already lost a lot of helicopters supporting Lam Song, so we had received instructions to try some different tactics. Today's was 50 feet off the trees and keep your speed up! We had to fly up this valley to get to where our C&C was going. The NVA were everywhere. As we went, I could easily see them walking around on the ground and we took A LOT of SA fire that day! Unbeknownst to us, some of this fire had cut the cables leading from our radios; so we couldn't talk to anyone. We still had intercom and it would be a few minutes before we figured out what was wrong. We were the second Snake. As we passed over this small ridge and dropped into another valley, we couldn't determine where the lead Snake had gone; so we broke left. The number three Snake followed us but broke right. Well, all of a sudden we are alone and no one is talking to us. We were convinced that everyone else had been shot down! After a few minutes, Dave decided it is best to go back home and started back East. We are still low level and, as luck would have it, we came upon our C&C that had, indeed, been shot down. They had made a controlled, forced landing in a good sized area covered by elephant grass. It is easy to recognize your own people at 50 feet, but we couldn't talk to them. Dave decided he is going to land and just as he sets up to do this, another C Troop Gun landed near the C&C; so they wave us off. We head back for Khe Sanh. Later I learn that they replaced Dave Nelson, the front seat in the Snake, with CPT W. Emil Farr, the wounded C&C pilot and the Snake medevaced him. He was the Gun Platoon Leader at the time; just flying C&C at day. I never saw him again, so he must have been wounded seriously. I was also told that the gunner on the C&C had been shot through a leg; the bullet cut a main artery. He bled to death from that wound. Sorry, I don't know any more details about this. We

got back to Khe Sanh and learn that our radios were shot out, so no more flying today. That was fine with me! One day like that day was more than enough for an entire life time! Welcome to Vietnam, Dave!!

David Stinson recalls: Sometime prior to 25 Feb, CPT Jones was wounded and medevaced home. I'm fairly certain that a CPT Jones had been serving as the XO for several months. He had a big, red moustache. We called him "Yosemite Sam" or "Yost" for short. After he left CPT Bill (William R.) Wilson took over as XO. On 25 Feb, CPT Emil Farr was flying C&C as the Cav and the Air Force tried to prevent FSB from being overrun. Emil was hit several times by AK fire as the C&C bird was shot down trying to rescue the crew of an F-4 that had just been shot down in front of them. The door gunner was killed. [Editor's note: We believe this was SP4 Edward A. Johnson, Jr.] George Bivens, flying lead gun, landed his snake just off the side of FSB 31 and his front seater, a warrant officer named David Nelson, got out, policed up Emil and put him in the front seat. George took Emil to the aid station at Khe Sanh and David stayed with the downed crew until they were picked up. Emil was medevaced home. I probably should have taken over as platoon leader when Emil got medevaced. I think I had date of rank on 1LT Mitch Scott and was a snake A/C while he was not, but at that time I was detached and serving as Air Cav advisor to the ARVN Airborne Division, just east of Lang Vei. I think Mitch took over the gun platoon.

Also on the 25th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15832 flown by an unnamed crew. The record states that while on a combat mission in Laos they took an unknown number of hits in the cockpit that wounded one of the pilots. The aircraft was repaired in theater.

On the 26th, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, B Troop continued to scene the drive by the 42nd Regt towards Ben Het.

On the 27th, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, B Troop while supporting the 42nd Regt got 5 KBAs at YB731098 as they continued to scene for the 42nd Regt as it moved north.

Also on the 27th, A Troop's Guns provided armed escort for an extraction done by the 247th Med. Both the medevacs and the Guns took fire but no damage. The Guns expended under the control of the MACV advisors on the ground.

On the 28th, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, B Troop while supporting the 42nd Regt fired 80 per cent at YB792462 with 33 confirmed KBAs. The report also states that the 42nd Regt got into a full-scale battle with the 66th NVA at YB8210.

The Squadron staff was getting accustomed to their new role and Tom Galyean provides this insight:

In late Feb or early Mar I worked primarily in the mission control center of the Squadron S-3 at Qui Nhon airfield. As a result of the fall out from the Mai Lai fiasco, there was a command policy to fully investigate the circumstances whenever there were civilian injuries alleged to have been caused by American forces. As I recall, a Cobra had accidentally fired a rocket near a little village on the beach somewhere generally north of Qui Nhon and east of Bear Cat. I can no longer recall the exact reason for the accidental misfire. Unfortunately, the rocket landed near where a young boy, about four years old, was playing and he received a shrapnel laceration on one of his calves. I was assigned to help investigate this matter. To help me interview witnesses, I was assigned with the same "Kit Carson" Scout that served with A Troop during the 8 Aug 1970 engagement. By this time A Troop's Blues no longer needed him in their primary mission and we had developed a good friendship. When I interviewed the child's mother about what had happened, she was surprised that I was doing an investigation. Through the interpreter, she told me in substance: that she knew that what had happened was an accident; that the pilot didn't mean to shoot the rocket; and that she hoped that we wouldn't punish or make the pilot angry for what had happened because if we did,

she was afraid that the pilot might not come back and help protect them from the VC. I have no reason to believe the "Kit Carson" Scout was saying words I wanted to hear. The look on that woman's face and the circumstances of that discussion, are among those events of my tour in Vietnam that are indelibly etched in my recollection. Even though I had previously supported wholeheartedly both the general mission of our armed forces in Vietnam, and the specific missions of the 7/7th Cav, I knew what we were doing in Vietnam was right.

During this month it is possible that there was an undocumented event relating to HHT UH-1H #67-17315. The Goldbook database states that after serving with HHT since March, 1968 for a total of 2,142 hours this aircraft was turned into the 79th TC CO in Qui Nhon and returned to CONUS where it continued to fly for the Army. Anyone who can provide details about this aircraft during this period of time should contact Mike Law.

During this month it is possible that there was an undocumented event relating to A Troop OH-6A #66-07786. The Goldbook database states that after serving with A Troop since March, 1970 this aircraft logged 52 hours in December 1970 but zero in January 1971 and in February was turned into the 608th TC CO in Qui Nhon and returned to CONUS for what could be avionics repairs. Anyone who can provide details about this aircraft during this period of time should contact Mike Law.

During this month it is possible that there was an undocumented event relating to C Troop OH-6A #68-17188. The Goldbook database states that after serving with C Troop since October, 1970 this aircraft logged 21 hours in February, 1971 and one in March, 1971 when it was turned into the 142nd TC CO for unknown reasons. Anyone who can provide details about this aircraft during this period of time should contact Mike Law.

March 1971

On the 1st, A Troop's Guns supported a single ship medevac by the 247th Med of one US and three enemy wounded. The situation began when the enemy ambushed a 23rd ARVN unit with a 51 cal. After the enemy were dispersed by artillery, A Troop's Guns searched the area and found no remaining enemy activity.

Also on the 1st, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, the 42nd Regt was still in heavy contact south of Ben Het and all available aircraft were dispatched on a tac-e called by the 22nd Div (forward). The 57th AHC inserted troops while gunships from the 57th AHC, the 361st AWC, and B Troop supported the operations. B Troop also conducted rescue operations for stragglers from the 1/42nd and 2/42nd Battalions. One LOH crashed when too many ARVNs tried to get aboard. The observer of the other LOH climbed down to the wreck and pulled the two crewmen out for pickup.

On the 2nd, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, B Troop while supporting the 42nd Regt at Ben Het fired 90 per cent at a confirmed enemy location at YB7910 resulting in 22 KBAs.

Also on the 2nd, the VHPA database lists **PFC Darrell Keith Heffner** as a C Troop KIA while serving as a passenger on an aircraft in South Vietnam at grid YD313857. The VHPA record provides no other details about a possible aircraft or battle damage incident to relates to this soldier. The Wall database gives his tour start date as 12 Feb 1971, his MOS as 68B20 (aircraft power plant repairman), and provides these details: age 19. single Negro male, Baptist, from Ford City PA.

1LT John Nelson provides: Our troop clerk/mailman related an odd story to me about a replacement soldier, a mechanic, assigned to the unit while we were at Khe Sanh. Here is how the story goes: PFC Keith David Heffner reported for duty just like every new arrival. He showed up at the Troop Headquarters with a duffle bag of belongings over his shoulder and a lost look on his face, fearful of the dangers of Vietnam. The young black soldier dutifully filled out all of the paperwork required of each new arrival then quietly went to his platoon leader CW3 Richard "Snappy" White and reported for duty. Immediately after reporting, Keith asked his platoon leader how long it would be before he

would begin receiving mail from home. The warrant officer patiently explained to him that it would take at least week for his letter to get to his home and another week before anything would make it back to him from the world, maybe longer. Although Heffner knew that the mail delivery process took a while, he never the less trekked to the Mail Connex religiously each day after morning roll call and asked the mail clerk if there was a letter for him. He received the same message each day, "Be patient, it takes a while for mail to get through." Heffner was a loner who spoke very little to the other members of his platoon. The only conversations any of his fellow workers remember having with him were work related. He worked in silence and never made an effort to get to know the other members of his platoon. Keith was extremely secretive individual, almost defensive when anyone asked him anything about himself. After a couple days of non-communication with the newbie, the other mechanics in the engine shop simply avoided contact with the aloof soldier. PFC Heffner did his job as instructed by his superiors and proved in his short time with the unit that he was a fairly competent helicopter engine mechanic. When he finished his shift, he went to his bunk in the barracks. There he would just sit and write voluminous letters to someone. No one knew to whom he was writing the letters. He didn't even spend time with the other black soldiers in his platoon, who were usually a gregarious group. Keith made his daily trek to the mail shed for seven days straight without receiving the first letter or package. Each time he inquired about his mail, he received the same disappointing news that there was none and was told, "Be patient, it takes a while for mail to get through." Judging by his sullen manner the others knew that something was bothering him. Although it was obvious that something was not right; the soldiers in the shop avoided reclusive newbie. Heffner was assigned to guard duty on the evening of his seventh day at Quang Tri. He was ordered to walk patrol around the airfield hangers, just like all of guards had been instructed since Charlie Troop arrived. Sometime around midnight, the sergeant of the guard heard the firing of an M-16 inside the bounds of Heffner's guard post. When he arrived he found the lanky young PFC lying on the tarmac in a pool of blood. The top of his head was partially missing. He had apparently placed the weapon under his chin and pulled the trigger. No one could guess why he ended his life. All that anyone knew was that the quiet young soldier was obsessed about receiving a letter from someone. No one knew whom he was expecting a letter from or why he so desperately sought this letter. The next day, the company clerk reported that a letter came for Heffner. The envelope had a return address from someone in Pennsylvania. The clerk assumed that the letter was either from his family or a girlfriend with whom he had something to settle. Now, all that his family would receive was a telegram. And later they would receive a casket with their son. He had chosen to escape from this land of death and his own private hell. He was just gone, like he was never there. If you asked any of the Troop members about the suicide on the flight line, they most likely had little or no knowledge about the incident. No one I asked knew the name of the person who had killed himself. The majority of the troopers didn't even know that a soldier had killed himself. I think the Brass wanted the self-inflicted death covered up fearing that his self-destruction would somehow cause the rest of us to lose our fighting spirit. This incident really did happen. I think PFC Keith Darrell Heffner is the soldier who took his own life.

John continues: I discovered Heffner's name on the Vietnam Helicopter History CD from the VPHA. He was listed as a passenger who died on 2MAR71. The CD listed him as a member of Charlie Troop. I had no recollection of there being a death of any passengers or non-crewmembers during the Lam Son 719 Campaign. I remembered the story I had written and researched more after I found this listing. I found some information about Heffner on a couple "Wall" web sites. I am sure that the story I wrote above was about him. I filled in his name as the suicide victim in my story after I discovered his name. This finding conformed to my memory of the incident. He died a death shrouded in mystery and secrecy rather than the death of a combat warrior. Perhaps some people would categorize his death as a cowardly act. His name may not deserve to be included among those whose names are listed on the Vietnam wall as one who perished honorably. However, just

being in Vietnam surely could be listed as the cause of his death. Each of us who served in Vietnam lost a little piece ourselves over there.

On the 3rd, A Troop provided security for President Thieu's visit to Lam Son. During the screen, the Scouts found five bunkers which were destroyed by the Guns. No contact was made and the mission ended at 1600 hours when the President left.

Also on the 3rd, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, B Troop again worked as a screening force for the 42nd Regt southwest of Ben Het. Two UH-1Hs from B Troop and two from the 57th ran a series of resupplies for the troops in the field.

On the 5th, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, near YB855105 B Troop found and extracted 207 ARVNs and three U.S. from the 2/42nd Regt. The report also states that the ARVN operation in the Plei Trap Valley officially ended on this date.

On the 6th at 1300 hours, A Troop was working an AO near Dalat and received a frag movement order to move to An Son. They arrived at An Son at 1945 hours.

Also on the 6th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a loss record for B Troop OH-6A #68-17361 flown by an un-named crew at grid YB873120. The record provides no details about the events that resulted in the lost of this helicopter. The Goldbook database indicates this aircraft arrived from the 79th TC CO, joined B Troop in February and was declared a total loss in March. As one of the War Story entries during the 2006 VHPA Reunion WO1 John Shafer provided a vivid description of the events of this day. The following is an edited version of that war story that John titled "The Warrant Officer who began the craze of Base Jumping from a Helicopter."

The date was March 6th. We were flying in the tri-border area southwest of the Ben Het Special Forces camp. We always flew LOHs with the pilot in the right seat and the Observer in the left seat with an M60 in his lap. In order to fly in the LOH in the AO a pilot had to fly as an Observer for a few hours to learn how the Scouts worked. Scalphunter Lead was CPT John Black and his Observer was SGT Rickey Mills. I was flying his wing as Scalphunter 18 and my Observer was WO1 Garland Hines. Garland's nickname was Gaylord and we always pronounced it with regal tone in our voices to emphasis the 'lord' part of his nickname. While we were working our normal Cav mission for the day, we received a change of mission to assist an ARVN force that was fleeing a base near Ben Het that the NVA had overrun. The Scouts were given the assignment to locate this unit and direct them to an LZ for the Pallbearers could lift them out. Well, we found the unit on the side of a hill and tried to direct them to an LZ but the terrain was just too steep and the LZ was just too far away. Additionally we were running out of time. The ARVNs ended up blowing down some trees so we could take our LOHs in to help them. We were able to put the toe of the skids on the side of the mountains and the ARVNs would climb on board. The plan was to move a few at a time down to the LZ where the Hueys would pick them up. CPT Black went in to pick up a load. Just as he was getting close we heard some gun fire. Naturally the ARVNs panicked and too many got on his aircraft. Just as he started to lift off I told Garland, "Shoot the trees!" Garland gave me this strange look and says, "What the hell are you talking about?" So I tell him again, "Shoot the trees!" I wanted him to shoot into the trees so it would scar the ARVNs enough to drop off the skids then CPT Black would have enough power to fly away. Well, you have to understand the Garland was this good ol' boy from Missouri and he didn't want to do that. The way I phase it is that he was slow on the draw with his M60. CPT Black did take off but was bleeding off RPM as he moved toward the LZ. His plan was to pick up speed and RPM as he dove down the hill. That didn't work. We followed him. He ended up dropping down through over 150 feet of trees and bamboo. We hovered over the crash site and started making our way down through the trees. I tell Garland that he has to look outside and clear the tail rotor. Another strange look but he does it. I tell him he also needs to watch the rotor blade clearance on his side while I'm looking to the front and on the right

side. We were able to look down at the wreckage. I could see SGT Mills trapped inside. He wasn't moving so I hoped that he was just knocked out. There were a couple of ARVNs laying near SGT Mills and we couldn't see CPT Black at all. As we are slowing working our way down I tell Garland to jump. Another strange look! He yells back in a very high pitched voice, "We're too high." So I gave him a strange look. We keep working our way down and again I tell him to jump. He says, "We're still too high." He does keep clearing the tail rotor and we are still working our way down. Soon we start cutting bamboo with the main rotor blades and I tell him to jump. He gave me blank look as if to say you crazy mother. We move over and cut some more bamboo then I feel the LOH rock back and forth a little. I look over and Garland's gone! I'd guess he'd jumped from over 50 feet! So I called him the first base jumper from my helicopter. That was Gaylord! Once on the ground, he got SGT Mills and the ARVNs out of the wreckage and found CPT Black. He got everyone away just before it exploded. He gave first aid and go them into a position where they could be pulled out by a Pallbearer Huey with a Jungle Penetrator. You know I don't think Garland ever flew as my Observer again and I don't understand why not! Twenty-eight days later Garland got into another incident that ended his tour in Vietnam but I'll save that for another war story presentation. Garland went on to have more than 27 years in the military including service in Desert Storm and Somalia. He couldn't make this Reunion. He and his wife, Linda, are about the celebrate their 37th wedding anniversary. John Black is in attendance here today. Both he and SGT Mills stayed in and made the military their career.

Also on the 6th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a loss record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15832 at XD528486. No other details are provided about this event. Anyone who can provide details about this incident is encourage to contact Mike Law.

Concerning C Troop during this period, WO Hubert M. "Mike" Cochran recalls: The C-130s landing at Khe Sanh were interesting to watch. The new runway was a little wider and longer than the old one but still seemed short. Those guys must have reversed props and hit the brakes as soon as their wheels touched down. The Air Force pilots must have stood on the brakes because they had to be at full throttle before takeoff. Often the lights of an approaching C-130 could be seen while one was on the active unloading or getting ready to roll. It seems that most of the landing were made to the west and the takeoffs were made to the east. Landing and departing aircraft were meeting each other, but there weren't any midairs that I can remember. An OH-58 was shot down in Laos and our UH-1s were tasked with inserting the ARVNs to retrieve the bodies. This was a late afternoon mission because the slides I have of the Hueys in the LZ show them with their lights on. The ARVNs were inserted and we took off and orbited while the bodies were collected. We were the trail ship in a flight of three when we went back in to pick up the ARVNs and the bodies. As we hovered near the 58 I had a chance to get a good look at what was left of the aircraft. It was mostly ashes, the burned out shell of a SPH4 and perhaps a radio. I'd like to expand on Butch Elliott's account of the events on 6-7 March. We were notified in C Troop that our UH-1s were needed to help with an insertion. The pilots involved were summoned to a briefing in one of the unit's underground TOC. I thought that the briefer said that a CH-47 crew was down and needed rescuing, but it must have been Butch Elliott's crew that we went after. Regardless, we were given the basics. Fifteen UH-1s would be involved, and a company of Hac Bao would be inserted. The concept of the mission was basically that we would maintain altitude until we reached Aloui, descend to the deck and proceed along Route 9 until we reached the LZ. All this time we would be controlled by a C&C bird who would warn us as we approached the LZ. There must have been some other facts brought out in the briefing that got our attention (we learned later that 50% losses were expected) because when we went out to preflight, Danny Wray, a fellow Southern Baptist, and I had a two man prayer meeting. The mission was the following day. Bill Ramsey was my AC, and we were chalk one. We flew the mission as briefed and had no problems until we reached Aloui. We got on the deck and as soon as we passed Aloui all hell broke loose. Bill and I knew immediately that we were taking fire because it was coming from both sides (Danny Wray, who was flying chalk two,

said that he could see the tracers criss-crossing behind our Huey). The radios came alive with frantic calls of "Taking fire! Taking fire!" "My gunner's been hit," curses, etc. From the way it sounded, we were getting the shit shot out of us. In the meantime, the C&C bird let us overfly the LZ! He basically told us to pull up and turn around, and we would have to do it again. I don't remember exactly what my thoughts were at the time, but it must have been something to the effect of, 'You want us to do what?' We did as instructed and attempted to do the insertion again. We were successful this time because the C&C ship got us in. It only took seconds to drop off the Hac Bao. We heard chalk two (Danny Wray) call that he was out, and by the time we had made a pedal turn to pull pitch all we could see was the belly of his Huey. He must have pulled the collective to his armpit because he was getting the hell out of Dodge. John Fitzgerald was the CE on our ship. I also remember Michael S. Morris was in chalk three. Miraculously none of the aircraft were shot down and no one was killed to my knowledge. We returned to Khe Sanh and if I'm not mistaken some of the guys were kissing the ground. The word was received that we had to go back the next day and extract the downed crew and Hac Bao. After an uneasy night we were briefed again and headed for the PZ. We took a different route and flew at a different altitude, and to the best of my memory we took little if any fire on the return trip. Our Huey had close to twenty Hac Bao on board as we left the PZ on the return trip. The downed crew had been picked up to the best of my knowledge. Apparently the 97 air strikes called in by Butch Elliott had been effective.

On the 7th, A Troop worked the Suoi Cau Valley. One LOH took three hits in the rotor blades, landed and was slung back to camp. A little later, a Scout found a squad-size enemy unit walking down a trail. About 20-25 rounds were fired at the Guns as they killed two. During the remainder of the day, the Scouts found numerous trails, hooches, and bunkers indicating recent enemy usage. All hooches and bunkers were destroyed by the Guns but no contact was made.

Also on the 7th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #67-16077 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was a reconnaissance armed escort mission, while en route in level flight, at an altitude of 150 feet with 80 knots of airspeed, they took three hits 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.

On the 8th, A Troop returned to Phan Rang.

Also on the 8th, according to the 52nd CAB ORLL, five UH-1Hs from B Troop and three from the 57th AHC conducted a CA for the 47th Regt. B Troop supported the 42nd Regt, fired 90 per cent at YB8030, getting 40 confirmed KBAs.

On the 9th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop AH-1G #68-15138. The decoded details of the record state that this was an armed escort recon mission and while en route at an altitude of 700 feet with 100 knots of airspeed they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the area below the cockpit that caused structural damage. They completed the mission and the aircraft was repaired locally. However, the Goldbook database indicates this aircraft was turned into the 604th TC and hence to ARADMAC for repairs. After the repairs, the aircraft returned to CONUS for service.

On the 10th, A Troop was scheduled as a maintenance down day but A Troop was called to support a TAC E for an 53rd Regt unit in contact with a platoon size VC force. The Guns screened for three hours during which only one expended ordnance.

On the 16th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an AVDAC record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15675. The decoded details of the record state the aircraft sustain major combat damage from a mortar round while parked in an unprotected area.

Also on the 16th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for B Troop AH-1G #68-15028. The decoded details of the record state that this was a direct combat support close air support

mission and while attacking the target at an altitude of 400 feet with 100 knots of airspeed they took one hit from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the fuselage. They completed the mission and the aircraft was repaired locally.

On the 17th, A Troop was told to move to Pleiku and closed there at 1130 hours.

Also on the 17th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A # 67-16339 flown by an un-named crew. The decoded record states that while on an armed recon mission, while on the ground in a pick-up zone they took one hit from a SA/AW 7.62mm type weapon. The continued flying, completed the mission and the aircraft was repaired locally.

On the 19th, A Troop supported the 47th Regt near Pleiku. The Scouts found ten uniformed people without weapons in a village and insert the ARP with negative results. Later the Scouts found one armed person and the Guns killed him while destroying four hooches.

On the 21st, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record with fatalities for C Troop AH-1G #68-15019 flown by **CW2 David C. Lancaster** as AC and **WO1 James W. Manthei** as pilot at grid XD635358 in Laos. The Wall database gives the following tour start date and MOS data: Manthei, 15 Feb 1971, 100B; Lancaster, 29 Sep 1970, 100B. The decoded details of the record state that this was a direct combat support close air support mission in Laos and while attacking the target they received multiple hits from ground weapons of an unknown type. They crashed, the aircraft was destroyed and the two pilots were killed.

1LT Dave Ferrell describes the situation: I was flying Dave's wing that day and we were the only two ships from C Troop assigned to this mission. The ARVN were withdrawing from Laos. We had been sent out to support an ARVN armored unit that had been ambushed. There was this horseshoe shaped bend in the road pointing to the south. From low hills on the west and east side, the NVA were shooting at the ARVN. I watched an RPG or B40 come out of the trees and hit the 113 which blew just like in the movies. A few seconds later, another hit a tank and the turret flew up into the air. Things aren't going well for the ARVN. About that time we get everyone sorted out enough to start shooting at the ambushers. The NVA were squared away and had positioned at least three 51-cals in a nice triangle to cover their forces. These 51-cals start in on us. We stop shooting at the ambushers and start in on the 51-cals. We must have made some progress because their fire dropped off about the time my Snake was empty. I told Dave I was out of ammo and wanted to leave. Dave said he wanted to make one more pass. I told him I could not cover his break; but he said he was going in anyway. He made his run and emptied the ship. We watched in horror as he took a full broadside of 51-cal. He called that they had been hit, lost the tail rotor and that Jim was wounded. He continued on to the south looking for any place along the highway to land the Cobra. They didn't get too far when their airspeed went to nothing and they went twirling into the ground. We later talked to the medevac team that retrieved their bodies. They said they believed both men died of broken necks caused by their chicken plates and this twirling fall. I remember being really upset about losing Dave. We had become good friends. That very morning he had shown me a picture of his wife and the card she had sent him - today was their anniversary!

On the 23rd, A Troop worked an AO near Chec Beo and found a large rice cache. The Blues were inserted and destroyed some of it before bad weather forced the Troop from the AO.

The 24th was the ending period for the Valorous Unit Award (VUA) for C Troops. In 1975 via DA General Order #24, C Troop was awarded the VUA the period 8 Feb to 24 Mar 1971.

On the 24th, A Troop found and destroyed a company minus size staging area. A Troop was told to leave Pleiku on the 25th to return to Phan Rang but could not because of bad weather.

On the 26th, one A Troop AH-1G was damaged in a mortar attack and was sent to the 604th TC for a tail boom change. The remainder of the Troop closed at Phan Rang at 1330 hours.

Finally on the 26th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an AVDAC record for A Troop AH-1G #67-15715. The record states this was Combat Incident Damage caused by other combat by rocket while the aircraft was parked in an unprotected location. There were no casualties. Search and rescue operations were not required. The helicopter was recovered.

On the 27th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record for B Troop OH-6A #68-17246 flown by an un-named crew at grid YB851470. The decoded details of the record state that this was a recon mission and while en route from an altitude of 150 feet with 60 knots of airspeed they took four hits from a 7.62mm type SA/AW that damaged the flight controls and resulted in a forced landing and destruction of the aircraft. The Goldbook database indicates this aircraft was turned into the 142nd TC CO and declared a total loss.

From the 28th until the 31st, A Troop worked AOs around Song Mao. The Scouts found signs of enemy activity but no contact was made.

On the 31st, the VHPA Helicopter database has a loss record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15807 at grid YD012011 from by, **WO1 James Bernard Low** as AC and WO1 Tom Dunn as pilot. The record states they took fire and crashed while supporting operations in Laos. The Wall database states the WO1 Low's tour start date was 7 Jan 1971 and his MOS as 004A. The Goldbook database also states this aircraft was lost to inventory during March.

Pilots Don Purser and Dave Ferrell provided some details of this event while attending the VHPA Reunion in Atlanta: They reported receiving fire and the Cobra may well have been burning before they crashed into a river bottom. The hydraulics caught fire and this really burned Jim before he could be removed from the wreck. Eventually both pilots were evaced. Don remembers going with several other C Troopers to visit Jim in the hospital in Quang Tri. Don said his face and upper body were so badly burned that they couldn't recognize him at all. Only after Jim started speaking did they recognize his voice. They understood he lived about a week or so before dying on April 3rd. Don and Dave could not recall the other pilot's name. He was wounded but survived.

1LT David Stinson provides: We lost three gun pilots in Laos, warrant officers David Lancaster, Jim Manthei and James Low. WO1 Tom Dunn was flying the aircraft when Low got killed and everyone said they thought Dunn was dead too. I went home thinking that and then saw him months later at the PX at Fort Leonard Wood - truly like seeing the walking dead.

Mal Doremus writes: I remember WO1 Jim Low as a nice kid with dark hair and kind of square face. He was about 6 foot or so tall as I recall. He was flying front seat but I don't recall who he was flying with. I've read the VHPA summary which says they took fire and crashed into a river bottom and both pilots were evaced. I kind of recall that he was burned and was being lifted out by a sling on a C&C Huey but they took fire too. The Huey didn't get enough altitude so he was dragged through the trees and got real beat up getting out. But it was a long time ago...maybe Don Purser's memory is better.

Some time during the month of March an undocumented event happened to B Troop AH1G #66-15352. The VHPA Helicopter database does not contain a battle damage or accident record for this aircraft for this period but the Goldbook database indicates it was turned in to ARADMAC for CONUS repairs that took four months. The aircraft then went to Ft. Steward for use by the Army. Anyone with details about this undocumented event is encouraged to contact Mike Law.

During this month it is possible that there was an undocumented event relating to B Troop UH-1H #66-16703. The Goldbook database states that after serving with B Troop for only the month of February, 1971 this aircraft was turned into the 604th TC CO in Pleiku and returned to CONUS for repairs that required 10 months before it returned to flying status. Anyone who can provide details about this aircraft during this period of time should contact Mike Law.

April 1971

A Troop Moves to Camp Holloway

On the 1st, A Troop was placed on stand-by for movement to Pleiku. The order was finally received at 2230 hours. A Troop closed at Pleiku at noon and at 1500 received a TAC E support request from FSB Lonely where the US 62nd Arty camp was under attack by a VC force. A Troop sent four Cobras and the VC immediately broke contact. Though the Guns received fire, none were hit and they believed they killed four VC. Later the Arty camp credited A Troop with 20 kills.

C Troop Moves from Khe Sanh to Quang Tri

About the first week of April, C Troop moved from Khe Sanh back to Quan Tri and regrouped there. A few days later, they loaded up everything and returned to Lane the same way they had arrived - via air and ground convoys. The 7/17th's participation in Lam Son 719 was over at this point. According to the 17th CAG ORLL for the period ending 31 Oct 1971 the relocate date was 15 April.

C Troop Moves from Quan Tri to An Son

On the 3rd through the 5th, A Troop supported the 47th Regt, 22nd ARVN.

On the 3rd, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss with injuries record for B Troop OH-6A #67-16383 flown by an un-named crew. One crew member was injured. The decoded details of the record state that while en route on a recon mission at an altitude of 500 feet with an airspeed of 100 knots they took four hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW in the engine, they crashed and burned, the helicopter was lost to inventory and destroyed. CW2 Garland Hines, Scalphunter 14, recalls:

Robert Favor was the gunner/observer on the LOH. We were returning from Ben Het to Pleiku. We were flying low level about 12 miles NW of Pleiku when I saw tracers coming up under the nose like I was firing a minigun. The ship exploded and left a trail of fire that pointed to where we went into the trees. We were the trail ship. WO1 John Shafer was in the lead LOH. The C&C and Cobras were ahead of us. John turned around and landed close to where we had crashed. I don't know how I got out of the wreck. The first thing that I remember doing was trying to stand up and discovering that my left leg was shattered, so I passed out. The C&C Huey landed and took us to the 71st Evac. I never returned to the troop. I went from Pleiku to the 67th Evac in Nha Trang, then Japan, and Guam and finally ended up in the States after about 13 days. I had leg and back injuries. I remember one operation on my ankle. It took about six months for the swelling to go down and feeling returned to my legs. I returned to active duty and retired after 27 years of service. In 1972 John came through Fort Knox. He and Bob (Robert R.) Stevens related the story to me. CPT John D. Black was the Scout platoon leader the whole time I was in B Troop. I do remember 1LT Steve Moody.

CW2 John Shafer, Scalphunter 18, recalls: INSERT HIS MATERIAL HERE.

On the 4th, A Troop was involved in some undocumented action and was credited with 17 kills.

On the 7th, A Troop sent two AH-1Gs on a TAC E to FSB 6; but after an hour they returned to base as they were unable to contact the friendly forces on the ground.

The 8th was the ending period for the RVN Gallantry Cross with Palm Award for C Troop. In 1973 via DA General Order #5, the C Troop was awarded the RVN Gallantry Cross for the period 8 Feb 1971 to 8 Apr 1971.

On the 14th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an AVDAC record for C Troop AH-1G #67-15627. The record states this was Combat Incident Damage caused by other combat by ground fire while the aircraft was on an armed escort mission. There were no casualties. Search and rescue operations were not required. The helicopter was recovered.

On the 15th, while working around Cheo Beo, an A Troop LOH drew fire from three or four hooches surrounded by spider holes. Two elephants and one OP were also found. All were taken under fire and destroyed and one person was killed. The Blues determined this was a company-size base camp, so artillery was adjusted and the camp completely destroyed.

Also on the 15th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for B Troop UH-1H #66-16734 flown by WO1 Sawyer as AC but the rest of the crew is not named. The decoded details of the record state that this was a combat mission and the aircraft was recovered to Plieku. The Goldbook database states this aircraft was turned into the 604th TC Co and hence to factor repairs in CONUS. The accident summary reads:

We were in a cruise flight when Pallbearer Lead asked what our engine instruments read when keeping up with him. We topped the engine with maximum power when the engine quit abruptly. N1 was approximately 99.5 percent. Altitude was about 5000 feet. Outside air temperature was about 20 degrees centigrade, and EGT approximately 560 degrees. The hover check indicated a weak engine. The co-pilot was flying at the time and entered autorotation, the pilot took the controls and headed for the highway called Pallbearer Lead. Upon terminating at the bottom of the autorotation we fell through from about 4 feet with a hard landing that spread the skids. The aircraft was rigged and slung back.

On the 16th, A Troop's ARP uncovered a small aid station. Several fresh footprints were followed into a tree line which the Guns fired up killing one.

On the 17th, A Troop's Scouts reported a parachute with harness next to a tunnel opening and a flight suit, underwear, and a flight helmet were found on the ground. Two people were observed hiding in the bushes with a 51 cal which hit a LOH four times. The Guns expended with unknown results but an airstrike was called in.

Also on the 17th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #68-17345 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was an armed recon mission and at an altitude of 20 feet with 50 knots of airspeed they took 4 hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW that caused unspecified damage. They completed the mission. The aircraft was repaired locally and continued to serve with A Troop.

Also on the 17th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an AVDAC record for A Troop AH-1G #67-15607. The record states this was Combat Minor Damage caused by other combat by ground fire less than .50 cal in size while the aircraft was on an armed escort mission. There were no casualties. Search and rescue operations were not required. The helicopter was recovered.

On the 21st, A Troop's Gun saw several people in an open area. When attempts to ID them produced fire, the Guns opened fire with unknown results. Later an enemy squad was observed walking a trail. The Guns fired; six were killed, two wounded and two captured. Upon further investigation a bunker complex was uncovered. Airstrikes were called in with unknown results. The Blues and a reaction force were inserted and found 500 lbs of rice which was turned over to the 45th Reg.

On the 22nd, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for C Troop OH-6A #67-16019 flown by CPT J.C. Nelson as pilot, WO1 M.A. Devaux as co-pilot, and SP4 M.J. Gonsalves as CE. The records indicate that MAJ S.B. Allen was the accident investigation officer. The Goldbook database states this aircraft was turned into the 79th TC Co and continued to serve in Vietnam after three months of repairs. The accident summary reads:

At approximately 0900 hours, the crew was refueling at the LZ English refueling point. After refueling the pilot brought the aircraft to a hover in preparation to reposition for departure. At this time a flight of slicks was hovering in the POL area creating rotor wash turbulence. While still at a low hover, the aircraft encountered this turbulence and the pilot lost directional control. The tail of

the aircraft swung to the right causing the tail rotor to contact the fuel nozzle which was placed in a 105mm shell casing mounted on a four-foot tall engineer stake. Upon hearing the tearing sound the pilot executed a hovering autorotation. The aircraft landed hard causing the main rotor blades to flex downward striking and subsequently severing the tail boom. A normal engine shutdown was accomplished and all crew members exited the aircraft. No injuries were sustained.

WO1 Michel Devaux mentioned during a Feb 2010 conversation: "I haven't thought about this incident for a number of years but when it was described to me – suddenly a flood of memories came back! I was a married man during flight school. One day my wife and I were wearing jeans into the PX and some serious officer "lit into us" for our poor appearance. Not long after that I got orders to an OH-6A transition course immediately after flight school. I joined C Troop at Quang Tri in early February. I remember going up to Khe Sanh and flying one or two missions in a LOH before they stopped flying them in combat. I remember one admin flight then I started flying as a Cobra front-seater.

On the 23rd, A Troop was screening an area 20 miles west of SHODE III when the 3rd Bn, 45th Regt, 22nd ARVN made heavy contact with an NVA Reg. A Troop was requested to provide support. During the mission, one LOH was engaging a mortar position when it was hit by 30 cal AW fire. The observer was hit in the left groin but continued to engage his target. Another round hit the ship, shattered and sent shrapnel inside, wounding the pilot in the left leg. Both pilot and observer continued to support the mission for about ten minutes before they returned to the Phu Nhon rearm point where they discovered two more rounds had hit the observer's chicken plate. Both were evacuated to the 71st Evac. Meanwhile the C&C had discovered a 51 cal position and took one round through a rotor blade.

Also on the 23rd, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record with injuries for A Troop OH-6A #68-17317 flown by an unnamed crew. One crew member was wounded. The decoded details of the record state that this was an armed recon mission and at an altitude of 10 feet with 50 knots of airspeed they took 2 hits from 7.62mm type SA/AW that caused fragmentation damage to the crew and the flight controls. They continued to fly but aborted the mission. The Goldbook database indicates the aircraft was repaired locally and continued to serve with A Troop.

On the 25th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an AVDAC record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15675 flown by an unnamed crew. The record states this was Combat Incident Damage caused by other combat by grenade and RPG fire while on a direct fire support mission. There were casualties. Search and rescue operations were not required. The helicopter was recovered.

On the 26th, A Troop's Scout discovered approximately 20 people in a base camp with five hooches and bunkers. The Scouts received fire so the Guns opened up and killed one. The Blues were inserted and immediately came under heavy fire. A reaction force was inserted to support the ARP. Both units began receiving heavy fire and mortar rounds. When the fire lifted, the ground forces found a training area. The area was destroyed by the Guns. The LOHs received fire two more times and the Guns expended with unknown results. When the Infantry was extracted, it was found that they had suffered four WIA.

Rick Gillihan provides: I was with A Troop from 10 April 70 to 30 April 71. I extended for an early out of the Army. We worked out of Camp Holloway for most of that time. I was a field re-armor for the Cobras. When I first got in-country there were only five in our squad. Besides rearming, we also pulled perimeter guard duty and flight-line guard duty. We were a little short of manpower. Most (95%) of the time there were two of us sent to the field. The days we didn't go to the field, we pulled guard duty on the 12-4 shift. When we stayed on base we would clean and repair guns and do other odd jobs. When the Troop would stage away from base, we flew out on the slicks with the Blues, but occasionally we would ride on the C&C ship. So much of the time though, I was told to get on the chopper and get off the chopper, but had no idea what the name of the LZ or base was. I remember

Dak To, Kontum, Duc Co, and several others but I can't remember the names, if I ever knew them. Occasionally, later in my tour, we rearmed out of other bases larger than Camp Holloway. When I first got there we didn't have a radio with us, but eventually they gave us a PRC-25. It was for our safety plus we could hear when they made contact in the AO and would be coming in for rearming. I have no idea who was responsible for making certain the ammo we needed was there when we got there; some ordnance company, I knew at one time, but have forgotten the name of the unit. But the ammo was ALWAYS there for us, sometimes dropped off in bundles from a chopper, and at this one place they would leave a flat bed semi with the ammo on the trailer. The runway was next to some dirt road. I have a picture of that particular runway. We had two guys in a jeep with an M-60 mounted on it for our perimeter, and I have a shot of that. Eventually, 5 or 6 months in my tour, we got an 'ordnance specialist' by MOS. He was the one who ordered all the ammo, at least for Camp Holloway. Looking back I wish I would have had an opportunity to get a camera much sooner than I did. I wish I'd have taken many more pictures than I did during the few months my camera worked - before the dust got to it. I feel lucky that I have the shots I have, and ended up doing photography for a living in the 1980s. For that reason, I have hung on to my RVN negatives, and just recently been scanning them into my computer and making prints of things I had forgotten all about. I have only a couple of decent shots of the Cobras. Our Cobra pilots were very respectful to us and made us feel very much a part of the team. There were times when they would stay in the ship, with the thing revved up so much it sounded like it was about ready to take off. It would shake like hell. Reloading a minigun still HOT from being fired is something I will never forget. We were always rushing back and forth with the 17-lb and flechette rockets. If the pilots were in a hurry, the chunker was usually the first to get left out of the rearm sequence because evidently it jammed a lot. They were always in a hurry when the Blues were on the ground and had made contact. We worked with the 4th Infantry Division when I first got there. Later it was the ROK's and eventually with the blanky blank ARVN's. I remember CPT Blake and CPT Harold Dress, two guys who I had a lot of respect for even before this; getting out of their ships, taking off their shirts and helping us hump rockets at this one AO. The logistics at that place were such that we had to carry them quite a distance. They didn't have to do that. That was the only time I remember them helping, but hey we had our job and they had theirs. I liked the Cav, even though I volunteered for the draft and wasn't going to make a career out of the Army, I am glad I was a part of the Cav.

Late on the 29th, **CW2 Ronald L. Evans** and **WO1 Robert L. Long** of B Troop were killed. The Wall database states that CW2 Evan's tour start date was 31 May 1970 and WO1 Long's was 21 Oct 1970. The VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15468 at grid ZA150569. The decoded details of the record state that this was an rescue support mission and while attacking a target they were hit by unknown enemy fire, crashed and burned. The helicopter was lost to inventory and destroyed.

CPT John Sparks provides some details: For some time during this period B Troop was tasked to provide a set of Cobra gunships on 5-minute stand-by for the Pleiku area. Ron was the AC that evening and Bob Long was his front seater. I don't remember who was flying their wing. Anyway, about dusk a ground unit almost due west of Pleiku got into trouble and requested gunship support. The stand-by gun team launched. Several of us were in the club drinking when the second Cobra called in that they had been shot down and that their ship was burning. I had been drinking so I didn't fly, but the Troop scrambled a reaction force. They found the crash site but the enemy fire was too strong to insert the Blues that evening. The next morning, we returned to the scene; the enemy had fled and we were able to recover the bodies.

CPT Hank (Henry N.) Bourdo provides: I remember this incident very clearly. MAJ Carr was certain that the crash was as a result of engine work done by my maintenance crew during the 100 hour PE. I rode out in the slick and he dropped me and one of the mechanics and the Cobra Crew Chief on the ground. We walked the distance of the crash site from the point where it crashed

through the trees to its final resting place. The bird was torn to hell and the transmission was quite some distance away from the bird. The engine had also torn loose from its moorings. We then had to hoof it back to the LZ and the Major came back, landed and took us out of there. Later a recovery crew was lifted in and recovered the bodies, and major parts of the helicopter. An investigation by our Direct Support unit determined that the engine had not caused the accident but that both pilots had been struck by hostile fire and probably died instantly. The approach that the helicopter had made was almost a perfect landing at high speed. We also found a main rotor blade from either a Cobra or Huey and on it there were lots of crude drawings scratched in the paint showing people "leading" a helicopter and shooting at it. I have been to the Wall several times and I always say a prayer for both of those fine men. There are some other events connected to that night but I have vowed to keep them private as they would not honor the memory of W2 Evans and W1 Long.

MAJ Glenn Carr provides: CPT John Crosby, the Gun platoon leader at this time, ran over to my hooch with the news they'd gone down. We jumped into my jeep and tore off across Holloway via the most direct route to the flight line. Sometimes we weren't on the road. We arrived at the Snake Line (with a flat tire) and jumped into a Cobra. John was running it up but didn't like what he had, so we aborted. By this time it was dark and the weather was getting lousy. We went out at first light and recovered their bodies. I had the recovery crew stop a moment while I said a prayer – not for Long or Evans but for their families who were about to have their world turned upside down. The men seemed to be very receptive to this gesture. I rode the Huey back to Pleiku main with Long's body bag between my legs and Evans to my right. Fast forward thirty years – I'm sitting at my civilian job checking the Squadron's website and this lady Cyndi Long Inlow asked if anyone knew about her dad, Robert. I picked myself up off the floor – thought about it for several hours and answered her. She was elated to find his commanding officer. Shortly after that, WO Lambert came up on-line. We both still had copies of the memorial service brochure and mailed them to her. She finally learned about the father she'd lost at age 6. She and her lovely family were honored guests at the 2002 reunion in Radcliff. I invited Cyndi and her mother to the Dayton Ohio airshow the following summer. They attended as special guests of the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation to witness our Air Cavalry demonstration. I had some private time with Cyndi and Robert Long's mother and answered numerous questions. One thing that really POed me. She told me that she never received a letter from me or anyone else. I assured her that I had written a two page letter and still had a copy if she wanted to see it. She said that this was all behind her now and that she didn't want to revisit it. Learning that the Army failed in forwarding that letter to her makes me furious!

WO James Lambert provided the following in a series of emails in 2000 to Cyndi Long Inlow, daughter of Bob Long: I was the AC of the wing Cobra that evening and WO Dennis Avenell was the other pilot. On this particular night's stand-by mission, I was originally scheduled to be the gun team leader with another pilot. Just a few minutes before the mission started our Platoon leader switched us from Lead to Wing position. The reason for the change was that the other pilot I was flying with had not flown any night missions from the back seat and the intent was to train him for that duty. About 2100 hours we received a launch order from our operations. Earlier that evening a VNAF L19 Bird Dog had been shot down near Highway 1 about 20 miles northwest of Pleiku. A VNAF UH-1H had been sent to search for survivors. They were also shot down. Our mission was to search for survivors from either crash and bring in the 'Reaction Force' to recover them if there were any survivors. As we approached the coordinates of the crash site, I could see the burning wreckage of both aircraft. The Lead Cobra appeared to be directly over the crash site at about 1500 feet when they took a direct hit from AA fire. The aircraft exploded in mid-air, then fell to the ground with a secondary explosion killing both pilots instantly. After they were shot down, I blacked out our aircraft then sent a situation report to our operations and requested the reaction force be sent in to secure the area. As per the SOP, when we went into action, the 30-minute gun team moved up to 5-minute stand-by status, a company of infantry was alerted with our Lift section

to transport them. The second gun team arrived about 20 minutes later. I briefed them on the situation and remained in the area for about another 15 minutes, then left to refuel and rearm. The infantry was being inserted as I was leaving the area. I didn't return that night because the area was quickly secured and it was confirmed that there were no survivors. In fact the bodies could not be recovered that night because of the intense aircraft fires. They were recovered the following day. I recall two 'interesting' ideas about this event. First, during our debriefing the next day, WO Avenell said he didn't see a thing and thus was unable to contribute substantially to the record. I can only assume that the horror of the event caused this to happen to his mind. I've been to The Wall, looked at the names and asked God many times "Why me Lord?" because "But for the grace of God," my name would be there. So I am really the only eye witness to their deaths. Second, the autopsy reported that both pilots received fatal wounds from 51 cal rounds but I have always been doubtful of that report for the following reasons: (a) I did not see any evidence of 51 cal tracers that night. (b) If Ron or Bob had seen any tracers, they would have immediately blacked-out their aircraft since all the enemy weapons we had previously encountered in this area were visually aimed (no radar or heat seeking). (c) Since they went down without any communication of AAA threat, this means that they were probably struck by the first volley of AA fire and that would be very unlikely for optically sighted weapons at night. Initially, because I hadn't seen any evidence of hostile fire, there was concern that they might have flown the aircraft into the ground. However, the official report was that the aircraft was brought down by 51 cal AA fire. The autopsy report must have ruled out the aircraft accident scenario. As to whether it was some kind of aircraft trap, I'm sure it was. Regardless of whether the enemy were NVA or VC, they would have known that we would search for downed aircraft until the situation was resolved. That further leads me to doubt that the enemy was either that skilled or lucky to shot down three aircraft and then vanish into the night. The weapon engagement was much more characteristics of an SA-7 missile than a 51 cal but these wouldn't be confirmed until the Easter Offensive of 1972. I have often wondered if this was an early test of the SA-7 system. So after 29 years and many countless hours of trying to figure out how they were shot down, I have no answers; only questions and lingering doubts. It is easier for me to accept the official position that their aircraft was brought down by 51 cal AA fire than believe there was a cover-up of the deployment of a new, more lethal weapon. I knew both Ron Evans and Bob Long very well. The memory of them and respect for them will always with me.

MAJ Glenn Carr provides: A very close call occurred sometime in late April or May 1971. I was flying C&C with CPT Butch Cleveland, my ops officer. We were about twenty minutes ahead of the rest of the troop. I was going to drop into a CP for last minute coordination then meet the troop at the logger site. We were headed somewhere north east of Kontum maybe east of Dak To at the usual 3000 ft. I called the various artillery advisories along our path getting "all guns cold." So we tooled on our way looking at the mountains and counting waterfalls. Looking almost straight down suddenly something caught my attention. All the crewmembers could have heard me without pressing the mike button when I exclaimed loudly, "G*# D#@^!!! Butch did you see that"? He responded, "I didn't get a good look at them but I think they were set on super quick." It was one of those moments when everything goes into slow motion seeming like minutes watching those rounds gracefully arch over and fade away. The crew chief said, "Sir, those were 105's." The gunner said, "They sure were and they were OD with yellow markings." Even with my sharp-eyed gunners I doubt he could see yellow markings on a spin stabilized round. But none of us were doubting we had just seen two 105 rounds pass under us about 15-20 feet below the skids. By this time Butch had an armpit full of collective and the IVSI was pointing straight up. As I gathered my composure I calmly call Artillery asking did you just give me a guns cold for this area - yes sir was the response. I said "Well sonny boy I just saw two 105 rounds pass 15-20 feet below my aircraft - not only me but my entire crew saw them and watched them go out of sight. What the hell is going on down there?!!!" A sheepish reply came back, "Sir we'll recheck our guns." A few minutes later,

"Embalmer 6 all our guns are cold and have been for over two hours." We had a bit of conversation until their six came on - "Embalmer 6 this is Arty 6 (can't remember his call sign) please accept my humble apologies for this mistake. We just found an ARVN battery firing and they failed to call in. Again I apologize for this." "Arty 6, This is Embalmer 6 you have absolutely no idea of how glad I am to be able to accept your apology. Just don't tell me where that ARVN battery is located because I am madder than hell and I have ten gun ships at the other end of this mike button." He said he would gladly handle that issue for me. I told the crew we should be silent for a few minute to pray in our own way giving thanks to our Lord for watching over us. ----Amen. Fast forward to present times when I see a famous one in a million picture of a Caribou about five hundred feet high split in half as he flew in front of an artillery battery. There but for the grace of God and twenty feet go I.

MANG HO 16

For the period 20-24 Apr and 3-14 May, the 7/17th provided command and control for the air assault portions of this operation conducted by the Capital Republic of Korea Infantry Division (CRID) and the 173rd Abn to the northwest and west of Phu Cat AFB; specifically the Suoi Cau, Soui Tre, and Soui La Tinh Valleys, and Base Area 226. The following units participated: the 61st and 129th AHCs assigned to the 7/17 and C/7/17; the 92nd and B/227 AHCs and D/227 AWC from the 10th CAB; the 134th AHC, the 238th AWC, and the 180th ASHC from the 268th CAB; the A/227th AHC and the C/228th ASHC from the 52nd CAB; the 268th Pathfinder Det from the 268th CAB; and the 10th Pathfinder Det from the 10th CAB. Intelligence indicated that elements of the 3rd NVA division were regrouping and retraining in or near Base Area 226. The terrain was described as a valley floor at about 100 meters elevation, steep mountains rise to 700 meters on the east and 800 meters on the western side. Dense vegetation offered excellent overhead concealment for enemy movement. Rugged ridges and pinnacles, encompassed by vegetation, offered concealed AA weapons positions with extremely good fields of fire. Very few adequate LZs existed in the area and most were one or two ship LZs on the surrounding pinnacles while those on the valley floor that could accommodate four or five ships were very vulnerable to AA fire from positions on the mountains above. The concept of the operation was for the Squadron to provide air recon and tactical mobility for the Infantry units primarily via the two organic AHCs (the 61st and the 129th) and C Troop. They would reconnoiter, prepare and insert the Infantry elements into numerous LZs simultaneously to surround and cordon off Base Area 226. This was accomplished by inserting the ROK units to the south and east and the 173rd to the north and west as blocking forces on the 20th, 21st, and 22nd. Then two ROK Regts assaulted the mountain tops and valley floor to engage the enemy. During the period 3 - 14 May numerous assaults and extractions were conducted for tactical redeployment of the ROK units to further engage the enemy units. Elements from the 10th, 52nd, and 268th CABs were opconed on a daily basis. On the 20th (D-3), five companies and one Bn CP were inserted into five LZs. On the 21st (D-2), 105 ROK and 663 US troops were inserted. On the 22th (D-1), two ROK companies were inserted into two more LZs. On the 23th (D Day), the Squadron and opconed elements assembled at two PZs. The slicks were broken down into ten flights of five ships each with supporting gunships. C Troop provided the initial recon and prep of the proposed LZs. Pathfinders were assigned to slick flights to each LZ to assist the CH-47s flights to follow. POL and rearming points were operational at both PZs. After an artillery prep, C Troop started a VR around the proposed LZs at 0930. At 0945 the assault forces were airborne and at 1000 they put 12 companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs, and one Arty Btry into ten LZs simultaneously. On the 24th (D+1), they again used two PZs and the same schedule. C Troop reconed the LZs and at 1000 the Squadron inserted nine companies and three Bn CPs into seven LZs simultaneously. On 3 May (D+10), they began the extraction of the ROK Cavalry Regt with eight companies and two Bn CPs from nine PZs. On 4 May (D+11), they extracted the 1st ROK Regt consisting of ten companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs and one Arty Btry from ten PZs. On 5 May (D+12), they used one PZ to reinsert the ROK Cavalry Regt with eight companies into six LZs. The Blue flight received some SA fire and the guns engaged the targets. Two Hueys received hits. On the

6th (D+13), they inserted 11 companies, one Regt CP, two Bn CPs and one Arty Btry from the ROK 1st Regt into 15 LZs. On the 10th (D+17), they began the final phase by extracting eight company and one Arty Btry of the ROK 1st Regt from nine PZs. On the 12th (D+19), they extracted one company from the ROK Cavalry Regt from one PZ. On the 13th (D+20), they extracted seven companies and 2 Bn CPs from eight PZs. The Yellow flight received SA and B-40 fire and the Guns engaged. One Huey and one UH-1C were hit. Enemy personnel and bunkers were discovered and attached by the Guns. The day's operations claimed 10 KBAs. On the 14th (D+21), they completed the extraction of nine companies and one Bn CP from seven PZs. The totals for the entire operation were for UH-1Hs: 2696 hours, 4099 sorties, 11,176 passengers using 351 aircraft and for CH-47s: 252 hours, 300 sorties, 1428 passengers, 706 tons using 45 aircraft. The analysis section in the After Action Report provides some insight into this operation. Apparently the CRID was very security conscience because it provided only fragmentary information in advance for planning purposes and denied preparation air recons of their AO. They also did not put their G-3 or Regt Cmdrs in a C&C yet demanded simultaneous insertions. The lack of airborne decision makers caused delays in LZ selection as everyone had to wait for the information to be radioed back to the ROK CPs. All the opconed air units could not laager in the Lane area, so they had to fly in every morning and home every night. This, of course, delayed the air assaults about one hour. Temporary refuel and rearm points had to be established for several days outside fixed facilities which taxed the Squadron's S-4 and HHT personnel and added a security problem. Finally, the CRID wanted their elements extracted from the field and returned to their base camp. This required extra "air taxi" time that could have been eliminated if they had used some ground convoys. The operation claimed 252 enemy killed, 110 individual weapons, 35 crew weapons, and 7 radios captured against 13 Koreans killed and 60 wounded with no US losses and no aircraft losses.

Inclosure 3 (Unit Strength) of the 52nd CAB ORLLs for the period ending 30 April 1971 shows the following for B Troop: Officers authorized 18, assigned 14, Warrant Officers authorized 31, assigned 24, Enlisted Men authorized by MTOE 182, authorized for fill 182, assigned 144. The same document shows the following for D Troop: Officers authorized 5, assigned 5, Warrant Officers authorized 0, assigned 0, Enlisted Men authorized by MTOE 127, authorized for fill 127, assigned 130. The document shows the 52nd Security Detachment Officers authorized 1, assigned 3, Warrant Officers authorized 0, assigned 0, Enlisted Men authorized by MOTE 132, authorized to fill 132, assigned 122. The document also lists the 68th Infantry Detachment subordinate to the 52nd Security Detachment with zero officers and warrant officers, Enlisted Men authorized by MOTE 19, authorized to fill 19, assigned 19. The 68th Infantry Detachment used PPS-5 radar equipment to detect enemy soldiers within 5000 yards of the base or airfield.

The 52nd CAB ORLLs for the period ending 30 April 1971 has two command action reports related to B Troop as follows:

Briefings/Spot Reports. (a) Observation: Past procedure and practice has been to recon an area of operation throughout the day and send in spot reports to the supported unit as to what was found and the action taken. (b) Evaluation: B Troop has found that the activity could and should be explained in a briefing given to the support unit Commander and his Advisors. This briefing could furnish vital information to the ground CO. (c) Recommendation: B Troop has found that the best and most accurate source of this information are the Scout pilots; and, consequently, they should brief the ground commander. (d) Command Action: B Troop Scout pilots now land and have direct contact with the ground commander and brief him on terrain, avenues of approach, obstacles, and first person analysis of the objective area. This information is valuable to a ground commander during an operation and will enhance the effectiveness of a recon element.

ARVN Aerial Rifle Platoon. (a) Observation: A recurring problem encountered using ARVN ARPs concern the ARPs failure to maneuver out of a LZ and sweep the objective quickly and thoroughly. (b) Evaluation: This problem was created by the misconception that the American Advisor with the

ARPs was in command, and that the ARVN were well versed in Air Cav Tactics, Techniques and employment of the ARPs. B Troop has found that both its pilots and the ARVN ARPs did not understand each others' capabilities, level of training and requirements. (c) Recommendation: B Troop has found that a briefing given to the ARVN Platoon Leader and his counterpart can and will enhance the effectiveness of the ARPs. If the situation allows, the C&C should return to the staging area, brief the ARPs in detail and then insert them into the LZ. (d) Command Action: B Troop has found that 30 minutes spent on a briefing, then allowing the ARVN ARPs Ldr to brief his troops, saves time and much confusion once they are inserted. This procedure in no way is meant to be derogatory or degrading to the ARVN, it simply means that Air Cav tactics are new to the ARVN and we must insure that the transition into ARP tactics is thoroughly understood by our Allies.

May 1971

Sometime during this month, MAJ Warren Griffith assume command of C Troop replacing MAJ Sydna 'Bert' Allen.

During the first week, A Troop's operations were weather restricted.

Earlier in this history MAJ Glenn Carr the CO of B Troop provided details about the risks involved with inserting ARVN Browns, and finally he stated that with the war winding down there was virtually no need for the ACTs to insert except for downed aircraft situations. Now he provides the following insights:

The idea for ACTs to insert troops did change in May 1971 during the Battle of Firebase 6. FB 6 was on top of the mountain just south of the Tan Canh airstrip or southwest of Dak To. As the ARVN pursued the enemy westward we were asked to insert not as a Cav mission rather as a lift platoon. We made several lifts only to watch the ARVN forces turn the opposite direction and go to the other side of the mountain, thus avoiding contact. During that operation one of my scout birds had to go in I think to pick up a downed pilot - not sure of the circumstances but as he lifted off several ARVN "cowards" tried to jump on board. Once evicted, the bird again attempted a lift off only to be pulled to the ground by the cowards hanging off the skids. Once again they were gun-butted off the skids and the little bird departed. It was sad, sad, sad. I knew in my own mind that this war was lost. The ARVN had demonstrated vividly they were not willing to fight. I turned over the Troop command on 31 May 71 to MAJ Robert Cassity and became the XO of the 52nd Avn Bn.

On the 4th according to the 52nd CAB ORLL dated 7 Nov 1971, B Troop worked in the vicinity of Dak To on a normal cav mission and received fire from 2-5 personnel in green fatigues, they were engaged by gunships with negative results at grid YB897167.

On the 10th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an aircraft accident and loss record with a fatality for C Troop OH-6A #67-16339 flown by WO1 T.W. Wiggs as pilot, SP4 R.C. Muckenfuss as CE, and **SP4 David Wayne Starcher** as Observer. SP4 Starcher died from the injuries he received in this incident. The Wall database states that Starcher's tour start date was 6 July 1970 and his MOS was 67N2F. The narrative in the VHPA record reads as follows:

In accordance with witness statement, the following discussion is submitted. The accident occurred while the pilot was conducting a combat visual reconnaissance mission. While flying the lead LOH, the pilot observed a recently used trail. He followed the trail up to a tree line at the top of a ridge. Then orbiting to the right around a bunker, He called in a spot report on the bunker. Thinking he might have taken fire, he steepened his turn to the right abruptly, about 25 feet above the ground while flying approximately 30 knots. His turn took him from a downwind to a crosswind situation; he went into a severe spin to the right. At first the pilot felt he could fly out of the spin, as he had on similar occasions in the past, by decreasing power and gaining airspeed. His attempts to accomplish such were futile; just prior to impacting a tree, he announced the realization that the aircraft was out

of control. As the aircraft spun, the back seat observer threw two boxes of 7.62 ball ammunition and one box of grenades from the aircraft to lighten the load. The aircraft hit a tree. Upon initial impact, the pilot's inertia reel failed to lock and his face hit the cyclic stick, knocking him temporarily unconscious. Then the aircraft rolled backward, snapping off the tail boom and rotor blades, till the fuselage came to rest 250 feet down slope, in the bottom of a rocky ravine and stream bed. During the above sequence of events neither crew members from the wing LOH, nor the crew chief of the downed LOH, saw or heard any enemy fire. Sometime between the initial impact and the settling of the aircraft, the observer was thrown out of the aircraft, and sustained injuries, from which he later died. The pilot of the scout put his observer on the ground to aid the casualties. After assisting the pilot and crew chief from their respective seats in the aircraft, the wing observer searched until he found the lead observer approximately 50 feet up the hill lying conscious in some rocks; his chicken plate was lodged against a stump. Two more observers and the C&C crew chief were put on the ground to assist the injured until the Blues could be inserted to secure the area and medical evacuation could be effected. The wing LOH carried the aerial observer, who was the most critically injured of the three, to a place where a Dustoff helicopter could evacuate him. He subsequently died at LZ English, B Med. Next the pilot was removed by a hoist. The crew chief was carried by several of the infantrymen, to a small clearing, where he was evacuated by another LOH. As the Blues walked back to the LZ, they could hear enemy rustling in the bushes all around them. The Blues, having recovered radios and weapons from the aircraft, were extracted. The wreckage was left unrecovered.

On the 11th, A Troop destroyed a small base camp west of Phu Nhon.

On the 12th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #68-17345 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was an armed recon mission and at an altitude of 20 feet with 50 knots of airspeed they took 1 hit in a main rotor blade from 7.62mm type SA/AW. They completed the mission. The aircraft was repaired locally and continued to serve with A Troop.

On the 14th according to the 52nd CAB ORLL dated 7 Nov 1971, B Troop 'while working in the vicinity of Kontum, grid YA870080, [Editor's note: the 'A' in the grid coordinates was overtyped in the original and might be a 'B'.] sighted six personnel wearing kakhi uniforms and engaged with gunships, resulting in thre KBA's.'

On the 15th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for A Troop OH-6A #68-17286 flown by CW2 J. Dobek at Camp Holloway. The Goldbook database indicates this aircraft was returned to CONUS for factory repairs that took 10 months. After that the aircraft serviced the Army again at Ft. Rucker. The accident summary reads:

The aircraft experienced an antitorque failure while on a VR about 10 miles west of Phu Nhon approximately ZV 209-993. The pilot flew back to Pleiku AFB and made a running landing. He over ran the runway incurring damage to the front/left strut and the two main rotor blades. The ARADMAC report: Disassembly, inspection, and metallurgical laboratory analysis of the tail rotor transmission has failed to reveal a positive cause of failure in the input bevel gear drive shaft. See metallurgical laboratory report 71MX271.

On the 18th according to the 52nd CAB ORLL dated 7 Nov 1971, B Troop 'while working in the vicinity of Phu Nhon, received small arms and automatic weapons fire from vicinity YA782142. Target was engaged by gunships with results of 3 KBA's.'

On the 19th, an A Troop Cobra crashed at Phu Nhon while hovering from the POL to the parking area. The pilot had gone IFR in the dust and the ship came to rest in an inverted position. Neither pilot was injured.

On the 20th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage and loss record with fatalities for A Troop OH-6A #68-17247, at map coordinates ZA206367 flown by **WO1 Gregory Allen Smith** and **WO1 Robert Graham Bruce** who both died in the crash. The Wall database states WO1 Smith's tour start date as 7 Feb 1971 and WO1 Bruce's as 19 Jan 1971. The A Troop unit history states the incident happened at 1105 hours west of Dragon Mountain near Camp Enari. The Blues were inserted to secure the crash site. The cause of the crash was never determined. The decoded details of the record state that this was an unarmed recon mission, they may have received fire from an unknown type and source, they crashed and the aircraft burned and was lost to inventory and destroyed.

WO1 Gerd "Geb" Wolf recalls: Greg and I graduated with class 70-41, were roommates during the OH-6A transition course at Ft Rucker, and joined A Troop together at Phan Rang in February. We were being prepared for our in-country check rides and due to the activity in the area, Greg and I didn't get much flight time except as acting gunners in either a Corbra or LOH. We had plenty of time to write home and visit the many amenities of an Air Force Base. This would soon change for both of us. After a few weeks in-country, the CO called Greg and me in with the news that there was an OH-6A trained pilot in the 192nd AHC coming to A Troop so one of us need to go there in exchange. Greg said he wanted to stay with the LOHs and I was OK flying Hueys so I moved across the runway to the 192nd AHC. Soon after, A Troop moved to Pleiku and the 192nd to Dong Ba Thin and Ban Me Thuot. Everyone knew we were good friends. As things progressed, I soon made AC and spent a lot of time on single ship resupply or MACV support missions in II Corps. On one mission near Song Moa, I was requested for an emergency hot resupply of an ARVN unit with US advisors in a heavy fire fight and running out of ammo. There were no gunships anywhere to be found in the area, and oddly enough, the only helicopters they could find were mine and the C&C ship for A Troop that was working a hunter-killer mission several miles north. The guns were very low on fuel and the ARVN unit was about to be over run. With the C&C ship and its 50-cal as cover, I went into the LZ with the ammo. The unit was victorious and subsequently killed 40+ of the enemy and captured several crew served weapons. I was give the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Bronze Star for our efforts. One evening, returning from a day of flying, I was approached by some of the guys in my unit. They asked if I had heard about the casualty up in Pleiku area and that the 7/17 had lost an OH-6 and crew to enemy fire. I had not, but immediately inquired at Ops about any information. It wasn't too long after that my worst thoughts were confirmed. Greg had been shot down and killed in the subsequent crash. It was a tough bullet to swallow that many of us have had to endure. About a week later, I was informed that Greg's parents had requested that I escort his remains home for burial in Sioux City, Iowa. When I arrived at Greg's home I was given the letter from the unit commander of A Troop describing what had occurred. Greg and another man were on a parts run. I don't know if they were going to or returned but they were shot down near Dragon Mountain. The LOH crashed and burned. After a brief stay with Greg's family following the funeral I was granted leave to visit with my family in New York, then I returned to Vietnam and completed my tour with the 192nd.

"Geb" Wolf continues, I still have a copy of the Sioux City Journal newspaper article dated 9 June 1971. [An edited version of that articles follows.] The 15-member US Army Memorial Detail from Fort Leavenfort, Kan., took part in the morning services for Gregory Alan Smith at the Austinana Lutheran Church and Logan Park Cemetery in Sioux City. Although Greg complained that "he was so tired of cold showers that he felt like the red clay was part of him," the young man wrote his parents, that he really felt that he was "doing what was needed for his country." He enjoyed being a helicopter pilot. Greg also commented in one letter that "it looks like I'm going to be in Pleiku forever." It was in a helicopter crash near Pleiku that the pilot died on May 20. Greg volunteered for his last mission. It was his day off. His parents received the following description from their son's commander officer, Maj. George Fuller. "On the morning of May 20, your son was flying as pilot of a light observation helicopter near Pleiku. Your son volunteered to fly some badly needed

equipment to a forward staging area south of Pleiku so that an aircraft could be repaired and the troop continue its mission. Approximately 30 minutes later (11 a.m.), the aircraft crashed in a small clearing seven miles south of Pleiku. Rescue teams were immediately inserted but found upon reaching the aircraft that it had been destroyed by fire. It was determined after the recovery of your son's body that he had died instantly from the impact of the crash." Warrant Officer Gerd Wolf of Long Island, N.Y., who first met Greg at a Fort Polk, La., reception station was his roommate and buddy through basic training and flight school returned with the body to Sioux City.

C Troop moved their operations base to An Khe for two weeks during this period.

On the 24th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an aircraft accident record with fatalities for B Troop OH-6A #67-16253 flown by **WO1 Leroy James Westra** and **SP4 Randell Charles Short** at grid AR905455. The Wall database gives the following tour start date and MOS data: Short, 22 Aug 1970, 67V2F; Westra, 15 Jan 1971, 100B. Apparently SP4 Short died at the accident site and Westra died the next day from burns and injuries. The record indicates that MAJ G. Carr was a passenger on this aircraft; but we believe he was the accident investigation officer. The accident summary states:

WO1 Westra and SP4 Short were making a morning test flight, checking for high-frequency vibrations. WO1 Westra called off Holloway Army Airfield at 0628 hours. The pilot then flew to an area 7 miles east-southeast of Pleiku where many test flights were conducted. He pulled a DER check and did a SED maneuver using maximum descent and maximum airspeed. As he started to recover from the maneuver, he lost RPM sustained an engine failure, a fire, and then entered autorotation. His flight time up to this point was 32 minutes. No emergency calls were heard by any aircraft in the Pleiku area or Holloway Army Airfield. The aircraft traveled 510 feet from initial impact point to final resting place. The point of impact was left of center-line on hard-packed, two-lane, dirt road running southwest to northwest. The heading of the skid marks and road is 305. The aircraft hit with sufficient vertical velocity to spread the skids and allow the belly to strike the ground within 10 feet of the initial contact point. The aircraft headed toward the center of the road and became airborne again. At 129 feet from initial impact, the right skid came in contact with the ground again and made skid marks an additional 165 feet. The aircraft then left the road and impacted the ditch on the right hand side. After impact in the ditch, the aircraft came to rest in the center of the road with an approximate heading of 250. After the aircraft made firm contact with the ground the pilot then got out of the aircraft and pulled the crew chief from the wreckage. The fuel line was not shut off. All aircraft instruments were destroyed in the fire and the following circuit breakers were popped: Warning Light and Instrument and AC Inverters. All major components were found in the main wreckage or were burned.

WO1 John Shafer recalls: INSERT FROM TAPE

On the 21st, the VHPA Helicopter database has an aircraft accident record for B Troop AH-1G #67-15629 flown by CPT W. Welsh as pilot and CW2 R.L. Tusi as IP. The accident summary states:

The aircraft was sitting at flat pitch 15 seconds after completion of an autorotation for a critique of check ride. Suddenly there was a snapping sound and the aircraft dropped to the left and the aircraft recovered before the aircraft hit the ground. The aircraft was flown back to Camp Holloway and was set down on sand bags.

D Troop 1/10th Cav - About this time, D/1/10th Cav, the ACT for the 1/10th Cavalry Squadron that had been part of the 4th Div was attached to the 7/17th. Mike Lovett explains:

As the 4th Div was standing down, the 1/10 Cav Squadron was still based out of Camp Radcliff near An Khe with the primary mission of keeping a good percentage of QL-19 open between the coast and Pleiku. D/1/10 was the Squadron's organic ACT and we lived at Radcliff as well. In fact I can remember we had a very nice New Years Eve party not too long after we occupied the buildings

formerly used by the 4th Avn Bn. Our Squadron was part of TF Ivy and then TF 1/9 as the stand down continued. Aviation support became a serious problem by late 1970 because we were not part of the 1st Avn Bde. When we needed parts or IPs or anything aviation related, we had to go all the way to Nha Trang and even then it wasn't good. We still flew most of our missions for the 1/10 Cav but they really couldn't support us like E/704 AMNT used to do. Our commanders made a lot of noise and about Jan/Feb 1971 we moved to Lane. Within a short period we were attached to the 7/17 Cav and the support was much better. Initially, we had no billets or other facilities. We shared some space with C/7/17, got an old Korean building and even had some built for us and lived in tents too. That part wasn't too great. Our ARP was still at An Khe and we always had two Guns plus two or three 58s (we didn't use OH-6As for Scouts after ?) at An Khe as a quick reaction force to keep the road open. That arrangement was hardly normal for an ACT but I don't think there were any normal units left in Vietnam at that time. Even when we were in the 7/17th, we still flew missions for the 1/10th most of the time. Like other ACTs during that period, we were not allowed to put our American ARP on the ground. When we supported the 1/10th, there were American ground forces near at hand. But we often sent pink teams up and down the coast, especially when C/7/17 was up north during Lam Son 719, without any hope of Infantry back-up. Basically we did a lot of aerial recon with the Scouts just marking targets as best they could for the Guns. We were also lucky during those days that we didn't have many birds go down and I can't remember anyone getting killed during the first half of 1972.

Earl Ewing remembers these times as follows: When I joined D/1/10th Cav in June, they had been living at An Son for some time because their operations were well established. They were living in wooden buildings but there wasn't enough room for everyone. For the first few weeks I moved from bunk to bunk while guys were on R&R. I had gone to AMOC and Cobra school after flight school, so I was in the Service Platoon and the 518th TC Det during my three months with D Troop. I recall we used to take Cobras we couldn't fix to our support at Tuy Hoi which was a very large facility. D Troop did keep operational teams at An Khe and more than once we had to go there to fix something or to take in parts. I can also remember going to Pleiku for the same reason but maybe that was when I was with the Squadron. In September, I became the Maintenance Officer for the 7/17th. We were always very busy because the Squadron was a collection of all sorts of aviation units and the ARVN had our units scatter ships all over the place just like trucks. I believe a lot of people got hurt and a lot of equipment was damaged and misused under this 'scatter deployment' concept. In early '72 I can remember over flying Tuy Hoa on the way to Vung Tau so we could have our Cobras modified to switch the tail rotor to the other side. It was really impressive to see that Tuy Hoa had 'turned to nothing.' By then we were getting most of our parts and some support from Nha Trang but blades and engines were in short supply. I finished up my tour with the 29th in March.

CPT Robert 'Tip' Franklin provides: I was a Scout pilot with C/1/9th Cav in 1966 and 1967 on my first tour in Vietnam. On my second tour, I was the Troop Commander of D/1/10th Cav from October 1970 until July 1971 – nine months. D Troop was based at An Khe. Several ideas come to mind when I think about D Troop in October. First, they were still recovering for the events of 28 August when they lost four Blues and one crew member, the gunner, in a Huey. Second, as the 4th Inf Div was standing down, the missions assigned to D Troop were hardly the traditional Cav reconnaissance mission. They were tasking two LOHs to go here, some Hueys to go there, and some Cobras to cover this operation. The 1/10th Cav Squadron was tasked with keeping Highway 19 open but didn't use their ACT correctly. Third, we had to turn in our OH-6As for 58s. I remember we started flying first-light and last-light patrols around the Golf Course. Since the enemy hadn't been harassed too heavily, they had brought their mortar and rocket positions relatively close to An Khe. We inserted our Blues, captured some goodies, killed a few bad guys, and won a little respect from both the 4th ID folk and the enemy. After the 4th ID departed, we worked for Task Force Ivy

and then Task Force Reed – both were centered around the 1/10th Cav. Since the Americans no longer needed the large base at the Golf Course, those units that remained started relocating to Old An Khe. In early February 1971, D Troop was chopped from the 1/10th Cav Squadron and assigned to the 7/17th Cav. At the same time I was responsible for turning the famous Golf Course over to the Vietnamese. We were told that we should remove all the pin-ups from the walls, all the extra military equipment and even the comms and electric wiring from the buildings. What a joke this was – everything was “IG Inspection Ready” when we turned it over to the Vietnamese about 9 a.m. By the middle of the afternoon, Vietnamese trucks were rolling out the front gate with building materials they’d taken from all over. I heard that some ARVN Captain had either been making too much profit or not sharing it with the right people and got himself killed over this building supply business. Back to D Troop, I remember meeting LTC Ernie Smart, CO of the 7/17th Cav in late 1970 and learned that D Troop was going to become part of the 1st Aviation Brigade rather than remain organic to the 1/10th Cav. Our relationship with the 7/17th Cav was beneficial in several respects. While we continued to work the Highway and supported the 1/10th Cav, we also received missions in support of the 173rd and the ROKs. Then in July, LTC Smart came up to me and asked if I wanted to be the S-3 of the Squadron – after nine months of command, I was READY for a change. The significant things I remember about being the S-3 was coordinating the missions for the 61st and 129th AHCs for the ARVNs and the ROKs. I still fly the 58 a lot to save Huey blade time. I put a C&C comms pack in it and flew it with just the crew chief. That way I could even get down and play Scout when I wanted to do so.

On the 29th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for A Troop OH-6A #68-17345 flown by an unnamed crew. The decoded details of the record state that this was an armed recon mission and at an altitude of 10 feet with 70 knots of airspeed they took one hit in a main rotor blade from 7.62mm type SA/AW. They completed the mission. The aircraft was repaired locally and continued to serve with A Troop.

Also on the 29th, the VHPA Helicopter database has a battle damage record for C Troop OH-6A # 67-16157 flown by an un-named crew. The decoded record states that while on a recon mission in the AO they took one hit from a SA/AW 7.62mm type weapon in the doghouse. They continued flying, completed the mission and the aircraft was repaired locally.

On the 31st, MAJ Robert C. Cassity assumed command of B Troop replacing MAJ Glenn Carr.

Also on the 31st, the VHPA Helicopter database has an aircraft accident and loss record for B Troop OH-6A #67-16529 flown by CW2 P Bradsell at grid YB988153. The record indicates that the aircraft was recovered to Camp Holloway but declared to be a total loss. The Goldbook indicates that this LOH only served with B Troop one month before it was lost to inventory. The accident summary states:

The aircraft was at a low hover getting ready for take off with a Vietnamese doctor and a stretcher patient on board. An ARVN troop walked into the tail rotor and the aircraft landed with no further damage. Status of the ARVN troop is unknown.

WO1 John Shafer recalls: Insert additional material from John here.

MAJ Glenn Carr recalls: B Troop received the mission late one evening approximately 29 – 30 May, maybe a bit earlier, to put an ARVN doctor on FB 6. It was a volunteer type mission with increased operational security. We were to execute it at first light the next morning with only one LOH and the C&C bird to drop off the doctor. I asked for volunteers from the Scouts. No married men need to apply! Mr. Shafer and Mr. Bradsell immediately stepped forward. I chose Pete because I considered him to be the most experience OH-6A pilot. I think Shafer was POed but that’s what I got paid for. We took off at first light. Pete and the doctor in the LOH and me with my XO, CPT Jim Haley[can’t accurately identify this person] in the C&C. The reason for such operation security and only a minimum crew in the LOH was because both the 52nd CAB and the ARVN command at

Dak to considered it an untenable area for aircraft due to the well fortified sides of the mountain slopes below FB 6. Several weeks before there had been numerous American losses on that mountain and FB 5 just to the west of FB 6. There was an ill fated attempt to rescue eight or so bodies from a previous UH-1 shoot down resulting in five to eight more KIA Americans. This was the incident where MAJ Bill Adams later would be awarded the MOH. These two actions resulted in both the 52nd CAB and the ARVN command's decision to steer away from aviation involvement on or near the two FBs. Now back to the mission. Pete made a swift approach and landed. The doctor exited and as Pete lifted off an ARVN soldier ran into the tail rotor. I watched as Pete make two and a half to three turns before setting down. He exited the LOH and went into the command bunker. At that point I told CPT Haley that Pete must have had a tail rotor failure, so Hartley bottomed the collective to go in. I then made a decision that I have regretted all my life. I pulled the collective back up and told CPT Haley that we had lost our element of surprise and we had lost too many others on this hill unnecessarily. Pete was in good company and was not injured. That decision, clearly, was not popular with the majority of the Troop but I made it and I stand by it. Later, Pete as the only American on FB 6, was able to direct devastating fire from Air Force fast movers and Cobra guns on the enemy. This allowed the ARVns to reign superior on FB 6 a while longer. As I remember Pete's worst problem was being out of cigarettes! The Scout pilots dropped cigarettes to him on homemade parachutes. After about a week, the situation had improved to the point that MAJ Cassity from the 52nd CAB approved going in to get Pete. CW2 Pete Bradsell was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his efforts on FB 6. The ceremony was sometime in 1972. I was invited as a special guest of the CG of the 1st Cav Division at Fort Hood when the Chief of Staff, General Abrams, presented the award to Pete.

During this month it is possible that there was an undocumented event relating to A Troop AH-1G #67-15575. The Goldbook database shows this aircraft served with A Troop since August 1968 and in May 1971 was turned into the 604th TC Co. It logged time in the 604th in May and June which indicates it was still flyable. The VHPA Helicopter database has a lost record dated 28 July 1971 for this aircraft that contains no details other than the grid coordinates of AT 839-458. Anyone who can provide details about this aircraft during this period of time should contact Mike Law.

During this month it is possible that there was an undocumented event relating to A Troop OH-6A #68-17267. The Goldbook database shows this aircraft served with A Troop since February 1971 and in May 1971 was turned into the 604th TC Co and hence required 10 months of repairs in CONUS before returning to service with the Army. The VHPA Helicopter database contains no details for this aircraft during this period of time. Anyone who can provide details about this aircraft during this period of time should contact Mike Law.

During the month of May and/or June it is possible that there was an undocumented event related to B Troop AH-1G #68-15028. The Goldbook database shows this aircraft served with B Troop since Mar 1969 when it was a brand new aircraft. It logged zero hours in May and in June was being repaired by the ARADMAC facilities of the 1st Transportation Battalion resident on the USNS Corpus Christie Bay. After four months of repairs, it was returned to active Army service in CONUS. Anyone who can provide details about his aircraft during this period of time should contact Mike Law.

During the month of April and/or May it is possible that there was an undocumented event related to C Troop UH-1H #69-16703. The Goldbook database shows this aircraft served with C Troop in March 1971 only when it was a brand new aircraft. It logged zero hours in April and in May was turned into the 79th TC Co for three months of repairs. Anyone who can provide details about his aircraft during this period of time should contact Mike Law.

June 1971

A Troop spent 15 days down due to weather this month. Its missions included several convoy escort missions from Pleiku to Phu Nhon and two SAR operations in an attempt to locate a civilian Cessna 180 which disappeared between Cheo Reo and Pleiku. During this period of time, C Troop moved to Kontum and operated there for several weeks. During this month, the Squadron HQ and HHT moved from Qui Nhon to An Son. LTC Ernie Smart continues providing some important background information about this period:

It wasn't long after the Squadron had moved to Qui Nhon airfield that we learned that that decision was flawed! Things were getting "ugly" in the city itself to the point where it was not safe to have our soldiers off the airfield after dark. The poor LTC airfield commander at Lane had lots of responsibility but no authority to address the security, race, drugs, and prostitution problems that had become acute. Most of the aviation units based at Lane were now attached to the 7/17th and it made a lot of sense for the HQ and HHT functions to be closer. I finally told the 17th CAG that we had to move to An Son and bring some of the "wild times there" under control. The good news is that we had indeed established a good working relationship with the ROKs. We understood and appreciated their no non-sense approach to combat operations and to the issues of drugs as well. So the Squadron HQ and HHT moved to An Son about June. Some of our first steps were to take over the perimeter and to man the gates. Basically the Koreans manned the southern half and my command, the northern half. Times were hard for the girls that had been "living on the inside" for so long. We also started having meetings among the EM by rank. We'd gathered all the Privates together and listened to what they had to say, then the Specialists, junior SGTs, etc. One of the things we learned, for example, was that the Privates were unhappy with the way their club was being run. I said: "Fine, you run your club." They were shocked that we would do this. They picked the people and we cut the orders giving them the jobs. Things like that really helped improve morale and mitigate some of the problems. We also found that we had several people that really caused a lot of trouble and didn't belong there; so we quickly "helped them move on". We also coordinated with the ROKs to put our units to work. Basically when a man is in a combat situation, he generally isn't bored and the racial differences were put aside. So we tried working people harder. Of course by that time the 7/17 HQ was operating more like a CAB. We had two AHCs, a Chinook Company, a fixed wing unit and provides support for the dust-off guys. Thank God for the Koreans and the good relationship we had developed with them! The ARVN, especially the 23rd Div guys we worked with a lot, were not good at using aviation assets correctly. And with some rare, rare exceptions, they didn't have a clue what Air Cavalry was all about! People have often asked me why I commanded the 7/17th for an entire year versus the normal six months. I tell them that about the time my six months were up, we had some definite ideas in place and specific interests in addressing "the wild times". I really felt we were doing some good and I personally thought it was the right thing to do. The commanders above me agreed enough to go to bat for me. So I extended in the job and they supported me. Now, anyone that was there during those days will readily tell you that we were hardly "pure as the driven snow" when I turned the Squadron over to Jack Anderson. But we had "stemmed the tide" and "corrected" many of the abuses, while buying time for more American units to stand down and go home.

On the 2nd according to the 52nd CAB ORLL dated 7 Nov 1971, B Troop 'in the vicinity of Tahn Canh, engaged a single man with gunships at grid YB916114, with negative results.'

On the 5th according to the 52nd CAB ORLL dated 7 Nov 1971, 'Two AH-1G's from the 57th while working for the 7/17 Cav expended 2,000 rounds of 7.62, 300 rounds 40mm, and 96 2.75 rockets at ZB0015. Results unknown. B Trp 7/17 worked in the vicinity of Dak To, at YB854153, gunships engaged 3 personnel in the open, resulting in 5 KBA's.'

C Troop Moves from Lane to Kontum

On or near the 5th, C Troop moved its operation base to Kontum from Lane and would support operations in this area for two plus weeks.

1LT David Stinson provides: The intel guys believed that the NVA were going to attack south through the tri-border area, and since there were precious few American assets in that area at the time, Charlie Troop once again was deployed away from home. We were sent to Kontum and occupied an area abandoned sometime earlier by another American unit, right next to the airfield. So far as I can remember, we were the only real American unit around and it was pretty lonely. The troop worked the tri-border area (Dak To, etc.) for a little over two weeks, looking for the major push that was supposed to be headed our way, but didn't find a thing. I'm certain we had our own Blues during that sojourn - we'd have been very uncomfortable without them. About this time CPT Don Fix took over as XO. Don was a West Pointer who had the really funny habit of knocking his ring on the table, then putting it up to his ear as though it was a radio, and saying, "Westy (meaning Westmoreland), come in Westy." But we did some work with the ARVNs too. While there, I remember doing some practice pick ups and insertions with ARVNs in a big school yard (maybe a soccer field) in Kontum - the most memorable part of which was that an ARVN troop fell out of one of our slicks at about 500 feet and that stopped the exercise - he was DOA. One of those indelible memories. [Editor's note: The 57th AHC was based at Kontum from October 1967 until March 1970 when they moved to An Khe. They moved to Camp Holloway in mid-November 1970 where they remained until March 1973 when they stood-down.]

On the 11th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident record for C Troop AH-1G #68-15144 flown by WO1 D.R. Nelson as pilot near An Son. The Goldbook database indicates this aircraft was repaired locally and continued to serve with C Troop. The accident summary states:

During a simulated anti-torque failure the pilot rolled off the throttle and pulled pitch, the aircraft yawed 91 degrees to right. The aircraft touched down on the left skid. The blades contacted the ground. The aircraft remained up right. There was no further damage.

On the 17th, the VHPA Helicopter database has an accident and loss record for C Troop UH-1H #69-15453 flown by 1LT R.D. Schliesman as pilot and CPT D.J. Fix as co-pilot with SP5 K. Offerdahl as CE and SP4 W.I. Nelson as gunner with a Vietnamese 1LT passenger. It is possible that MAJ W.E. Griffith was the accident investigation officer. The accident summary states:

The board met again on 22 June 1971 and discussed the investigation. The following sequence of events was constructed from the crewmembers' statements: 1LT Schleisman, pilot and CPT Fix, copilot were assigned UH-1H #69-15453 and were to fly six resupply sorties in support of ARVN troops. The aircraft departed Kontum at 1155 17 June and landed at Tan Canh where the pilot received a mission briefing. After 30 minutes they departed for Ben Het where they were scheduled to fly the resupply sorties. The crew loaded the supplies and departed for the designated LZ with one ARVN passenger on board. The crew located the LZ after the ARVN troops on the ground signaled them with a reflecting mirror. They requested winds and approach avenues used by earlier aircraft. They were advised that winds were calm and that other aircraft had been approaching from different directions. The pilot, 1LT Schleisman made an approach to the LZ and terminated at a hover, before descending vertically with the crew clearing the aircraft down. The pilot elected to perform a slope operation by putting the left skid into the slope and hovering while the ARVN troops off-loaded the cargo. The copilot and crewchief, when asked by investigators, reported that the main rotor was approximately 3 to 4 feet from the slope on the left of the aircraft. The ARVNs had been instructed by the crew to off-load the cargo from the helicopter's right side to insure that the pilot would have sufficient cyclic to keep the left skid into the slope. The one ARVN passenger kicked or pushed several cartons from the right side of the helicopter. The pilot reported that the

aircraft began to slide down slope and reacted with more left cyclic and an increase in power. According to the pilot's statement, as the aircraft began to rise, the main rotor struck the hillside on the left of the helicopter. Since the board was unable to inspect the actual wreckage, no damage and crash sequence is available. The crew reported a damaged main rotor system severed tail boom and tilted mast. According to the copilot's sketch and photos, the impact knocked the helicopter away from the slope approximately five feet to the front, coming to rest upright but downslope from the LZ. The pilots shut down the aircraft, exited and called another helicopter for pickup. No injuries were sustained. The aircraft suffered major damage.

On the 22nd according to the 52nd CAB ORLL dated 7 Nov 1971, B Troop 'worked in the vicinity of Tanh Canh, at coordinates YB860145, elements received fire from approximately 12 people dressed in green kakhi uniforms and engaged with gunships with negative results. Vicinity YB87115 elements again received fire, engaged target with gunships, negative results.'

C Troop Moves from Kontum back to Lane

On or near the 22nd, C Troop returned its operations base to Lane.

CW2 Dennis Bartash recalls: After my year with B Troop, I didn't want to return to the States. My wife had divorced me. I got a great deal of satisfaction serving in the Army and in Vietnam. So I extended and started my third tour in Vietnam, again with B Troop, in early 1971 after my R&R leave in Australia. I was still in maintenance. Near the end of the extension, I was notified that I would be RIFed from the Army. I remember LTC Smart even wrote a letter saying how valuable I was and that 'I walked on water' (or words to that effect). But I was still RIFed. I left Pleiku and went to Saigon. I remember talking with an Australian flight officer in a club in Saigon – telling him that I wouldn't get on the airplane for the States. He said – why don't you join the RAAF? So I looked into it and agreed to join. I left Vietnam on a C-130 for Australia and enrolled in their flight lieutenant school. I was doing fine for the first three months or so until they made me swear allegiance to the Queen of England. No, I wasn't going to do that. The Australians were good-natured about that but said I'd have to leave flight school. They wanted to fly me back to the USA, but I wouldn't go – so they returned me to Vietnam. I remember being concerned that I didn't have a visa to be in Vietnam, so I went to the Embassy only to learn that it was illegal for me to be there! They told me they'd put me in jail if I didn't leave the country. I told them I still didn't want to go back to America. After a day or so they sorted something out and offered me a job in the Defense Intelligence Agency – collecting Intel. I worked there until early 1974. By that time I could tell that no matter what the official line was, the South Vietnamese were going to lose the war. I took some leave and went to Iran. I was very impressed with what I saw there, especially when Bell Helicopter offered me a job. I returned to Vietnam and resigned in May 1974. I worked for Bell in Iran as an instructor and manager for one of their forward direct support operations. I returned to the United States in ___? For some time now I've been collecting 'then and now' photos. I edit them and put them on a DVD. I'm especially happy with the DVD I made from my B Troop days.

On the 25th according to the 52nd CAB ORLL dated 7 Nov 1971, B Troop 'worked in the vicinity of Tanh Canh, grid BQ1627, gunships received ground to air .51 cal fire and engaged targets with negative results.'

On the 29th according to the 52nd CAB ORLL dated 7 Nov 1971, B Troop 'working in the vicinity of Dak To, coordinates YB959088, engaged 3-5 people, results 3 KBA's.'

Some time during the month of June an undocumented event may have happened to A Troop OH-6A #67-16077. The VHPA Helicopter database does not contain a battle damage or accident record for this aircraft for this period but the Goldbook database indicates it logged zero time in June and was then turned over to the B/123rd Avn Bn for some unknown reason.

Some time during May or June an undocumented event may have happened to C Troop OH-6A # 67-16216. The Goldbook database indicates it logged 60 hours in May but zero time in June and was then turned over to the 79th TC Co for some unknown reason for several months of CONUS repairs.